

THE REGIMENTAL DISPATCH: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 12TH UNITED STATES INFANTRY, COMPANY A

Volume 5 Issue 3

Fall 2015

Special points of interest:

- Remember Veterans Day, November 11, 2015
- Annual Meeting, February 6, -

2 Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science

3 **Civil War family**

3 **Annual Awards**

4 **Upcoming Events**

Commanders Column

The Manner of the day: A look at Victorian Custom.
Capt. Neil K. MacMillan

We recently attended an event where the authenticity standards were abysmal. We all know the event and I don't desire to further any embarrassment by expounding on the event. I will, however elaborate on one area where we can all improve. Our usage of for lack of a better term colorful language.

I am not averse to the use of profanity if I *need* to use it. However, at the above mentioned event we all heard language that was not only unnecessary, but would strip paint off a battleship. I am proud to say it was not delivered by any member of the 12th US! Having said that, the language was heard by spectators. Why is that important?

First, the use of such language feeds the perception that we are a bunch of undisciplined idiots playing Cowboys and Indians. Secondly, spectators are less inclined to return to an event if they are going to have their ears and those of their children assaulted by language that has to take the up elevator ten stories to reach the gutter. Perhaps though, the most important reason why this was troubling to me is that it flies in the face of the history and custom of the period!

Yes, there are several generals who were well-renowned for their expertise and artistry were in the usage of sulfuric language. What is the difference? They were not in mixed company or in the presence of children! The strictures of Victorian society were pointed in the view that such language did not belong in polite society in even the poorest of households! This is why you hear prostitutes referred to by such euphemisms as soiled doves and ladies of the night or ladies plying their avocation as General Benjamin Butler put it in his infamous order while commanding occupied New Orleans. It was that order that caused the residents of New Orleans to refer to the general as "Beast" Butler. Ladies and children were sheltered from any language that might injure their tender sensibilities. This was an era when chair legs were hidden lest they offend the eye of the beholder.

What does this mean for us as re-enactors? Bluntly put it means if you wouldn't use that language in front of your mother, grandmother or great grand-mother, then you should not use it in front of the spectators. We reenact to have fun, but we also don the wool and shoulder the musket to teach people the history they will not get in the classroom. If we're not getting it right neither are they! You all know me well enough to know I can speak "Sailorese" with the best of them, but you'll also note that I try to refrain from gutter language while spectators are around. Let's do this right and encourage our pards in other units to emulate us. That is the mark of a good unit after all.

Union and Liberty, now and forever!

Learning from the Wounded: The Civil War and the Rise of American Medical Science

Shauna Devine

The Civil War was a medical disaster. Tens of thousands died who should not have. The antagonists were absolutely unprepared in all aspects for that war. Not enough weapons. Not enough clothing. Not enough transport. Not enough food. Not enough soldiers and not enough experienced regulars to teach the men what they needed to learn. Not enough medical personnel and medicines, and what medicines there were often proved useless or even dangerous. Many of the doctors had no real training or experience handling mass casualties, or even individual soldiers. Medical knowledge was so primitive as to almost be laughable, were it not for the tragedy that resulted from this shortcoming.

But the war also turned out to be an unparalleled opportunity. Forward-thinking physicians literally took the bull by the horns, and the result was, by the end of the war, nothing less than earthshaking.

In the beginning, medical education was, in my personal opinion, a joke. Some medical schools such as the University of Pennsylvania were the elite, while others were little better than quack factories. And there were several competing theories of disease, its causes and proper treatment. Hydrologists and naturists competed with scientifically-based theories. There even were men practicing medicine who never set foot inside any medical school. As early as the Revolutionary War, some physicians recognized the inadequacy of their schools and looked to Europe, which in many aspects far exceeded schools here. German, Austrian, Scottish colleges and universities demanded far more of their students and provided opportunities for learning rarely seen in America.

One of the areas lacking in America was the opportunity to learn from cadavers. While in Europe the dead were often turned over to medical schools as learning tools, autopsies were rare here, and sometimes treated as harshly as grave robbing. American physicians who could afford it would go to Europe to further their training, while in America the overwhelming number of dead began to provide the same practical experience.

Taking data from previous readings, I've been telling people who stop at my exhibit that the American armies had no microscopes and were unaware of germs. I've been mistaken. Microscopes were in use in Europe decades before our Civil War as instruments for investigation of illness, and American physicians began to pick up on this years before the Civil War. The instruments were expensive, and few other than those elites who'd been to Europe had any idea how to use them. But interested American doctors not only began using them to study cadavers and living soldiers – and the did one more vital thing: ranking medical officers began ordering all army physicians to document the illnesses and injuries they were seeing, and in great detail. By the end of the war, tens of thousands of detailed medical records were submitted, providing an unparalleled opportunity not only to study, but to compare. How alike, for instance, was this case of “the trots” to this other one? What characteristics did they share and in what ways did they differ? How might diet, the weather, and geography affect disease outcome?

As understanding of disease and disease process grew, novel means of treating diseases and coping with their spread began to be developed. Major Jonathan Letterman devised means of triaging patients that even today characterizes battlefield care, and others began to isolate cases of particular illness that obviously were contagious. Entire hospitals were constructed to deal with highly contagious illnesses. One might accept only patients with “social diseases” while another dealt with digestive disorders and another with hospital gangrene and yet another with injuries and diseases of the eye. And always, document observances and outcomes, and turn those documents over to the Army Medical Museum, where they were displayed, along with physical evidence, to the medical profession at large. The self-impressed general officer who donated his amputated leg was by far not the only person to literally give of himself. Admittedly, not every specimen was volunteered. These guys and their bodies belonged to the army and the government to do with as they wished – at least, until the soldier was formally discharged.

This text is chock-full of examples and explanations and very much advances an understanding of the usefulness of the study of medial history, as well as history in general. I give it an “A” rating. For those interested in Civil War medicine, it's well worth the cost.

Civil War Family—Mrs. Mayers

At the 2015 Peterboro Civil War Weekend someone of the 12th US called our group – their Civil War Family. I like that phrase. On our reenactment weekends we set up a small town of our canvas tents. We work together on set up, meals and tear down. In between we educate the public, other reenactors and our own group. We sing, talk, laugh and sometimes cry. We have camped in rain, cold and hot weather. We have seen young members grow up, some even to leadership roles in the modern army, and others go on to college.

I was reading an article on leadership for work and it brought to mind that we all have a leadership role in the group. We do have our military chain of command and our corporate officers but as members of the group we all have responsibilities to keep the group going and growing. One of the responsibilities of all members is to communicate. We have the newsletter, Web site, Face Book group, phone calls and meetings.

One of the vital pieces of communication is concerning attendance at events and participation in unit mess. Mrs. Hurd and the other ladies take time and careful planning on the meals for unit mess. As a side note we are always looking for ideas for meals for our events. When we set a deadline we allow for time to turn the numbers into the event organizer. Some events, like Massena provide rations and they need the head count, and money to buy the rations. They also need the count of participants to ensure they have enough wood and straw/hay. For all of the events with a unit mess Mrs. Hurd skillfully creates the recipes to provide the volume of food needed for the people who have paid their mess fess and those who said they are participating in mess. From the recipes the grocery list is created for the shopping. Some of the events Mrs. Hurd or others may prepare some of the food in advance. At one event this year 17 people said they were going to participate in unit mess but only 10 people participated in mess. We need to be mindful of the deadlines set and submit our mess fees by the deadline. I know that unforeseen circumstances do occur please let the event mess coordinator, unit officers and/or military leaders know if there is a change in your plans for event attendance. Please send your mess fee to the unit mailbox by the deadline.

Concerning the newsletter. Lately it has been the same three or four people submitting articles or information. I know some of you say “you cannot write.” We do have several people that have editing skills and can assist with articles but since we are not trying for a literary award all submissions will be gladly received. Pictures are also appreciated.

The Web site does need updating—Private Hurd is the unit webmaster—can we please get some new photos and information together to update the site.

Annual Awards—2015**Award****Recipient**

Soldier of the Year

Private Dan Foster

Sergeant of the Year

Corporal Garrett deBiliek

Musician of the Year

Corporal Nancy Patnode

Civilian of the Year

Mrs. Shayne Camp

The Kurt Donath Michelin 5 Star Award

Private Kurt Donath

Most Traveled

Corporal Grant Denis

Matt Gurniak Civil War GQ Award

Private Kittipongse Amaritnant

12th US Infantry
PO Box 5384
Syracuse, NY 13220-5384

THE REGIMENTAL DISPATCH:

Volume 5 Issue 3

Upcoming Events



Please check the website, Face book page and yahoo group for updates and information.

November 7—Veterans Day Expo and Parade—New York State Fair Ground

Jan 8 –10, 2016—USV Annual Meeting, Gettysburg, PA

Feb 6, 2016—12th US Annual Meeting

June 11—12, 2016 24th Annual Peterboro Civil War Weekend, Education day on Friday, June 10, 2016