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"Numbers on Top of Numbers": Counting the Civil War Dead

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Abstract

The assumption that the government has an obligation to name and count the military dead only emerged in the United States as a result of the Civil War experience. A massive postwar reburial program dedicated to identifying and reinterring every Union soldier was paralleled by intensive public and private efforts accurately to number the war's losses, which had not been carefully compiled by either North or South during the conflict. In an era of increasing preoccupation with statistics, an enumeration of the dead came to seem imperative to understanding the Civil War's unanticipated scale and destructiveness.

EVERY morning, the *New York Times* prints in its first section a small box with the name, rank, and hometown of each new American service member reported killed in Iraq, as well as the total who have died since the war began in March 2003. With this daily feature, the *Times* honors those who have sacrificed their lives and at the same time reminds us of the growing cost of the war to the nation. The names of

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newly dead Americans are juxtaposed with a steadily escalating figure that urges us to think beyond particular individuals to the more general and all but unimaginable tragedy of more than 2500 foreshortened lives.[1]

The naming and the counting of our military dead have come to seem to us as Americans an essential part of war and an essential obligation of the state. Yet these assumptions about governmental accountability are of quite recent origin, emerging in large measure as the result of the experience of the American Civil War. The policies of both the Union and the Confederacy at war's outset seem today unthinkable. In neither North nor South did the military formally notify family members about wounds or death. Civil War soldiers wore no dogtags or other official identification; no record was kept of their next of kin. At the end of the war, almost half of Union and a far higher proportion of Confederate dead remained unknown.

Yet asking soldiers to sacrifice their names as well as their lives came in the course of the war to seem increasingly intolerable. Debates about freedom and citizenship had helped bring the war about; citizens' armies of both conscripts and volunteers would fight its battles. The obligations of the state to account for those who died in its service emerged as an inescapable corollary of these democratic and nationalist principles. Beginning with the establishment of a national cemetery after the battle of Gettysburg in 1863, the United States moved towards a policy that at war's end yielded a massive effort to identify and rebury the Union dead. By 1870, the bodies of almost 300,000 soldiers had been located across the South and reinterred in 73 national cemeteries. It was a forceful statement of the nation's new commitment to the citizen soldiers who fought in its behalf.[2]

A second endeavor paralleled this effort to name and honor the Civil War dead. Just as Americans had neglected to identify the slain, so too they had failed accurately to count them, to compile reliable and comprehensive numbers of those killed either in particular battles, in larger campaigns, or in the war as a whole. But as the conflict drew to a close, state and federal governments as well as a number of private citizens began to seek such a reckoning.

Late-nineteenth-century Americans exhibited an unprecedented and growing interest in the numbers of dead, in the statistics of the conflict they had experienced. Their expectations and the policies and procedures they created would ensure much more elaborate and accurate record keeping in the future. As a prominent official of the War Depart-

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1. It is worth noting that the *Times* does not attempt to count or name dead Iraqis, American civilians, or those of our allies who have been killed.

2. Monro MacCloskey, *Hallowed Ground: Our National Cemeteries* (New York: Richards Rosen Press, 1968), 35.

ment declared in the 1880s about the documentation of losses in the conflict, "We will do these things better in the next war."[3]

The Civil War has often been cast as the last old fashioned and the first modern war. It was a conflict that prefigured our own time in its unanticipated scale and scope, in its incorporation of rapidly advancing technologies of firepower, transportation, and communication. Yet the very unexpectedness of these developments meant that the Civil War was one of transition, one in which the old and new often stood visible side by side. The numbers of the dead and the numbering of the dead in Civil War America are both products of these fundamental social, cultural, and military transformations.

Historians of the Civil War frequently cite the commonly accepted total of 620,000 dead as a defining reality of the conflict. More Americans died, we repeat in our books and essays, than in all other American wars combined up to Vietnam; an equivalent proportion of today's population would mean 5,500,000 dead.[4]

Americans of the Civil War era could not themselves invoke such statistics to comprehend or explain their experience of unfathomable loss. The figures historians cite are the product of extensive postwar reconstruction—a combination of retrospective investigation and speculation that yielded totals that posterity has embraced as iconic. But no newspaper box, either in the *New York Times* or the *Richmond Enquirer* offered daily summaries of losses. Instead, soldiers and civilians both struggled for a means of communicating and understanding the magnitude of the conflict. "Death reigned with universal sway," one Confederate soldier wrote from the front, trying to convey his experience in what proved to be his last letter home. But language, and even metaphor, seemed inadequate to represent the carnage. "Words cannot express," soldiers remarked again and again in the aftermath of battle. Perhaps numbers could. "How many homes have been made desolate," a young

3. Col. Robert Scott quoted in William F. Fox, *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War, 1861–1865* (reprint 2002; Albany, N.Y.: Albany Publishing Company, 1889), 574. On naming and identifying the Civil War dead, see Drew Gilpin Faust, " 'The Dread Void of Uncertainty:' Naming the Dead in the American Civil War," *Southern Cultures* 11 (Summer 2005): 7–32.

4. On casualty figures, see *Historical Statistics of the United States* (Washington: GPO, 1975) pt. 2, p. 1140, series Y 879–882; "Statistical Summary of America's Major Wars," www.cwc.lsu.edu/cwc/other/stats/warcost.htm; Alexander Bukowski, "Casualties," in David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler, eds., *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-Clio, 2000), 373; Michael Clodfelter, ed., *Warfare and Armed Conflicts: A Statistical Reference to Casualty and Other Figures, 1500–2000* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland and Co., 2002); James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 3, 177 n 56; and James David Hacker, "The Human Cost of War: White Population in the United States, 1850–1880" (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1999), 1.

South Carolina woman demanded in 1863, seeking not just a count of the dead but an accounting for death's impact. "How many Mothers and Sisters and Wives have been made to mourn since this war has been sent upon us[?] Numbers on top of numbers and we are not yet through."[5]

The question "how many" was of growing importance in the early and mid-nineteenth century. A population that had been largely innumerate—basic arithmetic was not required for admission to Harvard until 1802—began to count and calculate, to teach mathematics in schools, to regard numbers as a tool of mastery over both nature and society. Americans had entered by mid-century into what historian Patricia Cline Cohen has called "an infatuation with numbers."[6]

Significantly, as the very term itself implies, statistics emerged in close alliance with notions of an expanding state, with the assessment of its resources, strength, and responsibilities. Often this quantification focused on censuses, on demography, and on mortality records, the very questions of life and death that took on new salience with the outbreak of war. Americans encountered the conflict and its death tolls predisposed to seek understanding in quantitative terms. In the face of the immensity of the Civil War's scale and horror, statistics offered more than just the possibility of comprehension. Their provision of seemingly objective knowledge promised a foundation for control in a reality escaping the bounds of the imaginable. Numbers represented a means of imposing sense and order on what Walt Whitman tellingly depicted as the "countless graves" of the "infinite dead."[7]

Yet the structures and mechanisms for ensuring accurate and comprehensive counts of the dead did not exist. Whitman wrote literally as

5. C. W. Greene to John McLees, 15 August 1864, McLees Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia; Kate Campbell to Dear Sister [Mattie McGaw], 15 May 1863, McGaw Family Papers, South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia.

6. Patricia Cline Cohen, *A Calculating People: The Spread of Numeracy in Early America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 205; I. Bernard Cohen, *The Triumph of Numbers: How Counting Shaped Modern Life* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2005); Alain Derosieres, *The Politics of Large Numbers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); James H. Cassedy, *Demography in Early America: Beginnings of a Statistical Mind, 1600–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969); James H. Cassedy, *American Medicine and Statistical Thinking, 1800–1860* (Cambridge. Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984); Theodore M. Porter, *The Rise of Statistical Thinking, 1820–1900* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986); Theodore M. Porter, *Trust in Numbers: The Pursuit of Objectivity in Science and Public Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Michael J. Cullen, *The Statistical Movement in Early Modern Britain* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1975); William Alonso and Paul Starr, eds., *The Politics of Numbers* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1987).

7. Walt Whitman, *Specimen Days,* in Whitman, *Complete Prose Works* (New York: Appleton, 1910), 114–15.

well as figuratively in calling them "countless." By army regulation both North and South, commanders were required to submit lists of the captured, killed, wounded, and missing with the description of each engagement. Hundreds of these lists are packed into boxes at the National Archives, but they represent a highly problematic record. In the immediate aftermath of battle, it was often difficult to procure information about the injured and slain. Civil War armies had no designated graves registration units, as more modern armies do, and commanders often had more pressing concerns than compiling lists of casualties. If reports were made close in time to a battle, the number of deaths was often understated, not just because of incomplete information but because many of the wounded who would soon die still clung to life. However, a lengthy interval between battle and casualty report—for instance, the four months Colonel Daniel McCook permitted to pass before submitting his report of losses from a series of December 1863 engagements in Georgia—produced other sorts of errors.[8]

William F. Fox, a former Union Lieutenant Colonel who published *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War* in 1889 after decades of work studying documentation of war deaths, found battle and casualty reports a poor source. "After a hard fought battle," Fox remembered, "the regimental commander would, perhaps, write a long letter to his wife detailing the operations of his regiment, and some of his men would send to their village paper an account of the fight, but no report would be forwarded officially to head quarters. Many colonels regarded the report as an irksome and unnecessary task."[9]

Union Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson regarded the failures of record keeping as the inevitable outcome of a bureaucratic incapacity that arose from the unanticipated scale of the conflict. "What may be called the book-keeping of our volunteer army," he wrote, "was borrowed from the book-keeping of our little regular army. It had suddenly to be expanded from thousands to millions." The duty of keeping

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8. Colonel Daniel McCook, Report of Killed and Wounded in Operations November 24–December 19, 1863, April 10, 1864, E653, Box 20, Returns of Casualties, Record Group (RG) 94, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA). For a compilation of the reporting requirements for officers, see "Prefatory," *The Medical and Surgical History of the War of the Rebellion,* part I, volume 1, *Medical History* (Washington: GPO, 1870), iii–ix. For examples of lists in the National Archives, see Regimental Casualty Lists, 1861–65, 17 feet, RG 94, E652; Casualty Sheets of Wounded, RG 94, E658; Indexes to Casualties, 1861–65, 13 vols., RG 94, E656; Registers of Death, Volunteers, 63 vols., RG 94, E650; Army Corps, Army, and Departmental Casualty Lists: Civil War, 1861–65, 49 boxes, RG 94, E653; Confederate States Army Casualties; Lists and Narrative Reports, M836.

9. Fox, *Regimental Losses,* 574.

records, he observed, tended to fall either to a man of military experience "without training in red tape," or "a man of red tape without any training . . . as a soldier. In either case, confusion resulted." History, Higginson, observed, is necessarily, "an inexact science." To underscore his point, he noted that the first 27,000 volunteers receiving bounties for enlistment in Massachusetts included twenty-three men named John Williams and twenty-one named John Smith.[10]

The military's purposes in counting the dead also influenced the reliability of military records. Casualty lists were not compiled because of concern about accounting for the individual lives that were lost, as the absence of any formal procedure for notifying kin made apparent. Counting the dead was largely an issue of assessing military resources, of seeing who was left alive to fight. The language is telling. Casualty lists from individual engagements contributed to the creation twice a month of company and regimental muster rolls, which were commonly known as "strength reports." These unit censuses named and described all those present for duty and noted changes from the last count due to furlough, expiration of enlistment, desertion, illness, injury, or death.[11]

A commander needed to know his military strength. Union General George McClellan was famously obsessed with both his own numbers and those of his enemy, consistently overestimating the number of Confederate troops arrayed against him by two or threefold and essentially incapacitating himself through this statistical fixation. For William Tecumseh Sherman, a man of action and decision rather than crippling reflection, numbers became a language in which to express as well as to measure battle's challenges and achievements. Each engagement described in his *Memoirs* is accompanied by a summary of losses presented in the form the War Department prescribed for casualty reports. Seemingly, he could best understand and communicate his experience by translating it into numbers.[12]

But if a general needed to know his own strength, so too he hoped to conceal it from the enemy. In May 1863, Confederate General Robert E.

10. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861–5* (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1895–96), viii.

11. See, for example, Strength Reports, 18th Tennessee Volunteers, RG 109, Chapter VIII, v. 108, 63–64, NARA.

12. William Tecumseh Sherman, *Memoirs of General W. T. Sherman* (New York: Library of America, 1990); for a brilliant consideration of Sherman and of Civil War casualty figures generally, see James Dawes, "Counting on the Battlefield: Literature and Philosophy After the Civil War," Chapter I in *The Language of War: Literature and Culture in the U.S. from the Civil War through World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002). On McClellan, see George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: C. L. Webster & Co., 1887), Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988).

Lee issued a General Order criticizing prevailing custom in reporting casualties for "encourag[ing] our enemies, by giving false impressions as to the extent of our losses." Inflated estimates and a tendency to report minor wounds as casualties, he believed, had resulted from commanders' pride in losses as "an indication of the service performed or perils encountered." Pride in sacrifice grew even stronger as the reality of death grew less immediate in the years after the war. Regiments competed for the honor of having sustained the greatest losses and thus, by implication, having exhibited the greatest valor. In this postwar battle for glory, deaths became a measure not of defeat but of victory.[13]

Compiling accurate statistics about losses would become a postwar preoccupation. As Union victory brought peace and a growing commitment to accounting for and honoring the dead, Yankees and Confederates directed very different resources to the task. Northerners would employ the expanding bureaucracy of the triumphant nation state, both in the federal reburial effort and in the collection of statistics on wartime military service and casualties.

Two Union measures implemented in 1865 were designed to take advantage of the end of hostilities to direct attention to creating a more accurate count of the dead. In July, Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs ordered a report of "all interments registered during the war . . . to be separately enumerated." Officers of the Quartermaster's Department were to supply dates and locations of burials for a census that ultimately became the basis for a massive federal reinterment effort that extended over the next decade. A second measure required that before disbanding each Union regiment submit a "muster-out" roll including the name and fate—wounded, killed, died of disease, deserted, captured, discharged— of every man who had served at any point during the conflict. The War Department supplied large sheets, one yard square, printed with appropriate headings and with blanks to be completed in multiple copies. William Fox relied largely on these documents for his compilation of losses, and he believed they showed "clearly and accurately the mortuary losses of the regiments to which they pertain."[14]

Union officer-turned-writer John W. DeForest suggests reason for some skepticism. In his popular 1867 novel, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty,* he provides a vivid portrait of the challenges

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13. On Lee, see Fox, *Regimental Losses,* 559. Lee seems to have systematically and significantly undercounted casualties after Gettysburg. See Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative: From Fredericksburg to Meridian* (New York: Random House, 1963), 578.

14. Meigs quoted in Edward Steere, *The Graves Registration Service in World War II,* Quartermaster Historical Studies #21, Historical Section, Office of the Quartermaster (Washington: GPO, 1951), 7. Fox, *Regimental Losses,* 57.

one officer faced in completing the muster rolls. Dulled by "clouds of fever and morphine," and confronted by "a mass of company records," Captain Edward Colburne nevertheless struggles to do his assigned duty within the three days allotted before his troops disband, for he is, he declares, the only man in his unit present since its origin and thus the only one with the requisite knowledge. At the end of a long night of labor, he submits the completed document to others to copy, faints and is confined to bed for forty-eight hours. One cannot but wonder if William Fox ever read De Forest's novel or recognized that his own data rested on such contingencies of memory and circumstance.[15]

Between 1866 and 1870, the War Department acknowledged the deficiencies in its records, issuing reports that presented three different—and ever increasing—totals of Union dead. These constant revisions resulted in large part from information gradually brought forward by individuals seeking back pay of deceased kin or applying for the federal pension benefits established in 1862 and expanded steadily through the rest of the century.[16]

The creation of an extensive pension system for Union veterans made systematic and accurate data about military service necessary. The array of muster rolls, strength reports, hospital records, and casualty lists kept during the war did not create a coherent personnel record for any individual soldier and thus left no easily accessible file to support a pension claim. The federal government struggled to create from the mass of wartime documentation a set of records that detailed the experiences of individual men. These came eventually to be known as the Compiled Military Service Records and after 1903 began to include Confederate as well as Union soldiers. Ultimately, nearly thirty million northern and more than six million southern entries were inscribed on index cards and sorted into individual soldiers' files. The scale of this effort required a small army of clerks, and the literal weight of this history inflicted its own postwar casualties when in 1893 the overcrowding of workers and documents in offices in Ford's Theatre caused two floors to collapse and kill twenty-two employees.[17]

15. John William DeForest, *Miss Ravenel's Conversion from Secession to Loyalty* (New York: Harper, 1867), 434–5.

16. On pensions, see Megan McClintock, "Civil War Pensions and the Reconstruction of Union Families," *Journal of American History* 83 (September 1996): 456–80; Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992); William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1918).

17. Mabel E. Deutrich, *Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1962), 46, 91. The CMSR has become an indispensable tool for Civil War researchers and genealogists. A printed index is now available with a useful introduction by Silas Felton that explains the origins of

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the attention to accounting for the dead after the war arose simply from the requirements of the pension system, as the inclusion of Confederates, who were of course ineligible for federal pensions, makes clear. Other efforts, both public and private, preceded and paralleled those specifically related to pension data and claims. It would be more accurate to see the pension system, its bureaucracy, and substantial cost, as a result and not a cause of the deep and widespread commitment to account for war casualties and to insist upon governmental responsibility for the injured and the dead.

Almost every state in the North and many of those in the South had endeavored to produce rosters far earlier, well before expanding pension provisions had required systematic federal involvement. Even during the war itself, individual states had authorized "Rolls of Honor" and other compilations of names of all who had served and died, but many of these efforts foundered amidst wartime exigencies. In the years after the war, nearly every Northern state renewed the effort to produce rosters.

The Pennsylvania legislature, for example, had authorized the creation of a list of its soldiers in 1864, but the project was not launched till 1866. Samuel Bates, Pennsylvania's State Historian, found his assignment no easy task, at first locating only a partial file of muster rolls in the state Adjutant General's office as a basis for his work. His "only recourse," he recognized, was to contact individual officers and interrogate them about the history of their units. In the preface to his five-volume *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers,* published in 1869, Bates reported that his search of "authentic information" had required him to probe "muster-in rolls, muster-out rolls, special muster-out rolls, provost marshal rolls, veterans rolls, special and general orders of the War Department and regimental and company books."[18]

Massachusetts made two separate efforts to assemble a complete list of soldiers' service and their fates. Rosters kept by the state Adjutant General's office were printed in 1868 and 1869, but twenty years later, the legislature created the post of State Military and Naval Historian and directed its first incumbent, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, to assemble an index list of Massachusetts soldiers and sailors that would incorporate the more accurate information that had been collected by the federal

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the CMSR and includes a complete bibliography of all state rosters. See Janet B. Hewett, ed., *The Roster of Union Soldiers, 1861–1865* (Wilmington, N.C.: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1997). Robert Krick introduces Janet B. Hewett, ed., *The Roster of Confederate Soldiers, 1861–1865* (Wilmington, N.C.: Broadfoot Publishing Co., 1995), and similarly includes a survey and bibliography of state efforts.

18. Samuel P. Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861–65,* 5 vols. (Harrisburg, Pa.: B. Singerly, 1869–71), iv–v.

pension office. Together with lists of men, Higginson published statistical summaries of casualties by unit and engagement.[19]

Confederates, who after 1865 had no nation state, no government bureaucracy, and no expectation of federal pensions, turned state and private resources to a similar effort to document and honor the lives and deaths of those who had served. But the incompleteness of Confederate records posed special challenges. The disintegration of the Confederate Army made the collection of comprehensive data at war's end impossible, and the movements of the Confederate Archives between the evacuation of Richmond, their capture in Charlotte, North Carolina, and their eventual acquisition by the U.S. War Department meant that a significant number of regimental casualty lists and other official records are missing. There are, for example, almost no muster rolls at all of Alabama troops, and all records after the end of 1864 are very fragmentary. Nevertheless, in the South as well as the North most states tried to compile and publish rosters of those who had served and those who had died, and these volumes continued to appear into the second decade of the twentieth century.[20]

In 1862, the South Carolina legislature had passed a measure calling for a comprehensive Record Book "as a token of respect to . . . [the] memories of Carolina's dead." The report that resulted was riddled with errors. Professor William Rives of South Carolina College was appointed in 1864 to undertake a second effort, and he struggled with military devastation, interruptions of mail, and inadequate financial support. By advertising in newspapers for information, scanning obituaries, interviewing veterans, enlisting the help of tax collectors, and filling notebooks of "coarse brown paper" with data, he had by 1870 collected the names of 12,000 South Carolina soldiers who had died in Confederate service. But, he stated, "I could not complete the work to my satisfaction." In 1912, the Historical Commission of South Carolina took up the task once again, and A. S. Salley, Commission Secretary, published three volumes covering five infantry regiments in 1913.[21]

19. Higginson, *Massachusetts in the Army and Navy During the War of 1861–5*. Massachusetts, he concluded, had sent 113,835 men to the war and had lost a total of 13,498. Higginson's skepticism about history's exactness seems to have been well founded; a 1997 compilation of Massachusetts soldiers based on records in the National Archives counts 146,738.

20. A recent study by James David Hacker identifies other problems in Confederate records, arguing that southern deaths from diarrhea and dysentery have been seriously undercounted, and that total numbers of war deaths should be increased by as many as 9,000. Hacker, "The Human Cost of War," 41–43. Note Robert Krick's comment on the "nonchalant Confederate approach to military record keeping," in his introduction to *The Roster of Confederate Soldiers,* 4.

21. A. S. Salley, Jr., comp., *South Carolina Troops in Confederate Service* (Columbia, S.C.: R. L. Bryan Co., 1913), vi. The Roll of the Dead prepared by a Con-

In North Carolina, John W. Moore overcame obstacles presented by incomplete and erroneous data available within the state by turning to Confederate records in the hands of the U.S. War Department. But he found these official reports incomplete as well. "Scarcely one had full account of the casualties," he wrote. "Unlettered orderly sergeants" produced "spelling that was really wonderful," although likely, he feared, to astonish those whose names were so creatively rendered. Nevertheless, Moore was confident that the four volumes he produced in 1882 represented the most accurate presentation of North Carolina statistics possible.[22]

Other southern initiatives extended beyond individual states and addressed explicitly sectionalist purposes. The newly formed Southern Historical Society, established in 1869 and committed to "vindicating the truth of Confederate History," sought to provide an accurate count of southern losses. Its secretary, the distinguished physician Joseph Jones, believed that establishing the totals of troops North and South and documenting the extensive Confederate losses promised to provide an explanation—and justification—for Confederate defeat, as well as irrefutable evidence of the Confederate soldier's "resolution, unsurpassed bravery and skill."[23]

Private citizens in the North also set to counting wartime casualties and deaths. Frederick Phisterer, a German immigrant who had received the Medal of Honor for heroism at Stone's River in 1862, published a *Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States* in 1883 as a supplement to Scribner's popular *Campaigns of the Civil War* series. The volume included chapters on "Losses" and "Officers Deceased While in the Service" alongside its description of "Numbers and Organization of the Armies of the United States" and the listing of leaders and engagements. William Fox claimed that his monumental *Regimental Losses in the American Civil War,* published in 1889, offered "full and exhaustive" statistics of both Union and Confederate units collected from both state and national sources. Thomas Livermore, who had served as a Major in the New Hampshire volunteers, attempted to amplify and correct Fox's

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federate widow from Rives's notebooks remained unidentified in the National Archives until 1993. It has now been published as *Roll of the Dead: South Carolina Troops in Confederate State Service* (Columbia: South Carolina Department of Archives and History, 1995).

22. John W. Moore, *Roster of North Carolina Troops in the War Between the States,* prepared by order of the legislature of 1882, 4 vols. (Raleigh, N.C.: Ash and Gatling, 1882), v. See, for Tennessee, John Berrien Lindsley, *The Military Annals of Tennessee* (Nashville, Tenn.: J. M. Lindsley and Co., 1886).

23. "Editorial Department," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 1 (1876): 39; "Confederate Losses During the War—Correspondence Between Dr. Joseph Jones and General Samuel Cooper," *Southern Historical Society Papers* 7 (1879): 289.

conclusions in *Numbers and Losses in the Civil War in America,* which grew from an essay read before the Military History Society of Massachusetts in 1897 into a book published in 1900. Frederick Dyer undertook an even more comprehensive effort in what became his 1908 *Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* in 1,796 pages, based, he assured his readers, on "authentic information from all reliable and available sources." The government's *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion,* begun in 1874 and ultimately published in 128 volumes, was, he proclaimed, "woefully deficient," thus rendering his effort imperative. Dyer's first volume opens with a summary of Union enlistments and losses that lists the numbers of those killed in action, those dying of wounds, disease, accidents, suicide, and even of sunstroke. But Dyer perpetuated errors in government data that Fox had corrected nearly two decades earlier.[24]

Americans North and South, in official capacities and as private citizens, proliferated enumerations of the war dead, yet remained far from establishing a definitive count. The specificity, rather than the accuracy, of these totals attracted Americans seeking consolation in the seemingly comprehensive and comprehensible character of numbers.

Yet even as they counted, Americans speculated about what the numbers they so eagerly amassed actually meant. Joseph Jones counted soldiers and their deaths both to demonstrate southern valor and to explain the defeat of the hopelessly outnumbered Confederacy. Regimental commanders counted to tell the story of "how well [their unit had] stood" and to be remembered among those whose losses, and thus whose courage, was greatest. States in both North and South enumerated the dead to honor the slain. A name upon a list was like a name upon a grave, a repository of memory, a gesture of immortality for those who had made the supreme sacrifice. And the hundreds of thousands of Civil War dead who remained unnamed could at least be counted. Names might remain unknown but numbers need not be. Americans counted to establish the dimensions of war's sacrifice and the price of freedom and national unity. They counted because numbers offered an illusion of certainty and control in the aftermath of a conflict that had transformed the apparent limits of human brutality. They counted, too, because there were just so many bodies to count. Numbers seemed the only way to cap-

24. Frederick Phisterer, *Statistical Record of the Armies of the United States* (reprinted 2002; New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1883); Fox, *Regimental Losses*; Thomas Livermore, *Numbers and Losses in the American Civil War* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1901); Frederick Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (reprinted 1959; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Dyer Publishing Co., 1908). The 1959 reprint has an excellent introduction by Bell Irvin Wiley. See also review of Dyer in the *American Historical Review* 15 (July 1910): 889–91.

ture what was most dramatically new about this war: the very size of the cataclysm and its human cost.[25]

But as numbers solved some problems of understanding, so they presented others. William Fox addressed this directly, urging his readers not to "grow impatient at these statistics." The numbers were not, he assured them, "like ordinary figures," but instead, "statistics every unit of which stands for the pale, upturned face of a dead soldier." These were not cold abstractions, but numbers that literally, he argued, possessed a human face.[26]

Fox recognized too a central dilemma posed by enumerations of the Civil War dead: how to move from the meaning of a single death to the significance of hundreds of thousands. As Joseph Stalin once remarked with both experience and insight, "One death is a tragedy; a million is a statistic." A half century earlier, Fox made a similar observation. "It is hard," he wrote, "to realize the meaning of the figures . . . . It is easy to imagine one man killed; or ten men killed; or, perhaps, a score of men killed. . . . but even . . . [the veteran] is unable to comprehend the dire meaning of the one hundred thousand, whose every unit represents a soldier's bloody grave. The figures are too large."[27]

This problem of the one and the many challenged all of Civil War America and became a central theme in the war's popular culture. How could the meaning of so many deaths be understood, and, conversely, how could an individual's death continue to matter amidst the loss of so many? "All Quiet Along the Potomac Tonight," a song claimed and sung by both Union and Confederacy, focuses with irony on the dismissal of a single soldier's death as unworthy of notice. "T'is nothing," in the face of the casualty lists that have become commonplace: "a private or two now and then/ will not count in the news of the battle." Yet the work of the song is to reclaim the importance of this individual life, that of a husband and father who is just as dead in this night of "quiet" as if he were one of thousands who had died in the din of dramatic battle. He is a man, the song insists, who counts, even if he is not counted. An 1862 story in *Harper's Weekly* entitled "Only One Killed" echoes the same theme in a form of popular resistance to the anonymity and insignificance of the individual death amidst what the writer called a "fearful aggregate of woe." Charles Lewis, a soldier from New York, spoke in almost the same language as the *Harper's* story after his brigade was reported to have lost "but one" in an engagement in the fall of 1863. "We say 'but one' never

25. Fox, *Regimental Losses,* 58.

26. William F. Fox, "The Chances of Being Hit in Battle," *Century Illustrated Magazine* 37 (May 1888): 99.

27. http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/j/josephstal137476.html; Fox, *Regimental Losses,* 46.

thinking that that one was somebody's all perhaps. Had a million been slain, it would have been 'only one' in a million homes."[28]

Poems, songs, and stories—with titles like "One of Many," "Only a Private Killed," "Only One Killed," or just "Only"—sought to preserve the meaning of the individual amidst the multitude. Numbers both aided and inhibited understanding. Counting created a kind of equality; no rank or distinction remained in the totals of war dead. Yet at the same time, numbers undermined the individuality that was tied closely to equality's purposes and to the democratic imperatives of the war. The distance, the discrepancy between the one and the many juxtaposed and reinforced two modes of understanding that became central to the Civil War experience. Almost paradoxically, sentimentality and irony existed side by side in Americans' warborn consciousness. The sentimental drew its strength from the need to resist the unintelligibility of mass death by focusing on the singularity of each casualty, the tragedy of each loss. Sentimentality served as a weapon against the force of numbers, against the statistical homogenization and erasure of individuals. Irony, by contrast, emerged from the acknowledgement of this fundamental tension, the admission of the almost unspeakable possibility that the individual might not, in this juggernaut of modern mass warfare, actually matter. "All Quiet Along the Potomac" manages, like Civil War America more generally, to be at once sentimental and ironic in its treatment of the dead soldier who is simultaneously all and "nothing."[29]

Late nineteenth century Americans collected both names and numbers, seeking to understand the loss both of individuals and of multitudes and demanding a government commitment to these war dead. The programs and the bureaucracy that resulted at once recognized and dehumanized the individual, and became as well an emblem of the modern nation state that emerged from the war. The massive reinterment effort

28. For contemporary versions of "All Quiet," see, for example, "Editor's Table," *Southern Literary Messenger* 34 (October 1862): 589; and "Journal of the War," *DeBow's Review* 2 (July 1866): 68–69; "Only One Killed," *Harper's Weekly,* 24 May 1862, 331; Lewis quoted in Robert V. Wells, *Facing the "King of Terrors": Death and Society in an American Community, 1750–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 127.

29. See H. M. Wharton, *War Songs and Poems of the Southern Confederacy* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston, 1904), 153–54, 131–32; "Only" is in *Harper's Weekly,* 3 January 1863; "One of Many" is ibid., 16 April 1864; "Only a Private Killed" is a refrain from a poem composed by H. L. Gordon and sent to Mrs. E. H. Ogden, 6 June 1862, manuscript letter, Ogden Papers, Gilder-Lehrman Collection, New York Historical Society. On Civil War sentimentality, see Alice Fahs, "The Sentimental Soldier," in *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 93–119. On irony, see Claire Colebrook, *Irony* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

and the expanding pension system represented an unprecedented level of governmental responsibility to its citizens. In wars of a new century, this commitment would find expression in new structures of account-ability for soldiers' names, bodies and numbers: in dog tags, formal mortuary and graves registration units, routine next-of-kin notification, and regular, definitive military censuses.

But the struggle to establish accurate assessments of Civil War losses and to ensure better accounting in future wars was only in part about numbers and casualty reports. As William Fox observed, "Every story, even a statistical one, has a moral." The movement to count the Civil War dead was about the duties of a nation to its citizens. But it was also about more transcendent questions, questions that extended beyond the state and its policies and obligations. The rhetoric of Civil War mortality statistics provided the language for a meditation on the deeper human meaning of the conflict and its unprecedented destructiveness, as well as for the exploration of the place of the individual in a world of mass and increasingly mechanized slaughter. It was about what counted in a world transformed.