

War

GRADE 11



Confederate boy, age 14, lies dead outside bomb proof in trenches of Fort Mahone.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, LC-B8184-318

“Foot to foot, body to body and man to man, they struggled, pushed and strived and killed. Each had rather die than yield. The mass of wounded and heaps of dead entangled the feet of the contestants, and, underneath the trampling mass, wounded men who could no longer stand, struggled, fought, shouted and killed—hatless, coatless, drowned in sweat, black with powder, red with blood, stifling in the horrid heat, parched with smoke and blind with dust, with fiendish yells and strange oaths they blindly plied the work of slaughter.”

— The Civil War’s Common Soldier,
National Park Civil War Series,
James I. Robertson, Jr., *Eastern National*, 1994.



Teacher's Note: Land Advantages

Have the students read *How a Young Girl Saved the Day for a General* and answer the questions.

How a Young Girl Saved the Day for a General

GRADE 11

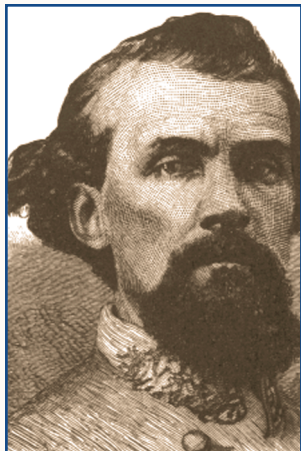
Do you ever feel like you can't do anything really important or make a difference in the world because you're too young? Do you ever feel that there's nothing you could possibly teach an older person? Well, if so, don't underestimate yourself; you have a lot to offer! You just have to believe in yourself and be prepared to help when an opportunity arises. You're never too young to change the world!

Colonel Abel D. Streight of the 51st Indiana regiment was in charge of carrying out what was referred to as *the Great Plan*. It certainly was one of the most daring plots of the war. The mission was to destroy a railroad in Rome, Georgia that was essential to the Confederacy's war efforts. Getting to the town would be a problem for two reasons: First, the men would have to travel through Tennessee, Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia, all of which were enemy territory, before reaching Rome. Second, the land to be crossed was rugged, mountainous, and full of rivers. They would have to use mules instead of horses, because horses couldn't travel quickly over uneven land and were more particular about what they ate. Despite the fact that the journey was rough and dangerous, Streight reminded his men of the glory that would be theirs if they destroyed this vital supply line.

Only days after Streight's Independent Provisional Brigade Designed for Special Secret Service (composed of mostly infantrymen and two companies of cavalrymen) began its journey, Confederate General Braxton Bragg was notified that a large group of Union troops was headed in his direction. Bragg had no idea where they were headed or what they planned to achieve, but he sent General Nathan Bedford Forrest and his men to intercept the Union soldiers. By the time Streight had reached Alabama, he was certain that his *lightning brigade* was moving so fast that it would be far ahead of any Confederate troops that might be pursuing it. By this time, Forrest had realized where Streight and his men were headed and for what purpose. He and his small force of cavalrymen rode around the clock to stop Streight and his men.

On April 29, Streight's men were setting up camp at the foot of the pass that would lead them to the top of Sand Mountain. They were unaware that Forrest's men were only four miles behind them. When Streight discovered that Forrest was closing in on him, he devised a plan to ambush the Confederates by hiding artillery pieces behind bushes at the top of Sand Mountain. The plan didn't work as well as Streight had hoped, and the two forces battled for a few days, each determined to reach the railroad first in this race for time. While fighting hand-to-hand on Hog Mountain, Forrest had three horses shot out from under him in a matter of hours. Streight continued to create ambushes, burn bridges, and block trails, yet Forrest and his cavalrymen always managed to make up for their losses.

In a last ditch effort to shake Forrest off his trail, Streight decided to burn the only bridge over Black Creek. After pouring over his maps, he knew that Forrest would have to search for miles to find a safe place to cross the creek and by then, Streight and his men would be well in the lead. His clever plan might have proved successful if Forrest hadn't run into Emma Sansom, a sixteen-year-old girl who lived near the creek and knew the layout of the land well. She was familiar with a hidden trail that led to a section of the creek where the water was low enough to cross safely. Forrest asked for her help, and as Emma was mounting his horse, her mother came running up and frantically demanded to know where she was going. Forrest assured her, answering, "She is going to show me a ford where I can get my men over in time



General Forrest from *Battles and Leaders*.

to catch those Yankees before they get to Rome. Don't be uneasy; I will bring her back safe." Emma later wrote, "We rode out into a field through which ran a branch or small ravine and along which there was a thick undergrowth that protected us for a while from being seen by the Yankees at the bridge or on the other side of the creek. When we got close to the creek, I said, 'General Forrest, I think we had better get off the horse.'" Forrest did as she asked and followed Emma through the brush on foot. As they were being fired upon by the Union troops, Emma showed Forrest where his men, horses, and artillery pieces could safely cross Black Creek. Before she turned towards home, Forrest asked her name and requested a lock of her hair.

Thanks to Emma, Forrest and his men only lost an hour or two instead of the day or two that Streight had been counting on.

Forrest knew that Streight's men outnumbered his own by over two-to-one, so a head-on collision at Rome would certainly be a Union victory. He remembered that in the Bible, Joshua was terribly outnumbered at the Battle of Jericho, but he tricked his enemy into believing that he was in command of a great force. Joshua did this by ordering his men to constantly move around while carrying lights at night, so it appeared that there were many soldiers outside the city. Forrest decided to try a similar plan. When he approached Streight's force, his men pulled a few *Jericho maneuvers*, and Streight surrendered immediately to a body of men that was less than half his size!

Forrest, having saved the Western & Atlantic Railroad, received the gratitude of the Confederate Congress. Emma Sansom, the only woman ever known to ride with Forrest, was honored as well. Emma cherished a quick note that Forrest had left for her on the day she assisted him, which happens to be the only remaining piece of writing by Forrest from the Civil War. The note read: *Hed Quartes in Saddle. May 2 1863. My highest Regards to miss Ema Sanson, for her Gallant conduct while my force was Skirmishing with the Federals across Black Creek near Gadsden alabama NB Forrest, Brig Genl comding N. ala-*

Amazing Women of the Civil War: Fascinating True Stories of Women Who Made a Difference... Webb Garrison, Rutledge Hill Press, Nashville, Tennessee, 1999.

Please answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper:

- 1.** In what way did land pose problems throughout this journey?
- 2.** How did Streight attempt to use Black Creek and the surrounding land to his advantage?
- 3.** Why did Forrest take the advice of a young girl, possibly at a risk to his troops, without question?
- 4.** How was Emma's knowledge of the land and the creek crucial to Forrest's victory?

