

Nearly 100 years after the Americans had declared their independence from England, the founding fathers dreams of a united nation and liberty for all had not yet been fully realized. Dissension between the Northern and Southern states made Civil War inevitable and the burden of blame rested heavily on the shoulders of both sides.

As the fate of the United States hung in the balance, even the very young began to take the nations future to heart. The Civil War erupted at a time when a boy's transition from childhood into manhood was determined more by his actions than his age. Young boys were eager to enlist for their convictions as well as for the

adventure. Although the minimum age to get into the army was 18, boys would often lie about their age and recruiters were all too willing to humor the eager youths.

Johnny Clem had an uncommon desire to serve his country, and first tried to enlist in the Union army at the age of 9. Being quite small for his age, however, he was turned away. Not to be undone, he took up with the 22nd Michigan Regiment, making himself useful by doing whatever work needed to be done. Though not officially enrolled, his fellow soldiers admired his spirit and chipped in to buy him a uniform and give him a regular soldiers pay of \$13 per month. Johnny's determination, hard

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work, and bravery paid off, and by 1863 he was not only officially enlisted as a drummer boy, but also promoted to Sergeant, becoming the youngest American soldier to ever hold that rank. He was discharged in September 1864, after the War Department forbid officers to enlist any soldiers under the age of 16. After the war, John Clem became a career officer, and in 1915 he retired with the rank of major general as the last Civil War veteran to actively serve in the Army.

Johnny Clem Drummer Boy of Chickamauga



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