

"Hats OFF! To the Thirty-third!"

A Study of the Headgear Worn by the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment

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The issue hat of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteers was the Pattern of 1858 Dress Hat. Produced in about a half-dozen sizes, the hat was made of black fur-felt stiffened with shellac, with a double row of stitching around the brim. A black silk grosgrain ribbon and bow was sewn around the base of the hat. The hat featured a thin leather sweatband, but no liner. Manufacturers pasted their label inside the crown of the hat.

While at Camp Utley, Racine, Regimental Quartermaster John Nichols issued hats to the recruits of the Thirty-third Wisconsin. "One hat, with trimmings", " as in the case of Private Thomas G. Button, or "hat, complete" as in the case of Private William E. Roberts. The "trimmings" consisted of: a hat cord with tassels made of blue wool worsted, a brass infantry horn insignia, a brass eagle pin to turn up (or "loop up") the brim on one side of the hat, and a single black feather. Did the soldiers actually trim their hats with these items? If so, in what manner did the soldiers of the Thirty-third trim their hats? How does the use of hat trimmings in the Thirty-third affect our current impression that plain, unadorned hats were the popular head covering in the Western Theater?

One classic image guided our early understanding of the hats and hat trimmings of the Thirty-third Wisconsin. Arthur J. Robinson, formerly of "E" Company, published his own soldier image on the cover of his post-war pamphlet *Memorandum and Anecdotes of the Civil War*. Despite cropping, the image shows the dress hat trimmed with worsted cord, feather horn insignia, a non-regulation size brass "E" in the loop of the horn, and "3 3" in brass numerals above the horn. Beneath the horn, Robinson pinned a "WIS." Pin--- known in some collector's circles as a "veteran's pin." The location of the feather indicated that the hat was "looped up" on the right side, contrary to Paragraph No. 1517 of Revised U. S. Army Regulations. The reason for this departure from the regulations seems to be the change in army drill manuals. The Revised U. S. Army Regulations and attendant uniform regulations were designed to accompany the drill manual written by Gen. Winfield Scott. Scott's manual prescribed that the musket be carried in the left hand at the "Shoulder Arms" position. Thus, the left side of the hat was "looped up" to avoid obstructing the musket during the manual of arms. With the adoption of Silas Casey's manual, the rifle-musket was to be carried in the right hand at the "Shoulder Arms" position. Some regiments, like the Thirty-third Wisconsin, followed the intent of the regulations and changed the side of the hat that was looped up. (1)

Company "E" member Tollef Leversen wore the Pattern of 1858 Dress Hat with trimmings: brass infantry horn, brass numerals "33" above the horn, possibly a letter "E" in the loop of the horn. If he wore the issue hat cord of blue worsted, it is not visible, due to the fact Tollef pushed the hat back a bit on his head to show more of his face and forehead for the camera. Also indistinct was the black feather, which should be evident on the side of the hat not looped up. Tollef looped up his hat brim on the right side. (2)

James Turner, another private in Company "E," is pictured with a dress hat looped up on the right side. A black feather is seen at the wearer's left, at the "10 o'clock" position. Turner wore a blue worsted hat cord with longish tassels, and trimmed his hat with the numbers "3 3" centered in the front of the hat, a brass letter "E" below that, and a commercially available "WIS." pin below the company letter, in a fashion similar to Robinson. (3)

The use of brass numeral "3 3" and a company letter in brass for several "E" Company soldier images has made for an argument that quartermaster stores provided these numerals and letters to all companies of the Thirty-third Wisconsin. Continuing examination of soldier images of the regiment from the Camp Utley period indicates that this conclusion is not accurate. Analysis of items of uniforms and equipment issued to "K" Company indicated that brass letters and numerals were not included in the listings of hat trimmings. Images of several privates in Company "A" indicated that brass numerals and company letters are missing from the hats. In Company "H," four enlisted images are known; two of these show hats trimmed with only the worsted cord, feather, brass horn, and eagle side pin.

What were the sources of the numerals and letters seen in "E" Company? Or the trimmed hat seen in an image Corporal James H. Ellsworth of "H" Company? Racine had several vendors that supplied military goods and clothing. The most reasonable answer was that the members of "E" Company and other soldiers either individually or collectively purchased additional brass insignia, including the "WIS." pins with which to adorn their hats.

The army fatigue cap has become emblematic of the American Civil War. Clearly, soldiers in the Thirty-third Wisconsin wore the fatigue cap only to a very limited extent. Third Sergeant William Coburn of Company "H" (Union Avengers) from Kenosha County is pictured in two different images with a fatigue cap bearing a brass letter "H" on to top of the crown, quite near the front. In an ambrotype of three Company "H" soldiers taken at Camp Moore, outside Memphis, Tennessee between November 19 and 26, 1862, Coburn is pictured with two comrades from "H": Orderly Sergeant George Hale and Drummer Asa Harris. Both Hale and Harris wear the regulation hat, trimmed with worsted cord, black feather, and brass horn insignia. No brass numerals or company letter were attached to either hat. Both wearers looped up their hat brims on the right side, and affixed the black feather to the left side of the hat. (4)

The effects of Private Frederick B. Taylor of Co. "H," wounded and died during the siege of Vicksburg, June 30, 1863, included a fatigue cap. It should be pointed out that an

interpretation of "effects" indicated that Taylor's belongings thus inventoried after his death were not actually being worn on his person. (5)

The continued wear of the regulation hat gave way to utility and fashion after a year in the field. During such a period, the more perishable hat trimmings would have succumbed to the rigors of constant wear, starting with the feather and continuing with the hat brasses and their fragile solder points. Fashion in the Western Theatre strongly favored minimally trimmed or unadorned hats, primarily for the reason that trimmed hats generally marked a man as a "recruit."

Some Thirty-third men took their clothing ensemble into their own hands. In mid November while at Natchez, Mississippi, Private William Truman of Company "E" drew "a pr. of boots and a cavalry jacket" as new outfit. On November 20, he "bought a hat of[f] a sutler," which completed his ensemble. Truman may have been motivated to acquire a new uniform by the fact he was working to learn the fife and hoped to join the regimental band as a musician. Another reason for the appearance of non-regulation clothing and hats may have emanated from a general feeling among the ranks that their excellent performance during the siege of Vicksburg and Jackson had earned them a "veteran" status among their peers.

Photographic images of western soldiers indicate that this veteran status was often reflected in one's clothing and hat. Truman was not alone in the purchase or acquisition of non-regulation hats. With Colonel Moore's leave in November and Lieutenant Colonel Lovell's assignment as Provost Marshal at Natchez, command of the regiment devolved upon Major Horatio Virgin. It didn't take the men long to take advantage of Major Virgin's easy going nature, and many more non-regulation hats began to adorn the heads of Thirty-third Wisconsin men. In early December, the regiment transferred from Natchez to the XVII Corps camp at Hebron Plantation east of Vicksburg, and Lieut. Col. Lovell resumed command. (6)

Colonel Jonathan B. Moore returned to the regiment from furlough and was dismayed at the practice of wearing non-regulation hats in the ranks. This and other irregularities caused a falling out between himself and Lovell. This argument prompted Lovell to obtain an assignment as chief of the Thirty-thirds recruiting efforts in Wisconsin, thereby removing himself from the regiment and its irascible commander. Moore set about to correct what he perceived to be irregularities in the regiment. He published Special Orders No. 58 on December 15, 1863: "The Colonel commanding has observed that certain soldiers of his command are disposed to disregard orders regarding uniformity of clothing and particularly hats. White or light colored hats are out of place in the line. A single white hat upon 'Dress Parade' destroys in a measure the beauty and uniformity of the whole line. It is therefore ordered that Non-Commissioned Officers or soldiers shall not be permitted to wear upon 'Dress Parade' or upon other occasions of duty any other but the regulation hat. No light colored hats of recent purchase will be permitted to be brought into camp and if brought in will be excluded from it. Company commanders will be held responsible for the enforcement of this order." (7)

Special Orders No. 58 appears to presumptively solve for modern reenactors the wearing of non-regulation hats in the ranks of the Thirty-third. On one hand, there are no further orders in the books thus far consulted that indicated a reminder to the regiment to wear the regulation hat. Col. Moore retained personal command of the regiment throughout the Meridian Campaign, so it would be reasonable to conclude that Special Orders No. 58 was enforced from early February through early March, 1864.

However, Colonel Moore was never satisfied with command of a single regiment. His continued aspirations for a Brigadier's star landed him a brigade command during the Red River Campaign. The Thirty-third Wisconsin was assigned to Moore's First Brigade. Commanding the regiment for the absent Lieut. Col. Lovell was Major Horatio Virgin.

Virgin, like Lovell, treated the men with dignity, and allowed the latitude and flexibility generally afforded to soldiers on active campaign. On the march and particularly in battle, Major Virgin conducted himself well during the Red River Campaign, and received the accolades of his soldiers and superiors alike. While the order books continued to preserve directives that reminded company commanders about cleanliness in camp, reminded them to correct irregularities on guard duty, and to account for ordnance stores, the order concerning "uniformity of clothing and particularly hats" seemed to have been forgotten. Further, there was the opportunity for the soldiers of the Thirty-third to purchase replacement hats or caps in Alexandria, Louisiana, or from other regiments or from each other. The uniforms of the men, already worn from the Meridian campaign, were subjected to additional stress from the forced marches that comprised the second half of the Red River Campaign. It is most reasonable to conclude that uniform shortages prompted the men to refit themselves where and when they could, or go without. Given the large amount of foraging and looting allegedly committed by "Smith's Guerrillas" as they covered the withdrawal of Bank's army from Red River, it is doubtful that the soldiers opted to "go without."

Upon return of the regiment to Memphis, Colonel Moore remained behind while Maj. Gen. A. J. Smith assembled his troops in the vicinities of Moscow and La Grange for a July, 1864 campaign against Nathan Bedford Forrest. Free from the watchful eye of Col. Moore and again subjected to an active campaign in the summer heat of Mississippi, it is reasonable to assume that non-regulation hats again began to appear in the ranks. These hats were worn side-by-side with battered regulation felt hats, creased or formed to suit the wearer and inevitably dust covered and sweat-stained. Confirming evidence of this theory awaits discovery. Unfortunately, images of Thirty-third Wisconsin soldiers from the 1864 period, notably Color Corporal Charles Wheeler, E, and Private Commodore Perry Flora, A, are hatless. We do know that a forage cap was among the effects of Sergeant John P. Deubner, Company "K" when he was accidentally killed on December 4, 1864 at Nashville, Tennessee. Further, a recently discovered image taken in November, 1864, showed Corporal Nels Holton, "B" Company, in uniform taken in St. Louis at W Vogel Photographer, No. 13 South Fourth St. Holton holds a forage cap in his hand. (8)

CONCLUSION: The initial government issue of the Thirty-third Wisconsin Volunteers at Camp Utley, Racine consisted of the Pattern of 1858 Dress Hat, with "trimmings:" hat cord and tassels of blue wool worsted, black feather, brass infantry horn insignia, and brass eagle hat pin. The hat pin was used to turn up the brim on the wearer's right side; the black feather was placed on the left side of the hat, near the front at between the "10 and 11 o'clock" positions, at the discretion of the wearer. The brass infantry horn was commonly worn. Soldiers in Company "E" wore the "3 3" above horn and the company letter within the loop of the horn. Other soldiers within the regiment wore just the horn. Sergeants like William Coburn were known to wear a private purchase cap.

While it is reasonable to conclude that trimmed regulation hats were generally worn by the regiment through the Vicksburg Campaign, it is important to underscore the perishability of hat trimmings while in the field, particularly the feather. After that campaign, there was a trend in the regiment towards private purchase non-regulation hats, which peaked at about the time of the regiment's garrison service at Natchez, Mississippi during the Fall of 1863. At this time, the regiment was commanded by Major Virgin. This service coincided with the absence of Col. Moore from the regiment on furlough for at least several weeks in November, and the detached service of Lieut. Col. Lovell as Provost Marshal at Natchez. This trend is thought to coincide with a general feeling within the regiment that the unit had attained a "veteran" status among its peers, and this feeling was demonstrated in their clothing and hats. Photographic evidence of other western Federal troops showed a preference for plain, minimally adorned hats.

The regiment was transferred to Hebron Plantation in early December, after which time Col. Moore issued Special Orders No. 58, which stated that: "Non-Commissioned Officers or soldiers shall not be permitted to wear upon 'Dress Parade' or upon other occasions of duty any other but the regulation hat." This order very likely endured through the Meridian Campaign, or the first week in March, 1864.

However, with the opening of the Red River Campaign, Col. Moore was assigned to brigade command, and the assumption of regimental command fell to Major Virgin, for the absent Lieut. Col. Lovell. I have speculated that the rigors of active campaign returned some of the men to the practice of wearing non-regulation hats---a fashion well established in the Western Theatre. The regulation hat presumably predominated, along with an occasional forage cap. This practice may well have continued for the remainder of the Thirty-third Wisconsin's term of service.

Notes:

(1) Records of Issue, Thirty-third Regiment, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, courtesy of Mark Reitz; Arthur J. Robinson, Memoranda and Anecdotes of the Civil War, 1861-1865, cover illustration. Author's collection. Mark Reitz found the initial issues of Company "I" members Button and Roberts as a result of original research done in February 1985.

(2) Howard V. Garrison collection. Used with permission.

(3) Mark Dexter collection. Used with permission.

(4) William Benson collection. Used with permission.

(5) Records of Effects of Deceased Soldiers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, courtesy of Michael Thorson.

(6) William Truman, diary, p. 25, U.S. Army Military History Institute, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. In the Nineteenth Century, hats were a symbol of status and manliness. Men took great care in the selection and purchase of their hats in civilian life. This fashion translated itself into the army, where veterans, having earned that status through successful combat with the enemy, tended to reflect their "devil-may-care" attitudes in their clothing --modified to suit their taste or purchased to reflect their new status [e.g. uniform shell jackets, cavalry shell jackets, non-regulation sack coats, etc.] and their hats. The hats of veterans frequently were re-shaped regulation hats, non-regulation private-purchase hats, or plain forage caps. Minimal trimmings, like officer-quality hat cords, are also seen.

(7) Thirty-third Regiment, regimental order and courts-martial books, Record Group 95, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

(8) Robert Pagel Collection; Gerald Larson Collection; Records of Effects of Deceased Soldiers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, courtesy of Michael Thorson; John D. Bohlig collection.

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