

A CHECKLIST FOR FEDERAL ISSUE TROUSERS

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The construction details of Federal regulation issue trousers are difficult to discern from museum displays, because uniform coats usually cover the most important features. Even Montgomery C. Meigs' thirty eight official Quartermaster General photographs reveal little about trousers. Frederick Todd's monumental study, *American Military Equipage 1851-1872*, while correct on many details, was inaccurate on several trouser features. Given the dearth of hard data, it was not surprising that an entire generation of reenactors marched to the sound of the guns in bogus britches.

With the onset of the 1990s, the underside of Federal uniforms began to receive some attention. The Mudsills' Paul McKee published an excellent study on issue trousers in *The Company Wag* in 1991. Also in 1991, the Time-Life *Echoes of Glory* volume on Union equipment displayed 11 pairs of issue trousers. Unfortunately, good information is not always used. Three years later, the merchants' rows at major living history events continue to be filled with racks of terrible trousers, bad in cloth, color and cut. The following checklist is designed to help you avoid getting fleeced the next time you are in the market for wool.

1. Cloth. Check that the wool is kersey twilled, heavy weight, and a greenish sky blue color. Issue trousers were made from the same heavy weight wool used for overcoats and Veteran Reserve Corps jackets. The Quartermaster Manual of 1865 specified "2 yards 15 inches of 3/4 (.75 yards wide) sky blue woolen kersey, pure indigo dyed, free from shoddy or floss, and the nap slightly raised, weighing 11 ounces per yard,"

Kersey has a pronounced diagonal weave, .09" between ridges, but many mass produced reproduction trousers use cheaper wool, with a flat weave. Kersey was dyed with the same indigo used for frock coats, and it was difficult to achieve consistency in the dilution. As a consequence, there was a great deal of variation from bolt to bolt but the color was consistently darker than baby blue and had a noticeable greenish cast.

Requests for swatches were sent to 10 major uniform vendors, and their variation in wool quality was remarkable. The better modern vendors have begun to approximate the color, but they have not yet duplicated the weight and stiffness of issue kersey. In comparison with the 8 issue examples available for inspection, County Cloth came closest to matching the weight of original kersey, and C & D Jarnigan came closest to matching the color.

2. Waistband. Check that the waistband has the proper tapering and is free of topstitching. The waistband of issue trousers tapered from front to rear, from 1 3/4" tall at the fly

to 3/4" at the vent. The waistband piece was cut 1 1/4" longer than the pants, with the extra length folded inward to reinforce the waist button. There was no top stitching on the waistband of issue trousers. Instead, the upper edge of the waistband was pressed down and secured by the cotton waist band lining. The lining was wider than the wool waist band, and hand sewn top and bottom.

3. Vent. Check that the vent is the proper depth, and has provisions for adjustment. Both the rear of the waist band, and a portion of the back seam, were split to form a vent. On shallower vents, ranging from 1.75" to 2", the opening was adjustable using a string passing through a hole in either side of the waistband. On vents that were 2.5" to 3.25" deep, an extra piece of material on the inside was added as reinforcement 1" all around. Some issue trousers had a separate two piece belt, made of kersey 1 1/2" high, affixed 3" below the waistband, which fastened with a patented two prong buckle.

4. Yoke. Check that the trousers have a high back and one of the three proper yokes. Federal issue trousers were cut to be about 3" higher in the rear than in the front. That height served to prevent the unsightly gap that otherwise formed in back between the bottom of the shell jacket and the top of the trousers when the soldier was mounted or seated. A large yoke between the waistband and the legs of the trousers provided the extra height, although it required the use of suspenders for effective deployment.

Three types of yokes were used on issue trousers. Type 1 was triangular in shape, with the base aligned with the rear seam, 4" in height. The point of the triangle on Type 1 may touch the leg side seam, or it may stop about 1" short. Type 2 was almost identical to Type 1, except that the point of the triangle was cut off, and the yoke met the side of the leg with a 1-2" seam. The third type of yoke did not extend to the leg seam. It consisted of two irregular rectangles on either side of the center seam. The effect of the two pieces was a pentagon shape with the point at the vent. The insert was 6.5" high on the center seam, 5.5" wide at the waistband, 4.5" high on the leg side, and 6.5" wide at the bottom. The virtues of this type of yoke were not clear, but they are found on trousers manufactured by several contractors, including Anspach & Stanton.

5. Fly. Check that the fly is narrow. The front of the left side of the fly was part of the pant leg, but was set off by a line of stitching for the inner fly. The line of stitching on the left side of the fly was 1 1/8" on the narrowest, and 1 3/4" wide on the largest specimen examined. There was a curved taper on the lower 3", angling to the inseam. The edge of the fly was not topstitched on most specimens.

The inner fly, which carried the button holes, was made of

blue kersey. The button holes were handsewn, and evenly spaced. The back of both pieces of the fly were faced with either white or dark brown cotton. The right side of the fly carried 4 or 5 buttons, and involved a separate piece of kersey, 1.5" wide and 10" high, attached to the right leg piece. Its shape paralleled the left side. The inner side was faced with cotton, which often covered the raw edges.

In several of the trousers examined, the edge of the button-hole inner fly was tacked to the front in 2 or 3 places. When worn, the fly on those trousers could not gape open and expose the buttons. Most issue trousers, however, show no evidence of that useful feature.

6. Watch pocket. Check that the trousers have a watch pocket on the right side. The watch pocket opening was 3.25" wide, and was formed at the seam of the waistband and the pants leg on most specimens examined. In a few cases, a slit was made in the waistband itself. Schuykill, and some contractors, used an extra piece of kersey to face the opening above the waistband seam, 4" wide and 1/2" to 3/4" high, turned under at the top. The pocket itself was of white cotton, 3.5"-4" deep.

7. Side pockets. Check that the trousers have 1 of the 3 proper type of pockets. The most common form of side pocket opening was vertical, inset into the side seam of the legs about 1" below the waistband. The inside front of the pocket was faced with kersey 1.5-2" wide. The inside rear of the pocket was also faced with kersey, 1-1.5" wide. The outer edge of the pocket was top stitched, and tacked with an extra row of stitching at the top and bottom. The pocket itself was of white cotton, 6.5" wide and 12" deep.

The second type of pocket was a modified "dog ear" style. It had a horizontal opening 5" wide, and a vertical opening along the leg seam 1"-2" high. The issue version does not have the longer vertical opening and the button at the corner that is found on private purchase trousers with "dog ear" pockets.

The least common type was the diagonal slash pocket. The opening for this pocket was cut directly into the front of the leg, starting 1" from the leg seam. The corners of the pocket were 2" below the waistband on the leg side and 1" below the waistband on the fly side. The opening was 5" wide, with a slight curve. The wool inner facing of the pocket was 1" on the front and 2" in the rear. Two pairs of identified issue trousers, complete with inspector marks, had decorative top stitching below the diagonal pockets. The top stitching began at the corner of the pocket, curved below to a point 1.25" beneath the center of the opening, then formed a loop 1" long and .5" wide, and finally curved up to the other corner. The effect is Country-Western, and would be scorned on a Farb, but it is completely authentic.

8. Cuffs. Check that the cuffs have the proper reinforcement. Issue trousers were reinforced with an extra piece of kersey inside the cuff, about 1" wide, which reduced wear

from the brogans and added strength to the inseam. The cuffs were quite roomy, with a 9.5"-10" diameter.

9. Cuff slits. Check that the cuffs have the proper 1" slit. The outer seam of the leg was split at the cuff to allow the trousers to slip over the brogans. This split was only 1" high, however, and was finished off to include a flap.

On most issue examples, the top stitching of the cuff extended 1" up the front half of the leg seam, producing a finished edge. A flap was made behind this slit, using the extra material from the seam of the rear leg piece. On other specimens, the flap was made using material from the front leg seam. At 1" from the cuff the front leg seam material was snipped in 3/8" and extended over the seam itself and tacked to the rear leg piece. The raw edge of the flap was whip stitched. As a consequence, the cuff slit appears 3/8" behind the leg seam line. On both types of construction, an extra 1" square of cloth, either kersey or cotton, provided reinforcement behind the flap.

10. Mounted trousers. Check that the seat seam is reversed, and the saddling is the proper width. The lower part of the rear and crotch seam in mounted trousers was finished in reverse, such that the raw edge faced outward from the body of the trousers. With that construction, chaffing was kept to a minimum. The raw edge of this seam was covered by the saddling.

The saddling on the seat and legs of mounted trousers followed a complex curve. The piece was 15" high up the rear, 16" wide above the level of the crotch, 11" wide on each leg at the crotch and 4.5" wide at the cuff. The saddling is attached to the pants with a tight seam 1/4" from the edge. The raw edge is not turned under, but instead is tacked to the trousers with a 3/16" whip stitch. Original garments show both machine and hand stitching of the saddling of mounted trousers.

On mounted trousers, there are two pairs of buttons in each cuff to hold a leather piece which fastens under the instep. One pair of buttons straddles the inseam, the other pair is positioned 1" to the rear of the cuff split. The centers of buttons are separated by 2 1/8". Numerous infantrymen wore mounted trousers because they wore longer on the seat and between the legs

11. Buttons. Check that the trousers have the proper tinned buttons. Original waist and suspender buttons were tinned, stamped, two-piece buttons with four holes, 2/3" in diameter. The Quartermaster Manual specified 6 suspender buttons for mounted and 4 for dismounted trousers, but dismounted trousers with 6 original buttons have been observed. The fly and instep buttons were noticeably smaller 1/2" buttons. The use of 2/3" buttons at those positions is completely inaccurate. Pewter cast buttons look adequate, but black japanned buttons are not authentic for Federal issue trousers.

12. Tacking. Check that the major stress points are bar-tacked. Issue trousers had bar-tacking at all major points of stress, including the edges of the side and watch pockets, bot-

tom of vent, base of fly, and top of cuff slit.

13. Size. Check that the trousers are issue size. Quartermaster issue trousers came in only four sizes. Soldiers whose proportions did not match those of the Quartermaster Department had to make do, or employ the company tailor. A tall soldier who needed Size 4 trousers to cover long legs would have the waist taken in, which would eliminate the sizing vent at the waistband. A stout soldier who needed a Size 4 for his girth would have the legs taken up, eliminating the slit at the cuffs. In other words, soldiers who were not regulation sized should not have trousers which retain all of the regulation features in the waist and cuffs.

Modern vendors could supply the army of reenactors with the original 4 sizes, plus 3 larger sizes, and thereby reduce their own costs. Reenactors could either personally adjust them, thereby losing a few features, just like the originals, or have a poor fit, just like the originals. Either alternative will enhance the authenticity of Federal regiments.

	Waist	Outseam	Inseam
Size 1:	32"	41.5"	31"
Size 2:	34"	42.5"	32"
Size 3	36"	43.5"	33"
Size 4:	38"	44.5"	34"
Size 5:	40"	45.5"	35"
Size 6:	42"	46.5"	36"
Size 7:	44"	47.5"	38"

14. Price. Check that you pay a reasonable price. Modern vendors charge \$60-75 for a pair of inauthentic trousers off the rack, and double that for a pair of reasonably authentic trousers cut to the buyer's measurements. The Federal government paid about \$81.00 in today's money for a pair of dismounted, and \$88.35 for a pair of mounted trousers, which used heavier wool, better dye and more handstitching than is currently available. Modern vendors should be able to profit by mass producing trousers to an authentic pattern in seven sizes, and charging about \$80.00.

COMPARISONS:

	1861	1865	Modern
dismounted trousers	\$2.05	\$5.40	\$81.00
mounted trousers	3.31	5.89	88.35

Sources

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