Notes

1. Monthly Report of Sick and Wounded Refugees and Freedmen, May 1868; June 1867; April 1867; June 1868. Monthly Report of Sick and Wounded Refugees and Freedmen Hospital and Homes in Western North Carolina, July 1867; January 1868; February, 1868; March 1868; April 1868; March 1867; November 1867; December 1867; October 1867. RG 105, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Land (North Carolina), Salisbury Freedmen's Hospital, e.2587–2586, box 59, National Archives, Washington, DC. I should also note that when I first used these records, I was able to go through the boxes for each state; all of these documents are only available to the public on microfilm. After a close inspection of the finding aid, I think the aforementioned documents can be found as part of the "Morning Reports of Sick Freedmen" and "Medical Reports" all listed under Salisbury (Freedmen's Hospital), roll 63, Records of the Field Offices for the State of North Carolina, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1872, National Archives, M1909.


Jubal A. Early: Model Civil War Sufferer

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On a drizzly winter’s day in Toronto, Canada, in 1866, former Confederate general Jubal A. Early bent over a letter to a past commander, D. H. Hill. 1 Stooped from arthritis contracted long before the Civil War but worsened by the damp chill, Early scratched onto the page unmistakable misery and bitterness. In self-imposed exile and daily worsening poverty and ill health, he divulged to Hill: “I am as far
from that happy state of mind which the Scriptures require[—]to forgive our enemies[—]as it is possible to conceive." Moreover, he was "far from being reconstructed," as there was "scare a night of my life that I do no not dream of being engaged in battle with the Yankees." Instead of longing to banish the nighttime shadows of war, however, he avowed, "I wish it was not 'all a dream.'"²

Early was not the only self-exiled former Confederate; many others relocated to foreign climes such as Brazil, the Caribbean, Mexico, Canada, Europe, and Australia to avoid dreaded Yankee reconstruction and rebuild broken lives. Most saw themselves as victims, but Early's commitment to suffering stood out even among this embittered group. At war's end, despite marginally functional health, he made a mad dash on horseback from Virginia to Texas to escape parole before sailing to the Bahamas, Cuba, Mexico, and, finally, traipsing across Canada, condemning almost every place he traversed. Only Canada escaped his complete censure. Havana he deemed "uninteresting." Mexico was an even graver disappointment. There he had hoped to participate in a French war against the United States, continuing his Confederate service by proxy. When that conflict failed to eventuate, he urged fellow Confederate itinerants to give the country a wide berth.³

At the same time, he began the process of justifying his wartime career, becoming the first important general to pen a memoir, in this case, a justification of his failed 1864 Shenandoah Valley campaign, which cost him his public reputation and his military career, when Lee removed him (via a very gentle letter) from command on March 30, 1865. Not long after, Early also completed an autobiography of his entire war experiences with the Army of Northern Virginia, which would be published posthumously in 1912.⁴ His fierce determination to disclose the truth as he perceived it propelled him through exceptionally trying times of illness and squalor so severe that it reduced him to continual begging from family and friends. In a series of pitiful letters from Canada, Early admitted to his brother Sam, “I am so much crippled up that I move about with difficulty, and am more bent than I have ever been.” In regard to Sam’s intermittent financial support of his exile, Early lamented, “I feel as if I were taking from you the means of educating your children, and in that way doing a great injustice to them.” At his frankest, he confessed, “I cannot stand this life that I am leading.”⁵

Why did Early commit to four miserable years of separation from his beloved home aside from a reasonable fear of being hanged for treason? In the scholarly monograph War Stories, which has most influenced
my cultural understanding of Civil War-era suffering, the historian Frances M. Clarke points out that Victorian Americans emphasized suffering as a measure of morality, particularly for the middle to upper classes. Her reading of Northern sentimentalism is also applicable to Southerners, especially Jubal Early, who came from respectable Virginia stock and, as a former Whig, freely espoused his superiority to the democratic masses. Early's period of self-deprivation was not meant to, say, atone for the sins of slavery or secession, as in religious mortification. Rather his suffering was an attempt to redeem his tarnished reputation and to prove the former Confederacy's moral superiority to the Union. The affinity he felt with other perceived martyrs, such as the ladies of the memorial association in Winchester, Virginia, confirmed his purpose. “It is sad, sad indeed to be an exile from my country, and still sadder to mourn the loss of the most just and most sacred cause for which man ever fought,” he began in a newspaper article in October 1866, equating his and his country’s travails. But there was, he wrote,

some comfort in knowing that the struggle which developed so much heroism on the part of our soldiers and so many virtues in our women has not been all in vain, and wherever I may wander, will bear with me the proud consolation derived from the knowledge that my countrywomen, who were so faithful and devoted during all the trials and vicissitudes of our dreadful contest for independence . . . remain true to the memories of the dead.

Early, the ladies of Winchester, and the defunct Confederacy, he believed, each exemplified model sufferers.

Early fought back against any suggestion that his life failed to embody a noble ideal of Confederate suffering. He was clearly stung when Robert E. Lee suggested that self-exiled Confederates might have made the selfish choice by abandoning the South in its most desperate hour of need. For Early had, after all, gone to great lengths to prove that he was the least selfish Confederate, even donating the proceeds of his 1866 memoirs to the Shenandoah Valley’s Winchester Ladies Memorial Association, which was among the first groups to provide proper burial for the scattered Confederate dead. He did so despite his poverty and the painful condemnations heaped upon him by that region’s newspapers for bungling the 1864 military assignment he believed impossible given the superiority of Union manpower. Lee’s reservations about the Confederate exodus aside, Early appeared to achieve the personal purpose of his
suffering by his return to Virginia in spring 1869. According to a letter from General Hill that June, Early had attained the status of a Southern Odysseus: “Honestly I believe you are [now] nearer to the hearts of the Southern people than any other man.”9 Yet this was only the beginning of Early’s quest to herald his version of the war, as he continued working fastidiously to craft his place as one of the most influential generals, if only after the fact.

In the latter decades of his life, Early devoted the considerable argumentative and literary skills he had honed as a lawyer to constructing and propagating a historical memory that not only justified his own sour exit from the war but also rehabilitated his fellows losers. This would come to be known as the Lost Cause. As Gary W. Gallagher, one of the leading scholars on the Lost Cause, explains, Early “hoped that future generations would rely on [his written historical] record,” which, in addition to his two memoirs, involved newspaper articles, a tremendous amount of influence over the Southern Historical Society Papers, and numerous essays, letters, and speeches. Indeed, Early could be considered primarily responsible for disseminating the myths that Lee and Stonewall Jackson were consummate generals facing inept Northern military commanders who only succeeded because of their superiority in manpower and matériel. Moreover, the Army of Northern Virginia, which, of course, included the beleaguered Early, “set a standard of valor and accomplishment equal to anything in the military history of the Western world.”10 Unlike some of the writers of the age, however, Early was not interested in fairytales that elevated his heroes beyond what he perceived as their accomplishments and virtues. He was as protective of the facts, as he saw them, as a monk guarding the Holy Bible. His meticulous managing of the historical record is exactly what carried him through his bitter, latter years, and his successes are difficult to deny. His version of the war still dominates public memory today, having crept beyond the South to infiltrate popular media at large.11 In short, his body of work not only redeemed his own suffering but also buttressed the entirety of former Confederates.

Early’s case suggests an interesting nexus between studies of nineteenth-century suffering and Civil War memory that is increasingly apparent in veteran studies. David Blight’s seminal Race and Reunion set the standard memory narrative, suggesting that white Northerners and Southerners gradually shed the emotional scars of war to reunite as Americans, symbolized in handshakes across former battlefield fences and the mutual donning of blue uniforms in the Spanish American War.
In Blight’s estimation, this powerful tale of white reconciliation stifled the African American memory of slavery as the war’s primary cause and emancipation as the war’s principle outcome. In recent years, however, scholars have convincingly called into question whether emotional reconciliation ever took place, either among veterans or civilians. Chief among these historians are John Neff and Caroline Janney, whose collective works have demonstrated the unwillingness of Americans on both sides, particularly women, to discard their conception of the other as enemy in the processes of soldier burial and commemoration. Likewise, M. Keith Harris’s new book, *Across the Bloody Chasm*, suggests that beneath the reconciliationist spirit of commemorations, former Confederates refused to concede the moral victory to Union veterans. Though white supremacy did indeed threaten to obscure the emancipation narrative, the historian Barbara Gannon has shown that Union veterans of the Grand Army of the Republic maintained this narrative more than previously thought, continuing to stress the accomplishment of freedom and supporting the organization’s black veterans well into the twentieth century. In short, Jubal Early’s method of funneling his wartime suffering into maintaining a historical memory that suited his personal needs was very much within the norm for Civil War veterans.

Early’s strategy has continuity with what I’ve observed from the war years. Before I transferred my scholarly focus to Early and his stunningly productive self-martyrdom, I studied the wartime suffering and coping strategies of Civil War soldiers. Many elements of nineteenth-century culture, such as religion, class expectations, and sentimental writing, as well as military training, specifically addressed the uses of suffering and provided the means by which to persevere. Though religion offered Early little comfort, his favored technique of letter writing was a universal means by which contemporaries processed and overcame despair. Further, as Early’s enduring rancor confirms, the construction of the enemy played a prime role in motivating soldiers to endure hideous camping conditions, twenty-mile marches, and the horrors of combat, just as it enabled them to kill when the moment presented. Those at home also learned the powerful concept of enemy construction by engaging with correspondence and newspapers, which helped knit together civilian dedication and nationalism through four years of unspeakable carnage.

During the war, soldiers like Early were steeped in a military culture that taught and rewarded resilience. Locally recruited, Civil War
soldiers knew their comrades from home and developed “touch of the elbow” camaraderie, which provided solidarity in combat and threatened public shaming in cowardice. In my first book, *Nature’s Civil War*, I looked at the more mundane types of wartime soldier suffering outside of combat and the associated methods of endurance that required individual ingenuity as well as networks of comrades and civilians. Daily soldier woes included the quotidian grind of hostile environmental conditions; sicknesses, ranging from the trivial to the deadly; and fluctuations in morale, which could have severe consequences for soldier discipline and campaign progress. The dance between nature and soldier comfort proved more important to determining whether a soldier lived or died than did combat, as two-thirds of Civil War mortalities resulted from disease. As anyone who has picked up a Civil War soldier’s letter, diary, or reminiscence can attest, soldiers complained ad nauseam about this type of suffering. A passage from the 1862 diary of a Stone-wall Brigade officer, Major Frank B. Jones, serves as representative:

Monday morning . . . it was cold and cloudy. It soon commenced raining and for three days it has hailed and rained and snowed in the most unaccountable manner. Our encampment is worse than any barnyard for in many places there seems no bottom. Our tent floors are deep in mud, but the sun is out and I hope there will be more comfort after a while. Thursday morning was so cold and cloudy that I laid in bed a long while rather than expose myself to the bitter dawn and cold. My heart was very sad. Our great discomfort and our cause weighed down upon me.

The account reveals the overt connection between environmental challenges—for instance, exposure to foul weather, insects, and challenging terrain—and a soldier’s physical welfare and mental fortitude. In confirmation, roughly a week later Jones griped that the hot sun rendered him “depressed and miserable” and precipitated a “violent nervous headache.” Jones reminds that even the privileged officer class endured relentless stresses outside of combat.

Yet, as I learned, soldiers coped with these taxing conditions by relying on an astonishingly diverse program of self-care and informal networks of knowledge and aid. In other words, they carefully managed their suffering in order to endure it. Major Jones was hardly a passive audience to his pain. In just the few weeks of the incidents above, he used
prayer, napping beneath the pleasant shade of an apple tree, an informal night’s leave to a carpenter shop, a horse’s conveyance, whiskey, a sturdy tent arrangement, and a little stove he stole from the Yankees to combat despair, heat, rain, muddy terrain, illness, and sickening rations. The medicine he received from his regimental surgeon was merely an afterthought and did not appear to mitigate his discomforts more than his attempts at self-care. Other soldiers similarly practiced careful hygiene routines, boiled their water, and eradicated insects in the name of comfort and survival, frequently relying on each other, local civilians, and African American laborers and slaves to provide them with knowledge, goods, shelter, and personalized medical care.

Civil War soldiers used their everyday trials to claim coveted veteran status while still in the ranks. As with Jubal Early, surviving suffering elevated one’s reputation. One green soldier, for example, longed for the day when he would be “gradually hardened” against sickness and misery, but for the time being he was embarrassingly ill with dysentery from camping on the cold, wet ground. In contrast, a veteran soldier boasted to his sister in a letter, “We had a good bit of rain last night and most of us got wet through, but the sun is out this morning and we are fast getting dry. We don’t mind a wetting now anymore than a lot of ducks would.” Looking back on the war, another soldier confirmed with pleasure, “It is surprising how much fatigue and hardship men can stand when put to it . . . It took men to do these things—men with muscles, sinews, and nerves in their bodies, and courage in their hearts.”

Suffering became a badge of honor, transforming mere mortals into heroes.

Evidence of these continuities is absent from one of the new strains in Civil War studies, which emphasizes the weight of soldiers’ suffering, depicting many as broken to the point of dysfunction. There is now a growing body of such work, focusing on the myriad horrors of the war, undoubtedly influenced by our modern context in which war’s enduring physical and psychological impact on soldiers and veterans is daily apparent. Yet it should be recognized that Victorian Americans possessed cultural means to persevere that are lacking in ritually impoverished and socially disjoined modern society. The Civil War generation was one that largely embraced suffering as a positive and productive good, whether they were enduring nagging chigger bites on a laborious summer march or the long-term mental anguish of defeat and humiliation. For all my frustration with Jubal Early’s Lost Cause, I cannot help but be struck by how carefully he sculpted his suffering to suit his suc-
cessful agenda and how productive such labored suffering turned out to be. After all this time, we are still not free of the ornery general, huddled over a letter to his brother, insisting on his and the Confederacy’s immortal martyrdom.

Notes

I extend sincere thanks to Frances M. Clarke for the invitation to participate in this forum and for her editorial wisdom on this essay.

1. On December 4, 1866, the weather ranged from the low thirties to forties, Fahrenheit, and approximately half an inch of rain fell. Historical Canadian weather data can be obtained from the following website: http://climate.weather.gc.ca/, accessed on May 15, 2015.

2. Jubal Early to D. H. Hill (Toronto), December 4, 1866, box 3, D. H. Hill Papers, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA.


5. Jubal Early to Samuel Early (Toronto), May 4, 1867, Mss1EA 765b 35–36, Jubal A. Early Papers, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA; Jubal Early to Samuel Early (St. Catharines), October 28, 1867, bound vol. 4, Jubal Anderson Early Papers, LC; Jubal Early to Samuel Early (Drummondville), September 6, 1868, bound vol. 5, Jubal Anderson Early Papers, LC.


8. Robert E. Lee to Jubal Early (Lexington), March 15, 1866, George H. and Katherine M. Davis Collection, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA.

9. D. H. Hill to Jubal Early (Charlotte), May 12, 1869, bound vol. 5, Jubal Anderson Early Papers, LC.


11. Ibid., 211–14.


13. Clarke’s War Stories is strong on the former, and Earl J. Hess, The Union Soldier in Battle: Enduring the Ordeal of Combat (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), is strong on the latter.


16. Maj. Frank B. Jones, 2nd Regiment Stonewall Brigade, April 10, 18, 1862, Frank B. Jones Diary, March-June 1862, Museum of the Confederacy, Richmond, VA.
In 2008, I was struck by two interesting and high-profile publications. Both Drew Gilpin Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the Civil War* and Mark S. Schantz’s *Awaiting the Heavenly Country: The Civil War and America’s Culture of Death* spoke directly to the issue of death and dying in the Civil War. Though similar in some of their descriptions of antebellum culture and wartime carnage, the books seemed to me to offer enough contrasting perspectives that I imagined a major historical and historiographical argument would ensue. I was wrong, and my own modest entry into the discussion of the meaning of Civil War deaths more recently helped me understand why.

Winner of the Bancroft Prize and finalist for the Pulitzer, Faust’s *This Republic of Suffering* has become a standard in the field. It places death at the very center of the Civil War experience, in the process developing keen insights into how the government, the larger society, communities, and individuals coped with the dying. While acknowledging that nineteenth-century Americans were more familiar with death than we are today, Faust bases her argument on the claim that the “Civil War represented a dramatic shift in both incidence and experience,” producing “carnage that has often been thought reserved for the combination of technological proficiency and inhumanity characteristic of a later time” (*Republic of Suffering*, xii). Schantz’s *Awaiting the Heavenly Country* received more qualified and less extensive praise but nevertheless found an appreciative audience. His goal is to show how circumstances before the war in some sense trained Americans to understand