

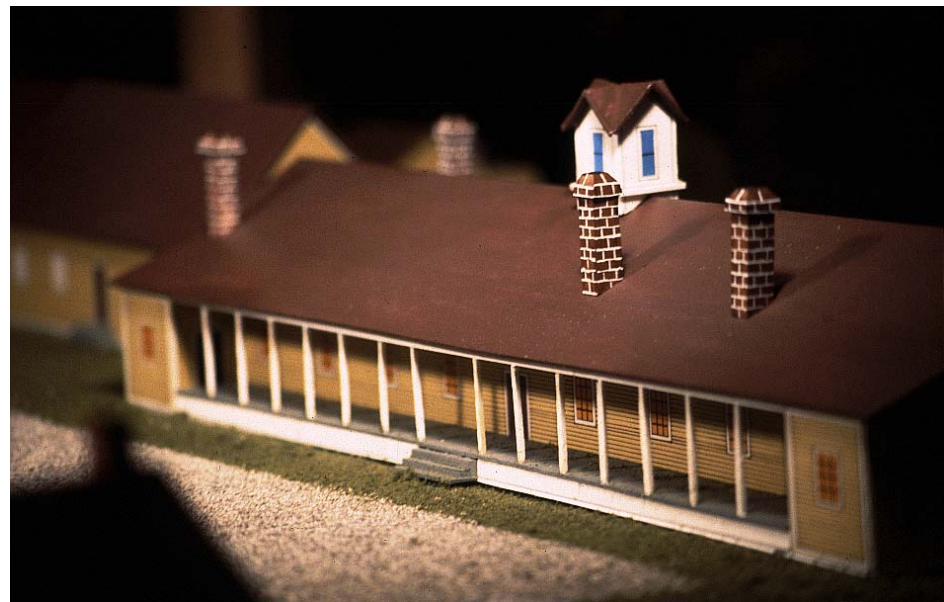
Antebellum Army *(continued)*

Instead of rooms, each group of six soldiers was allocated a variable space, 225 square feet north of the 38th parallel and 256 square feet south of it. This stood as the only remaining grouping of men in the new regulations.

The wood allotment was now one twelfth of a cord for each man individually from May through September and one sixth of a cord from October to April. Coal was now substituted for wood at the rate of 1,500 lbs. of anthracite to the cord.

These standards demonstrate that the barracks were evolving from clusters of small rooms to larger ones holding more men and that stoves were starting to replace fireplaces in general use. The new regulations now referred to “the permanent buildings for the use of the Army as barracks, quarters, hospitals, storehouses, offices, stables.”

It was during this great leap forward in housing of the common soldier that the major military establishments of the antebellum Washington Territory were constructed. Forts Walla Walla, Simcoe, Steilacoom, and the Columbia Barracks at Vancouver all benefited from this new perspective in providing for the needs of the Territory’s soldiers. Barracks furniture was now being supplied to the men through the Quartermaster’s Department as opposed to being built by them. The old provisions dating from the regulations of 1821 regarding the placement of knapsacks and clothing on the shelves of the bunks remained in place, showing that the army had no illusions that the hypothetical new iron bunks would be materializing any time soon. The straw allowance was now issued to each individual man as opposed to pairs of men, showing the universality of the individual bed-sack. “In barracks, twelve pounds of straw per month for bedding will be allowed each man, servant, and company woman.” Enlistment periods were now five years instead of three, with



This is a scale model of another barracks at Fort Steilacoom. It is part of the fort diorama carefully crafted by Robert Demorest.

each soldier receiving a new blanket in his first and third year of enlistment. In 1855 the blanket was changed from white with black end stripes to the new, heavier gray one with black end stripes that would remain the standard until the end of the century.

By 1860 official army barracks were definitely here to stay. In that year the Quartermaster’s Department issued “Regulations concerning Barracks and Quarters for the Army of the United States, 1860.” This was the first comprehensive statement by the army relating to army quarters since Poinsett’s issue of 1838. These regulations were a compilation of all of the rules presently in force that in any way related to army buildings. They also stated some important changes as well. At permanent fortifications, barracks and quarters were to be built by the Engineer Department and then turned over to the Quartermaster’s Department once occupied. The buildings would once again revert back to the control of the Engineer Department if ever they were vacated. The Quartermaster’s Department, though, was to have the responsibility of constructing barracks “at interior posts, or

cantonments, unconnected with permanent fortifications....” These regulations also spelled out the exact dimensions, as well as the building materials to be used, in the construction of any new barracks or other army buildings.

The new regulations of 1860 were eclipsed by the advent of the Civil War and were never distributed. “The War” found the average soldier on both sides right back where his predecessors had been, camping out during the summer and huddled in squalid huts for the duration of each winter. By the end of the war, with the rigors of the march, even that changed. A new tent, the “dog tent,” had emerged. Each man now carried his half of a two-man shelter instead of six men grouping into one. With the addition of a “gum blanket,” his home was complete. It would not be until 1866 that the army would once again take up the task of constructing true barracks to comfortably house its ever-necessary standing forces.

Christmas at Fort Steilacoom

**December 11, 2010
4 to 7:30 p.m.**

Fort Steilacoom

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Perpetually in the Field Housing the Antebellum¹ Army

By Gideon Pete

The first regulations governing the housing of US Army personnel were issued in 1801 by then Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn, under the heading of “Regulations to be observed in the allowance of Barracks or Quarters to the Officers of the Army, and in the delivery and distribution of fuel and straw to the garrisons on the sea coast and recruiting parties.” Co-joined to these was another edict titled “Regulations respecting certain Supplies and Objects of Special and Extra Expense” which covered the six categories of supplies that the Army afforded itself at the time. These six categories, besides rations, were Quarters, Transportation, Forage, Fuel, Straw, and Stationary. Note that no mention was made regarding enlisted barracks. In actuality, the War Department did not believe itself to be responsible for providing barracks to the rank and file at all. It further limited its involvement in this area by stipulating “no repairs shall be made to any barracks or buildings which shall incur a disbursement of money exceeding fifty dollars, but by an order of the Secretary of War.”

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, army regulations did not require that its enlisted personnel be housed in barracks with the exception of some permanent posts that were scattered few and far between. Most of the army at this



Barracks for U. S. Army soldiers at Fort Steilacoom by 1858 were fairly comfortable compared to earlier times.

time was considered by the ever frugal Congress to be “in the field” and was equipped accordingly. In addition to the six articles previously mentioned, the War Department supplied tents, blankets, iron kettles and skillets, along with tin pans and a meager candle ration, nothing more.

The army lived in tents during the summer and built temporary log huts for the winter. This was the pattern that had been adopted during the Revolution, and it remained the norm for our soldiers until the revision of 1812. As was typical for the soldiers who fought

the British in ’76, it appears from the regulations of 1801 that the winter huts the men built housed groups of eight. From October to April the men were to receive the following: “To every room occupied as a barracks by eight non-commissioned officers, musicians and privates, one cord (of wood) per month,” also “One truss of straw weighing thirty-six pounds is allowed every thirty-two days for each palliass (bed sack) for two men.”

In 1813 the War Department came out with new and more detailed regulations for the army. For the first time, army regulations provided

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¹ Before the Civil War

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President's Message



Here we are, the end of another wonderful year. We have put on some great programs over the past year, with one more to come:

Christmas at the Fort on December 11 from 4 to 7:30 p.m. Come tour with us during the Christmas celebration of 1860.

Our year started out with Mrs. Casey's Tea (always a hit), and then the annual swap meet and display. We have had numerous school groups, and the military units from JBLM set up tours with us. We hosted our Living History Day and open house. These are all programs to get us noticed in the community. The more we are noticed, the easier it is for us to keep the history of Fort Steilacoom alive.

We have also had some really great lectures this past year. Some of these have been presented by members of the Fort Steilacoom Living History Detachment as first person accounts. Tom Melberg, as Capt. Bennet Hill (Company M, 1st Artillery), gave us a history of the founding of Fort Steilacoom. John McPherson, as a Captain of the 4th Infantry, presented a lecture of defensive fortifi-



Staff Sgt. John Harlow from Fort Lewis compares a modern day soldier's pack with Bernard Bateman's Civil War backpack—to the awe of students at Lake Louise Elementary School during their Veterans' Day assembly.

cations and how they should be constructed. Lawrence Bateman, as Lt. August V. Kautz, presented a "Remembrance of Fort Steilacoom."

And in November Michael Sullivan of Artifacts Consulting gave a history of the Northwest as it related to the Fort Steilacoom historic site. We already are planning a set of lectures for next year's calendar.

At the Annual Meeting in October, all of the officers were re-elected. John Roten was elected to the Board of Directors and John McPherson was re-appointed Web Master.

I would also like to send a "thank you" to Don and Janiece Johnson for loaning some items to the Sutler's Store display, a butter churn and butter molds. Linda Knight, from The Whistle Stop Antiques in Sumner, donated a turkey feather duster which is now on display in the kitchen of Quarters 1. Look for new displays to come to the fort next year.

Remember, we are on our winter hours now at the fort. The museum will be open on the first Sunday of the month from 1 to 4 p.m. Thanks to all of our volunteers for their hard work that keeps this place going.

Lawrence Bateman

Antebellum Army (continued)

for a permanent housing of the everyday soldier. "To twelve non-commissioned officers, musicians, or privates, one room or (in the summer) a kitchen." These quarters were to be built by the men with tools lent through the Quartermaster Department for the purpose. The army was now issuing supplies to the men in groups of six and quartering them in groups of twelve. This is a strong reflection of Congress in its continuing efforts to keep the cost of supplying its army to a minimum.

Whereas the enlisted used to be housed in groups of eight, they were now housed in groups of twelve with no increase in the allowance of heating fuel. The straw allowance remained the same; with each set of "bunkies" receiving thirty-six pounds every thirty-two days. The quarters that the men now occupied were, for the first time, government property and the new regulations reflected that fact. If, upon vacating the barracks rooms, the soldiers had either caused damage or left them in a filthy state, their officers would now be responsible for their repair.

There were other additions to the new regulations. Requisitions for straw must now be confirmed by the commandant of the regiment or garrison, wood was now issued according to the number of kitchens or "room occupied for cooking." The candle ration was now fixed at one and a half pounds and soap at four pounds for each 100 rations. And camp equipment was fixed at one common tent, one iron kettle, and two tin pans for every six men.

From this we can infer that the men were housed in six man tents during the summer months with each company being furnished a kitchen structure of some sort. They would then "hut up" in groups of twelve for the winter with each small hut having two iron kettles and four tin pans with which to prepare their meals. No more than one and a half pounds of candles would be provided to light these rooms every eight days, and the men now had to keep their quarters clean (or at least leave them clean upon moving out).

The next major change in the housing of the army came in 1821 under the direction of Winfield Scott. Army units and their quarters were now to be inspected twice a week, although daily "visits" by the officers were encouraged. The "chambers" housing the men were to be numbered on the outer doors with the number pertaining to the unit of the men that they housed.

The quarters were, for the first time, to contain arms racks, and each man's name was to be "labeled on his bunk in the place most apparent." Cooking equipment was to be stowed out of sight, in a closet or recess, and wood was to be stored in a box near the fireplace. Each unit's "chamber" was required to conform as closely as practicable to every other and to be kept clean and in good order. For the first time, "All public barracks and quarters are under the direction of the officers of the Quartermaster's Department, and shall be assigned by them to the officers and troops of the Army, agreeably to regulations."

Even with this, the army continued in its aversion to constructing permanent quarters: "No permanent barracks or quarters shall be erected at the expense of the United States but by order of the Secretary of War." Wood was once again issued on the basis of six men occupying a space.

Congress cut costs by reducing the straw allowance to "One truss of straw, weighing eighteen pounds, is allowed to every two men, at the commencement of the month. At the expiration of fifteen days, each truss will be refreshed with four pounds, and at the expiration of the month the whole straw will be removed, and a fresh bedding of one truss will be furnished." In addition, "At all posts in the vicinity of prairies belonging to the public, hay will be used in lieu of straw and shall be provided by the troops."

Finally, to discourage theft, each army blanket was now marked in the center "with the letters U.S. with indelible liquid." At this point in time, the winter quarters of most of the army merely reflected a wooden version of the summer campaign experience.

The army modified its regulations once more in 1825 and again in 1835. Little was changed as it pertained to the quartering of the average soldier. The issuing of blankets was formalized, with the central U.S. stencil continuing to remain. Each soldier received one in the first year, and another in the second year of each three-year enlistment.

The Quartermaster's Department now furnished materials for bunks, benches, and tables from which the soldiers could furnish their rooms. These furnishings, when completed, were marked with the number of the room for which they were constructed and could not be removed except by the authority of the Quartermaster's Department.

In 1838 the Secretary of War, Joel Roberts Poinsett, developed the "Rules and Regulations for insuring uniformity and a due economy in the

construction of permanent buildings hereafter to be erected for the use of the Quartermaster's, Engineer, Ordnance, and all other departments of the Army." This was the first comprehensive plan pertaining to how all future buildings for the army were to be constructed. He specified that not only future construction, but also any repairs or additions to existing structures, must all adhere to these new specifications. Despite all of its good intentions, Poinsett's extremely detailed proclamation had little effect as far as barracks construction was concerned, for the next seventeen years.

The next revision of the army's general regulations came in 1841. These were revised again in 1847. Both of these revisions kept the status quo as far as housing of the rank and file were concerned.

The next big change came in December of 1854 when General Order 22 authorized the first general issue in any barracks of a manufactured item, the single iron bedstead. Although authorized, iron bunks were not to arrive in any significant number until the early 1870s. The Medical Department, with its separate procurement authority, however, did not hesitate in the least in acquiring them. According to their property returns, iron bedsteads were almost universal at all post hospitals by the end of 1858. This goes to showcase the sometimes vast variation between the theory of the latest revision of the regulations and what actually exists in the field. New changes to the army regulations most often reflected field modifications and usage that had become commonplace since they were last issued. At other times, the regulations reflected changes that would take yet some time to occur.

The general regulation changes for 1855 and 1857 are essentially the same. These regulations offered the greatest changes since those of 1821 and reflected the army's growing willingness to view its soldiers as individuals as opposed to groups of six, eight, or twelve.

(Continued on page 4)