

Tennesseans in the Civil War

High School

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Sam Davis: Boy Hero of the Confederacy

Standard: 8.79

Essential Question: Who was Sam Davis and what part did he play in the Confederacy during the Civil War?

Sam Davis was born October 6, 1842 in Rutherford County Tennessee. He was one of 12 children and the oldest son of Charles Lewis and Jane Simmons Davis. Charles Lewis, Sam's father, was a wealthy businessman and plantation owner. He married Margaret Saunders and they had four children together. Margaret passed away in the late 1840's. Charles then married Jane Simmons and they had eight more children. Charles Lewis owned 51 slaves and became a prominent businessman selling cotton and other goods.

At the age of 18, Sam attended his first year at the Western Military Institute in Nashville, TN. In 1861, he left the military institute and joined the 1st Tennessee Infantry Regiment. Sam took part in the Shenandoah Valley Campaign and the Battle of Shiloh. He was wounded in the Battle of Perryville. After recovering from injuries he received in the Battle of Perryville, he joined the Coleman Scouts.

The Coleman Scouts were a courier service in which young, unmarried men with good horsemanship skills and knowledge of the land were used to exchange information. They exchanged information about the movement of Union Soldiers, as well as personal information between the generals. Sam's half-brother John was also a part of the Coleman Scouts and is known as one of the men who helped to establish the unit. Henry Shaw also known as E. Coleman led the scouts. Shaw was captured around the same time as Davis, but later escaped.

In November 1863, Sam Davis was heading south to deliver papers to army headquarters. However, before he could reach his destination Union Soldiers captured him outside of Pulaski, Tennessee. He was taken to Pulaski to General Dodge and was found carrying information about the fortifications and movements of Union troops. There was also a sealed letter in his boot from E. Coleman to General Bragg. Because of the documents found on Davis, he was charged with being a courier of mails and as a spy.

General Dodge felt as if the information contained within the papers could only come from someone that was an informant behind the Union lines. Dodge tried to convince Davis to give up his informant, but he would not. He offered Davis his freedom, a horse and his firearms in return for the name, again Davis refused. Dodge then assembled a Federal Court Martial to try him. They convicted Davis of both spying and being a courier.

While in the jail awaiting his hanging, he wrote goodbye letters to both his mother and father. He left information about where to obtain the items he was leaving for them

when they came for his body. Davis spent the next day and night before his hanging with the Chaplain James Young. Davis requested that the chaplain sing “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand” with him before he was hanged. It was his mother’s favorite hymn.

The next morning he was taken to the gallows. Davis was made to ride atop of his own coffin to the spot where he would be hanged. For the final time, General Dodge offered his freedom in exchange for information on the informant. Davis firmly stated that “If I had a thousand lives to live, I would give them all rather than betray a friend or my country.” On November 27, 1863 Sam Davis was hanged at the age of 21.

Several weeks passed before his family found out that a Confederate spy had been hanged. They sent their neighbor John Kennedy and their son John to Pulaski to identify what they hoped would not be Davis’ body. Upon arriving in Pulaski, Kennedy and John were taken to the grave where the body was exhumed and was unfortunately identified as Sam Davis. His body was taken back to Smyrna for a proper burial. Davis’ family first buried him near the creek. After the war, his body was moved closer to the house in a memorial garden. Although Sam Davis had a short life, the impact of his actions would not be forgotten. Davis story is said to be a story of valor told by Union and Confederate soldiers alike. In the years following the Civil War, white southerners romanticized the causes and outcomes of the war. It was referred to as the “Lost Cause.” Davis’ story was also romanticized and he was considered to be a hero of the “Lost Cause” During this era, numerous memorials were built to honor him. In 1915, a statue of Sam Davis, Boy Hero of the Confederacy was placed on the grounds of the Tennessee State Capitol.

Sources: “On Jordan's Stormy Banks I Stand: The Story of Sam Davis.” *Tennessee Division, SCV*. Sons of Confederate Veterans, n.d. Web. 21 July 2014. <<http://www.tennessee-scv.org/samdavis.html>>

“Sam Davis Hero of the Confederacy.” *Sam Davis Confederate Hero*. Confederate Legion. Web. 21 July 2014. <http://www.confederatelegion.com/Sam_Davis.html>

The Historic Sam Davis Home and Plantation. Sam Davis Memorial Association, n.d. Web. 21 July 2014. <<http://samdavishome.org/history.php>>

Sam Watkins

Standards: 5.15, 8.79

Essential Question: What Role did Sam Watkins and Company H of the First Tennessee Infantry play in the Civil War?

Samuel Rush “Sam” Watkins was born June 26, 1839, in Mount Pleasant (Maury County), Tennessee. Sam Watkins was born into a planter class family. Sam’s father Frederick owned more than 100 slaves on two plantations in Maury County. The Watkins family was the 3rd wealthiest family in Maury County.

Sam Watkins enrolled in Jackson College in Columbia, Tennessee, but at the age of 21 enlisted in the Confederate Army after Tennessee seceded from the Union in 1861. Watkins originally enlisted in the “Bigby Greys” of the 3rd Tennessee Infantry in Mount Pleasant. However, in the spring of 1861, Watkins transferred to the “Maury Greys” of Company H of the First Tennessee Infantry. Sam Watkins served as part of Company H throughout the duration of the Civil War. Company H was involved in many of the Civil Wars most important battles including: Shiloh, Corinth, Murfreesboro (Stones River), Chickamauga, Missionary Ridge (Chattanooga), Atlanta, Franklin, and Nashville. Sam Watkins was one of only seven of the original 120 soldiers enlisted in Company H still part of the unit when General Joseph E. Johnston’s Army of Tennessee surrendered to General William Tecumseh Sherman in North Carolina in April, 1865.

Sam Watkins is best known for his memoir *Company Aytch: Or, a Side Show of the Big Show*. Written in 1882, *Company Aytch* is a personal narrative following Watkins’s involvement in Company H throughout the Civil War. Some historians question the accuracy of some accounts within the book because it was written nearly 20 years after the Civil War. Despite these questions, *Company Aytch* has remained one of the best primary sources about the common soldier’s Civil War experience. Watkins’ memoir gained new fame when Ken Burns used sections from it in his acclaimed series *The Civil War*.

Source: “Sam Watkins.” *Chickamauga and Chattanooga National Military Park*. National Park Service, n.d. Web. 21 July 2014.
<<http://www.nps.gov/chch/historyculture/sam-watkins.htm>>

Andrew Johnson

Standards: 5.15, 5.22

Essential Questions: What role did Andrew Johnson play during the Civil War? What factors led to Johnson's impeachment?

Andrew Johnson was born on December 29, 1808 in Raleigh, North Carolina. Johnson's father was a porter at an inn and his mother worked as a laundress and seamstress. Johnson family could not afford to send him to school. Instead he was apprenticed to a tailor, but ran away. Johnson moved to Greeneville, TN in 1826 where he opened a tailor shop and married. His wife, Eliza McCardle Johnson, tutored him in math, reading and writing. Johnson was eventually successful enough to purchase property and slaves who worked as servants in the Johnson home. Johnson began his political career in 1829 as an alderman. In the 1830's Johnson was elected to the Tennessee legislature where he served several terms. Johnson was elected to the House of Representatives in 1843. As a politician, Johnson always favored the poor over the rich and wanted to give federal lands in the west to settlers. However, Johnson also believed that the Constitution guaranteed the right to own slaves. Johnson became governor of Tennessee in 1853 and left the governorship in 1857 to become a Senator. When the secession crisis broke out in 1860, Johnson traveled across the state urging Tennesseans to remain loyal to the Union. Even after Tennessee seceded in June, 1861, Johnson refused to give up his seat in the Senate. He was the only Southern Democrat who did not resign.

In 1862 Lincoln appointed Johnson military governor of Tennessee. As governor, Johnson tried to restore federal authority in Tennessee. In 1864 Lincoln selected Johnson as his vice-president because he was both a Southerner and a unionist. Following Lincoln's assassination on April 15, 1865, Johnson was sworn in as the nation's 17th president.

Johnson faced the difficult task of reconstructing the nation in the wake of the Civil War and he soon clashed with Congress over control of Reconstruction. Radical Republicans wanted to punish the South for the war. They believed that Johnson was too friendly towards the South, in too much of a hurry to reincorporate the former Confederates back into the union, and too unwilling to give civil rights to African Americans. When Johnson vetoed the Freedman's Bureau and the Civil Rights bill, Congress overrode his vetoes. To further limit the president's power, Congress passed the Tenure of Office act which prohibited the president from removing government officials. When Johnson removed Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from office in violation of the Tenure of Office Act, the House voted to impeach Johnson in February 1868. Johnson was the first U.S. President to be impeached; however, he was acquitted and his presidency spared by a single vote in the Senate. Several of the more moderate Republicans voted not guilty because they did not think a president should be impeached for political disagreements with Congress. Johnson served out the remainder of his term, but was not nominated for re-election in 1870.

Following his one- term as president, Johnson returned to Greeneville. In 1874, he became the first former President of the United States to win a seat in the United States Senate. However, four months after taking his seat in the Senate, Johnson suffered a stroke and died on July 31, 1875. He was buried wrapped in an American flag with his head resting on a copy of the Constitution.

Source: Appleby, Joyce et al. *The American Journey*. New York: Glencoe-McGraw Hill, 2002. Print.

History.com Staff. "Andrew Johnson." History.com. A&E Networks, n.d. Web. 20, June 2016.<
<http://www.history.com/topics/us-presidents/andrew-johnson>>

Nathan Bedford Forrest

Essential Question: What role did Nathan Bedford Forrest play in the Civil War?

Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest proved such a menace to Federal forces throughout the Civil War that Union General William T. Sherman stated that it would be wise to “follow Forrest to the death, if it cost 10,000 lives and breaks the Treasury.”¹ While Sherman referred to Forrest as “the very devil,” another word that is consistently used to describe the military career of Nathan Bedford Forrest is “genius.” One historian has written, “Military observers at the time and later concluded that Forrest was a natural military genius.”² Even Sherman, sworn enemy of Forrest, admitted that the Confederate General possessed a “genius for strategy that was original and to me, incomprehensible.”³ During the war, Forrest was renowned for his daring and his courage. He had twenty-nine horses shot out from under him and was himself wounded several times. Nevertheless, he won successes against Union armies, usually larger than his own, in battle after battle.

Forrest was born the eldest of eleven children to a blacksmith named William Forrest and Mariam Beck in Marshall County, Tennessee on July 13, 1821. After the death of his father and up to his mother’s remarriage, Forrest supported the family himself. Afterward, he went to Texas, returned to Tennessee, and married Mary Montgomery in 1845. In 1857, Forrest made a fortune in Memphis selling land and slaves. He was running a profitable plantation when the war broke out in 1861.⁴

When Tennessee voted to leave the Union that June, Forrest sided with his home state. A skilled horseman, Forrest enlisted as a private in a cavalry regiment. As he was well-known in Memphis, a handful of his friends petitioned Tennessee Governor Isham Harris to commission Forrest as an officer. Forrest was quickly made a colonel and permitted to form his own cavalry regiment.

Forrest quickly developed a fast-paced, aggressive style of fighting battles that would become his trademark. He aimed to keep Union forces in one place with a frontal assault and then rapidly attack both sides at once. Forrest himself led the charges and engaged in hand-to-hand combat on several occasions. When Union forces under Ulysses S. Grant besieged Fort Donelson on the Cumberland River, Forrest grew impatient with his commanding officers who

¹ *O.R.*, Ser. I, Vol. 39, pt. II, p. 121.

² Rodney P. Carlisle, “Forrest, Nathan Bedford,” from *American National Biography*, Vol. 8 (New York: Oxford University Press), 1999, 264.

³ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 262.

had decided to surrender. Disgusted with their admission of defeat, Forrest led his regiment on a late-night breakout through enemy lines. Days later, when Nashville surrendered, Forrest secured the Confederate rear guard as the army retreated into Mississippi.⁵

Forrest played an important role in the Battle of Shiloh. He led a number of cavalry charges to slow down the advancing Union troops on the second day of battle. Following Shiloh, Forrest remained in west Tennessee to attack Grant's supply lines. After the Battle of Chickamauga, Forrest urged Bragg to attack the Union before they could reach Chattanooga. His advice was ignored and Forrest obtained an independent command in west Tennessee.⁶

The most controversial events of Forrest's military career occurred on April 1864 when Forrest attacked Fort Pillow outside of Memphis. The fort was garrisoned by African American soldiers and Tennessee unionists. Approximately half of the 600 men in the fort were killed. Many of these men were killed as they attempted to surrender. 67% of the dead were members of the U.S. Colored Troops⁷. Whether Forrest ordered the killings or lost control of his men remains unclear. The Fort Pillow Massacre was widely publicized in the North.

Forrest took part in a number of other major battles including the Battle of Franklin on November 30, 1864. Following the Confederate defeat at Nashville, Forrest once again slowed down the Union advance so that the Confederates could retreat. Forrest ultimately surrendered in May of 1865.⁸ Following the war, Forrest once again gained fame as the first Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan. Forrest traveled throughout the South promoting the Klan along with his railroad ventures. Forrest returned to Memphis where he died on October 29, 1877.

⁵ Derek W. Frisby, "Forrest, Nathan Bedford," *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, Vol. 2, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2000), 720.

⁶ "Nathan Bedford Forrest." *Tennessee Encyclopedia and History and Culture* 1st edition. 1998. Print, 321.

⁷ Ibid, 321.

⁸ Ibid, 321.

David Farragut

Essential Question: What role did David Farragut play in the Civil War?

On July 26, 1866, David Glasgow Farragut was named the first full admiral in American history. He was honored for a career in the navy that spanned over fifty years. One historian wrote that Farragut was similar to Ulysses S. Grant in that “he possessed great force of character rather than a subtle intellect.”⁹ It was for his service during the Civil War, however, that Farragut earned his most recognition and praise.

David Glasgow Farragut was born James Glasgow Farragut in Campbell’s Station, Tennessee, an area near Knoxville, on July 5, 1801. After his birth, he was taken to New Orleans, where he was adopted by Commodore David Porter. The story goes that Porter’s elderly father, himself once a master sailor in the U.S. Navy under George Washington, was fishing and collapsed with sunstroke. Farragut’s father found him and took him to the Farragut home, where the family cared for the dying Porter until the end. In order to repay the tenderness of the Farragut family, Commodore Porter adopted young James and became his guardian.

James began service in the navy with his new father when he was only nine years old. In the War of 1812, James served with Porter in a sea battle with two British ships off the coast of Chile. A gunner on their ship, the *Essex*, was struck by a cannonball and fell against the young Farragut, pushing him backward through an open hatch. Farragut struck his head and received the only wound he would ever receive during his naval career. In recognition of the battle, he changed his name to David, in honor of his adopted father.¹⁰

Afterward, David Farragut’s journeys took him to Europe and the Gulf of Mexico. During the Mexican War, he served as captain of the sloop *Saratoga*. At the outbreak of the Civil War, Farragut awaited orders in Norfolk, Virginia. As a southerner, he had to decide whether to fight for the land of his birth or for the government he flourished under. In the end, Farragut believed President Abraham Lincoln was justified in his military actions against the southern rebels. Therefore, Farragut decided to remain a U.S. naval officer. When heckled by southern leaders who tried to get him to renege and join the Confederacy, Farragut responded, “Mind what I tell you: You fellows will catch the devil before you get through with this business.”¹¹ After a short time at desk duty, Farragut was assigned to oversee the West Gulf Blockade Squadron and their operations in the Gulf of Mexico.¹²

⁹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 419.

¹⁰ Michael S. Davis, “Farragut, David Glasgow,” *Encyclopedia of the American Civil War*, Vol. 2, ed. David S. Heidler and Jeanne T. Heidler (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2000), 683.

¹¹ David D. Porter, “The Opening of the Lower Mississippi,” *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, vol. II, (New York: The Century Co., 1887), PDF book, 26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 684.

During the spring of 1862, Farragut received orders which laid out a plan for his fleet to travel up the Mississippi River and aid Union armies in their attempt to control the river and cut the Confederacy in half. One of the keys to the success of the operation was for Farragut to capture the port of New Orleans.

The battle for the largest city in the South began in April, 1862. Against heavy resistance, Farragut steamed his ships up the river, taking cannon fire from all sides. Confederates pushed flaming rafts into the river to set Union ships ablaze. The rebels fired from incomplete ironclads still moored to their docks.¹³ None of this stopped Farragut and his fleet. They passed the river defenses, defeated them from the north, and sailed triumphantly into the city.

With New Orleans in Union hands, Farragut took his fleet up and won the river capturing cities and frustrating Confederates. The only city he failed to capture was Vicksburg, along the final Confederate stronghold on the Mississippi. His accomplishments on the Mississippi earned Farragut a promotion to the rank of rear admiral. In March 1863, Farragut again sailed for Vicksburg to blockade the town. With the help of Grant's forces on the other side of the fortress, the town fell on July 4.

Farragut's next mission consisted of shutting down Confederate blockade runners. To do this, Farragut had to capture rebel ports that harbored such runners. The first harbor targeted was Mobile. Attempting to mimic his success in New Orleans, Farragut tried to run the gauntlet of Mobile's defenses. Instead of cruising through, however, the Union navy encountered Confederate water mines, called torpedoes. Several Union ships were lost due to the mines, and with the whole operation in chaos, Farragut delivered order for which he is remembered. He strapped himself to the rigging of his flagship, the *Hartford*, and shouted the memorable phrase, "Damn the torpedoes. Full steam ahead." His ships finally passed through, and Mobile surrendered. After the capture of Mobile, Farragut was promoted to vice admiral.¹⁴

In 1865, Farragut was one of the first Union officers to enter Richmond after its fall. After the war, Farragut settled in New York, where the government awarded him \$50,000 to buy a home. To commemorate his lifelong service to the navy, he was given the rank of full admiral in 1866. He was the first American to hold such rank. The newly-minted full admiral went on a European goodwill tour. In 1870, while inspecting a naval yard in New Hampshire, Farragut died after suffering a heart attack.

¹³ McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 419-20.

¹⁴ Davis, "Farragut, David Glasgow," 684.

Isham Harris

Essential Questions: What role did Isham Harris play during the Civil War?

Isham Harris was born on February 10, 1818 in Franklin County, Tennessee. Harris' father was a farmer who owned a small number of slaves. In 1832, Harris moved to Paris, Tennessee and worked as a clerk. He then moved to Tippah County, Mississippi, where he studied law at night. Harris later returned to Paris and in 1841 was admitted to the Tennessee bar. Harris was elected to the Tennessee State Senate in 1847 and the U.S. House of Representatives in 1848. Harris was reelected to the House in 1850, but declined the office to practice law in Memphis. Harris was elected governor in 1857 and reelected in 1859 and 1861.

Harris began to urge Tennessee to secede following Lincoln's election in 1860, but a secession vote in February of 1861 failed. Following the attack on Fort Sumter in April, 1861, Lincoln called for 75,000 troops, Harris responded by saying that "Tennessee will not furnish a single man for purposes of coercion but 50,000 if necessary for the defense of our rights and those of our Southern brothers." Harris pushed for a second vote on secession in June, 1861. Middle and West Tennessee supported secession while East Tennessee remained loyal to the Union. As governor, Harris raised one hundred thousand troops for the Confederacy. Forced to flee when Nashville was captured by Union forces in 1862, Harris spent the rest of the war as an aide-de-camp on the staffs of Albert S. Johnston, Braxton Bragg, John B. Hood, Joseph E. Johnston, and P. G. T. Beauregard. Johnston died in Harris' arms during the Battle of Shiloh in 1862. As a headquarters officer, Harris participated in the many important battles in Tennessee including the Confederate disasters at Franklin and Nashville. After the Confederate surrender, Harris fled to Mexico and England before returning to Memphis in 1867 to resume his law practice and political career.

In 1877 Harris was elected to the U.S. Senate; and reelected in 1883, 1889, and 1895. As a United State Senator, Harris supported low tariffs, states rights, strict constitutional construction, limited government and white supremacy. Harris was also deeply involved with the controversy over the currency system. In 1893 Harris led "silver" Democrats in opposing President Cleveland's demand to repeal the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Harris joined William Jennings Bryan campaign for president in 1896. Harris poor health was aggravated by Jennings loss, and he died in Washington D.C on July 8, 1897. His body was returned to Memphis for burial at Elmwood Cemetery.

Source: Schlup, Leonard. "Isham Harris." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. Tennessee Historical Society. 2018. Web. 5 June 2019.

William Driver

Essential Questions: What role did William Driver play during the Civil War?

William Driver was born on March 17, 1803, in Salem, Massachusetts. At age thirteen Driver ran away from home to begin a career at sea. When Driver became a captain, his mother and the young women of Salem sewed a large American flag that he flew aboard his ship the Old Glory. Thus, the American flag acquired the nickname of "Old Glory." As a captain, Driver helped sixty-five descendants of the Bounty mutineers to return to Pitcairn Island.

After his wife's death, Driver moved his family to Nashville where two of his brothers lived. He became a salesman and was active in Christ Episcopal Church. At holidays, Driver displayed "Old Glory" by stringing a rope from an upstairs window in his house to a tree across the street.

Driver remained loyal to the Union during the Civil War and sewed "Old Glory" into a quilt to protect it after Tennessee seceded. When Union troops captured Nashville in 1862, Driver gave them the flag and it was flown over the State Capitol for a short period. Today, "Old Glory" is displayed at the Smithsonian Museum of American History in Washington, D.C.

Source: Paine, Ophelia. "William Driver." *Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture*. Tennessee Historical Society. 2018. Web. 5 June 2019.