

## A Federal Cap Pouch from 1861

The need to supply so many soldiers caught the Ordnance Department by surprise with the outbreak of hostilities in the spring of 1861. The numbers of volunteers requested by President Lincoln far exceeded anything the departments comprising the War Department had ever experienced before. Thus, despite a commutation system, which reimbursed the states for units raised, armed and equipped by them, the Ordnance Department quickly had to expand its own reliance on contractors for accoutrements and other necessary equipage. The expanded use of contractors for the procurement of cap pouches (and other necessary items) was specifically authorized by Chief of Ordnance General James W. Ripley in a letter dated 5 May 1861 to Major William A. Thornton, commander of the New York Arsenal. [1]

For cap pouches at least, there was virtually no reliance on contractors before the Civil War. Nearly all cap pouches used by the Regular Army or supplied to the states under the Militia Acts of 1808 had been produced within the Ordnance Department, primarily at either Allegheny or Watervliet Arsenals. The item had not even been included in the definition of a "set" of accoutrements supplied by contractors until 1861, as "Before that date [5 May 1861], cap pockets & picks were supplied from Watervliet Arsenal." [2] While there may have been a perception that Watervliet was the principal supplier of cap pouches across the decade of the 1850s, its total production of 48,147 pouches was little more than half of Allegheny's total production of 87,634. [3] Further, total production of cap pouches at all arsenals *during* the Civil War came to only 97,640, which paled in comparison to the nearly two and one half million supplied by contractors. [4] Production within the Ordnance Department amounted to less than five percent of its total requirements during the war, accounting for the scarcity of arsenal-marked examples today.

Because of the varieties allowed by the states under their own procurement systems, the relative newness of the item to all contractors and somewhat lax inspection procedures within the Ordnance Department, a number of different styles of cap pouches were received by the Ordnance Department or otherwise entered Federal service at the beginning of the war. All were supposed to have conformed to the "Pattern of 1850," as no new pattern was authorized by the Department until 1862. This article will not examine the different styles of cap pouches delivered in 1861, but will focus on one cap pouch that can be well documented to the fall of that year.

A cap pouch in the author's collection bears the maker's mark of A.C. McClallan & Co., which was located in Springfield, Massachusetts. This pouch was part of an order made by Captain George Thatcher Balch (FIG 1), a principal assistant to Major Alexander Dyer, commander of the



FIG 1. This previously unpublished image of Captain George T. Balch was taken at West Point in late 1864 or early 1865, when he was an instructor at the US Military Academy. [Courtesy USMA Library, Special Collections and Archives Division]

Springfield Armory. Captain Balch is worthy of a short digression here as he was one of the important 'behind-the-scenes' operatives of the Ordnance Department for a majority of the War. After serving Dyer at Springfield, Balch's talents were requested in Washington and he was transferred to the Ordnance offices there. He had great organizational skills and did such a fine job that he was recommended for promotion to Chief of Ordnance himself upon Ripley's retirement in September 1863. However, President Lincoln would not agree to jump him so many grades (although Lincoln had done virtually the same thing in 1861 when he made Captain Montgomery C. Meigs, an engineer officer, Quartermaster General). A compromise was reached whereby Colonel George D. Ramsay was made Chief, but the "real decisions" would be made by Balch. In effect, after September 1863 Balch ran the Ordnance Department for a year. This worked until Dyer was named to succeed Ramsay and became Chief in September of 1864. Dyer wanted nothing of Balch's surreptitious "assistance," whereupon Balch was sent to West Point as an Instructor of Ordnance and Gunnery for the remainder of the War. For "meritorious service" during the War, Balch was brevetted lieutenant colonel and retired from the service on 1 December 1865. He died on 15 April 1894 and the record of his efficient service during the war faded away. [5]

As can be seen in FIGs 2 through 6, this particular cap pouch remains in virtually unused condition. We know

McClallan delivered it to the Springfield Armory in September 1861 as part of three thousand cavalry accoutrements sets ordered by Balch. (Having been made for cavalry use, the contract is not part of Paul D. Johnson's listing of 1861 contracts for infantry accoutrements.) [6] It exhibits features typical of Watervliet-style cap pouches throughout the War. [7] Fundamental to that style was a one piece outer flap, with an integral, elongated tab to engage the brass closure button. In addition to a tooled edge, the letters "US" were stamped into the leather (without periods in this case, but observed with both one and two periods after the letters on other early cap pouches). As expected on early-war cap pouches, the outer flap has "high shoulders," a term used by the author to describe the narrowing of the outer flap well up on the body of the pouch, which resulted in a long tab to engage the brass button and the exposure of much of the pouch body. The characteristic of "high shoulders," present in both the 1845 and 1850s pattern pouches, would continue well into 1862.

The well-formed cap pouch body on this example differs from many of the pouches delivered in 1861 by having a nicely defined edge. On the other hand, it does exhibit the typical sloped sides and bottom of most 1861 pouches. The result is the closure button projecting at about a seventy-five degree angle rather than straight down (at ninety degrees), as was typical of later pouches. The somewhat unusual shape of the brass closure button is nevertheless very similar to that seen on other, Wilkinson-marked examples, possibly reflecting the utilization of the same subcontractor for fittings.

The maker's mark used by McClallan was unusual in that it is ink-stamped on the inside of the outer flap (FIG 4), the only mark thus observed for contractors. Generally the makers' marks are stamped into the leather, often that of the inner flap. The mark on this cap pouch matches that observed on a very early example of the new revolving pistol cartridge box introduced in 1861 (FIGs 7 and 8). This particular box was also delivered in September 1861 as part of the three thousand sets of cavalry accoutrements, and it, too, shows no evidence of having been issued.

The fleece lining is glued and tacked only to the inner flap with four short stitches that do not go through the outer flap, indicating the fleece was sub-assembled before the inner flap was sewn in place. In this case the inner flap has been reduced in length to  $2\frac{3}{4}$  inches long, with small end pieces attached by eleven stitches. The back of the pouch has a round shape at the bottom and a gradual transition to the outer flap, rather than the "stepped cut" seen on many pouches made in the 1850s. The edge has been trimmed close to the stitching only on the front, rather than to the "knife edge" seen on some other pouches (FIG 6). The cone pick is well-formed with a P-shaped loop and has a pointed end. As expected the belt loops on these McClallan examples are not riveted. That feature would be implemented by Balch only at Springfield shortly thereafter, and not generally on cap pouches until the fall of 1862. The

loops are one-half inch wide, both edges are tooled and the loops will accommodate a two inch wide belt.

Captain Balch was so pleased with the contractor's work he wrote in a letter of recommendation to Chief of Ordnance General Ripley on 26 September 1861, "I shall send tomorrow by express to you one set of cavalry accoutrements manufactured by A.C. McClellan [sic] & Co. of this city, a sample of 1000 sets...Mr. McClellan's accoutrements speak for themselves, and if any more of these goods are required, I respectfully request that I may be allowed to give his house another order. I also wish that these accoutrements may be put into the hands of troops who will appreciate them." [8] So unknown is this contractor's work that even today his name is confused with that of the general.

In the same letter to the Chief of Ordnance, Captain Balch stated he intended to introduce a change to the pouch pattern on future orders, which would include riveting on the belt loops. "I intend to have all the cap pouches furnished on my orders rivetted [sic], and, I know they will wear twice as long for it." [9] Balch had no authority to make the change on his own initiative. Normally a pattern change should have required a Board of Ordnance Officers recommendation, review by the Chief of Ordnance and final approval from the Secretary of War. However, because he had more pressing matters there was no admonition from Ripley that such a change to the pouch should not be made.

Balch was ahead of his time adding rivets to belt loops on cap pouches, a feature more commonly encountered on pouches delivered beginning a year later. As Balch noted, this change was to be implemented after the McClallan contract, confirmed by the fact that the latter's pouches did not have rivets in the belt loops. However, we know Balch did, indeed, implement the change for deliveries only to Springfield Armory through a pouch delivered by P. Jewell & Sons of Hartford, Connecticut, under a 16 November 1861 contract Balch made for one thousand sets of infantry accoutrements. These Jewell-marked cap pouches were also of the Watervliet-style, and had four small, "non-standard" rivets on the belt loops.

With Balch's glowing recommendation it is a wonder why McClallan never took another contract for accoutrements, or even bid in response to an advertisement. He certainly did not face a tough inspector, as some other contractors did. And we can only guess why at least some of McClallan's accoutrements appear never to have been issued. With the pressing need for accoutrements early in the war it is hard to believe they were not immediately issued, but rather overlooked after Balch's departure for the remainder of the war. For whatever reason, the survival of such well-documented cap pouches gives us a chance to see what the Ordnance Department was acquiring in those hectic opening months of the war.

**Fred Gaede**

# NOTES:

[1] Chief of Ordnance General James W. Ripley to Major William A. Thornton, 5 May 1861, Entry 6, Letters Sent to Ordnance Officers, Record Group 156, Office of the Chief of Ordnance, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC (RG 156, OCO, NARA).

[2] Captain Robert H.K. Whitely to Chief of Ordnance General James W. Ripley, 30 May 1861, Entry 21, Letters Received, RG 156, OCO, NARA.

[3] Totals of cap pouch production for the years 1848 to 1860, inclusive, compiled from the *Annual Reports of the Chief of Ordnance to the Secretary of War*.

[4] "Entry 940," Summary of the Weekly Statements of Stores Manufactured at the Principal Arsenals, RG 156, OCO, NARA. The assistance of Paul D. Johnson in completing these compilations is gratefully acknowledged.

[5] Francis B. Heitman, *Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, From Its Organization, September 29, 1789 To March 2, 1903* (Washington: GPO, Two Volumes, 1903), Vol. I, page 185

[6] Paul D. Johnson, *Civil War Cartridge Boxes of the Union Infantryman* (Lincoln, RI: Andrew Mowbray Publishers, 1998), pages 136-40.

[7] The other style of cap pouch was first manufactured at Allegheny Arsenal and has what was referred contemporaneously as a "full front" outer flap, with a separately attached latch tab. Many Allegheny-style cap pouches would be delivered in 1862 by contractors, identified by the stamped names on the surface of the inner flaps.

[8] Captain George T. Balch to Chief of Ordnance General James W. Ripley, 26 September 1861, Entry 21, Letters Received, RG 156, OCO, NARA.

[9] Ibid.

Fred Gaede, the former editor of the Company of Military Historians journal, *Military Collector & Historian*, has contributed to the **DOG** before, most recently on characteristics of the Federal issue infantry blanket of the Civil War (WINTER 2000). This article contains excerpts from his current effort, a forthcoming book, *The Cap Pouch in the U.S. Service, 1833-1896*. All images (except as noted) were provided by the author.



FIG 2. Front view of the McClallan-marked example, clearly showing a characteristic of early Civil War cap pouches. Note how the outer flap narrows to the latch tab before the entire body of the pouch is covered. This produces an outer flap with what the author has termed "high shoulders."



FIG 4 and 4A. Interior of the outer flap of the cap pouch, showing McClallan's distinctive stamped maker's mark. Enlargement of maker's mark.

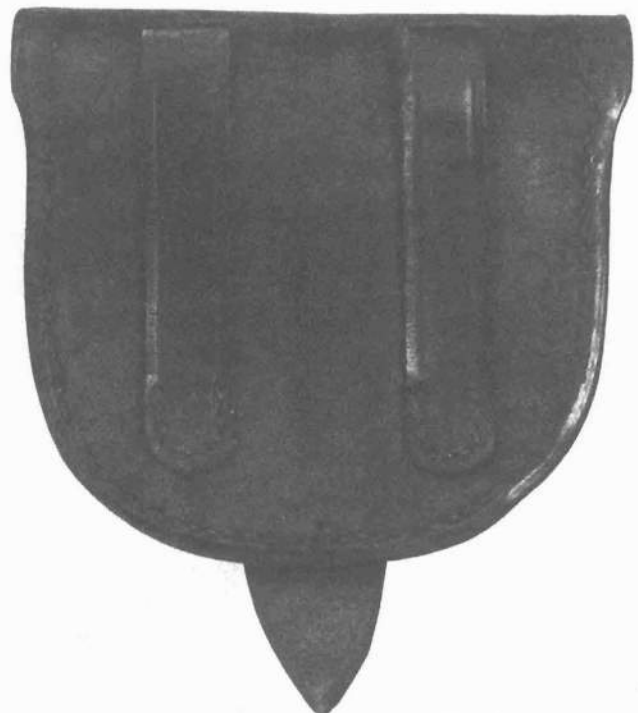


FIG 3. Back view of the same pouch. Note the relatively narrow belt loops, which lack rivets; the rounded shape of the pouch body; five tack holes that have not been struck by a closure stamping; and little skiving of the leather outside of the seam on the backside.



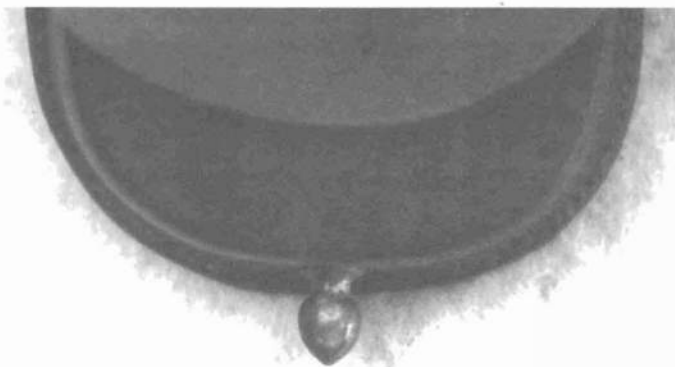


FIG 5. One of the “non-standard” button shapes found on many early War cap pouches can be seen on this McClallan example, as well as several other contractors in the New England area. This suggests one machinist may have been supplying several contractors with fittings for their accoutrements.

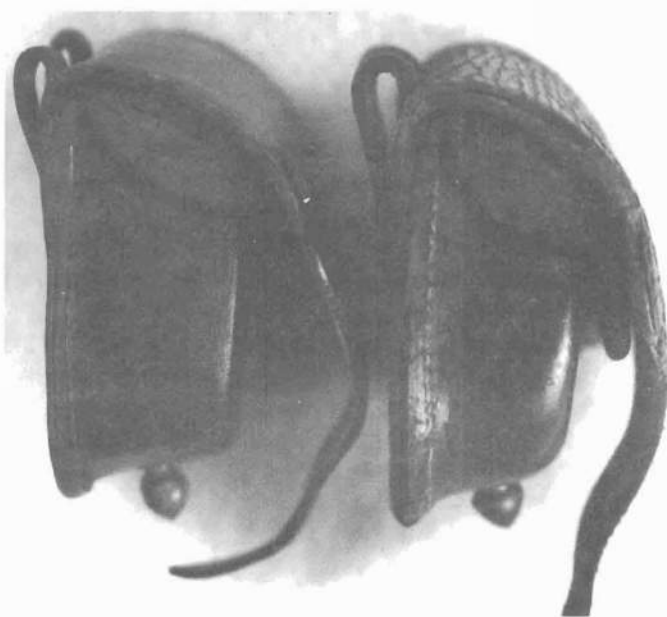


FIG 6. A side view of the McClallan-marked example (left) and the Jewell-marked example referred to in the text. Note the skiving of the McClallan example has been lightly done on the back piece and strongly cut back on the front edge of the pouch body. That on the Jewell example has been strongly cut back on both edges, resulting in a “knife edge” seam of outer flap and pouch body. It took a skilled leather worker to make skives like that without cutting into the stitches and ruining the piece. (Because of that many reproductions are not skived at all.) As the war progressed skiving was reduced and the technique changed.

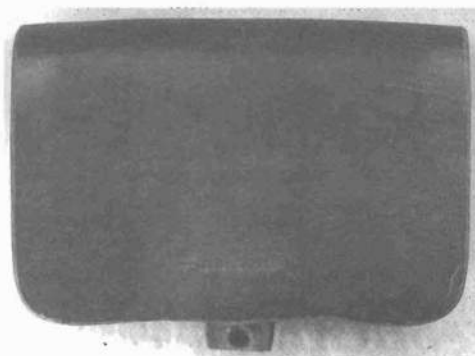


FIG 7. Front view of the early War, McClallan-marked revolving pistol cartridge box. This box was delivered with the cap pouch in September 1861.

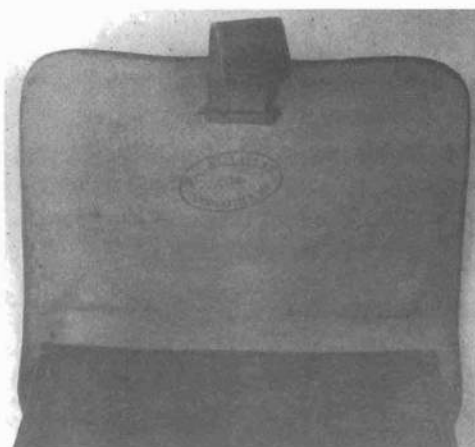


FIG 8. Interior of the cartridge box outer flap, showing the same distinctive oval mark as seen on the cap pouch stamped onto the leather.



FIG 9. Fronts of the McClallan-marked pouch (left) and the Jewell (right), showing the “sharp” edge to the pouch body on the former, contrasted to a “rounded” edge of the later. The rounded edge was more characteristic of the arsenal-made pouches both before and during the Civil War.