

# THE Company Wag

January 1990

The Journal of The Mudsills, Inc.

Volume 3, Number 1

## "The Colonel Commanding the Brigade Directs..."

The 5th Kentucky served from Chattanooga to Atlanta in the brigade of General William B. Hazen, a regular army officer as well known for his fiery temper and strict adherence to regulations as for his steely determination under fire. (See The Captain's Dancing Master in Vol 1, No.1.) Recently, Nicky Hughs of the Kentucky Historical Society had turned up an order book from the 6th Kentucky Infantry. Its pages are filled with orders from then-Colonel Hazen, their brigade commander. Although they date from before the 5th had joined Hazen's Brigade, they do lend some insight into the frustrations of a career officer in command of free-willed volunteers.

Murfreesboro, TN, Aug. 12, 1862  
Cols. of Regts are reminded that the advantage for uniforming their officers was probably never so good as now... They are directed to remind the officers of their Regts that a part of the condition of their appointments was that, they uniform themselves within a certain time. At the muster ordered on the 18th of this month a special report will be made of all officers who shall not at that time appear uniformed as required by law. The special attention of the Col. Comdg. this Brigade has been called to this subject by noticing Lt. Fullier of the 27th KY passing his HdQtrs in a garb discreditable to a private soldier...

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**W**hat is the main difference in appearance of the Western soldier from his Eastern counterpart?

Ask any moderately versed student of the Great Rebellion and he will tell you "It's his black hat!" Without question, the differences are more profound than just a cosmetic choice of headgear. But in regards to appearances, the Westerner is known first by his widespread preference for brimmed hats instead of issued forage ("Bummer") caps. Although civilian hats were extremely popular in the Western armies (see page 6), photographic evidence would indicate that the issue "Hardee" hat, devoid of insignia and reshaped into countless forms, was the most common. In this article, we will compare several original specimens with reproductions currently on the market and explore ways to easily improve our hats with little effort.

### Background

Hats have vied with caps in the American military ever since the beginning of our national existence. The cocked hats of the 18th Century were merely wide-brimmed hats that could allow the wearer to let down one or all the sides of the brim at his pleasure. During the Mexican War, many officers and men purchased brimmed hats for use in the hot climate instead of the

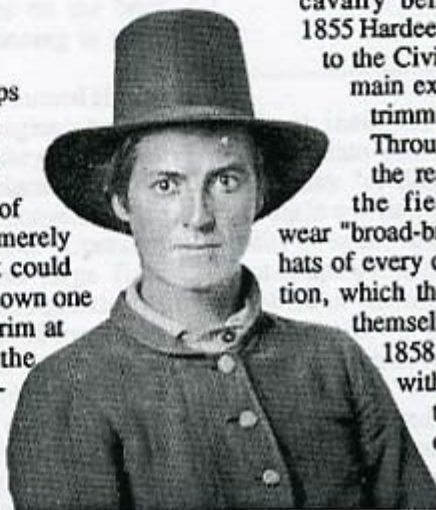
1839 forage cap. Thus at the end of the Mexican War when Colonel T.P. Andrews of the Regiment of Voltigeurs convinced the army to produce a grey felt hat whose brim could be looped up on both sides, he was not proposing anything radical. Unfortunately, the Voltigeurs never received their hats. In 1851 the army began issue of the "Albert Cap;" a shako-like forerunner of the Civil War forage cap wholly unsuited for the rigors of hard campaigning. That same year, Colonel Harney of the Second Dragoons convinced the War Department to issue the surplus Voltigeur hats to several companies of the Second Dragoons then stationed in Texas while the rest of the frontier army cursed under their 1851 caps.<sup>1</sup>

It was not until 1855 that the "Hardee" hat (or "Jeff Davis" or "Kossuth" hat) was introduced for issue and only then to the two new regiments of cavalry being formed. The 1855 Hardee hat is very similar to the Civil War model, the main exceptions being in trimmings.<sup>2</sup>

Throughout the 1850's the rest of the army in the field continued to wear "broad-brimmed, slouched hats of every color and description, which they had purchased themselves."<sup>3</sup> Finally in 1858, due to agitation within the service and the widespread use of non-regulation felt hats, the Hardee hat be-

## MORE THAN JUST MAKING THE HAT FIT

by Paul McKee



(From Green Collection)



(Above) An original Model 1858 Felt Hat showing much of the insignia specified in the Regulations for dress wear, but rarely worn in the field especially by the western armies. (John Wedeward collection.)

came an issue item for all branches of the army.<sup>4</sup> General Orders No. 3, dated 24 March 1858, stated:

For Officers: Of best black felt. The dimensions of medium size to be as follows:  
Width of brim, 3 1/4 inches,  
Height of crown, 6 1/4 inches,  
Oval of tip, 1/2 inch,  
Taper of crown, 3/4 inch,  
Curve of head, 3/8 inch,  
The binding to be 1/2 inch deep, of best black ribbed silk.

For Enlisted Men: Of black felt, same shape and size as for officers, with double row of stitching instead of binding, around the edge. To agree in quality with the pattern deposited in the clothing arsenal.<sup>5</sup>

A contract let on July 30, 1858 to John G. Snyder of Philadelphia for 16,500 hats states:

The material to be composed of four ounces of best Russia Hare, carrated, and one and a half ounces of best Scotch Coney, the stiffening of the best Campbell Shellac in solution of alcohol. Inside trimming to be of the best quality black japanned leather, three inches deep, sewed to, but not through the Hat, a double row of stitching of the best black silk instead of binding around the edge of the brim...<sup>6</sup>

This 1858 model eliminated the chin strap (despite objections from officers of the cavalry), and replaced the braid

and old style hat cord on enlisted models with a hat cord of worsted wool with tasseled ends. Although hat cords in the color of the branch of service were not specified until 1861, it is presumed that this practice began in 1858. New too, was the now familiar system of branch insignia of the Civil War years: hunting horn for infantry, crossed sabers for cavalry, crossed cannons for artillery, etc. The hats were issued untrimmed with the only decoration being a narrow black silk ribbon around the base of the crown. The insignia was attached by inserting the brass loops on the back through the felt and pinning in place with leather thongs.

Although many fully trimmed Hardee hats were worn at the beginning of the Civil War as dress hats, they quickly fell from favor with the volunteers. Many felt the hat unsightly, inconvenient and unmilitary in appearance. Operating from fortifications and large fixed camps, the eastern soldiers quickly took to the French inspired 1858 forage cap. The western armies however, maneuvering over a wider theatre of operations in warmer climates, found the same value in wide brimmed hats as the pre-war veterans of southwestern campaigns. Worn right off the shelf

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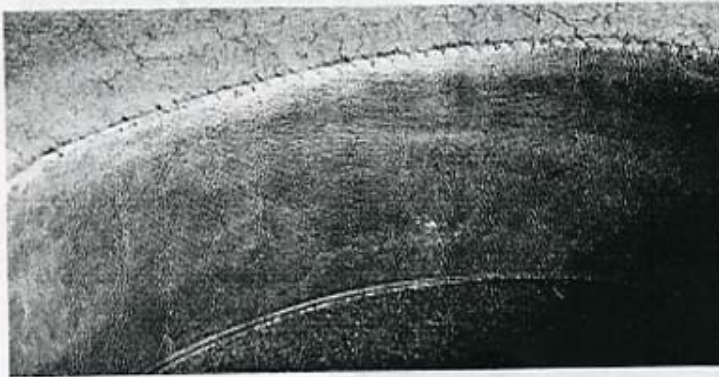
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without insignia, they were often reshaped into countless variations. In fact, many "civilian" slouch hats appearing in war time photography may in reality be issued hats. By the war's end, photographic evidence shows that large numbers of eastern troops in the field had also adopted the hat. Despite the general condemnation of the Hardee hat in the 1868 "Woodhull Report", brimmed hats lived on in various forms as a regular item of issue in the United States Army for the next 60 years.

(Below) Sweat band detail on original Hardee hat. Note the whip stitching at seven stitches per inch and the embossed line along the opposite edge. (Right) Label detail on original Hardee. The pasted label covers the entire crown and curls up the sides of the crown about 1/8". The label appears to be made of paper with a shiny black coating and gold imprint. Aside from the size markings, the labels in all hats surveyed were nearly identical.



### Comparison of Originals to Reproductions

Edgar M. Howell states in his landmark book, *United States Army Headgear 1855-1902*, that of over 20 enlisted hats that he surveyed there was remarkably little variance with the 1858 specifications.<sup>7</sup> Although our resources for this short study are infinitely more limited than the Smithsonian Institution's, we feel that a closer look from our small sampling will help in assessing the quality of reproduction headgear.

In our sampling, most brims measured a uniform 3 inches, and no hat exceeded 5 7/8 inches in height. The black felt, now turned brownish black in most cases, was extremely thin measuring on the average of .082 inch. Black silk ribbon around the base of the crown was present on all hats, measuring an average of 5/16 inch in width. (An original hat belonging to Don Rademacher has a ribbon measuring 1/2".) It is interesting to note that the majority of these ribbons were not merely knotted as previously thought but were applied as would much wider ribbons on civilian hats. That is, the ribbon is stitched to the hat and then a false

knot is constructed of ribbon and is then sewn in place on the left side of the hat. The brim stitching is reasonably uniform from the edge, both rows are evenly distanced apart and are consistently 4 stitches per inch. The stitching appears to be made with a single needle sewing machine as there is evidence of sewn crossovers between the rows. Sweat bands when present, are uniformly 2 1/2 inches wide of extremely thin leather (average .012 inch), and nearly maroon in color.<sup>8</sup> The sweat bands showed an embossed line along the entire length, 1/16 inch wide and between 1/16 and 1/4 inch in from the top edge of the leather. The sweat band on the hat in John Wedeward's collection appears to possibly have a series of tiny embossed lines 1/32 inch apart running the length of the leather. All hats had labels pasted into the entire crown. Although Howell states in his sampling that all hats had black "oil cloth" labels in the crowns, none of the labels in our sampling appeared to be made of that material. Instead, we believe that the black labels are made of a paper product. One hat in the author's collection has damage on the crown; the reverse side of the label in this hat can be seen and it shows no woven surface as would be evident on oil cloth. The



(Left) Original Hardee hat as it would appear when issued. Note the 5/16 inch black ribbed silk hat ribbon around the base of the crown. (Author's Collection)

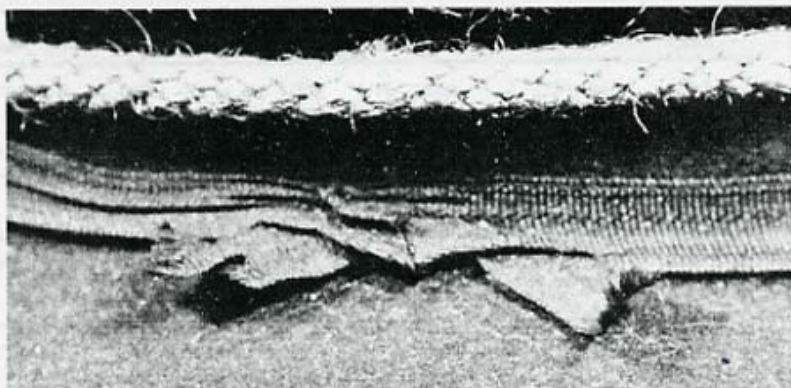
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face of the labels are black with a slight sheen and a gold imprint in the center. (See illustration on page 3)

So how do the repro stacks up against the originals? One observation is that there is far more variation from manufacturer to manufacturer in repro than in originals. The thickness of the felt varies from acceptably thin to grossly swollen. With the exception of Don Rademacher (who converts hats from other manufacturers), none have hat ribbons, none have labels in the crown, and none have correct sweat bands. In fact, the majority of the sweat bands are the wrong color and are not even made of leather! The hat offered by S. & S. Firearms is inexpensive and has a nice correct thin weight of felt, but lacks the double row of stitching on the brim besides the label/ribbon/sweatband defects. The hat offered by the successors of Frank Burgess is a durable model, but the felt is far too thick (and swells even thicker with dampness), the brim too wide and also lacks correct detail-

ing. Perhaps the best Hardee hat right out of the box is that offered by Haentze Hatcrafters. The weight of the felt is correct and the brim width is right on at 3 inches, though the overall height of 5 3/8 inches may be a little low. It, too, is naked without the ribbon, correct sweatband and label. Don Rademacher offers a Hardee hat already fitted with correct sweatband, label and ribbon (albeit synthetic), and stiffened with shellac as per regulations. Don's product is the recommended choice for those who want a reasonably correct hat but don't want to do the conversion work themselves. There have been rumors of other repro Hardee hats circulating on the open market: a hat offered by Militaria, Inc. of Kearny, New Jersey, and remaining stock of W. Stokes Kirk possibly available from the successors of that business. No examples of either hat have been



(Above) Sewn-on false knot on the silk ribbon on an original Hardee hat. In this example, the ribbon is tacked in place; the knot is then constructed separately and sewn into place.



(Left) Stitching on the brim of an original Hardee hat. On this example, the first row of stitching is 1/4 inch from the edge with the second row 1/8 inch from the first. As on all originals surveyed, the machine stitching was four stitches to the inch.

seen by the author but the reader is urged to compare these products against the data in this article before making an expensive purchase.

### Improving Reproduction Hats

When you buy a brand-new hat, try to resist the temptation to wear it right away just as you bought it. There is one modification that is so inexpensive, so easy, yet so important to the appearance of your hat when you wear it; adding the ribbon! Trot right over to the sutler selling ribbon and tie it on. Original hats were issued with this ribbon and wearing one without it makes it look strangely blank and unfinished. Sadly, black silk grosgrain ribbon (5/16-3/8 wide) is as scarce as hen's teeth these days. But don't let that be a reason for procrastination! Go ahead and use the synthetic ribbon that's widely available for now and keep your eyes open for the real thing.

If you do nothing else to your hat at least do this for the sake of appearances. (For the correct method of attaching the ribbon, see illustration above.)

If you don't want to be apologetic about the inside of your hat, there are a couple of modifications you can do yourself. Paste a label into the crown. One is included in this issue for your use. Unfortunately, pasting a label into a battered and creased Hardee hat is an exercise in futility. It may be best to save your label for your next new one. Simply lay the label face up on a table. Turn your hat upside down and center the crown on top of the gold imprint. With a pencil held against the side of your hat, trace the outline of the oval crown onto the label. The traced outline should be slightly larger than the crown. Trim the label to this drawn outline. Generously coat the backside of the label with yellow glue or craft glue. Don't coat your hat with glue. Insert the



| Hat                                    | Brim   | Height* | Crown*          | Felt  | Stitching                                    | Ribbon                                        | Sweatband                                         | Label                                |
|----------------------------------------|--------|---------|-----------------|-------|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Original Hat, John Wedeward Collection | 3"     | 5 3/4"  | 5 3/4" x 6 1/4" | .095" | Rows are 1/8" apart, 4 stitches per inch     | 5/16" black ribbed silk, false knot           | 2 1/2" wide maroon leather .012" thick            | Size 3, pasted into crown            |
| Original Hat, Paul McKee Collection    | 3"     | 5 5/8"  | 5 7/8" x 6 3/8" | .082" | Rows are 1/8" apart, 4 stitches per inch     | 5/16" black ribbed silk, tied knot            | 2 1/2" wide maroon leather .012" thick            | Size 4, pasted into crown            |
| Original Hat, Paul McKee Collection    | 3"     | 5 3/4"  | 5 5/8" x 6 1/2" | .059" | Rows are 3/16" apart, 4 stitches per inch    | 3/8" black, plain silk, false knot            | N/A                                               | Size 5, 7 1/4" pasted into the crown |
| Original Hat, Tom Rock Collection      | 3 1/8" | 5 7/8"  | 5 7/8" x 6 3/8" | N/A   | Rows are 1/8 inch apart, 4 stitches per inch | 5/16" black ribbed silk, false knot           | N/A                                               | Size 4, pasted into the crown        |
| Repro, S&S Firearms                    | 3"     | 5 1/2"  | 5 1/2" x 6"     | .079" | no stitching                                 | no ribbon                                     | 1 1/2" black composition                          | no label                             |
| Repro, Haenize Hatcrafters             | 3"     | 5 3/8"  | 5 3/8" x 5 3/4" | .082" | Rows are 1/4 inch apart, 5 stitches per inch | no ribbon                                     | 1 1/2" black composition                          | no label                             |
| Repro, Burgess & Co.                   | 3 1/2" | 6"      | 5 1/4" x 6"     | .152" | Rows are 3/16" apart, 5 stitches per inch    | no ribbon                                     | 1 1/2" black leather                              | no label                             |
| Repro, D. Rademacher                   | 3"     | 6"      | 5 1/4" x 6 1/4" | .079" | Rows are 1/4 inch apart, 5 stitches per inch | 3/8" Black ribbed synthetic ribbon, tied knot | 2 1/2" Maroon leather with diamond pattern emboss | Period type label pasted into crown  |

*\*Note: Dimensions in each example represent the individual hat measured. Some dimensions may vary depending on size of hat*

label into the crown of your hat, the top of the label closest to the rear of your hat. (When you doff your hat, the label should be right side up when the hat is in your hand.) Press firmly, squeezing out air bubbles and creases. Try not to move the label too much. Take your thumbnail and push the label into the corners of the crown all the way around. The label should curve at least 1/8 inch up the side of the hat all the way around the crown. Now you will need a way to apply flat pressure to the label. Doubtless the original labels were pressed in with round wooden blocks. In lieu of such a special tool, you might try filling the hat with sand for a few hours. I've even had good results by lining the hat with a plastic bag and filling it with water. Both methods will apply a nice even pressure.

Replacing the sweatband is a little more involved, but is really easier than

it seems. Your biggest problem will be finding paper-thin dark maroon leather. A good bet would be finding a place that will sell you bookbinding leather. I found an old retired leather worker who was willing to sell me a small quantity of maroon pigskin. You will need to cut a strip 2 1/2 inches wide-- but don't cut a straight strip! It will have to be curved to fit into the tapered crown. The best way is to make a pattern from the old sweatband widening it to the proper width. A good suggestion is to have someone run the edge that will be sewn through a sewing machine without thread to give you holes to guide your stitches. Then simply whip stitch the sweat band into place. You may want to do this operation before you put the ribbon on the hat.

And what is our recommendations for insignia and trimmings? Unless the scenario and your impression really

calls for it, leave it all at home. The western veterans had little use for hat brass, plumes and hat cords; these were often objects of ridicule. Of course an occasional hat cord or a regimental number might show up in photographs taken in the field, but these would be highly unusual. More common would be the corps badge among late war western troops. The thing we have to remember is that the veterans were not interested in the Hardee hat as a handsome military hat, it was anything but that. What they needed was a good serviceable hat that would protect them from the sun and rain. With a shortage of available civilian slouch hats the old veterans knew the answer to their need was only as far away as the quartermaster.

*Continued page 8*

