

## AN ANALYSIS OF SOME UNIONIST RECRUITING TRENDS

Jessie Blalock  
9919 Killarney Lane, #102  
Gaithersburg, MD 20877-3928  
e-mail: <jcblal@clark.net>

One of the most commonly-held assumptions about Civil War regimental companies is that the men of a company usually originated from a common neighborhood, often from a single county, or from several contiguous counties, and it is also assumed that when men enlisted at a place, a substantial number of them were natives of that place.

It is also a widely-held belief that the men who joined Unionist Tennessee regiments were generally residents of eastern counties, although some revisionists claim that a significant portion of those Union regiments were not even native Tennesseans, but rather came from Kentucky, West Virginia, or Ohio.

In the course of researching the 4th Tennessee Cavalry (USA), I have transcribed and extrapolated data that contradict some of these assumptions. One of the main points I have uncovered is that the men of Company A, who are on record as originating from Scott County, in fact did not come from Scott County, although a large number of them did enlist there. They were a diverse group, but originated primarily from Bradley County and other south-central Tennessee counties.

The "gold standard" for Tennessee Civil War reference is commonly held to be the two-volume work *Tennesseans in the Civil War* (Nashville: Civil War Centennial Commission, 1964). This publication is invaluable in doing any sort of research about the Volunteer State's role in the Civil

War. However, despite being meticulously researched, one should not assume that all the information contained therein does not merit closer examination.

The entry for Company A of the 4th Tennessee Cavalry (USA) states: "Organized at Louisville, Kentucky, December 13, 1862; mustered at Nashville, February 9, 1863. Most of the men from Huntsville, Scott County."

In the course of transcribing the official rosters of the men who enlisted in Company A (National Archives microfilms M395-30 through M395-38), I compiled demographic data from the "descriptive record," which includes, among other items, the soldier's place of birth, occupation, place of enlistment, date of enlistment, and recruiter's name.

By the time I had completed transcribing Company A, it was apparent to me that virtually none of the men who enlisted in this company were born in Scott County. At first I assumed that this was due to the fact that Scott County was not created until 1849, thus precluding anyone over the age of thirteen having been born "there." Then I conjectured that the men who would have been living in the Scott County area as natives in 1862 would most likely have been born in one of the counties from which Scott County was created (these being Anderson, Campbell, Fentress, and Morgan). But then I saw that this was not the case, either.

The men of Company A were a diverse lot. Of the 114 who enlisted into Company

## AN ANALYSIS OF SOME UNIONIST RECRUITING TRENDS

A for whom I could get data (i.e., excluding "early deserters" who were not mustered in), 89% of them were born in Tennessee (the others being North Carolina [4], Georgia [4], Virginia [1], Indiana [1], and Unknown [2]). They came from twenty different Tennessee counties, although almost 50% of the native-born came from just four counties: Bradley (24), Bledsoe (14), Greene (10), and McMinn (7). These are all a long way from Scott County.

So how, then, did this myth arise? The fact is that a large number of these men did enlist at Huntsville, in Scott County. On a single day, namely October 25, 1862, over forty men were recruited into Company A at Huntsville by Col. Meshack Stephens. Of course, this is not technically a "majority," being only 35% of the total, but it is definitely a significant portion and is the largest single recruitment event of the company's history.

One would assume that even though a large number of the regiment as a whole originated from outside of Scott County, of the men who actually enlisted there, a significant portion would have been born in or near Scott County. However, this does not prove to be the case, either. Of the thirty-seven men who registered on that date (excluding eight "early deserters" whose county of birth is unknown), there is an even higher percentage from faraway

Bradley County (32% or 12/37, vs. 21% or 24/114) than in the regiment as a whole. And the remainder who enlisted on October 25th at Huntsville came from eleven other Tennessee counties, as well as from two other states, but only a solitary one of them was born in a county contiguous to Scott.

It is common knowledge that Scott County was the most strongly Unionist county in Tennessee, to the extent of even having proclaimed itself the "free and independent state of Scott," desiring to secede from the secessionists. One can therefore assume that it was an active hotbed of recruitment for Unionists. However, the degree to which outsiders flocked to enlist there in this case is puzzling. Were these men in Scott County for the specific purpose of enlisting as Union cavalry soldiers? If so, was it premeditated? Did they travel there specifically to enlist in the 4th, or did they instead impulsively heed the oratorical or persuasive powers of Col. Stephens? Was there a recent event that precipitated this flurry of enlistment, and if so, what was it? Were these men pre-recruited in their home counties prior to traveling to Scott County? Did Col. Stephens advertise, and if so, what methods did he utilize?

And why did no native-born men of Scott County join Company A of the 4th Tennessee Cavalry?