

## Section III: Civil War



**Title:** Comparing Confederate and Union Soldiers

**Grade Level:** Middle School

**Objectives:** Understand the different experiences of Union and Confederate soldiers.

**National History Standards:**

Standard 3: Student engages in historical analysis and interpretation; Era 5: Civil War and Reconstruction (1850–1877); 2A: Compare the human resources of the Union and the Confederacy; 2B: Explore the motives for fighting and the daily life experiences of Confederate soldiers with those of white and African American Union soldiers.

**Time:** 90 minutes

**Background:**

Soldiers on both sides were young and inexperienced; most were in their teens or early twenties. In the North, they were farmers and factory workers and newly arrived Irish immigrants; some were African Americans—both escaped slaves and, after 1862, free blacks who were recruited for the United States Colored Troops. In the South, they were farmers, mechanics, and students. Most were volunteers who joined for the cash bounty or the monthly salary (\$13 for privates in the Union army; \$11 in the Confederate army). Many were draftees unable to pay a substitute to go in their stead. Many died in their first months from illness or wounds. Those who survived learned to be soldiers in the daily drills and discomforts of camp life, the exhaustion of miles-long marches, and the dry-mouth terror of battle.

**Union troops** were well-outfitted, even overburdened, with army-issued supplies and equipment. They wore regulation uniforms of heavy wool—in just two sizes—with leather-billed caps and stiff shoes. Atop knapsacks stuffed with extra clothes, a weekly change of underwear, and personal “truck,” they carried rolled-up wool and rubber blankets and half a tent. They filled haversacks with salt pork, hardtack, coffee, sugar, dried peas, pressed sheets of desiccated vegetables, and perhaps a pickle. They slung canteens and cartridge boxes over their shoulders and carried muskets.

**Confederate soldiers** often were forced to outfit themselves. They wore various uniforms, although gray jackets became common, often with felt slouch hats. Many had no knapsacks; instead they looped their bedrolls across their chests when they marched. Tents were scarce. Men kept tobacco and pipes, a bit of soap, maybe foraged apples in their haversacks. Many immediately cooked and ate their three-day ration of fatback and cornbread, rather than packing it. They filled their canteens with buttermilk or cider, and kept a cup to dip water from streams. They carried their muskets, but most had no cartridge boxes, so they stuffed ammunition into their pockets.



Union uniform *National Museum of American History*

“It has rained for a week and the roads are muddy. After marching for twenty miles it is not pleasant to lie down at night in the wet without any cover. I am tired—in fact I never was so tired in my life. But Hurrah! ‘It is all for the Union.’”

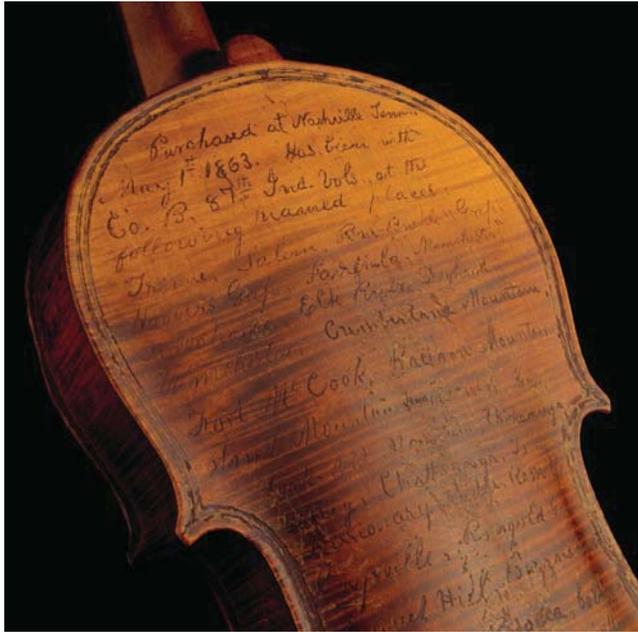
—Elisha Hunt Rhodes,  
Second Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry



Confederate uniform *National Museum of American History*

“Instead of growling and deserting, they laughed at their own bare feet [and] ragged clothes.... Weak, hungry, cold, wet, worried with vermin and itch, dirty, with no hope of reward or rest, [they] marched cheerfully to meet the well fed and warmly clad hosts of the enemy.”

—Carlton McCarthy,  
Army of Northern Virginia



Fiddle carried by Solomon Conn of the Eighty-seventh Indiana Volunteers *National Museum of American History*



Silk 35-star battle flag of the Louisiana Eighty-fourth Infantry Regiment *National Museum of American History*

**Materials:**

- [Online Video—Union soldier Louis Myers](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/myers.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/myers.aspx>
- [Online Video—Union soldier William G. Christie](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/christie.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/christie.aspx>
- [Online Video—Union soldier Spotswood Rice](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson8.aspx)  
<http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/resources/video/Lesson8.aspx>
- Union and Confederate recruiting posters
- Union and Confederate uniforms
- Fiddle carried by Solomon Conn of the Eighty-seventh Indiana Volunteers; he carved into it the place names of his unit's encampments and engagements
- Silk 35-star battle flag of the Louisiana Eighty-fourth Infantry Regiment

**Lesson:**

Working in pairs, have students design and create a chart to allow them to compare and contrast the Union and Confederate soldiers' experiences. They should develop a list of questions they'd like to explore about Civil War soldiers. Students should consider the different perspectives of Confederate and Union soldiers. The Confederate soldier was in a defensive position, believing he was defending his home from external attack. How might this have affected how Union and Confederate soldiers felt about their roles?

As homework, have students read about the experiences of Union and Confederate soldiers. Textbooks, library research, the internet, and the books suggested in the bibliography of this manual should be assigned. They should use their chart to guide their reading and research and fill it in as they go. The next day, as a class, compare the experiences of Union and Confederate soldiers.

Examine the recruiting posters and uniforms. Have students list the similarities and differences. Discuss why such similarities and differences exist and how those support what they learned in their research.

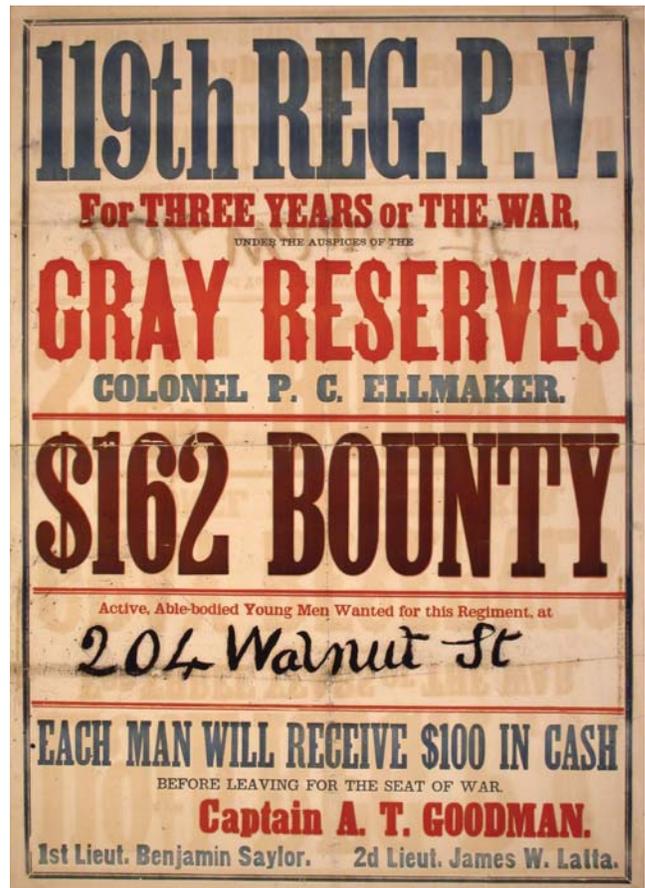
### Follow-up Activity:

Have a class discussion about African American participation in the Union army. Then play the first-person account of a Minnesota soldier talking about how black soldiers were treated. As a class, make a list of the reasons why African Americans would want to fight for the Union army.

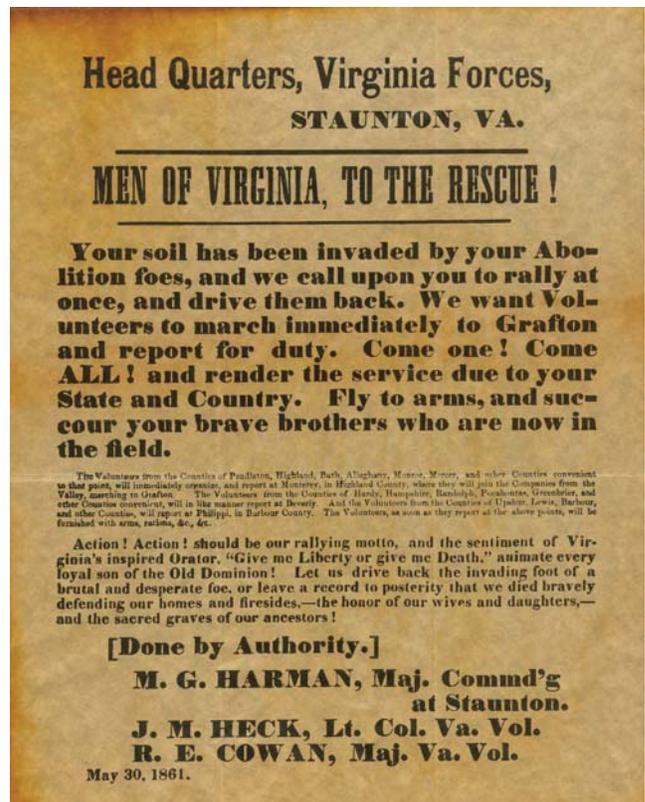
Using their battle flag, introduce the Louisiana Eighty-fourth Infantry. They were a unit of free black men. The regiment fought in the western campaigns and is credited with keeping Mexico out of Texas at the end of the Civil War.

Have students examine the regiment's battle flag and ask them what they can learn from the flag alone. On the stripes are printed the names and dates of battles. Why would the Eighty-fourth want to record this information? Why use the American flag as a symbol on which to record this information? What other symbol might they have selected? Have students compare the flag to Solomon Conn's fiddle, used for a similar purpose.

Finally, students can add a column to their comparison chart and do research to address the same questions for African American soldiers.



Union recruiting poster *National Museum of American History*



Confederate recruiting poster (reproduction)  
*Courtesy of Museum of the Confederacy*

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