

# Tar Heels pitch in

From the North Carolina Civil War Sesquicentennial (see <http://www.nccivilwar150.com/>) website.

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“Tar Heel,” evidence indicates, was a derogatory nickname applied to North Carolina soldiers by others in the Army of Northern Virginia. It was a natural, given that the boys from the piney woods oftentimes were harvesters of tar, pitch, and turpentine. It stuck and what at first was resented became a badge of pride.

Over the course of 1861-1865, over 125,000 North Carolinians—more than from any other Southern state—fought for the Confederacy. Forty-seven generals, among them Robert F. Hoke, Bryan Grimes, D. H. Hill, and J. J. Pettigrew, were Tar Heels. With one-ninth of the Confederate population, North Carolina supplied one-sixth of the soldiers. The state led in the total number of troops lost, over forty thousand, 19,673 as a result of battle and another 20,602 due to injury or disease. Tar Heels accounted for one-quarter of Confederate deaths.

There was irony in the sacrifice. Unlike others in the region, few Tar Heels had a vested interest in preserving slavery. Reluctant to enter, North Carolina quickly mobilized for the fight. Training camps, typically alongside railroad lines, dotted the landscape. Units such as the Burke Rifles, Edgecombe Guards, and Uwharrie Grays took the field. Yet, alone among Confederate states, North Carolina was home to a sizable peace movement. Divided allegiances were common and desertion rates ran high. Two Union regiments of African American soldiers, most of them emancipated slaves, were assembled in the northeast part of the state late in the war.

The resources extended beyond personnel. Taxes and bonds supported the effort financially. Cottage industries such as gunsmiths and sword factories contracted with the state. The entire output of North Carolina’s thirty-nine cotton and nine woolen mills was dedicated to clothing the troops. Zebulon B. Vance, governor from 1862 to 1865 and a veteran of the Twenty-Sixth Regiment, devised a plan to obtain supplies from Great Britain via the Bahamas. Blockade runners imported rifles, shoes, uniforms, and food up the Cape Fear River, the “lifeline of the Confederacy.”

Veterans of the five-year conflict took pride in their accomplishments and Tar Heels engaged their counterparts in other states, particularly Virginia, in debates over the war’s

legacy. “First at Bethel, Farthest to the Front at Gettysburg and at Chickamauga, and Last at Appomattox” was touted and emblazoned on the Confederate Memorial at the Capitol in Raleigh. Almost a century and a half later the war sparks interest, controversy, and enthusiasm.

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### “Tar Heels”

Where did the nickname “Tar Heel” come from? According to one story, it was first used to refer to North Carolinians during the Civil War. In a battle in Virginia, North Carolina troops fought alone to victory after a supporting column retreated. The Virginians who had retreated asked the victorious North Carolinians, “Any more tar down in the Old North State, boys?”

“No, not a bit,” the North Carolinians replied, “old Jeff’s bought it all up.”

“Is that so? What is he going to do with it?”

The North Carolinians quickly replied, “He is going to put it on you’ns heels to make you stick better in the next fight.”

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### On the web

#### Assessing the North Carolina Civil War effort

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/6529>

In this lesson plan, students read about the Civil War effort in North Carolina and complete a graphic organizer detailing how various groups within the state influenced the war effort.

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