

UNION CAVALRYMAN

1861-1865



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Author's dedication

This book is dedicated to the memory of my great
uncle, Sergeant Byron Kear of Co. D, 144th Ohio
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FRONT COVER: The Union cavalry attacking
General Jackson's troops at Bull Run. (picture
courtesy of the Ann Ronan picture library)

BACK COVER: Union General Philip Sheridan
(1831-1888) leading his cavalry during a charge.
(Courtesy of the Hulton Getty Picture Library)

UNION CAVALRYMAN 1861-65

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In December 1860, when South Carolina seceded from the Union, the regular US Army contained only five mounted regiments. Considering the vast size of the United States (and of the new Confederate States of America, as the Southern states soon styled themselves), this was a wholly inadequate cavalry arm with which to fight a war. In addition to the five regular regiments, only a handful of volunteer cavalry companies existed: infantry had been preferred, due to the high cost of equipping and maintaining mounted units.

The 1st Regiment of Dragoons had been raised

in 1836; the 2nd Regiment of Dragoons had originally been raised as a mounted rifle regiment, and redesignated in 1844. The Regiment of Mounted Riflemen dated from 1846. The 1st and 2nd Cavalry Regiments had been raised in 1855, under Secretary of War Jefferson Davis, who would become the President of the Confederacy. Seeing the need for more mounted troops to fight the Civil War, Congress authorized a 3rd Cavalry Regiment in May 1861; it was actually organized in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, on 18 June 1861. To bring these six assorted mounted units under tighter and more uniform con-

This is what recruits thought they were getting into the cavalry for – a full-blown, sabre-waving

charge which would roll over the enemy like a breaking wave. The reality was to be quite different.



trol, all were redesignated Cavalry Regiments on 3 August 1861: the 1st Dragoons became the new 1st Cavalry, and the other units were redesignated in order of seniority as the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th Cavalry Regiments.

Since it was clearly apparent that six cavalry regiments would not be enough to serve on a front that stretched for a thousand miles, the US Army's Adjutant General, Lorenzo Thomas, asked officially for the raising of 40,000 cavalymen on 19 February 1862. Henceforward, each state's governor was asked to raise a few volunteer units of cavalry as well as infantry and artillery. The numbers requested were not large: the Federal government was unable to equip large numbers of cavalry. Indeed, when the war broke out the government only had 4,076 cavalry carbines, 27,192 pistols, 16,933 sabres, and 4,320 sets of horse equipment, most of which were required for

the regular regiments. In all, it took some \$500,000–\$600,000 to equip a single cavalry regiment, on top of higher pay rates for officers, and the cost of recruiting other necessary professionals such as saddlers and blacksmiths.

The basic unit of organization of the cavalry was the regiment. According to General Order 15, dated 4 May 1861, a cavalry regiment was to have three battalions, each with two squadrons, each of two companies. A regiment had a minimum strength on paper of 997 officers and enlisted men.

The following figures give some idea of the rate of expansion of the cavalry. On 31 December 1861 the cavalry strength of the Union numbered 4,744 in the regular army, as well as another 54,654 volunteers. By 30 June 1862 this had grown to 75 cavalry regiments totalling 71,196 men. The Assistant Chief of Cavalry reported on 6 August 1863 that the US Army mustered 174 cavalry regiments with 109,126 men. As of 13 February 1865 the Cavalry Bureau reported that there were 160,237 cavalymen on its rolls, of which 105,434 were present and fit for duty. 154,000 horses had been purchased in the previous year, and there were 77,847 horses which were considered serviceable. The Cavalry Bureau was organized on 28 July 1863, to take overall charge of organization, equipment, and horses. Maj.Gen. George Stoneman was its first chief, replaced by Brig.Gen. J.H. Wilson on 26 January 1864.

ENLISTMENT

The bombardment by Confederate artillery of Fort Sumter on 12 April 1861 was the spark that finally set off the Civil War, and quickly brought thousands of eager volunteers for the Union cause. It proved especially easy to raise cavalry, since recruits naïvely believed that their military duties would be easier than in the infantry, and that they would be able to ride to war instead of having to walk. Few, however,

There were a handful of pre-war militia cavalry units, mostly in larger cities, and recruited from volunteers with enough money to afford a horse, equipment, and fancy uniforms. This man is a

member of Philadelphia's First City Troop, which had been founded in 1775 and saw Revolutionary War service. His uniform style, however, dates from the War of 1812. (Author's collection)



were aware of the arduous chores inseparable from the care of cavalry horses. One Union officer later admitted that before the war he thought the 'typical cavalryman was a swashbuckler, who rode terrifically with a sabre gripped by his teeth, a revolver in each hand, and his breath almost aflame as it spurted from his nostrils'. Such illusions were quickly dispelled by the realities of war.

To raise as large a body of volunteers as quickly as possible, local civic leaders and other suitable men were empowered to raise a company, or occasionally a regiment. The new officers then spread out into the countryside to find volunteers to fill out their units.

'The method of obtaining enlistments was to hold war meetings in schoolhouses,' wrote an Ohio cavalry officer. 'The recruiting officer, accompanied by a good speaker, would attend an evening meeting which had been duly advertised. The latter did the talking, the former was ready with blanks to obtain signatures and administer the oath.' Though these meetings were generally well attended, 'sometimes it was difficult to induce anybody to volunteer'.

The government set a strict minimum for the size of a newly recruited company before it was accepted onto government payrolls and its officers received their official commissions. These minimums applied even to existing volunteer cavalry units organized, uniformed, and equipped long before the war began.

One pre-war volunteer unit, from just outside Washington City, volunteered for service in June 1861 and was accepted. But, according to one of its members, 'there was still an obstacle in the way. The government would not muster a man unless a fully organized company, with a minimum aggregate of seventy-nine men, were presented to the mustering officer. Captain Wister and his gay troop rode all over the country, among the farmers' sons, in quest of recruits; but all his efforts failed to raise the requisite number of men who were able and willing to find their own horses and equipments, notwithstanding that the government had offered to pay the troopers forty cents per day for their use and risk; with the

A number of volunteer cavalry units wore special variations of the regulation dress. The 3rd New Jersey Cavalry, who designated themselves the

1st US Hussars, wore the most elaborate variation, with orange collar tabs and rows of yellow tape across the jacket front. (Richard Carlile)





Corporal Windsor B. Smith, a 5 ft. 9 in. tall resident of Portland, Maine, joined Co. K, 1st Maine Cavalry Regiment, on 21 August 1862. In January 1863 he was detached from the company to serve as an orderly to Brig. Gen. Gabriel Paul, who was blinded by a bullet in the first day's fighting at Gettysburg. Smith returned to the regiment and was appointed

corporal. This photo was taken when he was on furlough at home in December 1863. He was further promoted to sergeant on 1 May 1864. He was captured on 29 September 1864, and paroled that July. His health was so damaged by his time in Confederate prison camps that he never regained his strength and was discharged in July 1865. (Author's collection)

proviso, however, that, in case the trooper lost his horse in any way, he must furnish another, or serve on foot. This proviso was the straw that broke the camel's back. After three months spent in drilling, and in unavailing efforts to fill up, Captain Wister's troop disbanded, on the 30th of June, and its members sought service in their commands.'

Despite these problems, the first call for volunteer forces was rapidly met. Although regulations demanded only physically fit men between the ages of 18 and 45, many volunteers who were unfit, too old

or too young passed the cursory physical examination which doctors were required to give each recruit. This was despite the recommendation that 'A cavalry soldier should not exceed in weight one hundred and sixty pounds, should be active and strong, physically sound, with a natural fondness for horses and experience in handling them.'

The Recruit

People looking at surviving period clothing today often comment on the small stature of Civil War soldiers. This is something of an oversimplification. In fact, over ten per cent of the volunteers in e.g. the 1st Wisconsin Cavalry were over 6 ft. tall; while Captain W.W. La Grange was 6 ft. 4 in. tall, the same height as Abraham Lincoln. The average recruit was in his early twenties and American born, though most were only one or two generations removed from their European heritage, and there were large numbers of German- and Irish-born citizens. In a typical company – Co. C, 9th Pennsylvania Cavalry – all but 17 men were born in Pennsylvania, while seven came from Germany, three from Ireland, two from England, and one from Wales.

Background was generally rural, and about half of all Union Army recruits were farmers. Since the cavalry was seen as more glamorous than other branches of service it appealed to the higher social classes, and attracted a higher proportion of men from non-farming backgrounds than other branches. The typical Union cavalry regiment contained men from virtually every walk of life. The 156 enlisted men of Co. C, 9th Pennsylvania Cavalry included representatives of 36 occupations, including an artist, blacksmith, boatbuilder, brickmaker, carpenter, chairmaker, chemist, cigarmaker, engineer, engraver, farrier, gunsmith, labourer, machinist, mason, merchant, miller, miner, painter, physician, plasterer, printer, railroader, saddler, tailor, teacher, teamster, and weaver. In all, over 60 per cent of the company's men had a profession, while only 20 per cent said they were farmers.

The recruits of the 1st Ohio Cavalry, by contrast, were said to have been mostly farmers' sons who were also accustomed to riding and to handling horse equipment. The 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, formed in late 1862, was made up, according to the regimental historian, mostly of farmers,

The dress jacket was to be worn, as here by a private of the 16th New York Cavalry Regiment, with brass shoulder scales and the dress hat, often called the 'Hardee' or 'Jeff Davis' hat. The gloves were not an issue item, although most men tried to get a pair, especially in colder weather. (Richard Carlile Collection)



lumbermen and mechanics. 'Fortunately,' he noted, 'most of them were good horsemen.'

Not everyone, however, was impressed with the quality of Union cavalry recruits. One bitter New York cavalry officer commented: 'No one can have been with our cavalry long, and observed carefully the material of which these regiments are made up, without being struck with their great inferiority, mentally and physically, when compared with either the infantry or artillery.'

After the first volunteer units had been enlisted, company-grade officers were elected; it was generally

the case that local civic leaders received these posts. Some regiments were fortunate enough to recruit veterans of the Mexican War or the 1848 revolutions in Europe, and these men were natural choices for officers. Most new officers, however, had to learn their trade alongside their men. Colonels were usually appointed by state governors, and were often professionals technically 'on leave' from their regular army assignments in order to serve in a volunteer regiment. When experienced soldiers or professionals were not available, however, officers were simply chosen from among men who were seen to have a flair

for command or were respected members of society, though some most unlikely-sounding candidates were chosen. 'We elected our own officers,' wrote a 3rd Colorado Cavalry Regiment veteran. 'Hal Sayre, a mining superintendent, was elected to be captain. H.B. Orahood, a druggist at Central City, was elected first lieutenant; and Harry Richmond, a tragedian with Languish and Atwater's theatrical troupe, second lieutenant. Late that fall, just before we were ready to start from Bijou Basin, Hal Sayre was promoted to major and Orahood was made captain.' Eventually the army had to set up panels to screen its volunteer officers, and remove the worst of them from their commissions.

The first cavalrymen found the war far rougher than they had anticipated, as indeed did all Federal troops. Losses were high, both in killed and permanently disabled. Once news of the ugly realities of war filtered through to the civilian community it grew harder to find volunteers; eventually large cash bounties had to be offered to tempt recruits. This money succeeded in enticing some men: 'It was in 1864 that I joined a cavalry regiment in the department of the Gulf, a raw recruit in a veteran regiment,' wrote a member of the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry.

'It may be asked why I waited so long before enlisting, and why I enlisted at all, when the war was so near over. I know that most of the soldiers enlisted from patriotic motives, and because they wanted to help shed blood, and wind up the war. I did not. I enlisted for the bounty. I thought the war was nearly over, and that the probabilities were that the regiment I had enlisted in would be ordered home before I could get to it. In fact the recruiting officer told me as much, and he said I would get my bounty, and a few months' pay, and it would be just like finding money.'

Some who joined for the bounty money deserted at the first chance, only to enlist elsewhere for another bounty. Many states retained the bounties, at least in part, for payment upon discharge. Yet enough money had to be paid in advance to bring in recruits – men could often earn more in civilian jobs than the \$13 a month paid in the opening stages of the war to Union privates.

Even with the bounty system in place there were not enough volunteers, and in 1863 a conscription law had to be passed. Conscripted men could still avoid service by paying a fee or hiring a substitute to take their place, but the army was from this point on largely able to maintain its forces at sufficient strength. Conscripts were, however, generally less well motivated and often less physically able to serve than the early volunteers.

TRAINING

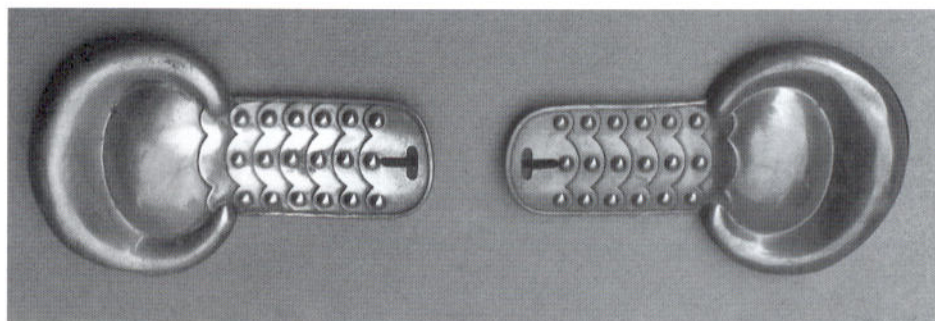
Even if cavalry recruits were already good horsemen, which was not often the case, all of them still needed training. 'Camps of Instruction' were set up near larger towns, where railroads could bring in the recruits and the supplies they would need. The newly recruited companies, when complete, were brought to these camps and formed into regiments. At the camp the recruit received his uniform, weapons and equipment, though not always at once. 'The

The dress jacket was also trimmed on the back with yellow tape. The fabric tabs at the bottom of each seam were called 'belt support pillars' and were designed to keep the sabre

belt from slipping off the jacket. In service, some soldiers opened the seams of these pillars and used them as hiding places for money in case of capture. (Author's collection)



Many dress jackets worn by volunteers had lower collars than those issued to regulars, with only one false buttonhole on each side. The crossed sabre cap badge was not regulation but was widely worn by cavalymen, as by the man on the right here. (A. S. Shazo)



These shoulder scales show the rivets added to the non-commissioned officer's version.

process of mounting and equipping went on slowly,' wrote a 1st New York Cavalry officer. 'At one time we could get horses but no equipments; at another, equipments but no horses. Then sabres were not to be had, although it appeared as if everybody was offering to sell the Government sabres. Few, indeed, were the pistols to be had; and it was months before we could get a carbine.'

The first task of the cavalry recruit was to learn how to care for his horse, and how to assemble the confusing tangle of saddlery and harness. He was then taught dismounted drill – the simple facing movements, marching, and saluting – before proceeding to the more complicated mounted drill. Rid-



ing a horse into battle was quite different from riding to church on Sunday. The army issued strict instructions on how training would be conducted:

'The recruit commences his instruction on foot. The first week after his arrival at the regiment is employed exclusively in instructing him in all the details of discipline, police, and interior service, and in those relating to his dress and the grooming of his horse.

He is taught to mount without saddle on both sides of the horse. He is taught the name and use of the principal parts of the arms and equipments, and the manner of keeping them clean; the manner of rolling the cloak, of folding the effects, and of placing them in the valise. These different instructions are given by the corporal of the squad, under the superintendence of the sergeant and officer of the platoon. At the end of this week, the recruit commences the first lesson on foot; he continues to be instructed in the above-mentioned details. The recruits are drilled on foot twice a day, when possible, an hour each time. Their instruction on horseback is commenced at the same time with the sabre exercise.

The soldier also had to learn by heart the commands as transmitted by bugle, the battlefield being too noisy for voice commands. These commands, according to Cooke's *Tactics*, were:

'1. The general. 2. Boots and saddles. 3. To horse. 4. The assembly. 5. To arms. 6. To the standard. 7. The march (it also answers for a quick step on foot). 8. The charge. 9. The rally. 10. Reveille. 11. Stable call. 12. Watering call. 13. Breakfast call. 14. Assembly of the guard. 15. Orders for the orderly sergeants. 16. Assembly of the trumpeters. 17. Retreat. 18. Fatigue call. 19. Dinner call. 20. Distributions. 21. Drill call. 22. Officers' call. 23. The recall. 24. Sick call. 25. Tattoo. 26. To extinguish lights.'

As if these were not enough, a separate group of bugle calls were set aside 'For the service of skirmishers':

'1. Forward. 2. Halt. 3. To the left. 4. To the right. 5. The about. 6. Change direction to the right. 7. Change direction to the left. 8. Trot. 9. Gallop. 10. To commence firing. 11. To cease firing. 12. To charge as foragers. The rally is No. 9, general signals.'

There was, however, always the problem of find-

Non-commissioned officers, such as this sergeant, were authorized red worsted sashes. The

yellow stripe down each leg has photographed black on the film of the day.

ing qualified personnel to train recruits. Most training was to have been conducted by corporals. According to Cooke's *Tactics*, 'The Corporals should be capable of executing all the lessons mounted and dismounted, and should be qualified to teach the *school of the trooper dismounted*, and at least 4 lessons mounted.' Sergeants were to perform the more advanced stages of training, and were, according to the manual, to be 'capable of executing, dismounted and mounted, all that is prescribed by this book; and should be able to teach the lessons of the *school of the trooper*, and to command a platoon in the *school of the squadron mounted*.'

Unfortunately, most sergeants and corporals of newly recruited companies knew as little about soldiering as the privates. New NCOs were forced to read the manuals, usually keeping one step ahead of their trainees by studying the next day's lesson the evening before. Usually each regiment had one or two old soldiers who had campaign experience in the Mexican War or had served in a pre-war volunteer company, and these held nightly classes for the new NCOs. There was no set programme of training nor length of time allotted for it. Often, as soon as a regiment was formed it was sent to join the field army even if it lacked the necessary equipment. Training was then improvised in the field.

In April 1862 the 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment was sent on to Washington without horses, and was immediately threatened with conversion into infantry. To prevent this the commander concocted a wily scheme. He drew horses that were unfit for service on the pretext of training his men in the rudiments of mounting and riding. In the meantime some of his men had been assigned to the Provost Marshal's office, and were issued good horses for their duties. The commander exchanged these few good horses for some of the unfit nags. When the cavalry inspectors visited the regimental camp they immediately got the impression that the entire regiment was indeed mounted. The inspectors instructed that the worn-out nags be exchanged for good mounts from the artillery stables. Thus the

Yellow chevrons on each arm marked non-commissioned officers. This man wears an unofficial chevron which first appeared around May

1863: the one bar and three chevrons represent a company quartermaster sergeant. (Richard Carlile Collection)

regiment managed to remain a cavalry formation, and received some much-needed training into the bargain.

The 17th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment was formed in late 1862, and set up its training camp outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. 'In this camp horses, sabres and horse equipments were issued, and the active duties of the soldier commenced,' the regimental historian wrote. 'Drill, drill, drill, drill was now the order over and over again. Drill by squads! drill by company! drill by squadron! and drill by regiment! Then there were dress parades, guard, fatigue and other camp duties of various kinds, which kept the men almost constantly employed. At first



these drills and camp duties were cheerfully accepted by the men, but soon they became monotonous and were regarded by some as superfluous and unnecessary. . . . Then there were dismounted drills, sabre drills, carbine drills, revolver drills, and various other drills. Considerable stress was given to the sabre drill, that being the chief weapon used when on duty, dress parade and review occasions. The colonel established a school of instruction, and the officers were obliged to make themselves thoroughly acquainted with the tactics and other military duties.'

There was, however, no formal schooling available for officers either. In some regiments officers were expected to pick up the necessary skills by observation and reading on their own. In others, especially where the regimental commander had prior military experience, officers took evening



classes on topics such as army regulations, cavalry tactics and requisition procedures. When the 1st New York Cavalry was first formed, according to one member, its commander opened schools of instruction, 'and the officers applied themselves to the tactics. We had company drills, too, nearly every day, but the work of training new horses so that they could execute movements with celerity progressed slowly. Efficiency was a thing not to be attained in a month or even a year; nor was it difficult to see from the slow progress we made in improvement what a Herculean task it was to make an army a general could feel safe with in the face of an enemy.'

Other regiments arranged more specialized training for their men. In the 1st New Jersey Cavalry's training camp, according to its chaplain, 'Several times the regiment was ordered out as if for the march, until the men became accustomed to pack and saddle well and promptly.'

The men who joined in 1861 were the lucky ones: they at least received some preliminary training before being sent out on active campaign. In later years new recruits were forwarded directly to their regiments, without any stay at a camp of instruction. There they had to 'learn the ropes' with only the friendly help of the more experienced troopers and NCOs. Some progressive regiments set up 'Q' troops, in which recruits received the basic training. Eventually, however, most regiments lost so many trained men and had such a high proportion of recruits they had to virtually begin anew. The 2nd New York Cavalry, for example, was down to some 350 all ranks by the end of the Second Bull Run campaign; this was one of a number of regiments from the Army of the Potomac which returned to the outskirts of Washington to set up a new camp of instruction for their recruits.

Again, some back-to-basics training was given in the winter of 1863-4 when a new tactical system for cavalry was introduced. 'There was little time for rest or recreation,' wrote one Michigan veteran. 'Long and tiresome drills and "schools of instruction" made up the daily routine. In one respect, however, these

Battalion quartermaster sergeants, like this man, wore two bars over their three chevrons. His otherwise plain dark blue jacket is trimmed around

the top and front of the collar and down the front with yellow tape. This was common among Pennsylvania cavalymen.

drills of troops, regiment and brigade were a good thing. Many hundreds of new recruits were sent on from Michigan and, being put in with the old men, they were worked into good soldiers before the campaign opened, and proved to be as reliable and efficient as the veterans with whom they were associated.'

In much the same way, when Maj.Gen. James H. Wilson was given a corps of cavalry in the Western theatre in the winter of 1864, he made sure that 'a thorough system of instruction for men and officers was instituted, and every necessary effort was made to bring the corps to the highest possible state of efficiency'. This, unlike much previous training, emphasized dismounted tactics, especially using the quick-loading seven-shot Spencer carbine, which gave Wilson's troops far greater firepower than any potential enemy. In reality, the average cavalryman learned how to perform his duties more from service in the field than from formal training programmes.

In many ways, the objective of all military training is to turn a man into an obedient automaton. In this respect Civil War training failed. As a New York cavalry officer later noted, 'The American soldier is an observing, thinking being. You can never destroy his individuality; you can not make him a mere piece of machinery. He had a rough and homely way of criticizing what is going on around him, but his criticisms are well taken, and tersely expressed. He observes the movement of his general closely, obeys his orders because it is his duty, but respects him only so far as his ability entitles him to respect.'

UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT

On 17 August 1861 Captain William E. Doster, Co. A, 4th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, put in his first requisition for the basic uniforms and equipment needed to equip his newly organized company of 92 enlisted men. For each he requested: a complete cavalry cap, a blouse, a coat [i.e. dress jacket], one pair of trousers, two flannel shirts, two pairs of

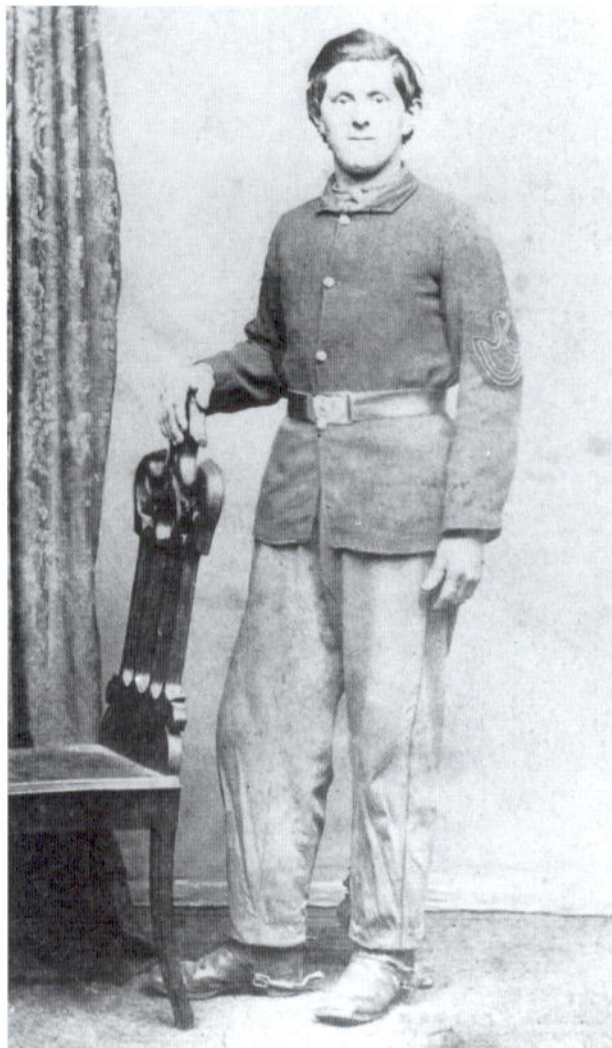
Farriers often adopted an unofficial badge of a saddler's knife. This man

also has a pair of issue spurs on his boots. (Richard Carlile)

drawers, two pairs of stockings, a pair of boots, a great coat, a blanket, a haversack and a canteen complete with straps. In addition he also requested two wall tents complete with flies, poles, and pins, 17 'common tents', 12 spades, 12 axes, four pickaxes, 12 hatchets, 12 camp kettles, 30 mess pans, a sash [probably for the company's first, or orderly, sergeant], two bugles with cords and tassels, a 'descriptive book', an 'order book', a 'clothing book', and a morning report book. This list gives an idea of the equipment of an individual trooper, and all the additional items necessary to equip a single company.

Cavalryman's dress

The US Army was one of the first to have both a fatigue dress and a full dress. The Union cavalryman's full dress headgear was a stiff, broad-brimmed



hat, turned up on one side; these hats were generally detested as being worthless and were rarely worn after the first few months; indeed many units threw them away at the first opportunity. The dark blue short jacket, trimmed with yellow braid, was better liked and was often even worn as a fatigue item. Trousers were dark blue until December 1861, when the colour was changed to a cheaper sky blue. They were reinforced with a double thickness of cloth on the inside of the legs to prolong wear. Laced bootees were issued, though many soldiers purchased knee-length boots of their own, and these were sometimes issued as well.



The fatigue dress included a dark blue cap with a leather peak which was based on a floppy version of the pre-war dress shako. Officially, for enlisted men, it was to bear the regimental number only, but this tended to be accompanied by a crossed-sabre badge as a mark of the cavalry branch. The fatigue tunic, known as a blouse, was also dark blue. It reached to below the hip bone like a modern suit jacket, was fastened in front with four brass buttons, and had an inside pocket over the left breast. The same trousers were worn for full dress and fatigue use.

Winter wear for enlisted men included a double-breasted sky-blue overcoat with a standing collar and a cape that reached to the cuffs. NCOs' chevrons were worn on the lower sleeves just above the cuffs, so that they were visible while the cape was being worn loose around the shoulders.

In the field and on fatigue duties in camp, officers were authorized waist-length jackets. These were quite popular, since frock coats were less comfortable when the wearer was mounted. The jackets were usually cut single-breasted, regardless of the wearer's rank, although some field officers did wear double-breasted jackets. For winter use officers wore a dark blue double-breasted overcoat; towards the end of the war officers were allowed to wear enlisted men's overcoats, to make them less of a target in the field. (For additional information on uniform items, insignia of rank, etc., see *Men-at-Arms* series No. 177, *American Civil War Armies 2: Union Troops*.)

Cavalry officers often embellished their uniforms with non-regulation touches. Brig.Gen. George A. Custer, commanding the Michigan Brigade, was seen by a brigade member in July 1863: 'He was clad in a suit of black velvet, elaborately trimmed with gold lace, which ran down the outer seams of his trousers, and almost covered the sleeves of his cavalry jacket. The wide collar of a blue navy shirt was turned down over the collar of his velvet jacket, and a necktie of brilliant crimson was tied in a knot at the throat, the long ends falling in front. The double rows of buttons on his breast were arranged in groups of two,

This standard issue fatigue dress has been decorated by the addition of a coloured collar and tape down the front and on each cuff. An outside left breast pocket has also been

added. Photographed in St. Louis, site of an important cavalry post, this soldier was a member of the 16th Illinois Cavalry.

indicating the rank of a brigadier general. A soft, black hat with wide brim adorned with a gilt cord, and rosette encircling a silver star, was turned down on one side giving him a rakish air.' While Custer was a noted dandy, many officers exercised a less dazzling degree of sartorial latitude: this was, after all, an army in which regulars were far outnumbered by duration-only citizen soldiers.

Enlisted men also often preferred to wear other than issue clothing. Many did not like the yellow-laced jackets, preferring instead plain dark blue jackets made to their own specifications. These were mostly single-breasted, with a slash breast pocket over the left breast and a short standing collar. A Wisconsin volunteer in 1864 had just such a plain jacket made for him when he joined, but after a period of hard service it wore out and he had to draw an issue uniform: 'I can remember now how my heart sank within me, as I picked up a pair of pants that was left. They were evidently cut out with a buzz-saw, and were made for a man that weighed three hundred . . . The sergeant charged the pants to my account, and then handed me a jacket, a small one, evidently made for a hump-backed dwarf. The jacket was covered with yellow braid. O, so yellow, that it made me sick. The jacket was charged to me, also. Then he handed me some undershirts and drawers, so coarse and rough that it seemed to me that they must have been made of rope, and lined with sand-paper. Then came an overcoat, big enough for an equestrian statue of George Washington, with a cape on it as big as a wall tent. The hat I drew was a stiff, cheap, shoddy hat, as high as a tin camp kettle, which was to take the place of my nobby, soft felt hat I had paid five dollars of my bounty money for. The hat was four sizes too large for me. Then I took the last pair of army shoes there was, and they weighed as much as a pair of anvils, and had raw-hide strings to fasten them with. Has any old soldier of the army ever forgotten the clothing that he drew from the quartermaster? These inverted pots for hats, the same size all the way up,

In the field mounted men, including officers, often wore custom-made versions of the fatigue blouse which were longer than usual and featured several outside pockets. Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant

Robert G. Huston, 118th Illinois Mounted Infantry, also wears the kind of broad-brimmed hat which was another popular personal acquisition, especially in the west. (Richard Tibbals)

and the shoes that seemed to be made of sole leather, and which scraped the skin off the ankles. O, if this government ever does go to Gehenna [Hell], as some people content it will sometime, it will be as a penalty for issuing such ill-fitting shoddy clothing to its brave soldiers.'

Many enlisted cavalymen wore pieces of civilian and even Confederate dress. As late as 31 July 1864 officers of the veteran 2nd Iowa Cavalry Regiment had to be ordered that, 'The regiment having been supplied with clothing, no article of citizen's apparel whatever will be allowed to be worn. All such clothing in possession of the men must be disposed of to-





The issue enlisted man's overcoat had a cape that reached the cuffs, and two rows of buttons down the front. In the rush to get uniforms to the men in

1861, materials other than the regulation sky blue wool often had to be used for these coats, as in this dark blue example. (David Scheinmann)



Non-commissioned officers, such as First Sergeant Elbridge Williams, pictured here, wore chevrons on their overcoat cuffs so they would not be hidden by

their capes. Note the boots with flaps that covered the knee. These were not issued, but bought from sutlers or sent from home. (Richard Carlile Collection)

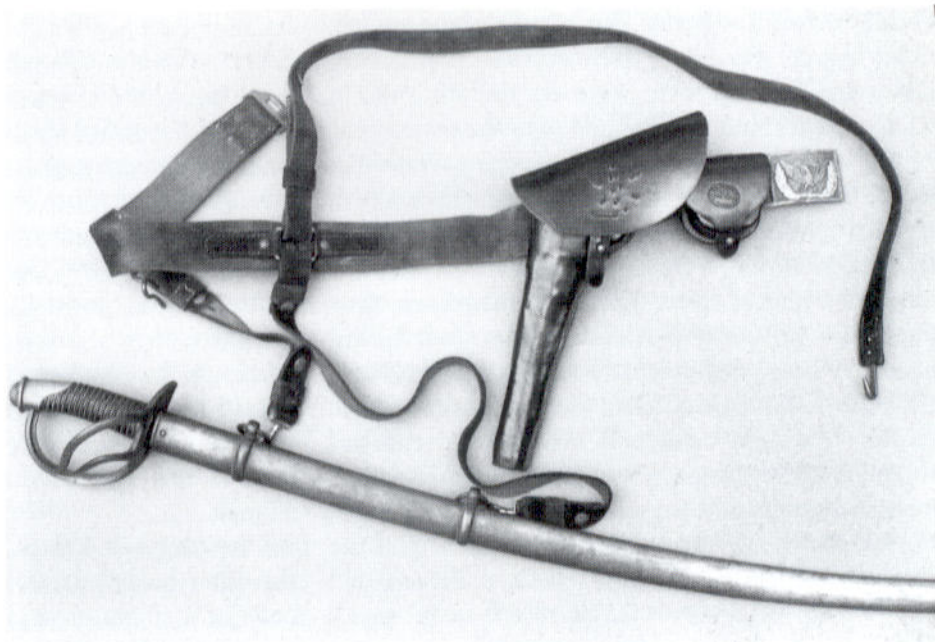
day. Company officers will make a minute inspection of their Company quarters and the men's knapsacks tomorrow morning, and all hats, coats, and pants other than the prescribed uniform will be taken possession of and burned.'

The fact is, however, that no amount of orders could stop the men – and even the officers – from wearing wide-brimmed black civilian hats in the field. The superior quality of most civilian items ensured that they remained popular with the men throughout the war. Indeed, on 5 July 1864 the men of the 2nd Michigan even had to be ordered not to wear 'the whole or part of the confederate uniform'. One can understand why the Confederate uniform, especially in the hot South, would be preferred to the

US Army issue dress: many Southern summer garments were made of denim or cotton cloth, while the US Army uniform, issued year-around, was made entirely of wool.

Heavy gloves, often cut with large gauntlet cuffs, were useful when riding. Strangely, these were not issued, and both officers and men had to buy them from sutlers to get them sent from home. Most were made of natural buff leather, though some officers had the cuffs embroidered with a gold eagle, stars, the national motto or some similar design.

The basic enlisted cavalryman's belt had two slings to hang the sabre from the left side, while the pistol and cap pouch were worn on the right. A sling that passed over the right shoulder helped support the weight of the sword; this was disliked and was often discarded.



A close-up of the belt plate showing the separate silver wreath applied to the cast brass belt plate. The percussion cap box has a US Army Ordnance Department inspector's markings.

Equipment

The equipment included a sword belt with a rectangular brass belt plate featuring a spread-winged eagle enclosed by a silver wreath. The belt was generally made of leather, dark brown on the outside and left a natural cream colour on the inside, although it rapidly grew the same colour inside as out after a short period of wear. The sabre hung on the left hip, and a black pistol holster on the right hip. A small leather pouch for percussion caps was normally worn on the right just in front of the holster to allow easy

access to it when using the carbine: however, in order to get all the necessary pouches on the belt, the cap box was just as often worn on the front left hip. The cap pouch had a piece of sheepskin placed just inside to prevent caps from falling out when it was left open, as often occurred in combat. It also contained a nipple pick, a thin piece of iron wire used to clean out the nipple of the carbine or pistol, which often fouled up during use. A slightly larger pouch for pistol ammunition was worn behind the holster. Enlisted men also carried carbines, slung by a spring and swivel hook from a wide belt, with a large brass frame

buckle, around the body. The larger carbine ammunition pouch was often worn on the carbine belt, unless the cap box were worn on the left side, in which case it could be crammed onto the sword belt.

A wool-covered canteen was slung from the saddle or worn around the body, along with a waterproofed haversack in which the man's rations, and spare ammunition, were to be carried. Each man also received a pair of spurs (although these were often purchased privately, particularly by officers); and necessary horse equipment. This was based around the Army's issue McClellan saddle, named for its deviser Maj.Gen. George B. McClellan, who had copied it from European models. The other equipment included saddle bags, a picket pin, a rope, a feed bag for the horse, and a 'boot' in which to rest the carbine muzzle.

WEAPONS

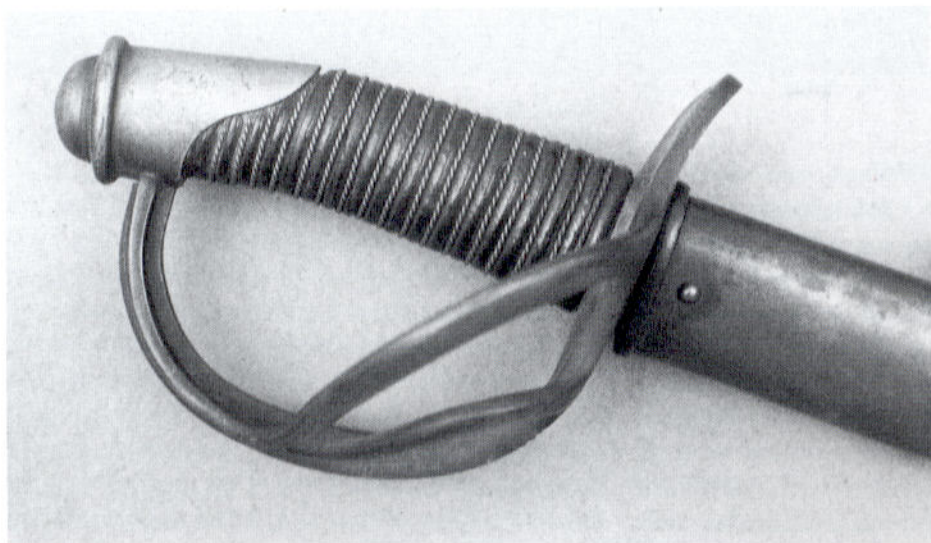
The cavalry was the best armed of all the branches of service. The cavalryman's sword, intended for mounted combat, was either the M1840 heavy cavalry sabre or the similar but lighter version designed in 1860. Both were based on an earlier French model and featured a slightly curved blade, a brass guard, and a leather handgrip bound with twisted wire. The sword was carried in an iron scabbard, and usually had a brown leather sabre knot attached to the guard; this was worn around the wrist in action, preventing the sabre from being dropped.

Sabres and knives

Sabres were normally issued with blunt blades. In the summer of 1862 a Georgia regiment of the Confederate cavalry notified the men of the 7th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment that they had sharpened their sabres and were planning to show the Federal cavalry what sabres were intended for. Soon afterwards the 7th captured several Georgians and found that their sabres had, indeed, been sharpened. The Pennsylvanians immediately put their own sabres to the grindstone – fortunately, as it turned out. In a battle soon afterwards the 7th Pennsylvania charged with drawn sabres, clearing the facing Confederate line within five minutes for the loss of only 45 men.

Besides belt knives, which many men carried, the other major edged weapon, the lance, was used only by a single regiment and for a relatively brief period. Maj.Gen. George B. McClellan, commander of the Army of the Potomac, had before the war visited a number of European armies and had been impressed by their lancer formations. In November 1861 he suggested that one of his cavalry regiments should be converted to lancers, and the 6th Pennsylvania was chosen.

In the event, the lance did not live up to expectations. One veteran recalled that, 'Our weapon being unfitted for any service but the charge, we were held only to resist attack from the enemy.' A Southern cavalryman later recalled how 'Rush's Lancers' were attacked by Confederate cavalry, 'but before our Virginia horsemen got within fifty yards of their line,



The hilt of the M1840 dragoon sabre, the 'old wristbreaker'. The M1860 light cavalry sabre was quite similar in appearance.

this magnificent regiment, which had doubtless excited the liveliest admiration in Northern cities, turned tail and fled in disorder, strewing the whole line of their retreat with their picturesque but inconvenient arms. The entire skirmish, if such it may be called, was over in less time than it is required to record it: and I do not believe that out of the whole body of 700 men, more than twenty retained their lances.' In 1863, recognizing the uselessness of the lance in North America, the 6th turned in their remaining weapons to the quartermaster stores, and replaced them with the more conventional Spencer carbines and pistols.

Pistols

The pistol was a far more popular weapon. Six-shot revolvers made by Colt Firearms Co. were the most common; other models made by such companies as Savage and Starr appeared in far smaller numbers than the Colts. The issue 'Army' Colt pistol was 0.44 calibre, although 0.36 calibre 'Navy' models were also popular, especially among officers, who preferred their lighter weight. They fired paper-wrapped cartridges, using copper percussion caps to ignite the charge. The revolver, though valued for a quick firing rate, was not yet a refined weapon: percussion caps would sometimes fly apart on firing, causing the revolving cylinder to jam; and there was always the danger that a single shot might set off all six rounds at once, with crippling effect. Pistols were accurate only at very short range, which meant they were useful only in cavalry

mêlées and other close actions, which were not particularly common.

Carbines

The most useful cavalry weapon was the carbine. Most were manufactured by private companies; Union troopers were issued with a plethora of designs, some good and some bad. The breechloading carbine was standard, but the types can be classed as firing either fixed ammunition or paper ammunition, the latter being the most common, especially in the early stages of the war. Carbines were both shorter and smaller in bore than the 0.58 or 0.577 calibre rifle muskets of the infantry; most were between 0.50 and 0.54 calibre.

The Sharps carbine was initially the most popular model. It used a paper or linen cartridge box, inserted in the breech through a falling block that sheared off the paper when closed. A 0.52 calibre weapon, it weighed 7¾ pounds and was 39 inches long. One reason for its popularity was its simple mechanism, which worked well no matter how dirty it got from mud or gunpowder residue.

The Starr carbine, of 0.54 calibre, was similar in design and function to the Sharps; however, its mechanism was more delicate. An ordnance officer reported that 'the least dirt deranges it. It requires

The side of the Smith carbine showing the ring which was used to hook the carbine to the carbine sling. The owner of this particular carbine,

Sergeant Franklin Thomas, Co. A, 12th Illinois Cavalry Regiment, carved his name on the stock, as can still be seen. (Chris Nelson)





This cavalryman holds his new M1859 Sharps carbine and M1860 light cavalry sabre, complete with black leather sabre knot. He has two M1851 Colt Navy

revolvers stuck in his belt. His broad carbine sling, with its brass tip and large brass buckle, is worn across his chest. (Mick Kissick)

both hands to press back the lever, the cartridge is not readily placed straight in the barrel, and the gas check is very imperfect. After a few firings the saltpetre corrodes the barrel where it enters the gas check, rendering the level double hard to open. As the part becomes more corroded, the effect of the discharge would be greatly impaired.'

The Smith carbine was of 0.50 calibre; it weighed 7½ pounds and was 39 inches long. It was unique among issue carbines, however, in that it used rubber cartridges which sealed the gap in the shotgun-like breech. These cartridges often proved difficult to extract after firing in combat conditions; otherwise, the weapon was fairly popular. Less so was the 0.52 calibre Cosmopolitan carbine, made in Hamilton, Ohio, of which over 9,000 were acquired by the army during the war. Using linen cartridges,

the Cosmopolitan leaked gas on firing, was not sturdy in use, and had inaccurate sights. The Department of West Virginia's Chief Ordnance Officer wrote in August 1864 that the Cosmopolitan was 'a very worthless weapon . . . thrust upon the Ordnance Department by political influence of contractors'.

Only 1,050 Gibbs carbines were issued; this was another weapon that had to be broken open at the breech to allow a linen cartridge to be inserted. A report from an Army of the Potomac ordnance officer dated August 1863 condemned the Gibbs: 'I cannot report favorably on the arm. The working is very simple but perfectly exposed rendering it liable to catch all dirt, and the smallest stick or pebble getting into it renders it unserviceable, until it is taken apart and cleaned.'

The 0.54 Merrill carbine used a unique top-loading mechanism operated by raising a lever on top of the breech to expose the chamber. A paper cartridge was inserted; when the top lever was closed a small piston pushed the cartridge forward. These weapons, which also came with unique cartridge boxes, were not popular, and were soon replaced in the Eastern theatre; after 1863 they were mostly to be found in the West.

Eventually the army turned to carbines which used fixed ammunition that included the primer as well as the powder and round. The 0.54 Burnside used a metallic cartridge otherwise similar to the Smith carbine round. The US government issued more than 50,000 Burnsidés, but the troopers were not completely happy with it: the spring holding the lever shut was too weak for prolonged service, and cartridges had a habit of jamming in the breech when the gun was fired.

The Ballard, of which only 1,509 were bought by the US government and 20,000 by the state of Kentucky, used a falling breechblock system including the trigger and hammer, which was lowered to receive the cartridge; after firing a spring-loaded ejecting rod under the breech cleared the weapon for the next round. The 0.50 calibre Maynard used a cartridge with an especially wide base to ease extraction after firing. The cartridge did not contain its own primer, however, and the weapon had to be fired with a standard musket cap. Though well made and rugged, it saw only little usage in the last years of the war.

This cavalryman holds a Colt Army revolver as well as his sabre. Note the long brown leather sabre knot, which was worn around the wrist so the sabre could not be lost during mounted combat. (David Scheinmann)



Although these carbines used metallic cartridges, which were an improvement over the paper-wrapped rounds so easily destroyed by water or jostling in the cartridge box, they were still loaded and fired one round at a time. Several repeating carbines saw service, and their higher rate of fire gave the Union trooper a definite edge over most opponents. The 0.52 calibre Spencer was the most popular of these weapons. It used a magazine holding seven rim-fire cartridges in line in a spring-loaded metal tube which was inserted into the butt. It was consequently

heavier, at $8\frac{1}{4}$ pounds empty, although it was only the standard 39 inches long. The army bought over 95,000 Spencers, and they were the most common cavalry weapon by the end of the war.

The Henry rifle, a brass-framed lever-action ancestor of the later famous Winchester, was popular with the troops, who bought many of them privately, but not with the army, which purchased only small numbers. It was never an issued cavalry carbine; at $9\frac{1}{4}$ pounds and $43\frac{1}{2}$ inches long it was unwieldy for use on horseback, and lacked a rail-and-ring for



Private Isaac C. Davis, 15th Pennsylvania Cavalry, wearing the dress jacket with the fatigue cap, has an M1851 Colt Navy

revolver stuck in his sword belt and an issue cavalry sabre at his waist. He holds his Sharps carbine at his side. (John Sickles)

attachment to a carbine sling. Nevertheless, a handful of cavalrymen and, especially in the West, mounted infantrymen carried them.

Units formed further West tended to be worse equipped with weapons than those in the East. The 7th Pennsylvania, which served under Generals Rosencrans and Buell in the Western theatre, was originally given Belgian muzzle-loading rifles, which were not replaced by Spencer and Burnside carbines until early 1864. The 3rd Colorado, even further west, was formed in August 1864 for a hundred days, largely to fight Indians. Almost two months of that time was wasted in simply acquiring equipment, including weapons, and when the weapons arrived they were hardly reassuring. 'We were armed with

old, out-of-date, muzzle-loading muskets, which were loaded with paper cartridges,' recalled one veteran. 'We had to tear off the end of the paper cartridge with our teeth, pour the powder into the muzzle of the gun, ram the bullet and paper down on top of the powder, and then see that the nipple that held the cap was primed before putting the cap on. These guns carried plenty of powder and lead, but could not be depended on for accurate shooting except at close range, and it was slow work reloading them. However, I was fortunate enough to trade my musket for a Sharp's carbine.'

US Army Cavalry Weapons

The figures below indicate the numbers of weapons the US Army acquired and, for the most part, issued between 1 January 1861 and 30 June 1866. Since the

Weapons Acquired/Issued by US Army 1 Jan. 1861-30 June 1866

<i>Carbines</i>	<i>Number Acquired</i>	<i>Pistols</i>	<i>Number Acquired</i>
Ballard	1,509	Allen's	536
Ball's	1,002	Adam's	415
Burnside	55,567	Ball's	2,814
Cosmopolitan	9,342	Colt's Army	129,730
Gallagher	22,728	Colt's Navy	17,010
Gibbs'	1,052	Joslyn	1,100
Hall's	3,520	Perrin's	200
Joslyn	11,261	Pettingill's	2,001
Lindner	892	Le Fauchaux	121,374
Merrill's	14,495	Remington's Army	125,314
Maynard's	20,002	Remington's Navy	11,901
Palmer's	1,001	Raphael's	978
Remington's	20,000	Savage's	11,284
Sharp's	80,512	Starr's	17,952
Smith's	30,062	Roger & Spencer's	5,000
Spencer's	94,196	Whitney	11,214
Starr's	25,603	Foreign	100
Warner's	4,001	Horse pistols	200
Wesson's	151	Signal pistols	348
French carbines	200		
Foreign carbines	10,051		
Musketoons	587		

period covers some time after the war had actually ended, it will be skewed towards late-war weapons; for example, vastly more Sharps carbines than Spencers were carried in most of the actual cavalry combat, particularly in earlier campaigns such as Shiloh, Antietam, Vicksburg, and Gettysburg. Nonetheless, the list shows the proportion of types of weapons Union cavalymen actually carried.

FIELD SERVICE

The soldier's day in camp began at dawn, when a bugle call summoned him for the first roll call. Thereafter the bugle dictated most of his activities, from taking care of the horses to sitting down for dinner. Much of the morning, after man and horse were cared for, was spent in drill, since accurate drill was still considered the prerequisite for all basic battle manoeuvres. A dress formation was held in the evening, after which the soldier was dismissed and the remaining time, until tattoo, was his own. Sundays were slightly less arduous; a dress parade and full inspection in the morning were followed by a free afternoon.

Leisure time was, however, quite rare, as men of the 1st Ohio Cavalry soon discovered: 'The trooper has his carbine to care for and keep in order, which evens him up with the infantryman in care of arms and equipments, and in addition to this he has his revolver, sabre and horse equipments to keep in order and his horse to water, feed and groom every day, and the soldier who enlists in the cavalry service expecting a "soft snap" will soon learn, to his sorrow, that he has been laboring under a grievous mistake. On a campaign or march in good weather, when it is not necessary to pitch tents at night, the infantry stack arms, get supper and are soon at rest or asleep; but not so with the cavalryman – the company must first put up the picket rope and then the horses must be watered, fed and groomed. If there is no forage in the wagon train, he must then hunt forage for his horse, and perhaps go a mile or two for that. Then he unsaddles, gets his coffee, grooms his horse, and is ready to lie down an hour after the infantryman is asleep. In the morning, if the cavalry are to move at the same hour the infantry are to march, they must have reveille an hour earlier than the infantry, to have



Federal Ordnance officers often pulled obsolete equipment out of storage to fill the needs of all the volunteers the army had recruited. This cavalryman holds an

M1833 dragoon sabre, which was considered too light for field service and was generally unpopular. He has two Colt revolvers stuck in his belt.

time to feed, groom and water their horses; and while he has the advantage on the march, it would not be considered by the average citizen a very easy task to march forty, fifty or even sixty miles a day mounted, which was a usual occurrence on our scouts and raids.'

Discipline

Never the strong point of a volunteer army, discipline loosened further in the field. Foraging to supplement the issued rations was common. Issue rations were both limited and boring: they included desic-

cated vege-tables, a sort of dried soup mix (which apparently consisted mostly of turnips), salt pork or beef, and the infamous 'hard tack'. Eggs bought or stolen from farmers, and fruit pie from the regimental sutler, brought much-needed variety into the diet.

Stealing was something for which the cavalryman had more frequent opportunities than the infantryman: his duties often took him away from the main body of troops and the prying eyes of superior officers. One Iowa cavalryman noted that many of his mates 'carried on a wholesale robbery business. Money, watches, jewelry and valuables of any kind were stolen by them calling themselves forages; they were literally thieves, and robbing banditti.' Even when the cavalryman paid for items from Southern civilians, it was often not with legal currency – a

number of enterprising Northern printers produced counterfeit Confederate currency, which they sold cheaply to Union soldiers in large quantities.

Sutlers

It was at the training camp that the cavalry recruit first met the sutler, one of whom was authorized to each regiment. The sutler was a merchant, who sold products that were not issued by the government, but were considered important for the soldier's health and morale. They worked from a fixed spot in the camp, often a shack with a canvas roof or a tent; in the field they operated from wagons. According to the exhaustive General Orders No. 27 and 35, dated 21 March 1862 and 7 February 1863, sutlers were authorized to sell: apples, oranges, figs, lemons, butter, cheese, milk, syrup, molasses, raisins, candles, crackers, wallets, brooms, comforters, boots, pocket looking glasses, pins, gloves, leather, tin washbasins, shirt buttons, horn and brass buttons, newspapers, books, tobacco, cigars, pipes, matches, blacking

On the move in the field, two cavalrymen shared a single shelter-tent, made of two pieces buttoned together. This replicated

shelter tent, known by the men as a 'dog tent', is ready for inspection, with the occupants' equipment laid out in it.





These cavalrymen, sketched by famous American artist Winslow Homer, enjoy the Thanksgiving holiday in camp at their sutler's tent.

brushes, clothes brushes, tooth brushes, hair brushes, coarse and fine combs, emery, crocus, pocket handkerchiefs, stationery, armor [gun] oil, sweet oil, rotten stone, razor straps, razors, shaving soap, soap, suspenders [braces], scissors, shoestrings, needles, thread, pencils, belt- and pocket-knives, Bristol brick, canned meats and oysters, dried beef, smoked tongues, tinned and fresh vegetables, pepper, mustard, yeast powders, pickles, sardines, Bologna sausages, eggs, buckwheat flour, mackerel, codfish, poultry, saucepans, tin coffee pots, tin plates and cups, forks, knives, spoons, twine, wrapping paper, uniform clothing for officers, socks, trimmings for uniforms, shoes, shirts and drawers . . . In the Western theatre sutlers were also allowed to sell bicarbonate of soda, seidlitz powders, yeast powders – and even lager beer, though the sale of alcoholic beverages was otherwise generally prohibited.

'Sutlers were regular sharks,' wrote one Ohio cavalryman, 'and their methods of doing business was by Sutler's checks from one pay-day to another. These checks were either tickets or metal representing from ten cents to one dollar, and any soldier

could go and get a limited amount of checks and the Sutler would charge him up on his books with the full amount of them, and then when the soldier made his purchases the Sutler would charge him up so as to get at least one hundred per cent. profit – for instance, fifty cents a pound for cheese, one dollar for a plug of Navy tobacco, and three dollars for a canteen full of commissary whisky, warranted to kill at a hundred yards. When pay-day arrived the Sutler was on hand at the table besides the Paymaster to collect, and he always got his full share of the greenbacks paid out . . .'

In more permanent camps regimental sutlers had fierce competition. Only a short time after arriving at one such camp in early 1862, a New York cavalryman found that outside the bivouac area, 'Streets were laid out and named, and long lines of tent-shanties, in which a brisk trade was carried on, gave a gay and picturesque appearance to the place. Here a persuasive Jew made his bow, and invited you in to buy his

cheap clothing and his flimsy haberdashery; there, an enterprising gentleman from Boston had opened a showy establishment, and had everything the soldier wanted, from a bunch of matches to a leathery cheese. Then a respectable-looking gentleman from New York invited you in to see the extensive stock he was just opening, and intended to sell at cost and expenses. He didn't want to make a dollar out of the soldier, he was sure he didn't; and as for the like of a bottle of good whiskey, why he always threw in that as a matter of friendship. The "Broadway Saloon" rivalled with the "Philadelphia House" in the quantity and quality of dinner given you for a dollar. Both had their female contraband [African-American] waiters, draped in the gayest attire; both swarmed with flies, and steamed with the heat of a furnace.' On top of all that, it was always possible to find, the cavalryman reported, 'a "little game" going on just beyond the Oaks.'

Pastimes

Gambling was always popular: 'As soon as the soldiers were paid off, all the little dealers would get out their "chuck a luck" boards with the mysterious white figures on a black oil-cloth and the games would commence all along the line – in tents, on cracker boxes, on forage sacks and wherever seats

could be improvised. In fact, at some points where the troops were paid off there was nothing to buy and nothing to spend money for, and the boys that did not send their money home must spend it in some manner, and in some instances a devotee of the alluring game of "draw poker" or "Old sledge" would sit down after being paid off and at one sitting put every dime he had in the "Jack pot". But the players were all very liberal, good-hearted fellows, and when a comrade got "broke" they would always "put up a stake" for him until the next pay day, if he was "a square fellow."

The same Ohio cavalryman noted that, 'In the cavalry service horse racing was the great sport, and the First Ohio was no exception to the rule. When we were in camp for any length of time, and the service was not too hard, the lovers of that sport would improvise a track on some straight stretch of road, or across some old fields or pastures, and the "sprinters" would be put in training under the care of some experienced horsemen and jockeys, of which there were a number in the regiment. . . . Very often races would be made with horses of other regiments and the betting would be heavy and the excitement ran high.'¹¹

With only a limited amount of money available to lose or spend, the soldier had to find some other way



One young cavalry bugler rides his animal inside a sutler's tent, while to the left of picture another cavalryman sits on a barrel. The sutler was often the social center of a cavalry camp. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated News)

Right: Winter quarters usually consisted of log huts with roofs made from the tents. A company of the 14th Massachusetts Cavalry return to their winter quarters in the winter of 1861–62, while a log-cutting detail, bottom right, chops firewood.



Above: These cavalymen, seated in front of the camera, look across a camp at a group of some 200 Confederate prisoners captured during the 1862 campaign in the Valley of

Virginia. The cavalryman standing, near right, rests on a Sharps carbine. Note the shelter-half tent, open at both ends, on the near left, and the teepee-like Sibley tents, which did

not last through the year, on the near right. Shelter-half tents were buttoned together and shared by two men; each Sibley tent was designed to house 20

soldiers and their personal gear, along with a sheet-iron stove in the centre for warmth. (National Archive)





Boxes of food, clothing, and reading materials from home were the things that often kept a soldier going. These cavalrymen enjoy one of their fellow troopers' boxes from home during the Christmas 1861 holiday.

Right: Eventually large cash bounties had to be offered to attract recruits into Union cavalry regiments. Here, in the left foreground, a cavalryman tries to persuade a civilian into joining the ranks of his regiment. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated News)

of passing most of his idle hours. Wherever possible, the troopers took in the sights; many had seen little of the world beyond their own farms and the nearby small market towns, and cities, especially Washington, were special treats. A visit to the US Capitol building was a must, and many soldiers recorded visits to George Washington's tomb along the Potomac River. Almost everything in the South was of interest, especially the slaves. Few Northerners had seen African-Americans before; and some who had not been in favour of abolition before the war turned abolitionist once they saw how the slaves were forced to live. The average Union cavalryman, however, is unlikely to have claimed he was fighting for

freedom for the slaves, or for equality between the races.

Mail writing was very popular – indeed, thanks to extensive public schooling in the North, most soldiers were literate. 'Men who never wrote a letter in their lives before, are at it now', wrote a 2nd New York Cavalry captain, 'those who cannot write at all are either learning, or engage their comrades to write for them, and the command is doing more writing in one day than, I should judge, we used to do in a month, and, perhaps, a year.' Most of these letters were predictably similar: they gave news about the writer, especially his health, and about other local boys in the same unit; they enquired about the

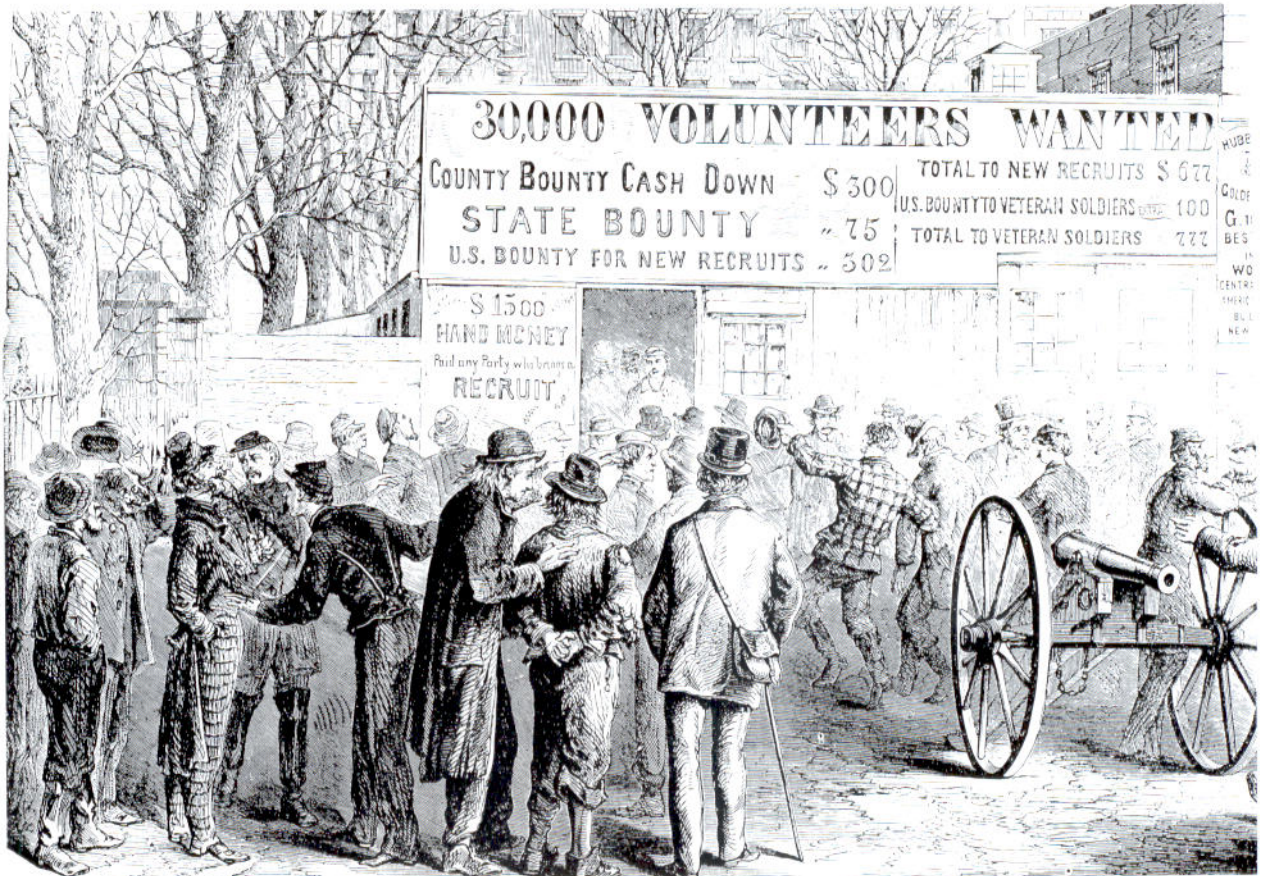
goings-on back home, especially of unattached women; and they asked for items to be sent from home, including food, stamps (which were hard to get at the front), items of clothing, and reading material.

Soldiers also read newspapers sent from home, popular novels (which were cheaply available in paperback), and religious literature, which was widely distributed by chaplains and organizations such as the Christian Commission. Ambitious men read military manuals to improve their prospects of promotion. Newspapers from the South could occasionally be obtained by trade with the enemy.

Fraternization was greatly frowned upon, but when the two sides went into winter quarters, as along the Rappahannock River in the winter of 1862–63, pickets often held informal truces. Typically, tobacco and newspapers from the Confederates were exchanged for coffee and newspapers from the Federals. When a river separated the two sides the men improvised small boats to sail their trading goods across.

Baseball, often called ‘rounders’, was just gaining popularity and was replacing cricket as the most popular American sport. Regiments from largely urban areas where baseball was played, such as New York and Philadelphia, raised teams and taught units from places where the game was still little known. It was a game that could be improvised at short notice; all that was needed was a short pole, easily produced from a young tree, and a ball perhaps made from a walnut wrapped in yarn, with simple markers to indicate bases. A New York cavalryman wrote from camp in early 1862 that ‘An exciting game of “baseball” was played on the eleventh, near our camp, between boys of the “Fourteenth Brooklyn” and the Harris Light [2nd New York Cavalry]. The contest resulted in a drawn game, so that neither could claim the victory.’

Concerts put on by various unit bands were another popular form of free entertainment. The same New York cavalryman noted: ‘To increase the variety of our experience, and to give it a pleasing tone, Kilpatrick’s brigade-band made its first appear-



ance in front of head-quarters this evening. They discourse national airs in a manner that thrilled and elated us, making the welkin ring with their excellent music.' Cavalry brigade bands were authorized by General Order No. 91 of July 1861, and were to contain a band leader and 16 musicians. Generally the musicians played some form of brass horn: a cornet (or saxhorn), an alto horn, a tenor horn, a baritone horn, and a bass horn. Drums, both side and bass, and cymbals were occasionally added. In larger bands woodwind sections comprising piccolos, flutes, and soprano clarinets were added, although these were unusual.

Although early in the war the bandsmen were put to work during battle aiding the wounded, this job was later taken over by Ambulance Corpsmen. Bandsmen sometimes reverted to their original role and actually played during battle. During the battle

Americans of the 1860s were often sincerely religious; most Union cavalymen went to church services when they had the chance. At this

one, officers have brought their camp chairs and sit in the front, while a regiment or brigade band, extreme right, plays hymns.

of Dinwiddie Court House, for example, the commanding officer of the 1st Marine Cavalry recalled that 'Our band came up from the rear and cheered and animated our hearts by its rich music; ere long a rebel band replied by giving us Southern airs; with cheers from each side in encouragement of its own band, a cross-fire of the "Star Spangled Banner", "Yankee Doodle", and "John Brown", mingled with "Dixie" and the "Bonnie Blue Flag".'

Religion was an important aspect of life in an age where the majority of the population were churchgoers. Each regiment was authorized a chaplain, though the position was often vacant. Chaplains held religious services on Sundays, and on many other mornings and evenings as well, and these were usually well attended. In many units the men organized their own prayer or Bible study groups, and these were popular whether the unit had a chaplain or not. Chaplains had to be from a recognized Christian faith until the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry Regiment, a unit largely made up of Jews and with a Jewish colonel, appointed a Jew, Michael Allen, as their chaplain. Allen was a cantor rather than a rabbi, although he



had received a certificate as a *Haber* (Fellow in Jewish Studies). Although he was at first dismissed when discovered by the authorities the rules were changed in 1862, and from then on rabbis were allowed to become chaplains.

Drinking, though officially banned, was always popular. Troops near towns could generally get away to visit local saloons; otherwise many sutlers sneaked liquor into the camps to sell to the troops. Beer was not popular at this date except among German troops, and most men preferred whiskey in one form or another. Some managed to have friends at home ship them liquor in innocent-looking packages – one ingenious man had a bottle sent to him stuffed inside a roast goose. Officers drank wines as well, and often carefully nurtured friendships with the regimental surgeon, who had a supply of whiskey issued for medicinal purposes.

Prostitutes also followed the armies, especially settling in places such as Washington, where a large number of troops were in garrison at any given time. Since the cavalry were often posted on the outskirts of the army they were more able to take advantage of the available women than the infantry or artillery.

On the March

A great deal of time was spent on the move, however, where many of these activities were impossible. The cavalry was noted for long marches, both during campaigns with the rest of the army as they protected the flanks and scouted ahead, and on raids when they were on their own. Sometimes they rode for most of the hours of the day and night. In such cases they often slept in the saddle, wrote a 2nd New York Cavalry captain, 'either leaning forward on the pommel of the saddle, or on the roll of coat and blanket, or sitting quite erect, with an occasional bow forward or to the right or left, like the swaying of a flag on a signal station, or like the careenings of a drunken man. The horse of such a sleeping man will seldom leave his place in the column, though this will sometimes occur, and the man awakes at last to find himself alone with his horse which is grazing along some unknown field or woods. Some men, having lost the column in this way, have fallen into the enemy's hands. Sometimes a fast-walking horse in one of the rear companies will bear his sleeping lord



Captain Franklin S. Case, seen here with his wife Clara, was elected second lieutenant of Co. H, 2nd Ohio Volunteer Cavalry when it was formed in August 1861. He was promoted to first lieutenant on 10 May 1862 and to captain on 19 May 1863. Wounded in fighting near Monticello,

Kentucky, on 9 June 1863, he was captured at Ream's Station, Virginia, on 29 June 1864. He survived captivity, but his health was so damaged that he was discharged on 26 May 1865; his regiment remained in service until that September. (Sue Kerekgyarto)

quickly along, forcing his way through the ranks ahead of him, until the poor fellow is awakened, and finds himself just passing by the colonel and his staff at the head of the column!

When finally able to halt, troops in the field had time to do little more than take care of their horses, cook for themselves, clean their weapons if necessary, and set up shelter-halves or roll up in their waterproofed ponchos and blankets for the night.

COMBAT & TACTICS

Union cavalry was not especially well used in the early days of the war. Most commanders, with backgrounds from other branches of the service, used their cavalymen on picket or headquarters duty; they were rarely organized into large mobile bodies. As late as 1864, when Maj.Gen. Philip Sheridan assumed command of the Army of the Potomac's Cavalry Corps, this was still often the case. On reviewing his new command he noted that 'the horses were thin and very much worn down by excessive and, it seemed to me, unnecessary picket duty, for the cavalry picket line almost completely encircled the infantry and artillery of the army, covering a distance, on a continuous line, of nearly sixty miles, with hardly a mounted Confederate con-

fronting it at any point. From the very beginning of the war the enemy had shown more wisdom respecting his cavalry than we. Instead of wasting its strength by a policy of disintegration he, at an early day, had organized his mounted force into compact masses, and plainly made it a favorite. . . .'

Eventually, Union commanders took their cue from the Confederacy which, from the beginning of the war, had grouped its cavalry into full brigades and corps and sent them off on destructive raids into enemy territory. By 1863 the lesson had been learned, and the Union sent entire corps of cavalry on raids. Especially notable were Grierson's Raid in April–May 1863 in Mississippi, the strike against Richmond in 1864, and Wilson's Raid into Alabama and Georgia in 1865. Indeed, many of the 'campaigns' of the war, such as the 1864 Valley Campaign under Maj.Gen. Sheridan, were really little more than large cavalry raids. The objective of these raids was to weaken the will of the Southern population to fight, and to destroy the South's agricultural and manufacturing capabilities. This strategy was the cavalry's main contribution to the eventual Union victory.

Federal cavalymen capture a Confederate gun near Culpepper, Virginia, on 14 September 1863, following a four-hour long pitched battle with Confederate cavalry units. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated News)





Captain, 1st Dragoons, California 1858

Dismounted sabre drill



On the march





D A bivouac in the field

Dismounted tactics, Gettysburg, 1 July 1863





Private, 1st Ohio

Mounted tactics, Yellow Tavern, 11 May 1864

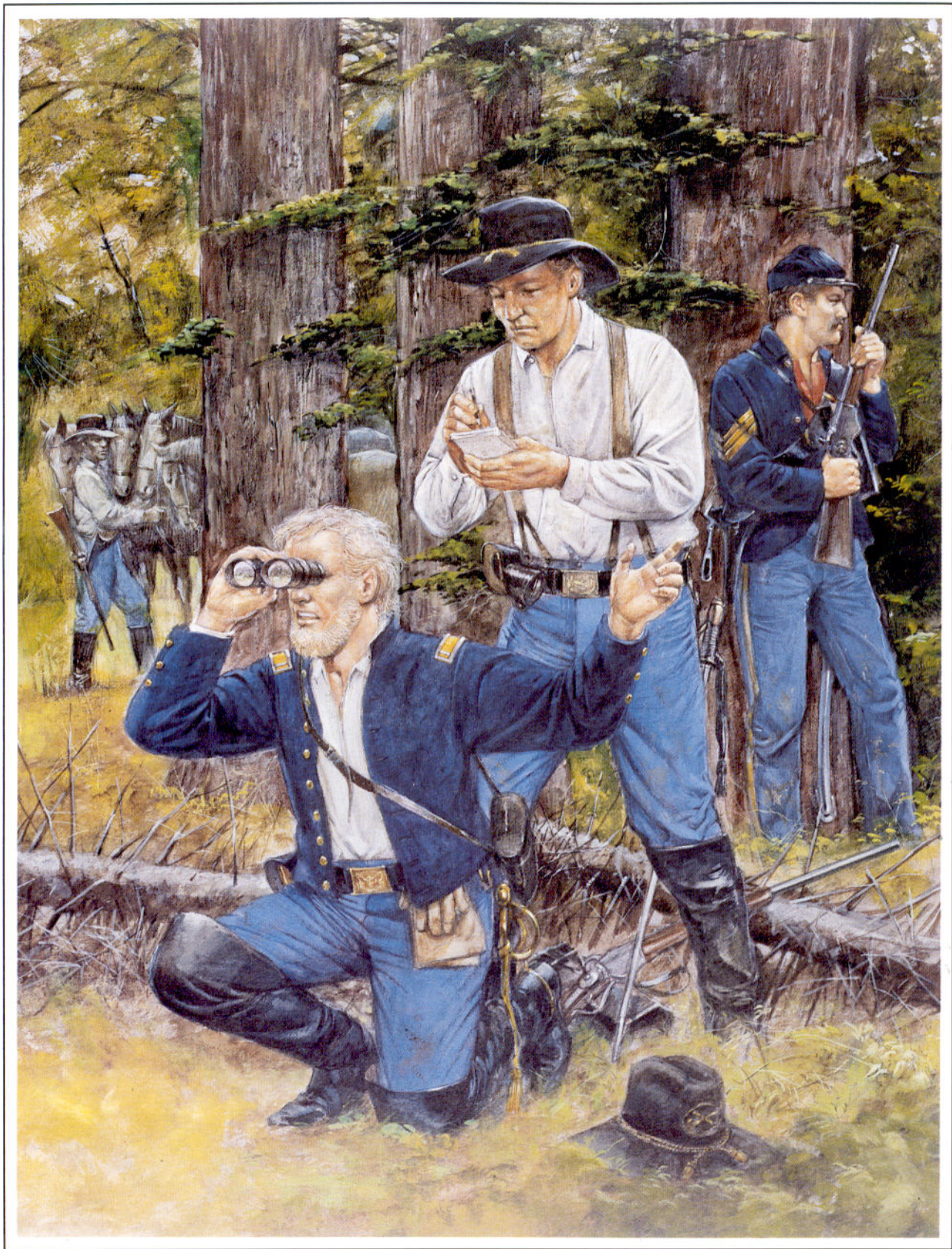


The aftermath of battle



Live and let live, the Rapidan river, winter 1863-64



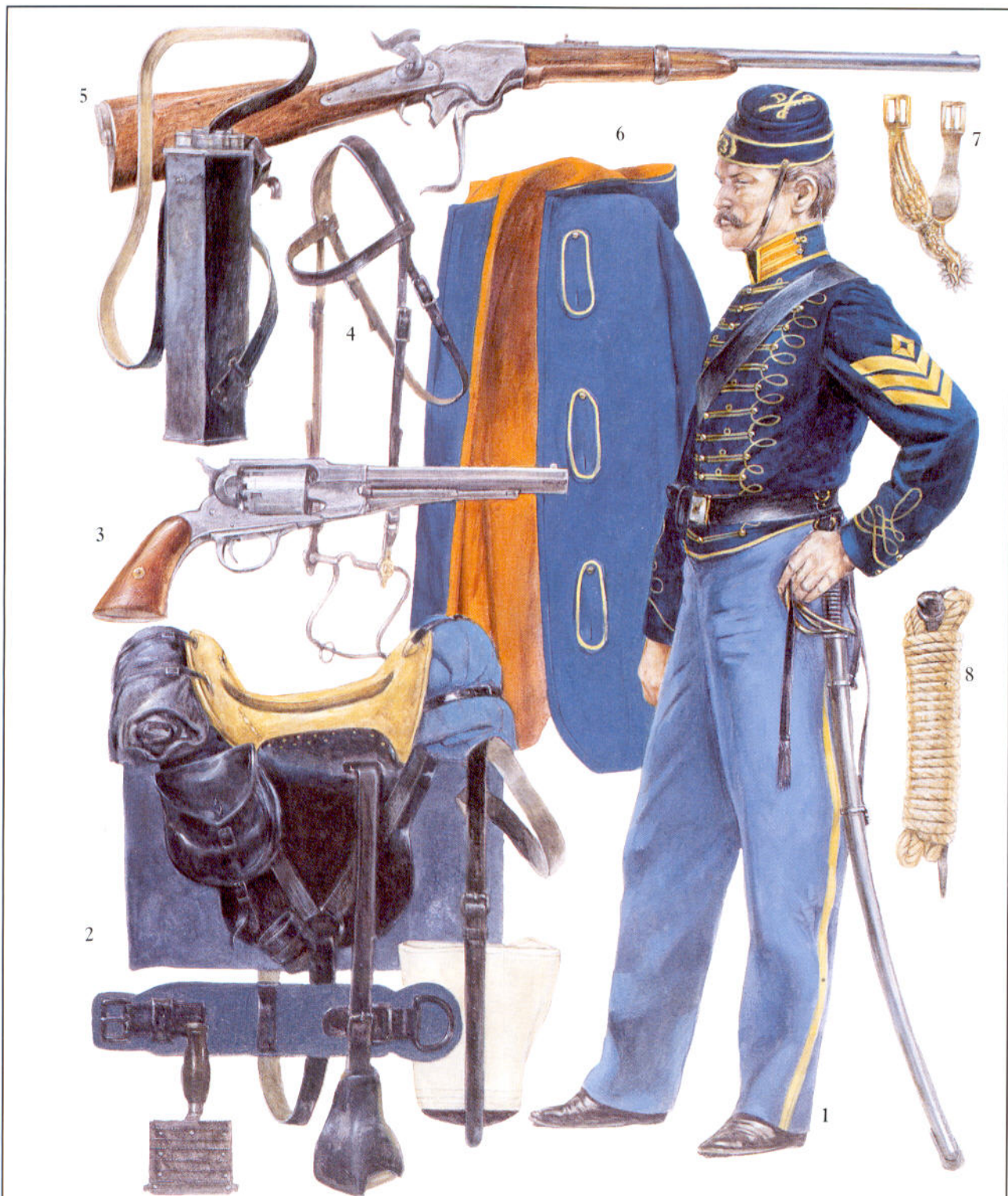


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The eyes and ears of the army, the Wilderness 1864



Grierson's Raid, Newton Station, Mississippi, 24 April 1863



1: Sergeant, 3rd New Jersey Cavalry, 1864
 2: US regulation M.1859 McClellan saddle,
 carbine thimble, and nose bag
 3: Remington .44 calibre revolver
 4: 1863 pattern single-reined bridle with curb bit

5: Spencer repeating carbine with
 Blakeslee Quickloader case
 6: Hooded 'talma' or cloak
 7: Gilt eagle spur
 8: Iron picket pin and rope

The training and combat potential of cavalry were often wasted in the early years of the war as commanders tended to use their mounted troops as pickets or, as here, couriers. In this 1861 photograph (as indicated by the havelock, a cap cover which lasted a short time in service) an officer of the day scribbles a note to give to the cavalry courier. (John R. Sickles)



Deficiencies in tactics

Most recruits believed that cavalry actions would involve hordes of sabre-swinging riders dashing on broken infantry formations or against enemy cavalry units, acting like the knights in the books they had read in their childhood. The main cavalry combat doctrine of the time was designed for just such situations; however, in reality combat rarely developed as planned. Foot troops quickly learned that if they remained calm and kept their formations intact no mounted charge could dislodge them. William Watson, of the 3rd Louisiana Infantry, described the first time his regiment met cavalry during the battle of Wilson's Creek: 'Suddenly some one cried out that there was cavalry coming down upon us. "Pooh!" cried Colonel M'Intosh, "who the devil cares for cavalry? Here, you rifles, take your position along that fence and send them to the rightabout." This was addressed to our company, and we ran and took up position. We saw the cavalry advancing upon us, but before they came within range of our rifles a shower of grape and shrapnels from Woodruff's battery sent them to the rightabout.'

This scene was to be repeated almost every time cavalry attempted to force a dismounted unit's position; as a result, the mounted charge against troops

on foot was largely abandoned in practice. One British professional officer decried Civil War cavalry combat, saying that the sabre was rarely used and neither side actually charged the other. Instead, each side would exchange shots, often at fairly safe distances, until one side or the other withdrew. According to a member of the 1st Ohio Cavalry, 'in the early part of our service it was usual to halt to receive the attack of the enemy, and attempt to fire from our horses, instead of dismounting to fight on foot, or drawing saber and charging him; all of which we learned before the close of the war'.

The reason was simple: modern firearms had made the mounted cavalry charge virtually obsolete. By the time a mounted regiment got close enough to a dismounted unit to engage it with sabres, it had already been torn apart by rifle or carbine fire. In May 1862 a Union cavalry expedition was sent against the Mobile and Ohio Railroad in Missouri. 'While we were still wrecking the road,' recalled Philip Sheridan, then commander of the 2nd Michigan Cavalry Regiment, 'a dash was made at my right and rear by a squadron of Confederate cavalry. This was handsomely met by the reserve under Captain Archibald P. Campbell, of the Second Michigan, who, dismounting a portion of his command, received the enemy with such a volley from his Colt's



An artist at the front in fall 1862 sketched this advance of mounted skirmishers from the Army of the

Potomac. Advancing on horseback was uncommon; dismounted skirmishing was more usual.

repeating rifles that the squadron broke and fled in all directions.'

In just this way the Union cavalry held up the Confederate advance into Gettysburg on 1 July 1863, long enough for Union infantry to get into a strong defensive position. Indeed, many of Maj.Gen. John Buford's 1st Cavalry Division troopers fought as infantrymen during that action. Some of the 3rd Indiana, for example, had comrades lead their horses to the rear, their carbines still hooked to the saddles; they took up rifled muskets from the fallen, and joined Wisconsin infantrymen from the Iron Brigade. Meanwhile, according to Buford's official report of the battle, other cavalymen had taken 'partial shelter behind a low stone fence, and were in short carbine range. Their fire was perfectly terrific, causing the enemy to break and rally on their second line, which made no further advance towards my position.'

This is not to say that the cavalry never charged. Brig.Gen. John F. Farnsworth led a heroic although costly charge at Gettysburg. On the third day of the battle he was ordered by Army of the Potomac

cavalry division commander Maj.Gen. Judson Kilpatrick to take his brigade across an uneven field broken by large rocks and small brush, against two unbroken regiments of Alabama infantry; two brigades of Confederate infantry on their right also had them in their gunsights. Farnsworth protested the order, but Kilpatrick, as typically inept as most early Federal cavalry commanders, insisted on the charge, adding, 'If you are afraid to lead this charge, I will lead it'. His Victorian sense of honour cut to the quick, Farnsworth demanded that Kilpatrick take back his insinuation, adding that he would indeed lead the charge. He would have been better advised to take up his superior's offer, for the sake of the lives of many Union cavalymen whom Kilpatrick would waste in the future, if not for his own. The charge did result in the capture of some hundred Confederate infantrymen, but at the loss of 65 good cavalymen, including Farnsworth himself.

Dismounted tactics

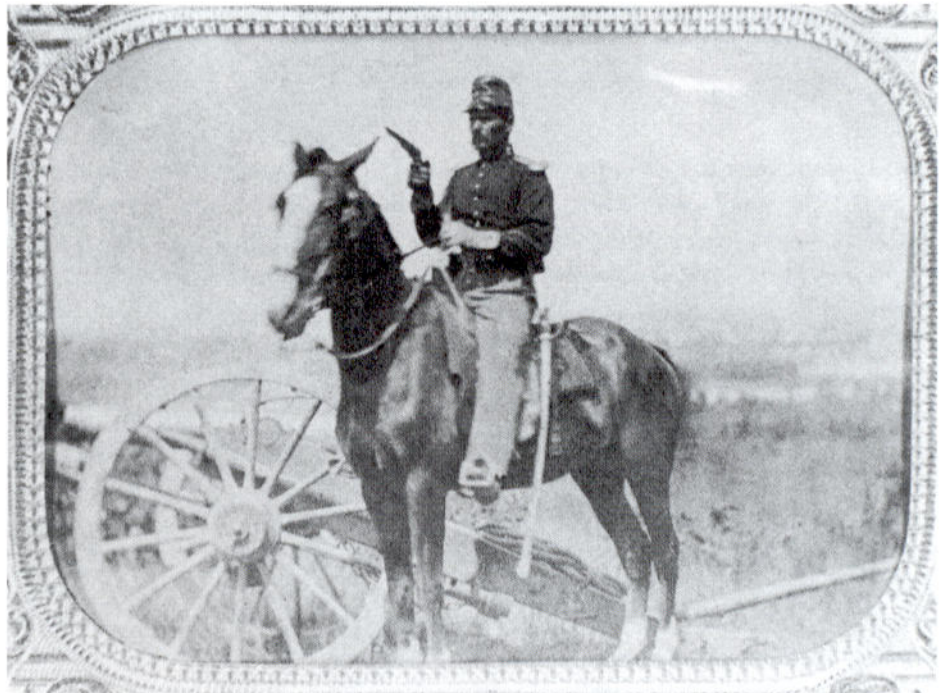
Other cavalry units could also handle a sabre charge as well as Farnsworth's men; Custer's Michigan Brigade, for example, had a reputation for daredevil assaults. In many cavalry brigades certain regiments or battalions were designated as foot units, while others concentrated on the sword. 'From the time of

the organization of the Michigan brigade,' one veteran later recalled, 'the First regiment had been designated as distinctively a sabre regiment, the Fifth and Sixth for fighting on foot, as they were armed with Spencer rifles [*sic*], and the result was that with them, dismounting to fight when in contact with the enemy in the early part of their terms became a sort of second nature. The First had a year's experience with the cavalry before the others went out, and it was in a saber charge at the Second Bull Run battle that Brodhead its first colonel was killed. The First Vermont, like the First Michigan, was a saber regiment and went out in 1861. When this regiment was attached to the brigade, Custer had three saber regiments, and it fell to the lot of the Fifth and Sixth Michigan to be selected more often than the others, perhaps, for dismounted duty. It often happened, however, that the entire brigade fought dismounted at the same time; and sometimes, though not often, all would charge together mounted. Owing to the nature of the country, most of the fighting in Grant's campaign from the Wilderness to the James was done on foot. In the Shenandoah valley campaign in the latter part of the year 1864, the reverse was the case and at the battles of Tom's Brook, Winchester and Cedar Creek the troopers in the command for the most part kept to

the saddle throughout the engagements.' General Sheridan recalled that his first command contained a 'sabre battalion', while the rest of the regiment was armed with Colt rifles, which they used as their main weapons.

In such a case, the official tactical system produced by Philip St. George Cooke and published in Philadelphia in 1862, was the first system used. It called for cavalry to deploy in a single line, manoeuvring from a column into line by groups of fours. This system did not survive the war. According to a Michigan cavalryman, 'The winter of 1863-64 was one of hard work for the Federal cavalry. In addition to their other duties, the Michigan regiments were required to change their tactical formation and learn a new drill. Up to that time Philip St. George Cooke's single rank cavalry tactics had been used. The tactical unit was the set of fours and all movements were executed by wheeling these [four-man] units. There was but one rank. For some reason, it was decided to substitute the old United States cavalry tactics and form in double ranks.'

Most fighting, however, was not done according to the manual, on horseback, but dismounted. Each fighting unit retained its four-man basic component, but in the case of dismounted fighting the fourth man would hold the horses of the other three behind the



This cavalryman posing in front of a Napoleon cannon wears shoulder scales, and an oilcloth rain cover on his cap. A half-chevron on his left forearm indicates that he is a veteran volunteer with three years of Civil War service to his name. (US Army Military History Institute)

lines while the three fought the enemy on foot with their carbines.

The range of the carbine largely determined the distances at which cavalrymen fought, and put them at a severe disadvantage when up against enemy infantry. Modern firing tests with US Army issue carbines, conducted by *Gunns & Ammo* magazine with original weapons in excellent condition, rested on sandbags, showed their effective ranges to be significantly less than the longer-barrelled rifled musket of the infantry. An M1861 rifled musket, when shooting offhand, could put ten consecutive shots in an 11-inch bullseye at 333 yards; and it could be sighted and fired at 900 yards. Carbines had sights that allowed for fire at 500 yards, but were not very effective beyond 100 yards. The Sharps, the most common carbine of the war, when fired from a benchrest, placed a group of shots within a five-inch circle at 100 yards; Smith and Merrill carbines were just as accurate. The Spencer, however, could only place rounds within a seven-inch target at 50 yards

and a nine-inch one at 100 yards, and was quite inaccurate beyond that range; of course, the seven-shot Spencer made up in firepower what it lacked in accuracy.

Successful engagements

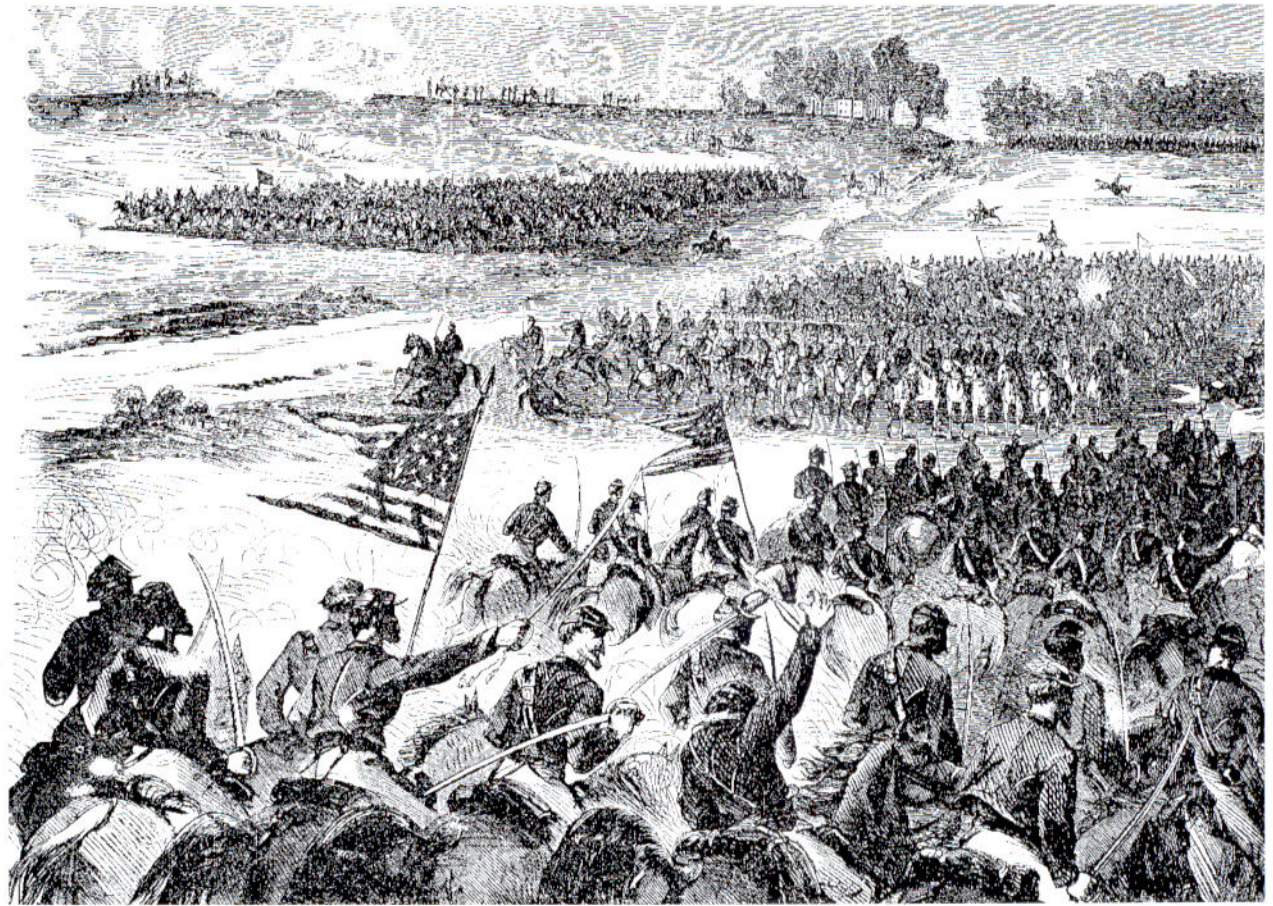
The improvements in firepower and range of both infantry and cavalry weapons dictated radical changes in tactics. Aside from its use in 'mopping-up' operations, the cavalry charge was virtually defunct; the new tactical emphasis was on mobility and dismounted firepower. This combination won the day in what may have been the single best example of what the new Union cavalry could do: the capture of Selma, Alabama, by cavalrymen of Maj.Gen. James H. Wilson's command in March 1865.

The city was well defended, and fortified in depth with a ring of defensive works built by trained engineers months before the assault. Two brigades of dismounted Union cavalrymen armed with Spencers charged into the defensive lines on foot, one group advancing while the other covered them with fire, in a classic alternating fire-and-movement manoeuvre. They rapidly overran an outer line defended by Confederate infantrymen protected by abatis. Without a pause, they charged through a second line 200

Infantry, standing firm, could always drive off cavalry; here Confederates resist a charge of the 5th US Cavalry Regiment during fighting in the

Peninsular Campaign, 27 June 1862. An artist for Harper's Weekly magazine saw the event and made this sketch of it.





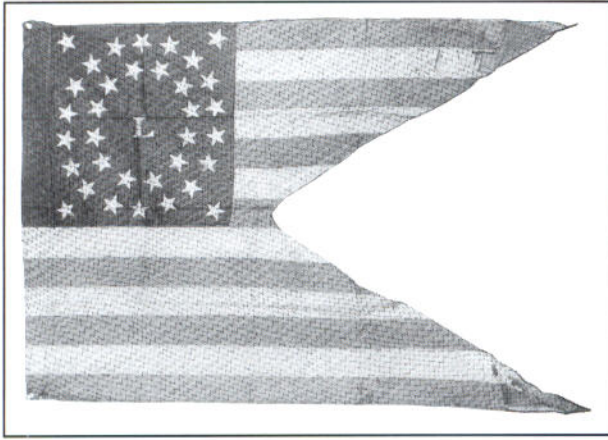
yards behind the first, protected by wire stretched between low stakes, and sharpened pikes sticking out of the ground, and defended by infantry and artillery. When the dismounted cavalymen had cleared a gap in the second line, mounted troopers charged though. The 7,000 defenders who had rallied at the third and final line stopped the mounted charge, so these cavalymen dismounted and joined their comrades on foot. The attackers – only 1,700 Union cavalymen – quickly forced the final line; then all remounted, and rode quickly into the city. According to the Confederate commander – the respected Maj.Gen. Natham Bedford Forrest – the speed and momentum of the assault could not be stopped. Forrest was under the impression that his men faced equal numbers of attackers, instead of outnumbering them six to one. Union casualties were only 40 killed, 260 wounded, and seven missing. Confederate casualties are not known, but 2,700 troops and 106 cannon were captured. Wilson himself called it ‘the most remarkable achievement in the history of mod-

Two guidons are carried in a cavalry charge. The guidon served an actual

purpose, both as a point to dress on, and as a rallying point in battle.

ern cavalry, and one admittedly illustrative of its new powers and tendencies.’

During the operations of which the capture of Selma formed a part, Wilson’s men also made a number of successful night attacks. In one such assault some 400 officers and men of the 3rd Iowa Cavalry captured a Confederate fort near Columbus, Georgia, which was defended by 3,000 Confederates with 27 cannon. At 8.30 p.m. they advanced on foot and brushed aside the defenders; the 10th Missouri Cavalry was sent forward to exploit the success, and although initially successful, the unit was subsequently driven back. The 3rd Iowa then returned to the attack, part storming the fortifications under heavy fire; under the cover of darkness much of the shooting was too high, and the dismounted Union troopers soon gained the fort. The rest of the 3rd, which had been kept mounted in reserve, was then



The regulation cavalry company guidon was red, white, and blue, like the US flag, with the company

letter in the canton. (West Point Museum Collections)

sent in to complete the successful capture. Within one hour the battle was over and the fort was in Union hands. There is an unmistakably modern flavour to this action: the Union cavalry exploited speed, firepower, and poor visibility to overcome superior enemy forces.

WOUNDS AND SICKNESS

During the Civil War the prospects for a wounded soldier were not good. Although medical science had made advances over the previous two centuries, it still left a great deal to be desired: the concept of microbes was unknown; instruments and operating areas were not sterilized, and the risk of infection from even minor wounds was extremely high. Rather than the clean slash wounds from sabres which most cavalrymen expected to be the main risk of their branch of service, their most common wounds came in fact from the infantryman's rifled musket and the cavalryman's carbine and pistol: Less than 0.4 per cent of all wounds were caused by edged weapons, including bayonets; only 5.5 per cent came from artillery, 'torpedoes' (mines) and grenades. At Fredericksburg, only six out of the 7,302 recorded Federal wounded were injured by sabre or bayonet.

The wounded soldier was first treated by his regiment's medical staff, which included a surgeon,

an assistant surgeon, and an enlisted hospital steward. The actual job of taking a wounded soldier from the field at first fell to regimental bandsmen. Later in the war enlisted men of the Ambulance Corps, specially appointed and trained and under medical officer supervision, were generally the first to the aid of a stricken soldier. They were usually identified by some special badges, in most armies consisting of a green half-chevron and a band around the cap.

These men brought the soldier to a field aid station, run by the regiment's assistant surgeon and hospital steward. There the wounded were quickly patched up as far as was possible. If the wound was slight, the soldier often opted to return to the front after a short rest; otherwise, he was sent back to a regimental hospital. Here operations such as amputations were performed by the regimental surgeon. Later in the war, however, it was found more efficient to gather all the surgeons from various regiments into a larger hospital organized on a brigade or even division level. Major operations were thereafter generally performed in these hospitals, the best surgeons performing the surgery while the others assisted according to their lights.

If, after a brief stay, the cavalryman was fit to return to his regiment for active duty, he did so. Otherwise he was sent, often in specially equipped railroad hospital cars, to a general hospital in the rear. Most of these permanent hospitals were built around major cities such as Washington, Philadelphia, New York, or Chicago. If he was still unfit for duty after a spell in a general hospital, the trooper was usually discharged, although after early 1863 he could also be transferred for the rest of his period of enlistment into the Invalid Corps (later Vétéran Reserve Corps), which performed static guard or provost marshal duties, and helped out in hospitals. Men capable of semi-active duty, who could handle weapons, were assigned to 1st Battalion companies and served mostly as guards, while those who had lost limbs were allotted to 2nd Battalion companies and performed hospital duties.

Bullet wounds were not only the most common battlefield injury they were also the most dangerous. Slow-moving (950 fps muzzle velocity for the infantry rifle musket) and heavy (one ounce), the lead bullets dragged dirty uniform cloth and other debris

deep into wounds; they shattered bone, and tore flesh. The only way of treating most major wounds to the limbs was amputation. 'In the most available places tables have been spread for the purpose of amputations,' wrote a New York cavalry officer after Cedar Mountain. 'We cannot approach them, with their heaps of mangled hands and feet, of shattered bones and yet quivering flesh, without a shudder. A man must need the highest style of heroism, willing to drag himself or be borne by others to one of these tables, to undergo the process of the amputating blade.'

Post-operative infection was always a danger, given the insanitary operating conditions. Pus was thought, incorrectly, to be a positive sign of recovery; and all too often the black flesh and sickening stench of gangrene followed operations. This mortifying flesh had to be cut away, and secondary amputations were common. A surprising number of men survived both initial and secondary amputations, even if gangrene were involved; blood poisoning, however, was almost always fatal.

There was no planned physical therapy for men to learn to use prostheses in place of their amputated

limbs. Men learned to walk again on their own, often with the help of their fellows or others who had previously lost limbs and were now in Veteran Reserve Corps 2nd Battalion companies assigned to the hospital.

Major wounds to the head, chest or abdomen were largely untreatable save by bed care and prayer. Luckily the benefits of operating on unconscious patients had been appreciated almost two decades earlier, and the US Army's medical officers were generally well supplied with anaesthetics such as chloroform.

Living conditions and disease

Huge numbers of men also arrived at hospitals suffering from diseases. Early in the war a great number

At a temporary aid station just behind the front line a regimental assistant surgeon, kneeling left, performs first aid on a patient, while a hospital steward, centre, takes medicine out of a specially designed hospital knapsack worn by a soldier

assigned for medical service. Here the wounded soldier got the first medical assistance he needed, before being sent on by an ambulance, as in the background, to the regimental or brigade hospital.



of soldiers from rural backgrounds fell prey to basic diseases such as measles, mumps, and chickenpox; they had not been exposed to these ailments in childhood as had soldiers from urban backgrounds. Once in the service, the most common ailments could be traced to microbes in badly cooked food or tainted water. Statistics suggest that the average Union cavalryman was sick twice a year with something major enough to be reported to a doctor. The average mortality rate from these diseases exceeded 53.4 per thousand.

Indeed, the average Civil War soldier was far from aware of the importance of cleanliness in maintaining health. An inspection of the 2nd Iowa Cavalry in January 1862 found 'dirty shoes and boots in and about the bunks, [and] scraped sweepings from the floor under the bunks [and tables]. Consequently, while the regiment was in these barracks over 60 of its members died. In the 2nd Michigan Cavalry strict

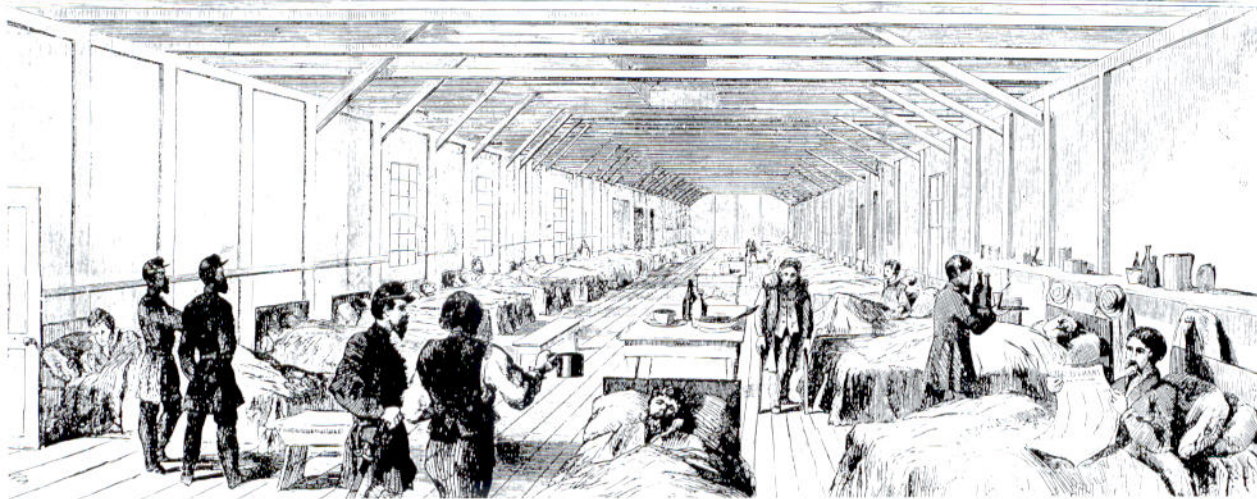
The large general hospital at Hilton Head, North Carolina, was typical of hospitals built by the army especially for the purpose of receiving and treating

large numbers of wounded men. They were designed to admit as much fresh air and light as possible. (Frank Lelie's Illustrated News)

orders were issued that straw mattresses and blankets had to be aired for five hours every five days, and the men had to bathe 'at least once a week'; and this regiment lost far fewer men to disease than did the Iowa unit. Indeed, many regiments had to order their men to wash; 1st Massachusetts Cavalry officers had to order the troopers to wash their dirty necks, faces, and hands in January 1863, long after the unit had been organized.

The South had a far less healthy climate than the northern areas where most of the Union troops originated. Mosquitoes were common, as were tape worms and various parasitic microbes. The hot climate itself, especially as experienced in heavy wool uniforms on active service, helped to tire men out and break down their health.

The diseases acquired from unhealthy environments were generally treated with ineffective pharmaceuticals, including mercury. Alcohol was the primary drug used, although some doctors questioned its use as a general remedy; nonetheless, it was widely dispensed as a first medicine of choice, which partly explains the long lines before the doctor's quarters for daily sick call. Quinine was another



common drug, as were some mystery preparations such as the frequently mentioned 'blue mass'. The most common complaint, diarrhoea or dysentery, which averaged 711 per thousand every year, was treated with Epsom salts, castor oil (in the morning), or opium (in the evening). Men usually got over the diseases themselves despite such medicines; however, deaths from diseases such as chronic diarrhoea were not at all uncommon.

Horses were equally at risk from sickness and wounds; veterinary science had developed even less than had medical knowledge. On 1 August 1863 allowance was made for the appointment of one veterinary surgeon for each cavalry regiment; however, most had little or no actual training. The few schools in existence varied in quality, and many were little more than diploma mills which required little education to enter and little more than a tuition 'fee' to ensure graduation. Many of these schools were centred in Philadelphia, where as late as 1877 it was possible to purchase a degree in veterinary science for only \$100.

THE PLATES

A1: Captain, 1st Dragoons, California, 1858

This officer wears the field dress as laid down in the 1857 dress regulations. As this unit's service in California had shown in reality many of the items would have been modified if not thrown away. In particular the Jeff Davis or Hardee hat would almost certainly have been discarded in favour of a more practical slouch hat. Many officers replaced the frock coat with the more comfortable waist length cloth jacket, it is doubtful that the cross belt and sash would have survived long on active service. The unit was originally authorised on 2 March 1833 as the US Regiment of Dragoons but as the cavalry increasingly developed dismounted tactics the title of Dragoons became superfluous. The unit was redesignated as the 1st Cavalry on 3 August 1861. **A2:** United States Army Cavalry tactics manual; **A3:** Field binoculars and case; **A4:** Stamped brass cavalry officer's badge; **A5:** Officers and NCOs belt buckle; **A6:** Dragoon tunic button; **A7:** Enlisted man's waist belt. Buff-leather with brass keeps, and standard belt-plate; **A8:** Model 1860 .44-calibre Colt Army revolver, widely



The cape on the mounted man's overcoat reached well below the wrists. (Richard Carlile)

issued to cavalrymen, taking loose powder and ball or cartridges of paper, foil, or skin; **A9:** Standard issue cavalry spur; **A10:** Pistol ammunition, .44-calibre Colt paper cartridges that required percussion caps which would have been carried in a cap box on the waist-belt.

B: Dismounted sabre drill

The only way to familiarise the raw recruits with the confusing array of weapons and equipment was repetitive drill. They would invariably arrive at their

units with little or nothing in the way of training. If there was a lull in the fighting then there might be time enough for a more experienced NCO to teach them some basic skills. If the unit was on campaign however they would have to learn 'on the job', which might make the difference between life and death. Here a corporal is taking the opportunity of a break on the march to introduce three recruits to the mysteries of the sabre. The middle trooper has correctly adopted position 41, right point. His comrades have not performed quite as well. The trooper on the right has in fact adopted position 55, against infantry right parry, although he may just have realised his error. Their companion seems to be struggling but he may well never get to use the sabre in anger anyway. The carbine was rapidly becoming the trooper's preferred weapon, the increased accuracy and effectiveness of firearms and artillery having rendered the old fashioned cavalry charge practically

suicidal. Judging by the amused looks of the old sweats in the background this is a lesson they have already learned.

C: On the march

During the early years of the war the Federal cavalry lacked the confidence and experience to cut loose from its large, slow moving field armies in the way that the Southern troopers seemed able to do almost at will. Their duties were largely confined to those of headquarters guards and couriers, although they were still expected to provide a protective screen around the army to discourage the enemy's inquisitive scouts. When on campaign they would more often than not have been encumbered with all the impedimenta of the logistic 'tail' of the army. This lack of mobility and confidence greatly reduced the effectiveness of the cavalry arm in the early years of the war.

D: A bivouac in the field

Conditions on campaign were spartan for all concerned but particularly so for the rank and file. The

Cavalry means horses, which therefore requires the equipment to keep them in the field. The blacksmith and his

portable forge was an important figure in the cavalry regiments. (Frank Leslie's Illustrated News)



enlisted trooper would often share a two-man button-down canvas tent, or if encamped for a period of time and well supplied might have the slight comfort of living in a 20 birth 'Sibley' tent. Even under the best of circumstances conditions were cramped, and he still had the major task of taking care of his main asset, his horse.

The officers on the other hand did have some degree of comfort, always allowing for a lull in the fighting or a rest period. They usually had a tent for themselves where some of the comforts of home might be stowed away as we see in this scene. A writing desk and stationary set were always treasured items, for letters home and for the orders of the day. He may well have had, depending upon rank, an array of personal possessions such as travelling chest; portable stove; drinks cabinet; the current newspapers; and a fresh supply of books. If the unit was travelling light, however, the officers would often be expected to tolerate the same conditions as the men under their command.

E: Dismounted tactics, Major General John Buford's 1st Cavalry Division, Gettysburg, 1 July 1863

'They will attack you in the morning and they will come booming . . . You will have to fight like the devil until support arrives.' John Buford's prediction to one of his brigade commanders the night before the Battle of Gettysburg emphasised the role his cavalry corps would play in this engagement. They met the advance of Heth's Alabama and Mississippi divisions head on as they made their way up the Chambersburg Pike, north-west of Gettysburg heading towards the town, expecting to meet little resistance from the Federal cavalry detachment they knew to be there. Buford, a strong willed Kentuckian regular soldier and ex-Indian fighter, commanded a tightly disciplined and experienced corps of troopers. An added advantage was their newly equipped seven-shot Sharpes carbine which in the hands of a sound marksman could loose off twenty rounds per minute. With five times the fire power of the 'Butternut' soldiers advancing towards them they presented a

formidable barrier.

This was classic dismounted tactics; one out of four remained in the rear holding the horses whilst the other three engaged with their carbines and pistols from behind the small stone wall. Buford's two dismounted brigades, after two hard hours of heavy fighting, managed to hold the ridge until reinforced in the nick of time by General Reynolds's infantry, thus saving the Union left flank from collapse at such an early stage of the battle.



This double-breasted regulation field grade officer's coat was worn by Lieutenant Colonel

Augustus W. Corliss, 2nd Rhode Island cavalry. (Chris Nelson)

F1: Private, 1st Ohio

This trooper typifies the rugged western Yankees who entered service as 'horse soldiers'. Tough, lean and with very few of the frills that one would expect from the dashing *beaux sabreurs* of the eastern states.

They were similar to their southern counterparts in that they too came from a mainly rural background and thus did not have trouble familiarising themselves to horse culture or the rigours of that lifestyle.



Equipped with the basic essentials of carbine, pistols and sabre they were a real handful for all opposition they faced.

Dressed in regulation dark blue tunic, sky blue trousers and wearing the casual slouch hat that many preferred, this trooper has the Burnside carbine attached to a shoulder belt, making it far easier to handle once on horseback. He would always carry normally at least one pistol and his sabre, although the latter was sometimes dispensed with. **F2(a)**: Knapsack, usually leather and containing personal belongings; **(b)**: playing cards; **(c)**: cut-throat razor; **(d)**: bible; **(e)**: tobacco pipe; **(f)**: watch; **(g)**: canteen; **F3**: Burnside carbine; **F4**: carbine sling with attachment device; **F5**: carbine cartridge box with belt loops; **F6**: cartridge and percussion caps.

G: Mounted tactics, Yellow Tavern, 11 May 1864

By this stage of the war the Federal cavalry units were more than capable of 'mixing it' with their southern counterparts. This was demonstrated when Sheridan's troopers engaged arguably the finest cavalry force in the Confederacy, at Yellow Tavern. While on a raid into the rear areas of General Lee's Army of Northern Virginia they encountered Jeb Stuart's southern horsemen a mere six miles from Richmond. This was a typical mounted cavalry encounter, repeated sweeping charges at the enemy using pistols, carbines and sabres.

Stuart was in the thick of the action, as was his habit, showing the fearless bravado and dash that his troops loved, and enemies respected. He carried for close quarters fighting his Whitney revolver, a most effective weapon for any cavalryman when in the thick of a full blooded melee. Stuart himself was mortally wounded in the right side by a single .44 calibre ball fired by a private (who himself was killed eleven days after this event) Stuart died 27 hours later.

By 1864 the Union cavalry were in the ascendance, with new weaponry and healthy horses, and the

This version of the company grade officer's coat was worn by Captain John Hobensack, 1st New Jersey Cavalry. The collar has been turned down and

shows its black velvet lining. The sword belt is an officer's version, with a brass buckle used to adjust the waist size on the right hip. (Chris Nelson)

confidence in their ability to use them successfully. They also learned from the Confederate cavalry and their own experience, how best to hurt their enemy on how to be best used as a force for quick and decisive actions. It would be Sheridan's cavalry corps who would speed the destruction and defeat of the Confederates with various raids on their industrial bases, and the harassing and cutting off of their army's supply lines, trapping General Lee and the remnants of his beleaguered force at Appomattox Station on 8 April, after their defeat at the Battle of Five Forks seven days earlier. Thus bringing the war to an end.

H: The Aftermath of battle

'The horrors of the war are best witnessed after a battle', stated a Vermont sergeant who had seen his fare share of fighting, and indeed the treatment received once wounded was marginal until one reached a medical unit. Even then basic errors in how to combat the spread of disease and infection led many men to suffer the dreaded consequence of amputation, or death from peritonitis, meningitis and other transmitted diseases picked up from the un-sterilised surgeons hands and their instruments. Over ninety per cent of all Civil War wounds were caused by the rifle bullet, their low velocity resulting in smashed limbs and severed arteries, which were an open invitation to infection if not treated immediately. Such was use of large calibre ammunition such as the .75, that a wound to the abdomen or the chest was fatal.

For the cavalry trooper often involved in skirmishes far ahead of the main column of the army, or on deep penetration raids into enemy territory, receiving first aid was a major concern. Even with the fighting continuing further afield from this scene, casualties expected to receive only basic treatment before they were transported to a field hospital. The wounded and dying had to rely on their comrades or front-line orderlies to care for them, which was basic first aid, whilst the battle still raged.

First Lieutenant William Schmalz, 5th West Virginia Cavalry, wears the plain waist-length jacket often preferred to

the frock coat for mounted use. He has also acquired a pair of dark leather gloves for riding. (David Scheinmann)

I; Live and let live, the Rapidan river, Winter 1863-64

Although officially forbidden, this sort of fraternisation was common with both sides swapping everything from coffee and food, to newspapers and tobacco. During a lull in the fighting and particularly in winter, unofficial truces would be agreed between units facing each other and a *modus vivendi* established that would cause the least discomfort for each. Once campaigning began both sides would take up



the fight in earnest, however.

It is noticeable the disparity in quality in clothing and provisions between the combatants; the Confederates wearing a rag-tag mixture of southern uniforms which they have collected on their travels, whilst their Federal counterparts are kited out in relatively new uniforms and winter overcoats. The Union always enjoyed a monopoly on materials and supply and by this stage of the war far exceeded the South in clothing, feeding and arming it's troops and population.



J: The eyes and ears of the army, the Wilderness, 1864

The cavalry were the antennae of the army, helping the ponderous bulk of the main force seek out the enemy. Through scouting and reconnaissance they would feel its way around the opposing force, monitoring movements, gathering information and assessing its weak points. Part of their role was to observe the enemy without being discovered themselves. By pinpointing which units were moving and to where they could help determine where the Confederates would strike next. By the latter part of the war the Federal cavalry had developed not only the confidence but the skill and subtlety to excel in this role.

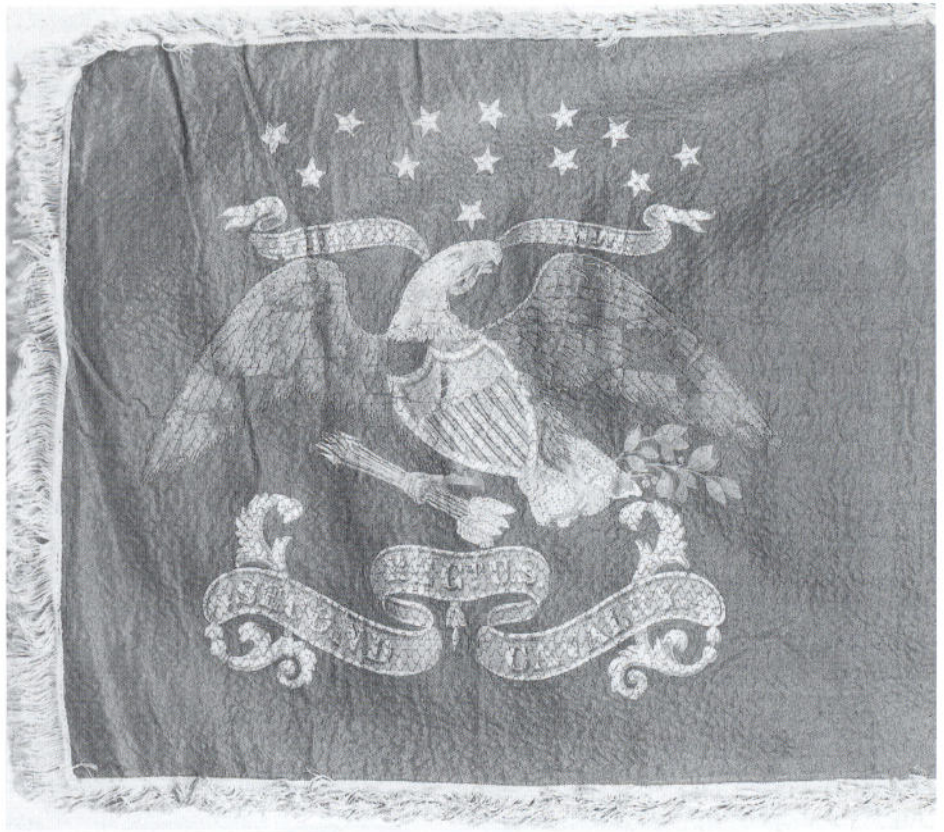
K: Grierson's Raid, Newton Station, Mississippi, 24 April 1863

In the last two weeks of April 1863, General Grant was endeavouring to bring his army within striking distance of Vicksburg, ordered Colonel Benjamin H. Grierson south into the Mississippi to attack and destroy Pemberton's communication and supply lines, stir up as much alarm as possible and to distract the Confederates while Grant moved his forces across the river below Vicksburg thus out-flanking the city's defences. Heading a 1700-strong force (protected by forward 'reccé' scouts known as the 'Butternut Guerillas' due to their disguised rebel attire to avoid discovery) Grierson would cover over 600 miles of road and swamp destroying Confederate ordinance, rail-road track and supplies between Vicksburg and Mobile. Continually harassed by militia units, and pursued by a larger force of regular Confederate troops, the blue raiders successfully completed their mission in sixteen days arriving safely at Baton-Rouge. They had killed or wounded 100 Confederates, captured and paroled 500 more, tore up 50 miles of rail track and captured 1,000 horses and mules, (Grierson's losses were three killed, seven wounded and nine missing) leaving General Sheridan to describe it as '*... the most brilliant expedition of the war*'.

Colonel James B. Swain, 11th New York Cavalry, wears a lamb's-wool-trimmed jacket; this style was very popular among mounted officers. Swain,

a poor officer, was court-martialled on a number of charges in February 1864, and dismissed from the service that month. (Benedict R. Maryniak)

The regimental colour of the cavalry regiment was dark blue, with a natural-coloured eagle and bearing the gold red ribband edged in gold regimental designation. (West Point Museum Collections)



On 24 April they entered Newton Station, a track side hamlet 25 miles west of Meridan, which had been seized earlier in the day by the 'Butternut Guerrillas' and was now in the process of being destroyed. Two locomotives were wrecked, along with over 30 freight cars loaded with supplies for Vicksburg. Other details of men are ripping up track, burning sleepers, tearing down telegraph wires, and setting fire to a government building housing caches of small arms. By 2 o'clock the action was complete and the column moved onwards further south leaving their morning's work smouldering away behind them.

L: Sergeant, 3rd New Jersey Cavalry, 1864

Although towards the war's end the Federal cavalry were equipped and supplied via centralised depots there were still units who stood out as belonging to another time or place. One such regiment was the 3rd New Jersey Cavalry, or the 'Butterflies' a nickname they earned for their flamboyant attire. Raised initially in January 1864 as the 1st US Hussars they were dressed in such splendour previously unseen in

other Federal cavalry regiments, in an attempt to attract new recruits. Yet their appearance as almost 'toy soldiers' was very deceptive, as they were the embodiment of what the Union cavalryman had become by 1865; heavily armed with repeating Spencer carbines and .44 Remington revolvers which gave them the edge in skirmishes and melees with rebel cavalry and infantry units alike.

The state paid for the additions to the regulation cavalry uniform; the cap was the issue forage cap with peak removed, extra braid was placed on the jacket, and the remainder US Army regulation. This regiment was typical of the new 'horse soldier' serving under General Sheridan, they no longer merely served as a screen for advancing infantry. Possessing tremendous firepower and with the ability to hit the enemy hard and fast they had evolved into a powerful force capable of independent action.

The 3rd New Jersey would serve with distinction until the war's end routing southern cavalry at Tom's Brook, Virginia; and seeing action at the Battle of Five Forks, which helped force Lee's battered army out of it's fortifications around Petersburg.

SITES OF INTEREST

Antietam National Battlefield Site, Sharpsburg, Maryland

Site of the single bloodiest day of the war, the visitor centre features one of the best short films made on the war and is worth the visit for that alone. There is also a collection of militaria, including weapons, uniforms, medical equipment, ammunition and provisions.

Carlise Barracks, Carlisle, Pennsylvania

Established as a military post in 1757, Carlisle Barracks was the site of the School of Cavalry Practice from 1838 until 1861. Regular army cavalry recruits were trained here during that time, as were local volunteer units at the outbreak of the war. The Barracks were captured and burned by Confederate cavalry, 27–29 June 1863, and most of the buildings are of later date; but Quarters 2 and the Hessian powder magazine survived the fire, and the Coren Apartments (officers' quarters) were rebuilt immediately after the fire to original specifications. Today the Barracks house the US Army Military History Institute library and collection.

Carter House Military Museum, Franklin, Tennessee

The Carter House was in the centre of the defending Union line at Franklin, while the cavalry served on the flanks of the battle. Maps in this private museum show the unit positions well, while the collection includes a fine variety of weapons, uniforms, and documents. Although now an antiques- and crafts-centred village, the town is outwardly little changed since the battle.

Cedar Creek, near Strasbourg, Virginia

Here Union cavalry commander Philip Sheridan and one of his leading subordinates, George A. Custer, had one of their finest moments. Belle Grove Plantation house still looks much as it during the battle when it was Sheridan's headquarters, as does much of the battlefield.

Chickamauga–Chattanooga National Military Park,

Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia

The largest national military park, with some 8,000 acres; the highlight of the visitor centre is the Fuller Gun Collection, which contains a wide variety of cavalry as well as other US Civil War shoulder arms.

Fort Chickamauga, Cookson, Oklahoma

Run by the Sons of Veterans Reserve, an organization of those descended from Union soldiers, Fort Chickamauga is the only horse cavalry post still active in the US. Its activities are largely centred on the years just after the Civil War, but many of the 'living history' activities are also relevant to 1861–65.

Fort Donelson National Military Park, Dover, Tennessee

Not really a cavalry battle site; nonetheless the park's visitor centre does contain a wide variety of wartime artifacts, many of which pertain to the US cavalry.

Fredericksburg and Spotsylvania National Military Park, Fredericksburg, Virginia

The centre for parks on the sites of four major actions – Chancellorsville, Fredericksburg, the Wilderness, and Spotsylvania Court House – the museum has an excellent weapons collection as well as a variety of unusual uniforms and related objects.

Gettysburg National Military Park, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

The site of one of the greatest battles ever fought in North America, which started with Buford's cavalry fight of 3 July 1863. The excellent museum has a wide variety of artifacts relating to the Union cavalry, including weapons, uniforms, and equipment.

Manassas National Battlefield Park, Manassas, Virginia

Site of two major battles, in 1861 and 1862, the headquarters houses both an excellent museum and a top-grade research library. The latter includes a number of important manuscript collections, including the papers of Generals J.B. Ricketts and Fitz-John Porter.

Mansfield State Commemorative Area, Mansfield, Louisiana

A private park just south of Mansfield; the museum

contains material on the Red River Campaign, along with a collection of uniforms, weapons, and artifacts. It also houses an extensive and interesting Civil War library.

Pea Ridge National Military Park, Pea Ridge, Arkansas

Site of the most important battle to have been fought in Arkansas, ten miles north-east of Rogers, the area is still relatively untouched. The visitor centre contains a collection of weapons, uniforms, and displays, and replicated equipment shows how the items were used.

Petersburg National Battlefield

Union cavalry did play an important part in the fighting during the siege, which lasted from June 1864 until April 1865. The museum at the visitor centre takes due note of the fact, with displays of cavalry artifacts.

Shiloh National Military Park, Shiloh, Tennessee

The museum at the visitor centre on this 1862

battlefield includes a number of items of cavalry interest including pistols, carbines, sabres, boots, sword-belt plates, and uniforms.

Stones River National Battlefield, Murfreesboro, Tennessee

The visitor centre contains a section on cavalry which includes weapons and incidental items such as spurs.

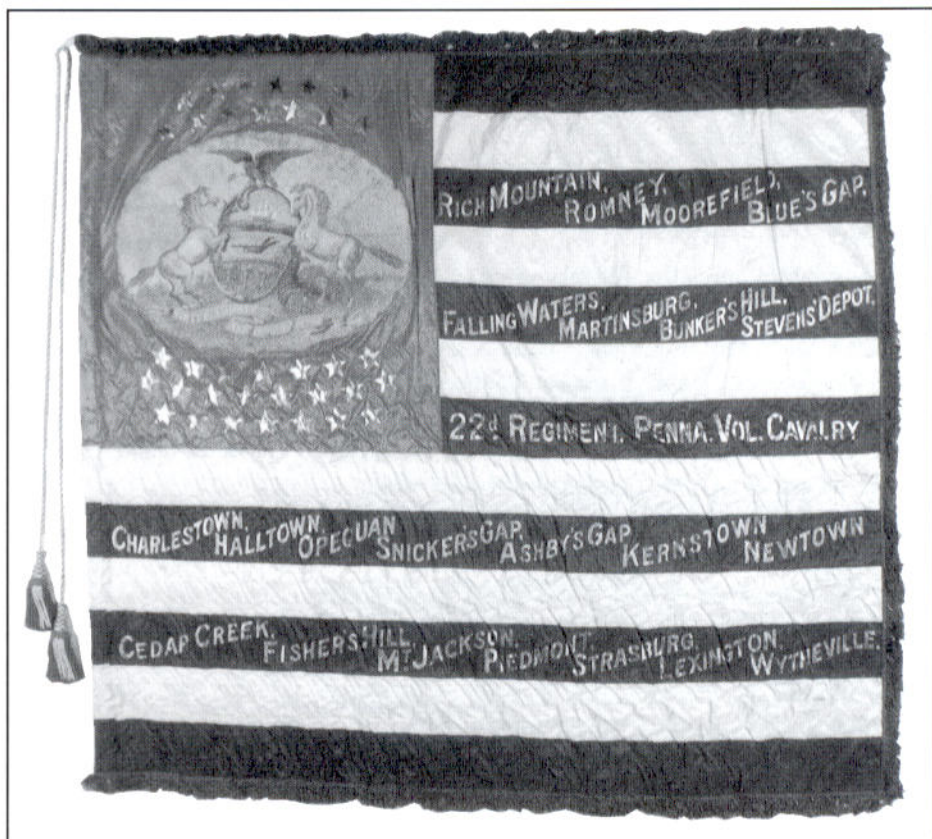
US Cavalry Museum, Fort Riley, Kansas

Located in the traditional home of the US Army's cavalry, the museum contains weapons, uniforms, and cavalry equipment, including a large variety of issue saddles. The library is stocked with useful books, maps, early training films, and other reference materials.

War Library and Museum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Organized by a veteran officers' group, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, the museum has a number of interesting cavalry guidons, weapons, and uniforms. The building also houses an

The US flag, Hollywood movies notwithstanding, was not authorized for cavalry use. However, many volunteer units obtained variations of it. This particular example, carried by the 22nd Pennsylvania Cavalry, had the seal of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania painted in the canton as well as the stars. (Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee)



extensive Civil War library, with one of the best collections of unit histories in the country.

West Point Museum, US Military Academy, West Point, New York

One of the world's leading military museums, the collection includes paintings, flags, uniforms, weapons, and edged weapons. Much of the emphasis is on the Civil War, although displays are changed from time to time.

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State cavalry regiments often carried versions of their state flag instead of the regulation US cavalry colour. This particular example bears the arms of Pennsylvania, and was carried by the 17th Cavalry Regiment of that state. (Pennsylvania Capitol Preservation Committee)



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