

The Tongue of the Camp: Drumming and Drummers of the American Civil War

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

The American Civil War is perhaps the most written about era in American history. From the great battles to the men who fought them, from emerging technologies to political developments, from the impact on race relations to the influence on gender roles, nearly every conceivable subject has been treated by Civil War scholars. One subject that has gained interest over the last three decades is the music of the 1860s. Historians have looked at the effect of the war on musical expression on both the home-front and the front lines. Much of the research on military music has been focused on brass bands, however, leaving one important area under studied—the field musicians, the regimental drummers and fifers. Field drummers of the Civil War armies were vital to the daily functioning of camp life because they were efficient means of communication and they helped bolster morale. Interestingly, the post of field musician was an entry point for underage recruits, allowing many boys to become soldiers. This paper intends to be a comprehensive analysis of Civil War era drumming and its social implications. The author recounts the history of military field drumming in America; analyzes the techniques employed by Civil War drummers; explains the role and responsibilities of the drummer in camp and in combat; and examines the impact of war on the boys who served as drummers.

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“...My drum, my delight and glory,
That I carried all through the day
Rolling and beating and tapping
As to and fro went the fray;
I wish I could beat it again,
It was ever my glory and joy...”¹

During the American Civil War, musicians were a ubiquitous presence in the armies North and South. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the sounds of a Civil War camp without hearing the call of the bugle, the shrill of the fife, or the beat of the drum. So important was music to the constitution of the army that no less a commander than Robert E. Lee once remarked, “I don’t believe we can have an army without music.”² Of course, it is important to distinguish between the different kinds of music in the Civil War armies. There was diversionary music, made by the soldiers during their free-time; this music was made by soldiers who crafted ingenious little cigar-box fiddles or by simply clapping and singing around a camp fire. There was band music. Regimental brass bands were not uncommon in the armies of both sides, and they were utilized to boost morale and for public relations purposes. In fact, it was to this type of music General Lee referred when he made his comment about the necessity of music to the army. Just as important to the functioning of the armies was a third type of music—the practical variety. This music was created by the field music, the fife and drum corps and buglers. In many ways, the field music was the heartbeat of the army. In camp or garrison, the soldier’s life was governed by the drum or bugle, which served as both a clock and public announcement system, signaling what duties were to be done and when.

¹ Alfred B. Sweet, “The Drummer Boy,” in *The Drum Beat*, ed. R.S. Storrs, Jr., February 22, 1864, quoted in Dennis M. Keesee, *Too Young To Die: Boy Soldiers of the Union Army 1861-1865* (Huntington, WV: Blue Acorn Press, 2001), 259.

² Bruce C. Kelley and Mark A. Snell eds., *Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 26.

The nature of military field music is different from other forms of musical expression. Its purpose was neither to entertain nor to express an artistic message, though this is not to say that field music could not achieve the former purpose. (Artistic expression was more difficult to achieve, considering that the regulations called for more-or-less strict adherence to the proper calls.) The primary purpose of military music in the Civil War was communication. Relatively easy to manufacture and maintain, portable, and very loud, the drum was well suited for this purpose. An understanding of Civil War era drumming is beneficial to the drummer of today because elements of this highly practical type of music are still utilized in modern drumming, namely, the basic rudiments. It could be argued that the Civil War was the high point of American rudimental drumming. It was the last great conflict to make such extensive use of field music; within half a century, advances in technology and changes in military theory made field music obsolete as a practical tool. Modern drummers, though, still share in the legacy of Civil War drumming, and an unbroken tradition of rudimental technique links the drummer of today to those Civil War field musicians, blue and gray.

Who were these field musicians? When considering Civil War musicians, a recurring image is that of the “little drummer boy.” This image, which has been propagated so much since before the end of the war as to become a cliché, is, in actuality, not inaccurate. Many minors enlisted in the Union and Confederate forces as drummers; indeed, for many, this was the only way to enter the army. However, it would be incorrect to assume that all Civil War drummers were children (or that all children who served in the war were musicians.) Nonetheless, the fact that so many minors did serve raises several questions about the nature of childhood in mid-19th century America and

about the effect of the Civil War on children. How did serving in the army affect these children psychologically? Did the experiences of drummer boys more closely resemble the experiences of adult Americans than those of other children? Why were Americans so willing to allow children to leave home to serve and even die in a terrible conflict?

This paper will examine the drumming and drummers of the American Civil War. It will look at a myriad of aspects relating to this topic, including how the drummers were recruited and organized, their daily routine in camp and their role in combat. It will also analyze the musical style and techniques used by these drummers. Additionally, this paper will examine how children who served as drummer boys were affected by their experiences and what this suggests about the nature of childhood in 19th-century America. Essentially, the author's purpose is to understand the role and impact of drumming in one of America's greatest conflicts. This paper will begin with a brief historiographical survey of the secondary literature pertaining to Civil War drumming and its impact on children. The second part will sketch the history of military drumming in America, tracing its origins back to European traditions. Part three will analyze the style and techniques utilized by these drummers. The fourth section will examine the drummers' role in the army, looking at their daily routines and duties in camp and in combat; this part will also examine sundry other aspects regarding Civil War drummers, including their uniforms, equipment and pay. The paper will conclude with an analysis of how child drummers were affected by their experiences.

Though the author has attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, his focus will be on white Union infantry drummers for the simple reason that the bulk of the material at his disposal pertained to this group. That being said, a quick scan through the

Confederate Army Regulations and the regulations adapted for the use of colored troops reveals that the regulations concerning Rebel and black drummers are practically identical to those concerning Northern white drummers. The author has found no reason to believe that Confederate and African-American drummers' experiences *as military musicians* were different from their white Yankee counterparts.

As this paper will demonstrate, field music (drumming in particular) was an integral component of the armies of the American Civil War. Their routines coordinated the army's activities in camp, and they served as an efficient form of communication. Because field musicians did not usually serve as combatants, the post was considered an acceptable entry point for minors into the army. Once enlisted, though, these children found themselves in an adult environment and were forced to quickly mature and adapt if they were to survive.

First of all, it is necessary to distinguish between the two principal musical ensembles present in the armies of the Civil War: namely, the field music and the bands. The field musicians (i.e. drummers, fifers and buglers), also known as the fife and drum corps, sounded the calls and were utilized as a medium of communication; they fulfilled a "functional service." The bands were usually composed of twenty-four members, mostly brass with a few drums. The bands, if present, performed at parades and other special occasions; the band was a social ensemble. Most significantly, army regulations required each regiment to have a drum corps; bands, on the other hand, were constituted at the request of the regimental commander. Thus, field instruments were provided by the government, while bands were privately funded. Whereas bandsmen were ranked as most enlisted soldiers (private, corporal, etc.), the rank of musician was reserved for the

field music. It was not unheard of, though, for field musicians to double as bandsmen. Conversely, Bufkin asserts that, as the war progressed, some regiments dispensed with their drum corps all together and doubled their bandsmen as field musicians.³

Throughout this paper, unless otherwise noted, any mention of music and musicians should be understood as referring to the field music.

Historiographically, drummers and drumming of the Civil War has been an underdeveloped topic. Many works on the War between the States mention the armies' field musicians, but very few dwell on them. For the most part, the Civil War drummer seems to be taken for granted. Bell Wiley, who pioneered the study of the common Civil War soldier, makes only passing references to field musicians and drummer boys in his classic works *The Life of Johnny Reb* and *The Life of Billy Yank*.⁴ One of the first books to really address the role of the drummer in the war is the misleadingly titled *Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War* by Francis Lord and Arthur Wise.⁵ Despite its title, Lord's and Wise's book does not delve deeply into the subject of drummer boys; most of their book deals with regimental brass bands. The book's one chapter devoted to field music does provide a good introduction to the role and responsibilities of drummers, but, even in this chapter, readers must be careful to distinguish between references to bands and to field music. (Of course, Lord and Wise supplement their work with many photographs and illustrations, making it an excellent source for visual representations of

³ William A. Bufkin, "Union Bands of the Civil War (1862-1865), Instrumentation and Analysis," Vol. I (PhD diss., Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1973), ii-iii; Kenneth E. Olson, *Music and Musket: Bands and Bandsmen of the American Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 14-15, 236; United States War Department, *Revised Regulations for the Army of the United States, 1861, with a Full Index* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1862), 138.

⁴ See Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1943); Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1951).

⁵ See Francis A. Lord and Arthur Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War* (South Brunswick, NJ: Thomas Yoseloff, 1966).

Civil War drummers.) On the other hand, *Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War* only superficially examines the effects of the war on the boy drummers who served. Perhaps the most detailed examination of Civil War drummers that the author has encountered is Kenneth Olson's *Music and Musket: Bands and Bandsmen of the American Civil War*. The author feels that Olson approaches the role of drummers in the war more systematically than Lord and Wise, but, like *Bands and Drummer Boys of the Civil War*, *Music and Musket*'s focus is not just the field music, but Civil War military music in general. Thus, Olson focuses more attention on regimental bands than field drummers. Also like Lord and Wise, Olson only scratches the surface of the effects of the war on children. (Though, in fairness to Olson, Lord and Wise, their intent was to examine the role of music in the war and not the conflict's social implications.)

In fact, this is a common theme throughout the literature pertaining to Civil War musicians: field musicians are recognized as being important components of the armies, but they are almost always treated in conjunction with military bands, and, indeed, the research on other aspects of Civil War music (either in the military or on the home-front) often seems to overshadow the research on field music. To illustrate this point, in *Bugle Resounding: Music and Musicians of the Civil War Era*, a collection of essays derived from the first two National Conferences on Music of the Civil War Era, not one article is devoted to Civil War drummers.

On the subject of children in the War of the Rebellion, more comprehensive works have been published. Likely the most authoritative scholar of our time on the effects of the war on children, James Marten deals exclusively with this topic in *The*

Children's Civil War.⁶ Regarding the war's impact on minors who served as drummers, though, Marten's book is only tangentially valuable. In *The Children's Civil War*, Marten excludes drummer boys (and other child soldiers) from his analysis, arguing that "their military service made them *de facto* adults; their experiences resembled the exploits of the men with whom they served more than those of the children who stayed home."⁷ While it is true that their experiences were different from those of home-front children, excluding drummer boys from a study of the war's impact on children is a mistake because, due to their (sometimes extreme) youth, these boys were affected in other ways than adult soldiers. Stephen Mintz, in *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood*, does include boy soldiers and drummers in his analysis of children in the Civil War, but one chapter is not enough space to adequately examine both civilian and military children.⁸

The most comprehensive book on the effects of the Civil War on children who served in the ranks is Dennis Keesee's *Too Young to Die: Boy Soldiers of the Union Army 1861-1865*. Keesee topically examines the experience of Yankee boy soldiers, including enlistment, training, camp life, combat, discipline, death, and their lives after the war. Rather than treating drummer boys separately from those youth who carried muskets, Keesee intersperses anecdotes of musicians with those of combat soldiers, implying that the war had the same effects on those children who marched with rifles as on those who marched with drums, an implication with which the author is inclined to agree.

⁶ See James Marten, *The Children's Civil War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

⁷ Marten, *Children's Civil War*, 2.

⁸ See Stephen Mintz, *Huck's Raft: A History of American Childhood* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

Having presented this survey of the literature pertaining to drumming and drummers of the Civil War, the author hopes that the following will prove a meaningful contribution to our understanding of Civil War era drummers, their roles and responsibilities in the armies, and the impact of the war on those men and boys who beat the drums in America's greatest conflict.

The exact origins of military drumming are impossible to determine. For as long as there has been warfare, it seems that there has also been martial music. The drum, in particular, has long been associated with war. Euro-American military drumming was heavily influenced by the Janissary ensembles of the Ottoman armies, which made extensive use of percussion instruments. The earliest side-drums (direct ancestors of the 19th century field drum) appeared in Europe in the 15th century, and they were soon adapted for military use. As early as 1591, the drum was being used to maintain cadences for marching infantry; as one tactician put it, "according to the stroke of the drum...so shall [the soldiers] go." Fife and pipes were soon added for their melodic value, and by the 17th century the fife and drum were common in armies throughout Europe.⁹

To be a musician requires a certain amount of skill not shared by every soldier; coupled with a high demand for their services, this meant that early field musicians were afforded high prestige. In the 17th century, field musicians were represented by guilds

⁹ George Larrick, "Drumming and Fifeing of the Civil War," *NACWPI Journal* 37, no. 1 (Fall 1988): 8; Robert Garofalo and Mark Elrod, *A Pictorial History of Civil War Era Musical Instruments and Military Bands* (Charleston, WV: Pictorial History Publishing Co., 1985), 36, n.5; Raoul F. Camus, *Military Music of the American Revolution* (Westerville, OH: Integrity Press, 1975), 6-7; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 4.

and were often paid more than other soldiers. The fact that they were maintained despite their extra cost attests to their value in the European armies.¹⁰

The adoption of field music was a practical consideration. As armies grew in size and structure, they could no longer be coordinated by vocal orders alone. The drum's volume made it a suitable instrument through which to relay commands, and so it was adopted for use in the infantry. (The bugle was eventually adopted for the cavalry.) Naturally, once the drum was adopted, the standardization of drum beats began. Thus were developed the camp duties: various camp chores became associated with specific beats, which then became a part of the daily camp routine.¹¹ It is likely that this was also the time when the rudimental system of drumming began to emerge.

Military drumming arrived in the New World with the colonists. On the American continent, every militia unit was supposed to have a drummer. Interestingly, while soldiers in the militia were required to furnish their arms at their own expense, many colonial governments provided instruments for their drummers out of the public funds. Not surprisingly, American colonial field musicians were heavily influenced by British traditions. The birth of a truly American tradition of field music can be dated to the compilation of von Steuben's drill manual, though the musical duties set forth therein show much borrowing from the English and Scottish duties of the British army. One of the earliest American instructors for drumming was composed by Charles Ashworth, an Englishman who joined the United States Marines in 1803.¹²

¹⁰ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 4; Camus, *Military Music*, 3.

¹¹ Camus, *Military Music*, 4.

¹² Camus, *Military Music*, 40-41, 83; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 6; Samuel Potter, *The Art of Beating the Drum* (London: Military Musical Instrument Manufactory, Her Majesty's Brigade of Guards and Honourable Board of Ordnance, 1817), Preface.

The Civil War marked the high point of American military drumming; George Larrick, writing for the *National Association of College Wind and Percussion Instructors Journal*, states that, musically speaking, the Civil War “was really a drummer boy’s war, for it was he who called the great formations to battle, tapped the camps to sleep, and...set the cadence for those long and weary marches.” Larrick argues that, though regimental brass bands were common at the outbreak of hostilities, after 1862, the necessity of filling the ranks reduced the number of bands, leaving the fife and drum corps as “the only dependable source of music.” After the Civil War, military field musicians continued to sound the essential calls and alarms for day-to-day activities until 1918. In the aftermath of the Great War, field musicians were relegated solely to ceremonial duties, a function which they continue to serve to this day.¹³

Before proceeding further, it will be helpful to examine the techniques utilized by drummers of the Civil War. In his experience, the author has encountered a fair number of people who do not understand the skill it takes to master drumming. The fact that some soldiers were reassigned because they were incapable of learning the instrument dismayed the author’s own brother because he could hardly fathom that anyone could fail at the snare drum. Indeed, the drum seems deceptively simple. The author hopes that this analysis will provide not only an historical understanding of the development of rudimental drumming, but also instill a better appreciation for the skill required of these musician soldiers.

Generally, snare drum techniques can be divided into two sections: concert style and rudimental style. Concert style is employed in a symphonic setting, whereas

¹³ Larrick, “Drumming and Fifeing,” 9; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 4.

rudimental (or field) style derives from military tradition.¹⁴ Today, most orchestral drummers utilize the concert style and most high school and college marching drum-lines use the rudimental style. Though there is considerable overlap between the two techniques, the author believes the essential distinction between these styles is the roll. Concert style rolls are closed, meaning that the performer compresses as many rebounds as possible into the stroke; rudimental rolls are open, which means that there are only two rebounds per stroke. Civil War era field musicians practiced the rudimental technique. Defined as a “discipline based on subroutines or building blocks,” the basis of rudimental drumming is the memorization of various sticking patterns.¹⁵ These sticking patterns (or rudiments) can then be placed in a variety of sequences to create different drum beats. In fact, almost every single signal used during the war can be broken down into its component rudiments.

The beauty of the rudimental system is that it is easy to learn by ear; in a time when many people lacked ready access to sheet-music, it proved an effectual method of training new drummers. The teaching of the rudimental system by ear, though, resulted in the transmission of many variations of the rudiments. Because of this lack of standardization, almost one hundred rudiments could be heard throughout the war. However, the most commonly used patterns amounted to between twenty and thirty, which were outlined in the several printed instruction manuals that circulated during the conflict.¹⁶

¹⁴ Larrick, “Drumming and Fifeing,” 9.

¹⁵ Walter Sweet, *Mel Bay Presents Complete Music for Fife and Drum* (Pacific, MO: Mel Bay Publications, Inc., 1996), 88.

¹⁶ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 93, 261; Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 35.

Perhaps the most well known is the Bruce and Emmett *Drummer's and Fifer's Guide*. Very familiar with rudimental technique, having studied under Ashworth, George B. Bruce served as the drum major for the 7th New York militia regimental band and instructed at the "School of Practice," where many military drummers learned their trade. Shortly after the outbreak of hostilities, Bruce noticed that the war revealed the health of rudimental drumming to be poor and that "militia drummers...[were] but imperfectly acquainted with camp and garrison duties." Published in 1862, Bruce's *Instructor* was praised by several military band leaders and composers as being "the only reliable and standard work for the drummers and fifers of our country."¹⁷

Of course, good technique can not be achieved without proper positioning of the drum and the sticks, and the instructors usually began by addressing this issue. Suspended from a webbing that could be slung across the shoulder or around the neck, the drum was to be hung at an angle just above the left knee. The sticks were held in what today is referred to as traditional grip. Bruce describes it thus:

The left hand...should grasp the stick firmly...between the thumb and the first two fingers, passing over the third, and resting on the middle (or large) joint; the thumb...resting on the forefinger. The stick in the right hand should be held between the thumb and fingers lightly, with the little finger pressing it, so as to play through the hand, as a man would use a stick in fencing.¹⁸

Striking the head just above the center, drummers used both the wrist and the forearm in executing their strokes.¹⁹

¹⁷ Larrick, *Drumming and Fifeing*, 11; George B. Bruce and Daniel D. Emmett, *The Drummer's and Fifer's Guide: or Self-Instructor* (New York: Wm. A. Pond and Co., 1865), 1-2.

¹⁸ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer's and Fifer's Guide*, 5.

¹⁹ Ibid, 5; William Nevins, *Army Regulations for Drum, Fife, and Bugle; Being a Complete Manual for these Instruments, Giving All the Calls for Camp and Field Duty. To which is Added Suitable Music for Each Instrument* (Chicago: Root and Cady, 1864), no pagination.

The second part of most instructors focused on the individual rudiments, and they often concluded with an overview of the camp duties. The rudiments listed in Bruce are: the long roll, the 5, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, and 15 stroke rolls, the flam, the ruff, the single and double drags, the full drag,²⁰ the single, double and triple ratamacues, the tap ruff, flamamacues (modern flamacue), flam-a-poo (modern flam tap), flam accent, single, double, and flam paradiddles, flam paradiddle-diddle, side flamadiddle, compound paradiddle, drag paradiddle and compound flamadiddle. To illustrate the lack of rudimental standardization, note that William Nevins, in his instruction manual, includes also the hard, middling, and faint poing strokes, faint flam, triple paradiddle, slow drag, and what he calls the quick and half as quick.²¹

While it was possible to learn the various beats (and there were approximately fifty calls) without knowing the rudiments, knowledge of these building blocks eased instruction and memorization. For instance, though the army regulations did not specify an official instruction manual, they did describe in words some of the different signals: the call “to go for fuel,” for example, was a poing stroke followed by a 10-stroke roll; the signal to go for water consisted of two strokes and a flam. One of the greatest musical challenges for the Civil War drummer was the fact that he had to be able to play every call and quickstep from memory; knowing the rudiments alleviated this problem.

Finally, note should be made of the Civil War drummer’s understanding of tempo. Modern musicians determine the tempo of a piece of music based on the number of beats

²⁰ For some reason, Bruce includes what he calls the half drag; its inclusion baffles the author because it is identical to the ruff.

²¹ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 5-8; Nevins, *Army Regulations for Drum, Fife and Bugle*, no pagination. Most of the standard twenty-six rudiments recognized today are on these lists. Interestingly, the “run down,” a practice exercise whereby the drummer begins by playing each rudiment slowly, then gradually increasing to the fastest speed possible, and ends by gradually slowing down again, dates at least from the Civil War.

per minute; Civil War field musicians based their tempos on the number of steps a soldier could march in a minute. Obviously, this effectively limited the tempos that drummers could play at. Casey specifies three standard tempos: common time was to be played at 90 steps per minute, quickstep at 110 steps, and double quick at 140. Like the rudiments, though, measurement of time was not always consistent; Casey specifies that the call “for the troop” should be beaten at 30 bars per minute.²²

As noted above, the Civil War marked the high point of military drumming in America. During this conflict, military musicians were employed to an unprecedented extent, which has never been matched since the end of the war. There exists today a popular notion of Civil War soldiers marching off to battle to the stirring refrains of patriotic music; though largely romantic, this notion can be excused because it seems to have been prevalent in the 1860s, as well. While it is true that many recruiting depots were staffed with a contingent of musicians and that it was not uncommon for volunteer regiments to set out with musical accompaniment, especially at the beginning of the war, the day-to-day realities of camp life were not so glamorous. The principal duty of the company drummer was to sound the daily calls and provide music for ceremonies and drill; additionally, drummers were often assigned mundane camp chores, such as carrying water or assisting surgeons.²³

Though the army undoubtedly acquired some of its musicians from the draft, many drummers enlisted voluntarily. Garofalo and Elrod assert that most Civil War field musicians were between twelve and sixteen years old, an interesting statistic considering

²² Brig.-Gen. Silas Casey, *Infantry Tactics, for the Instruction, Exercise, and Maneuvers of the Soldier, a Company, Line of Skirmishers, Battalion, Brigade, or Corps d'Armee. Vol. I Schools for the Soldier and Company, Instructions for Skirmishers and Music* (New York: D. van Nostrand, 1862), 234.

²³ Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 7; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 296.

that the minimum age for enlistment for most soldiers was eighteen. Federal regulations state that recruits must be between eighteen and thirty-five, stand at least 5' 3" tall, be effective, able bodied, free from disease, of good character and habits, and competent in English. However, the age and height requirements did not apply to musicians. Recruits "found to possess a natural talent for music" could be trained on the fife, drum or bugle in addition to their soldierly drills, and "boys of twelve years of age...may be...enlisted for this purpose." The regulations admonish that "care should be taken to enlist only those who have a natural talent for music, and, if practicable, they should be taken on trial for some time before being enlisted." Furthermore, recruiters were advised to treat any minors with "great candor" and to ascertain the names of their parents or guardians in order to obtain their consent or objections. As the war progressed, though, the Union government attempted to reduce the number of under age soldiers, and acts passed on March 3 and July 4, 1864, forbade recruiters from enlisting minors under sixteen. Of course, as the human cost of the war mounted ever higher, necessity may have, at times, prompted recruiters to ignore this prohibition.²⁴

Once recruited, field musicians, even those with natural talent, still needed training. Many drummers in the regular army trained at the so-called "Schools of Practice" at Governor Island, New York, or the Newport Barracks in Kentucky. There, field musicians learned both the art of military drumming and the manual of arms. Though he did not attend the "School of Practice," Harry Kieffer, who served as a drummer boy, recalls being put through all the normal soldierly exercises; he also

²⁴ Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 12-16; United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 128, 130; Confederate States War Department., *Army Regulations, Adopted for the Use of the Army of the Confederate States* (New Orleans: Bloomfield and Steel, 1861), 160; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 110-111.

remembers that officers would test the men's readiness by sounding practice alarms in the middle of the night. Musically, many drummers learned the various calls by ear; rote training was especially common among state militias. However, a variety of instruction manuals saw print during the war. Prior to the Rebellion, Charles Ashworth's *Fife Instructor* was the most influential manual in use, though it was replaced by Scott's *Instructor for Drum and Fife* just before the war. In 1862, Bruce and Emmett published their *Instructor*, which may have been the most widely used drum instructor during the conflict. The army did not specify any official drumming manual, however, but Casey did include the music for each drum call in his *Tactics*.²⁵

Like any skill, one must continually practice on the drum if one is to stay sharp. Just as other soldiers spent much of their day drilling, drummers spent much of their day rehearsing. One young drummer recalls that he practiced so much that his comrades considered him "a perfect little pest." This annoyance was necessary, though, because each drummer had to be able to beat each of the many calls from memory on command. It seems, though, that drummers did not begin training on actual drums right away; rather, they learned the basics by practicing on wooden boards—an illustrated montage of camp life printed in Kieffer's memoirs contains a sketch of drummers lined up and practicing on barrels. Of course, there is more to drumming than just knowing the beats; drummers must also strengthen their wrists. Some clever drummers during the Civil War accomplished this by performing all menial tasks (such as tying their shoes or buttoning their jackets) with their weak hand. Practicing the drum in an army camp posed a significant problem, however: how was one to distinguish between a practice beat and a

²⁵ Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 35; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 84; United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 10-11; Harry Kieffer, *The Recollections of a Drummer Boy*, Reprint Edition (Mifflinburg, PA: Bucktail Books, 2000), 40-41, 48-49.

bona fide signal? The regulations addressed this concern by requiring that the hour for practice always be announced and that “the practice of drums must never begin with the “General” or the “march of the regiment.””²⁶

Field musicians did not serve in their own separate units; rather they were interspersed with the normal private soldiers. Army regulations authorized each company of infantry two musicians: one fifer and one drummer. Taken together, all of a regiment’s field musicians comprised the regimental drum corps; at full strength, this normally amounted to ten fifers and ten drummers led by a drum major. Ideally, trained musicians were recruited as company drummers, but some companies found themselves without any musically inclined individuals, in which case, soldiers would be “detailed to the drum corps.” Considering the high level of difficulty of some of the calls and the skill necessary to accurately execute those beats, it is easy to imagine that these detailed drummers met with little success at their assignments. However, because of the importance of field music to the army’s daily routine, it may be that some companies had no choice but to draft a soldier as their drummer and hope for the best.²⁷

The drum major was the leader of the drum corps. Bearing the responsibilities of a commissioned platoon leader, the drum major was responsible for the training of the field musicians. After consulting with the adjutant, who officially established the time of the camp duties, the drum major organized the beating of each call, and he was supposed to personally lead the “reveille” and “tattoo.” Other responsibilities included ensuring that the drums were kept in good condition and requisitioning any parts necessary for the

²⁶ Casey, *Tactics*, 26; Fairfax Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle* (Ft. Collins, CO: The Old Army Press, 1971), 95; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 37; United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 82; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 66.

²⁷ Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 35; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 84.

upkeep of the instruments. The drum major signaled the beats and movements with both his arms and his staff. For each call there was a corresponding signal, and it was incumbent upon him to know them all. A glance at the lists of drum major baton signals provided in Bruce's *Instructor* and Casey's *Tactics* reveal just how comprehensive these signals were: included in these lists are baton signals for putting up the drumsticks, unslinging, and grounding the drum (the same signals being used to indicate taking up and slinging the drum, and drawing out the sticks.) Interestingly, Lord and Wise state that the post of drum major was abolished after the Battle of Antietam and that all the regimental drum majors were discharged.²⁸ Neither Olson nor Garofalo and Elrod mention this event, and Bruce's *Instructor* was reprinted in 1865 with the sections pertaining to the drum majors intact. Though the post is included in Casey's *Infantry Tactics*, the Revised 1861 Regulations for the United States Army make no mention of the drum major at all. It could be that, while the drum major seems to have fulfilled necessary functions, his post was not required under military law. In this case, Lord and Wise may have only been referring to the abolition of the drum major in a specific division, though they do not make this completely clear.

If the drum major assumed the role of a platoon leader, the lead drummer acted as first sergeant. Appointed by the drum major, the lead drummer governed the performance of the music. Upon receiving orders from the drum major, the lead drummer gave the signals for the commencement of beating, controlled the tempo, and announced changes of the calls and marches. Additionally, the lead drummer was the drum corps' disciplinarian, reporting to the drum major any infractions and inspecting his musicians

²⁸ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 87; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 82; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer's and Fifer's Guide*, 47; Casey, *Tactics*, 232-233.

to ensure compliance with uniform regulations.²⁹ The drum major appointed the lead drummer, but the author found no evidence for the criteria used in determining the appointment. Considering his musical responsibilities, one would think the leader was chosen for his superior skill, but seniority, too, may have factored in the decision.

While the lead drummer occupied a permanent position, the orderly drummer was chosen on a daily basis. Also known as the drummer of the guard, the orderly drummer was selected by the drum major at guard mount, after which he accompanied the guard to the guard-house, where he remained until relieved at the next mounting of the guard. The orderly was responsible for announcing to the drummers that it was time to beat a call; army regulations stated that he was to assemble the musicians by beating the “drummer’s call” five minutes prior to the prescribed time for the respective beats. According to Olson, “the smooth performance of the entire corps was dependent on his cues.”³⁰

Like all soldiers, Civil War drummers were expected to maintain a rigid discipline. Bruce’s *Instructor* admonishes the drummer to strictly adhere to the beats as written because improvisation “is highly detrimental to the call’s elegance and renders it unintelligible.” Bruce also warns that “the Field music should always appear neat and clean...and should never engage in conversation, or leave their position in line without permission.” As with so many things in life, though, the reality often did not match the ideal. Olson writes that it is not uncommon to find a note in a muster role indicating that “John Doe, musician, was drunk on duty and incapable of performing his music.”³¹ This was unfortunate, as it was necessary for each regiment to have an effective drum corps

²⁹ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 14; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 87.

³⁰ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 39; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 22-23; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 4; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 87.

³¹ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 4; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 88.

because the beats were an important part of army life. An early English manual stated “the drum is the voice of the commander, the Spur of the Valient [sic], and the Heart of the Soldier;” this statement was as applicable to Civil War armies as it was to the armies of merry old England. In fact, Kieffer recollected that the “drum and fife have more to do with the discipline of an army than an inexperienced person could imagine.”³²

Before proceeding, it should be noted that military field music is composed of three categories: regulatory calls, tactical signals and ceremonial duties. The regulatory calls comprise the so-called “camp duties.” A part of the soldier’s daily routine, these calls included the “reveille,” “assembly,” mess and sick calls, the “tattoo” and “taps.” Tactical signals telegraphed commands during maneuvers and on marches; these beats signaled to march faster or slower, to halt, to wheel, or to form battle lines. The fundamental purpose of the regulatory calls and tactical signals was to tell the soldiers what to do. The ceremonial duties were slightly different in nature. These were performed during drill or on parade and included the different salutes to be accorded to ranking generals, foreign dignitaries and the President. The ceremonial duties were designed to develop *esprit de corps*, add grandeur and dignity to parades and maintain morale.³³ It is also noteworthy that, whereas the regulatory calls and tactical signals were the domain of the field music, the ceremonial duties could be fulfilled by the band.

The primary duty of the drum corps was to beat the regulatory calls, collectively known as the “camp duty.” The most succinct definition of the camp duty would be to call it the musical responsibilities which “affected the soldiery of [a] particular camp, garrison, or regiment.” Harry Kieffer called the drum the “tongue of the camp,” which

³² The Company of Fifers and Drummers Music Committee, ed., *The Camp Duty* (The Company of Fifers and Drummers, 1980), no pagination ; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 131.

³³ The Company of Fifers and Drummers, *The Camp Duty*), no pagination; Camus, *Military Music*, 3, 5.

woke the troops in the morning, mounted the guard, announced dinner, and recalled the soldiers to their quarters in the evening. The camp duty typically consisted of fifteen calls, the first of which was beat at dawn and the last after dark.³⁴

A drummer's routine day began at daybreak, though the exact time depended on the season. The revised 1861 regulations for the United States Army state simply that the "reveille" was to be beat at 5 AM in May and August, at 6 AM in March, April, September and October, and at 6:30 from November through February. Regardless of the season, the drummer's day began even earlier. Fifteen minutes before "reveille," the drummer of the guard (or orderly drummer) would beat the "drummer's call" at the guard tent; also referred to as "first call," this signaled the other drummers to assemble at the flag staff on the regimental parade ground where they would repeat the "drummer's call" (aka "second call.") This signaled the troops to fall-in for roll-call. At 6 AM, the lead drummer would count off with a "stick tap," and the musicians would beat "reveille," which was actually a series of six or seven pieces played in succession. At 6:15 would be beaten the "pioneer's march" ("fatigue call.") This informed the fatigue parties that it was time to police the camp and perform any other necessary housekeeping duties. The drums then sounded the "assembly" fifteen minutes after "fatigue call;" soldiers knew that the assembly meant to form in companies on the parade ground to receive instructions. This was followed immediately by the "surgeon's call;" at this signal, any sick soldier (as well as a few shirkers seeking to avoid drill and work) were escorted by an NCO to the hospital. At 6:45, the orderly drummer would again beat the "drummer's call," summoning the musicians to the guard-tent, where, at 7:00, they sounded

³⁴ The camp duty was also called "the Duty" or "camp duties." Kieffer, *Recollections*, 131; Company of Fifers and Drummers, *The Camp Duty*, no pagination; Nevins, *Army Regulations for Drum, Fife, and Bugle*, no pagination.

“breakfast call,” which many soldiers knew as “peas upon a trencher.” At about 7:45, the orderly drummer beat the “drummer’s call” once more, which would be dutifully repeated by the full corps, after which they would sound the “adjutant’s call,” signaling the adjutant and guard detail to report to the parade for guard mounting.³⁵ A somewhat elaborate affair, the beats used during guard-mounting were more akin to ceremonial duties than regulatory calls and will be discussed later.

After mounting the guard, the drummers would beat the “assembly,” which sent the troops to their duty stations and the musicians to rehearsal. At 11:45, the “drummer’s call” would once again resound throughout the camp, once by the drummer of the guard and once by the full drum corps. Upon hearing this, the soldiers knew it was about time to eat, for at 12:00 the drummers would beat “roast beef,” a common name for the “dinner call.” This ended the morning duty.³⁶

The afternoon duty began at 12:45, when the drummer of the guard beat the “pioneer’s march,” announcing the commencement of afternoon fatigue duties. The drum corps passed the remainder of the afternoon rehearsing, assisting the surgeon, doing mundane chores, or sounding the “assembly” for drill as ordered. If a formal dress parade was to take place, it was to occur one and a half hours before sundown. The parade would open with the same procedure as the guard mount; then the drums would beat a series of quicksteps as the regiment paraded. The drum corps concluded the parade with the “retreat,” which, like “reveille,” consisted of a series of pieces played in succession. On days when no parades were held, the drummer of the guard assembled

³⁵ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 39; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 22; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 88-90; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 9, 28-37.

³⁶ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 91; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 39.

the drum corps fifteen minutes prior to sundown with the “drummer’s call,” and the musicians would play “retreat.” “Retreat” was followed by supper (for which there appears to have been no drum signal.) After the final meal of the day, the drummers had the opportunity to clean and care for their instruments until 9:00. At 9, the drummers returned to the parade while the rest of the troops assembled for the evening roll call. After roll call, the drummers beat the “tattoo;” like “reveille” and “retreat,” the “tattoo” was not a regulatory call per se, but a series of individual pieces. The drummer’s routine day ended fifteen minutes after the “tattoo,” when the drummer of the guard beat the taps, which were quite literally “three distinct taps” that “closed the army day.”³⁷

The daily routine just described may be considered an example of a drummer’s typical day, but it should not be assumed that this schedule was set in stone. Army regulations specified only that the “reveille” was to be sounded at daybreak and the “retreat” at sunset; the regulations authorized the camp’s commanding officer to prescribe the time of the other camp duties as he saw fit, according to the season and climate. Apart from the camp duty, field drummers were also called upon to sound other regulatory calls throughout the day. These calls included beats “to go for fuel,” “to go for water,” the “adjutant’s call,” the “first sergeant’s call,” the “sergeant’s call,” and the “corporal’s call.” Other irregular calls included “church call,” to assemble for religious services, and “to the colors,” to form by battalions. The “general” was beat only when the whole army was to move and was the signal to strike the tents and break camp. (In the event the whole army did move, the “general” was followed by “the assembly” and

³⁷ Olson writes that the taps were beaten just before the “tattoo,” but Bruce’s *Instructor* clearly states that the taps were to be beaten after. Olson, *Music and Musket*, 91-92; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 40, 42; John D. Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), 156.

“to the colors.”) Of course, Bruce notes that the “general” could be omitted if, for whatever reason, silence was called for; presumably, this applied to all other signals, as well.³⁸

In addition to the regulatory calls, drummers were required to know the tactical signals. Whereas the regulatory calls governed camp life, the tactical signals relayed commands use during maneuvers or on the march. Among these calls were the beats signaling to march, to halt, to march in retreat, and to form lines of battle. In his *Infantry Tactics*, Casey also establishes a list of twenty beats for skirmishers which reads as follows: 1) double quick time, 2) the run, 3) deploy as skirmishers, 4) forward, 5) in retreat, 6) halt, 7) by the right flank, 8) by the left flank, 9) commence firing, 10) cease firing, 11) change direction to the right, 12) change direction to the left, 13) lie down, 14) rise up, 15) rally by fours, 16) rally by sections, 17) rally by platoons, 18) rally upon the reserve, 19) rally upon the battalion, 20) assemble on the battalion. However, Casey writes that these were to be sounded by the drum only if a bugler was unavailable; they do not appear in the revised 1861 regulations (though they are copied verbatim in the regulations adapted for colored troops) and the majority of these signals are not printed in Bruce’s *Instructor*.³⁹

Participation in guard mounts and parades constituted part of the drummer’s ceremonial duties. As previously noted, the ceremonial duties were not practical in nature; rather, they were intended to add grandeur and dignity to formal occasions. The

³⁸ Incidentally, church call was also the signal for a parley with the enemy. United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 39; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 22; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 48-49; Casey, *Tactics*, 230.

³⁹ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 47; Casey, *Tactics*, 227-228; United States War Department, *United States Infantry Tactics, for the Instruction, Exercise, and Maneuvers, of the Soldier, a Company, Line of Skirmishers, and Battalion; for the Use of the Colored Troops of the United States Infantry* (New York: D. van Nostrand, 1863), 391.

guard mount and dress parade were the two most elaborate occasions requiring ceremonial duties as part of the daily camp duty. Half an hour prior to the guard mount, the orderly drummer would alert the guard details and musicians to prepare with the “drummer’s call,” which was repeated fifteen minutes later by the whole drum corps at the parade ground. “Second call” would be followed by the “adjutant’s call” after another fifteen minutes. The drum corps would then play a quickstep for the details as they marched to the parade. Following the inspection of the guard, the adjutant would bark “Troop beat off!” At this command, the drum major signaled for the musicians to play “the three cheers.” The drum corps then marched to the left, playing “the troop,” until they reached the end of the line, at which point they faced right and countermarched to the left, until given the command to face front and return to their place on the right of the line. When the guard mount was concluded, the drummers would play as the guard marched off. When the guard had passed the new officer of the day, the corps wheeled to face the officer, and after the whole guard had passed, the drum major would march the drum corps (excepting the orderly drummer, who went with the guard) back to their quarters. The same procedure was used at the beginning of dress parades. Thirty minutes beforehand, the orderly would assemble the drum corps with “first call.” This would be followed by the “adjutant’s call,” which informed the soldiers to form their companies and march to the parade ground. As soon as all the companies were in line, the adjutant would order the drums (formed in two ranks to the right of the adjutant) to beat off and the parade would commence. As the regiment paraded, they would march to a quickstep performed by the drum corps. In the event of a review, the drums lined up, preceded by the drum major, six paces in front of the colonel; at the command to march,

the drums would start playing. Upon passing the reviewing officer, the music was to wheel left and take a position facing the reviewer. The drums would continue to play until the whole column had passed, at which time they would cease and join the rear of the column.⁴⁰

The camp duty included three other ceremonial duties: “reveille,” “retreat,” and the “tattoo.” Though “reveille” and “tattoo” doubled as regulatory calls (“reveille” was the signal to begin the morning duties and the “tattoo” was the signal to return to quarters for the night), they are akin to ceremonial duties in that they are not composed of a single beat, but rather a succession of independent pieces. “Reveille” consisted of “Three Camps” (also called “Points of War” by Bruce), “Slow Scotch,” “the Austrian,” “the Hessian,” the Prussian,” and “Quick Scotch,” Bruce adds “the Dutch” between “the Prussian” and “Quick Scotch,” but Olson states that this piece was not always included. The “retreat” included “the Lamplighter,” “Pretty Girl Milking the Cow,” and “Erin’s Green Shore.” The longest of these three duties, the “tattoo” consisted of “the Three Cheers,” “the Doublings,” “New Tatter Jack Quickstep,” “the Doublings,” “Slow March,” “the Doublings,” “Downfall of Paris,” “the Doublings,” “My Lodging’s on the Cold Damp Ground,” “the Doublings,” “the Troop (Trust to Luck),” “the Doublings,” “Quickstep,” “the Three Cheers,” and “the Doublings.” A shortened version was beat in winter. The “tattoo” also offered a rare opportunity for artistic control, for the drum major could add or substitute music as he saw fit. Of all the ceremonial duties included in the daily routine, the “tattoo” seems to have had the greatest influence on morale; one

⁴⁰ Camus, *Military Music*, 4; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 37-38; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 90-91; United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 55-56; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 34.

soldier recalled the “tattoo” as a “bed-time concert” and exclaimed that “it was a master-spirit that invented the tattoo.”⁴¹

Other ceremonial duties included the musical salutes given to high-ranking officials. The President and Vice President, the General Commander in Chief, and major and brigadier generals were all to be saluted according to their ranks. Brigadier generals and major generals received two or three ruffles respectively. The regulations for saluting the General Commander in Chief and the President and Vice President, however, are vague. For the General Commander in Chief, the drums were to beat an unspecified march, presumably selected by the drum major; the regulations state only that the President and Vice President were to be saluted with “drums beating.”⁴²

Field drummers also took part in funeral ceremonies. During funerals, all drums were to be muffled, which was accomplished by loosening the snares and slipping a piece of cloth between the snares and the head; the drums were also to be covered in a black crepe or serge. The musicians would line up on the right side of the escort, and, upon hearing the command “present arms,” they would salute the dead with the “three cheers” and then beat a funeral dirge (defined by Bruce as being “somewhat slower than marching time”) until the body was brought to its proper place in the lines. As the escort proceeded to the place of burial, a drummer would beat the time to march by. If more than one drum was used in the ceremony, some of the drums would roll continuously while the others beat time, switching every eight or sixteen bars. After leaving the burial

⁴¹ The slow and quick scotches are reminders of the influence of the duties of the Scottish units of the Revolutionary War. Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer's and Fifer's Guide*, 28-36, 42-46; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 88-89, 91-92; Camus, *Military Music*, 83.

⁴² Ruffles are rolls, usually preceding the playing of a ceremonial musical work. United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 40; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 23.

area at the end of the funeral, the drummers were to play a lively tune to lighten the mood.⁴³

Drummers also played parts in some camp punishments. Perhaps the most notable disciplinary action performed by the musicians was the drumming out of camp soldiers guilty of petty theft, absence without leave, cowardice, or any crime rendering them unfit to serve in the army. The rogue would be stripped of his uniform and equipment and marched out of camp by two flanking guards and four soldiers with charged bayonets whilst the drums beat the “rogue’s march.” Criminal soldiers were not the only people drummed from camp, though. Sometimes it came to pass that disorderly women would enter the camp, and it befell the drummers to drive them out. The drummers were to escort these “scarlet women” out of camp with the “pioneer’s march,” and on these occasions, the drums were accompanied by the fifes. The drummer’s most somber duty, however, was his participation in camp executions. During these macabre ceremonies, the muffled drums would beat the “death march” as the condemned was marched to his grave. After the execution, the soldiers left the field in time to a lively quickstep. Presumably, this was done to break the tension and restore the camp to good spirits, but Kieffer complained that “the transition from the “Dead March” to the quickstep was quite too sudden.”⁴⁴

Interestingly, the drummers’ disciplinary duties were not always confined to their musical responsibilities. At the beginning of the war, the drummers were often selected to execute floggings. According to one soldier “it had always been the custom in the

⁴³ Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 50-51; United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 45; Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 90.

⁴⁴ Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee*, 155-156; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 135, 142-143; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 89, 122; Bruce and Emmett, *Drummer’s and Fifer’s Guide*, 36.

army for the flogging to be administered by one of the musicians,” but he admitted to not knowing why. This bizarre practice was discontinued in the middle of the war’s first year.⁴⁵

Though it should have been theoretically possible to dispense with the ceremonial duties, this music became such a part of the soldiers’ routine that its absence was a cause for concern. Harry Kieffer recalls, for example, that his regiment, the 150th Pennsylvania, lost all of its drums at Gettysburg. Shortly after the battle, the 150th Pennsylvania attempted to hold a parade, but the lack of drums rendered the whole scene comical and it ended prematurely. Kieffer writes that his regiment held no more parades until after obtaining new instruments.⁴⁶

Of course, Civil War drummers did more than just bang on the drum all day while in camp. In addition to sounding calls, drummers were also at times assigned to gather wood, work at manual labor, carry messages, help the cooks, care for horses, forage, and assist the surgeons. Among the oddest jobs a drummer could be assigned were the making of headboards, assisting map-makers, and aiding the printers. Overall, Harry Kieffer recalls that a drummer’s non-musical duties were light.⁴⁷

To illustrate just how integral the field drummers were to the operation of Civil War armies, it should be noted that even small detachments were required to have a drummer. According to the revised 1861 regulations, a police guard was to consist of two sergeants, three corporals, *two drummers*, and enough men as necessary to carry out their responsibilities. Any advance post was to have a sergeant, a corporal, *a drummer*,

⁴⁵ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 123-124.

⁴⁶ Kieffer, *Recollections*, 131-132.

⁴⁷ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 119-120; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 111, 117; Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 90; George T. Ulmer, *Adventures and Reminiscences of a Volunteer, or a Drummer Boy from Maine* (Chicago: George T. Ulmer, 1892), 70; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 162.

and nine men; the pickets were composed of a lieutenant, two sergeants, four corporals, *a drummer* and forty privates. Recruitment parties included a lieutenant, one NCO, two privates, *a drummer* and a fifer.⁴⁸

As the above has shown, drummers had many duties both in camp and on the march, but what did they do when their units travelled by vehicle? The regulations state that “for the sake of exercise, the troops will occasionally be called to quarters by the beat “to arms”” when aboard a transport.⁴⁹ Obviously, this shows that drummers still had musical duties aboard transports, though it is not explicitly stated if the musicians beat the other regulatory calls, such as “reveille,” the “dinner call,” and “tattoo.” The purpose of drum calls being to communicate across long distances and considering the extreme close quarters inherent to travel aboard transports, it seems unlikely that these calls were sounded. As well, it is doubtful that the drummers performed any musical duties whilst traveling by rail.

Having examined the abstract place (i.e. the duties or role) of drummers in the army, it is not unreasonable to ask what their physical place was. The position of the field music in a column depended on the column’s purpose. If the column was in maneuver, the music was drawn into four ranks and posted abreast the left center company opposite the guide; the senior principal musician stood two paces in front of the music and the other principal musician stood two paces behind. If the column was en route, the field music marched at the head of their respective battalions. At night, the sergeant major and a drummer would march at the rear of their battalion to signal when it was too dark to proceed. Their place in camp is a little less clear. The orderly drummer,

⁴⁸ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 84-87, 128; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 69, 158.

⁴⁹ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 122.

of course, was posted at the guard-house and the other musicians beat the calls at the parade ground, but they do not seem to have been quartered separately from their companies. Lord and Wise note that some regimental bands were quartered together in one section of the camp, but they do not mention if this was true for the field music. The regulations are also silent on the location of the drummers' quarters. Most likely, they tented with the other men in their companies.⁵⁰

Of course, camp life was not the end-all-be-all of a soldier's life; obviously, combat was an unavoidable component of the Civil War. There exists a popular belief that the armies of the Civil War marched into battle accompanied by the stirring refrains of patriotic, martial music. Indeed, this notion has been popular since the start of the war; Harry Kieffer writes that, before he first experienced combat, he entertained the idea that "it is the duty of a drummer-boy to beat his drum all the time the battle rages to encourage the men or drown the groans of the wounded." In fact, the army deemed it at least theoretically possible to coordinate a battle via the drum, as evidenced by Casey's list of beats for skirmishers. The reality was much different. Kieffer reminds his readers that "amid the confusion and noise of battle, there is little chance of martial music being either heard or heeded."⁵¹

Field musicians did not play music during battles. Instead, they remained in the rear to carry out other essential activities. Specifically, they served as stretcher bearers. Drummers helped assemble hospital tents, cleaned surgical instruments, assisted surgeons during operations, gave water to the wounded, and buried the dead. Evidently, there was some stigma attached to these duties; perhaps some soldiers thought that, because they

⁵⁰ Casey, *Tactics*, 15; United States War Dept., *Tactics for Colored Troops*, 391; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 135; Confederate States War Dept., *Confederate Army Regulations*, 84.

⁵¹ Kieffer, *Recollections*, 111; Casey, *Tactics*, 228.

did not bear arms, these drummers were not truly serving the cause; it is possible that even some drummers felt that serving in the rear during battle was in some way cowardly or dishonorable. Kieffer remembers, though, that his colonel reminded the drummers that by caring for the wounded, “you are just as much helping the battle as if you were fighting with guns in your hands.”⁵²

There were exceptions, however; some drummers did fight in combat. Shortly after Shiloh, Johnny Clem (the famed drummer boy of that battle) ceased to serve as a drummer, instead carrying a gun into subsequent battles. Another drummer boy, after losing his drum, reportedly “took up a musket and fought manfully in the line.” On at least one occasion, a drummer actually drummed during battle. At First Manassas, Private David Scantlon of the 4th Virginia Regiment was ordered to “beat the rally” in an attempt to reform the regiment.⁵³ On the whole, though, drummers who fought in combat did so of their own initiative and are not representative of the actions of most field musicians.

Not only did the drummers of the Civil War have unique responsibilities, they also received unique uniforms. Historically, special musicians’ uniforms had long been a part of Euro-American military tradition. Because they were an instrument of communication, it was important for officers to be able to easily identify the drummers. Thus, the armies furnished their field musicians with readily distinguishable uniforms. In the 18th century, for example, musicians wore the reverse of their fellow comrades-in-arms; that is, if the standard uniform coat was blue faced with red, the musician’s coat was red faced with blue. Musicians’ uniforms in the Civil War were not quite as obvious

⁵² Ulmer, *Adventures of a Volunteer*, 55; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 206-207; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 112.

⁵³ Olson, *Music and Musket*, 112-114

as that, but they still made the drummers easily identifiable. According to army regulations, drummers wore a single-breasted frock without plaits and a shirt that extended one-half the distance from the top of the hips to the bend of the knee. One row of brass buttons, equidistantly spaced, adorned the front of the jacket. They wore a stand-up collar, and their cuffs were pointed according to pattern with two buttons under the seam. The collar and cuffs were edged with a cord of cloth (sky blue for infantry), and the shirts were fitted with a narrow lining the same color as the coat. Drummers wore dark blue trousers and a hat of black felt. For the most part, these uniforms were identical to those of other enlisted soldiers with one notable exception: added to the front of the drummer's jacket was a pattern of 3/8" wide lacing. This worsted lace was applied on line with the buttons; it spread 6 1/2" across at the bottom of the jacket and gradually expanded upward to the last button before contracting again to 6 1/2" at the base of the collar. (The regulations describe the pattern as having a "herring-bone form.") A strip of the same lace followed the bars on the outer extremities, and the color corresponded to the trimming of the drummer's corps. The uniform for artillery drummers was the same except that the lace trimming was red and a red stripe ran down the outer seam of the trousers. Also, the author has seen at least one formal portrait of a Union drummer in which he is wearing white gloves; however, the army regulations do not mention gloves as a standard part of the uniform. Confederate drummers, of course, wore different uniforms than their Federal adversaries. Officially, theirs consisted of a "double-breasted tunic of gray cloth, trousers of light blue, double-breasted cadet overcoat with cape, French-style caps, black leather tie, and Jefferson-style boots," though Rebel uniforms in general seldom appeared according to regulations.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Camus, *Military Music*, 9; Harold C. Peterson, introduction to *Fife, Drum and Bugle*, by Downey, 2;

In addition, drummers received several unique pieces of equipment. Obviously, the most important pieces of equipment the drummer carried were his drum and sticks; to carry the drum, he also received a sling of white webbing fitted with a brass drum-stick carriage, although some drummers preferred to slip their sticks under their belts when not in use.⁵⁵ Between 1861 and 1865, the Union army purchased more than 32,000 field drums from instrument makers throughout the Union, though the primary manufacturers were located in Boston, New York and Philadelphia. Civil War era snare drums were rope-tension drums based on three centuries of traditional manufacture. The shells were usually made of pliable woods such as ash, maple or white holly, but some metal rope-tension drums also existed. The drum heads were made of sheep or calf-skin; after soaking in water, the heads were tucked (“lapped”) around the so-called flesh hoops and held in place by wooden counter hoops.⁵⁶ The tuning rope was laced through iron hooks or holes drilled in the counter hoops, and leather braces (“ears”) attached to the ropes adjusted the tension. Made of either rawhide or catgut (Bruce prefers rawhide because it is more weather resistant), the snares were placed between the flesh and counter hoops or fastened to an adjustable fastener (“snare strainer”) at one end and connected to a fixed leather attachment (“butt”) at the other. Apparently, drum sizes were not standardized during the war, but the most common dimensions seem to have been a 15-16” diameter and a 10-12” depth. These dimensions are larger than the modern snare drum, which means that the drums of the Civil War had a deeper tone than those of today. Drumsticks

United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 477-480; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 144, 149; James D. Lockwood, *Life and Adventures of a Drummer Boy or, Seven Years a Soldier* (Albany, NY: John Skinner, 1893), 13-14.

⁵⁵ Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 156.

⁵⁶ Snare drums have two heads: the batter head on top, which is beaten with the sticks, and the snare head on bottom, across which the snares are stretched.

were usually made of dark woods such as ebony, rosewood or cocobolo. Typically longer, thicker and heavier than modern sticks, they were also tapered all the way from the butt to the head; Garofalo and Elrod state that the tip was occasionally made of a bead of bone, metal or ivory.⁵⁷

As with any piece of equipment, the drum needed care if it was to remain in good condition. Before use, drummers tightened and tuned their drums, a task which the conscientious drummer likely performed often because of the skin heads' sensitivity to changes in humidity. In fact, because skin heads were practically impossible to keep taught in damp weather, the drums could not be played in the rain; if the army was on the move in inclement weather, the drummers simply loosened their ropes, slung the instruments over the shoulder and marched with it on their backs.⁵⁸

Of course, drum parts occasionally needed replacing, in which case the drum major would requisition the necessary parts from the quartermaster. Although a snare drum appears at first glance to be a very simple instrument, Quartermaster Form No. 51 "Quarterly Return of Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipage" suggests that the army was well aware of the many parts that make up a drum. This form lists eight different requisitionable items pertaining to the snare drum: a complete drum, the batter head, the snare head, drumsticks, sling, stick carriage, cords, and snares.⁵⁹

Army regulations ordained that "the front of the drums will be painted with the arms of the United States on a blue field for infantry, and a red field for artillery. The letter of the company and number of the regiment, under the arms, in a scroll." However,

⁵⁷ Bufkin asserts that the drums of the field musicians did not differ significantly, if at all, from the drums of the bands. Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 36-38; Bufkin, *Union Bands*, 184.

⁵⁸ Kieffer, *Recollections*, 74-75.

⁵⁹ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 236.

Garofalo and Elrod assert that this design was more of a guideline and not rigidly enforced.⁶⁰

Another unique accoutrement issued to musicians was their one authorized arm: the musician's sword. Listed in the "Ordinance Department Classification of Stores" as conforming to the 1840 pattern, Kieffer describes it as "a straight, thin sword, fastened to a broad leathern belt about the waist." Dubbed a "toad sticker" by some drummers, Kieffer asserts that he and his comrades were at first proud of their swords and took good care of them. They discovered, though, that it was useless as a weapon and often got tangled in their legs while marching. This piece of armament was so feeble and worthless that Kieffer turned his in to the quartermaster after a particularly irksome march; many of his fellow drummers left their swords hanging on a tree after Chancellorsville.⁶¹

Generally, drummers were supposed to have their instruments with them at all times. However, army regulations require that "patients in hospital are...to leave their arms and accoutrements with their companies."⁶² Assuming that this regulation was followed, it is unclear what the musician did with his drum. Most likely, the instrument was kept by the drummer's tent mates. What became of the drum if the company relocated while the drummer was still in hospital, though, is uncertain.

As previously noted, musicians received their own rank, so it is not surprising that they were listed separately on the "Table of Pay, Subsistence, Forage, etc." Though field musicians had historically been among the highest paid soldiers in Europe and the

⁶⁰ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 23; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 156; Garofalo and Elrod, *Pictorial History*, 36.

⁶¹ United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 405; Lord and Wise, *Bands and Drummer Boys*, 156; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 76.

⁶² United States War Dept., *Revised Regulations 1861*, 283.

colonies, by the Civil War, the common drummer became the lowest paid soldier in the army. The principle musician fared best, receiving \$21 per month. All other drummers were paid \$12 per month, one dollar less than a private.⁶³ The controversy over payment of colored soldiers, of course, complicates this analysis. Presumably, when black privates were being paid only \$10 per month, colored drummers were also receiving less than their white counterparts. Unfortunately, the author could not ascertain how much less.

Although the army issued its drummers different uniforms, equipment and pay, field musicians received the same rations as other soldiers. Officially, each soldier received $\frac{3}{4}$ lbs of bacon or $1\frac{1}{4}$ lbs of fresh or salted beef, 18 oz. of flour or 12 oz. of hardtack or $1\frac{1}{4}$ lbs of corn meal a day. These rations were supplemented with beans, desiccated potatoes and vegetables.⁶⁴ Now, these were the rations as set forth in the regulations, but the confusion of war and the disruption of supply lines meant that soldiers—drummers included—often had to make do with less than the prescribed rations.

If further evidence is needed to prove the pervasiveness of the drummer throughout the Civil War, one need only look at the awards and honors bestowed upon these soldier musicians. At least six drummers were awarded the newly created Medal of Honor.⁶⁵ Three of them—William H. Horsfall, Julian A. Scott, and J.C. Julius Langbein—received the honor for rescuing wounded soldiers under fire. The government honored William Magee for taking Rebel guns at Murfreesboro. Benjamin

⁶³ Ibid, 351-352.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 243.

⁶⁵ Because the Medal of Honor list of recipients lists some drummers as “drummers” and others as “musicians,” it is difficult to determine exactly how many drummers received the honor.

F. Hilliker acquired his medal after being wounded while participating in a skirmish after laying down his drum at Mechanicsburg. Though wounded, Orion P. Howard remained on the field outside Vicksburg until he was able to deliver a message to General Sherman, for which he, too, received the Medal of Honor. Two of the youngest recipients of the award, Langbein and Howard were fifteen and fourteen respectively.⁶⁶

An interesting phenomenon of honor manifested during the war was the bestowing of the sobriquet “The Drummer-Boy of...” Probably because of their extreme youth, some drummer boys who took part in great battles received much public attention. Perhaps the most famous drummer boy was Johnny Clem, the “Drummer Boy of Shiloh;” other notable drummers were Avery Brown, “Drummer Boy of the Cumberland,” and the much disputed “Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock,” either John T. Spillaine or Robert Henry Hendershot. The title “Drummer Boy of...” was a matter of honor and pride not just for the individual but also for his regiment, and the dispute over who was the real “Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock” reveals just how deep these feelings ran. During the Battle of Fredericksburg, the 7th Michigan Infantry crossed the Rappahannock in boats to counter Rebel sharpshooters; reportedly, an unnamed drummer boy accompanied them. Shortly after the battle, Hendershot claimed to be that drummer boy, and newspapers across the North published his story. Hendershot, however, was notorious throughout his life for making unsubstantiated assertions, and many soldiers, especially of the 7th Michigan, denied his claims. The debate over who rightfully claimed the title “Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock” raged for decades. Around 1881, veterans of the 7th Michigan led a movement to strip Hendershot of the title and bestowed it upon

⁶⁶ Congressional Medal of Honor Society, “Recipients,” Ranks: Drummer, Musician, <http://www.cmohs.org/recipient-archive.php> (accessed February 22, 2010); Olson, *Music and Musket*, 116.

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⁶⁶ Congressional Medal of Honor Society, “Recipients,” Ranks: Drummer, Musician, <http://www.cmoHS.org/recipient-archive.php> (accessed February 22, 2010); Olson, *Music and Musket*, 116.

another drummer, John T. Spillaine. As late as 1893, the claim was still hotly debated, and both Hendershot and Spillaine, to their dying days, claimed to be the true “Drummer Boy of the Rappahannock.”⁶⁷

Although the issue has never been satisfactorily resolved, this episode demonstrates that the “drummer boy” was a powerful image in the public mind. In fact, it seems that simply adding the phrase “drummer boy” to a title was one way to sell a book. For instance, George T. Ulmer, a veteran of the war who enlisted as a minor, titled his memoirs *Adventures and Reminiscences of a Volunteer, or a Drummer Boy from Maine*. A critical reading of Ulmer’s book, though, reveals that he never actually served as a drummer; he mentioned that he would enlist as a drummer if it was the only way to serve the Union, but several bizarre turns of events right after he enlisted resulted in his never actually being assigned a permanent company. Ulmer did many things during the war, but not once did he drum.⁶⁸

The drummer boy (especially the dying drummer boy) was also a favorite motif of Civil War balladeers and romancers, and both adult and children’s literature of the period are filled with drummers. Drummer boys symbolized innocent patriotism and it was widely believed, as James Marten argues, that drummer boys could “soften gruff soldiers and inspire them to live up to the moral and social expectations of their time.” A common theme was the drummer boy reforming an alcoholic or profane adult soldier. Drummer boys in literature also represented courage, duty, sacrifice, and honor. The

⁶⁷ For more on Hendershot and his claims, see Anthony Patrick Glesner, “The Drummer Boy of the Rappahanock,” *America’s Civil War* 6 (January 2004): 26-32, 56.

⁶⁸ See Ulmer, *Adventures of a Volunteer*.

power of the image of the dying drummer boy is attested to by the response of one child who stated that he wished to go off to war and become “the dead drummer boy.”⁶⁹

The presence of so many boy drummers in the war raises the question of what the conflict meant for children. Today, the idea of children going off to war is probably abhorrent to most Americans, yet it was clearly not so appalling a notion in the mid-19th century. To understand this discrepancy, it is necessary to examine the changes which have occurred to the perceptions of American childhood. Stephen Mintz argues that the notion of the carefree childhood in which children are free from disease, labor and familial disruption and are isolated from the realities of the world is a myth that gained widespread acceptance only after World War II. In actuality, throughout much of their nation’s history, Americans did not sentimentalize childhood. In the 18th century, there was less age segregation and “less concern with organizing experience by chronological age.” During the colonial era, most Americans subscribed to the Puritan belief that children were merely adults in training. Not until the mid-1700s did the idea that children are innocent, malleable, fragile creatures who require shelter and care take root. As this idea garnered acceptance in the 19th century, children’s residence at home began to grow longer.⁷⁰

However, despite the growing notion of children as innocents, American society still perceived youth as being capable of succeeding in adult environments as is evidenced by legislation regarding minors in the military. Since the Revolution, Americans had accepted that children could serve in the armed forces, though there was a

⁶⁹ Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 297; James Marten, ed., *Lessons of War: The Civil War in Children’s Magazines* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1999), 24, 30, 207-114; Marten, *Children’s Civil War*, 40, 74.

⁷⁰ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, viii, 2-3.

caveat. An 1802 law required the consent of parents or guardians of anyone enlisting under the age of twenty-one. This was not intended to stop minors from enlisting, and an act of 1813 encouraged recruiters to enlist boys between fourteen and eighteen years as musicians. Another set of laws enacted in 1821 governing the age of enlistment did not define a specific minimum age, merely requiring parental consent for underage applicants.⁷¹

Similar laws still governed the enlistment of youth in the early 1860s. In 1862, at the age of sixteen, Harry Kieffer applied for enlistment as a private soldier but was denied because he was under eighteen. Kieffer quickly learned, though, that this age requirement did not apply to musicians and that, with his father's permission, he could enlist as a drummer "no matter how young I might be." So long as their parents or guardians consented, the army allowed minors to serve; again, though, there was a caveat: recruiters were supposed to make plain to the young enlistee that a soldier's life is toilsome and dangerous, and he was to be "allowed time to consider the subject until his mind appears to be fully made up before the oath is administered." Only in 1864 did the Federal government define the minimum age for enlistment. General Order 224 made it an offense to enlist any minor under sixteen (with or without parental consent) under pain of dismissal. Nonetheless, even this order made allowance for up to one hundred boys at least twelve years of age to be recruited, with parental permission, as musicians.⁷²

⁷¹ Keesee, *Too Young*, 7.

⁷² Kieffer, *Recollections*, 25; Keesee, *Too Young*, 10-13, 27, 296; United States War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series 3, V (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1900), 130.

Of course, the Civil War impacted America's perceptions of childhood.

According to Mintz, the middle-class ideal of a protected, prolonged childhood arose partially in reaction to the war's devastation.⁷³

When the Rebels fired on Ft. Sumter, children comprised more than one third of the American population (North and South), a substantial figure, especially when compared to population data from 1988, when that percentage fell to 22%. Coupled with 19th century American society's belief that children could, if need be, serve as soldiers, it is not surprising that so many minors ended up in the ranks. A report by the Sanitary Commission published during the war estimated that 46,000 Union soldiers were under eighteen, of which at least 127 were thirteen or younger. On the Confederate side, Wiley surmises that approximately one in twenty soldiers were under age. All together, Mintz sets the total number of minors in the ranks at 5% of the army. However, Keesee believes that most of these surveys are inaccurate because they take at face-value soldiers' claims of their ages at the time of their enlistment; many enlistees circumvented the age requirements by simply lying about their ages. Thus, Keesee believes that the total number of minors who fought is greater than those figures here presented.⁷⁴

Obviously, children constituted a considerable percentage of the Civil War's fighting forces. What factors influenced these boys and prompted them to join the ranks? The decision to enlist in the armed forces appears straightforward but is usually influenced by numerous factors working on a person throughout his or her life. One very influential factor is one's political leaning. The process of politicization is heavily influenced by parents, but news media, literature and peers also exert political

⁷³ Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 132.

⁷⁴ Marten, *Children's Civil War*, 10-11; Keesee, *Too Young*, 15-17; Wiley, *Life of Johnny Reb*, 330-331; Mintz, *Huck's Raft*, 120.

influence.⁷⁵ Often, a child whose parents believe in the validity of war will also accept war, and the eruption of hostilities indicates that 19th century American society as a whole accepted war as at least a necessary evil. Marten argues that children tend to hold a “contested” view of the world; that is, children evaluate issues in terms of black and white, with no concept of so-called “gray areas.” Marten also asserts that children, especially boys, “seem to understand war more instinctively than peace;” the popularity of children playing at pretend war attests to this. The constant exposure of Civil War children to the war and war-related issues from newspapers, weeklies, novels, public performances, games, toys, and letters from fathers and brothers who joined the army reinforced the importance of the conflict to these children. Marten believes that children in the Civil War “saw themselves not merely as appendages to their parents’ experiences but as actors in their own right in the great national drama.”⁷⁶

This heightened sense of participation in the war likely made many boys more sensitive to ideological motivations. Some wanted to repel the Yankee invaders; others wished to eliminate the scourge of slavery; still others enlisted from sheer patriotism. Gender roles, too, seem to have influenced children’s determination to join the army. To be a soldier was to attain manhood; otherwise, they would be “reduced to making lint for the army” with the girls. Many, as Kieffer recalls, were simply struck by the “war fever,” which distracted them from their schoolwork and chores; Kieffer remembers begging his father to let him go because “school is fast breaking up; most of the boys are gone. I can’t study anymore.” Another boy later traced his decision to enlist to the fact that “the

⁷⁵ Marten, *Children’s Civil War*, 150.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 3-5, 25, 159.

Yankee yearning for fight had possession of me.”⁷⁷ Others seized the opportunity to alleviate the boredom of home or escape from abusive family situations. Some minors, such as Delevan Miller and Gilbert van Zandt (both from Ohio), enlisted to stay with their fathers, uncles, and brothers. Orphans, on the other hand, saw the army as a source of food and clothing.⁷⁸

The above analysis addresses why children chose to join the military, but it does not explain why they joined as drummers. Most of the minors, it appears, who could pass themselves as eighteen or older eagerly enlisted as private soldiers. For those unable to appear of age, enlisting as a drummer boy was often the only way to get into the army. One youngster remembers being despondent when his initial application for enlistment was rejected until an acquaintance provided him with the obvious answer: enlist as a musician. This boy recalls being surprised that he did “not happen to think of getting in as a drummer.”⁷⁹ While many minors might have at first preferred to have been given the chance to fight, serving as drummer boys afforded them the opportunity to actively serve the cause.

Understanding why children wanted to serve as drummers is one thing; understanding why American society allowed them to join the ranks is quite another. When the war began, few Americans envisioned the carnage it would bring; Keesee argues that early on, “war’s horrors had not yet been experienced, so numerous parents did not object as their little ones stepped off leading parades while smartly beating their

⁷⁷ Kieffer was also keen to volunteer early so that he could serve with men he knew, rather than risk the possibility of getting drafted into a company of strangers. Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 121; Marten, *Children’s Civil War*, 177; Kieffer, *Recollections*, 25, 29, 31; Ulmer, *Adventures of a Volunteer*, 17.

⁷⁸ Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 99; Jane Hollingsworth, “The Little Drummer Boy,” *Civil War Times* 43, Issue 3 (August 2004): 30, 24; Keesee, *Too Young*, 34, 35.

⁷⁹ Keesee, *Too Young*, 22.

drums.” Indeed, at the time, it was fashionable for young men and even boys to volunteer as soldiers, and some parents took pride and honor in the thought of their children bravely serving their country. As well, the excitement of forming a regiment often clouded parental judgment, especially if the father was involved in the formation, making these parents more willing to consent to their boy joining the army. Furthermore, recruiting officers were pressured to fill quotas and eager youths were easily enlisted. An additional reason why parents may have been willing early on to give their consent was the mistaken perception that, because musicians were non-combatants, they served in relatively safe positions. Though drummers did not fight, serving as stretcher-bearers actually often left them more exposed to enemy fire than other combatants, but so long as they were thought to be safe, parents were willing to send their boys off as musicians.⁸⁰

As the conflict dragged on, however, and as the brutality of the war sunk in, parents became more reluctant to allow their boys to join the army. Quite a few resorted to running away from home in order to enlist, but, to the chagrin of more than several, worried parents tracked them down and brought them home. Conversely, the strain on manpower brought on by the war made the army eager to accept children as musicians because this freed up men for the firing-line.⁸¹

The parents who did allow their boys to enlist, it seems, found some consolation in the idea that their officers would look after them. Keesee asserts that it was not uncommon for parents to contact the commanding officer of their child’s unit and beseech him to take care of their little boy. Many soldiers apparently instinctively sympathized and cared for the children in their regiment; the men in one unit, for

⁸⁰ Ibid, 25, 27, 72, 84, 185; Larrick, “Fifing and Drumming,” 9; Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 95.

⁸¹ Keesee, *Too Young*, 18, 41, 79; Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 89.

instance, “constituted themselves watchful guardians [of their drummer boy]...any of them would share their last “hardtack” with him, when cold they would shield him with their blankets.” For many men who left behind their own children, these drummer boys may have served as surrogate sons.⁸²

Understandably, military service profoundly impacted the lives of Civil War drummers. Many found themselves away from home for the first time, and the war forced them to quickly mature if they were to survive. Of course, service in the army could have both positive and negative influences. It was the worry of some Americans that military service would inexorably lead to the corruption of youth. One soldier remarked that “we have drummer boys with us that...now could stare the Devil out of countenance and can’t be beat at cussing, swaring [sic], and gambling.” Indeed, military service exposed many drummer boys for the first time to the vices of drinking, smoking, gambling, sex, and profanity. Not all drummer boys turned profane, though, and many were lauded by their comrades for their exemplary behavior.⁸³ On the positive side, service as drummer boys instilled in these youth discipline, strong work-ethics, a sense of self-reliability, and the will to succeed. The exhilaration of war aroused in some boy soldiers the desire to seize every living moment, and Keesee notes that “some claimed much later to have lived more fully during their service years than they did the rest of their lives.”⁸⁴

Ultimately, the war robbed drummer boys of their innocence and even their lives. Children were just as vulnerable to disease and enemy bullets as adult soldiers; in fact,

⁸² Keesee, *Too Young*, 30; Lockwood, *Seven Years a Soldier*, 78; Marten, *Children’s Civil War*, 74.

⁸³ Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 129; Wiley, *Life of Billy Yank*, 301; Olson, *Music and Musket*, 103-105; Keesee, *Too Young*, 87.

⁸⁴ Keesee, *Too Young*, 88, 258.

youth, especially the youngest boys, may have been even more susceptible to debilitating diseases than their older comrades. Those who survived would never forget the horror of battle. One boy remembered surveying a battlefield and seeing mutilated men and other “sickening sights which tended to make [him] a hardened soldier;” sights such as these caused “the heroic ardor of [his] boyish dream” to dissipate.⁸⁵

Despite this loss of innocence, many boy soldiers continued to exhibit a youthful spirit throughout the war. The drummer boys of one Pennsylvania regiment, for instance, found time during the battle of Chancellorsville to break ranks and chase rabbits.⁸⁶ The Civil War may have destroyed many children’s innocence, but it could not completely dominate the spirit of boyhood.

The conflict left a lasting impression on each drummer boy. Some stayed in the army for many years after the war. James Lockwood, for example, reenlisted and served as a private soldier in the frontier Indian Wars. The “Drummer Boy of Shiloh,” Johnny Clem, was eventually commissioned an officer and rose to the rank of major general. Most, though, returned home following their discharge. Many resumed their schooling, and then used their military experience and acquaintances to find jobs. In some youth, the war kindled a sense of adventure and opportunity which was satisfied by moving west. Quite a few former drummer boys became active in veterans’ organizations, and the ranks of the Grand Army of the Republic were filled with veterans who had enlisted as minors.⁸⁷ Because of their youth, drummer boys tended to outlive their comrades-in-arms, and a handful of the last surviving Civil War veterans were former drummers,

⁸⁵ Ibid, 65, 74-75; Mintz, *Huck’s Raft*, 122; Ulmer, *Adventures of a Volunteer*, 32.

⁸⁶ Keesee, *Too Young*, 86.

⁸⁷ See Lockwood, *Seven Years a Soldier*; Downey, *Fife, Drum, and Bugle*, 93; Keesee, *Too Young*, 257-258.

making these boy soldiers some of the last living reminders of a by-gone era in American history.

Clearly, the drummers of the Civil War were an ever present and integral part of the Yankee and Rebel armies. In spite of their importance to the war effort, and despite the fact that modern field drumming technique descends from their military traditions, field musicians are often overlooked by both Civil War and musical scholars. As this paper has demonstrated, Civil War drummers should not be taken for granted. Two of their three musical responsibilities (the regulatory calls and tactical signals) were staples of army life. The beats of the drum governed the soldiers' routine and the tactical signals were vital forms of communication. The efficiency of the drum corps as a means of communication made them an indispensable tool for army commanders. The drummers' ceremonial duties were invaluable in the maintenance of soldierly morale.

Though the drummers ranged in age from old to young, a good many were no more than boys. 19th century American society, though beginning to idealize childhood as a period of innocence, still believed children to be capable of assuming adult responsibilities, so many Americans were not averse to seeing boys serve as soldiers. The drummer's post was considered ideal for children because it generally entailed less strenuous duties and freed up other soldiers for the firing-lines. The perception of drummers as non-combatants was misleading, but it may have served to comfort parents who otherwise would have opposed allowing their boys to don the uniform. The war, of course, affected these youth in various ways. Some succumbed to vice and sin; others developed discipline and strong work-ethics. A perennial danger, death claimed more

than a few boy musicians. For those who survived, service as a drummer boy in the armies of the American Civil War must have been a pivotal epoch in their lives.

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