

“Social Studies / History Activity”
In Their Own Words
“A Soldier’s Life: Examining the choices made during the Civil War”

Background

Thousands of young men throughout the North and South enthusiastically joined the army in 1861 and 1862. Most of these volunteers joined a company that was raised near their hometown. These companies were truly a community affair. The ladies eagerly sewed uniforms and flags for the men. Close relatives often served in the ranks together including brothers, and fathers and sons.

These citizens were quickly turned into soldiers. The companies were sent to a camp for instruction where they were organized into regiments and the men introduced to army life. Hours were spent drilling. Here they learned the rudiments of maneuvering on the battlefield with linear tactics and how to fire their muskets. Some regiments were sent into the field with very little training. Midwestern states were well represented in military campaigns throughout the Ozarks. Many regiments from Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin passed through this area during the war.

Military service during the Civil War was quite strenuous. Infantrymen carried at least 40 pounds of equipment, including a blanket, extra clothing, rations, and ammunition. Since the nearest railhead was at Rolla, soldiers moved throughout the area on foot. It was not uncommon for the men to march as many as 20 or 30 miles a day when campaigning. All supplies had to be brought in by wagon. The Ozarks are a rugged and mountainous region which easily broke down both men and horses. Poor roads and the terrain generally confined armies to camp in bad weather. It was here the soldiers spent most of their time. They passed the hours with many diversions including writing letters, reading, and gambling.

Civil War soldiers lived on a sparse diet. Standard army rations were salt pork or beef, hardtack, and coffee. Hardtack is of course best remembered today. Simply flour and water that was baked into a cracker like substance, it was often very hard and known to the men as “teeth-dullers” and “sheet iron crackers.” These crackers were also called "worm castles" because of spoilage and insect infestation. Soldiers often soaked it, or even smashed it with a musket stock to make it edible. Fruits and vegetables were noticeably absent from the soldiers diet. Civilian contractors known as *sutlers* were usually available to sell these items and other luxuries to the men, but often at inflated prices.

Despite the hardships, most Civil War soldiers served honorably. Soldiers in Missouri and Arkansas often faced the threat of guerrilla attacks. This danger caused them to worry greatly about their unprotected families who remained at home. Many letter and diaries in this collection

express a devotion to duty, but also concern for their loved ones. Still, most were deeply committed to their cause, and thousands died for it.

Task

This task is designed for use at the fourth, eighth and high school grade levels. Questions and activities corresponding with the respective levels are located with each activity. Teachers are encouraged to use or adapt the provided sample questions for their individual classroom. Students will read and analyze five different perspectives pertaining to the lives of soldiers. Students will focus on why soldiers enlisted in the military, the effects of battle on soldiers and civilians, and the struggles soldiers faced while in service. They will read excerpts from the Lyman Gibson Bennett collection, William Rountree Memoir, Wilson's Creek Correspondence from "Randolph Harrison Dyer", *A Confederate Girlhood* by Louisa Cheairs McKenny Sheppard, and the Lemuel Donnell Diary. Students will reflect on the validity of the sources and which sources contain more factual information. Students are expected to provide verbal and/or written feedback regarding the primary source documents.

Show-Me Knowledge Standards Addressed

- SS 2 (knowledge of) continuity and change in the history of Missouri, the United States and the world
- SS 5 (knowledge of) the major elements of geographical study and analysis (such as location, place, movement, regions) and their relationships to changes in society and environment
- SS 6 (knowledge of) relationships of the individual and groups to institutions and cultural traditions
- SS 7 (knowledge of) the use of tools of social science inquiry (such as surveys, statistics, maps, documents)

Show-Me Performance Standards Addressed

- 1.2 conduct research to answer questions and evaluate information and ideas
- 1.5 comprehend and evaluate written, visual and oral presentations and works
- 1.7 evaluate the accuracy of information and the reliability of its sources
- 2.3 exchange information, questions and ideas while recognizing the perspective of others
- 3.1 identify problems and define their scope and elements
- 4.1 explain reasoning and identify information used to support decisions
- 4.3 analyze the duties and responsibilities of individuals in societies

Activities

Read an excerpt of Lyman Gibson Bennett Diary (See Resource Packet)

- Full Transcription of the Bennett Diary is available on *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- [<http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/675>]

Read an excerpt of William Rountree Autobiography (See Resource Packet)

- Full Transcription of the William Rountree Memoir is available on *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- [<http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/1864>]

Read an excerpt to Wilson's Creek Correspondence from Randolph Harrison Dyer (See Resource Packet)

- Full Transcription of the Harry Letter is available on *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- [<http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/1341>]

Read an excerpt of A Confederate Girlhood by Louisa Cheairs McKenny Sheppard (See Resource Packet)

- Full Transcription of A Confederate Girlhood is available on *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- [<http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/1122>]

Read an excerpt of Lemuel Donnell Diary (See See Resource Packet)

- Full Transcription of the Donnell Diary is available on *Community and Conflict: The Impact of the Civil War in the Ozarks*
- [<http://www.ozarkscivilwar.org/archives/1712>]

Discussion Questions

(4th Grade)

- *List some of the reasons a man would join the army.*
- *What side of the war did Louisa Campbell support? What side of the War did General Nathaniel Lyon support? Do you think Louisa really met General Lyon before the Battle of Wilson's Creek? Why or Why Not?*
- *Name the types of documents did you read. Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some period of time? If after the event, how long?*
- *Describe an event that happened to you yesterday. Describe an event that happened to you a month ago from yesterday. How does time impact memory?*
- *Explain how Lemuel Donnell's service in the army was different than most soldiers.*
- *What other information do you need to better understand these documents?*
- *Compare reading these personal accounts with reading summaries of Civil War battles in textbooks. How do they make you more aware of the personal suffering of the participants?*
- *List some disadvantages of relying on personal accounts of historical events.*

- *What side of the War did "Harry" support in his August 12, 1861 letter? Explain how you can tell.*

(8th Grade)

- *List some of the motivations that young men had to enlist in the military.*
- *Do you think Louisa's story of meeting General Lyon is accurate? Is Louisa Sheppard's or William Rountree's memoir more credible? Explain.*
- *Discuss the types of documents you read. Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some period of time? If after the event, how long?*
- *Which authors had firsthand knowledge of the event? Which just recorded what others saw and heard?*
- *Did the authors of these documents wish to inform or persuade others? (Check the words in the source. The words may tell you whether the recorder was trying to be objective or persuasive.) Did the authors have reasons to be honest or dishonest?*
- *Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some period of time?*
- *Compare Lemuel Donnell's service in the military different to other soldiers. Explain how it was different.*
- *What other information do you need to better understand these documents?*
- *How does reading these personal accounts compare with reading summaries of Civil War Battles in textbooks? Do they make you more or less aware of the personal suffering of the participants?*
- *Identify some disadvantages of relying on personal accounts of historical events.*

(High School)

- *List some of the motivations that young men had to enlist in the military for both the Union and Confederacy. Compare the reasons you have just given with those people give today for joining the armed forces. Are some still the same?*
- *Describe inaccuracies in Louisa's story of meeting General Lyon. Do you believe that any of Louisa's story actually happened? Which memoir is more credible? Explain.*
- *Compare and Contrast the types of documents you read. Why are there different accounts of the same event? What biases influenced the authors of these documents?*
- *Which authors had firsthand knowledge of the event? Which just recorded what others saw and heard?*
- *Did the authors of these documents wish to inform or persuade others? (Check the words in the source. The words may tell you whether the recorder was trying to be objective or persuasive.) Did the authors have reasons to be honest or dishonest?*
- *Was the information recorded during the event, immediately after the event, or after some lapse of time? How large a lapse of time? Give reasons why the lapse of time is important.*
- *Compare Lemuel Donnell's service in the military to other soldiers. Explain how it was different.*
- *What other information do you need to better understand these documents?*
- *How does reading these personal accounts compare with reading summaries of Civil*

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War Battles in textbooks? Do they make you more or less aware of the personal suffering of the participants?

- *Identify some of the advantages and disadvantages of relying on personal accounts of historical events.*

(Role Play)

- *If you were a man during the Civil War, defend the reasons why you would want to join the War.*
- *If you were a wife or daughter during the Civil War argue why or why not you would want your father or brother to become a soldier.*
- *If you lived during the Civil War, how would the outcome of the war impact your life (if living in the North and South?) Would this change your opinion to the above two questions?*

Resource Packet

Lyman Gibson Bennett Diary Aug. to Dec. of 1861

[\[http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=1093&REC=2\]](http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=1093&REC=2)

The history of nations is but a history of men and though full of instruction and of warning, how few profit from the perusal. Our nation like others was cradled in war and carnage, but from the strife we issued free and independent. Within the lifetime of many who fought to gain that independence three wars with foreign nations have been successfully waged, and now another far more bitter is raging between members of our sisterhood of states. Our glorious flag is trailing in the dust and trampled under the feet of traitors, Who, that has a drop of our father's blood surging in his veins can remain a disinterested spectator until the angry tide of war overwhelms us all. I can not! I will not! I have a wife, a lovely wife, the daughter of a race of heroes, who tells me "Go and may God be with thee". God Bless her! Heaven be with my dear ones. I will go to return victorious or a corpse. The disaster at Bull Run opened the eyes of the nation to the magnitude of the danger which threatened it, and again all the patriotic fires of Columbias free born sons burst out afresh and companies and regiments were raised with astonishing celerity and hurled upon the foe.

William Rountree Memoir, 1932

[\[http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=3571&REC=4\]](http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=3571&REC=4)

The presidential election of 1860 was the most bitter election every held in the United States. The Democratic Party was split up into three factions. The Northern Democrats nominated Stephen A. Douglas. The 'Fire-Eating" Democrats of the South nominated John. C. Breckenridge. The more conservative Democrats of the South nominated John Bell of Tennessee. The young Republican Party nominated Abraham Lincoln. There were plenty of threats made by the extreme Southern party that if Lincoln should be elected and installed as President, the South would secede; and they meant it, too. However, no one on the border states dreamed or believed that Lincoln would be elected. I was going to my last fall and winter school that I was to attend for several years. Our teacher was a man by the name of Jesse Wright. He had sized things up correctly and said that Lincoln would be elected. Even we boys were wrought up over the election, and we had lots of arguments over the result. Wright's prediction proved true, and by spring the nation was in a turmoil of excitement and uncertainty as to what would happen March 4th when Lincoln was sworn in as President. We were not left long in doubt as to what was going to happen. On April 12, 1861, Fort Sumter was fired upon, and the Civil War, or the War of the Rebellion, was on. Then state after state left the Union. In fact, up to the time of the Civil War, there was not a United States but a loose confederation of states, many of them claiming the right to quit the Union, and not to free the slaves as the South contended. The freeing of the slaves was done later on as a war measure, the same as burning bridges or tearing up railroad tracks, for the slaves were used by the Southern people to supply the Southern Army with food and munitions." It was not many weeks after the first shell fell in Sumter until the people of the whole nation began to take one side or the other. Mr. Lincoln called for 75,000 troops, and some thought that the war would soon be over and the states brought back into the Union. In our State of Missouri, Clark Jackson, the Governor, and the Secession Party tried to make the state secede but were prevented by the preponderance of Union men and Missouri remained loyal, but in doing so made herself the battleground for four long years.

One of the first exciting events that I witnessed was the raising of the first Rebel flag on the courthouse which then was in the center of the public square in Springfield. The Breckenridge Democrats, or Extreme Southerners, were organizing and arming at Farmer's Grove, west of town. Our Congressman, John S. Phelps, was organizing the Home Guards out at his farm south of town. In the mid-afternoon the Rebels marched into town from the west, and almost at the same time the Home Guards came in from the south. It was rumored a Rebel flag was going to be raised. It looked as if war was going to begin right then. John Payne, a rabid Rebel, was making a speech from the top of the courthouse, and Pony Boyd, a loyal young lawyer, was making a Union speech from the steps of the courthouse. One demanded he be permitted to raise the flag and the other that he be prevented. It looked like a clash at any moment. Grandfather and

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some of the more conservative citizens went to Pony Boyd and got him to stop his speech and consulted other men and, to prevent bloodshed right then on the square, permitted Payne to raise the flag.

From that time the war was on and Springfield was the contending point of the armies for three long years. The battle of Wilson Creek, in which General Lyon was killed and the first big battle west of the Mississippi, was fought August 10, 1861, only a few miles from where we lived on the that same Wilson Creek. All day long we listened to the cannons roar and the continual crash of musketry. It was our first and biggest battle of the war but not our last as we had that same year, on October 25th, the famous charge of Fremont's body guard, commanded by Major Zagona, and then again, January 8th, 1863, Marmauke's attack on Springfield in which your mother's family (Massey), including herself, a little girl, had to flee for safety to the extreme northern part of the city. As I said, General Lyon was killed. The Union Army was defeated. General Nathaniel Lyon had a force of about 5,500 men as against the opposing Confederate Army of about 10,000 under General Benjamin McCullough and General Sterling Price. The Battle of Wilson Creek was one of the bloodiest of the war, relatively to the number engaged. After the battle General Sigal took command and retreated with the army to Rolla, Missouri. The Rebel Army came in and took possession of all our grown horses and mules and almost everything else that was of value, including our carriage. It was a sight I never want to see again. Dead men and dead horses were scattered all over the field of battle, lying under the scorching rays of the August sun. The men were decayed and as black as negroes. They had to be buried where they fell by digging a shallow grave and rolling them in.

They were reorganizing many of the regiments that had been depleted by the long years of war. My uncle, Lucious rountree had been in the army as an officer from the beginning, and he started in to raise a company of cavalry. In the reorganization of the 8th Missouri into what would be the 14th Cavalry under his command, more men would be needed. Although I was really under the age of 18 years, I decided to try to enlist. Men were so scarce by that time that no questions were asked, and I had no trouble in enlisting in his company

Wilson Creek Correspondence from Randolph Harrison Dyer Aug 12, 1861

[\[http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=3675&REC=1\]](http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=3675&REC=1)

Springfield Mo Aug 12th 1861 Dear Sister On Saturday last we had one of the most terrible battles [Battle of Wilson's Creek, 1861] that ever was fought on this Continent, resulting in the defeat and route of the entire Federal army On Friday evening the order was issued for us to advance on Springfield at 9 o'clock and our picket guards were drawn in The appearance of rain prevented the execution [execution] of the order & [Benjamin] McCulloch did not think it necessary to send them back, so that the first thing we knew in the morning they commenced firing on us from three points having entirely surrounded us, such scampering of wagons & rushing to arms was never seen, and notwithstanding the great advantage in the ground & of a sudden surprise, on the enemy's part, our men soon formed and commenced driving them back at every point They rallied and returned several times & not until after some six hours hard fighting were they entirely routed. We lost 267 killed dead and double that number wounded

I am happy to say that our neighbors of Kansas suffered most terribly & many of them are among the prisoners, who number some four or five hundred. I sincerely hope that after their late defeat [Battle of Bull Run, 1861] in Va & this one here that the people of the north may take the sober second thoughts & that none of us will ever be called on to witness another such a day.

A Confederate Girlhood- Louisa "Lulu" Cheairs McKenny Sheppard, 1892

[\[http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=883\]](http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=883)

with Mother's full approval, he enlisted that day. The enlistment of these two boys was indicative of their very different characters. Sam's reckless, dare-devil courage and impulsive nature sent him dashing off at the first hint of an approaching battle. His apparent lack of consideration for his mother was really caused by his fear that she would forbid his going. He was a sweet-natured, open-hearted youth. Tom, on the other hand, though he was much a bred-in-the-bone Rebel as Sam, took the night to think it over, and to consult with Mother. He was the brainy one of the family; bookish, quiet, very reserved, very gentle, he yet had that same quality of absolute fearlessness common to all my grandmother's sons. Tom was tall, hawk-nosed and handsome, like his mother. Sam was a Campbell in type, stocky and ruddy and blunt-featured. Then followed a trying time. The town was full of German soldiers, belonging to Sigel's command. They were not very well behaved, and at last became so troublesome and rude, that Mother complained to General Sweeney [Thomas W. Sweeny], who was in command of the Federal troops in Springfield. He was kind and attentive, and said that if she would give rooms to two of his staff officers, they would see that her property was protected. It was hard to get good quarters for the officers at this time. Colonel Mills and Major Spencer came at once. Colonel Mills was a stern, dignified soldier, who never unbent to join in the family life. But Major Spencer was always pleasant, and evidently thought it no breach of patriotism to make himself agreeable to those about him. We all liked him, and I think he became a real friend to Mother. The day before the Battle of Wilson's Creek, Colonel Mills told Mother that he would bring General [Nathaniel] Lyon and some of his staff to dinner. She agreed and at once saw to the preparation of one of those dinners for which she was famous. General Lyon was a rough-looking man with good manners. He sat at Mother's right and opposite to me. During dinner he raised his wine glass to Mother, and said, "Madam, you wish us success?" "Sir," she answered with grave dignity, "I am a Southern woman." He looked at her in utter amazement, then said, "And you have sons in the Confederacy?" Mother's fine grey eyes were dark with trouble, as she made answer; "Four," then with a sudden flash of spirit, "and I wish they were fifty and I were leading them." Some at the table smiled and our friend, Major Spencer twinkled at me, but General Lyon arose and took her hand as he said; "I hope no trouble is at hand for so brave a woman." He was killed the next day, and we never saw Colonel Mills and Major Spencer again

The battle was fought on August 10, 1861. Uncle June's place was only five and a half miles from the battlefield. That day is vivid in my memory. Early on that bright and beautiful morning we heard the first cannon. Everyone rushed out of doors to listen, and in the midst of the excitement the two older cousins with Will and me, and a half-witted boy named Dave, who lived on the place, slipped away to a distant meadow. There were tall haystacks there, and the boys climbed one and helped Eliza and me to the top. There we stayed all day long in the blazing

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August sun, without any dinner, watching the dense columns of smoke as they arose, and listening to the boom of the cannon. It seems to me that we heard the rattle of musketry, but perhaps it was too far away and we only imagined it. I think we did not talk at all, but only exchanged astounded and awestruck glances. But Will did say once: "I reckon Brother Lonnie is shooting those cannons." About four o'clock, seeing a cloud of dust rolling up the road, we descended from our stack and hurried to meet it

Our house was now a hospital. I don't know how many men we had, but there were cots and pallets everywhere, filled with Union and Confederate men, many of whom were past all aid. Colonel [John A.] Foster, of the Confederate Army, died at our house the same day. Mother and Aunt Mary were head nurses and the colored servants were their aids.

Lemuel Donnell Diary, Aug. 1861 through Jul. 1865

[\[http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=4187&REC=1\]](http://cdm.sos.mo.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=/mack&CISOPTR=4187&REC=1)

I find camp life very unpleasant, in consequence of bad diet, and irregular meals, as none knew much about cooking....

I get a pass and start for Texas, by way of Van Buren and Fort Smith, going through the Choctaw Nation, stopping near Sherman, Texas, with a relative, on the 23rd. A blue norther, peculiar to this country, comes up and my horse being lame, we remain one day, as it is snowing some. The next day we pass down to uncle Thos [Thomas] Davis' in Collin Co. [TX] about 35 miles. I spend my time pleasantly at his house and with the young ladies of the neighborhood.

The conveniences are so bad we leave and go 8 miles into the country, to Ben Roberts, and with a vegetable diet we begin to improve rapidly. It is a very rainy season and the house can only be approached on timbers which have been felled for the purpose How difficult and unpleasant for a large army to travel through such a country as this

Received a furlough for 9 days to visit my cousin and walk 25 miles without sitting down. 20th Arrived at cousins – found all well & glad to see me, and enjoyed myself hugely on good diet. Find others from the same command on furlough. 28th Returned to camp to-day on horseback very tired