



COMMON SOLDIERS

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Photo National Archives

Visual History

The poor medical practices of the Civil War claimed many lives. The Civil War surgeon's amputation kit pictured below was typical for the time period. One does not need a vivid imagination to understand why soldiers may have feared their own doctors just as much as they feared the enemy.



Courtesy/Dr. Michael Echols, www.braceface.com/medical



Primary Source

Boredom was the bane of existence in Civil War camps, and soldiers struggled to find ways to pass the time between battles. Above, the 114th Pennsylvania Infantry, stationed at Petersburg, Va., in 1864, passes the time playing cards. Exchanging letters with loved ones back home was also a welcome diversion for the common soldier. John H. Sweet of Tennessee wrote the letter below to his parents in November 1863.

“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. It is very cold up here, as cold as it is where you are in mid-winter. You must excuse this exceedingly bad letter as I have written in great haste. My love to you and all. Write when you can and a long letter as I am very anxious to hear from you.”

VOCABULARY

Choose the vocabulary word from the word bank that best suits the definition. Write it on the line provided. Then write your own sentence using each word.

Rifled	Infantry	Cavalry	Company	Bayonet
Amputation	Hardtack	Artillery	Inadequate	Patriotism
		Conscription		

- Love and devotion to one's country _____
- Not good enough _____
- The drafting of civilians into military service _____
- Regular soldiers who fight on foot _____
- A group of about 100 soldiers, usually from the same area _____
- Soldiers who fight on horseback _____
- The branch of the army that fights with heavy cannons _____
- A hard biscuit used for army rations _____
- Cut with spiraled grooves in the barrel, to increase accuracy _____
- A blade attached to the muzzle of a rifle and used for hand-to-hand combat _____
- Surgically removing a limb of the body _____

ACTIVITY

Pretend that you are a Civil War soldier on the march. Write a letter home to a loved one of your choice describing your experiences. What are your greatest joys? What do you fear? What is camp life like and how does it compare to combat time? Be descriptive and creative.

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