

A survey was taken of all the surviving shelter halves known to me (three in the Stametelos Collection, two at Gettysburg NPS, and one at the Smithsonian Institution). Those in the Stametelos Collection I was able to measure and observe in detail in person. The others as of this writing (2/27/88), are known only through descriptions provided by the institutions holding them: rather complete in the Smithsonian's case; somewhat sketchier for the NPS.

All available data were compared with the only government specifications for such tents I am aware of: those of G.O. 60, QMG's office dated December 12, 1864 and corrected February 1, 1865 (See Appendix A). Two broad divisions became apparent: while *none* of the surviving tents met the dimensions given in the specifications, two of them met them in all or almost all other respects, and four were obviously of another pattern, distinguishable by having bone buttons and only two sets of grommet holes on the ground edge of the tent. Although it is too small a sample to draw any firm conclusions, it is interesting to note that the latter category are contractor marked in three of four cases, while the ones conforming to the '64 specifications are not. For the purposes of this study, I propose calling the bone buttoned, two loop "earlier issue" and those conforming to the '64 specifications "later issue". This is, however, entirely my own interpretation.

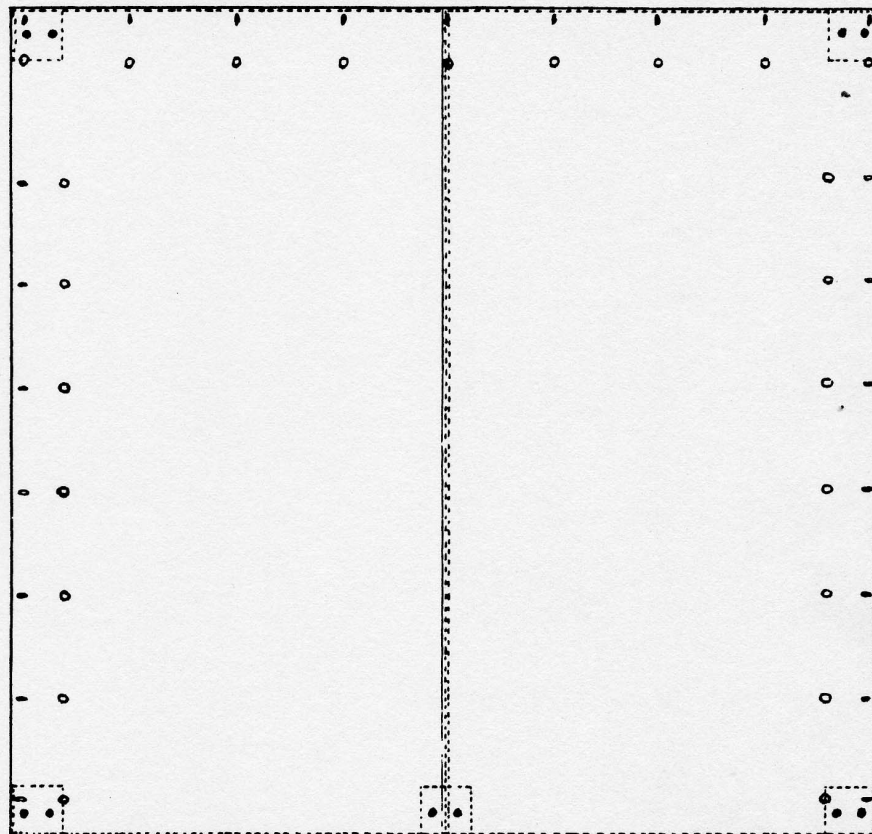
The Stametelos Collection

Stametelos A and B were used together as a complete tent. Mr. Stametelos remembers these as having been used by a sergeant in a Massachusetts regiment, but as of this writing has not been able to find the documentation in his records. They are the products of the same contractor, H.S. McComb of Wilmington, Delaware and are so marked, twice on each half at the foot edge of both widths of cloth. Interestingly, the stamps are quite different, though the wording is the same. (See figure 2). They are the earlier pattern, of a light twilled cotton drill, the reinforces of the same material. Tent loops are present, of a 1/4" hard

shiny finished stout rope, knotted at each end. Stametelos C is the later pattern and belonged to Corporal Sewall L. Heywood of Company E, 6th Maine Infantry. He joined the regiment on July 15, 1861, and was mustered out on August 15, 1864. The tent half has no markings at all and is constructed of a heavier, tabby weave cotton canvas with a blue stripe running down the length, 1" from the edge. The reinforces (contrary to the '64 specifications) are of an unbleached linen canvas of ap-

A Survey of Civil War Shelter Halves

by Patrick McDermott



proximately 60 threads per inch, much like the canvas used for knapsacks. The central reinforce is smaller than those at the corners; also a deviation. In all other constructional details it conforms to G.O. 60. Tent loops are present, of a very light hemp twine.

Figure 1. U.S. Shelter Half, the Ideal, conforming to GO 60, QMG's Office, December 12, 1864, corrected February 1, 1865.

Gettysburg National Park Service

Gettysburg A and B Accession # 5058(2) and 5058(3) were used together

H. S. M^cCOMB
WILMINGTON.

H.S. M^cCOMB,
WILMINGTON

Figure 2

as a single tent. As mentioned above, these have not yet been personally inspected and the information provided (being a conservationist's workup and not intended as an archival description) seems to be incomplete. They appear to be of exactly the same construction and materials, though only one (B) is noted as being stamped with the contractor's name: B. Hansell, Philad'a. This appears only once, reversed, at the top left of the tent half. Both halves are constructed of three widths of fabric: a tabby weave linen of 20 threads per centimeter with a red stripe woven into the length near the edge. Two of the pieces of each half are used selvedge to selvedge; they are connected by the third piece which may or may not be a full width of cloth. The reinforces are of the same material. Tent loops, 17cm of rope knotted at both ends, are present on "A." One of the most interesting features of these unusual halves is the fact that each has what appears to be a field addition of a third loop at the foot of the center seam. "A" has a light loop of twine run through the tent and knotted, and "B" has a loop of 5cm wide canvas sewn on at that location. Until the objects can be viewed personally, it is impossible to say whether these were field repairs, though the inference is strong. Made with only corner grommet holes, and mounting bone buttons, these fall into the "earlier" category.

Smithsonian Institution

Smithsonian A, (Accession #58592, Catalog #291023) was used by First Lieutenant Charles W. Maynard of the 20th Michigan Infantry. The tent is unmarked and constructed of a light, tabby weave cotton duck, having a blue stripe woven in 1 and 1/2 inches from each side. The reinforcements are made of a heavier cotton canvas; in this, it deviates from the '64 specifications. In all other constructional respects it conforms to them. Tent loops are present, and are knotted at both ends.

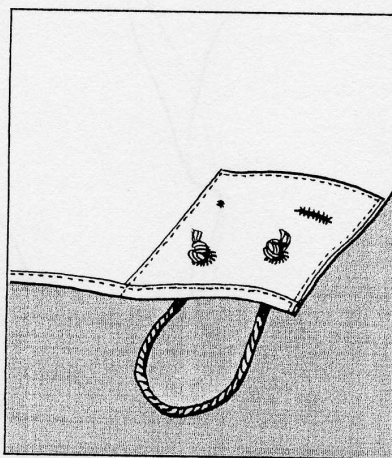


Figure 3

Some Constants

With the exception of the Gettysburg halves, which are unique in being made of linen and three widths of fabric, all the surveyed halves shared a number of characteristics. They were made of two entire widths of cotton fabric seamed together selvedge to selvedge, the end edges of the tents being the other selvedge edge of each piece and having no turning; an extremely economical method of construction. The ground and ridge edges were turned in a hem. All had 23 buttons, disposed as 9 along the ridge edge and 7 on each end edge. All had a pair of grommet holes at each corner; the later pattern also has a pair at the ground edge of the central seam. All had hand worked grommet holes and button holes, the grommet holes being worked in a heavier unbleached linen twine. All were machine sewn in a rather long stitch, about 1/8", using a common light sewing cotton. It has not yet been possible to determine this detail for the two NPS artifacts. Five of the six examples had their stake loops attached as in Figure 3. I suggest this to have been the standard method.

The Question of Size

The first thing to attract my attention after compiling the raw data on these tents was the complete lack of uniformity regarding size. None fulfilled the '64 specifications, but more importantly when attempting to theorize an "ideal" pattern for each example (that is, the pattern the existing tent was manufactured from, removing sloppiness of construction and efforts and effects of use), some very odd measurements resulted, particularly in attempting to organize the seemingly random button placements. On all three which I was able to measure in detail, these varied from 7" to 8 1/2" between centers. To place them evenly with likely margins resulted in measurements like 7 3/4" and 7 3/8", with a fair juggling of margins and (interestingly) always a narrower spacing along the end edges than along the ridge edge. (The '64 specifications call for a constant 8" spacing.) These proposed spacings were possible, but surely did not seem

probable. Practicality and Don Rademacher's good sense cleared up my mental fog nicely when he made a prototype tent exactly following the '64 specifications, and then washed the completed article. What had started out as 66 x 65" ended up as 62 1/2 x 57 1/2"! A glance at Table 1 will show that this falls nicely into the pattern of extant tent dimensions. Don suggests that the 1864 specifications in essence codify what the Government *desired* all through the war, and also attempted to end some abuses (such as specifying metallic rather than the no doubt cheaper but more fragile bone buttons and going to great lengths (no pun intended) to insure that the desired dimensions were achieved without help. It is my belief that C&D Jarnigan Company has perpetrated and perpetuated a mistake in the reenacting world by assigning a "growth spurt" to tents during the course of the war. I expect the error to have been centered on measuring an original tent for their "early war" pattern, and accepting the '64 specifications as they stand for the "late war" model. In point of fact, I believe the majority of tents throughout the war were *made* at or near the 66 x 65" regulation size. It is worthwhile noting that the '64 specifications, do not specify the fabric to be pre-shrunk, and the extra trouble of washing and drying thousands of yards of fabric, together with the loss of a sizable percentage of that yardage due to shrinkage would be sufficient to give any contractor pause. The first rain in camp created the diversity of small sizes observable today.

Additional Notes about the Use of Shelter Tents

Reference to the '64 specifications shows the (upper?) grommet holes referred to as "pole and rope holes," and requires that they be placed so as to line up when the tent is erected. While no hard evidence of issue poles has surfaced to date (and it is the opinion of this writer that while they probably did exist, few quartermasters chose to requisition them, and fewer soldiers chose to draw them), I am obliged to Don Rademacher for his suggestion that the inner hole of the upper pairs was for the

spike of the pole and the outer for the guy line supplied with each half, thus erecting the tent without a ridgepole, and for his directing me to the following quote, printed in *They Who Fought Here* by Wiley and Milhollen (Bonanza, 1959) from Corporal Sam'l Storrow of the 44th Massachusetts Infantry, which describes just such a setup on page 84. In writing his parents from camp in North Carolina on March 17, 1863, he mentions:

"I wish you could see us here in our camp of shelter tents. These are made in three pieces about 5 feet square, of stout drilling, one of which each man carries rolled up with woolen blanket in his rubber one. Two of them are buttoned together and raised upon two poles 4 feet long for the main body of the tent; the third buttons on behind like a sort of a hood. The poles are secured by two cords which accompany the tents. Thus you have a tent which accommodates three brothers, who must literally be in-arms when they are all within. Shape, that of an inverted "we" as Mr. Weller would say. Dimensions 4 feet perpendicularly and 5 laterally."

I have been unable to uncover any evidence of issued tent ends during the war except for Wilbur Hinman's fictionalized account, *Corporal Si Klegg and his Pard*, published in 1887. On page 577 he says:

"One edition of the pup tent was provided with a three cornered piece of cloth, which, after the tent was pitched, was quickly joined on with buttons and entire-

ly closed one end, contributing much to the well being of the dwellers within."

Photographs showing erected shelter tents have turned up a small number which seem to have some sort of an end covering, but the detail has not been sufficient to determine whether they were issue items with a manufactured look about them. On the other hand, there are many, many references in personal narratives, reminiscences and regimental histories to the lack of ends, and the many expedients the Boys got up to to supply their want: "going snacks" with one or two others and using their half or halves to close off one or both ends, using blankets, gum blankets or overcoats, building brush windbreaks, or in at least one instance known to me, sneaking down to the wagon train and cutting a piece of wagon cover off when the teamster was asleep! (I must warn reenactors to think carefully before attempting this last and tempting option. The chance of more than 1 or 2 men in a regiment succeeding with such thievery is *extremely* remote, and the temper of the muleteers is also amply documented in period sources.) It is my opinion that while tent ends may have existed as a great rarity, the bulk of the evidence compels us as reenactors committed to representing the commonplace rather than the exceptional to dispense with them (however good an idea) and like the Boys whose experiences we seek to honor and share, either

Table 1

Shelter Halves	Length	Width
1864 Specifications	66"	65"
Stametelos A	63 1/2"	58"
Stametelos B	63 1/2"	58"
Stametelos C	64"	60 1/2"
Gettysburg NPS A	64 1/2"	57"
Gettysburg NPS B	64 1/2"	59"
Smithsonian A	64"	60"
Rademacher	62 1/2"	57 1/2"

shiver or adopt expedients which look obviously makeshift.

Patrick McDermott, a member of the 5th New Hampshire Infantry, is a respected "font of knowledge" on 19th Century music and thought. Pat is also a recommended source for reproduction period printed materials. He further directs that if any questions arise

Appendix A:

G.O. #60, QMG's Office, Dec. 12, 1864, corrected Feb. 1, 1865. Description of Shelter Tent

Dimensions of each half tent when finished:

Length, (measuring along foot or top)

5 feet 6 inches

Width, (measured along seam)

5 feet 5 inches

To be made of cotton duck 33 1/2 inches wide, clear of all imperfections, and weighing eight ounces to the linear yard.

To be made in a workmanlike manner in every respect, with strong, well-worked button holes, made with waxed thread of sufficient size and strength to make them durable. All other holes to have good strong grommets well worked in them with waxed thread or twine.

Top Buttons- Nine metallic (tinned, galvanized or zinc) buttons, in a line parallel to, and four inches from, the upper edge or head of each tent, at intervals of eight inches from centre to centre, the extreme buttons being one inch from the side edges or ends of each half tent.

End Buttons- Seven metallic (tinned, galvanized or zinc) buttons, in a line parallel to, and four inches from, each side edge or end of the half tent, at intervals of eight inches from centre to centre, the first button of the row being three inches from the lower edge or foot of half tent.

Button holes on each half tent, twenty-three in number, along the upper and side edges, at a distance of a half inch therefrom, opposite the buttons of their own half, and corresponding imposition to the buttons on the other half tent.

Three loops to each half tent, at lower corners and foot of seam, of six-thread Manilla line, small, soft, and pliable.

Guy lines, one with each half tent, six feet ten inches long, of six-thread Manilla line, small, soft, and pliable.

The pole and rope holes must be placed so as to correspond when the half tents are put together.

The corner and stay pieces to be made of same material as the tent, and to be four inches square.

If the tent be sewed by machine, it must be a lock-stitch machine.

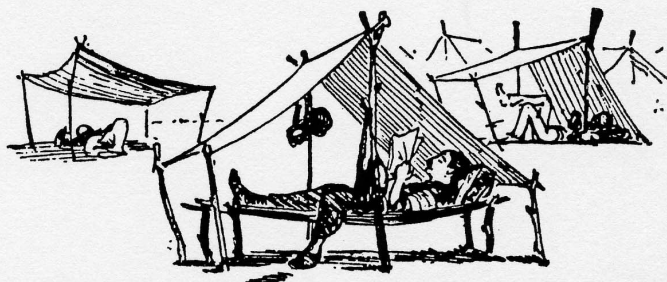
No force should be used to bring the tent to its required measurements.

regarding this article, that he can be reached at 64 Linden Avenue, Somerville, MA 02143 or at (617)776-3464 weekends and evenings between 7 and 12pm EST.

Don Rademacher now reproduces shelter tents based on Pat's research and

along with his excellent haversacks, are the best now on the market. Don can be reached at Artifakes, 1608 West Pearl Street, Steven's Point, Wisconsin 54481, (715)341-5893.

Editor



How d'ye like it's fur's ye've got?



SI'S FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THE VETERANS.

by Scott Cross

Taking a look at my pards in the ranks of the Mudsills, I can't help but ask the same question posed to Si Klegg by the grizzled veteran of '61: "How d'ye like it's fur's ye've got, anyway?" This got me to speculating. How far have I got? How far have we got?

We think of ourselves as veterans; old hands at the game of war and ready to taunt and tease green awkward units. But are we really veterans? We spend two days at an event in our uniforms; perhaps up to three or four at a big skirmish like Manassas or Shiloh. We may go to one event a year, or like some of the "hard-cores," up to a dozen. By multiplying the number of events you go to in a year by two days, then multiplying the number of years you have been doing living history, you can get an idea of just "how fur ye've got."

Not very impressive, is it? Most of us spend between a week and a month (hard, hard-cores!) actually in the field a year. I don't believe any of us has even a year under his belt yet. Most of us probably fall in between three months and ten months.

With that in mind, let's trace the history of the 5th Kentucky and see where you are at.