

## *Soldier's Heart* by Gary Paulsen

**Subject:** United States—History—Civil War, 1861-1865

**Award:** Best Books for Young Adults

**Book Lists:** Gifted, Middle School, North America, Reluctant Readers

**Props:** Union cap



It's June of 1861 and Charley Goddard has heard that there was going to be a shooting war. The rebels had violated the law and fired on Fort Sumter. It seems they were itchin' for a fight. Charley knew the Union was right, and he knew he didn't want to miss the opportunity to let those rebels know it. Charley had heard the drums and songs and slogans. He had seen the girls faint at the meetings that were filled with such noise and hullabaloo that it was better than a circus. Course Charley'd never seen a circus. At the age of 15, Charley had never seen anything—but Winona, Minnesota. But Charley had a plan.

Minnesota was forming a volunteer regiment to go off and fight. Although Charley was younger than the minimum recruiting age, he wasn't any boy. He worked as a man worked in the fields all of the day and into night, and looked like a man, standing tall. He didn't make a beard yet, but his voice had dropped enough so he could talk with men. He was going to sign up to fight as a man. Charley figured he'd just take him a walk, say goodbye to his Mom and just walk away from his home town, until he was at Fort Snelling where no one knew him. He would lie about his age, sign up, get him a musket, a uniform, and go see what a war was like.

At Fort Snelling, the Colonel of the regiment read a list of things he couldn't do—desert his post, traffic with the enemy, steal from his fellow soldiers, act immoral or without decency—and then Charley signed his name, told them he was eighteen and he was a soldier. (*Put on Union Cap*) Charley was ready for an adventure. But at

first, he was pretty disappointed. There wasn't much of a war. There was a lot of playacting and a lot of drills in the hot sun. But no war, until Charley traveled to Virginia and the battle at Bull Run.

There was no more playacting, no drills, just death everywhere. Bullets flew past him with evil little snaps and snickers as they cut the air. Next to Charley, 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 plowing into the ground. He heard the bullets hitting the men—little thunkslaps—and saw the men falling. Some of them screamed as they fell. Most were silent. Many were dead before they hit the ground. Many were torn apart, hit ten or twelve or more times before they had time to drop. This wasn't an adventure. Charley knew he had made a mistake. He shouldn't be there. But it was too late, he couldn't go back. Charley was a soldier now. (*Take off cap*)

Charley Goddard really existed and every event in this book is factual. What he and his friends will see and be forced to do is so horrific and devastating that some of them will not be able to tolerate it. Some of them will come through combat unscathed; most will not, because war is always, in all ways, appalling. In the Civil War, soldiers who came back from a battle somehow disturbed, were said to have a "soldier's heart." Charley will survive. By the end of the book he will be 19, a man. (*Hold up book*) *Soldier's Heart* by Gary Paulsen. See what Charley saw, feel what he felt, learn what it means to have a "soldier's heart."