

# No Time for Games

From the Second Battle of Manassas through the Maryland Campaign: Children and the War



## The Weight of War on Little Shoulders...

Much has been written about the movements of armies and the actions of leaders during the Civil War. A less explored topic, but equally as important, is how the war affected the lives of young people. An entire generation was shaped by their perception of events during this critical time in American history. Forces beyond their control impacted their homes, their families, and even their health. Though some became victims of the war, lost to disease, starvation, or violence, others used their experiences to reform the country born out of the ashes of our nation's darkest days.



Many children spent the war worried about relatives and friends who were fighting far away. Some felt the effects of the war in their stomachs, as food supplies dwindled. Some boys lied about their ages and went off to fight. Those not killed or wounded became scarred nonetheless, as their young eyes witnessed the horrors of war.



*"The sight of hundreds of prostrate men with serious wounds of every description was appalling. Many to relieve their suffering were impatient for their turn upon the amputation tables, around which were pyramids of severed legs and arms... Many prayed aloud, while others shrieked in the agony and throes of death."*

*~ Sixteen-year-old Edward W. Spangler,  
130<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania at Antietam  
(Courtesy of York County Historical Society)*



(Opposite) A family in a Union camp (Above) Carte de visites of young Civil War soldiers

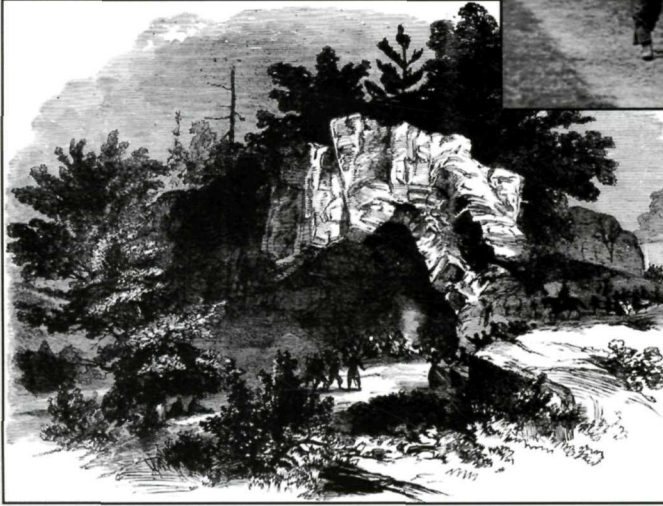


## Witnesses to War

The children of John and Martha Thornberry witnessed the tumultuous events of the two battles of Manassas and shared in suffering from the privations and dislocations of war. Their home across from Sudley Methodist Church escaped the combat of First Manassas but was overrun with wounded Federals following the fighting. While John was serving on the battlefield with the 49th Virginia Infantry, Martha and the children sought shelter during the battle at her sister's nearby home on Stony Ridge. Returning to their modest dwelling in the aftermath, she and the children found the house emptied and their possessions tossed and broken in the nearby well. John later returned, disabled from wounds, to convalesce in the care of relatives.

Eight months later in March 1862, Northern photographer George N. Barnard captured one of the war's most poignant images of lost innocence. The photograph, among a set of images taken in the vicinity of Sudley Church, reveals four of the five Thornberry children pausing amid play to observe the passage of Union cavalry at Sudley Springs Ford.

The return of the armies to the area during the Second Battle of Manassas in late August 1862 brought the war to the Thornberry doorstep once more. Laura Thornberry Fletcher was seven years of age at the time of the battle. Nearly 75 years later, she recalled the fighting being "worse than the first" battle. "We were driven from our home by big cannons planted on the east and on the west of our home," she wrote in a brief memoir. Warned by soldiers to leave, the family sought refuge nearby and watched the action from a safe distance, with the rattle of musketry continuing until late in the day. After the battle, Laura remembered her father returning to the battlefield and trying "to count the dead men, but could not." After passing over 150 bodies, John Thornberry grew sick from the carnage and could not continue. Such stark images remained vivid to Laura despite the passing of a lifetime.



(Top) A boy tends a mule team (Left) Civilians sheltering in the Killiansburg Cave

## Through Their Eyes

The crews of Chesapeake & Ohio Canal boats were composed of either the boat captain and a hired crew or the captain and his family. An important job on the crew was mule boy. They walked the towpath with the mule teams pulling the canal boats. Often as young as eight years old, these boys walked up to 16 miles during six hour shifts. Thus the phrase in a popular song of the time, "I got at mule and her name is Sal, 16 miles on the C&O Canal."

During the Civil War, the C&O Canal experienced the best and worst of times. Canal boats transported record amounts of coal to help fuel the Union war effort. At times, Confederate sabotage impeded operation of the canal. During troop crossings of the Potomac River and the canal, and when battle raged nearby, workers frequently fled until the danger passed.

During the Battle of Antietam, families from Sharpsburg fled the town and sought shelter along the canal. Many women and children hid in Killiansburg Cave three miles upstream from Shepherdstown.

*“The great objects in life were to procure something to eat and to keep yourself out of sight by day, and keep your candle light hidden by night; lights of every kind, being regarded as signals to the Rebels, were usually greeted by a volley of guns.”*

*~ Annie Marmion, young local resident*

Other families found their homes overwhelmed with wounded after the armies passed by. Holding tightly to their own humanity, but losing their innocence to the awful sights of war, children gave aid to the sick, wounded, and dying; no matter what uniform they wore.



A young girl in mourning dress

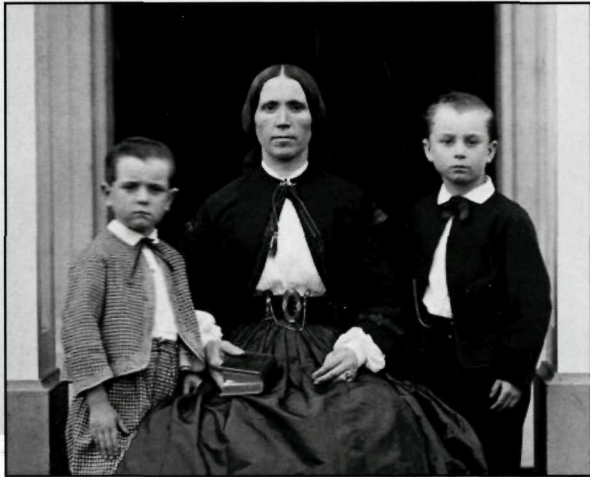
While dealing with realities of war on the home front, most children worried about the battlefield as well. Where were their fathers and brothers? News traveled slowly and what arrived was not always welcome. Many photographs of children at this time show them dressed in mourning or holding the image of a loved one they would never see again.

*“I can’t realize that I am never to see that dear boy again... it is too hard to realize.”*  
*~ Sarah Palmer writing about her younger brother, James, killed at the Second Battle of Manassas.*

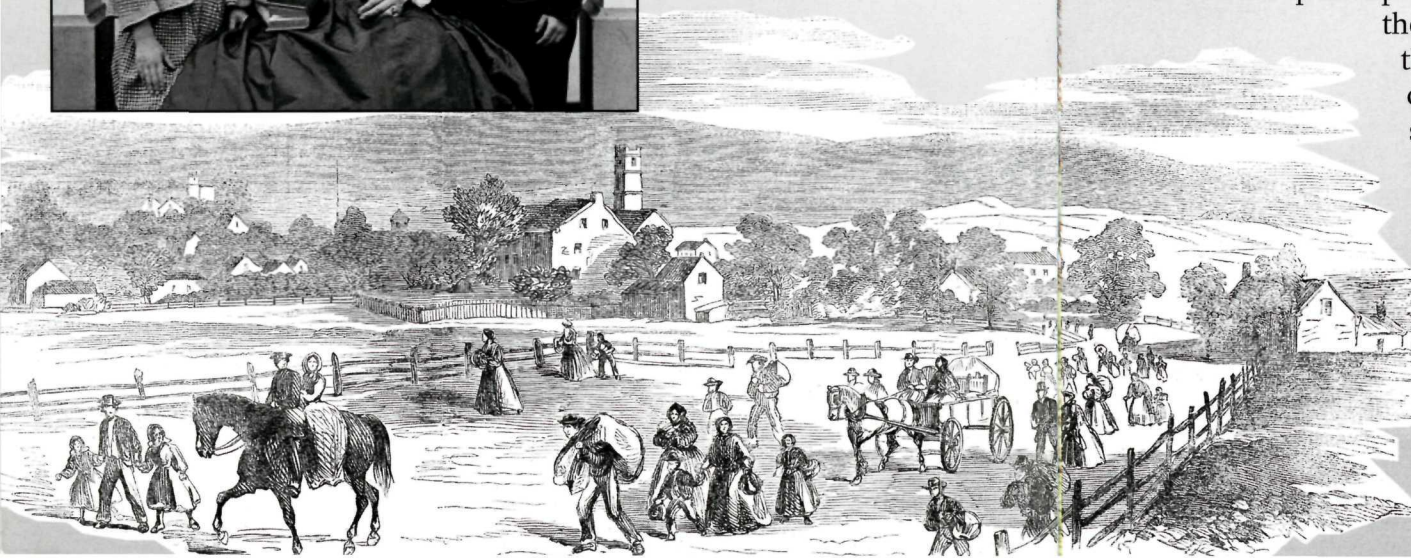
## Civilian Children

The Union and Confederate armies moving through Maryland totaled almost 200,000 men. Some were veterans of horrible battles; compassion and sympathy drained from them by death and suffering. These men were suspicious of civilians and saw threats everywhere. Fearing the wrath of such soldiers and the violence that came with them, many civilians elected to evacuate their homes and avoid the possibility of confrontation. Refugees clogged the roads of Maryland; many of them women and children.

*“God grant that you, that none I love, may ever pass through such scenes, or witness such bloody, fearful sights! Words can give you no conception. It was perfect agony. . . . If the Rebels are going to invade your State, as they have this, I would advise you to pack up and go as far north as you can.  
Your affectionate cousin, Annie Young”*



(Left) Mrs. Tynan of Frederick, Maryland with her two sons in 1862 (Below) Civilians flee Sharpsburg before the Battle of Antietam. (Opposite) Civilians seek shelter in a Sharpsburg basement during the 1862 battle.



Most of the soldiers treated civilians with respect. Curious children were allowed to play among the men and ask them questions. They often exchanged gifts, sharing gentle moments in terrible times.

Five-year-old Cecilia was in the care of her aunt and uncle on a little farm near Fox's Gap in September of 1862. Realizing battle was imminent, the family buried a trunk of belongings in the cellar, then fled their home. Cecilia never forgot the sight of soldiers lining the old Sharpsburg Road. Some soldiers pointed their bayonets at the scared girl, but one Confederate soldier, reminded of his own family, stopped to give Cecilia a jar of preserves and a tiny ring that had belonged to his daughter. He told Cecilia, "I don't know if I'll ever get back or not, you keep it."

## African American Children

Not all African Americans were enslaved, but children slave and free faced daunting challenges during this time. Free children struggled with their place in a white dominated society, carefully holding on to their fragile status. Slave children, under their parents and masters, lived in fear of punishment and isolation. Though circumstances widely varied, they often worked in fields with adults, tended animals, cleaned and served in their owners' houses, and took care of younger children while their parents were working.

Because they were not fully functional workers, slave children were given smaller rations than adults. While masters had a vested interest in the survival of children as future workers and assets, there was always a constant struggle between delayed reward and daily costs. The combination of meager diet and insufficient clothes in the best of times meant that slave children were particularly vulnerable when the Civil War brought shortages across the South.

Despite their marriages not being legally recognized, African Americans worked very hard under slavery to keep familial ties intact. These close ties can be seen by the sheer volume of African Americans who returned to their families during the war. Between 1820 and 1860 approximately 30% of all slave children born in the upper South were taken from their families and sold to the Deep South to work in the harsher climate on plantations. After years of forced migration, many of these African Americans took

the opportunity provided by the upheaval of war to escape their masters and travel long distances to be reconnected with their families. By 1864, approximately 400,000 slaves within the South had fled their masters.

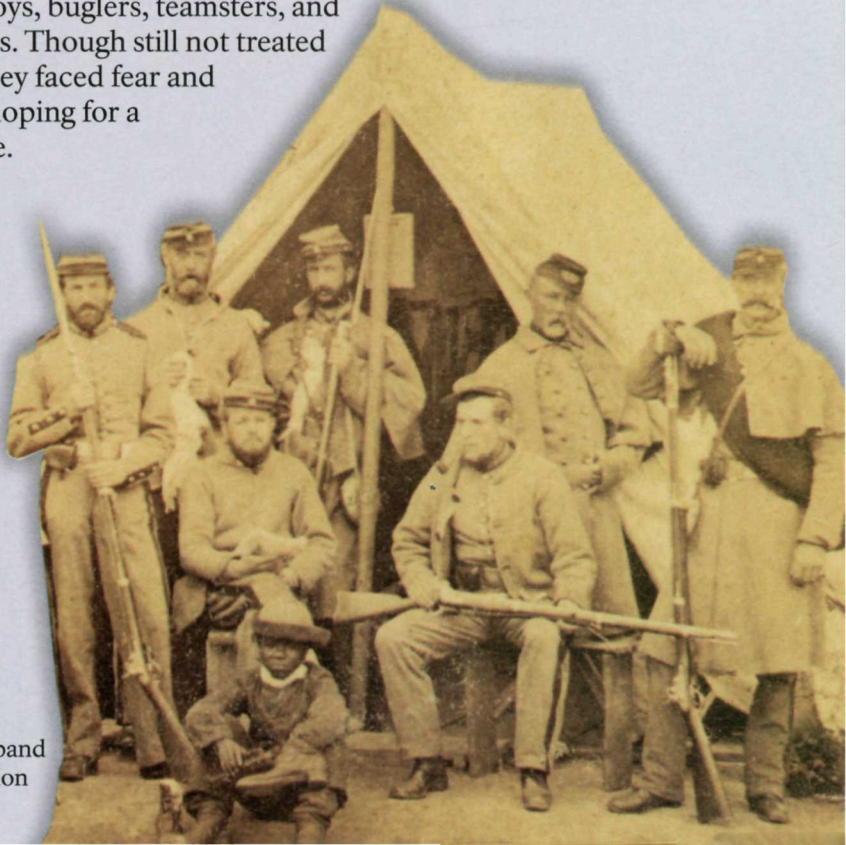


Sketch of a Contraband Camp. There were so many children in these camps that creating schools for them became a priority.



In addition to those returning home, many African American children found themselves living in Contraband Camps during the war, as their families fled to Union lines for refuge. Setting up these camps for slaves fleeing bondage was an unofficial practice of the Union army in the South until the Confiscation Acts of 1862 officially freed all slaves who came in contact with Union lines. Within these camps, approximately half of all fleeing slaves present were children. With limited resources in some camps, many already exhausted and malnourished children died. In better camps, the children found more opportunities. Because of the large presence of children in some camps, an emphasis was placed on education. The American Missionary Association and other similar organizations sent educators to the camps to set up both Sabbath schools and primary schools.

In camps with poor conditions and no schools, African American children often worked to gain status, get better rations, or earn wages. Already familiar with tasks such as digging ditches, cooking, and washing, these young Contrabands served in menial jobs until the Emancipation Proclamation allowed them to serve in uniform. Those old enough became drummer boys, buglers, teamsters, and even soldiers. Though still not treated as equals, they faced fear and hardships, hoping for a better future.



A young Contraband working in a Union camp

## Fear and Confusion

By the time the Maryland Campaign started, 18-year-old Jennie Chambers was already a seasoned “civilian veteran.” She witnessed John Brown’s raid in 1859, the destruction of the U. S. Armory in 1861, and was nearly arrested by Confederates for aiding Union troops. She watched her father go to prison and was sent to live with her uncle in Maryland for the winter to keep her safe.

From September 13 through 15, 1862, Jennie and her family lived in the middle of the war zone, as their farm was strategically important to “Stonewall” Jackson’s plan to capture the Federal garrison at Harpers Ferry. On the night of the 14th, Jackson’s men snaked along the ravines dragging artillery into position to turn the Union’s left flank, positioned adjacent to the Chambers Farm. As dawn broke, Confederate artillery pounded their farm.

Jennie’s family escaped to the cellar. “One shell exploded in front of the cellar door; another cut a limb from a large tree at the corner of the house. At about 10:00 A.M. the firing ceased and we were called out to gaze upon the white flag on Bolivar Heights. The grape shot, shell, cannon balls were lying almost like hail over the barn and fields of the farm... it was literally torn to pieces by the shelling.”

Following the Union surrender, Jennie saw soldiers from both sides come together on her farm. “I remember my father passing ‘round a large basket of peaches to the blue and gray indiscriminately, as they sat conversing. I looked at them and said, ‘See what you are doing, awhile ago you were in deadly combat. Now you are friends.’ The answer came ‘When we are in war, we are in war. We are brothers. When the battles are over we are brothers.’”



Sketch of a cease-fire after the Battle of Antietam that allowed each side to treat their wounded and bury their dead.

## Boys in the Service

Most of the boys who joined the army were assigned less dangerous positions, such as bugler or drummer boy. These jobs were important because their instruments were used as calls and signals for the troops. Still, in large battles, there was no place to hide. Charley King was one of the youngest soldiers killed in the war. He was only 13 when he died at the Battle of Antietam.



Johnny Cook

Johnny Cook enlisted as a bugler with Battery B, 4th United States Artillery in 1862. During the Maryland Campaign, 15-year-old Johnny served as a messenger. At the Battle of Antietam, Johnny and his unit came under heavy fire from Confederate soldiers along the Hagerstown Pike near the infamous "Cornfield." When Johnny returned from helping his wounded commander to safety, he discovered that the soldiers serving on the cannon had been killed. Johnny began to load the cannon by himself until Gen. John Gibbon rode by, saw what was happening, jumped off his horse, and began to help the brave young cannoneer.

*More than 40,00 drummers served in the Union army, while the Confederacy boasted approximately 20,000. The Civil War would be the last conflict in which drummer boys played a role. More modern means of communication replaced them.*

The Confederate soldiers came dangerously close, but Johnny and Gen. Gibbon were able to man the cannon and push them back towards the West Woods. For his bravery at Antietam, Johnny Cook became one of the youngest soldiers ever to receive the Medal of Honor. His official Medal of Honor citation reads: "Volunteered at the age of 15 years to act as a cannoneer, and as such volunteer served a gun under a terrific fire of the enemy." Johnny went on to serve at Gettysburg and several other battles. After the war, he moved back to his hometown of Cincinnati, Ohio. He died in 1915 and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.



Various carte de visites  
of young Civil War  
soldiers and sailors

Dear President Lincoln,  
I have a young son -- Lemuel S. Hardin -- who has been a short time in the  
Southern Army -- has been severely wounded -- he has made his way through  
the lines -- and is now in Canada -- He is crippled for life -- and is anxious to  
return to his home and family -- He has been a resident for the last three years in  
Louisville Ky -- and at a country seat -- near the city...

If you think favourably of my petition -- for my son to return to his country  
-- and to his home and mother -- to be a good boy in future -- you can make the  
conditions -- I can see no good reason why he should not be allowed to return  
home.

After a young man has -- "sown his wild oats" --, or "seen the elephant" -- he is  
often better prepared to settle down and become a sensible man -- he has a better  
appreciation of home and the advantage of a good position. Mr President -- I  
claim your indulgence in favor of my petition -- not on the merit of the case --  
but as an act of clemency to a wayward youth -- My waif of a son is endowed  
with many of the good qualities of the noble man from which he comes -- both  
of head and heart.

Yours respectfully -- Sarah E. Walworth

From the Abraham Lincoln Papers at the  
Library of Congress - letter from Mrs.  
Walworth dated December 19, 1864

## An Uncertain Future

Hearing about the dangers to their relatives and friends engaged in battle at far away places or witnessing it firsthand as violence overflowed the battlefields into their homes and yards, children naturally reacted to the prolonged stress with fear and sadness.



Carte de visite of a soldier with child

*“My Dear Dear Father:*

*I do want to see you so much. I do miss you so much in the evening when I come in and no one is in, and I am so lonesome by myself and if you were here you would tell me stories and so I would not be lonesome...”*

*~ Loulie Gilmore, 10 years old  
Savannah, Georgia, 1862*

The emotional damage done when so many children lost so many relatives and friends changed the perspective of an entire generation. Suffering, emotional and physical, was a much more familiar feeling than joy. Even their games and playtime were dictated by the war. Playing soldier and wearing mock uniforms became common. The war completely consumed their lives and affected how they viewed the world for as long as they would live.

*“In these few months, my childhood had slipped away from me. . . . Necessity, human obligations, family pride and patriotism had taken entire possession of my little emaciated body.”*

*~ Celine Fremaux, 12 years old  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1862*

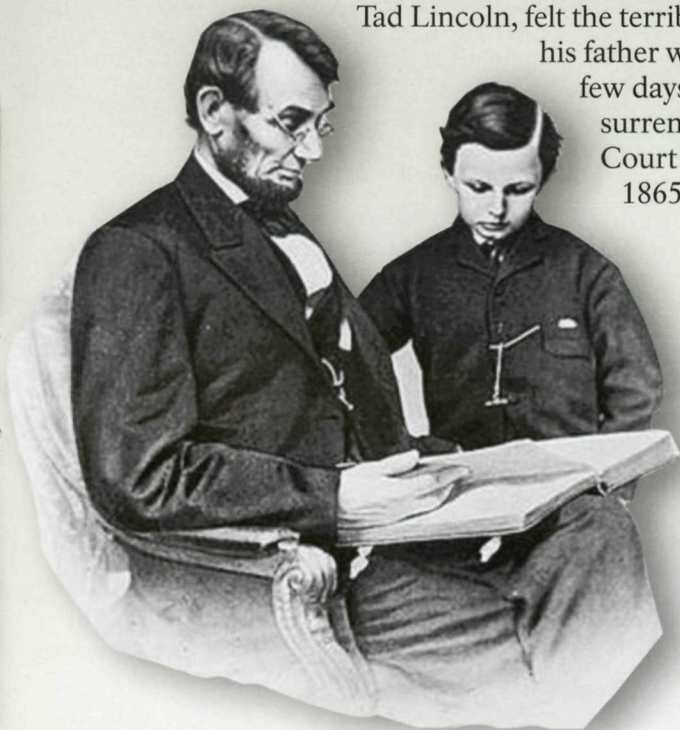
The Civil War significantly changed the lives of African American children. Now they did not have to fear being separated from their loved ones forever through sale. For the first time, their families chose where and how to live. While white children could at least attempt a return to normalcy after the war, African American children had to try to create a new place for themselves in a changed society.

The Civil War lasted four years and affected the country and the people in ways still not completely understood. Over 620,000 Americans lost their lives. Cities were reduced to rubble, landscapes were left in ruin. Communities were forever changed. In the aftermath of such an event, even reasons for happiness were often tinged with sadness and uncertainty.

*"We all turn and look toward the road, and there, indeed, is a soldier with a musket on his back, wearily plodding his way up the low hill just north of the gate... I could not relate him to the father I had heard so much about. To me he was only a strange man with big eyes and care worn face. I did not recognize in him anything I had ever known."*

*~ Hamlin Garland, describing his father returning home*

Even the son of President Lincoln, 12-year-old Tad Lincoln, felt the terrible pain of loss when his father was assassinated a few days after the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House on April 14, 1865.



President Lincoln and his youngest son, Tad



*“The Sesquicentennial of the Civil War is a time to commemorate those who fought and died during this pivotal era in American history. At the same time, it is an opportunity for us to renew our commitment to the ongoing march for freedom and equality for all people.”*

*~ Ken Salazar, US Secretary of the Interior*

This series of booklets allows us to tell stories “beyond the battlefield” and examine how this terrible conflict affected ordinary people and the communities around them. Thank you for your support and interest.

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