



Civil War Uniforms & Equipment

Created by Jacob Hamill, SCDNR Heritage Trust Public Information Coordinator (2019). Adapted from "The Life of a Civil War Soldier" Lesson Plan by the Tennessee State Museum.

Grade Levels

3-8th, High School U.S. History

Estimated Time

1 hour

Goal

Students will learn what life was like as a soldier in the Civil War by analyzing uniforms, equipment, and other common personal items used by soldiers. By learning what soldiers in the Civil War wore and carried with them, students will understand the hardships soldiers experienced, not only on the battlefield but also while in camp and on the march. Students will also learn how the availability of resources differed between the Union and the Confederacy, and how this difference was reflected in a soldier's uniform and personal equipment.

Objectives

After completing the activity and viewing the documentary film *The Planter at the Gate*, students will be able to:

1. *Observe* historical events featured in *The Planter at the Gate*.
2. *Summarize* key events from the documentary.
3. *Identify* the location of Fort Lamar and the Battle of Secessionville in South Carolina.
4. *Explain* the significance of the Battle of Secessionville in the context of the Civil War.
5. *Examine* Civil War photographs and *identify* various components of a soldier's uniform.
6. *Inspect* the equipment and personal items of a Civil War soldier and *discuss* the function and importance of each item.
7. *Compare* the economy and industry of the Union to the economy and industry of the Confederacy, and *hypothesize* how this difference affected the course of the war.
8. *Consider* what personal items they would bring with them if they were a soldier in the Civil War, *distinguishing* between items necessary for survival and items used for comfort.

Academic Standards

English

- 3-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 3-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 3-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.
- 4-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 4-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 4-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.
- 5-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 5-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 5-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.
- 6-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 6-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 6-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, and perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.
- 7-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 7-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 7-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.
- 8-RI.7 Research events, topics, ideas, or concepts through multiple media, formats, and in visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities.
- 8-W.6 Write independently, legibly, and routinely for a variety of tasks, purposes, and audiences over short and extended time frames.
- 8-C.2 Articulate ideas, claims, perspectives in a logical sequence using information, findings, and credible evidence from sources.

Social Studies

- 3-4.4 Summarize the course of the Civil War in South Carolina, including the Secession Convention, the firing on Fort Sumter, the Union blockade of Charleston, the significance of the *Hunley* submarine; the exploits of Robert Smalls; and General William T. Sherman's march through the state.

- 3-4.5 Explain how the destruction caused by the Civil War affected the economy and daily lives of South Carolinians, including the scarcity of food, clothing, and living essentials and the continuing racial tensions.
- 4-6.1 Explain the significant economic and geographic differences between the North and South.
- 4-6.5 Explain the social, economic, and political effects of the Civil War on the United States.
- 8-4.5 Compare the military strategies of the North and the South during the Civil War and the fulfillment of these strategies in South Carolina and in the South as a whole, including the attack on Fort Sumter, the Union blockade of Charleston and other ports, the early capture of Port Royal, and the development of the *Hunley* submarine; the exploits of Robert Smalls; and General William T. Sherman's march through the state.
- 8-4.6 Compare the differing impact of the Civil War on South Carolinians in each of the various social classes, including those groups defined by race, gender, and age.
- USHC-3.2 Summarize the course of the Civil War and its impact on democracy, including the major turning points; the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation; the unequal treatment afforded to African American military units; the geographic, economic, and political factors in the defeat of the Confederacy; and the ultimate defeat of the idea of secession.

Activity Type: In Class

This is to be done as an in-class activity. The teacher will provide the required materials.

Materials

- "Civil War Uniform & Equipment Activity" Handouts (1 per student).
- Opaque envelopes containing the cut out set of cards (1 envelope & set of artifacts for every 3-4 students).

Fort Lamar History

- By the spring of 1862, the Union's Department of the South, under the leadership of Brigadier General David Hunter, was poised to launch an assault on Charleston by way of land. A Union victory at the Battle of Port Royal in November of 1861 provided the Federals an excellent staging area for organizing an attack on the city. Logistical information provided by Robert Smalls, a runaway slave who had commandeered a Confederate steamer, the C.S.S. Planter, opened the way for Union troops to advance on James Island.
- Capturing Charleston early into 1862 would have dramatically turned the tide of war in the Union's favor. The North could have utilized Charleston's large harbor and railroad connections to launch large-scale campaigns into the South's interior, potentially forcing the Confederacy to divert its eastern forces away from Virginia.
- To protect Charleston's southern flank, the Confederates, under the command of Major General John C. Pemberton, constructed a string of fortifications on

James Island, extending from Fort Pemberton on the Stono River to a small fort built on the neck of the Secessionville peninsula. General Pemberton placed South Carolinian Brigadier General Nathan George “Shanks” Evans in charge of the island’s defenses.

- The Secessionville fort, then known as the Tower Battery for the watchtower constructed at the site, was flanked by marsh on both sides and was built on the narrowest portion of the peninsula, which measured only 125 yards wide. Colonel Thomas G. Lamar was placed in command of the fort and tasked with overseeing its construction.
- On June 2, 1862, Union forces under the command of Brigadier General Henry W. Benham, who was placed in charge of the operation by General David Hunter, landed on the southwestern tip of James Island at Grimball Plantation.
- A few minor skirmishes followed as Union forces began to unload supplies and organize troops, in turn prompting the Confederates to reinforce their fortifications.
- Worried that they did not have enough men to capture Charleston, General Hunter ordered General Benham to not advance on Charleston or Fort Johnson until he received reinforcements or direct orders to attack.
- Despite these instructions, in the early morning of June 16th General Benham launched a surprise attack on the Secessionville fort. This force, totaling around 6,500 men organized into two columns, was expected to easily overwhelm the Confederate garrison of 500.
- As the Union force approached the fort, they had to navigate through overgrown hedge rows and open cotton fields, slowing their advance. As the land approaching the fort narrowed, the left side of the Union column was pushed into the marsh, breaking the line and compressing the center, causing the second wave to run into the first.
- At this point, around 5:00 am, the fort’s defenders were alerted to the Union’s presence. As the Confederates rushed to their stations, Colonel Lamar took personal command of the 8-inch Columbiad cannon. When the Union lines were within two hundred yards of the fort, they were met with the mighty Columbiad’s blast.
- Despite sustaining heavy fire from the fort’s cannons, the Union forces managed to climb onto the fort’s parapets where they fought hand to hand with the Confederate defenders.
- The fort’s garrison was quickly reinforced by surrounding Confederate battalions, who were able to repel the Union’s foothold.
- The marshes inhibited the Union army from launching a successful flanking maneuver to assist the main assault, as the water and pluff mud proved to be impassable.
- Confederate artillery fire to the Union’s flank, in addition to Confederate reinforcements, forced General Benham to order a retreat. Despite the battle only lasting around two and a half hours, losses were heavy.

- The Union sustained nearly 700 casualties, with 107 killed, while the Confederates experienced around 200 casualties, with 52 killed. Most of the battle's casualties occurred either on the narrow peninsula immediately in front of the fort or on the fort itself.
- After the battle, the Secessionville fort, which was referred to as the "Tower Battery" at the time of the battle, was renamed to Fort Lamar in honor of its commander. Colonel Lamar, who was wounded during the battle, died a year later from fever contracted while serving on the island.
- By July 8th, the Union army vacated James Island and returned to Port Royal.
- For disobeying orders and losing the battle, General Benham was court martialed and demoted.
- Fort Lamar was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

Civil War Uniforms & Equipment Background

- Uniforms in the Civil War varied depending on a number of factors, such as a soldier's regiment, whether they were in the infantry, cavalry, navy or artillery, and on the availability of resources. Despite this variation, uniforms for both sides generally consisted of a forage cap (also called a kepi), an undershirt, a sack coat, trousers, leather brogans (boots), and a heavier frock coat for cold weather.
- Uniforms for the Confederates tended to vary more than the uniforms of their Union counterparts. Confederate uniforms varied in color from dark gray to butternut brown, and it was often up to the soldiers themselves to replace worn out clothing. Union uniforms typically were in better shape than Confederate ones, however both sides still had their share of threadbare and shoeless soldiers. Union uniforms were also frequently made of wool and therefore too warm for the hot summers of the South.
- Despite the blue-gray division, many regiments wore uniforms outside this dichotomy. The 7th New York State Militia wore gray uniforms with black trim, and the 1st and 2nd Regiments of the U.S. Sharpshooters, referred to as Berdan's Sharpshooters, wore green uniforms. Confederate soldiers frequently wore blue trousers with their grey or brown coats. Regiments from both the Union and Confederacy also adopted a uniform inspired by the Zouave battalion of the French Army, which was modeled on Algerian dress, featuring baggy pantaloons, short jackets, and fezzes.
- In addition to their uniform, soldiers had other equipment to look after, in addition to their personal items. For Union soldiers, some of these items, like blankets, bags, etc., were issued by the army. For the Confederates, many had to bring these items from home and augmented their personal equipment when they could. It was not uncommon for soldiers to appropriate equipment from the dead when possible.
- All soldiers had a canteen to carry drinking water, a haversack (a bag to carry a soldier's personal items), a cartridge box (to carry ammunition), and a firearm. Soldiers also often had a knapsack to carry their bedding, although some

soldiers simply rolled their bedding up and carried it with them over their shoulder.

- Soldiers carried a variety of personal items to help ease the hardships of war and the drudgery of camp life. Such items included plates and utensils for eating and cooking, a sewing kit (called a housewife), pencils and paper to write letters, as well as books, playing cards, and tobacco pipes to help pass the time.

Vocabulary

- **Brogans:** Standard footwear for a soldier in the Civil War. Each boot was made to fit either foot and would gradually wear into the right shape over time.
- **Canteen:** A container used to carry drinking water.
- **Cartridge Box:** A box used to hold a soldier's cartridges, paper tubes holding together a bullet and gunpowder.
- **Frock Coat:** A heavy wool coat worn in cold weather.
- **Haversack:** A bag used to carry a soldier's personal belongings and other small pieces of equipment.
- **Homespun:** Cloth or fabric made at home from recycled materials, often having a coarse texture.
- **Kepi:** Also called a forage cap, the kepi was the typical hat for soldiers in the Civil War.
- **Sack Coat:** An easily produced coat made of wool. For Union soldiers, a sack coat was typically blue. For Confederates, a sack coat could vary in color from gray to brown to almond yellow.
- **Sewing Kit:** Civil War soldiers called their sewing kits a "housewife". A sewing kit carried pins, spare buttons, thread, and extra cloth to repair a soldier's uniform and other cloth items.
- **Undershirt:** A lightweight shirt worn underneath a sack coat, usually made of cotton.

Lesson

1. Before class begins, prepare the envelopes and items. There should be one envelope containing all twenty items for every 3-4 students.
2. Give a brief history of Fort Lamar and the Battle of Secessionville.
3. Show the documentary film *The Planter at the Gate*.
4. Distribute the handout.
5. Ask your students how a historian might be able to learn about the past. Possible answers include diaries, photographs, recordings, etc. Discuss with your students how a person's clothing and personal belongings can also tell us a lot about the past.
6. Divide the students into small groups. Ask your students to look closely at the uniforms the people are wearing in the photographs, noting any small details and differences.
7. Turn your students' attentions to **Part 1** of the handout. Students may brainstorm as a group to come up with answers to the questions. After all the groups have

finished answering the questions, lead a class discussion on the photographs and have students share their answers.

8. Next, distribute to each group the envelopes containing the slips of paper that depict a soldier's personal items and equipment.
9. Before opening the envelopes, have your students create a list on their handout of items they think a soldier in the Civil War would carry with them.
10. After students create their list, have them open their envelope and inspect the items inside.
11. Have your students compare the items in the envelope to the items on their list. As a class, discuss some of the items in the envelope, clarifying any items the students are unfamiliar with.
12. Have your students work in groups to classify each item from the envelope as either an item necessary for survival, or as an item used for comfort or entertainment. Students should share their reasoning behind how they classified certain items.
13. Guide your students through questions 4 & 5 for **Part 2**, using the questions as opportunities for discussion.
14. Once students have finished the questions for Part 2, have them return the paper slips to the envelope.
15. End the lesson by discussing the daily lives of soldiers in the Civil War. Ask your students what items they would bring with them if they were a Civil War soldier.

References

- Brennan, P. (1996). *Secessionville: Assault on Charleston*. Campbell, CA: De Capo Press.
- Burton, E. M. (1970). *The siege of Charleston: 1861-1865*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- Davis, W. C. (1989). *Rebels & yankees: The fighting men of the Civil War*. San Diego, CA: Thunder Bay Press.
- Soldering. (n.d.). *CivilWar@Smithsonian, Smithsonian Institution*. Retrieved from http://www.civilwar.si.edu/soldiering_intro.html.
- The life of a Civil War soldier. (n.d.). *Tennessee State Museum*. Retrieved from http://www.tnmuseum.org/Traveling_Trunks_Top_Level/The_Life_of_a_Civil_War_Soldier.

Civil War Uniform & Equipment Activity

Part 1: Uniforms

Below are two portraits of soldiers from the Civil War. The photo on the left is of a Union soldier, while the photo on the right is of a Confederate soldier. Closely observe their clothing, noting any similarities or differences between the two, and answer the questions below.



Image 1



Image 2

1. List an observation about the Union soldier's uniform (Image 1).
2. List an observation about the Confederate soldier's uniform (Image 2).
3. Compare and contrast the two uniforms. What are some similarities and differences between the two?
4. List different articles of clothing that make up a Civil War soldier's uniform.
5. What can you not tell about these uniforms solely from these two photographs? What do these photographs not tell us?

Part 2: Equipment

1. Inside the envelope are a variety of items a Civil War soldier would have and carry with them. Before opening the envelope, create a list of items you think a soldier in the Civil War would have in the space below.
2. Now open the envelope and inspect the items inside. Compare these items to the list above. Were the items you listed similar to the items in the envelope? Are there any items in the envelope you are unfamiliar with?
3. Working with your group, categorize each item from the envelope as either an item necessary for "survival" (items needed to remain alive and healthy) or as items used for "comfort" (items used by soldiers to entertain themselves or alleviate the hardships of military life).
4. How might the supplies and equipment of a Confederate soldier differ from the supplies and equipment of a Union soldier? What are some items one side might have that the other did not (or did not have enough of)?
5. During the Civil War there were frequent supply shortages. What happened when there were not enough supplies to go around?

Envelope Items (for Students)

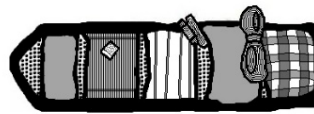
Brogans



Canteen



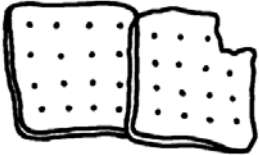
Housewife (Sewing Kit)



Kepi (Hat)



Hardtack



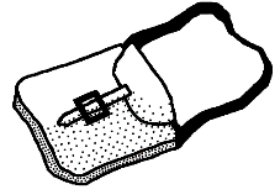
Blanket



Letter



Haversack



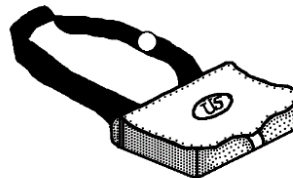
Sack Coat



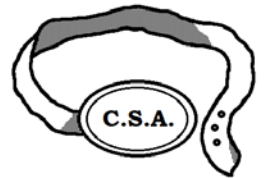
Playing Cards



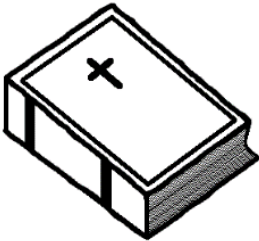
Cartridge Box



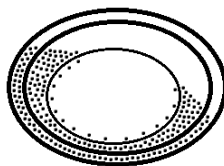
Belt Buckle



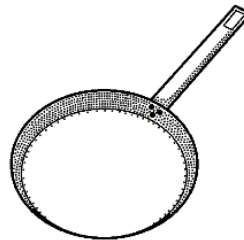
Bible



Plate



Skillet



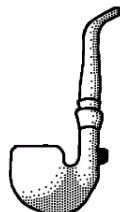
Coffee



Cup



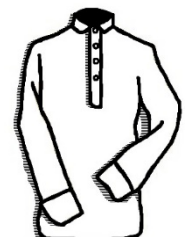
Pipe




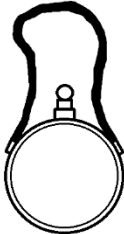
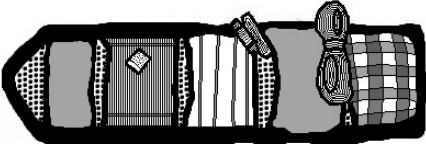
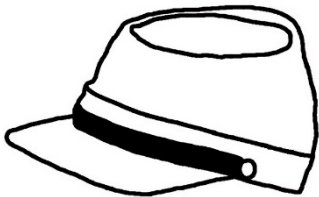
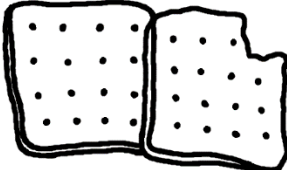
Rifle

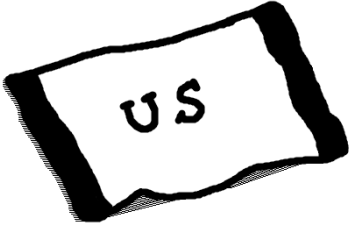



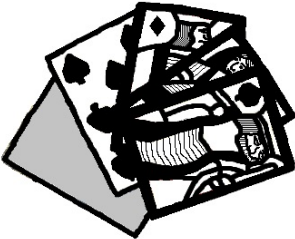



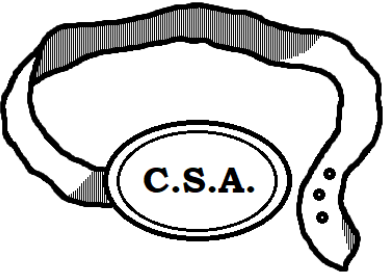
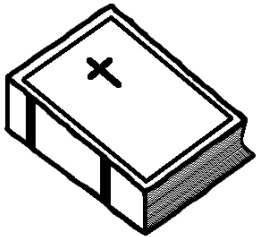
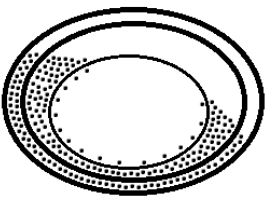
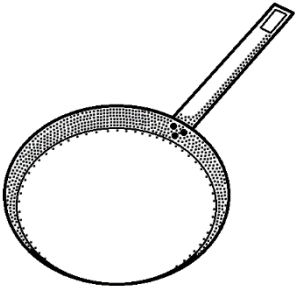
Shirt



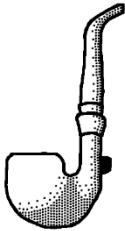

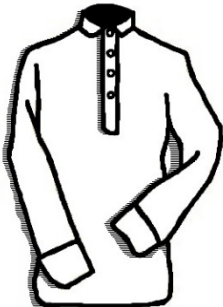


Item Information (for Instructor)

Image	Title	Description
	Brogans (Boots)	Standard footwear for a soldier in the Civil War. Each boot was made to fit either foot, and would gradually wear into the right shape over time.
	Canteen	A container used to carry drinking water. Canteens could be made from a variety of materials, but they were usually covered in wool cloth, which kept water cool if the wool was soaked and then allowed to evaporate.
	Housewife (Sewing Kit)	What soldiers called their sewing kits. A housewife carried pins, spare buttons, thread, and extra cloth, and was used to repair a soldier's uniform and other cloth items.
	Kepi	Also called a forage cap, this was the typical hat for a soldier in the Civil War, although it offered poor protection against the sun, wind, and rain.
	Hardtack	A large, dense cracker made from shortening and flour, hardtack was the most prevalent item in a soldier's diet. These crackers were too hard to eat on their own and had to be soaked in water or fried in grease to soften it. They were also often infested with bugs.

	<p>Blanket</p>	<p>Soldiers needed a blanket to keep warm at night. While Union soldiers might be issued a blanket by the army, Confederate soldiers often brought blankets from home that were made from recycled fabric called “homespun”.</p>
	<p>Letter</p>	<p>Writing letters to friends and family back home was an important activity for soldiers. Soldiers wrote about their everyday experiences, including camp life, marches, the heat, and the prevalence of diseases. Likewise, soldiers looked forward to receiving a response from their loved ones and cherished the letters sent to them.</p>
	<p>Haversack</p>	<p>A bag used to carry a soldier’s personal belongings and other small pieces of equipment. Soldiers had to be able to carry everything with them while on the march, and therefore many tried to keep the weight of their haversack to a minimum.</p>
	<p>Sack Coat</p>	<p>A part of a soldier’s uniform, a sack coat was an easily produced coat made of wool. For Union soldiers this item was typically blue, but for Confederates, a sack coat could be gray, brown, or almost yellow in color.</p>
	<p>Playing Cards</p>	<p>Card games were a popular way for soldiers to pass the time, and gambling was a common activity in army camps. However, many soldiers would throw out their decks before a battle so as not to be judged for possessing sinful items if they happened to die on the battlefield.</p>

	<p>Cartridge Box</p>	<p>A cartridge box was used to hold a soldier's cartridges, or paper tubes that held together a bullet and gunpowder. Most cartridge boxes held up to forty cartridges.</p>
	<p>Belt Buckle</p>	<p>A soldier's belt and belt buckle was worn above the waist and on the outside of the jacket, and was used to hold and secure essential items, such as a soldier's canteen, haversack, and cartridge box.</p>
	<p>Bible</p>	<p>Soldiers liked to read books to help pass the time. Bibles were especially popular because many soldiers were deeply religious and would read the Bible to find comfort or inspiration.</p>
	<p>Plate</p>	<p>Soldiers had to carry around their own eating equipment, often stored in a mess kit. Plates were often made from tin or copper and were very durable.</p>
	<p>Skillet</p>	<p>Soldiers would cook and eat food in groups of four to five men. They would split the food and cooking equipment among the group so no single person had to carry everything.</p>

	<p>Coffee</p>	<p>Coffee was an important part of a soldier's diet and was universally enjoyed strong, without milk or sugar. Union naval blockades prevented the importation of coffee to the Confederacy, so Confederate soldiers turned to chicory beans as a substitute.</p>
	<p>Cup</p>	<p>Soldiers had to carry around their own eating equipment, including cups. Like plates, cups were made of durable tin or copper and were necessary to soak hardtack and drink coffee. Some cups were collapsible to save space.</p>
	<p>Pipe</p>	<p>Smoking tobacco was a popular activity among soldiers, and most smoked tobacco out of a pipe. "Homespun" tobacco, or tobacco that was twisted and tied was the preferred form of tobacco because it was easy to chew or cut into small pieces for smoking.</p>
	<p>Rifle</p>	<p>Soldiers were issued a longarm, such as a rifle or musket, to use in battle and maintain. However not everyone received the same weapon model, and many soldiers had to make do with outdated smoothbore muskets.</p>
	<p>Shirt</p>	<p>Soldiers would wear a lighter shirt underneath their sack coats. Whereas a sack coat was made out of a heavy fabric, like wool or flannel, the undershirt was made out of cotton, or another more breathable fabric.</p>