

What did they Wear?

A post-Gettysburg analysis of Clothing and Equipment
requisitioned by the 1st USSS on July 28, 1863.

by

Bill Skillman (2002)

The Gettysburg campaign has been considered one of the most pivotal in the Civil War. It commenced about June 4th, when Gen. R.E. Lee ordered portions of his Army of Northern Virginia to vacate positions around Fredericksburg and advance west then northward into Maryland and then Pennsylvania. The Army of the Potomac began pursuit on June 11th. By July 31st, the campaign came to a close after the victorious Army of Potomac had pursued the Confederates back into Virginia; with Meade's forces going into camp at White Sulphur Springs. The campaign for both sides comprised of nearly continuous marching and fighting; particularly the battle at Gettysburg over July 1-4. The 1st U.S. Sharpshooters began the campaign with 450 men present for duty, and suffered 89 casualties at Gettysburg. The September 30, 1863 Ordnance rolls show only 296 rifles present. Wyman White observed: "*Now when the strain and excitement was off, a large portion of the men found themselves completely exhausted. A great many were sent off to hospitals to be braced up or discharged, and every man who had made the whole campaign was pretty well used up and under the weather*". As I hope to show in the following article, the clothing and equipment worn by many of the Sharpshooters was in equally bad shape.

This past spring, Mike Tita (Co. C. 2nd USSS) sent me papers from the 1st U.S. Sharpshooter files at the National Archives in Washington, D.C. One form, "***Requisition and Estimate of Clothing for July 28, 1863***", is very important since it reflects the first opportunity the USSS had to replace the worn out clothing and material from the Gettysburg campaign. The author is not identified. However, by comparing the handwriting on the requisition to the official papers of Lt. Col. Caspar Trepp (commander the Regiment from December 1862 to November 1863), there are enough similarities to lead me to believe that the handwriting is his own.

To help the reader begin to understand *why* the July 28th requisition form is so important, it is essential for us to review The Company Clerk (subtitle) What to do AND How to do it. The Clerk was an indispensable guide for a commissioned officer, as it informed him how to select the appropriate forms (to request or dispose of clothing, rifles and accouterments, food, etc.), how to fill them out and to whom he needed to submit the forms to. For our purposes we open to page 106 under the heading of **Requisitions for Clothing, Camp and Garrison Equipment**:

198 "*Requisitions are forms used for specifying the requirements of the troops for certain authorized allowances for their support and service, to which the order for the issue is obtained from the proper authority. They are necessary for placing before the proper officer, in an official manner, the articles wanted and the necessity for their issue. Requisitions are of two kinds, regular and special. A regular requisition is for such articles where the allowance is regulated and fixed by law or regulation. A special requisition is where the articles are rendered necessary from some cause (for example; Requisition for Fuel, Forage, Straw).*"

222. "*Regimental or post quartermasters draw the supplies from depots, and company commanders make their requisitions upon them through the regimental (post) commander.*"

223. "*For a regiment in the field, it is usual to make periodical issues, and for the commander of the regiment to call for requisitions from the various company commanders, who should ascertain, by actual inspection, what is required. These requisitions are then consolidated and the regimental quartermaster draws from the depot for the entire regiment"*

225. "*Clothing may be obtained according to the want of the troops...*"

227. "*Camp and Garrison equipage includes the (cap and hat) ornaments, haversacks, canteens, musical instruments...They are borne upon the property return and only charged to the soldier when lost or destroyed by him."*

230. "*During active campaign the allowances above mentioned are materially reduced. No surplus clothing and no tents are allowed except shelter tents. The latter are allowed at the rate of one shelter tent to each commissioned officer, and one to every two non-commissioned officers, soldiers..."*

From the above specifications, we know that the information below reflects the clothing needs of each USSS company following an inspection by their captains. The men were required to replace worn out clothing. Should they somehow exceed their yearly clothing allowance (\$42), any additional costs would be deducted from their monthly pay. Let us see what Regulations (found in the Clerk) allowed the men to draw over three years of service (the term served by the majority of the 1st USSS, who were mustered in beginning in August, 1861):

<u>Item</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>1-2-3</u>	<u>Total</u>
Uniform Coat		2-1-2	5
Blue Flannel Sack Coat (blouse)		2-2-2	6
Trousers		3-2-3	8
Bootees, pairs		4-4-4	12
Stockings, pairs		4-4-4	12
Forage Cap		1-1-1	3

Flannel Shirt	3-3-3	9
Flannel Drawers	3-2-3	8
Blankets	1-0-1	2

The Post-Gettysburg Requisition

The type and quantity of clothing drawn by each of the 1st USSS companies is instructive; as it gives us idea of the strength of the regiment at this time, as well as the types of clothing worn by the men on campaign. We also need to contemplate the nature of the requisition itself. Usually inspections, requisitions and issuance of Clothing and Ordnance (rifles, bayonets, cartridge boxes, etc.) would take place at the end of each quarter (March, June, September, and December). Since the Sharp Shooters were already on the march before the 2nd quarter inspections could occur it is unlikely that the officers and quartermaster were able to issue needed clothing and material until the Gettysburg Campaign had concluded.

	Blouses	Shirts	Drawers	Caps	Socks
Field Staff	-	-	-	-	2
A	19	6	2	1	6
B	7	24	9	4	42
C	8	9	2	-	19
D	1	5	-	1	10
E	1	7	2	3	18
F	16	11	2	1	23
G	1	21	17	1	37
H	4	13	4	1	27
I	5	27	-	6	25
K	6	16	7	1	25
	59	139	45	19	234

Not surprisingly the single most requested item to be replaced was the humble sock, (due to their tendency to wear out and the difficulty of replacing them on campaign). Unlike trousers, blouses and shoes; Army socks were a 'one size fits all' proposition. What I found particularly exciting was the number of blue blouses being requested. Note that there is no listing on the requisition form for Rifle green uniform coats. I will address this more in the conclusions section.

The numbers under the 'Pants' section correspond to the standardized waist/length dimensions for each garment. .

	Pants				U.S. Army Sizing System		
	1	2	3	4	#	Waist	Inseam
FSt(aff)	2	-	-	-			
Co. A	-	1	2	3	1	32	31
B	11	6	4	-	2	34	32
C	-	8*	-	-	3	36	33
D	-	6	1	-	4	38	34
E	3	6	-	1			
F	-	5	6	2			
G	2	4	5	2			
H	3	6	1	-			
I	7	3	1	-			
K	-	5*	-	-			
	28	37	20	8			

- 13 pr of pants without sizes

Unfortunately, we do not know the color of the 93 trousers issued. I discovered this vexing problem among Capt. Merriman's Co. 'F'. 1st USSS papers (covering Sept 1863 to muster out one year later) as well. While the standardized forms provided a specific heading for trousers, along the margins a clerk or Merriman had penciled in "Green" for about 15 pairs. However, on other requisition forms this critical notation (for us USSS researchers anyway) was missing. While there is plenty of period references/photographic evidence of the USSS wearing Rifle green and sky blue kersey trousers, the July 28th requisition is silent on this subject. Also note that the Wolverines of Company 'C' and 'K' requested trousers that were "without sizes". Dan Wambaugh, my clothing & materials guru, believes this was a clerical error made by the clerk (officers of both companies were wounded at G-burg). According to Dan, all trousers would have been inspected and marked for size before leaving the Depot. Since the clerk did not specify the size the Regimental Quartermaster would have to take a 'best guess' at the sizes needed. This translates that when the trousers finally arrived some Wolverines were issued trousers too small and others trousers that were too large. While 'swapping' would solve some of the problem; invariably, some Sharpshooters would have presented a very comical appearance during roll call. Fortunately, among the Sharpshooters there was usually a 'Company Tailor' who could make modifications to the issue clothing and get it to fit better....maybe.

	Shoes							
	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Staff	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
A	-	-	2	1	5	2	1	-
B	2	4	8	6	3	-	-	-
C	-	1	3	4	-	-	-	-
D	-	1	2	6	-	1	-	-
E	-	2	2	6	1	1	-	-
F	-	2	5	7	6	3	2	-
G	-	1	6	9	6	-	-	-
H	1	1	3	7	3	1	-	-
I	-	-	1	8	8	-	-	-
K	-	-	2	7	3	3	1	-
	3	12	35	61	35	11	4	0

Next, we find that the second most requested item was 161 pairs of shoes. Considering the men had marched well over 160 miles (using Wyman White's diary and Map Quest to provide a rough distance estimate) on alternating flinty to ankle (to knee deep during the pursuit of Lee's army) mud-filled roads during the campaign, this should come as no surprise.

When examining the Camp Equipment portion of the requisition, I found Trepp's handwriting very difficult to decipher. The printing is exceedingly small and cramped, with slight smudges suggesting he used a pencil to fill out the form. Fortunately, Trepp added a side bar noting items issued to staff members Stearns and Attwell. Here his handwriting was larger and easier to translate. Using the items issued to these two men I was able to identify two particularly difficult-to-read headings as 'Haversacks' and 'Socks'.

*Stearns 1 Pr. pants No 1
 2 Pr. Socks 1 Canteen
 1 Haversack*

*Attwell
 1 Pr Pants 1 Pr. shoes 1 Canteen
 1 Haversack*

While I am not 100% certain that the headings below are correct, I again reviewed Capt. Merriman's (Sept. 1863 to Sept. 1864) style of accounting for Clothing and Camp/Garrison Equipment. Keep in mind that an officer was required to follow a standardized sequence when listing the clothing and equipment; regardless if the form was handwritten or entered on Regulation blank forms.

	Haversacks	Canteens	Blankets?	Pat. Blankets	Shelter tents?
Staff	2	2	-	-	-
A	12	8	1	4	-
B	31	18	-	9	12
C	16	6	3	16	-
D	5	6	-	3	3
E	16	8	-	3	4
F	24	11	-	3	6
G	26	12	-	8	11
H	11	9	-	11	6
I	23	17	-	16	15
K	19	13	6	7	12
	185	110	10	74	69

Note the number of haversacks requested. Since they held raw salt pork, crackers and coffee that churned (and exposed to daily 80-90 degree temperatures) into a malodorous and greasy mass on the march, it is not surprising the men would dispose of them after the campaign had finished. Also the canteens requisitioned suggests they were 'throw away' items as well-no doubt equally smelly and rusty from foul water, spoiled milk, honey or other, more intoxicating, potables. No stainless steel canteens filled from water buffalo spigots for these gentlemen.

More interesting is the requisition for painted blankets (in lieu of rubber ones). Captain Merriman's records show a slightly higher ratio of painted blankets issued over rubber ones. It is difficult to determine if this was due to a preference by the men or if the former item was more readily available compared to the Goodyear treated blankets. Having used both types of ground sheet/shelter myself for the past 8 years, I discovered the painted blanket provides slightly better insulation compared to the rubber. It is also lighter weight, this became an important consideration during Recon-2 when we had no fixed camp and were expected to carry our belongings at all times.

Considering that it was the middle of summer the small number of wool blankets requisitioned comes as no surprise. There are a couple reasons for this, I believe. One, the Regulations allowed a man to draw only 1 wool blanket every other year. Second, Brian White informed me that before the Gettysburg campaign some comrades-in-arms cut a single 84x 65 inch blanket into halves to

reduce the weight of their marching loads while still providing them with a measure of comfort for cool nights. Nearly 25% of the men had lost or condemned shelter tent halves when the requisition was made. As stated in the Regulations, each man was issued a shelter half; two men (or more) buttoning them together to form a tent.

Conclusion (for now): With the pending 140th Anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg there is a movement afoot for members of the Sharp Shooters to recreate the appearance of the original men at the time of that epic battle. But let's address the single most important question; "*Do I wear my green uniform coat?*" "*Do I wear a blue blouse/sack coat?*" Some fellows (who prefer the green coat) can rightly point out that the above requisition *follows* the Battle of Gettysburg. Another group suggests the men drew blouses because their green coats had worn out, and were compelled to draw a (less expensive) substitute. On April 28, 1863 Wyman White remarked "*At ten o'clock we received orders to fall in...Hosts of woolen blankets, tenting, and overcoats had to be given up. Some men got boxes and packed some of their property in them and buried them...I, among them did the burial act, and in this case we got paid for the trouble as the (Chancellorsville) campaign was only 9 days duration*". White does not specify turning in *his* green coat. However, he indicates that the 2nd USSS was under orders to pack up their heavier clothing in wooden boxes: (uniform coats, greatcoats, extra clothing, spare blankets) that would be collected by the Regimental QM to be shipped and stored at the Washington Arsenal before campaign season commenced. In the Fall these boxes were returned to the Regiment. Clothing and effects of deceased or discharged soldiers boxes would be inventoried and sold (see **Inventories of Deceased Soldiers** in the Clerk) to the men who remained in service.

What did they wear? New Information on how the USSS was attired during the Gettysburg Campaign-Part 2

What a difference 8 hours makes. Last evening I returned home after putting the finishing touches on my article, (and emailing same to Brian White and Dan Wambaugh for proof-reading), to discover a book that I had ordered from the 20th Maine Bookstore had arrived. Last week, Brian had learned that the Richardson Civil War Round Table had published a new Sharp Shooters book (released November 2002). It encompasses the three years service of James Mero Matthews of Maine's Co. D. 2nd USSS, as detailed in his journals

Matthew's book documents day to day experiences, War news, various official duties he performs, food & cooking, and Co. D. politics. If you are looking for riveting accounts of Bull Run, Turners Gap, Miller's cornfield, Chancellorsville and Gettysburg—do not buy this book. Despite Matthew's obsessive tendency to record daily entries in his journal, there is barely a mention of the details that most of us hunger for. Perhaps he sent letters home to his family with better descriptions of these fights but there is nothing from the Round Table to suggest this. Now I can hear you boys shuffling your feet and grumbling: "*Another one of yer long winded, shaggy dog stories, Bugler. Get to yer' point*". Okay lads. The following entries is what makes Matthews book worth my money:

Sun. June 7, 1863: Still in camp and all kinds of rumors. Orders last night indicated a movement but none occurred yet. **Our Green coats are to be turned in and we are to draw blouses** in their place.

Mon. June 8, 1863: **Boxed our extra clothing** and turned it over to the Q.M. Sergt. Turned in **one green coat** and one woolen blanket and one pair pants.

Sun. Sept 20, 1863: On guard. Rosecrans is meeting with a slight disaster- so papers say. He recently captured Chattanooga. Easy time on guard. Turned in at night as there is no guardhouse. Inspection in A.M. **Our boxes containing green clothing** etc. will be delivered to the men tomorrow.

Mon. Sept 21, 1863: **Clothing boxes distributed.** Nearly everything is stowed. On picket about 300 rods from camp-eight men to a relief and three relieves-easy.

Conclusion (for now): After four years of diligent research I have finally discovered a piece of conclusive evidence to answer the vexing question of "*What did they (the USSS) Wear at Gettysburg?*" Matthews entry suggests that Co. D.-2nd USSS wore blue blouses during the Gburg campaign. It is logical to presume this order applied to all of the Second Regiment. While the 1st USSS was in another brigade, we can surmise that orders for them would be the same. However, my research is still far from complete, but Lt. Matthew's book provides us with an invaluable piece of the puzzle.

Finally, I would like to ask the readers to give a 'tip of the cap' to Comrade Mike Tita for providing us with this very interesting nugget of history. He has provided us with an invaluable insight into the condition of the 1st USSS at the conclusion of the Gettysburg campaign, and he has added one more piece of the puzzle of "What did they Wear?"

I welcome your thoughts and comments: WES

Sources:

Dalton, P. (Ed.). Soldiers in Green: The Civil War Diaries of James Mero Matthews 2nd USSS
Richardson's Civil War Round Table. Sandy Point, ME 2002

Kautz, A. V. The Company Clerk J. B. Lippincott & Co. Philadelphia, 1863 (reprint Sullivan Press 1995)
Merriman, Chas. Co. F, 1st USSS papers 1863-64. Wm. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor.
Sword, Wiley. Hiram Berdan, his Famous Sharpshooters, and their Sharps Rifles. A. Mowbray (pub). 1988
Tita, Mike (researcher) USSS Requisition July 18, 1863-National Archives, Washington, D.C.
Trepp, Caspar: Collected Papers 1861-1863. New York State Archives, Albany, N.Y.