



Lesson Plan

Interview an Infantryman

Grades

4, 5, 6

Subjects

Language Arts, U.S. History

Time Allotted

30 minutes in classroom, 30 minutes at battlefield

Setting

Classroom, Stones River National Battlefield

Group size

25 to 30 students

Skills

Speaking, writing, decision making

Methods

Students will interview a "soldier" to learn about his daily life.

Materials

Paper and pencil
Optional: material to make hardtack

Keywords

Flint-lock
Hardtack
Haversack
Infantry
Percussion cap
Ration

Objectives

At the end of the activity, students will be able to:

- *Name some items that were important to a soldier during marches, battles and camp.*
- *Compare those items to similar items of today.*



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Infantrymen carried their supplies with them at all times in a leather haversack. Personal belongings,

such as, pictures, bibles and tobacco plus food supplies and eating utensils were packed inside. Before going to battle, each soldier was issued a ration of food. Since meat spoiled easily, it had to be dried or salted because there were no refrigerators to keep it fresh.

Hardtack was a plain flour biscuit that was baked to last. Soldiers nicknamed it “teeth dullers” and “sheet-iron crackers” because of its hardness. In fact, it was so hard that the only way to eat it was to dip it in coffee or soup to rehydrate it and soften it for chewing.

Beans and coffee were also dried and had to be cooked in water. Rations were usually enough food to last for two to three days but both sides agree that the food was not good enough and there was never enough to satisfy their hunger.

An infantry man’s weapon, a musket, was perhaps the most important item he carried. Soldiers were issued different types of rifles. Some of the oldest models used a flint-lock ignition system, but most of them were converted to the newer percussion cap system by the time the war started.

Starting in 1842, several models using the percussion cap ignition system were designed and perfected throughout the years. In 1855 the first rifle musket was produced by the United States. It fired the famed .58 Minie ball. The Ordnance Department had to contract with twenty manufacturers to meet the need of the war. Together they produced over 700,000 model 1861 rifle muskets between 1861 and 1865.

ACTIVITIES

- Before leaving for the field trip, have students make a list of items they would take on a long trip. Tell them to include personal items as well as food supplies.
- Discuss the items and then ask the students to imagine themselves as civil war soldiers. Have them reevaluate their lists and apply them to the needs of a soldier. Which items are similar?
- What items would not be available to a soldier? What are the modern substitutes, etc.? Explain differences using background information.
- Ask the students if they had the chance to meet a Civil War soldier what would they ask him about his life in camp, on marches and in battle. Then as class, or individually develop a list of questions to take to the battlefield for an “exclusive interview.”
- At the park, the students will observe the dress and commentary of a representative from Stones River National Battlefield. Optional: Have the students bring notebooks and pencils to take interview notes and stage a mock press conference.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIVITIES

- Make hardtack.
- Civil War Soldier’s Wishlist Activity

RESOURCES

Billings, John D. *Hardtack & Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life*. University of Nebraska Press, 1993 reprint.

Coates, Earl Jo and Dean S. Thomas. *An Introduction to Civil War Arms*. Thomas Publications, Gettysburg, PA, 1990.

Ray, Delia. *Behind the Blue and Gray: The Soldiers Life in the Civil War*. Dutton, NY, Lodestar Books, 1991.

Wiley, Bell Irvin. *The Life of Billy Yank*. New York, Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1962.

Wiley, Bell Irvin. *The Life of Johnny Reb*. Louisiana State University Press, Baton Rouge, LA, 1978.

APPENDIX
Recipe for Hardtack

1 cup flour
1/3 cup water
1 tablespoon salt

Mix flour and salt in large mixing bowl. Add water and stir until thoroughly mixed. Knead mixture lightly by hand. Roll mixture onto cookie sheet until about 1/4 inch thick. Cut into 3-inch squares. Poke each square one time with a fork. Bake at 350 degrees for twenty minutes. Let cool. Serve with beverage or soup.