**Allegiance, Ability, and Achievement in the American Civil War: Commander Traits and Battlefield Military Effectiveness**

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**1 Introduction**

* Battlefield victory depends on many factors that may change over time.
  + In the ancient world, military combat was heroic in nature, with aristocrats doing battle and masses of infantry essentially serving auxiliary roles.
  + Greek democracy brought with it the democratization of warfare, in which companies of hoplites fought one another in phalanx formation.
  + Military engagements were further altered when Persia invaded the Greek city-states, and Militiades’ genius was instrumental in developing a strategem to defeat Darius’ forces (Andreatta,2015). Without his insights, the battle might well have been lost.
* The **critical role of command** has long been recognized by military strategists and historians.
  + A. A. Vandegrift, a USMC General in WWII: “positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but because the leader has decided in his mind that the position cannot be held” (United States Marine Corps, 1997, 1).
  + Rulers seek for the right commander to win the conflict:
    - Plutarch (1992) describes Quintus Fabius Maximus as the only man capable of stopping Hannibal’s rampage through Italy, following the defeat of Gaius Flaminius at Lake Trasimene.
    - Liddell Hart (1996) traces the importance of six great commanders in the second millennium.
    - And Taaffe (2011) highlights the decisions made by U.S. Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall in World War II in selecting officers who could defeat the Axis powers.
* For the American Civil War (hereafter, the “Civil War”), military leadership has been deemed especially important.
  + The Confederacy possessed superior leadership (e.g., Alexander, 2007), enabling its forces to achieve several early victories (McPherson, 1988, 327) (Defeat of Unions at the First Battle of Bull Run).
  + As the war progressed, the gap narrowed, and the Union was able to exploit its own advantages in terms of resources and manpower, turning the tide in its favour (Bond, 1998). This account suggests Lincoln might have appointed more competent commanders later in the war. (It also implies the possibility of learning over the course of the war.)

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* However, while commanding officers were likely chosen for some combination of leadership capabilities and loyalty.
  + Standard theories of executive appointments admin politics suggest a trade-off between loyalty and competence (e.g., Edwards, 2001, Hollibaugh, Horton and Lewis, 2014, Hollibaugh, 2016a, Krause and O’Connell, 2015, Lewis, 2008).
  + The incentives are likely different between context of administrative politics, and that of military leadership in war.
  + Thus, the **Civil War** provides an excellent opportunity to examine not only the **relationship between traits of military leaders and battlefield performance**, but also the generalizability and applicability of extant theories of executive politics.
* Provide several contributions to the study of military success.
  + First, we employ large- scale data on the attributes of battlefield commanders in the Civil War.
  + Then use these data to compute measures of loyalty and competence for commanders on both sides.
  + Finally, we assess the respective roles that loyalty and competence play in determining battlefield outcomes.
  + Our results are broadly supportive of the traditional hypothesis, suggesting that leadership is indeed related to success, and that while the Confederacy began the war with a competence advantage among its commanders, the gap narrowed considerably as the war progressed.

**2 Military Leadership and Battlefield Outcomes**

* While the international relations literature has devoted attention to factors influencing outcomes of military conflict, its focus has been directed primarily at its highest level—wars and militarized disputes—ignoring combat within wars (Gartner, 1998, Reiter, 2009).

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* At the interstate level, researchers have focused on factors such as regime type, alliances, material capabilities, and attributes of political leadership (e.g., Biddle and Long, 2004, Choi, 2004, Lake, 1992, Reiter and Stam, 1998, Wolford, 2007) to explain why one state might defeat or surrender to another.
* At the intrastate level, analyses have emphasized the importance of state capacity, regime type, industrialization, terrain, tactics, and outside intervention (e.g., Balch-Lindsay, Enterline and Joyce, 2008, Chatagnier and Castelli, 2016, Cunningham, Gleditsch and Salehyan, 2009, DeRouen and Sobek, 2004, Fortna, 2012, Mason, Weingarten and Fett, 1999).
* The purpose in each case is to determine the likelihood that one side achieves strategic victory over the other. Neither successes at the tactical or operational level, nor how those successes lead to strategic success, are explained.
* The decision to ignore **battlefield success** is surprising, as many scholars have acknowledged its importance in determining overall outcomes (Reed and Clark, 2000, Slantchev, 2003, Smith and Stam, 2004). Although exceptions exist (e.g., Biddle and Long, 2004, Grauer and Horowitz, 2012, Reiter and Stam, 1998), **little research** has been dedicated to understanding the components of **battle-level effectiveness**. This is noteworthy given claims that traditional quantitative indicators of success in military conflicts are poor predictors of battlefield success (Biddle, 2006, Freedman, 2005), suggesting the need for additional study.
* Moreover, **a crucial determinant of battlefield success**, military leadership, has been particularly understudied.
  + Research on leaders has focused primarily on political leaders, and their incentives to initiate or participate in wars (Bueno De Mesquita and Siverson, 1995, Chiozza and Goemans, 2011, Fuhrmann and Horowitz, 2015, Goemans and Fey, 2009, Horowitz and Stam, 2014).
  + The relationship between leadership and success has mostly been confined to the (often conflict- specific) literature on coup-proofing—that is, where leaders stack officer corps with individuals personally loyal to them, often leaving them ill-prepared to resist domestic uprisings and foreign invasions (Gaub, 2013, Hosmer, 2007, Pilster and Böhmelt, 2011, 2012).

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* One notable focus on battlefield success is Reiter and Wagstaff:
  + Analyses how battlefield success in World War II affected decisions to promote or remove commanders.
  + They outline how tactical expertise, the ability to inspire soldiers, the choice of competent subordinates, and the provision of better strategic options allow leaders to affect battlefield outcomes.
  + Their analysis, however, focuses on the effects of tactical victories, rather than their causes. Here, we opt for the opposite tack and examine how commander qualities affect the likelihood of success.
* The Civil War is ideal for this purpose.
  + Though the conflict was an intrastate dispute, the manner of fighting by the combatants—two standing armies engaging in pitched battles over territory—was more akin to conventional warfare than the insurgency combat more common to civil conflicts.
  + Indeed, although it has generally been overlooked within the subfield, the Civil War has been analyzed in several recent works by IR scholars (Poast, 2015, Reiter, 2009). Second, while historical within-war data are scarce, the Civil War is well-documented (Weiss, 1966). This may be due to its place as “the single most important event in American history” (Reiter, 2009, 140), as well as its idiosyncrasies.
  + Using these data, we can show precisely how individual-level commander competence contributed to tactical victory, addressing an issue that has long been ignored by conflict scholars.

**3 Military Appointments in the American Civil War**

* Focusing on leadership in the Civil War provides us with an opportunity to speak to a second literature and examine the generalizability of extant theories of executive appointments.
* Whereas foundational works focused on several personal traits, recent research has focused on loyalty and competence, with a consensus emerging regarding a trade-off between the two (e.g., Edwards, 2001, Hollibaugh, Horton and Lewis, 2014, Krause and O’Connell, 2015, Lewis, 2008, 2009).
* Although these works were (largely) situated within the contexts of appointments to executive agencies and cabinet departments, there is reason to believe the negative relationship between loyalty and competence is applicable to questions of martial prowess. This is especially true of the Civil War, the background of which made loyalty an important criterion.4 Indeed, there is evidence that both Lincoln and Davis considered questions of loyalty when deciding whom to promote. After General Don Carlos Buell’s failure to defeat Braxton Bragg’s forces in Kentucky, Union leaders relieved him of command and searched for a replacement. General George Thomas—a top tactical mind, and one of the only Union commanders to enjoy early success—was a natural successor. Lincoln, however, expressed a reluctance to “replace one Southern-born commander for another,” and opted for William Rosecrans, whose partisan and religious identification were politically expedient (Broadwater, 2009, 87). When Secretary of War Edwin Stanton expressed little confidence in Rosecrans, urging Lincoln to replace him with Thomas, Lincoln referenced Thomas’ origin, saying, “Let the Virginian wait” (Piatt and Van Boynton, 1893, 327), illustrating a willingness to trade competence for loyalty. Thomas was given command of the Army of the Cumberland at the end of 1863, but only after he prevented Rosecrans’ defeat at Chickamauga from turning into a disaster.
* Loyalty played an important role in the selection of Confederate commanders as well, though Davis arguably placed a premium on personal loyalty, rather than birthplace.5 Indeed, the most senior officer in the Confederate military—outranking Generals Robert E. Lee and P. G. T. Beauregard—was New York native Samuel Cooper, who was appointed adjutant general of the Confederate Army, responsible only to President Davis himself. William Davis (1996, 360) argues that Cooper was awarded his lofty rank because of his friendship with the Confederate president, and his willingness to do Davis’ bidding, allowing the latter to “solidify [his] control over his armies. Davis could act through Cooper, and the rank insulated Cooper from question.”
* These anecdotes suggest that perceptions of loyalty influenced both Confederate and Union decision making during the war. This does not mean, however, that loyalty was the only—or even paramount—criterion. Indeed, relative to bureaucratic appointments, the importance of battlefield competence and the existential threat posed to the Confederate government (as well as uncertainty over repercussions in the event of capture or a Confederate loss) likely rendered competence even more critical.6,7 Moreover, the unique context of the war may have mitigated any relationship between loyalty and competence. For example, uncertainty over punishment in the case of a Confederate loss might have ensured the pool of potential flag officer nominees was disproportionately loyal. Current models rarely consider the pool of potential nominees (but see Hollibaugh, 2015) and none, to our knowledge, endogenize self-selection into the pool. Conceivably, the inclusion of high penalties for failure and self-selection might affect longstanding results.
* Additionally, cultural differences might alter the aforementioned effects, or even exert their own influence. Indeed, while both the Union and the Confederacy were part of the United States prior to secession, cultural differences existed between the two—and persist to this day. One of those most relevant to our analysis is honor, which has long been valorized within the American South (Nisbett and Cohen, 1996). Characterizing honor as a reputation for resolve, Dafoe and Caughey (2016) find that Southern presidents have been more likely to initiate, continue, and win militarized disputes.If the same dynamic held in the Civil War, then those commanders who most identified with the Confederacy (i.e., those most “loyal”) likely also identified most with Southern honor, and would be more likely to achieve success on the battlefield due to the desire to maintain a reputation of unwillingness to back down. This should not hold (at least not to the same extent) for Union commanders, not having grown up in a culture that placed the same emphasis on honor; in these cases, the standard loyalty-competence tradeoff would be more likely to be observed, with loyalty having neutral—or even negative—effects on outcomes.

Finally, for Confederates with military backgrounds, traits related to competence may be associated with increased (personal) loyalty. Unlike Lincoln, Davis was a Mexican War veteran and a West Point graduate. As such, he maintained personal connections within the officer corps. When putting together the Confederate government and military, he “looked to West Pointers and to men he knew and trusted” (Davis, 1996, 316). For Davis, some attributes associated with competence as an officer—such as training at West Point—might also have been related to personal loyalty. Thus, the circumstances involved in military appointments—as well as the characteristics of the South—could result in a positive association between loyalty and competence for Confederate commanders, in contrast to the long literature on the loyalty-competence tradeoff among executive appointees.8 However, these considerations should be absent for Union commanders, who (for the most part) neither grew up in the culture of the American South nor faced uncertainty over the possible outcomes in the case of a Union loss (e.g., they faced no possibility of being executed for treason, as conquest of the Union was not among the goals of the Confederacy).