

Civil War Times in Western North Carolina An Historical Introduction

Following the Battle of Fort Sumter on April 12, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called on North Carolina and other states in the Union for troops to fight the Confederacy. The reaction in Western North Carolina to Lincoln's call for troops varied. War time governor Zebulon B. Vance who was from WNC, expressed the feelings of many when he said, "If war must come, I preferred to be with my own people. If we had to shed blood I preferred to shed Northern rather than Southern blood." Others felt that the Union should be preserved and sided with the North.

North Carolina seceded from the Union on May 20, 1861, and Buncombe County residents began getting involved in the war. Earlier, in December of 1859, William Wallace McDowell had helped organize a local militia, the Buncombe Riflemen. On April 18, 1861, six days after Fort Sumter, Captain McDowell led his troops to Raleigh to join the war. Soon after, a second company, The Rough and Ready Guards (under Captain Zebulon Vance) followed. Union sympathizers traveled (sometimes under cover of darkness to join forces in Tennessee.

Buncombe County was a very rural area and isolated at the time of the Civil War. Asheville was its county seat, and its few streets were narrow, ungraded wagon roads without pavement. There was no public water supply or sewer system; nor were there railroad or telegraph connections with the rest of the world. Slow, undependable postal services were the sole means of communication with the outside world. There was a county courthouse, and a town Marshal who kept order and preserved municipal peace, collected town taxes, supervised street improvements, and had control over the streets and the public square. The Civil War only slowed the building and improvement of roads and byways, since all efforts were focused on the war.

Asheville adapted itself to the war effort. Enfield rifles were manufactured in Asheville, and in the fall of 1862, the confederate government took over the operation of the armory. A group of men in Asheville organized and drilled in infantry and artillery practice and served as the "home guard". An earthwork battery overlooking the approach up to the French Broad River was erected near the point where the Battery Park Hotel is today. Asheville was fortified with simple trenches and breastworks at several places. This included a portion of the ridge in a hollow that had once been a road from Asheville to the river. It was in that hollow that the Battle of Asheville was fought.

North Carolina perhaps gave and suffered more for the Southern cause than any other Confederate state. Our state supplied about one-seventh of the soldiers, even though it had only one-ninth of the population of the Confederacy. Most of the 125,000 North Carolinians sent to war were volunteers. This number was larger than the voting population of the entire state. More than 40,000 North Carolina soldiers lost their lives in the Civil War. Many of these men came from Buncombe County.

Civil War: The Life of A Soldier
Pre Visit Lesson
The Buncombe Riflemen

Introduction

William Wallace McDowell, a wealthy Buncombe County businessman and framer, was a slave owner who strongly supported the Confederacy. In December 1859, prior to North Carolina's secession, he organized a group of volunteer soldiers – a militia. This militia was called the Buncombe Riflemen. This was the first confederate troop raised in Western North Carolina. The Riflemen wrote their own constitution and bylaws, laying down rules for the militia. The Riflemen had their own uniforms, complete with green velvet trim. The elegance of the uniforms is depicted in a pre-war photograph of McDowell. In the photo, McDowell holds a cavalry saber and has the four chevrons indicating the rank of Captain. The front of McDowell's hat bears a metal wreath with the letters "BR" for Buncombe Riflemen. Because the original photo was an ambrotype, the image is reversed, making the letters appear to be backwards.



A few days after the Battle of Fort Sumter in April 1861, the Riflemen marched to Raleigh where they joined with other militias to form a larger group called the First North Carolina Volunteers. The Riflemen were known as Company E in the First North Carolina. The First North Carolina Volunteers marched to Virginia. A group of Union spies spotted them near a church named Big Bethel. The Buncombe Riflemen fought the spies. A few days later, the Battle of Big Bethel ensued. Although Union troops outnumbered Confederate troops 4 to 1, the Confederates won the small battle. William McDowell and the Buncombe Riflemen were awarded the Bethel Flag.



Postcard of Bethel Flag with two images in corners. (From Western North Carolina Historical Association collection.)

The Buncombe Riflemen were at Yorktown, Virginia for six months. However, McDowell requested a leave of absence because he suffered from “a constant obstinate diarrhea for more than three weeks, and [was] rendered unfit for all Military duty and is so feeble and debilitated as scarcely able to be up.” McDowell returned to Buncombe County to recover, and the First North Carolina, including the Buncombe Riflemen joined the 60th Regiment of North Carolina.

Smith McDowell House Museum. “A Brief History of the Buncombe Rifles.” Civil War Times in Western North Carolina. (1982), 22-23

Buncombe County Riflemen
Quiz Questions

1. What were the years of the Civil War
2. What were some of the main causes of the Civil War?
3. Give two different names given to the North and South during the Civil War.
4. On what did most wealthy landowners and their slaves live?
5. Why were southerners big farm owners?
6. Why were the mills built in the North?
7. Name the place where the Civil War began.
8. How did most people in Western North Carolina feel about slavery?
9. Name the person who organized the Buncombe Riflemen.
10. What is a militia?

Buncombe Riflemen Quiz – Answer Key

1. What were the years of the Civil War
1861-1865
2. What were some of the main causes of the Civil War?
Slavery, economics, difference in lifestyle, states' rights
3. Give two different names given to the North and South during the Civil War.
Union/Yankees, Confederacy/Rebels
4. On what did most wealthy landowners and their slaves live?
A plantation
5. Why were southerners big farm owners?
A warm climate allowed for a long growing season
6. Why were the mills built in the North?
A cold climate did not allow for a long growing season, therefore large farms were not economical, also there was a larger population in the North
7. Name the place where the Civil War began.
Fort Sumter, South Carolina
8. How did most people in Western North Carolina feel about slavery?
They were too poor to care
9. Name the person who organized the Buncombe Riflemen.
William Wallace McDowell
10. What is a militia?
A group of volunteer soldiers

Civil War: The Life of a Soldier
Pre Visit Lesson
The Battle of Asheville
Information

In the spring of 1865, after fighting in Virginia and surrendering in eastern North Carolina, southern troops were forced to move toward the WNC mountains. The Union Army, aware that Southern forces could fight with their backs to the mountains for one last stand, planned three invasions in the region. Col. George Kirk crossed the Smokies into Haywood County, Gen. George Stoneman headed for the Piedmont, and Col. Isaac Kirby led the third invasion to Asheville.

Under Kirby, 900 infantrymen of the Hundred and First Ohio Infantry, traveled from Tennessee by roads that ran along the French Broad River. They left camp in Greenville, TN on April 3, 1865 with two cannons and a train of supply wagons. Kirby picked up a few hundred more men, Confederate deserters and Union sympathizers, as they rode into North Carolina.

Kirby crossed the State line at Paint Rock and marched down the Buncombe Turnpike reaching Warm Springs (now Hot Springs) on April 4, 1865. They planned a march on Asheville for the following day.

Kirby left his wagons and cannon in Warm Springs under heavy guard and headed for Asheville with enough provisions for a few days. The infantry traveled the Turnpike along the French Broad River and burned every bridge that they passed in order to prevent rear attack. They burned the wooden bridge at Alexander and one at Craggy Station, just four miles from Asheville. Afraid that his horses may be killed in battle, Kirby appropriated horses he saw on the march.

Kirby's men stopped briefly just outside of town at the home of Mrs. H. E. Sondley, where they took fresh horses and rested. Two scouts went ahead to the Nicholas Woodfin farm (now the Woodfin area) where they were recognized by Nicholas Woodfin. Woodfin galloped into town to warn of the impending Yankee attack.

Confederate soldiers in Asheville consisted of old men, boys and men home on convalescent leave. The three-hundred men came together under the leadership of Col. George Wesley Clayton and took up positions at Woodfin Ridge, which had been prepared with earthworks for such an attack.

They fought from 3:00 pm until 8:00 pm on April 6, 1865. The fight ended in Yankee retreat. Researchers suggest that there were a number of reasons why Kirby might have retreated. Perhaps Kirby was ordered not to lose one man's life in the battle, or the weather was a factor, or perhaps his troops consisted of traitors that could not keep up the fight.

The battle of Asheville was one of the last southern victories and stands as an important fight for that reason. Although there are no Southern records of the battle, Col. Kirby reported a Confederate victory.

The American Civil War Vocabulary

Dysentery	An infectious disease of the lower bowel, causing pain, severe diarrhea, and passage of blood and mucus
Forage	To search for food or supplies, or to make a raid in search of them
Infantry	Foot soldiers, or the branch of the military to which they belong
Knapsack	A carrying bag worn on the back and made of leather, canvas, nylon or the like
Artillery	Mounted large-caliber weapons, such as cannons or rocket launchers, used in land warfare and manned by a crew
Ligature	A band or tie used to connect, esp. a surgical stitch.
Bayonet	A knifelike weapon that attaches to the muzzle end of a rifle for use in close combat
Retreat	The withdrawal of a combat force from contact with the enemy.
Bedroll	Bedding rolled into a portable bundle, as for camping outdoors
Tourniquet	Any device that uses pressure to stop the flow of blood, usually through the arteries of an arm or leg, as after a serious injury
Bombard	To attack with bombs, cannon fire, or artillery
Campaign	A military operation organized to achieve specific objectives
Canteen	A small portable container, usually for water; flask
Cartridge	A tubular case for an explosive charge or bullet
Cavalry	Troops mounted on horseback

Civil War: The Life of a Soldier
Pre-Visit Lesson
Drilling the Company

Objective: To increase students' understanding of the soldiers' everyday life and role on the battle field and to analyze battle tactics and the effects of the Union and Confederacy using similar battle tactics.

Materials: "Brief History Infantry" http://www.usregulars.com/drill_history.html
"School of the Soldier" <http://www.10thbattalion.org/school.php>
"Hardee's Tactics" is also available on the above web site

Lesson:

1. Ask: What type or rank as a soldier would you want to be during the Civil War and Why?
 - a. You may use the illustrations on following pages as you wish.
2. For primary grades teacher can give an overview of "Brief History Infantry" for secondary grades have students read the article.
3. Give students time to ask questions on what they read and the role Hardee's Tactics played throughout the Civil War. Have students pull their assigned position and rank out of a hat. Use gym, field, or clear space in the classroom.
4. Use "School of the Soldier" to help teacher students how to form company. Have students practice forming company a few times. Once they have mastered forming company practice another formation. (Also possible to have two groups that stand opposite of each other and have the captains of two regiments call out orders they would use to help advance on the other regiment.) Debrief with class
5. Questions:
 - a. What is the purpose of drilling soldiers?
 - b. Why did the Union and Confederate use the same tactic book?
 - c. What were the effects of both the Union and Confederate using the same tactics? (If using two regiments ask students how they were affected by having the same company, advance, and retreat formations. Did it help them plan their next move, how did it effect their company-were they hurt by this, helped, or have no effect)
 - d. How did this lesson make you feel? (If using two regiments and friends were split up from each other ask them how being on the opposing side as their friend made them feel)

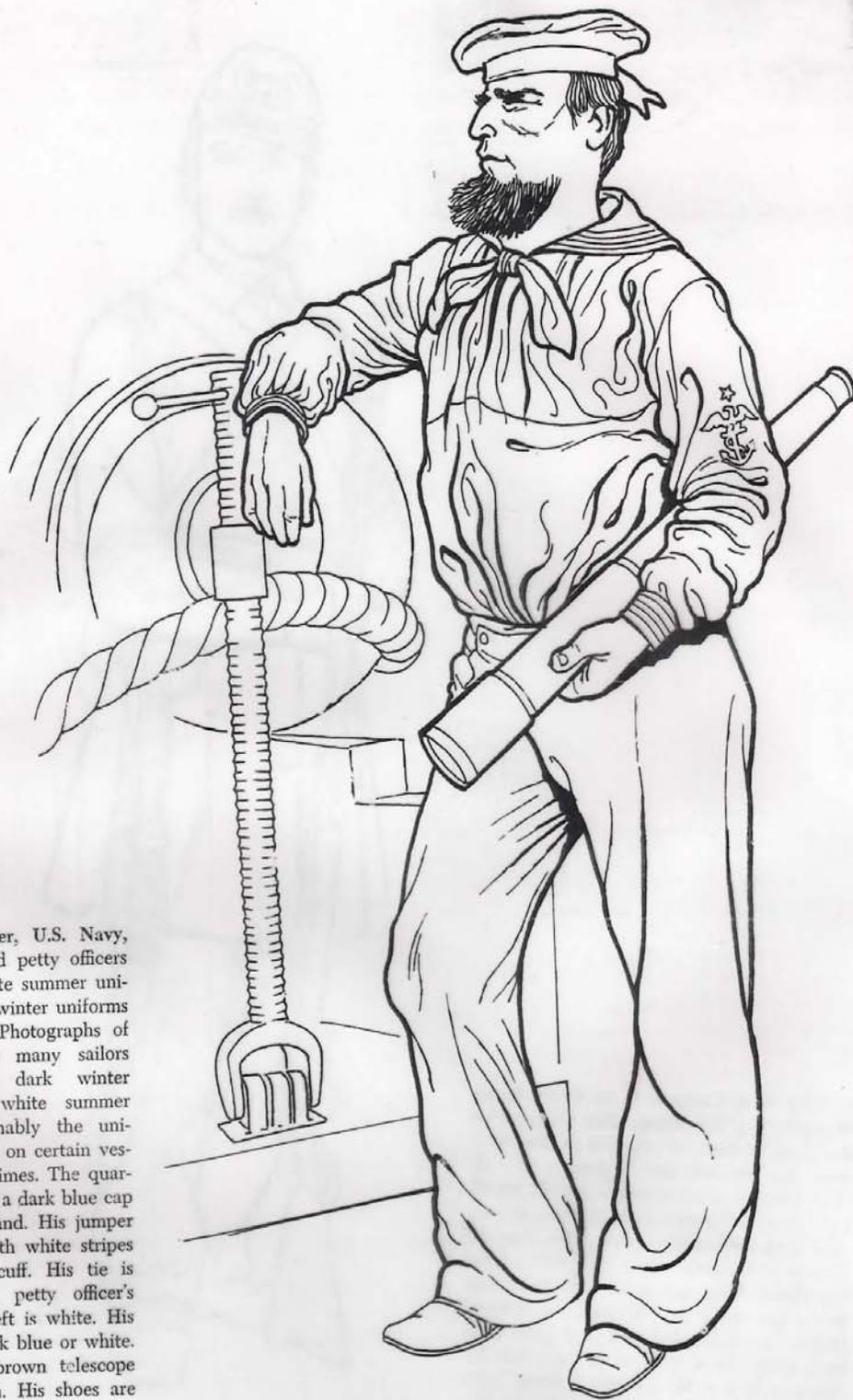
Assessment: Proper behavior and activity class participation



15. Private, Company F, 4th North Carolina Infantry Regiment, "The Rough and Ready Guards," C.S. Army, 1861. The organizer and first captain of this company of North Carolina mountaineers was Zebulon B. Vance, later Governor of the state. After the war, he described himself as having been "awfully rough, but scarcely every ready." The company fought at Antietam, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg, among other bloody actions. This private wears a black hat with the company device in gold letters on a pale blue background. His jacket is gray with dark blue trim. His buttons and belt are brass. His belts, shoes and bayonet scabbard are of black leather. His trousers are butternut brown.



27. Lieutenant, Company G, 1st United States Sharpshooters, U.S. Army, 1862. Carrying on the great tradition of riflemen in America's wars, the 1st and 2nd Regiments of U.S. Sharpshooters served mainly as snipers, armed with Sharps rifles and specially-made sniper's rifles with telescopic sights. The men of Company G came from Wisconsin. Our Lieutenant wears a uniform entirely of rifle green. His sash is red. His belts are of black leather, as are his shoes. His belt plate is of brass as are the buttons on his coat and the device on top of his cap. He is armed with a sniper's rifle and a Colt pistol. Because he is a rifle officer, he does not carry a sword.



34. Quartermaster, U.S. Navy, 1863. Sailors and petty officers were issued white summer uniforms and blue winter uniforms of similar cut. Photographs of the time show many sailors wearing their dark winter jumpers with white summer trousers—presumably the uniform of the day on certain vessels at various times. The quartermaster wears a dark blue cap with a black band. His jumper is dark blue with white stripes at collar and cuff. His tie is black and his petty officer's badge on his left is white. His trousers are dark blue or white. He carries a brown telescope with brass trim. His shoes are of black leather.



20. First Lieutenant, Hampton's Legion of South Carolina, C.S. Army, 1862. Organized, equipped and commanded by Wade Hampton, a wealthy South Carolina planter, the legion contained four companies of cavalry, six companies of infantry, and a battery of artillery. They fought at the first battle of Bull Run under Hampton's command. The lieutenant wears a brown slouch hat with a red feather in it, and a brass palmetto device on the front. His jacket is gray with yellow collar, cuffs and trim. His trousers are light blue and his belt, pistol holsters and boots are of black leather. His belt plate, buttons, spurs and sword hilt are brass. His gloves, which he holds in his right hand, are buff. His sword has a steel scabbard. Behind him is a company commander's tent with the blue and white palmetto flag of South Carolina flying over it.

Outreach Lesson: The Life of A Soldier

Goal: To utilize a variety of objects to immerse the students in the way of life for the typical Civil War Soldier

Objectives:

The students will observe and handle reproduction items such as a uniform, rucksack and mess kit and identify the uses of each

The students will read letters from Civil War soldiers and compare the handwriting and language of the time.

The students will assess the value of pastime items and activities of the soldier during the long stretches between battles.

North Carolina Standard Course of Study Goals:

3rd Grade	4 th Grade	5 th Grade
3.02	2.03	2.03
4.04	3.01, 3.02	4.05
5.01, 5.02	5.02	6.01
6.03		

Materials:

Large poster paper for writing or access to teacher's white board

Trunk of Civil War artifacts

1840s Map – in exhibit room

Foam core photos of Civil War letters

Copies of transcribed letters

Procedures:

1. Draw a line down the middle of the poster paper and label each side North and South
 - ◆ Ask for words they know relating to the Civil War and ask which side that word relates to. Such as “Yankee” “Rebel” “Blue” Grey” etc.
1. Discuss how soldiers in the War would identify each other. Why do soldiers wear uniforms? Who else wears uniforms today and why?
2. Ask for a volunteer willing to be ‘dressed’. Begin to dress the student with pants, shirt, jacket, etc. from the uniform in the trunk.
 - ◆ Ask students what the uniform is made of [wool]. It would have been very hot in the spring and summer months.
 - ◆ Make sure students notice the green velvet trim. What does this indicate about the Riflemen’s ideas about war? [Uniforms are relatively fancy, but in reality, soldiers spent a lot of time in dirty conditions.]
3. Once the student is dressed, begin adding other items he would have carried, such as the blanket, haversack, bullet case, etc., explaining each item.

- ◆ What is the item made of? What was its use?
- 4. The student will be getting a little warm at this point, so allow him to take off the uniform and begin opening the rucksack and other items to show what he was carrying in them. Have the students attempt to identify each item and then clarify if they don't understand. Not only does the soldier carry a gun, bullets, but he carries all his belongings with him. He carries pen and paper to write letters home, too.
- 5. Distribute some of the large Civil War letters to students
 - ◆ Can you read the writing?
 - ◆ What do you think about the handwriting?
 - ◆ Where there are parts that you can read, are all the words spelled correctly?
- 6. Distribute transcribed copies.
 - ◆ Are these easier to read? Many times historians transcribe old handwriting for that very purpose.
- 7. Choose selected students to read a passage from the transcribed copy.
 - ◆ What do you think of the writing? Is that how people speak today?
 - ◆ How do you suppose the person receiving these letters felt when they received them?
- 8. Wrap up the lesson with some of the following questions.
 - ◆ What new information did you learn today?
 - ◆ Does seeing these artifacts make you interested in doing more study on the Civil War?
 - ◆ Would you have liked to have been a soldier in that war? Would you fight for the Union or the Confederacy?

Civil War: The Life of a Soldier Civil War Games

Goal:

The students will use this as a fun day and play games based on the Civil War.

Materials:

Deck of Cards

Construction paper (enough for every student)

Makers, Colored Pencils, Drawing Utensils

Any game materials

Table at each station

Paper and Pencil

Procedures:

1. Have the class set up into stations. Four is possible, and then split your students into groups, so that you have equal amount at each station. **Explain each station to them prior to beginning the activity!**

- ◆ Station 1- Advantages/Disadvantages of the Civil War by Jeffrey Moore

Play a simple card game "WAR!" Divide the students that are in that station up into the north and the south (if it is an odd number place the odd numbered student on the north side).

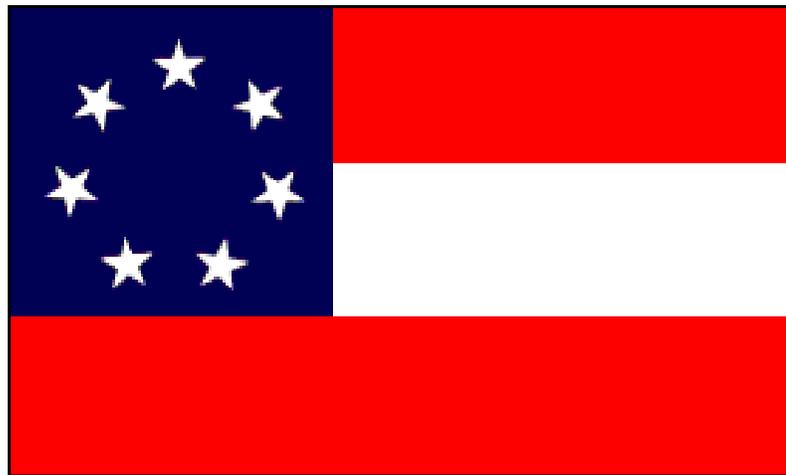
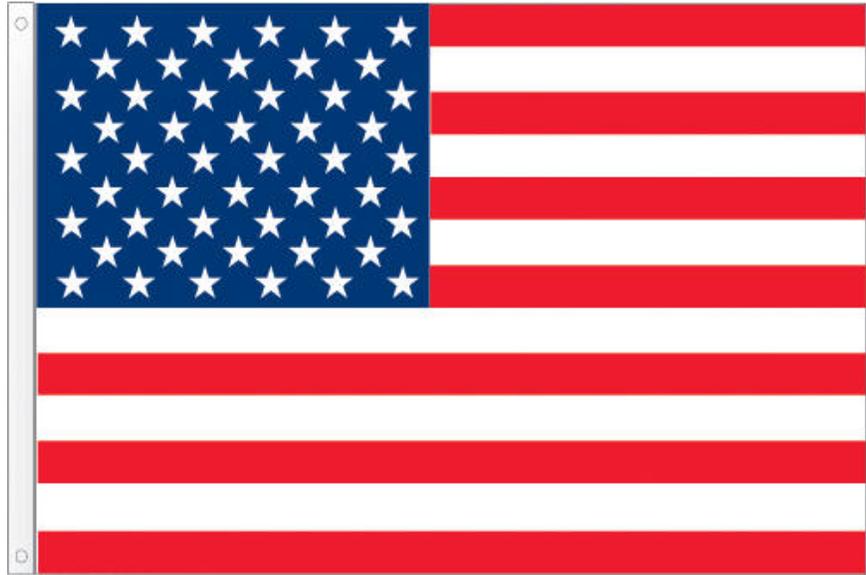
Basically one student from the south represents one soldier. However, because of the population differences between the two regions (22 million for the north, 9 million for the south), one student from the north equals three soldiers.

A student from the north and the south come up to a neutral table and draw the top card from the deck. Whoever draws the larger card stays in and the other soldier is defeated. Again, if the student from the south loses, s/he must sit down and be silent. If the north student loses, he sits down, but still has two turns left.

Going through the game, students should realize (unless by some improbable luck) that the South has virtually no way of winning the game. Now students can conceptualize how the population of the north was a tremendous advantage during the Civil War.

Now the game leads into further discussion of advantages/disadvantages of the North/South. Have them write the advantages and disadvantages on a sheet of paper for each side.

- ◆ Station 2- The students will look at the two different flags during the Civil War. The Confederate and the Union. Then on a piece of construction paper the students will design their own flag that they think will combine the North and the South together.



- ◆ Station 3- Beating Boredom- The students make up a list of all the things that they do while they are bored.
- ◆ Station 4- The students will write a letter home as if they were one of the soldiers from either the North or South.

Civil War: The Soldier's Life
Post Visit Lesson
Hearing the Civil War: Music of the Civil War

Overview: Music played several very important roles in the Civil War. Drum beats and bugle calls rallied the soldiers and directed them through the battle. Sentimental and patriotic songs were sung in camp – passing the time, remembering the homes soldiers left behind and building their strength for the battles ahead.

Objective:

This activity is mean to expose the students to some of the most popular sounds of battle and songs of camp life, thereby bringing the emotions of the period to the forefront.

Materials: recorded copies of Civil War Songs

The CD *A Southern Soldier Boy* may be borrowed from Smith McDowell House Museum and is a good source.

Procedures:

1. Obtain recorded copies of selected songs.
2. Divide your class into two groups and assign one group to one song and the other to another song (suggest: a southern song vs. northern song). Each group can learn to sing their song (with the help of a teacher or recording) and discuss the words as they relate to the context of war. For example, the words of “Dixie” reminisce about the southern way of life that Confederate soldiers were fighting to preserve, and “The Battle Cry Of Freedom” talks of preserving the Union and fighting for freedom.
3. At the end of the lesson, both groups can learn and sing a song that both sides of the war would have known and sung that song. (such as “Home Sweet Home”) Students can then talk about the commonalities among all soldiers, such as missing the comforts of home and the companionship of loved ones.

Assessment: Class participation