

Music of the Civil War

***Battle Hymn of the Republic*, Julia Ward Howe, 1862**

The Battle Hymn of the Republic first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in February, 1862, during the Civil War. Julia Ward Howe, wife of a prominent Boston abolitionist, had visited a Union Army camp in Virginia where she heard soldiers singing a tribute to abolitionist John Brown (who had been hanged in 1859 for leading an attempted slave insurrection at Harper's Ferry). A clergyman at the camp, aware that Howe occasionally wrote poetry, suggested that she craft new verses more appropriate to the Civil War effort, to be set to the same rousing tune.

As Howe later explained it, the verses came to her in a single night:

"I went to bed and slept as usual, but awoke the next morning in the gray of the early dawn, and to my astonishment found that the wished-for lines were arranging themselves in my brain. I lay quite still until the last verse had completed itself in my thoughts, then hastily arose, saying to myself, I shall lose this if I don't write it down immediately. I searched for an old sheet of paper and an old stub of a pen which I had had the night before, and began to scrawl the lines almost without looking, as I learned to do by often scratching down verses in the darkened room when my little children were sleeping. Having completed this, I lay down again and fell asleep, but not before feeling that something of importance had happened to me."

Soon afterwards, she submitted the poem to *The Atlantic Monthly*, which accepted it and paid her a fee of four dollars. After the verses appeared on the first page of the February, 1862, issue, they quickly caught on as the rallying anthem of the Union troops, and were sung frequently throughout the rest of the Civil War. Howe's words later inspired American soldiers during World War II, and civil-rights activists during the sixties.

Text abridged from *The Atlantic Monthly*:

<http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/unbound/flashbks/battlehymn.htm>