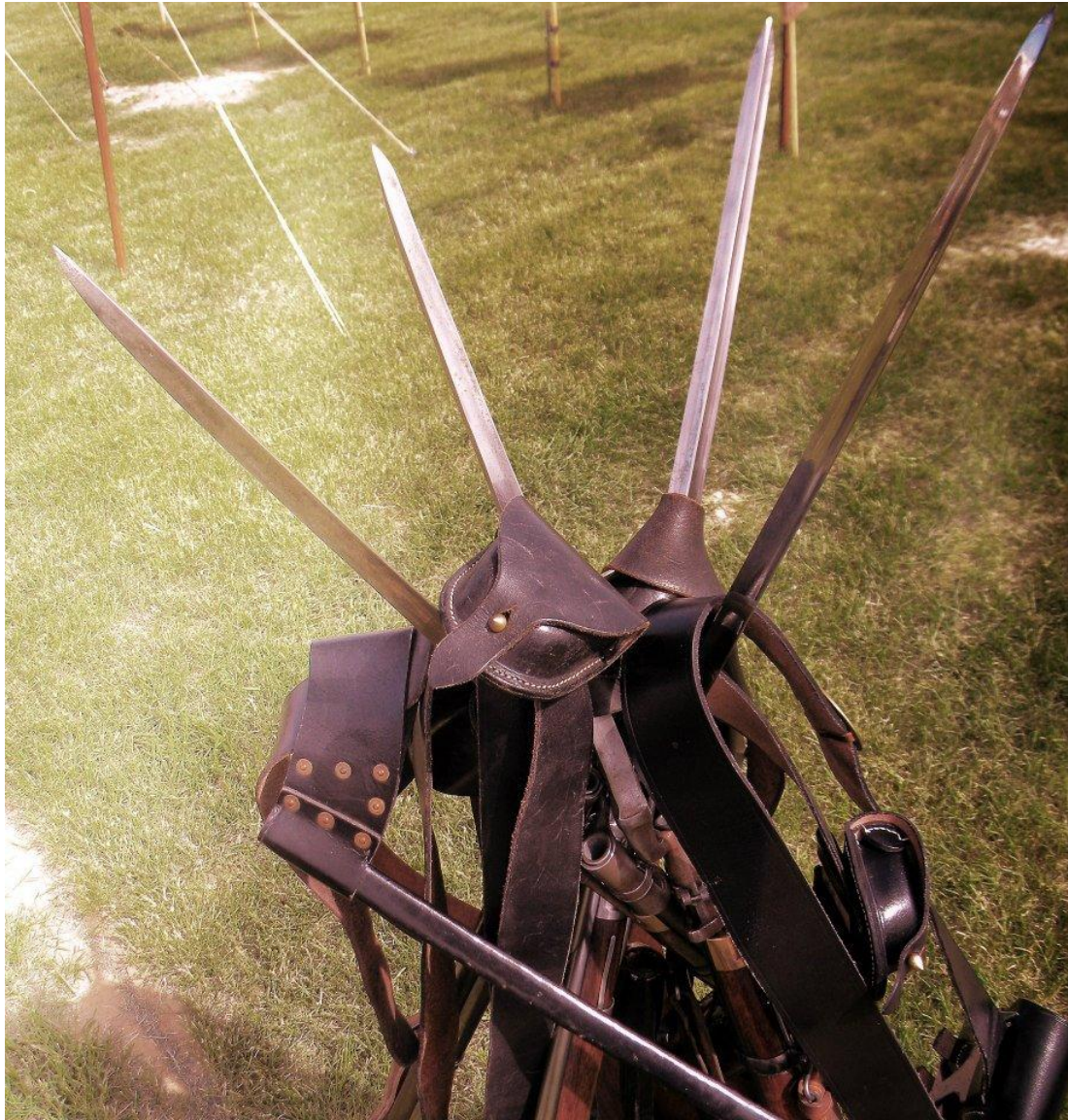


Helendale After Action Report



Herein follows a true account of what I seen at Helendale in the year 2012. You can choose to believe it or not. I make no claims about the broad strategies or the big picture. You will have to look in the histories for that. I only report what I saw.



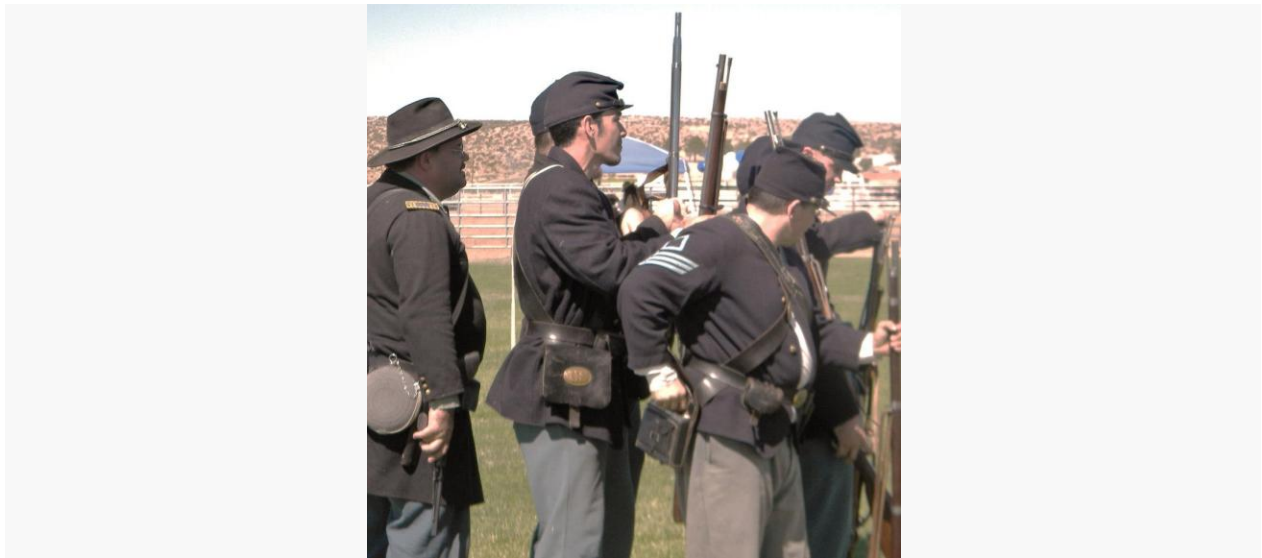
The sign pointed us in the right direction.

With newly-enlisted Privates Jorgensen and Lee, I arrived on Saturday morning. Our commanding officer still had not arrived, though he had departed from his officer training camp a full night before, so we pitched our tent under the direction of 1st Sergeant Coddling. We were situated in a nice grassy area near the road. We had to borrow equipment and provisions from a neighboring encampment, because Captain Coffey was indisposed or lagging, I know not which. After setting up, we proceeded through School of the Soldier, as the company at that time consisted of a number of newly-enlisted privates, for whom this was either their first outing, or their second or third. After Sergeant Coddling taught the new men right from left, Captain Coffey arrived with breakfast, and the company quickly ate and unpacked the company wagon.



Rolling cartridges and eating goobers.

As the day wore on, we proceeded through the School of the Company as best we could with only five or six privates, rolled cartridges, and generally lazed around, in anticipation of exertions later on. On several occasions we were ordered to fall in and form up, only to be left standing in the sun for what seemed like an interminable amount of time while our officers chatted in the shade of the tent fly. In the absence of more officers and NCOs, I was appointed acting corporal and the position quickly went to my head, though I daresay not so much as it's gone to Coddling's or Coffey's.



Loading on the move.

In the early afternoon, we got word of the approach of a handful of Rebs. We deployed in skirmish formation, delivering fire and advancing in pairs. The outnumbered Rebels were defeated soundly, and the efficacy of this maneuver was plain and interesting to all. As an individual soldier, I felt less secure than I typically feel while in a line, but the maneuver allowed me more personal freedom of movement and selection of targets.

The crowd of spectators in attendance was small, and those who entered the camp consisted mainly of a peculiar species known as know-it-alls.

In the late afternoon, our picket, Private Valdovinos, was taken unawares by some Rebel skirmishers, and was shot dead as he stood guard. The rest of us dropped our lunch and quickly unstacked arms, and in our haste, we jumped out onto the field to fire and then immediately fell back, looking like a disorganized rabble who hadn't spent many of the preceding hours drilling and training. Our officers were less than pleased. Finally falling into line, we advanced into the field, but were quickly cut up. My pards Lee and Jorgensen were shot down, as was the rest of the line. I doubt not that I will meet them away up yonder. Finding myself quite alone, I was at a loss, but when

encouraged to surrender by the Secesh, I opted instead to take one down with me, which I did, before being fired upon and making the ultimate sacrifice for cause and comrade.



Standing at parade rest.

In the evening we were treated to some left-over meat, and stayed up into the wee small hours, talking the kind of talk that could make milk curdle, or cause mothers to spontaneously burst into tears. Let us say though that none of those in attendance felt the need to blush.



Not at church.

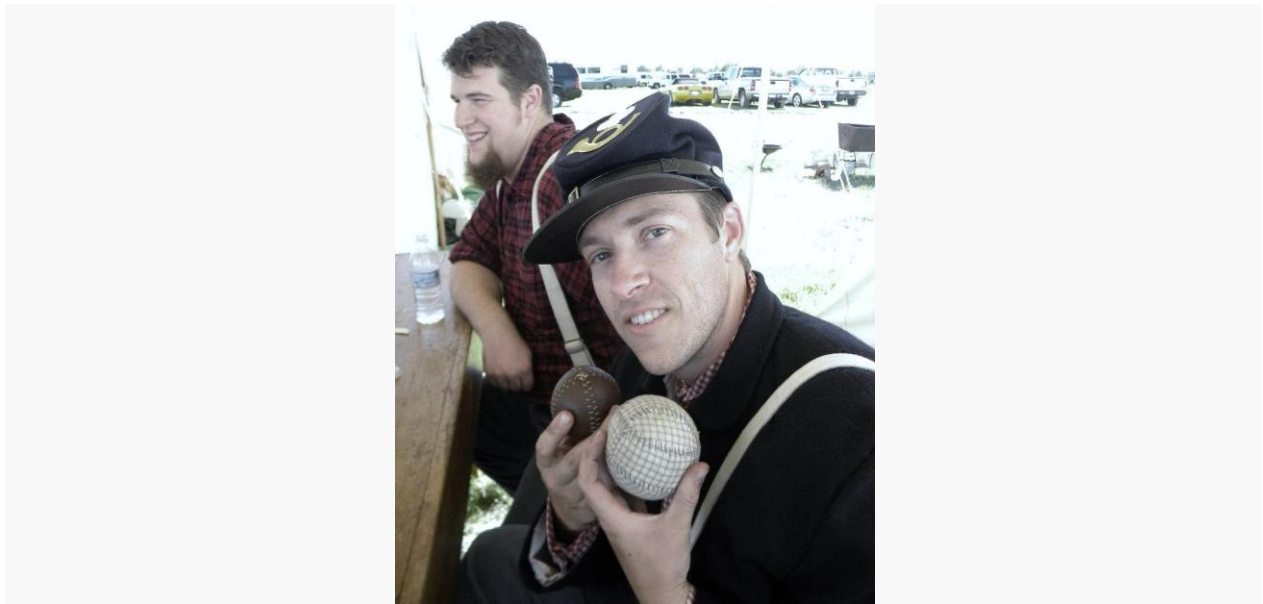


1st Sergeant Coddling explains how to clean muskets. Several privates suffered third degree burns from boiling water shortly after this picture was taken.

The following morning, we had a delicious breakfast provided by 1st Sergeant and Sara Weaver, and then most attended church. Us freethinkers and non-believers, or otherwise misguided and misinformed souls, remained behind to roll cartridges and otherwise while away the hours. We again took the field of battle in the afternoon, and I mean to tell you that one of the Rebels we were up against spent more time crawling around on the ground than standing to fight, more like a crab or a spider monkey than a man. Again we were decisively defeated. Our Captain committed the ultimate sin of firing on his own man, unloading two rounds from his pistol into the wounded Sergeant Coddling. I don't make this up. I saw it with my own eyes. Once again I found myself the only survivor from my company, and once again I was ordered to surrender. I would have fired a last shot, but the caps I had borrowed from my 1st Sergeant didn't snugly fit onto my musket, so the last one I tried to prime with slipped off into the grass, and I was again shot down. With the deaths of Captain Coffey and 1st Sergeant Coddling in these two battles, I genuinely realized the importance and influence of officers. I was literally at a loss for what to do, and wanted badly to ask my officers for direction, but found their bloated corpses unresponsive. This was a valuable learning experience which will add authenticity to my living history impression.

To cool off, as it was rather hot after this, the entire company went and bought Hawaiian Ices, a delectable concoction, from a nearby vendor, who I swear had children working as slaves. Arriving back at camp and finding ourselves with free time, the privates played a game of baseball in a nearby field, a past time which I hope to engage in more in the future.

The weekend's final battle saw the 71st victorious. We advanced on the Rebs in two sections, cutting them down like wheat before the scythe. One Confederate was taken prisoner, and I personally annihilated another.



Comparing balls. Baseballs, that is.

All in all, the weekend was a success, from my standpoint. The new privates and I had fun, learned a lot, and pledged to return. The public to me seemed less than interested, though our encampment was more like a sideshow to a larger affair. Compared to the larger events I have been to, I actually enjoyed Helendale more because we were more frequently engaged in tasks, whether we were drilling in the field or listening to the knowledgeable prattling of our commanding officers or cleaning camp. At the larger events, I felt like there was a lot more sitting around doing nothing, which may suit some people fine, but is boring to me. I look forward to the next event, whether it is big or small. The camaraderie was more than enjoyable, and the focus on drill and tactics was enlightening and entertaining, no less so than the much-larger events I have attended, though the battles here were over too quickly.

Packing up, we departed to our various entrepots, to be forever sundered or to meet again, only heaven knows.

