

New River Rifles

Uniform and Equipment Guidelines

Getting started or, “What should I buy first”

If you are just starting out, the most frequently asked question from a perspective recruit is, “what should I buy first?” The answer may sound surprising but, don’t buy anything until you have attended an event or two. The New River Rifles have enough loaner gear and uniform items to outfit a new recruit or, to loan to new members while they are building their impression. I.E, we will initially get you onto the field so you can decide if this hobby is something you want to pursue before you spend any money. This is the best way to proceed before you make a financial investment only to realize that reenacting doesn’t have the allure you thought it would.

Once you have made the commitment to pursue the hobby your next step is to ask for advice and conduct some basic research. Notice I didn’t say go out and buy anything yet. So, before you go out and spend your hard earned money;

1. Review the uniform guidelines.
2. Ask the unit authenticity committee or a member to mentor you on what items are appropriate for the unit’s impression.
3. Review the approved vendors list and do enough research to allow you to make an informed purchase.

After you have done the previous, the next step is to develop a mental picture of what you want your impression to look like and formulate a plan on how to achieve it. Having a plan and prioritizing the items you need to purchase in order to accomplish your goal is the best course of action in developing a convincing impression. This will also help you avoid wasting money on things you don’t need if they fall outside of your immediate goals.

Doing this will ultimately save you money and avoid the frustration of having to replace items that are either inappropriate or not approved. This hobby like most others can become expensive if you let it but, you do not have to spend exorbitant amounts of money to have a good impression. Though like most things in life, you get what you pay for. In the long run it makes more sense to spend the difference in price for an authentic item, than it is to buy an unauthentic (usually cheaper) one that you will eventually replace when you realize your folly. “Buy once, Cry once” should be your mantra when it comes to buying gear. Those who have been in the hobby for any length of time can confirm this advice.

Now to answer the \$64 question. After you review the uniform guidelines for specific details, the following **basic items** are the first things to consider for purchase as part of your plan:

- Shoes; spend the money on correctly made shoes and start wearing them at home to break them in. While we may have something to fit you in the loaner gear; we may not if you wear an odd size. Having correctly fitted and broken in shoes will contribute greatly to your comfort level.
- Canteen; for sanitary reasons get your own canteen as soon as possible. No one wants to drink after someone else who may not have emptied and stored a loaner canteen correctly.
- Mess gear; Plate or canteen half, cup, eating utensils. Same reasons as the canteen. Correctly made tin items are preferred as they are readily available and usually inexpensive when compared to the same items made from stainless steel.

This should get you started. Where to go next is dependent on your plan, finances and the advice you receive from your mentors. There are many paths to help you arrive at your ultimate destination. Just remember to ask questions, research the items and vendors you are considering and when in doubt, ask some more questions and you will have an impression to be proud of.

Your ultimate goal

The goal of the New River Rifles is to present an authentic impression of soldiers while on campaign or in camp. Having been clothed and supplied with items as drawn through the appropriate government depot systems. These can be augmented by items common to the period as procured by either the soldiers themselves or, provided from loved ones at home.

In the absence of event requirements that mandate specific uniform standards or items, you should strive to portray the average foot soldier of the Civil War for both Confederate and Federal impressions. Generic, non-descript, and average should be your goal. While a certain amount of individualism is encouraged it should be achieved by making the most of the items issued to you or sent from home. The way you wear your kepi or hat, wearing a civilian shirt or vest, etc.

Avoid the temptation of buying uniform items or embellishments that draw attention to yourself. Unless you are portraying J.E.B. Stuart; refrain from wearing hat brass, ostrich plumes or elaborately trimmed uniforms and other gaudy items. These are the trappings of Farbdom and should be avoided.

CONFEDERATE IMPRESSION GUIDELINES

While portraying the common soldier is the ultimate goal, uniform variations resulting from the Confederate Commutation and later Depot systems of supplying the Army lends itself to developing a convincing though individual impression. To learn more about this fascinating subject please follow the link provided to the Company of Military Historians website and read the three part article written by Les Jensen, former curator of the Museum of the Confederacy: <http://www.military-historians.org/company/journal/confederate/confederate-1.htm>

Some of these variant patterns are only appropriate for specific events and/or time frames and would be poor choices for a generic impression. On the other end of the spectrum are patterns that shared common traits that were manufactured on a large scale at depots over relatively long periods, utilizing a variety of materials as they became available at the time of production.

Jackets:

With the previous information in mind the best choice for a 24th VA Infantry impression and one that will cover the greatest period of the war, is an untrimmed **Richmond Depot Type II** shell jacket with the following characteristics:

- Constructed with a six piece body, two piece sleeves, stand up collar, having shoulder straps (epaulettes) and with or without belt loops. While normally seen with a nine button front closure, from six to eight can also be encountered.
- Materials of wool/cotton blend jean cloth, cassimere or satinette in an authentic natural or period dyed color. By mid 1863 imported English blue/gray wool kersey was used in quantity by the Richmond Depot and would be appropriate for mid-late war events. (Avoid 100% wool garments of non-period colors with sutler row names like Richmond/Tuscaloosa/Confederate Gray, Butternut, etc.)
- Lined in osnaburg, cotton drill, sheeting or correct color/pattern period shirting material.
- Appropriate buttons are VA state, Block "I", Script "I", Federal Eagle (all correct period brass), plain coin (brass, copper or plated) or wooden.
- Colored trim or piping on the jacket (a type I trait) should be avoided unless you are complying with event-specific uniform standards. The addition of such trim should be temporary and removed after said event.

Another option for a primary jacket would be a **Four button jacket**. Whether they are products of the commutation or depot systems cannot be ascertained with 100% certainty though there is photographic evidence of their use throughout the war and examples with provenance to the Richmond area survive. These should not be confused with civilian sack coats which differ in style and construction.

- Constructed with four piece bodies coming below the waist, one or two piece sleeves and stand up collars. They have no shoulder straps or belt loops though most surviving examples have one outside welted pocket.
- Materials, linings and buttons as above.
- This is a good choice for those who find shell jackets restrictive or otherwise a hard fit.

Alternate Impressions:

Early War; With the 150th anniversary events fast upon us an early war impression would be appropriate for 1861 and early 1862 events. This impression has perhaps the greatest leeway in attire as the Confederate States were in the infancy of recruiting, forming and outfitting new regiments for service using civilian volunteers or existing militia units as the basis. There are three appropriate choices for this impression, all of which would have been encountered in newly formed units.

- A civilian Sack or Frock coat. Or, what you wore from home to your initial rendezvous point or camp of instruction. Stay with documented period styles and materials. If you go this route, a sack coat is more affordable than a correctly made frock.
- The 1858-59 Virginia militia uniform regulations called for a gray single breasted frock coat and gray pants. If you were in or, came from an existing militia company this is most likely what you wore. The frock should be made of light to medium gray wool or jean cloth and lined in osnaburg or appropriate shirting. Trimming if used, should be of black cotton or wool tape. The wearing of a trimmed frock is only appropriate for 1861 or 1862 events. Remove the trim and it is wearable for later war events.
- The over shirt was a common working garment of the time that was transformed into the “Battle Shirt” by embellishing the otherwise plain garment with contrasting trim and brass buttons to achieve a more military appearance in the absence of any standard or issued uniform. They were commonly made of wool flannel, jean cloth and lindsley/woolsey (linen/wool blend).

Late War; For these events there are two well documented options in lieu of the Richmond Depot Type II. Those being either the **Richmond Depot Type III** or, a **Peter Tait Jacket**. Both of these were made exclusively of English blue/gray wool kersey. This material is often referred to as English Army cloth or Cadet Gray in period references.

- The Richmond Depot Type III is the last pattern type produced by the depot having traits of the Type II with the absence of the shoulder straps and belt loops. The majority of surviving examples are encountered with either 8 or 9 button fronts.
- The Peter Tait Co. of Limerick Ireland produced three variations of jackets concurrently and ran these, along with trousers through the blockade in late 1864. The surviving examples are machine sewn and topstitched, have five piece bodies, two piece sleeves, linen linings and 8 button fronts with either old English or lined block “I” buttons. Red trimmed Artillery versions are encountered with lined block “A” buttons and were also issued to Infantry units. The three variations are:
 1. Shoulder straps and collar piped in dark blue.
 2. Shoulder straps and collar faced in either French blue or red.
 3. Collar faced in French blue or red without shoulder straps.

Documentation has shown that Tait manufactured jackets are only appropriate for late war events from Nov 1864 to the end of hostilities in the Virginia and Carolina theaters.

Trousers:

- Trousers are to be of the Richmond Depot or documented civilian pattern type.

- As in jackets, the materials should be of wool/cotton blend jean cloth, cassimere or satinette in an authentic natural or period dyed color. There are extant examples of imported blue trousers. In addition there are records of substantial amounts of imported blue wool kersey for use in the manufacture of trousers. However the color is a Royal or French blue color quite unlike the sky blue color of Federal trousers. By mid 1863 imported English blue/gray wool kersey was used in quantity by the Richmond Depot for both jackets and trousers and would be appropriate for mid-late war events.
- The use of Federal trousers by confederates is to be discouraged as documentable instances of such use are rare or battle specific. The practice should be considered a modern reenactorism.

Shoes; All shoes or boots must be of correct period style, material, and construction with either pegged or sewn soles of black or russet leather.

- Documented Confederate or U.S. issue brogans, Jefferson Bootee, imported British Blucher Shoe or, period civilian patterns.
- Pull on boots of the Artillery, Cavalry or civilian stove pipe styles are only appropriate for the former or, for wear by an Officer and are not recommended for an infantry impression.

Headgear:

- Slouch hats; Colors of black, gray, brown, or tan. Ribbon around base of crown and brim having either high or low crowns which may be rounded, flat or telescoped. Correct period linings are encouraged.
- Kepi; Authentic pattern made of appropriate materials as used for jackets/trousers. Wool/cotton blend jean cloth, cassimere or satinette in an authentic natural or period dyed color or imported kersey. Brim and chin strap of leather or painted cloth with appropriate cuff sized, military, coin or civilian brass buttons.
- Civilian style wheel/mechanic hat; authentic pattern and materials.
- Federal forage caps are permitted on a limited basis within the ranks.

Shirts; Military or civilian patterns constructed from wool flannel, linen or cotton cloth in colors, stripes, plaids or prints appropriate to the period.

Eyeglasses; Must be of period style and construction. Your modern tortoise shell frames and transitional polarized lens', etc. will not be allowed. Note: Colored lenses used before 1875 usually served a medical purpose. Eyeglass types commonly found in the 19th century were.

- Sliding temple spectacles; were made from the early 1760's until 1880. They featured two piece, retractable temple arms. The temple arms were extended for use or could be retracted for storage. This type of spectacle stayed in place better than straight temples.
- Straight temple spectacles; were produced from 1833 until 1920. Most lenses in this type of spectacle are oval. However, square and octagon lenses are also encountered.
- Curved temple spectacles; did not appear until the 1880's when makers took advantage of mass produced spring steel wire. These temples curved around the ear and were the most secure for holding the eyeglasses in place. While not 100% correct, they are the most commonly encountered authentic frames available.

FEDERAL IMPRESSION GUIDELINES

The New River Rifles portrays the 83rd Penn Infantry as our primary Federal impression. The items listed below are what are required for your Federal Infantry impression. Common items such as shoes and shirts you previously purchased for your Confederate impression will be acceptable for your Federal impression as well.

UNIFORM COATS:

- U.S. Sack Coat (Fatigue Blouse), your primary federal coat. Made from medium to dark blue wool flannel with four eagle buttons. While both lined and unlined versions were issued the lined version is recommended as it will offer the best protection from the elements and cold weather.
- State Jacket, (optional) a waist length jacket similar to a shell jacket. Made from dark blue kersey with 8 to 11 button fronts, either with or without shoulder straps and belt loops depending on state of origin.
- Enlisted Frock Coat, (optional) the standard coat of the pre-war army and appropriate for early war events. Made from dark blue kersey with a 9 button front and piped in light blue around the collar and cuffs.

TROUSERS; the required trousers are U.S. Enlisted Infantry (Footman's) trousers made from sky blue wool kersey. The pre-war regulations called for dark blue kersey trousers and these would be appropriate for early war events or Officer impressions.

HATS:

- U.S. Forage Cap; made from medium to dark blue wool kersey with a black leather visor and chinstrap.
- McDowell Cap; constructed similar to the standard forage cap with a taller crown and rounded visor.
- 1858 Hardee Hat; the regulation black felt, tall crowned, dress hat to be worn without the regulation hat brass.
- Civilian hats; black in color having either high or low crown which may be rounded, flat or telescoped with ribbon around base of crown and brim. Correct period linings are encouraged.

ACCOUTREMENTS

The most cost effective plan for buying the accoutrements you need for this hobby is to buy those for your Federal impression first. This will provide you with a basic set that you can augment with Confederate specific items as your finances allow.

Leather Gear; A good plan would be to purchase a complete set of Federal 1857 or 1861 pattern accoutrements. The M1857 pattern is the pre or, early war pattern of sewn (not riveted) construction that served as the basis for many Confederate variations. Buy the complete set with U.S. belt buckle, U.S. box plate and Eagle breast plate. Switching over to your Confederate impression can then be accomplished by simply removing the box and breast plates and replacing the U.S. belt plate with an appropriate Confederate buckle. Or, swap the U.S belt entirely for a Confederate belt and buckle (Roller buckle, Georgia frame, Forked tongue or imported British snake).

Recommended Cartridge Box patterns:

- Pattern 1839 Cartridge Box (.54 or .69 caliber)
- Pattern 1857 Cartridge Box (.58 or .69 caliber, sewn construction)
- Pattern 1861 Cartridge Box (.58 or .69 caliber, sewn and riveted)
- C.S. Arsenal copies of the above patterns (black or russet leather, painted cloth)
- Imported Enfield Pattern Cartridge Box (.57 caliber)

Cap Box:

- U.S. pattern 1850 standard or shield front (sewn construction)
- U.S. pattern 1861 standard or shield front (sewn and riveted)
- C.S. Arsenal copies of these types (black or russet leather, painted cloth)
- Enfield pattern cap box

Waist and Box Belts: Black only for U.S. impression. Black or Russet leather and Painted Cloth "Tarred Canvas" for C.S. patterns/variations are acceptable for mid-late war events and white web belting and baldrics for early war/militia impressions.

Acceptable Buckles:

- Virginia State seal or Militia plate
- Frame (Georgia style or serpent tongued style)
- British snake
- Blackened iron roller
- Square C.S.A. plate
- U.S. plate (U.S. Impression, not recommended for C.S.)

Bayonet Scabbard: Black only for U.S. impression. Black or Russet leather for C.S patterns/variations and painted cloth for mid-late war C.S. Ensure you buy a scabbard to fit your intended bayonet type.

- U.S. Gaylord Pattern (sewn, early war 2 rivet or, 1863 late war 7 rivet)
- C.S. copies or variations
- British Enfield style with frog
- Militia pattern for use on dedicated Baldric

Weapons:

Muskets and Rifled Muskets: Only three band types with a bayonet to fit. Of those listed the 1861 Springfield and the 1853 Enfield are the easiest to procure as they have been the mainstay of the reproduction manufacturers for decades. Therefore they are the most prolific among reenactors, though they are not always appropriate for every impression.

- U.S. Model 1861 (.58 caliber)
- Enfield Pattern 1853 (.57 caliber)
- U.S. Model 1816/22 (.69 caliber smoothbore converted to percussion)
- U.S. Model 1842 (.69 caliber, rifled or smoothbore)
- U.S. Model 1855 (.58 caliber)
- Austrian Lorenz (.54 or .58 caliber)
- Richmond Arsenal, first or second model (.58 caliber)

Canteens: Will be of an authentic pattern and construction. Available tin canteens are constructed of either modern electroplated tin (thin coating) or authentic hot dipped (thick coating). Hot dipped versions are preferred when available as the coating is more durable than the modern electroplated tin which wears through or rust more quickly. Beeswax lining is optional. Stainless steel canteens are not encouraged and **will** have appropriate covers.

- Wooden Gardner pattern
- Confederate tin drum
- Federal Issue; either 1858 “Smoothside” or 1862 “Bullseye” styles. Authentic covers made of jean cloth in brown or gray colors. Sky blue covers are not historically accurate and dark blue covers were rare.

Haversack: Federal or Confederate issue of proper pattern and materials; oilcloth, cotton drill/duck, linen or ticking as appropriate.

- Mexican War pattern of white cotton drill/duck having a scalloped flap with three tin or pewter buttons for closure.
- U.S. 1862 “Meechum” pattern of oilcloth with a removable cotton liner with leather tab/roller buckle closure.
- Documented Confederate patterns of oilcloth, cotton, linen or ticking with buckle or button closure.

Knapsack: (optional) Documented Federal or Confederate issue of proper pattern and materials.

- Mexican War “single bag” or Documented C.S. type “Kibbler”
- Militia pattern “hardpack” with internal wooden frame
- U.S. model 1853/55/64 “double bag” (early to late war patterns)
- British import Isaac & Campbell Co. “hardpack”

CAMP EQUIPMENT

Blankets: Federal issue types of 100% wool and/or Confederate produced or imported wool, jean cloth or civilian styles acceptable. Avoid wool/poly mix or surplus blankets with obvious modern military markings.

- Federal 1858 pattern; 100% wool, gray with black stripes near ends, usually encountered with US embroidered in the center, approximately 84”x 60”.
- Federal 1861 pattern “Emergency Issue”; similar to 1858 but of tan color with brown end stripes, of slightly lighter weight material, approximately 72”x 60”.
- British import; 100% wool, solid almost white natural color or with blue end stripes.
- Confederate manufactured wool or jean cloth.
- Civilian period type blankets, coverlets, quilts or carpet blankets.

Gum blankets, Oil cloths & Ponchos: This is the period rainwear meant to protect the Soldier from inclement weather. They were also utilized as a “Ground Cloth” to provide a water resistant barrier to prevent blankets or clothing from becoming wet while sleeping on the ground. Ponchos were essentially gum blankets or oil cloths manufactured with a flapped or hemmed hole in the center to facilitate wearing around ones neck. While originally intended for cavalry troops, ponchos were widely used by the infantry.

- Gum Blanket, made of gutta-percha or India rubber coated cloth with small brass grommets, approximately 72”x 48”.
- Oil Cloth, made of a linseed oil mixture coated cloth to repel water. Grommets may be either brass or sewn, approximately 72”x 48”.

Shelter Halves: Federal Issue patterns made from 100% cotton drill or duck with tin or bone buttons, reinforced corners and sewn (not metal) grommets in issue size of 64” long by 60” wide. Shelter halves are currently reproduced in one of two variations.

- Type IIa; constructed of three panels seamed together vertically. The center panel is a narrow section joined to the two outer sections to achieve the regulation length. A variant of this pattern is attributed to the Cincinnati Depot having the three sections seamed together horizontally.
- Type IIIa; constructed of two equal width panels seamed together vertically to achieve the regulation length.

Tentage: Proper tents were not carried by the Soldiers themselves but were transported with the Regimental or Company property on the wagons that accompanied the Army or, “Baggage Trains”. They were common to the early war period, at camps of instructions, in garrison or in winter quarters. It was realized rather quickly that they became an impediment to Army’s on campaign. Subsequently their use while on campaign were usually reserved for officers or staff functions, while the common Soldier relied on the easily transported and quick to set up shelter half. Three major variations encountered are:

- Sibley tent; of conical design, stands about twelve feet high and eighteen feet in diameter and is supported by a central pole. It can comfortably house about a dozen men.
- A Frame or Wedge tent; the civil war standard was approximately 6' high, 6' deep, and 8' wide at ground level with flaps at one end for entrance. Modern versions are available in larger sizes.
- Wall tent; most often utilized by officers, approximately 7' high, 10'6" wide, and 12' deep. Usually used with an attached fly in the front of approximately 12' by 12'.

Mess Gear: This section will only cover the items commonly carried by the individual Soldier for the cooking or eating of his rations. The unit owns several large coffee pots, skillets, pans, etc. that are shared by all members. This is tin ware; notice the key word is **Tin**, not enameled "speckle ware" and not stainless steel. Stainless items are not authentic and are frequently more expensive and usually manufactured to a lower standard than correctly made tin items.

- Tin cup; the 1858 regulation cup is 4" by 4" with a wire reinforced rim and a handle attached via solder, wire loops and a rivet. Will hold approximately 24 ounces and you can cook in it. Smaller civilian versions of around 3 1/2" by 3" are common and hold approximately 12 ounces.
- Plate; issued plates were approximately 10" in diameter and slightly dished.
- Canteen half; a popular and authentic option to the issued plate. They were made by heating a leaking canteen to remove the solder and utilize the two halves as plates. Their shape makes them useful as a bowl as well as a plate. Attaching a piece of wire where the spout formally resided will allow the passage of a stick enabling its use as a field expedient frying pan.
- Boilers; usually made from tin cans by attaching a wire bail to facilitate hanging over a fire to boil coffee, beans, salt pork, etc. and minimize burning ones hands.
- Utensils; (knife/fork/spoon) commonly available from most sutlers in a variety of authentic types. If you carry a pocket knife you can forgo a table knife and just use a spoon and fork to lighten your load. Period silver plated originals can frequently be found at flea markets and antique stores for bargain prices if the plating is starting to wear through.

While not all inclusive, the previous sections have hopefully given you the details to look for when buying authentic items to improve or, build your impression upon. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact a member of the authenticity committee or your mentor.