Battlefront

In the spring of 1861, baseball players in dozens of American cities and towns prepared their minds, bodies, and grounds for another brilliant season of play. But the news from Fort Sumter, South Carolina, sent shock waves throughout the sporting world. The beginning of four terrible years of civil war had important short- and long-term repercussions for baseball. The game became a feature of military life, and it took on new meanings in the context of war. Observers of American sporting life stressed the analogy between team sports and battle, urging the former as training for the latter. Thousands of players enlisted in regiments and competed in campgrounds on makeshift playing fields as they awaited combat on battlefields. In the course of time a few Confederate and Union prisoners of war were even allowed to indulge in ball games to keep them active and to help them pass the long hours of incarceration as they awaited repatriation.

The sporting press of the late 1850s and early 1860s frequently pointed out the parallels between America's first team sports and war. In wrapping up its review of the 1857 season, using metaphors that would too soon prove to be realities, the Clipper remarked that the players "will be compelled to lay by their weapons of war, enter into winter quarters, there to discuss and lay plans for the proper conducting of next season's campaign." Yet sportswriters were acutely aware of the crucial differences between play and mortal struggle. In March 1861 that journal hinted at the impending crisis:
"God forbid that any balls but those of the Cricket and Baseball field may be caught either on the fly or bound, and we trust that no arms but those of the flesh may be used to impel them, or stumps, but those of the wickets, injured by them." But three months later it remarked that "Cricket and Baseball clubs... are now enlisted in a different sort of exercise, the rifle or gun taking the place of the bat, while the play ball gives place to the leaden messenger of death. Men who have heretofore made their mark in friendly strife for superiority in various games, are now beating off the rebels who would dismember this glorious 'Union of States.'" In 1864 a Rochester reporter noted that "many of our first class players are now engaged in the 'grand match' against the rebellious 'side,' and already have made a 'score' which, in after years, they will be proud to look upon." That year a Union soldier, encamped with his regiment at Culpepper Court House in Virginia, reported that "if General Grant does not send them to have a match with Gen. Lee, they are willing to have another friendly match, but if he does, the blue coats think that the leaden balls will be much harder to stop than if thrown by friendly hands on the club grounds."

Although indulging in pastimes such as baseball might seem inappropriate in the emergency of wartime, several editorialists believed that team sports were useful in preparing men for more serious and deadly contests. The Rochester Express noted that with "the serious matter of war... upon our hands,... physical education and the development of muscle should be engendered" through baseball. In January 1862 the Clipper emphasized both the short and long term benefits of athletics in army camps. It reported: "Many officers who never before took a 'hand in' at any of our out-door games, are now among the leading spirits in the conduct of such matters; and the influence exerted thereby is spreading throughout the entire army. 'Young America' must have his sport, be he a soldier or a civilian, and with the leisure afforded him by a life of soldierly inactivity, he has ample time to indulge his sportive tastes." That writer predicted that "when the rebellion is crushed, and the Army of the Union mustered out of service, we will then have an abundance of the right sort of stuff with which to recruit our forces for the
encouragement and practice of physical games and pastimes. As our friends are mustered out of the army, they will be mustered into the service for the peaceful pursuit of health giving exercises for the mind and body.” Another commentator argued that baseball best promoted the health of the nation’s young men, “for to excel in it, the player must be courageous, capable of enduring bodily fatigue, possess the judgment to conceive and the activity and skill to execute, and also the moral attributes of being courteous in manner and gentlemanly in language, besides having entire control of his temper.” He noted; “These requisites are such as go to make up the first-rate soldier. Indeed, the practice of base ball is an admirable preliminary school for attaining many of the most important qualifications of a soldier, the endurance of bodily fatigue and the cultivation of activity of movement being two important elements.”

Thousands of northern club members volunteered for service in the Union Army, while a few enlisted in the Confederate cause. Abraham G. Mills of Cincinnati, a future President of the National League and one of the chief perpetrators of the Doubleday-Cooperstown myth, packed a bat and ball with his army gear before reporting for military duty. He later recalled that he used his sporting equipment as much as his side arms. In late May of 1861 Wilkes’ Spirit of the Times reported that the pitcher of the Union club of St. Louis planned to resign from his team to accept a commission in the Second Missouri Artillery after leading his team to victory in a championship match against a city rival, the Empire nine. According to the writer, “the boys console themselves with the hope that the balls he will pitch at the foes of his country’s flag, may be as successful in putting down their insolent presumption, as were those pitched against his civil opponents yesterday, in humbling the more honest pride of the former Champions of Base Ball in St. Louis.”

In New York City, where a stunning patriotic outburst reversed that metropolis’ strong antebellum pro-southern sentiment, many sportsmen put ethnic and political differences aside to rally to the flag. The Clipper enthusiastically supported Lincoln’s call for troops and published the names of enlistees, including ball players. It praised those who signed up, and urged others who were slower
to act to follow their example. “Better join in, boys,” it advised the slackers, “than be loafing the streets or hanging around bar-rooms, and thus show the people you have some noble traits that atone for whatever bad ones you get credit for.” Otto W. Parisen, one of modern baseball’s pioneer players and a member of the Knickerbockers of New York during the 1850s, received a commission in July 1861 as Captain in Company C and Quartermaster of the 9th Infantry Regiment, New York Volunteers. He survived the Battle of Antietam, was honorably discharged, and was commissioned again as a first lieutenant, Company F in the 122nd Infantry Regiment, New York Volunteers. He was mustered out in June 1865. G. S. Holt of the Henry Eckford club of Brooklyn was not so lucky. He was shot in August 1861 while returning to his camp with the Union Army, killed by “friendly fire” from another company on picket duty. Ninety-one members of Brooklyn’s celebrated Excelsior club volunteered for the Union cause, but one of its first nine performers defected to the enemy. A. T. Pearsall, a successful physician, went over to the Confederate side in the winter of 1862–63. As a Brigade Surgeon in Richmond, Virginia he attended to a few Union prisoners, including some former fellow club members. He inquired about his former playmates, but when word of his whereabouts reached Brooklyn the Excelsior club expelled him.

Military authorities permitted recreation for soldiers at appropriate times and places between campaigns and during winter camps because it supplied diversion and proved useful. Thousands of energetic young men confined to army camps soon became bored with repetitive drills and chores. With plenty of free time on their hands and little to do outside of their training they naturally sought to amuse themselves. Their officers therefore permitted wholesome activities that would keep the recruits out of serious trouble. The U.S. Sanitary Commission recommended that “when practicable, amusements, sports, and gymnastic exercises should be favored amongst the men,” and it listed baseball among the approved pastimes. Dr. Julian Chisolm, an author of a manual of surgery for the Confederate Army, suggested that while in camp “Temporary gymnasium might be established, and gymnastic exercise should be en-

BATTLEFRONT
5. Soldiers and ball players from Company G, 48th New York State Volunteers at Fort Pulaski, GA, c. 1862–63. This is the only known photograph of a baseball game played during the Civil War. Used with permission of the National Baseball Hall of Fame Library, Cooperstown, NY.

encouraged as conductive to health, strength, agility, and address.” He also specifically listed “manly play of ball” as part of a soldier’s daily exercise schedule.

Officers on both sides encouraged sport on holidays, in winter camps, and also during breaks between drill sessions to relieve the boredom of camp life and to enliven the training period with activities that were enjoyable and exciting. They hoped to use athletics to motivate men for grueling drill sessions, to foster group cohesion and loyalty, and to upgrade the physical condition of recruits. The Clipper applauded the practice of games in camp, noting the “beneficial effect they have on the spirits and health, and how they tend to alleviate the monotony of camp life.” It added: “They also lead to a wholesome rivalry between companies and regiments, and
augment the esprit du corps of the same, to an extent that to those who have not witnessed it would appear marvelous.” George Lewis of Battery E, First Regiment of Rhode Island Light-Artillery recorded in his regimental history in December 1861: “Many of the boys had a revival of their school days in a game of ball. These amusements had much to do in preventing us from being homesick, and were productive, also, of health and happiness.”

Northern and southern war diaries, memoirs, and regimental histories recount innumerable examples of recreational pastimes among Union and Confederate troops. The most popular were combative sports, especially boxing and wrestling matches, which were often used to settle personal disputes. Men from rural villages and counties naturally turned to familiar country amusements, such as fishing, hunting, target shooting, feats of strength, swimming, and horse races. Those who were more inclined to sedentary pursuits favored the quieter games of card playing and dominoes. Many soldiers preferred athletics, such as cricket, running and jumping contests, football (then primarily a kicking game, an early form of soc-
In the miscellaneous category were a host of fun-filled frolics, including snowball encounters, greased pigs chases and greased pole climbing, sack and wheelbarrow races, and cock fights. As soldiers enjoyed their favorite amusements they were also exposed to unfamiliar forms of sports and games; some of them tried out these new pastimes (especially the New York version of baseball) and played them during the postwar period. Of course, as sport historian Patricia Millen has pointed out, baseball games were far less common in army camps than other simpler forms of amusement—especially card playing. When men did play ball, their matches tended to be informal contests within their own regiments, briefly noted in their diaries as part of the routine of a soldier’s life.

Any discussion of the impact of baseball on northern and southern troops must begin with the theory that Albert G. Spalding expounded in his classic early history of the sport, *America’s National Game*:

No human mind may measure the blessings conferred by the game of Base Ball on the soldiers of our Civil War. A National Game? Why, no country on the face of the earth ever had a form of sport with so clear a title to that distinction. Base Ball had been born in the brain of an American soldier. It received its baptism in bloody days of our Nation’s direst danger. It had its early evolution when soldiers, North and South, were striving to forget their foes by cultivating, through this grand game, fraternal friendships with comrades in arms. It had its best development at the time when Southern soldiers, disheartened by distressing defeat, were seeking the solace of something safe and sane; at a time when Northern soldiers, flushed with victory, were yet willing to turn from fighting with bombs and bullets to playing with bat and ball. It was a panacea for the pangs of humiliation to the vanquished on the one side, and a sedative against the natural exuberance of victors on the other. It healed the wounds of war, and was balm to stinging memories of sword thrust and saber stroke. It served to fill the enforced leisure hours of countless thousands of men suddenly thrown out of employment. It calmed the restless spirits of men...
who, after four years of bitter strife, found themselves all at once in the midst of a monotonous era, with nothing at all to do.

And then, when true patriots of all sections were striving to forget that there had been a time of black and dismal war, it was a beacon, lighting their paths to a future of perpetual peace. And, later still, it was a medium through which the men who had worn the blue, found welcome to the cities of those who had worn the gray, and before the decade of the sixties had died the game of Base Ball helped all of us to “know no North, no South,” only remembering a reunited Nation, whose game it was henceforth to be forever.

It is easy to refute his reference to Abner Doubleday’s alleged invention of baseball. But what about the remainder of his claims concerning the impact of baseball on the men at war? What exactly was the meaning of the sport in the context of the deadly conflict between North and South? Did it have the positive short- and long-term benefits on the victorious and vanquished troops as Spalding argues? Did the war really help to spread baseball to all regions, and was it a helpful agent of sectional reconciliation after the war? This and subsequent chapters will show that there is some truth to Spalding’s assertions, although the consequences of the war for baseball were more complicated than he suggested.

As the historian Reid Mitchell has persuasively argued, the recruitment of northern soldiers and their commitment to the Union cause must be understood in the context of the values and institutions of their home communities, including rural villages, small towns, and urban neighborhoods in large cities. Local leaders raised companies and regiments; officers and common enlisted men generally knew each other quite well. Their companies were primarily military institutions, but they also resembled the private voluntary associations, including athletic clubs, that were so common in antebellum America. It is not surprising to find that the towns and cities most infected with the baseball fever of the period from 1857 to 1861 also produced the regiments that were most active on campground ball fields. Men who had joined baseball associations before
7. “Call for Volunteers.” This image of ball players volunteering for military service reflects Albert G. Spalding’s view of the link between patriotism and baseball during the Civil War. It was drawn around 1911, the date of the publication of Spalding’s America’s National Game. Used with permission of the New York Public Library. Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.

the war were accustomed to wearing club uniforms as they took on the role of athlete. When they joined the army they adopted a martial life and clothing. Then when they competed in baseball matches they played both roles. Of course not all recruits were dedicated soldiers and healthy, talented athletes. As George T. Stevens of the 77th Regiment, New York Volunteers remembered: “Each regiment had its share of disease and desertion; each had its ball-players and its singers, its story-tellers and its merry fellows.”

Most of the baseball players who enlisted in Civil War armies came from the northeast (especially Manhattan and Brooklyn), but all regions contributed ball players turned soldiers, including the Confederacy. Soldiers played the New York and Massachusetts
versions of the game, along with premodern types of townball. To enjoy their practice sessions and matches they improvised makeshift grounds, constructed rudimentary equipment, and arranged contests both in camp and perilously close to enemy positions. Men from Manhattan, Brooklyn, and upstate New York naturally dominated many contests. In October 1861 a “bold Soldier boy” sent the Clipper an account of a baseball game played by prominent Brooklyn club members on the parade ground of the “Mozart Regiment, now in Secessia.” He was eager to report the sports news to civilians on the home front, “lest you might imagine that the ‘sacred soil’ yields only to the tramp of the soldier; that its hills echo only the booming gun, and the dying shriek.” The men, he explained, were “engaged in their old familiar sports, totally erasing from their minds the all-absorbing topic of the day.” Mills remembered that on Christmas Day, 1862, before a crowd of 40,000 soldiers at Hilton Head, South Carolina, a team from the 165th New York Volunteer Infantry, Duryea’s Zouaves, played a match against a picked nine from other Union regiments. Nicholas E. Young, later a president of the National League, was a cricketer from a town in upstate New York who played his favorite sport in the army near White Oak Church, Virginia, in the early spring of 1863. In that year he switched his allegiance from cricket to baseball after the 27th New York Regiment organized a club. According to Mason Whiting Tyler, during that season ball games were “all the rage now in the Army of the Potomac,” and his camp was “alive with ball-players, almost every street having its game.” George T. Stevens of the New York Volunteers remembered that when he was at Falmouth, Virginia that year “there were many excellent players in the different regiments, and it was common for the ball-players of one regiment or brigade to challenge another regiment or brigade.” He added: “These matches were watched by great crowds of soldiers with intense interest.” When the Fourteenth Regiment returned to Brooklyn in June 1864 a comrade in arms from the Thirteenth Regiment wrote to the Brooklyn Daily Eagle: “Among the returned heroes of our gallant Fourteenth are some well known ball players, who, while devoted to the use of more deadly weapons, have not forgotten the use of bat or ball, as the many games played
8. “On Tented Fields—in Prison Pens.” This image was prepared for Spalding’s *America’s National Game*, published in 1911. The American flag in the center links two views of troops playing baseball on a camp field and also inside a prison yard. Used with permission of the New York Public Library. Photography Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, Astor, Lenox, and Tilden Foundations.
by them during their three years service will prove.” He proposed
an “amalgamated match” between the two regiments to inaugurate
a new ball ground in Coney Island. The Star Club of Brooklyn
graciously offered their practice field to the men of the Fourteenth Regiment to help them organize a team at home.

When New Englanders competed among themselves they
often played by the rules of the “Massachusetts game,” but when
they faced New Yorkers they sometimes observed the NABBP regu-
lations. (Newspaper accounts generally did not specify which type
of the sport was played in army camp games.) John G. B. Adams of
the Nineteenth Massachusetts Regiment recalled that while he was
encamped in Falmouth in early 1863 a “base ball fever broke out.”
Enlisted men and officers played “the old-fashioned game, when a
man running the bases must be hit by the ball to be declared out.”
After a short while Adams’s Regiment challenged the Seventh Regi-
ment of Michigan to play a game for sixty dollars a side. The Massa-
chusetts men prevailed, and the prize money was spent on a supper
for players on both sides and their guests. Adams declared: “It was
a grand time, and all agreed that it was nicer to play base than minie
(bullet) ball.” That June a correspondent to the Clipper reported a
match following the Massachusetts game rules played for $50 a side
between Massachusetts’s Eleventh Regiment and the Twenty-Sixth
of Pennsylvania. He noted: “We have four clubs in our brigade, and
there are several more in the division.”

Confederate troops played townball as well as more modern
versions of the game in their army camps. In November 1861 the
Charleston Mercury of South Carolina reported that Confederate
troops were stuck in soggy camps near Centreville, Fairfax County,
Virginia. Heavy rains created miserably wet conditions so that “even
the baseball players find the green sward in front of the camp, too
boggy for their accustomed sport.” Bell Wiley, in The Life of Johnny
Reb, cites one anecdote of ball playing in the Twenty-fourth Alaba-
ma Regiment as Joe Johnston’s southern troops watched for Gen-
eral William Sherman’s movements. But Wiley also states that base-
ball games were common in practically every regiment of the
Confederacy. Because southerners had a much harder time than
their northern counterparts in obtaining good bats and balls, they
generally had to make do with rudimentary homemade equipment.
In Wiley’s words: “the bat might be a board, a section of some farm-
er’s fence rail, or a slightly trimmed hickory limb; the pellet might
be nothing better than a yarn-wrapped walnut; but enthusiasm
would be so great as to make the camp reverberate with the cheers
and taunts of participants, if not of spectators.” In early April of
1862 the Charleston Mercury remarked that “every volunteer who
has been in service, has realized the tedium of camp life.... there
is waste time, which might be used advantageously at such manly
exercises as cricket, baseball, foot ball, quoit pitching, etc.” That
paper lamented the shortage of sporting goods available for the men
and called for hardware dealers to supply quoits (flat iron rings tossed
as in horseshoes) and also cricket and baseball bats. “For want of
such things,” it concluded, “the time of the soldier is mainly spent
playing cards.”

In America’s National Game Spalding recounted a rumor
“that in Virginia, in the long campaign before Richmond, at periods
when active hostilities were in abeyance, a series of games was
played between picked nines from Federal and Confederate forces.”
Although Spalding reported no direct evidence of those contests,
he did cite “cases where good-natured badinage had been exchanged
between Union and Confederate soldiers on the outposts of opposing
armies in the field.” John G. B. Adams of the Nineteenth Massa-
chusetts recalled that early in 1863 several men of the Union army
encamped at Falmouth played baseball and also watched Confeder-
ates play games across a river. He wrote: “We would sit on the bank
and watch their games, and the distance was so short we could un-
derstand every movement and would applaud good plays.” While he
did not mention any Union-Confederate contests, he did observe
southerners fishing and throwing part of their catch to northern
boys. He also stated that “our men and theirs met in the river and
exchanged papers, tobacco and coffee and were on the best of
terms.” In a history of American sport, Wells Twombly recounted
that members of Stonewall Jackson’s second brigade were chasing a
hare when they encountered a group of Yankees. The story goes
that after the northern troops waved their hands to signify that they carried no weapons they engaged in a baseball game. Their match intrigued the Confederates, who then expressed a desire to learn the New York rules. It is a nice tale, but unfortunately Twombly did not cite any primary source to support it.

Numerous accounts of baseball in army camps highlight the role that officers had in encouraging, facilitating and often even participating in games. It appears likely that they did so because they recognized the beneficial effects of the sport on their men, but it is also undoubtedly true that they simply enjoyed the play. Charles E. Davis, Jr. of the Thirteenth Massachusetts Volunteers related that when his Regiment was in Virginia in early May 1862 they were surprised during a match when General George L. Hartsuff rode by, “got off his horse and requested permission to catch behind the bat, informing us there was nothing he enjoyed so much.” Although he stayed only a few minutes, he impressed Davis “without in the least sacrificing his dignity or suggesting the lessening of his discipline, the cords of which we already noticed were tightening.” In January 1864, while in winter quarters in Mountain Run, Thomas M. Aldrich of Battery A, First Regiment, Rhode Island Light Artillery participated in a contest in honor of General William Hays, “who had sent to Washington for balls and bats to enable us to play to good advantage.” He explained: “When the general and his wife came galloping into camp, with a number of officers and ladies, our captain went out to greet them and said ‘Ah! general, I suppose you would like to see the battery on drill.’ The general quickly replied ‘No; I want to see them play ball, which they can do better than any men I ever saw.’” General Hays returned with his wife a few weeks later to watch another game. At about the same time near Brandy Station, Virginia Captain Lemuel A. Abbott of the Tenth Regiment Vermont Volunteer Infantry played in a match against a side of non-commissioned officers for an oyster dinner, with his team victorious.

Sometimes the war disrupted these pastimes, which were supposed to divert the soldiers’ attention from the dangers and possible death awaiting them. In the spring of 1862 during a game between the Fifty-Seventh and Sixty-Ninth Regiments of New York
Jacob Cole was lying on the ground watching the match when he heard a “rumbling noise.” When Cole and his friend stood up they heard nothing, but when they put their ears to the ground Cole told his friend that “our boys are fighting.” He remembered: “Hardly had I spoken before orders came to report to our regiments at once. So the ball game came to a sudden stop never to resume.” Generally soldiers sported within the relative security of their encampments, though sometimes they violated army regulations and competed outside the fortifications and beyond the line of pickets. George H. Putnam remembered a contest among Union troops in Texas that was aborted by a surprise enemy assault: “Suddenly there came a scattering fire of which the three fielders caught the brunt; the center field was hit and was captured, the left and right field managed to get into our lines.” The northern soldiers repulsed the Confederate attack, “but we had lost not only our center field but . . . the only baseball in Alexandria.”

Baseball historians have long asserted that during the Civil War prisoners played the sport in both northern and southern camps, and also that matches played in those institutions introduced modern forms of the game to novices and helped with the cultural diffusion of baseball after the return of peace. Fragmentary evidence does support these conclusions, although it must be remembered that premodern versions of baseball were well known in all sections of the nation prior to the war. It appears that ball play was common in several prisons, especially during the first two years of the conflict. But as conditions deteriorated after 1862, especially in the south, athletic contests occurred less frequently. Union and Confederate prisons all experienced increasingly crowded and unsanitary conditions, with inadequate food, clothing, and shelter. Poor diets, oppressive heat in the summer and freezing cold in the winter, rampant disease, lack of sufficient space, and in some cases brutal treatment by guards all made strenuous physical activities highly problematic for the inmates. To pass long hours of incarceration, however, men did play checkers, chess, and card games and gamble with rations or what little money and wealth they possessed. There are even accounts of musical balls when half of the participants dressed them-
selves in blanket skirts and filled out formal dance cards. Officers tended to be better educated and in some institutions, such as that on Johnson’s Island, Ohio, organized debating societies and classes in French, dancing, and music. Wrestling and boxing matches often resulted naturally from personal encounters, especially when conditions were the worst. Baseball matches became special events that a few privileged prisoners enjoyed and many others watched when circumstances permitted.

The two prisons that featured the most extensive baseball playing were the camps at Salisbury, North Carolina, and Johnson’s Island, in Lake Erie near Sandusky, Ohio. A well-known illustration and several diary accounts document the participation of inmates in the sport at the Salisbury institution. Otto Boetticher was a commercial artist from New York City who enlisted in the 68th New York Volunteers in 1861 at the age of 45. He was captured in 1862 and wound up at Salisbury before being exchanged for a Confederate captain on September 30th. His drawing presents an idealized, pastoral view of a match in a setting that more closely resembled the Elysian Fields in Hoboken than a jail yard. Charles Carroll Gray was a doctor who was held at Salisbury from May 17 to July 28, 1862. In his diary he recorded that July 4th was “celebrated with music, reading of the Declaration of Independence, and sack and foot races in the afternoon, and also a baseball game.” Indeed, he recalled that baseball was played nearly every day that the weather permitted. William J. Crossley, a sergeant in Company C, Second Rhode Island Infantry Volunteers, was captured at the Battle of Bull Run, July 21, 1861. He was transported to camps at Richmond, Virginia, and Tuscaloosa, Alabama before winding up at Salisbury on March 13, 1862. In his memoir he described a baseball match at Salisbury that spring between sides of men previously held in New Orleans and Tuscaloosa. He recalled that the “great game of baseball” generated “as much enjoyment to the Rebs as the Yanks, for they came in hundreds to see the sport.” He added: “I have seen more smiles today on their oblong faces than before since I came to Rebeldom, for they have been the most doleful looking set of men I ever saw, and that Confederate gray uniform really adds to their mournful appear-
CHAPTER TWO

9. “Union Prisoners at Salisbury, N.C.” Otto Boetticher drew this idealized image of union troops playing baseball in a Confederate prison camp. He was a commercial artist from New York City who was captured in 1862 and released in September of that year, before conditions in that prison deteriorated significantly. This illustration was published in 1863. Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

ance.” The game ended in a draw, eleven runs each, but “the factory fellows were skunked [shut out] three times, and we [from the Tuscaloosa prison] but twice.” Another commentator “regretted that we have no official report of the match-games played in Salisbury between the New Orleans and Tuscaloosa boys, resulting in the triumph of the latter.” He explained that “the cells of the Parish Prison were unfavorable to the development of the skill of the ‘New Orleans Nine.’” Crossley was released that summer as part of a general exchange of prisoners, rejoined his old regiment in October, and fought again at campaigns at Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, Chancellorsville, the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, and Cold Harbor.

There is also evidence that some of the prison guards at Salisbury joined in or at least watched the action on the diamond. Josephus Clarkson was a Boston ship chandler’s apprentice before the war who was incarcerated at Salisbury. In his diary he recalled that
the inmates preferred to follow the New York rules rather than the
townball regulations since the latter game allowed fielders to “plug”
base runners with the ball to record an out. He remembered that a
pitcher from Texas was removed from one game after “badly laming”
several prisoners. Clarkson wrote that “the game of baseball had been
played much in the South, but many of them [the guards] had never
seen the sport devised by Mr. Cartwright.” His side had to politely
inform their captors “that we would no longer play with a man who
could not continue to observe the rules.” Adolphus Magnum, a
Confederate chaplain who visited the prison in 1862, wrote that a few
inmates “ran like schoolboys to the playground and were soon joining
in high glee in a game of ball.” He added: “Others... sat down
side by side with the prison officials and witnessed the sport.”

Through 1862 Salisbury prison was not filled to capacity, and
the decent supply of food, frequent prisoner exchanges, and opportu-
nities for recreation made life reasonably tolerable for most of the
inmates. But conditions deteriorated significantly from late 1862
through the end of the war—especially over the last few months be-
cause of overcrowding, severe winter weather, a breakdown of prison
control, and shortages of shelter, food, medicine, and fuel. Approxim-
ately one-quarter of Salisbury’s total prison population of fifteen
thousand perished within its walls, with most of the victims dying
over the last months of its existence. There is no direct evidence of
ball playing there during that period, and given the horrific condi-
tions and poor health of the inmates it is unlikely that they partici-
pated in any athletic games from 1863 until the surviving prisoners
were liberated through an exchange agreement in February 1865.

After 1862 Johnson’s Island prison in Ohio was restricted
to officers. Conditions there were generally better than at most other
camps, in part because of the rank of the inmates and also because
its average prison population was only about two thousand five hun-
dred. Although the southerners suffered from lack of food and especi-
ally the intense cold in the winter, during the summer months the
weather was fine for baseball. William Peel of the 11th Mississippi
Infantry Regiment was captured at the Battle of Gettysburg and sent
to Johnson’s Island. In July he noted in his diary that an inmate was
injured when a bat flew out of a hitter’s hands during a game of ball.
CHAPTER TWO

Colonel D. R. Hundley was a native of Alabama and a graduate of Harvard Law School who married a daughter of a Virginia gentleman with real estate holdings in the suburbs of Chicago. Hundley moved to a house on the lake shore north of the city in 1856, but spent several winters in his home state. A supporter of Stephen Douglas for the presidency in 1860, after Lincoln’s election he relocated to Alabama and joined the Thirty-First Alabama Infantry in the Confederate Army. He was captured by Union forces in June 1864. In his diary he recorded great excitement on August 27, 1864 over a baseball match between the Southron [sic] and Confederate clubs, “the former having for their colors white shirts, and the latter red shirts.” He wrote: “During the progress of the game, nearly all the prisoners looked on with eager interest, and bets were made freely among those who had the necessary cash, and who were given to such practices; and very soon the crowd was pretty nearly equally divided between the partisans of the white shirts and those of the red shirts, and a real rebel yell went up from the one side or the other at every success of the chosen colors. The Yankees themselves outside the prison yard seemed to be not indifferent spectators of the game, but crowded the house-tops, and looked on with as much interest almost as did the rebels themselves.” Peel recalled that there were several hundred dollars wagered on that match by the clubs and outsiders, in which “The Southerners beat the Confederates very badly: the Rounds standing nineteen to eleven.”

Another account of the August 27th contest by Lt. M. McNamara lists Charlie H. Pierce as captain and catcher of the “Southern” nine (composed of those below the rank of captain), which defeated the Confederate team (made up of men of higher rank). McNamara estimated the crowd of spectators at about 3,000, including prisoners, officers, and citizens of Sandusky, Ohio. He also stated that “so apprehensive were the prison officials that the game was gotten up for the purpose of covering an attempt to break out, that they had the slides of the port holes drawn back and the guns prepared for action.” A local newspaper published a detailed and favorable account of the game, but apparently some radical northern newspapers were highly critical of the prison’s commanding officer
for permitting the prisoners such recreation. According to McNamara, “their malicious efforts were successful, the commander was removed, and the amusement of the unhappy prisoners, for the time being, cut off.” But not all was fun and games for Hundley, Peel, and their comrades. Hundley described the great hunger men suffered that drove many to hunt for rats to eat. He even recorded the founding of a “Rat Club, (which is now a recognized institution, on an equal footing with our Chess Club, our Base-Ball Club, Cricket Club, and numerous others.)”

Prisoners also played the game in other camps. In a Collier’s Weekly article dated May 8, 1909, Will Irwin wrote about New Orleans boys who “carried base balls in their knapsacks” and “found themselves in a Federal prison stockade on the Mississippi,” perhaps the one at Rock Island. He explained: “They formed a club. Confederate prisoners from Georgia and South Carolina watched them, got the hang of it and organized for rivalry. In the East and West Series that followed the West won triumphanty by unrecorded scores.”

Considering the widespread popularity of various forms of premodern baseball and the emergence of the “New York game” during the 1850s, it is not surprising that many soldiers carried bats and balls in their knapsacks during the Civil War. Officers endorsed the playing of the sport as a wholesome and beneficial relief from the repetitive military drills and the overall monotony of camp life. Ball matches helped recruits pass the days and months between battles, and these spirited contests also amused inmates in Union and Confederate prisons. But while the men in uniform kept the game going in the midst of war, the fate of baseball back on the home front was uncertain. Public opinion in the New York City region, Boston, Philadelphia, and smaller towns and rural communities would determine whether civilian players and club officers would suspend their activity until the return of peace, or whether they would advance the game to new levels of acceptance and participation.