



# FIFE AND DRUM BOYS

by C.M. Sanchez  
illustrated by Doris Ettlinger



HOUGHTON MIFFLIN

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**HOUGHTON MIFFLIN HARCOURT**  
School Publishers

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 **Foreword**

It was 1777, a difficult year for colonial Patriots. Their war for independence from the British was going badly. British forces had beaten the Continental Army in New York and Pennsylvania. Many Patriots feared the Revolution was doomed.

 John “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne was a British general. He commanded about 7,000 experienced soldiers. They seemed unbeatable.

On September 19, 1777, Continental troops faced Burgoyne’s army near Saratoga, New York. The battle raged for weeks. The outcome of the Battle of Saratoga would be crucial to America’s future. This fictional story describes the final days of that battle from the **viewpoint** of two young Patriots.




A colonial fife and drum

## Reporting for Duty

Thirteen-year-old Will Stone hurried through the chilly October dawn. A drum hung from his neck.

Will was about to **embark** upon a great adventure. Today was his first day as a drummer for the Continental Army. He had joined Captain Crawford's company at Saratoga. He was replacing a drummer who had been hurt in battle. This morning, he was reporting for duty. He ran toward the captain's tent.

 For several weeks, the Americans and the redcoats had been fighting at Saratoga. Each day, the battle grew more intense. The British troops were fierce fighters, but the Americans were holding their own.

*Today, Will thought, I'll see a battle.* The idea filled him with excitement and fear.

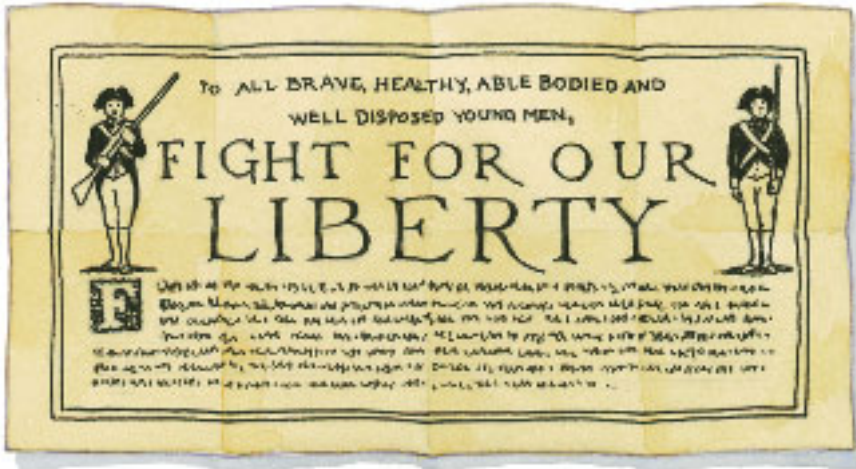
Will knew that army drummers had an important job. In the noise and confusion of battle, the sound of drums and flute-like instruments called fifes could be heard more easily than a person's voice. Officers used signals played on these instruments to communicate with soldiers during battle.

Drummers had duties off the battlefield, too. They played signals for commands that told soldiers when to wake up, eat, and march.

Will loved to drum. He had been playing the instrument for the past five months. He had taught himself the various military signals. So, when he heard that one of the American drummers had been hurt, he had run immediately to the army camp to volunteer for the job. He'd had two reasons for wanting to do it.

This was one of the first American flags.





🔊 The Patriots printed anti-British pamphlets.


🔊 Like many colonists, Will wanted freedom from the British. He felt the British king was unfair. The king made the colonists pay high taxes but didn't let them have **representatives** in government.

🔊 Will also had a personal reason even more urgent than his wish for freedom. His father had been using his print shop to produce anti-British pamphlets. The pamphlets encouraged people to support the revolution.

🔊 Will's father had been handing out the pamphlets to other colonists. If the British troops won the battle, they would control Saratoga. Then they could put Will's father in jail. He might even be hanged as a traitor.

## A Terrible Start

By the time Will reached the captain's tent, he was breathless with excitement. He looked around and caught sight of the captain. Will approached him and saluted.

 "Are you Will Stone, the new drummer?" the captain asked.


"Yes, sir," Will replied.

"Do you know the drum signals?"

"Yes, sir."

"Excellent. Then wake the company and call them to breakfast."

"Yes, sir," Will answered nervously.


 He raised his drumsticks, took a deep breath, and drummed the signal. Seconds later, soldiers burst from their tents. But something was wrong. They were grabbing their muskets. They shouted, "To arms! We are under attack!"




 Will meets Captain Crawford.



 The soldiers rush from their tents.


 Will gasped in horror. In his nervousness, he had played the wrong command! He'd sent the soldiers running for the battlefield instead of to the breakfast table.

 Captain Crawford quickly called the men to come back. Then he strode toward Will.


“What were you thinking, boy?” the captain demanded. “We face the enemy in hours. In battle, your drum is the very voice and tongue of the commander! Much depends on you. There must be no more mistakes.” He glared down at Will. Then he briskly walked away.


Will's face burned with embarrassment. What a terrible start to his army service!



 After the captain left, Will fled to a quiet corner of the camp. He had to practice. He played his signals over and over.

Suddenly, he heard a cheerful voice. “Hello, Will!” It was Tom, a fifer in the company.

 Sixteen-year-old Tom was taller but thinner than Will. Fifes were lighter than drums, so fifers did not have to be as strong as drummers. Tom had been a fifer since the Revolutionary War started. He had been in many battles.

 “Hello, Tom,” Will muttered. He still felt embarrassed.

“Don’t worry about this morning,” Tom said kindly. “You should have seen me a year ago—I barely knew one end of my fife from the other!” He laughed.

Will relaxed. “Would you test me on some signals?”

 “Certainly. Let’s hear ‘Face Right,’” Tom said. Will beat the command perfectly.

“Now, ‘About Face.’” Will drummed the signal without hesitation.

“Very good!” said Tom. “Now, rest.”

Will panicked. “I don’t know that one!”

Tom laughed. “I meant that *you* ought to rest. Sit down. Rest while you can. Soon the redcoats will be on the march, and the fighting will start. Are you ready?”

“I thought I was,” Will said. “But after my mistake, I’m not so sure.”

Will sat down next to his friend and looked around. The sun had come up, and he could see smoke from the British campfires rising in the distance.

Will practices his signals for Tom.



🔊 Tom handed Will some “fire cake.” Fire cake was a small loaf of bread made from flour and water. It was baked on hot rocks.

Will shook his head. “No, thanks. It tastes terrible.”

Tom laughed. “True. But you should eat. And according to our scouts, it’s better than what the redcoats are dining on!”

🔊 Tom was right. The British hadn’t planned on camping for so long. They were running out of food.

Will felt nervous. He wondered exactly when the fighting would start. And he wondered if he would be able to stay calm when it did.

🔊 Tom offers Will some “fire cake.”







 Time for battle!

 “What’s battle like?” asked Will.

Tom was silent for a moment. Then he said, “It’s hard to describe. Cannons and muskets booming. Men shouting. You can smell the gunpowder. And people get killed and hurt...”

 Tom stopped. He saw that his description was making Will nervous. He said, “You’ll be fine. And I heard Captain Crawford say that the British are getting weaker. We’ll be playing ‘Yankee Doodle’ at our victory dance soon.”

“How soon?” asked Will.

 Before Tom could answer, both boys heard the captain’s voice. “Tom! Will! The British are beginning their approach! Come now! Bring your instruments.”

It was time.



▶ The company lines up for battle.

## ▶ The Fighting Begins

Minutes later, Will and Tom stood in formation with the company. In the distance, Will could see the redcoats lined up, too. He could hear the rumble of their drums.

▶ Will was so nervous he could barely breathe. He glanced at Tom. Tom smiled and whistled the beginning of “Yankee Doodle.” Will smiled back, holding his drum with his hands so that it didn’t bump against his legs.

▶ Will remembered the captain’s words, “In battle, your drum is the very voice and tongue of the commander. Much depends on you.” *I can’t make a mistake, Will told himself. I will not.*

🔊 “Forward, MARCH!” the captain barked. At the captain’s side, Will drummed the signal. The company marched into battle.

Cannons flashed. Bullets flew. Will tried hard not to be **distracted**. He played Captain Crawford’s commands perfectly. The soldiers responded as if the captain were speaking into their ears.

🔊 An hour later, the fighting was over. The American troops had fought well. The soldiers cheered.

After praising the soldiers, Captain Crawford turned to Will. “Well done,” he said quietly. Will glowed with happiness.

🔊 Suddenly, a soldier nearby on horseback lost control of his steed. The horse reared up on its hind legs. Will couldn’t get out of the way. He was knocked down and hit his head. He vaguely saw that his drum was **shattered**. Then everything went black.

🔊 Will’s drum is shattered.




## A Happy Awakening

A while later, Will woke in a hospital tent. His head hurt terribly. Tom sat nearby, playing “Yankee Doodle.”


“What happened? Did we win today?” Will demanded.

 “No,” Tom replied. Will’s heart sank.

But Tom was grinning. “We won the battle *yesterday!*” he said. “You’ve been knocked out for 26 hours! The British are surrendering!”

 “So Saratoga is ours!” Will exclaimed joyfully. That meant his father was safe! His head felt better already.

Tom smiled. “Now you should rest—Captain Crawford’s orders. We need you... after all, the war’s not over yet!”

 The Battle of Saratoga ended on October 17, 1777. General Burgoyne and his troops surrendered to American forces. A turning point in the war, this victory showed the world that American troops could defeat a powerful army.

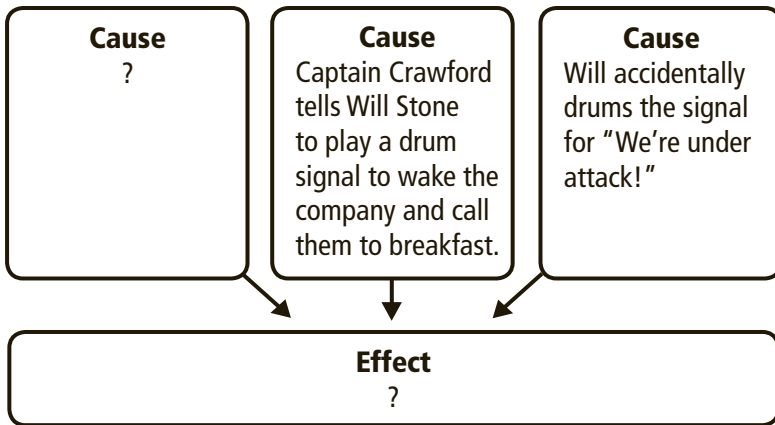
# Responding



## TARGET SKILL

### Cause and Effect

What happens when Captain Crawford tells Will to wake up the company? Copy and complete the chart below.



## Write About It

**Text to Self** Will starts his career as an army drummer by making a mistake. He recovers from his mistake and performs well in battle. Think about a time when you made a mistake and then recovered from it. Write a paragraph that explains what happened.





### TARGET VOCABULARY

bracing

conduct

cramped

distracted

embark

pressing

representatives

shattered

surveyed

viewpoint



### TARGET SKILL

**Cause and Effect** Tell how events are related and how one event causes another.



### TARGET STRATEGY

**Visualize** Use text details to form pictures in your mind of what you are reading.



**GENRE Historical Fiction** is a story whose characters and events are set in a real period of history.

**Level:** S

**DRA:** 40

**Genre:**  
Historical Fiction

**Strategy:**  
Visualize

**Skill:**  
Cause and Effect

**Word Count:** 1,584

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