

# The Shoulder Arms

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## Joint Infantry Drill

A proposal by  
2nd Lt Norman S. Hewitt  
9th Regt, USIC

Recently I addressed the members of the RACW Board of Directors to consider some ideas I have been discussing with other veteran members. Foremost among those ideas was the concept of

blending the Confederate and the Federal Armies together for battalion size practice. Application and experience are the keys to a believable and accurate 1860's military impression. There are many reasons for the infantry of both sides to work together as a cohesive group. I've listed just a few.

Both sides need to learn basically the same drill. It's impor-

tant each company of soldiers on either side understand how to follow commands and correctly maneuver on the battlefield.

Officers and NCO's learn to work with larger commands than their familiar company size.

Most importantly, Officers and NCO's on both sides will learn together the basic commands required to maneuver troops on the battlefield with historical correctness.

Officers and NCO's will practice verbal commands of which there are many. Knowing what to say, when and how to execute verbal commands is essential to authenticity.

What differences there may be, if any, with the manual of arms drill, can be learned separately when needed. This will also speed and facilitate the learning curve when troops galvanize.

Camaraderie between the two sides which leads to greater Club Esprit de Corps. ■



*The first three muskets purchased by the RACW with monies from the NRA grant have arrived.*

**Editor's note:** With reference to the above article, the Union and Confederate Artillery of the RACW have trained together on multiple occasions to the benefit of both organizations.

## A Soldier's Letter

The writer is claimed by the Democracy [The Democratic Party] of the town from which he volunteered, and the letter was written in answer to his father in that regard. His sentiments show him to be a true Democrat, but not of the Copperhead brand:



CAMP OF THIRD REGT.,  
EXCELSIOR BRIGADE,  
March 29th, 1863.

**D**EAR FATHER—You wish me to disclose my politics. Now, that is a hard matter for me to reveal; but I will tell you as near as I can how I stand, and you may call it what you will. I am for fighting the traitors to the death, and for backing old Abe in all his undertakings that are in accordance with the Constitution, and in all that our Government considers as military necessities, as long as I can

agree with them. I am for fetching our Northern rebels down here and placing them in the front ranks, giving the old veterans a chance to punch them up. Furthermore, any man, not upholding our Government, and not aiding to his utmost to put down the rebellion, (he having control of his mental faculties) is a vile traitor, and should be punished like the rest. In my humble opinion, no man can be neutral. His sympathies are for one side or the other. I say as great men have said—I know no party—no North—no South—but simply Union. It must and shall be preserved. You may construe what I have said as you please. Call it Democracy, or Republicanism, or Abolitionism, those are my sentiments. I shan't trouble myself about any kind of politics, but war as long as war lasts—nor will any good, loyal citizen. I am afraid you people at the North don't realize that there is a war; but if you are not awake before long, you will understand that there has been a deadly struggle for Liberty, while you have been sleeping—when, with your strength added to ours, we could have swept the polluted traitors from existence, and rid ourselves of the greatest curse that ever a nation was plagued with. Why don't the North arise in her majesty and say we will crush the traitors? A few of her brave sons have volunteered, and thousands fallen in defence [sic] of the Union, and there is no one to avenge their death. For shame! From your son. ■

Featured Unit this issue:



## 72<sup>nd</sup> New York State Volunteers

**T**he 72<sup>nd</sup> New York State Volunteers was one of five regiments formed by Daniel Sickles who resigned from the U.S. Congress to seek fame as a Union general. Unlike most regiments which were formed from specific cities or counties, the 72<sup>nd</sup> drew men from across the state and even from New Jersey. Sickles had named his brigade, the Excelsior Brigade after the state's motto, meaning, *ever upwards*, and as such was to represent the entire state.

After a rough beginning trying to form the brigade in which there was controversy over Sickles' commission and the status of the troops as either United States or New York State men, in early spring of 1862 the regiment was finally designated the 72<sup>nd</sup> New York State Volunteers and was sent to their first major deployment as part of the Third Corps, Second Division. The regiment was sent to Norfolk Virginia as part of the push toward Richmond, known as the Peninsula Campaign. On May 5<sup>th</sup> the regiment fought its first major fight at Williamsburg. In an uneven fight, the 72<sup>nd</sup> and her sister-regiments

fought unsupported and took heavy casualties. When the battle was over nearly 200 72<sup>nd</sup> men were either dead or wounded. In no other fight during the war would the regiment suffer so greatly. The Excelsior Brigade participated in many of the major fights during the campaign including Fair Oaks and Malvern Hill. Because Sickles was gone much of the time, the 72<sup>nd</sup>'s commander, Colonel Nelson Taylor led the brigade while subordinate officers commanded the regiment. By late summer 1862, the campaign was over and the 72<sup>nd</sup> numbered only about 200.

In Fall of '62 the regiment was transferred from the Peninsula and saw heavy action leading up to the Second Battle of Bull Run.

In December of 1862 the 72<sup>nd</sup> NYSV received nearly 200 badly needed replacements which brought regimental strength to just over 400. With these recruits in hand the regiment participated in the Battle of Fredericksburg, and though they didn't fight heavily, they remained in the field, under arms, without tents and literally under the guns of the enemy for 50 straight hours before the defeated Union troops retired.

After the failure at Fredericksburg, the Federal Army soon went into winter quarters. In late April, 1863, the first campaign of the season began. By May 7<sup>th</sup> the Battle of Chancellorsville was over with yet another bitter Union defeat. During the fight the 72<sup>nd</sup> was heavily engaged

loosing nearly one-fourth of the regiment. Counted among the dead was their beloved Colonel William O. Stevens who had earlier replace Taylor. Stevens had been mortally wounded on the second day of battle, and died the next day in the hands of the Confederates.



The armies clashed again during first week of July at Gettysburg. With just over 300 men in the field the 72<sup>nd</sup>, now under the command of Col. John Austin, was positioned near the Emmetsburg Road. It fought hard and was forced to retreat when the Third Corps was routed from their advanced position. By the time the fighting on the second day was over, one-third of the regiment were casualties; including Austin. Among other notable casualties was Dan Sickles himself, who had his leg taken off by a stray cannon ball.

After pursuing the Confederates from Gettysburg, the Union army failed to bring the enemy to battle and went into winter quarters. In May of 1864 General U.S. Grant launched the Overland Campaign and for the next five weeks the countryside of northern Virginia ran red with blood as the two sides fought

some of the fiercest battles of the war. By the time the battles of The Wilderness, Spotsylvania Court House, North Anna River and Cold Harbor were finished, the Union forces and 72<sup>nd</sup> NYSV were bloodied but entrenched around the important rail junction of Petersburg, just south of Richmond. The 72<sup>nd</sup> had fought in many of these battles but fortunately was not in the thickest of the fighting and remained in tact albeit depleted in numbers.

But while the Civil War would last another year, until April of 1865, it was not to be for the men of the 72<sup>nd</sup> New York State Volunteers. With the enlistments of many of its veterans running out, the regiment was disbanded in mid-July of '64. The veterans went home and those newer men, with time still owing, were sent to other regiments.

The 72<sup>nd</sup> didn't finish the war, but during its service over 1,200 men filled its ranks, with over half becoming casualties. The men who served fought in nearly every major engagement, bringing honor to themselves and the state they represented. ■



**Excelsior!**



## A Confederate Reenactor's Cogitations on Slavery and Race

– Capt. Ken Janson  
Hurt's Battery

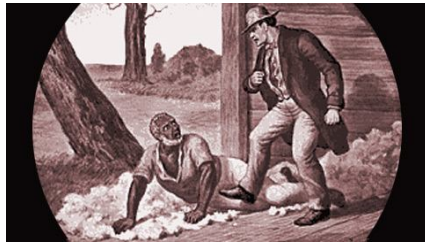
**A**s a Civil War reenactor, as a captain of Confederate artillery, I have been called upon on more than one occasion to explain how I can in conscience represent the historic Confederacy given that it was “*fighting for slavery.*”

A good question whose answer is both very simple and impossibly complex. Many modern Americans outside of the old South simplify the complexities of the Civil War as a fight between the *good guys*: the northerners who were fighting for freedom, and the *bad guys*: the southerners who were fighting for slavery. The short, easy response that is used by many Confederate reenactors: *The War wasn't about slavery. It was about States' Rights.*

This is both true and untrue at the same time. True: the vast majority of Confederate soldiers were not slave owners and were not, therefore, fighting to maintain slave property. But also True: the vast majority of the ruling class in the southern states were slave owners and

were indeed fighting to maintain slave property.

The above, however, misses a main point. The slavery issue of the 1850s and 1860s was not at its heart only about whether a state or territory would or should permit slavery within its borders. What was really going on was an attempt – sometimes irrational, sometimes inarticulate, sometimes violent – to define how American society would deal with the huge number of African Americans that had been forcibly brought to these shores.



The hard part (thank goodness) for most modern Americans to grasp is that nearly all mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Americans both north and south, except for a tiny minority, could no more accept that blacks could be their equals in capacity, intellect and virtue than they could have accepted that people would routinely fly across the Atlantic. Back then, the word *racist* was not even used. It was not needed. All *rational* people *knew* that whites were superior to blacks, browns, yellows, reds, what-have-you. If you really believed in human equality in the 19<sup>th</sup> century you were generally seen as, in modern parlance, a left-wing radical nut case.

The sad truth is that racism was the 19<sup>th</sup> century norm – north

and south. Most northern freesoilers that opposed slavery did so, not because they believed in universal equality, but because slavery meant having blacks around, and they simply didn't want blacks around. Oregon, admitted to the Union in 1859 as a free state, soon passed a law making it illegal for “free” people of color to settle within its borders. This notion was not unusual. There were then three ways that our ancestors saw that they might deal with blacks and the slavery question:

1. Keep the slave in bondage as the best way to regulate him and maintain a functioning society
2. Free the slave and ship him, will he or no, to Africa (witness the creation of the nation of Liberia)
3. Allow him freedom but keep him in a perennial under-class forever subjugated to the white race.

The fourth possibility of living up to the words of the Declaration of Independence that *All men are created equal* was given consideration by very few whites.

**10 LIKELY and VALUABLE  
SLAVES  
AT AUCTION.**

**On THURSDAY the 24th inst.  
WE WILL SEI**

In front of our Office, without any kind of bid or reserve for cash,  
AT 11 O'CLOCK.

**10 AS LIKELY NEGROES**

As any ever offered in this market; among them is a man who is a superior Cook and House Servant, and a girl about 17 years old, a first rate House Servant, and an excellent seamstress.

**BROOKE & HUBBARD,  
Auctioneers.**

Wednesday, July 23, 1823. Richmond, Va.

Most common men fighting for the Confederacy did so because

their homes were being invaded. If they gave thought to the slavery issue at all, they would have mostly accepted #1 above because they could in the social milieu of the times come up with no other solution that seemed likely of success. The racial bigotry of the common Rebel soldier was basically shared by the common soldier fighting for the Union. Equality was simply not on the table. It is true that many educated southerners, Robert Edward Lee being one such, knew that in the long term slavery was untenable. It had to die, but they had no idea how that might be achieved or how race relations could or should be redefined on a societal level.

So, if you want to be a mid-19<sup>th</sup> reenactor whose impression stands for universal equality, you have very, very few choices – a Quaker conductor on the underground railroad, perhaps. And so, asking a Confederate, or Union reenactor about race relations when in fact your question is rooted in today's America just doesn't make sense. You might as well ask him/her why the troops didn't use jeeps.

So how do I cram all of the above into a sound bite for a spectator who asks me how I can be in gray? I tell them as much as they are willing to hear, ending with a grateful acknowledgment that we have, thank goodness, come a long way since then. I often add with a smile and a nod at my guitar that Reb camps tend to be more lively than many Yank camps (the 72<sup>nd</sup> NYVI excepted), and I like my music. ■



## Artillery Thoughts

– Major Don LaPorta  
Chief of Union Artillery

**W**inter in our hobby is a time to repair, prepare and reflect on our hobby and look forward to next season. I hope all are enjoying the winter rest and the holidays. We in the artillery have just finished our annual Saint Barbara Feast and celebration dinner. This year we had a very good showing of our Confederate friends. We had a wonderful time together enjoy each others company. Times like this build companionship throughout the coming season. One would like to see more of this activity among the different units of the RACW. Time spent like this is productive. Time spent negatively is not constructive. Please spend your time getting to know the other members of our hobby, not looking for things done wrong.

Winter suggestions. It is a good time to order equipment for next year. During the active season one isn't always able to get the *stuff* needed for our hobby. Oil your leathers and boots, this keeps them soft and pliable and greatly adds to their long use. A good cleaning and oiling of your firearms, pistols, rifles and of course cannons.

Again it is our hope that everyone have great holidays

and enjoy your family, till we meet again in the spring on the field of honor. ■

## THE INFANTRY SOLDIER'S HAVERSACK

– QMSgt S. O'Cooney  
9th Reg't Invalid Corps

**T**he haversack is an important and useful accoutrement for Infantry reenactors portraying the campaign or battlefield impression. Soldiers on campaign or on a march to reach the battlefield often lived out the haversack for weeks on end, carrying with them, in a convenient manner, all of life's necessities for small comforts in the field.



The 1863 Regulation US Pattern Tarred Haversack measured 12½" x 3½" x 13", with a 5" flap. The flap is secured with a single strap, made of leather,

with a roller buckle. Inside the haversack is a cotton sack, secured by buttons at both ends, and on one side. The simplicity of the haversack allowed army contract suppliers to manufacture huge quantities with relative ease, speed and low cost.

Many, if not most, Confederate haversacks were often home made or of local manufacture, often of any available materials, such as cotton or canvas sacking, upholstery fabric or any other durable material. Waterproofing was desirable but not always applied to Confederate haversacks.

Soldiers carried food, rations, extra ammunition cartridges needed in a long firefight to supplement those carried in their cartridge box, and any other personal items that make life on campaign a bit more bearable.

Stenciled identification lettering was to be applied indicating the soldier's company, regiment and number, although photographs and diaries reveal that this was more often done by units that were either regular army or better equipped and organized, and that most state volunteer units did not observe this regulation.

In the rush to equip large numbers of men in a short period of time, these requirements were, according to photographs of the period, evidently not routinely observed. In the

early or pre-war years especially, when regulations were more carefully followed, and when the call up led to regular army regiments being brought to Federal service, the use of stenciled lettering seemed to be more often applied.

### **CUSTOMIZING y'r HAVERSACK for the INFANTRY IMPRESSION**

Federal Regulations required that the flap of a soldier's haversack was to be marked with the soldier's Company Letter and Regiment Number, e.g. **Co. C 72nd NYVI**, and with the soldiers Number in the Company, e.g. **35**. These markings were to be made in 1.5" tall block letters that could be easily seen at a distance. Regulations did not specify the color of the



markings, however, with haversacks being tarred and black in color, white is the color of markings used in most cases.

Reenactors first need to determine whether stenciled lettering is authentic and documented as being routine, or exceptional, for their unit. Individuals wishing to "personalize" their impression gear may,

of course, indulge in painting on the regulation letters, but care should be taken to observe stencils made by comrades, and to take pains to avoid creating a stencil that could be distracting of too different from his company-mates. Uniformity is desired in the federal Army, and more personalized gear might indicate a militia or regular army unit, or a Confederate unit.

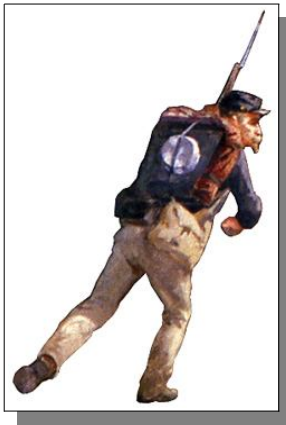
Reenactors can duplicate the period fonts used quite easily by borrowing or purchasing a set of period font stencils, and by using a paint brush with white paint. Veteran reenactors will tell you that a neat stencil job often begins with a ruler to center and align the letters and to determine proper spacing between the letters. These same techniques work as well when the campaigner similarly stencils his canteen, boxes or other gear.

Reenactors can vary the font from piece to piece to avoid the look that everything was stenciled at the same time and by the same person.

A pencil may be used to sketch out lightly the basic layout, before the stencils are applied. Each letter should be outlined in pencil, and then with the stencil removed, the paint brush will give a good thick coat of paint.

Water based paint is not desirable, for obvious reasons. Veterans have discovered that fabric stores and sewing depart-

ments in general stores, usually carry a thick Fabric Paint in many different colors, that adheres well, dries quickly, and that is somewhat flexible and very durable after being dry. The Fabric Paint comes in small plastic bottles with an applicator tip that allows finer detailing when needed. Once applied, it is easy to use a small paint brush to spread the Fabric Paint and to complete the form of each letter. Be sure to allow the letters to dry and cure well, before being taken to the field.



Spay painted letters tend to be more easily applied, but the letters will more easily flake and fall off the tarred sacking—usually within a few seasons of hard use. The brush-painted letters tend to be thicker when applied and they will also crack and appear old in a few seasons, but will not fall away as easily—creating a weathered veteran campaign appearance that is so desirable.

As with canteens, haversacks may be embellished in a variety of personal ways – the strap of the haversack was issued in one

long length, to suit the needs of men of all different heights. Reenactors should either sew or tie a knot in their straps to allow the haversack to fall at a comfortable position while on the march and allowing it to be tucked under the belt, on the left hip and above his bayonet frog. This prevents the haversack from swinging or getting in the way while marching or fighting, but still allows the soldier easy access to his hard tack or salt pork to chew.

The soldier often will also use the haversack closing strap to hold his tin cup or other small items that he can easily reach with on the march. The clank and rattle of the tin cups on haversack straps, of a thousand soldiers on the march, is oft described as the *music* of soldiers of the era.

There is something soothing and mesmerizing about the reassuring clinking of tin cups on haversack straps that gives a tired and dusty regiment an air of authenticity. ■

*In childhood, good manners,  
 In youth, self-control,  
 In middle age, fairness,  
 In old age, good advice,  
 In death, no regret.  
 – ancient Greek inscription*

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 (530) 925-0200  
[racw\\_duncan@yahoo.com](mailto:racw_duncan@yahoo.com)

### NON-COMBATANT CORPS

#### REPRESENTATIVE

Tabitha Dubke  
[doorknob87@yahoo.com](mailto:doorknob87@yahoo.com)



## Publication Information

The **Shoulder Arms'** new editor is Ken Janson who will be happy to receive any help/suggestions/submissions you might have to offer.

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**Editor** – Ken Janson,  
[shoulderarms@racw.org](mailto:shoulderarms@racw.org)

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*Pickett's Charge - Gettysburg July 3, 1863*