

One of our great American Specialties

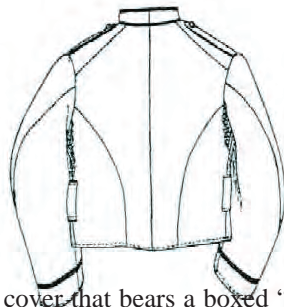
Here is a subject philatelists have been enthralled with for over 100 years.



The Confederate Post

By Patricia A. Kaufmann

North Carolina Depot – Clothing the Troops



Illustrated is a Confederate cover that bears a boxed “North Carolina Depot, Richmond, Va. Official Business” imprint. North Carolina maintained a private depot in Richmond from which State troops were issued clothing. According to *Stangers’ Guide and Official Directory for Richmond*, the North Carolina Depot was an Army Depot located at the “second door from the corner Main and 8th Sts” in Richmond.

During the first year of the war, uniforms were procured locally or nationally, for which the Confederate government reimbursed the cost. Many uniforms were issued by State authorities, some from units that had been militia prior to the outbreak of hostilities. While there was some attempt at uniformity at a local level, there were many curious designs.

There is a marked difference between jackets made by different depots at different times. It became obvious to the Confederate government that this inefficient system would not provide a large army with all the items required.

On September 6, 1861, a Clothing Bureau was established in Richmond. Major Richard Waller was in overall command of the bureau, which had separate branches for shoes and clothing. Raw materials were supplied to the clothing manufactory through a central quartermaster department depot in Richmond.

Materials were obtained from textile firms, and a staff of about 24 professional tailors would cut out the various pieces for each garment. The parts were then bundled together with thread and buttons. These could be best described as “kits”; which were then issued to women who assembled the garments in their homes.

From early 1863, large amounts of clothing were made and issued to the soldiers in the field. Statistics from the last six months of 1864 up to and including January 31, 1865, included 104,199 jackets, 140,570 pairs of trousers, 167,862 pairs of shoes, 157,727 cotton shirts, 170,139 pairs of drawers, and 146,136 pairs of socks. These were field issues only, and did not include items issued to the men at posts, paroled and exchanged prisoners, or those in hospitals.

While large quantities of clothing were available, transportation was a major problem, so while warehouses in various locations had uniforms and equipment in stock, the troops in the field did not always get what they needed in a timely manner. Even when large amounts of clothing were issued, the soldiers tended to wear them out very quickly.

Uniform colors varied from batch to batch, as did Union material. One of the main problems for the South was the chemicals used in material dyes. Occasionally, material was used without dyeing. One brigade was issued off-white jackets made from undyed, untreated wool. The men wearing them could not stand the smell; the more fortunate men who did not have to wear them bleated like sheep every time they passed.

Extract from *Johnny Reb & Billy Yank* by Alexander Hunter of the 17th Virginia Infantry (1904):

“Johnny Reb’s uniforms: ... not two men clothed alike in the whole regiment, brigade or division; some had caps, some wore hats of every shape and in every stage of dilapidation, varied in tint by the different shades of hair which protruded through the holes and stuck out like quills; the jackets were also of different shades, ranging from light gray with gilt buttons, to black with wooden ones; the pants were for the most part of that nondescript hue which time and all weathers give to ruins, or if with the eye of an artist you still sought to name the color, you would be apt to find it, with a strange fatality, like that of the soil; white shirts there were none, shirts of darker shade were scarce, owing to the stringency of the market; some of the men wore boots, others the army brogans; but many were bare-footed; all were dusty and dirty...”

Such was the attire for the often ragged Confederate troops. Covers with imprints such as the North Carolina Depot bring it home to us.

For membership information on the Confederate Stamp Alliance, email Trish Kaufmann at trishkauf@comcast.net or write to 10194 N. Old State Road, Lincoln, DE 19960. CSA website www.csalliance.org. ✉