

The Regimental Dispatch Spring 2017

The Regimental Dispatch:

Newsletter of the 12th US Infantry Civil War Living Historians.

Ink stains: the editor's column.

As I type this it is a sunny day, which has really been a rarity of late. The season will soon be upon us and we'll be deciding which events are must do events and all of the preparation that goes with that. Welcome to the new and hopefully improved, newsletter. I would like to see more articles from all of you. While I love to write and expound on a variety of topics, this is and should be YOUR newsletter. In previous incarnations we did not have an opinion page. I am going to include one starting with this issue. There are stipulations: Absolutely no modern politics. I would like to see articles at some point on how politics led to the Civil War. Civil discourse is a must so I will not publish any article that is insulting, or biased to race, religion or gender orientation etc. Did racism and sexism exist in the Civil War era? Absolutely! There is more than enough bilge water slopping over modern society without it interfering with our hobby as well. Other than that I am not a censor! Free and open discussion is necessary for the republic to thrive, but that doesn't mean the discussion has to be nasty.

I will still write the commander's corner and hope that First Sergeant Camp will chime in on occasion with his perspective. He is an extremely busy man in both his 21st and 19th century personas. Surgeon Mayers has consistently provided informative, entertaining and thought-provoking articles on medical subjects. I'd like to see a civilian column on the myriad of topics that many of us, even in the reenacting community, know next to nothing about.

I also want history articles! What did they think? What games did our Victorian era ancestors play? What tactics did they use to fight out deadliest war? Perhaps I can prevail on Chaplain Browka to provide an article on the religious revival that swept through both armies during the war. I'd like to throw in a trivia question or two and some other things. What would you like to see? Let me know, or better yet, send me an article!

Until next time, I'll let the printer's ink dry.

The editor.

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The Commander's Corner

Capt. Neil K. MacMillan, 12th US Infantry.

As you all know by now, we have had our annual meeting and elections Congratulations to all who were elected or reelected. Our corporate board was unanimously re-elected. We have a new NCO! I know you all join me in wishing Corporal Dan Foster the best in his new role. While we all joke with Dan, it is a promotion that is well deserved! Foster will be filling the vacancy left by our new second Sergeant, Sgt. Grant Denis! Huzzah Grant! Jim Hurd, at his request, has reverted to private. Thank you Private Hurd for filling the second Sergeant position at a critical time for the unit.

Bradford Burgher has been instrumental in building a solid cadre of musicians who are well-trained and enthusiastic about their craft. It is a distinct pleasure to promote him to Sergeant-Major and principle musician! Sergeant Nancy Patnode will fill his vacancy and it is an equally well deserved promotion.

We have several new people. Jered, Avi and Dana, I look forward to seeing you all in the field and welcome to our Civil War family! Congratulations to our own Arie Landis and her fiancé, Joshua! Arie has been a field nurse with the unit for several years. We wish you both all the happiness and blessings you can handle and hope we'll see both of you in camp and on the field!

2017 Events

Date	Event	Location / Notes
January 7	USV annual meeting	Gettysburg, PA
February 11	12 th US Annual Meeting and Dinner	Fabius, NY
April 29 - 30	Neshaminy State Park Civil War Reenactment	Bensalem, PA
May 6 – 7	Old Mill Village	New Milford, PA
May 18 - 21	Fire on the Genesee	Mt. Morris, NY – Letchworth State Park
June 3 - 4	Troy, NY	Troy, NY
June 9 - 11	Peterboro Civil War Weekend	Peterboro, NY
June 24 – 25	Delhi – 144 th NY	Delhi, NY
July 14 – 15	Genesee Country Village	Mumford, NY
July 29 - 30	Massena Civil War Weekend	Massena, NY
July 29 – 30	Fort Ontario – Harbor Fest	Oswego, NY

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Aug 4 – 6	French Asylum, 141 st PA	
Aug 18 – 20	Hamlin Beach	Hamlin Beach State Park
Aug 26 – 27	Farmers Museum Civil War Weekend	Cooperstown, NY
Sept 8 – 10	Top of the Hill – 157 th	Rt. 13, Vienna, NY
Sept 16	Clay Historical Society Fall Festival	
Sept 15 – 17	German Flatts	German Flatts, NY
Sept 25 - 27	Wellsville Civil War Weekend	Angelica, NY
Nov 4	Syracuse Veterans Day Parade and Expo	New York State Fairgrounds
Nov 18	Remembrance Day	Gettysburg, PA

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Secret weapon: Capt. Bill Mayers

The August, 2014 issue of Civil War Times offered the story of Billy Yank's secret weapon. Now, I'm not so sure about its secrecy, since there're documented instances of trade between opposing troops, but I certainly can agree with this item's popularity - coffee. The beverage has been popular among warriors since the Fifteenth Century, and remains so today.

Coffee was among the first valued items to become scarce in the Confederacy once the Anaconda Plan went into effect. There are plenty of stories about the increasingly desperate attempts "down south" to find an acceptable substitute, ranging from and ground up peanuts to acorns treated the same way. Someone even tried cutting up, drying and roasting sweet potatoes and making a coffee substitute from that. Personal note - that actually tastes fairly good. But the problem? No caffeine. That was - and for the modern soldier as well is, the critical ingredient.

"I could drink one, or even two quarts a day and want more!" an unidentified Union soldier is said to have remarked in a letter home. A popular book title - *Hardtack and Coffee* - expresses the desirability of the drink in period terms. Even though it often was issued in the form of un-roasted beans, it was treasured. A soldier would roast his beans in a skillet and then pound them with a rock - sometimes even with his rifle butt, toss them into a cup and add boiling water. Sugar, if he had any, but most didn't bother with milk or cream, additives even more difficult to procure in the field. Ah, caffeine - kept a guy on his toes, and may have thereby saved his life. The only thing a Yank in the field appreciated equally was - tobacco. Thus, the illicit trade between opposing sides.

Ever enterprising, northern businessmen did try to capitalize...someone invented "essence of coffee" - the earliest form of instant coffee I can find reference for. But the soldiers hated the taste. In 1850, Jim Folger had opened a coffee-roasting business in San Francisco, thus establishing a well-known coffee empire. We "moderns" lift a steaming cup in his honored memory. And yes, the stronger, the better (at least for them youngsters). "Strong enough to float an iron wedge" as the saying goes. And thanks to author Kim A. O'Connell for the article I'm quoting from.

And from VVA Veteran, the newsletter of Vietnam Veterans of America, this:

Before the grueling day begins, there is the welcome taste of GI coffee. Take a chunk of C4 about the size of a fingernail and shape it into a ball and set it carefully down. Tear open the packet of instant coffee saved from last night's C ration. Pour it into a canteen cup half filled with water. Stir with the white plastic spoon from the C ration. Strike a GI match and light the C4. Do not breathe the fumes as it's said to be harmful. Hold the canteen cup over the burning explosive until the water boils, about thirty seconds. Remove the cup from the bright yellow flame. Let the C4 burn itself out. Those who step on it risk losing a foot. Tear open and pour in one or two packets of non-dairy creamer. Repeat with sugar. Stir with the plastic spoon. With eyes closed, inhale the savory vapors; cup to lips, feel the hot, inky brew flood your mouth, scourge your tongue, roll down your willing gullet. The taste is awful, but it will do. There comes the softly echoed "zero two" and a hundred packs, helmets, and weapons are reluctantly lifted, slung and shifted into place. Listen as one hundred grudging soldiers, one by one, trudge forward into the grim unwinnable jaws of Vietnam. Coffee has lessened the drudge, if not the dread.

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Captain Mayers

2017 Peterboro menu

Friday night - foil packets of hamburger patty, potatoes, carrots, onion & cookies

Saturday

Breakfast - Sausage gravy & biscuits, hard boiled eggs

Lunch - Cold roasted chicken, Mrs. Mayers Coleslaw, 3- Bean Salad, fruit, cookies

Supper - Beef Stew, Strawberry shortcake

Sunday

Breakfast - Pancake breakfast at community center - not included in mess fees

Lunch - Sandwiches, fruit, cookies

Mess Fees:

Mess fees received by the Treasurer by May 25th - \$15.00 per person for the 5 meals

Mess fees received by the Treasurer between May 26th and June 7th - \$25.00 per person for the 5 meals

At the event – *if there is food left after everyone who has paid has eaten - \$6.00 per meal.*

Dues and Insurance

Dues - \$20.00 per family per year

Insurance - \$20.00 per person per year – 12 years and older

\$10.00 per person -per year – under 12 years

Please mail Dues, insurance and mess fees to:

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

Manners: Customs of Speech

Capt. Neil K. MacMillan

First impressions are often lasting impressions. In the re-enacting community, the first impression we give will make or break our ability to teach history to our spectators. Therefore if behooves us to get it right. One of the hardest things for 21st century folks to get right is the class structure of mid-19th century American society and the complexities of military and civilian forms of speech.

The familiarity we greet each other with today was all but unheard of in 1860. Even long time acquaintances greeted each other with “Sir” or “Madam”. Gentlemen never greeted ladies not of their acquaintance without an introduction. The titles of Mr., Master (for young lads), Mrs., and Miss were always used. In the military or in mixed company soldiers or sailors were addressed by rank. In public, which in 1860 meant anywhere other than home, even husbands and wives followed this custom. You will often hear Captain and Mrs. Mayers follow this custom in camp.

In the Civil War military, enlisted addressed officers in the third person. For example: instead of saying, “Captain I need to speak to you.” The private in 1861 would say, “Private Jones has the First Sergeant’s permission to speak with the captain.” You’ll notice there are two iron-clad rules here. First is that the 1st Sgt. Is the liaison between the officer and the enlisted. His permission **must** be secured prior to speaking to the officer. We will be enforcing this in camp while spectators are expected (any hours that the camp is open). 1st Sergeant Camp has earned his position several times over and he is entitled to that courtesy! Third person was used to maintain a formality between the officer and the enlisted man. Normal usage of speech (first person) is used between enlisted or officers not in mixed environs. When relaying a message from a senior officer to a junior officer, you present the former officer’s compliments; “Sir, Colonel Childs sends his compliments and requests the Captain to bring his men forward and form a skirmish line.” You never present compliments of a junior officer. You would report back to the senior officer thusly: “The private begs to report to the Colonel that Captain MacMillan has moved his troops forward and established a skirmish line as the Colonel ordered.” Heady stuff I’m sure.

Profanity was harshly discouraged and was a finable offence under the Army regulations. It was NEVER used in the company of women or children. Yes, men swore and even dropped the notorious “F-Bomb”, but even on the line older soldiers tended to avoid profanity if young musicians were around. As re-enactors this is something we need to studiously avoid when spectators are around. Women were never supposed to know let alone use profanity! Those who did ran the risk of being accused of being the lowest sort of woman an actress or (GASP!) a “soiled Dove”. Children were swiftly and harshly punished for any and every breach of this rigid social constraint. Slang was discouraged when in polite society or talking to officers. There was no real social stigma, but you were seen as under educated. Having said that, English then as now was an adaptive language that was constantly evolving and slang was used in camp or for that matter on the job.

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Some Civil War Slang:

Worm castles: Hard tack from the fact that such bread when issued to the troops was infested with bread weevils.

Rio: Coffee. The name derives from the Brazilian city of Rio de Janeiro where a large percentage of Army coffee originated. Soldiers on both sides pronounced it “Rye-O”.

Shave tail: A very junior officer such as a second lieutenant or a naval ensign.

“See the elephant”: a phrase meaning to experience something important for the first time. In military usage this was usually applied to seeing combat for the first time.

Jonah: A soldier who is dramatically inept. The guy who manages to kick over your coffee pot just as your Rio is ready. Think Private Slice with a clasp knife.

25th Annual Peterboro Civil War Weekend

The Peterboro Civil War Weekend committee is busy planning the event.

There will be approximately 150 fifth graders plus teachers and chaperones for the Education Day. Mrs. Martin is still looking for a couple of stations.

Friday evening the movie “Union Bound” will be shown at 7:00 pm in the Smithfield Community Center. Admission is \$5.00 per person.

Saturday and Sunday the event will be open to the public from 10 – 5 on Saturday and 10-4 on Sunday. Skirmish at 2:00 pm.

Saturday evening the 77th Regimental Balladeers will be performing in the Smithfield Community Center. They are a very good music group.

On the 12th US Facebook page there is a link to a Google form to collect information on Peterboro attendance and mess participation. Thank you for all who have entered their information. Please enter your information for the Peterboro Civil War reenactment if you have not. I also sent an email with a link to the form.

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Musings of a Musician:

Sgt. Nancy Patnode

I have been a Civil War Musician Reenactor for eleven years. I have had a few conversations with other reenactors and spectators too. The spectators tend to be more interested than the reenactors. Music in the Civil War is not taught or highlighted on the history channel. The conversations I have had with some reenactors, goes something like this.

Music is nice to have but, not important. You can have a battle without musicians. They really aren't needed. You have to have guns and people willing to shoot to have a battle.

At this point I must agree. I am passionate about my music and work very hard to get it right.

I am another set of eyes watching for safety issues, I check when someone goes down, if medical is needed.

If you are one of those that doesn't think we need music, let me challenge you. Get into your car and turn the radio off.

Editor's note: Music was used to signal orders during battle both by bugle and drum in the infantry.

Capital Dames – The Civil War and the Women of Washington, 1848 – 1868, by
Cokie Roberts

Reviewer: Mrs. Carol Mayers

This book is the third in a series by Cokie Roberts on women and US History, *Founding Mothers and Ladies of Liberty* preceded the 2015 book on the Civil War and the Women of Washington. As with her previous works this book is well written and full of primary source documentation.

Sources for the book were newspaper articles, government records and private letters and diaries – many never before published.

When I look at the volume of writings on the American Civil War most of them are about the battles and the men who defined the course of the war. American women joined the cause as well. Nursing, supply organizers, relief workers, teachers, journalists, and stepping in to roles and jobs previously held by men. Cokie highlighted some of the women who resided in Washington DC before, during and after the war and their contributions to the war effort, and facilitating the healing of the country after the fighting was over. The war changed many things including the role of women in American society.

In the Epilogue there is a list of the "Cast of Characters" in the book. I found it interesting the men listed was noted as a relative of a female instead of the women listed as a relative of a man.

I highly recommend all of Cokie Roberts' books on women and US History.