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A War Correspondent's Kit

I am going to try to describe some kits and outfits I have seen used in different parts of the world by travelers and explorers, and in different campaigns by army officers and war correspondents. Among the articles, the reader may learn of some new thing which, when next he goes hunting, fishing, or exploring, he can adapt to his own uses. That is my hope, but I am skeptical. I have seldom met the man who would allow any one else to select his kit, or who would admit that any other kit was better than the one he himself had packed. It is a very delicate question. The same article that one declares is the most essential to his comfort, is the very first thing that another will throw into the trail.

A man's outfit is a matter which seems to touch his private honor. I have heard veterans sitting around a camp-fire proclaim the superiority of their kits with a jealousy, loyalty, and enthusiasm they would not exhibit for the flesh of their flesh and the bone of their bone. On a campaign, you may attack a man's courage, the flag he serves, the newspaper for which he works, his intelligence, or his camp manners, and he will ignore you; but if you criticize his patent water-bottle he will fall upon you with both fists.

So, in recommending any article for an outfit, one needs to be careful. An outfit lends itself to dispute, because the selection of its component parts is not an exact science. It should be, but it is not. A doctor on his daily rounds can carry in a compact little satchel almost everything he is liable to need; a carpenter can stow away in one box all the tools of his trade. But an outfit is not selected on any recognized principles. It seems to be a question entirely of temperament. As the man said when his friends asked him how he made his famous cocktail, "It depends on my mood."

The truth is that each man in selecting his outfit generally follows the lines of least resistance. With one, the pleasure he derives from his morning bath outweighs the fact that for the rest of the day he must carry a rubber bathtub. Another man is hearty, tough, and inured to an out-of-door life. He can sleep on a pile of coal or standing on his head, and he naturally scorns to carry a bed. But another man, should he sleep all night on the ground, the next day would be of no use to himself, his regiment, or his newspaper. So he carries a folding cot and the more fortunate one of tougher fibre laughs at him. Another man says that the only way to campaign is to travel "light," and sets forth with rain-coat and field-glass. He honestly thinks that he travels light because his intelligence tells him it is the better way; but, as a matter of fact, he does so because he is lazy. Throughout the entire campaign he borrows from his friends, and with that *camaraderie* and unselfishness that never comes to the surface so strongly as when men are thrown together in camp, they lend him whatever he needs. When the war is over, he is the man who goes about saying: "Some of those fellows carried enough stuff to fill a moving van. Now, look what I did. I made the entire campaign on a tooth-brush."

As a matter of fact, I have a sneaking admiration for the man who dares to borrow. His really is the part of wisdom. But at times he may lose himself in places where he can neither a

borrower nor a lender be, and there are men so tenderly constituted that they cannot keep another man hungry while they use his coffee-pot. So it is well to take a few things with you—if only to lend them to the men who travel “light.”

On hunting and campaigning trips the climate, the means of transport, and the chance along the road of obtaining food and fodder vary so greatly that it is not possible to map out an outfit which would serve equally well for each of them. What on one journey was your most precious possession on the next is a useless nuisance. On two trips I have packed a tent weighing, with the stakes, fifty pounds, which, as we slept in huts, I never once had occasion to open; while on other trips in countries that promised to be more or less settled, I had to always live under canvas, and sometimes broke camp twice a day.

In one war, in which I worked for an English paper, we travelled like major-generals. When that war started few thought it would last over six weeks, and many of the officers regarded it in the light of a picnic. In consequence, they mobilized as they never would have done had they foreseen what was to come, and the mess contractor grew rich furnishing, not only champagne, which in campaigns in fever countries has saved the life of many a good man, but cases of even port and burgundy, which never greatly helped any one. Later these mess supplies were turned over to the field-hospitals, but at the start every one travelled with more than he needed and more than the regulations allowed, and each correspondent was advised that if he represented a first-class paper and wished to “save his face” he had better travel in state. Those who did not, found the staff and censor less easy of access, and the means of obtaining information more difficult.

But it was a nuisance. If, when a man halted at your tent, you could not stand him whiskey and sparkling soda, Egyptian cigarettes, compressed soup, canned meats, and marmalade, your paper was suspected of trying to do it “on the cheap,” and not only of being mean, but, as this was a popular war, unpatriotic. When the army stripped down to work all this was discontinued, but at the start I believe there were carried with that column as many tins of tan-leather dressing as there were rifles. On that march my own outfit was as unwieldy as a gypsy’s caravan. It consisted of an enormous cart, two oxen, three Basuto ponies, one Australian horse, three servants, and four hundred pounds of supplies and baggage. When it moved across the plain it looked as large as a Fall River boat. Later, when I joined the opposing army, and was not expected to maintain the dignity of a great London daily, I carried all my belongings strapped to my back, or to the back of my one pony, and I was quite as comfortable, clean, and content as I had been with the private car and the circus tent.

Throughout the Greek war, as there were no horses to be had for love or money, we walked, and I learned then that when one has to carry his own kit the number of things he can do without is extraordinary. While I marched with the army, offering my kingdom for a horse, I carried my outfit in saddle-bags thrown over my shoulder. And I think it must have been a good outfit, for I never bought anything to add to it or threw anything away. I submit that as a fair test of a kit.

Further on, should any reader care to know how for several months one may keep going with an outfit he can pack in two saddle-bags, I will give a list of the articles which in three campaigns I carried in mine.

Personally, I am for travelling “light,” but at the very start one is confronted with the fact that what one man calls light to another savors of luxury. I call fifty pounds light; in Japan we each were allowed the officer’s allowance of sixty-six pounds. Lord Wolseley, in his “Pocketbook,” cuts down the officer’s kit to forty pounds, while “Nessmut,” of the *Forest and*

Stream, claims that for a hunting trip, all one wants does not weigh over twenty-six pounds. It is very largely a question of compromise. You cannot eat your cake and have it. You cannot, under a tropical sun, throw away your blanket and when the night dew falls wrap it around you. And if, after a day of hard climbing or riding, you want to drop into a folding chair, to make room for it in your carry-all you must give up many other lesser things.

By travelling light I do not mean any lighter than the necessity demands. If there is transport at hand, a man is foolish not to avail himself of it. He is always foolish if he does not make things as easy for himself as possible. The tenderfoot will not agree with this. With him there is no idea so fixed, and no idea so absurd, as that to be comfortable is to be effeminate. He believes that "roughing it" is synonymous with hardship, and in season and out of season he plays the Spartan. Any man who suffers discomforts he can avoid because he fears his comrades will think he cannot suffer hardships is an idiot. You often hear it said of a man that "he can rough it with the best of them." Any one can do that. The man I want for a "bunkie" is the one who can be comfortable while the best of them are roughing it. The old soldier knows that it is his duty to keep himself fit, so that he can perform his work, whether his work is scouting for forage or scouting for men, but you will often hear the volunteer captain say: "Now, boys, don't forget we're roughing it; and don't expect to be comfortable." As a rule, the only reason his men are uncomfortable is because he does not know how to make them otherwise; or because he thinks, on a campaign, to endure unnecessary hardship is the mark of a soldier.

In the Cuban campaign the day the American forces landed at Siboney a major-general of volunteers took up his headquarters in the house from which the Spanish commandant had just fled, and on the veranda of which Caspar Whitney and myself had found two hammocks and made ourselves at home. The Spaniard who had been left to guard the house courteously offered the major-general his choice of three bedrooms. They all were on the first floor and opened upon the veranda, and to the general's staff a tent could have been no easier of access. Obviously, it was the duty of the general to keep himself in good physical condition, to obtain as much sleep as possible, and to rest his great brain and his limbs cramped with ten days on shipboard. But in a tone of stern reproof he said, "No; I am campaigning now, and I have given up all luxuries." And with that he stretched a poncho on the hard boards of the veranda, where, while just a few feet from him the three beds and white mosquito nets gleamed invitingly, he tossed and turned.

Besides being a silly spectacle, the sight of an old gentleman lying wide awake on his shoulder-blades was disturbing, and as the hours dragged on we repeatedly offered him our hammocks. But he fretfully persisted in his determination to be uncomfortable. And he was. The feelings of his unhappy staff, several of whom were officers of the regular army, who had to follow the example of their chief, were toward morning hardly loyal. Later, at the very moment the army moved up to the battle of San Juan this same major-general was relieved of his command on account of illness. Had he sensibly taken care of himself, when the moment came when he was needed, he would have been able to better serve his brigade and his country.

In contrast to this pose is the conduct of the veteran hunter, or old soldier. When he gets into camp his first thought, after he has cared for his horse, is for his own comfort. He does not wolf down a cold supper and then spread his blanket wherever he happens to be standing. He knows that, especially at night, it is unfair to ask his stomach to digest cold rations. He knows that the warmth of his body is needed to help him to sleep soundly, not to fight chunks of canned meat. So, no matter how sleepy he may be, he takes the time to build a fire and boil a cup of tea or coffee. Its warmth aids digestion and saves his stomach from working overtime. Nor will he act on the theory that he is "so tired he can sleep anywhere." For a few hours the man who does

that may sleep the sleep of exhaustion. But before day breaks he will feel under him the roots and stones, and when he awakes he is stiff, sore and unrefreshed. Ten minutes spent in digging holes for hips and shoulder-blades, in collecting grass and branches to spread beneath his blanket, and leaves to stuff in his boots for a pillow, will give him a whole night of comfort and start him well and fit on the next day's tramp.

If you have watched an old sergeant, one of the Indian fighters, of which there are now too few left in the army, when he goes into camp, you will see him build a bunk and possibly a shelter of boughs just as though for the rest of his life he intended to dwell in that particular spot. Down in the Garcia campaign along the Rio Grande I said to one of them: "Why do you go to all that trouble? We break camp at daybreak." He said: "Do we? Well, maybe you know that, and maybe the captain knows that, but I don't know it. And so long as I don't know it, I am going to be just as snug as though I was halted here for a month." In camping, that was one of my first and best lessons—to make your surroundings healthy and comfortable. The temptation always is to say, "Oh, it is for only one night, and I am too tired." The next day you say the same thing, "We'll move tomorrow. What's the use?" But the fishing or shooting around the camp proves good, or it comes on to storm, and for maybe a week you do not move, and for a week you suffer discomforts. An hour of work put in at the beginning would have turned it into a week of ease.

When there is transport of even one pack-horse, one of the best helps toward making camp quickly is a combination of panniers and bed used for many years by E. F. Knight, the *Times* war correspondent, who lost an arm at Gras Pan. It consists of two leather trunks, which by day carry your belongings slung on either side of the pack-animal, and by night act as uprights for your bed. The bed is made of canvas stretched on two poles which rest on the two trunks. For travelling in upper India this arrangement is used almost universally. Mr. Knight obtained his during the Chitral campaign, and since then has used it in every war. He had it with Kuroki's army during this last campaign in Manchuria.

A more compact form of valise and bed combined is the "carry-all," or any of the many makes of sleeping-bags, which during the day carry the kit and at night when spread upon the ground serve for a bed. The one once most used by Englishmen was Lord Wolseley's "valise and sleeping-bag." It was complicated by a number of strings, and required as much lacing as a dozen pairs of boots. It has been greatly improved by a new sleeping-bag with straps, and flaps that tuck in at the ends. But the obvious disadvantage of all sleeping-bags is that in rain and mud you are virtually lying on the hard ground, at the mercy of tarantula and fever.

The carry-all is, nevertheless, to my mind, the most nearly perfect way in which to pack a kit. I have tried the trunk, valise, and sleeping-bag, and vastly prefer it to them all. My carry-all differs only from the sleeping-bag in that, instead of lining it so that it may be used as a bed, I carry in its pocket a folding cot. By omitting the extra lining for the bed, I save almost the weight of the cot. The folding cot I pack is the Gold Medal Bed, made in this country, but which you can purchase almost anywhere. I once carried one from Chicago to Cape Town to find on arriving I could buy the bed there at exactly the same price I had paid for it in America. I also found them in Tokyo, where imitations of them were being made by the ingenious and disingenuous Japanese. They are light in weight, strong, and comfortable, and are undoubtedly the best camp-bed made. When at your elevation of six inches above the ground you look down from one of them upon a comrade in a sleeping-bag with rivulets of rain and a tide of muddy water rising above him, your satisfaction, as you fall asleep, is worth the weight of the bed in gold.

My carry-all is of canvas with a back of waterproof. It is made up of three strips six and a half feet long. The two outer strips are each two feet three inches wide, the middle strip four feet. At one end of the middle strip is a deep pocket of heavy canvas with a flap that can be fastened by two straps. When the kit has been packed in this pocket, the two side strips are folded over it and the middle strip and the whole is rolled up and buckled by two heavy straps on the waterproof side. It is impossible for any article to fall out or for the rain to soak in. I have a smaller carry-all made on the same plan, but on a tiny scale, in which to carry small articles and a change of clothing. It goes into the pocket after the bed, chair, and the heavier articles are packed away. When the bag is rolled up they are on the outside of and form a protection to the articles of lighter weight.

The only objection to the carry-all is that it is an awkward bundle to pack. It is difficult to balance it on the back of an animal, but when you are taking a tent with you or carrying your provisions, it can be slung on one side of the pack saddle to offset their weight on the other.

I use the carry-all when I am travelling "heavy." By that I mean when it is possible to obtain pack-animal or cart. When travelling light and bivouacking by night without a pack-horse, bed, or tent, I use the saddle-bags, already described. These can be slung over the back of the horse you ride, or if you walk, carried over your shoulder. I carried them in this latter way in Greece, in the Transvaal, and Cuba during the rebellion, and later with our own army.

The list of articles I find most useful when travelling where it is possible to obtain transport, or, as we may call it, travelling heavy, are the following:

A tent, seven by ten feet, with fly, jointed poles, tent-pins, a heavy mallet. I recommend a tent open at both ends with a window cut in one end. The window, when that end is laced and the other open, furnishes a draught of air. The window should be covered with a flap which, in case of rain, can be tied down over it with tapes. A great convenience in a tent is a pocket sewn inside of each wall, for boots, books, and such small articles. The pocket should not be filled with anything so heavy as to cause the walls to sag. Another convenience with a tent is a leather strap stretched from pole to pole, upon which to hang clothes, and another is a strap to be buckled around the front tent-pole, and which is studded with projecting hooks for your lantern, water-bottle, and field-glasses. This latter can be bought ready-made at any military outfitter's.

Many men object to the wooden tent-pin on account of its tendency to split, and carry pins made of iron. With these, an inch below the head of the pin is a projecting barb which holds the tent rope. When the pin is being driven in, the barb is out of reach of the mallet. Any blacksmith can beat out such pins, and if you can afford the extra weight, they are better than those of ash. Also, if you can afford the weight, it is well to carry a strip of water-proof or oilcloth for the floor of the tent to keep out dampness. All these things appertaining to the tent should be tolled up in it, and the tent itself carried in a light-weight receptacle, with a running noose like a sailor's kit-bag.

The carry-all has already been described. Of its contents, I consider first in importance the folding bed.

And second in importance I would place a folding chair. Many men scoff at a chair as a cumbersome luxury. But after a hard day on foot or in the saddle, when you sit on the ground with your back to a rock and your hands locked across your knees to keep yourself from sliding, or on a box with no rest for your spinal column, you begin to think a chair is not a luxury, but a necessity. During the Cuban campaign, for a time I was a member of General Sumner's mess. The general owned a folding chair, and whenever his back was turned every one would make a rush to get into it. One time we were discussing what, in the light of our experience of that

campaign, we would take with us on our next, and all agreed, Colonel Howze, Captain Andrews, and Major Harmon, that if one could only take one article it would be a chair. I carried one in Manchuria, but it was of no use to me, as the other correspondents occupied it, relieving each other like sentries on guard duty. I had to pin a sign on it, reading, "Don't sit on me," but no one ever saw the sign. Once, in order to rest in my own chair, I weakly established a precedent by giving George Lynch a cigar to allow me to sit down (on that march there was a mess contractor who supplied us even with cigars, and occasionally with food), and after that, whenever a man wanted to smoke, he would commandeer my chair, and unless bribed refuse to budge.

This seems to argue the popularity of the contractor's cigars rather than that of the chair, but, nevertheless, I submit that on a campaign the article second in importance for rest, comfort, and content is a chair. The best I know is one invented by Major Elliott of the British army. I have an Elliott chair that I have used four years, not only when camping out, but in my writing-room at home. It is an arm-chair, and is as comfortable as any made. The objections to it are its weight, that it packs bulkily, and takes down into too many pieces. Even with these disadvantages it is the best chair. It can be purchased at the Army and Navy and Anglo-Indian stores in London. A chair of lighter weight and one-fourth the bulk is the Willisden chair, of green canvas and thin iron supports. It breaks in only two pieces, and is very comfortable.

Sir Harry Johnson, in his advice to explorers, makes a great point of their packing a chair. But he recommends one known as the "Wellington," which is a cane-bottomed affair, heavy and cumbersome. Dr. Harford, the instructor in outfit for the Royal Geographical Society, recommends a steamer-chair, because it can be used on shipboard and "can be easily carried afterward." If there be anything less easy to carry than a deck-chair I have not met it. One might as soon think of packing a folding step-ladder. But if he has the transport, the man who packs any reasonably light folding chair will not regret it.

As a rule, a cooking kit is built like every other cooking kit in that the utensils for cooking are carried in the same pot that is used for boiling the water, and the top of the pot turns itself into a frying-pan. For eight years I always have used the same kind of cooking kit, so I cannot speak of others with knowledge; but I have always looked with envious eyes at the Preston cooking kit and water-bottle. Why it has not already been adopted by every army I do not understand, for in no army have I seen a kit as compact or as light, or one that combines as many useful articles and takes up as little room. It is the invention of Captain Guy H. Preston, Thirteenth Cavalry, and can be purchased at any military outfitter's.

The cooking kit I carry is, or was, in use in the German army. It is made of aluminum, weighs about as much as a cigarette-case, and takes up as little room as would a high hat. It is a frying-pan and coffee-pot combined. From the Germans it has been borrowed by the Japanese, and one smaller than mine, but of the same pattern, is part of the equipment of each Japanese soldier.

On a day's march there are three things a man must carry: his water-bottle, his food, which, with the soldier, is generally carried in a haversack, and his cooking kit. Preston has succeeded most ingeniously in combining the water-bottle and the cooking kit, and I believe by cutting his water-bottle in half, he can make room in his coffee-pot for the food. If he will do this, he will solve the problem of carrying water, food, and the utensils for cooking the food and for boiling the water in one receptacle, which can be carried from the shoulder by a single strap. The alteration I have made for my own use in Captain Preston's water-bottle enables me to carry in the coffee-pot one day's rations of bacon, coffee, and biscuit.

In Tokyo, before leaving for Manchuria, General Fukushima asked me to bring my entire outfit to the office of the General Staff. I spread it out on the floor, and with unerring accuracy he selected from it the three articles of greatest value. They were the Gold Medal cot, the Elliott chair, and Preston's water-bottle. He asked if he could borrow these, and, understanding that he wanted to copy them for his own use, and supposing that if he used them, he would, of course, make some restitution to the officers who had invented them, I foolishly loaned them to him. Later, he issued them in numbers to the General Staff. As I felt, in a manner, responsible, I wrote to the Secretary of War, saying I was sure the Japanese army did not wish to benefit by these inventions without making some acknowledgment or return to the inventors. But the Japanese War Office could not see the point I tried to make, and the General Staff wrote a letter in reply asking why I had not directed my communication to General Fukushima, as it was not the Secretary of War, but he, who had taken the articles. The fact that they were being issued without any return being made, did not interest them. They passed cheerfully over the fact that the articles had been stolen, and were indignant, not because I had accused a Japanese general of pilfering, but because I had accused the wrong general.

The letter was so insolent that I went to the General Staff Office and explained that the officer who wrote it, must withdraw it, and apologize for it. Both of which things he did. In case the gentlemen whose inventions were "borrowed" might, if they wished, take further steps in the matter, I sent the documents in the case, with the exception of the letter which was withdrawn, to the chief of the General Staff in the United States and in England.

In importance after the bed, cooking kit, and chair, I would place these articles:

- Two collapsible water-buckets of rubber or canvas.
- Two collapsible brass lanterns, with extra isinglass sides.
- Two boxes of sick-room candles.
- One dozen boxes of safety matches.
- One axe. The best I have seen is the Marble Safety Axe, made at Gladstone, Mich. You can carry it in your hip-pocket, and you can cut down a tree with it.
- One medicine case containing quinine, calomel, and Sun Cholera Mixture in tablets.
- Toilet-case for razors, tooth-powder, brushes, and paper.
- Folding bathtub of rubber in rubber case. These are manufactured to fold into a space little larger than a cigar-box.
- Two towels old, and soft.
- Three cakes of soap.
- One Jaeger blanket.
- One mosquito head-bag.
- One extra pair of shoes, old and comfortable.
- One extra pair of riding-breeches.
- One extra pair of gaiters. The former regulation army gaiter of canvas, laced, rolls up in a small compass and weighs but little.
- One flannel shirt. Gray least shows the dust.
- Two pairs of drawers. For riding, the best are those of silk.
- Two undershirts, balbriggan or woollen.
- Three pairs of woollen socks.
- Two linen handkerchiefs, large enough, if needed, to tie around the throat and protect the back of the neck.

One pair of pajamas, woollen, not linen.
One housewife.
Two briarwood pipes.
Six bags of smoking tobacco; Durham or Seal of North Carolina pack easily.
One pad of writing paper.
One fountain pen *self-filling*.
One bottle of ink, with screw top, held tight by a spring.
One dozen linen envelopes.
Stamps, wrapped in oil-silk with mucilage side next to the silk.
One stick sealing-wax. In tropical countries mucilage on the flap of envelopes sticks to everything except the envelope.
One dozen elastic bands of the largest size. In packing they help to compress articles like clothing into the smallest possible compass and in many other ways will be found very useful.
One pack of playing-cards.
Books.
One revolver and six cartridges.

The reason for most of these articles is obvious. Some of them may need a word of recommendation. I place the water-buckets first in the list for the reason that I have found them one of my most valuable assets. With one, as soon as you halt, instead of waiting for your turn at the well or water-hole, you can carry water to your horse, and one of them once filled and set in the shelter of the tent, later saves you many steps. It also can be used as a nose-bag, and to carry fodder.

I recommend the brass folding lantern, because those I have tried of tin or aluminum have invariably broken. A lantern is an absolute necessity. When before daylight you break camp, or hurry out in a wind storm to struggle with flying tent-pegs, or when at night you wish to read or play cards, a lantern with a stout frame and steady light is indispensable. The original cost of the sick-room candles is more than that of ordinary candles, but they burn longer, are brighter, and take up much less room. To protect them and the matches from dampness, or the sun, it is well to carry them in a rubber sponge-bag. Any one who has forgotten to pack a towel will not need to be advised to take two. An old sergeant of Troop G, Third Cavalry, once told me that if he had to throw away everything he carried in his roll but one article, he would save his towel. And he was not a particularly fastidious sergeant either, but he preferred a damp towel in his roll to damp clothes on his back.

Every man knows the dreary halts in camp when the rain pours outside, or the regiment is held in reserve. For times like these a pack of cards or a book is worth carrying, even if it weighs as much as the plates from which it was printed. At present it is easy to obtain all of the modern classics in volumes small enough to go into the coat-pocket. In Japan, before starting for China, we divided up among the correspondents Thomas Nelson & Sons' and Doubleday, Page & Co.'s pocket editions of Dickens, Thackeray, and Lever, and as most of our time in Manchuria was spent locked up in compounds, they proved a great blessing.

In the list I have included a revolver, following out the old saying that "You may not need it for a long time, but when you do need it, you want it damned quick." Except to impress guides and mule-drivers, it is not an essential article. In six campaigns I have carried one, and never used it, nor needed it but once, and then while I was dodging behind the foremast it lay under tons of luggage in the hold. The number of cartridges I have limited to six, on the theory

that if in six shots you haven't hit the other fellow, he will have hit you, and you will not require another six.

This, I think, completes the list of articles that on different expeditions I either have found of use, or have seen render good service to some one else. But the really wise man will pack none of the things enumerated in this article. For the larger his kit, the less benefit he will have of it. It will all be taken from him. And accordingly my final advice is to go forth empty-handed, naked and unashamed, and borrow from your friends. I have never tried that method of collecting an outfit, but I have seen never it fail, and of all travelers the man who borrows is the wisest.