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MEN-AT-ARMS SERIES

63

# THE AMERICAN INDIAN WARS 1860-1890



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PHILIP KATCHER G A EMBLETON

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

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# *The American Indian Wars 1860-1890*

## *Introduction*

The wars between whites and Indians, the most famous of which were fought on the great western plains between 1860 and 1890, were among the most tragic of all wars ever fought.

They were wars to the death between one civilization and another, both unable to comprehend or accommodate each other. To the victor went no less than the complete domination of a continent; to the vanquished, no more than total extinction.

The eventually victorious civilization was that of western Europe. It was a civilization based on individual profit through the use of personal property. It was highly organized and structured, very adaptive to new situations and technologically oriented.

The other civilization, on the other hand, was fragmented – broken into small tribes incapable of gathering themselves together for any prolonged activities. The tribes were nomad and, as such, had no concept of personally owning land. When they took presents and signed treaties for their land they never, within their own souls, believed they could really barter away land, the mother earth. Moreover, in their failure to comprehend white ways, they took the presents not as payment for land but as tribute and as signs of weakness, and despised the farmer whites for being inferior to the warrior redmen.

The Indians were doomed from the start.

Their way of war – and they could understand no other – consisted of constant skirmishes between tribes, comprising mostly of a few quick raids with the aim of stealing some horses, women and children. It was for sport or revenge. The Indians could not understand, therefore, why if they raided in Texas the U.S. Army from Utah and

Kansas would also come after them and not stop until they were soundly defeated and in a reservation. To their minds if they defeated one Army column that should be the end of it. The death of one Army general should result in peace.

Instead, however, they found themselves constantly pursued, fighting a European-style war of constant pressure until there is a final and total victory for one side or the other. It was a type of war the whites knew; the Indians did not. Their lack of understanding of white military and civil unification was fatal.

That unification was not apparent to the vast majority of Indians because of their own total lack



**Chief Joseph, leader of the Nez Percé during their war with the whites, and possibly the most able leader the Indians produced during the years of the Plains Indian wars (Smithsonian Institution)**





**Second Lieutenant Read, 3rd Infantry, and Chief of Scouts John O. Austin examine the body of hunter Ralph Morrison, who had been killed and scalped near Fort Dodge, Kansas, 7 December 1868, less than an hour before. Lieutenant Read wears the regulation frock-coat and a chasseur-type forage cap (Smithsonian Institution National Anthropological Archives, Bureau of American Ethnology Collection)**

of tribal co-operation. (Indians like Santana are exceptions.) Were it not for the Indians who happily co-operated with the whites against their own kind, the wars would have lasted longer and been much bloodier. In the south-west Apache fought Apache and a wide variety of tribes fought the Sioux. Many of these red allies joined because of ancient tribal feuds which seemed more important than red unification; others because they had seen the white man's power first hand and felt their only chance of survival lay in co-operation with the whites.

The Indian Wars, as all wars are between people who don't understand each other, were excessively cruel wars. Perhaps the only things to compare with the hideous massacre of friendly Indians, camped beneath an American flag at Sand Creek, would be the equally hideous treatment of settlers caught by raiding Indians and made to die as

slowly and painfully as possible. No one side had any premium on cruelty.

The Indian Wars are not neat wars of grand manoeuvre and great battle. Between 1866 and 1875 whites and Indians, mostly Sioux, fought some 200 battles, the majority with mere handfuls of people involved; between 1875 and 1887 only a few less were fought, mostly with Apaches. There were campaigns; there were battles. And yet, in these wars to the death between civilizations, they were, perhaps, less important than those who actually fought them.

## *The Plains Indians*

The Plains Indian, mounted on a brown and white dappled horse and topped by an enormous feather bonnet, has ridden into the sunset and the imaginations of millions throughout the world. Oddly enough, however, his life span was quite brief.

It was not until the late 18th century that the



basic groups which became the Plains Indians, the Sioux and the rest, were thrown out of their green eastern woodland homes by their perpetual rivals, the Chippewas, and had to find new homes in the arid and sparsely vegetated plains of northern America. There they found two basic ingredients which vastly changed their previously agrarian lives – the horse and the buffalo.

The horse is not native to America. It is thought the first horses to live free on the continent escaped from Spanish explorers of the 16th and 17th centuries. Herds of these wild horses still roam western American states, and they supplied the newly-arrived Indians with a different form of transportation.

The buffalo filled all the Indians' other needs. His meat fed them, his hide clothed them and even his excrement served to fuel their fires. The buffalo became the most vital part of the Plains Indian environment. It was hunters and settlers driving off the buffalo which caused most Indian wars.

Some ninety-five different tribes lived on the Plains, although many of them were smaller divisions of a larger tribe. The largest and most aggressive tribes included the Cheyennes, Com-

anches, Crows, Kiowas, Osages, Pawnees, Sioux and Utes. Other tribes like the Nez Percé and Modocs fought brief wars with the Army, but were, on the whole, rather peaceful.

These names are not always the names tribal members called themselves, but ones given by early explorers, usually French. The Sioux, for example, called themselves the Kakota. The word 'Sioux' was a French abbreviation of 'Nadowessioix', taken from an Ojibwa name for the tribe 'Nâdowesssi', meaning a small snake or enemy.

Tribes had no formal governments. They were divided into separate bands, each with their own chiefs, usually chosen for brave actions, great speeches or special wisdom. Chiefs had no real power, however, other than that of persuasion. Decisions about war, moves and the like were made by a council of band leaders, including the chief and shaman, or medicine man.

Individuals also often belonged to societies, rather like clubs. These had special officers, dress and songs. They were graded and usually mem-

**Chief Washakie, with his arm extended, directs the dance of some Shoshone Indians at Fort Washakie, Wyoming, about 1892. Their women sit watching the dancers. Behind them soldiers are watching, wearing combinations of fatigue and stable dress (U.S. Signal Corps)**







**Crow prisoners at the Crow Agency, Montana, 1887. They are dressed as they would be in battle, with colourful blankets and necklaces. The soldiers wear regulation fatigue dress, with two of them complete with marksmanship badges on their collars. The belts are Mills web cartridge belts (U.S. Signal Corps)**

bers would advance from one to another as they aged or performed some major act of bravery. Societies had different purposes: some policed the village, while others were concerned with hunting or war.

A typical one is a Kiowa society called the Koitsenkga, the society of the ten bravest. Each of its ten warrior members wore special sashes in battle. When a stand was necessary, the member would pin his sash to the ground, vowing to remain there until killed or released by a fellow member. The Koitsenkga's leader wore a black elkskin sash, while the next three highest members wore red elkskin sashes. The remaining members wore red cloth sashes.

The most famous, and possibly the largest, society was the Hotamintanto, a Cheyenne word

usually translated as the 'dog soldiers'. This was made up of the tribe's bravest warriors, and the society spread to include members from among the Arapaho and Sioux.

A group which may be considered a society was that of the 'suicide boys'. According to Sioux John-Stands-in-Timber, just before Little Bighorn, 'Some of the Sioux boys had just announced that they were taking the suicide vow, and others were putting on a dance for them at their end of the camp. This meant that they were throwing their lives away. In the next battle they would fight till they were killed. The Northern Cheyennes claimed that they had originated the suicide vow; then the Sioux learned it from them, and they called this dance they put on to announce it "Dying Dancing".'

'The next morning the Indians held a parade for the boys who had been in the suicide dance the night before . . . It was customary to put on such a parade after a suicide dance. The boys went in front, with an old man on either side



**Chief Looking Glass, one of Chief Joseph's most able lieutenants, and killed during the Nez Percé war, mounted for war and armed with bow and arrows. Behind him are teepees, the buffalo-skin tents in which Plains Indians lived (U.S. Signal Corps)**

announcing to the public to look at these boys well; they would never come back after the next battle.'

This ceremonial dance was only one – and a rare one at that – of a variety of dances held for a number of reasons. One of the most famous of them was the Ghost Dance, created about 1890 by an obscure shaman who had a vision of this particular dance causing the return of hundreds of thousands of slain braves. These warriors, along with living ones, would drive white men from Indian lands.

The dance itself involved a frenzied, continuous dancing until the participant fell, too exhausted to move. It was to go on until the dead arrived.

A novel addition to the dance was a special 'ghost shirt', worn during the dance and then in battle. The shirt, being blessed through dancing, would ward off any white man's bullets. Surviving examples of ghost shirts are quite beautifully beaded and fringed, made of animal hide, although simpler white cotton shirts were also worn.

Visions, such as caused the ghost dance, were a vital part of Indian life. In their late teens boys would be sent into the wilderness to seek a vision, which usually came after fasting or self torture. This vision, taking the form of an animal or god, would become his personal guardian, teaching him special magic songs and prayers.

The vision would also give him special items, perhaps feathers, old bones or pebbles, which he carried with him for the rest of his life. Faced with a problem, he used them to get in touch with his guardian.

Indians having especially strong visions often became shamans. They were thought to have special powers, such as an ability to cure the sick. In some tribes the shaman required special training as he was in charge of tribal rituals. The shaman was also often responsible for the tribe's



**Chief Powder Face, an Arapaho, wears his war costume in this photo taken between 1868 and 1874. He holds his coup stick with both hands, while cradling a tomahawk in one arm. The chest piece serves both as decoration and a form of armour (National Park Service)**





**Heliograph Station No 3, Bowie District, Arizona, about 1885, manned by Signal Corps men. In the cloudless south-west, signals could be flashed great distances by mirrors. Both soldiers and Indians used the same communication method (U.S. Signal Corps)**

sacred objects.

Shamans, like other Indians, carried their own medicine with them in a small bag which was part of their standard wardrobe. Other than this, their typical wardrobe was small, and consisted of beautiful clothing made of skins and decorated with painted quills. These were replaced with beads after the arrival of the whites.

According to one Sioux in the late 19th century, beads replaced quills as a result of an Indian-caused wreck of one of the first trains passing over their lands, in the early 1860's: 'My mother had hidden near by, and after the train smash-up she ran to it. It happened to be a freight, carrying supplies of all sorts to the distant West, and among the cargo was quite a quantity of maple sugar, gingham, and beads. My mother obtained from this train wreck the first beads ever seen by the Sioux Nation. Prior to that time, all the fancy work on moccasins or clothing was made with porcupine quills, which were dyed. In using these quills, the women would hold them in their mouths until soft, then, when they were used, the quill was flattened with the finger nail.

'Being a very smart woman, my mother conceived the idea of using some of these beads in place of the quills, to see what they would look like. She beaded a strip of buffalo skin, using yellow beads for the background, instead of the white ones which are now used so much. This

beaded strip she sewed on a buffalo calf skin, which I wore as a blanket.'

Besides beads or quills, some successful warriors trimmed their shirts and moccasins with human hair. Other possible decorations were bear claws and elk and wolf teeth. As only two teeth from one elk could be used, a shirt such as one on which there were 300 elk teeth showed its wearer to be a great hunter.

Such were ceremonial items. Usually the Indian went about in summer in little more than a breechcloth and, perhaps, a shirt. Ceremonial clothing, however, was worn for any important occasion, including war. Wrote a Cheyenne Indian, Wooden Leg, 'If a battle seemed to occur, the warrior's first important preparatory act was to jerk off all his ordinary clothing. He then hurriedly got out his fine garments.

'The idea of full dress in preparation for a battle comes not from a belief that it will add to the fighting ability. The preparation is for death, in case that should be the result of the conflict. Every Indian wants to look his best when he goes to meet the Great Spirit, so the dressing up is done whether the imminent danger is an oncoming battle or sickness or injury at times of peace. Some Indian tribes did not pay full attention to this matter, some of them seeming not to care whether they took life risks while naked or only partly clad or shabbily clad. But the Cheyennes and the Sioux were careful in following out the procedure.'

An Army officer described some Sioux at a meeting in 1876: 'All the men wore loose trousers of dark blue cloth; moccasins of buck or buffalo



skin covered with bead work; and were wrapped in Mackinaw blankets, dark blue or black in color, closely enveloping the frame; some of these blankets were variegated by a transverse band of bright red cloth worked with beads, while underneath appeared dark woollen shirts. Strings of beads, shells, and brass rings encircled each neck. The hair was worn long but plain, the median line painted with vermilion or red ochre. Their faces were not marked with paint of any kind, an unusual thing with Indians in those days.'

Some Indians, even among the Sioux and Cheyennes, however, wore no clothing at all into battle. They were, said Wooden Leg, '... such warriors as specially fortified . . . by prayer and other devotional exercises. They had special instruction from medicine men. Their naked bodies were painted in peculiar ways, each according to the direction of his favourite spiritual guide, and each had his own medicine charms given to him by this guide. A warrior thus made ready for battle was supposed to be proof against the weapons of the enemy.'

One Sioux symbol, painted on a body or shirt, was a hand, which showed the wearer had killed an enemy in a hand-to-hand fight. According to an Army captain in the 1870s black was most commonly used by the Comanches for painting the body and face, although much olive green, red and yellow ochre was used as well.

Besides body and face paint, hair was important to the Indians. Different tribes wore their hair in different styles. The Omahas braided their hair with feathers. The Crows pulled their hair into a tall pompadour with heavy doses of grease. The Pawnees shaved their heads, leaving a strip of hair running from brow to nape of neck. The captain among the Comanches wrote that in that tribe, 'Their hair, especially that of the "bucks" or warriors, is a matter of great pride to them and daily about a village they could be seen carefully combing, greasing, and braiding their scalp-locks, which are generally tied with red flannel, with otter or beaver fur and, in battle, by elaborate head-dresses or war-bonnets of the most unique and fantastical designs.

'They carefully plucked all hair from the face with a pair of tweezers made either of bone or metal.'

Warbonnets generally were made of feathers. Among the Sioux the feathers had special meanings. Each untrimmed feather stood for one man the wearer had killed, while a notched or flat-trimmed feather indicated that he had cut an enemy's throat. A split feather indicated a wound received in battle.

'Warbonnets were not worn by all warriors,' wrote Wooden Leg. 'In fact, there were only a few such distinguished men in each warrior society of our tribe. It was expected that one should be a student of the fighting art for several years, or else that he be an unusually apt learner, before he should put on the crown of eagle feathers. He then did so upon his own initiative, or perhaps because of the commendatory urgings of his seniors. The act meant a profession of fully acquired ability in warfare, a claim of special accomplishment in using cunning and common sense and cool calculation equipped with the bravery attributed to all warriors. The wearer was supposed never to ask (for) mercy in battle . . .

'War chiefs and tribal chiefs ordinarily were



**This hospital steward's four-button fatigue blouse is longer than usual and has three outside pockets. He holds a black slouch hat**





**Medical aid for both sides was crude, as this lieutenant wounded in the Battle of Slim Buttes, Dakota Territory, 1876, has discovered. A post hospital may be many miles away (U.S. Signal Corps)**

warbonnet men, but this was not a requirement for these positions. Pure modesty might keep the bravest and most capable fighter from making the claim. Also, an admittedly worthy wearer of the warbonnet might not be chosen for or might refuse all official positions.'

Each man made his own warbonnet, with his wife, mother or sister making only the beaded band for his forehead. Some tribes didn't wear beaded headbands. An officer described the Crows in the 1870's as having, '... head-dress fashioned in divers shapes but the most frequently formed from an old black army hat, with the top cut out and sides bound round with feathers, fur and scarlet cloth. Their arms were all breech-loaders, throwing cartridges of caliber .50 with an occasional .45. Lances, medicine-poles and tomahawks figured in the procession. The tomahawks, made of long knives inserted in shafts or handles of wood and horn, were murderous weapons.'

Indians had no facilities for making self-contained ammunition or guns and therefore depended on trading or buying that material, being supplied with it by the government, or capturing it in battle.

As a result there was a tremendous hodge-podge of weapons in use in every band. Shotguns and hunting rifles, taken from slain hunters and farmers; Colt revolvers from cowboys, and military carbines, rifles and pistols from soldiers were

mixed with native weapons. Guns and ammunition, supposedly for hunting but as often used for war, were also supplied by the U.S. Government through its Indian Agents. Often these weapons were decorated by nailing brass tacks in designs all over the stocks. As Indians gave little thought to the future, however, they were usually ill-tended, dirty and rusty inside and out. Rather than clean a weapon, the typical Indian preferred to obtain another.

The most famed native weapon was the bow and arrow. Originally these appear to have been about the length of an English long-bow. However, when the horse came into use, the bows were made shorter. A typical one was noted as being some three feet long. By 1865 most Indians were using arrowheads made of sheet or scrap iron.

An Army captain wrote in 1864, 'A bow-and-arrow is a much more dangerous and effective weapon than a revolver in the hands of an Indian. While a revolver could shoot six times... it could not be loaded on horse back on a run with somebody pursuing, but the Indian could shoot six arrows... and then he could shoot twenty-four more in rapid succession. And so, when a soldier had shot out all his cartridges, he was a prey to an Indian with a bow-and-arrow who followed him. In addition to this, the Indians carried lances, which they used to good purpose. Our boys had sabers; an Indian could not hit a soldier with a lance if the soldier had a saber, nor could a soldier saber an Indian if the Indian had a lance.'

Lances were generally some twelve to fifteen feet



long, decorated with feathers and scalps. Among the Comanches only the bravest warriors could carry lances.

The lance was similar to another long stick carried in battle, decorated like the lance but shaped like a shepherd's crook. This was the coup stick, which was used to gain honours. Its owner would touch a live enemy with it, without being harmed himself during battle. If the enemy were dead, honour for the coup went to he who touched the corpse first, rather than the actual killer.

Such a way of making sport of battle led to tremendous acts of bravery, but they were, in the long run, rather foolish.

Other native weapons were tomahawks, although by then these were usually made by white men for trade. They were clubs of wood often tipped with stone and knives. Knives were also usually bought from white men and were often the famed Bowie knives.

For defence many Indians carried small round shields. An Army officer in the 1880s described them: '... [the] shields of the Shoshones, like

those of the Sioux and Crows and Cheyennes, were made of the skin of the buffalo bull's neck, which is an inch in thickness. This is cut to the desired shape, and slightly larger than the required size to allow for shrinking; it is pegged down tight on the ground, and covered with a thin layer upon which is heaped a bed of burning coals, which hardens the skin so that it will turn the point of the lance or a round bullet.' The shield was then decorated with paint, while bits of fur or hair were often hung around its sides.

Thus dressed and armed the Indian was ready for battle.

'Their tactics under fire are difficult to describe,' wrote Captain Richard Carter in the 1870s. A typical one was, '... the action with Quanah Parker's band of Qua-ha-da Comanches in the mouth of Cañon Blanco, October 10, 1871, when they assembled their entire force for an open field fight with our command of the 4th Cavalry. Their

**General George Crook in the south-west as he normally appeared during a summer campaign, with his favourite mule, shotgun and two Apache scouts. His hat is a cork sun helmet (U.S. Signal Corps)**







Lieutenant Colonel George Custer's column of troops in the Black Hills expedition, Dakota Territory, 1874. Two 12lb Napoleon cannon are in the foreground, while cavalry rides along the flanks, left and right. The rear officer on the left appears to be wrapped in a blanket or waterproof (Office of the Chief of Engineers)

rapid swing out or rush into a V-shape formation and then fanning out to the front from these two wings into an irregular line of swirling warriors, all rapidly moving in right and left hand-circles, no two Indians coming together, and their quick extensions, while advancing to the right or left, and as rapidly concentrating or assembling on the centre, but without any close bunching and their falling back all in the same manner, sometimes in a fan-shaped or wing formation, all was most puzzling to all of our Civil War veterans who never witnessed such tactical manoeuvres, or such a flexible line of skirmishers; all without any audible commands but with much screeching and loud yelling.'

This was typical of all Indian attacks. The war chief would lead his men to the attack, but from there on it was every man for himself. 'We paid no attention to the chiefs,' said a Santee Sioux, Lightning Blanket, in 1862. 'Everyone did as he pleased.'

Although it seems total chaos, the Indians felt their tactics worked best. Wrote another Sioux,

Big Eagle, 'Owing to the white men's way of fighting they lost many men. Owing to the Indians' way of fighting they lost but few.'

Generally, however, Indians preferred not to fight pitched battles. 'They have no idea of meeting the enemy upon an open plain face to face, to be shot at like dogs, as they say,' wrote Ojibway Chief Kahkewaquonaby. 'Their aim is to surprise the enemy by darting upon them in an unexpected moment, or in the dead of night. They always take care, in the first place, to ascertain the position of the enemy. When they find them unprepared or asleep, they creep up slowly and stealthily, like panthers in pursuit of their prey; when sufficiently near, they simultaneously raise the war whoop, and before the enemy awake or have time to defend themselves, the tomahawk is rattling over their heads.'

When attacked in their own village the braves immediately ran for horses to meet the enemy on horseback, while the women gathered children and ran for cover. According to half-breed George Brent, 'At such times a man always took any pony he wanted; if the pony was killed in the fight the rider did not have to pay its owner for it, but everything the rider captured in battle belonged to the owner of the pony he rode.'



## The Apaches

'With a stupidity strictly consistent with the whole history of our contact with the aboriginies,' wrote an officer who spent some years in the Apache homeland, the south-west, 'the people of the United States have maintained a bitter and unrelenting warfare against a people whose name was unknown to them. The Apache is not the Apache; the name "Apache" does not occur in the language of the "Tinneh", by which name . . . our Indian prefers to designate himself "The Man."'

The name 'Apache' actually comes from a Zuñi word meaning 'enemy'.

The Apaches, whose territory covered what is now parts of Texas, Arizona, New Mexico and Mexico, were a number of smaller groups, each made up of a number of families united by kinship and a common place of residence. Each local group was independent, while a number of these groups would form a loose association or band within certain territorial limits. These bands would go together under one leader in wartime, although normally each group had its own leader.

Moreover, some of the bands together considered themselves a single people, and made up a tribe, although there were no tribal officers or governments.

Each local group would usually have a head chief, who would make decisions on sending out raiding parties, holding ceremonies and such activities. However, he had no real authority, depending on his influence among his followers to persuade them to do his will. Any family unhappy with the chief was free to join another group, and a popular chief would attract followers from a number of neighbouring groups. Each group also had its own shaman.

While some groups had hereditary chiefs, the position passing within the same clan, others passed the post on to sons of dead leaders or members of important families who had qualities of being a noted hunter, warrior or wise man.

Clan heads within the group were subchiefs, while their wives were women chiefs in charge of the clan's women.

In wartime one man, known for fighting and leadership abilities, would usually be chosen as war chief for a whole band of up to several hundred warriors. Individual groups sometimes preferred their own war chiefs, and it would not be uncommon for a band to go into battle with two or more war chiefs.

The band's council, made up of local group's chiefs and subchiefs, would also choose a civil leader, usually someone known as an outstanding speaker, for the war's duration. Often both war and civil chiefships were combined in one man.

While council and band leaders would have to approve major wars, an individual was free to organise and go off on his own raid any time. He could enlist men to follow him from his own group.

Before any raid or war special dances and ceremonies would be held. Other ceremonies, especially a scalp dance with everyone participating, would be held on the warriors' successful return.



The 1861 volunteer cavalryman's jacket had a short collar with only one button and lace buttonhole, while the regular's had two. The shirt was grey flannel. Boots were rarely issued, although widely worn





**Men of Troop C, 5th Cavalry in the Indian Territory, 1888, wear typical field dress. The man second from the left wears a false-fronted 'fireman's' shirt, while the man next to him sports a quite un-military white shirt. Their issue hats lack any badges (U.S. Signal Corps)**

Rarely did the Apaches ride into battle, for they were poor horsemen and preferred to dismount and fight on foot.

One of General George Crook's officers, who served against the Apaches, wrote, 'The Apache was a hard foe to subdue, not because he was full of wiles and tricks and experienced in all that pertains to the art of war, but because he had so few artificial wants and depended almost absolutely upon what his great mother - Nature - stood ready to supply. Starting out upon the war-path, he wore scarcely any clothing save a pair of buckskin moccasins reaching to mid-thigh and held to the waist by a string of the same material; a piece of muslin encircling the loins and dangling down behind about to the calves of the legs, a war-hat of buckskin surmounted by hawk and eagle plumage, a rifle (the necessary ammunition in [a] belt) or a bow, with the quiver filled with arrows reputed to be poisonous, a blanket thrown over the shoulders, a water-tight wicker jug to serve as a canteen, and perhaps a small amount of "jerked" meat, or else of "pinole" or parched corn-meal.

'That is all, excepting his sacred relics and "medicine", for now is the time when the Apache is going to risk no failure by neglecting the precaution needed to get all his ghosts and gods on his side.'

Rarely did Apaches fight actual battles in large bands; they preferred to raid. Their tactics usually consisted of a small group of two or three Apaches sneaking to some rock or hill's shelter which overlooked an enemy camp. There they would wait for as long as several days, almost motionless, until they got a chance to stampede a herd, kill some enemies or 'jump' a waggon train.

Wrote an officer, 'They knew how to disguise themselves so thoroughly that one might almost step upon a warrior thus occupied before he could detect his presence. Stripped naked, with head and shoulders wrapped up in a bundle of yucca shoots or "sacaton" grass, and with body rubbed over with the clay or sand along which it wriggled as sinuously and as venomously as the rattler itself, the Apache could and did approach to within ear-shot of the whites . . .

'On such occasions he preferred to employ his lance or bow, because these made no sound, and half or even a whole day might elapse before the stiffened and bloody corpse of the herder or wagoner would be found, and the presence of Indians in the vicinity known. At least twenty such examples could be given from my own knowledge . . .'

## *The Army*

Until 1865, when the Regular Army was free to return to Western duty, the frontiers were largely guarded by locally-raised regiments. Besides locals, the Army raised five regiments, called U.S. Volunteers, from among captured Confederates who preferred fighting Indians to the cold and misery of Union prison camps. They had been guaranteed they would not be used against their fellow southerners.

By 1866 all the volunteers had been demobilised and the Regulars were back on the plains.

The men who made up the Regular Army came from all backgrounds. Many had a taste of army action during the Civil War, found it to their liking and stayed in. A good number simply changed from Confederate grey to U.S. blue - often losing a great deal of rank in the process. Others came



from European armies. Still more were men 'on the run' from the law, big city toughs or men financially 'busted'. Troop C, 8th Cavalry even boasted a Harvard University graduate among its rankers.

One man, who previously put in four years in the German Army, wrote that the men in his regiment, the 7th Infantry, in 1888 were only fair soldiers, although the company officers were excellent leaders. Relations between officers and rank and file were very good, he thought.

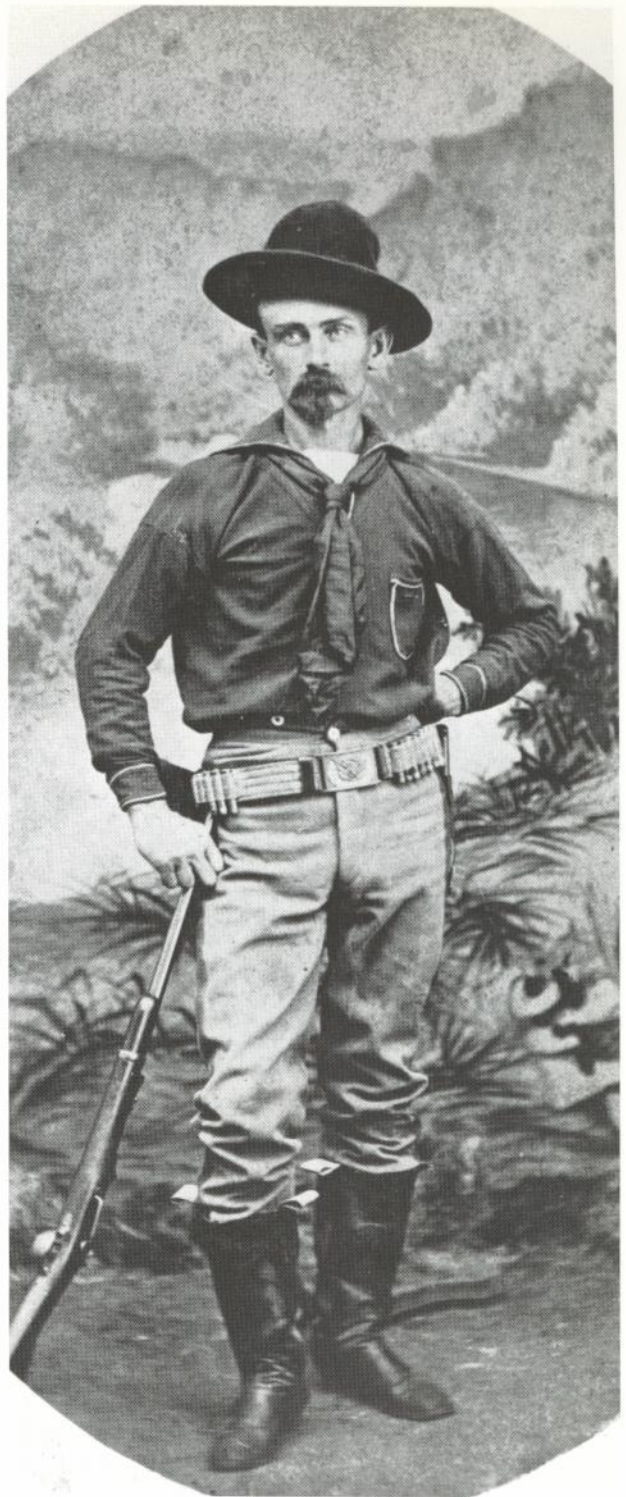
The 7th Infantry, which served on the northern plains, was a better than usual regiment because it managed to serve together in the same place and thus maintain an *esprit de corps* rather unique in the Army. Only the 13th Infantry, serving in Apache country, and the 4th Cavalry managed to stay together in the same way.

Each regiment was made up of ten to twelve companies. These rarely served together, making the company for all practical purposes the basic military unit. The President had the authority to permit companies to have any strength from a minimum of fifty rank and file to a maximum of a hundred, with a captain and two lieutenants. In 1866 light artillery batteries were authorised 122 rankers, while infantry, cavalry and heavy artillery companies were allowed 64. After Little Bighorn this strength was raised to one hundred, although companies rarely reached such a number. A 5th Infantry officer, campaigning against the Sioux and northern Cheyennes in 1878 wrote that one of his regiment's companies had only sixteen men fit for duty.

Not only were companies separated and small, but the men were largely untrained. It was supposed that, with the majority of men being Civil War veterans, little more training was necessary, even drill being neglected. Post sutler's clerk Peter Koch wrote that inspections at Fort Ellis, Montana, in 1871, were limited to, 'officers . . . inspecting a few bottles of champagne'.

This began to change by 1872. In that year small arms target practice officially began, with each soldier having to fire ninety rounds annually at a rifle range, and to participate in drills on estimating distances.

Little Bighorn shocked the military establishment. Training really began in earnest. In 1879 a



**First Sergeant John Comfort in field dress. The sergeant has adapted the leather swordbelt into a cartridge belt by sewing canvas loops around it. His sailor-type shirt is strictly a civilian model (U.S. Signal Corps)**





**This cavalryman wears the gauntlets first issued in 1884. Except for the neckerchief, his uniform is entirely the issue fatigue one for the later Indian War years (U.S. Signal Corps)**

policy of awarding prizes and furloughs to each unit's best shot was adopted, with each man having to fire twenty rounds a month. In 1880 a formal programme of competitions at post, department and divisional level was initiated, with the best marksmen competing at Creedmore, Long Island, New York. By 1890 the Army felt the U.S. Regular was the world's best military marksman.

Other forms of training were practice marches, skirmishes and drills. The 5th Infantry was drilled in all kinds of weather even before Little Bighorn, giving that regiment a special reputation for steadiness under fire. Other regiments were sending recruits out on long practice marches and war

games as early as 1879.

Still, the only real specialists in the Army were in the Signal Corps. The Corps' telegraph and heliograph operators were the Army's first field specialists and, as such, were the highest rated enlisted men in the Army. In the 1880's upon enlisting they received special training in their crafts at the Corps' own school at Fort Myer, Virginia.

Another training area initially neglected was first aid. By the late 1880s two to four men a company were given special training as litter bearers, with an emphasis on bandaging wounds, making splints and anything else they could do on the spot. Litter bearers were joined by another new rank, hospital corpsmen, and a programme of weekly lessons and lectures for these men was begun in 1887.

Artillery changed little from the Civil War. Bronze, smooth-bore 12lb Napoleon cannon were commonly used. With a slower rate of fire and shorter range than guns used by contemporary European armies they would have been hopelessly outclassed in a war with any other nation. At the range Indians typically fought, and given the fact Indians had no cannon at all and were quite awed by its use, the Napoleon was all that was needed.

Perhaps more effective and popular than the limber-drawn Napoleon, especially in the rocky south-west, was the model 1841 12lb mountain howitzer. Made to be carried in parts on pack mules, it could be quickly assembled to fire a shell some 900 yards to a mile away.

Infantry weapons had kept up with modern developments by the introduction of a breech-loading system in 1866. The old 0.58 calibre Springfield rifled muskets were quickly and easily converted to breechloaders using brass or copper cartridges by altering the breech to an Allyn 'trap-door' breech. This system was similar to the system adopted in 1872 for use on the Springfield 45/70 rifles.

With only slight model changes, the same weapon served throughout the period. Although it had a sharp kick, and its black powder gave off great clouds of smoke which made concealment difficult, it had a high rate of fire, long range and fine accuracy.

The paper cartridges for the old muskets had been carried in tin holders in leather cartridge



A 10th cavalry trooper in Arizona, 1888, as drawn by Frederick Remington. He carries two water-bottles



boxes. The new metal cartridges noisily bounced about in the old boxes, making sneak attacks pretty difficult. Soldiers solved the problem themselves by making looped belts to hold their cartridges. These were made at first by sewing loops onto issue leather belts. Tannic acid in the leather corroded the cartridge cases, putting a layer of tough blue-green verdigris on each one. Not only could this dangerously weaken the cartridge, but it made it stick in the weapon's breech or soldier's belt. The soldier would have to pry a fired case loose from the breech – slow and dangerous in a hot fight.

The men solved this problem by either cleaning each cartridge daily or making their belts of heavy canvas, which had no acid content.

An 18th Infantry captain, Anson Mills, at Fort Bridger in 1866 had his post saddler make leather looped belts for his men, personally obtaining a patent on the idea. In late 1876 the Ordnance Department, which had consistently preferred boxes to belts, finally gave in to popular pressure and had 30,000 canvas and leather 'prairie' cartridge belts made at Watervliet Arsenal. By then virtually no cartridge boxes had been used out West for a number of years.

This light-weight belt had another advantage, besides bringing in a fair sum of royalties to Captain Mills. It reduced the fighting man's load. The Indian-fighting infantryman became one of the lightest loaded soldiers in the world. Lieutenant W. B. Weir in 1877 listed an infantryman's full





**Peaches, a White Mountain Apache scout in 1885. He is armed with a civilian-type rifle and apparently a British revolver (National Archives)**

field equipment load as:

60 rounds ammunition and belt	5.40 lbs
overcoat	5.25 lbs
blanket (grey wool)	5.13 lbs
rubber blanket (ground cloth)	3.00 lbs
Springfield rifle and sling (bayonet omitted from this list)	8.40 lbs
extra clothes	2.00 lbs
full canteen (one quart)	3.84 lbs
five rations: 3/4 lbs meat and 1 lb hardtack per day	8.75 lbs
<b>Total</b>	<b>41.77 lbs (18.79 kg)</b>

Officers, who generally carried a pistol and often some sort of rifle, carried about the same weight. Sometimes the men went even lighter, as shown in General Field Orders No. 2, Department of Dakota, 10 August 1876, in an anti-Sioux campaign: 'No tents whatever will be carried, no company property, no cooking utensils [sic], except tin cups, no bedding (except one blanket per man) . . . 100 rounds of ammunition (per man) . . . Every infantry officer and man will carry with him two days' cooked rations.'

## THE CAVALRY

Because of the type of land on which the Plains Indian Wars were fought – fairly treeless and vast – and the fact that the Indian way of life was based on the horse, the arm of the service which bore the primary brunt of the Indian Wars was the cavalry.

When the Civil War broke out there were only six cavalry regiments. They were sent where they were most desperately needed – along the east coast to fight Confederates. As the Indians declined to stop fighting their own wars and making raids just because whites were fighting between themselves, cavalry had to be sent west. The main effort had to be made by volunteers.

During the war the cavalry regiments in the west were the 1st and 2nd California; 1st and 3rd Nebraska; 12th, 13th and 14th Missouri; 5th, 6th, 9th, 11th, 15th and 16th Kansas; 2nd and 3rd Colorado; 1st Michigan; 1st Nevada; 7th Iowa, 6th West Virginia; 11th Ohio; 21st New York; 17th Illinois; 3rd Massachusetts, and 3rd Wisconsin.

Captain Eugene F. Ware, 7th Iowa, later wrote that his regiment, ' . . . was well mounted and had been provided with new uniforms, but was poorly armed. Each cavalryman had a Gallagher carbine, an exceedingly inefficient weapon; a Colt's .44 calibre revolver, which loaded . . . with a paper cartridge; a heavy dragoon sabre, which was becoming obsolete and which, subsequently, before the regiment's term of service expired, was boxed up and stored.' Such a description would be typical of any of the volunteer regiments.

The volunteers served well enough – except



for the disgraceful massacre at Sand Creek by Colorado Volunteers – until the Regulars could return. By 1866 only Regulars patrolled the plains.

The 1st Cavalry was sent to the Pacific Coast in 1866. In 1868 it was sent to Arizona to handle Apaches. A decade later, 1878, it was sent to posts in Nevada, Montana and Idaho. In 1881 four troops returned to Arizona. The entire regiment was reunited in the Dakotas in 1884 and returned again to Arizona in 1892.

The 2nd Cavalry, also known as the 'Dandy Regiment' because of the smartness of their turnout, was posted to Kansas in 1866. The First Squadron was sent to Montana in 1869, returning to the regiment in 1874. The regiment was used mainly against the Sioux and Cheyennes. In 1877 the regiment served in the Nez Percé campaign. From 1880 to 1883 it was again mainly employed against the Sioux, being sent to the Pacific Coast in 1884. In 1890 the regiment was sent to posts in Arizona and New Mexico.

The 3rd Cavalry was sent to forts in Arkansas and Texas in 1866. The next year it was sent to various posts in New Mexico, Arizona and throughout the south-west, fighting Apaches. It was sent north, serving against Utes and Sioux in 1872, returning to Texas in 1882.

The 4th Cavalry was sent to Texas and the Indian Territory (now Oklahoma) in 1866. Between 1875 and 1881 it was mostly fighting Utes and Cheyennes. It was sent to New Mexico in

1881. In 1884 the regiment was assigned to Arizona forts. It was sent to the Pacific Coast in 1890.

The 5th Cavalry was sent to Kansas in 1866. In 1871 it was sent on to forts in Texas, going on to Arizona the next year. In 1875 it was returned to Kansas, going on campaigns from there against the Sioux, Cheyennes and Nez Percé. In 1879 it was sent against the Utes. In 1880 the regiment was split among posts in Kansas, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

The 6th Cavalry was sent to Texas in 1865. In 1871 it was sent on to various posts in the Indian Territory and Kansas. In 1875 it was sent to garrison posts in Arizona and New Mexico, being united in New Mexico in 1885. In 1890 it was sent to the Dakotas.

The 7th Cavalry was organised in various posts from Kansas to the Rocky Mountains in 1866. In 1875 it went to posts in Texas and the south-west. From 1873 to 1876 it served against the Cheyennes and Sioux, being virtually destroyed at Little Bighorn in June 1876, and having to be newly recruited. From 1877 to 1890 it served in posts in the Dakotas and Montana.

The 8th Cavalry was organised in the Presidio (fort) of San Francisco, California, in 1866, serving there until 1870 when it was sent to Arizona.

**Apache scouts at Fort Wingate, New Mexico, on parade with 45/70 carbines and web-type cartridge belts. They wear a wide variety of leggings and foot-gear (U.S. Signal Corps)**







**Crow King, a Hunkpapa scout, at Fort Buford, North Dakota, 1881, wears an old second lieutenant's coat. His hair is braided with animal fur (U.S. Signal Corps)**

In 1875 it was sent on to Texas, and in 1888, the Dakotas.

The 9th Cavalry was an all-black regiment – ‘buffalo soldiers’ to the Indians, ‘brunettes’ to the whites. It was organised in New Orleans, largely from among blacks who had seen service during the Civil War, in 1866. Officers were white. The next year it was sent to Texas, serving there until sent on to New Mexico in 1875. In 1881 the regiment was split among posts in Kansas and the Indian Territory. In 1885 it was sent to posts in Nebraska and Utah, while two troops went to Montana in 1887.

The other black Cavalry regiment was the 10th Cavalry, organised at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1866, where it was stationed until 1868. It was sent then on campaigns in the Indian Territory, and the next year to posts in Texas and the Indian Territory. In 1875 the regiment was divided among posts in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, ending up in posts in Texas and Arizona alone in 1882.

Each cavalry regiment was made up of twelve troops, divided into three squadrons of four troops

each. A colonel, assisted by a lieutenant colonel, commanded a regiment. Each squadron was commanded by a major. The squadrons were numbered.

Troops were designated by letters, although the letter ‘J’ was omitted. A ‘J’ Troop, if there were one at all, was a ‘John’, or recruit, troop.

Each troop was commanded by a captain, assisted by a first lieutenant and a second lieutenant.

Non-commissioned officers on the regimental staff included a sergeant major, a quartermaster sergeant, a chief musician and a chief trumpeter. Each troop had a first sergeant, five sergeants, four corporals, two trumpeters, two farriers, a saddler and a waggoner. The 1st, 6th and 9th Cavalry Regiments, according to General Orders 47, 9 May 1877, were to have 54 privates in each troop, while the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 7th, and 10th Cavalry were to have 84 privates per troop. This means the Army could deploy 10,970 cavalymen, all ranks, against the Indians. Desertions, deaths and special assignments kept the actual number in the field considerably below this figure.

Cavalrymen were armed with a variety of weapons. The first was a brass-hilted Model 1860 light cavalry sabre, slung from a black leather waistbelt with a rectangular brass buckle bearing an eagle and silver wreath. When the men went into the field, however, sabres were often boxed and stored.

Balancing the sabres, which hung on the left side, was a revolver on the right, worn butt to the front in a covered black leather holster. In the early years of the Plains Indian Wars these were Colt and Remington 0.44 calibre percussion revolvers. They used a paper-wrapped cartridge, ignited by the hammer hitting a copper fulminate-of-mercury-filled cap on a nipple behind the chamber. Loading was a fairly slow procedure.

In 1872 a new model of Colt 0.45 calibre revolver was approved by the Army, the famed ‘Peacemaker’, which used a self-contained brass cartridge. Issue was not immediate to the troops, however, with, for example, the 7th Cavalry not receiving their new pistols until the first half of 1874.

Each man carried a carbine. These were breech-loading, with the ones used in the early years



those used in the Civil War, e.g. Sharps, Smiths, Spencers, Gallaghers and Burnside's. They were usually 0.52 calibre, with a rather short range; little further, in fact, than pistols. They also used, except for the Spencers and Henrys, paper cartridges and copper caps. The other two used brass self-contained cartridges, stored in magazines.

In 1873 the same breechloading system as used in infantry rifles was adopted for carbines. As with pistols, issue was not immediate and the 45/70 Model 1873 Springfield carbine was not issued to the 7th Cavalry, for example, until mid-1875.

Officers often used non-issue weapons. Lieutenant Colonel George A. Custer, for example, carried a brace of British-made revolvers and a Remington sporting rifle, while Crook preferred a shot-gun.

Cavalrymen also generally carried 'butcher knives' in their belts.

Ammunition for this arsenal was originally intended to be carried in leather cartridge boxes – large ones for carbine ammunition sometimes carried on the carbine sling and small ones on the waistbelt for pistols. Caps were carried in small black leather pouches worn on the front hip. As caps for both weapons were different sizes, often two cap pouches would be worn at one time.

As with the infantry, cavalrymen didn't like the old cartridge boxes when metallic cartridges for breechloaders were issued. The Ordnance Department therefore issued another type of cartridge box, the Dyer pouch, which had twenty-four canvas loops to hold cartridges inside each pouch. They were still unpopular with the troopers, who preferred using looped waistbelts. As early as 1872 the 3rd Cavalry was reported as all using looped waistbelts, without a single pouch in the regiment.

Captain C. E. Dutton, Chief Ordnance Officer in the Department of the Platte, reported on 14 January 1877, 'The officers & soldiers *will not use* the cartridge box & *will use* the belt & if they cannot obtain canvas belts from the Ord. Dept. they will improvise them. I should add however that some Cavalry Captains prefer the fleece-lined (Dyer) pouch but certainly not a majority of them.'

Pistol ammunition for the Peacemaker was carried in old cap pouches. The pistol itself was



**A Frederick Remington drawing of an Apache Scout wearing native Apache boot-type moccasins**

carried in a holster similar to the older ones, butt forward, although the holster didn't slide easily onto looped cartridge belts without some work by the individual soldier. In 1877 the Ordnance Department began issuing web cartridge belts with a provision for the holster.

Initially troopers rode on plain rawhide-covered saddles, although they were supposed to be replaced with a black leather-covered, beechwood saddle, the McClellan, from the beginning. The 7th Cavalry didn't receive the new saddles until 1869 and the old ones weren't wholly replaced until the end of 1875. The new saddle had a blue webbing girth and hickory wood stirrups covered with black leather hoods marked 'US' on each one.

An extra strap was included on the saddle for a man to hold the horse while its owner was off fighting. Generally, one out of every four men



nished them, but no two of the Pawnees seemed to agree as to the correct manner in which the various articles should be worn. As they lined up for dress parade, some of them wore heavy overcoats, others discarded even pantaloons, content with a breech-clout. Some wore large black hats with brass accoutrements; others went bare-headed. Many wore the pantaloons, but declined shirts, while a few of the more original cut the seats from the pantaloons, leaving only leggings. Half of them were without boots or moccasins, but wore the clinking spurs with manifest pride.'

One Army officer who probably made more use of Indian scouts than most was George Crook. The success of his campaigns against the Apaches largely depended on his scouts, which he managed to recruit from among the very people he was fighting.

In the hot south-west, Crook's scouts dressed in even less of a regulation manner than scouts did on the northern plains. An officer accompanying Crook described them in 1883 as wearing, '... a loosely fitting shirt of red, white or grey stuff, generally of calico, in some gaudy figures, but not infrequently the same article of woollen raiment issued to white soldiers. This came down outside a pair of cotton drawers, reaching to the moccasins ... a leather belt encircling the waist holds forty rounds of metallic cartridges and also keeps in place the regulation blue blouse and pantaloons which were worn ... only when the Indian Scout is anxious to paralyze the frontier towns or military posts by a display of his finery. The other trappings of the savage auxiliaries are a Springfield breechloading rifle, army pattern, a canteen full of water, [and] a butcher knife ...'

In contemporary illustrations Apache scouts usually wear their hair long with a colourful head-band instead of a hat. Other than that, they were generally dressed the same as typical Plains Indian scouts - a five-button fatigue blouse, a web cartridge belt, sometimes sky blue trousers and a black slouch hat.

It was not until Circular No. 10 was published on 11 August 1890 that the Indian Scouts received a regulation uniform.

Generally it was the same as other Army uniforms, save the dark blue shirt had a deeper collar, some two inches wide at the back and three-and-



**On the frontier officers preferred the broad-brimmed slouch hat to the regulation forage cap. Colonel Silas P. Richmond has the embroidered infantry officer's cap badge with his regimental number in its centre on his hat**

a-half inches at the front to hold a neckerchief. The badge to be worn on the slouch hat was, 'to be made of nickel or some white metal, three inches in length, the letters U.S.S. in the upper intersection' of a pair of crossed arrows. The hatcord was white worsted with a strand of scarlet interwoven, representing the blending of Indian society into that of the whites, ending in a white worsted slide and two white tassels. Chevrons were white, piped scarlet.

A unique uniform item was an overcoat, 'to be made of Irish frieze, or imitation of that material of some dark color, to be cut ulster shape, large and full enough to cover all accoutrements; to reach within ten inches of the ground; to be closed in front with two rows of brass buttons; to be slit well up in the rear to admit the seat in the saddle; the coat, lined with black Italian cloth, or other suitable material, made to button around the neck, under the collar, and large enough to cover the head; to be worn at night and in inclement weather; and each hip to have a horizontal slit



held four horses while the other three were in action.

The saddle blanket was blue with yellow border and yellow 'US' badge. In September 1876 the 4th Cavalry received dark grey saddle blankets.

In the field the average cavalryman had a folded overcoat strapped to the saddle pommel, although many went without overcoats. A coiled lariat and picket pin hung from the near pommel ring and a nose bag from the opposite ring. A small canvas grain bag, filled with oats, hung from the cantle. A tin cup was strapped through its handle to the near saddlebag strap. A wool, later canvas, covered canteen hung by its sling, cotton at first and later leather, from the saddlebag stud on the cantle arc. Rations were carried in haversacks, also hung from the saddle.

Saddlebags were the small, leather 1859 model.



**An infantry sergeant in 1861 dress uniform with the dark-blue trousers originally ordered. He is armed with the brass-hilted non-commissioned officer's sword**

Captain Dutton noted that, 'The old pattern (small size) are almost useless to them. The leather bags (Model 1874) would be preferred though the linen bags (Model 1872) would be highly satisfactory. I think that if the Cavalry could be supplied at once or before the spring campaign opens with large saddle-bags that branch of the service would be most highly delighted.'

Horses were often smaller and hardier than those found in European cavalry regiments, usually standing about 15 hands. At least once they were assigned to different troops according to colour. Custer noted in the 7th Cavalry, 'For uniformity of appearance it was decided to devote one afternoon to a general exchange of horses. The troop commanders were assembled at headquarters and allowed, in order of their rank, to select the colour they preferred.'

This was not a common thing and it was rather unpopular with the soldiers who had to give up well-known animals simply to appear uniform – especially strange since dress uniformity was in many ways unknown!

## THE INDIAN SCOUTS

If 'it takes a thief to catch a thief', then a wild Indian could best be tamed by an already-tame one. So reasoned the Army. In 1866 General Order No. 56 was published, calling for the enlistment of Indians as Army scouts.

These scouts were organised into permanent companies and attached to Regular regiments. A muster roll of Company A, Indian Scouts, in 1878, then attached to the 3rd Cavalry at Fort Rains, Dakota Territory, indicates that officers were white, while Indians served as a first sergeant, a sergeant, a corporal and as private scouts.

Indian scouts were issued regular Army fatigue uniforms. However, they felt much more comfortable in their native costume and, as a result, usually wore a mixture of the two. Officers didn't attempt to maintain regulations about the dress of their scouts.

Buffalo Bill, seeing a parade of Pawnee scouts in 1869, thought, '... their full-dress uniforms were calculated to excite even the army horses to laughter. Regular cavalry suits had been fur-



covered with a flap, this for access to the revolver and ammunition. The coat to be lined throughout.'

Artist Frederick Remington thought, '... the new overcoats of the corps metamorphose the scouts into something between Russian Cossacks and Black Crooks'.

For dress the basic 1888 cavalry blouse was ordered, trimmed with white piped in scarlet. Non-commissioned officers' and trumpeters' trousers had white stripes piped in scarlet, as well, while the trumpeters' dress coats probably had white lace across the chest with a scarlet strip through the centre.

The 1888 helmet was worn with white mohair cords with a strand of scarlet woven in and a white horsehair plume with four strands of scarlet running through it. A pair of crossed arrows was worn on the staff badge on the helmet.

According to Circular No. 10 the scouts also received an unusual guidon, cut square instead of swallowtailed like Regular cavalry, and made of scarlet silk with white silk fringe. In the centre were two white crossed bows and four arrows, two on each side, with the words 'U.S. SCOUTS' and the troop's letter on top and the departmental name on the bottom, all in silk.

By then the scouts had been firmly integrated into the Army, and Remington in 1890 described a, '... company of Cheyenne Scouts who are to escort the General - fine looking, tall young men, with long hair and mounted on small Indian ponies. They are dressed and accoutred as United States Soldiers and they fill the eye of a military man until nothing is lacking.'

#### ARMY FIELD DRESS ON THE PLAINS

'Crook,' wrote an officer who served with him in the south-west, 'never liked to put on [a] uniform when it could be avoided.'

During a winter campaign in 1875 Crook wore, he wrote, '... boots, of Government pattern, number 7; trousers of brown corduroy, badly burned at the ends; shirt of brown, heavy woolen; blouse, of the old Army style; hat, a brown Kossuth of felt, ventilated at top. An old army overcoat, lined with red flannel, and provided with a high collar made of the skin of a wolf shot by the

general himself, completed his costume, excepting a leather belt with forty or fifty copper cartridges, held to the shoulders by two leather straps.'

Crook was far from unique in his disdain for regulation dress. Custer wrote once how a group under his command was mistaken for Indians, '... and well they might, considering that two of our party were Osages and the others dressed in anything but the regulation uniform'.

Custer himself usually wore a light grey, low-crowned hat and a heavily-fringed buckskin jacket and trousers, with a dark blue shirt of which the wide collar was tied together by a scarlet cravat. A canvas cartridge belt held his holsters and a knife in a fringed and beaded sheath. Many other 7th Cavalry officers wore similar garb.

Why such a deviation from the specific regulation dress?

One reason was that issue clothing was of poor quality. Private William Murphy, 18th Infantry, wrote that in northern Wyoming in the winter of 1866-7, 'Our shoes were made of cheap split leather and the shoddy clothes ... furnished at that time were not any protection.'

Many uniform items were made in great quantity during the Civil War for the huge Army and were badly fitting and of poor materials. So much of this remained in the Quartermaster's stores for years after the war which they could not afford simply to toss out, that it was issued regardless of quality. A 6th Cavalry trooper in Texas composed this ditty to sing in a Christmas Eve variety show:

You ought to see the coat I wear,  
And, then, the trousers, such a pair!  
There's no such uniform, I swear,  
In any decent army.

Complaints about quality, however, drew a sharp reply from Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs that it was the duty of officers to be concerned with economy and to avoid criticism of serviceable material. The clothing issued, the General said, was the same as saw service in the Civil War and if troops on the frontier were kept busy enough they wouldn't have time to complain about their dress.

When new uniforms of decent quality were finally issued, beginning around 1873, a habit of 'making-do' on the plains had been entrenched





1 Cheyenne warrior, 1878  
2 Sioux warrior, 1876  
3 Ghost dancer, 1890s



- 1 Sergeant Major, US Cavalry, 1866  
2 Corporal, US Cavalry, 1866  
3 Captain, US Cavalry, 1866  
4 Sergeant, US Infantry, 1866







1

2

3

- 1 First Sergeant, US Artillery, 1875  
2 First Lieutenant, US Cavalry, 1875  
3 Quartermaster Sergeant, US Infantry, 1875

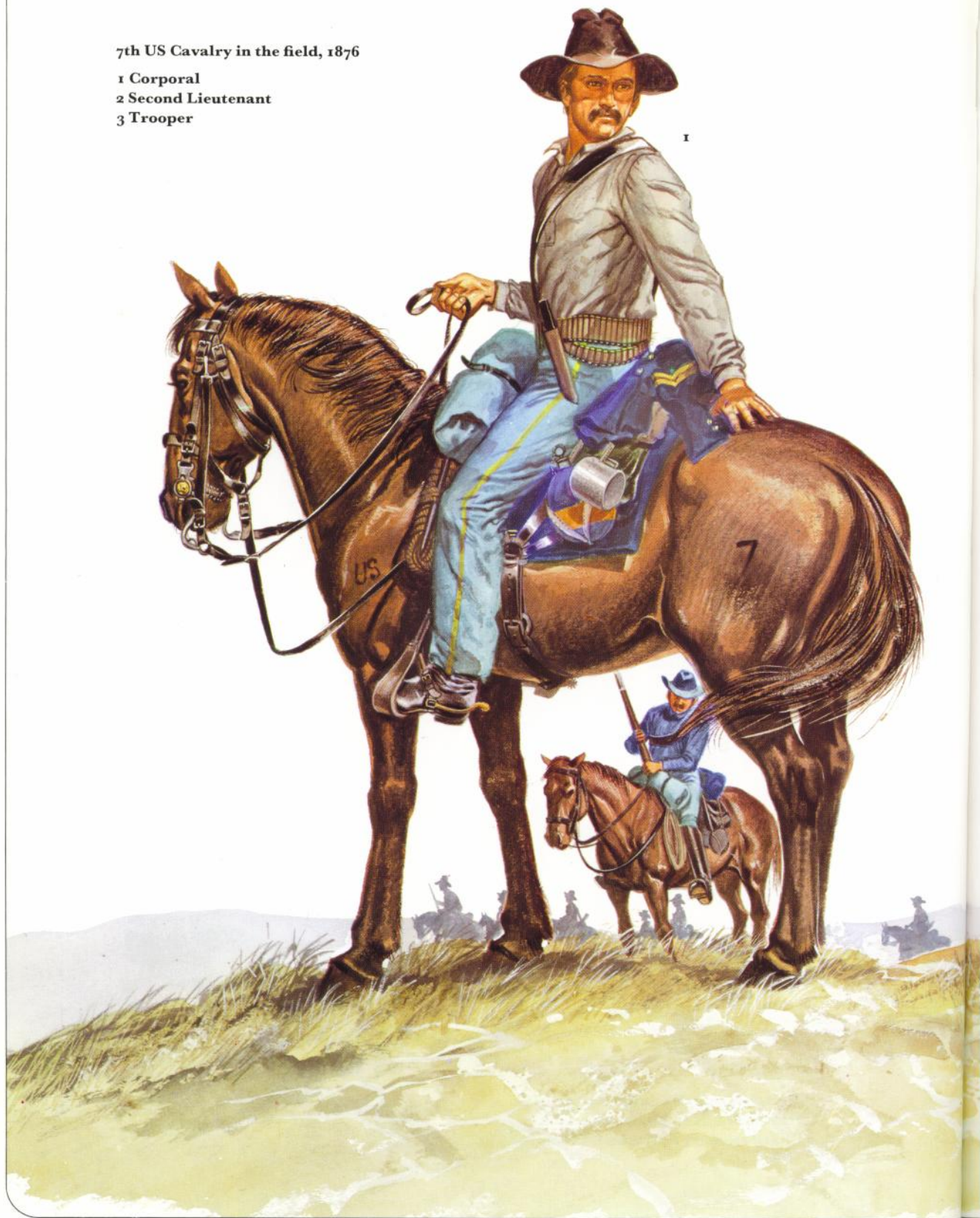


7th US Cavalry in the field, 1876

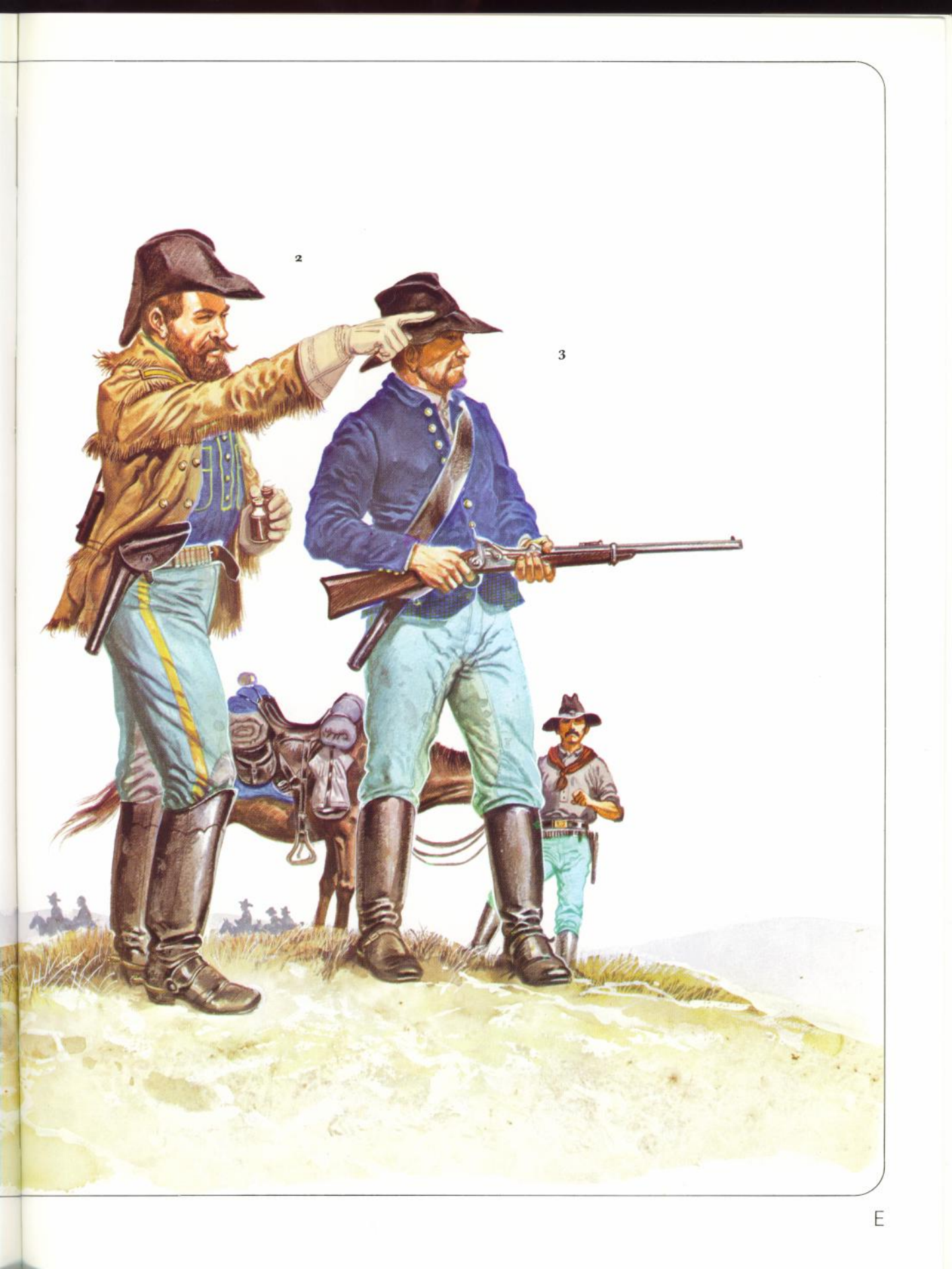
1 Corporal

2 Second Lieutenant

3 Trooper







2

3





1

2

3

1 Captain, 5th US Cavalry, full dress, 1872  
2 Sergeant Major, 5th US Cavalry, full dress, 1872  
3 Trooper, 9th US Cavalry, full dress, 1872



- 1 Sergeant Major, Apache Scouts, 1880s
- 2 Apache Scout, 1880s
- 3 Apache warrior, 1880s
- 4 Officer, US Cavalry, 1880s





- 1 US officers in winter field dress, 1870s-1880s
- 2 Trooper, 10th US Cavalry, winter field dress, 1870s-1880s
- 3 Brigadier General George Crook, winter field dress, 1870s-1880s
- 4 Sergeant, North-West Mounted Police, 1870s





rather firmly and even the new uniforms were mixed with old and civilian clothes on campaign.

It was also a major problem to get uniforms of any quality to men, often far from posts, spread throughout a country lacking decent roads and railways.

In a south-western summer campaign an officer reported, 'We were all cut down to the lowest notch in the matter of clothing, a deprivation of which no one complained, since the loss was not severely felt amid such surroundings.'

Corporal F. J. Gehringer recalled returning to Fort Wingate in September 1866, after a campaign: 'We were a sight to behold, hardly a uniform on a man – many just had overalls.'

In the summer extreme heat drove officers and men to as simple a uniform as possible and, regardless of regulations, a uniform quite similar throughout the period. Although a few caps were worn, generally soft, broad-brimmed hats were most common. The initial issue ones were black, with grey ones being issued by the mid-1880's. The first issue ones were said to last only about three weeks in the field, although quality was said to improve by 1876. Soldiers often bought greyslouch hats themselves.

A civilian scout with the 7th Cavalry wrote that in that regiment, 'Occasionally a man had a [company] letter on his cap, but they generally wore what kind of hat they pleased and not all had letters on their hats.' Cavalry, infantry or other corps badges were often worn, although the majority of men left their hats plain.

A variety of this issue hat, worn briefly around 1876, had hooks and eyes on the hat brim, so it could be fastened up like a chapeau-de-bras. These didn't last long.

Sir Edward Thornton, British Minister to the United States, obtained one hundred cork British Army helmets from India in 1875 for the Quartermaster Department to test on the plains. They were approved for use in 1880 when General Orders 72 authorised cork summer helmets for rank and file in 'hot climates'. They were to be without pugarees, but with a narrow cloth band worn where the pugaree would go, and to be covered with white drill cloth. Officers wore a slightly fancier helmet, with a finer quality covering, brass chin strap, side buttons and spike top.

The helmets were worn mostly while on garrison duty, apparently. A quartermaster lieutenant at Fort Mojave, Arizona Territory, wrote in 1883 that the men hated them and he himself thought nothing could be worse for frontier service.

In the field the helmet's bright white cover stood out too much and in 1882 1,000 helmets were ordered with unbleached brown linen covers for field service. A grey slouch hat was ordered at the same time to replace the 1875 pattern black one. Soldiers also wore broad-brimmed straw hats in the sun.

The first American soldiers to wear camouflaged clothing were those in the south-west in the 1880s. Their whole uniforms were made of brown canvas – cool and hard to spot.

Otherwise, in the summer, the men shoved their wool blouses into saddlebags or knapsacks and went in issue dark blue shirt sleeves. Many officers and men wore what Custer described as, '... those ordinary check overshirts worn on the plains, the color being black and white'. These were called 'hickory' shirts and were bought from civilian traders. Officers also liked double-breasted blue shirts trimmed in white or yellow braid, often with corps badges embroidered in silk on the collars.

Rankers generally wore the issue sky blue, or 'mixture' kersey trousers, although they were often free to wear what they wished. Corporal Jacob Horner wrote that in the 7th Cavalry, in the 1870s, 'K Troop became known as the "dude company" of the regiment. Its members took the white canvas trousers used for stable duty and the troop tailor fashioned them into tight fitting cavalry breeches. The K's wore white shirts and white collars (when off duty or in town) . . . they made a striking appearance.'

Infantrymen and some artillerymen wore ankle-high boots, or 'shoes', while most artillerymen and cavalrymen wore calf-high boots. Trousers were worn either outside the boots or stuffed into them. On the march infantrymen frequently tucked trouser legs into their socks to prevent dust from getting down into their feet. Officers, even in the cavalry, sometimes wore infantry boots with brown canvas leggings.

Few of the men wore the yellow neckerchiefs so





**The 1861 fatigue uniform consisted of a blue wool blouse with four brass buttons, sky blue trousers and a blue kepi-like forage cap**

common in modern films about the Plains Indian wars, although many officers did wear cravats with broad running ends.

The Plains is a land of extremes, the most extreme being temperatures. In the summer, a blistering sun – in the winter quite the opposite. An officer wrote that in the winter, ‘Particular attention was bestowed upon his subject of clothing; and when I say the mercury frequently congeals in the bulb, and that the spirit thermometers at Fort Fred Steele, Wyoming, that winter registered as low as 61° below, Fahrenheit, the necessity of precaution will be apparent. The most elastic interpretation was given the word “uniform” so as to permit individual taste and

experience to have full play in the selection of the garments which were to protect from bitter cold and fierce wind.’

Supposedly the issue blue wool fatigue uniform, with the addition of a sky blue kersey overcoat complete with cape, was all the soldier would need for winter dress. Such was quickly found not to be so.

In 1876 the Quartermaster Department bought buffalo-hide overcoats and Canadian-made felt boots for Plains use, along with seal-skin caps and gauntlets. The latter items were not serviceable because they became hard and brittle when they dried out after being soaked. By 1878 muskrat skin was successfully tried. Caps and gauntlets of it were purchased in quantity by 1881.

Officers and men were free to wear whatever they could afford or wished to in the winter. An officer serving in a winter campaign under Crook described what was probably a typical assortment of dress styles in any period winter campaign: ‘For cavalry, great care was demanded to protect feet, knees, wrists, and ears; the foot soldier can stamp his feet or slap his hands and ears, but the mounted man must hold his reins and sit up straight in the saddle. Commencing with the feet, first a pair of close-fitting lamb’s-wool socks was put on, then one of the same size as those worn by women, so as to come over the knees. Indian moccasins of buckskin, reaching well up the leg, were generally preferred to boots, being warmer and lighter; cork soles were used with them, and an overboot of buffalohide, made with the hairy side inward and extending up nearly the whole length of the leg, and opening down the side and fastened by buckles something after the style of the breeches worn by Mexican “vaqueros”. These overboots were soled, heeled, and boxed with leather, well tanned. Some officers preferred to wear the leggings separate, and to use the overshoe supplied by the Quartermaster’s Department. By this method, one could disrobe more readily after reaching camp and be free to move about in the performance of duty while the sun might be shining; but it was open to the objection that, on account of the clumsy make of the shoes, it was almost impossible to get into the stirrups with them.

‘All people of experience concurred in denounc-



ing as pernicious the practice of wearing tight shoes, or the use of any article or raiment which would induce too copious a flow of perspiration (which might freeze later) . . . For underwear, individual preferences were consulted, the general idea being to have at least two kinds of material used, principally merion and perforated buckskin; over these was placed a heavy blue flannel shirt, made double-breasted, and then a blouse, made also double-breasted, of Mission or Minnesota blanket, with large buttons, or a coat of Norway kid lined with heavy flannel. When the blizzards blew nothing in the world would keep out the cold but an overcoat of buffalo or bearskin or beaver, although for many the overcoats made in Saint Paul (Minnesota) of canvas, lined with the heaviest blanket, and strapped and belted tight about the waist, were pronounced sufficient. The head was protected by a cap of cloth, with fur border to pull down over the ears; a fur collar enclosed the neck and screened the mouth and nose from the keen blasts; and the hands were covered by woollen gloves and over-gauntlets of beaver or muskrat fur. For rainy or snowy weather most of the command had two india-rubber ponshoes sewed together, which covered both rider and horse. This was found very cumbersome and was generally discarded.'

Buffalo coats, while best for frontier use, were rather expensive and therefore the Clothing Bureau experimented with sheepskin overcoats and canvas overcoats lined with sheepskin. These were reported to soak through with rain and snow easily and were abandoned in favour of overcoats similar to those made in Saint Paul. Enough buffalo overcoats had been bought for most men on the plains to have one.

## DRESS REGULATIONS

1861-1892

The following regulations governed Army dress during the period. Quoted material is taken directly from official regulations.

### 1861 REGULATIONS

'All officers shall wear a frock-coat of dark blue cloth, the skirt to extend from two-thirds to three-fourths of the distance from the top of the hip to

the bend of the knee; single-breasted for Captains and Lieutenants; double-breasted for all the other grades.' A major general wore, 'two rows of buttons on the breast, nine in each row, placed by threes,' with 'collar and cuffs . . . of dark blue velvet'. A brigadier had the same with 'only eight buttons in each row . . . placed in pairs'. The field officer had, 'only seven buttons in each row on the breast, placed at equal distances'. Company officers and medical cadets had, 'only one row of nine buttons, . . . placed at equal distances'.

'A round jacket . . . of dark blue cloth, trimmed with scarlet, with the Russian shoulder-knot, the prescribed insignia of rank to be worked in silver in the centre of the knot, may be worn on undress duty by officers of the Light Artillery.'

'The uniform coat for all enlisted *foot* men, shall be a single-breasted frock of dark blue cloth, made without plaits, with a skirt extending one-half the



An H. A. Ogden drawing of 1872 dress uniforms. The dismounted men are, from left, a cavalry field officer, a foot company officer, a cavalry sergeant, an infantry corporal and an infantry private



distance from the top of the hip to the bend of the knee; one row of nine buttons . . . ; stand-up collar to rise no higher than to permit the chin to turn freely over it, to hook in front at the bottom and then to slope up and backward at an angle of thirty degrees on each side; cuffs pointed . . . and to button with two small buttons at the under-seam; collar and cuffs edged with a cord or welt of cloth as follows. . . .: *Scarlet for Artillery*; *sky-blue for Infantry*; *yellow for Engineers*; *crimson for Ordnance* and *Hospital stewards*. On each shoulder a metallic scale . . . .’

‘*All Enlisted Men of the Cavalry and Light Artillery* shall wear a uniform jacket of dark blue cloth, with one row of twelve small buttons . . .’ The stand-up collar had ‘two blind button-holes of lace . . . one small button on the buttonhole’. The same lace bound up the collar, jacket front and back seams. Each cuff had a laced, pointed cuff with two small buttons. Lace was red for light artillery and yellow for cavalry.

Musicians wore their corp’s uniform, ‘with the addition of a facing of lace . . . on the front of the *coat or jacket* . . . placed on a line with each button . . . (and) a strip of the same lace following the bars at their outer extremity . . .’

On fatigue men could wear, ‘a sack coat of dark blue flannel extending half-way down the thigh . . . falling collar . . . four coat buttons . . .’

Generals and staff officers had dark blue trousers, plain for generals and with a gold cord down each leg for staffers. Regimental officers wore dark blue trousers, ‘with a welt let into the outer seam . . . of colors corresponding to the facings of the respective regiments’. Enlisted men wore dark blue trousers with sergeants having a one and a half inch wide stripe and corporals a half inch wide stripe down each leg. On 16 December 1861 officers and men, except generals, were ordered to wear sky blue trousers.

Hats were black felt, the brims bound in silk for officers and stitched for rankers. Officers wore their respective corps badges embroidered in gold on black velvet. Rankers wore brass copies of the same badges. These were a shell and flame for ordnance; two sabres crossed, edges upward, for cavalry; a crossed cannon for artillery; a bugle for infantry; and a castle for engineers. Generals and staff officers wore a silver US in old English

characters within a gold wreath.

All ranks wore their regimental numbers as part of their hat badges. Hats also had corps colour cords; an ostrich feather (three for generals) on one side; and a brass badge pinning up the right side for mounted men or up the left side for foot men. Light artillerymen wore a visored shako, ‘with red horsehair plume, cord and tassel’.

‘For fatigue purposes, forage caps [were] . . . dark blue cloth with a welt of the same around the crown, and yellow metal letters in front to designate companies.’

‘Commissioned officers may wear forage caps of the same pattern, with the distinctive ornament of the corps and regiment in front.’

Generals wore a, ‘buff, silk net’ sash. Medical officers wore a, ‘medium or emerald green silk net’ sash, while other officers wore, ‘crimson silk net’. Sergeants and hospital stewards wore, ‘red worsted’ sashes.

‘The sash will be worn [over the coat] on all occasions of duty . . . except stable and fatigue.’

‘The sash will be worn by *Officers of the Day* across the body, scarf fashion, from the right shoulder to the left side, instead of around the waist, tying behind the left hip as prescribed.’

Belts were plain black leather, except for those of generals which had ‘Russia leather, with three stripes of gold embroidery’. The belt plate was ‘gild, rectangular, two inches wide, with a raised bright rim; a silver wreath of laurel encircling the “Arms of the United States”; eagle, shield, scroll, edge of cloud and rays bright. The motto, *E Pluribus Unum*, in silver letters upon the scroll; stars also of silver . . .’

Dress officers had gold epaulettes with rank badges within a solid crescent. A major general had two silver stars, the Army’s commanding general had three, and a brigadier general had one. A colonel wore a silver eagle and either his corps badge or the infantry, artillery or cavalry colour. The lieutenant colonel had a silver leaf and the major had nothing. All general and field officers had bullion fringe three-and-a-half inches long and a half inch in diameter.

Company officers had bullion fringe two-and-a-half inches and a quarter inch in diameter. A captain had two silver bars; a first lieutenant had one; and a second lieutenant had nothing.





'The epaulette may be dispensed with when not on duty, and on certain duties off parade, to wit: at drills, at inspections of barracks and hospitals, on Courts of Inquiry and Boards, at inspections of articles and necessaries, on working parties and fatigue duties, and upon the march, except when, in war, there is immediate expectation of meeting the enemy, and also when the overcoat is worn.'

Then officers wore shoulder straps one-and-three-eighths inches wide by four inches long. They were dark blue for generals with the same stars worn within their gold borders as worn on epaulettes. Other officers wore shoulder straps of their corps colour and their epaulette badges, except a major had gold leaves and company grade officers had gold bars. Medical cadets wore, 'a strip of gold lace three inches long, half-an-inch wide, placed in the middle of a strap of green cloth three-and-three-quarter inches long by one-and-

**Officers in 1872 dress uniforms at Fort Walla Walla, Washington Territory, in 1874. From left, the seated are an infantry and two mounted officers. Standing, from left, they are an infantry private, an infantry company officer, a mounted officer, a field-grade infantry officer, two company-grade mounted officers, a surgeon, and another company-grade mounted officer. Note the surgeon's chapeau and unique sword (U.S. Signal Corps)**

one-quarter inches wide'.

Non-commissioned officers wore chevrons, 'upon both sleeves of the uniform coat and overcoat, above the elbow . . . one-half an inch wide, same colour as the edging on the coat, points down, as follows:

*For a Sergeant Major* – three bars and an arc, in silk.

*For a Quartermaster Sergeant* – three bars and a tie, in silk.

*For an Ordnance Sergeant* – three bars and a star, in silk.

*For a Hospital Steward* – a half chevron . . . of





A 15th Infantry Regiment sergeant in 1872 dress uniform

emerald green cloth, one and three-fourths inches wide, running obliquely downward from the outer to the inner seam of the sleeve, and at an angle of about thirty degrees with a horizontal, parallel to, and one-eighth of an inch distant from, both the upper and lower edge, an embroidery of yellow silk one-eighth of an inch wide, and in the centre a "cadeceus" two inches long, embroidered also with yellow silk, the head toward the outer seam of the sleeve.

*For a First Sergeant* – three bars and a lozenge, in worsted.

*For a Sergeant* – three bars, in worsted.

*For a Corporal* – two bars, in worsted.

*For a Pioneer* – two crossed hatchets of cloth, same color and material as the edging of the collar . . .

*To indicate (5 years of) service* – . . . below the elbow . . . a diagonal half chevron, one-half inch wide, extending from seam to seam, the front end nearest the cuff and one-half an inch above the point of the cuff, to be the same colour as the edging on the coat . . . Service in war will be indicated by a light or sky blue stripe on each side of the chevron for Artillery, and a red stripe for all other corps . . .

Officers wore a dark blue overcoat, 'closing by means of four frog buttons of black silk and loops of black silk cord down the breast . . .' Rank was marked by, 'a knot of flat black silk braid'. Generals wore a double knot of five braids; colonels, a single knot of five braids; lieutenant colonels, a single knot of four braids, and so on, ending with a second lieutenant who had a plain sleeve. Rankers wore sky blue overcoats, double-breasted with a cuff-length cape for mounted men, and single-breasted with an elbow-length cape for foot men.

## 1872 REGULATIONS

Officers had the same frock-coats. A full general had twelve buttons in sets of four, and a lieutenant general, ten buttons, the upper and lower groups in threes and the middle group in fours.

Field officers wore nine buttons in each row on their double-breasted coats. 'The upper half of the cuffs to be ornamented with three double stripes of gold braid running the length of the cuffs, pointed at their upper ends, and with a small button below the point of each stripe . . .'

Company officers now wore two rows of seven buttons each and 'two stripes on the cuffs'.

Military storekeepers, who in the 1861 regulations wore, 'a citizen's frock-coat of blue cloth, with buttons of the department to which they are attached,' now were allowed 'a single-breasted coat, as lately worn by Captains . . . with staff shoulder-straps to indicate rank'.

On fatigue officers wore, 'a sack coat of dark blue cloth or serge; falling collar; single breasted, with five buttons in front . . . with black braid . . . extending from each button and button-hole back six inches and terminating in "herring-bone" loops.

'The skirt to extend from one-third to two-thirds the distance from the hip joint to the bend of the knee . . . a knot of black braid . . . on the upper part of the cuff.' The braid was ordered removed 19 November 1875.

Enlisted men wore frock-coats slightly shorter than those of 1861. They were piped in corps colours, with a corps colour gorget patch four inches deep on the front of each collar, the 'number of regiment or badge of corps in yellow metal



in the middle of [the patch] . . . on each side'. Facing colours were used on shoulder tabs; on the coat's skirt which was also 'ornamented with four buttons'; and on cuffs which now had three buttons. 'Two straps of dark blue cloth, piped with the same color as the facings [are to be] let into the waist-seam on each side [of] the coat and buttoning above the hip to sustain the waist-belt.'

Corps colours were as in 1861, except for engineers who wore scarlet and white with scarlet shoulder tabs. On 20 March 1873 ordnance sergeants' facing colours were changed to cadet grey. Musicians used the 1861 braid system. Cavalry, artillery and the signal corps wore similar but shorter coats, with orange the signal corps colour. Generals and staff officers alike wore plain dark blue trousers. Everyone else wore 1861 regulation trousers.

The original fatigue blouse was pleated and had five buttons. In 1874 this was replaced with a plain one with facing colours piped on collar and cuffs.

Generals and staff officers wore a 'chapeau'. Mounted men received black felt helmets with a yellow metal eagle on the front and a plume holder with a red or yellow horsehair plume on top. Officers had gold cords and tassels hanging from it; the men had red or yellow ones. Everyone else received dark blue cloth shakos, but those for the officers were 'ornamented with mohair braid of the same colour as facings . . .' Pompons were also in facing colours. Badges were the 1861 regulation ones.

On 19 November 1875 infantrymen were ordered to have cap badges of two 'rifles without bayonets, barrels upward'. The regimental number was worn below the spot they crossed, with enlisted men wearing the company letter above that. 'Field and Band Musicians will continue to wear the bugle and letters as at present prescribed.' The order was effective 1 June 1876.

On fatigue everyone had caps, 'chasseur pattern', like the 1861 forage caps but with stiffened sides and a bit smaller than the old ones. Corps badges and, for enlisted men, company letters were worn on the cap fronts.

Sashes were taken from everyone but generals who had buff silk ones. On 12 February 1877 they were ordered to wear them from left shoulder to right hip. Their sashes were then to be of buff and



**First Sergeant John Comfort in 1872 full dress uniform with his Congressional Medal of Honour (U.S. Signal Corps)**

gold thread.

Generals wore 1861 regulation swordbelts. Field officers' belts had, 'a broad stripe of gold lace on . . . black enameled leather'. Staff officers below field grade had belts with, 'four stripes of gold, interwoven with black silk'. Cavalry, artillery and infantry company officers had the same stripes, 'interwoven with silk of the same color as



the facings . . . Swordbelt plates from 1861 regulations were used.

Only generals had epaulettes. The General of the Army had 'two silver embroidered stars, with five rays each, one and one-half inches in diameter, and the "Arms of the United States" embroidered in gold placed between them'. A lieutenant general had three stars; a major general, two; and a brigadier general, one.

Other officers wore shoulder knots, 'of gold cord, Russian pattern'. 'An aiguillette of gold cord [was] to be worn with the right shoulder-knot and permanently attached thereto,' by officers of the adjutant-general's and inspector-general's departments and generals' aides-de-camp. Other officers wore the knot, 'on cloth of the same color as the facings of their arm, with insignia of rank and number of regiment embroidered on the cloth ground'. Non-fighting corps wore their badge on their knots. Regimental adjutants also had aiguillettes. Rank badges were as in 1861, except the major had a gold leaf.

'The shoulder-strap will be worn whenever the epaulette or shoulder-knot is not.' They were the same as in 1861. The rank of medical cadet was abandoned.

'Officers serving in the field may dispense with the prescribed insignia of rank on their horse equipments, and may wear overcoats of the same color and shape as those of the enlisted men . . . and omit epaulettes, shoulder-knots, or other prominent marks likely to attract the fire of sharpshooters; but all officers must wear the prescribed buttons, stripes, and shoulder-straps, to indicate their corps and rank.'

Non-commissioned officers wore 1861 chevrons. Engineers had scarlet chevrons piped white. A new rank, principal musician, was marked by three bars and a bugle and a company or battalion quartermaster sergeant had three bars and a single tie. On 20 March 1876 infantry chevrons were changed to dark blue.

Officers wore a 'dark blue close fitting double-breasted surtout coat, with a cape, made to detach from the coat . . . with seven buttons . . . as those on the uniform coat'. Cuff rank badges were five braids in a single knot for a colonel, four for a lieutenant colonel and so forth down to the plain-cuffed second lieutenant.

All enlisted men were to have the 1861 mounted man's overcoat. On 25 June 1873, official regulations stated, 'Until further orders, the single-breasted overcoat, with the additional cape, may be issued to, and worn by, enlisted men of all arms of the service, in lieu of the double-breasted overcoat.'

## 1882 REGULATIONS

The 1872 coat was regulation, but its cuff stripes were removed. Each cuff had three small buttons, regardless of rank. In the field, officers could wear a plain dark blue sack coat without braid, with five buttons and shoulder straps.

Trousers were 1872 ones. In addition, from 1879, 'Whenever, in extreme southern latitudes, white trousers are worn by enlisted men, the officers must in like manner wear them.'

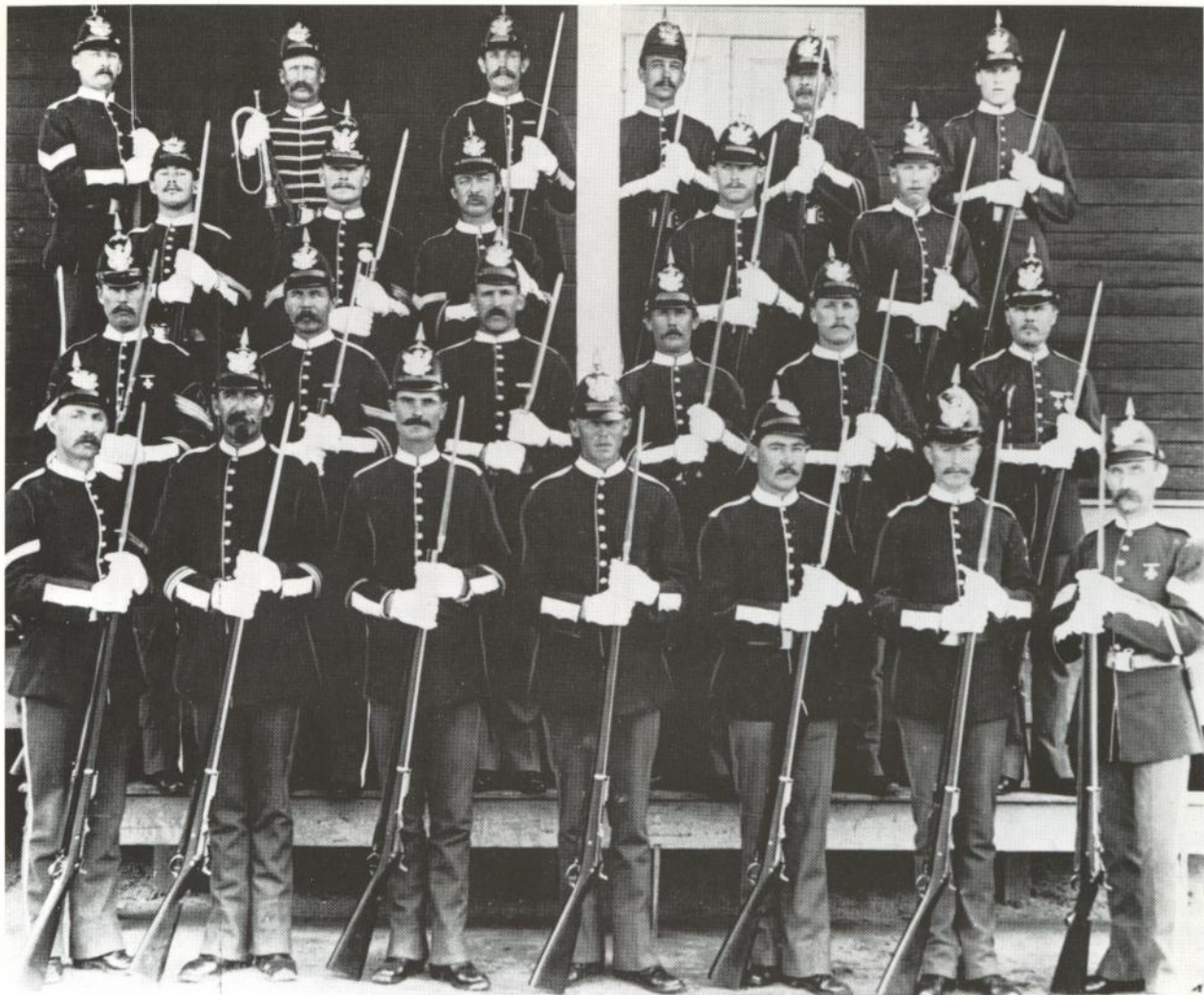
Generals and staff officers, except signal officers, wore a chapeau, cocked slightly to the left, 'showing the gilt ornaments upon the right side'. Mounted officers wore helmets, 'of cork or other suitable material covered with black cloth, or of black felt, at the option of the wearer. Trimmings: cords and tassels, top piece and plume-socket, chain chin-strap and hooks, eagle with motto, crossed cannon, rifles, or sabres, all gilt, with the number of the regiment on the shield in white; plume of buffalo-hair, white for Infantry, yellow for Cavalry, and red for Artillery.' Signal officers wore the same with orange plumes.

Foot officers had the same helmets, 'except the trimmings are as follows: top piece, spike, chain chin-strap with hooks and side buttons, eagle with motto, crossed rifles or cannon, all gilt, with the number of the regiment on the shield in white.'

In summer officers wore cork helmets, 'covered with white facing cloth, 'complete with top piece, spike, chain chin-strap and hooks, all gilt'.

'The helmet cords will be attached to the left side of the helmet and come down to the left shoulder, where they are held together by a slide; one cord then passes to the front and the other to the rear of the neck, crossing upon the right shoulder and passing separately around to the front and rear of the right arm, where they are again united and held together by a slide under the arm; the united cords then cross the breast and are looped





up to the upper button on the left side of the coat.'

The chasseur cap was still worn. A black felt fatigue hat could be worn on marches and campaigns. Also, 'Whenever, in extreme southern latitudes, straw hats are worn by enlisted men, the officers must in like manner wear them.'

Generals wore 1872 epaulettes and other officers, the 1872 shoulder knots. Shoulder straps were worn when knots were not. A shoulder strap with a shepherd's crook of frosted silver on a black velvet background was authorised for chaplains.

Sashes, swordbelts, swordbelt plates and overcoats were as in 1872.

Enlisted men wore 1872 pattern coats. Chevrons were also the same, with the addition of a badge worn on both sleeves by Signal Corps privates first class. It was 'crossed signal flags, red and white, on dark blue cloth . . .' Signal Corps non-commis-

**A company of the 1st Infantry, about 1890, in full dress. Note the man second from the left, front row, has three service stripes, one indicating wartime service. Several men wear marksmanship medals. Two men, top row, second and third from the right, and the bugler clearly show the 1874 belt buckles with extra loops to be used with the knapsack (Museum of the Presidio of San Francisco)**

sioned officers wore this badge above their chevrons. Signal Corps privates second class wore the badge on their left arms only.

Trousers were 1872 pattern ones.

Enlisted men wore helmets like their officers. They also wore chasseur caps and, 'on the frontier or in active campaign', black felt hats.

Overcoats were, 'of sky-blue cloth, double-breasted . . . the lining and facings to conform (in colour) to the trimmings of the uniform. The lining for Infantry great coat capes to be dark blue.'





An H. A. Ogden drawing of a major general in 1882 full dress talking with an infantry officer

## 1888 REGULATIONS

Officers wore the 1882 regulation coats, trousers, fatigue blouses and helmets. Storekeepers lost their uniforms.

Forage caps were the same and officers' ones had, 'a cord cap-strap of gold on silver'. Badges were the same except signal officers had a burning torch added to their crossed flags. Black felt fatigue hats were, 'to be worn only on target practice, fatigue duty, and on marches and campaigns.'

Epaulettes, shoulder knots and shoulder straps were the same, although chaplains lost their straps in 1888. Sashes, swordbelts and swordbelt plates were the same.

Officers, except generals, wore an overcoat of, 'a double-breasted ulster of dark-blue cloth, lined with dark-blue flannel, or black Italian cloth, closing by means of four black mohair netted olives

and loops of black mohair square cord . . .' Braid showing rank on the sleeves was as it was in 1872. In addition, the coats had capes of the same material, lined in facing colours. 'On the frontier and campaign, officers may wear the soldier's overcoat, with insignia of rank on the sleeve.'

Facing colours were the same except infantry now used white.

Enlisted men wore 1872 pattern coats except collars were made wholly of facing colours. Regimental numbers were no longer worn on collars. Ordnance was to have crimson piped white for its colours, and the Hospital Corps, green piped white. The coat 'for acting hospital stewards [is] to have a red cross on each side of the collar, in front'. Post quartermaster sergeants had buff facings piped white, and post commissary sergeants, cadet grey piped white.

Fatigue blouses were the same as before.

Gold chevrons were authorised for dress. Otherwise, chevrons were the same with several additions and/or changes:

*For a Saddler Sergeant* – Three bars and a saddler's round knife, handle upward . . .

*For a Chief Trumpeter* – Three bars and an arc of one bar, with a bugle of pattern worn on the caps, in the centre.

*For a Post Quartermaster Sergeant* – Three bars and a crossed key and pen.

*For a Commissary Sergeant* – Three bars and a crescent (points front) . . .

*For a Hospital Steward* – Three bars and an arc of one bar of emerald green cloth, inclosing a red cross.

*For an Acting Hospital Steward* – The same as for a hospital steward, omitting the arc.

*For a Company Litter Bearer* – A brassard of white cloth . . . on which is a red cross . . . to be worn on the cuff of the left arm.

*For a Farrier* – A horseshoe of cloth.

Trousers were the 1872 pattern, except that musicians wore 'two stripes, each one-half inch wide, of cloth conforming to the color of facings'.

Foot soldiers received brown cotton duck leggings for marches and campaigns.

Helmets and badges were the same as in 1882 except band musicians wore, 'a lyre of white



metal'; cavalry trumpeters wore crossed sabres like other cavalrymen; and field musicians wore brass bugles.

Fatigue caps and overcoats were the same as in 1882.

In the field non-commissioned officers and musicians wore bleached cotton duck blouses and trousers, while privates wore the same in unbleached cotton duck.

## THE NORTH WEST MOUNTED POLICE

Indians didn't recognise national borders; tribal lands spread between the United States and Canada. Problems in protecting Canadians from Indians, and vice versa grew. On 30 August 1873 provisions of an act of Parliament were enforced by an Order in Council, and recruiting for the North West Mounted Police was started.

The organisation was to have 300 men, aged between 18 and 40, in two ranks. Sub-constables were to be paid 75c daily, and constables, \$1 daily. Three divisions of fifty men each were to be posted at Fort Gerry, Manitoba, and three more at Stanley Barracks, Toronto.



1882 regulation helmet plates for a 6th Infantry officer and an artillery ranker

The organisation was modelled somewhat along lines of the Royal Irish Constabulary, with dress and administration copied from the British Army. Later non-commissioned and inspector (officer) ranks were added, using British rank badges.

The unit first saw action when 275 mounted policemen were sent west in July 1874 to pacify warring tribes and protect the country from

adventurers. By that autumn they were as far west as the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. In two years the organisation was firmly established.

In many ways the N.W.M.P. was more successful in pacifying its wards than the U.S. Army. This may have been partly so because it had less Indians to pacify and less settlers to keep away from them. It is probably equally true to say that it was because the individual policeman seemed to lack the arrogance and brutality often shown by newcomers to the west. Typifying 'friendly authority', policemen usually gained the Indians' confidence and respect, thus avoiding bloodshed.

Their first uniform was red and fairly plain. Red was chosen because the Indians had been friendly with the British Army, earlier stationed out west, and to them the colour represented authority. A red-coated man wasn't trying to hide – he was out in the open, upholding the law impartially.

The first coats were Norfolk jackets, with open roll collars, two large skirt pockets, two inside pockets and Austrian knots on the inspectors' sleeve. There were no facings or lace. Riding breeches were steel grey Bedford cord, while trousers were dark blue with a double white stripe. For dress, a white cork helmet with a muslin pugaree, its ends hanging behind, was worn; while a blue cavalry pill box cap with a white band and button for privates, and gold for non-commissioned officers and inspectors, was worn for fatigue. Boots were black wellingtons with steel spurs for dress and brown boots for service.

Brown cotton jackets and trousers were worn on fatigue. The uniform was completed by white gauntlets, a brown pistol belt with a brass snake buckle and a white haversack.

In 1876 a new uniform was ordered. For dress, inspectors wore a scarlet jacket, cut and laced like an hussar's jacket, with dark blue collar and cuffs. Dark blue overalls had a gold stripe. The helmet had a brass chain and spike. Sword slings were scarlet morocco with gold edging and the sword knot was gold. The dress pouch was purple velvet with gold embroidery and a silver buffalo head in its centre.

For undress, inspectors wore a scarlet tunic with dark blue collar. Rank badges were trimmed in gold. A dark blue pill box hat with gold band and buttons was worn with scarlet-striped, dark blue



## Major Engagements, 1860–1890

Pyramid Lake, Nevada – 1860	Lava Beds, California – 1872–1873
Apache Pass, Arizona – 1862	Palo Duro Cañon, Texas – 1874
Wood Like, Minnesota – 1862	Warbonnet Creek, Nebraska – 1876
Birch Coulee, Minnesota – 1862	Slim Buttes, South Dakota – 1876
New Ulm, Minnesota – 1862	Rosebud, Montana – 1876
Fort Ridgely, Minnesota – 1862	Little Bighorn, Montana – 1876
Cañon de Chelly, Arizona – 1864	Dull Knife, Wyoming – 1876
Kildeer Mountain, North Dakota – 1864	Clearwater, Idaho – 1877
Adobe Walls, Texas – 1864–1874	White Bird Cañon – 1877
Platte Bridge, Wyoming – 1865	Big Hole, Montana – 1877
Fetterman Disaster, Wyoming – 1866	Cañon Creek, Montana – 1877
Hayfield Fight, Montana – 1867	Bear Paw Mountain, Montana – 1877
Wagon Box Fight, Wyoming – 1867	Birch Creek, Washington – 1878
Washita, Oklahoma – 1868	Milk Creek, Colorado – 1879
Sand Creek, Colorado – 1868	Cibicu Creek, Arizona – 1881
Beecher's Island, Colorado – 1868	Big Dry Wash, Arizona – 1882
Summit Springs, Colorado – 1869	Skeleton Cañon, Arizona – 1886
Salt River Cañon, Arizona – 1872	Wounded Knee, South Dakota – 1890

trousers. The swordbelt was worn under the tunic, with brown sword slings hanging out. A black sabretache with a regimental badge was carried with the sword.

Other ranks wore scarlet dragoons' tunics without facings, trimmed with yellow braid. Trousers were blue with a yellow stripe and their boots were black.

In the field all ranks preferred black slouch hats, although these were not regulation.

First weapons were a 0.577 Snider-Enfield car-

bine, a breech-loading, single-shot weapon; and a 0.45 Adams revolver. As Indians got more magazine-fed arms, the N.W.M.P. became out-gunned, and eventually replaced their old carbines with 45/75 Winchester carbines.

Possibly the most famous N.W.M.P. action was after Little Bighorn when the Sioux fled to Canada for safety. Red-coated Mounties met them at the border and safely guided them to a new home there. It was an action in the organisation's highest traditions – maintaining order peacefully.



# The Plates

(Detailed uniform descriptions will be found in the body of the text.)

## A1 *Cheyenne warrior, 1878*

The typical appearance of a Plains Indian warrior, carrying a cased bow, quiver of arrows, tomahawk, and buffalo-hide shield.

## A2 *Sioux warrior, 1876*

Generalisations on the subject of the decoration and painting conventions of Indian tribes are usually unsafe; but it may be said that the full bonnet identifies this warrior as a prominent member of his community, though not necessarily a chief, in the sense understood by Europeans. He carries a lance and a large horn-handled knife; a carbine and a looped cartridge belt are either trade items or trophies of war. Shortage of ammunition and the almost complete absence of skilled repairers of firearms were major handicaps among the tribes. Handguns were quite often observed among the armament of warriors.

## A3 *Ghost Dancer, 1890s*

The ghost shirt appeared in many kinds of material, and with decoration of every sort.

## B1 *Sergeant Major, US Cavalry, 1866*

The familiar laced shell-jacket bears chevrons of rank on both sleeves, and the trousers, yellow-striped for NCOs, are tucked into the boots. Carbine and cartridge box are carried on a broad leather cross-belt.

## B2 *Corporal, US Cavalry, 1866*

The shell-jacket seen from the front: it was popular, and often worn in place of a fatigue blouse, minus its full dress scale epaulettes. The company letter appears above the branch badge on the crown of the cap. Note cap pouch for the percussion weapons, worn on right front of belt; 'butcher knife', a private item carried by most soldiers; and snap-hook attachment on cross-belt for the carbine.



This 2nd Cavalry Regiment private wears 1882 full dress, complete with carbine sling, Indian War Service medal, 1860 pattern cavalry sabre and belt. For some reason, he has two helmet cords around his body, instead of the regulation one. His helmet plume also appears to be an officer's type

## B3 *Captain, US Cavalry, 1866*

The officer wears his frock coat over a checked shirt, quite common on the plains. In the background is a trooper wearing the caped sky-blue overcoat and a black slouch hat.

## B4 *Sergeant, US Infantry, 1866*

This NCO wears absolutely regulation uniform, down to the sash and sword of his rank and the back-breaking 1864 contract knapsack.

## C1 *First Sergeant, US Artillery, 1875*

Following an old and still-practised Army custom, this light artillery NCO hands out cigars to cele-



brate his promotion. Service chevrons were authorised on dress coats only at this period, but this NCO is apparently proud enough of his Civil War service to wear his on the sleeve of his 1874 piped fatigue blouse – the kind of deviation from regulation dress frequently observed. Authorisation of this practice in 1882 indicates that it was already established; in 1888 authorisation was reversed again.

*C2 First Lieutenant, US Cavalry, 1875*

The straw hat was popular in hot climates; great latitude was observed in the manner of campaign headgear. The fancy braided shirt, a personal purchase, is also typical of the officers of the period. Note the locally-made canvas leggings, the field-glasses in a slung case, and the 'butcher knife' in a sheath decorated with brass rivets.

*C3 Quartermaster Sergeant, US Infantry, 1875*

The pleated 1872 fatigue blouse was suppressed in 1874 – officially – but continued in use long afterwards. The non-regulation grey slouch hat was more popular than black items. Bullet loops have been sewn to an old leather NCO's belt; such belts were widely used, being more capacious and much easier of access than the regulation pouch.

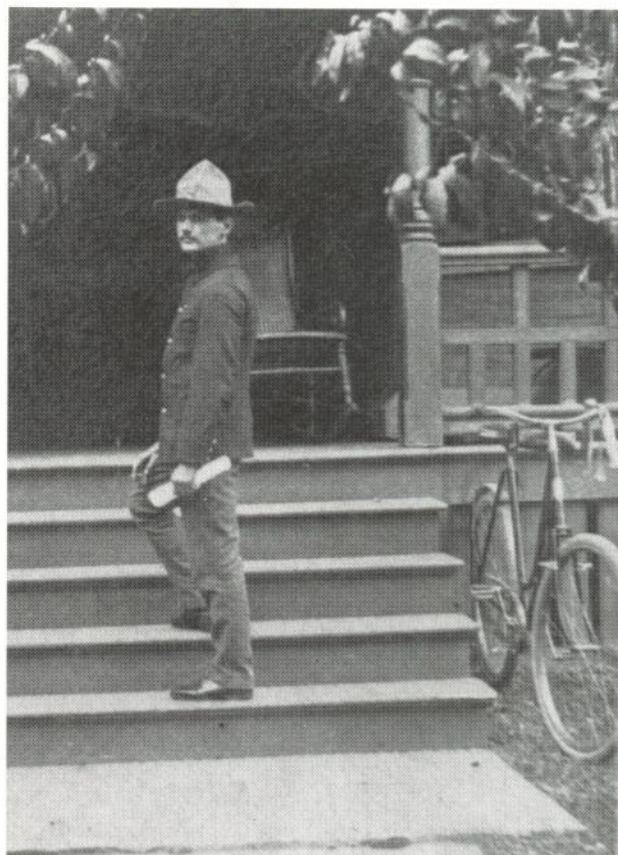
*D & E: Officers and men of the 7th US Cavalry in the field, 1876*

This group displays the far-from-uniform appearance of the Indian-fighting cavalry in the field. The corporal (1) has tied his blouse to his saddle, and rides in an old issue grey flannel pullover shirt. His belt has large loops for carbine ammunition, and a small extra length of belting attached with loops for pistol ammunition. Trousers are worn over boots. Note saddle fixtures, including rope and picket-pin, and the slung canteen which has been re-covered with old blanket cloth. The second lieutenant (2) wears a fringed buckskin jacket, of the kind popularised by the 7th's commander, George A. Custer. Note field-glasses, issue holster worn butt-forward on the right hand side of a privately acquired looped belt, shoulder straps attached to shoulders of the jacket, and fancy shirt. The odd-looking hat is the 1872 issue campaign slouch, a disastrous piece of design which rapidly lost its shape under field conditions. It was pro-

vided with hooks and eyes along the edges of the brim so that it could be worn as illustrated, resembling a *chapeau-de-bras*. The trooper (3) wears the same hat flapped down, and a fatigue blouse made from an old 1861 dress frock-coat cut down – note the nine buttons. The trousers are heavily reinforced on the inside leg, as was normal for mounted troops. The carbine is the .45/70 issue weapon, still carried clipped to a cross-belt. Note that bandanas were personal items, and were of many different shades and patterns.

*F1 F2 F3 Captain, Sergeant Major and Trooper in 1872 full dress uniform*

The officer's helmet cords are of gold, those of non-commissioned personnel yellow. The officer wears the regimental number in white metal between two sets of rank bars on the branch-colour escutcheon of his epaulettes, and the non-commissioned and enlisted men wore it on the branch-colour collar-patch. The lower of the Sergeant Major's service stripes on the forearm indicates service during the



The slouch hat was commonly worn in a point, called a 'Montana peak'





Civil War – here, in red, indicating that he served with the Artillery. The Negro trooper of the 9th Cavalry has the same tunic as the NCO apart from rank chevrons, but wears unstriped trousers.

*G Apache Scouts and Cavalry officer, 1880s*

The US Army made great use of Indian auxiliaries, and one of the major reasons for the defeat of the tribes was the willingness of warriors to fight alongside the white man against other clans and tribes. Scouts usually wore a mixture of Army and native dress; Army jackets were common, but Army trousers virtually unknown. The senior scout (1) wears the chevrons of a Sergeant Major in Cavalry yellow, and the red head-cloth common among Apaches serving with the Army. The scout in the background (2) has obtained a recruit's lined Fatigue blouse (only recruits received lined blouses) and has reversed it for camouflage in the

**Assistant Commissioner James F. Macleod, N.W.M.P., with his hand on his horse's saddle, with two of his inspectors and a constable at Fort Walsh in 1878. Note how the undress jackets fasten together without buttons (Royal Canadian Mounted Police)**

bleached landscape of the south-west. The renegade prisoner wears typical native dress (3); the officer (4) wears a fancy shirt with a plastron front, Indian leggings, and a straw hat.

*H1 Officers in winter field dress, 1870s–1880s*

Officers provided themselves with a wide variety of fur and hide garments against the cold.

*H2 Trooper, 10th US Cavalry, winter field dress, 1870s–1880s*

A 'buffalo soldier' of the Negro 10th Cavalry, wearing the issue buffalo-hide winter coat over an old piped 1874 blouse and a privately acquired neckerchief.





**Sioux Chief Big Foot lies dead on the field of Wounded Knee after the last major battle of the Plains Indian wars, 1890 (U.S. Signal Corps)**

*H3 Brigadier General George Crook, 1870s–1880s*

The Army's best Indian-fighting general had an individual taste in clothing for field duty. Here he wears his modified sky-blue cavalryman's overcoat, lined red and with a collar made from the pelt of a wolf he shot. In hot weather Crook often wore a weird-looking sun-helmet and a canvas jacket; given that he frequently rode a mule, and armed himself with a shotgun, he made a striking picture!

*H4 Sergeant, North-West Mounted Police, 1870s*

The 'Mounties' enforced the Queen's peace north of the Canadian border during the period of the Indian wars, with notable success. This NCO wears 1873 uniform, apart from corduroy trousers, more comfortable and hard-wearing for field dress than issue blues. Note the unusual cut of the front of the red tunic.

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