
*Primary Source Comprehension:
The Life of a Union Soldier: Daniel Corrigan*

Reporting Category: Virginia and United States History

Topic: Skills; Civil War and Reconstruction

Primary SOLs: VUS.1, VUS.7

Materials: Primary Source stories of Daniel Corrigan; Daniel Corrigan's Compiled Service Record

Directions: Students will read the two primary source documents about Sergeant Daniel Corrigan of the 19th Massachusetts Infantry that trace his life throughout the American Civil War.

Exercise Context: Daniel Corrigan joined the United States Army in August 1861. He enlisted in the 19th Massachusetts Infantry, a regiment that saw action at most of the major battles fought in the Civil War's Eastern Theater. During the war, the regiment lost 161 men killed or mortally wounded in battle and 133 men died of disease.

Daniel Corrigan was an Irish immigrant, as were approximately 10% of the Union soldiers that participated in the war. None of Corrigan's letters or diaries survived but his Compiled Service Record, a monthly record of his service, and writings by his comrades give us a glimpse into his military service.

Exercise:

1. No picture of Daniel Corrigan exists. But what does his volunteer enlistment form tell us about Corrigan's physical traits?

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2. Read the stories about Daniel Corrigan at the battles of Gettysburg and Bristoe Station. What do these stories—snapshots of Corrigan’s life—and his promotion during the war tell us about his conduct on the many battlefields of the Civil War?
3. Using the “Memorandum from Prisoner of War Records” in Corrigan’s Compiled Service Record and the eyewitness account of Corrigan’s return to the 19th Massachusetts Infantry from Confederate prison, how do you think the Civil War physically affected Corrigan when he returned home at the war’s conclusion? Why was Corrigan’s condition the way it was as reported by his comrade?
4. Utilize both primary sources to write a 1-2 page memoir of Corrigan’s Civil War service as if you were him. Use the dates when he was present in his compiled service record to determine which battles Corrigan fought in. Some questions you might want to consider answering are: Where was he captured, and what might his experience have been in a Confederate prison? As an Irish immigrant, why did he enlist in the Union Army? What was daily life like for Corrigan in the army? It is encouraged to use outside sources to help tell the story of a common Union soldier in the Civil War such as Daniel Corrigan.