



71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry Beginner's Handbook Beginner's Guide

Beginner's Guide to Reenacting Introduction to Reenacting Handbook Presented as a service by the 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Co. B, we hope you find it useful.

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How to Get Started in Civil War Reenacting

Civil War Reenactment is one of the fastest growing hobbies in the United States, and with good reason. Not only does it reinforce our sense of pride in our heritage, but also it's something in which the entire family can participate. It's educational and, finally, it's a great way to escape the worries of today and "pretend" in the great outdoors.

Beginners should start by attending reenactments and observing what goes on. Get a feel for the atmosphere and conditions of a living history event before you rush to buy uniforms & equipment. Once you're sure that the discomfort (sleeping on cots or bedrolls, wearing uncomfortable clothes, and generally avoiding anything "farby") is worth it, then find a unit to join. "Farby" is a Civil War Reenactment term for anything not typical of the period (far-be-it to-say-that's-not-correct-but-it-isn't was shortened to "farby"). A plastic mug would be farby, as would a polyester uniform since they didn't have plastic or polyester in 1861.

For a great description of women's clothing and textiles during the Civil War, read "American Civil War Fashions" by Kathy Dhalle on the Bits of Blue & Gray website.

Following are some useful terms to acquaint you with Civil War Reenacting. Used by permission of Kathleen Smith.

Civilian – a person, male or female, who reenacts any non-military impression during Reenactments.

C.S. or C.S.A. – Confederate States or Confederate States Army.

First person – When a reenactor speaks to fellow reenactors and the public as a person during the 1860s. They will take on the “persona” of one who is living through the period and will not speak in modern language. They will speak as though the War Between the States is current.

Impression – Many reenactors will choose an “impression” during a reenactment. Military reenactors will choose infantry, artillery, cavalry or medical (and a few others such as engineers or sharpshooters) and many will choose a civilian impression. While doing their “impression” many will do a “first-person” impression

Muster – A gathering, especially of troops, for service, inspection, review or roll call.

Reenactor – A person, male or female, dedicated to recreating the War Between the States or Civil War. Most will sleep/camp at the reenactment event.

Thread counter – A reenactor who insists a historically accurate impression, down to fabric and buttonholes having the same thread count typical of the time. The derogatory term for this same person is “stitch nazi.”

Sutlers – Merchants who followed troops during the actual War. Also, merchants who set up during reenactments and sell period-style goods to reenactors and the public.

Units – Groups of reenactors who participate as an actual unit that fought during the War, i.e., the 71st PVI or the 8th Alabama.

Duties of All Re-enactors

Reenactors must keep in mind always that they have three primary responsibilities:

1. Setting a good example

The public watches how we act and interact with each other and them. You may be talking to our next recruit, and no one wants to be part of a rag tag, undisciplined, and uncouth group. Each reenactor should set an example of diligence and correctness in performing military duties. This includes being fully equipped and ready to go at all times. We are a family group with families around of our own and with families of the public around and should act that way as much as possible.

2. Being a source of knowledge

Where possible, reenactors should take the opportunity to train and mentor others. Previous experiences and mistakes are important learning tools for helping others grow in the hobby. If you don't know something, don't make it up or tell the public let alone another reenactor something silly and untrue as the truth. The other reenactors and the public look at us as being a wealth of historic knowledge.

3. Creating a fun and welcoming hobby environment

The fun of the hobby and its impact on the public comes from having large numbers of re-enactors. Each new or potential new recruit is important. We need to make them feel welcome the first time they walk into our camp, as a spectator or recruit. No new recruit will stay around long if his questions aren't taken seriously or if he/she's subjected to teasing, ridicule or hazing.

First Person

When military camps are open to the, public, a quality first person impression will add to their sense of history and result in positive memories that will last for a long time. However, this can be achieved only by practice and attention to detail.

Physical appearance should reflect actual living conditions and be free from anachronisms, like wristwatches, modern eyeglasses and cigarettes. We're not stitch counters, however we can try and be/stay as authentic as possible.

An often-overlooked feature is your personal knowledge of political and economic issues during the progress of the war, and details of everyday life that civil war soldiers would have known about. This kind of expertise takes some time to accumulate but is important. It's this kind of information that the public is likely to have and judge you by for accuracy.

Last on the list are the details such as figures of personal speech common to the civil war soldier, or the contents of haversacks or pockets. Events are not geared to doing strip searches to see how accurate you are down to your underwear, but you don't want to pull out Bic lighter, and light a modern cigarette while convincing a spectator that you're camped there in winter quarters around Stevensburg, Virginia.

Uniform and clothes

This hobby is by no means inexpensive, however it can be enjoyed without breaking the bank. Having an authentic uniform means acquiring a complete and functional uniform. In addition to the sack coat, trousers, and leathers, make sure that shirt and shoes are appropriate to the civil war era. In addition, most events now include guard duties and stacking arms, so a bayonet and sheath that actually work with the musket are important and should be included. Most units have gear to loan you for a short time while you gather together period correct gear of your own. Members are given a year to acquire their kit, however sooner is better because loaner gear is extremely limited.

Plan on bringing at least one change of shirts, underwear and socks. Socks should be heavy wool types or double pairs of the light cotton variety. Shoes or boots should be plain black until the period correct foot wear is obtained. A period style vest is a good idea, especially in cool weather, and is a good place to keep pocket watches, ear protection and meal tickets.

Other mandatory important accessories include a canteen (don't be without one), a poncho, and a haversack. When the temperature drops below 50, seriously consider getting a greatcoat (or a good wool blanket) with wool gloves and a wool scarf. Finally, plan on a complete change of street clothes, especially if getting to the event involves a long car ride.

Rifle and Ammunition

We use primarily the 1861 or 1863 Springfield rifled muskets. However, the 1853 British Enfield is acceptable. No other firearm can be used on the field with the consent of the Command Group (the Officers and Non

Commissioned Officers) . Weekend-long reenactments, with two battles and drill, can use 100 cartridge rounds (paper tubes filled with black powder – we can show you how to make your own) or more. Plan ahead and bring enough for the whole weekend. There won't be time to make any and “rolling rounds” isn't a period correct activity. Take enough caps too. Other re-enactors don't appreciate someone who always has to "borrow." We will sell you a packet of 10 cartridges with caps for \$5.00. If you don't own a rifle and plan on “borrowing” one this doesn't stop you from buying powder and caps.

A field cleaning kit for your musket or to clean a borrowed musket in a small cloth bag is a must. Rifles should be cleaned each night in the field to make sure they're reliable the next day. The kit should include a small bottle of oil, a cleaning jag and a rag that can be torn into patches. It should also include some small squares of bicycle inner tube to plug the nipple along with a spare nipple, a nipple wrench, and a nipple pick. Some re-enactors have acquired collapsible cleaning rods that can fit into a haversack. We can show you how to field clean your weapon (or the weapon you borrowed – the following is a description of that process).

Rifle care

At a typical weekend reenactment, a Saturday night cleaning is highly recommended to make sure you can "repel the evil hoard" on Sunday. Use a field cleaning kit, and do the following:

1. Plug the nipple with a piece of leather or rubber and fill the barrel with boiling water and rinse. Do this several times until the water runs clear.
2. Remove the plug, point the nipple down, and dry the barrel out with some cloth patches. This step also forces some of the water out through the nipple to clean out the vent.
3. After the patches come out dry, (it will take a few), oil the inside of the barrel with **another patch soaked with oil.**
4. Finally, wipe down the stock and metal parts with oil.

Camping Equipment

We portray a unit in winter quarters, so there are primarily Wedge tents, aka “A” tents. Dog tents and select wall tents. **DO NOT PURCHASE A WALL TENT.** Wall tents are approved only by the Command Group on a case-by-case basis. The best thing to do is to discuss your intended purchases of tent or other equipment with a member of the Command Group before proceeding with the purchase.

An often-overlooked item is a travel toilet kit with a personal selection of items like soap, shampoo, toothpaste and brush, contact lens gear, spare glasses, allergy medicine, prescriptions, aspirin, toilet paper in a watertight pouch, and other items. Your travel toilet kit should be small enough to hide in a haversack or small bag.

Water supplies tend to run low especially in hot weather, and when water buffaloes are hard to get at. It is always a good idea to bring drinking water, most “local” water is hard on the stomach. Use only what you need for cooking, cleaning and drinking. Do not be afraid to drink too much water, remember the "return with an empty canteen" rule. Soaking a handkerchief and putting it under your hat, will also help keep you cool.

A quick word about porta-jons; be prepared in case paper runs out. Keep some in a zip-lock baggy or some other inconspicuous watertight container (sometime the toilet paper at events gets real scarce). Mind your manners; remember that a lot of other people have to use these facilities (including you again).

Food

Even if free meals are promised, or you are told food (Camp Cooks) will be available to purchase, take enough meals and snacks for the whole weekend. All food should be easy to prepare and easy to clean up. Breakfast, especially, is a meal where it is better to eat in a hurry before things start to happen. Cornbread and hardtack can be made at home so they're ready to eat. Instant coffee or fruit drink can be mixed with hot or cold water. Instant oatmeal can be mixed with nuts, coconut, or can be the flavored kind.

Snacks, include peanuts (goober peas), granola bars, and trail mix hidden in a small cloth bag. Fresh fruits and vegetables like apples, carrots and celery can be carried in a haversack. For lunch or dinner, potatoes and corn can be cooked in the coals. Soak corn in the husk in water for half an hour first. Hard boiled eggs can be brought from home or boiled in the fire as can "ramen noodles." canned hams have more real meat than bacon, are precooked and have less grease. Slice and cook on a stick or in a skillet.

Eating and Drinking

Think of each reenactment as an endurance sports event that lasts for two days. Reenactors face physical exertion, lack of sleep, climate extremes and constant demands on their attention. All this means it's important to eat and drink regularly.

Be sure to drink several large tin cups of water each day and bring your canteen back empty from each drill and battle. (The empty canteen rule.) Avoid sweet drinks and alcohol because of the dehydrating effect. If you do not have a canteen, get one. Usually there's one to borrow, or take some hits from a pard's.

Also be sure to eat at regular intervals. Take your mess kit whenever you are going to eat. You never know if dishes will be provided, and you must eat. Do not ignore body signs. Get plenty of fruits and vegetables, as well as grains. Avoid salty food of any kind. Most events are not bound to eating only authentic meals and foods. Several events offer pancake breakfasts and the like; so take advantage of these offers. A lot of people work hard to bring these amenities; our taking part shows our appreciation.

Sutler's Row and civilian or modern camping

Most re-enactors don't spend the whole weekend in military camp and most events schedules allow for some personal time. Before leaving camp, give some thought to what might take place while you're gone. There are a few things that you should always plan to be in camp for, including: All drills, inspections, parades and roll calls if your company has orders for guard duty or other military chores (all Privates are subject to these duties). You should plan on being available to do your share. The Company Commander or First Sergeant should know when you would be needed. It's also a good idea to carry an appropriate timepiece during guard duty. Obviously, no-one can tell you not to leave camp, but some of the most amazing time-transforming events happen at unexpected times right in camp.

Re-enactors that stay with their families in civilian camp, modern camp or motels have their work cut out for them. It takes special dedication to spend the right amount of time with your company to be there for military duties, and to keep mom and the kids from feeling neglected.

One more point about modern camping. This term is used loosely in the reenactment hobby. This usually means wherever you park, is where you camp. The facilities available are 95% of the time near the re-enactors only. Modern camping, unless totally self-contained, can be very difficult.

Post Event cleanup (when you get home)

One of the most important things to do after any event is putting things away ready to go for the next event. Take special care to clean and preserve the rifle, especially the barrel, the bore and the percussion cone. Remove all visible rust and wipe lightly with oil or other preservative. At least once a year, disassemble and inspect all the major assemblies and stock. Renew the stock finish and remove all rust.

Dry clean or wash uniform items, shirts, socks and vests. Cold water wash in Woolite followed by drip-dry is acceptable for wool items. Even if they appear to be clean, uniforms should be cleaned every two or three events.

Leather items, including boots, should be cleaned of visible dirt. If they've gotten wet, they should be coated with Neat's-foot oil or other preservative. This is also the time fill those cap boxes and cartridge boxes and to make more rounds if the supply is getting low.

Finally metal items such as cooking gear and even the bayonet should be dried, washed and any rust removed with steel wool. Be careful not to rub through the outer layer of galvanizing in your cookware, this would leave the bare tin underneath to rust very quickly. Pushing a long thin strip of rag into the bottom and hang it upside down so the water soaks into the rag can dry out canteens. Replace the rag strip when it becomes soaked.

Frequently asked or wondered about items

Rule one – if it's not your chair, don't sit in it. If you didn't bring a chair REALLY don't sit in one unless invited. If it weren't a problem it wouldn't be mentioned at all.

Q: What kind of tent can I have?

A: Don't run right out and buy a wall tent. Wedge tents or Dog tents are the preferred tentage. However, if you have a family you can request permission from the Command Group. Only certain wall tents are set on the Company Street, all others are set in an area designated by the Command Group

Q: Are we really in the Army?

A: No you're not. You've elected to join a hobby that portrays a military unit. When the public is present and we're on the field we do our best to "portray" a disciplined military unit. However you are free to leave anytime you decide to. No one will try and force you to stay. Being a member of this group carries commitment and responsibility with it. It's all about choices.

Q: Can I be any rank I want to?

A: Only if you want to be a Private, everyone starts out as a Private. Other ranks are awarded by the Command Group based on an established set of criteria.

Q: What is the 71st?

A: The 71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Company B (71st PVI, Co. B) is a group of friends that gather together to honor the memories of those who served our country during the American Civil War between 1861 and 1865. While our primary method of remembering the sacrifice those brave men exhibited it through battle reenactments, we also strive to pay tribute to them in other methods such as Living History (living as they did).

Q: Who is in the 71st PVI, Co. B?

A: A roster of members will be sent to you shortly. Suffice it to say that our members come from a broad spectrum of background, with a interest in history and the common goal to pay tribute to those that made the United States the great nation it is.

Q: How do I get started?

A: You have already started by expressing a desire to participate. The next step would be to attend our next event. By the way, we don't have Company Meetings outside of events (we are just to geographically spread out to get together between events).

Q: What if I was never in the military, can I still participate?

A: Absolutely, while some of the 71st PVI, Co. B have been in the military, many have not. We can help you become familiar with military protocol in no time.

Q: How do I know when the next event is?

A: You will shortly be sent a schedule of events for the calendar year. Events are normally held on the weekends (since most of us work full time). You can also review our calendar at:

<http://www.71stpenncob.com/index.htm>

Also, due to the large number of individuals in the 71st PVI, Co. B we have found the most efficient method of communication is through email. Before each event an email is sent out with directions, time and place of event, an most importantly a request asking if you are attending the event or not. The pre-event email will also instruct you on other issues that require your response. As a matter of courtesy you are expected to reply to that inquiry in a timely fashion. This helps us plan for a successful event

Q: What if I can't make that event?

A: Members are encouraged to attend every event. However, we realize that factors beyond our control may impact your attendance. At a minimum you are expected to attend 3 events a year. If you can't attend an event, please respond to our email asking about your attendance.

Q: How much does it cost to join the 71st PVI, Co. B?

A: Nothing. The 71st does not have dues. However, to be a member of the 71st you must be a paid member of the American Civil War Society (ACWS). Membership (at the time this is written) in the ACWS costs \$35 per year for an individual and \$40 for families.

Q: How much will an event cost?

A: Participants are not normally charged a fee to participate at ACWS Events. However, there may be a cost associated with your food if you choose to eat with our Company Cook.

Q: What's a Company Cook?

A: The 71st PVI, CO. B is fortunate enough to have some of the finest cooks in reenacting as part of our Company. As such, we eat really well. These fine cooks prepare meals for the weekend, and only ask that we reimburse them for the cost of the food and give us a week's heads up on your attendance, and what meals you plan to participate in.

Q: I don't have a uniform. How do I get one?

A: The best way is to purchase your own uniform from folks that reproduce goods accurate to the military during the American Civil War. However, before you purchase anything, you need to talk to one of the

Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO'S) or Officers, about what to buy. The folks selling the gear don't always know what is correct for our Unit (even if they say they do). Another thing that varies is cost? Ask one of us before you buy anything.

Until you are ready to purchase your own gear, the 71st PVI, Co. B has a limited number of uniforms and tents that can be borrowed during the event. When you reply about your attendance, just remember to inquire about "loaner gear". Keep in mind that this gear is the personal property of someone who is generous enough to share with you, and you are liable for any damage to the things you borrow. The 71st PVI, Co. B also has a limited number of tents available for loan at events, as with the uniform just make sure to ask.

One last line on this issue; you are expected to get your own gear as soon as possible. Your ability to borrow gear diminishes with time in the Unit. Newer folks have first priority on use of the "loaner gear". You will not be eligible to borrow anything after one calendar year from your joining the 71st PVI, Co. B.

Q: What if I want to become an Officer?

A: Everyone in the 71st PVI, Co. B starts out as Private (this is the most fun rank anyway, trust me). Only through dedication, devotion, and knowledge are people advanced through the ranks. Members are not allowed to wear rank insignia that they haven't been given permission to wear. Rank permission is only given through the Command Group of the 71st PVI, Co. B.

Q: Who makes up the Command Group for the 71st PVI, Co. B?

A: The Command Group is comprised of the member NCOs, Officers, and one Civilian Representative from the 71st PVI, Co. B. These individuals are responsible for making all the decisions that affect the 71st PVI, Co. B (with consensus from the rest of the 71st PVI, Co. B members), including your ability to participate.

Q: How old do I have to be to carry a gun of the field?

A: The ACWS rules state that you need to be 16 years old (14 to 15 years old with special provisions). However, the ability to carry a weapon on the field is the decision of the Command Group of the 71st PVI, Co. B. Age isn't the sole determination, physical ability, and being responsible enough to carry a weapon is.

Q: So how do I "officially" join?

A: Just fill out and send in the ACWS Membership form at www.acws.net. You can participate immediately, but your membership will not be "official" until after you have participated in three events. After you have attended three events, the existing members of the 71st PVI, Co. B will vote on your acceptance as an "official" member.

Remember, we are all here to honor the memory of those that actually served to make this great country of ours the splendid place it is. Your conduct, participation, and dedication will determine your ability to join us. To us this is a fun hobby, and we want to make your participation enjoyable as well.

The Command Group,
71st Pennsylvania Volunteer Infantry, Company B