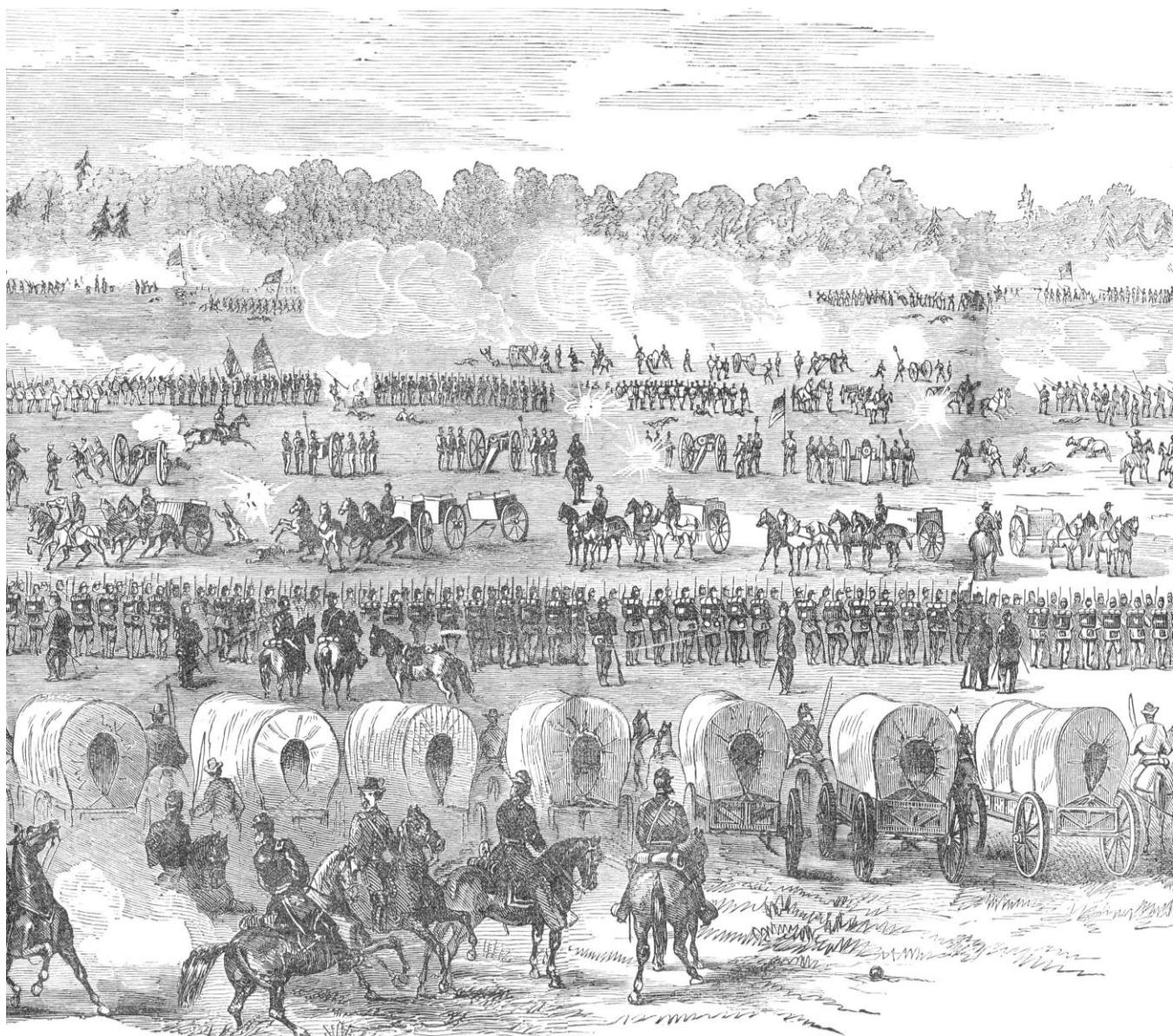


# The Bugle



Quarterly Journal of the  
Camp Curtin Historical Society  
and Civil War Round Table, Inc.

Winter 2008  
Volume 18, Number 4



*The Organization and Operation  
of the Union Army*

*"The field upon which we now stand will be known as classic ground, for here has been the great central point of the organization of our military forces. When my administration of public affairs will have been forgotten and the good and evil will be only known to the investigation of the antiquarian, Camp Curtin, with its memories and associations, will be immortal."*

- Governor Andrew Curtin, 1865

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### Upcoming Society Events

*Mark your calendar now!*

#### **April 19 - Wert on Stuart**

Civil War Author Jeffry Wert will present a program on his new book, *Cavalryman of the Lost Cause: A Biography of J.E.B. Stuart*, at the spring meeting of the Society at the Civil War Museum in Harrisburg at 2:00PM, Sunday April 19.

#### **June 20-21 - Civil War Days**

Our annual commemoration of the Confederate invasion of Cumberland County and the Union defense of the Harrisburg area will be marked by a Union encampment, Civil War artifact displays at Negley Park in Lemoyne on Saturday and Sunday, June 20 and 21.

#### **September 13 - Harrisburg Cemetery Tours**

Join us on a walk through history and meet the "residents" of the Harrisburg Cemetery on Sunday, September 13.

### Book Discounts for Members

The Civil War and More Book Store offers Camp Curtin Historical Society members a 10% discount on their entire purchase and make a 5% donation of the pre-tax sales total to the Society's historic preservation fund. Located at 10 South Main Street in Mechanicsburg, the store offers thousands of items on the Civil War, WWI and WWII. For more information, store hours and directions, call 717-766-1899 or visit [www.civilwarandmore.com](http://www.civilwarandmore.com).

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**Cover:** *The Union Army at the Battle of Glendale, June 30, 1862*, as drawn by Alfred Waud, an artist for Frank Leslie's Illustrated News. The depiction, somewhat compressed, shows front line infantry and artillery engaging the enemy, while reserve infantry awaits orders to move, all backed-up by supply wagons. This issue's feature article tells how the Union Army was organized for such large scale operations.

### **Camp Curtin Historical Society and Civil War Round Table**

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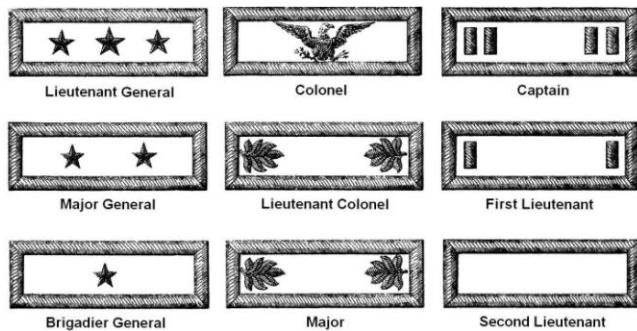
# The Organization and Operation of the Union Army

*This article is one of a continuing series designed to explain some of the basics of the Civil War. In order to understand descriptions of battles, it is necessary to know a little about the organization of the armies and military terms.*

## OFFICER RANK

In the United States Army, personnel are classified by a hierarchy of rank, during the Civil War, the following commissioned officer ranks were in use and the insignia worn in shoulder straps:

Lieutenant General	Three Silver Stars
Major General	Two Silver Stars
Brigadier General	One Silver Star
Colonel	Silver Eagle
Lieutenant Colonel	Silver Oak Leaf
Major	Gold Oak Leaf
Captain	Two Gold Bars
1st Lieutenant	One Gold Bar
2nd Lieutenant	No Insignia



During the war, only two men held the rank of Lieutenant General – Winfield Scott, awarded the rank by brevet for his service in the Mexican War, and Ulysses S. Grant, promoted to the rank by regular commission in March 1864.

Officers could hold their rank by either regular commission or brevet commission. A regular (sometimes called ordinary) commission could not be revoked nor could its holder be assigned to a position lower than normally commensurate with that rank. The only way an officer could lose

the rights of a regular commission was by death, resignation, retirement, or order of a court martial. A brevet commission was an honorary promotion. Since the U.S. Army did not have medals (the Medal of Honor was introduced during the Civil War), the only way to honor an officer for bravery or distinguished service was to give him an honorary rank. The brevet rank conferred no higher pay or level of command. It was simply an honorary title that could be added to the officer's signature (Captain John Smith, Brevet Major) and, on certain occasions, he could wear the uniform and insignia of the brevet rank.

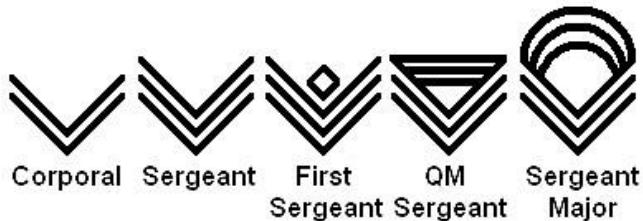
Brevet officers could be "put on duty" at their brevet rank and given the pay and level of command that equaled the brevet rank. Such officers wore the same insignia as a regular commission. A brevet position, however, was completely temporary. An officer could be returned to his prior rank, command and pay by order of a superior officer. Most general officers during the Civil War held their commissions by brevet.

During the Civil War, an officer could hold rank in the United States Army (USA) or in the United States Volunteers (USV). The USA was the permanent army; it existed before the war and would remain after the war. The USV was the temporary army, raised to put down the rebellion and it would be disbanded after the war. It was thus possible for officers to hold four different ranks at any given time during the war. For example, a West Point graduate might be a Captain in the USA (his permanent rank at the beginning of the war). When the war progresses he might be brevetted a Colonel in the USA, hold a regular commission as a Brigadier General in the USV and be a Major General by brevet in the USV.

In the United States Army, officers were appointed by the President, with the consent of the Senate. In state regiments, officers were appointed by the governor.

## NONCOMMISSIONED RANK

As any officer will tell you, it is the noncommissioned officers - Sergeants and Corporals - who run the day-to-day operations of any army. They wore chevrons that indicated their rank and branch: sky blue for infantry, scarlet for artillery, and yellow for cavalry and engineers, and crimson (maroon) for ordnance. Chevrons were worn on both sleeves of the coat, with points down. Privates wore no chevrons.



Noncommissioned officers (NCOs) were selected by the colonel of the regiment, although early in the war, the men in the volunteers elected their NCOs and sometimes the officers.

## THE REGIMENT

The Regiment was the basic unit of recruitment, administration and maneuver in the Union Army. Pursuant to regulations adopted July 22, 1861, federal infantry regiments were to consist of approximately 1,000 men.

The regimental staff included one each of the following: colonel, lieutenant colonel, major, adjutant (lieutenant in charge of record keeping), quartermaster (lieutenant in charge of supplies), surgeon, assistant surgeon, chaplain, sergeant major, quartermaster sergeant, commissary sergeant (in charge of provisions), and hospital steward. The regimental band had two principal musicians and twenty-four musicians. In the fall of 1862 bands were eliminated from the regimental organization and musicians then in service were discharged, reducing the total by up to twenty-six. Some were retained at the brigade level.

There were ten companies, lettered A through K but no J company. (When written in script, the J looked like an I so the J was eliminated to avoid

confusion.) Companies consisted of one captain, one first lieutenant, one second lieutenant, one first sergeant, four sergeants, eight corporals, two musicians (drummers), one wagoner (to drive the company supply wagon), and between sixty-four and eighty-two privates. Thus, depending on the number of privates, a company ranged from 82 to 100 and the regiment from 858 to 1,036.

The organization on paper, however, was rarely reflected in actuality. Almost from the first day a regiment was accepted into federal service, it began to shrink. Numbers were reduced in camp by medical discharge and death by disease; once in battle, additional losses came from wounds, death, capture, and missing in action; some men were transferred and others deserted; a few were discharged, imprisoned, or executed by court martial. No regular system of replacing men existed to fill vacant ranks. Thus, a regiment was rarely at its authorized strength. At the time of the Battle of Gettysburg in July, 1863, Pennsylvania infantry regiments in the Army of the Potomac ranged from 66 to 590, with the average of the sixty-eight regiments being 332 men. As units got smaller, the number of officers and NCOs was reduced.

A good estimate of how much space a regiment took up on the battle field is to divide the strength in half since the standard battle formation had two lines and multiply by two feet per man. Thus, a 300-man regiment in two lines means 150 men in each line or 300 feet. Imagine two lines of men, standing shoulder-to-shoulder across the length of a football field and you have a good idea of what a regiment looked like in line of battle.

Cavalry regiments were organized along similar lines as the infantry but in 1862 were authorized two additional companies (also called troops). Field artillery regiments rarely operated as a unit. Instead, independent company-sized units called batteries, normally equipped with six cannons, were the usual operational contingent for the field artillery. Heavy artillery regiments did tend to stay together and manned the big guns at fixed fortifications. Later in the war, some of these units were withdrawn from the forts and used as infantry in the assaults on Petersburg and Richmond.

## LARGER UNITS

The exact make up of larger units varied considerably by year and specific army. A group of two or more regiments formed a **Brigade**, usually commanded by a colonel or brigadier general. At Gettysburg, about half of the brigades were commanded by colonels.

A group of two or more brigades formed a **Division**, usually commanded by a brigadier general.

A group of two or more divisions formed an **Army Corps**, usually commanded by a major general. In modern nomenclature, corps are indicated by Roman numerals (V Corps) but during the Civil War, they used Arabic numerals (5th Corps).

A group of two or more army corps formed an **Army**, usually commanded by a major general. Sometimes, however, an army could be any large independent command, often little more than a division or corps. In the Union Army, most field armies were named after rivers in the area of their operation (Army of the Potomac) although a few were named after geographical area (Army of Virginia).

## THE STAFF CORPS

The men in the infantry, artillery and cavalry fought the Civil War in the field but without the behind the scenes work of the staff corps, the fighting men could not have done their jobs.

Although often derided by line troops and neglected by historians, the staff performed numerous necessary functions that can make or break an army.



In the Union Army, a hat insignia for most of the staff corps was a "U.S." inside a wreath, while the background for the shoulder boards was

described as dark blue but actually appeared black. The Corps of Engineers and Ordnance Department had their own special insignia, noted

below. The organizations were variously called corps, departments and offices.

**Adjutant General's Department** - responsible for the transmission and receipt of all orders and correspondence of the army and for maintaining "personnel records" on all soldiers. Almost all reports had to be hand written in triplicate so adjutants were assigned at all organizational levels (brigade, division, corps and army) to handle this mountain of paperwork. Each regiment had a Lieutenant assigned to perform these duties; he was assisted by the Sergeant Major and the First Sergeants.

**Corps of Engineers** - responsible for building roads, bridges, pontoons, docks, fortifications and for making maps. (Early in the war, there was a separate Corps of Topographical Engineers but the two corps were merged in 1863.) The Corps of Engineers insignia was a turreted castle.

**Inspector General's Department** - responsible for insuring that all of the army's regulations and procedures were followed to the letter. Everything from paperwork to drilling fell under the inspectors' probing eyes.

**Judge Advocate's Department** - responsible for conducting courts martial and providing legal advice.

**Medical Department** - responsible for medical services under the direction of the Army's Surgeon General. The department operated hospitals, ambulance services and a nursing corps. Regiments were authorized a Surgeon, Assistant Surgeon and Hospital Steward but many regiments were short staffed.

**Ordnance Department** - responsible for developing, procuring, inspecting and distributing arms and ammunition. The U.S. Ordnance Department insignia was an artillery shell with flame.

**Pay Department** - responsible for paying the troops and keeping the accounts of the army.

**Provost Marshal's Department** - responsible for policing the army, especially rounding-up stragglers. Later in the war, a special provost

marshal was assigned to each congressional district to enforce the draft laws.

**Quartermaster Department** - responsible for providing equipment to the troops, including uniforms, tents, tools, firewood, and transportation services. Each regiment had a Lieutenant and Sergeant assigned to quartermaster duties.

**Signal Corps** - responsible for battlefield communications by signal flags, torches and telegraph.

**Subsistence Department** - responsible for providing food and related items. Its head was the Commissary General of Subsistence.

## ARMY PAY

Soldiers were supposed to be paid every three months but a shortage of paymasters, the geographical dispersal of armies and the large number of troops made this schedule almost impossible. Before a man was paid, a paymaster audited the soldier's account and deducted amounts for excess draws or loss of clothing or equipment, and debts to the regimental laundress and sutler. Both the laundress and sutler were official positions sanctioned by the army. Unlike modern sutlers who sell military equipment, Civil War sutlers supplied goods the army did not supply.

PAY RATES IN 1861		
Rank	Per Month	Per Year
Lieutenant General	\$270.00	\$3,240.00
Major General	\$220.00	\$2,640.00
Brigadier General	\$124.00	\$1,488.00
Colonel	\$95.00	\$1,140.00
Lieutenant Colonel	\$80.00	\$960.00
Major	\$70.00	\$840.00
Captain	\$60.00	\$720.00
1st Lieutenant	\$50.00	\$600.00
2nd Lieutenant	\$45.00	\$540.00
Sergeant Major	\$21.00	\$252.00
Quartermaster Sergeant	\$17.00	\$204.00
First Sergeant	\$20.00	\$240.00
Sergeant Major	\$17.00	\$204.00
Corporal	\$13.00	\$156.00
Private	\$13.00	\$156.00
Principal Musician	\$21.00	\$252.00
Musician	\$12.00	\$144.00

Note: The rates for Colonel and below are for men in the infantry; other branches received a few dollars more.

## RATIONS

In the convoluted language of the Army Regulations, a soldier's daily ration was:

*...three-fourths of a pound of pork or bacon, or one and a fourth pound of fresh or salt beef; eighteen ounces of bread or flour, or twelve ounces of hard bread, or one and a fourth pound cornmeal; and at the rate, to one hundred rations, of eight quarts of bean, or, in lieu thereof, ten pounds of rice, or, in lieu thereof, twice per week, one hundred and fifty ounces of desiccated potatoes, and one hundred ounces of mixed vegetables; ten pounds of coffee, or, in lieu thereof, one and one-half pound of tea; fifteen pounds of sugar; four quarts of vinegar; one pound of sperm candles, or one and one-fourth pound of adamantine candles, or one and one-half pound of tallow candles; four pounds of soap, and two quarts of salt. On a campaign, or on marches, or on board of transports, the ration of hard bread is one pound.*

Privates received one ration per day and higher ranks received additional rations. Needless to say, the regulations were not always followed and the distribution of food, its quantity and its quality varied considerably depending on the distribution system, location of troops, and time of year. Each regiment had a Commissary Sergeant whose main duty was to requisition and distribute food. Cooking was the responsibility of the individual soldier although in fixed camps kitchens were often established and men assigned as cooks.

## EQUIPMENT

Through the Ordnance and Quartermaster Departments, the army supplied the soldier with everything he needed to fight. Like food, however, the quantity and quality was quite variable, although it generally improved as the war went on. The word "shoddy" to describe poor quality came into popular use in the first year of the war. Ultimately, an army inspection system improved over all quality. One of the Union's great strengths was its manufacturing base and transportation system that allowed mass production and distribution of equipment.

The typical weapon of the Union soldier was a single-shot, muzzle loaded rifle-musket, made at the U.S. Armory in Springfield, Massachusetts or a similar model made by one of more than twenty private manufacturers. About 1.5 million of the various U.S. rifle-musket series were made from 1855 to 1865. Additionally, the North imported about 400,000 British made Enfield rifle-muskets. Thus, by the end of the war, the average Union infantryman was armed with a rifle-musket.

Along with his weapon, the soldier was also issued a bayonet and scabbard, a cartridge box for carrying ammunition, a cap pouch for carrying percussion caps, and a waist belt. His metal canteen and painted cloth haversack for carrying his rations were his two other most important pieces of equipment.

The basic uniform was a frock or sack coat in dark blue and trousers in light blue. Hats, caps, overcoats, rubberized ponchos, shoes (in lefts and rights), shirts, stockings, drawers (underwear), blankets and half of a "dog tent" (today known as a pup tent). The Army Regulations specified the schedule of distribution for each item; for example, a soldier was to receive four pair of stockings and three shirts per year. Often,



soldiers relied on shipments from home to supply their needs for shirts and socks.

Despite the legend that many soldiers threw away their cumbersome knapsacks, most Union soldiers had a backpack. Modern research confirmed that quartermaster reports show the widespread use of knapsacks. It should also be remembered that soldiers would have their pay docked if they did not have a piece of issued equipment at periodic inspections.

## PAPERWORK

It is often said that an army moves on its stomach but in reality it moves on its paperwork. Nothing got done in a Civil War army without a written order, report, or receipt, in triplicate. Much of the time of officers and sergeants was spent preparing reports.

Company reports were submitted to the regimental headquarters, where they were consolidated and submitted to brigade, to division, to corps, to army and finally to the War Department. There was a specific schedule of daily, bi-monthly, quarterly, quarto-monthly, and annual reports. The quarterly reports included Returns (Inventories) of Clothing, Camp & Garrison Equipage, Ordnance & Ordnance Stores, Quartermaster's Property, and Deceased, Discharged & Joined Men. Many of these reports survive in the National Archives and provide a wealth of details for historians on the day-to-day operation of the army.

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## Dues Due

Please check the mailing label on your envelope. If it does not have the year 2009 above your name, your membership is about to expire. We hope that you will reenlist and help us continue our work of preservation, education and commemoration. If you paid your dues recently, your check and this mailing may have crossed in the mail. To confirm your dues status, please email campcurtin1861@aol.com.

## Local History

*Civil War Harrisburg, a Guide to Capital Area Sites, Incidents and Personalities*, the 60-page illustrated booklet edited by Lawrence Keener-Farley and James Schmick, and published by the Camp Curtin Historical Society, is available for \$10.00. Send your check made payable to Camp Curtin Historical Society to: CCHS, P.O. Box 5601, Harrisburg, PA 17011.



**The Camp Curtin Historical Society**  
*proudly presents*  
**Art Straub**  
*speaking on the*  
**“The Dred Scott Decision”**

Art Straub is a Camp Curtin Historical Society member. Shortly after moving to Harrisburg 28 years ago, Art discovered Gettysburg and developed a passionate interest in the Civil War.

Like most people with an interest in the Civil War, he knew a little about Dred Scott and recently decided to delve deeper into this legal case. What began as a relatively simple case of a slave petitioning a local court for his freedom because he had lived in free states for several years turned into one of the most important U.S. Supreme Court cases in the nation's history.

The Dred Scott decision, written by Chief Justice Roger Taney, held that African-Americans were not and could not be citizens of the United States and that the Missouri Compromise of 1820, limiting slavery in some states, was unconstitutional. This decision changed the landscape of American politics and helped to set the stage for the Civil War.

**Join us for this fascinating slide-illustrated talk at  
2:00PM, Sunday, February 15, 2009  
at the Camp Curtin Memorial-Mitchell United Methodist Church  
2221 North Sixth Street, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania**

*This program is free and open to the public so bring a friend.  
Refreshments and social hour will follow the presentation.*

*The program will be preceded by the Camp Curtin Historical Society's annual meeting, including presentation of reports and elections.*

**For directions or information, telephone 717-732-5330  
(Email [campcurtin1861@aol.com](mailto:campcurtin1861@aol.com))**