Carolina chameleons: North Carolina Confederate soldiers who joined the Union army

David E. Arthur

Date of Award
8-2000

Document Type
Thesis

Degree Name
Master of Arts

Department
History

First Advisor
Dr. Robert C. Kenzer

Second Advisor
Dr. John L. Gordon, Jr.

Third Advisor
Dr. Daniel M. Roberts, Jr.

Abstract
This thesis traces 862 North Carolina Civil War soldiers who fought for the Confederacy, deserted or were taken prisoner, and then enrolled in the United States army. The pre-war lives, Confederate and United States military service, and post-war experiences of these men are examined to discover why they chose to enlist in the Union army. A sample of 226 soldiers was compiled by selecting every fourth county in the state in which these "Carolina Chameleons" lived. Their pre-war lives were revealed in the 1860 Population Census and their Southern service in Confederate military records compiled in Louis H. Manarin and Weymouth T. Jordan, eds., North Carolina Troops, 1861-1865, A Roster, 13 vols. (Raleigh: North Carolina Department of Archives and History: 1966-1994). The military service records of the First through Sixth U.S. Volunteers revealed their Northern service and the 1870 Population Census, 1890 Veterans Census, and U.S. Military Pension Records their post-war lives. Most of these soldiers were young men who volunteered early in the war for Confederate service. A significant majority served the South for over one year before being captured by Federal forces. Most were imprisoned for less than one year before joining the Federal forces. After the war, nearly two-fifths of the men returned to North Carolina to reside permanently with a majority again living in the state at some point in their lives. While some men were conscripted or forced into Confederate service despite their opposition to the Confederacy, most were loyal soldiers to both sides. Their decision to switch sides was dictated by the greater probability that they would die of disease in prison than in combat. For most Carolina Chameleons, expedience superceded political or ideological motivations for changing sides.

Recommended Citation
https://scholarship.richmond.edu/masters-theses/632
largest such unit, about 500 men, mustered in at New Orleans in November 1862. Deserters in both the Union and Confederate armies might face firing squads. The Federal government encouraged men to desert from the Confederate Army by pardoning and restoring their citizenship rights and allowing them to go home if they took a loyalty oath to the Union. In August 1864, Union Lt. Gen. The Confederate States Army (C.S.A.) was the military land force of the Confederate States of America (Confederacy) during the American Civil War (1861–1865), fighting against the United States forces. On February 28, 1861, the Provisional Confederate Congress established a provisional volunteer army and gave control over military operations and authority for mustering state forces and volunteers to the newly chosen Confederate president, Jefferson Davis. Davis was a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy.

Durham, North Carolina – Durham is a city in the U.S. state of North Carolina. It is the county seat of Durham County, though portions also extend into Wake County in the east, the U.S. Census Bureau estimated the city’s population to be 251,893 as of July 1, 2014. Durham is the core of the four-county Durham-Chapel Hill Metropolitan Area and it is the home of Duke University and North Carolina Central University, and is also one of the vertices of the Research Triangle area. The Union faced secessionists in eleven Southern states grouped together as the

Confederate States of America, the Union won the war, which remains the bloodiest in U.S. history.