

Venturing Crew I872

EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS

(Updated April 5, 2009)

In order to help new crew members get oriented with regards to uniform and equipment required to participate with the crew this document has been prepared. It lists and details the basic and additional equipment needed:

- Basic Enlisted Uniform List
- Black Slouch Hat or Kepi
- Dark Blue 4 Button Sack Coat
- Muslin Shirt
- Sky Blue Trousers (mounted or foot pattern)
- Braces (suspenders)
- Brogans (shoes) or Boots
- Canteen
- Additional Equipment List
- Belt with Oval US Buckle
- Cap Box
- Cartridge Box
- Blanket
- Poncho
- Gum Blanket (ground cloth)
- Black Tarred Haversack
- Mess Kit (Cup, Plate or Utensils or Mucket)

Period Correct Impression: Ideally everyone's attire and equipment would be "authentic museum quality." But this is expensive and difficulty to accomplish, but in our unit we strive to be as authentic as possible and try to minimize the obviously out of character clothing and equipment. An example of something out of character would be turning out for battle in a complete uniform, but wearing a pair of white Nikes. A pair of simple black or brown leather boots worn with the trouser legs over the tops and laces would avoid that problem; so knowing

what you can “get away with” and working towards a complete uniform will make a good period correct impression.

By nature our hobby is filled with amateur historians and many of these people are not afraid to tell you what is wrong with your “impression” either to your face or behind your back. These people may use the condescending term “farby” to say something is “far below” standards. If we do the best we can and continually improve our individual and unit impression and will leave little for them to say about us.

Civil War Period Impression (1861-1865) The Civil War happened in the Victorian period. This period was noted for its over developed sense of modesty. Skirts were even added to tables and chairs to cover exposed legs. Gentlemen and members of the more polite society kept themselves as covered as possible and this is reflected in the regulations regarding uniforms. Soldiers would wear the complete uniform, including the sack coat, at all time. Even on hot days you would not wear just trousers and muslin shirt because the shirt was considered underwear. So running around without your sack coat would be like running around half naked! On hot days you are allowed to unbutton your coat, but only from the bottom. Regulations prohibit the unbuttoning the very top collar button. For these same reasons at formal occasions such as dances, men would wear white cotton gloves as well.

Indian Wars Period Impression (1865-1875) We also portray a company serving in the Indian Wars of north Texas. The civil war uniforms are correct for this period right up through the 1870’s although the troopers tended to be a bit ragged. This was due in part to the infrequent pay calls, meaning troopers had no money when the uniform wore out. And due in part to the fact the civil war surplus was not of the best quality. There is a story that a trooper was considered in uniform if he wore just one article of military uniform. For our unit’s impression, this allows troopers some choice in the selection of headgear, trousers, shirts and such. But all of this must be the proper style for the period and the frontier. And despite this little allowance, the commanding officer of the 4th US Cavalry, Colonel McKenzie, governed his command “by the book” and required the troops to wear the proper uniform when on garrison duty at the fort.

BASIC ENLISTED UNIFORM DESCRIPTIONS

Although there were many styles of uniform that were “regulation” during the civil war, our unit has a specific uniform that the members wear to events. We portray a dismounted cavalry unit that serves as artillery at times. We try to look like a uniformed federal company in field dress. You may be tempted to purchase a fancy yellow trimmed a shell jacket or a long frock coat but get the proper basic uniform first. You can save the fancy stuff and goofy hats for later when you want to look impressive at the dance. The crew’s official uniform is as follows:

Black Slouch Hat or Kepi: Slouch hats are wide brimmed black felt hats that provide good shade in the Texas sun. Period correct style is preferred avoid “cowboy hats” that have a modern shape or a chinstraps are not correct. While brass sabers and unit numbers are period correct, these ornaments were often lost or not taken on campaign. This omission allows our unit to portray various units.

The kepi, which is a small round wool cap with a leather brim, may also be worn. Here again the brass ornaments should be omitted. The “regulation location” for the brass on a kepi is on the front, not on the top. This is difficult to wear properly and there are many civil war photos showing brass being worn in various locations.

Dark Blue 4 Button Sack Coat: The sack coat is the basic utility garment used by all federal troops. Sack coats come in heavy wool or in light wool with a lining. The unlined coat is preferred because even though it is heavier wool, the one layer of cloth is cooler. The sack coat has one pocket on the inside left side called a “kidney pocket.”

Muslin Shirt: Soldiers were issued a simple pattern shirt of natural color that buttoned about half way down the front and had a drop collar. Soldiers might buy additional shirts from sutlers or be sent clothing from home. For this reason any period correct style or pattern is acceptable.

Sky Blue Trousers: The enlisted uniform includes sky blue wool trousers. These are worn much higher than normal pants and should be a little loose. Cavalry troops were issued “mounted trouser” with reinforced seats. You may use these, but they are not required for our unit’s impression. Non-commissioned officers, corporals and sergeants, were authorized to wear yellow stripes on the trousers of ½” and 1” respectively, to allow them to be recognized when they are not wearing a sack coat with chevrons. Because wool can be warm, its best to have your trousers a bit loose fitting. These are worn very high in the waist. This fit is very different than what you may be used to, we call it “old man style”, but get used to it!

Braces: The Civil War period suspenders were quite simple and are called braces. Brightly colored braces were not common, natural color or “bed ticking” patterns are preferred. Braces had no elastic and had no “adjustable clips” at that time. They simply had buttons that would allow the adjustments and leather tabs to attach them to the trousers.

Brogans and Boots: Period correct footwear for soldiers comes in two forms, low cut brogans and calf length boots. The absolutely period correct versions make no distinction between lefts and rights when new. They had square toes and it was only after breaking them in that you had a left and right shoes. Period footwear had leather soles and heels. In order to make them last longer soldiers would wear metal heel plates that looked like small horseshoes.

Brogans are low cut boots made of split hide rough side out. These were more commonly used by foot troops but were also used by cavalry, especially dismounted, as they are more comfortable on the march.

Cavalry boots were polished black leather and calf length. While these look better, they are less comfortable and more expensive than brogans.

Stockings and Drawers: Period correct socks and underwear are not required but are included here for information. Socks were called stockings and were very similar to the natural wool socks that we use today, except they might not have been as high of quality. The underwear was referred to drawers. There were long sleeve tops and full-length bottoms with button fly and with ties at the ankles.

Canteen: It is very important that you drink lots of water while in the field. The correct style of canteen is covered with wool, has a strap and cork stopper. The inside was coated with bee’s wax in order to prevent rust. It is preferred that the wool is sky blue wool, but any color is acceptable. When the canteen is not in use the cork should be removed and allowed to dry out and expand.

ADDITIONAL REQUIRED EQUIPMENT

Once the basic uniform is complete, you will want to acquire the following items to complete your impression. Currently the crew has access to leather goods that can be borrowed.

Belt with Oval US Buckle: A black leather belt with an oval US buckle is what is used to support the leather goods holding caps, ammunition, revolvers etc.

Cap Box: This is a small flapped “box” used to carry the winged musket caps for the carbines and muskets. It is worn just to the right of the buckle. The pistol holster is worn right of that.

Cartridge Box: This is a rectangular box that has belt loops to attach it to the belt left of the buckle. It carries 20 rounds for the carbine. Additional rounds are carried in foil in the sack coat’s “kidney pocket.” Do not buy the large infantry box with tin internal boxes and requires its own strap and buckles.

Blanket: The army was issued gray wool blankets with black stripes at the ends and the letters U.S. stenciled in black. You should avoid the green wool army blankets because they are just as out of place as the white Nike sneakers. The blanket may be worn rolled length wise and attached to the backpack or “rebel style” tied and worn over the left shoulder.

Poncho: For rain gear troops were issued ponchos made of canvas waterproofed by painting with a black rubberized tar.

Gum Blanket: Troopers were issued blankets made like the poncho to be used as a ground cloth for sleeping. These were also rolled up with the blanket to keep it dry while packed.

Black Tarred Haversack: A canvas bag painted with a kind of black tar was issued to carry all the personal items and extra packaged ammunition. The strap should be adjusted to the right length by cutting and stitching together.

OTHER PERSONAL ITEMS

Federal troops were well supplied and paid every two to four months. Merchants called “sutlers” were authorized to travel with the regiments and open little shops where the troops could buy just about anything. They sold uniform parts, food, leather goods, equipment, candles, paper, etc. There are modern day sutlers that attend most reenactments that sell even a wider variety of goods.

Pocketknife: a small jack knife is much more useful than a large “bowie knife.” Many soldiers came to the war with big knives and threw them on the roadside once the marching started.

Mess Kit: The official mess kit was a tin plate and cup. But many soldiers preferred to carry a large cup with a lid called a “mucket.” There were no military issued knife fork and spoon, they just used pocketknives, and wooden handled forks and spoons.

Housewife: Soldiers carried small sewing kits to fix buttons and such on their uniforms. If you spend much time in the field you will need one of these.

Tent: Troopers Civil War A-Frame Tent (DWG RK1078 \$140)

Carbine: These were simply short rifles used by the cavalry. Federal units were fairly uniformed in the choice of these arms. The Council has 27 Smith Carbines that we use and if you can find one for your self for about \$450 that is a good buy. However these carbines are difficult to find these days. The other suitable choice is an Enfield Musketoon for about \$425. If you wish to get fancy, you may purchase a .54 cal Sharps for about \$600. But what ever you do, discuss your purchase with an officer before you buy any gun.

You will need a sling and a nipple wrench for your “long arm” and gun cleaning supplies.

Revolvers: Buy a 1858 New Model Remington .44 cal, 1852 Colt Navy .36 cal, or a 1862 Colt Army .44 cal. The cheapest way to buy a revolver is to purchase then on line from Cabelas. Do not purchase a brass-framed revolver. If you are considering purchase of any other revolver please discuss this matter with the officers.

Then you will need other things. Buy your holster from a quality sutler like Frazer Brothers and take the revolver with you and just check it by putting it in the holsters before you buy it! You will want a spare cylinder or two for the Remington. You will need a nipple wrench, small pistol box, cleaning kit, oil for your revolver as well. Oh and powder flask will be wanted too.

OTHER ASPECTS OF UNIFORM

General Information Regarding the Uniform: Wool was selected for the uniform because it was rugged and durable. Clothing was infrequently washed and worn until it was no longer serviceable. They armies had followers who would wash clothes for the troops. In the field they might have washed them by swimming in a stream with a bar of soap. They would was and rinse out each article while wearing them, then hang them out to dry on bushes. Jackets and trousers would last for several months before they would “rub out.” Shoes lasted just about the same length of time. Enlisted were given a clothing allowance, and were allowed to draw supplies as required. At the end of the year accounts would be settled up by paying credit of docking pay. More often than not, the troopers owed the army for all the clothes they had drawn and this money was deducted from their pay.

We don't really want the period correct smell, but if we were cavalry troops we would smell of wool, leather, smoke, dust, horse sweat, and if in battle add grease and burned gunpowder. All of this combined effectively mask most body odors.

Light Marching Order: This term typically meant that a company was ready for a three-day march. They would take only the most necessary items and 3 days worth of food and ammunition. At the end of the three days they would receive additional supplies or wait for the company's equipment wagon to arrive. These wagons would carry the more weighty items like tents and cooking equipment.