

### Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army After 1862

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## Review

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**Noe, Kenneth W.** *Reluctant Rebels: The Confederates Who Joined the Army after 1862*. University of North Carolina Press, \$35.00 ISBN 978-0-8078-3377-3

### Understanding the Later Enlisters

Bell Irvin Wiley and Bruce Catton established the primes a half-century ago that men who enlisted at the beginning of the Civil War were the most enthusiastic and patriotic of volunteers. Hence, they became better soldiers and braver fighters than those who entered military service in 1862 and thereafter. Two generations of historians accepted that interpretation.

In the last decade, however, revisionists in the field have been chipping away at the Wiley-Catton belief. Usually employing qualitative data and statistical analyses, some historians are picturing Johnny Rebs and Billy Yanks in different lights when it comes to why they enlisted and what feelings—if any—affected their military conduct.

Kenneth Noe's latest book joins the choir. A long-established, highly respected professor at Auburn University, Noe has authored five books on topics ranging from the Appalachian region in the Civil War to the 1862 battle of Perryville, Ky. This latest work directly challenges the high qualities of the first enlistees by underscoring the heretofore obscure attributes of the "later enlistees."

Noe selected 320 Confederates in the latter category. The sampling, by the author's own admission, is small in comparison to the 180,000 later volunteers who comprised 22.5% of the Confederate armies. Noe admirably limited his sources to soldiers' letters and diaries. Postwar reflections and rationales lend themselves too much to error.

With insight and skill, Noe hands down some provocative judgments. The second and third waves of enlistments included recruits too young for service in 1861 and those laboring under the burden of heavy demands at home. These volunteers were not motivated as much by Confederate nationalism as they were by the simple wish to defend their families.

Whereas early recruits expected a quick war, later volunteers (slightly older on average and certainly wiser) went to battle with a deeper hatred of the enemy. An overriding affection for home, Noe declares, impaired *esprit de corps* because it conflicted in one sense with faith in God. Group fellowship so often associated with army camp revivals was relatively unimportant because soldiers' feelings about God and home were one and the same. Such a "localist attitude" intruded into unit pride.

This is not to imply that the later enlistees were short on bravery and honor. Quite was the contrary, Noe concludes with thoughts worth pondering. "Part of the Confederacy's ultimate problem was that the thin gray line of white men the South called up in the war's second year and beyond always were too few in number, too old, too divided in heart and soul, and physically not always up to the task before them. Later enlistees could and would fill the ranks and kill in combat, but many of them could not march and fight as well as their new nation needed them to do" (210).

*James I. Robertson, Jr. is author of Stonewall Jackson: The Man, The Soldier, The Legend and Alumni Distinguished Professor at Virginia Tech.*