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William Booth Taliaferro: A Biography

Martha Arle Sibley

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

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WILLIAM BOOTH TALIAFERRO: A BIOGRAPHY

A Thesis

Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by
Martha A. Sibley
1973
APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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Approved, May 1973

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ABSTRACT

An adequate knowledge of history should contain an understanding of both the men who led and the men who followed. Upheavals in the nineteenth-century South produced many leaders, but millions of followers. In this paper I hope to contribute to that branch of history which deals with little known historical figures, by examining a reasonably typical, upper-class Virginian of the nineteenth century.

The term average can readily be applied to William Booth Taliaferro. He represents that group of aristocratic Virginians who dominated the commonwealth's affairs before the Civil War, furnished a large number of officers for the Confederate army, and returned from the war to rebuild Virginia through politics, business, and education. Nurtured in the pre-war ideals of honor and service to one's country, Taliaferro spent his life in the customary pursuits of law, politics, education, and the military. Although the Civil War did not alter his basic ideals, Taliaferro accepted the changes that faced Virginia's society and applied himself to improving the condition of the state.

Besides his representative characteristics, Taliaferro makes an interesting subject because of his contact with famous men and important events. During his seventy-six years, Taliaferro had some association with such men as Winfield Scott, John Brown, Stonewall Jackson, P.G.T. Beauregard, Joe Johnston, William Mahone, and Lyon G. Tyler. Militarily, he participated in the Mexican War, the protection of Harper's Ferry following John Brown's raid, and in the Civil War. Politically, he took office with the return of Conservative power after the Civil War and held his position until the state debt question reared its head to dominate Virginia politics. In education, Taliaferro served on the boards of three state colleges during each school's formative years, and spent twenty-seven years during the crucial post-war period on the Board of Visitors for the College of William and Mary.

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I. EARLY LIFE

In 1822, William Booth Taliaferro was born in Gloucester County, Virginia. Many opportunities, customary in his social class, stretched before him. Bolstered by an aristocratic heritage and a well-to-do family, young William could attend the best schools and choose from the professions of gentlemen—lawyer, doctor, educator, clergyman, politician, or military officer. Nineteenth-century Virginia presented almost endless possibilities to a man with ambition and the prescribed background: Taliaferro was well endowed with both qualities.

From his parents William inherited ties to many leading families of Virginia. Frances Booth, his mother, could claim Armisteads, Pages, Joneses, and Cookes as kinsmen. Prominent in Virginia since the 1690's, the Booth family migrated to Gloucester County from Lancaster County, England. Thomas Booth, the immigrant, settled on Ware Neck, between the North and Ware Rivers, to manage the estates of Robert Bristow. Not content with supervising the property of others, Thomas engaged in trade and invested his profits in land. His second son, Mordecai Booth, inherited some land and his father's talent for trading. As the family fortune grew, Mordecai purchased large portions

1 "The Armistead Family," William and Mary Quarterly, First Series, VI (January, 1898), 165.
of Ware Neck, and in 1751, he acquired the Belleville estate from Thomas Morris, III. Here, he created an imposing mansion, suited to his social position. The Morris home served as a detached wing for the more elaborate building. When the American Revolution disrupted overseas commerce, a financial decline struck the Booth family. Originating under Mordecai, this reversal continued during the lifetime of his son George and his grandson George Wythe.2

In 1777, the family lands passed into the hands of four-year-old George Wythe Booth, William B. Taliaferro's grandfather. Although many Booth holdings had been disposed of before 1794, the Belleville tract remained in the Booth family. When an 1802 fire destroyed the stately house built by Mordecai Booth, the family fashioned the nineteenth-century Belleville house by adding a frame section to the Morris house, which still stood.3 George Wythe Booth married Lucy Jones, his cousin, but died in 1808, at the age of thirty-five. His will provided for the division of Belleville between his three daughters, seven-year-old Mary, five-year-old Frances, and two-year-old Lucy Anne. However, all three girls had to contend with poor health, and during adolescence both Mary and Lucy Anne died of consumption. Setting her heart on an heir, Mrs. Lucy Jones Booth hastened the marriage of her only

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2Ludwell Lee Montague, "Landholdings in Ware Neck," Virginia Magazine of History and Biography, LX (January, 1952), 75-77.
3Ibid.
surviving daughter Frances (usually called Fanny) to Warner Throckmorton Taliaferro.  

The Taliaferro family also held a lofty position in Virginia society. Prominent in England since the Norman Conquest, a branch of the family transplanted itself in America before 1638. To Robert Taliaferro, the immigrant, the English government granted 6,500 acres on the Rappahannock River near present-day Fredericksburg. He also received land in Gloucester County in 1655. Through the generations Taliaferro men usually held at least one county office and frequently served in the House of Burgesses or state legislature.

In the fifth generation of native Virginians, Dr. William Taliaferro first married Mary Throckmorton from the Churchill estate in Gloucester County. Their only child, Warner Throckmorton Taliaferro, was William B. Taliaferro's father. After his first wife died, Dr. William Taliaferro married his sister-in-law Harriet Throckmorton. Dr. and Mrs. Taliaferro and their two sons, Alexander Galt and William, Jr., continued to live on the Churchill plantation near Belleville during William B. Taliaferro's youth.

4Lucy Ann Page, "Family Account of Mrs. Lucy Ann Page, Late of Gloucester County," William and Mary Quarterly, First Series, XI (October, 1902), 134-135.


6Montague, loc. cit., 82.
Frances Booth married Warner Throckmorton Taliaferro in 1821, and the pair lived at Belleville, the Booth estate. William B. Taliaferro was born December 28, 1822, at Belleville. Like her sisters, Frances died of consumption on April 3, 1824. She has been described by her cousin as a woman "with highly cultivated mind and innate refinement of manners, softened by Christian grace, she was truly the impersonation of everything beautiful in the female character." In later life Taliaferro remembered very little about his mother, but he always treasured his vague impression of her. As a small child he loved to listen to the old servants tell stories about his mother and the Booth family.

When Frances died, the Booth lands in Gloucester passed into the hands of the Taliaferro family. Warner and Frances had already deeded the Belleville estate to Warner's father, but after Frances' death, Dr. Taliaferro arranged to deed the land to Warner and young William jointly.

Belleville, a typical ante-bellum plantation, shared in the life-style and social activities of Ware Neck. Based on county

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7Ibid.

8"A Soldier Sleeps," Richmond Dispatch, March 1, 1898.

9Lyon G. Tyler, ed., "Old Tombs in Gloucester County," William and Mary Quarterly, First Series, III (October, 1898), 118.

10Page, loc. cit., 135.


12Montague, loc. cit., 82.
tax records, the estate probably contained at least nine hundred acres during William's childhood. In 1849, county officials valued the buildings alone at two thousand dollars. Besides extensive land holdings, Belleville boasted an array of outbuildings, including servants' quarters, roomy barns, stables, blacksmith shop, carriage house, harness shop, shoe shop, weaving house, carpenter's shop, and saw pit. The large house commanded a breath-taking view of North River, and this vista, coupled with the lavish gardens designed by William's step-mother, established Belleville as one of Gloucester's showplaces. Under Warner Taliaferro's supervision the estate reached its zenith.

In spite of such attributes, Belleville probably possessed a certain rural simplicity. In the 1840's, William suspected that life on Ware Neck might not impress a group of his Alexandria friends. He feared the cane-bottomed chairs and ancient furniture would disappoint his visitors, with their more fashionable tastes. Taliaferro himself enjoyed Belleville's unpretentious appearance and revealed his dislike for "everything stylish particularly in the country."  

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13 Gloucester County, Virginia, Land Book (1849), 28.


During William's early years his father married Leah Seddon and brought his second wife to Belleville. William and his step-mother built a close relationship. The boy wholeheartedly accepted her in place of his natural mother, and Leah exhibited as much interest and pride in him as in any of her own sons. Warner and Leah raised their five children with William. Philip Alexander, oldest of the five, spent his life as William's closest friend and adviser. After Philip was Susan Seddon, the only girl and a great favorite with William, then Thomas Seddon, Edwin, and Warner Throckmorton, Jr. Other members of his step-mother's family played important roles in William's life. Thomas Seddon, Leah's father, achieved prominence as a Fredericksburg banker and merchant. Her brother James served as United States Congressman and later as Confederate Secretary of War. When two of Leah's sisters—Marion Seddon Smith of Glenroy and Ann Seddon Roy of Greenplains—settled in Gloucester County, they exchanged frequent visits with the Taliaferro family.

Perhaps William's early formal education took place at the Newington Academy, a boys' school founded in 1818 near Gloucester. However, this conjecture rests solely on circumstantial evidence. Besides formal education, William developed a deep

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16Sherman, op. cit., 30.

17Montague, loc. cit., 82-83.

18In Glo-quipps, (May 31, 1967), 1, reference is made to a sketch of Newington Academy written by William B. Taliaferro in 1885. Perhaps this sketch answered the 1885 request by the Gloucester County Superintendent of Schools that Taliaferro supply what information he could of early education in Gloucester County.
interest in literature. Lucy Jones Booth, his grandmother, instilled a love of books in her family. This early training carried over into William's later life, and reading consumed much of his spare time. Besides keeping abreast of legal publications, he frequently read histories of the United States and foreign countries.

In October, 1839, William registered as a junior for his first session at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. To prevent homesickness, he surrounded himself with relatives. Warner T. Jones, his cousin and lifelong friend, accompanied him to Williamsburg and studied law at William and Mary. The boys roomed in the home of J.C. Sheldon and his wife Harriet Dixon Sheldon, another of William's cousins. The next year William moved to the Thomas Griffin Peachy home where he settled in with the Peachys' six children. Two of the boys, Archibald and John Blair Peachy, attended college with William. After two years at the school, William received his A.B. degree in 1841.

About the time William started college, William and Mary entered its most splendid ante-bellum period. President Thomas R. __________

19Page, loc. cit., 134.
20"Register of Students in William and Mary College, 1827-1881," William and Mary Quarterly, Second Series, IV (January, 1924), 60.
21"Langborn, Taliaferro, Throckmorton, Dixon," William and Mary Quarterly, First Series, IXX (October, 1910), 105.
22"Register of Students," loc. cit., 67.
Dew steered the school to new heights. By 1839, the student body numbered one hundred and forty, including thirty law students. Besides President Dew, the faculty consisted of Judge Nathaniel Beverley Tucker, law professor; John Millington, chemistry and natural science; Robert Saunders, mathematics; and Dabney Brown, humanities. President Dew and Professor Tucker used their influential positions to instruct students in the social, political, and economic benefits of slavery, a philosophy which permeated William and Mary during William's school years.23

Proceeding to Harvard, William enrolled in the law school directed by Judge Joseph Story and Simon Greenleaf.24 Story, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, Dane Professor of Law, and author of the internationally recognized Commentaries, pioneered in formal school instruction to replace office training for young lawyers. A brilliant conversationalist, Story aroused great enthusiasm in his students. Simon Greenleaf had accepted the Royall Professorship of Law in 1833. Effectively complementing each other, the colorful Judge Story inspired students and the diligent Greenleaf taught. With concerted efforts they increased the law library, enlarged the law school, and gained national recognition for their work in educating lawyers.25 By the time

23Lyon G. Tyler, The College of William and Mary in Virginia: Its History and Work (Richmond: Whittet and Shepperson, 1907), 78.
William entered the program, Harvard Law School had achieved prominence. According to available records, William attended Harvard only for the 1841-42 session. After a year at Harvard William returned to the country life of Gloucester. In the next few years he established his law practice and laid the foundations for a gentlemanly existence. In 1846, William and his father divided the Belleville estate between them, having held it jointly since 1825. While Warner took the Belleville house and the eastern part of the estate, William received the western section and a forest tract on the southeastern edge of Belleville. In 1849 tax records, Gloucester officials estimated William's holdings at four hundred and twenty acres. At the confluence of North River and Back Creek, William built his new home, two stories with a steep roof, pointed gables, big center chimneys, and a large front porch. In 1847, he christened the English-style house Dunham Massie after the ancestral seat of the Booth family in Lancashire, England. Since the Booths had owned Belleville, Warner willed the remainder of the estate to William and provided other lands for his younger sons. Philip received Burgh Westra across Back Creek from Dunham Massie, and Thomas got Lowland Cottage on the opposite side of Ware Neck.

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26 Montague, loc. cit., 86.
27 Gloucester County, Virginia, Land Book (1849), 28.
28 Farrar, op. cit., 35.
29 "The Booth Family," William and Mary Quarterly, Second Series, VI (July, 1926), 264.
30 Montague, loc. cit., 87-88.
In the meantime, events were occurring outside Gloucester which would soon take Taliaferro far from home and friends. In 1846, war broke out in Mexico. From the sound of the first shot, Taliaferro probably yearned to participate in the glorious battles and achieve fame for himself. Since he did not serve in the regular army, Taliaferro had to wait for an opportunity to reach the excitement of war. For some months he could only watch developments in Mexico and Washington.

By the end of 1846, conditions in Mexico had combined to weaken drastically the United States forces. Military morale drooped; threats to assassinate various officers abounded; the men seldom received wages; supplies and money for supplies ran short; sickness ravaged the army. Above all, General Scott desperately needed fresh troops. With the regular army estimated at seven thousand below full strength, Congress had to create new regiments to fill in the gaps. After considerable political scheming and bickering, the Ten Regiment Bill passed both houses of Congress by February 10, 1847, and President Polk signed the bill into law on February 11. According to the bill's provisions, the ten new regiments would only serve until after the signing of peace with Mexico. Very few regular army officers chose to leave the security of older regiments to accept slight promotions in these new temporary regiments. Since the government had to enlist officers to lead the new troops, many civilians with little or no military experience applied for commissions. Applicants campaigned vigorously, the key prerequisite for appointment being political influence. Besides the flood of
potential army officers, confusion also resulted from Congressional fights over the organization of troops and financing the war. However, some new troops reached Vera Cruz in the early summer of 1847, and marched inland to reinforce General Scott at Puebla. By August 6, Scott had almost fourteen thousand men, including three thousand too ill to march. With this new strength, Scott started his expedition toward Mexico City.

The Ten Regiment Bill, which allowed the large-scale entrance of civilians into the armed forces, gave Taliaferro his chance to get to Mexico. He received a captain's commission in the Eleventh United States Infantry, one of the provisional regiments. On Sunday, July 25, 1847, he set sail on the brig Saldana from Norfolk to Vera Cruz. With his dreams of glory, Taliaferro could almost eagerly exchange "home, friends, social joys, the delights of refined life, of polished society... for a foreign and hostile land and the rough discomforts of a soldier's camp." Patrioticly, he surveyed his men, who with "stout hearts and bright hopes, with flowing flag of our proud and glorious country floating over our heads" would "brave the boisterous ocean and war, disease, and hardship, and press forward to do our duty to our country as soldiers and Americans." On that July day,


Taliaferro expected great achievements from his men and personal glory for himself.34

For the most part, the voyage progressed uneventfully. As a captain, Taliaferro ranked highest of the one hundred and fifteen men on board. His command consisted mostly of Virginians, but also included Pennsylvanians, Germans, and a few Irish "to give a raciness and zest to the conversations." During the journey the enlisted men crowded together in the hold, four in a bunk. Taliaferro, in comparative luxury, shared the officers' small cabin with his second lieutenants, George B. Fitzgerald and Joseph P. Thom. The fourth bunk should have belonged to the first lieutenant, but he remained at Fort Monroe under arrest. This cabin also functioned as storage space for trunks, boxes, weapons, and the company drum.35

Sailing southward, the ship passed near Andros Island in the Bahamas and turned westward to skirt northern Cuba. The brig moved around Havanna on August 15, and headed across the nine hundred miles of gulf to Vera Cruz. His new responsibility of command weighed heavily on young Taliaferro. Complicating the more serious problems, seasickness affected many of the troops, and Taliaferro, admitting only to a slight headache, lamented having to carry so much of the work load himself. Other men reported cases of measles and "bilious fever."36 To combat


35Ibid.

36Ibid., August 4, 1847.
an even worse condition, Taliaferro punished several men for sleeping on duty, missing roll call, and other lapses of military discipline.

Taliaferro did not devote all his efforts to working and solving problems. He found enough leisure time to read and to keep a detailed voyage journal. Other pastimes included target practice at a swinging bottle, fishing from the stern, shooting at animals which the ship's captain called whales, and an occasional trip ashore to search for water or fresh food. After nearly a month the ship approached Vera Cruz. Taliaferro feared that "here in Mexico with strangers and enemies are our lives to be surrendered and our bones to crumble."^37 Apprehensive, but eager, Taliaferro entered Vera Cruz harbor at daybreak on August 24, 1847. After months of waiting, he could now participate in the glorious conquest.

In Mexico Taliaferro reported to Colonel Henry Wilson, Governor of the Vera Cruz District. The extremely high prices in Vera Cruz disgusted Taliaferro, but fortunately, he soon left the city. His temporary camp, a cluster of tents situated about four miles from Vera Cruz, stood near the seashore where the National Highway turned toward the interior and Jalapa. Several hundred men gathered here and waited for orders to march inland. Curbing guerrilla activity in the area occupied much of the Americans' time.^38

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38W.B. Taliaferro to Susan S. Taliaferro, August 26, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.
With the mountains, gorges, and forests of Vera Cruz for protection, guerrilla bands frequently preyed on American troops as they traversed the National Highway. Often these attacks occurred about thirty-seven miles from Vera Cruz where the highway crossed the Antigua River. At this place, high mountains surrounded a bridge approximately fifty feet high and a quarter of a mile long. From these heights an old fort held a commanding view of the bridge. Although crossroads and fords enabled an approaching army to turn the position, evasive guerrillas could effectively use the fort for swift attacks on United States forces below.  

In September, 1847, Lieutenant Colonel George W. Hughes of the Maryland Volunteers headed an expedition to remove the guerrillas from the bridge area. According to Hughes' plan, Taliaferro would lead a diversionary frontal attack on the fort while Major John Kenley circled the stronghold and stormed the more vulnerable side. But the skirmish did not go according to plan. Since the Mexicans had already vanished, Major Kenley took the fort sooner than expected, without firing a shot. When his men started up the precipice, Taliaferro did not know the enemy had abandoned the fort. As the command struggled upward, a few guerrillas hidden on hills behind them opened fire, but the Americans thought the shots came from the fort. Therefore, Taliaferro's men fired on their compatriots in the fort, and Major Kenley, believing his assailants were Mexicans, returned

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39Smith, op. cit., 171-72, 47.
the fire. Both Kenley and Taliaferro saw the mistake quickly, and Taliaferro's command fired a volley at the guerrillas behind them.40

Soon after this unfortunate affair, Colonel Hughes' command made the short march to the hacienda of Santa Anna. Housing themselves in the villa, Hughes, Kenley, Taliaferro, and the other officers lived as refined gentlemen, while the men camped in the open air. The supply train caught up with the troops a day later, making life more comfortable for officers and men.41 Probably Taliaferro did not return to Vera Cruz, but waited at the hacienda for General Joseph Lane's command which left Vera Cruz on September 19, heading for Puebla.

About this time, Taliaferro was promoted to major in the Ninth Infantry, temporarily satisfying his active ambition. He believed that he had fulfilled his own "conscientious ideas of duty" and pleased his superiors. Although he did not think anyone else in his position could have done better, the responsibility worried Taliaferro. Feeling the disadvantage of inexperience and youth, Taliaferro confided in his step-mother. "His honour, his reputation, the lives of hundreds dependent upon himself, and his mind, that thinks and acts for all--it makes one, sensitive, ambitious--as I am,--tremble at his position." Nevertheless, Taliaferro welcomed the challenge.42

40 W.B. Taliaferro to Leah S. Taliaferro, Sept. 10, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.
41 Ibid.
42 Ibid.
While he wrestled with guerrillas in Vera Cruz, Taliaferro could only observe the military conditions which would soon draw him into the final stages of Mexico's defeat. Undertaking a drive from Puebla, General Scott captured Mexico City on September 13. Colonel Thomas Childs commanded the garrison left behind to hold Puebla, but by September 13, a small force of Mexicans had besieged the town. After the fall of Mexico City, Santa Anna and his army reinforced the besieging troops at Puebla, hoping to capture the town and trap Scott in Mexico City. However, American reinforcements were also moving toward Puebla. In mid-September, General Joseph Lane reached Vera Cruz and started a brigade toward the interior.43

Perhaps Major Taliaferro set out from Vera Cruz with this brigade on September 19, or perhaps Lane incorporated Taliaferro's troops into his larger command when he paused briefly near the National Bridge. Guerrillas delayed the force for several days between the bridge and Jalapa, but on October 1, General Lane resumed his march. Downpours of rain, mud, bogs, poor rations, and extreme heat on the plains where "water sold for five dollars a drink and men died of sheer fatigue," complicated the difficult trek.44

When he heard of the approaching Americans, Santa Anna left a small force to continue the siege of Puebla and moved to meet

43Smith, op. cit., 174-176.
44Ibid., 176.
Lane at Huamantla and El Pinal. On October 9, Santa Anna withdrew most of his troops to El Pinal about eight miles from Huamantla and paused to appraise Lane's movements. Lane, receiving a false report that Santa Anna occupied Huamantla, sent in an advance force under Captain S.H. Walker. The inconsiderable group of Mexicans retreated to unite with Santa Anna's main army. To celebrate their apparent victory, many of the Americans got drunk and sacked Huamantla.45 Taliaferro's men presented him with such gifts as a scarf and Holy Cross looted from the town.46

However, the American rejoicing came too soon. Santa Anna returned with his full army and attacked Captain Walker's troops in Huamantla. The advance force held the town until the remainder of Lane's men could come to their aid. The united pressure of Lane and Walker compelled Santa Anna to retreat, insuring a relatively easy American entrance into Puebla. To the accompaniment of bells and "The Star-Spangled Banner," General Lane's command relieved Colonel Childs' force in Puebla on October 12. After two hours of guerrilla fighting in the city, the Americans had effectively broken Mexican resistance.47

Spending about two months in Puebla, Taliaferro used part of the time to combat guerrillas in the vicinity. With Dr. James Clark and another officer, Taliaferro commandeered a fifteen

45 Smith, op. cit., 176-178.

46 W.B. Taliaferro to W.T. Taliaferro, Nov. 5, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.

47 Smith, op. cit., 176-178.
room house in the city. Thus, he lived quite comfortably, excepting only the "destructive climate," for the duration of his stay. About December 4, he welcomed assignment to Brigadier General Caleb Cushing's brigade bound for Mexico City. Ambition had made him restless and dissatisfied with his situation in Puebla, and with the transfer to Mexico City, he hoped to be given command of one of ten regiments.48

In Mexico City Taliaferro met Adjutant General Frank Page, an old friend, and stayed in Frank's quarters for a short time.49 Since the American command allowed officers to seize housing from Mexican families, Taliaferro soon found his own accommodations. Naturally choosing from well-to-do families, Taliaferro and the other officers of the Ninth Infantry selected an elaborate home decorated with marble-topped tables, an aviary, and frescoes.50 To fit the refined life in Mexico City, Taliaferro had to spend most of his pay on fashionable clothes. Finding numerous amusements to suit his taste, he enjoyed balls, bull fights, dinner parties, and above all, plays at the Santa Anna Theater, "the largest and most magnificent on the North and South American continents."51 Taliaferro's assignment in Mexico City lasted


49 W.B. Taliaferro to Leah S. Taliaferro, Dec. 6, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.

50 W.B. Taliaferro to Susan S. Taliaferro, Dec. 17, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.

51 Ibid; W.B. Taliaferro to Philip Taliaferro, May 25, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.
only a few weeks, but he visited the city occasionally during the following months.

Near the end of December, Taliaferro left the pleasures of Mexico City and moved to Pachuca, a town of about a thousand people in the mining state of Queretaro. When he arrived, Taliaferro found four churches, an assaying office, a treasury depository, a few good houses, and many mud huts. With silver mines in the surrounding mountains, Pachuca served as a center for assaying and taxing. During the occupation months Taliaferro's command collected the silver tax for the United States government and protected silver shipments on the four-day march to Mexico City.\(^52\)

The dullness of Pachuca increased Taliaferro's bitterness and dissatisfaction. Even before he left Mexico City, Taliaferro had "tired of this wretched country where no glory can be achieved."\(^53\) When the controversy arose over the recall of General Scott and the appointment of General G.W. Pillow as Scott's replacement, Taliaferro became unwittingly involved in the political scheming. Before his arrival in Mexico, Taliaferro's prejudices went against General Scott, and he believed that General Pillow had been persecuted. As a Democrat, Taliaferro's sympathies should have gone to General Pillow. Above all, Taliaferro's longing for

\(^{52}\) W.B. Taliaferro to Leah S. Taliaferro, Jan. 3, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^{53}\) W.B. Taliaferro to Leah S. Taliaferro, Dec. 3, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.
promotion dictated that he court Pillow and try to obtain his influence. As the intimate friend and pet of President Polk, Pillow had the power to speed the advancement of young officers. Although he longed for promotion and to continue in the army after the war, Taliaferro sided with General Scott. Already he was demonstrating his penchant for becoming embroiled in disputes. He did not flaunt his opposition to General Pillow, but he always spoke his opinion freely and strongly when asked. Through spies in the camp, both generals soon knew Taliaferro's sentiments. The morning he left Mexico, General Scott gratefully inquired about Taliaferro and complimented him to a friend. On the other hand, General Pillow threatened revenge on those who opposed him. To Taliaferro, "the spectacle has indeed been pitiful to see men sacrifice, as I believe they have done, their principles of justice and right to mere personal considerations." He had hoped that factionalism did not exist in the army, but he discovered that "the life actually engenders a selfish spirit and add what here are most often new army and volunteers who were politicians at home and can not live without the excitement of party even here."^54

After the Scott-Pillow affair, Taliaferro's ambition festered. He wrote that "it would be better for me if it [the war] did last, for it is a sore thing to be in the midst of heroes and know

^54 W.B. Taliaferro to W.T. Taliaferro, April 26, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.
that you can not be called one also."\(^5^5\) It depressed him "to see our country showering down laurels upon the heads of her brave sons and to receive not even a leaf" himself.\(^5^6\) With the rapid promotions for gallantry, all Taliaferro could do was "to deplore his own sad fate—where he sees himself commanded by a man, two grades below him yesterday."\(^5^7\)

As Taliaferro's bitterness increased so did his hatred of Mexico. To him, "men, women, mules, and dogs are all equally despicable and mean, fit for nothing but to be exterminated and rooted out from the earth."\(^5^8\) He denounced Mexico's backward condition in law, agriculture, medicine, and science. He described the Mexicans as "self-conceited,"\(^5^9\) and the Catholic religion as "foolery."\(^6^0\) Progress would come only when "the tide of the Anglo-Saxon race . . . reaches Mexico and ameliorates this sad condition."\(^6^1\)

55 W.B. Taliaferro to Leah S. Taliaferro, April 30, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.

56 W.B. Taliaferro to Dr. William Taliaferro, May 24, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.

57 Ibid.

58 W.B. Taliaferro to Susan S. Taliaferro, August 26, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.

59 W.B. Taliaferro to Philip Taliaferro, May 25, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.

60 W.B. Taliaferro to W.T. Taliaferro, Nov. 5, 1847, Taliaferro Papers.

61 W.B. Taliaferro to Dr. William Taliaferro, May 24, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.
In the late spring of 1848, the Mexican government ratified the peace treaty. By June 19, Taliaferro's regiment had marched to Camp Bedano near Jalapa and awaited orders to proceed to Vera Cruz for transportation home. The government had withdrawn all troops by the end of July, and Taliaferro was on his way back to Gloucester.

\[\text{\textsuperscript{62}}\text{W.B. Taliaferro to Philip Taliaferro, June 19, 1848, Taliaferro Papers.}\]
II. THE 1850'S

When he arrived home from the Mexican War, Taliaferro started on a decade of broadening his activities, raising his position in the state, and creating his own family. For Taliaferro, the 1850's represent a brief period of dabbling in matters which would later play a significant role in his life.

Taliaferro re-opened his law practice in Gloucester County, specializing in laws governing the oyster industry. After living quietly for two years, he entered politics, and the people of Gloucester elected him to the Virginia House of Delegates on December 8, 1851.\(^1\) However, he served only one term, beginning his political career inauspiciously.

On February 17, 1853, Taliaferro married Sally Niverson Lyons, a daughter of Judge James Lyons. Many prominent people in state and national affairs visited Laburnam, the Lyons's home near Richmond. Judge Lyons, an elegant and accomplished gentleman, was noted as an able lawyer and Sally herself exemplified many qualities of a Virginia lady.\(^2\) "She won dominion by grace, gentleness, sweetness, and refinement."\(^3\) Sally attended the

\(^1\)Election Certificate, Dec. 20, 1851, Taliaferro Papers.
\(^3\)Editorial, Richmond Times-Dispatch, October 20, 1899.
Anglican Church regularly and usually recorded the quality of the sermon in her diary. As a strong supporter of Virginia and the South, she exhibited great courage during the Yankee raids and other hardships of the Civil War.  

In Gloucester Sally fit in well with her husband's family. Soon after the marriage, Taliaferro wrote Judge Lyons that the elder Taliaferroes at Belleville had accepted Sally as a new daughter. "I should have a small army arrayed against me if I were to insist upon taking my own wife to my own home." By 1861, Taliaferro's family had grown from two to seven. On January 16, 1854, the oldest child, Leah Seddon, was born; on January 13, 1855, James Lyons; on July 20, 1856, Warner Throckmorton Langbourn; on October 20, 1858, Fanny Booth; and on June 23, 1860, George Wythe Booth.

The young Taliaferro family engaged in the visiting and entertaining demanded by Gloucester's social standards. Sally's diary frequently mentions the names of Tabb, Mann, Page, Wise, Wellford, and Harrison. As a favorite pastime, Taliaferro

4Sally L. Taliaferro, Diaries of 1859, 1860, 1861, 1862, 1863, 1864, Taliaferro Papers.

5W.B. Taliaferro to James Lyons, April 29, 1854, Taliaferro Papers.

6Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1859, addition by Mary H.L. Taliaferro, Taliaferro Papers.
enjoyed fishing with his children, occasionally seining four or five thousand fish.\(^7\)

Taliaferro had many concerns outside his home. During the 1850's, he increased his activities in the business of internal improvements and by 1855, had acquired an interest in the Richmond and York River Railroad Company.\(^8\) A few years later he attended stockholders meetings for men concerned with making the Kanawha River navigable.\(^9\) Taliaferro always maintained the law practice as his primary business interest, and it absorbed more and more of his time, frequently taking him to the courts in Mathews County and in Richmond.

Continuing his involvement with military affairs, Taliaferro served as a member of the Board of Visitors of the Virginia Military Institute from 1852 to 1857, and presided over the board from 1854 to 1857.\(^10\) During these years, board meetings usually lasted several days. In 1855, for example, the board met from June 26 to July 7. Since the meetings generally coincided with the annual graduation ceremony, these occasions produced a whirl of social activity. Board members often devoted

\(^7\)Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1859, August, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^8\)F.S. Claxton to W.B. Taliaferro, March 5, 1855, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^9\)Thomas H. Lewis to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 9, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^10\)Register of Former Cadets, Faculty, and Members of the Board of Visitors, Museum, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, Virginia.
their lengthy meetings to discussing such issues as which courses they should include in the curriculum, enforcement of regulations against hazing, improvement of existing facilities, and increasing the physical plant of the growing school.11

Taliaferro engaged in several other activities at the Virginia Military Institute. He addressed the 1852 graduating class at the commencement exercises and delivered a short speech at the dedication of the Institute's first statue in October, 1856. School officers named the 1854 summer encampment Camp Taliaferro, to honor the new president of the Board of Visitors. While serving as chairman of the dedication ceremony for the equestrian statue of George Washington in 1857, Taliaferro ordered the corps of cadets to attend the celebration in Richmond.12 At Virginia Military Institute Taliaferro met T.J. Jackson, a new teacher in natural philosophy and instructor in artillery. Students, faculty, and board members often noted Professor Jackson's stern discipline and eccentricities. After he became much better acquainted with "Stonewall" during the Civil War, Taliaferro remembered the Jackson of the 1850's as "a man of peculiarities, quite distinctly marked from other people—reserved, yet polite; reticent of opinions, but fixed in the ideas he had formed."13 Francis H. Smith invited Taliaferro to the 1889 semi-

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11 William Couper, One Hundred Years at V.M.I., Vol I (Richmond: Garrett and Massie, 1939), 263-267.
12 Ibid., 267, 297, 307, 327.
13 Mary Anna Jackson, Memoirs of Stonewall Jackson (Louisville, Kentucky: Prentice Press, 1895), 508.
centennial celebration, honoring the surviving board members from the school's early years. Although he refused the invitation, Taliaferro recalled his experience on the board with pleasure and with pride that he had been able to render some service.¹⁴

During the decade Taliaferro rose to the rank of major general in the Virginia Militia. By 1859, he held the highest position in the state forces and had an active interest in revitalizing and updating the militia in case Virginia should need trained soldiers. Moreover, a well-organized militia would bring greater honor to its leader.

Late in the fall of 1859, Taliaferro got his opportunity to help make the state militia more effective. On October 16, 1859, John Brown conducted his notorious raid on the arsenal at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, hoping to encourage a slave revolt. Although armed forces quickly suppressed the attack, capturing Brown and his followers, the raid had far-reaching effects. Southern newspapers and orators used Brown's activities to demonstrate the evil intentions of the Northern people. The *Richmond Daily-Dispatch* warned Virginians to arm themselves, declaring that "it is not worthwhile to tell us that this spirit exists only among a few abolitionists. When the system is diseased the body breaks out in sores. These abolitionists are the sores."¹⁵

¹⁴W.B. Taliaferro to Francis H. Smith, June 14, 1889, Taliaferro Papers.

¹⁵*Richmond Daily-Dispatch*, Nov. 7, 1859.
Martial law was established around Harper's Ferry and Charlestown, forcing any stranger to give an acceptable account of himself or leave immediately. For the month between Brown's trial and his execution, the rumors ran rampant. Several fires in the area convinced the inhabitants that abolitionist sympathizers lurked nearby to spirit away the prisoners. Governor Wise continued to send state troops to join the federal forces in the area. On November 21, Taliaferro left Gloucester for Richmond in route to take command of the state forces around Charlestown.

Town life in Charlestown revolved around the military visitors. Early each morning the people woke up to the beat of drums. Additional confusion resulted near the barracks as companies of men poured out to answer roll-call and sentinels returned from their posts. Relative quiet prevailed for an hour or two. Then the men separated into small groups and marched to the various houses where they were quartered for breakfast. Morning parade followed. After this spectacle few armed soldiers ventured into the streets, except scattered sentries guarding the various armories.

Taliaferro found Charlestown crowded with the constantly arriving troops. Since the men had difficulty obtaining rooms

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16 Richmond Daily-Dispatch, Oct. 29-Nov. 18, 1859.
17 Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1859, Nov. 21, Taliaferro Papers.
and food, Taliaferro and Quartermaster Robert Caskie called on the citizens to help in every way possible. For meals officers quartered small groups of men in citizens' homes. When word reached him that several companies took their meals in local hotels, Taliaferro inquired about the arrangements to pay for this food. He learned that the men paid a dollar per day, believing the state would refund the money. To solve the problem, Taliaferro issued cooking utensils and food rations to the men, or if they preferred, an allowance of forty cents a day. Taliaferro also ordered a reorganization of the Commissary Department and further improvement of the new hospital.\textsuperscript{19}

Taliaferro became so involved in preparations for a successful execution and a more efficient militia that he even failed to write Sally of his safe arrival.\textsuperscript{20} Although he reported no really threatening activities in the area and belittled sentry accounts of suspicious individuals as a common mistake of new troops in a novel situation, Taliaferro did continue with necessary precautions.\textsuperscript{21} More and more troops arrived. On November 28, according to a Richmond correspondent, Charlestown itself contained six hundred and fifty-eight men in infantry, artillery, and cavalry. The immediate neighborhood held about three hundred

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\textsuperscript{19}\textit{Richmond Daily-Dispatch}, Nov. 28-30, 1859.
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\textsuperscript{20}\textit{Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Nov. 29, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.}
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\textsuperscript{21}\textit{W.B. Taliaferro, Report to Governor Wise, Nov. 27, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.}
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armed men, while nearby towns housed an additional four hundred. However, officials thought this force inadequate. On November 28, they awaited two companies from Norfolk and Portsmouth, one company from Charlottesville, and the Virginia Military Institute corps of cadets.22

As the execution date approached, Taliaferro announced that no one should see the prisoners without orders from him. Three days before the hanging, he issued a proclamation of regulations. In Jefferson County or the adjacent counties, the soldiers would immediately arrest any stranger if he could not furnish a satisfactory explanation of his presence. Strangers, especially in groups, approaching on pretext of attending Brown's execution would be turned back or arrested. Military forces would block roads and stop trains. Reliable information seemed to indicate that all citizens of the surrounding country could best serve their own interests by remaining at home during the execution. No women or children would be allowed at the hanging.23

Although Sally Taliaferro's diary noted simply on December 2, that "Thermometer 97. Lovely day. Very warm. Execution of Old Brown," much activity occurred in Charlestown.24

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22Richardson Daily-Dispatch, Nov. 28, 1859.
23Ibid., Nov. 30, 1859.
Sheriff Campbell, Mayor Greene, and Colonel Hunter had made arrangements for the execution. The event was to take place in a large field behind the prison. Brown left his cell at 11 o'clock and rode to the gallows in the back of a wagon. The military forces stood in lines around the gallows, with none close enough to hear any last words the old fanatic might utter. About one hundred yards from Brown, the corps of cadets formed the first line. Taliaferro and his staff, all mounted, came next, and a second line stood one hundred yards behind the cadets. The execution passed without a major incident.  

However, Southern fears remained, and precautions continued at Charlestown through the executions of Brown's companions, with troops still arriving and leaving daily. Some trouble did occur before the final hangings could take place. Soon after Brown's death, Taliaferro complained to Governor Wise of Sheriff Campbell's laxity in managing the jail. Campbell ignored suggestions for extra precautions, declaring that Taliaferro's military authority did not extend over the civil officials inside the jail. Yielding on this point, Taliaferro stationed troops outside the building to prevent escape. Taliaferro also endeavored to furnish witnesses to the Sheriff's inadequate safety measures. In his relations with the civil authorities

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Taliaferro revealed his domineering attitude and urge for power, but on this occasion he was accurate in criticizing the Sheriff. About a week later Cook and Coppic, two of Brown's men, attempted an escape, but outside the jail Taliaferro's guards seized them. The event produced much excitement, and Taliaferro assumed personal direction until after the executions. Four of Brown's followers were hanged on December 16, with the same military precautions, but more spectators.27

After the executions the militia forces dwindled rapidly, from one thousand and ninety men on December 4, to one hundred and ninety-four on December 22.28 Taliaferro finished the trials for unsoldierly-like conduct in time to reach Gloucester on Christmas Eve.29 In line with his state loyalty, Taliaferro concluded, "the troops which I have had the honor to command possess a morale and are composed of a material which I believe has never been brought together in its same extent in this or any other country."30

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28 Morning Reports of the troops at Charlestown, Dec. 4 and Dec. 22, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.
29 Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1859, Dec. 24, 1859, Taliaferro Papers.
III. THE CIVIL WAR: APRIL, 1861—JANUARY, 1862

As a confirmed secessionist, Taliaferro rejoiced when Virginia left the Union on April 7, 1861. Due to his experience as an officer in the Mexican War and in the state militia at Charlestown, he hoped to receive a high commission to fight for the South. Since Taliaferro had held the highest rank in the state's armed forces for several years before secession and troops were needed immediately to protect the state from invasion, Governor John Letcher called in the militia men who were staying near Richmond.1

Even before he officially announced Virginia's secession, Governor Letcher summoned Taliaferro to a meeting at the executive mansion. Taliaferro had stayed in Richmond during the weeks of crisis and reported immediately to Governor Letcher. At this interview the Governor offered Taliaferro command of the forces going to Norfolk, instructing him to seize the Norfolk navy yard and take Fort Monroe, if at all practicable. The Governor asked that Taliaferro prepare to leave for Norfolk and call again for another conference on April 18.2

1W.B. Taliaferro, "Recollections of the Civil War," June, 1880, Taliaferro Papers.
2Ibid.
The action of the Virginia Convention thrilled other Virginians besides Taliaferro. After only ten hours of independence, Richmond seemed a changed city. The people had hauled down United States flags and raised Virginia flags in their places. State flags appeared where flags had never flown before. Excitement and anticipation permeated the city, and people accepted their new position readily. Taliaferro noted that "men spoke of the United States as of a foreign power separated by the oceans, so instantly did they seem to realize the situation, and ladies spoke of their 'friends' abroad in Baltimore or Boston as if they lived in London or Berlin."  

In this electric atmosphere, Taliaferro prepared to assume his military duties at Norfolk, selected his staff, and returned to the Governor on April 18. Letcher introduced Taliaferro to Captain Robert Pegram of the state navy, recently resigned from the United States navy. Pegram had charge of the naval station and naval defenses at Norfolk and was to cooperate with the land forces under Major General Taliaferro in all necessary land operations. To raise sufficient troops, Letcher authorized Taliaferro to call out the volunteer forces in the Petersburg area.

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3 Ibid.


5 Taliaferro, "Recollections."
In the late afternoon Taliaferro and Pegram set off for their new commands by special train. They paused briefly in Petersburg and arranged for the call-up of volunteer forces. When the two men approached Norfolk, a committee of citizens met the train and described their situation to Taliaferro. If he suffered any pangs at leaving the excitement of Richmond, this new predicament soon dispelled Taliaferro's regrets. Norfolk's fears sprang from the nearness of United States troops. Without authorization some overzealous citizens had attempted to capture the Union ships at Norfolk by sinking several enemy ships in the mouth of the Elizabeth River. The remaining ships seemed to be bottled-up in the river and focused their guns ominously on the defenseless city.

At Norfolk Taliaferro found a variety of suggestions for possible action. Some people frantically proposed to attack the navy yard, while a more moderate group suggested merely demanding the surrender of the Union forces. Still others feared that any rash act might provoke a bombardment from the fleet guns. After listening to the demands for action, particularly from his life-long friend ex-Governor Henry A. Wise, Taliaferro chose to study the situation himself, come to a decision, and act on his own responsibility. On one hand, the state force at Norfolk was small and without discipline, and the entire available artillery consisted of a few six-pounders. On the other hand, the Union   

6Ibid.
forces had six wooden ships, which Taliaferro believed to be heavily armed, a force of marines on land, and some workmen of known northern sympathy. After analyzing the situation, Taliaferro hoped the fleet would just sail away. If he had taken a stronger, more daring stand, Taliaferro might have captured critically needed supplies for the Confederate forces. Temporizing, Taliaferro prepared to raise and train the men, acquire better weapons, and maintain his defenses until the situation allowed him to attack. In the meantime, perhaps the fleet would leave of its own accord.7

While Taliaferro formulated a plan to seize the magazine at Fort Norfolk on April 21, two more Union ships entered the harbor, in spite of the obstructions. The Federals scuttled some of their ships, spiked the guns, and departed. Sadly the citizens of Norfolk gathered to watch the ships, objects of considerable pride to the populace, burn and sink. They did manage to extinguish a fire in the navy yard and save the powder stored there. Taliaferro suffered mixed feelings about the whole affair. He had failed to secure the ships for Virginia, but the Federals had departed without doing great damage to unprotected Norfolk.8

Colonel Andrew Talcott of the state engineers arrived at Norfolk, and Taliaferro instructed him to improve the defenses of the city. To state officials, Talcott reported much confusion

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid.
at Norfolk, with the citizens heaping blame on Taliaferro for allowing the Federals to escape. By this time the State Convention had reorganized the military system of Virginia and proceeded to relieve Taliaferro of duty "under the ban of public opinion." Taliaferro's first command lasted four days.10

When the influx of former United States officers into the state forces demanded a reorganization, Taliaferro accepted an appointment as colonel.11 For such an ambitious man, this reduction from the highest ranking major general to one of several colonels must have been a humiliating experience. Probably the incident contributed to his bitterness over the high positions given to West Point graduates. After the war, Taliaferro denounced the faith placed in West Pointers, arguing that military education could not replace military experience. He charged Jefferson Davis with favoring West Pointers because he himself had graduated from the academy. With the glaring omissions of Lee and Stonewall Jackson, Taliaferro credits only Joseph Johnston, Beauregard, and Hardee with overcoming this "conceit."12

9 Douglas S. Freeman, Robert E. Lee (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), I, 480.

10 Taliaferro, "Recollections."

11 Official Records, II, 800.

12 Taliaferro, "Recollections."
Leaving Norfolk, Taliaferro returned to the excitement and intrigues of Richmond. He reported to General Lee and in early May, accepted command of the troops near Gloucester Point in Gloucester County. Already engineers were erecting batteries to defend the York River, and Taliaferro was given authority to increase his force by calling-out the Gloucester troops.13

At Gloucester Courthouse Taliaferro and Lieutenant Colonel Powhatan R. Page found the people filled with "martial ardor." The volunteer companies who had assembled there crowded into the tavern for dinner. Taliaferro and Page joined the group and were relating the news from Richmond when an excited rider brought news from Gloucester Point.14 The steamer Yankee had entered the river, probably to reconnoiter, and Virginia's six-pounders had fired on it for thirty minutes with no damage to either side. The ship had turned back. Taliaferro impulsively ordered the volunteers to the area immediately to prevent an enemy landing.15

Many difficulties hampered Taliaferro's efforts at Gloucester Point. Since the six-pounders proved inadequate in protecting the mouth of the river, Taliaferro requested larger guns, which arrived within a few days.16 Taliaferro also complained that he did not receive communications from Richmond, while other obstacles

14Taliaferro, "Recollections."
15Official Records, II, 821.
16Ibid.
hindered his cooperation with Yorktown on the opposite bank of the river. By rushing the volunteers to the Point when the Yankee appeared, Taliaferro had created some of his own problems. The men had intended to be away from home only for one day and did not bring the necessary equipment for a long encampment. Taliaferro had no time to provide shelter for the troops, but he quartered his men in nearby homes. This arrangement led to slight conflict between the civilians and the volunteers, but before the situation could become too serious, the men had built huts for shelter.\(^17\) Taliaferro hoped to set up a hospital, but again had trouble with civilians. Residents of the area would not donate or rent their private homes for this purpose. Since no suitable buildings could be located, Taliaferro asked Lee for permission to extend his military authority over these people. However, Lee replied that Taliaferro should erect an appropriate hut for the hospital.\(^18\)

Taking into consideration all the problems, these days passed peacefully. Many wealthy and generous Gloucester citizens regarded the volunteers as heroes and supplied good food and society for the troops. The soldiers could amuse themselves with horse races, running matches, and fishing in the York. With his home and family only a few miles away, Taliaferro could also enjoy the calm, but these days soon ended for Taliaferro.\(^19\)

\(^{17}\)Ibid., II, 834-35.

\(^{18}\)Ibid., II, 844, 857.

\(^{19}\)Taliaferro, "Recollections."
Before long other officers invaded Taliaferro's little domain. In May, Lee sent Captain T.L. Preston to aid in recruiting, and a representative arrived from Colonel Talcott of the engineers. Although subordinate to Taliaferro in matters of general defense, the engineer would take orders from Talcott in constructing the battery at Gloucester Point. Writing to Lee on May 22, Captain Preston stated that the small force would be completely unable to prevent a landing. He also pointed out that the engineer and Taliaferro could not cooperate with each other, since the engineer refused to consider himself under Taliaferro's command. About June 1, Taliaferro received orders to report to Richmond for other service.

Recalling the incident years later, Taliaferro concluded that this removal resulted from his reluctance to leap into action at every rumor of a Union approach. The "mighty visits of certain officers" who suspected a Yankee behind every wave had greatly annoyed Taliaferro. He believed that general headquarters had received a false report that he did not attach sufficient importance to these "rumors." Perhaps he referred to Captain Preston's criticism of the situation at Gloucester.

21 Ibid., 876-77.
22 Ibid., 866.
23 Taliaferro, "Recollections."
24 Ibid.
Point. At any rate, Taliaferro left his second relatively independent command under questionable circumstances.

After approximately one month of war, Taliaferro had already demonstrated the personality traits which would plague him for the next four years. Domineering and pugnacious, he could not get along with soldiers or civilians. He demanded respect for his power and would have forced obedience from civilians had Lee allowed him to do so. He and the engineer could not cooperate, and Taliaferro bitterly resented other officers who criticized his conduct at Gloucester Point. On impulse, he had ordered the Gloucester troops to the Point, without personally observing the situation beforehand or considering such necessities as housing and food for the force. With his complete confidence in his own military judgment and his over-sensitivity to criticism, Taliaferro started the war with the wrong attitude.

When he reached Richmond, Taliaferro heard of an expedition to northwestern Virginia and accepted the command of a regiment in this force. Proceeding to Camp Lee near Richmond, he located the twenty-third Virginia regiment, recently organized from some of the independent companies which arrived daily. At Camp Lee the soldiers enjoyed the admiration of Richmond citizens, and civilians customarily turned out to watch the military drills. On one occasion, a friend introduced Taliaferro to one of the spectators, Jefferson Davis, whom he thought to be very affable and accessible to military men.  

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25 Ibid.
Even before his regiment left Richmond, Taliaferro started to have trouble. He envied Colonel Samuel Fulkerson whose men respected and admired their commander. Taliaferro rationalized that he had only known his troops for a few days and admitted that he might have imposed too rigid discipline on new volunteers. Besides the difficulties with his own men, the government considered replacing Taliaferro for expedition because he held extreme secessionist views. The government hoped to placate strong Union sentiment in the northwest by placing Taliaferro's regiment under a man who had favored the Union. When officials summoned him for questioning, Taliaferro complained that he would hate to go to the northwest because he had not seen his wife and children in several weeks, a strange excuse for an ambitious man. However, Taliaferro's men protested any change in command, thus settling the issue.26

At last the regiment marched out of Richmond, on the very day that Sally arrived to visit her husband. To pay respect to the governor, Taliaferro directed the regiment down Broad Street past the executive mansion. The celebration continued during the train trip to Staunton. Civilians pushed baskets of sweets and fruits through doors and windows; young ladies gave flowers to the soldiers; the locomotive even sported a festive garland; as the train passed, people cried, "God bless you." From Staunton

26 Ibid.
the troops marched northwestward through the mountains. The military glory, the most important aspect of army life for Taliaferro, now ended.27

Brigadier General Robert Garnett had assumed command of the troops in northwestern Virginia. While Taliaferro's men camped at Bealington, near Monterey, a Yankee force appeared across a creek from the Confederates. In the artillery duel which followed, Taliaferro's inexperienced troops broke and fled for miles. Although another regiment successfully held off the enemy, the rout humiliated Taliaferro. Blaming his men, Taliaferro believed that he "had worked unceasingly at their discipline and instruction" and "had made them efficient soldiers." His inflated sense of honor demanded that he request a transfer to another regiment, but Garnett convinced Taliaferro to stand by his troops.28

The Federal army in northwestern Virginia soon forced Garnett's troops to retreat. Before July 12, heavy rains had turned the roads to mud and caused the numerous creeks to rise. Yet another drenching rain and constant pressure from enemy troops made marching conditions even worse.29 When his troops began to grow more and more demoralized, Taliaferro halted his men and addressed them. He reminded them of the disgraceful affair at Bealington

27Ibid.
28Ibid.
and suggested that only gallantry in another battle would remove this shame. If another battle came soon, the reputation of the regiment and its colonel might still be salvaged.\(^{30}\)

As the retreat continued, Taliaferro's men had numerous opportunities to prove themselves in battle. For many miles the twenty-third Virginia and the first Georgia regiments composed the Confederate rear guard and cooperated to protect the wagon train. As the caravan forded a creek, the first Georgia formed a line and held off the enemy until the wagons had crossed. Meanwhile, the twenty-third Virginia took up a good defensive position some distance behind the Georgians. When the enemy pressed too hard, the Georgia troops could retreat through the Virginians and reform in a new position. This alternating process continued until the Confederates reached Carrick's Ford.\(^{31}\)

The twenty-third Virginia and a larger Federal force confronted each other across Carrick's Ford, a deep crossing swollen by recent rains. Taliaferro's troops occupied a high bank with a commanding view of the ford and the road. As the Federal skirmishers approached, Taliaferro temporarily mistook them for the Georgians who had been cut off, but the Confederates quickly realized the error, gave a shout for President Davis, and opened fire.

\(^{30}\)Taliaferro, "Recollections."

Taliaferro held the ford until the men had used most of the ammunition and the artillery had withdrawn.\textsuperscript{32}

The twenty-third retreated in good order to the next ford where they found General Garnett. He asked Taliaferro to select ten sharpshooters to act as skirmishers and place them behind some driftwood. Unable to decide which men to send, Taliaferro ordered a whole company back to Garnett. Since the driftwood could not accommodate a whole company, Garnett chose ten men and returned the others to Taliaferro's regiment. When the Federals came up, Garnett remained with the skirmishers and was killed as he ordered a retreat. Command of the rear guard fell to Taliaferro. The twenty-third overtook the main force after marching five miles and crossing another ford.\textsuperscript{33} Taliaferro found Colonel Ramsey, the ranking officer, incapacitated by a severe illness and took command of all the troops.\textsuperscript{34}

While the remnant of Garnett's men wandered through the mountains, Confederate officials wondered what had become of the troops after Garnett's death. Brigadier General H.R. Jackson, Confederate Commander at Monterey, thought the force might have fallen into complete disorganization.\textsuperscript{35} But on July 16, he

\textsuperscript{32}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34}Taliaferro, "Recollections."
\textsuperscript{35}Official Records, II, 247-248.
received a communication from Colonel Ramsey. "We have suffered awfully. Not many men were killed by the enemy, but there are hundreds missing. We were near starvation . . . . What is left of this army will not be fit for service in a month." Since some organized command still existed, Jackson ordered Ramsey to join his army, and after seven days of arduous marching Ramsey's men reached Monterey.\footnote{Ibid., 253.}

When newspapers vividly described the retreat from Carrick's Ford, charging demoralization and complete lack of discipline, Taliaferro could not resist taking up the quarrel by writing a letter to the editor. He emphatically denied these rumors, arguing that exposure, fatigue, and disease had ravaged the regiment. With scant provisions the retreat had covered one hundred and eighty miles of miserable mountain roads, through rain, mud, and swollen rivers. The men had often marched night and day in the presence of superior federal forces. "No regiment in the whole service has been harder worked with as little complaint and has stood it better than the Twenty-third, and though its enemies may attempt to defame it, justice will eventually be done it."\footnote{W.B. Taliaferro to editor of the Daily-Dispatch, August 27, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.}
General Jackson divided his force into two brigades, leaving Taliaferro in charge of five regiments at Monterey. Although the men welcomed a few weeks of rest, Taliaferro's burdens increased when the officials in northwestern Virginia called-up the militia. Although most of these men requested furloughs, General W.W. Loring ordered Taliaferro to grant very few leaves. "All their children have the measeles [sic], all their wives are in an interesting situation, all their fathers and mothers are expecting to die, and all their cattle have gone astray."38 Many men suffered from measles and fever, complicated by crude medical care. At times the sick list numbered nearly a thousand. Taliaferro himself enjoyed the relief from battle, but his dreams of glory still lingered. Confessing that he hoped to avoid any more brush-fighting, he concluded that "I was satisfied there was little honour and very great danger in the experiment and would be perfectly satisfied to be held back until there is a real fight."39

Taliaferro's next venture into battle also failed. In early September, General Lee and General Loring planned an attack on the Federal position at Cheat Mountain. Taliaferro waived rank to serve under Colonel Albert Rust who had reconnoitered

38W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, August 10, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.
39Ibid.
the enemy's location. Rust assured Taliaferro that the Confederates could get behind the Federal's undefended flank on the mountain crest. Although Taliaferro did not believe any respectable engineer would leave a flank in the air, Rust convinced him that the plan would work. On September 10, Taliaferro set out with Rust on a trying two day march through rain, mud, and cold. The small force approached the Federal pickets at the mountain crest on September 12. Captured prisoners falsely informed Rust that the Federals had fortified their position and manned the area with four thousand troops. Weighing this erroneous intelligence, Rust decided not to attack the flank, but to locate a weak spot in the Federal line. This new plan also encountered difficulties. With the rugged terrain complicated by moss, trees, undergrowth, bogs, and rocks, the officers agreed that "an assault would be madness." Taliaferro suggested that the men return to H.R. Jackson's camp, and Rust accepted the proposal. As a result of Rust's failure to attack, the entire Confederate campaign had to be abandoned. If Taliaferro and Rust had shown more initiative, courage, and perseverance, this result might have been reversed.

At the Greenbrier River on October 3, Taliaferro's men held the center of the Confederate line. While Confederate forces

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on each side of the twenty-third fought an infantry battle and Federal artillery raked his men, Taliaferro huddled in the field fortifications and yearned to participate in the infantry action.41 As winter approached, the men began to complain of the miserable weather conditions at their camp near the Greenbrier River. Although he disliked forcing the men to stand guard in such awful weather, Taliaferro himself hated the cold and trusted that he would "not be required to remain out here all the winter."42 Conditions would soon get even worse.

In December, General Loring's Army of the Northwest joined T.J. Jackson's Army of the Valley for an attack on Federal forces in the South Branch Valley. Loring reluctantly yielded to Jackson in overall command, but retained command of the Army of the Northwest. When his brigade reached Winchester on December 8, Taliaferro renewed his acquaintance with "Tom Fool" Jackson, whom he had known as a much ridiculed instructor at the Virginia Military Institute during the 1850's.43 Now Major General Jackson would command Colonel Taliaferro.

On January 1, 1862, the army moved northwest from Winchester through Bath, Hancock, and toward Romney, the main objective.


42W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, Nov. 9, 1861, Taliaferro Papers.

Since the campaign opened in unusually warm weather, many of the men discarded their overcoats and left their winter baggage with the wagon train. Severe winter weather struck the army before the day ended. The first night they camped in biting cold, sleet, and snow. When icy roads detained the wagon train, the men could obtain no rations and no winter equipment. From this inauspicious beginning the campaign deteriorated, and the morale of Loring's command dipped lower and lower. On January 4, they reached Hancock.44 Taliaferro recalled that "when we reached the river opposite Hancock there was neither tent nor camp equipage. No houses were there, hardly a tree. The weather was intense, and a hard, crisp snow sheeted the landscape."45 By January 7, Jackson had to stop and rough-shod the animals because snow and ice made the roads impassable for horses and wagons. When the Confederates reached Romney, Jackson hoped to push forward, but the demoralization of Taliaferro's brigade prevented further action. Jackson decided on winter quarters and stationed his men at strategic points in the South Branch Valley.46 Then Jackson and the Stonewall Brigade, his "pet lambs," returned to the comforts of Winchester, leaving the other men in miserable physical condition, ravaged by disease, surly and insubordinate.47

44Vandiver, op. cit., 186-188.
45Jackson, op. cit., 511.
47Vandiver, op. cit., 189.
With his extreme self-confidence, Taliaferro probably believed that his opinion of the situation at Romney had far more value than "Tom Fool" Jackson's plan. The officers of Loring's command, including Taliaferro, resorted to insubordination and signed a petition to General Loring on January 25. This document recited the horrible conditions at Romney, stressed the possible danger from Federal troops, and pointed out that the severe hardships might discourage the men from reenlisting for the summer campaign. Loring received the petition, endorsed it as "expressing the united feeling of the army," and forwarded it to General Jackson. In turn, Jackson disapproved the petition, but sent it to the War Department.48

While the petition moved through the chain of command, Loring decided to take further action. Since Taliaferro was going to Richmond on leave, Loring asked him to deliver a copy of the petition to President Davis personally. Unfortunately, Davis accepted the document, questioning Taliaferro about the force at Romney and about Jackson's troop placement throughout the South Branch Valley. Taliaferro, much too willing to offer his criticisms of Jackson's campaign, had compounded his offense in by-passing the proper channels and taking his complaints to the President of the Confederacy. As a result, the Secretary of War instructed Jackson to order Loring's men back to Winchester.

Jackson complied, but tendered his resignation. State officials fortunately persuaded him to retain his command. 49

Taliaferro left the Valley district with Loring's command, thus ending his first year of campaigning. Jackson's men rejoiced to see the "terribly disorganized band" go. 50 Taliaferro's record could not encourage an ambitious man. Removed with good cause from commands at Norfolk and Gloucester Point, censured by the press for the long retreat after Garnett's death, his role in the failure to attack Cheat Mountain, his resort to insubordination over the Romney expedition, and the wrath of Stonewall Jackson could certainly combine to prevent any military achievement in the future.

49 Vandiver, op. cit., 192-93.

50 Ibid., 195.
IV. THE CIVIL WAR: FEBRUARY, 1862—JANUARY, 1863

Although he still hoped to make a new start and save his military reputation, the Richmond command returned Taliaferro to Jackson's Army of the Valley. After reorganizing his division, Jackson needed a brigadier general to command the second brigade, and Taliaferro had recently been promoted to that rank. He reported to Jackson on April 13, 1862.¹

To make his new start, Taliaferro had to overcome significant obstacles. In the first place, he had not been assigned to the second brigade, which did need a leader, but to the third brigade which Colonel Samuel Fulkerson was commanding admirably. With Taliaferro's inability to get along with his fellow officers, this situation could easily have led to friction between the two men. More significantly, Jackson had not forgotten Taliaferro's role in the Romney affair and complained to the adjutant general that

Through God's blessing my command, though small, is efficient, and I respectfully request its efficiency may not be injured by assigning to it inefficient officers. Last winter Gen. Taliaferro had charge of a Brigade and he permitted it to become so demoralized that I had to abandon an important enterprise in consequence of the inefficient condition in which he reported his Brigade. Notwithstanding the demoralized condition of his Brigade he left and visited Richmond, thus making a second visit there within two months. His brigade since he left it, has, under other hands,

¹Vandiver, op. cit., 210.
become efficient, and it as well as the others bids
fair to render good service if not placed under incom-
petent officers.\footnote{Ibid., 212.}

Taliaferro resented the new assignment almost as much as
Jackson did. Feeling the weight of Jackson's disapproval,
Taliaferro saw his opportunity to succeed as a brigade commander
dwindling. However, Taliaferro recalled later that "I determined
to do my duty the best way I could and satisfy \[^{myself}\] if I did
not satisfy Gen. Jackson. I determined to disabuse his mind by
my conduct of any personal feelings against him, and try to let
him judge of me by my subsequent actions.\footnote{W.B. Taliaferro to Holmes Conrad, July 11, 1877, Taliaferro
Papers, quoted in Frank E. Vandiver, \textit{Mighty Stonewall} (New York:
McGraw-Hill, 1957), 213.} Jackson did give
Taliaferro a chance, and "he would not be sorry.\footnote{Vandiver, \textit{op. cit.}, 213.}"

In early May, 1862, Jackson knew he would soon face an
overwhelming enemy force if he failed to defeat several Federal
commands individually before they were able to unite. To prevent
a combination of Federal troops in the Shenandoah Valley, Jackson
conducted his masterful Valley Campaign. The skirmishing which
occurred on May 7 grew into a full-scale battle at McDowell on
May 8. In the Confederate line of march that day, Taliaferro's
brigade was following General Edward Johnson's command when
Johnson's advance forces began to skirmish with the enemy.
Stonewall Jackson ordered the third brigade forward and Taliaferro
placed his troops in the weak spots along Johnson's line. When

\footnote{\textit{op. cit.}, 213.}
General Johnson sustained a leg wound, Taliaferro took charge as senior officer in the area. He was preparing his men to hold their position through the night and to collect abandoned weapons, when the Union forces started to withdraw. Jackson ordered Taliaferro's command back to the wagons for a rest. The brigade had suffered one hundred and one casualties, but had helped drive one Federal force westward from the Valley.⁵

After McDowell illness kept Taliaferro out of the Valley Campaign for a few weeks.⁶ He missed the excitement of mid-May when Jackson put down the start of an uprising in his third brigade by threatening to execute the rebels.⁷ During Taliaferro's absence, Jackson had routed General Banks from Winchester and had turned his attention to the southern Valley by the time Taliaferro rejoined the army.

Threatened by the approach of General John C. Fremont from the west and General Shields from the east, Jackson carefully selected a position near Port Republic. From his camp on the north side of the Shenandoah River above Port Republic, Taliaferro heard artillery fire near the town on June 8. When he received orders to move his brigade to the single wooden bridge which led to Port Republic, he advanced and discovered that a small Union force had captured the bridge and the town. With covering fire from the artillery,

⁵Official Records, XII, pt. 1, 480-482.
⁶Jackson, op. cit., 513.
⁷Vandiver, op. cit., 236.
Taliaferro's men charged the bridge and occupied the town. Although they killed or captured several Federals, many others managed to escape across an unguarded ford in the river, forcing Taliaferro to conclude that had he "known the topography we could have captured most of the enemy." A competent general should have known the topography.

On the morning of June 9, Jackson ordered Taliaferro to leave Port Republic and return to his previous position north of the Shenandoah River. According to his plan, Jackson would use most of his command to defeat Shields south of the Shenandoah, then cross the river and defeat Fremont. To insure his success, Jackson left one brigade to delay Fremont's approach and placed Taliaferro's men in a good position to protect the only bridge. However, as the struggle with Shields continued, Jackson had to abandon his hope of attacking Fremont. He called all his available forces into the battle, but Taliaferro's brigade, arriving just as the Confederate attack penetrated the Union line, fired only one volley at the departing Federals. Pursuing for about seven miles, the brigade captured between three and four hundred prisoners. Since he took little part in the victory, Taliaferro "only had the satisfaction of securing the fruits of the gallantry of others."9

After settling his command for the night at Brown's Gap in the Blue Ridge, Jackson sent a messenger to ask if Taliaferro had

8 Official Records, XII, pt. 1, 773-774.
9 Ibid., 774.
brought up all the captured artillery. Taliaferro replied that he had salvaged everything except one broken caisson and explained that the scarcity of horses had prevented him for bringing this one article. Jackson answered with another order. "If it took every horse in the command, that caisson must be brought up before daylight." It was.\(^{10}\)

The illness which plagued Taliaferro struck again soon after the Battle of Port Republic. During the last half of June, while Jackson's army moved to join General Lee in the biggest battle the South had seen so far, Taliaferro despairingly recuperated in Goochland County. Since he stayed with Sally's sister Josephine and was treated by his brother Philip, Sally could be comforted that her husband had family nearby. Sally herself wanted to join him in Goochland, but decided that the danger of road travel was too great.\(^{11}\) His father-in-law sympathized with the disgruntled Taliaferro over missing the tremendous battle shaping up near Richmond and offered the hospitality of Laburnam as soon as Taliaferro could travel.\(^{12}\)

About the time Federal forces in front of Richmond withdrew to Harrison's Landing, Taliaferro rejoined Jackson's command. Moving his army to Gordonsville, Jackson planned to protect rail-

\(^{10}\)Jackson, *op. cit.*, 514.

\(^{11}\)Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, June 27, 1862, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^{12}\)James Lyons to W.B. Taliaferro, June 25, 1862, Taliaferro Papers.
road lines from Richmond to the Valley and wait for the right opportunity to attack the Federal army at Culpeper.13 Using the respite at Gordonsville to catch up on military business, Jackson convened numerous courts-martial and put the men through long drills every day. The courts-martial provided the main camp excitement, and as the number of trials increased, Jackson had to assign all his general officers to that duty.14

During this brief rest from fighting, Taliaferro experienced the strict secrecy which Jackson always observed. Taliaferro recalled after the war that "to be ordered blindly to move, without knowing whither or to what purpose" always annoyed the division commanders. At Gordonsville Jackson ordered Taliaferro to pack his wagons and form the troops on the road before daylight, but did not hint at his destination. As the sun rose, the troops waited for marching orders. At long last, Taliaferro interrupted Jackson's breakfast to ask for instructions and was directed on a fifteen mile march. Jackson merely wanted to change his camp. Probably the numerous dinner invitations he received from gentlemen near the new camp pacified Taliaferro's anger.15

When General Pope divided his Federal force near Culpeper, Jackson had his opportunity to attack the enemy. Although he planned to strike quickly, the hot, dusty, confused march of

14Vandiver, op. cit., 333-335.
15Jackson, op. cit., 518-19.
August 8, delayed the attack and gave the Federals time to prepare. The opposing armies faced each other near Cedar Run on August 9. Brigadier General C.S. Winder's division occupied the Confederate left, with Garnett's brigade on the extreme left flank and Taliaferro's brigade next in line. When General Winder suffered a mortal wound, the division command fell to Taliaferro. As Taliaferro's report stated, "I now assumed command of the division under the disadvantage of being ignorant of the plans of the general, except so far as I could form an opinion from my observation of the dispositions made." Taliaferro shifted troops from the Confederate left to the center of the line, which seemed to him the most vulnerable spot. Although they did attack in the center, the Federals also executed a flanking movement on the weakened Confederate left. Disorder prevailed for a time in Taliaferro's division, and the Southerners began to retreat. Again Taliaferro's poor judgment and failure to keep informed on troop placements created more problems for General Jackson. When reinforcements and encouragement from Jackson rallied the troops, the line stabilized and began to push the Federals back. Taliaferro pursued the enemy about three miles, until he realized that additional Union troops were approaching.

Sending most of his army to northern Virginia in August, Lee hoped to defeat the enemy before heavy Federal reinforcements could arrive. Lee and Jackson intended to trap the Union army

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between the Rappahannock and Rapidan Rivers, but the Federals blocked this plan by retreating across the Rappahannock. For several days the Union army marched along the north bank of the river, as Jackson's command eased up the south bank, searching for an unguarded ford.¹⁸

When Taliaferro's division reached Beverley Ford (Cunningham Ford) on August 21, they contacted the enemy. After silencing the Federal guns in an artillery battle, Taliaferro's men provided covering fire for a brief cavalry reconnaissance north of the river.¹⁹ During the heavy artillery exchange, Taliaferro accompanied General Jackson to the batteries. Men fell wounded all around him, but Jackson seemed oblivious to danger until he turned to ask Taliaferro if he had a family. Taliaferro replied that his wife and five children waited at home, but they might soon be a widow and five orphans. Suddenly Jackson appeared to realize that a corps leader should not stay so near the front, but Taliaferro always suspected he withdrew out of sympathy for Sally and the children.²⁰ Frequently exchanging fire with the enemy, the division continued up the river and neared Jeffersonton on August 24.²¹

¹⁸Freeman, op. cit., II, 275-291.
²⁰Jackson, op. cit., 520-521.
²¹Official Records, XII, pt. 2, 655.
On August 25, Lee and Jackson initiated a daring plan to cut supply lines between Washington and the Union army. Undertaking a surprise march around the Federal force, Jackson moved his whole corps up the river and crossed the Rappahannock above Waterloo. Although he did not know his destination, the cool mountain breezes and freedom from enemy fire raised Taliaferro's spirits. All day they trudged northward. When the march resumed at dawn on August 26, the corps turned due east, following the roadbed of the Manassas Gap Railroad through the Blue Ridge Mountains and into eastern Virginia.22 On this march Taliaferro again encountered General Jackson. As his men tramped along one night, Taliaferro mistook the general and his staff for a cavalry group, recklessly pushing the infantry off the road. When he halted the riders, angrily threatening punishments for their careless behavior, Taliaferro discovered his superior officer and could only offer his best apologies.23

When the division entered Manassas Junction on August 27, Taliaferro took charge of the vast Federal stores captured there. Keeping the issuing process well in hand, he distributed supplies to the various units.24 Under Jackson's orders, Taliaferro destroyed all liquor not needed for medicinal purposes, except


23 Jackson, op. cit., 524.

24 Vandiver, op. cit., 360.
a special bottle of cognac recommended for Taliaferro's private use by the Federal commissary. Taking this loot to his quarters, Taliaferro met Jackson and Jeb Stuart. When he invited them to test the cognac, Jackson declined, and Stuart, perhaps reluctantly, followed this example.\textsuperscript{25} As a large Federal force approached, Jackson instructed Taliaferro to let the men take what they could carry, and then destroy the remaining supplies. After marching fifty-six miles in two days, the men enjoyed their holiday in the vast stores at Manassas, taking everything from canned meat to caramels.\textsuperscript{26}

After Manassas, Jackson ordered Taliaferro to a good defensive position near Groveton. The next morning Union forces appeared in large numbers, and battle lines formed parallel to the Warrenton turnpike. After the Confederate artillery repulsed one Federal attack, Taliaferro's division advanced into an open field, and the two lines exchanged heavy fire for more than two hours without cessation.\textsuperscript{27} As Taliaferro described the scene later,

A farmhouse, an orchard, a few stacks of hay, and a rotten 'worm' fence were the only cover afforded to the opposing lines of infantry; it was a stand-up combat, dogged and unflinching, in a field almost bare. There were no wounds from spent balls; the confronting lines looked into each other's faces at deadly range, less than one hundred yards apart, and they stood as immovable as the painted heroes in a battle-piece . . . . Out in

\textsuperscript{25} Jackson, op. cit., 523.

\textsuperscript{26} Johnson and Buel, op. cit., II, 504-505.

\textsuperscript{27} Official Records, XII, pt. 2, 656-57.
the sunlight, in the dying daylight, and under the stars, they stood, and although they could not advance, they would not retire. 28

Finally, about 9 p.m., the Federals began to withdraw gradually from the field. Seriously wounded, Taliaferro relinquished command after the battle. 29

Recovering in Richmond, Taliaferro spent most of his time visiting friends and relatives. Sally stayed in the city from early September to late October, but when she left, Taliaferro still lingered. Although he did suffer from the ball lodged in his arm, Taliaferro took every opportunity to leave the miseries of army life for the pleasures of Richmond. Finally deciding to rejoin the army, he left the city on December 1. 30

Taliaferro returned to Jackson's command just in time to participate in his final engagement with the Army of Northern Virginia. With the battle lines drawn along the Rappahannock River at Fredericksburg, Jackson placed Taliaferro's division at Guinea's Station, ten miles to the southeast, to guard the Richmond, Fredericksburg, and Potomac Railroad. When the Federal threat increased on the Confederate right, Jackson moved Taliaferro's division to Hamilton's Crossing as reserves for A.P. Hill's division. Thus, Taliaferro saw little action in his last battle in Virginia. 31

28 Johnson and Buel, op. cit., II, 510.
30 Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1862, Sept. 3-Dec. 1, Taliaferro Papers.
In January, 1863, disaster struck Taliaferro's ambitions. Having directed a division since August 9, he opened a campaign for a promotion suitable to the size of his command. He collected testimonials from the officers of his division, and probably expected assistance from Secretary of War James Seddon, his step-uncle. But Taliaferro's record also produced powerful opposition. Although he did not comment, Jackson conveyed his opinion by failing to recommend Taliaferro for promotion. Brigadier General Trimble, one of Taliaferro's men, was promoted to major general and given command of the division. If he remained in Jackson's corps, Taliaferro would now serve under a man who had recently been his subordinate.

Taliaferro felt that this slight to his honor forced him to request a transfer. Before his petition could be approved, Taliaferro and Frank Paxton, one of his brigade commanders, built a minor question of military etiquette into a major incident. Again Taliaferro was demonstrating his belligerent attitude toward other officers. Taliaferro insisted that court-martial proceedings had to pass through proper channels and that a division commander could open a sealed packet of court documents. Paxton denied these rights so vehemently that Taliaferro had him arrested for disrespect and asked permission to conduct a court-

32 J.R. Jones to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 30, 1863, Taliaferro Papers.

33 Vandiver, op. cit., 443-44.
martial. Although General Lee denied Taliaferro's court-martial application, he supported his position in regard to military etiquette. With this small victory to his credit, Taliaferro left the Army of Northern Virginia.34

Sadly parting from his men, Taliaferro traveled to Richmond awaiting his new assignment. Although he hoped for a command near Richmond, he thought he might participate in a court of inquiry on temporary duty in Jackson, Mississippi. Again, Taliaferro anticipated help in obtaining a desirable command from Secretary of War Seddon. Hoping and waiting, he lingered in Richmond for some time.35

34Ibid., 443-44.

Taliaferro urged Sally to visit Richmond before he received his orders. Since she hoped her husband would be stationed permanently near the city, Sally hesitated to make the long, hazardous journey. At first she sent a trusted slave to tell Taliaferro that she could not come unless the government had ordered him to a distant part of the Confederacy. Although he was still uncertain about his destination, Taliaferro continued to plead, and finally Sally agreed to make the difficult trip. The couple had several days to visit relatives and friends before Taliaferro's orders arrived. Although he was told to report to General P.G.T. Beauregard at Charleston, South Carolina on February 26, 1863, Taliaferro stayed in Virginia until March 2.¹ Under instructions from Beauregard, Taliaferro proceeded to a short and pleasant assignment in Savannah, Georgia, but returned to South Carolina within a few months.²

Taliaferro soon discovered that the siege tactics of Charleston were very different from the fighting in northern Virginia. Both armies and navies played important roles in the struggle, with the Federal fleet subjecting the city to heavy shellings and

¹Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1863, Feb. 11-March 2, Taliaferro Papers.
²Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1863, March 12-March 25, Taliaferro Papers.
Federal troops maneuvering on the islands which form Charleston harbor. Most of the activity centered around the Union attempt to maintain constant battle conditions and Confederate efforts to strengthen their defenses against relentless Federal encroachments. Although few major land battles stand out from the constant skirmishing, Federal troops paid dearly for every captured foot of the low, marshy islands.3

Since he had taken every opportunity to abandon his men and the drudgery of camp life for Richmond society, Taliaferro must have enjoyed the gracious accommodations and refined amusements of Charleston. Receiving numerous invitations, he attended literary meetings, musical evenings, and had free use of a friend's private library.4 Taliaferro visited often in plantations near the city and recuperated on one estate following a brief illness.5

Soon after his return from Savannah, Taliaferro participated in his most important single battle at Charleston. Morris Island, a small, desolate place, forming the southern edge of the harbor's mouth, stretched about sixty-five hundred yards to the southwest. A narrow handle of land, which comprised the northern part of the island, widened gradually toward the southern edge. Battery Wagner sat on this thin strip of land about thirteen hundred yards from the northern tip of the island. For defense, the


4Jonathan Lucas to W.B. Taliaferro, Dec. 9, 1865, Taliaferro Papers.

Confederates had erected fortifications on the southern end and placed thirteen guns in Battery Wagner.\(^6\)

On July 10, 1863, the Federals launched an amphibious assault on the south end of Morris Island, forcing the Confederates to give ground slowly and retire into Battery Wagner. After an unsuccessful attack on Wagner, the Federals began to shell the fort from island batteries and the fleet. General Beauregard decided that, since they could not push the Federals off the island, the Confederates should hold Wagner and make its capture as costly as possible.\(^7\)

On July 14, Taliaferro took command of Battery Wagner.\(^8\) To cut down on casualties, he had the men disperse themselves around the outside of the battery in "rat holes," rice casks embedded in the sand.\(^9\) He placed part of the artillery under sandbags to prevent its destruction and trained each man to defend his assigned place around the parapet.\(^10\) During his first night in Wagner, Taliaferro sent out Major Rion and one hundred and fifty men to locate the heaviest enemy concentration, and in a brisk skirmish Rion captured two prisoners.\(^11\) A bombardment continued for seven

\(^6\)Burton, op. cit., 152-53.

\(^7\)Ibid., 154-61.

\(^8\)Official Records, XXVIII, pt. 1, 416.

\(^9\)Burton, op. cit., 161.

\(^10\)W.B. Taliaferro to Colonel Pope, Feb. 2, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.

hours daily on July 15, 16, and 17, with a minimum of casualties and damage. The veterans of Wagner were sent back to Charleston for rest on July 15, and fresh troops replaced them. On July 17, the Soldiers Relief Association collected food from its membership and sent cooked provisions to the "brave defenders on Morris Island." At 8:15 a.m. on July 18, the Federal fleet, consisting of ironclads, flagship, five monitors, and numerous wooden gunships, moved in and kept up a constant bombardment for eleven hours. Taliaferro estimated that not less than nine thousand shots fell around Wagner during this period, but casualties remained low since most of the Confederates had taken shelter in the bombproof and ratholes. In the late afternoon, the bombardment worsened. Soon after 7:00 p.m. there was a lull. Taliaferro ordered his men to their places on the parapet, but one demoralized regiment refused to move from the bombproof, leaving the southeast salient undefended. With his thirteen hundred exhausted men, Taliaferro prepared to meet an attack by six thousand Yankees. The guns, which played a crucial role in the Confederate victory that day, were uncovered and readied for

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12Ibid.
13Charleston Courier, July 24, 1863.
14Charleston Courier, July 16, 1863.
17Burton, op. cit., 163.
service. Since the shelling had wrecked his heavier guns, Taliaferro ordered his men to fire the remaining artillery as rapidly as possible, and at times had to operate the guns himself. During the attack a group of Federals overran the undefended south salient, resulting in furious hand-to-hand combat.\(^1\) When a general Union retreat was ordered and the men who had penetrated the battery were trapped, Taliaferro's men needed three hours to kill or capture the remaining Federals.\(^2\) Viewing the awful carnage of one hundred and eighty-eight Confederate and fifteen hundred Union casualties,\(^3\) Taliaferro concluded that he had never seen so many dead in the same space.\(^4\)

The victory brought great praise from Charlestonians. The *Charleston Courier* stated that "not a word to [sic] much can be said in favor of a majority of the noble men who shared in the defence of Fort Wagner . . . . Gen. Taliaferro, with the cool courage for which he is distinguished, made a close personal reconnoissance [sic], and soon had measures perfected for driving them [the Federals] from the work."\(^5\) After the war Taliaferro recalled the struggle.

"I may perhaps say that considering the conditions and results, the Battle of 'Battery Wagner' on Morris Island, South Carolina,

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\(^1\)W.B. Taliaferro to Colonel Pope, Feb. 2, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^2\)Ibid., 166.

\(^3\)Ibid., 167.

\(^4\)W.B. Taliaferro to Colonel Pope, Feb. 2, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^5\)Charleston Courier, July 20, 1863.
18th of July, 1863, has offered me more satisfaction than any other one."23

The Federals on Morris Island settled down to a siege after July 18, and Taliaferro left the island for a brief rest, but returned to the fort on July 22.24 Conditions in Wagner were miserable. The men crowded into the small fort, in the extreme heat, with the sun blazing on the white sand, the constant bombardment, the stench of decomposing bodies, and the biting flies drawn by the smell. With the well contaminated by dead bodies, water was scarce, and in the tropical heat food spoiled in shipment from Charleston. The commanders rotated the infantry every three days for relief. During the daily bombardment only five hundred men remained in Wagner, with the others scattered around the dunes and ratholes.25

Although perhaps he did not understand the tactics of defending during a siege, Taliaferro revealed the same timidity and lack of perseverance that he had shown at Norfolk and Cheat Mountain. He reported that the Federals were closing in and requested to withdraw the garrison on the evening of July 24.26 Headquarters instructed Taliaferro to hold Wagner longer, until they could

23W.B. Taliaferro, undated note, Taliaferro Papers.
25Burton, op. cit., 172-75.
complete new batteries. On July 26, General Ripley relieved Taliaferro of command at Wagner, but Confederate forces held the battery until September 7.

On August 1, Taliaferro transferred his activities to James Island, located between Morris Island and the city of Charleston, and concerned himself with strengthening defenses. After the fall of Battery Wagner, Federal attention turned to James Island, and skirmishing began in earnest. On September 7, Taliaferro's men attacked a group of Federal pickets, drove them from the island, and destroyed the bridge by which the enemy planned to cross from Morris Island to James Island. However, Taliaferro's health started to worry his superior officers, and General Beauregard instructed General Ripley to offer Taliaferro a leave in which to recuperate. A few weeks later Taliaferro visited Richmond, urging Sally to come there also, and the two had a week of social activities before Taliaferro returned to Charleston. However, the nagging illness continued into 1864.

27Ibid., 381.
28General Ripley to W.B. Taliaferro, July 26, 1863, Taliaferro Papers.
30Ibid., 721.
32Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1863, oct. 27-Nov. 2, Taliaferro Papers.
In February, 1864, the Union forces eased their pressure on Charleston and turned their attention to Florida, hoping to keep Jacksonville as an open port and push the Confederates out of eastern Florida. To meet the new threat, the Confederate government transferred many troops from the Charleston area to Florida, including Taliaferro and most of the other high ranking officers. In late February, even Beauregard assumed personal command in Florida. When the Federals launched their invasion of the interior, the Confederates won a decisive victory at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864. Although he did participate in this campaign, little is known about Taliaferro's role in the battle. After this success Taliaferro did not remain in the state very long. On March 26, Sally heard that her husband had returned to Charleston, "Mr. Davis having refused to promote him to the command Gen. Beauregard gave him in Florida." 

Taliaferro went back to his previous assignment on April 8, 1864, and held the post for several months. On July 2, the Federals launched an amphibious attack on the south end of James Island, as part of a massive assault on Charleston. At first, several Federal regiments succeeded in landing on the island and out-flanking the Confederate force. Although they entrenched

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33 Burton, op. cit., 278-281.
34 Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1864, March 26, Taliaferro Papers.
on the southern part of the island, Taliaferro could not order a counterattack until he shifted troops from Fort Johnson, which defended the northern section of the island. The following day the Confederates reestablished their lines to the south. On July 3, the Federals also attacked the weakened Fort Johnson. When the Unionists had trouble landing, the commander of the fort captured more prisoners than he had men. Although the Citadel cadets arrived to aid in defending the island, Taliaferro still needed reinforcements. From July 4 to July 9, the Federals kept up a slow bombardment, which became heavy at times, and skirmishers put constant pressure on the Confederate line which stretched across the island. Taliaferro begged for reinforcements and a torpedo boat to distract the Union ships. After Union forces attempted a last unsuccessful assault on the northern part of the island, the fleet left, having subjected James Island to eight days of shelling.

When the pressure on Charleston slackened after this massive attack failed, Taliaferro took time to visit Virginia again. Since his home and the homes of his family stretched along the federally patrolled rivers, exposed to frequent Yankee raiding parties in search of valuables, food, or Confederate soldiers, Taliaferro had been unable to go to Dunham Massie throughout the war. On this last trip to Virginia, he braved all hazards to see his home and children. A knock at the nursery door and young Leah’s excited voice roused Sally from her sleep about

9:30 one night. Running to the door, she was astonished to see her husband. A great celebration followed, with all sorts of presents for the children, but Taliaferro was afraid to stay very long. On the second day he and his brother Phil went back to Richmond, planning for Sally to join them the next day. Taliaferro and his wife spent about a month in Richmond society before he left for Charleston.\textsuperscript{37}

Before many months had passed, the Federal army under General Sherman forced the Confederates to evacuate Charleston, the last troops leaving the city on February 18, 1865. As Sherman marched north from Savannah through the Carolinas, Taliaferro's division joined the command of General William J. Hardee to observe and harass the enemy. They withdrew northwestward to Cheraw, South Carolina, although the poor condition of roads and railroads severely hampered the march, crossed the Pee Dee River, and on March 4, reached Rockingham, North Carolina. By March 9, Hardee's men encamped near Fayetteville on their way to unite with other scattered divisions under the overall command of General Joseph Johnston. The Confederates hoped to pull all available troops together and attack the widely separated wings of Sherman's army, but first, he had to ascertain whether Sherman aimed for Raleigh or Goldsboro.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{37} Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1864, March 26, Taliaferro Papers.

Johnston assigned Hardee's army to conform with Sherman's movements north from Fayetteville, determine the Federal destination, and delay Sherman's march if possible. On March 15, Taliaferro's division played an important part in the skirmish near Averysboro. The division held an advanced battle line for several hours before a Federal flanking movement forced Taliaferro to order a retreat behind the main Confederate line. The Federal strength overwhelmed the Southerners, and that evening Hardee ordered a withdrawal toward Smithfield and the meeting with Johnston. Although a small affair, Averysboro did have significance. The stiff resistance of Taliaferro's men and then the rest of Hardee's troops demonstrated that the South's fighting spirit had not broken. The Yankees noted "more pluck than we have seen in them since Atlanta." Also, the battle separated the wings of Sherman's army and gave Johnston a chance to attack each wing individually.

At Bentonville Johnston planned a full-scale attack on the left wing of Sherman's army and ordered Hardee to move his two divisions in that direction as rapidly as possible. After their hard fight at Averysboro, Taliaferro's men undertook the long forced march to Bentonville and camped five or six miles from their destination on March 18. They managed a few hours sleep, marched on early the next morning, and arrived in time to participate

40Ibid., 209-218.
in the battle. Not realizing the size of the Confederate force, the Union generals kept ordering their men forward into the furious fighting. When a break in the Federal line allowed Hardee's men to counterattack, the Confederates thought they might win the bitter fight, but the continuing supply of Federal troops finally turned back the Confederate thrust. During the night each army strengthened its lines. On March 20, the enemy began to close in on Johnston, but fighting was relatively light. The next day Union forces put considerable pressure on the Southern position, but a powerful counterattack by Hardee prevented them from closing off the last Confederate escape route. That night, in rainy, miserable weather, Johnston's army withdrew across Mill Creek Bridge. Although the battle had been indecisive, the Confederate casualty list grew to more than twenty-six hundred.41

After Bentonville, Johnston ordered Taliaferro's men back to Smithfield, North Carolina, to await Sherman's movement from Goldsboro. On April 9, Johnston received intelligence that Sherman would march northward by way of Raleigh and ordered his men to retreat in that direction. After Lee surrendered in Virginia, Johnston could choose between laying down his weapons at Raleigh or continuing to fight a guerrilla war. He began to negotiate with Sherman.42

As the war drew to a close, Taliaferro's thoughts turned again to his long wanted and often thwarted promotion, and he

41Ibid., 219-31.

42Barrett, op. cit., 201-2.
planned to visit the Secretary of War, John Breckinridge, on April 18, at Greensboro to discuss the matter. In his recommendation General Hardee stated that he knew Taliaferro well and trusted him implicitly. He added that he had 'never known a more brave, zealous, and faithful officer, that he richly deserves his promotion, and I sincerely hope you will give it to him.' He thought Taliaferro had a strong case. At any rate, he finally got his promotion. Retroactive to January 1, 1865, Taliaferro became a major general on April 25, 1865.

On April 26, Johnston surrendered, and the war was over. Although he always looked back on his army career with pride, Taliaferro had to whitewash a number of his military activities. He never accepted the responsibility for his own failures, but always found a scapegoat. In Taliaferro's opinion, he never had enough troops or weapons, his men were cowardly, he did not have the necessary information, or other officers plotted against him. The glory of military life appealed to Taliaferro much more than the day-to-day routine; thus, he took frequent and extended leaves from his troops. He bitterly resented Confederate officials for their refusal to raise his rank without considering that his record did not warrant promotion.

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43 W. Hardee to John Breckinridge, April 18, 1865, Taliaferro Papers.

44 John Breckinridge to W.B. Taliaferro, April 25, 1865, Taliaferro Papers.
VI. POST-WAR POLITICS

After the Southern surrender Taliaferro returned to his law practice in Gloucester, but with Reconstruction politics in full swing, he could not sit by idly for long. He hoped eventually to reach high political office, but in the late 1860's, Conservative traditionalist office-seekers such as Taliaferro had little chance of election in Gloucester County. In fact, the state-wide elections of 1867 revealed to the disappointed Conservatives apathy among white voters and lack of an efficient party organization. The state's Conservative committee attempted to remedy the organizational problem by setting up local groups and enlisted Taliaferro's aid in establishing the Gloucester Conservative Party.1 In 1869, Taliaferro ran as the Conservative nominee for the House of Delegates, hoping to use the position as a stepping stone to higher office. Fitting his campaign to county conditions, Taliaferro relied heavily on personal popularity rather than on party appeal. After an enthusiastic race, Radical strength proved too strong, and Taliaferro's first venture in Reconstruction politics ended in failure.2

Taliaferro continued to help register potential Conservative voters in Gloucester and bring them to the polls, but by 1873, he

1Conservative State Committee to W.B. Taliaferro, April 2, 1868, Taliaferro Papers.

2Leah S. Taliaferro to unknown, April 1, 1869, Taliaferro Papers.
felt ready to play a more active political role. He attended many Conservative meetings and served as a Gloucester delegate to the state convention in Richmond from August 6 to August 9. Although the delegates selected James Lawson Kemper as their gubernatorial nominee on a unanimous third ballot, Taliaferro could not give his enthusiastic support to the candidate. He believed that Kemper and his railroad allies would industrialize and modernize until Virginia's pre-Civil War style had been erased. As a traditionalist, Taliaferro yearned to retain as many of Virginia's ante-bellum characteristics as possible in a changed world. Confirming Taliaferro's fears, the Conservative platform accepted the "new order" by committing the party to equal civil rights, free public education, industrial development, and federally financed public works. Although he continued to work within the Conservative Party, Taliaferro could not give complete allegiance to the gubernatorial candidate or the platform.

In the general election which followed, Taliaferro campaigned again for Gloucester's seat in the House of Delegates, and with many other successful Conservative candidates, he won the election. Conservatives carried not only the governorship, but also two-thirds of the delegates and an even greater percentage of state senators. Hearing the results of the local election, Sally

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4 W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1873, July 7, Taliaferro Papers.
6 Ibid., 110.
rejoiced that the exciting contest had given her husband "the handsome majority of 107" votes. According to Sally, "everybody expressed unbounded delight," people lit bonfires, and even the whistle of the steam mill added its voice to the festivities. She hoped the defeated candidate would "content himself with the obscurity which is his proper place."  

Attending his first post-Civil War meeting of the House of Delegates on January 1, 1874, Taliaferro worried about rising to a state-wide office and paid minimal attention to legislative matters. The Conservative caucus placed him on the Courts of Justice Committee and the Committee on the Chesapeake and its Tributaries, where he served throughout his years in the legislature. As a member of the special House committee, Taliaferro conferred with the Maryland commissioners to arbitrate and fix a permanent boundary between the two states. According to the agreement, Virginia could claim soil rights to the low-water mark on the south side of the Potomac, and had free use of the entire river. Although Taliaferro worried that Virginia might appear to surrender some previously existing privileges, friends assured him that the wording of the agreement left no room to question Virginia's claims on the Potomac. Besides his committee activities,

7Sally L. Taliaferro to James L. Taliaferro, Nov. 8, 1873, Taliaferro Papers.
Taliaferro's interest centered in such programs as the appropriation to set up a statue of Stonewall Jackson and the bill to incorporate the Gloucester Monument Association. He did manage to stay busy while he served in the legislature, often working in committees until late at night and rarely finding time to visit his sister or Sally's father. He complained that talkative friends constantly invaded his room at the Exchange Hotel and left too little time for him to work on House business.

In 1875, Taliaferro decided to try for a state-wide office. By the halfway point of his term, Governor Kemper had lost the support of some traditionalists who blamed him for abandoning ante-bellum Southern ideals. In spite of the dissatisfaction, most Conservatives stood behind Kemper. However, Taliaferro believed that if he could win the lieutenant governorship in 1875, he might force Kemper to resign and then succeed to the governorship himself. Taliaferro began to contact his friends and ask for their support. Henry E. Blair, a friend from the legislature, made discreet inquiries among delegates from southwestern Virginia and believed that they all held Taliaferro in high regard. Unless they had to support a regional candidate, Taliaferro would probably get their votes. Some delegates believed that he had

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2W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, March 3, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.
4Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 11, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
a better chance for election than any other announced candidate. His friends wrote letters to their local papers, urging his election, and one man suggested enlisting Valley newspapers to rally support from Taliaferro's military comrades of the Stonewall Brigade.

While the power and glory of high office attracted Taliaferro, his family considered more mundane matters. Young Warner was primarily interested in the extra salary, not abstractions such as honor and patriotism. Hearing a rumor that his father had a good chance of winning the election, Warner hoped only that the pay would compensate for the financial losses of a reduced law practice. On the other hand, Sally wrote that "The Enquirer says it [lieutenant governorship] is a stepping stone to Poverty—but I suppose you think that the number of steps you have taken in that direction must have carried you to that point long ago, and another one will not matter much." Regardless of ambitions, hopes, and fears, Taliaferro lost the election and had to shelve his aspirations again.

The next year national politics dominated Taliaferro's thoughts. Since the Civil War Grant and the Republicans had carried Virginia,

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15 Henry E. Blair to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 27, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
16 J.P. Fitzgerald to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 11, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
17 Warner T. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 18, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
18 Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 11, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
and now the National Democratic Party hoped to regain these electoral votes. With Virginia Democrats desperately wanting to obtain a majority, Taliaferro took a great interest in the state convention of 1876, hoping to serve as permanent chairman of the convention or as delegate-at-large. Although he secured some votes for each position, he could not gather enough support to win either office, but was named to head the Democratic Executive Committee of Virginia. 19 As state chairman Taliaferro shared the responsibility for the success or failure of the Democratic presidential nominee, Samuel Tilden, in Virginia. While organizing Virginia Democrats down to the local level, he also kept in constant touch with the national committee, sent frequent reports of Democratic progress in Virginia, conducted a state-wide canvass of all voters and their party affiliation, 20 and compiled a list of all Democratic candidates for state office. 21 He appointed county Democratic chairmen who would stay in touch with both the state and national Democratic committees, and encouraged all Virginia Democrats to contact doubtful voters, urging them to vote Democratic, or at least, not to vote Republican. 22

To climax other party efforts in the state, Taliaferro wrote an

19 Jubal A. Early to W.B. Taliaferro, June 5, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.

20 W.S. Andrews to W.B. Taliaferro, July 26, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.


22 Abram S. Hewitt to W.B. Taliaferro, Oct. 19, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.
address to the people of Virginia, which received praise from state committee members who sanctioned Taliaferro's conservatism.\(^{23}\) When a copy of the address reached the national committee, the chairman congratulated Taliaferro on composing "a document which ought to carry conviction, and at the same time avoids the discussion of any question which might place the party in a false position."\(^{24}\) Perhaps some of Taliaferro's activities brought results because Tilden did carry Virginia in his unsuccessful bid for the presidency.

In 1877, Taliaferro resigned as state Democratic chairman to run for the Conservative gubernatorial nomination. In the early stages of the campaign, the major contenders divided as regional favorite sons, rather than over political issues. Frederick Holliday represented the Valley; John Daniel, the Piedmont; William Mahone, the Southside; William Terry, the Southwest, and Taliaferro, the Tidewater. Fitzhugh Lee hoped to come in as a compromise candidate.\(^{25}\) Mahone, because of his personal unpopularity, needed to divert the campaign to issues, and chose to raise again the question of paying or repudiating the long-standing state debt. Mahone actually wanted to adjust the debt downward by agreement with the creditors, but his forceful language led many people to believe that he favored arbitrary adjustment without consulting

\(^{23}\)John T. Lovell to W.B. Taliaferro, August 28, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^{24}\)Abram S. Hewitt to W.B. Taliaferro, Sept. 8, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^{25}\)Maddex, op. cit., 249.
creditors. Most of the other candidates evaded or straddled the issue, but once raised, the question could not be dropped again.26

With help and encouragement from friends, Taliaferro started his campaign in January, 1877. An acquaintance from southwestern Virginia told Taliaferro that many men from his Civil War command lived in that part of the state and supported his bid for governor.27 Other friends wrote to offer help,28 and campaigned for Taliaferro as a man who understood the financial condition of the state and the needs of the poor people.29

In spite of cheerful predictions from friends, Taliaferro felt depressed about his chances of receiving the nomination. In February, while staying at the Exchange Hotel in Richmond, he had an opportunity to observe the constant activity of the Mahone group. The scene made Taliaferro realize that his lack of money and weak organization handicapped him severely, but perhaps the personnel of the Mahone campaign distressed him even more. John Wise, the son of one of Taliaferro's oldest friends, led the Mahone forces, worked every day around the Capitol, and gave an elaborate dinner in Mahone's honor. Deeply hurt, Taliaferro believed that if Wise could not support the Taliaferro campaign

26Ibid., 249-52.
27William M. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 8, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
28J.W. Stubbs to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 27, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
29Major Cockerell to W.B. Taliaferro, March 14, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
then he could at least refrain from working actively for Mahone. Viewing the efficient Mahone organization, Taliaferro's hope for success dwindled.30

By April, Taliaferro had begun to receive good news about his chances, and his spirits had improved. He had heard that John Daniel found his most formidable opposition in Taliaferro, and had gained the support of Lieutenant Governor Thomas.31 Friends informed him that "Taliaferro stock" was rising in the Valley, and that he and Holliday led in that region. G.C. Wharton even predicted victory over Holliday and invited himself to visit Taliaferro in the governor's mansion.32 Reports from Norfolk indicated that Taliaferro had the support of the people, but lacked the necessary organization. With Mahone attempting to manipulate the selection of convention delegates, Taliaferro's Norfolk group needed a leader to check this influence.33

In Richmond Taliaferro's friends got a late start. After waiting in vain for Taliaferro to visit the city, George Hundley organized a small group shortly before the election of delegates. He called two Taliaferro rallies, appointed committees, and accomplished enough to make Taliaferro activities conspicuous.

30W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, Feb. 6, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

31W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, April 5, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

32G.C. Wharton to W.B. Taliaferro, June 1, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

33S.R. Donohoe to W.B. Taliaferro, June 2, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
throughout the city. One diligent Taliaferro worker in the Madison Ward loaded his carriage with five or six voters, drove them to the polls, shouted "let the Taliaferro boys have a fair show," and drove off for another load. An efficient organization to direct other workers should have given Taliaferro more Richmond delegates. The Richmond results gave Daniel twenty-four delegates; Lee, sixteen; Taliaferro, fifteen; Mahone, thirteen; and Holliday, two. But Taliaferro was "the second choice of most everybody," and reports even suggested that the Mahone delegates from Richmond would give their votes to Taliaferro if Mahone stood no chance.

The Conservative State Convention opened on August 8, and immediately attention was focused on the debt question. Mahone held the most delegates, with Daniel in second place, but neither could obtain a majority after six ballots. When other candidates refused to release their delegates to Mahone, John Wise, now Mahone's floor leader, gave Holliday a seventh ballot majority by releasing the Mahone delegates to him. Since Holliday leaned toward readjustment of the debt, the convention balanced the ticket with funders for lieutenant governor and attorney general.

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34 George A. Hundley to W.B. Taliaferro, June 26, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
35 George W. Munford to W.B. Taliaferro, June 30, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
36 J. Bigger to W.B. Taliaferro, June 29, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
37 George W. Munford to W.B. Taliaferro, June 30, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
38 Maddex, op. cit., 252-53.
Although his friends stood by him throughout the convention, Taliaferro felt betrayed, blaming Mahone and Wise for his failure to earn any nomination. The delegates of Holliday, Lee, and Daniel had all visited him to express their friendship and assure him that he would be their second choice, but no Mahone man approached him. The Daniel delegation even offered Taliaferro the nomination for lieutenant governor or attorney general if he would help Daniel obtain the gubernatorial nomination. Taliaferro agreed to accept such a position "if there was a spontaneous movement." Then the Holliday-Mahone alliance settled the governor's race, and the Wise brothers persistently objected to giving Taliaferro any place on the ticket. The Mahone men successfully controlled the party, so Taliaferro failed again. After the convention he wrote that "I believe sincerely I would be the nominee today for Governor but for Richard and John Wise." 39

After this defeat, Gloucester re-elected Taliaferro to the House of Delegates for 1877-79. By this time factions split the Conservative Party over the state debt question, and separate party organizations were beginning to develop. The funders advocated paying the debt in order to preserve Virginia's honor and entice other investors to the state, while the readjusters favored some form of debt repudiation in order to reduce state taxes and direct revenue to more pressing problems, such as

39W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, August 11, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
education. Financial issues and factional strife dominated the two legislative sessions between December, 1877 and April, 1879.\(^{40}\) Taliaferro, like most others of his profession and class, supported the funders and denounced the repudiationists. Primarily, he wanted to maintain the character of Virginia and do justice to the creditors, but believed some degree of readjustment was necessary. He thought the legislature should show the creditors Virginia's true condition, a situation created by war and by no fault of the people. Then the government could offer to pay four percent on all bond claims, and the creditors should accept this compromise.\(^{41}\) Fully expecting to be ostracized, he did not think the majority of legislators shared his opinion.\(^{42}\)

When the legislative elections of 1879 arrived, funders and readjusters waged a vicious campaign, with the Conservative and Republican parties playing a minor role. The battle lasted from August to November and covered a wide spectrum of legal and illegal election practices. In Gloucester Taliaferro stood by his position that the government and creditors could arrange a compromise of the debt, and affirmed that, having never owned state bonds, he had no interest except in preserving the honor of Virginia and the Conservative Party. Campaigning on the Conservative platform of 1877, he called for settling the debt

\(^{40}\) Maddex, op. cit., 256-71.

\(^{41}\) W.B. Taliaferro to Dudley Mann, Jan. 14, 1878, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^{42}\) W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, Dec. 6, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
without raising taxes, denounced the readjusters as too narrow in scope, and equated them with radicalism. Until the election funders believed they would carry the state, but voting results showed readjuster majorities in both legislative houses. Gloucester replaced Taliaferro with the readjuster candidate, ending Taliaferro's career in state politics.

After twelve years out of public life altogether, Taliaferro entered local politics as judge of the county court in Gloucester. According to the custom for filling local offices, legislators usually followed the recommendation of representatives from the area where the vacancy occurred, but Gloucester's delegates opposed Taliaferro. To counteract this influence, Taliaferro wrote to many friends in the legislature, seeking their support, and was able to defeat "the low dirty subterfuges employed by the C.H. Ring." On December 22, 1891, H.J. Williams of Augusta County nominated Taliaferro for the judgeship. As the only nominee, he received all the votes cast, but Gloucester's delegate did not vote. He served in his new post until 1897, resigning only a few months before his death.

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43 W.B. Taliaferro to William White, June 8, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.

44 Maddex, op. cit., 271-75.

45 William Lovenstein to W.B. Taliaferro, June 17, 1891, Taliaferro Papers.


Like many of his fellow soldiers, Taliaferro returned from the war with great hopes for his political future. However, during the 1870's his ambitions were thwarted again and again. In 1879, he suffered his final political defeat and turned his energies to other interests.
VII. POST-WAR EDUCATOR

Taliaferro's interest in education went back to the ante-bellum period, and after his political failure, he devoted much of his time to improving Virginia's schools. Even while politics occupied the most prominent place in his thoughts, Taliaferro had worked for better education in Virginia. Taking an active role locally, he served on the Board of School Trustees for Ware Township in Gloucester County, often received applications for teaching positions in Gloucester, and was consulted by administrators about such matters as the adoption of textbooks for the county schools.

Taliaferro also took an interest in higher education during the 1870's, serving on the Board of Visitors of Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College at Blacksburg from 1876-1879. In 1872, the legislators had appropriated land-grant funds for establishing the school to train young men in technical occupations, but during these early days, when Taliaferro had a connection with the college, poor facilities hampered technical instruction, and faculty conflicts disrupted the school.

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1 W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1871, Feb. 18, Taliaferro Papers.
2 Henry C. Thornton to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 18, 1873, Taliaferro Papers.
In his three years on the board at Blacksburg, Taliaferro took little part in the various quarrels, although he did become interested in the conflict between one faction who wanted the school to continue military training and another group opposed to the program. James Lane, director of the military program, encountered antagonism from most of the faculty. According to Lane, the only military activity consisted of a forty-five minute drill, five days a week, with three-fifths of the students excused for the daily work detail or with doctors' permits. Since weather conditions prevented utilizing about a quarter of the allotted drill time, Lane believed that the small amount of remaining practice could not interfere with other college duties. He also argued that Congress required the teaching of military tactics, and that disciplined drill helped the students in many ways.

To protect the military program from its enemies, Lane relied on Taliaferro, as the only military man on the board, to present properly and forcibly a favorable report to the other board members. Although Lane complained bitterly about underground manipulations by the college president and certain professors, the military program survived. Such controversies occurred frequently in the early years at the Virginia Agricultural and Mechanical College, but Taliaferro could remain optimistic about

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5James H. Lane to W.B. Taliaferro, July 13, 1878, Taliaferro Papers.
6Ibid.
the school's future. After visiting Blacksburg, he concluded that Virginians could derive great value from the college, if properly managed.\(^7\)

In a more enduring association, Taliaferro took an early interest in establishing a school for girls in Virginia. In 1875, J.P. Fitzgerald sent Taliaferro the plan for an academy which he intended to open in the vacant county buildings at Farmville, requesting Taliaferro's aid in gaining legislative approval for the charter.\(^8\) After the charter passed, Taliaferro continued his connection with the school, and during the 1870's he often attended board meetings of the Farmville Female College. Since the small town offered very poor accommodations, he usually stayed in the home of John Cunningham, the school's president.\(^9\)

In 1884, the legislature passed an act to establish a state normal school for women at Farmville, and the older institution passed under state control. The governing board of fourteen members elected one of themselves, W.H. Ruffner, as the school's first president. The Farmville Female College transferred its property to the new school, the legislature voted two appropriations for equipment and operating expenses, and the Peabody Fund made a gift of five thousand dollars. Within the limits of these

\(^7\)G.C. Wharton to W.B. Taliaferro, June 1, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^8\)J.P. Fitzgerald to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 11, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^9\)John A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, May 26, 1876 Taliaferro Papers.
resources, President Ruffner and the board established the most complete program possible for teachers' training.\textsuperscript{10}

After the college became a state school, Taliaferro served on the first Board of Visitors, and within a short time became president of the board. During the years Taliaferro worked with the normal school, the institution gradually expanded. After only one session under state control, President Ruffner believed the school's growth justified an addition to the faculty and asked the board's permission to hire a new instructor with a salary of four hundred and fifty dollars for half a session.\textsuperscript{11} In 1886, Taliaferro, Ruffner, and A.D. Watkins, secretary of the school, rejoiced over the completion of a new building.\textsuperscript{12}

During the 1890's, growth accelerated. In 1891, the normal department enrolled one hundred and eighty-five students and hoped to reach two hundred, an increase of twenty students over the previous session.\textsuperscript{13} As school officials worked to improve the physical plant, Taliaferro was concerned with allotting available funds to the school's most pressing needs. By September, 1892, the executive committee planned to have eight thousand dollars to spend on improvements, especially installing boilers

\begin{footnotes}
\item[10] Heatwole, \textit{op. cit.}, 248-49.
\end{footnotes}
and heating apparatus in some of the newer buildings. In 1896 an extra appropriation of five thousand dollars would not cover construction of desperately needed dormitory rooms, so the board decided to build a science laboratory to ease the problem of classroom space. A group of professors at the University of Virginia took an interest in the difficulties of the State Female Normal School and championed the school's petitions for various grants from the legislature. Although Farmville's officials suspected these professors were most concerned with diverting attention from efforts to make the university coeducational, they appreciated the assistance.

As head of the Board of Visitors, Taliaferro confronted many serious problems. Financial difficulties forced administrators to wage a perpetual campaign in the legislature for larger appropriations. Relying heavily on Peabody grants, officials often ran short of money before these funds arrived and had to borrow money from banks to fill in the financial gaps. School administrators worried that the legislature might establish a rival normal school at Staunton, but Farmville's supporters defeated this suggestion.

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14 J.A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, June 20, 1891, Taliaferro Papers.
15 J.A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, March 7, 1896, Taliaferro Papers.
17 J.A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, April 2, 1889, Taliaferro Papers.
The people at Farmville created other problems, with faculty disputes often disrupting Taliaferro's peace. Generally officials could handle such situations by making quiet inquiries about the cause of the trouble and soothing the ruffled feelings of the belligerents, but this system did not always work.19 One instructor, discharged for irresponsibility and incompetence, took her case to Virginia's Superintendent of Public Instruction and demanded a public hearing. In this instance, the superintendent upheld the decision of Farmville's Board of Visitors and allowed the matter to drop.20 Problems with students also came to Taliaferro's attention. For example, a "terrible affair" occurred in 1894, between a young man, who soon vanished, and one of the college's young ladies.21

When the legislature appointed him to the county judgeship in 1891, Taliaferro considered resigning from the board, believing some of his duties might be slighted if he tried to do too much. However, he decided to stay on the board and continued as president until he tendered his resignation late in 1897, only a few months before his death.22 The board could not

19 A.D. Watkins to W.B. Taliaferro, June 3, 1887, Taliaferro Papers.
20John L. Buchanan to W.B. Taliaferro, August 3, 1888, Taliaferro Papers.
21J.A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 1, 1894, Taliaferro Papers.
22J.A. Cunningham to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 6, 1892, Taliaferro Papers.
allow the occasion to pass without putting upon record the high esteem the members thereof entertain for him who, after serving this school from its organization with fidelity and zeal, thus retires. He brought to the service of the State the best energies of a loving son and now that the infirmities of age and the encroachments of disease have compelled him to forego the performance of a duty which brought to him pleasure and enjoyment, we here record our regret that we shall have no more benefit of his counsel and the pleasure of social interview with him.23

Of all his school associations, the College of William and Mary claimed Taliaferro's highest loyalty and affection, having graduated there in 1841 and sent his sons to the college after the Civil War. Holding his position at William and Mary years longer than any other educational office, Taliaferro entered the Board of Visitors in 1871, and continued until his death in 1898, serving as president of the board for the last seven years.

Perhaps Taliaferro took so much interest in William and Mary because he realized that the school needed a great deal more assistance than any of the other colleges with which he associated. The Civil War had ravaged William and Mary. Fire had damaged or destroyed the college buildings, looters had stolen many of the school's valuables, and the endowment funds had become useless. Besides these almost insurmountable obstacles, the school's traditionalist leadership clung to the ideals of a dead era and continued to follow an almost exclusively classical curriculum.24

23 Minutes of the Board of Trustees Meeting, Farmville, Dec. 16, 1897, Taliaferro Papers.

24 Maddex, op. cit., 216-17.
Except for necessary repairs to buildings, the situation had changed little when the Board of Visitors elected Taliaferro to membership in 1870. Through a clerical error the secretary did not notify Taliaferro of his selection for a year, and he attended his first board meeting in July, 1871. Although politics consumed much of Taliaferro's energies during the 1870's, he did take some part in college affairs, attending board meetings and the related social activities. In 1873, President Benjamin Ewell invited him to give the commencement address, if he would refrain from being "to [sic] hard on the political powers that be." Ewell thought a bill to relieve William and Mary would soon come before the legislature and did not want to give opponents of the measure any ammunition. Taliaferro declined the invitation because he lacked the necessary time.

The 1870's brought financial disappointment and disaster to William and Mary. In vain officials tried repeatedly to obtain financial assistance from the Virginia legislature, but the major disappointment came from Washington. At least twice, administrators attempted to persuade Congress to grant an indemnity for damages inflicted on the school by Northern soldiers during

25Benjamin Ewell to W.B. Taliaferro, June 16, 1871, Taliaferro Papers.
26Benjamin Ewell to W.B. Taliaferro, May 22, 1873, Taliaferro Papers.
27Benjamin Ewell to W.B. Taliaferro, June 8, 1873, Taliaferro Papers.
the war. In the 1874 effort, President Ewell went to Washington to see if he could increase the chance for success, but "he didn't seem to be in very good spirits about the appropriation."29 As his contribution to the campaign, Taliaferro sponsored a joint resolution in the legislature asking Virginia's senators and congressmen to vote for William and Mary's indemnity bill. Both houses of the legislature approved the resolution, but Congress failed to pass the appropriation.30 When another attempt late in the decade ended with the same result, President Ewell concluded that poor management had allowed the bill to become a party issue, with the Democrats supporting the indemnity and the Republicans opposing it. Friends of the college had cautioned against letting either party sponsor the bill, and while Ewell had followed this advice as long as possible, the bill had failed again. Ewell summed up the situation. "What is the college to do now?"31

In 1881, the cost of repairs and paying professors exhausted the college's meager financial resources, and President Ewell had to suspend classes. For the next seven years, Ewell, Taliaferro, and other board members attempted to reorganize the college's


29James L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, April 1, 1874, Taliaferro Papers.


31Benjamin Ewell to W.B. Taliaferro, May 17, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.
financial management and to raise money. Warner Jones, a cousin and fellow board member at William and Mary, wanted Taliaferro to help persuade the legislature to amend the college charter, giving financial control to the board rather than the faculty. The board unanimously elected Taliaferro as an agent for soliciting money to restore the endowment, giving him discretionary authority to travel and pay his expenses from any funds he might collect. Besides subscriptions, Taliaferro and Warner Jones worked to get an appropriation from the legislature, arguing that most aid to higher education went to the western part of the state, and the time had come to help eastern schools. This effort also failed.

During the suspension the board accepted an idea advanced by Ewell, Jones, and Taliaferro and asked the legislature for money to establish a course in normal instruction for men. The legislature approved the plan, appropriating ten thousand dollars annually to William and Mary, and the governor signed the bill on March 5, 1888. The legislature also reorganized the Board of Visitors, but Taliaferro retained his place. During the reorganization President Ewell resigned his position because of age, and Lyon G. Tyler

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32 Tyler, op. cit., 84.
33 Warner T. Jones to W.B. Taliaferro, August 3, 1884, Taliaferro Papers.
34 Benjamin Ewell to W.B. Taliaferro, May 17, 1881, Taliaferro Papers.
35 Warner T. Jones to W.B. Taliaferro, March 24, 1887, Taliaferro Papers.
became the new president. When the college reopened in 1888, the five buildings were neither modern nor in repair, and the library housed only seven thousand books. After paying debts, only twenty thousand dollars remained to cover operating expenses, but President Tyler set to work optimistically. Anticipating a large enrollment, he ordered some new furniture for the school and had repair work done on the grounds.

In the next few years William and Mary started its recovery. Enrollment for the 1888-89 session reached one hundred and one, and the board began to plan accommodations for a rapid increase of students. Early in the 1891-92 session attendance had risen to over one hundred and fifty with more students expected. When the curriculum came under examination, Tyler and Taliaferro favored such proposals as a course for the oyster industry which could combine practical knowledge and scientific skill. Expenditures for improvements ranged from the cost of whole buildings to forty dollars for a new school bell. When a new

36 Tyler, op. cit., 85-86.

37 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Sept. 25, 1888, Taliaferro Papers.

38 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 14, 1889, Taliaferro Papers.


40 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Nov. 27, 1890, Taliaferro Papers.

41 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, June 10, 1889, Taliaferro Papers.
dormitory was completed, the board honored their president by
naming the building Taliaferro Hall. Since William and Mary did
not furnish buildings extravagantly, each room of the new
dormitory would contain a bed, table, chair, washstand, looking
glass, and bed linen.  

Both in management and in obtaining money, the college's
financial problems continued. Within a year after the school
reopened, the treasurer had muddled his accounts, Tyler had made
financial errors, and funds ran short. The college needed about
fifteen hundred dollars to meet its obligations, necessitating an
emergency board meeting to straighten out the treasurer's accounts.

Although enemies in the legislature still attempted to block
appropriations for the college, Taliaferro succeeded in pushing
some bills through both houses. In a court battle with the
other beneficiaries of Mrs. Mary Whaley's will, the college won
funds to educate indigent children. Financial conditions had
started a slow improvement.

Soon after the college resumed operations in 1888, officials
again turned to Washington to gain an indemnity for war damages.
A committee of Virginians, including Taliaferro, met in Washington

42 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, May 16, 1894, Taliaferro Papers.


44 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 7, 1890, Taliaferro Papers.

45 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 9, 1893, Taliaferro Papers.
on January 3, 1890, and petitioned Congress to repay William and Mary's losses. From this date a fairly persistent drive continued until 1893. In August, 1890, the House Committee on War Claims gave the college bill a favorable report, but the large number of more pressing matters prevented a vote on the indemnity before the end of the session. About this time Congressman H.C. Semple from Alabama seems to have taken charge of William and Mary's claims, struggling against many obstacles for the next two years. He asked Taliaferro and Tyler to stir up an interest in the bill among friends of the college, with particular attention to Virginia's congressional delegation. Only two of Virginia's representatives had shown any interest at all, and none had taken an active interest. In fact, the members from Virginia avoided Semple when he attempted to discuss the matter. To secure the indemnity, Virginia's delegation would have to play a more active role. Semple aided the college with money as well as time. When he needed former president Ewell in Washington, Semple offered to pay Ewell's expenses, but President Tyler still had to give Ewell seventy dollars of the school funds to buy clothes for the trip.

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46 William Lamb to W.B. Taliaferro, Dec. 26, 1889, Taliaferro Papers
47 P.M. Thompson to W.B. Taliaferro, August 29, 1890, Taliaferro Papers.
48 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Nov. 27, 1890, Taliaferro Papers.
50 Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Dec. 5, 1890, Taliaferro Papers.
When Congress seemed almost ready to vote on William and Mary's claim in 1893, Semple suggested that Tyler and Taliaferro come to Washington. Since the Board of Visitors had voted money to Tyler for such purposes, Semple offered to pay Taliaferro's way.\textsuperscript{51} The two men reached the capital before March 1, and found room at the Metropolitan Hotel. With four men in a room, they paid four dollars per day, including meals. Taliaferro felt they could have obtained more economical accommodations, but many congressmen stayed at the Metropolitan and Tyler believed it would be advantageous to live near the congressmen.\textsuperscript{52} With hard work and help from several northern representatives, the indemnity bill passed in March, 1893.\textsuperscript{53} After twenty years of effort, the college had achieved its goal.

In education Taliaferro did not leave a truly distinctive mark, but his efforts combined with the work of many others did produce results. Emphasizing teachers' training at a time when Virginia most needed to improve her educational system, he played an important role in establishing the Female Normal College at Farmville and in creating a department of normal instruction for men at William and Mary. Taliaferro, and men like him, who cherished the traditional ideals of William and Mary, but realized

\textsuperscript{51}Lyon G. Tyler to W.B. Taliaferro, Dec. 10, 1892, Taliaferro Papers.

\textsuperscript{52}W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, March 1, 1893, Taliaferro Papers.

\textsuperscript{53}Tyler, \textit{op. cit.}, 85.
that survival in the post-war world required change, guided the college over a difficult transitional period. They preserved much of William and Mary's traditional spirit, but insured that one of America's oldest institutions would continue to live. Perhaps Taliaferro is remembered at his best for his influence on education.
VIII. LOCAL ACTIVITIES

Although legal, political, military, and educational interests often kept him away from Gloucester, Taliaferro always enjoyed his home. In spite of some money problems and family tragedies, the Taliaferro clan, including William, Sally, and eight children, lived a pleasant life at Dunham Massie. Besides the five children born before the Civil War, Sally gave birth to Mary Henningham Lyons on August 20, 1868, to William Churchill Lyons on February 24, 1871, and to Edward Carrington Stanard on December 17, 1874.\(^1\) Only Fanny Booth Taliaferro failed to reach maturity, dying in November, 1869, at the age of eleven.\(^2\) The other children lived long lives, with the boys serving in the professions of lawyer, professor, and clergyman.

To provide for his large family, Taliaferro depended on several incomes. Of course, the thriving law practice served as his primary occupation. Sally inherited a lot and house on Main Street in Richmond, but rental fees barely paid the agent and upkeep on the house.\(^3\) With the work of former slaves and share-

\(^1\)Sally L. Taliaferro, Diary of 1859, addition by Mary H.L. Taliaferro, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^2\)Imogen Lyons to Sally L. Taliaferro, Nov. 29, 1869, Taliaferro Papers.

\(^3\)Cobb and Wingfield Agency to Sally L. Taliaferro, June 27, 1892, Taliaferro Papers.
cropping tenants, Taliaferro's extensive land holdings produced many necessities of life. While he engaged in other ventures, Taliaferro left the farming operation in the hands of his oldest sons, James and Warner. Warner fulfilled his duties conscientiously, but James was "so disagreeable and utterly good for nothing" that he would only "stay in the house and read poetry." Nevertheless, the farms did sustain the family. At various times Taliaferro dabbled in other business ventures, especially internal improvements.

For at least ten years after the war, money problems threatened the family. In 1869, Sally wanted to take a one week trip to Richmond, but knew she would have to borrow the necessary money, since she did not even have enough cash to pay the servants and household expenses. Taliaferro remained overdrawn at his Richmond bank for several months in 1871. Young Warner, a student at William and Mary, wrote to ask for more money, but he knew "how hard it is to get money and that you have plenty of other ways of using it." Although Taliaferro may have had trouble obtaining cash, the family probably did not suffer. For example, he kept a precise

4Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, March 9, 1870, Taliaferro Papers.  
5Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Feb. 5, 1869, Taliaferro Papers.  
6National Bank of Virginia to W.B. Taliaferro, August 11, 1871, Taliaferro Papers.  
7Warner Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 7, 1875, Taliaferro Papers.
record of cash outlays on an average trip to Richmond in 1871, an eight day visit which cost sixteen dollars and thirty-five cents. His incidental expenses included twenty-five cents for a wharfage fee, ten cents for a streetcar, ten cents for church offering, and a dollar for breakfast. He purchased some necessities to take back to Gloucester—a dollar for garden seed, two dollars for paper, and five dollars for a law book. The remaining six dollars and ninety cents went for pleasure and gifts, so perhaps Taliaferro was not too concerned about finances. He spent thirty cents on a bar tab, ten cents for tobacco, and a whole dollar at the skating rink. For presents, he bought Sally a four-dollar bonnet and spent a dollar and a half on toys for the children.

Taliaferro enjoyed sailing, rowing, riding, fishing, and relaxing on the front porch at Dunham Massie with its tranquil view of North River. As an active participant in Gloucester's social life, he especially liked long whist games, but only for amusement. In 1873, Taliaferro attended a party and, at fifty years and four months, was the oldest person in the room. He recorded that "it is very disagreeable—the affliction of being so old—but I was a sort of belle, because of it—that is, very much waited on." Such entertainments exacted their price for

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8W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1871, March 20-21, Taliaferro Papers.
10W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1871, Feb. 20, Taliaferro Papers.
he was "very sick owing to imprudence at the party yesterday."\textsuperscript{11} Taliaferro, a travel enthusiast, took Leah to visit Baltimore, pausing near the Cedar Run battlefield on the way,\textsuperscript{12} and made a short trip to New York City as a guest of the Old Dominion Steamship Company.\textsuperscript{13} In 1876, he journeyed with Leah and Warner to the United States centennial celebration in Philadelphia, but complained bitterly about the cost of rooms and food.\textsuperscript{14}

Taliaferro was involved in many Gloucester activities, participating in the Confederate veterans group, and serving for many years as an Episcopal vestryman of Ware Parish near Dunham Massie.\textsuperscript{15} Taliaferro served as chairman of the Gloucester Confederate Monument Association and brought Governor Fitzhugh Lee to Gloucester for a fund-raising speech. With five hundred people present, Taliaferro proclaimed the meeting a large success.\textsuperscript{16} Within two years workers had finished the monument and placed it in the courthouse square.

Taliaferro took an active part in Masonic circles in Virginia. He had petitioned the Masonic Lodge for his degree on September 9, 1873.\textsuperscript{17}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{11}W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1873, April 26, Taliaferro Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{12}W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, August 20, 1870, Taliaferro Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{13}W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, April 5, 1877, Taliaferro Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{14}W.B. Taliaferro to Sally L. Taliaferro, Sept. 13, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{15}Sally L. Taliaferro to W.B. Taliaferro, April 10, [n.d.], Taliaferro Papers.
  \item \textsuperscript{16}W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1886, Sept. 8, Taliaferro Papers.
\end{itemize}
1850, was elected on October 14, and on November 27-28, received all three degrees, rising to the rank of Master Mason at lodge number six in Williamsburg. In 1873, the chapter degrees of Mark Master, Select Master, Royal Master, and Royal Arch were conferred on him. He joined lodge number seven, the Botetourt Lodge, in Gloucester and served as lodge master in the early 1870's. In the mid-1870's, he became Grand Master of Masons of Virginia, holding the post for about two years.

Perhaps Taliaferro's most beneficial local activity was his role in establishing the Tidewater Telephone Company in the late 1880's. He and several others became interested in connecting Gloucester to the outside world by installing a telephone, but inquiries revealed that the high cost of a cable and other expenses made the project impracticable. Later they revived the idea and solicited stockholders, with the help of Mr. Catlett, editor of the local paper. Most investors purchased less than ten shares, although some of the steamship companies, seeing the advantage to their shippers, bought larger blocks of stock. Acting primarily through public spirit, the investors sought benefits other than material dividends. When the stockholders organized, Taliaferro

17 Parke Jones to W.B. Taliaferro, Jan. 16, 1894, Taliaferro Papers.

18 W.B. Taliaferro, Diary of 1873, July 3-5, Taliaferro Papers.

19 W.J. Bayly to W.B. Taliaferro, April 15, 1873, Taliaferro Papers.

20 John Clopton to W.B. Taliaferro, May 27, 1876, Taliaferro Papers.
was elected to the Board of Directors. The company built a telephone line and connected it to the Western Union Telegraph Company at West Point, Virginia. Although no dividends were declared, the directors continued to add subsidiary lines until they had thirty stations on the peninsula east of West Point. About 1890, Taliaferro became president of the company and declared a good dividend. In a secret proxy grab, one company officer ousted Taliaferro and the old board, but a year later the stockholders restored Taliaferro to the presidency. Surviving board fights and a fire which destroyed their building and records, the company prospered.²¹

Taliaferro maintained his interest in civic affairs until the attack which led to his death. On election day, November 2, 1897, Sally drove her husband to the polls at Gloucester Courthouse, but the shock of narrowly avoiding a buggy accident during the trip home brought on the attack, possibly apoplexy.²² By the time Sally got him to Dunham Massie, Taliaferro was quite ill, and Sally sent for the children. His condition remained serious for several days, then improved slightly and stabilized. This situation continued for over three months, but on February 23, he developed a cough; and his condition worsened.²³ He died February 28, 1898, and was buried near Ware Episcopal Church in Gloucester County.

²¹W.B. Taliaferro to Mr. Bourne, Sept. 16, 1894, Taliaferro Papers.

²²"A Soldier Sleeps," loc. cit.

²³Sally L. Taliaferro, Diaries of 1897-98, Nov. 2, 1897-Feb. 23, 1898, Taliaferro Papers.
In the three-quarters of a century since his death, most of Taliaferro's personality has faded from view. Perhaps he had a generous, vindictive, witty, sadistic, charming, or sullen personality, but today only his intense drive to win power, glory, and lasting recognition can be seen clearly. Too frequently, ambition became his most powerful character trait. To a great extent, the role he would play in Virginia's history depended on the whims and yearnings of his ego.

Before the Civil War Taliaferro revealed this facet of his personality by his great desire to become a military hero. Entering the army during the Mexican War, he hoped to remain in this glamorous profession after the fighting ended, but the realities of military life soon changed his opinion. Disillusioned by the miseries of campaigning, quarrels among officers, and especially by the realization that he had arrived in Mexico too late to win the high honors he so desired, Taliaferro left the army and looked for another way to gain recognition. He had a short political career in the early 1850's, and rose to the highest rank in the state militia. At Harper's Ferry, he had a brief chance to distinguish himself, but again arrived too late, after the capture and trial of John Brown.

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Taliaferro believed his opportunity had come at last. After all, he was the highest ranking officer in the Virginia forces. But the course of the war constantly frustrated Taliaferro's ambition. Pushed aside by the influx of regular army officers and demoted to colonel, he
started the war with a poor attitude. Over-sensitive to slights to his personal honor and over-confident of his military ability, Taliaferro made his own situation worse by military failures, insubordination, poor relations with other officers, and frequent leaves of absence. Disgusted by his inability to win the rank of major general, Taliaferro finally requested a transfer from the enemies he had made in northern Virginia. Possibly experience had improved Taliaferro by the time he reached Charleston, or perhaps any suspected improvement results from a scarcity of material on his activities there. For some reason, either his questionable conduct in Virginia or new failures in South Carolina, Taliaferro did not receive his promotion for two years after the transfer to Charleston. Although evidence against him is abundant, Taliaferro always believed that Confederate officials had treated him unjustly.

Back in the civilian world, Taliaferro turned first to politics and then to educational work, always seeking that elusive recognition. He discovered many of the same frustrations in politics that he had come to know so well in the army. Taliaferro characteristically directed most of his efforts toward reaching a higher office, while the duties of his current position suffered from neglect. Not satisfied with his seat in the House of Delegates, Taliaferro made continual attempts to acquire a state-wide office, but his efforts were always thwarted. To Taliaferro, he never failed through his own mistakes or inadequacies, but always through the manipulations of his enemies. As an educational administrator,
Taliaferro found some of the recognition he so desired. He could not claim the glory of a military hero or the honor of a governor, but he must have derived great satisfaction as president of the boards at Farmville and William and Mary.

Entering a promising profession, obsessively trying to advance rapidly, becoming disillusioned and bitter, and turning to a new field, formed the pattern of Taliaferro's life. Since he had been trained for service to his state, his quest for recognition did produce a few valuable results. Perhaps his own ambition encouraged him to improve the militia during the Harper's Ferry affair, but within two years Virginia needed the best troops she could muster. Politically, he helped coordinate the work of Virginia Conservatives, although he may have intended to use the organization to increase his own power. Taliaferro performed his greatest service to Virginia in the field of education. Along with many other men, he realized that the state would have to improve its educational system to thrive in the post-war world and worked to achieve this goal. Taliaferro did make definite contributions to the establishment of teachers' training programs and to the survival of the College of William and Mary.

Taliaferro was neither a great man nor a villain, but a reasonably average representative of his age. He engaged in the customary pursuits of his social class—law, politics, business, education, and the military. Many men serve terms in the military or politics, but few become full generals or governors. If Taliaferro
differed from his associates, it was in his obsession that he must rise to the top in some field, his shifting of effort from one profession to another, and his complete disillusionment when rapid advancement did not occur.
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VITA

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