

# No Longer Whole – Civil War Amputees

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<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>TEACHER</b>	<b>GRADE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
American Studies Unit: Civil War Lesson: The emotional toll of amputation on Civil War Soldiers	NMCWM	04/08	Drafted: 4/24/2020

## **TIME REQUIRED**

30/45 Minutes

## **OVERVIEW**

During the Civil War era, those who had physical disfigurements were often shunned. Consequently, soldiers who had endured amputations suffered from great emotional and psychological distress. The term “invalid” had a connotation that the person was incomplete and not valid. For some, amputation served as a kind of double loss – one of limb, the other of manhood. How could one till fields or perform industrial work with a missing arm or leg? Who would willingly marry a man who was less than whole when so many able-bodied men were readily available? Others, however, saw the loss of a limb as something decidedly different - an amputation could serve as a means to illustrate personal sacrifices for the war.

One such amputee was 22 year old Peleg Bradford, Jr. who served in the 1<sup>st</sup> Main heavy artillery. A gunshot wound to the knee on June 17, 1864 necessitated the amputation of his right leg. He recovered in a Washington D.C. hospital until the end of the war. His emotional distress following the loss of his leg is apparent in his letters to his family and sweetheart because he felt he was no longer a whole man. Fortunately for Peleg, upon returning home he found strength in the acceptance of his family. He married his sweetheart Cynthia and began a family business. Peleg raised eight children and ran his own sawmill until his death in 1918.

This activity is designed to help students understand the emotional impact of amputations on soldiers through the letters and quotes of Civil War soldiers.

PHASES	4 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
CURRICULAR STANDARDS	SS.400.50.03.c Analyze regional differences in the Civil War and its effects on people in Maryland.	<p>SS.AS1.80.01 Identify and explain the impact of key events &amp; figures of the Civil War.</p> <p>SS.AS1.80.05 Explain how the Civil War caused technological change and medical advancements in America.</p> <p>SS.DL.10.01 Evaluate a variety of sources by identifying and defining the type, origin and authority of a source, examining the historical context and assessing the corroborative value of a source.</p> <p>SS.DL.20.01 Communicate and critique conclusions by constructing well organized arguments containing multipart theses supported by a variety of sources, utilizing historical reasoning skills and addressing opposing points of view/counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.</p>
OBJECTIVE(S)	Students will be able to understand the emotional toll of amputations on soldiers during the Civil War.	Students will be able to understand the emotional toll of amputations on soldiers during the Civil War and draw parallels to today.
INFORMATION REQUIRED	Amputation Peleg Bradford, Jr.	Amputation Disability Peleg Bradford, Jr.
ACTIVITY	<b>Engage:</b> What do you think were the most common emotions felt by a Civil War soldier who had an amputation?	<b>Engage:</b> What do you think were the most common emotions felt by a Civil War soldier who had an amputation?

**PHASES**

**4<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**

**8<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**

**Explore: Appendix A.** Students will read an excerpt from Peleg Bradford’s letter and a poem written by a Civil War soldier.

**Explain:** What are some of the emotions felt by both soldiers? Why do you think some soldiers would fear rejection by those at home following an amputation? Do you think some soldiers would feel proud to have lost a limb in battle? Why or why not?

**Elaborate:** Imagine you are a Civil War soldier who has lost a limb. Write a letter to a loved one expressing your experiences and how you feel about it.

**Explore: Appendix B.** Students will read excerpts from Peleg Bradford’s letters and quotes by other soldiers who experienced amputations.

**Explain:** Now imagine you have lost a limb in battle during the Civil War. Write a letter to a loved one or friend about your experiences, feelings, and hopes and fears for the future.

**Elaborate:** How has the view of disability changed from the Civil War to today? Are there similarities? Do you think amputees today face the same challenges as Civil War soldiers?

**EVALUATION/  
CLOSING**

How did amputations impact soldiers emotionally during the Civil War? What are some of the ways they viewed their disability? How do you think it compares to those who experience amputations today?

What were some of the emotional and psychological impacts on soldiers who experienced amputations during the Civil War? What are some of the ways they viewed their disability? How does this compare and contrast to soldiers who undergo amputations during more recent conflicts like in Vietnam and Iraq?

**REQUIREMENTS**

- This can be adapted to students needs as necessary.

**MATERIALS**

- Worksheets attached

**NOTES**

This lesson can be done digitally in Microsoft Word or Google Docs. This can be modified so that students can use creative writing techniques or answer and meet certain requirements.

## Appendix A – Explore (Primary Sources)

Columbian Hospital  
Washington D.C.  
August 1, 1864

Dear Friend

I take my pen in hand to answer your kind letter which I received some time ago ... My leg is getting along first rate. It is almost healed up. I have got so that I can get out of bed and stand up on one leg. It was fun to see me the other day when I was trying to walk on crutches and liked to fell flat on the floor, and I have not tried it since ... I will hardly dare to be seen when I get home with only one leg, but never mind, I lost it in a good cause.

I will now close my letter, so good bye for this time. You must write me often if I don't to you.

From an ever true friend,

Peleg Bradford

“I offered her my other hand

Uninjured by the fight;

‘Twas all that I had left.

‘Without two hands,’ she made reply,

‘You cannot handsome be.’

-Poem by Thomas A. Perrine after his sweetheart rejected him following amputation.

## Appendix B – Explore (Primary Sources)

Columbian Hospital  
Washington D.C.  
August 1, 1864

Dear Friend

I take my pen in hand to answer your kind letter which I received some time ago. I am getting along first rate and I hope these few lines will find you in good health. My leg is getting along first rate. It is almost healed up. I have got so that I can get out of bed and stand up on one leg. It was fun to see me the other day when I was trying to walk on crutches and liked to fell flat on the floor, and I have not tried it since.

It is very warm here now. It is enough to kill a man to have to lie a bed as long as I have in this hot weather. I will hardly dare to be seen when I get home with only one leg, but never mind, I lost it in a good cause.

You must put up with short letters for awhile until I get to write longer ones, and when I get home, we will not have to write. I will now close my letter, so good bye for this time. You must write me often if I don't to you.

From an ever true friend,

Peleg Bradford

Columbian Hospital  
Washington, D.C.  
August 20<sup>th</sup>, 1864

Dearest Friend

Perhaps you think I have forgotten you by not writing to you oftener, but I have not. I think of you every day, but I hope you will not think hard of me as I am where I am at the present time, but I hope the time will soon pass away and I can be at home with you, for I shall always hold the promise that I made when I was home last spring, but as I am now, it would be better for you to brake that promise, for when I made that promise I was a [whole] man, but now I am far from it ... I will not say any thing more about it this time until I get home, and then we will talk the matter over and make it all right ... whatever you say I will do.

Write as often as you can and I will try and write oftener, so good bye for this time.

Yours forever,

Peleg Bradford Jr.

“I offered her my other hand

Uninjured by the fight;

‘Twas all that I had left.

‘Without two hands,’ she made reply,

‘You cannot handsome be.’

-Poem by Thomas A. Perrine after his sweetheart rejected him.

“First I thought of my favorite sport of trout fishing, which I would have to give up. Then I thought of skating, swimming, and partridge hunting. Before all these things I thought sadly of women; for I was not old enough to have given up the thought of women.”

- Walter Lenoire

## Additional Resources from the National Museum of Civil War Medicine:

- [The Wounding of Peleg Bradford](#) – Read in detail about Peleg Bradford's wounding in this blog post
- [Amputation Kit Examination](#) – Membership and Development Coordinator Kyle Dalton examines the tools found in a Civil War amputation kit
- [Amputations in the Civil War](#) – This article takes a close look at the process of amputations in the Civil War
- [Civil War Prosthetics](#) – Find out what happened after the amputation for many soldiers in this examination of prosthetics of the Civil War
- [J.E. Hanger and the Growth of the Prosthetic Industry](#) – One of the first casualties of the Civil War went on to found one of the largest prosthetic limb companies, which still exists today. Read his story here

Visit [www.CivilWarMed.org](http://www.CivilWarMed.org) or [www.Facebook.com/CivilWarMed](https://www.Facebook.com/CivilWarMed) for more information