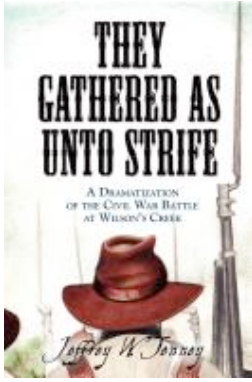


# THEY GATHERED AS UNTO STRIFE

A DRAMATIZATION  
OF THE CIVIL WAR BATTLE  
AT WILSON'S CREEK

An illustration of a Civil War soldier's gear. In the center is a brown, wide-brimmed hat. To the right is a long, dark rifle. To the left is a smaller, dark hat. The background is a light, textured surface with vertical lines, possibly representing a wall or a window. The overall style is that of a classic book cover illustration.

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*



*The second battle of the Civil War was fought in the remote southwest corner of Missouri in August 1861, at a place called Wilson's Creek. Few have ever heard of this battle, yet it bore the ominous markings of all the battles, hardships, and terrible losses that would follow in the East. They Gathered As Unto Strife is a poetic dramatization of that battle.*

# The Gathered As Unto Strife

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*They Gathered  
As Unto Strife*

*A Dramatization of  
The Civil War Battle at Wilson's Creek*

*By*

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

*Illustrated by Timothy Gillihan*

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Most of the characters in this book are fictitious. Characterizations of actual persons are products of the author's imagination.

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## **Introduction**

This is a dramatization of events just prior to and during the Civil War battle at Wilson's Creek. This battle between forces of the South and the North took place in what was then a remote part of the country, southwestern Missouri, in August 1861. It was the second consequential battle of the war, following the first battle at Bull Run in Virginia.

The composition of the southern forces was complex. Some favored secession from the Union, some did not. Some were pro-slavery, others opposed. Many of these forces came from neighboring states, notably: Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana. Perhaps the only common goal among them was defense of the State of Missouri from what was regarded as the hostile invading army of Lincoln's federal government, a government acting unconstitutionally in the case of Missouri, a state that had not declared for secession.

Northern forces constituted a more professional army, with many of its soldiers also drawn from neighboring states to the north and east. Their aim was to prevent Missouri from seceding and joining the Confederacy.

The soldiers of both armies suffered from shortages of food, equipment, and supplies leading up to the battle. Few had prior battle experience. Neither army could be said to be prepared for the battle at Wilson's Creek on August 10, but an unusual combination of circumstances, including several pre-battle skirmishes, together with the tenacious personalities of the commanding generals, led them to full-scale engagement at that place and time. Southern forces outnumbered the Northern by about 12,000 to 6,000.

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

This dramatization is not a history lesson, heavy with facts and figures. Instead it tells the story of the battle from the perspectives of the individuals involved. For the most part, these individuals are fictional, although sometimes based on real people. They are intended to be representational of the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of many caught up in these events.

## **Part I**

### **The Gray**





## **Stella May Wheeler**

### *The Seamstress*

The silk, they said, came from Japan, by ship,  
and by way of Paris.

The wool from the Isle of Wight, which I believed  
to be in some form of kinship with England.

The cotton, of course, from our loyal brothers and sisters  
of Mississippi, who knowing of our desperate circumstances  
shared eagerly of their own dwindling stores.

Each of the ladies sworn to that mission  
worked by night as well as day, our aim to  
provide shirt, pant, and the finest frock coat  
to each of our gallant soldiers by month's end.

Black pant, striped in red; white shirt of sixteen buttons and  
double pocket; gray wool coat with embroidered sleeve  
for every rank.

Thirty-seven was my count. Bettered by none.

Oh, how glorious they were, as they marched down  
Water Street to the boats that would carry them upriver  
to the camp. How cheered their faces by the hurrahs  
of the crowd and their knowing that the hearts of all  
would go with them into any fight, sewn as lovingly into  
their memories as each thread into their uniforms.

I know not how many were buried in those uniforms,  
how many left to the scavengers on the field.

Nor how many—few, I fear—who wore them proudly on  
that final day when hope blew away on the wind,

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

and honor wept,  
and right became wrong,  
and no music sounded from any hillside.  
Nor cheers on any street.



Stella May Wheeler

**Sarah James**

*The Truth Teller*

I made no uniforms for my sons.  
No need to wrap the bad will and thoughtless hubris  
of the men in Jefferson City in fetching clothes.  
Would I bake a pie from the finest peaches  
only to throw it against the outhouse wall?  
My three were the peaches of the Meramec,  
robust and ripe with promise.  
But young and not yet wise and too eager  
to listen to the madness pouring over our hills  
and through our sheltered valleys.  
The madness speaking of dangers from the North,  
of outsiders riding down upon us to  
burn our homes and murder our loved ones in their beds.  
The time had come for my young boys to become men. The  
turkey hunt had become a war against other men, unleashed  
by some Evil as hard and deep and eternal as  
the rock beneath our fields.  
I spoke the truth to my boys. No, what they were hearing  
were the desperate cries of greed denied.  
The cries of big properties bloated by slavery, of owners  
bloated with power and soured by corruption.  
Those who would send the innocent onto the fields of blood,  
while hiding in their palaces and claiming the privileges  
of their rank.  
I would not have my sons' blood stain the uniform of conceit.

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

They would die in the simple clothes that spoke the truth of  
who and what they were: laborers in fields of corn,  
humble diners at my kitchen table.

## **Simeon Taylor**

### *The Thwarted*

“Who withers under the sun will wither under fire.”

Those were the words of my company’s captain,  
oft repeated by my sergeant in drill, who in his mean and  
barren life I doubt once uttered a thought of his own making,  
nor surely during those days in camp while  
commanding all my prospects.

In my seventeen years of field labor and dock work,  
I had displayed no end of good health,  
and a hardiness that shamed many of my fellows.  
How was it, then, that I fell before them, a casualty not of  
war but of heat and exhaustion?

Was it that my sister had spurned the advances of this  
sergeant and a year gone by brought that dullard’s revenge upon me?  
I think not in the main. No, I had endured worse from  
much better men.

Regrettably, it was that leaden uniform, that tight, airless  
weave about each limb and torso that exposed some  
hidden frailty and delivered me to my doom.

Though sudden and nearly painless that death,  
a rifle ball would have been sweeter. A cannon’s  
decapitation more dignified.

None was more prepared than I. None more eager for  
opportunity and for victory.

I was the South’s most worthy son. But toppled  
by some perversion in the spirit of the time.

*Jeffrey W. Tenney*

## **Captain Hilbert Knight**

### *The Reluctant*

Lincoln's promise to raise a force of 75,000 to  
cross our state borders and pound  
the South into submission  
was not well received in Rolla.

Not among my friends and neighbors of secessionist bent,  
nor among most of unionist sentiment.

To gain the honey painlessly you treat the bee with respect,  
you do not smash the hive and lay waste to what  
the bee has wrought by a lifetime's labors.

I was myself loathe to hear of the fight at Ft. Sumter  
and to see that dark specter rise in the east.

I counted friends on either side.

But who can stand unmoved within a whirlwind?

What arrogance decides for others what is right  
and threatens to strip away our honor  
along with our property?

There was no choice for me after that.

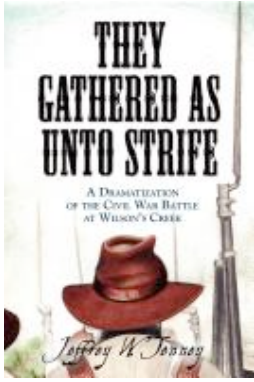
Some would claim that Fate's countenance  
is our own in flesh from the day we are born,  
not something gained in trade or won in contest, or  
delivered upon us at some crossroad in time.

But oh, yes it is.

Had those in Washington only put aside their resentments  
and jealousies, their prejudices, to see the issue from  
the other side, for a moment only,

*They Gathered As Unto Strife*

how much less pain for us all?  
Hopeful of a short conflict and the  
immediate return of reason and civility,  
I wore the gray.



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