

Get Out of That Rut, Soldier!

Dear friends, there is no doubt that we love what we do. How else can we explain why we endure long marches, triple-digit heat, awful weather and uncomfortable shoes?

But sometimes, our commitment is tested not by the elements, but by repetition. Sometimes things just get old, and we find ourselves losing the enthusiasm we may have had at first. The challenge has been replaced by routine; and the exciting stage of acquisition (first uniform, first musket) is replaced by a closet full of unused civil war gear.

There are also many veteran members who feel that once they can no longer participate as a soldier that their involvement must cease altogether. Nonsense! There's no reason to give up the hobby when you retire from soldiering, and there's no better way to jumpstart a second career than by taking on the challenge of acquiring a civilian wardrobe, persona and trade (and, yes, we'll accept "cranky old codger" as a trade).

If the shine has rubbed off, or the learning curve has flat-lined, or if you just want to try something new to keep things fresh, here are some suggestions:

- read Rags and Hope by Val Giles, or Polley's history of the Texas Brigade
- defarb your musket; it's like getting a new musket for a fraction of the price
- improve your poker game
- learn period parlor games (who remembers "Puss, Puss in the Corner"?)
- read Hardee's School of the Soldier every couple years to guard yourself against "reenactorisms" in your drill; stay sharp
- study the rank insignia, and be the guy who knows not just who and when to salute, but how to do it right
- get in touch with your Northern side; read Hard Marching Every Day, by Wilbur Fisk
- learn a new role (e.g., NCO)
- practice your handwriting; craft some letters or keep a journal
- save up, and replace worn out equipment with upgrades in quality and authenticity
- offload surplus gear to new guys, on the forums, or to the QM
- teach yourself to whittle around the campfire
- pick up an instrument; Mike's harmonica sure was nice at Neshaminy
- learn (or make up) words to Civil War songs
- read novels that were popular during the 1850s and 60s – fine literature if you wish, or some trashy dime novels from Sullivan Press
- establish a civilian or first-person identity (Who were you before the war? What was your job? Personally, I "volunteered" after losing a hand of cards. See third suggestion above.)
- practice your ~~Don Troiani~~, er... Jeff Trexler "hit"
- find an 1860s equivalent for a modern interest or skill, such as carpentry, music, construction, gardening, medicine, cooking, teaching, etc., and work it into your impression

- grow some crazy facial hair
- interact with the public, or help with a presentation for school kids
- learn to cook cush or skilleegallee; eating it is optional
- study period hairstyles, and be the company barber
- next time you're at rest on the march, have a "lice" race on your tin plate using a couple ants

All of us (yes, myself included) can pick just one area where we want to try something new this year. If one of these ideas appeals to you, or if you have your own ideas, spend the next few events focusing on it, and let us know what you learn. Whatever you do - whether you improve your kit, develop your persona, increase your overall knowledge of the period we represent, or simply find creative ways to kill time in camp - keep learning. And share what you know.

Respectfully,

Sgt Jones