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The Army for Lincoln in 1864: Electing the President, Ending the War, and Changing the Voting Process

The results of the 1864 presidential election show no signs of a closely contested race: Abraham Lincoln outpaced Democratic challenger George McClellan by 191 electoral votes – 212 to the incumbent Republican, 21 to the ousted general nicknamed “Young Napoleon.” The popular vote, while not as tilted, also went to Lincoln, who won a healthy, but by no means a landslide, 55 percent majority with roughly 400,000 more votes than McClellan. However, as Lincoln scribbled down his projected electoral vote while sitting at a telegraph office a month before the election, he projected a result far less comforting and assertive. Lincoln cautiously predicted a close 120 to 113 electoral count victory. Indeed, Lincoln had admitted two months earlier, “it seems exceedingly probably that this administration will not be reelected.”¹ Citizens of the 25 states that would participate in the election considered McClellan and the Democrats’ proposed peaceful end to the war after a dreary spring headlined by the disastrous Overland Campaign in May and June.² Even as the tide turned for the Union at Mobile Bay in August, followed by September’s victory in Atlanta, uncertainty hung in the air as to whether Lincoln would be granted a strong enough mandate to justify carrying on with a war that would result in over 700,000 deaths.

Credit for Lincoln’s decisive win in the election is often given to Sherman’s victories in the months leading up to the vote, which decimated the South and caused Northerners to buy

¹ Memorandum by Abraham Lincoln, August 23, 1864, <http://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2014/08/abraham-lincolns-blind-memorandum/>.

² David Herbert Donald, Jean Harvey Baker, and Michael F. Holt, *The Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 427. Elections were held in Louisiana and Tennessee but no electoral votes were counted: thus, some count 27 states participating in the election.

back into the war. However, starting before the midterm elections in 1862, a fervent, yet subtly recorded, political scrum concerning whether or not soldiers would be permitted to vote in elections began. Mathematically, the soldier's vote did not decide the result of the election, and had the soldiers voted for McClellan, they likely would not have been able overcome their past commander's 400,000 vote deficit. Nevertheless, giving the Union army the ability to vote was immensely important for the Union. The soldiers were given their fair say in the election, the army's investment and confidence in Lincoln and the war were reaffirmed, and Lincoln's ability to prosecute the war with the military's support was assured. The outcome of the soldier vote was as important as that of the popular vote for Lincoln: had he not received the overwhelming support of his men, Lincoln would have had to continue as Commander in Chief knowing that his soldiers lacked conviction in him and the war. While the soldier vote may not have been a deciding factor in the election, it held immense psychological importance for Lincoln and the soldiers, as well as symbolically upholding a principle of suffrage (at least for white males, at the time) that granted each person an equal say in government.

The soldier vote's legacy not only stands as a testament to Lincoln's popularity in the army, but also brought to light the issue of absentee voting. While not given the attention of an amendment to the United States Constitution, the Election of 1864 laid the path for voting legislation that now gives those who cannot reach the polls the opportunity to vote either by absentee or early voting ballots.

It is generally accepted that by the end of the Civil War, more than 2,100,000 soldiers and sailors had served in the Union army.³ Of these, Josiah Henry Benton estimates in his 1915

³ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 306.

Voting in the Field: A Forgotten Chapter of the Civil War, perhaps 1,300,000 were eligible to vote – African Americans, un-naturalized immigrants, and soldiers under 21 being mostly ineligible.⁴ Going by these numbers, roughly 400,000 soldiers of the more than 600,000 that were serving in the Union army at the time of the Election of 1864 were able to vote. In an election in which only four million votes would be counted, the question as to whether the soldiers would vote for a particular candidate en masse and if they would be able to vote at all were critical issues.⁵ The only previous wartime election had been held in 1812, and prior to 1860, not a single state sported legislation that enfranchised soldiers or sailors away from their home districts.⁶

In early 1864, the problem had still not been uniformly resolved: seventeen states had passed legislation permitting soldiers to vote from the field or by proxy while the issue was staunchly opposed in the remaining states by Democratic governors and legislatures. The fight for soldier suffrage had been picked up by Republicans following sobering defeats in the election of 1862, in which twenty seats were lost in the House of Representatives to the Democrats' gain of 27, and was almost universally opposed by Democrats who feared that soldiers would vote overwhelmingly for Lincoln.⁷ The Election of 1862 convinced Republican leaders that change was necessary to combat the "race baiting" tactics of Democrats and demonstrated the potential importance of a soldier vote.⁸

As 1864 approached, Democrats employed many of the same tactics that had been so successful during the midterms. An anonymous writer in Georgia's *Chronicle and Sentinel* on September 18 described the choice between Lincoln and McClellan:

⁴ Josiah Henry Benton, *Voting in the Field: A Forgotten Chapter of the Civil War* (Boston: W.B. Clarke, 1915), 311.

⁵ John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2001), 354.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 339.

⁷ Ford Risley, *The Civil War: Primary Documents on Events from 1860 to 1865* (Westport, CT: Library of Congress, Greenwood Press, 2004), 148.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 340.

[Lincoln's] re-election means war: relentless, exterminating war. The emancipation of the slave, the subjugation of the people of the South; the confiscation of property; the obliteration of all political rights. The shield held up to our view as he makes war upon us is the head of Medusa. On the other hand, if Gen. McClellan should be elected, a cessation of hostilities will follow. The war will be suspended. The star of hope will rise above the surging billows.⁹

Another outspoken Democratic publication, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, published an article by an anonymous writer on November 5 claiming to describe the differences between the two candidates. It told readers to vote for Lincoln if they wanted “high taxes,” “four years more of war,” “the Constitution utterly destroyed,” “the degraded Negroes made your social and political equals,” “the Union of your fathers forever destroyed,” and “conscription.” It told voters to vote for McClellan if they wanted “peace and Union,” “a Constitution re-established,” a “government of law,” and a man “of spotless purity, distinguished patriotism, a ripe scholar.”¹⁰ A McClellan 1864 campaign broadside echoed the Democratic papers as it claimed that if the votes should “elect Lincoln and the Republican ticket, [they] will bring on negro equality, more debt, harder times, another draft.”¹¹

Indeed, the two largest ploys used by the McClellan campaign that specifically targeted soldiers were the search for an end to the war and extreme race baiting. While McClellan was running a campaign whose promises were largely geared towards soldiers, the Democrats' opposition to the soldier vote shows their clear doubts in McClellan's ability to appeal to the army. In response to the Democrats' unwillingness to allow soldiers to vote, a group of Pennsylvanians wrote to soldiers claiming that, “in a manner as foolish and impolitic as it was culpable and unjust, the false leaders of the Democratic party have in every State opposed your rights and defied your power.” The same memo claimed that Democrats would reduce Union

⁹ Anon., "The Presidential Canvass in the United States," *Chronicle and Sentinel* (Augusta, GA), September 18, 1864.

¹⁰ Anon., "What Do You Want?," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* (Cleveland), November 5, 1864.

¹¹ George B. McClellan, "1864 Campaign Broadside" Heritage Auction, <http://historical.ha.com/itm/political/george-mcclellan-fabulous-1864-racist-broadside/a/6092-38111.s>

soldiers “to the level of the soldier just emerged from slavery – the black man who whatever his courage, has so recently been enslaved that he does not as to vote as a citizen.”¹² The decision of Democrats to go against their candidate made Lincoln an even more appealing option and the result even more lopsided. Nevertheless, both candidates still believed in their ability to garner the soldier vote.

Less than six months before Election Day, however, the soldiers’ opportunity to vote still hung in the air. In a letter on March 1, Union soldier Frank Waterman expressed a feeling of uncertainty manifested by many other Union soldiers. “I thought at the last presidential election that I should be near enough 21 at this one to vote, by a little cheating; but I guess I must give up the idea unless soldiers are allowed to vote.”¹³ The army’s ability to have its input hung in the air, despite clear interest in the election – Waterman also noted “a good deal of discussion about politics in the army.” Allowing the soldiers to vote, rather than keeping their privilege from them due to an obligation of service, gave the soldiers an opportunity to voice their opinion in what they were fighting for and feel less separated from home. A group of Union soldiers voiced their sentiment in a *New York Times* article on April 23, 1864:

Therefore, be it resolved that being loyal citizens, the voters who are in the army of the United States are entitled to representation... as we will assure them that their rights, interests, and wishes will not be disregarded.¹⁴

The right of the soldiers to vote was not just an issue concerning the outcome of the election, but would give them confidence that their views were accounted for and mattered to the government. Seeing Lincoln’s reelection as a victory for themselves that they took part in, the soldiers would presumably feel more confidence and enthusiasm in the war – rather than being cast aside while

¹² Francis Jordan, et al, “To the Soldiers of Pennsylvania in the Union Army” [printed broadside] (Washington D.C.: McGill and Witherow, 1864), YA Pamphlet Collection, Rare Book/Special Collections, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

¹³ Letter by Frank A. Waterman, March 1, 1864, GLC03755, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York.

¹⁴ “The Presidency: Soldiers’ Views on the Succession,” *New York Times* (New York), April 23, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91833615?accountid=4314>

their decisions were made for them, far from the battlefield. Commanding General Ulysses S.

Grant agreed that it was only right that soldiers be able to vote:

In performing this sacred duty, they should not be deprived of a most precious privilege. They have as much right to demand that their votes shall be counted, in their choice of rulers, as those citizens, who remain at home; Nay more, for they have sacrificed more for their country.¹⁵

Undisputed was that the soldiers deserved a say in the election. However, there was no precedent for passing legislation providing for absentee ballots. In 1862, Connecticut's General Assembly's statute that soldiers in the Union Army would be allowed to vote in general elections was deemed unconstitutional by the Connecticut Supreme Court.¹⁶ The response to such technical boundaries in Connecticut and several other states was to amend state constitutions. Other blockades were formed by Democratic governors and state legislatures controlled by Democrats. In New York State, a voting bill allowing soldiers to vote in the field was passed in 1863 only to be vetoed by Democratic Governor Horatio Seymour, who had been elected to a second non-consecutive term as Governor in the slew of Democratic victories in 1862. To bypass the veto, the State Constitution was amended in 1864.¹⁷ Similar legislation was introduced in twelve other states, while four permitted soldiers to vote by proxy.¹⁸ Thus, some soldiers would vote in ballot boxes brought to the field, and others would send their ballots to someone at his home precinct who would cast it in his place (eventually, some soldiers would be given furloughs which allowed them to travel home to vote).¹⁹ In states where absentee voting was initiated, efforts to "get-out-the-vote" among soldiers became urgent. Union Leagues - Republican auxiliaries - organized letters to soldiers and saw to it that soldiers had paperwork in

¹⁵ Quoted in Charles Bracelen Flood, *1864: Lincoln at the Gates of History* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 310.

¹⁶ Wesley W. Horton, *The Connecticut State Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 161.

¹⁷ Benton, *Voting in the Field*, 306.

¹⁸ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 663.

¹⁹ Benton, *Voting in the Field*, 16.

order. One message from the Philadelphia Union League set up a system to secure the soldier his “right to vote” by making sure personal taxes were paid and also visiting “every house from which a soldier has gone to the field.”²⁰ The immense operation to insure that soldiers voted, and voted for Lincoln, demonstrates the immense importance Republicans placed in the soldier vote.

In his annual message to Congress on December 6, 1864, Lincoln explained that while soldiers in the majority of states had been permitted to vote in the election, “soldiers in the field from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, Delaware, Indiana, Illinois, and California, who, by the laws of those States, could not vote away from their homes” required furloughs to participate in the election.²¹ In Lincoln’s home state of Illinois, soldier Thomas J. Turner implored the President to grant leave to soldiers so they could vote on July 23:

I have arrived at the Conclusion that the contest will be a close one in this State [Illinois] unless we can have the votes of our brave and loyal soldiers. I, therefore, address you for the purpose of urging upon your consideration the necessity of granting furloughs to our soldiers so that they may be at home and participate in the election.²²

Soldier support was so important to Lincoln, who appealed specifically to generals and enlisted the support of Secretary of War Edwin Stanton to satisfy Turner’s and many other soldiers’ requests, that he even sent General William Sherman a letter on September 19, 1864 requesting that he do “anything [he could] safely do to let [Indiana’s] soldiers, or any part of them, go home and vote.”²³ While Sherman was hesitant to grant furloughs to his soldiers, he compromised with Lincoln and sent roughly ten thousand sick and wounded soldiers home to vote.²⁴ Assistant

²⁰ Letter from the Union League House, October 20, 1864, X.2.1864.10.2, Union League Club of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA. *From the Collection of LeeAnna Keith.*

²¹ Abraham Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress" (speech transcript, Washington, D.C., December 6, 1864).

²² Letter by Thomas J. Turner, "Soldier Vote in the Upcoming Election," July 23, 1864, The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

²³ Abraham Lincoln to William T. Sherman, September 19, 1864.

²⁴ Flood, *1864: Lincoln at the Gates*, 309-310.

Secretary of War Charles Dana noted that “[a]ll the power and influence of the War Department was employed to secure the re-election of Lincoln.”²⁵

The urgency of Turner’s letter and the rush to secure furloughs so soldiers could vote at home demonstrates the belief that Lincoln could have lost the election. Indeed, both Lincoln *and* McClellan had high expectations riding on the soldier vote. Counting on the army to fondly remember his time as its commanding general, McClellan was confident that he would carry the majority of the soldiers’ votes, even though he represented a party who opposed their ability to vote. A *New York World* publisher, Manton Marble, wrote in October of 1864 “we are as certain of two thirds of that vote for General McClellan as that the sun shines.”²⁶ “Uncle Abe,” as some soldiers referred to him, had faith in a familial bond and friendship he had made with the soldiers, and their desire to carry out the war now that the end was in sight.²⁷

Leading up to the election, the consensus among many in the Union military was that Lincoln would receive their votes. Waterman, in the same letter from March 1, 1864, wrote, “[a]s far as I have been able to learn the soldiers are nearly unanimous for Abraham Lincoln for our next president,”²⁸ while a fellow soldier Charles E. Walbridge proclaimed in a letter to his mother on October 7, 1864, that “[a]t all events this army is going to vote for Abraham Lincoln and so is the whole country.”²⁹

In a June 9 letter to the National Union League, Lincoln cited the story of an old Dutch farmer remarking to a companion that “it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams” in reference to his campaign for reelection.³⁰ Lincoln, rather than bash his opponent or use incendiary tactics such as race baiting, modestly appealed to the nation to allow him to finish the

²⁵ Quoted in Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political*, 663-664.

²⁶ Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle*, 340.

²⁷ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political*, 663.

²⁸ Letter by Waterman.

²⁹ Letter by Charles E. Walbridge, October 7, 1864, GLC04662.080, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York.

³⁰ Letter by Abraham Lincoln, "Reply to Delegation from the National Union League," June 9, 1864.

job he had started. The Union soldiers agreed, at least after the war turned in the Union's favor with Sherman's victories, that reelecting Lincoln, and not "swapping horses" for McClellan, would be the more productive option. Waterman wrote that "it might put the war back a year or two by putting a new man in [Lincoln's] chair," while soldier Damuth Dolphus wrote to his sister on October 1, 1864, that electing McClellan would "give the rebs all we have gained in the last three years."³¹ The enthusiasm with which the army backed Lincoln was the military's assertion that it was invested in defeating the Confederacy rather than agreeing to a truce for a peaceful end to the war, which Sergeant Lysander Wheeler called a "dishonest compromise" in a letter on September 14, 1864.³²

Only twelve of the states that permitted absentee voting separately kept track of the soldier vote – in these states, Lincoln accumulated 78 percent of the 154,054 identified votes, a lopsided 119,754 votes to McClellan's 34,291.³³ Had the figure been reversed, Lincoln still would have won the popular vote, but a few well placed votes in key states could have shifted the electoral count, at least making the election's results less assertive for Lincoln. Certain intangibles, such as soldiers writing home to friends and family informing them of their confidence in Lincoln, gained Lincoln votes as well. Of course, in addition to decisively voting in the presidential election, the soldiers also participated in state and local polls. The election of 1864 witnessed a complete reversal of the midterm elections, as Republicans gained 46 seats in the House of Representatives to the Democrats' loss of 31, reestablishing a strong majority of 134 seats to 31 (the Unionists controlled 18).

New York, Pennsylvania, and Connecticut brought Lincoln the smallest margins of victory – he won 50.5 percent of the vote in New York, 51.7 in Pennsylvania, and 51.4 in

³¹ Letter by Damuth Dolphus, October 1, 1864, GLC03523.14.70, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York.

³² Letter by Lysander Wheeler, September 14, 1864, GLC07460.100, Gilder Lehrman Collection, New York.

³³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 804.

Connecticut, gaining him 65 electoral votes.³⁴ In both New York and Connecticut, the soldier vote was grouped with all of the others (there were no separate tallies keeping track of how the soldiers voted) – so it is extremely probable, if soldiers had voted in those two states consistently with the recorded numbers from other states, that the soldier vote was the deciding difference.³⁵ Had Lincoln failed to carry New York, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, he would have won by a significantly less dominant 61 electoral votes, and should he have lost Indiana (53.5 percent) and Illinois (54.4), he would have scraped by with a margin of only three electoral votes. Lincoln had successfully persuaded General Sherman to allow roughly ten thousand sick and injured soldiers to return to Indiana on furloughs to vote, and they had voted overwhelmingly in favor of Lincoln.³⁶ Lincoln won the state by nineteen thousand votes – and the soldiers who were allowed to return home to vote could have provided as much as a twenty thousand vote swing, enough to win the state. Indeed, Lincoln had expected McClellan to win New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky, and Illinois.³⁷ Although he still would have won the election, he desired a sweeping victory to show, uncontested, that the Union had faith in him and the war.

To Lincoln, winning the soldier vote was more important than winning the election. He claimed, possibly playing politics rather than being genuine, “I would rather be defeated with the soldier vote behind me than to be elected without it.”³⁸ Had Lincoln lost the soldier vote and won the election, it would have been a slap in the face to his confidence in running the war. Lincoln had worked hard at establishing good relationships with soldiers, and if they voted for an ousted general who advocated a truce with the Confederacy, Lincoln would have had to wage war with

³⁴ Gerhard Peters, "Election of 1864," The American Presidency Project, accessed August 19, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/showelection.php?year=1864>.

³⁵ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 805.

³⁶ Flood, *1864: Lincoln at the Gates*, 309-310.

³⁷ Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle*, 339.

³⁸ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political*, 664.

the knowledge that he lacked the support of those fighting for him. Instead, the soldiers' decision to, as reporter Henry Wing put it in August of 1864, "vote as they shoot" allowed Lincoln to confidently continue fighting for an end to the war with his men behind him. The soldiers chose to continue fighting, and showed that they were willing to risk their lives in their investment in the Civil War.³⁹

Even in Georgia's notorious Andersonville Prison, where thirteen thousand of forty-five thousand Union soldiers detained would die, or suffer in a way that Walt Whitman described in a *New York Times* article as "often worse than death," a group of soldiers who held a mock election voted overwhelmingly in favor of Lincoln 188 to 36, according to a November 8 entry of Sergeant Lucius W. Barber's diary.^{40, 41} While the Democratic newspaper *Charleston Mercury* had claimed in an August article that the prisoners "are greatly exasperated at the Royal Ape for not exchanging them," these men, who would have been freed should McClellan have been elected and brought the war to an end via truce, had been won over by Lincoln's desire to "strive on to finish the work [they were] in," and "to bind up the nation's wounds."^{42, 43}

While Lincoln's overwhelming victory in the Election of 1864 was credited in part to his support in the soldier vote, state constitutional amendments or laws that allowed soldiers to vote away from home expired after the war's end.⁴⁴ After an election in which the soldier vote by absentee ballot had played such an important role, surprisingly nothing was done to amend absentee voting laws until the 20th Century. As the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment came and went, the ability to participate in elections was not given to soldiers abroad, sick or disabled

³⁹ Quoted in Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle*, 343.

⁴⁰ Walt Whitman, "The Prisoners," *The New York Times* (New York), December 27, 1864.

⁴¹ Lucius W. Barber, *Army Memoirs of Lucius W. Barber, Company "D", 15th Illinois Volunteer* (Chicago: J.M.W Jones Stationary and Printing Company, 1894),177.

⁴² Anon., "The Yankee Prisoners at Andersonville," *Charleston Mercury* (Charleston, SC), August 26, 1864.

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address" (speech transcript, Washington, D.C., March 4, 1865).

⁴⁴ Horton, *The Connecticut State Constitution*, 161.

people (to such an extent that they would have had to say home on Election Day), Americans residing overseas, or anyone unable to make it to polling stations.

The first time that civilians were able to vote by absentee ballot was 1896 in Vermont.⁴⁵ It took another ninety years to solidify nationwide legislation that would permit soldiers and citizens to vote abroad, although the method differs state by state. During World War II, the issue reentered the center stage of American politics. Robert Ramsay (D-W.Va.) brought a bill to the floor of the House of Representatives to “provide for a method of voting by members of the land and naval forces absent from the State of their residence,” which was followed by seven hours of intense debate.⁴⁶ In September of 1942 a bill was passed (247-53 in the House, 47-5 in the Senate), allowing soldiers to vote and exempting them from a poll tax. President Franklin Roosevelt claimed in his State of the Union on January 11, 1944 that the right of the soldiers to vote is “the fundamental prerogative of citizenship,” and that not permitting soldiers to vote was an “unjustifiable discrimination” that Congress had to correct “as quickly as possible.”⁴⁷

It took another 40 years before a federal and more permanent legislation would be passed definitively ending the debate on the soldier vote. The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act of 1986 states that “each state shall permit absent uniformed services voters and overseas voters to use absentee registration procedures and to vote by absentee ballot in general, special, primary, and runoff elections for Federal office.”⁴⁸ Universal suffrage, to this day, would not be attainable without the absentee ballot. As argued during the Election of 1864, a soldier should not have the privilege of voting taken away because he was abroad defending the United States. Nor should a disabled citizen not be given the chance to vote because of an

⁴⁵ Kate Kenski, "Absentee Voting," in *Encyclopedia of American Political Parties and Elections*, by Larry J. Sabato and Howard R. Earnst (New York: Facts on File, 2006).

⁴⁶ Michael Anderson, *Politics and Progress, American Society and the State since 1865* (Wesport, CT: Praeger, 2001), 86.

⁴⁷ Franklin Delano Roosevelt, "State of the Union Message to Congress" (speech, Congress, Washington, D.C., January 11, 1944).

⁴⁸ The Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, 42 U.S.C. § 20 (1986).

inability to reach the polls. In the 2010 presidential election, nearly 28 million of 130 million votes were by absentee ballots,⁴⁹ and currently absentee voting is permitted without an excuse in 28 states, while an excuse is needed in 22 others and the District of Columbia.⁵⁰ The election of 1864 deserves to be credited with first demonstrating the unarguable need to address the issue of absentee voting, even though it did not create permanent legislation.

Ironically, Lincoln's victory in the Election of 1864 helped him more during the four months between the election and his second inauguration than it did in the month between his inauguration and assassination. A Democratic victory would have meant a "lame duck" period of virtual ineffectiveness for Lincoln, and, as Alexander McClure observed, "his power to prosecute the war and make peace would be greatly impaired."⁵¹ In this way Lincoln's victory in the Election of 1864 had more of psychological than official connotation as it applied to bringing an end to the Civil War. Giving soldiers the opportunity to vote in the presidential election had a tremendous effect on the results, let the men who were fighting to preserve the Union have their justified opinion, validated Lincoln's continuation of the war, and began to change voting legislation that affects every election today.

Had there not been a soldier vote in the election of 1864, the soldiers' opinion of Lincoln and level of enthusiasm in the war would have been passed down through opinionated letters, newspaper articles, and memoirs. Perhaps the Civil War would have been considered a true "rich man's war," while being a "poor man's fight," or at least a war completely in the hands of politicians in Washington. However, the fact that the vote was given to soldiers, not just out of desire to win the election but the sentiment that the soldiers deserved an input, represents the

⁴⁹ Adam Liptak, "Error and Fraud at Issue as Absentee Voting Rises," *New York Times* (New York), October 6, 2012.

⁵⁰ Kenski, "Absentee Voting."

⁵¹ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political*, 662.

shifting mindset of the next century that not just a specific group of people deserved to vote, but that democracy in America meant a broader definition of suffrage, certainly including soldiers.

The soldier vote in the Election of 1864 paints a more detailed image of the Union soldier in the Civil War as one who had passion for his whole country and the desire that the Union be preserved. Major James Connolly wrote to his wife on September 25, 1864, “[w] must have the man who dares to say: the Nation must live. We can trust ourselves to no other pilot.”⁵² Allowing the soldiers to vote affirmed that they had this view, and allowed them to choose Lincoln as their “pilot.” As John Vorys (R-Ohio) argued during the debate over the same issue during World War II, “men who are good enough to die for us are good enough to vote for us – or against us – regardless of their color or wealth.”⁵³

⁵² James A. Connolly, *Three Years in the Army of the Cumberland: The Letters and Diary of Major James A. Connolly* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1959), 262.

⁵³ Anderson, *Politics and Progress, American*, 86.

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