

Western Cavalry equipped as infantry??

By Ken Knopp

I once again delved into the Ordnance Inspection Reports. A host of wonderful detail and incredibly enlightening information is found in these reports. Today, I want to share some of this with you. I should point out that at times, these reports tend to create more questions than answer such as whether the items in question are CS or Federal capture however, they are very interesting. There is other very enlightening information concerning the numbers and kinds of long arms, pistols, haversacks and canteens I shall post at a later date.

My Observation: Among many things I found in the course of this research of the Ordnance Inspection Reports was a glaring reality- many western cavalry were equipped a lot like infantry! Obvious you say? Yes? No? Then why do most cavalry reenactors NOT reflect this fact in more detail? Many accoutrements in use were likely simple infantry issue. No mention of pistol boxes, very few “saber belts” are noted (even fewer sabers). Waist belts are noted separately as are cap and cartridge boxes and “cartridge box belts”. This suggests that cartridge boxes were often attached NOT on the waist belt but carried slung over the shoulder via the ”cartridge box belt”....like infantry! The numbers in the field appear to slowly descend as the war progress but there are large numbers as late as early 1864. Interestingly, a few (very few but some) knapsacks and bayonet scabbards are also occasionally noted. I submit four separate reports from 1863 and 1864. Here’s the data:

SOURCE: Inspection reports and related records, Inspection Branch, Adjutant and Inspector Generals Office, Roll #4, M935, National Archives, RG 109, War Dept Collection of Confederate Records.

1. Aug 1863, Chalmer’s Cavalry (two Brigades) One of the earliest, most detailed available. Approx. 1,247 effective men.

Cart. Boxes 1245 99%

Cart Box Belts 1141 91%

Cap Boxes 1310 105%

Waist Belts 890 71%

Saber Belts 230 18% (ONLY 24 sabers noted in the entire command!)

2. Dec. 1, 1863, Army of the West Inspection Report, There are approximately 10,280 cavalrymen in total.

This full report includes both the infantry and cavalry commands. As for cavalry, at this time Forrest had been recently sent west again and had very few (about 2,500) men in his immediate command. The gov’t had not yet entirely consolidated the cavalry under Forrest so each of these commands are noted

separately in the report including Forrest, Chalmers, Cosby, Ross, Ferguson, Geer, Wirt Adams and Richardson.

Cart. Boxes 8923 87%
 Cart Box Belts 5206 51%
 Cap Boxes 9366 91%
 Waist Belts 8560 83%
 Saber Belts Less than 1%

3. May 26, 1864, Forrest Cavalry Corps. Very detailed report. 8,952 effective troopers. Just prior to Brice's Crossroads Forrest was inspected again. He was near his peak and had three brigades with a total strength of 8,952 men plus his Escort (about 65 men) and artillery. Shortly after, his command was broken up when Richmond forced him to return a large number of men back to their infantry commands or sent on detached duty. Still, this very complete report provides some interesting information about arms, equipment, etc. Of course, it also raises some big questions.

Cart. Boxes 3936 44%
 Cart Box Belts 2425 27%
 Cap Boxes 405 45%
 Waist Belts 3721 42%
 Saber Belts Less than 3%

SIDE BAR NOTE: One can readily see that Forrest's Cavalry was, on the whole, very poorly equipped BEFORE Brice's Crossroads. However, the report shows he did have plenty, (about 9,500) serviceable horses! Forrest has 8,952 "effective men" in his command however arms are not sufficient for this number. As for arms, only 60% could be given long arms and only 22% pistols! Forrest is also extremely deficient in cavalry horse equipments!! The report shows he can fully mount only approximately 3,489 men. The rest did not have saddles, bridles, etc. Historians have long said Forrest had about 4,500 men in battle that memorable June day yet Forrest himself always claimed he could only bring 3,000 or so of his widely scattered men into the battle against Sturgis' force of 8,000. I believe Forrest was correct. He had more men and plenty of horses but the number of horse equipments suggest he could not transport them into the fight!
 (Sorry, to digress....)

4. July 31, 1864, Wheeler's Cavalry Corps, Report shows 6,734 effective men. Extremely detailed report.
 Cart. Boxes 7233 107%
 Cart Box Belts 2411 27% ("Shoulder Straps")
 Cap Boxes 7299 108%
 Waist Belts 5052 75% (2070 or 41% had "waist belt plates". What kind? Were the remainder attached via roller buckles, horse shoe and frame buckles???? Good questions.
 Saber Belts 1243 18%

SUMMARY: You want to IMPROVE your “Western Cavalry” impression and be Plain, Everyday Common (PEC) for most periods of the war? Here’s one way for “some” of you, lose the saber and saber belt and buy an infantry cartridge box with shoulder belt! Of course, other details can vary. What do you folks think about this data and its meaning?

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The currying process being done is called Setting out.

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