

the little horse mystery

Chapter Two by Kay Hively

As the parade came closer to Nathan, more soldiers began to appear. Behind the officer on the horse were two men marching with flags. One carried a United States flag. The other held a flag that Nathan did not recognize.

Nathan's father said it was the regimental flag. It was just for this group of soldiers. They were the only ones who could carry it.

After the flag bearers came more men on foot, marching with their heads held upright and looking straight ahead. The men who were walking were not dressed like the one on horseback. Their uniforms were not the same. Most of them had on just one or two pieces of a uniform. Part of their dress was regular clothes like they had worn before they joined the army. One of the soldiers carried a big drum which he beat with every step he took.

All the soldiers carried rifles, but they were not shiny and new like those carried by the man on the horse. None of the foot soldiers had swords.

Everyone called out to the soldiers. Men on the street had taken their hats off when the flag came by. Now they were waving their hats at the soldiers.

Women waved handkerchiefs and gloves. Some of the women cried. Children and dogs ran along beside the soldiers. Nathan's eyes were glued to the men who marched by in straight lines. They marched with their chins jutting out and with determined looks on their faces.

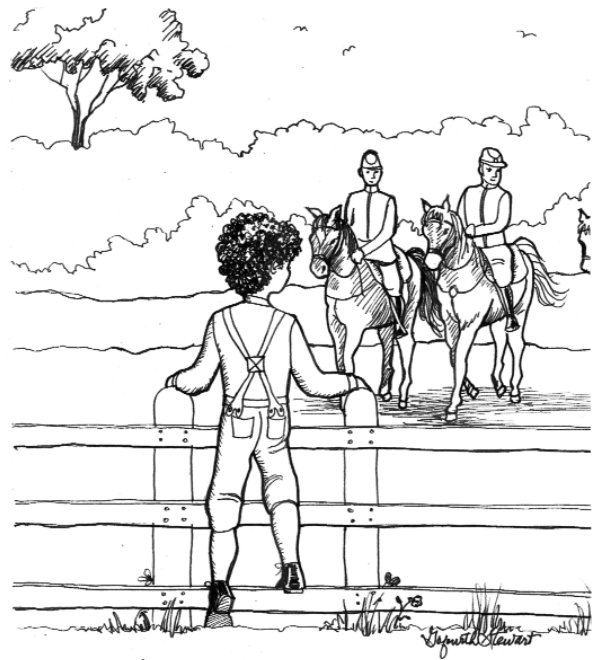
One day, Nathan said to himself, he would be a soldier, too. He wanted to be brave and noble like the men he had read about. Maybe he would even be a general.

At the end of the parade, Nathan saw three men on horses. They were wearing nice uniforms and had shiny guns. As he watched the three men at the back of the parade, Nathan recognized one of them. It was Abner Walters, his friend who ran the blacksmith shop.

The blacksmith shop was one of Nathan's favorite places. Abner and his elderly father worked there every day. Last summer, they had even let Nathan help around the shop. It was hot in there, but Nathan loved helping Abner and his father.

As Nathan watched Abner ride up the street, a bolt of panic shot through Nathan's body. Seeing the men march out of town, he realized that Abner was leaving – going away to fight in the Civil War. He had never had a friend go away before.

Nathan raised himself up as high as he could and called out Abner's name. The big man on the horse turned his head and looked straight at Nathan. A tiny smile crossed Abner's lips and his right hand snapped a quick salute in the boy's direction. Nathan could not help as a tear rolled down his cheek. It was hard for Nathan to be brave as he watched his friend ride off down the street.



Author Kay Hively and Illustrator Billie Gofourth-Stewart are both of Neosho, Missouri. Produced in partnership with this newspaper and the Missouri Press Foundation with support from Verizon Foundation. Copyright 2002.

Classroom Extensions

Things to Think About and Do –

- The soldiers had a regimental flag. Get some art supplies and design a flag for your family or for your school. What illustrations do you think should be on a family or a school flag?
- What is a blacksmith shop? Find and read a poem called "The Village Blacksmith." Who wrote that poem?

Next Week: Chapter Three – A Bump in the Night