"The Methods": Living History How-tos

"A PILGRIMAGE OF FLIES"
Federal Soldiers On the March
by John Tobey

Next to being under the thundering guns of battle itself, Civil War soldiers counted their days of being "on the march" as some of the most noteworthy of their service. To the soldiers, the words "on the march" conjured up visions of excitement, purpose, and the thrill of seeing new sights. Of course, experienced soldiers also knew that it could mean privation and hardships.

The experience of being on the march varied with the season, year, theater, campaign, and the regiment itself; to fully describe the marching experiences of the majority of soldiers in the Army of the Potomac would require a book-length monograph. With this tall task in mind, this article is a mere "introduction" to the experiences men encountered while marching, rather than a definitive work.

Marching Orders

The first march of a new campaign was preceded by anxious waiting by many (perhaps a majority) of the troops. Despite the enthusiasm and satisfaction with which their permanent camps were originally laid out and constructed the soldiers were, for the most part, usually ready to leave them behind. Lice had often permanently infested many of the quarters—particularly winter huts—and, before the army broke camp, the air about the place was strong with the odors of mud, smoke, and the cloying smell of sinks (latrines). Almost every soldier, officers and men alike, chafed under what they called "putting on style" of military formalities—what today we might call "chickenshit"; as veterans they knew that at least some of the rules would be temporarily abandoned once they were on the road.

If it was the first march of a new spring campaign, plenty of warning of the impending move was usually provided. The first indication was the appearance at regimental headquarters of a brigade orderly who the men "knew" carried marching orders. That evening, the marching orders were read during parade.[1] If they followed the typical format, the orders would state the proposed hour of departure and the amount of rations and ammunition to be carried. Three day's rations was typical, as well as forty rounds. Occasionally, this was altered—before the Chancellorsville campaign, Hooker ordered his men to carry eight days rations and one hundred rounds. Sometimes marching orders specified the amount of other baggage the men were allowed to take, which of course was the case prior to short marches when the men went in "light marching order" with only their canteen, haversack, arms and accouterments.

Below are excerpts from the marching orders given to the 86th New York on April 15, 1863:

> "Commandants of Companies will see that each man for duty of this command has his knapsack packed as instructed yesterday in previous orders. Contents: 1 pair drawers, 1 shirt, 1 pair socks, 1 piece shelter tent.
>
> 5 days rations of Hard Bread, sugar, coffee & salt…these rations not to be issued until after we start on the march. Care should be taken in packing Knapsacks to fill them evenly & not too thick & have the overcoat nicely rolled and strapped on top so that the coat & knapsack will sit close to the neck & shoulders and not pull back.
>
> The blankets, extra clothing &c. will be packed & left in charge of the Quartermaster Depot…
>
> I would recommend that the men wear their best clothing & that Company officers make a memorandum of what they leave behind."[2]

Occasionally, the marching orders helped to reveal to the men what lay ahead, such as:

> "We received orders to be ready in ten minutes in light order with one day's rations and coffee in canteens. It was evident we weren't going far and that we have lively work to do or we would have carried our coffee dry and carried rubber blankets."[3]

Preparations

The first thing many soldiers did after receiving marching orders was to write home. Experienced soldiers knew that during active campaigning, the mail service was erratic at best and it could be the last letter they could send off for some time. This desire to communicate, and the sheer excitement drove many men to pull out out their pens and paper and dash off an excited note to their loved ones back home.

Sometime during the evening before the march was to commence, ammunition for the coming campaign would be issued to the men. While a soldier's cartridge box typically held only forty rounds, often the Army of the Potomac issued significantly more than a box-full the night before a campaign got underway. Sixty rounds per man was issued on numerous occasions, and sometimes as much as 100 rounds was carried by each soldier, often stuffed into pockets, knapsacks, and haversacks, in addition to the cartridge box.[4]

Similar to the issuance of ammunition, rations were also distributed to the men. Often marching orders stipulated that the troops were to carry *cooked* rations, which meant that a lot of salt pork was sizzled over fires the night before the march. To reduce the amount of rations that had to be carried, it was not unusual for some men to cook *and eat* a good portion of their rations soon after they were issued. Of course, this meant less food for the hungry soldier once the exertions of the march began in earnest!

At some point, the soldier would develop his "marching outfit". Such a process usually involved a conflict between sentiment, practicality, and comfort. For many, the process probably went something like this: With the hubbub of their comrades in the background and all his worldly possessions laid before him, the soldier began to make important decisions…

First, the essentials were set to the side—musket, accouterments, canteen, haversack. The things that obviously had to be left were set off to the other side, such as the quilt that his mother had sent to ward off the winter chills or the crude set of checkers that were made to pass the idle time in his winter hut. The soldier probably removed a few of the more recent letters from his stack of letters from home, and committed the rest to the "stay" pile. Perhaps a few pieces from the large wad of hometown newspapers were stashed in the pocket of his blouse for "necessary use", while the rest of the pile joined the quilt and old letters.[5]

Choosing from the remaining items often required making some hard choices. Because marching orders were sometimes less detailed than the Chancellorsville orders quoted above, the soldier had to decide a number of things on his own. What did he want to try to

carry on the march (and risk having to replace out of his own pocket if he threw them away), and what should be left with the quartermaster? Even if the marching orders *were* specific about what the men were to take, they were sometimes ignored by veteran soldiers who "knew better". In the Chancellorsville example cited above, the company memoranda on material left behind and some notes pertaining to material lost at Chancellorsville revealed that some men chose to take their blankets and leave their overcoats, while a few men apparently "lost" their knapsacks (but, interestingly enough, not their contents) in the relatively short march from Falmouth to Chancellorsville.

Some soldiers left behind their heavy woolen army blanket and counted on spooning with a comrade under a single blanket if the weather was cool. Sometimes a soldier without a blanket would find it tough to find a comrade who was so tolerant of his willingness to take his chances to march with a lighter load. A soldier of the 7th Wisconsin wrote, "It is truth but there are some that have only one blanket between them… But I won't tent with a man that won't carry his blanket."[6]

Some tentmates attempted to "even the load" as implied by the following: "I left my woolen blanket at Maryland Heights…Pollard still keeps his blanket so I carry both pieces of tent. That is the way of all the old soldiers in hot weather."[7]

When deciding what went on the march and what remained in camp, personal possessions of course were the most difficult choices. Many veterans learned the usefulness of a sewing kit and, accordingly, a small case with needles and thread usually found its way into the veterans' pocket. Shaving kits were usually left behind, although soldiers were loath to part with them because of their replacement value. Many men who normally did their own shaving must have followed the example of a soldier of the 150th New York in June 1863, "Some things, including my shaving apparatus, I thought best to send home than throw away here, as I cannot take them with me."[8]

Writing portfolios were also usually pared down. Ink was a difficult material to work with and to store even in the most controlled circumstances, so steel pens and ink bottles often stayed behind. During the campaign, pencils could substitute for the noble pen, despite the fact that, in those days, pencils were considered a *faux pas* for writing letters. Some soldiers even declined to carry stationary, envelopes, or stamps on the march as evidenced by the following: "When you write, enclose a sheet of paper and one envelope. This will save me much trouble. Remember this only when you know I am not in camp."[9]

Many "messes" that may have occupied a single winter hut together tended to divide up the small array of items that they collectively decided to take on the march. For example, one man may have carried a hatchet under the flap of his knapsack, while another toted a small frying pan the same way, and yet another may have carried a lightweight tin pail suspended from his waistbelt.

Variations of this arrangement were *very* common during the war; unfortunately such "communal effort" by members of a mess is seldom seen in modern reenacting. Here are a few historical examples:

> "Among our indispensibles, however, a few of us carry certain new arrangements. At McGill's suggestion, we have bought a coffee pot, a frying pan, and a kettle for boiling. Wivers carries the coffee pot slung at his side. Sgt. Bivins carries the frying pan strapped on his back…I have, strapped to my belt, the boiler; its crocky bottom painting thunder-clouds on the blue of my thigh, as it swings to and fro."[10]

A member of a nine-month regiment preparing for the march to Chancellorsville wrote, "I will carry that old frying pan that we found at Harper's Ferry. Jim Roggers carries the axe and Hiram takes our coffee pot."

Of course, the process of assembling the marching kit was a highly individualized process, even when orders that governed the men's loads were issued. Some men, particularly new ones, loaded themselves down like pack mules and a few others elected to carry almost nothing and suffer—or depend on the good humor of their comrades.

The Last Night in the Old Camp

In post-war memoirs, veterans often remembered the last night before a new campaign started as a time of almost carnival-like atmosphere. John Billings described it as:

> "The soldiers were wont to 'make a night of it.' As a rule, there was little sleep to be had, the enforcement of the usual rules of camp being relaxed on such an occasion…
>
> After [the] routine of preparation was completed, camp-fires were lighted, and about them would gather the happy-go-lucky boys of the rank and file, whose merry din would speedily stir the blood of the men who had hoped for a few hours' sleep before starting out on the morrow…
>
> Some one would start a song, and then for an hour at least 'John Brown's Body,' 'Marching Along,' 'Red, White, and Blue,' 'Rally 'round the Flag,' and other popular and familiar songs would ring out on the clear evening air."[11]

Getting Underway

The bugle (or drum call) that provided the signal to actually break camp was *The General*, after which remaining tents were struck and the men were supposed to immediately complete their packing and be ready to march. The time it took to "strike tents" varied depending on the type of camp, the experience level of the troops and the types of tentage that was standing when the call was sounded. A soldier of the 100th New York wrote home, "I can strike my tent, roll my coat, fold my blanket & tent, pack them in my knapsack & fasten the coat on the top, put on my harness, & be in readiness to move at any time in 10 minutes time."[12]

As is so often the case in military life, the men would sometimes sit around and wait after *The General* sounded—on occasion, depending on the campaign, men waited for hours or even *days* after everything was "packed". Eventually, however, the bugle blew *Attention,* which precipitated the regiment forming formed into line on the battalion parade ground. At last the *Forward* was sounded and the march was underway.

A Regiment on the Road

According to our old friend John Billings, one could always tell the head of a regiment in a long line of marching troops: it began with a mounted officer, presumably the regimental commander, although it could also have been the adjutant or even the lieutenant colonel.[13]

The regimental colors were *not* normally at the head of the regiment. Instead, they were usually in their proper place near the center of the regiment's line—at the end of the color company.

Normally, when a regiment faced by the right flank (what many today incorrectly refer to as a "column of fours"), each company commander was positioned at the *head* of his company (i.e., marching

next to his own Orderly Sergeant). When taking the route step, however, the company commanders dropped to the *rear* of their respective companies, which was to better keep tabs on their men and prevent straggling.[14]

Billings remembered that at the tail end of a regiment was marked by the regimental mule, which was often led by a contraband and sometimes was accompanied by the headquarters cook. The mule bore the headquarters baggage and was so burdened that Billings wrote, "the head, ears, and feet that you see are the only visible externals of a mule." The headquarters mule typically bore items such as a frying pan, mess pans, tent poles, a canvas fly, a valise, knapsack, haversack, a hamper on each side, a musket, "and other matter". Early in the war, the regiment would have been trailed by its regimental wagons.[15]

IN HEAVY MARCHING ORDER.

When the column anticipated contact with the enemy, flankers were sometimes sent to march parallel to the main body, up to 400 yards away in open terrain and perhaps half that distance in heavy terrain or woodland. The flankers were probably no more than a skirmish line, marching by the flank, one on either side of the main body on the road; the flankers were supported by "Supports" comprised of company- or platoon-sized contingents that marched approximately 250 yards from the main column.[16]

When on the march the column was usually preceded and trailed by, respectively, the "advanced guard" and "rear guard". The advanced guard extended "four or five hundred yards beyond the flank of the column on each side" of the road and protected the head of the column. The advanced guard was optimally supposed to include approximately one-tenth of the strength of the entire force, and included troops of all arms (i.e., infantry, cavalry, and artillery). The advanced guard was supposed to march one-half to one mile ahead of the column, although the distance was modified to suit local conditions. The advanced guard included three main elements: a line of skirmishers, three Supports (i.e., a massed contingent probably company- or platoon-sized, as necessary), and a massed Reserve. One Support marched along the road between the skirmishers and the Reserve, and one Support marched 100 yards behind the skirmishers on each side of the road. The Reserve was supposed to march approximately 250 yards behind the line of skirmishers. The Reserve was supposed to comprise at least one half of the strength of the entire advanced guard, and included almost all of its artillery.[17]

When advancing on the enemy, the rear guard was supposed to be not larger than one-twentieth the size of the entire column, and if the force was in retreat the rear guard was supposed to be strengthened to comprise one-eighth of the column's strength. The rear guard's duty was to protect the rear of the column (which was obviously more important when the column was retreating) and pick up stragglers. The rear guard was optimally supposed to be approximately a half-mile behind the rear of the column, with its associated Reserve marching approximately 200 yards ahead of the line of skirmishers, and a single Support marching approximately 100 yards ahead of the skirmishers. The rear guard's line of skirmishers extended roughly 100 yards on each side of the road.[18]

In all cases regarding advanced and rear guards and flankers, the duty of the Supports was to simply support the skirmish line with additional men. If a more serious threat was encountered that the skirmishers could not handle, then massed bodies from the Reserve were sent to the danger sport and deployed for action. In the case of an army or corps on the move, the advanced or rear guard could be an entire brigade or division. When in retreat and closely pressed by the enemy, the actions of the rear guard, of necessity, had to conform to some extent to those of the enemy.

A constant problem on all marches—both those of the Civil War and in modern living history events—is the tendency for a column to "open up" by allowing the intervals between files and units (companies, regiments, etc.) to increase. Even for disciplined troops, intervals in the column tended to open as units passed through fences and crossed watercourses. "Opening up" of the column was viewed as a particular evil during the period because, the longer a column became, the slower it moved and the longer it took to concentrate it for battle and re-supply. In a period handbook August V. Kautz wrote,

> "The column should be closed up just previous to each halt, by calling the command to attention, and closing up the files before resting. When passing a stream, or other obstacle that requires delay, the loading files of each company [should] move far enough beyond, to allow room for the company to form, and when the entire company is past the obstacle, it moves on to its position in the column, and halts for the other companies—the leading company having moved forward a sufficient distance to permit the column to close up in the same way, until all have passed the obstacle. Such a delay should be counted as a rest. In moving off from a halt or rest during the first hundred yards the 'close order' should be preserved."[19]

So much for the methodology: the soldiers who were being goaded to "close it up" experienced it in a simpler fashion, "I can march well but they step off too fast sometimes, up hill it is always on the run."[20]

Individual Soldiers in the Column

Because the majority of marching was at the "route step," it is worthwhile to evaluate exactly how the men interpreted "route step". Silas Casey's drill manual states that, at the route step, muskets could be carried "at will" (meaning, "carry the piece at pleasure on either shoulder, with one or both hands, the muzzle elevated") or "they may sling them on their backs muzzle up".[21]

Today, some reenactors interpret this to mean that the guns must have been held in one of the regular positions from the manual of arms; however, examination of reliable period artwork suggests that weapons were carried in almost any fashion imaginable. For example, Charles Reed's sketch of infantrymen on the march in the summer of 1863 shows an officer resting his sword over his shoulder, and most of the men carrying their weapons at appears to be a very sloppy right shoulder shift, and at least one man with his weapon slung inverted over his shoulder, muzzle pointed downward.[22]

One "route step" method of carrying the musket that this writer has found particularly comfortable is to turn the piece so that the trigger is facing upward. The hammer spur, now facing downward, can be used as a hook to keep the weapon from sliding down the shoulder. It can rested this way on either shoulder, and takes all of the weight of the musket away from the arm. The pressure of the hammer spur on the shoulder is easy to become accustomed to, and is almost negligible when a pack is being worn and the hammer can be rested on one of the shoulder straps.

Also, the troops did not always march at the route step for the entire trip. A soldier of the 149th New York remembered of the march to Gettysburg:

> "It will be remembered that in passing through the villages above mentioned and others, the flags were unfurled and the men marched in cadence step to music of the band and drum corps. The passage through villages in Maryland and Pennsylvania was more of a parade than march."[23]

What must have been one of the more memorable sights of troops on the march was fording rivers or creeks; an Irish Brigade staff officer recalled in late April, 1863: "Our passage across the river by moonlight was magnificently grand."[24]

While the army would typically seek to cross major rivers on pontoon bridges, the vast majority of smaller rivers and creeks were simply forded by the infantry. When larger rivers or streams were

forded, it was not uncommon to post a line of cavalry in the water downstream of the ford to "catch" men who lost their footing and were swept downstream. Despite this, especially when swift waters were forded by larger bodies of troops, drownings were not uncommon.

Before crossing a creek or river some men preferred to remove a good portion of their equipment and clothing—their shoes and socks at minimum—before getting wet (oddly enough, this is something that is often *not* portrayed by reenactors on a march; perhaps reenactors are "tougher" than real soldiers…?). Of course, allowing the men to remove just their shoes and socks and roll up their pants legs consumed precious time on both sides of the watercourse, and there are accounts in which commands were specifically given to prevent the men from spending too much time while fording. What a interesting sight it must have been when a regiment crossed a large creek, with everyone waist-deep in the water—which was not uncommonly freezing cold—with all their worldly possessions carried in their arms or perched on their heads! Once the far bank was reached and the men were again ready to march, it was common for the men to use their muskets as "clothes-lines from which [were suspended] socks, shoes, here and there a shirt, perhaps a towel or handkerchief." When crossing watercourses at night, large bonfires were usually built on each bank to illuminate the ford.[25]

Several times per day the column halted for short rests, which was described by a Massachusetts soldier in the Potomac Army:

> "It was an interesting sight to see a column break up when the order came to halt… It would melt in a moment, dividing to the right and left, and scattering to the sides of the road, where the men would sit down or lie down, lying back on their knapsacks if the had them, or stretching out full length on the ground. If the latter was wet or muddy…infantrymen would perhaps sit astride their muskets, if the halt was a short one."[26]

If the halt was anticipated to be more than just a few minutes—a signal of this was when the column was closed up followed by stacking of weapons—it was common for the men to kindle small fires using twigs or some other ready fuel source and place coffee on to boil.

After a short rest, particularly one in which equipment was not taken off, Billings reported that it was extremely common for muscles to stiffen up to the extent that the men "could hardly arise without assistance", and "made wry faces for the first few rods after the column started [marching]."[27]

Distance and Rate

Distances of marches and the rates at which they were conducted varied so much in practice that the topic was almost omitted from this article: it seems that the more one looks, the harder it is to determine the army's "typical" speed and distance of march.

According to one manual, a typical distance for infantry to march in one day was twenty miles, and they should never be expected to march less than fifteen.[28] In fact, the distance marched by infantry during the war ranged from only a mile or two to distances that exceeded twenty miles; in a few rare instances troops of the Army of the Potomac marched over thirty miles in a day.

Typically, the troops were marched for an hour or so, with ten or fifteen-minute rest breaks. For planning purposes, marching speed was calculated at 2½ miles per hour, including the rests. It was thought that after six to eight days of marching the troops should be given a day to rest.[29] Wartime records show that this was, as a rough rule, often done.

Hardships

Captain John DeForest listed the three miseries of marching as blistered feet, thirst, and dust.[30] Some soldiers would probably have added mud to the list as well, and therefore that foe of shank's mare is discussed below together with Captain DeForrest's marching ills.

Blistered feet were (and still are) the result of unhardened feet and poor footwear. DeForest himself had a partial solution for this problem that involved soaping the inside of the socks. Supposedly, this decreased the amount of friction between the foot and the sock and thereby reduced blistering.[31] Whether this actually works or not remains to be seen—this writer has not seen this "trick" practiced.

Many soldiers alleviated the pain associated with blisters by cutting holes in their footwear over or under the blister. During the hard marching of the Gettysburg campaign Charles Hickok of the 106th Pennsylvania wrote, "Yesterday we had about as hard a march as ever we had…the skin wore off my feet in about a dozen places, so I have cut my shoes nearly to pieces to get along at all."[32]

Thirst was even a greater hazard. It is difficult for us to relate to the original soldiers who considered a farm creek to be the ideal source of refreshment because, of course, drinking untreated water from such a source is probably unthinkable (rightfully so) to modern reenactors.

Civil War soldiers had to drink water from such sources and others that were much less appealing. Roland Bowen wrote that he was forced to drink water from the tracks of a mule.[33] Decades after the war, a veteran of the 155th New York remembered of the march to Deep Bottom, Virginia in mid-August, 1864,

> "It was very hot… We halted in a woods. Johnny Vaughn and I went in search of water, took about a half dozen canteens each, [and] found a good running stream[;] the water looked reddish owing to the soil it ran through, but it was cool and good. We did not look for microbes in those days."[34]

Another soldier recalled this humorous anecdote of a water detail:

> "They draw cuts with blades of grass to see to who shall take the canteens and hunt for water. And when the unlucky one returns and some foolish one asks, 'Where did you get the water, Bill?' There is a roar of laughter when Bill replies, 'Don't ask me till you've had your drink.'"[35]

Little wonder that one young recruit was given the following advice before his first campaign, "Fill your canteen at every stream we cross and wherever you get a chance elsewhere."[36]

Some soldiers had other ways of warding off thirst. A soldier of the Second Corps's 14th Connecticut Infantry, for example, marched with an oak leaf in his mouth.[37]

Dust was another plague that is seldom seen to today on the scale that our ancestors had to deal with. Soldiers complained of dust that permeated everything, and even found its way into the men's mouths. Dust could coat the soldiers so thoroughly that it was difficult to tell

THE FLANKERS.

whether they were Yanks or Rebs, because the liberal coating that was so common on every dry march could conceal the very color of the uniforms. Imagine marching in a thick fog of dust for twelve hours straight and one may start to gain an appreciation of this scourge of marching soldiers.

Deep **mud** was a problem when the weather had been rainy for a long period of time and the army churned up the usually soft-bottomed roads into a sucking morass. Marching through such goo could be extremely fatiguing, and numerous soldiers wrote humorous descriptions of traipsing through it; one such description forms the title of this article, as Warren Lee Goss wrote, "The army resembled, more than anything else, a congregation of flies making a pilgrimage through molasses."[38]

The surgeon of the 69th New York National Guard Artillery regiment wrote of an exceptionally muddy night march in late January, 1863, near Suffolk, Virginia:

> "At first some would try and pick up their steps, but they came to the conclusion that they might as well wade right through it, and in some parts of that road, half mud, half river, the mud was up the poor fellows' waists; even those on horseback suffered, and several horses got stuck so badly as to require assistance to get them out. I am rather surprised that the General did not bring one of those gunboats with legal draft, for I am sure they could get along. Several of the soldiers lost their boots, and trudged along the remainder of the journey barefoot. Such are the glories of war."[39]

One thing that was *not* generally considered to be overly odious on the march was **rain,** at least as long as it was not a freezing rain, and one that did not result in deep mud**.** This is an interesting view of things that does not generally square with how many modern reenactors view the weather, and is described by a soldier of the 61st Illinois,

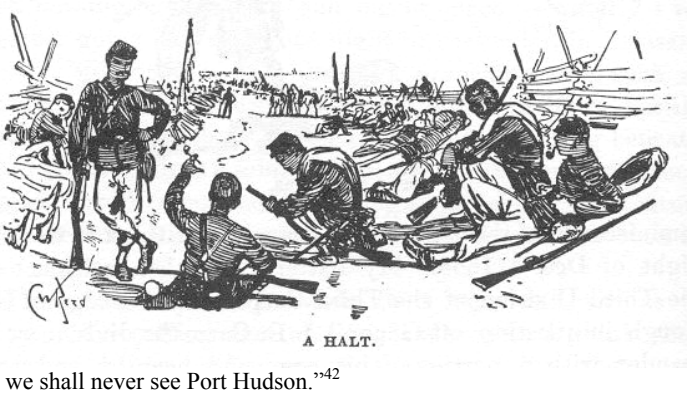
> "I have read somewhere in General Sherman's memoirs a statement in substance to the effect that rain in camp has a depressing effect upon soldiers, but is enlivening to them on a march. From personal experience I know that observation to be true. Many a time while on a march we would be caught in heavy rains. The dirt road would soon be worked to a loblolly of sticky yellow mud. Thereupon we would take off our shoes and socks, tie them to the barrel of our muskets a little below the muzzle and just above the end of the stock, poise the piece on the hammer on either shoulder, stock uppermost, and roll up our breeches to the knees. Then like Tom O'Shanter, we 'skelpit on through dub and mire, despising wind, rain, and fire,' and singing 'John Brown's Body' or whatever else came handy."[40]

Of course, it is reasonable to assume that not all soldiers took such a lighthearted view of rain. Some downpours were cold, and soaked the men and their gear, which in turn rendered things soggy and heavy—particularly if the soldier is unpracticed at making up his pack—anyone who has carried a fairly wet army blanket for any distance appreciates this.

John Billings remembered, "As soon as it began to rain, or just before, each man would remove his rubber blanket from his roll or knapsack, and put it over his shoulders, tying it in front. Some men used their shelter tent instead—a very poor substitute, however."[41]

"Lightening the Load"

Despite the careful reduction of marching kit performed before the campaign, once the trek commenced many soldiers had to abandon more of their load to keep up. As James Hosmer wrote, "We thought, before, we were peeled down to the last rind, but more still must go, or



A HALT.

we shall never see Port Hudson."[42]

The following excerpts are good examples of what soldiers did to dump unwanted weight. A soldier in the 11th United States Infantry wrote,

> "I had the heaviest knapsack in the company but as it began to be a burden I bade farewell to Mr. Overcoat…I tore my blanket in two leaving nearly half of it to lighten my load…It is now warm and I can get along with my rubber [blanket] & other half blanket and the rest of the clothing I have comfortably this summer...Many draw a new full equipment to be thrown away again on the next march."[43]

Roland Bowen wrote,

> "I went about a mile and I couldn't carry my knapsack any further, so I took out my shelter tent, rubber & woolen blankets, rolled them up, took my gun strap and threw them over my shoulder. My overcoat, shirts, stockings, and all my private concerns I threw away."[44]

Another Regular, this one in the 12th United States, remembered,

> "We had some heavy marching to Pennsylvania…We had to throw away all our extra clothing, knapsacks, woolen blankets, & in fact everything we could possibly do without. All we carry is our oil blankets and our shelter tent, guns, belt, haversack, and canteen."[45]

One soldier removed the cape from his overcoat, and finally ditched the entire overcoat.[46] Warren Lee Goss made an observation relative to this phenomenon,

> "On the first long march the reaction sets in, and the recruit goes to the opposite extreme, not carrying enough of the absolutely necessary baggage, and thereby becoming dependant upon his obliging comrades when a camp is reached. Old soldiers preserve a happy medium."[47]

Straggling

The Army of the Potomac's General Orders No. 62 stated, in part: "Every exertion must be used by the officers of the whole force to prevent any of the men from halting or leaving the ranks on any pretence whatsoever."[48]

However, despite the best efforts of the officers, straggling was often a problem on the march. Some men broke down and struggled along, far behind their units, and some went down completely and had to be hospitalized. Extremely hot weather even could cause death by heat stroke—a particularly bad instance of this was the march of Hancock's Second Corps from Petersburg to Deep Bottom in mid-August, 1864, where as many as 100 men allegedly died from the heat while marching. Another motive for straggling was to "see some sights."

Still another reason for—and result of—straggling was foraging. While an entire book can be written on foraging and plundering, it is interesting to note that the Army of the Potomac's General Orders No. 62 included the following: "Depredations and plundering of every description will be most surely and severely punished".[49] Foraging, however, is a separate research topic that is not covered in this article.

As mentioned earlier, while marching at the route step company commanders moved to the rear of their companies to prevent straggling and keep track of the men. In fact, if a man wanted to fall out of the march for any reason, he was supposed to get a written pass from his company commander for that purpose. The usage of such "permission slips" to fall out has recently been the subject of debate, but there is evidence that they were actually used, as written by Captain John DeForest of the 12th Connecticut:

> "I made up every morning a dozen or so of permits, written on slips of paper, to the following effect: 'The bearer, --- ---, of Company I, Twelfth Connecticut, has leave to be absent from the colors for ten minutes.' If a man wanted to fall out I gave him one of these slips, filling in the blank with his name, and adding the hour of the day and my signature. On his return, he reported to me & delivered up the paper."[50]

Ira Petit also recounted the procedure, and the result of falling out without permission:

> "No matter what a man's condition is he can't sit down and rest when he has a mind to; he must keep up with his company. If he falls out without written permission from his captain or the doctor, he will be forced along at the point of the bayonet and made prisoner kept in confinement by the Provost guard until court martialled!!![51]

Straggling occurred even in the famous regiments. One lad in the Army of the Potomac's 6th Wisconsin provided the following detailed descriptive account of straggling on a particularly fatiguing march in August, 1862, albeit punctuated with one highly memorable incident:

> "In the afternoon, the men, who were completely worn out, began to straggle and fell out in squads… I assumed command of myself and gave orders to halt and lie down, which I did, and using my knapsack for a pillow I tried to get a little rest. General Burnside…came along, riding in a powerful black horse and he was forcing the stragglers along by attempting to ride over those men who were laying down, and he ordered me to get up and go on; and I paid no attention to it, as I considered I did not belong to his command…and with an exclamation that he'd make me leave there he spurred his horse toward me.
>
> "…I sprang to my feet and cocking my gun…brought it to a ready, determined to…kill him right there…. He asked to what regiment I belonged… and said something which I understood to be to hurry along as soon as I could, and he rode off and I laid down and was not disturbed again. After laying for an hour or two I moved on and went into a farm house and bought a canteen of fresh milk and a batch of biscuits and afterward moved on until I overtook a several of company K, and we went along gaining addition to our number [together with] apples, potatoes, chickens, and other additions to the larder, and at dusk we took possession of a small grove and had coffee with milk in it and biscuits, roast potatoes, apples, and burned chicken to our heart's content. Early next morning, refreshed and vigorous, we started and soon overtook the command bivouacked in a field close to the road, where it had halted for the simple reason that there was no longer anyone there to march."[52]

Another member of the same brigade had a similar recollection of the same march:

> "10 AM. A couple of the boys have come in bringing the news of the Regt coming in soon. Here some two or three more boys come. There some more. Well, they are coming in separately, every man for himself. Here Cap comes with two or three and they keep coming in for an hour. As soon as the regt got across the river, 2½ miles distant, the boys kept breaking ranks and coming ahead and stopping & c so there was no Regt at all to come into camp."[53]

This march was obviously an extreme case and it is unlikely that these men would have straggled so badly later in their career. Guerilla activity, for example, had a wonderful effect on marching troops by preventing straggling. There was safety in numbers and only the most adventurous troops would risk being caught alone in partisan territory.

Conclusions

Given the proper roadways, marching is one of best activities that we as reenactors can undertake in terms of experiencing things "as the original soldiers did." Consider the difficulties to re-create the proper psychological and physical environment of an established camp: soldiers' accounts suggest that life in permanent camps was characterized by unending rounds of military drudgery (which *is* re-creatable) as well as boredom, homesickness, and disease which are much difficult or unnecessary to re-live in a meaningful way. Of course we do not need to discuss the practical and emotional impossibilities of re-creating the experience of combat. Marching, along with its two affiliated enterprises, bivouacs and campaign cuisine (both of which are the topic of separate articles in *The Columbia Rifles Research Compendium*), remain among the most achievable, historically accurate living history experiences available.

Endnotes

[1] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, Boston: George M. Smith & Co., 1887, pp. 331-332.
[2] National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Regimental Order Books of the 86th New York Volunteers.
[3] Clarke, Hermon (Jackson and O'Donnell, eds.), *Back Home in Oneida: Hermon Clarke and His Letters.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1965, p. 155.
[4] Living historians should not carry ammunition anywhere other than their cartridge box and knapsack, for obvious safety reasons. One spark into a reenactor's trouser pocket could ignite a package of ammunition in an explosion that could cause serious bodily harm.
[5] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, pp. 333-334.
[6] Ray, William (Herdegen and Murphy, eds.), *Four Years in the Iron Brigade*, DaCapo Press, 2002, p. 104.
[7] Fowler, George, *Letters to Eliza*, Chicago: Follet Publishing Co., 1970, pp. 32-33.
[8] VanWyck, R.T. (Kaminsky, Virginia, ed.), *A War to Petrify the Heart: The Civil War Letters of a Dutchess Co. NY Volunteer*, Fishkill, NY: East Fishkill Historical Society, 1997, p. 102.
[9] Bowen, Roland (Coco, Gregory, ed.), *From Ball's Bluff to Gettysburg…and Beyond*, Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 1997, p. 119.
[10] Hosmer, James, *The Color-Guard*, Boston: Walker, Wise & Co. Boston, 1864., p. 112.
[11] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 335.
[12] Hulbert, S.B. (Galloway, Richard, ed.), *One Battle Too Many*, 1987, p. 78.
[13] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, pp. 340-341. According to Dominic Dal Bello in his *Parade, Inspection and Basic Evolutions of the Infantry Battalion,* 4th Edition (Santa Barbara CA: Army of the Pacific Press, 1998, p. 57), during route marches, the colonel usually rode at the head of his regiment. On page 339 of *Hardtack and Coffee*, John Billings describes where the headquarters of divisions and brigades marched.
[14] Kautz, August V., *Customs of Service for Officers of the Army*, J.P. Lippincott Co., 1866, para. 666.
[15] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 341. Also on page 341 Billings describes the mules that punctuated the end of a brigade column.
[16] Army of the Potomac General Orders No. 69, February 25, 1862.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Kautz, August V., *Customs of Service for Officers of the Army*, para. 668.
[20] Petit, Ira, *Diary of a Dead Man,* Eastern Acorn Press, 1981 p. 132
[21] Casey, Silas, *Infantry Tactics*, Vol. 1, 1862, School of the Soldier (S.S.) para. 228, p. 57; School of the Company (S.C.) para. 313, p. 164.
[22] Reed, Charles W., (Campbell, Eric, ed.), *A Grand Terrible Drama*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2000, p. 106.
[23] Collins, Georgie, *Memoirs of the 149th Regiment New York Volunteer Infantry*, Syracuse NY, 1891, p. 130.
[24] Conyngham, David, *The Irish Brigade and Its Campaigns*, New York: William McSorley & Co., 1867, p. 394.
[25] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 344.
[26] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 348.
[27] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 349.
[28] Craighill, William P., *The 1862 Army Officer's Pocket Companion*, Mechanicsburg PA: Stackpole Books, 2002 (reprint), p. 93.
[29] Ibid, p. 93.
[30] DeForest, John W. *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War*, New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1946, pp. 92-95.
[31] DeForest, John W. *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War*, p. 94.
[32] Charles Hickok, letter to his father, dated July 13, 1863. Unpublished manuscript in the author's possession.
[33] Bowen, Roland (Coco, Gregory, ed.), *From Ball's Bluff to Gettysburg…and Beyond*, p. 107.
[34] Smith, Newell Mott, "A Personal History of the 155th New York Volunteer Infantry", Buffalo and Erie County Historical Society, speech given to the G.A.R. Chapin Post, Buffalo, New York, c. 1902
[35] Burdette, Robert, *The Drums of the 47th*, Urbana IL: University of Illinois Press, 2000, pp. 100-101.
[36] Wilkeson, Frank, *Recollections of a Private Soldier in the Army*, New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1886, p. 40.
[37] Hirst, Benjamin, *The Boys from Rockville*, University of Tennessee Press, 1997, p. 138.
[38] Goss, Warren Lee, *Recollections of a Private*, New York: Thomas Cromwell & Co. 1890, p. 23.
[39] Dwyer, John ("J.D."), *Irish American* newspaper, New York City NY, February 14, 1863.
[40] Stillwell, Leander, *The Story of a Common Soldier*, Franklin Hudson Publishing Co., 1920, p. 27.
[41] Billings, John, *Hardtack and Coffee*, p. 346.
[42] Hosmer, James, *The Color-Guard*, p. 82.
[43] Petit, Ira, *Diary of a Dead Man*, Eastern Acorn Press, 1981, p. 127.
[44] Bowen, Roland (Coco, Gregory, ed.), *From Ball's Bluff to Gettysburg…and Beyond*, p. 107.
[45] Bowen , Charles T., *Dear Friends at Home: the Civil War Letters and Diaries of Sergt. Charles T. Bowen, Twelfth US Infantry 1861-1864*, Baltimore: Butternut & Blue, 2001, p. 261.
[46] Fowler, George, *Letters to Eliza*, pp. 32-33.
[47] Goss, Warren Lee, *Recollections of a Private*, p. 7
[48] Army of the Potomac General Orders No. 69, February 25, 1862.
[49] Ibid.
[50] DeForest, John W. *A Volunteer's Adventures: A Union Captain's Record of the Civil War*, p. 95.
[51] Petit, Ira, *Diary of a Dead Man*, page 131-132.
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[53] Ray, William (Herdegen and Murphy, eds.), *Four Years in the Iron Brigade*, p. 127.

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