

## Packing for the March

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By

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### 1. Objective of this presentation:

The objective of this presentation is to inform the listener of the various typical packs used by Union soldiers (southern soldiers were similar but more varied) during the American Civil War, what the soldiers typically packed in their packs, and what the modern reenactor may wish to pack for a campaign.

### 2. Evolution:

#### a. Early War Pack

**Hard Pack** This knapsack is a pre-war militia style found in many period photographs. This knapsack was made on a ridged wooden frame. A painted cloth covers the wooden frame. A large leather flap covers the front of the knapsack. This flap has a cloth back and a leather edge. Three straps are attached at the top for the carriage of a blanket or overcoat. Size of knapsack 15" Wide X 13 1/2" Length X 4" Deep.



**b. Mid War Pack**

1853 Double Bag Knapsack (Early Riveted Version). Construction of the bag is the same as a sewn version except the leather parts are attached with rivets instead of stitching. The back straps have square ends and the buttons are not covered. White cloth ties are used on the inside pocket closer. Size of this knapsack is 14 1/2" wide X 30 1/2" length. Overcoat straps (Blanket Straps) are included. A wooden frame can be used in this knapsack.

Pattern of 1864 Double Bag Knapsack (Late War Version). The body of the late pattern knapsack is not constructed with welted seams. The four flap sides of the body are rounded. White leather ties replace the cloth ties of the 1853 pack. The straps are attached with two vertical rows of stitching (up and down the strap). The back straps have scalloped ends and the brass buttons are covered with leather circles.

The earliest contract date on an original knapsack of this type is late August 1864. This is the most commonly found type of original Civil War knapsack, the earlier versions having been mostly used up during the war. Overcoat straps (Blanket Straps) are provided. Size of this knapsack 14 1/2" wide X 32 3/4" Long.



**c. Late War**

It's not documented when Union troops discarding the clumsier and less comfortable knapsack in favor of the blanket roll and haversack. It is likely observation of southern

troops may have influenced the Union soldier southern soldiers having adopted this style early in the war. A spare shirt, socks, perhaps drawers, poncho, and other assorted loose items likely comprised the blanket roll. The haversack was used for food and personal items that did not fit in the roll.



### **3. Ways to carry a pack (demonstration).**

- a. Shoulder straps over a stick,
- b. Shoulder straps through the blanket straps,
- c. Front straps crossed over chest (soft pack),
- d. Front straps hooked on belt (soft pack).
- e. Blanket over right shoulder.

#### 4. What to put in the pack:



##### a. Authentic packing:

##### “Billy Yank”

The weight of all this equipment ranged in soldier estimates from 40 to 50 pounds. A Yank who accepted the latter figure gave detailed estimates as follows: “40 rounds ammunition, belt &c...4 lbs; canteen of water, 4 lbs; haversack of rations, 6 lbs; musket, 14 lbs; knapsack at least 20 pounds, besides the clothes we have on our backs.”<sup>1</sup>

Another soldier, after a similar listing, noted: “In addition to the actual weight the five different straps which passed over every part of our bodies produced unpleasant touches of cramp now and then. I can appreciate the feelings of an animal in harness now.”<sup>2</sup>

Most Yanks eventually found means of reducing the load. Indeed, the process of becoming a veteran was in large measure one of shedding. References have been made to the tendency to get rid of overcoats and dress coats. Eventually the knapsack disappeared in favor of the blanket roll.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> O.R., series 3, II, 518-520; W.D.A.G.O. G.O. 100, April 29, 1863

<sup>2</sup> Thomas L. Livermore, *Numbers and losses during the Civil War* (Boston 1900)

<sup>3</sup> *The Life of Billy Yank, the Common Soldier of the Union*, by Bell Irvin Wiley



**b. Items typically carried in a Union soldier's knapsack:**

- shelter tent half and possibly a tent end,
- gum blanket or poncho,
- spare clothing items such as; shirt socks, drawers, night cap, handkerchief,
- candle,
- toiletry items such as straight razor, mirror, shaving soap and brush, comb,
- house wife (sewing kit)
- musket upkeep items
- bible or testament,
- letters from home,
- carte de vist (CDV) of loved ones,
- amusement items (cards, dice, reading material)
- pencil and paper for letters
- string, rope or twine,
- hand axe,
- frying pan,
- blanket or over coat (depends on season, but usually both not carried),
- mucket or boiler

## 5. How much to carry?



A SERIOUS MISCALCULATION.



HOW SI CAME OUT.

**It depends on you.** Most soldiers carried from 18 to 20 pounds in their packs.  
 - J.W. Bartmess, a **recruit**, wrote from Camp Carrington on Nov. 26, 1862,  
 to his wife, “the following is a list of what we get and the prices:

### Prices of items in 1862:

Dress coat \$6.71  
 Over Coat \$7.20  
 pants \$3.03  
 Shirts .88  
 drawers .50  
 Socks .26  
 blanket \$2.60  
 knap sack \$2.75  
 Canteen .48  
 haversack .48  
 Rubber blanket \$1.25  
 hat \$1.55  
 trimmings on hat .30  
 total \$27.99

**Miligan's Patent Mess Kettle.**

Arranged for your Officers, weight 15 pounds, price \$17.  
 and

**Miligan's Army Tent Stove.**  
 Patent applied for.

Weight 15 pounds, price \$8 00. Sold by Dealers in Military Goods throughout the country. Wholesale Depot, No. 4 Main Street, New York. Send for circular. **MILIGAN BROS.**

## 6. Reenactor packing for the March.

### a. Creature comforts to consider

- Two pair of socks, one light weight to wear inside a heavier sock,
- Medicated powder for feet or groin,
- Medicines (aspirin, cold and sinus, prescriptions, etc.),
- Items for contact lenses if worn,
- Cell phone for emergency,
- Chapstick, sun block, etc.
- Dried food or hikers meals,

- Power bars,
- Iodine tablets for water,
- Spare under wear,
- Extra shirts,
- Lightweight long underwear for sleeping at night,
- Small pillow,
- Soap, shampoo, and other personal grooming care products, etc.

**b. Remember, 20 pounds in 1862 is still 20 pounds today.** You will have to carry it all on your back and shoulders for as long as the march lasts.

**It depends on you!**