

You Are  
There

**KEY TERM**  
epidemic

# Life as a Soldier

**FOCUS** Young soldiers on both sides in the Civil War believed in their cause, fought bravely, and suffered mightily.



## Hoping to Be a Hero

To young men looking for adventure, war sounds thrilling. How excited you must be if you are a 17- or 18-year-old farm boy in 1861. Until now your time has been spent plowing fields and milking cows. You might have dreamed of doing something heroic, but there aren't many chances to be a hero on the family farm.

Now, war is breaking out. If you join the army, you have a chance to put on a uniform, march into battle, and fight for a glorious cause. In the case of a New England farm boy, that means saving the Union. For a Southern farm boy, it is defending states' rights.

## The Reality of Army Camps

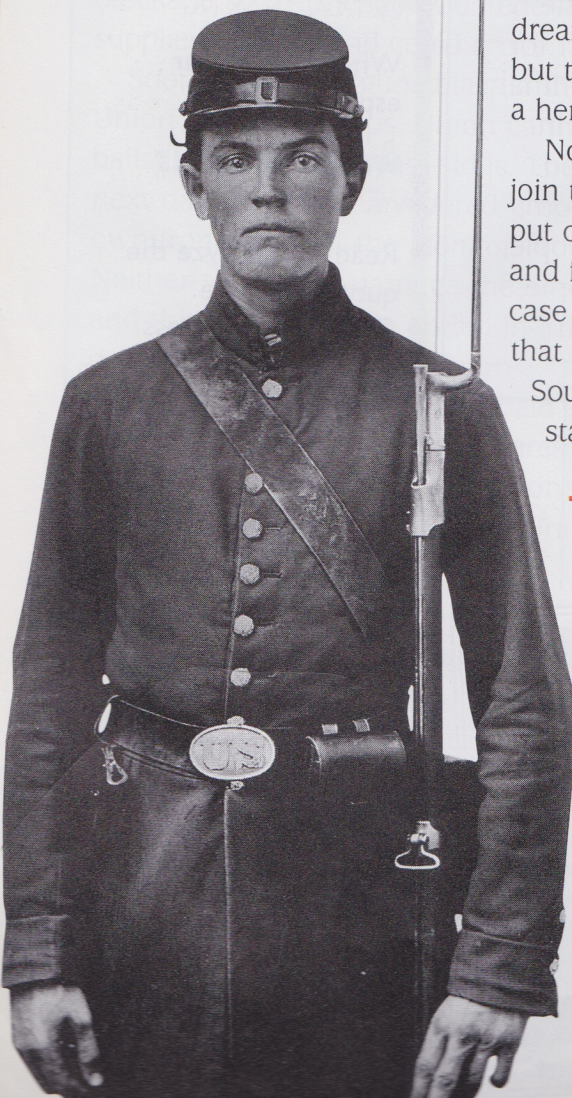
If you are one of the tens of thousands of young boys and men who join the Confederate or Union army, you soon learn that war is not what you expected. Life in an army camp is hard. You become dirtier with each passing day; there is little time to wash clothes or

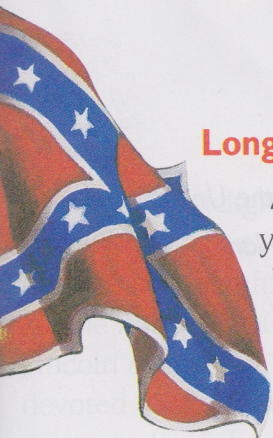
take a bath. Soon your body is covered with lice.

As time passes, if you are lucky enough to have a uniform, it becomes ragged. Your boots wear out, but new ones are often impossible to get. You might find yourself marching through miles of sharp, tangled bushes in bare feet. The lack of tents means that you have to sleep on the ground, without regard to the weather. You and your fellow soldiers huddle under thin blankets—some so poorly made that they fall apart in the rain.

Food is another problem. It is usually scarce; even when you have some, it is often spoiled. A meal might consist of moldy bread and rotten meat. If there is no time to cook bacon, you have to eat it raw or go hungry.

▼ A Union cavalry trooper





## Long, Lonely Days

As the weeks pass, your dreams of glory begin to slip away.

Most of the time you aren't standing proudly on the battlefield but are

marching through the rain or waiting around a campsite. You write long letters to your family back home, telling them of your loneliness. You try to keep up your spirits as this war drags on and on.

## The Horrors of Battle

When fighting occurs, misery turns to horror. Most battles are chaotic. Smoke from guns and cannons fills the air. You hear the agonizing screams of wounded men. You might see friends shot or taken prisoner. As one Confederate soldier writes, "It is a sad sight to see the dead and if possible more sad to see the wounded—shot in every possible way you can imagine."

You yourself might end up among the dead or wounded. If you are wounded, you have to hope the injury isn't serious. Medical knowledge is very

limited. Nurses can bandage wounds, and doctors can amputate shattered arms or legs. But beyond that, there isn't much anyone can do. Many soldiers die from infections and loss of blood. Also, there is the threat of dying from deadly **epidemic** diseases that are in the filthy, crowded army camps. In fact, for every Civil War soldier killed in battle, two die from disease.

★ **epidemic** The spread of disease to a large number of people in a short period of time



▼ A Confederate private



SHOW WHAT YOU  
**KNOW!**

### REFOCUS COMPREHENSION

1. Why did many young men volunteer for the army?
2. What were some of the problems that soldiers faced daily?

### THINK ABOUT IT CRITICAL THINKING

If you had lived during the time of the Civil War, would you have wanted to serve in the military? Give your reasons.

### WRITE ABOUT IT ACTIVITY

Suppose you are a Union or Confederate soldier. Write a letter home telling of life in your army camp.