

Volume 27, Issue 11

"We are but few in number but formidable." -Pvt. James Shelton, 7th Md. (o. B

June 2024



BOOK STRAPS, OF ALL KINDS, AT NEAT, KEARNEY & CO.'S TRUNK STORES, 336 Washington Street, 336 HOLYONTE THE ADAM HOURL And 527 Elm and 24 Friend Streets, Boston.

CIVIL WAR IDENTIFICATION DEVICES

By Bill Hart

In reading the correspondence of many soldiers during the civil war, at least after the first rush of enthusiasm and expectation of a quick victory, there seems to have often been an acceptance of the possibility of death. With that acceptance came a desire for their resting place to be known. Although it was not always possible and many were buried in unmarked graves and sometimes in mass burial trenches, when possible soldiers attempted to recover and honorably bury comrades and mark the burial not just with a marker such a hand painted or carved board from a packing crate but to also describe the place by using landmarks such as distinctive trees or rocks in letters home so that families would be able to find their loved ones' resting place.

Sometimes, searches after a battle would be unable to find their comrades despite knowledge of where they fell for many reasons. Mortally wounded soldiers could drag themselves away from the site of their wounding where they were last seen by comrades and identification could prove difficult due to the extent of wounds or decay. The fear of being buried in a nameless grave drove soldiers to devise various means to identify their body in the event of their death.

One of the simplest and easiest was to write their identification information on a slip of paper and pin it to their uniform before going into battle. The information they wrote varied but in addition to their name, often included their regiment and company, and their hometown.

Since soldiers often did not know the time and place that they might perish, more permanent means came into use. One of the most basic was to



flatten a minie ball and etch their identification information onto its surface, make a hole through the result and tie the leaden device around their neck. Sergeant Giovannini and Private Miski demonstrated this at an event several years back, making their own identification tags in this manner. Soldiers were also known to carve identification information onto a bit of wood which they bored a hole into to hang the piece around their necks. Another soldier-produced identification tag was made by smoothing down one side of a silver coin. often a quarter dollar or a coin of similar size and drilling a hole for a neck string or soldering a hinged t-bar pin with a clasp to the back and etching their information into the blank side.

Proposals were made to the Secretary of War and

OUR CAMP JOURNAL

VOLUME 27, ISSUE 11

Upcoming Campaigns

JUNE / JULY

July 6-7: **161st Gettysburg**, Daniel Lady farm, Gettysburg, PA (Company event) *(FVB Event)

Visit: www.GBPA.org to register online.

July 19-21: Funkstown, MD

http://www.funkstown.com/specialevents/day-in-the-park/

(7th MD Max Effort - Company event) *(FVB Event)

AUGUST

August 9-11: 160th Anniversary Foulkes Mill, Cumberland, MD (Individual)

August 10-11: Securing the Home Front, Stroudsburg, PA 142nd Co. G Event (Individual)



ID Devices

(Continued from page 1)

other officials in Washington to produce official identification tags for Union soldiers but nothing came of it and such tags were never issued to soldiers.

Sutlers, always on the lookout for prospects to increase their wealth, saw an opportunity in this. They sold readymade identification medals with holes already drilled for a neck string. These had a patriotic symbol or the bust of an American patriot and a motto on one side with the other side blank for the identification information. The image of an eagle was popular as was a Union shield. Some of the busts I have observed include Presidents Washington and Lincoln and Generals Grant, Hooker, McClellan, Sher-

man, and Sigel. Sutlers could use a hammer and a set of alphabetic stamps to stamp the identification information onto the discs. Small machines were also made for the purpose which produced a neater result. Similar products were also available through mail order and were advertised in *Harper's Weekly* and other popular periodicals of the day advertised as "soldier's pins". These could be made of copper, brass, silver, or other metals including at times gold. Some of the silver and gold pins were sold by jewelers and were professionally engraved and sometimes included enameling. These came in a variety of shapes and styles and were at times in the shape of the corps badge of the unit the individual belonged to. Similar pins were produced as souvenirs after the war, often with addition of the battles they had engaged in for veterans to wear at reunions and



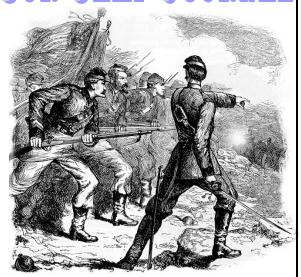
other gatherings. These could be confused with pins made during the war.

The primary use of the metal tags was by Union soldiers who had the resources to afford them. Very few identification tags for Confederate soldiers have been found.

Northern jewelers nationwide were astonishingly quick to exploit the ready market of soldiers eager to possess such a badge and, indeed, to have a better one than their comrades. Newspaper ads for badges were plentiful, and soldiers were enlisted as "agents in the field" for various firms. Many badges were simple thin-sheet silver stampings or cut-outs, with an engraved inscription, or colored enamel-filled center, or both. Some, however, were ornate gold and silver wonders of craftsmanship produced by the most prestigious American firms, such as the farewell badge that famed Brig. Gen. Joshua L. Chamberlain pinned to the chest of Brig. Gen. Charles Griffin in May 1865. Made by Tiffany & Company, which was a premier supplier of military goods of every type imaginable, from uniform buttons to weaponry, the badge was made of enameled gold displaying the Maltese cross of V Corps on a white ground. Edged with diamonds, the badge was crowned with a larger center diamond that was reputed to have cost \$1,000- an

A sutler-made tag with the image of President Lincoln and a pre-drilled hole for a neck string.

OUR CAMP JOURNAL



Civil War Re-enactors; America's Living Historians.

ID Devices

(Continued from page 2) astounding sum at the time. After the war, Chamberlain commissioned Tiffany to make a gold and enameled charm bracelet for his wife, Fanny, which incorporated military and rank symbols as the primary ornaments.

Soldiers and jewelers often used U.S. quarter-dollar silver coins as an inexpensive substitute for commercially produced disks. One side

Know Your Enemies...

This is one of a number of *Familiar Hints to Indiana Soldiers Taking the Field* given to Indiana volunteers in 1862 to help them become good soldiers. The U.S. Christian Commission later published and distributed **100,000** copies to soldiers, maybe including members of the 7th Maryland?

YOUR ENEMIES: UNCLEANLINESS, PROFANITY, INTEMPERANCE, LEWDNESS.

Keep the body clean. – After marching, if feet are sore, bathe in salt and water. Keep the hair close; air your blankets well. You never take cold, no matter how wet, if in motion. When retiring wet, rub the body until reaction comes on. If

of the coin was shaved smooth to accommodate the engraved information. A hinged T-bar pin was sweat-soldered to the reverse, leaving the coin motif fully visible, pos-

The cut-out cloth emblems took various shapes: a circle for I Corps, a three-leaf clover for II, a diamond for the III, and a Maltese cross for V. Each badge's shape was also a different color to differentiate the three divisions composing each corps: red for the 1st Division, white for the 2nd, and blue for the 3rd. The concept was immensely

sibly as proof of the silver content.

popular with the soldiers, who quickly began to have their own customized badges fabricated and engraved by jewelers and pin makers.

possible, never retire in a state of perspiration, until the body is clean and dry. Be regular in calls of nature;

constipation results in half the diseas-

wish His blessing. Keep your own self

coward. The habit is unmanly, useless

man was made with *nerves* to sustain

him under labor; he can depend upon

them. Liquor excites, but brings reac-

tion and ruin. Coffee is a stimulus,

and is nutritious. Quit strong drink. *Lewdness* makes beasts of men –

never risk it. Be as pure as when at

home. In a word, be as good citizens

mothers, wives, and maidens look to

in the field as if at home, where

you for support and favor.

Drinking – unless under medical advice, is your greatest curse. A *well*

God of battles. Revere Him, if you

-respect, and you cannot become a

Swearing profanes the name of the

es of camp.

and degrading.









Left, identification devices utilizing the reverse side of a quarter with a hole drilled for a string or a bar-pin.

Above, the ID tag of J. Pearson of the 14th NY Heavy Artillery.