



Dan Sutherland

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Guerilla Warfare in the Civil War

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Guerilla war (the term means “little war” in Spanish) is as old as history itself. The Scots under William Wallace (“Braveheart”) and Robert the Bruce used guerilla war to liberate Scotland from English rule. In the American Revolution, Francis Marion (the “Swamp Fox”) and others harassed the British and helped win our Revolutionary War. In 1861, many in the South attempted to follow this old American military tradition of “partisan” war in the hopes of defeating the Yankees.

Most “regular” military men disliked guerrilla warfare because it drained the regular armies of men, encouraged desertion into such units or avoidance of service for the same reason, disrupted strategic planning, exhausted local resources, and degenerated into brigandage and lawlessness. The Confederacy attempted to regulate guerrilla activity, but as the war progressed, regular military men exercised less control over the partisans. The partisans themselves were mutating into various kinds of guerrillas, some working in sufficient concert with regular military forces to be useful arms of the organized Confederate war effort and others becoming no more than outlaws. By 1863, large areas of the South had plunged into chaos, with so-called "partisans" engaged in robbery, murder, almost wanton destruction of property, and other acts of disruption. Some Southern communities came to welcome Union occupation as the only way to restore order and save themselves from anarchy.

On Feb. 12, 2011, Professor Daniel Sutherland will explore guerilla war, arguing that it took a large toll on the Confederate war effort by weakening support for state and national governments and diminishing the trust citizens had in their officials to protect them.

Daniel Sutherland is a professor of history at the University of Arkansas. He has served on the faculty for 20 years, and has won numerous teaching and advising awards at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Professor Sutherland has authored or coauthored thirteen books on 19th century America, including [A Savage Conflict: The Decisive Role of Guerrillas in the American Civil War](#) (UNC Press, 2009), for which he received the Tom Watson Book Award from the Society for Civil War Historians.