

IT'S IN THE BAG

THE M1851 HAVERSACK IN FEDERAL SERVICE

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The Federal soldier in the field knew that the most reliable source for his next meal was the haversack bouncing against his left hip. The haversack was an essential and well-made piece of equipment, even though its appearance was rather plain. The 1851 haversack was described in the *1861 U.S. Army Regulations* as follows:

1577. Haversack -- of painted canvas, with an inside sack unpainted, according to the pattern now issued by the Quartermaster's Department.

The haversack was almost as simple a piece of equipment as the regulations described it to be. Indeed, the M1851 Haversack was such a homely article that most veterans probably burned theirs as soon as they returned home in 1865. And if great-grandfather had a sentimental attachment to his army haversack, it likely was not shared by his wife or daughter, who often cast the dirty, greasy bag into the dustbin within a month of his joining the G.A.R ranks in the sky.

Given the low survival rate of original haversacks, and the fact that few tintypes and *CDVs* portrayed soldiers carrying the bulky and unglamorous article, it is understandable that current vendors would have some difficulty in obtaining the proper materials and dimensions.

Federal issue haversacks were made of light weight material that is closer to the texture of an oxford cloth shirt rather than the canvas duck used in tents. The weight of the cloth was described in the 1865 *Quartermaster's Manual* as "7/8 cotton or pure linen drilling, to weigh 6 ounces to the yard."

A second detail about the M1851 haversack is that its shape appears to be rectangular rather than square. It is 12" to 14" tall with the flap closed, and 10" wide at the bottom. The sides are formed by sewing together (using flat felled seams) the front and back pieces, whereas the bottom is a separate 10" by 3" gusset. When the back is flattened so that the gusset bulges downward, the haversack measures roughly 13" - 15" high by 12½" wide.

A third detail about the haversack is the shoulder strap. Most are made from a single piece of cloth, 40" to 45" long, folded over so the width is 1¾"-2", with the two edges flat felled in the middle of the strap, with a single line of stitching up the center. A few documented haversacks have been observed with stitching at both side edges of the strap, although they may be state issue or private purchase. The shoulder straps are generally set no more than 1/2" from the side seam, so the flap does not appear to be wider than the distance between the outer edges of the straps.

The *Quartermaster's Manual* specified that the haversack was to be "from top of flap to bottom of sack, 16½" long." Observed issue specimens have been close to that measurement.

The curved flap of the M1851 haversack is rather shallow, measuring only about 5¼" top to bottom in the center. The flap is reinforced inside by a second piece of cloth that follows the bottom of the flap's curve and is 3" to 3½" in height. Thus, there are two thicknesses of cloth underneath the closing strap but the part of the flap that actually folds is just one layer of cloth.

Three additional reinforcements are inside the haversack. Two rectangles inserts in the rear corners provide support for the straps and for two of the buttons for the rice bag. In the center of the front, inside the bag, is a reinforcement piece that is 7" tall and 2" inches wide. That insert provides support for a button for the rice bag at the top and the closing buckle at the bottom of its length. Note that this reinforcement commences at the top of the bag and terminates about 5" from the bottom of the bag. Some haversacks have been observed with a front insert that goes all the way from the top to the bottom of the bag, but they may be state issue or private purchase.

The closing buckle is a 5/8" wide japanned roller buckle, held in place by folded piece leather that has just 1½" length that is visible. It is attached with two vertical rows of six stitches. A standing loop 3/4" high is present immediately behind the buckle. The top edge of the buckle is positioned about 6½" from the bottom of the bag. The closing strap is leather, 6" to 7" long and may be stitched on or attached with a copper rivet. The *Quartermaster's Manual* specified that the strap was to contain six holes, although that was not always adhered to.

Only one of the five original Federal issue haversacks that were examined for this article retained its rice bag. That rice bag was made from a single piece of unbleached cotton drilling that was heavier than the cloth of the haversack itself. It was constructed with a flat felled seam on the right side and bottom. The finished size was 12½" tall and 11½" wide. The upper edge was turned down 1¼" to the outside of the bag. The turned down edge served as reinforcement for the button holes in the front and two rear corners. All of the observed rice bag buttons have been two piece tinned iron, 5/8" in diameter, with four holes. They are identical to the buttons found on the waist bands of Federal issue trousers, and are referred to in the *Quartermaster's Manual* as "white metal suspender buttons."

The painting of the haversack involved a mixture of boiled linseed oil and lampblack for the first and second coat. That mixture turned the bag black inside and out. The final coat was black oil varnish, which created a shiny appearance (Osman, 1995). The shine is visible in the 1866 Quartermaster photographs, but it is not clear how long the shine would have

lasted in the field. It is not evident on surviving originals, which tend to have a dull charcoal color.

Twenty-four vendors were asked to supply an example of their product and nine haversacks were made available for review. If any Civil War haversack manufacturers were overlooked, they are welcome to submit their product for evaluation in a follow-up article. Similarly, if any vendor discussed here wishes to provide additional information that supports the accuracy of a detail questioned by this article, they are welcome to submit it.

Haversack Depot
1236 River Acres Drive
New Braunfels, TX 78130
Ph 210-620-5192
Price \$37.00 plus \$3.00 postage.

This haversack bears a close correspondence to the original. The manufacturer formerly served as director of the U.S. Army Quartermaster Museum at Fort Lee, Va. and copied a specimen from that collection. The original is stamped U.S. QMD 3-65. Because individuals in the Quartermaster's Department stamped their names or initials on the articles that they inspected, this may be a prototype for a variant style of haversack.

The cloth used for the body of the haversack is the proper light weight. The front height of 11¼", length from bottom to top of flap of 16½" and flap length of 6" approximates the *Quartermaster Manual's* dimensions. The width of 11" (Q.M. says 12½") bottom panel's width of 8 5/8", and depth of 2¼" (Q.M. says 3½") is a bit on the small side but matches the original at Fort Lee. The roller buckle is the correct 5/8". The side seam is nicely flat-felled. The strap is correctly seamed in the middle. The usable strap length of 40" is comfortable for medium-size soldiers, and is correctly attached with two rows of stitching. The cloth used for the rice bag is too light weight, but is correctly affixed with white metal buttons. The rice bag is sewn with an original Wilcox and Gibbs sewing machine patented in 1859.

The overall appearance of this haversack is highly accurate, but includes four variant construction details. The five original issue haversacks examined for this article all had the flap made in a continuous piece with the back of the haversack. On those five originals, the front was made from another piece of material that was attached to the back at the two side seams. On this product, by contrast, there is no side seam on the right side because the front and back of the haversack are made of one long piece of material. In addition, the flap is made from a second piece of material that is sewn to the back of the haversack at the fold. The original haversack at Fort Lee supports this variant construction. This reproduction is nicely finished with a soft, semi-reflective black substance that stains

through to the interior and closely resembles the original. A Quartermaster mark and date in white paint is displayed under the flap. This is one of the most accurate of the haversacks examined.

O'Dea & Co.
3985 Beaver Lane
P.O. Box 3785
Camp Verde, AZ 86322
520-567-0007
Price \$35.00 plus \$5.00 postage

This haversack was said to have been copied from an original in a private collection known to the author, and it displays excellent workmanship and many authentic touches. The body of the haversack is a light weight cotton drilling. The strap is correctly seamed in the center, by hand. The side seams are flat felled, also by hand. The measurement from top of flap to bottom of sack is 17.5" long, which matches several originals. The width at the top is 13¾", a tad wide, but the width of the bottom insert is 10" by 3¼" is perfectly correct. The height of the front, 10", seems a bit short. The flap is correctly reinforced only at the bottom half, on the lower part of the curve. The cloth reinforcement on the front of the haversack correctly terminates under the buckle. At 1¼" wide, the roller buckle is a bit large and heavy, as is the 3/4fs" wide closing strap. The closing strap and the strap holding the buckle are each both sewn and attached by rivet to the haversack, a detail that should be double-checked against the original. The rice bag is unbleached muslin, a bit light in weight, but properly sized to fit the bag and attached with three tin buttons (with cardboard backs). The haversack is blackened with a smooth, lustrous substance that correctly stained through to the inside, and has the pleasant fragrance of linseed oil (rather than the harsh petrochemicals that some bags use). This haversack is very nicely made, and is generally accurate.

The Regimental Quartermaster, Inc.
P.O. Box 553
Hatboro, PA 19040
Price \$22.00 and \$25.00+\$3.95 shipping

This vendor offers two haversacks. The less expensive one was copied from the Army National Guard Museum, J. Craig Nannos collection. That haversack is also shown in William C. Davis' *Fighting Men of the Civil War* (p. 45). The haversack's correct height of 12", flap height of 5", and body width of 11¾" makes that a plausible attribution. The bottom, which measures 8" by 3" may be a legitimate variation. The reinforcement for the buckle goes the full height from top to bottom of the front. There are a few points on which this haversack visibly differs from its prototype in the Nannos

collection: the original strap is sewn in the middle of the strap, this one is seamed and sewn on the edges. The strap is incorrectly attached to the haversack with an "X" stitch. The original affixed the closing leather tab with two rows of horizontal stitching, this one has two vertical rows of stitching which is still correct. The rice bag is only 8" wide, with two buttons in the front and one in back; the five originals examined for this article all had two buttons in the back and one in the front. The original should be rechecked to ascertain whether this is accurate. The blacking on the canvas is a little rough, but not too abrasive. This haversack is quite authentic for the price.

The second haversack offered by this vendor should be regarded as a "private purchase" style rather than an issue item. The length up the back of 21", the front height of 15", width of 13" and the depth of 3 1/2" suggests that this haversack was designed for the soldier with a hearty appetite, or one assigned to foraging detail. Aside from the extraordinary size, there are a number of other novel features that prevent this haversack from being confused with an original: the 3" by 8" cloth reinforcement for the buckle is sewn outside of the bag rather than inside; there is a unique 2 1/4" by 4 1/2" cloth reinforcement for the leather closing tab sewn outside of the flap; the flap is two-ply throughout; the leather holding the closing buckle is 3 1/2" long, sewn with an "X" and featuring a metal standing loop; and the rice bag is edged with a separate 1" piece of heavier white cotton. This specimen was missing the front button for the rice bag; likely a small oversight because the corresponding button hole was present in the rice bag. The haversack was blackened with a soft, moderately reflective coating that gave it a nice texture. This haversack would be better for carrying the company's stores rather than on the shoulder of an authentic Federal.

Trans-Mississippi
117 Dearborn Place
Apartment 121
Galeta, CA 93117
No price specified

This haversack is described as a "New York Depot Pattern." The location of the original used for this reproduction is not specified. The dimensions of the reproduction do not match those of a documented haversack with markings from the New York Depot that was carried by Sgt. Horace E. Greenwood, Co. F. 1st N.H. Heavy Arty. The height from top of flap to bottom of bag of 16 1/2" is correct. But the front height is only 9 1/2" and flap length is 7", so when it is closed the bag looks squatter than it should. Two inches more on the front and sides would reduce the length of the flap and make for proper proportions. The bottom width of 9 1/4" and depth of 3 1/4" is tolerable. The 1" blued roller buckle was a trifle large. The second layer of cloth under the front correctly goes only half

way down the fold. The strap is seamed on both edges, contrary to the documented New York depot original. The usable strap length of 37" is shy of the *Quartermaster's Manual's* minimum, and causes the haversack to ride rather high under the arm. The inner rice bag is affixed with tinned buttons, albeit with cardboard backs. The surface painting is quite shiny, but not rough. Bright white canvas is visible inside, underneath the rice bag. This haversack shows the manufacture is making some effort to be accurate, and with a little more effort should be able to achieve it.

J.A. Boerste & Co.
1910 M. Van Buren St.
Huntingburg, IN 47542
Price \$25.00 + \$5.00 postage

During the Civil War, articles produced through the St. Louis and Cincinnati Depots often differed from those made back east because the contractors did not have access to the sealed samples at the Quartermaster General's office. Access to official patterns remains a challenge 135 years later. This vendor frankly acknowledges having based his product on the Time-Life book *Echoes of Glory: Arms and Equipment of the Union* (pp. 210-211) rather than directly on an original. The 11" height of the front is a bit short, and the bottom width of 10" by 4 1/4" makes for a bag that is thicker than expected. The 8" long flap is rather generous, but correct in having reinforcement only on the lower portion. The haversack makes a good appearance when the closing flap is buckled. Then, the flap appears to be 5" long and the overall height appears to be 13", which are correct proportions. The pattern just needs to be adjusted so that the sides of the haversack rise another 3" at the top, increasing the length of the front and decreasing the length of the flap. The reinforcing cloth under the front buckle also is in the proper place, although the buckle is brass rather than japanned iron (it could be painted black). The carrying strap is stitched at the edges rather than the center, and is incorrectly affixed with an "X" stitch. The rice bag is a medium weight unbleached canvas that makes a perfect fit to the haversack, and is the most authentic of any examined. The three brass French military buttons inside are incorrect, but easily replaced. The haversack is made of canvas that was piece-dyed black rather than painted black, so it has a soft and non-reflective look. Despite its lack of paint, it is said to be water and weather resistant. This haversack is good for having been based on photographs.

Fair Oaks Sutler, Inc.
9905 Kershaw Ct.
Spotsylvania, VA. 22553
703-972-7744
Price \$22.50

This reproduction does not look bad resting under a canteen, but some of its construction details differ from originals. The bag height of 12" is acceptable; the flap height of 7" is a little long, but the bottom width of 12" is noticeably off. The sides of the haversack each contain two seams, because the sides and bottom are incorrectly made from a single piece of 4" wide cloth that forms a "U" around the perimeter of the bag. This is a sturdy construction, but it was not the way it was done in the Civil War. The haversack's flap is incorrectly two ply all the way to the fold. The reinforcement piece under the front buckle incorrectly starts 6" from the top and ends at the bottom of the bag, the opposite of originals. The leather piece that holds on the buckle is incorrectly 3' long and sewn on with an "X" stitch. The haversack sling is correctly seamed in the center, but the sling has an unnecessary additional row of stitching on both edges. The rice bag is two inches narrower in width than the haversack itself, and tends to come loose from the white metal buttons. The outside is painted black with some runs and streaks; the texture is rough as sandpaper; the inside of the bag shows white canvas. The vendor stated that they do not manufacture this haversack. Consequently, one should not judge the quality of their other goods from this item.

Two haversacks were briefly examined at the 1996 Nashville Civil War show:

Fall Creek Sutlery
P.O. 92
Whitestown, IN 46075
Price \$24.95

This haversack looks better from a distance than it does up close. The height of 11¼" and bottom width of 11¼" and depth of 3" convey a square appearance. The strap is stitched in front and incorrectly has a stitched "X" to affix to the haversack. The inner rice bag is noticeably smaller than the haversack itself. The painted finish is noticeably rough.

Old Sutler John
PO Box 174 Westview Station
Binghamton, NY 13905

The height of 12" and bottom width of 1¼" and depth of 2" are not too far off from the original. The straps, however, are incorrectly set in an inch from the sides. The edges of the strap are stitched. The painted finish is noticeably rough.

In addition to the nine above, five other vendors also replied:

Quartermaster Shop	Uniforms of Antiquity
5565 Griswold Rd.	122 Sweetgum Ln.
Kimball, MI 48074	Mena, AR 71952

These two vendors kindly reported that they don't make haversacks.

Confederate Yankee
P.O. Box 192
Guilford, CT 06437-0192

This vendor indicated that they do not manufacture the haversacks that they offer, and directed us to their two sources. We were not able to contact those manufacturers in time for this article, but we appreciate the vendor's responsiveness.

John Zaharias, Sutler
P.O. Box 31152
St. Louis, MO 6313

This vendor kindly sent his catalog that offers a "U.S. Regulation Haversack, painted canvas with bread bag" for \$35.95. Unfortunately, a specimen was not furnished.

Levi Ledbetter, Sutler
7032 Mineral Springs Road
Oakboro, NC 28129

This vendor declined to have his products reviewed by *The Watchdog*, citing dissatisfaction with the review given to his leather gear in a previous issue. In *The Watchdog*, Volume 4, Number 3, Mike Hubbs examined this vendor's M1864 cartridge box, compared it with original specimens, noted a number of discrepancies, and concluded that the "workmanship was good but does not hold to original details."

The Watchdog believes that such feedback as offered by Mr. Hubbs is constructive rather than destructive. *The Watchdog* provides information to Civil War reenactors about the accuracy of reproduction goods that are offered for sale in today's market, with the hope that enlightened consumer demand will cause vendors to strive for greater accuracy in the future. If vendors revise their haversacks and wish to have them reevaluated in a follow-up article, they are welcome to submit samples, provided the samples represent what is offered to the general public. Vendors who offer the most accurate goods at the most attractive prices deserve to flourish.

References

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