

# UNIFORMS OF THE CIVIL WAR

## Union Soldiers

Union troops were well-outfitted, even overburdened, with army-issued supplies and equipment. They wore regulation uniforms of heavy wool with leather billed caps and stiff shoes. Atop knapsacks stuffed with extra clothes, a weekly change of underwear, and personal "truck," they carried rolled-up wool and rubber blankets and half a tent. They filled haversacks with salt pork, hardtack, coffee, sugar, dried peas, pressed sheets of desiccated vegetables, and perhaps a pickle. They slung canteens and cartridge boxes over their shoulders and carried muskets.

### UNION UNIFORMS

Don Dretke, pictured far right, represents a Union soldier in regulation uniform of heavy wool in just two sizes with leather-billed caps and stiff shoes. At the start of the Civil War enlisted men in the U.S. Army were issued two coats, a frock coat used for dress with standing collar that reached almost to the knees, and a fatigue coat for performing regular duties. According to the 1861 regulations trousers were to be dark blue like the coats. This was changed to sky blue on 16 December 1861 and lasted to the end of the war.

Wade Marcum, pictured right, is wearing what would have been the standard issue uniforms for the Union Army. The sky blue pants, worn by the 1st Regular US Army, were distributed to all Union soldiers by 1862. The Hardy Hat, which was often used as a dress hat, could also be altered to the personality of the wearer. The hat brims were turned up to prevent cartridges to fly up and ricochet onto their faces. Also pictured above is the very efficient and popular Henry Rifle. It is a 16-shot rifle so soldiers usually bought it with 2-3 months wages.



### UNION CAVALRY SARGEANT

At right, Wade is pictured wearing a navy blue issue coat with yellow trimmings and three stripes on the side which represent a Union Cavalry Sargeant. He is wearing a forage hat that was worn during more informal events. The coat includes pillows on the back that would have been carried on the saber belt. Cavalry men usually carried a small pistol like the 1860 Colt revolver seen on the picture. To add a personal touch, soldiers would sometimes wear a neck scarf of their own choosing to keep warm.



### U.S. COLOR TROOPS

Early in 1863, Abraham Lincoln observed: "The colored population is the great available yet unveiled force for restoring the Union." Two months later, the War Department issued General Order #143 which sanctioned the creation of the United States Colored Troops (USCT).

Three regiments of the USCT entered the Rio Grande Valley in the fall of 1864. They patrolled the border to stop ongoing violence in Mexico from spilling into the United States, and to discourage bandits and Native Americans from attacking civilian communities. The last USCT regiment, the 117th U.S. Colored Infantry, left the Rio Grande in July 1867.

Deon Ellis, pictured at right, is outfitted as a US Colored Infantry soldier holding an Enfield rifle-musket with bayonet.



### CAP POUCH



Various designs were developed during the war, but the cap pouches' basic purpose remained unchanged: to store items which all percussion muskets required in order to fire—the caps. Constructed of leather, each such had an outer flap that closed with a brass button riveted to the bottom. Inside was a lining of sheepskin with wool to prevent the caps from falling out.

### BUTTONS



Unpolished buttons were the sign of an undisciplined regiment. Pictured, top left, is a button that belonged to an imperial Mexican soldier found in the RGV. During the Civil War, Mexico was overrun with French troops under the control of Maximilian. Several regiments made it to north Mexico close to the border with Texas. Bottom left & top right: Buttons that belonged to soldiers in infantry regiments during the Civil War in the Rio Grande Valley.

### BROGANS



Soldiers wore these leather shoes called brogans as part of their uniforms. Brogans were "straight" shoes, meaning that there is no right or left foot. As soldiers wore and overran with French troops under the control of Maximilian. Several regiments made it to north Mexico close to the border with Texas. Bottom left & top right: Buttons that belonged to soldiers in infantry regiments during the Civil War in the Rio Grande Valley. Heel plates resembling small horseshoes were frequently attached to the shoes, helping the soldiers' shoes last a bit longer. Sturdy brogans were an absolute necessity for armies, and were highly sought after in the South.

### BOOT



Pictured above is a high cavalry black knee high boot with Mexican spurs that would have been worn by soldiers serving in South Texas during the Civil War. Regiments would hand out a limited amount of shoes and boots to soldiers so families would often have to send soldiers new pairs.

### CAPS & HATS



The Model 1858 forage cap was by far the most common kind of headgear provided to Union troops. Soldiers were always finding ways to cool so some caps were fitted with a circular metal ventilators. In the field many soldiers proudly wore brass numbers and letters on their caps to indicate their regiment and company.

### CARTRIDGE BOX



The cartridge box was sling across the chest and rested on the right hip within easy grasp during battle. Inside the leather box were two tins that held loose cartridges on top and bundles of ten in the lower compartments. These metal containers and two leather flaps effectively protected the paper cartridges from moisture in inclement weather. For much of the war, the outer flap was punched with two holes to secure the "US" box plate made of lead stamped with brass.

### TRUMPET



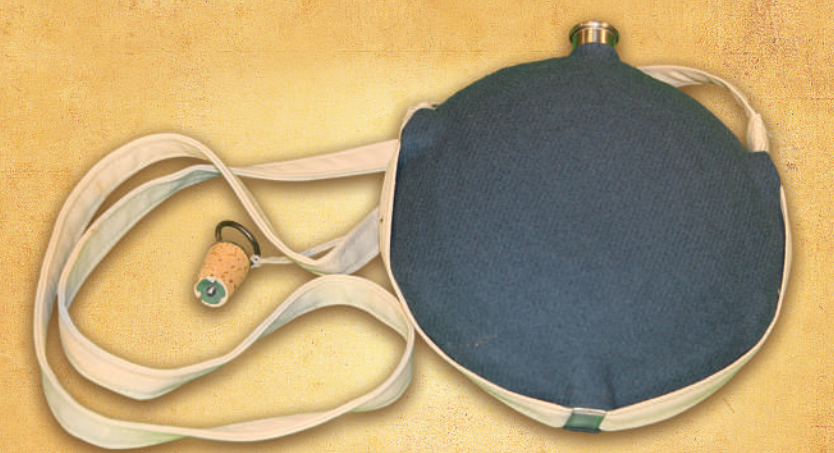
Of all the memories veterans recalled of their Civil War experience, countless reminiscences of music can be found in thousands of letters and journals of soldiers who fought on both sides. Music played a large part in the war and the field music of buglers was not only necessary for the telling of time and duties in camp but also guided the actions of troops in battle.

### BELT PLATES

Like the one on a cartridge box, the infantry waist belt plate was made of lead stamped with brass that each soldier was expected to keep polished. A tarnished belt or box plate was possibly an indicator of poor morale or discipline within a regiment. Although the heavy belt plate was mostly ornamental, some surviving examples clearly show signs that they have stopped Confederate bullets, thereby saving the lives of the soldiers wearing them. Below the belt, bottom center, is a replica of the 'badge' that was worn by cavalry men on their hats. Top right: Replica of an infantry badge.



### CANTEENS



The most common type of military canteen held about a quart of water. It was made from lightweight tinned iron sheeting stamped out on presses and formed into halves that were soldered together. They were inexpensive and easily manufactured in large quantities. Many other types and styles of canteens were issued as well, including some made from wood and even leather.

## VOICES OF THE CIVIL WAR

*"It has rained for a week and the roads are muddy. After marching for twenty miles it is not pleasant to lie down at night in the wet without any cover. I am tired—in fact I never was so tired in my life. But Hurrah! It is all for the Union."*

—Elisha Hunt Rhodes  
Second Rhode Island Volunteer Infantry

*"I wish you could take a peep at us tonight in our snug, cosy [sic] quarters...about half are writing, some reading, and some building castles to live in when the war is over. We are a merry set of fellows having all the necessaries of life and some of its luxuries. Now sir, I have yet to see the first soldier who does not get everything he needs in the way of rations or clothing."*

—Anonymous (Union)  
5<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire Regiment

Sunday Sept. 21, 1862

*Dear Folks,  
On the 8th we struck up the refrain of "Maryland, My Maryland!" and camped in an apple orchard. We went hungry, for six days not a morsel of bread or meat had gone in our stomachs - and our menu consisted of apple and corn. We roasted, we burned, we stewed, we boiled, we roasted these two together, and singly, until there was not a man whose form had not caved in, and who had not a bad attack of diarrhea.*

*Our under-clothes were foul and hanging in strips, our socks worn out, and half of the men were bare-footed, many were lame and were sent to the rear; others, of sterner stuff, bobbled along and managed to keep up, while gangs from every company went off in the surrounding country looking for food. . . Many became ill from exposure and starvation, and were left on the road. The ambulances were full, and the whole route was marked with a sick, lame, limping lot, that straggled to the farm-houses that lined the way, and who, in all cases, succored and cared for them.*

—Alexander Hunter

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