



Spring, 1714: The Beginning of Germanna

Ann Miller

Three hundred years ago, at the beginning of 1714, the area that is now Orange County (then the western ends of Essex, King and Queen, and King William counties) was bare of European settlements, but this was about to change. The fort and settlement planned for the horseshoe bend of the Rapidan River, at the area soon to be known as Germanna, would be the westernmost outpost in Virginia, and the gateway to the settlement of Piedmont Virginia and lands further west.

The historical record of settlement at Germanna begins with the April 28, 1714 order of the Virginia Council to build and equip the fort and build a road for the settlement of the first German colony at Germanna. The site was then in the western reaches of Essex County, well above the Fall Line, and far to the west of any other settlers. Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood, noted the Council minutes, “proposed to settle them [the German colonists] above the falls of Rappahannock River to serve as a Barrier to the Inhabitants of that part of the Country against the incursions of the Indians, & desiring the opinion of the Council whether in consideration of their usefulness for that purpose the Charge of building them a Fort, clearing a road to their Settlement & carrying them thither two pieces of Canon & some Ammunition may not properly be defrayed by the public.”¹



Detail of *Virginia, Marylandia et Carolina in America septentrionali Britannorum*, a mid-eighteenth century map published in Germany by Johann Baptist Homann. Library of Congress, Geography and Map Division.

The Council concurred unanimously with Spotswood’s request and placed the German settlers “under the denomination of Rangers” to exempt them from public levies. Part security force, part explorers, Rangers literally did “range” through the frontier of settlement on patrol. Several orders of Council in 1711 had specified the make-up of Ranger patrols: “For the better protection of the Inhabitants of this Colony against the Incursions of Indians . . . ten men & an Officer out of each of the Frontier Countys be appointed to Range

three days in a Week above the Inhabitants [i. e. to the west of the limits of settlement].” Reinforcements could be drawn from county militia, and if needed the number of Rangers could be increased.²

In mid-May, virtually on the heels of the Council’s approval of his request for public funds to be expended in the settlement, Spotswood made “a Fortnights Expedition to Reconnoitre the Nor[th]ward Frontiers & to fortify a place for Settling a Body of Germans above the Falls of Rappahannock.”³ Settlement would proceed soon afterward.

¹ H. R. McIlwaine, ed., *Executive Journals, Council of Colonial Virginia* (1928; reprint, Richmond: Virginia State Library, 1976), 3: 371–372.

² McIlwaine, *Executive Journals*, 3: 286, 291.

³ “Journal of the Lieut. Governor’s Travels and Expeditions Undertaken in the Public Service of Virginia,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, Series 2, 3 (January 1927): 42.

Germanna 300th Anniversary & Wilderness 150th Anniversary

The spring of 2014 marks two significant anniversaries in Orange County history: late April to mid-May marks the establishment of the fort at Germanna in 1714. May 5-6 marks the anniversary of the Battle of the Wilderness in 1864. The Society will offer several programs in 2014 to commemorate these events.

2013 Annual Fund Donors

The Orange County Historical Society acknowledges with gratitude recent contributions to the annual fund drive.

Historians:

Karla B. Baer
 James W. Cortada, Jr.
 Carol M. Couch in memory of Marilyn B. MacGregor
 William Pannill in memory of William Pannill III, member of
 the Committee of Public Safety of Orange County, VA
 William and Joanne Speiden in memory of Sandra D. Speiden
 Susan B. Strange in memory of Marjorie B. Strange
 The Tucker Family in memory of Everette Lee Tucker, Sr.
 Frank S. & Bernice S. Walker

Patrons:

Richard F. Barnhardt
 Louise Brush
 Paul & Janet Carter
 Divona B. Eltzroth
 Wayne & Virginia Firth
 Florence Bryan Fowlkes
 John W. Frazer in memory of Marjorie Woolfolk Frazer
 Porter & Mary R. Goss
 Mr. & Mrs. Joe Grills
 Karen R. Hegyi
 Holladay House Bed & Breakfast
 Marianne Hurd
 Bill Jones
 Lynne G. Lewis & Paul J. Donohue
 Mason Insurance Agency
 Louis Mittelman, Jr.
 H. Harwood & Frances M. Purcell
 Joseph Y. Rowe
 Elizabeth G. Rudinger
 Stephen R. Sanford
 Mr. & Mrs. Charles H. Seilheimer Jr.
 Frank A. Thomas
 Randolph G. Thompson
 Ann B. Thornton
 Nelson & Beverly Tucker
 Joseph & Carla Wascalus
 Harry Van Trees in memory of Ambrose Burton

Supporters:

Marilyn C. Barrow in memory of Rear Admiral John Barrow
 USN
 Joan & Luther Bergstrom
 Bob & Toni Burton in memory of May Burton Sr.
 Mrs. Angus Green in memory of her husband, Angus M. Green
 Rose F. Graham & John Tranver Graham
 Joan Hebrance
 Elsie P. Jarvis
 Inn at Westwood Farm in memory of Bee Browning
 Robert and Marie Johnson

Mark John Kington
 Mitchell P. Lichtenberg
 Geana Madison in memory of the Williams Family 1730s
 John C. Maxwell
 Ann L. Miller in memory of Adra "Bee" Browning
 Joan P. Moxley in memory of Bob Moxley
 Donald R. & Vibeke E. Ober
 Peter G. Perry in memory of Wallace E. Perry
 Mike Saxton in memory of Captain William Graves Crenshaw
 Marion W. Van Alstyne in memory of the Newman Family of
 Orange Co., VA
 Ellen K. Wessel
 L. Lee Wouters

Friends:

Robert T. Anthony
 Jayne E. Blair in memory of Donna M. Blair
 Sherry Borders
 Pen & Suzanne Bresee in memory of Francis B. Hastings, Jr.
 Robert S. Christensen, Jr.
 Rebecca Gilmore Coleman in honor of Frank Walker
 Barbara M. Collins
 James & Barbara Gerock
 Rebecca Grainger in memory of McAllister ancestors
 Vivian A. Gray
 Historic Gordonsville, Inc.
 Debbie Holcombe
 Carol & Ross Hunter
 Patricia Hurst
 Hope R. Kidwell
 Patricia LaLand
 Robert E. Lee
 Doris J. MacEwan
 Jack & Linda Miller
 Patty Parmer
 Carol and Carl Phillips
 Steven E. & Jo A. Satterfield
 Richard M. & Doris Smith
 Atwell W. Somerville
 Alyson P. Sparks in memory of Edward B. Sparks
 Frances J. Stachour in memory of My Revolutionary Ancestors
 from Orange Co.
 Charles & Mickey Staton
 W. O. Stidham in honor of Poster Day
 Page Sullenberger in honor of Joseph Y. Rowe
 Patrick Sullivan

Sergeant Tyrus Heber “Ty” Tisdale

Paul Carter

Tyrus H. Tisdale, second son of Mr. and Mrs. B.H. Tisdale, was born on 12 October 1913 in Madison County. His parents' farm, however, was in Orange County just east of Somerset on Route 641 (Liberty Mills Road), and he grew up there living the life of a farm boy. At some point, he acquired the nickname of “Ty,” and that stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Ty graduated from James Barbour High School (whose main building is now the home of the Four County Players), and he attended Fork Union Military Academy. Early on, Ty became known for his skills as a baseball player. Regionally, he played in the Elks League of Charlottesville and in the Valley League. Locally, he played on the Orange Ramblers and Montpelier Club teams. He even briefly entertained thoughts of entering the minor professional league player draft. His favorite baseball glove is still in the possession of the family.

As Ty reached his middle teen years, war clouds were beginning to gather in Europe, and as a precaution, the United States began to expand its armed forces. Ty was still too young to join the armed services, but just barely. For a time, he worked at Snead and Company of Orange, the predecessor to today's Virginia Metal Industries, located on the Old Gordonsville Road.

Ty joined the U.S. Army on 2 May 1941 and received his basic and advanced training at Fort Meade, Maryland, and at Camp A.P. Hill in Caroline County, Virginia. He was then stationed for a time at Camp Blanding, Florida, and at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. He was trained to be a member of a two-man team that operated a .30-caliber heavy machine gun. The gun, a product of World War I trench warfare, could fire up to 600 rounds a minute. One team member carried the gun and its cooling system and the other carried the mounting tripod and ammunition.

In September 1942, Ty went overseas to England and began training for what became Operation Overlord, the invasion of the European mainland. At some point, he became both a sergeant and a member of the famed 29th Infantry Division that contained regiments from Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. With the extensive Civil War history of those states in mind, the division was quickly nicknamed the “Blue and Gray” Division. On 31 May 1944, Ty wrote a letter home. Shortly thereafter, pre-invasion security sealed him and his comrades off from the rest of the world. On 6 June, the 29th Division boarded landing craft and headed directly for Omaha Beach on the coast of France. The waters of the English Channel were still rough from a recent storm, and the wind, currents, and enemy resistance combined to produce massive confusion.

Ty was a member of H Company of the 116th Infantry Regiment. H Company was scheduled to be in the second wave to



reach the beach. F and G companies were in the first wave, and they waded ashore at 6:35 a.m. Shelling from the ships supporting the landing had started grass fires on the heights overlooking the beach and the thick smoke temporarily obscured the vision of friend and foe alike. As the H Company members in the second wave headed toward the beach for a scheduled 7:00 a.m. landing, the enemy resistance seemed to be very light. A few artillery shells were coming down around the landing craft, but direct fire from the beach was sporadic and inaccurate. The men began to wonder whether possibly the landing might just be a piece of cake after all. By the time the second wave reached the beach, however, the grass fires were burning out, and Ty and his companions were open, unprotected targets for a murderously accurate blizzard of rifle and machine gun fire that opened up on

them from positions all over the heights overlooking the beach.

Landing craft could not come all the way up to the dry sand. The enemy had set hundreds of “tetrahedrons” at both the high and low tide levels. Tetrahedrons were six-pronged, jack rock-like metal structures designed to rip the bottoms out of landing craft. Landing craft had to stop just short of the tetrahedrons and send the soldiers out into moving water of uncertain depths. The men, already weighted down with packs and equipment and now struggling in the swells to maintain their footing, were defenseless targets.¹

After Ty's landing craft dropped its ramp, he stepped out into waist-deep water. Before he could reach the sand, Ty received a mortal head wound. His best buddy helped him to shore, still alive, and propped him up against a tetrahedron where he soon died.

The family back in Orange County received the sad news of his death by a telegram dated 17 June 1944. Sergeant Tisdale's remains were initially buried in St. Laurent Cemetery, northeast of St. Lo, France, until the late forties when they were exhumed and brought to Orange. His father and brothers met the casket at the Orange train station, and took it to Graham Cemetery for burial. Present besides his parents were his brothers, T. B. Tisdale of Orange and W. M. Tisdale of Washington, D.C.

Sergeant Tisdale is the uncle of Barbara Hawse of Orange and Tom Tisdale of Keswick.

¹ Actual accounts of the landings were not officially declassified until February 2005. Those reports are rife with stories of the confusion on the beach, with companies landing in the wrong sectors, units getting mixed up with each other and trying to get to their assigned locations, and officers failing to make command decisions.

To Feed an Army

Jayne E. Blair

I. Logistics

Even as we observed the Sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, the overwhelming majority of the exhibits, publications, lectures, tours, and reenactments dealt with the same subject areas that have been explored almost from the moment the war slipped into the province of history. So often, information being presented as “new” only adds more detail to existing details. That is of course interesting, but even the new or casual Civil War student knows that this comprehensively documented war has more facets than they are being routinely exposed to. This article proposes to explore one of those facets, specifically, that area of logistics dealing with the feeding of armies.

First, what is logistics? Logistics is an inclusive term referring to those activities of an organization that involve the procurement, storage, maintenance, and preservation of the organization’s supplies, materials, equipment, and facilities, plus the necessary transportation and distribution of the same as well as the transportation of the organization’s personnel. It is a term that originated in the military, but is now being used increasingly by other large public and private organizations. The critical importance of logistics to the military is highlighted by the oft-repeated saying, “Amateurs discuss tactics, while professionals discuss logistics.”

The logistical duties of a modern army are discharged by its Quartermaster Corps, but that hasn’t always been the case. When the Quartermaster Corps was created for America’s first army in 1775, it was not responsible for supplying food or clothing to the troops. Those duties had historically been the province of a department called the Commissary, and Joseph Trumbull of Connecticut was appointed by Congress to be the first Commissary General of that department.

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of supplying food to soldiers. There is the basic nutrition factor, and undernourished soldiers not only perform inefficiently, they are also more susceptible to diseases. Diseases were the fear of pre-twentieth century armies. In 1777, the famous Philadelphia physician, Dr. Benjamin Rush, wrote: “Fatal experience has taught the people of America that a greater proportion of men have perished with sickness in our armies than have fallen by the sword.”¹ Sadly, that situation was no better in the 1860s, and roughly two-thirds of all the soldiers who died in the Civil War died from disease.

The Commissary Department’s official name was “Commissary General of Stores and Provisions.” That grand title, however, could not conceal the woefully poor performance of General Trumbull’s department as the Revolution dragged on. Creating a supply network from scratch is difficult in the best of circumstances, and General Trumbull’s department was struggling with a lack of funding, blockaded ports, awful roads and moving armies. In theory, armies were supposed to be able to also buy food locally, but they had the

same problem as General Trumbull: such suspect continental currency as they had didn’t lure much food out of farmers’ hiding places.

In November 1775, the Commissary General’s office declared that a soldier’s daily ration was to consist of the following: 16 oz. beef, 6.8 oz. peas, 18 oz. flour, 1.4 oz. rice, 16 oz. milk, 0.1830 oz. soap, 0.0686 oz. candle, and 1 qt. Spruce beer.² The beer was seen both as a nutritional stimulant and as an instant remedy for the bad water that soldiers sooner or later encountered.

Not only was the food available to a soldier in the field almost always a far cry from the official ration, there was a fundamental problem: an almost total absence of vegetables. Again, Dr. Rush: “The diet of soldiers should consist chiefly of vegetables. The nature of their duty, as well as their former habits of life, require it... Their vegetables should be well cooked.”³

Dr. Rush notwithstanding, the ration allowance stayed pretty much the same for the next seventy-plus years except for the substitution of rum, brandy or whiskey for the spruce beer. The liquor or spirits ration was then eliminated in 1832 by order of President Andrew Jackson when it was replaced by the issuance of a coffee and sugar allotment. Congress set that portion of the ration in an Act of 5 July 1836, stating that, “the allowance of sugar and coffee to the noncommissioned officers, musicians, and privates, in lieu [of whiskey], shall be fixed at six pounds of coffee and twelve pounds of sugar to every one hundred rations, to be issued weekly when it can be done with convenience of the public service, and, when not so issued, to be provided for in money.”⁴ The wording of the act reflects the fact that at the time commissioned officers were securing all their rations privately.

After the War of 1812, the Commissary General created a Subsistence Department which had the powers to buy and issue rations. This Department was abolished in 1842 when it was incorporated into the Quartermaster Department that was then charged with procuring all supplies and equipment for the military. In June 1860, Brigadier General Joseph E. Johnston was appointed Quartermaster General of the United States Army. Ten months later, however, Johnston, a Southerner, resigned to join the Confederate army.⁵

The new Confederate government had organized its military with laws, rules and regulations quite similar to those in effect in the Federal army, including its Quartermaster Department. Also, a number of people with experience in the Federal Quartermaster Department joined the Confederate army. That said, it still takes time to establish a supply network, and in the case of the South, a

² Rations: Conference Notes – Prepared by the Quartermaster School for the Quartermaster General – January 1949.

³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴ John W. Barriger, *Legislative History of the Subsistence Department of the United States Army*, 2d ed. (Washington, D. C.: n.p., 1877) and Franz A. Koehler, *Coffee for the Armed Forces: Military Development and Conversion to Industry Supply*, QMC Historical Studies, Series II, No. 5 (Washington, D. C.: n.p., 1958), 1-11.

⁵ US Army Quartermaster Foundation Fort Lee, Virginia (http://www.qmfoundation.com/quartermaster_time_line.htm : accessed 12 May 2014).

¹ Benjamin Rush, “Directions for Preserving the Health of Soldiers, Addressed to the Officers of the Army of the United States.” (n.p.: By Order of the Board of War, 1777), 1.

Army (*continued*)

Federal naval blockade made things vastly more difficult. The South needed to export its cotton, tobacco, and rice to get money to buy supplies, then it needed to import those supplies. The Federal navy sharply curtailed both efforts, and Southern quartermasters found themselves having to improvise on a huge scale.

With the outbreak of hostilities in 1861 and the call for troops by both the Federal and Confederate governments, young men rushed to join existing or newly forming units. For the Quartermaster Departments on both sides, the reality was that a very large number of people were abandoning their domestic food supplies in favor of the army's and in a few hours they would all be hungry. What were they to be fed? And how?

By the time the Civil War got underway in earnest, the basic ration for a Union soldier was, on paper, 20 oz. beef, 22 oz. flour, 7 oz. potatoes, 2.65 oz. dried beans, 1.6 oz. green coffee, 2.4 oz. sugar, 0.64 oz. salt, 0.04 oz. pepper, 0.32 gill vinegar, 0.045 oz. yeast, 0.64 oz. soap and 0.24 oz. candle. At the same time, the basic ration proposed for the Southern soldier was: 12 oz. pork or bacon (or 20 oz. fresh or salted beef), 18 oz. flour (or 12 oz. hard bread or 20 oz. corn meal), 2.5 oz. peas or beans (or 0.16 oz. rice), 0.96 oz. coffee, and 1.92 oz. sugar. Also 1.5 pounds of tallow candles were issued per 100 men. The options built into the official Southern ration reflect the problems facing the Southern quartermasters.

An Army quartermaster was to accept delivery of supplies from the central government and supplement them as needed with items purchased locally. He would have the supplies shipped by wagon or rail to the army's various supply depots. Wagon trains of allocated supplies were then sent to the quartermasters of the several corps composing the army. The corps quartermasters divided the items received by the number and size of the divisions composing the corps. Division quartermasters continued the subdividing and delivery to the brigades, and the brigades to their regiments. The regimental quartermaster broke the supplies down into bundles in number and size equal to the companies in the regiment and sent word to the company supply sergeants to come pick up their bundles.

The company supply sergeant spread a blanket and placed on it bags containing individual weekly rations. When called, soldiers would arrive and select a bag each. The soldier then was to carry his foodstuffs in a special bag called a haversack.

In actual practice, the distribution of supplies to individual soldiers varied widely, depending on such factors as whether shortages or enemy activity had disrupted communications or whether the men were in combat, on the march, at an isolated post, etc.

Basic rations were often supplemented with hardtack. Sometimes hardtack was the ration. Hardtack was a cracker made of flour and water and baked until it was very hard. A common size was 3" square by about 0.5" thick. They were packed in tin-lined boxes in an effort to keep them dry and insect-free. Unfortunately, that didn't always work. The men carried these crackers in their haversacks and would usually soak them in water or coffee to create something like a wet biscuit. Pounding a cracker with a rifle butt made pieces that could be held in the mouth for softening. In that way, hardtack could be consumed while on the march.⁶ Hardtack was still being used as a ration supplement as late as the Spanish-American War.

Acquiring local food supplies, known as "foraging," was a time-honored method of supplementing or replacing issued rations. Foraging could be organized and official, such as an army being ordered to "live off the land," or it could be impromptu and unauthorized, with a few apples, ears of corn, and an occasional chicken taken from farmers' fields and yards. In friendly territory, foraged items were supposed to be paid for, but the rule was routinely broken. In both friendly and enemy territory, helpless civilians in the path of an army could be stripped clean of everything edible and left to beg for food.

II. Coffee, Vegetables, Condiments—But Especially Coffee.

During the Battle of Antietam on 17 September 1862, members of the 23rd Ohio scrambled out of their tents near Frederick Maryland, and made a forced march of approximately twenty miles to the battlefield without having even their morning coffee. The men were thrown into battle near Burnside Bridge upon their arrival. A young Commissary sergeant, once on the field, saw some of the men of the 23rd returning to headquarters "looking confused and dazed." The sergeant, William McKinley, quickly fixed some pancakes and fresh coffee. He then loaded the food into a supply wagon drawn by several old mules and headed off through the shot and shell of battle until he reached members of his regiment. General J.L. Botsford of the Ohio Volunteers later said: "It was nearly dusk when we heard tremendous cheering from the left of our regiment. As we had been having heavy fighting right up to this time, our division commander, General Scammon, sent me to find out the cause which I very soon found to be cheers for McKinley and his hot coffee."⁷

Coffee was the backbone of both armies. Whenever possible, soldiers started the day with this marvelous brew and many ended the day with it. When in camp, no matter the season, the coffee pot was always boiling as both men and officers sought the beloved beverage. Ever since President Jackson substituted coffee for liquor, that drink helped fuel the men in the field. The popularity of coffee also led to the introduction of canned milk and instant coffee.

accessed 12 May 2014).

⁷ Radinsky, Mike, "A Cup of Coffee, Served with Distinction," 14 September 2010, *Civil War Memory* (<http://www.examiner.com/article/a-cup-of-coffee-served-with-distinction> : accessed 12 May 2014) and Levin, Kevin, "On Antietam and Hot Coffee," 11 August 2011, *Civil War Memory* (<http://cwmemory.com/2011/08/11/on-antietam-and-hot-coffee> : accessed 12 May 2014). [Note: In 1897, William McKinley became the 25th President of the United States. He was assassinated in 1901 while on a visit to the World's Fair in Buffalo, New York. Upon his death, members of his old Civil War regiment, 23rd Ohio Infantry Volunteers commissioned a monument to honor McKinley's dedication to the men of the regiment by his actions on the afternoon of September 1, 1862 during the Battle of Antietam. On the rear of the monument is the following: "Sergeant McKinley Co E. 23rd Ohio Vol. Infantry, while in charge of the Commissary Department, on the afternoon of the day of the battle of Antietam, 17 September 1862, personally and without orders served "hot coffee" and "Warm food" to every man in the Regiment, on this spot and in doing so had to pass under fire."]

⁶ "Hardtack," *Wikipedia* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardtack> :

Army (*continued*)

With the start of the war, the Union quickly established a blockade of southern ports in an attempt to prevent the South from importing any of the necessities of war and from exporting any goods that would give them a financial gain in foreign markets. As the war progressed, this would cause a hardship for the southern soldiers. No longer could the South import or afford the coffee bean. The price rose dramatically to entice smugglers to attempt to run the blockade or sneak coffee in through the ports of Mexico. The price of a pound of coffee went from twenty cents to almost sixty dollars as the war progressed.

That same blockade prevented one of the South's most important cash crops, tobacco, from being exported. The northern soldiers had to pay more to be able to have a smoke with their evening coffee. Thus soldiers would often write home telling their families of meeting the enemy late in the evening while on picket duty to exchange coffee for tobacco or vice versa. They would explain that after exchanging pleasantries, they would return to their lines to once more pick up their rifles and become enemies again.

In the North, coffee was first distributed as ground coffee, but it was soon discovered that some suppliers "mis-weighed" or used inferior beans, or even went so far as to add sand and/or other fillers to the mix. In an effort to eliminate that problem, the Union army started issuing whole coffee beans to the soldiers, but by the end of 1861, commanders found that the soldiers were consuming too much time roasting and crushing the beans. In an effort to make it easier for the soldier in the field to get his coffee, soldiers were issued "essence of coffee" which was prepared coffee, milk and sugar boiled down into a thick, mushy liquid substance which the soldier mixed with hot water—an early concoction of instant coffee. This did not go over well with the men and in some cases caused much diarrhea amongst the men. The army went back to a roasted coffee bean, but the soldiers were prevented from dropping out of line to brew coffee. Instead they began to chew the beans if they wanted their coffee while on the march.

The importance of coffee to soldiers was reflected in the attention paid to how it was distributed to them. According to the December 1988 issue of *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, two ordinary blankets were laid out, one containing forty-five divided mounds of ground coffee and an equal number of sugar piles on the other. This represented a four-day ration of coffee and sugar for Company C of the 100th Indiana Volunteer Regiment. "No matter how carefully they tried, it was impossible to divide the coffee equally; the company had no scales. As a result, each mound was always a bit larger or smaller than the others." To make the distribution fair to all, the sergeant in charge, "facing away from the



Sgt. William McKinley (later President McKinley) serves coffee to members of the 23rd Ohio Infantry Regiment. Detail of the Monument to William McKinley at Antietam National Battlefield. Photo by Jayne E. Blair.

coffee and the company, read from the muster roll and called out a name at random,"⁸ and that soldier would come forth and chose his ration.

John Billings of the 10th Massachusetts Voluntary Artillery Battery also confirmed this procedure in his book *Hardtack and Coffee*, published in 1888. He reported that the rations were "usually brought to camp in an oat-sack, a regimental quartermaster receiving and apportioning his among the ten companies, and the quartermaster-sergeant of a battery apportioning his to the four or six detachments. Then the orderly-sergeant of a company or the sergeant of a detachment must devote himself to dividing it. One method of

accomplishing this purpose was to spread a rubber blanket on the ground—more than one if the company was large,—and upon it were put as many piles of the coffee as there were men to receive rations; and the care taken to make the piles of the same size to the eye, and to keep the men from growling, would remind one of a country physician making his powders, taking a little from one pile and adding to another. The sugar which always accompanied the coffee was spooned out at the same time on another blanket."⁹

The northern soldier had another luxury—milk—for his coffee. Fresh milk was difficult to come by, for it would spoil quite rapidly. In 1853, however, Gail Borden had discovered she could prepare a milk product that did not need refrigeration by boiling milk without scorching or curdling it. The raw milk she used for her product had to come from farms who had agreed to wash the udders of cows before milking, keeping their barns clean, and scalding and drying their buckets and strainers between each milking. She then canned the milk and canned milk became an instant hit with consumers. The Army Quartermaster soon added this item to the supplies provided to soldiers in the field. Thus was born Borden's Eagle Brand Condensed Milk.

The absence of the coffee bean posed a hardship for all residing in the South, citizen and soldier alike. Due to the difficulty of importing or purchasing the real thing, drinking pseudo-coffee became an acceptable way of life. Newspapers across the South carried recipes for making coffee substitutes from everyday materials such as potatoes, beets, parsnips, and rye in addition to corn meal, acorns and chicory. A subscriber to the *Charleston Mercury* wrote a letter stating that, "cotton seed was a good substitute for coffee, I was induced to try a mixture of two-thirds cotton seed and one-third coffee, and found it answered extremely well. The

⁸ J. Britt McCarley, "Union Rations between 1861 and 1865," *Quartermaster Professional Bulletin*, December 1988.

⁹ John Billings, *Hardtack and Coffee: The Unwritten Story of Army Life* (Pittsburgh, Penn.: P.J. Fleming, 1888).

Army (*continued*)

seed merely requires to be washed and parched before grinding, the same as coffee.”¹⁰

Of the many items substituted for coffee, it was reported that the acorn was the best. The nut contained tannic acid that was said to resemble the caffeine of the coffee bean. In 1862, Dr. A. Poiteven stated in the *Mobile Daily Tribune* that the best way to prepare coffee from the acorn was to first roast it in the oven, then remove the hard shell and grind the kernel like the coffee bean.

A soldier in the field had to use anything he came across to grind his coffee if he wanted to have coffee with his meal or as a way to wind down from the day or battle. There were tough times when he most likely made his coffee from the root crops he came across on his trek through the country—beets, turnips or corn. The beets or turnips were cut up into small chunks which were roasted until hard and the soldiers would grind it into granules by use of a rock, pan or rifle butt. Parched corn, field corn with the husks removed and dried in the sun or roasted in a skillet could be made into coffee but did not taste very good. It was an acquired taste and often the soldiers flavored it with old coffee grounds.

Salt has been one of the most importance spices in the history of man. Not only is it a critical bodily nutrient, it has been used for centuries to preserve food. Virginia possessed one of the largest salt mines south of the Mason-Dixon Line. It is located near Saltville in Smyth County. During the Civil War, the Union made numerous attempts to capture this area in order to deprive the South of its salt supply. In December 1864, a Union force under Major General George Stoneman finally was able to attack and destroy the salt works and render a major blow to the Confederacy.

Often soldiers in the field failed to receive their allotment of fresh vegetables as prescribed by army regulation, especially in the early part of the war. This lack of vegetables caused many soldiers to come down with scurvy, a disease which manifests itself initially as malaise and lethargy, and, if left untreated, causes bleeding from mucous membranes and eventually the loss of teeth, jaundice, neuropathy and ultimately death. Upon recommendation from the medical department, the Union Commissary started incorporating onions, potatoes and turnips as the “vegetable equivalent.”

Though the “vegetable equivalent” concept appeared proper on paper, it did not work too well unless the army had settled into an extended encampment. Though these rooted vegetables did not spoil as fast as other fresh vegetables, their weight made them difficult to carry with an army on the march. In mid-1862, “desiccated” potatoes and vegetables found their way into the men’s haversacks. Desiccated vegetables were nothing more than dried vegetables but the soldiers called them by other names anyway: “desecrated” or “consecrated vegetables” and sometimes, “baled hay.” Desiccated vegetables consisted of turnips, parsnips, carrots, beets, onions, string beans, potatoes, corn, cabbage, and, according to some soldiers, “what seemed to be cornstalks, potato-tops, and pea-vines.”¹¹ The vegetables were cut up into bite-size pieces

and then hydraulically pressed and steamed into blocks measuring anywhere from six to twelve inches square by one or two inches thick. The North often referred to these squares as “blocks” while the Confederacy often referred to them as “pods.”

According to Abner Small of the 16th Maine Volunteer Infantry, “I suppose it was healthful, for there was variety enough in its composition to satisfy any condition of stomach and bowels. What in Heaven’s name it was composed of, none of us ever discovered. It was called simply ‘desiccated vegetables.’ I doubt our men have ever forgotten how a cook could break off a piece as large as a boot top, put it in a kettle of water, and stir it with the handle of a hospital broom. When the stuff was fully dissolved, the water would remind one of a dirty brook with all the dead leaves floating around promiscuously. Still, it was a substitute for food. We ate it, and we liked it, too.”¹²

Whether they liked it or not, it did not matter. Survival mattered. Near the end of the war, men on both sides were suffering, not from battle wounds, but from disease brought on by a lack of vitamins usually obtained by eating fruits and vegetables. In the south, most of the crops had been destroyed. It has been reported that before the Wilderness Campaign, Lt. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, worrying about the health of his men, sent a telegraph message to Washington stating: “I will not move this army without onions.” He soon received three railroad cars loaded with onions, a worthy opponent of the scurvy and dysentery prevalent in the camps. General Robert E. Lee also had his problems with the lack of fruits and vegetables. He reportedly said that the Confederate Congress was unable “to do anything except eat peanuts and chew tobacco, while my army is starving.” Perhaps Napoleon was right when he said “an army marches on its stomach.” It was true then and it is true now.

¹² *Road to Richmond: The Civil War letters of Major Abner Small of the 16th Maine Volunteers*, Harold Adams Small, ed., (Oakland: University of California Press, 1939), 19.

¹⁰ *Charleston Mercury* (South Carolina), March 31, 1862, p. 1, c. 1.

¹¹ “Campaign Cuisine for the Culinarily Challenged”, *Columbia Rifles Research Compendium: A Resource for Living Historians in the Development of a Well-Rounded Civil War Federal Soldier Impression*, 1st ed. (n.p.: Columbia Rifles, 2001).

Historical Society Board 2014

John Tranver Graham, President
Barbara Vines Little, Vice President
Jayne E. Blair, Secretary
Richard Durphy, Treasurer
Clara Colby
C. Sterling Howell
Ruth Mallory Long
Amy Payette
Heidi E. Pettyjohn
Elaine Rowe-Brown
John Strader

Research Historian
Ann Miller

Orange County Historical Society
130 Caroline Street
Orange, VA 22960

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Orange, VA
Permit No. 60

From the Vault



Visitors to the Orange County Historical Society's Research Center will be familiar with the current "From the Vault" entry. Among the items in the Society's collections is this copy of the eighteenth century Charles Bridges portrait of colonial Lt. Governor Alexander Spotswood, on display in our front library room. This handsome portrait was given to the Society in the early years of its existence, a generous donation by Spotswood descendants Mrs. Will R. Gregg and Mrs. J. Winston Fowlkes.

This spring marks the 300th anniversary of Spotswood's establishment of Fort Germanna and the associated settlement. In 1714 the Germanna Colony was the westernmost European settlement in Virginia.

Please Join Us!

We invite you to join the Orange County Historical Society. Please provide your name and contact information as you wish it to appear in our records and select the appropriate dues level. Mail the completed form, along with your dues payment to The Orange County Historical Society (OCHS), to 130 Caroline Street, Orange, VA 22960.

The Orange County Historical Society is a non-profit organization. Your membership fees are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

Name: _____

(If business/organization member, name of business or organization)

Street: _____

City: _____

State: _____ **Zip:** _____

Telephone: _____

Email: _____

Membership Status: New Renewal Address, name, etc. update

Would you be willing to receive meeting notices via email in lieu of a postcard? Yes No

Membership Level: Society dues are for the period of January 1 - December 31.

Annual Individual Member: \$20

Annual Student Member (High School or College): \$12.50

Annual Family Member: \$30

Annual Sustaining Member: \$100

Annual Patron Member: \$200

Annual Sponsor Member: \$300