

TWENTY-SIXTH  
NORTH CAROLINA

BUILDING YOUR  
IMPRESSION



## EVERY INCH THE SOLDIER BUILDING AND IMPROVING YOUR IMPRESSION

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As a beginning re-enactor the most important task facing you is the development of your impression. For some of you this may seem like a simple task requiring only the purchase of a musket and a gray or blue uniform. For others developing an impression may seem like an enormous task, one in which you do not know where to begin. Even for veteran re-enactors the improvement of an impression may seem like a daunting challenge. After all, thanks to a hobby full of bad impressions and Hollywood misconceptions the look, dress and life of the average soldier in the American Civil War is misconstrued and permeated with inaccuracies. Therefore, developing a soldier's impression is unfortunately not a simple task, but neither is it an impossible one. Thanks to photographs, better research, better instruction and better purveyors of high quality and authentic gear, the task of developing your impression is easier than ever. All you have to do is know where to begin.

### RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH:

The first step in your journey is not to a vendor but to a bookshelf. Upon joining the Regiment the first task assigned to you is to read and research the lives of the men you have vowed to portray. This can be done through two different types of sources: primary and secondary. Curt Heinrich Schmidt in his article "Basic Research 102" defines the primary and secondary sources as follows:

**Primary Sources:** Sources that contain raw, original, non interpreted and unevaluated information. These are best when the information comes from an "eye witness" or "participant." While the written word is considered better than oral tradition, there is also the value of period images as well as artifacts (Historians love these). Primary sources tend to come first in the publication cycle, often in newspapers, weekly and monthly magazines; letters, diaries, correspondence, official records. Primary sources are also surviving artifacts but they require their own additional research in the form of analysis and evaluation to put them into a correct period context of material culture, technology, application, and circumstance. An antique or relic, taken out of its period context, standing alone, is called a "statistical artifact," and may or may not be valid or supportive of the research idea, theory, or hypothesis.

**Secondary Sources:** These are sources that digest, analyze, evaluate and interpret the information contained within primary sources. They tend to be argumentative. Secondary sources tend to come second in the publication cycle, often scholarly periodicals and books, (Professors like these), articles in scholarly journals analyzing the war pos-

sibly footnoting primary documents and books analyzing the war.

Primary sources are one of the best ways to begin research on your impression. Diaries, letters, memoirs and period newspaper articles are perhaps the most frequently encountered primary sources, and at the end of this manual you will find a list of recommended primary sources that are all readily available. However, these sources may or may not deal with subjects of clothing, equipment or appearance. Therefore, one primary source that you should not overlook is photographs. These can be found in several excellent books listed in the recommended reading section of this manual, as well as several websites that can be found in the links section of the Regiment's webpage. These photographs contain an amazing range of detail and are the best illustrations of what a soldier in the Civil War looked like. From this source pay particular attention to:

- \* Dates
- \* What uniforms were worn when
- \* How those uniforms were worn
- \* What equipment is visible and how was it worn
- \* Clothing particulars such as shoe and hat styles and distinguishing characteristics associated with them.

The key objective of such an exercise is to look for consistencies. Of course you may find one picture out of one hundred illustrating a soldier with some outlandish uniform, but that is one out of a hundred; it certainly does not typify or represent the average soldier, and the average soldier is what you want to portray. Aside from accuracy and authenticity the single largest guiding principle to building your impression is what the hobby refers to as Plain, Everyday, Common or PEC. In following this approach you will not only make your impression more accurate but you will also make it much more versatile.

## **RULES OF ACQUISITION:**

Once you have completed your required reading and conducted enough research to gain a basic understanding of how a soldier looked and lived in the field, your next step is to acquire the items needed to build your impression. The acquisition of your uniforms and equipment can lead to sticker shock and thus lead to the purchase of lower quality, lower priced, less accurate items in order to save a buck. However, before you fall into this trap there are several things to keep in mind:

### **IN THIS HOBBY YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR**

The hat, brogans or blanket that you purchase from Mr. Mainstream vendor may save you a few dollars but you can be guaranteed that they will be poorly made from inaccurate material using incorrect patterns and will ultimately leave you bare headed, barefoot and cold. As a result, you will have to replace your prematurely worn items. If you replace them with items of equal or lesser value, then you will have started a vicious cycle and ultimately counteract your initial goal of saving money. If, however, you wise up and replace these items with higher quality ones, then you will realize that your initial purchases were an \$80-\$100 lesson in the varying quality of reproduction Civil War uniforms and equipment. Fortunately, you do not have to encounter this pitfall. The Regiment's Authenticity Committee and its membership have compiled a list of recommended vendors for every item you will need to acquire. This list was not built to plug particular vendors; but it was compiled through knowledge, trials and experience, and is given to all members to put their impressions on the right path initially and not after they have bought hundreds of dollars of bad stuff. Just remember that all reproductions are not equal and a smart initial investment will save you money in the long run.

## IMPRESSIONS ARE NOT BUILT IN A DAY

All of your required acquisitions are broken down into three phases and you have 18 months to purchase everything you need. Therefore, by no means should you feel like you have to buy everything at one time. This mindset can lead to the bargain basement pitfall discussed earlier. You should use all of the time allowed and all of the resources made available to you. Remember, even veteran re-enactors continually evaluate their impression, or they should. Constant evaluation and continual small improvements, not large ones, will lead you to a great impression. Just take your time, research well and do things right the first time.

## LOOKING LIKE A SOLDIER, NOT A RE-ENACTOR

Once you have taken the field your next step in building an impression is to wear your uniform and equipment or “kit” properly. Later in this manual you will see illustrated examples of various impressions and the obvious placement and wearing of certain items. However, there are common mistakes made by re-enactors that you should avoid:

### BAD HEADGEAR:

Nothing will make or break your impression like a bad hat or cap. A few things to remember are:

1. Buy correct first. If you use the recommended vendors list you can avoid making the wrong initial purchase.

2. Hats (Slouch Hats) should incorporate the following features

- \* Grosgrain ribbon binding on edge of brim
- \* Leather sweat band
- \* Lining
- \* Ribbon around crown
- \* High quality wool felt
- \* Proper blocking and shape. Avoid the center creased Stetson look a likes (aka Tom Berringer in *Gettysburg*). Also, avoid the cheap hat blanks sold by many sutlers that end up looking like shapeless “hillbilly” hats.

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### 3. Caps (Kepis or Forage Caps) Should incorporate the following features

- \* Leather sweat band
- \* Lining
- \* Proper weight of wool (nothing too thick)
- \* Proper thickness of leather visor
- \* Visors can be bound or unbound on the edge
- \* Oil cloth visors are a nice touch for Confederate caps.
- \* A federal forage cap M1858 should be a medium blue indigo dyed wool flannel of the proper weight (8 oz). The visor should be thin enameled leather with no binding. The chin strap should be of a thinner enameled leather with a brass keeper.

#### Notes on Wearing caps:

- \* This is not a modern baseball cap and thus it will not fit like one nor should you try and wear it like one. Again, go back to your research and look how caps are worn in period photographs. The visors are worn flat or turned up. DO NOT turn your bill down on the ends like a modern baseball cap.

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- \* Caps can be worn in a variety of ways but one common style was to wear the cap pushed back on the head or at a tilt or angle. (SEE EXAMPLES OF ORIGINAL SOLDIERS BELOW)



## MODERN OR NON PERIOD EYEGLASSES:

This should be obvious to every living historian but sadly is not. Even if you had the perfect museum quality uniform and equipment if you wore modern eyeglasses then your impression is ruined. This would be the equivalent of having a top notch kit topped off with a John Deer Baseball cap. Also, make sure that you purchase period eyeglasses. Reproduction frames are available and fairly inexpensive but many re-enactors will buy any antique frame they find and have lenses placed in them. Be careful with this and just remember that the 1920's do not equal the 1860's so old glasses do not equal Civil War glasses.

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## MODERN CLOTHING OF ANY KIND:

No modern clothing of any kind should be visible. This includes

- \* T-Shirts
- \* Bandanas or neckerchiefs
- \* Socks
- \* Ear rings, nose rings, necklaces or other excessive jewelry like class rings (Wedding rings are fine)
- \* NO WRIST WATCHES----PERIOD

## EXCESS DECORATION:

Too many re-enactors contract the “Hey Look at Me” syndrome resulting in every kind of button, pin and plume imaginable attached to the uniform or person. Similar to this is the “Too Much Cool Stuff” syndrome. You may find at mainstream sutlers some really cool looking pins, belt plates, hats or other “dandy” items. But, as cool as these items may seem, you should not waste your money on them. Chances are they are not accurate and are a complete fabrication developed by the sutlers to, you guessed it, make money. Remember your guiding principle



to impressions, Plain, Everyday, Common. In order to stay true to this, and avoid the afore mentioned afflictions, stay away from the following:

- \* Excess hat brass and hat cords unless documented for the unit you are portraying.
- \* Metal pins or embroidered badges on your uniform (Scottish thistles, Irish Harps, Masonic insignia, etc...)
- \* No feathers, coon bones or any other dead animal parts attached to your uniform
- \* Ethnic garb such as Tam O'Shanters, Glengarries, kilts, etc... These were rarely worn in the Federal service and were non-existent in Confederate service.
- \* No cartridge box plates, cartridge box belt plates or oval belt plates for CS impressions (US impression only)
- \* Federal corp badges that are inappropriate for the unit and timeframe you are portraying.

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## WEARING ACCOUTREMENTS WRONG:

(ILLUSTRATIONS ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES)

An excellent article on this topic is "A Study on the Wearing of Haversacks and Canteens" by Christopher Graham. This article can be found in the articles section of the Regiment's webpage.

### 1. Waist belts

Waist belts should not be worn low around the hips. This is sloppy not to mention uncomfortable. In addition, the waist belt and cap box must be higher on the body to facilitate proper capping of the musket during loading. The proper position for the waist belt is at the "military waist" which is at or about the navel.

### 2. Cartridge Box

The Cartridge Box should fall just below the waist belt riding on the right hip. If the box rides too low it will be harder to reach and uncomfortable on the march.

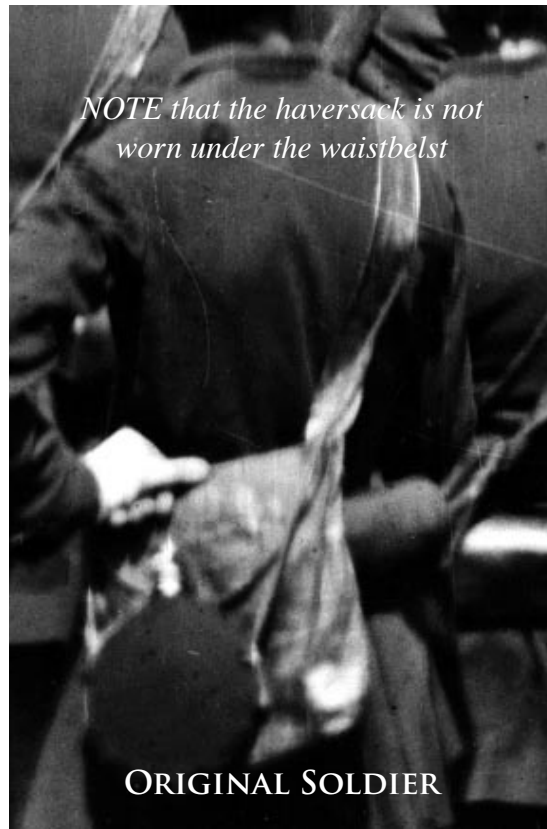
### 3. Canteen and Haversack

As with the Cartridge Box these should be worn higher on the body. If the haversack and canteen are down around the knees then they will become very tiring on a long march as they will bang against your knees and the knees of your file partner and when you sit down, you will have to gather up the haversack and canteen to avoid crush-

## HIVERSACKS



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*NOTE that the haversack is not worn under the waistbelt*

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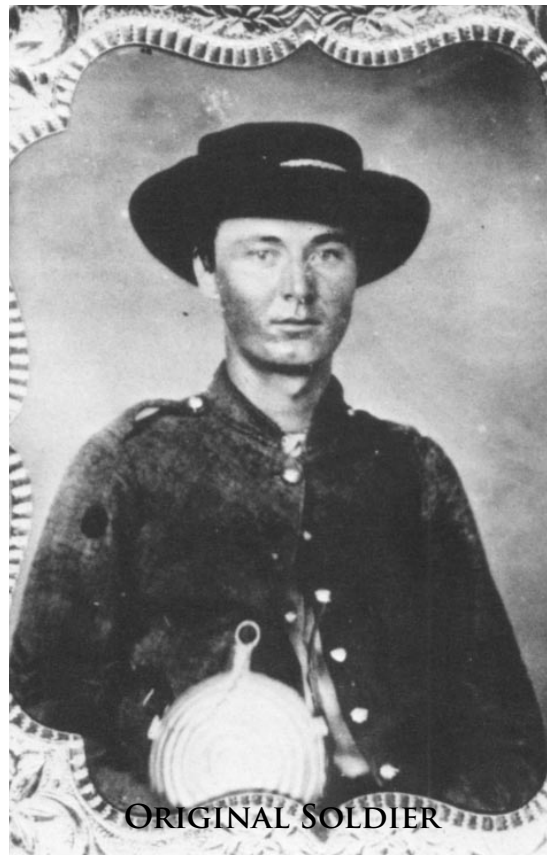


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## CANTEENS



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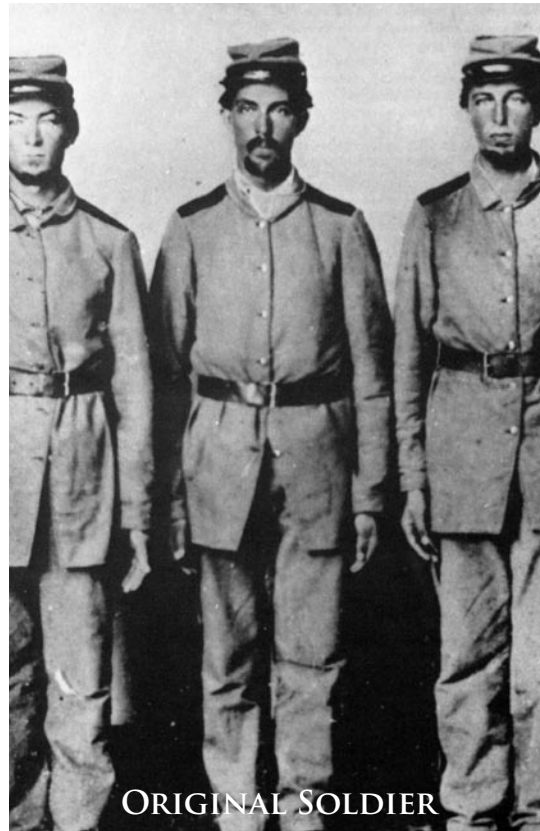
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## WAISTBELTS



## CARTRIDGE BOXES

