

Educator Resource

Battle of Bull Run/ Manassas Pt.2

Dates & Eras 1861

Themes Battles
Soldiers

Grades 5-7

Standards VS.1,
VS.7,
USI.1,
VUS.1;
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.
RH9-10.2,
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.
RH9-10.9

History Overview

Today, communication is easy and nearly instantaneous. Television, the Internet, social media, cell phones, landlines, newspapers, and the postal service serve to spread information about current events across the population. We can use our phones to record what is going on around us at a given moment and transmit this information almost instantaneously to our friends and family. Society runs on fast download speeds, and total information saturation is the norm.

But, how did information about current events travel during the American Civil War? In addition to the telegraph, letters, newspapers, and word of mouth were the main means of communication. During the Civil War, individuals on the home front had to wait weeks or even months to find out what happened to their loved ones on the battlefields. People in the 1860's experienced the same desire to record and share what was happening in their lives as we do today and some soldiers kept journals and diaries to record these experiences.

Here are excerpts from the diaries of J.T. Petty and J.S. Newman. Use these and the accompanying transcripts to explore these two men's experiences during the battle of Bull Run/First Manassas.

Suggested Questions

1. What challenges confronted families on the homefront during the war? What effect would receiving limited information have on families as they tried to cope with the war?
2. Imagine you are a family member back home and you finally receive a letter from a loved one serving as a soldier during the Civil War. What kinds of things would you want to read about and how would you respond?
3. If Civil War soldiers had access to social media, list 3-4 things they would document and record.
4. What would have been some pros and cons to having access to immediate information during the Civil War? Explain how more information might impact someone's desire to be a soldier at this time.
5. After reading both diary entries, what are a few differences between the writing styles and word usage between the two?
6. What are the more important issues that each man writings about? Why do you think each were so different?
7. What are some words or phrases you did not understand during the readings?
8. What generalizations can be made about these two soldiers? How does this change or enhance your perception of a Civil War soldier?

Resources

[Newman Diary and Transcription](#)

[Petty Diary and Transcription](#)

Additional Links

[View of Battlefield \(Library of Congress\)](#)

[Federal Cavalry at Bull Run \(Library of Congress\)](#)

Suggested Activities

1. Instruct students to imagine that they are young soldiers on their way to their first battle and have them write about their experiences. Have students include day to day activities, messages to family, and the battle itself. Students should use the diaries of Petty and Newman for ideas and writing styles.
2. Have students draw a Venn diagram to list the similarities and differences between the two soldier's diary entries. After completion, have students gather into small groups to discuss their diagrams.
3. Have Students gather into small groups and create a newspaper article about the Battle of Bull Run. They should use the diary entries and photos of the battlefield to demonstrate their ability to read and interpret primary sources. After completion, have groups present to the rest of the class.

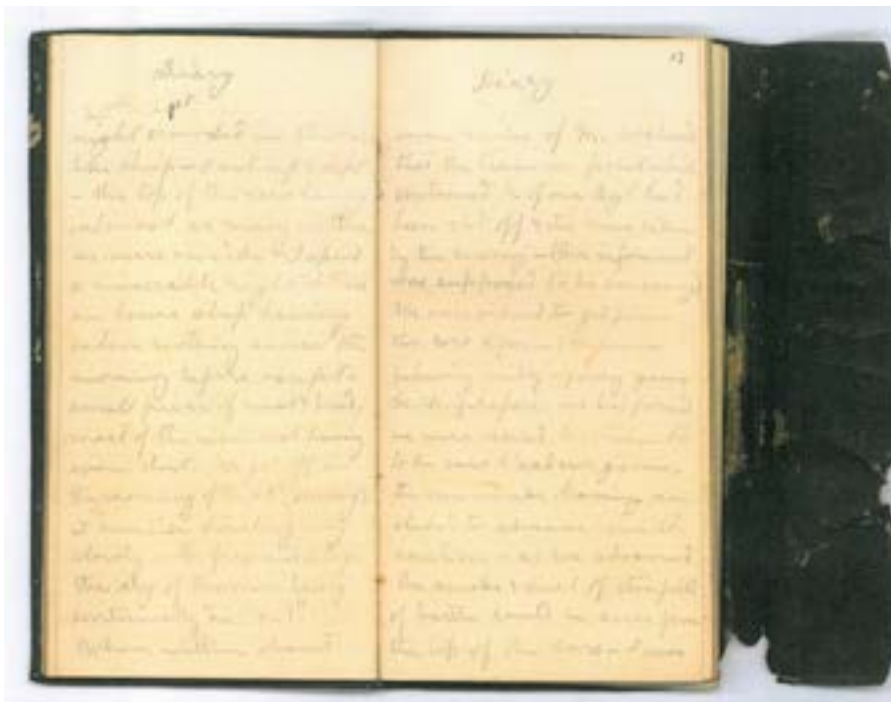
Excerpts from James S. Newman's Diary & transcription



James S. Newman, Private 13th Virginia Infantry Co. C 19-21st July, 1861

American Civil War Museum

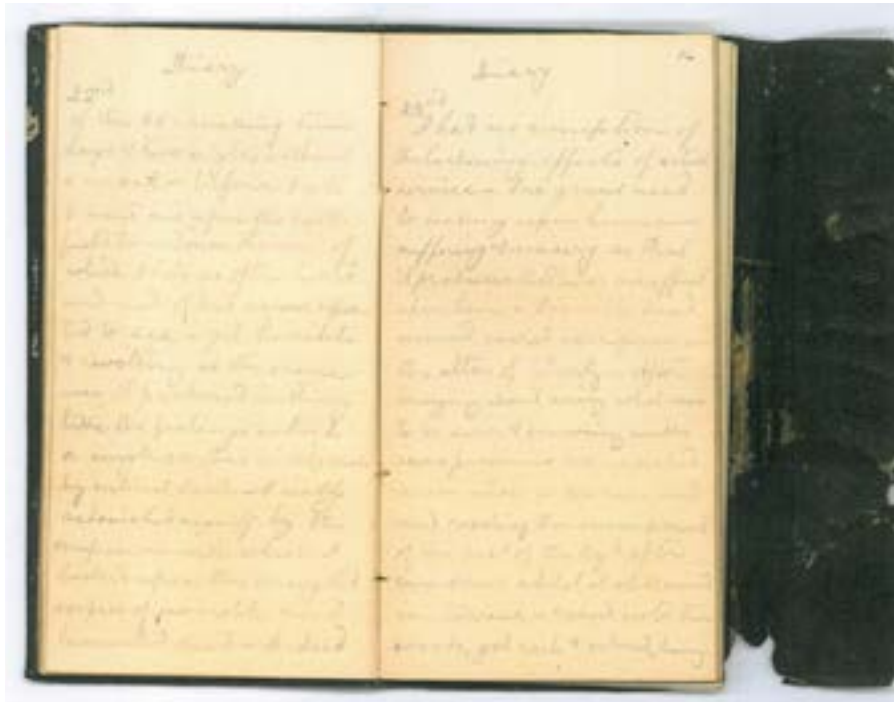
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James S. Newman, Private 13th Virginia Infantry Co. C 19-21st July, 1861

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From the American Civil War Museum

Diary of James S. Newman Private 13th Virginia Infantry Co. C "Gordonsville Grays"

Diary excerpts from July 19-22, 1861

19th July. Friday 20th (1861)

[Manassas]

Getting well under way at about 10 o'clock a.m. we marched all day without stopping to cook or eat—reaching Piedmont stan [station?] at 10 p.m. lying down to rest in the rain without cooking or eating with a few exceptions who cooked instead of sleeping. The next morning 20th a breakfast was cooked w'h (which) gave each man a partial meal—the waggons were then sent ahead with all the cooking utensils so that there was no chance of getting anything more to eat until we overtook them. We were then ordered to hold ourselves in waiting & readiness for the train to convey us to Manassas—after waiting very impatiently all day the train arrived late in the evening—during the day however the road had been blocked up by a collision occasion by a traitor conductor—as soon as the train arrived we embarked with the expectation of reaching M (Manassas) before midnight, but instead we were run back nearly a mile to wait until the way was opened where we remained all the night crowded in cars like sheep—I sat up & slept—the top of the cras having on them as were inside—I spent a miserable night without an hours sleep having eaten nothing since the morning before except a small piece of meat & bread, most of the men not having even that. We got off on the morning of the 21st (Sunday) at sunrise traveling very slowly with frequent delays and the cry of the men being continually "on! on!". When within about seven miles of M (Manassas) we heard that the train in front had been cut off & the men taken by the enemy—the informant was supposed to be an enemy). We were ordered to get from the cars & form (the men behaving badly—firing guns ec & ec) before we had formed we were ordered to return to the cars & load our guns, the commander having concluded to advance with caution—as we advanced the smoke & dust of the field of battle could be seen from the top of the cars—I was anxious to disembark & marching across to the scene of action—(21st Sunday) We would have done better service if we had done so & sent a courier forward to inform our friends of our approach. We went on however to M (Manassas) in the cras arriving there at about 3 ½ or 4 p.m. We were marched out at almost double quick time a distance of five miles nearly to the battle field, reaching it just as the enemy were reported vanquished. (July 21st Sunday). As we marched to the battle field the dust was so thick that we could not see a man five paces immediately in front of us. We bathed at a mud hole of stagnet water & filled our canteens of the liquid as red as cider & milk warm, yet as pleasant as tho it was clear & thoroughly iced—as we passed from M (Manassas) to the battle field we met numerous wounded & broken down men—some taking care of themselves—others with wounded leaning upon them. The first we met told us to hurry on, that we were much needed & had work before us—as we neared the field those whom we met said we came too late—they had finished the work—we had only to take their leavings—They reported with great delight the capture of Sherman's battery—some told us to pick off the red pants, that they had injured us more than any other part of the enemy—we met many of the red pant prisoners. There was an evident disappointment depicted in the faces of the men when they heard they were not to be lead against, or in pursuit of, the enemy—I got a few Yankee crackers at head quarters which I ate with water enjoying them as much as a king ever did the richest repast.

21st-22nd--We then bivouacked in the middle of a field in which the rifled bombs of the enemy's guns fell without bursting-several were picked up by our men. The next morning at about 10 or 11 o'clock we had breakfast, the first meat [meal?] we had had since the morning of the 20 making two days & two nights without a meal—22nd—before I hate I went out upon the battlefield to witness horrors of which I had so often heard & read of but never expected to see—yet horrible & revolting as the scene was, it produced nothing like the feelings which a single corpse made such by natural death—I really astonished myself by the composure with which I looked upon the mangled corpses of our noble and lamented dead—Indeed I had no conception of the hardening effects of active service. One grows used to looking upon human suffering & misery so that it produces little or no effect upon him—Our noble dead seemed sacred sacrifices on the altar of liberty—after lounging about seeing what was to be seen & conversing with some prisoners we marched seven miles in the rain and mud reaching the encampment of the rest of the Regt (Regiment) after sundown whilst it still rained in torrents—went into the woods, got rails & wheat

Excerpts from James T. Petty's Diary & transcription



James T. Petty, Private 17th Virginia Infantry Co. B 18-22nd July, 1861

American Civil War Museum

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Transcription

From the American Civil War Museum

Original Pocket Diary of James T. Petty, Private 17th Virginia Infantry Co. B

Diary excerpts from July 18-22, 1861

Thursday July 18, 1861

Arose at 5—"Passed" my wagons out—Am penciling on horseback—Col. Corse just ordered me (about 7 a.m.) to ride to camp for a wagon for Surgeon's wagons relief which is loaded with overcoats—Left coats at McLane's house $\frac{3}{4}$ mile this side our troops—Afternoon—have been in cornfield back of Ware's house above Beauregard's quarters looking at the smoke of the battle now raging at the Ford—The enemy appeared there a few minutes after I left—Different couriers from there concur in saying we have repulsed them twice—the last time very decisively—If our Cavalry (2,000) could have crossed the run & followed up the second retreat they would have cut off all the enemy's advance guard.—The banks were precipitous, however—night—we lost only about 9 or 10 killed & 40 wounded to-day—the enemy were slaughtered by scores & hundreds it is reported—none of the Warren thickest of the flight—9 or 10 wounded—6 days reations were issued to our brigade to-night & sent at 12 p.m.—I retired a little after 12 & slept in the Qr. Mr's tent—Geo. Hope with me—

Friday 19 (July, 1861)

It is certain we did not lose over 10 killed & between 30 & 40 wounded—The ____ regt. fired into our troops & wounded more than the enemy—In heaven's name what do they mean by acting so—they are two quick to fire—Just say boo! & pop goes a gun at whoever is before them—I can't call this courage for brave men are cool—this is the third time they have done this trick—Poor Madison Tyler was indebted to them for his death—shot—by federal prisoners from Martinsburg, came down on Manassa train this morning—Johnston is expected here with his command from Winchester to-day—Our troops will concentrate & a great battle be fought here. Beauregard's "trap" is working admirably and Washington will doubtless soon be in the hands of the bold Southrons to whom it rightly belongs—Uncle Burkitt came down & returned today—Newt went home sick—saw poor Tom Langsters corpse (Alex. Rifles) who was the one killed in our regiment yesterday. A triumphant smile rested like a ray of sunshine upon his marble-like features—He was wounded at 9 o'clock tonight—Just after the battle. The 3 months reports to April 30 copied.

Sunday July 21, 1861

Slept a few minutes between 3 & 4 only—a surpassingly beautiful morn—calm, bright & balmy as May—am writing this & wrote part of a former entry in trenches—6 a.m. artillery has opened near us and fired 4 rounds—all hands ordered to their posts—8 a.m. Firing has commenced in earnest & very near to our position—Read 107th Psalm and stopped at the 11th verse just as a bomb from a rifled cannon whizzed by my head—Our regiment & the 5th N.C. were ordered cross the run—After crossing we with 3 other companies were ordered to deploy as skirmishers—Capt. Simpson chose Way Kendrick & myself as his guard—C.U. Richardson also acted as such—We approached near enough to give a signal to the men at the enemy's guns so as to ascertain who they really were—Encountered 8 Yanks & had to retreat—Capt. S. fell in the water—a puddle waist deep—I fell on a rock & rolled down on the Capt. in the water—Bruised

myself badly & lost my gun in water—came back to the trenches, got another gun & went back to the company—Capt. Simpson ordered me to return to camp—Went back at 11 a.m. & watched the great

battle of Stone Bridge till 5 in the afternoon—At night we were ordered into the trenches at Camp Pickens when a false that the Yanks were coming via Aquia Creek.

Monday 22 (July 1861)

Left camp & rejoined the company in the rain this morning—The Hessians were completely routed yesterday—Sam Thomas & I lay on a hill & watched the fight from 11 a.m. to the time they began to retreat in the afternoon—I was disabled by my leap down the hill. We captured 63 pieces of artillery & 120 ambulances & wagons &c and stores & small arms without number—Poor Yankees! The “forward to Richmond” dispatch of the N.Y. Tribune didn’t seem to have many charms for them yesterday if we may judge from their backward to Washington—Hundreds of our men supplied themselves with gun cloths & oil cloth haversacks that the Yanks threw away in their great Hegira from Bull Run—or Jonathan’s Run as it will probably be called now from the big tracks Jonathan made in that vicinity