

Field Dressed

Invited to the dance with little to wear.

By
Lad Moore



Variations in Confederate Uniforms, —Harper's Weekly, August 17, 1861

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Marshall, Texas would figure prominently in the history of the South for its Confederate war effort. It was the Headquarters for the Trans-Confederacy west of the Mississippi

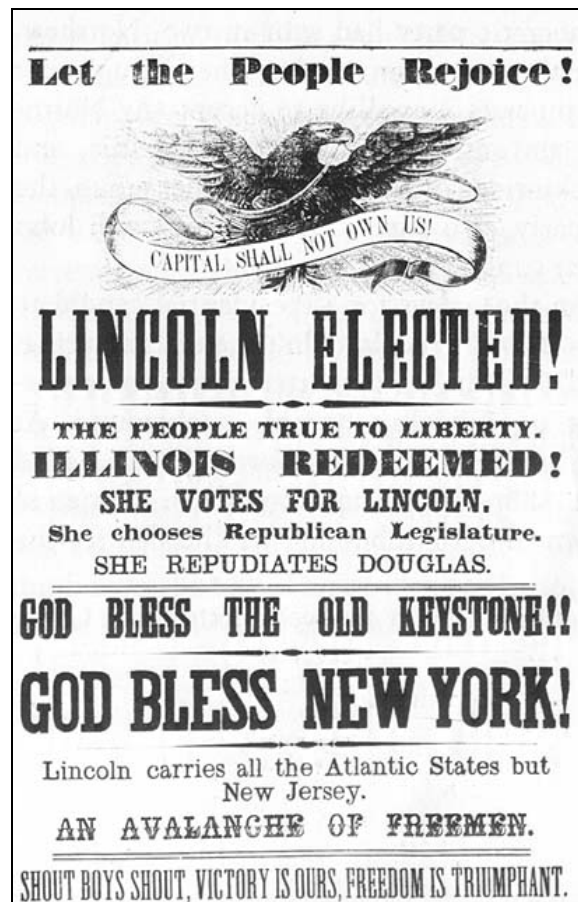
and served as the State Capital for the government of Missouri in exile. The city's proud factories produced saddles, harnesses, pistols, light and heavy munitions, and military hats for Southern troops.

Indeed, providing clothing and supplies for the new army was a desperately vital mission. But in this war, things didn't start out so' uniformly.'

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Setting the stage for America's Civil War began with these few words from President Abraham Lincoln:

"Government cannot endure permanently half slave, half free..."



Today, posters like these would be called *spin*, because achieving the Presidency did not reflect Abraham Lincoln's ideal mandate, having been elected by only 40 percent of the popular vote and garnering only 180 of 303 possible electoral votes.

Marshall joined in the chorus of Southern boos following the election, as reported in a local pro-secessionist newspaper of the time:

MARSHALL TEXAS REPUBLICAN, January 26, 1861

***Hung in Effigy.**—On Thursday morning an effigy of Abraham Lincoln, duly labeled and covered with various devices, was to be seen hanging upon a temporary gallows within the enclosure of our Court-house square. It was gotten up we presume by some of the "b'hoys" during the preceding night. A bad representation of Abraham; stout and fat while also raw-boned, and cadaverous. Thus would the Abolition President himself be served were he to enter a Southern state, and yet there have been, and perhaps there are yet some, who hope to find him a conservative President; the chief executive of the entire Union.*

(B'hoys: Slang word used to describe the young men and women of the rough-and-tumble working class culture of the late 1840s and into the period of the American Civil War.)

Just one month after the election, even before Lincoln's swearing-in ceremony, South Carolina reacted by seceding from the Union. Two months' time saw six more states join the loose assembly. These were Louisiana, Texas, Georgia, Alabama, Florida, and Mississippi. Events moved fast and thirty days later, the Confederacy was officially formed with Jefferson Davis as its President. On April 17, 1861, Virginia followed suit, and within five weeks came Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina, thus forming an eleven state Confederacy with a population of 9 million, including nearly 4 million slaves. The Union counted 21 states and a population of over 20 million. Missouri and Kentucky, struggling to remain neutral, were counted on both sides.

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On January 31, 1862 President Lincoln issued General War Order No. 1 calling for all United States naval and land forces to mount a general advance beginning on February 22, George Washington's birthday.

There was sometimes a misplaced eloquence in the announcements that war had come, and each side likely shared an unrealistic vision of how the battlefield scene would appear:



“Do not fear first glimpse of the elephant when taking the front. The sameness of our waistcoats will seem a raging surge of sea to the hapless lads who lack such purpose and will as we. Our finely hammered sabers will swoon them to their knees and cut to marrow as we show furious determination to execute the will of God himself. We shall be flanked with His Righteousness on or left and the heralds of His Archangels on our right. Our terrible might cannot be dismissed. Our divine purpose will not be deterred!” —Lords

(Author’s Note: “Seeing the Elephant” was a slang term that described a recruit’s first encounter with the battlefield.)

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The war is on! *What shall we wear?*

It’s almost seems postscript or trivial, but certainly ironic, that the uniforms of the two armies are more telltale than the modern observer might recognize with so many movies and books glorifying the soldiers of one side or the other. Even the Civil War re-enactors of today sometimes don’t get it right. A union of 21 states with a central government has means, money, and power to outfit its soldiers with the best uniforms and munitions, which they did. Not so with the Confederate States. They were separate entities having just come together with a new government having no national financial structure and no trove of weapons and supplies. The phrase *Army Uniform* was basically an oxymoron as it relates to the Confederacy.

When soldiers of the South first gathered in Richmond, each state arrived wearing different outfits. In the Harpers Weekly plate of August 17, 1861 there appears 26 varying styles, all accurately illustrated for the magazine by an artist of the day. The styles and colors were designed to represent each individual state as being a contributing volunteer regiment. They had little similarity, and when a uniform was worn out there was no replacement from the state that originally sent the regiment. In some cases, soldiers did not wear uniforms at all—just farm clothes, sometimes even lacking shoes. This in no way diminished a Confederate soldier's pride. As an English Colonel once said:

"The Confederate soldier has no ambition to imitate the regular soldier at all. He looks like the general rebel that he is, but in spite of his bare feet, ragged clothes, old rug, and toothbrush stuck like a rose in his buttonhole, he has a sort of devil-may-care, self confident look that is very charming."

Maybe by ignorance but likely by necessity, some of the uniforms that did match were blue, like those of the Union—not a great idea for the confusion of a battlefield. One example was the Tennessee Volunteers, who reported to the war wearing their former US Army uniforms with only the Union epaulets having been removed.

Towns and townspeople all over the south were solicited for clothing as was the case in Marshall with these appeals:

MARSHALL TEXAS REPUBLICAN, October 1862

Clothing for Capts. Hill and Van Zandt's Companies: A letter has been received from Dr. E. P. M. Johnson, saying that our friends and fellow-citizens in those companies are destitute of clothing. It is incumbent on all who have friends or relatives in those companies to furnish them immediately. The clothing should be left at the store of G. G. Gregg & Co., by the first day of November next, arrangements having been made to forward them at once.

Letter of Thanks: The "Marshall Guards" (Texas) desire to return their sincere thanks to Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. McCants, managers of the "Ladies Sewing Society," for the Confederate States Army, No. 82 Camp Street, New Orleans. Also to Mrs. H. Parsons, who volunteered especially for the "Marshall Guards." These patriotic ladies have been constantly engaged for the last ten days in making our uniforms, and doing all in their power to equip us expeditiously as possible; none of them have enjoyed the comforts of home during that period, but have been constantly engaged in their noble task, to fit us out for the war.

A Louder Call for Clothing! The undersigned have been detailed to obtain clothing for their respective companies; W. A. Salmon for Capt. Allen's company and N. H. Calloway for Capt. Berry's company, Clark's Regiment. The clothing for Allen's company will be left at the store of Mr. Sam. Bludworth, and that for Berry's, with Mr. B. F. Frederici. It must all be in by the 28th inst., and plainly marked for the different members for whom it is

intended. It is scarcely necessary to urge the relatives and friends of the soldiers to provide them with a liberal share of clothing, and where it is possible, with hats and shoes. The climate where they are destined to spend the winter is very severe, and if they fail to obtain the necessary articles from home to keep them comfortable, they must necessarily suffer, and in many instances die from exposure.

*W. A. Salmon,
N. H. Calloway.*

Noting the disarray and not wanting the appearance of a rag-tag element, the Confederate War Department set about issuing uniforms and equipment for the differing regiments. This effort was never completely successful and uniform variations and shortages existed throughout the war.

The resulting “official” Confederate uniform was loosely designed around the Union army model, but was generally cadet gray in color. The common infantry frock or shell coat was short-waisted, with buttons often made of bone, brass, or even wood. Buttons sometimes included markings that depicted or identified the represented state. Since cotton was plentiful in the south, the coats were made of “jean,” a very durable mix of thick cotton with a bit of wool. The inside was lined with lighter cotton. To achieve a balance in color, a gray dye was made from the bark of certain trees. This dye faded in time and took on a brown tint, often mottled in tone. These discolored jackets spurred the nickname “Butternuts” for the soldiers who wore them. The trousers were blue, and were also jean. For the most part, there were far fewer ornamental trappings, less fancy rank distinctions, and diminished flowery embroidery than those worn by the enemy.

Confederate officers, generally thought to have greater financial means, were expected to provide their own uniforms. They were better dressed than infantrymen, but their clothing was still non-uniform. The standards set by the War Department in 1861 for military officer uniforms were observed to some degree, but the designs and trappings were subject to the tastes and circumstances of the individual. Officers liked the freedom to design uniforms that gave them identity and flamboyance on the field of battle. Some even had armor made both for adornment and protection. The armor proved to be both heavy and ineffective for the .36, .55, or larger caliber minie balls. Thus, a steel breastplate weighing over ten pounds and providing little defense benefit soon found its way into roadside ditches. Passing infantrymen didn’t even bother to pick up the discarded pieces because a man seen wearing one was held in contempt by his fellow soldiers. *“Dost not don this lest there be sufficient for all.”*

The mid-Victorian times heralded a period of fine millinery. Maybe due to that influence, there seems to have been more attention given to the military hats than the uniforms. Most styles were made of felt, but it was not uncommon to see extreme variations such as woven straw—unconventional, but far better than wool in the heat. The prized animal felt fabric was often short in supply, and coarse cotton denim was sometimes substituted. The wide brimmed hats were preferred to protect the neck and forehead from the sun, but supplies of them were scarce.

At the top of the line were the officer and cavalry hats. Part of the fame for this style was owed to General J.O. Shelby of the Iron Brigade command. Known as “Jeb Stuart of the West,” he exhibited the same swashbuckling image in battle as did Stuart, with striking black ostrich plumes flowing from his wide-brimmed hat. Near the end of the war, at his final appearance on the balcony at Wyalusing Plantation in Marshall, he likely sported his trademark hat. It may have been the very theatric prop that inspired his brigade to join him in the Shelby Expedition to Mexico.

Two Portraits in Beaver Felt and Plumage

Joseph Orville Shelby (December 12, 1830 – February 13, 1897) J.O. Shelby was heralded as “The Soldier Never Defeated” as he was the winner of, or instrumental in dozens of important CSA victories. A cavalry officer, he won promotions quickly as he advanced to General. His troops, known as The Iron Brigade, were sometimes more mercenary than regimental. He is best remembered for his flamboyant dress, cavalier manner, and no-nonsense dedication. When the war ended he spurned surrender and disdained the announced reconstruction, taking his troops to Mexico and offering themselves up as a “foreign legion.”

*“I won't be reconstructed, I'm better now than then.
And for a Carpetbagger I do not give a damn.
So it's forward to the frontier, soon as I can go.
I'll fix me up a weapon and start for Mexico.”*

* * *

“Jeb” Stuart (February 6, 1833 – May 12, 1864) was a US Army officer of high regard who became a Confederate army general when Virginia seceded. Shortly after his defection, he learned that his father-in-law would remain with the Union army. Of this Stuart wrote: “He will regret it but once, and that will be continuously.” Stuart was a gallant cavalry commander who was said to have perfected the use of mounted soldiers in the support of ground actions. He was easily recognized on the battlefield by his dapper image, wearing a red-lined gray cape, yellow waist sash, and a tilted wide brim hat with ostrich plumes on the hatband. Each day he added a red flower to his lapel and was even known to wear cologne in battle. His nickname “Jeb” stemmed from the initials of his given name, James Ewell Brown Stuart. He was killed in the Battle of Yellow Tavern, near Richmond, Va.

The more common headgear was the variant of the “French Pattern Kepi,” also known as the “slouch cap” because of its sunken top. It was the standard for all troops. These caps had colored bands to denote the particular service such as infantry, artillery, and cavalry. They were made of wool felt, with visors of leather or oilcloth covering pasteboard. Officers added gold braid; one strand denoted a lieutenant, two a captain, three a field officer and four a general. All original caps included leather chinstraps, but many of the straps were removed and used for makeshift tourniquets. Another “fatigue version” of this cap was called the “forage cap,” a similar but less expensive hat that many soldiers called “shapeless as a feedbag.”

MARSHALL TEXAS REPUBLICAN, May 25, 1861

“The best military hat in use is the light colored soft felt; the crown being sufficiently high to allow space for air over the brain. You can fasten it up as a continental in fair weather, or turn it down when it is wet or very sunny.”

There were several capable manufacturing factories in the south, but almost none existed in Texas at the outbreak of the war. The influence of the headquarters for Trans-Mississippi operations was likely the reason that Marshall established its war industry, among them a Confederate hat factory. The newspaper reported:

MARSHALL TEXAS REPUBLICAN, February 26, 1863

***Southern Hattery:** It will be perceived that Capt. H. L. Berry is getting up a hattery, for the benefit of the army. This is an enterprise in which every one will wish him success.*

***The Southern Hattery:** The undersigned has put in operation at this place a shop for manufacturing wool hats for the soldiers exclusively. I am now prepared to work twenty or more hands. I have some good workmen employed, but I am needing more, who are skilled in the business, to whom liberal wages will be paid. A liberal cash price paid for wool delivered here to E. Schwartz. A coarse article of fall shearing preferred. --Signed, H. L. Berry*

(Author’s Note: It is likely that this is the same H.L. Berry, a CSA captain, who commanded the Marshall Texas Infantry Company known as “Clough & Hill Avengers.” It was part of the 14th. Texas Infantry led by General Edward Clark, the Marshall resident who had succeeded Sam Houston as [Confederate] Governor of Texas in 1861. The unit fought bravely at the Red River Campaign.)

MARSHALL TEXAS REPUBLICAN, February 26, 1863

Capt. A. U. Wright of Jefferson, one of the most energetic officers in the Confederate service, has established a large shoe shop for the Confederate States, in Jefferson, in which he is turning out, we understand, over a hundred pair of shoes a day. We propose visiting it as soon as we have time. Thus we

go. Our people are learning not only industry and economy, but to manufacture all such articles as we formerly bought from the Yankees. But for the thousands of valuable lives sacrificed, this war would prove of great advantage to us.

Several styles of hats and caps as well as saddle blankets were the main products manufactured in Marshall at a location that is now 201 W. Grand. Formerly Edmund Key family property, the site is now an office complex. At one time the factory employed more than 40 cutting, blocking and finishing men. The Marshall plant's raw materials were shipped from neighboring Hallsville, site of a high-grade fur-felt plant at Young's Mill Pond.

(Author's Note: Young's Mill Pond was one of the oldest swimming holes in the area. Owned by James K. Polk Young, it was a deep, cold-water lake located north of what is now the junction of Hickey and Noonday roads. The lake was used for swimming regularly into the 1950's.)

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A Confederate soldier was known as "Johnny Reb." "Reb" is simply short for Rebel. The name "Johnny" derives from a food staple known as Johnny Cake, a type of pan-fried cornbread that the soldiers carried with them. Just as popular was the derogatory term "Gray Back," usually associated with a soldier dressed in the official gray uniform. The term was Union slang borrowed from a common term for a certain insect: "Watch now, lest come a soldier from the South, having the same color and nuisance as the gray head louse."

Similarly, a uniformed Union soldier was referred to as a "Blue Belly," and more often as a "Yankee"—a slang name that was slurred in context to make it derogatory. In an old joke, a Southerner alleges, *"I was twenty-one years old before I learned that 'damn' and 'yankee' were separate words."* Some CSA soldiers believed that the word "Yankee" was used to describe a Northerner who wished to "yank" or "pull away" the right of Southerners to keep slaves, although it is known that the term was in use much earlier during the Revolutionary War. Many faulty etymologies have been devised for the word, including one by a British officer in 1789 who said it derived from the Cherokee word *eankke*, meaning "coward" -- but no such word exists in Cherokee.

The Well-Dressed Confederate Soldier



*“It was the custom for the soldier to attend himself to a merchant photographer to be pictured in his fine uniform and hat. It was less that the family wished a remembrance of him should he be lost than for the pride that the day inspired. He sat there, having to be especially rigid and still until the burst of camera powder had passed and the image captured. Only then could he relax and savor the remaining moments before the march. His family beamed at his crisp suit and whispered among themselves of his handsomely chiseled features. He was to represent what the others could not in this struggle. His father, save for a gimp requiring a sturdy stick, would be walking beside the boy this day.*

*It was said he did not yet require an everyday razor, so he packed his haversack with extra stores consisting of twelve straps of fine venison jerky and eight sheet irons, but without his father’s pleasing sorghum. The family shed tears as he ran down the dusty road to the waiting of ten of his school chums, now comrades of war. Yes, tears, but as much for joy as trepidation.” –Lords*

(Author’s Note: “Sheet Iron,” also called Hard Tack, was a Civil War slang term for a flat, unleavened, nearly tasteless biscuit made of flour, water and salt. It was commonly carried on long marches or sea voyages due to the fact that it could be eaten for years after it was baked. Soldiers would often soak the biscuits in their morning coffee in an attempt to soften it. Because of the extreme hardness of the biscuit, it gained many jokes and derogatory names, including: ‘dog biscuits’, ‘tooth dullers’ and ‘ships ballast.’)

Shown above in his “Official CSA Uniform” is Pvt. Edwin Francis Jemison, 2nd Louisiana Regiment, C.S.A. At age eighteen, he served in the Peninsula campaign under General J.B. Magruder and was killed in the battle of Malvern Hill, July 1862. Because of Louisiana’s proximity, this hapless young man may have well been wearing one of Marshall’s felt caps.

To the fallen on both sides: May you forever rest in peace.

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 “Lords” is a pseudonym of the author, Lad Moore

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