

## Dawn to Dusk, A Day in the Life

From a Paper by John H. VandeVate of Woodberry Forest School, this is a sample of a day in the life of a soldier and the physical toll that marching took on the men.

“Every morning, five a.m. in summer and six a.m. in winter, the silence of the sleeping camps was pierced by a bugle blaring out reveille. This was the most exasperating part of every soldier's life--to tumble out from under warm blankets into the cold, damp morning air. One song, a parody of ‘I can't get'em up’, expresses the soldier's love for reveille most explicitly:

*Oh, how I hate to get up in the morning;  
Oh, how I'd like to remain in bed.  
But the saddest blow of all is to hear the bugler call,  
‘You've got to get up, you've got to get up,  
You've got to get up in the morning!*

*Some day I'm going to murder the bugler;  
Some day they're going to find him dead.  
I'll amputate his reveille,  
And stamp upon it heavily,  
And spend the rest of my life in bed!*<sup>1</sup>

“Henry Berkeley recalled one horrible morning in this entry: ‘*All night our surgeons, some twenty in number, have been cutting off arms, legs, etc., and dressing wounds. This morning I got up at four a.m., there was a big pile of amputated arms, hands, legs, and fingers within a foot or two of me, what a horrid sight!. Such is army life...*’<sup>2</sup>

“Half an hour after reveille, mess call was sounded. Hungry soldiers rushed to the mess tent for a breakfast of ‘peas on a trencher’. The soldier's opinion of the notoriously bland army food is reflected in this song set to the tune of ‘mess call’:

*Soupy, soupy, soupy without any bean  
Porky, porky, porky without any lean  
Coffee, coffee, coffee without any cream.*<sup>3</sup>

“After breakfast sick call and fatigue call were sounded. Men with ailments marched before the doctor and were given what little treatment was available. Men worn from work, reported at fatigue call--these men were given less strenuous duties such as policing the camp, cutting wood or digging drainage ditches.

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<sup>1</sup>John H. VandeVate, *Camp Life and the Civil War Around Woodberry Forest*, published privately, date unknown, p.6. A copy is on file at the Orange County Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

“At about eight a.m. guard mounting was called. The first sergeant turned out his detail for the next twenty-four hours, inspected them, and marched them to the parade grounds where they were inspected again and sent off to their posts. If the regiment was preparing to march that day, everyone would pack up all his extra baggage and give it to the quartermaster. You carried what you kept, so not much remained after the quartermaster left. Usually, on long marches, men carried a blanket rolled and tied over the left shoulder; a canteen hung on the right hip with a cup and plate; and on the left hip a haversack with a towel, soap comb, knife, fork, underclothes, and rations. The plates carried on the hip often came in handy--when surprised by the enemy, men used these to build a makeshift trench.<sup>4</sup>

“On those days when the soldiers did not break camp, they were drilled in military skills. First they drilled in squads--practicing basics of military skills. Then, for an hour just before noon, the squads got together and had company drills. As in all wars, drill was drill and one was thankful when it could be avoided.

“At noon, mess call blared again. Whether on march or in camp soldiers always looked forward to mess call. On march, soldiers removed their rations from their haversacks if there was any left. If there was time they cooked them, if not, cold beans were better than no beans at all.

“If the regiment remained in camp, each man had certain duties he was required to fulfill. Drivers and cavalry had to clean and feed their horses and clean the stables among other things. William Dame recalls having kept the company’s cannons clean and ready for service, guarded the guns and the camp, guarded the forage from wild animals and men, policed the camp, and kept the roads to camp in order--a difficult but necessary job if one wishes to get any food shipped in.

“When the regiment was on march, a soldier’s main duty was to march. Marching was not an easy task, especially if one was in the back of the column. Dust often became so thick that the soldiers could hardly breathe. Whenever the column came across a large puddle, part of the line would fall behind. Once the puddle was passed these men had to run to catch up with the rest of the column. John William De Forest recalls his experiences on one excessively prolonged march:

*Oh, the horrors of marching on blistered feet! It is an incessant bastinado applied by one’s own self, from morning to night. I do not mean a single blister, as big as a pea, but a series of blisters, each as big as a dollar, or to judge by one’s sensations, as large as a cartwheel. I have had them one under the other, on the heel, behind the heel, on the ball of the foot, on every toe, a network, a labyrinth, an archipelago of agony. Heat hunger, thirst, and fatigue are nothing compared with this torment. When you stand, you seem to be on red-hot iron plates; when you walk, you make grimaces at every step. In the morning the whole regiment starts limping, and by noon the best soldiers*

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

*become nearly mutinous with suffering. They snarl and swear at each other; they curse the general for ordering such marching; they fling themselves down in the dirt, refusing to move a step further. Fevered with fatigue and pain, they are actually not themselves. Meantime, the company officers, as sore-footed as anyone, must run about from straggler to straggler, coaxing, arguing, ordering, and, perhaps, using the flat of the sabre. Instead of marching in front of my company, I followed immediately in the rear, so that I could see and at once pounce upon everyone who fell out.*

*Having tried various alleviations for the hardships of marching, without much benefit, I conclude that man was not made to foot it at the rate of thirty miles a day! Soaping the inside of the stockings does some good, by diminishing the friction and, as a consequence, the blistering. It is also advisable to wash the feet before starting, always providing you have sufficient time and water. Beware of washing them at night; it cracks the heated skin and increases the misery. Beware, too, of trying to march on the strength of whiskey; you go better for a few minutes, and then you are worse off than ever....<sup>5</sup>*

*In describing the miseries of marching, I must not forget the dust. The movement of so many thousands of feet throws up such dense and prodigious clouds that one who has not witnessed the phenomenon will find it difficult to imagine it in all its vastness and nuisance. The officers dodge from side to side of the road to escape the pulverous suffocation; and the men, bound to their fours, choke desperately along in the midst of it.<sup>6</sup>*

“In the evening, if the men did not have to march all night, the superior officer called halt and ordered the men to prepare a camp. Only too gladly the men fell out and began to cook their evening mess and rest their feet. The men at the end of the column often did not reach the camp until hours later--they were usually allowed to march at the head of the column the next day.

“Whether on march or in camp the men got together after supper. They sat around the campfire, relaxing, talking, until one-by-one they trailed off to their tents and ‘hit the sack’. Taps ended the day.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*