

THE REGIMENTAL DISPATCH: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE 12TH
UNITED STATES INFANTRY, COMPANY A
Volume One, Issue Two Summer 2006



Caption; 1st Sgt MacMillan converses with soldiers of the 12th US Infantry at Bennett's tavern. Erie Canal Village 2005. Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly.

Upcoming events

July 2nd : Party and Deck christening. Major Allen's house Bring a dish to pass.

July 4th Living history display Manlius Historical society.

July 8& 9: Heritage Square, Ontario, NY

July 14-16: Genesee Country Village, Mumford, NY

July 21-23: 145th Bull Run @ Cedar Creek, Middleton VA

July 29-30: Massena, NY

Aug. 5&6: Erie Canal Village, Rome NY

Aug. 18-20: Hamlin Beach, NY

Events marked in **Red** are Maximum effort events.

Please check the website for updates and changes!

Caps are in short supply but before you buy caps consult your NCOs or officers

Commanding Officer: Capt. James Hurd

Corporate President: Mrs Maria Killius

Editor: 1st Sgt. Neil K. MacMillan

Editorial

In the past, I have not written editorials for this newsletter. Usually if I want to get a point across, I'm pretty capable of doing so. I'm going to deviate from that policy.

As I have told you, this is your newsletter. In the past we have dealt with issues of getting the newsletter out in a timely fashion and I am trying to resolve that. However, I need your help.

So far the only article I have received for this issue is Capt. Mayers' for his *Lancet and Laudanum*. Column.

As much as I love to write, I would love to see some more articles from the rest of you. What makes reenacting work or not work for you? Tell us about you as a reenactor and a person. What is your specialty? If you're the safety officer or you have safety concerns, I'm offering you a forum to air them.

I'd like to see articles on the drill maneuvers we practice and use in the field and would like to revive the Commanding officer's column Yes Captain I am talking to you! I would also like to feature a recipe every issue. I will also be featuring articles on Military courtesy and would love to see articles on Victorian etiquette for both ladies and gentlemen.

Lets all do our part to have a newsletter worthy of the calibre of people we have in the 12th Infantry. And starting next issue we will feature a letters to the editor column! Sound off only keep in mind that I will edit for inappropriate or abusive language. Send your ideas to me and send articles. I remain your obedient servant,
Neil K. MacMillan 1st Sgt and Humble editor.

Mentioned in Dispatches

Congratulations to Private Matthew Gurniak on his graduation from Liverpool High School. Private Gurniak will be attending the Military Academy at West Point, NY Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!

Congratulations to Corporal Alex Stowe on his graduation from Lafayette High School. Private Stowe will be attending Syracuse University. To quote Sgt Poltenson "Well Done, Spanky!"



Caption: Cpl. Stowe polishing brass. Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly

Congratulations to Elaine Cron and her fiancé Kit on their engagement. Good luck to you in Virginia.

Congratulations to Private James Quattro and Miss Amanda More on their engagement. They plan a 2008 wedding.

Congratulations to Mrs Roxie Schreibman on her impending nuptials.

Lastly, welcome to our new members!

Private Ruuspakka, Pvt. Ray Morgan, the Markstein family and any others I have forgotten. Welcome to you all and I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

Pvt. Harry and Jan Reichert have been appointed as Public Affairs committee chairs. Congratulations to them.
Send your notices for mention in dispatches to your friendly neighborhood first sergeant for inclusion!

Lancets and Laudanum Capt. Bill Mayers



Caption: *Surgeon Mayers attends to a wounded Soldier. Erie Canal Village 2005. Photo Courtesy of Peggy Reilly*

Upon learning of the profound inadequacy of medical care of the soldiers who served in the American Civil War, people often remark, shaking their heads in wonder, upon the stupidity of Civil War Surgeons. In response it must be pointed out that although their medical knowledge often was erroneous and sometimes dangerous, stupid they were not. Though early in the conflict a number of genuine incompetents managed to secure appointments as surgeons or assistant surgeons, usually through political connections, they were almost all weeded out very quickly and sent packing. The competent surgeons within the Union army noted the inadequacy of the preparation of many physicians and convinced the government to order the institution of examining boards. Staffed by the most competent of surgeons, these boards administered tough examinations to would be military surgeons and only those approved by this board were granted a surgeon's or assistant surgeon's commission.

The Army surgeon reflected his civilian peer, having received the same training and schooling (or not), as did the latter. The most common means of becoming a physician was through medical college and apprenticeship. A young man would apply himself as an apprentice to a licensed, practicing physician for a varying period of time, obtain said physician's recommendation and then apply to medical school. At times, the process occurred in reverse order. Medical licenses were issued by the applicant's local or county medical society and not by the state.

Medical school was typically two years of study. The first year consisted of sixteen long, sometimes very long, lectures. The second year was a repeat of the first. One often could, if one scored well enough on his exams, avoid the second year and receive his medical diploma after the first year. After school and apprenticeship, the applicant would seek his medical license and once it was in hand, could enter into practice on his own, partner with other physicians, or travel to Europe to "Complete" his medical education. In Europe, medical school was twice as long and involved much more hands on training in such disciplines as anatomy.

Many of the medical practices generally accepted in the United States dated to the time of George Washington's contemporary, Dr. Benjamin Rush. Doctor Rush subscribed to the idea of "heroic" therapy, believing illness was due to an imbalance of the "four humors" within the body. It wasn't, of course, but because he was so well known and respected as the ultimate authority, many of Rush's ideas persisted into the earliest years of the Twentieth Century. A number of his ideas were actually beneficial. For instance, the condition called dropsy, now known as congestive heart failure, was being successfully treated through the use of the digitalis leaf. Digitalis remains a potent and frequently prescribed heart medicine to this day.

But Rush also believed in the use of calomel and "Blue mass" to treat a variety of conditions. Calomel is mercuric chloride and blue mass is merely another form of mercuric chloride. Mercury is poisonous. How did such a substance become one of the most revered medications in Eighteenth Century America? Hard to say, except that medical science then consisted mainly of the empirical variety. Try it and if you see the results you want, then it must be because of whatever it was. If evacuation of the bowels and intense vomiting is desired, well, Calomel will certainly give you that!

The empirical method often led to the wrong conclusions. Alcohol was considered a potent stimulant, whereas it's actually the opposite. Tobacco was considered a sedative when it is the opposite. Germs were

known but their role in disease was not. Pasteur began discussing and writing about his theory that germs were involved in disease at the time of the Civil War, but it took another generation before his ideas were published and widely accepted. Vectors, that is, vehicles of disease such as mosquitoes, flies, unwashed hands and contaminated drinking water were largely unknown, misunderstood and quite often, if they were known, were deliberately ignored in the interest of military expediency.

Sanitation was one of those factors often ignored by people who should have known better. The battalion, regimental, and division surgeons knew how important proper disposal of human and animal urine and feces is, but they had no authority to compel unit commanders to order the proper care of the sinks. More than one grizzled old Regular Army officer, incensed at the surgeon's impertinence, snarled, "That's the way an army camp is *supposed* to smell and would refuse to order the proper maintenance of the sinks.

As mentioned earlier, some medications did work as intended, but the number of said medicines was small. Besides digoxin, there was morphine and a liquid form of opium known as laudanum. Each was immensely useful as an anodyne, a pain reliever. There was quinine, of which immense quantities were given for the relief of malaria symptoms. Unfortunately it was also given for fevers unrelated to malaria, in which case it had little beneficial effect, meaning that it's true value was misunderstood for many years.

And of course, the spectator to our reenactments comes to see the treatment of battle wounds. Their favorite hoped for spectacle is an amputation. Surgical treatment of wounds was crude at best. Despite popular belief, the first response of the surgeon to a wound of the limb was not to whack it off. In fact, modern physicians, when considering the state of medical knowledge of the period, suggest that the Civil War surgeons failed to amputate frequently enough! The first consideration was to save the limb if at all possible. Some that were pretty severely damaged were in fact "saved", though quite often the limb was of limited use forever afterward. But, the risk of death from infection of such wounds was so high that given the total lack of antibiotics modern surgeons would unhesitatingly advise, "Chop it off, for goodness sake!"

Not only was wound treatment and surgery crude, people who really had no business with a scalpel in their hands at times performed it. One brand new assistant surgeon documented his reporting to his unit hospital during a fierce battle, observing one amputation, and then being handed an amputation knife by the surgeon-in-charge and told, "Perhaps you would care to operate, Doctor." He promptly amputated a limb, admitting in his diary, "I had never before touched an amputating knife." He noted the surgeon-in-charge was "kind enough to compliment my work."

During the Crimean War, to which a number of American surgeons went as observers, one in seven casualties who were treated according to the standards of the day survived. By the American Civil War, only a few years later, one in three survived. Medical science was slow to advance, but advance it did. Untold suffering and thousands upon thousands of lives that otherwise would have been lost were spared through the efforts of conscientious and dedicated surgeons. We owe them their due, Folks.

Yr ob't servant,

Ass't Surgeon Capt. Bill Mayers

12th US Infantry Rgt.



Caption: *For every soldier killed outright, three were wounded. Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly*

First Call: Peterboro
1st Sgt Neil K. MacMillan

For those of you who came out to Peterboro, let me say thank you. Yet again, we were at an event where we endured miserable weather. However we did as this unit always does and rose to the occasion.

If I didn't get a chance to schmooze with any of you, please accept my humble apologies. As most of you know I was sick as a dog.

For once the forces were about even. Now all we have to do is get the Rebs to take some hits and we'll be all set.

Kudos to Linda Hurd and Peggy Reilly for their efforts to ensure people got registered.

It was a fun event in spite of the weather, in spite of the galloping crud and I hope you all agree. Next year hopefully things will be better.

We have a number of events coming up so check the web site or call your section leader and let somebody know what your intentions are. Union and liberty, now and forever!



Caption: *Morning parade at Peterboro 2004 Sometimes it doesn't rain. Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly*

Trivia Question:

Name the Oswego woman who served as a surgeon with Sherman's Army of the Tennessee.

Answer in the next issue!

Peas on a Trencher: Civil War fare

This issue I feature a recipe from the Civil War that I personally have had some success with. Hopping John is a traditional Southern dish that was served to slaves and that poor whites ate as well. When supplies were readily had, Hopping John augmented an austere diet for the Confederate army.

Making it is relatively simple and can be done before hand or cooked over the campfire.

This recipe serves about eight but it can be increased.

1 lb. Of dried black eyed peas

3 pints of cold water

½ pound of salt pork sliced

1 tsp. of Tabasco sauce

½ tsp salt

2 tbspc bacon fat or lard.

2 medium onions chopped

1 cup uncooked long grain wild rice

1 ½ cups boiling water

Cover the peas with cold water after sorting out the bad ones in a large kettle or Dutch oven. Soak over night. Add Salt pork, Tabasco sauce and salt. Cover and cook over low heat for about thirty minutes. Meanwhile in a

separate pan brown onions in bacon fat until yellow, then add to peas along with rice and boiling water. Cook mixture until rice is tender and water is absorbed, approximately 20-25 minutes.



Caption to picture at bottom of page: *Mrs. Pamela Crane prepares a delicacy of the era at Peterboro 2005*
Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly

145th Bull Run: An Overview

European Military experts consistently underestimated the military abilities of the Americans. This included both wars fought with Great Britain, the Mexican War and the Civil War. A German count, Helmut Von Moltke said the Civil War had nothing to teach Europe It was two armed mobs going at each other.

To a degree the count was right. However, there is more to it.

In addition to being the first major battle fought in the eastern theatre of the war, it was the last time the United States Army used the square. The war that had nothing to teach the Europeans would usher in warfare that would presage France's bloody killing fields fifty-four years later. That was to come later. On that bright July day the war promised to be over by nightfall. The Americans didn't understand themselves any better than the Europeans.

General Irvin McDowell's advance was initially successful but stalled when the Confederates were able to bring up reinforcements by rail, a first in warfare. Southern troops push the Union army out of Manassas regular army troops hold the bridges by the old tactic of forming a defensive square and McDowell's troops make it into Washington.

Ironically, the Union army might have maintained better cohesion had it not been for the upper crust of Washington. Several socialites including some congressmen and senators followed the army to watch a tidy little battle that would restore the Union. When McDowell's forces were pushed back the civilians panicked and ran starting a general rout out of what had been an orderly if not stubborn retreat.

McDowell was replaced by McClellan, and the war would drag on.

What does this mean for us as reenactors? This is a chance that comes all too infrequently. We will be billeted with other Regulars and will fight the same battle that General Sykes remarked upon when he said "At Bull Run, the Regulars taught the Army how to fight. At Gettysburg they taught the army how to die"

Huzzah for the Regulars!



Caption: *The Regulars prepare to go into battle at Gettysburg.*

Announcements

Joe Jadhon and Tim Fitzgerald are looking for a ride to Bull Run. If you can give them a ride let them know

ASAP.

Ra-Lin's Discount has German Percussion caps for muskets. They are \$13.95 for a tin of 200. Get them now while they are still there.

Registration is due for Erie Canal Village July 1st! Get it in ASAP. This is a Maximum effort event and I hope I will see all of you there!

As I stated in my editorial, the newsletter needs articles. Also let me know what you want to see in the newsletter!



Caption: *School was important to our ancestors. Children of the 12th get education at Erie Canal Village 2005 .Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly*



Caption: *After the battle a peaceful sunset.at German Flatts, Herkimer 2005
Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly*



Caption: *Relaxation came very rarely, even for children. Douglas and Henry Armstrong enjoy a brief respite at Erie Canal Village 2005. Photograph courtesy of Peggy Reilly*

