GOAL 3 | LESSON PLAN | HIGH SCHOOL

Life At War

GRADES: High School

APPROXIMATE LENGTH OF TIME: 60 minutes

GOAL: Students will be able to discuss the life of a Civil War soldier, analyzing his role within society and the military.

OBJECTIVES:

1. Assuming the role of an investigative reporter, students will be able to write an article through which they will describe the daily life of a Civil War soldier, discuss the challenges soldiers faced, and describe a soldier's role within the military.
2. Students will be able to describe the effects of weapons technology on soldiers and medical treatments used for wounded and sick soldiers.

COMMON CORE:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2
Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4
Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9
Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

NCSS STANDARDS FOR SOCIAL STUDIES:

1—Culture
2—Time, Continuity, and Change
3—People, Places, and Environment
5—Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
6—Power, Authority, and Governance
8—Science, Technology, and Society
10—Civics, Ideals, and Practices

MATERIALS:

1. Life at War Power Point Presentation
2. Classroom Read/Share
3. Writing Assignment: A Soldier's Life Editorial
4. Soldier's Life Resource Pack
5. A Soldier's Life Editorial Rubric

ANTICIPATORY SET/HOOK

Civil War soldiers lived hard lives in a world different from the world of the 21st century.

Ask students what they think soldiers' lives were like. What did they eat and wear? What did they do for fun? What kind of help was available to them if they got sick?

PROCEDURE:

Print out the PowerPoint with notes prior to class. There are notes included with the slides that will be on the printed slides, but won't be seen by your students during the presentation.

Activity 1

1. Whole-class instruction with the *Life at War PowerPoint* presentation and associated discussion questions located in the notes section of the Power Point.

Activity 2

2. Place students into several small groups.
3. Provide each group with a *Classroom Read/Share* sheet. Students will read the information on their sheet and then construct a brief answer to the question at the top of that page.
4. Call on each group to share their question and answer with the class.

Activity 3

5. Hand out Writing Assignment: *A Soldier's Life Editorial, Soldier's Life Resource Pack* (for reference material) and *A Soldier's Life Editorial Rubric.*

CLOSURE:

1. Have students share their editorials with the class either orally or by hanging them around the room to be read.

ASSESSMENT IN THIS LESSON

1. Informal assessment through the *PowerPoint* discussion questions
2. Informal assessment through the *Read/Share discussion*
3. *Editorial*

Name: _____
Date: _____

Classroom Read/Share

THE CIVIL WAR SOLDIER: What was life as a soldier like in 1863?

By the National Park Service

Each of the following pages contains a read/share sheet.

Organize your class into several small groups. Ideally, there should be a group for each numbered read/share sheet.

Everyone in each group should work together to develop a response to the question at the top of the page, based on the reading.

Give the groups approximately 10 minutes to read and share within their groups.

When time is up, call on a member of each group to share their information with the class.

Be sure to provide students with a copy of the article in its entirety for reference.

(1) What challenges did men face once they were in the army?

The life of a soldier in the 1860s was an arduous one and for the thousands of young Americans who left home to fight for their cause, it was an experience none of them would ever forget. Military service meant many months away from home and loved ones, long hours of drill, often inadequate food or shelter, disease, and many days spent marching on hot, dusty roads or in a driving rainstorm burdened with everything a man needed to be a soldier as well as baggage enough to make his life as comfortable as possible. There were long stretches of boredom in camp interspersed with moments of sheer terror experienced on the battlefield. For these civilians turned soldiers, it was very difficult at first getting used to the rigors and demands of army life. Most had been farmers all of their lives and were indifferent to the need to obey orders. Discipline was first and foremost a difficult concept to understand, especially in the beginning when the officer one had to salute may have been the hometown postmaster only a few weeks before. Uniforms issued in both armies were not quite as fancy as those worn by the hometown militias and soldiering did not always mean fighting. There were fatigue duties such as assignments to gather wood for cook fires. Metal fittings had to be polished, horses groomed and watered, fields had to be cleared for parades and drill, and there were water details for the cook house. Guard duty meant long hours pacing up and down a well-trod line, day or night, rain or shine, always on watch for a foe who might be lurking anywhere in the hostile countryside. A furlough was hard to come by as every man was needed in the field and few men had a chance to ever visit home.

(2) What kind of shelters were available to soldiers? How did they live?

A soldier's home in camp was a rectangular piece of canvas buttoned to another to form a small two-man tent, or *dog tent,* as the soldiers called them. First introduced in 1862, every Union soldier was issued one for use during active campaign and the men joked that only a dog could crawl under it and stay dry from the rain. The tent could be easily pitched for the evening by tying each end to a rifle stuck in the ground by the bayonet or by stringing it up to fence rails. Confederates did not receive shelter tents though some Confederate units were issued a variation of the tent, which they pitched as a lean-to or shelter. As the war progressed it was very common for a Confederate camp to be filled with captured Union tents as well as captured blankets, canteens, and haversacks. Confederates especially prized the Union rubber blankets, which were not manufactured in the South and were ideal as a ground cloth or overhead shelter.

Army camps were like a huge bustling city of white canvas, sometimes obscured by smoke from hundreds of campfires. Camps were considered temporary throughout the year until the winter months when the armies would establish winter quarters. The soldiers would construct log huts that were large enough to accommodate several men, made of trees taken from any nearby source. The logs were laid out on stones underneath the bottom log, in a rectangle and notched to fit tight at the corners and stones, brick, or mud-covered logs were formed into a small fireplace in one end. Mud filled the gap between the logs and inside of the chimney over the fireplace. A roof made from tents or sawn boards and wooded bunks built inside finished the hut. Soldiers often named their winter huts after well-known hotels or restaurants back home such as "Wiltshire Hotel" or "Madigan's Oyster House." The armies quartered in these small huts through the winter months and then it was back to the field and dog tents.

(3) What was drill? What kind of activities were part of drill? Why did the soldiers spend so much time drilling?

Marching and fighting drill was part of the daily routine for the Civil War soldier. Infantry soldiers drilled as squads and in company formations, each man getting accustomed to orders and formations such as marching in column and in a "company front", how to face properly, dress the line, and interact with his fellow soldiers. After an hour of drill on that level, the company moved onto regimental level drills and parades. The soldier practiced guard mount and other procedures such as the Manual of Arms, which infantrymen learned for the rifle-musket. Veterans of the war often remarked how they could recite the steps of loading and priming for many years after the war, thanks to the continual drill. The drill was important for the infantry for they used tactics that had changed little since the time of the American Revolution or the age of Napoleon: infantry fought in closely knit formations of two ranks (or rows) of soldiers, each man in the rank standing side by side. This formation was first devised when the single-shot, muzzle-loading musket became the normal weapon on the battlefield, the close ranks being a necessity because of the limitations of the musket. Yet, by 1861, new technology had made the old-fashioned smoothbore musket nearly obsolete with the introduction of the rifle musket. By the time of the Gettysburg Campaign, the rifle musket made up the majority of infantry weapons in both the Union and Confederate armies though it took much longer for the tactics to change. Even with the advance of the rifle musket, the weapons were still muzzle loaders and officers believed that the old-fashioned drill formations were still useful to ensure a massing of continuous firepower that the individual soldier could not sustain. The result of this slow change was a much higher than anticipated rate of casualties on the battlefield. Cavalrymen drilled with their sabers, both on foot and horseback, while artillerymen drilled with their cannons limbered up to the team of horses and unlimbered, ready to fire. Oddly enough, marksmanship on a rifle range did not take precedence over other drill the soldiers learned for several reasons—the military believed that each man would shoot accurately when told to and the war departments did not wish to waste ammunition fired on random targets.

(4) What were musical instruments used for? What were the two most important instruments in battle and why?

For the infantry, drums were used to announce daily activities, from sunrise to sunset. Reveille was sounded to begin the day at 5 AM, followed by an assembly for morning roll call and breakfast call. Sick call was sounded soon after breakfast, followed by assemblies for guard duty, drill, or to begin the march. Drummers were also important on the march to keep soldiers in step during parades and to call them to attention. In battle, drums were sometimes used to signal maneuvers and give signals for the ranks to load and fire their weapons. The artillery and cavalry relied solely on buglers who were as important in their roles as the drummers were to the infantry. When not playing for their respective regiments, musicians were often combined with regimental or brigade bands to play marching tunes or provide field music for parades, inspections, and reviews.

Soldiers loved to sing and there were many tunes popular in both armies. A variety of instruments were available to musically minded soldiers, including guitars, banjos, flutes, and harmonicas. More industrious soldiers fashioned string instruments such as fiddles out of wooden cigar boxes. Regimental or brigade bands often played during the evening hours and there were instances of army bands being heard to play favorite tunes for the opposition when the armies were separated by a river or siege line. Some of the more popular tunes for southerners were "Lorena," "Maryland My Maryland," and "The Bonnie Blue Flag." Union soldiers had "The Battle Cry of Freedom," "Battle Hymn of the Republic," and "Tenting on the Old Campground" as favorites. The men of both sides also enjoyed minstrel tunes such as "My Old Kentucky Home," "The Arkansas Traveler," and "Dixie."

(5) What did Northern soldiers wear? What did Southern soldiers wear? What were some similarities? What were some differences?

The soldier of 1863 wore a wool uniform; a belt set that included a cartridge box, cap box, bayonet, and scabbard; a haversack for rations; a canteen; and a blanket roll or knapsack, which contained a wool blanket, a shelter half, and perhaps a rubber blanket or poncho. Inside was a change of socks, writing paper, stamps and envelopes, ink and pen, razor, toothbrush, comb, and other personal items. The amount of baggage each soldier carried differed from man to man. The Southern soldier was highly regarded for traveling with a very light load basically because he did not have the extra items available to him that the Northern soldier had. Southern uniforms were quite different from the Northern uniforms, consisting of a short-waisted jacket and trousers made of "jean" cloth—a blend of wool and cotton threads that was very durable. Dyed by different methods, the uniforms were a variation of greys and browns. Northern soldiers called Confederates "butternuts" because of the tan-grey color of the uniforms. Vests were also worn and were often made of jean material as well. Shirts and undergarments were universally of cotton material and often sent to the soldiers from home. Southern-made shoes were of very poor quality and difficult to obtain. Union uniforms were universally of better quality because of numerous mills throughout the North that could manufacture wool cloth and the steady import of material from Europe. The Union soldier's blouse and trousers were wool and dyed a dark blue until 1862, when the trouser color was altered to a lighter shade of blue. The floppy-crowned forage cap, made of wool broadcloth with a leather visor, was either loved or loathed, but universally worn by most soldiers in the Army of the Potomac. Each soldier would adorn his cap with brass letters of the regiment and company to which he belonged. Beginning in 1863, *corps badges* were designed for the different army corps and these were universally adopted for the top of the cap. Like their Confederate counterparts, most Union soldiers disdained the itchy wool flannel army shirt for cotton shirts and undergarments sent from home.

(6) What did soldiers do in their spare time? What do you think was the most meaningful activity to them?

Leisure activities were similar in either army and most of it was spent writing letters home. Soldiers were prolific letter writers and wrote at every opportunity. It was the only way for them to communicate with loved ones and inform the home folks of their condition and where they were. Thrifty soldiers sent their pay home to support their families and kept only a small amount to see them through until the next payday. The arrival of mail in camp was a cause for celebration no matter where the soldiers were and there was sincere grumbling when the mail arrived late. The lucky soldiers who received a letter from home often read and re-read them many times. Packages from home contained baked goods, new socks or shirts, underwear, and often soap, towels, combs, and toothbrushes. Union soldiers often spent their free time at the sutler's store, comparable to the modern post exchange, where they could purchase toiletries, canned fruit, pocketknives, and other supplementary items, but usually at exorbitant prices. A private's salary amounted to $13.00 per month in 1863 and those unfortunates who owed the sutler watched as most of their pay was handed over to the greedy businessman on pay day. Confederates did not have the luxury of sutlers, who disappeared soon after the war began. Instead they depended on the generosity of folks at home or farmers and businessmen near the camps.

Free time was also spent in card games, reading, pitching horseshoes, or team sports such as the fledgling sport of baseball, a game which rapidly gained favor among Northern troops. Rule booklets were widely distributed and the game soon became a favorite. Soldiers also played a form of football that appeared more like a huge brawl than the game we know today, and often resulted in broken noses and fractured limbs. Holidays were celebrated in camp with feasts, foot races, horse racing, music, boxing matches, and other contests. But while on active campaign, the soldiers were limited to writing, cleaning uniforms and equipment, and sleeping.

Religion was very important in the soldier's daily routine. Many of the men attended church services on a regular basis and some even carried small testaments with the rest of their baggage. Union and Confederate armies had numerous regimental and brigade chaplains. These loyal officers also acted as assistants in field hospitals, comforting the sick and wounded and writing letters home for those who could not write. Chaplains held field services for their respective units and most accompanied the soldiers as they marched onto the battlefield. Father William Corby, the chaplain of the Irish Brigade, is best remembered for his granting of unconditional absolution to the members of the brigade before they marched into battle in the Wheatfield on July 2nd. Father Corby was immensely popular with the men and in the post-war era became president of Notre Dame University.

(7) What did soldiers eat? What were some favorites? What were some differences between the diets of Union and Confederate soldiers?

By far, the food soldiers received has been the source of more stories than any other aspect of army life. The Union soldier received a variety of edibles. The food issue, or *ration*, was usually meant to last three days while on active campaign and was based on the general staples of meat and bread. Meat usually came in the form of salted pork or, on rare occasions, fresh beef. Rations of pork or beef were boiled, broiled, or fried over open campfires. Army bread was a flour biscuit called hardtack, re-named "tooth-dullers," "worm castles," and "sheet iron crackers" by the soldiers who ate them. Hardtack could be eaten plain though most men preferred to toast the biscuits over a fire, crumble them into soups, or crumble and fry them with their pork and bacon fat in a dish called *skillygalee*. Other food items included rice, peas, beans, dried fruit, potatoes, molasses, vinegar, and salt. Baked beans were a Northern favorite when the time could be taken to prepare them and a cooking pot with a lid could be obtained. Coffee was a most desirable staple and some soldiers considered the issue of coffee and accompanying sugar more important than anything else. Coffee beans were distributed green so it was up to the soldiers to roast and grind them. The task for this most desirable of beverages was worth every second as former soldier John Billings recalled: "What a Godsend it seemed to us at times! How often after being completely jaded by a night march... have I had a wash, if there was water to be had, made and drunk my pint or so of coffee and felt as fresh and invigorated as if just arisen from a night's sound sleep!"

Soldiers often grouped themselves into a "mess" to combine and share rations, often with one soldier selected as cook or split duty between he and another man. But while on active campaign, rations were usually prepared by each man to the individual's taste. It was considered important for the men to cook the meat ration as soon as it was issued, for it could be eaten cold if activity prevented cook fires. A common campaign dinner was salted pork sliced over hardtack with coffee boiled in tin cups that each man carried.

The Southern soldier's diet was considerably different from that of his Northern counterpart and usually of much less quantity. The average Confederate subsisted on bacon, cornmeal, molasses, peas, tobacco, vegetables and rice. Soldiers also received a coffee substitute which was not as desirable as the real coffee Northerners had. Trades of tobacco for coffee were quite common throughout the war when fighting was not underway. Other items for trade or barter included newspapers, sewing needles, buttons, and currency.

(8) What were some ways soldiers were disciplined? Do you think that discipline was effective? Could these methods be used today? Are they?

Discipline in the military was very strict. The Provost Marshal of the army was responsible for enforcing military rules, but regimental commanders also had the authority to dole out punishments for minor offenses. Petty offenses such as shirking camp duty or not keeping equipment in good order were usually treated with extra duties such as digging latrines, chopping wood, or standing extra hours on guard duty. Insubordination, thievery, cowardice, or other offenses were more serious and the guilty party was usually subjected to embarrassing punishments such as carrying a log, standing on a barrel, or wearing a placard announcing his crime. "Bucking and gagging" was also a common punishment- the soldier's limbs were bound and he was gagged so he could not speak. In the artillery, the guilty person might be tied to the spare wheel on the back of a caisson. Desertion, spying, treachery, murder, or threats on an officer's life were the most serious offenses to which the perpetrator was condemned to military prison or shot by a firing squad. Crimes committed against civilians were also punishable by the army and felons were executed by hanging before a formation of soldiers.

(9) What were the most common types of arms and ammunition used? What components made up the army and what were the responsibilities of each of these in battle?

The singular purpose of the soldier was to fight a battle and win. There were a variety of small arms used during the Civil War. The average infantryman carried a muzzle-loading rifle-musket manufactured in American arsenals or one purchased from foreign countries such as England. The bayonet was an important part of the rifle and its steel presence on the muzzle of the weapon was very imposing. When not in battle, the bayonet was a handy candle holder and useful in grinding coffee beans. The typical rifle-musket weighed eight and one-half pounds and fired a conical shaped bullet called the *Minie Ball*. Bullets were made of very soft lead and caused horrible wounds that healed with difficulty. The artillery was composed of both rifled and smoothbore cannon, each gun served by a crew of 14 men including the drivers. The role of the artillery was to support the infantry while the infantry role was to either attack or defend, depending on the circumstances. Both components of the army worked together to coordinate their tactics on the field of battle. Cavalrymen were armed with breech-loading carbines, sabers, and pistols. Cavalry was initially used for scouting purposes and to guard supply trains. The role of mounted troops had expanded by the time of Gettysburg, with cavalry divisions acting as skirmishers and fighting mounted and on foot in pitched battles such as Brandy Station, Virginia on June 9, 1863. Other components of the armies included the signal corps, engineers, and medical and hospital corps, as well as supply organizations, including the quartermasters.

(10) What caused the most fatalities during the Civil War? Why? What was the most common treatment of battle wounds? Why?

Sickness and disease were the scourge of both armies and more men died of disease than in battle. Sanitation in the camps was very poor. Germs and the existence of bacteria had not yet been discovered, and medical science was quite primitive by today's standards. Morning sick call was played in camp and ailing soldiers trudged to the surgeon's tent, where the "sawbones" examined the sick. Quinine or other stimulants were administered, including an elixir called "Blue Mass." Whiskey was universally given for most ailments as was brandy and other stimulants. Extremely ill soldiers were sent to brigade hospitals, where most were further affected by disease. Thousands of men in both armies died without ever firing a shot in battle. Most wounds to the arms or legs had to be treated with amputation if there was any hope of saving a soldier's life. For every four deaths in the Civil War three were from disease or infection and one was from battle wounds.

Name: _____
Date: _____

Writing Assignment: A Soldier's Life Editorial

You are a reporter who has been sent by your home-town newspaper to a winter camp of either the Army of the Potomac or the Army of Northern Virginia.

Folks back home are eager to know how their sons, fathers, brothers, and sweethearts are doing. You are in charge of investigating and gathering information about the soldier's daily lives, meals, and the camp. You will then prepare an editorial that will be dispatched to your newspaper.

- Be sure to include pertinent and accurate facts about what you are witnessing. It is your responsibility to inform the people at home about the daily lives of their loved ones. You may use the Resource Pack and the Read Share materials as resources.

- Be sure to also include your opinion of whether the soldiers are being treated well and, fed well, and what folks back home can do to help their soldiers.

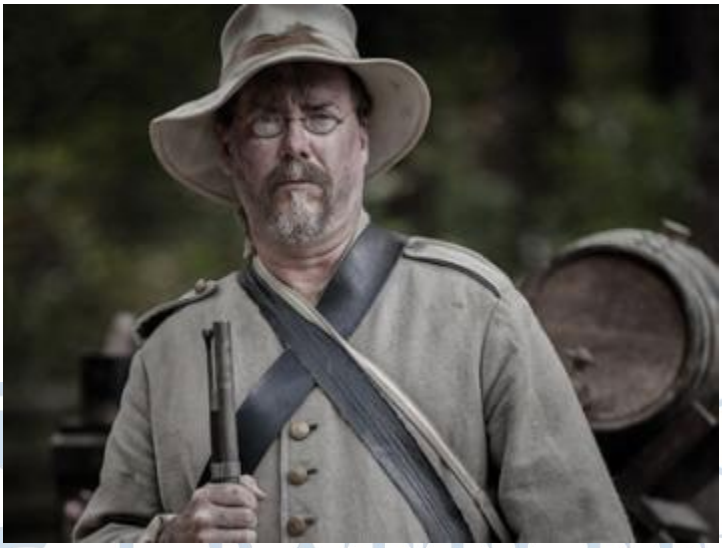
- Your editorial dispatch should be structured as a four-paragraph essay. It must have an introduction (first paragraph), a body (two middle paragraphs that can describe three aspects of a soldier's life) and a conclusion (your opinion about what folks back home can do to help support the soldiers and why they should).

HISTORY

Life of the Civil War Soldier in the Army

Drill Drill Drill

Sharon Denmark



Gary Helm, historical interpreter, Pamplin Historical Park, Va.
Photography by James Salzano

The three million soldiers who served in the Civil War each represent a unique story waiting to be told. Although no two men had the exact same journey into the army, experience in battle or emotional response to their involvement, similar threads weave their way through a significant number of these narratives.

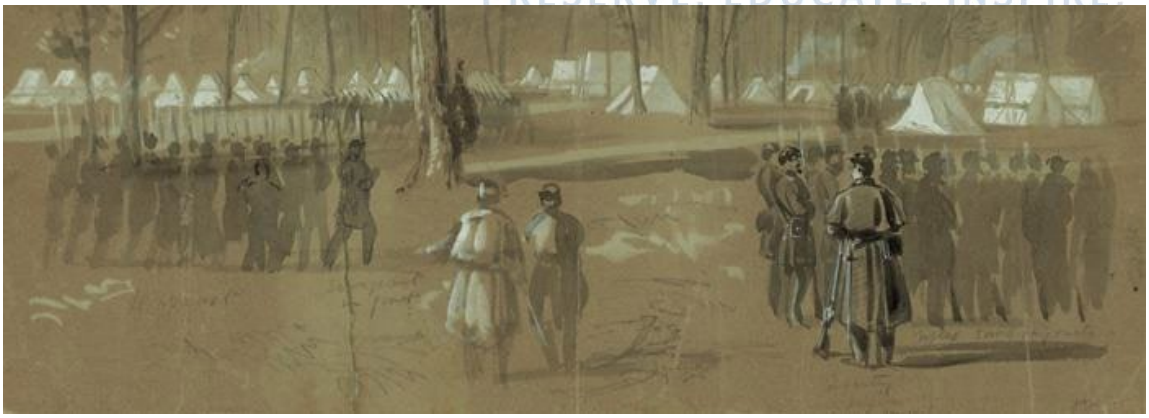
In studying the Civil War's common soldier — who he was and how the conflict transformed his life — we try to better understand the millions of men who risked their lives in virtual anonymity. What motivated the former innkeeper ordered to charge across open ground in the face of relentless gunfire? How did the factory worker who defended his trench line until the bitter end fare when he returned home with no more record of service than his name scrawled in a ledger? When we study the lives of men like these we gain insights into the courage and sacrifice demonstrated by each and every Civil War soldier. Time and again, they were asked to perform tasks that would have been unthinkable in their past lives as farmers, teachers, lawyers, shop owners, carpenters or iron-workers.

Although enlistment, medical and other official records can sometimes be spotty, they nonetheless allow us to analyze an astounding array of facts and figures to better comprehend an overwhelmingly destructive war. These dry documents, however, are augmented by a huge amount of correspondence, diaries and memoirs. Statistics can tell us something about the men in the ranks, but, thanks to a relatively literate society and the Victorian penchant for personal writing, we are lucky to have these first-person

narratives as a pathway into the lives of individual soldiers. The three million soldiers who served in the Civil War each represent a unique story waiting to be told. Although no two men had the exact same journey into the army, experience in battle or emotional response to their involvement, similar threads weave their way through a significant number of these narratives. Thus, as we examine the life of the common soldier, we do so through lenses of both commonality and individualism.

A soldier in the Union army was most likely a slim young man a little over 5'8" tall with brown hair and blue eyes. He was probably a farmer and a Christian. Precise statistical figures are more difficult for Southern enlistees, but most Confederate soldiers looked a great deal like their Federal counterparts — although they were even more likely to be farmers by trade. The war was largely a young man's fight — Union enlistment records indicate that more than 2 million soldiers were age 21 or under when they joined the cause — and some estimates place only 10 percent of the Federal force over age 30. There were, of course, cases on either extreme. Older soldiers typically filled more specialized roles or were officers; some teenagers lied about their age and saw front line combat, but many others served in other capacities, notably as musicians.

Recruitment tactics of the era typically raised companies from a single geographic area, meaning these units (and regiments they were combined into) reflected the demographics of those communities, often with a particular ethnicity or occupation predominating the ranks. Other units, especially those raised in urban areas, were remarkably diverse. Robert Watson, a Floridian originally hailing from the Bahamas who served with the Confederate army and, later, the Confederate navy, made this observation about the men with whom he served: "Truly this is a cosmopolitan company, it is composed of Yankees, Crackers, Conchs, Englishmen, Spaniards, Germans, Frenchmen, Italians, Poles, Irishmen, Swedes, Chinese, Portuguese, Brazilians, 1 Rock Scorpion Crusoe; but all are good southern men." It is the final pronouncement that undoubtedly mattered the most to Watson.



Soldiers Drilling
"All of this practice and repetition helped soldiers to survive on the battlefields."
Library of Congress

Each of these men, no matter his background, had to make a life-altering decision when the country fractured along fault lines that had long been present. In 1860, the United States was still a relatively young country — an evolving experiment in democracy in which both Northern and Southern states sought to protect their own interests. When discussing the motivations of soldiers we must distinguish soldier attitudes from the ideas their leaders espoused. A soldier's thoughts were his own and did not necessarily belong to Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis: not every Northerner was an abolitionist, nor every Southerner a slave owner. The reasons an individual might enlist were complicated and shifting, ranging from the purely practical to the highly sentimental. Soldiers identified most strongly with their comrades, their states and their communities — with, perhaps, a few country-sized ideals thrown into the mix. Then, of course, there was the draw of war itself as a path to manhood and glory. For others, the promise of a (somewhat) steady paycheck was reason enough to don a uniform. A soldier with the 36th Wisconsin, Guy C. Taylor, upon hearing from his wife that people at home were questioning his motives for enlistment, told her succinctly: "You can gust tell the folks that if they want to know what made me inlist they can find out by writeing to me."

The daily struggles and the mundane details of soldier life allow us to relate to these men across a distance of 150 years. The risk of falling ill was highest for new recruits, with each passing year in service affording growing immunity. In his book, Army Life: A Private's Reminiscences of the Civil War, Theodore Gerrish recalls a time spent too long in camp and writes, "One of the most disastrous features of the gloomy situation was the terrible sickness of the soldiers…men were unused to the climate, the exposure, and the food, so that the whole experience was in direct contrast to their life at home." Common viruses and infections included typhoid fever, malaria, pneumonia, tuberculosis, pox (both small and chicken), scarlet fever, measles, mumps and whooping cough.

Camp provided a soldier's first test of survival, especially for men from rural precincts. A Civil War-era encampment was not known for its wide open spaces and fresh air. It took little time for an army to alter a landscape by the sheer mass of its presence. Verdant pastures became a muddy mess in no time under the feet of thousands of soldiers and horses. With little understanding of sanitation, camps were notoriously nasty abodes; lice were rampant, and dysentery, often caused by impure drinking water, killed more men than enemy bullets.

Once enlisted and encamped, a recruit soon learned that his time was no longer his own. Day and night, he was under orders, a shift that required constant practice and discipline. In the course of this process, men learned the particular brand of patience known to soldiers today as "hurry up and wait." A Civil War soldier would find that modern axiom very familiar. In his work The 1865 Customs of Service for Non-Commissioned Officers and Soldiers, August V. Kautz writes that a soldier "should learn to wait: a soldier's life is made up in waiting for the critical moments."

The soldier spent a majority of his time in camp drilling, with the occasional stint at guard duty or a long march. The diaries of Robert Watson document such an existence repeated tens of thousands of times in both North and South: "Drilled in the

afternoon….Inspection of arms….Commenced drilling….Drill as usual morning and afternoon…. Drilled and…inspected our arms, quarters, &etc….” Theodore Gerrish writes of his first experiences as a soldier: “It was a most ludicrous march. We had never been drilled….An untrained drum corps furnished us with music; each musician kept different time, and each man in the regiment took a different step….We marched, ran, walked, galloped, and stood still, in our vain endeavors to keep step.” All of this practice and repetition helped soldiers to survive on the battlefield when those “critical moments” arrive.

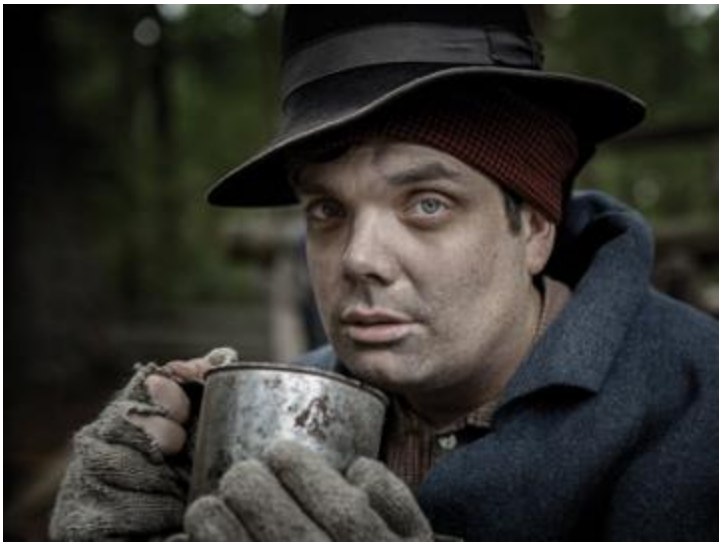
And those moments arrived year after year, longer than anyone in 1861 could imagine. Noble ideas and grand visions suffer greatly under the weight of bloody warfare, and yet the fighting men on both sides endured as best they could. The common soldiers of the Civil War shared typical weaknesses of the human condition. They were not without fear, panic and indecision. Still, we cannot help but look at their service with admiration and draw lessons and inspiration from their endurance, sacrifice and ideals.

HISTORY

Life of the Civil War Soldier in Camp

Disease, Hunger, Death & Boredom

Gary Helm



Ryan Walker, historical interpreter at Pamplin Historical Park, Va.
Photography by James Salzano

Only a tiny fraction of any soldier's time was spent in front line combat. Instead, the vast majority of his existence revolved around the monotonous routines of camp life, which presented its own set of struggles and hardships.

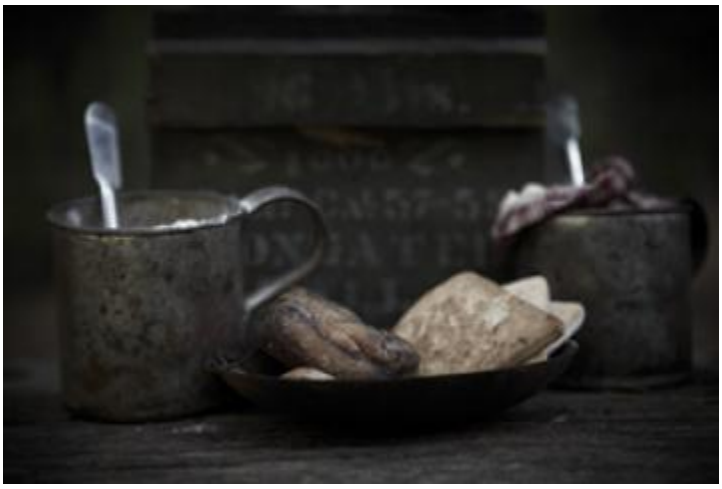
Once in the ranks, military life turned out to be far different than what the majority of Civil War soldiers had expected. Patriotic zeal blinded most of these volunteers to the realities and hardships they were signing up to experience. The passage of several generations had muted the country's memory of the deprivations of the American Revolution. Few had participated in the war with Mexico, which left a popular legacy of glorious victory. Certainly, argued the conventional wisdom, this sectional crisis would be resolved in a few short, painless months.

Volunteers viewed the battlefield as a great stage upon which they would either "secure their liberty" or "save the Union." While they acknowledged that losses would occur, no one envisioned their potential demise in any but heroic circumstances, but four years of the daily struggle to survive in military camps would prove otherwise. Twice as many Civil War soldiers succumbed to death from disease as from bullets, shells and bayonets. By varying estimates, between 400,000 and 500,000 soldiers lost their lives on this less gallant of stages. What was the basis of this noncombat struggle, and how did the common soldier cope?

During the fair-weather campaign season, soldiers could expect to be engaged in battle one day out of 30. Their remaining days were filled with almost interminable drilling, punctuated with spells of entertainment in the form of music, cards and other forms of gambling. The arrival of newspapers or mail from home — whether letters or a care package — in camp was always cause for celebration. Despite such diversions, much time was still left for exposure to the noncombatant foes of poor shelter, unhealthy food, and a lack of hygiene, resulting in waves of sickness and disease.

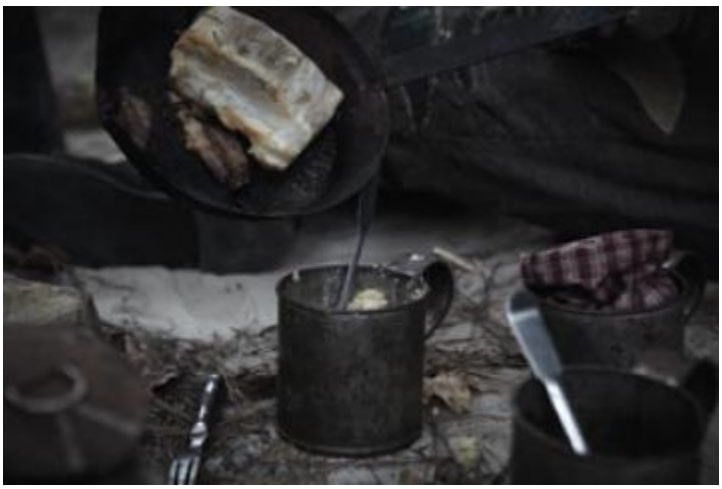
What a camp cabin might have looked like
Photography by James Salzano

After the first months of the war, the shelter half, or "dog tent," became the most practical means of overnight shelter. While portable and lightweight, shelter halves provided minimal protection for their two inhabitants. Sgt. Austin C. Stearns of the 13th Massachusetts described his shelter as "simply a piece of cloth about six feet square with a row of buttons and button holes on three sides; two men pitched together by buttoning their pieces together and getting two sticks with a crotch at one end and one to go across at the top and then placing their cloth over it and pinning it down tight." To protect the soldier from the damp ground, a tarred or rubberized blanket could be used. A stout wool blanket kept the chill off. Unfortunately, many soldiers discarded these heavy items on a long march or when entering combat, and lived (or died) to regret it when the weather changed. As the war moved forward, an exhausted soldier often merely lay on his blanket at night in an effort to simplify his life and maximize periods of rest. Such protracted exposure to the elements boded ill for his life expectancy.



The basics for every soldier, shown here, including hard tack.
Photography by James Salzano

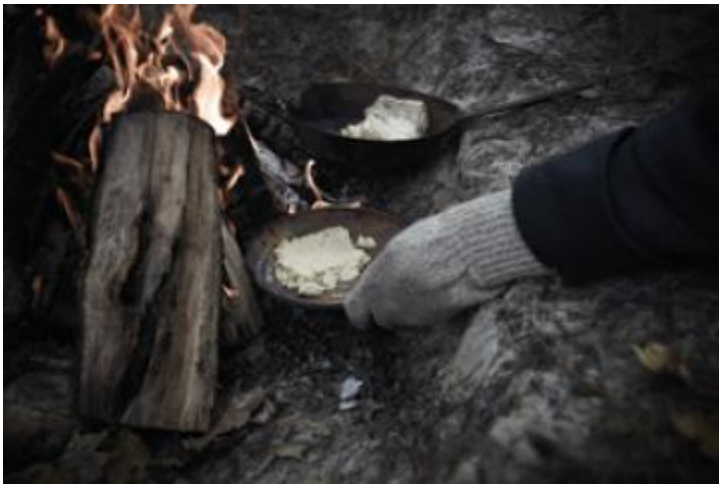
Rations on the march varied from plentiful to scarce. On paper, the Union army enjoyed the best rations of any army in history up to that time, but logistical difficulties inherent in feeding armies of tens of thousands resulted in occasional shortages. The Confederacy, while fighting on predominately "home turf," often found it difficult to consistently deliver full rations to its troops on the march, largely due to procurement and transportation problems.



Pork or hardtack was the standard face of a soldier
Photography by James Salzano

The full Union marching ration consisted of one pound of hard bread (the infamous hardtack), three-quarters of a pound of salted pork or one-and-a-quarter pound of fresh meat, along with coffee, sugar and salt allotments. At the beginning of the war, the Confederacy adopted the Union ration, but reduced it by 1862. Fresh meat and coffee became increasingly scarce. As fresh fruits and vegetables disappeared from military diets, soldiers' immune systems deteriorated and vitamin deficiency diseases such as

scurvy proliferated. The Union army responded by issuing desiccated vegetables. As described by Corp. Joseph Van Nest of the 101st Ohio, these delicacies consisted of "a combination of corn husks, tomato skins, carrots and other kinds of vegetables too numerous to mention." This bounty had been dried and compressed into a sheet or block and, when boiled, expanded to many times its previous size. While denigrated as "desecrated vegetables" by the boys in blue, they consumed them with alacrity as a variation in an otherwise bland diet. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to the culinary science of the era, most of the needed vitamins disappeared during processing.



Grease was poured onto cornmeal to make a "skillygalle."
Photography by James Salzano

Confederate soldiers usually had to forage for fresh vegetables. During the deprivations of the 1864 Atlanta Campaign, one Johnny Reb wrote, "Our men get a vegetable diet by cooking up polk, potato tops, May pop vines, kurlip weed, lambs quarter, thistle and a hundred kind of weeds I always thought poison. I thought it trash…but the boys call it 'long forage'…" On the march, "foraging" — a convenient euphemism for theft — would be employed by both sides in an attempt to improve the daily diet. Despite orders to the contrary, some Confederates liberally practiced this thievery during their forays into the North and even when marching and camping in friendly territory.

The commissary took a back seat on the march to the needs of the ordinance department, but still trumped the quartermaster, whose top priority was to provide forage for draft animals, not replacing uniform components. Threadbare patriots consequently appeared, particularly in the Confederate armies, and the "battlefield requisition" became a prime means of supply for the South. As Sgt. John Worsham noted at the end of the war:

"Nearly all equipment in the Army of Northern Virginia were articles captured from the Yankees…. Most of the blankets were those marked 'US," and also the rubber blankets or cloths. The very clothing that the men wore was mostly captured, for we were allowed to wear their pants, underclothing and overcoats. As for myself, I purchased only one hat, one pair of shoes, and one jacket after 1861."

Soldiers North and South also shared in the infestation of body lice in their clothing and bedding. Due to constant outdoor living, often under poor sanitary conditions, the “grey back vermin” became a visible manifestation of all of the invisible bacteria and germs whose presence was unknown to mid-19th-century science.

Union Soldiers at Brandy Station, Va.
Library of Congress

The seasonal movement to permanent winter camps would simultaneously improve and harm the physical condition of the Civil War soldier. While the men remained in one place, the supply chain of wagons and railroads caught up to their daily needs. Union logisticians employed their superior resources in overcoming commissary and quartermaster problems, but the Confederates also managed to supply their men in winter camp under more challenging conditions.

Periodic shortages did exist, but were vividly remembered by the Southerners. Both sides shared the difficulties that emerged from remaining in one place for an extended period of time. The majority of soldiers, being from rural backgrounds, had not been exposed to such a wide cross section of the human population and its communicable diseases. When accumulated in camps of tens of thousands, soldiers without natural immunities would succumb to the likes of measles and chickenpox. Those same large numbers, residing in one spot for more than a month, caused horrendous situations in relation to sanitation. The use of "sink pits" as latrine mechanisms ultimately led to the presence of human fecal bacteria in the water supply. That water supply, in many instances, did not need much help in the area of contamination. Swift running, clear water would be the exception more often than the rule. These conditions created the greatest killer of the war: amoebic and bacterial dysentery.

In some cases, women accompanied the army to do their laundry.
Photography by James Salzano

Whimsically called a case of the "quickstep," dysentery did more damage than the infernal killing creations of man. The creation of penicillin and other antibiotics was still decades away, leaving medical staffs of the Civil War few tools to combat the war's greatest killer. By the end of the war, the Union Sanitary and Christian Commissions made great strides in improving camp hygiene and clean water. The Confederacy had nothing on such a scale, although experience also improved camp conditions for the boys in gray.

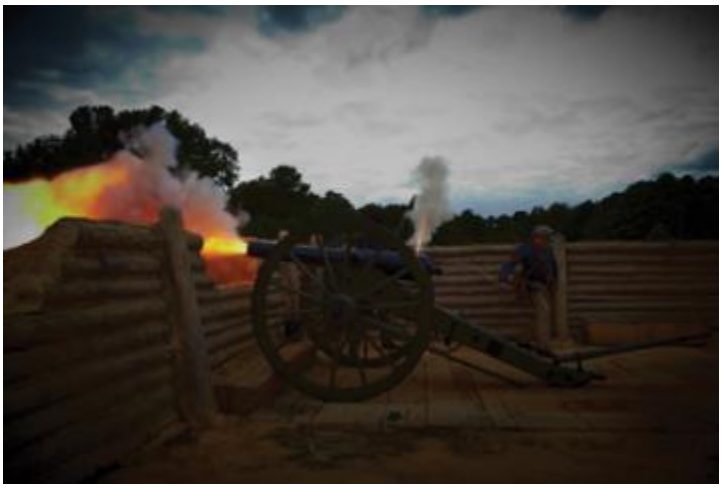
After four long years of war, the military encampments had taken their toll. Although the 2:1 rate of death from disease over combat may seem alarming to us today, it represented a significant improvement from earlier conflicts, like the American Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, when that number was closer to 5:1. Not until World War II did the number of battle casualties approach the losses from disease.

HISTORY

Life of the Civil War Soldier in Battle

… And Then We Kill

Edward Alexander



Shooting a cannon on location at Pamplin Historical Park, Va.
Photography by James Salzano

Just like the soldiers of every conflict before and since, the men who fought in the American Civil War enlisted for a multitude of reasons. To claim any universality for these soldiers and the divided nation they represented would be a mistake, with perhaps one exception — their expectations were vastly different from the actual experience of military engagement.

Due to the wide background of experiences and attitudes and the transformative nature of combat, soldier motivation ultimately should be viewed as a progression. Historians have generally broken this down into three fundamentals: what spurs men to enlist, what steadies them on the firing line or pushes them forward in the assault and what keeps them in the service through the end. Analyzing the war through the lens of one individual can illustrate the variety of motivational factors and different fates a Civil War soldier realized.

Charles Carroll Morey, from a large family in Royalton, Vt., enlisted as a corporal in the 2nd Vermont Infantry in 1861, just before his 21st birthday. No driving personal ideology rationalized his service. Instead, like many around him, he believed the pending war to hold great importance, even if he could not particularly define the patriotic instinct or adventurous excitement that spurred him into the ranks. Throughout his service, Morey captured his experiences through meticulous diary entries and honest letters home.

He did not seem to think much of his first experience "seeing the elephant" at Bull Run. "[S]ince the fight there seems to be considerable discontent," he wrote his sister, "but it is all caused I think by the hard march which we have not got over and the poor fare we have had…." Many soldiers, after experiencing battle, believed that civilians back home could have no way of understanding the events and emotions of combat and focused their writing to more relatable occurrences. "I cannot write it therefore will not try," Morey admitted to his mother after another fight.

Unexpected adversity tested Morey's resolve, as danger lurked even where the enemy did not. After the Seven Days' Battles near Richmond in 1862, one of his friends, Sgt. George E. Allen, drowned in a creek near the regiment's campsite. Morey described this loss, just on the heels of an especially trying engagement, as "the most severe blow this company ever sustained." Such sudden, inexplicable tragedies were tough to handle, even in a war in which twice as many soldiers died away from the battlefield as on it. "[H]e was always at his best in time of danger and did not fear to sell his life dearly if necessary in the cause in which he was engaged," Morey eulogized.

Nineteenth-century Americans accepted a certain rubric for the proper way to face death. A dying individual should be at home with family around to see them off into the next world. The battlefield clearly denied realization of this standard, but a surrogate could be attained through mortally wounded soldiers offering last words home to comfort and reassure their families. During the battle of Second Fredericksburg on May 3, 1863, a minié ball struck Pvt. Frederick W. Chamberlin in the neck as the 2nd Vermont aided the Union assault on the Confederate lines. Chamberlin's friends surrounded him and urged him to communicate a message back to his family, as his wound seemed fatal. "Tell them that I was a good soldier," Chamberlin asserted, before succumbing, a statement that Morey could vouch for. Morey wrote, "he was one of the best soldiers in the company and he came to his end in the line of duty defending that 'old flag which so proudly waves' ore the land of the free and the home of the brave."

As the war progressed, the frequency of combat escalated with no reduction in intensity. Nearly a year to the day later, the Vermont Brigade faced the task of defending a crucial intersection on the Wilderness Battlefield. During the fight, one of Morey's comrades knew immediately of the mortality of his wound, crying, "Oh! I am killed!" before falling. Now serving as orderly in his company, Morey felt responsibility for searching the deceased's pockets for items worthwhile to send home.

Reenactors act out the battle of Antietam
Photo by Carl Staub

At Spotsylvania's Bloody Angle, Morey offered one of his most personal recollections of combat. "[S]oon after we arrived on the ground we were firing and just after I had discharged my piece at a Johnnies head I turned to reload and while in the act of charging cartridge I saw a Reb who had got sight of me across his musket, and I can assure you my legs grew very short in a very short space of time or else there was a joint in them, that is to say I dropped down out of his sight just in time to hear his bullet whistle over my head. Then knowing the danger had passed I straightened up and finished loading." Having survived the horrors of the start to the Overland Campaign, Morey reflected on his ordeal. "It is with gratitude to God that I am permitted to write you a few lines once more. I don't know what to say first but will say praise God for his goodness in sparing my life while so many of our brave comrads have fallen victims to the enemy's shots…."

With no end to hostilities in sight, and the armies engulfed in constant daily fighting, Morey, now a lieutenant, strove to keep his presence felt at home, consistently inquiring about minute domestic details and offering his advice in any matter. This compartmentalization helped maintain a civilian identity and served to rationalize the violence in which he participated. Nevertheless, the psychological transformation required of the citizen soldiers who composed both armies concerned Morey. "[S]ociety will not own the rude soldier when he comes back, but turn a cold shoulder to him, because he has become hardened by scenes of bloodshed and carnage," he worriedly expressed in a letter. "I tell you, dear sister, there are feelings, tender feelings, down deep in the soldier's breast, which when moved will prove that all that is good is not quite dead."

Thoughts of home continued to dominate his thoughts, yet he understood the only proper way he could return. After Cold Harbor, he told his mother that he would be very happy to return home "if there was no war to call me into the field but as it is the war must be settled then I will come home and try to be content with a quiet citizen's life." Having transferred to the Shenandoah Valley, Morey suffered a wound in August that forced him to the hospital. "I think it is wrong for one who is able to do duty to stay away," he wrote, "yet it is not my fault that I am here." Duty often compelled soldiers to

take early leave from the hospital to reunite with their comrades in the field. Upon his return to his unit, which saw his promotion to captain, Morey felt "as though I had got home."

As the war progressed into 1865, Morey could only speculate on when his service would be fulfilled. In late March he wrote, "I think I would enjoy being home very much if the war was ended and an honorable peace once more established but this little job must be accomplished first…." Just a few days later, Ulysses S. Grant had the Union army lined up in anticipation of shaking the Confederate grip on the city of Petersburg. "We hope and pray that we may be able to strike the death blow to the rebelion before many days but perhaps we may fail," Morey confided, "yet we hope for the best and will work hard for it and trust in God for the accomplishment of the remainder, now is the time that we need divine assistance, pray for us that we may accomplish all."

In the early morning darkness on April 2, the 2nd Vermont, and the VI Corps to which it belonged, pierced the Confederate defenses on the grounds now preserved by Pamplin Historical Park. Surrender and the cessation of hostilities lay just one week in the future — but Captain Morey would witness neither. As the VI Corps connected the Union lines west of Petersburg, shrapnel from a battery near Robert E. Lee's headquarters struck Morey in the head. Thirty minutes later, and just seven days from the end, the wound proved fatal. "It seems a hard fate to perish in the last struggle, after having passed safely through so many," wrote a fellow Vermonter.

Morey's remains now rest in Poplar Grove National Cemetery, in a rare, marked grave among thousands of unknown soldiers. To Charles Morey and all who fought alongside or against him, the war's outcome would remain a mystery, but their legacy continues to inspire new generations of Americans.

Samuel Cabble's Letter

Samuel Cabble, a private in the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantry (colored), was a slave before he joined the army. He was twenty-one years old.
Massachusetts
1863

Dear Wife i have enlisted in the army i am now in the state of Massachusetts but before this letter reaches you i will be in North Carlinia and though great is the present national dificulties yet i look forward to a brighter day When i shall have the opertunity of seeing you in the full enjoyment of fredom i would like to no if you are still in slavery if you are it will not be long before we shall have crushed the system that now opreses you for in the course of three months you shall have your liberty. great is the outpouring of the colered peopl that is now rallying with the hearts of lions against that very curse that has seperated you an me yet we shall meet again and oh what a happy time that will be when this ungodly rebellion shall be put down and the curses of our land is trampled under our feet i am a soldier now and i shall use my utmost endeavor to strike at the rebellion and the heart of this system that so long has kept us in chains . . . remain your own afectionate husband until death—Samuel Cabble

Samuel Cabble returned to Missouri for his wife, and together they moved to Denver, Colorado.

George P. McClelland Letter

A Letter by George P. McClelland, Union Soldier
Virginia
December 19, 1863

Dear Sister Lizzie,
The weather has been very cold and the duty of the men is severe. They hardly have time enough to obtain sufficient wood to keep themselves warm.
We have a very strong guard; one half of the Regiment on duty every day for the reason we have an important post to guard and guerillas are as plenty as blackberries in summer. No one durst stray half a mile from camp or he will be "gobbled" up. It is really dangerous as we are liable to be picked off by murderous assassins at any time. I would sooner be in "front" – that is, with the main Army.
Pardon this scribble. I never take time to punctuate. I require a lecture from you or somebody else, then I'll be better.

Ever Your Brother,
George

John Sweet Letter

Letter from John Sweet, Confederate Soldier, to His Parents
Tennessee
November 1863

We have just returned from a trip into East Tenn where we got big amounts of everything to eat and everything we eat is so good to me as I had been starved out so long on some bread & beef, all that we got while we were here besieging Chattanooga. up there we got sweet and Irish potatoes, chickens, molassas, wheat bread and everything that was good for a poor soldier. Oh, how I do wish that I could be at home now, for it is getting late in the evening and I have had nothing to eat since breakfast and no telling when we will get rations for our rations are out, since we left our ration wagons behind in coming here to this place, for I know you have all had a good & plentiful dinner. I know you will say poor John, but this is only a chapter in military service which we often read, but I am content and will be more so when we get rations. The independence of the bounty is what I want and I am willing to suffer for something to eat many, many days if it will only send me to my dear parents, a full and independent boy.

John H. Sweet

Zachariah HJ Benefield Letter

Letter from Zachariah HJ Benefield, Confederate Soldier, to His Wife
Tennessee
April 1864

Mrs Sary Jane Benefield

Dear beloved wife I seat myself this morning to drop you A few lines to let you know that I am well at this time and hoping this few lines may --- ---- to hand and find you enjoying the best of health Jane I have no mise of intrust to write to you Only we have had A hard march we marched five days it snowed and rained every day we are camped a- Zolicofer Tennessee Eleven miles from the line of Virginia. When you hear from me again I will be in Virginia. I reckon We have stopped at Zolicofer to rest A few days on Tuesday the 22 of March the snow fell two feet deep hear & it has been snowing & raining every since We are on our rode to Virginia I think

Jane we are faring very bad for something to eat we get flour with the brand in it & it is half oats & man can't hardly eat it we don't get half enough if it We steal a little & parish a little. We can't buy nothing our money ant no count… Give my love and best respects to all friends I must close so no more at present Only remains your truly husband until death

Write soon Good Bye When this you See remember Me

Z H J Benefield

William Norton Letter

A Letter from William Norton, Union Soldier, to His Mother
Hilton Head, South Carolina
Oct. 8th, 1862

My Dear Mother,

Hearing that there is a mail going out this afternoon I thought I would improve the opportunity and write you a few lines.

I am sorry to tell you I am not very well at present. I was taken sick about three weeks ago with chronic diarrhea, and have been in the hospital about a fortnight. I have been pretty sick but I am getting better now and hope to be well in a few days.

I would like to have you send me some things which will come better in a barrel than in anything else. I should like some good fresh eggs, a bottle of preserves, some lemons if you can get some good ones, some ginger root. Some butter would be very nice, it will come better in a tin can than in anything else. I would like some sugar too. I wish you would send a bottle of good Cider Vinegar also-

I would like some pickled onions, and some dried apples. Some prepared chocolate would taste first rate, as we do not get good tea and coffee.

A towel and a couple of handkerchiefs will be very acceptable also. If there is any room for anything else I wish that you would fill it up with onions and good sound apples that are not quite ripe that they will keep better. Direct to the care of Capt. Sanford, Co C, 7th Regt. Conn Vols. _____ DD Tompkins Esq Asst. Q M General No 6 State St. N.Y. Please send it as soon as possible.

I have not heard from you since I have been here but should like to do so every mail. If convenient please send $5.00 the next time you write.

Give love to all enquiring friends, and believe me -

Ever your aff son

William Norton

Name: _____
Date: _____

A Soldier's Life Editorial Rubric

Newspaper Editorial Article Scoring Rubric	**Possible Points**	**Student Self-Assessment Score**	**Teacher Score**
Article is written in a logical sequence and is well organized.	10		
Article has a strong introduction.	10		
The body of the article is logical and well organized. The body of the article provides accurate and specific facts from the PowerPoint, the Read/Share activity, the letters and the Resource Pack.	10		
Article captures the reader's attention. Events are easily understood by the reader.	10		
Article has a strong conclusion that provides the reader with ideas about what the people at home can do to help support the soldiers and make their lives easier. Article provides in-depth coverage of the topic and a clear editorial opinion.	10		

Student accurately incorporates relevant vocabulary and names of places and people.	10		
Article is written in a way that demonstrates student understanding of the learning objectives from the lesson plan, that is, equipment, uniforms, weapons, hardships, health issues, camp life, etc.	10		
Correct spelling, sentence structure, usage and punctuation are evident throughout the article.	10		
Article was typed/generated with word processing software and formatted appropriately.	10		
Article was handed in on time.	10		
Total Points	100		

Each category is rated according to the following scale:

9-10 = Excellent, 8-9 = Very Good, 7-8 =Satisfactory, 6-7 = Unsatisfactory, 6-0 = poor

Student self-assessment score: _____

Teacher score: _____