

Soldier's Heart Study Guide

Soldier's Heart by Gary Paulsen

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

Soldier's Heart Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Plot Summary.....	7
Chapter 1, June 1861.....	9
Chapter 2, Fort Snelling.....	10
Chapter 3, Toward Manassas.....	12
Chapter 4, Bull Run.....	13
Chapter 5, Night.....	14
Chapter 6, Farming.....	16
Chapter 7, Town Life.....	18
Chapter 8, Winter.....	20
Chapter 9, Gettysburg.....	22
Chapter 10, June 1867.....	23
Characters.....	24
Objects/Places.....	27
Setting.....	30
Social Sensitivity.....	32
Literary Qualities.....	34
Themes.....	35
Themes/Characters.....	37
Style.....	39
Quotes.....	42
Topics for Discussion.....	44



[Essay Topics.....45](#)

[Ideas for Reports and Papers.....46](#)

[Further Study.....47](#)

[Related Titles.....49](#)

[Copyright Information.....50](#)



Overview

Soldier's Heart is a blunt depiction of Civil War combat. Based on the real-life experiences of Charley Goddard, the novel is an account of Charley's experiences from the time he enlists in the Union army at age fifteen to a couple of years after the Civil War when he is twenty-one and his life is a shambles. The title of the book is a phrase used by Americans to label Civil War veterans who seemed mentally lost because of the war. Paulsen points out that the same syndrome was called "shell shock" during World War I, "battle fatigue" during World War II, and is presently called "post-traumatic stress disorder."

From the moment Charley thinks, "I am not supposed to see this, God. No person is supposed to see this," Charley falls ever deeper into a depression in which he believes his own death is inevitable. Even comes to welcome it. He avoids other soldiers because they seem as doomed as he, and he does not want to become close to men who may die. The deaths of people he new from his Minnesota home, even the death of cocky Nelson, whom Charley knew for less than a day, weigh heavily on his mind. *Soldier's Heart* follows Charley's effort to withdraw into himself and away from the horror of the battles he fights.

About the Author

Gary Paulsen was born on May 17, 1939 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His father served in the military, and Paulsen did not meet him until 1946, when he and his family joined him in the Philippines. Paulsen remembers running wild at age seven, learning about street life firsthand. Eventually, in 1949, he and his parents moved back to America, moving frequently about the country as his father's postings were changed.

He recalls being antisocial and a very poor student until he was a teenager.

Paulsen was selling newspapers to patrons of bars and had learned that if he gave them time to have a few drinks they would pay twenty-five cents instead of ten cents for a paper. On a cold day while waiting for the right time to start selling his papers he entered a library to get out of the cold. An elderly librarian asked whether he had come for a library card, and Paulsen defiantly said he had. According to Paulsen, the library card with his name on it made him feel like he was somebody, and he used it to check out books, becoming a voracious reader; he can recall reading only one book before that time.

When he was seventeen Paulsen joined the army, and although he did not see action himself, he served with veterans of World War II and the Korean War and absorbed their accounts of combat. He used these accounts to create realistic experiences for Charley Goddard in *Soldier's Heart*.

While in the army, he became an expert in missiles, and after his discharge he found work as an engineer at Lockheed. He eventually worked on satellites.

In the 1960s, he changed his direction in life, deciding to become a professional writer. His first book was about the Vietnam War and was followed by a river of fiction and nonfiction—a river that was dammed when he was sued for libel for his book *Winterdance* (1977). His publisher gave him far less help than he expected, his finances were drained, and he was dispirited. Even though he won his case, he stopped writing and headed to the Midwest to live in the wilderness. His experiences from that period show up frequently in his young adult books about surviving in the wilderness.

In the early 1980s, Paulsen's life took another turn, this time back to writing.

Perhaps his third wife, artist Ruth Wright, helped him recover. In any case, he began writing books for all ages, with his pace picking up each year, and he has become one of America's most prolific writers. He now owns his own ranch in Wyoming.

During this period he has tackled controversial topics and often surprised readers with fresh points of view, resisting the stereotype of the tough-guy mountain man. In *Soldier's Heart*, he creates a novel about what combat can do to a soldier's mind.



The novel, based on a real-life figure, was named Booklist's Top of the List winner for Youth Fiction in the magazine's January 1, 1999 issue.

Plot Summary

Soldier's Heart is based on a true story about a fifteen-year-old boy in Minnesota named Charley Goddard who lies about his age to join the First Volunteers of Minnesota to fight in the Civil War. Some of the events and time sequences are not completely factual, but the essential elements of the book's story are true.

Charley Goddard is a fifteen-year-old boy growing up in the farming community of Winona, Minnesota, in 1861, just prior to what will become the Civil War. The whole area is talking about what they think will be a "shooting war." The atmosphere at the town meetings discussing the possibility is festive, with flags and drums and patriotic speeches.

As a volunteer army is beginning to form, Charley decides he wants to be part of it. Everyone assumes that it will be an easy, victorious battle, most likely over in a month or two if it happens at all. Charley lies about his age and joins the volunteers in what he thinks will be a fun experience that will make him a man. The pay is eleven dollars a month, much more than he makes working on the farms.

Charley trains and learns to be a soldier. Upon leaving the camp, the men are treated as heroes even before they leave town, accompanied by much cheering and flag waving. Charley feels great, and spirits are high. However, not long after, he finds himself in his first battle. The Union soldiers lose badly. He is caught in the middle of violent suffering and death, and he cannot believe what is happening so suddenly all around him. When the battle is over, hundreds of his comrades have been killed, and Charley and the other survivors are stunned. It is eventually named the Battle of Bull Run.

A camp is created near Washington and eventually reaches ninety thousand men. Charley becomes part of the day-to-day routine of the camp. He and the others forage the farms in the area for food and eventually build log houses to live in during the approaching winter. However, many men get diseases such as dysentery and die in the camp. During the time here, Charley participates in one nearby battle against the Rebel soldiers. The Union wins, but not without losing many men. One of them is a man whom Charley befriended only hours before. His name is Nelson, and he is shot in the stomach. Nelson knows the surgeons do not have the skills or time to mend his wound and that he will be left to die. As a result, he kills himself on the battlefield as the other soldiers leave for the return march to the camp.

Charlie takes part in a battle near Richmond, Virginia where the Confederate Army uses its mounted cavalry to charge Charley and the Union soldiers. Nearly one hundred men on horseback charge the six hundred foot soldiers. Charley and the others are told to shoot the horses in order to defeat the cavalry, and they do so, killing every horse and man.



Next, Charley participates in the Battle of Gettysburg, the final battle of the war. Here he has the protection of rocks and logs and a large force of artillery behind him. Most of the charging Rebel soldiers are killed in the lines as they attack, but some eventually get close. Charley participates in a hand-to-hand battle with bayonets. He is finally wounded, and after being patched up as well as possible, he is sent home to Minnesota.

Charlie is a broken man in Winona, Minnesota. He can barely walk even with a cane. He constantly passes blood, and his mental health has been affected severely. He contemplates suicide, but he decides to hold on to his dreams of the war a while longer.



Chapter 1, June 1861

Chapter 1, June 1861 Summary

Soldier's Heart is based on a true story about a fifteen-year-old boy in Minnesota named Charley Goddard who lies about his age to join the First Volunteers of Minnesota to fight in the Civil War. Some of the events and time sequences are not completely factual, but the essential elements of the book's story are true.

Charley Goddard is a boy of fifteen in Minnesota in June of 1861. Talk of a civil war is escalating, and the excitement is catching. He hears talk of forming a volunteer regiment which could reach one thousand men. He has never been more than five miles from his hometown of Winona, but he is determined to join and become a soldier. The pay is eleven dollars a month, and he plans on sending it to his mother and Orren, his younger brother.

Charley has one obstacle to his plan. They won't take boys who are only fifteen years old. He listens carefully at the town meetings and overhears men talking about the army. Charley decides that there is a way to join. He can just go to another area and lie about his age. He doesn't want to be stuck as a drummer boy or runner. He wants to get a musket and a uniform and be able to fight like a man.

Charley convinces his mother that lying to join the army is the right thing to do. After all, there's no real danger. The war isn't expected to last over a month or two. Charley and his mother think it will be over by fall. Packing some bread, cold potatoes and half of a roasted chicken, Charley leaves home and walks to Fort Snelling where all the men will gather before going off to fight.

Chapter 1, June 1861 Analysis

The first chapter sets the time as June 1861 and the originating place as Winona, Minnesota. The Civil War looms, and there is a great deal of excitement about a "shooting war." Almost the only character of the book, Charley Goddard, is introduced, and we briefly meet his mother, "Ma."

Charley agrees with the view of the Union and says that he knows they are right. The author does not go into any of the details of the differences between the North and the South. That is not what the book is about. Charley is still a boy, not quite a man yet, and he feels this is the time to grow up and become a man. A sense of excitement and even celebration is seen initially as the citizens of the towns in Minnesota enjoy a circus atmosphere, anticipating an easy victory. Little mention is made of the reasons there is to be a war. It doesn't seem to make a lot of difference, at least not to the people of Minnesota in 1861.



Chapter 2, Fort Snelling

Chapter 2, Fort Snelling Summary

When Charley gets to Fort Snelling, he tells them that he is eighteen. He is given a few basic rules and a uniform consisting only of a pair of black pants, gray socks and a cheap hat. That is all; he is now a soldier. The food is horrible, and he writes to his mother that the men are very unhappy about the conditions. He also feels that once the initial excitement is over it is mostly boring.

Charley learns how to march and carry a rifle as good as any man. They do not get to shoot too much, as there is a shortage of ammunition. When he does shoot, he is asked to hit a target at four hundred yards, but the rifles are very inaccurate and can seldom even hit a target at fifty yards. When the soldiers run out of ammunition, they march and practice shooting and reloading with no bullets.

Charley reads the letters his mother writes three times a week. She is getting more worried that he could get killed. Her fear rubs off onto Charley, and he begins to pay more attention when she tells him to just leave and walk on home before he gets shot. However, Charley and the other soldiers don't believe there really will be a war at all. The rumor is that they will guard the frontier forts from Indians so that the regular army can go fight for President Lincoln. The impending war does not seem as exciting as it did back home.

By June 22, Charley is thinking seriously about following his mother's advice. That day, though, the soldiers are called into formation and marched to the river to get on a boat bound for St. Paul. They march proudly through town in the new red flannel shirts they have been issued to the cheering of the townsfolk and waving of flags.

After a series of steamboat rides, the soldiers land in La Crosse, Wisconsin, where they board trains. Charley thinks these trains are very grand with their leather seats, fancy appointments and gourmet food. He has never experienced anything quite like this before. All in all, it is a great way to start a war.

Chapter 2, Fort Snelling Analysis

Charley is influenced somewhat by his mother and then the other soldiers, and he seems to echo their feelings about the inadequacy of the officers and the army in general. Just on the edge of desertion, Charley and the men march through town proudly, and he feels the departure to the river is quite ceremonial. His lack of experience also shows, since he is extremely impressed with the steamboats and the trains. He has never had any experiences quite like these.

Charley and the others, even those left behind in the towns, are very naive, knowing nothing about war and assuming that it will be one grand time. The reader sees a very

young and immature boy in Charley. The author depicts him and the other soldiers as having very little fear of being killed.



Chapter 3, Toward Manassas

Chapter 3, Toward Manassas Summary

Charley feels that he is being treated like royalty on the train ride. There are comfortable beds and good food, and everyone in the towns they pass through cheers and waves to them. Girls give them sweets and hankies. These are all new experiences for Charley and most of the men he is with. They all travel in high spirits.

Charley sees his first coloreds as the soldiers go through Maryland. He notices how poor they are, and for the first time, he really thinks about slavery and what it would be like. He assumes that the North will win the war quickly and wonders if the slaves will be freed or not. At this early point in the preparation for war, the war isn't about slavery to Charley, but about a general idea of right and wrong. At one stop a colored lady approaches Charley and gives him a sweet roll. She tells him that she hopes he returns home to his family safely. Just before the train leaves the station, a white woman comes out of her house and drags the colored lady back inside, shaking her fist angrily at the train. He realizes that the white lady is the first Reb, or Southerner, he has seen.

Passing some open farmland, Charley sees white farmers who are very poor and living in shacks and wearing rags. He is told that these are the people they have come to fight. They can hardly leave their homes, let alone fight.

As the soldiers continue on their journey, Charley hears more and more of his fellow soldiers using foul language. Charley is concerned about the swearing and immoral thinking. He does not like the other soldiers and wants to be with God if anything happens to him, with clean morals and uninfected thoughts.

Chapter 3, Toward Manassas Analysis

Charley's character continues to develop. Charley is not only naive and impressed with new situations, but now he is shown to be a religious person and uncomfortable around those who are not. Seeing his first black person, he shows that he has some compassion. His first sight of a Southerner makes him think of what it would be like to own someone. The chapter ends with Charley thinking that he is now a man, but obviously, Charley has no idea what is to come. He is pictured as an impressionable boy with a strong false sense of security in himself. The mood of the book darkens only slightly at this point.



Chapter 4, Bull Run

Chapter 4, Bull Run Summary

Some time has passed, and Charley finds himself in his first battle. As the men march across an open field toward the enemy's position, the head of the man next to Charley is immediately blown off, and an officer's horse is killed by the same cannon shot. As Charley marches on toward the hidden enemy, many of his comrades are killed before anyone on his side can even fire a shot. Men everywhere fall. The sound of bullets whizzing by is frightening, and the cloud of black gun smoke blurs his vision. Charley is so scared that he does not know what to do. He does not fully comprehend what is happening around him as the battle continues.

A man near Charley calmly turns around and begins to march toward the rear of the soldiers, but just as Charley decides to follow him, the man is shot several times in the back and falls to the ground dead. In a daze, Charley lies down, and dead bodies around him protect him from the rain of bullets that continues. A lieutenant named Olafson appears and tells Charley to get up, fall back to the rear and help anyone he can. Just as Charley gets up and begins walking, the lieutenant is hit by several bullets and falls dying, legs still churning in death. Charley still cannot believe what is happening to him, and he thinks that he is not supposed to be seeing this . . . he cannot be seeing this. With several other survivors, Charley runs to a grove of maple trees, takes protection behind one and begins throwing up.

Chapter 4, Bull Run Analysis

Some time has elapsed, and the reader is taken directly into the first battle of the Civil War, that of Bull Run. The first charge finds Charley lost and confused, and most of those near to him lose their lives immediately. Charley's immaturity and inexperience show, and he cannot seem to get himself to do anything. He finally shoots blindly in the direction of the enemy, but he gladly turns back when given the first opportunity. He is not shown to be cowardly; however, he appears to reflect the same lack of composure as those around him. The chapter ends with Charley taking refuge behind a tree, and as the realization of what has just taken place sinks in, Charley throws up. The reader gets the impression that Charley is lucky to be one of the few who live through this battle.

Charley has not begun to mature from these experiences because he cannot believe what has happened. He does not turn to God anywhere in the story, but here he seems to feel somewhat betrayed and deceived by God as he yells at Him.

The writer gives us a vivid picture of what the fighting was like at the beginning of the Civil War. This analysis is not from a distance but depicts a minute-by-minute experience from a person on the front line who sees it, hears it, smells it and feels it. The reader cannot help but also experience the battle in this manner.



Chapter 5, Night

Chapter 5, Night Summary

Charley and the other soldiers find themselves in a grove of trees, recovering from the battle. Officers move through the men telling them that they did a good job, but Charley and the others know it is a lie. They were soundly defeated. They are told to rest, as tomorrow they must do it again, but Charley doesn't see how it is possible. His legs will not carry him into the meadow again, and he fears that if they do, they will all be killed. Looking out towards the battlefield, he sees what he thinks are fireflies, but then he realizes that the spots of light are lanterns and candles being used by the survivors to find friends who have died.

Later, Charley is given rations of dried bread and raw salt pork. After his first bite, he finds that he is very hungry. He eats it all and empties his canteen of water. Soon he is asleep. Just before dawn, he is awakened and told to clean his rifle and get more ammunition. They are to move at first light. Charley goes to a nearby stream to drink and to fill his canteen with water, but after doing so, he sees that the water is pink, tinted with blood from bodies lying in it upstream.

Charley is again told to ready his rifle, and while doing so, he sees lumps on the ground of the battlefield. He sees by the new light of day that they are still, dead bodies. Charley thinks that he will join them soon and considers running away. However, he cannot, as none of the others are leaving.

Waiting for the battle to begin all over again, the men form lines as they are told. The soldiers obey just as they had the day before, and Charley wonders how they can do it. How can they just line up and wait to be slaughtered? Charley remembers how the day before families took buggies out to picnic near the battleground to watch the battle, still in a festive mood.

"Forward!" Charley is commanded. As the troops march through the meadow, they see the dead everywhere. Charley doesn't want to look down at the dead, but he cannot help it, and what he sees horrifies him. All the dead soldiers look the same as he marches over them, and they all wear the red shirts of the Minnesota men. They are already beginning to bloat. They lie at strange angles and are covered by flies planting eggs in the wounds. The smell is sickeningly sweet. They march on, waiting for the blasts to come at them from the trees ahead.

The soldiers march on, waiting for what they know is coming, and fear overcomes them all. The blasts, though, do not come. The troops get to where the Rebs made their stand and find that they left during the night, leaving food and cook pots still on the fires. They made small defenses of logs that they could hide behind with only their heads showing as they shot, and Charley thinks that he could have shot at them all day and never hit anyone. Then he looks down and notices that he has wet himself. Though he is



extremely embarrassed, he realizes that many others have done the same thing. This battle is over.

Chapter 5, Night Analysis

The character of the officers is developed more completely. They do what they can to motivate the men into battle again, even lying to them about how well they did. There is now a definite sense of distance between the officers and the soldiers. The reader senses that the battle was planned to be much different than it turned out to be. The author creates an image of Washington families coming to watch by horse and buggy, as though it were a sporting event. The drama is extremely high as the soldiers march across the field through the dead toward the enemy. Sight, sound, smell and feel are all used successfully by the author to heighten this extremely tense drama.

An accurate picture of what was experienced is offered. Historical facts are used accurately with the plot to create a believable scene of horror and fear compelling the reader to continue to read on.



Chapter 6, Farming

Chapter 6, Farming Summary

The men go to Washington and set up camp. There they are given proper uniforms of heavy blue wool with a black leather belt. Charley is paid for the first three months of his service, thirty-three dollars. He gets a pass to leave camp to see the sights, but it rains most of the time. He returns early. He buys two apple pies at twenty-five cents each, keeps four dollars for himself and sends the rest home to his mother. He includes a short note saying that he has been in a battle and that he was "scart." He also tells his mother that he cannot come home.

The men continue waiting for the next battle, all the while drilling and waiting some more. A new commander whose name is McClellan is assigned to them, and most of the men like and respect him. At least he sits well on a horse. Some of the men decide that there will be no more battles, but Charley is not one of them. He feels that there will be more battles and that he will die. If not in the next battle or the next, then he will die in the one after that.

As the soldiers continue to wait, Charley sees more of the countryside around Washington. There are neat farms with chickens, cattle, barley and fruit. The men are not supposed to take anything for themselves, but most do anyway. Charley helps the men "farm," or steal whatever they can to eat including some chickens, a pig and a cow. He knows it is basically wrong, but he agrees with the others that, if they don't eat it, the "dirty seches" or secessionists will. Then he eats so much unripe fruit that he comes down with dysentery. When he goes to the hospital at the back of the camp, he learns that so far, for every man who died in battle, four men died of dysentery. A kindly doctor gives him a shot of whisky and some powder to mix with water, and he goes back to where his men are preparing for battle.

A new recruit named Nelson nonchalantly tells Charley that they are going to go to a line of trees about two hundred yards away and "kick the Rebs out." Charley knows that Nelson does not know what is going to happen, but he is too overwhelmed with his thoughts of the last battle to tell hem. Charley feels that he is old, not in age (he is only sixteen) but in "meadows."

As the soldiers begin to cross the meadow, they can see the Rebel soldiers beginning to form lines in front of the trees. Getting closer, the Rebels begin running toward them and yelling. The Union soldiers are told to fire and to fire low. After the first volley of firing, the men watch as the front line of Rebel soldiers goes down. After firing four more times, the men are told to charge the confused Rebels. Running with his bayonet pointed in front of him, Charley screams, "Where's your damn yell now?" Soon the disoriented Rebels begin to run away. As they do so, Charley follows, yelling and screaming and running at them, hardly knowing what he is doing. He just wants to kill



them all. Charley is at the head of the line, continuing to run when a sergeant trips him and tells him that it is time to quit. The Rebels have been defeated.

As the men begin the march back towards their camp, Charley sees Nelson on the ground holding his stomach. Nelson tells him that he has a belly wound, and Charlie tells him that he'll be all right and that an ambulance will arrive soon to take care of him. Nelson tells Charley not to lie. Those with belly wounds are given some water and left to die. Charley knows he is telling the truth.

Nelson asks Charley to load his rifle and to put the stock near his foot and cock it. He also asks Charley to take off his shoe so he can itch his foot. After Charley does this, he starts walking back towards the men when he hears a shot. He begins to cry, knowing that Nelson has killed himself.

Chapter 6, Farming Analysis

Chapter six begins by conveying the everyday life of a soldier of the time, but it ends with a horribly bloody battle and a suicide. It opens with the Washington camp life as a mundane setting, followed by the description of the seemingly peaceful farms in the area. Soon the soldiers are foraging the farms for food and feeling justified in doing so even though they know it is against their rules. Charley is shown for the first time as somewhat more mature and thinking differently than the others. While many of them feel there will be no more battles, Charley is certain there will be and that he will die in one of them. Charley sees the innocence in some of the new men, and he feels old, not in years but in "meadows." He writes to his mother that he cannot come home. The author shows this as a sign of maturity in Charley.

A brief glimpse of the hospital is provided, and the reader learns that four times as many men die from dysentery as die in battle. Upon hearing this, Charley makes the decision not to stay there. Then, the horror of this war is pictured even more harshly as we learn that many of the men who fall in battle are left to die because there are not enough surgeons with the skills to save them.

In the next battle, a new version of Charley is established. He is shown as a seasoned soldier, marching into battle relatively unafraid, and he even somewhat leads the charge as the Rebel soldiers turn and begin to run. He does this unknowingly, out of some inner rage, and he has to be turned back by an officer when the charge is called back. The reader realizes once more that Charley is largely unaware of his actions while in battle.

Charley's emotions are displayed again, but differently, in the final pages of the chapter, as one of the new recruits kills himself after asking Charley to load and cock his rifle. Charley cries, displaying that he finally has a realization of what is happening to him. This is another example of his growing maturity. The author continues to provide insight into the horrors of the war and Charley's graphic experiences.



Chapter 7, Town Life

Chapter 7, Town Life Summary

Returning to the camp in Washington, the soldiers spend three months, finally building log shelters and trying to keep warm and dry as winter approaches. They even name some of the pathways in the camp for towns in Minnesota. Many more men become ill as the weather worsens.

McClellan is rumored to be afraid to fight. The men love and respect him, but rumors circulate that Lincoln wants a fight taken to the Rebels very soon. Nothing happens, however, and the men spend another month with their spirits and physical health deteriorating with the weather. They even hear that the entire New York regiment has deserted. The truth comes out later that it was only four men and that they were caught and shot by firing squads.

The conditions in the camp worsen. The men from Minnesota at least know about living in the country and are able to dig latrines and keep themselves somewhat healthy. Soldiers from the larger cities don't have these skills, and many die. At least one-half of those from New York die from some form of contagious disease.

The food is adequate but monotonous. It is mostly beans and salt pork with a little bread and coffee. The apple pies Charley had previously purchased now cost twice as much and contain very little apple or sugar.

Some food is made available by the women of the surrounding farms, but there are ninety thousand men in the camp by this time and very few farms. What little food is offered generally goes to the officers. They are also the only ones allowed whiskey. Though Charley doesn't drink alcohol, he thinks it is unfair that the officers get so many more privileges than the regular enlisted men. Soon the men complain enough that a rule created to allow them to have one shot of whiskey per man each day for medicinal purposes. The men have to buy it from the sutlers, and it is supposed to be consumed where and when it is purchased.

Charley pulls his own weight in camp with the daily duties but keeps many of his thoughts locked up inside. He continually takes care of himself and his equipment for the day he knows will come when there will be another battle.

Late one night on guard duty, Charley hears someone call from across the river. It is a Rebel soldier asking softly if Charley would like to trade some good tobacco for coffee. It just happens that all of a sudden Charley's camp has almost more coffee than they can use. Charley doesn't use tobacco, but he knows many men who do. He realizes that he can trade coffee for tobacco, which he will in turn trade for bread, pies and leather to fix his shoes. Finally Charley agrees, and the soldier on the other side of the river throws a line across to Charley who pulls it to him with a board on the end with the



tobacco on it. Then, the board is pulled back by the Rebel soldier to the other side with the coffee beans attached. The trade seems good to them both, and they agree to meet and trade again the next night. The two strike up a brief conversation from the protection of their respective shelters and find that they are both farmers, but with slightly different crops. They agree that it is stupid that here they are, both farmers, and tomorrow they may have to try to kill one another. However, an officer hears some of the conversation and reprimands Charley for talking with the enemy. The next night while Charley waits at the tree, someone takes a shot from the other side of the river that strikes the tree above him. Their truce is over.

Chapter 7, Town Life Analysis

The boredom and repetition take their toll on the soldiers, and rumors begin to mar the relatively calm atmosphere. It appears as if the soldiers trust each other less and less, and most of them continue to feel that there won't be any more battles. Charley withdraws within himself somewhat, constantly fearing the next battle and being certain that there will be one. Life in the camp and in the log shelters is described, and it is apparent that the group Charlie is with survives the winter better than those in some of the other groups. Once again, the historical facts of suffering and sickness due to lack of sanitary conditions are presented. Officers are described as somewhat elite, getting the best of everything while the soldiers under their command generally have few amenities.

For a brief time Charley talks quietly with the enemy and shows more and more of his inner personality, still willing to follow the direction and suggestion of others. For now, though, he does not agree that the fighting is over.

The reader sees that when the soldiers have time to complain, morale is low. When there is a battle and their lives are at stake, they rally as a group.



Chapter 8, Winter

Chapter 8, Winter Summary

Meat is scarce or nonexistent. Charley and several others are detailed to provide beef for the men, but there are no cattle. The doctor directs them to the Rebel horses captured that morning. They are normally used to pull artillery, but since the men must have meat, Charley and the others are ordered to slaughter and butcher them. Charley is accustomed to killing chickens, cows and pigs, but he had always thought kindly of horses that were used for work and befriended in Minnesota. The men must shoot them in the heads and then slit their throats before skinning and gutting them. This makes Charley extremely ill, almost ready to desert. The men are instructed to say that it is beef, but the men eating it know better; it has yellow fat, not white as in beef. They eat it anyway without complaint. They have no choice. The next morning at dawn, they are called to begin the march South.

The rumors increase. The South has won the war, or the South has lost the war. No one knows what to believe. The men keep marching towards Richmond. As they draw within two miles, they can hear cannon and gunfire. Charley knows enough now to realize that there are many guns, and that translates to many targets. He hears thousands of guns firing continually.

As the soldiers march within a half-mile of the fighting, Charley can see the end of the lane that divides to the right and to the left. The men are ordered to throw down everything but their guns, bayonets and canteens and march to the right, where Charley believes there is less firing. They are halted and spread out, and then they begin marching into another meadow. The meadows have become a symbol of death to Charley. As they walk, Charley sees a line of trees on the other side, but they can all tell by the bareness of the area that there are no Rebel troops or artillery there. Beyond sight to their left, they hear the main battle raging.

Out of nowhere, the soldiers all see Rebels arranging themselves in front of them in the trees. However, they are not foot soldiers or artillery, but cavalry, walking their horses into a line and getting ready to charge. Soon the Rebels begin trotting towards the Union soldiers. The line in front of Charley kneels, and his line remains standing behind them, waiting. The one hundred horses and riders charge Charley's line of six hundred men. They are told to fire at the horses, but Charley cannot bring himself to shoot at horses. When the Rebels are thirty yards away and the command to fire is given, Charley shoots a trooper in the chest. At the same time, six hundred soldiers fire, and every horse goes down with riders and horses sprawling everywhere. Horses are screaming more than men, and everywhere there is devastation. They are finally ordered to cease-fire.

Just as the men begin to get their breath, they are told to line up and turn to the left where they see thousands of Rebel troops heading straight for them. At four hundred



yards the men begin firing at the advancing Rebels. While many go down, the lines keep coming in the gathering darkness. At fifty yards, fifteen hundred Rebels begin shouting and firing, and many men go down around Charley. His clothing is hit four times, and his rifle and boots are grazed. The men are told to fix bayonets. Almost immediately, a man charges Charley with his bayonet, and Charley parries him away. The speed and force of the man charging him puts him directly onto Charley's bayonet, where he dies immediately. After that, it is pandemonium. Men are fighting, screaming and dying everywhere, and Charley once again goes almost into a trance as he screams at the enemy and kills as many as he can until they are gone. The Rebels have turned and run once again.

Charley thinks he is wounded in the shoulder and is sent to the rear to a hospital tent. Waiting for treatment, he sees a doctor sawing off the leg of a soldier and watches as he tosses it onto a large pile of amputated arms and legs. Off to one side of the tent is a pile of over two hundred men, and Charley knows they are dead. The ambulance wagons keep arriving with more dead and wounded. Soon Charley is attended to. As he is examined, he finds that it is someone else's blood. Charley has not been wounded.

As Charley begins to head back to the line, the surgeon stops him along with the person who examined him. The weather has gotten very cold, and the surgeon says his hands are too cold to continue without some sort of windbreak. Charley asks what they can use to make a windbreak. The surgeon merely motions towards the pile of dead men. "Use them," he says, and so they do. Soon they have wall of frozen dead thirty feet long and five feet high to block the icy wind. Exhausted, Charley lies down near the bodies to get out of the wind for a moment. He sleeps there for five hours.

Chapter 8, Winter Analysis

The horrors Charley must endure continue. Twice he must kill horses, and he is then forced to use the frozen dead as a shelter. Charley appears to be near the breaking point and is in a daze as he waits for treatment and observes the results of the slaughter at the hospital tent. In battle, he is fierce and seems to kill without thought. He almost seems to be enjoying it. Afterwards, he cannot believe what he has done and who he has become.

The historical accounts of actual battles are provided, and an accurate vision of the life of the Union soldiers is readily imagined. The events at the hospital actually happened.



Chapter 9, Gettysburg

Chapter 9, Gettysburg Summary

Charley finds himself at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on top of a meadow flowing down to a line of trees where the Union army is gathering for an attack a mile away. He prepares for the coming battle, but this time there is something different. He will have the artillery behind him and fences and rock walls in front of him for protection.

Soon the battle starts. Artillery shells from the enemy begin breaking over him. Men and horses are dying, and some of their artillery is hit and destroyed. Then the Rebel army begins its march toward Charley's position. The Union artillery begins mowing down row upon row of the Rebels, and thousands of them die. The marching enemy is still too far from their line for Charley and the others to even take a shot. Charley watches as they fall and die by the thousands, almost sorry for them and not knowing whether they are brave or just stupid. They continue up the hill until those left alive are within firing distance, and Charley begins to hear bullets hitting the rocks and logs around him.

As the few remaining Rebels come on, Charley's regiment leaves the safety of their position and makes a counter attack. The fighting begins again, hand to hand, metal against metal as bayonets are torn through bodies of men in both armies. As before, Charley yells, screams, fights and kills like a madman, but this time he is hit over and over and falls.

Chapter 9, Gettysburg Analysis

An accurate description of the Battle of Gettysburg overshadows the entire chapter. The reader continues to get an almost first-hand feeling of what it was like to be in the middle of the battle. Each battle is felt and observed more closely by Charley as he becomes accustomed and educated in what to expect and is more aware of the events as they happen. Some of the same things are present that Charley has come to expect: a meadow, a line of trees in the distance, fear, smoke, noise, horrible suffering and death. This time apparently the death is Charlie's own, as he is felled in a bayonet fight. Charley is nineteen years old.



Chapter 10, June 1867

Chapter 10, June 1867 Summary

The war is now over for Charley. He is back home in Winona, Minnesota, but he is not the same Charley. He thinks constantly of the war, beginning to end. He has time to think because he is disabled and can barely walk. He can't bend his knees at all. He gets sick if he lies down, and he passes blood constantly.

Charley is at the age when he should be getting on with his life, marrying, settling down, farming and the like. Charley cannot, though. He is too old, not in years, but in experiences he has seen, felt and endured. At twenty-one, he is tired and broken, and he appears to have no interest in anything.

Charley goes to the river for a picnic, and with his food, he pulls a .36 caliber revolver out of his lunch sack. The pistol was carried by a Confederate officer Charley stabbed and killed. He keeps it clean and polished. It is almost beautiful, he thinks. Considering suicide as he sits on the bank of the river, he decides instead to put the gun down and think about all the nice things that happened at the beginning of the war.

Chapter 10, June 1867 Analysis

The author jumps ahead to Charley's hometown where he lives in a shack, obviously shunned by others. He is a broken man, physically and mentally. The description of him at this time is that of a lonely person, wrapped up in himself with his memories, hobbling around alone with no future ahead of him in his young life of twenty-one years.



Characters

Charley Goddard

Charley is a fifteen-year-old boy who is growing up in Winona, Minnesota at the beginning of the Civil War. When the story begins, he is almost a man, working in the fields for long hours along with the men. His voice has just changed, and he is tall enough to look like a man. He has large hands, big as a stove lid. He cannot grow a beard yet, but he wants to be treated like a man.

Charley experiences the worst horrors of the war in front-line combat, and the reader sees him mature from a young, impressionable boy into an "old man." He is not old in the sense of years, but in the sense of battles: meadows, tree lines, noise, smoke, blood, suffering and a great deal of death.

Charley steals food and trades with the enemy illegally, but this is accepted behavior. Charley blends in with his companions as a normal soldier of the Civil War. He is seen in daily activity in Washington, where ninety thousand other soldiers wait their fate in the fall of 1861.

As the story comes to a close, Charley is broken physically and mentally, and he is pictured as a loner living in a shack by himself with no hope of a normal future. His thoughts of what he has seen crowd out any hope of a productive future, and he is left to himself almost as an outsider after serving his country.

Ma

Charley's mother is called "Ma." She is a normal mother-type, concerned for her son's safety. As the story progresses, she encourages him to desert the army and just walk home before he gets shot.

The Black Lady at the Train Station

Called "a woman of color," the black lady approaches Charley during a train stop outside of Baltimore, Maryland. She thanks Charley for what he is doing and gives him a sweet roll.

The White Woman

An unnamed lady comes out of a house as the train is leaving the Baltimore station, pulls the colored lady inside and shakes her fist at the soldiers on the train.



Swenson

Swenson is a private who sits next to Charley on the train and points out how poor the white families of the South are and how their army cannot be anything to concern them, since they can't even feed and clothe themselves.

Lieutenant Olafson

Olafson is an officer who pulls Charley out of a stupor near when the end the first Battle of Bull Run is over. As he tells Charley to "fall back in good order," he is shot in the chest and then in the head. He dies next to Charley.

McClellan

A new officer who takes command of Charley's group while they are in the camp in Washington is named McClellan. He is liked and respected by most of the men, and they say that he rides a horse well.

McClellan soon gets a reputation of not wanting to go into battle during the cold winter months, and the men love him for it. However, it is rumored that Lincoln wants him to attack some of the Rebels' lines soon.

The Rebel Soldier on Watch

Never named, Charley talks with a Rebel soldier on the other side of the river one night, and they exchange coffee and tobacco. The two talk and agree that it is a stupid war that makes two farm boys try to kill one another.

Nelson

Nelson is a new recruit Charley meets in Washington just hours before the battle near their camp. He represents what Charley was prior to his first battle. Charlie wants to tell Nelson how naive he is, but cannot bring himself to do it. When the battle ends and Charley and the soldiers walk back toward their camp, Charley finds Nelson with a bullet to his stomach, cringing on the ground. After getting Charley to help him load and cock his rifle, Nelson kills himself with it.

Dr. Hand

A man named Dr. Hand gives Charley some whiskey and a powder to add to water to help him get over his dysentery.

Doctor at the Ambulance Tent

A surgeon doing amputations after a battle orders Charley and another man to pile frozen dead bodies of Union soldiers to make a windbreak on one side of the hospital tent.



Objects/Places

Town Meetings

In Winona, Minnesota, and most other towns in Minnesota, town meetings are held to discuss and promote the Volunteer Regiment of Minnesota. These have a circus-like atmosphere with drums and flags. This is how Charley educates himself about the ways of getting into the army even though he is underage.

Fort Snelling

Fort Snelling is the closest fort to Winona, and Charley walks there from home to be able to sneak into the army without anyone knowing his real age. The soldiers are drilled continually in the hot sun. They also learn to shoot, but because there is a shortage of ammunition, they generally practice without bullets.

The Train

Charley boards a train after two steamboat rides and initial training at Fort Snelling. There are leather seats, fabulous food and luxurious appointments, and Charley hasn't ever seen anything so wonderful. People wave flags and blow kisses at every stop the train makes, and the journey is quite festive.

Southern "Crackers"

Law breakers and people who do not agree with the philosophy of the Union and physically show their displeasure are called crackers. These are the people that the Union begins to fight at the beginning of the war.

"Poor" Farms

As the train goes South, Charley sees the poor Southern farms. The housing is not much more than shacks. People are dressed in rags, and the soldiers wonder how they can make up an efficient army.

Meadows

Meadows appear often in the book, especially at the beginning of each battle. The soldiers must cross these dangerously open areas to get to the opposing troops across the meadows and in the trees. These come to signify death to Charley.



Trees

The opposing enemy is generally found in a line of trees where they hide for protection against the oncoming Union army.

Small Creek

The early morning hour just before dawn finds Charley drinking and filling his canteen in a small creek near where the troops spend the first night. Upon filling it and the light becoming better, Charley notices that the stream is pink from blood of dead soldiers lying in the creek upstream.

Camp in Washington

After the Battle of Bull Run, a camp is set up in Washington. Finally nearing ninety thousand soldiers, it has a number of different personalities, depending upon the weather and time of year. At first, it is pictured as a place of sightseeing and disorder as new replacement troops pour in. There are eventually log structures that house the men. Latrines are dug to take away the sewage, and it becomes a muddy mire when the rains come or the snow melts. The paths between different areas are named after streets in Minnesota, and it becomes almost a city, even having hospitals that are generally converted schoolhouses.

Food

While in camp, the food mentioned is generally the same. It consists of beans, salt pork, and coffee. Other food is stolen from the nearby farms or purchased from the settlers.

Surgeon's Tent

At the battlefield of Charley's third battle, a tent is set up to care for the injured soldiers. He observes a surgeon sawing limbs off wounded soldiers and sees a pile of hundreds of dead lying uncovered in the cold.

Dead Men's Wall

Charley and another soldier are instructed to pile frozen dead soldiers five feet high and thirty feet long to create a windbreak at the surgeon's tent.



Rock Wall

At the Battle of Gettysburg, Charley is positioned behind a brick wall for the first time. It affords him protection from the Rebel troops who are charging from below. Charley sees what the Rebels saw in some of the battles he fought previously.

.36 Caliber Revolver

Some time during one of the battles, Charley kills a Confederate officer with his bayonet. He takes the officer's pistol and keeps it in perfect condition, even after the war when he is back home in Winona. One day, he goes on a picnic, hobbling on his cane to the river. As he opens his sack of food this loaded revolver falls out too, and Charley picks it up. He contemplates suicide, but he does not kill himself and finally puts the gun down.

Setting

With the outbreak of war between the Union and the Confederacy in 1861, the Union army recruited soldiers throughout most of America, including Charley Goddard's area near Winona in Minnesota.

"Minnesota was mostly wild then, with Sioux and Chippewa Indians to the north and west, and there were some frontier forts on the edge of the wilderness to deal with any difficulties." During his drilling, Charley hears that the regular soldiers at some of the forts were being replaced by local recruits such as he, and there is hope that he and his regiment will become guardians of the frontier. Although some local units were used to replace regulars in frontier forts, Charley's unit, the First Minnesota Volunteers, are sent across rivers and through towns to Washington, D.C. With only red shirts as uniforms, they are sent into battle at Bull Run and are blown apart by Confederate troops who are dug in behind fortifications: Death was everywhere, nowhere. Bullets flew past him with evil little snaps and snickers as they cut the air. Next to him Massey's head suddenly left his body and disappeared, taken by a cannon round that then went through an officer's horse, end to end, before plowing into the ground.

Charley is amazed when the next day he and the survivors are ordered to form up into lines and again advance on the enemy fortifications. He is further amazed that he and the other soldiers actually obey. When they advance, they discover that the Confederate soldiers have left. Charley admires the log and dirt barricades the Confederates had erected and wished that he could stand behind similar fortifications.

Through the narrative, Charley seems to be marching across a meadow into a determined enemy. He finds himself in fierce fire fights, always surviving but always expecting to die. In one fight, his rifle is shot to pieces in his hands, and yet the blood that drenches his shoulder and side is not his.

The meadows are places of horror for Charley. Even while he is in camp, whiling away months waiting for General McClellan to decide to do something, he expects to return to the meadows and find death.

It is ironic that Charley's severest injuries come when he is among those behind fortifications while the enemy charges them.

He fires and ducks, fires and ducks, as a huge army advances across a meadow toward elevated Union bulwarks during the Battle of Gettysburg (although *Soldier's Heart* does not mention it, this is the infamous Pickett's Charge). From an historical point of view, it is interesting to see Pickett's Charge from the Union side, because the disaster is usually visualized from the Confederate side as superb infantry is wasted.

The surviving soldiers climb to the Union fortifications and the only Union unit behind them and still intact, the First Minnesota Volunteers, are ordered to counter the enemy



charge. Charley goes over the ramparts and is shot several times. Of the one thousand men originally in the First Minnesota Volunteers, forty-seven survive.

And Charley is one of them. He sees more action, says Paulsen, but his fate was made at Gettysburg. His wounds will kill him at age twenty-three. He began the novel as a farm boy without a father, with a mother who wanted him to desert and come back to her. He returns to Winona, to Minnesota, and there he lives in a shack. His picnics are in dramatic contrast to the horrors he associates with meadows and forests. He has a stream to sit by—it sounds similar to the one he and a Confederate soldier traded coffee and tobacco over. He has good food, a good hunk of beef, and a Confederate pistol, just in case he wishes to end his life. Even in a beautiful, bucolic setting, the setting in his mind is one of meadows covered with the dead.

Social Sensitivity

The social problems caused by posttraumatic stress disorder have been well publicized in America since the end of the Vietnam War. Acts of extreme violence have been attributed to it, as have some cases of severe psychological disorder. *Soldier's Heart* does not focus on the eruptions of violence; Charley apparently poses no danger to civilians after the war, although he is a danger to himself. He wonders "if it was time to go visit the others." This adds to his psychological complexity, because this is what is often called "survivor's syndrome"; sometimes when people have survived an event that killed many others, they feel that they should be dead, too. This is often associated with guilt, but Charley seems lacking in guilt. Instead, he seems stuck in his interior world where he believes that he should be dead, that in fact he was killed in battle. Part of the history of Charley is that, in fact, his wounds did eventually kill him years after he first received them. This aftermath of war is treated briefly in *Soldier's Heart*, the focus of which is not so much on the social consequences as on the individual ones, and not on the aftermath but on the process of developing soldier's heart.

The horrifying scenes in *Soldier's Heart* can be confirmed in history books. The present writer has read of the windbreak of corpses and the horse that was drilled end-to-end by a cannonball. In *Soldier's Heart*, Paulsen provides a good bibliography of books where these and other events in the novel may be found. Of particular social interest may be the distinctions Paulsen makes between city and country military units. It was the practice for a long time of the U.S. military to keep people from hometowns together. The First Minnesota Volunteers are a typical example of how units were formed during the civil war.

One of the consequences of this practice was to have all the young men from particular towns wiped out. The Civil War had enormous casualties far beyond what had been experienced before, and some units took almost universal casualties. Out of a thousand conscripts, later augmented by replacement volunteers, perhaps less than fifty survived—that for a frontier region that was not densely populated to begin with. In addition to the casualties, the many men who did survive were often carrying a severe psychological burden that was common enough to be given its own name, soldier's heart.

One response to the social misery created by the mayhem of the Civil War was a movement into the unsettled spaces of Midwestern and Western America. Women from as far east as Maine lived in communities without enough men to marry—many moved west to find places for themselves. The men could take their memories into the wilderness; many trappers, guides, and lawmen were veterans of the war, and the war may have been training for the challenges of frontier life: Men from cities—New Yorkers were the worst—had little concept of living with the land and no idea how to take care of themselves. They left sewage in the open, didn't drain the slops from their shelters and consequently were virtually destroyed by disease.



Paulsen emphasizes the individual experience of the war, and for the individual soldier, survival meant learning to care for himself amid uncivilized conditions. Paulsen notes that Charley still thought "a meal of coffee and beans and pork belly" was an adequate meal, meaning he could survive on little food. Had he not been wounded as he had, perhaps he would have joined others with soldier's heart into the frontier where they did not have to get to know people who might be killed.

Literary Qualities

"This is partly a work of fiction. Charley Goddard really existed," Paulsen says at the end. What Paulsen does is build a work of fiction out of historical facts. In the case of *Soldier's Heart*, he has a particular point he wishes to make about the dehumanizing process of warfare on those who are in the middle of combat. There seem to be two purposes in this: One is to explain the state of mind of those with soldier's heart, to make it comprehensible to those who see the body but do not understand the worn out mind within. The second is to make a statement about war, often portrayed as a mass event in historical works, showing it to be an individual experience with individual consequences.

To this end, Paulsen fills in details for Charley's experience. Reading the young man's letters must have given some insight into his state of mind, but even so Paulsen must provide thoughts and reactions for which he has only his imagination and his own military experience for reference. He says that stories of combat he heard from veterans while he served in the army have found expression in *Soldier's Heart*. Thus, his process of composition seems to have been to draw on many stories and use them to create a composite soldier—partly what can be known about the real Charley Goddard and partly what can be known of the universal experience of soldiers.

Paulsen does an admirable job of framing his story. His "Foreword" sets the context for his psychological study, linking Charley's experiences to those of soldiers in later American wars, indicating his intention to use Charley to make a general comment about soldier's heart and its several synonyms. His "Author's Note" at the end helps fill gaps in the novel, for instance noting that Charley did not actually fight at Bull Run, but that the experiences of Charley are otherwise based on Charley's actual experiences and on actual events. The horrific scenes are from history. He also lets his audience know what actually happened to Charley Goddard, noting that Charley was patched up and sent back to fight, seeing more action during the war. Physically and mentally broken, dying slowly rather than quickly from his wounds, he managed to be elected county clerk but died before serving at age twenty-three. These details help round out the *Soldier's Heart*, which is as much an experience of a man's life as it is a work of fiction. The fiction is well-rounded, as well, with Paulsen taking care in the images he presents of Charley leaving home, a talkative charmer, and the man who returns, preferring a solitary picnic. The Confederate gun is a fine symbol with which to end the fictional part of *Soldier's Heart*, because Charley has been convinced the Confederates would kill him. With the gun of an officer he killed, he can make sure that symbolically they do.



Themes

Inner Struggle

Charley's first struggle happens at the beginning of the story when his mother encourages him to just leave the fort and walk home. Initially Charlie is not tempted, but after being at Fort Sutton for a while with no more excitement, he considers deserting, only deterred when the men are called to leave the camp.

As the reader sees Charley mature from a boy of fifteen to twenty-one, he is constantly struggling within himself. While the difference between right and wrong is generally clear, he only falters a few times from "right." The first time, he "farms" with the other soldiers. The word "farms" describes the stealing of poultry, pigs, cows and fruit from the surrounding farms for food and trade. Charley knows this is not really right, but he does it anyway with the justification that if he and his friends don't take it, the Rebs will just get it instead.

The next departure from "right" comes when Charley is on watch one cold night at the camp in Washington. Huddled behind a tree for warmth, he hears a Rebel soldier on the other side of the river call to him softly and ask him to trade coffee for tobacco. Charlie does, even though he doesn't use tobacco. He knows he can trade it for items he does need.

Charley's main struggles within himself occur as he matures and becomes somewhat of a wild man in the field of battle, killing everyone he can and not wanting to stop even though the battle is over. His killing is against his own will in many ways, but he does it with the realization that his training works. After his initial fear, he does it out of habit.

Another struggle within Charley occurs when he is asked to kill horses for food, and later in battle. Charley's sensibilities are offended by having to kill the horses, even for his own survival. He does as he is told, but sometimes his actions cause him to be physically ill.

Personal Maturity

The book is a study of the maturing of Charley Goddard. His maturity is in small steps and takes place over a year or more. He is certain of himself during his boyhood, and yet as he does mature, he becomes less certain of himself and questions his maturity, at times seeing it as training, not the growing of his inner self.

The maturity seen can be measured somewhat by comparing Charley to those around him. His first training is the beginning of the process, but he is shown to be much like the immature boys who generally surround him. As the book continues, so does Charley's maturing process. By the end of the fourth chapter, he has seen and experienced conditions he never thought possible. His maturation process somewhat

parallels the four battles in which he participates. We must question whether his maturity ends with his retirement back home in Minnesota; does it continue?

Distance of Rank

Initially, Charley sees that the officers are somewhat confused and have trouble leading efficiently. At this point, he shows compassion by assuming they are all much like him with not much more experience in the army than he has. He understands that they are leading with not much more than manuals telling them what to do. By midway in the story we see men beginning to question authority more accurately. The distance between the soldiers of Charley's rank and the officers is defined somewhat by what isn't told. No account is ever given of what it was like to be an officer, leading the reader to assume Charley had little contact with them other than during training or on the field of battle.

This distance is hinted to as the officers are allowed to have seemingly unlimited whiskey, while at first the soldiers have none at all. There is also reference made to the fact that the officers get most of the food the farmers' wives are able to provide, leaving little for the others. However, toward the end of the last battle, the officers' authority and experience is not questioned at all. Soldiers having come to the realization that their survival depends upon the decisions of their superiors.



Themes/Characters

"They were said to have soldier's heart," says Paulsen of Civil War veterans such as Charley Goddard. Nowadays the term is post-traumatic stress disorder. The novel is a psychological study focused on the mind of a teenager who lied about his age and enlisted in the Union army. Charley is fifteen years old when he enlists. His reasons are foolish: He hears that the war may be the only one to come in a lifetime and that it would be a shame to miss it. Besides, "It would be over by fall," he hears.

He seems to be a good kid. He is tall, with big hands, and a hard worker on the family farm. Yet, he is naive and unworldly. His mother sees him off but soon regrets her decision. Charley undergoes what seems to be standard training—a boot camp of drills and more drills that later become part of Charley's survival skills. The army seems boring at first, but once the fighting starts, Charley responds without thinking, his mind already formed to be part of a military unit.

His mind is a curious place of conflicting ideas and desires. When he travels through Maryland, he sees slaves and wonders how anyone could own someone else and make him or her do whatever one wants. When he is told to take care that his clothing remains clean because cloth travels with bullets into wounds and can infect them, he wonders at the information. It seems hardly possible that a ball could pass through the cloth and into him. This inspires another thought: Charley believed in Heaven and Hell and God and Jesus and wanted to be with God if he was killed. If he had profane thoughts when he went to war, they might infect his soul as the dirty clothes would infect his wound.

This is an innocent thought, even a sweet one, but it indicates a mind not prepared for what Charley will see. Eventually, Charley decides that no one can be prepared to see what he sees without experiencing battle for himself.

His reaction to his first battle is one of terror. His mind cries out to reject the mayhem he witnesses, but the training he has undergone controls his body. He does just as he has been trained to do. "The smell [of the dead] was sweet, cloying," he notices.

But even as his mind struggles to comprehend, his body moves.

By the time General McClellan takes charge of the army, Charley has become a fatalist. He believes he will be killed by the war. As they encamp at Washington, D.C., some of the soldiers "thought they would just keep waiting and waiting and never fight again. It was, of course, a dream, a hope, and for many of them, a prayer." But Charley "still believed in the inevitability of battle and most of all believed in the absolute certainty of his own death." This does not mean that he gives up living. For instance, when he learns "four men died of dysentery and disease for every man who died of battle wounds" he stays away from hospitals if he can, because disease was to be found in them.



By the time he is sixteen, Charley has seen a great deal not only of death but of people in pieces. The war is cruel, and it demands of him inhuman behavior. For instance, he learns, "They don't pick up men with belly wounds and you know it.

They'll give me some water and leave me to die." Charley knows that "Stomach wounds were fatal." This meant that the wounded with belly wounds were left where they lay, with only a little water. Casualties taken to field hospitals were men whose lives could be saved. After one battle, he helps stack frozen corpses of men to create a windbreak for a large tent that was serving as shelter for the wounded. The corpses had been among the wounded. Charley shelters himself for awhile in the lee of the wall of the dead.

Experiences such as these take a terrible toll on Charley's soul. Paulsen describes them in biting prose that is remarkably realistic given how the events must seem surreal for those who have not witnessed such horrors. For Charley, there comes a division in his soul. He can trade with an individual Confederate soldier, a farmer like him, but in battle he becomes monstrous, a machine that will kill until it is killed. His charming boyishness withers.

When he is told to kill captured Confederate horses to provide meat for the wounded in a hospital: More meat for the sick, Charley thought, and felt bad for having to kill the horses.

He didn't fret the men at all. They were going to kill him and he didn't mind killing them first. But he hated shooting the horses.

Charley keeps to himself, shuns company for fear of becoming friendly with someone who will be killed as Nelson was killed.

For the novel, this means all other characters are peripheral and undeveloped. They are as Charley sees them—the walking dead.

As far as Charley is concerned, "There was always a forest and always a meadow," and there will always be the sights, sounds, and smells of the dead and dying.

Only for horses does he allow himself any sort of kindly feeling, but even they must die. Thus, at Gettysburg, when he is shot and collapses, he thinks "at last he was right, at last he was done, at last he was dead." This is all grim business; Paulsen keeps an unrelenting focus on how Charley loses all hope in his life. Paulsen explains it as having lived too much in too short a time; Charley's mind has become old with the burden of its memories.



Style

Points of View

The story is told from the third person point of view nearly exclusively from Charley Stoddard's position. Many of the specifics of his travel, daily life, experiences in battle and his leisure are taken from his diary; other incidents are from diaries of others very much like Charley and historical writings of the events. He sees the incompetence in many of his superiors, and we get a good idea of what he thinks of them. He dislikes their actions in many instances, but particularly at the beginning of his army life, he understands that they are little more experienced than he is. They must depend on manuals to direct them and their teachings.

Through Charlie, the reader gets some glimpses of what other soldiers in the same situation as Charley are thinking. He sees Nelson as he was only recently himself, innocent, believing all he is told and very much enthusiastic at the thought of going into battle, certain he will be on the victors' side and anticipating an almost fun atmosphere. The author tells the story with a great deal of accuracy and detail, mostly factual.

Settings

There are four main settings in the story. The beginning and end are set in Charley's hometown of Winona, Minnesota. Very little action happens there, but it is pictured as a quiet, middle-class farming community where everyone is well fed, neatly clothed and living in structures that are adequate, functional and comfortable. At the end of the story, Charley is back home, and after two years, he is broken and unhealthy mentally and physically. He is in the same town, but he becomes somewhat of a misunderstood outcast, living in what is described as "Charley's shack."

This community is starkly contrasted with the small farms in the South, which the reader sees as unkempt, uncomfortable and non-productive. The people in those areas seem to mirror their farms.

The next setting is Fort Snelling. Here Charley is introduced to military camp life. It is hot and boring. The marching and presentation of arms is repetitive. However, the camp and surrounding community seem bright and happy. Charley's memories of his time here are of pretty girls waving flags and handkerchiefs and marches through town with people cheering him on.

Originally called the Battle of Manassas Junction, the Battle of Bull Run is the next setting. The recreation is one of almost total fighting, suffering and death. All of these are graphically described. Two continuing motifs of the book are introduced as the battle begins. The first is a grassy, peaceful meadow, which later in the story becomes a symbol of death to Charley. Battle preparation begins here, and as the story continues and the meadows are described subsequently, they are the sites of the beginnings of



fear. The trees, or tree lines, also appear in each battle. The tree line is the staging area for the enemy's preparation. Taking the enemy situated in the trees is generally the objective of Charley and his fellow soldiers.

After the Battle of Bull Run, the setting moves to a military camp in Washington. Eventually the site of ninety thousand soldiers, the camp grows from a small grouping of men as replacement troops arrive. The scene around the camp is of successful farmers who sympathize with the soldiers from the camp. While it is the site of one brief battle, it is a fierce one, and a new side of Charley is developed as he cries after helping a fellow soldier commit suicide. A detailed picture of the camp is developed as the soldiers turn it from a place of tents into one with log structures with makeshift fire pits and latrines, and even named "streets." As Charley is on guard duty late one night and talks with a Confederate soldier, the reader gets a sense of how close the opposing armies are to each other, within calling distance at many places.

The third battle in which Charley participates takes place near Richmond, Virginia. After a march of nearly twenty miles on a cold day, the troops reach the battleground. Initially it appears as a quiet country lane where the road ends in a "T," but upon turning to the right, the men hear the firing of cannons and guns and soon find themselves at the anticipated meadow looking toward a line of trees on the other side. This time, however, they are attacked by soldiers who are on horseback. The deaths and suffering are the same, however, ending with hand-to-hand combat with bayonets, but Charley knows it as his "third battle." It is after this battle that Charley visits the surgeon's tent. The horrors he must endure continue with the piling of dead, frozen bodies to create a windbreak around the tent for the surgeons.

The soldiers move to the next setting, which is the Battle of Gettysburg. Charley is positioned at the top of a small hill and is surrounded by rock defenses. He is backed by heavy artillery and is able to view the battle almost nonchalantly in its first stages. Here with the protection of the hill and rocks, he is able to stick his head up only briefly to shoot. From the tree line a mile away, the Rebels come closer, getting killed by the thousands as the cannon drop them in neat lines as they attack. As Charley's regiment is deployed to meet the opposing army head on with bayonets extended, Charley gets wounded and passes out while thinking he finally has been killed.

Language

Young students can easily understand the straightforward language of this work. However, the subject matter may not be appropriate for some due to the compelling descriptions of suffering and death during the battles.

When the characters speak, it is often with a dialogue appropriate to the region of their origin or the level of their education. Idiomatic language is mostly centered in the writings of his mother and Charlie himself. One other example is Swenson, who converses much like Charley. The officers' speech is formal and without slang or other intonations, and it is generally limited to brief commands. Nelson's speech is also much



like Charley's, though it carries a sense of reckless innocence. The Rebel on watch that Charley talks with definitely has a southern drawl. He sounds like and is portrayed as an uneducated farm boy.

Structure

There are ten chapters in *Soldier's Heart*. They are completely chronological accounts of the life Charley experiences in the army and just before and after. The chapters are named in a variety of ways, referencing dates, travel experiences, battles, times of rest, life in the camp, the winter season and the area surrounding Washington. There is also a forward, and at the end of the story are author's notes. A map of the era shows where Charley begins his military career and where each battle is fought. This map, placed at the beginning of the book, helps the reader understand distances, specific places, battles and travel routes. The chronological nature of the narrative makes it easy to follow and also adds to the realism of this historical fiction, since the reader experiences Charley's life as Charley does.



Quotes

"I won't be getting into any trouble, Ma,' he said, wrapping some bread and cold potatoes and half a roast chicken in some tow cotton. 'Plus they'll be paying me. I hear they give eleven dollars a month.'" Chapter 1, p. 4

"Well here it is - my chance to be a man. A boy wouldn't go off to earn eleven dollars a month and wear a uniform. Only a man. So I'm going to be a man and do what a man can do." Chapter 1, p. 5

"I know it ain't right,' she wrote in one letter, 'but you must think on coming home now. Just leave the army and walk home before they get you in a battle and shoot you apart..." Chapter 2, p. 11

"Go it boys, get the Rebels!" Chapter 2, p. 13

"Hell, it'll probably be over before we get to Washington,' Swenson said." Chapter 3, p. 19

"*Make it stop now!* Charley thought, or thought he was thinking until he realized he was screaming it: *Make it all stop now!*" Chapter 4, p. 21

"I am not supposed to see this, God. No person is supposed to see this. How can You let this happen?" Chapter 4, p. 25

"There'll be plenty of time for puking later. Get ready. We're going against them again in just a few minutes." Chapter 5, p. 33

"You're just in time,' a private named Nelson told him. 'We're going up to that line of trees and kick the Rebs out.'" Chapter 6, p. 45

"Well, ain't you one to take on airs? I guess I know enough - I know all I'll need to know." Chapter 6, p. 47

"Better hold up there, gamecock - you can't take the whole Rebel army. Besides, they don't want any more of you. Let them go." Chapter 6, p. 51

"Find out what kind of whiskey he's drinking and send a case to *all* the generals." Chapter 7, p. 60

"Here we be, both farmers, talking and trading goods and tomorrow or the next day we got to shoot at each other." Chapter 7, p. 69

"They're going to come at us! They're sending horse against us!' somebody yelled." Chapter 7, p. 77



"Aim for the horses. When you get the command, aim low - hit the horses to break the men." Chapter 7, p. 78

"The doctor looked around, then back, then at the bodies. 'use *them*.' ""The dead?'
""They won't feel it. You' - he pointed a bloody hand at Charley - 'give him help there.
Pile them up to stop the wind from the side of the tent.'" Chapter 8, p. 89



Topics for Discussion

1. Charley is terrified by his first experience of combat. Why does he go back out onto the same meadow to face the same enemy when he is ordered to?
2. Why would Paulsen choose to make a novel out of the real-life experiences of Charley Goddard rather than a biography?
3. Soldier's Heart has some very gruesome scenes. Are these scenes appropriate for a book intended for young adult readers? Why would Paulsen put them in his book?
4. Soldier's Heart has a sad ending. Should young adult books have only happy, uplifting endings? Why would someone write a sad book for young adults?
5. Soldier's Heart was named Booklist's Top of the List winner for Youth Fiction in the magazine's January 1, 1999 issue.

There were many works of fiction for youth published the same year Soldier's Heart was. What qualities does it have that would inspire people to give an award above other works of fiction?

6. The novel is based on records and the letters to home by Charley. Is there any way to sort out the parts of the novel that are biographical from those that are fictional?
7. What does the scene of Charley by the stream, with a picnic meal, and a Confederate gun tell you about what Charley has become? Why is it important that the gun be a Confederate one and not another kind of gun?
8. At what time does Charley become dominated by soldier's heart? How can you tell?
9. Why does Charley stay in the army and not desert as his mother repeatedly asks him to do?
10. Is it sane for Charley to continue to go into battle time after time?



Essay Topics

Discuss the difference between the farms Charley is used to in Minnesota and those he sees from the train upon entering the South.

Discuss what the significance of the meadows and the trees. How do they change during the story in Charley's eyes?

Relate the changes Charley experiences toward the battles as he becomes more experienced in warfare.

Discuss the differences between the soldiers in the camp from New York compared to those from Minnesota.

Discuss the changes in the way the war is fought at the beginning of the war and the way it is fought at Gettysburg.

State two reasons why Charley finds it so difficult to kill horses.

Discuss three forms of research the author might have used to create this story.

How would you define a "soldier's heart"?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Who were the First Minnesota Volunteers? Write a history of their service during the Civil War.
2. What was the First Battle of Bull Run? Who won it? What was its importance?
3. What was the significance of Pickett's Charge at the Battle of Gettysburg?
4. Paulsen says that Charley continued to see action after being seriously wounded at Gettysburg. Why did the army send injured soldiers such as he back into combat during the Civil War?
5. Read *Eastern Sun, Winter Moon*, Paulsen's autobiography about his childhood. Write a book report of it and point out, if you can, elements in the autobiography that may have influenced Paulsen's point of view in *Soldier's Heart*.
6. "There was always a forest and always a meadow." What does this mean? How does it reflect on Civil War battles?

What does it say about how the battles were conducted?

7. Charley is drilled relentlessly while still in Minnesota, and the narrative notes, "The training must work, he thought.

I'm doing all this without meaning to do it." What is the purpose of drilling in the army? What is the process of drilling recruits?

8. Why were there no Confederate soldiers defending their fortifications when Union troops advanced on them after the First Battle of Bull Run?
9. Why did the Confederate army not attack Washington, D.C. after winning the First Battle of Bull Run?
10. What is the difference between posttraumatic stress disorder and survivor's syndrome? How do psychologists classify them?
11. What treatment is presently available for people with post-traumatic stress disorder (soldier's heart)? How would Charley be treated today?



Further Study

Review of *Soldier's Heart*. Booklist (January 1,1999): 782.

Buchholz, Rachel. "My Life's Work: Author." *Boys' Life* (December 1995): 28-30.

Mentions how Paulsen uses his personal experiences in his fiction.

Deveraux, Elizabeth. "Gary Paulsen: A Taste for Adventure and an Obsessive Work Ethic Are This Versatile Writer's Hallmarks." *Publishers Weekly* (March 28, 1994): 70-71. Mentions Paulsen's participation in the Iditarod.

Diehl, Digby. "Author, Author!" *Modern Maturity* (July-August 1995): 12. A profile of Paulsen.

Engelfried, Steven. *School Library Journal* (September 1998): 206. An endorsement of *Soldier's Heart*.

Gale, David. "The Maximum Expression of Being Human." *School Library Journal* (June 1997): 24-29. Commentary with an interview on Paulsen's career.

Mayer, Henry. Review of *Soldier's Heart*.

New York Times Book Review (November 15,1998): 40. Praises *Soldier's Heart*.

Paulsen, Gary. "The Booklist Interview: Gary Paulsen." *Booklist* (January 1,1999): 864.

In an interview with Stephanie Zvirin, Paulsen mentions the importance of reading when he was young. "I was an 'at risk' kid, as they are called now, and a poor student," says Paulsen. About *Soldier's Heart*, he says, "It's truth I'm after.

No part of the Civil War was nice."

———. *Eastern Sun, Winter Moon: An Autobiographical Odyssey*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993. An account of Paulsen's life during World War II and in the Philippines. Its style is as blunt as that of *Soldier's Heart*. There is an analysis of *Eastern Sun, Winter Moon* in volume 8 of *Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults*.

———. "Write What You Are." *Writer's Digest* (July 1994): 42-45. In this interview by Cheryl Bartky, Paulsen talk about experiences that are sources for his books.

Phelan, Carolyn. Review of *Soldier's Heart*.

Booklist Qune 1,1998): 1750. According to Phelan, *Soldier's Heart's* "spare, simple language makes the book accessible; the vivid visual images of brutality and death on the battlefield make it compelling.



Review of *Soldier's Heart*. *Publishers Weekly* (July 20,1998). A very positive review of *Soldier's Heart*.

Roback, Diane. "Paulsen Inks Long-Term Deal with HB." *Publishers Weekly* (February 8, 1993): 10. About Paulsen's relationship with Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Vasilakis, Nancy. Review of *Soldier's Heart*.

Horn Book Magazine (November 1998): 737. About *Soldier's Heart*, Vasilakis says, "The author's extensive research is evident in the richness of the details he provides, but what makes this novel so effective, and places it worlds apart from novels by the likes of G. Clifton Wisler or Patricia Beatty, is the unremitting focus on the trauma caused by war."

Weidt, Maryann N. "The Fortunes of Poverty." *Writer's Digest* (January 1992): 8.

According to Paulsen, the best writing advice is "Learn to live with poverty."

Related Titles

Paulsen says that he wanted to write a biography of Sally Hemings, a slave who may have been Thomas Jefferson's mistress. He could not find enough information on her to write a biography, but during his research, he found a book of interviews with former slaves. This book inspired *Nightjohn* (please see separate entry), which in its turn inspired *Sarney* (please see separate entry). Research for these books inspired his interest in the Civil War, and his further research into the war led him to the historical figure Charley Goddard, who at age fifteen enlisted in the Union Army. The outlook and tone of *Soldier's Heart* is foreshadowed in Paulsen's *The Rifle* (please see separate entry), a history of a beautiful and deadly weapon.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996