

ECHOES

Quilts For The Troops

By Carol Berry

Quilt making has always been a part of America's culture. A quilt, made of pieces of worn-out clothing and other scraps of material, gives warmth and comfort; and in the period before the purchase of inexpensive blankets was possible, a household necessity. Additionally, making a quilt provides a creative outlet for its

maker, affords an opportunity for socialization in the form of quilting bees, and speaks to thriftiness and reusability.

During the four years of the Civil War, quilt makers played an important role in providing troops with supplies. In the North, clothing and bedding were inadequate for the large number of men in the volunteer army.

In particular, stocks of blankets were quickly depleted, causing Quartermaster General Montgomery Meigs of the

About the Author

Carol Berry of Merced, a new member of the Round Table, volunteered this interesting article. She is employed as a secretary for Foster Farms in Livingston.

Her interest in the Civil War was rekindled with the movie Gettysburg, and she is a charter member of the Gateway Quilters Guild in Merced.

She will be visiting Gettysburg, Antietam, Harpers Ferry and Manassas during July.

U. S. Army to issue a plea for blankets: "To relieve pressing necessities, contributions are invited from the surplus stores of families. The regulation army blanket weighs five pounds; but good sound woolen blankets weighing not less than four pounds, will be gladly received at the offices of the United States Quartermasters in the principal towns of the loyal States, and applied to the use of the troops. To such as have blankets which they can spare but cannot afford to give, the full market

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Meetings Scheduled

The July meeting of the SJV Civil War Round Table will be a luncheon Friday, July 28 at the Downtown Club, 2120 Kern Street, beginning at 11:30 a.m. The June meeting was canceled.

Tim Johnson, a retired geography professor from CSUF, will share his research findings on the 3rd Maine. John Taylor, president of the Round Table and a former Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, also will discuss his recent visit to Burma, which, admittedly, has little to do with the American Civil War.

Checks (\$10) for luncheon reservations should be made out to San Joaquin Valley CWRT, and mailed to P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, 93755. Reservations must be received by Wednesday, July 26. Seating will not be guaranteed without a reservation.

The San Jose CWRT will present an evening with Peter Cozzens, July 29 at 6:30 p.m. in Alicia's restaurant, 144408 Union Ave., San Jose. Cozzens is the author of "The Terrible Sound" and "The Shipwreck of Their Hopes." For reservations call Zoyd R. Luce, 408-559-7631.

The August San Joaquin Valley CWRT meeting has been moved to 10 a.m. Saturday, Sept. 2 to accommodate the CSUF calendar. CSUF Librarian Zane Clark will conduct a two-hour workshop for Round Table members on the sources and materials for Civil War research. Luncheon will follow.

On Sept. 28, Evo and Jeremy Bluestein will present an evening of music from the Civil War era at a dinner meeting in the Remington restaurant at Clovis and Kings Canyon Avenues. The September newsletter will contain additional information.

Quilts (Continued from previous page)

value of suitable blankets, delivered as above, will be paid."

In response to this need, civilians began organized efforts to provide blankets. In one instance, residents of Cleveland supplied quilts, counterpanes and blankets to the arriving volunteers at Camp Taylor in Ohio; women went door to door on a "blanket raid" and were able to equip all 1,000 troops in two days.

Some quilts were the result of children's group projects. One such quilt consisted of 35 patchwork blocks; on each block was written the name and age of the child who made the square. Also written on one of the blocks was "For any soldier who loves little children." Besides making the quilt, the children raised the \$3 for the material and batting. The Minnesota soldier in Tennessee who received the quilt wrote the children that he had been given "that splendid quilt that your pennies and busy little fingers made," and, "how highly I value it, how carefully I shall preserve it, and how I shall take it home with me (if I don't wear it out and live to go home) . . ."

A quilt made in Green Bay, Wisconsin, in 1864, was located 20 years later in Bentonville, with some of the verses on it still legible:

The San Joaquin Valley Civil War Round Table officers for 1995 are:



President John Taylor
Vice President Bill Head
Secretary Barbara Moats
Treasurer Wayne Bowen

Other board members are Linda Clague, Tim Johnson, Verne Cole, newsletter editor; Rick Kubiak, historian; and the immediate past president, Charles Jorgensen.

Change of address? Call Verne Cole, 435-8410 or Wayne Bowen, 291-4885.

Dues Reminder

Annual dues, which include a subscription to the newsletter, are \$25, of which \$5 goes to battlefield preservation. Newsletter subscriptions are \$10. All dues became payable in January. Those who had paid at other times in the past may have their dues prorated this year if they desire. Checks should be made out to CWRT and mailed to P.O. Box 5695, Fresno, CA 93755.

For the gay and happy soldier

We're contented as a dove

But the man who will not enlist

Never can gain our love.

If rebels attack you, do run with the quilt

And safe to some fortress convey it;

For o'er the gaunt body of some old sesesh

We did not intend to display it.

'Twas made for brave boys, who went from the West;

And swiftly the fair fingers flew,

While each stitch, as it went to its place in the quilt,

Was smothered "God bless you, boys," too.

One quilt made in the form of a flag -- "red and white-stripes-and-a-blue-field with the white stars" -- was given to a Pennsylvania soldier at Fairfax Station, Virginia. He stated that "the first night the flag quilt was spread over me, I did dream of the loved ones far away."

Because textile production in the South was relatively rudimentary and manufactured goods from the North difficult to obtain, the need for bedding and clothing was even more critical in the Confederacy. Like their Northern counterparts, Southern women were instrumental in providing necessities for the boys in grey. Some women, previously dependent on slaves to do needlework, had to learn or relearn the art to help provide for both their families and the military.

"We are sadly in want of comforts," wrote Kate Cumming, a nurse in a Confederate hospital. "A number of negro women are at work quilting comforts," she reported, noting that the quilts were quickly and crudely constructed, of "unbleached homespun, and the raw cotton is put in them in lumps, and they are tacked about a foot apart."

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Voices of the Civil War

By Verne Cole

Voices of the Civil War: Gettysburg; Second Manassas. By the editors of Time-Life Books.

How could I resist? The advertising brochure asking me to take the first of another Time-Life series on the Civil War promised to reprint letters, diaries, and other material written by the participants in various bloody battles.

It promised to supplement these with photographs, sketches and battle diagrams to create another way of looking at that war. So I subscribed. I found the advertisement could not begin to portray the emotions I felt



Colonel William C. Oates, 15th Alabama Infantry, Laws Brigade, in a series of attacks, nearly reached the summit of Little Round Top. In his memoirs he recounted his withdrawal from that action: "When the signal was given, we ran like a herd of wild cattle."

in reading the first of the series, "Gettysburg."

Here were the men, and some of the women, seemingly back to life, telling me through their writings, how they felt, what they saw, what happened to them, during those early days in July 1863. There was a quality about the book that exceeded my expectations. "Second Manassas" was equally exceptional. Here are excerpts:

Private David J. Hill, 2nd Mississippi Infantry, Davis' Brigade.

Trapped in the railroad cut by the 6th Wisconsin, some 250 Missis-

sippi men were forced to surrender. Private Hill evaded capture by feigning a wound.

"I . . . found to my dismay that I was in a tight place, saw no chance of escape and was disgusted with the idea of surrendering and in fact became very much demoralized. I saw a bloody, muddy blanket lying on the

ground and also two wounded men lying near me. I tumbled down by them and covered myself with that blanket. I then went to all practicing all maneuvers and moaning that I thought would become a badly wounded and suffering man . . . I got out as soon as I thought it safe to do so and the first man I met was a Federal soldier wandering around as if dazed or lost and not knowing what to do. I saw

that all one side of his lower jaw was torn off. I got him to a shade and fixed him down with his oil cloth, blanket and knapsack, then brought him a canteen of water and how pitiful seeing him trying to drink by pushing the mouth of the canteen through the wound in his throat. I could do nothing more for him. He couldn't talk so I did not learn his name or what command he was of."

Sergeant Oscar D. Ladley, 75th Ohio Infantry, Ames' Brigade, wrote on July 5 about Cemetery Hill :

"They came on us about dark yelling like demons with fixed bayonets. We opened on them when they were about 500 yards off but still they came their officers & colors in advance. We lay behind a stone wall and received them with our bayonets. I was standing behind the wall when they came over. A Rebel officer made at me with a revolver with his colors by his side. I had no pistol, nothing but my sword. Just as I was getting ready to strike him one of our boys run him through the body and so saved me. There was a good man killed in that way . . . I never saw such fighting in my life, but we finally drove them back. It was a regular hand to hand fight. . . . I have 6 men left, the Regt. has 60 and the Brig(ade) has 300 out of 1,500."



Lieutenant Colonel Joseph A. McLean, 88th Pennsylvania Infantry, wrote his wife on Aug. 22, asking her to "kiss the little ones for me, and assure yourself I will do all I can to save myself consistent with honor." On Aug. 30 at Second Manassas he was killed.

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Kate Cumming later wrote to her mother that all the hospital cots had homespun comforts, some of the wards had calico comforts, and "there is a piece of rag carpet spread by the side of every cot."

Most quilts were solely used to keep Billy Yank and Johnny Reb warm, provide a soft place for them to lay, or shelter them from the sun or rain. However, Ginnie Moon, a Southern sympathizer on her way from Ohio to Tennessee, utilized her trunkful of quilts in another manner. She had stitched bottles of medicine into the quilts. She had also stitched 40 bottles of morphine, seven pounds of opium, a quantity of camphor, and 50 letters to different Confederate officers into her clothing. Discovered by a suspicious Federal customs officer, Ginnie was detained, paroled and finally sent South. As for the quilts, one likes to believe they were put to use by needy soldiers somewhere.

Sources: Uncoverings 1985: "Quilts for Union Soldiers in the Civil War," by Virginia Gunn; Quilters' Newsletter Magazine, July-Aug 1994: The Confederate Quilter, by Jean Dubois; "Hearts and Hands: The Influence of Women and Quilts on American Society" Ferrero, Hedges, Silber.

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