

Soldiers' Motivations in the Civil War

By Justine Meberg

Course: HI101, The Army of the Republic: Leading Citizen-Soldiers

Lesson: 9, Motivating Civilian Soldiers

This package works well at any point that the Cadets read James McPherson's *For Cause and Comrades*, from Lessons 8 through 11. In this lesson, Cadets interact with Civil War era artifacts to consider the dual frameworks of motivation and leadership. Regarding the former, cadets connect the ideas of initial, combat, and sustaining motivations with the rifle, bayonet, and camp stove. Cadets then discuss what kinds of evidence support their chosen connections. They might argue that the rifle, as the embodiment of what it meant to "bear arms" in defense of one's country, provides a good representation of the initial motivations that caused men to join the army. They might also connect the bayonet to combat motivations, as a close-quarter weapon used in hand-to-hand fighting.



Cadets in HI101 explore Civil War era objects representing the initial, combat, and sustaining motivations of soldiers in the Union and Confederate Armies.



Cadets in HI101 explore Civil War era objects representing changing ideas of officership.

The Sibley Camp Stove, particularly, allows for a discussion on how soldiers fighting in the Civil War emphasized the importance of primary group cohesion. A soldier's mess—a squad sized group of men—became a replacement in many ways for the family they left behind for the war. A soldier's mess provided comfort, warmth, camaraderie, and of course food. The emotional and physical sustenance became an important source of sustaining motivation, and one that persisted, arguably, beyond the call of the rifle and the bayonet.

We then use the saber and revolver in the second portion of class to discuss how officers fit into this discussion of soldiers' motivations and how conceptions of military leadership changed over time. To connect the Civil War to the American Revolution, how have the expectations of Officership changed over time, and why? If a saber is your weapon, where are you on the battlefield? If you carry a revolver as a sidearm, under what circumstances do you expect to engage the enemy? What differences can we note between ideas of honor over the nearly hundred years that has

passed from the 1770s to the 1860s? How have the expectations for junior leaderships changed in relation to the expectations of where a general should be during the battle? How did the Civil War shift towards mass citizen armies coupled with more industrialized transport, logistics, and weaponry shape these changes?

For use of West Point instructors, the following items were used in this display:

- 1) 9878: Stove, Tent Stove, Sibley, US Army, Cast Iron, Black, US, Circa 1865, Civil War
- 2) **19770.1: Saber, Cavalry, Reproduction, US Army, Steel/Brass, Bright, M1860, US, Civil War, SN: 3057**
- 3) **19770.2: Scabbard, Saber, Cavalry, US Army, Steel/Brass, Bright, M1860, US, Civil War**
- 4) **18091: Rifle-Musket, Percussion, Reproduction, US Army, Steel/Wood, Bright/Brown, M1863 Type II, .58 Caliber, US, Civil War, SN: 3661**
- 5) 1124.2: Bayonet, Socket, Triangular, US Army, Steel, Bright, M1863, US, 1863, Civil War
- 6) **16624: Revolver, Percussion, Single-Action, Reproduction, US Army, Steel/Wood, Blued/Brown, M1860, Colt New Army, .44 Caliber, US, Civil War, SN: 35904**

*Bold Items are a part of the teaching collection which do not need to be requested on the museum support request form but can be drawn from the arms room with this request.

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