

Shelter Halves

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National Regiment NCO School
Saturday, February 17, 2018

Talk is based on the excellent book:

Gaede, Frederick C., *The Federal Civil War Shelter Tent*, Alexandria, Virginia: O'Donnell Publications, 2001. Dean Nelson also a main contributor.

Speaking Points:

1. Provide a brief history of the shelter half – pre Crimean War (1853-1856) through April 1865. Over 2.6 million halves produced between 1861 and 1865 made of first linen, then cotton drill, occasionally cotton and linen mix, and then cotton duck; 140,000 +/- contracted two-piece poles sets used occasionally. No “contract” surfaced regarding stakes or pins.
2. Fabric rarely shrunk before production – shrinkage by weather especially humidity and dew an issue.
3. Fabric not treated although, a few contractors treated lots with some sort of mildew repellent. Duck cloth more water repellent.
4. End pieces also known as “hoods” not available during the Civil War. Troops used rubber blankets, another shelter half or whatever as a shield from wind, etc.
5. Practical observations and practices based on documentation and experience.
6. Enhance our impression, mobility, and comfort on campaign.
7. Early war three-piece tents, wooden stakes or pins driven with pieces of firewood or wooden mallets underrepresented in the hobby.
- I. Tente D’Abri – appears early 1850s in France and discovered by Captain George B. McClellan during Crimean War visit – appear in US or variations
Sept. 1861 – March 1862
 - A. Made of linen
 - B. 40 blackened bone buttons distributed on all four sides
 - C. Poles and guy ropes
 - D. 4 tent peg loops
 - E. 1 piece of canvas
 - F. Dimensions 51” x 67”
 - G. Type 1 (Gaede Study)

II. Day's Poncho/tent invention

- A. Appears Nov. 1861
- B. Made of Gutta Percha, India Rubber, Painted cloth
- C. Based on Tente D'Abri
- D. No real interest from Quartermaster Lt. Col. George H. Crosman-Philadelphia due to material issue especially in cold weather
- E. Six bone buttons
- F. Four tent peg loops?
- G. One piece of material
- H. Dimensions 71" x 60"
- I. Also mention tent knapsack - 1859

Early war campaigns involved hundreds of supply wagons carrying tents, which could not logistically supply troops immediately when halted for camp. The shelter half solved this problem adding greater mobility, and need for fewer supply wagons—a desire articulated by Quartermaster General Meigs.

III. Early War Shelter Half – Spring 1862 to end of 1863

- A. Made of linen but primarily cotton drill – both very flammable especially linen
- B. Twenty-three, 4 hole bone button, many of them black or dark– cross-stitched to tent on three sides
- C. Two tent peg loops per half
- D. Three pieces of canvas per half – due to loom width availability—production limitation
- E. Mention piecing
- F. Dimensions 66 ½" x 63" were the Quartermaster's expectations, (or 66" x 65" due to a Quartermaster typo) but existing tents, with shrinkage or stretching measure from 58-¾" to 64-¾" +/- x 57" to 66" +/- (See Gaede)
- G. July 17, 1862 – all items required manufacturers stamps
- H. Type IIa and IIb – Gaede Study

IV. Mid-War Shelter Half – without 3 tent pin loops sporadically fall of 1863 – fall 1864

- A. Made of stronger, heavier, more durable cotton duck, but some made of drill
- B. Twenty-three, tin, or zinc sunken panel, (some bone) 4 hole button – cross-stitched to tent on three sides – complaints that tin button rust stained the tent. Zinc preferred by the Quartermaster General
- C. Two tent peg loops per half
- D. Two pieces of canvas per half – loom able to produce necessary width
- E. Dimensions 66 ½" x 63" were the Quartermaster's expectations, (or 66" x 65" due to a Quartermaster typo) but existing tents, with shrinkage or stretching measure from 58-¾" to 64-¾" +/- x 57" to 66" +/- (See Gaede)
- F. More machine lock-stitched tents though as throughout, all grommets and buttonholes hand wrought throughout the war
- G. Type IIIa – Gaede Study

- V. Late-War Shelter Half with 3rd tent pin loop – July of 1864 to July 1865
 - A. Made of stronger, heavier, more durable cotton duck – blue “sail maker guideline” appears.
 - B. Twenty-three, tin or zinc sunken panel, possibly japanned, 4 hole-button – cross-stitched to tent on three sides. In August 1864, Platt Brothers and Company of Hartford, Connecticut delivers 2,300 great gross of zinc buttons or 3,974,400, which would furnish 170,000 halves.
 - C. 3 tent peg loops per half
 - D. 2 pieces of canvas sections per half
 - E. Dimensions 66 ½” x 63” were the Quartermaster’s expectations, but existing tents, with shrinkage realities measure from 58” to 64” +/- x 57” to 66” +/- (See Gaede)
 - F. Type IIIb variation – Gaede Study

- VI. Miscellaneous
 - A. Troops also referred to their tents as pup, dog, tents and dog kennels.
 - B. Artwork and sense of humor
 - C. Love / Hate relationship
 - D. 32 + extant tents examined in study
 - E. Tents repurposed
 - i. Folding camp chair seats
 - ii. Army of Northern Virginia HQ flag
 - iii. Gallows hoods for Lincoln assassins

- VII. Practical
 - A. Pre button shelter halves at home to facilitate setup in camp
 - B. Tie pole to tent and forked upright with waxed jute to steady tent. (One piece of documentation where troops drove pointed fork uprights into ground and tied pole to vertical pieces to steady support when tent placed over wooden structure.)
 - C. Use tent stakes made of maple or oak – about 1” dia. x 8” or so long. Easy to make with a hatchet and saw.
 - D. Roll stakes in brown paper for transport in knapsack
 - E. Drive tent stakes with piece of firewood – won’t harm wooden stakes. Metal hammers will damage or split wooden stakes plus you need to bring a hammer.
 - F. Stakes should be driven at about a 45 degree angle—3 inches in the ground and say 5 or 6 inches above the ground.
 - G. Loops should be able to move – during hot weather, move loops higher up on stake to allow for air flow.
 - H. Stretch hemp rope between uprights inside the tent for hanging stuff. I have hung everything from a musket to sword, etc.

VIII. Questions raised during presentation.

A. Were McComb, Wilmington, Delaware tents sent to the Philadelphia Depot?

Not really see below:

1. April 3, 1863	20,000 halves	New York
2. April 4, 1863	5,000 do	New York
3. April 24, 1863	50,000 do	Philadelphia
4. May 8, 1863	50,000 do	New York
5. August 1, 1863	4,000 do	New York
6. Nov. 13, 1863	50,000 do	New York
7. Feb 16, 1864	50,000 do	Philadelphia

B. If a tent we lost or damaged, were troops responsible?

1. Tents were company property – company would pay or replace.

C. Where can we buy Type II tents?

S&S Sutlery offers quite a variety of type II tents as well as tent pegs—the latter appear to be made of pine—make your own from oak or maple.

Joseph Lee Shelter Tent Half

B. Hensel Shelter Tent Half

S&S Sutlery
331 Buford Avenue
Gettysburg, Pennsylvania
717-338-1990
sheds@comcast.net

Original red oak, hand riven and sawn, tent peg courtesy of Marc Benedict, 53rd PVI – brought to NCO School Feb 2018



Original tent peg – different view, courtesy of Marc Benedict, 53rd PVI – brought to NCO School Feb 2018





Fig. 101. Tent pins for the French tente d'abri, taken from Fig. 21. Rather than conforming to a pattern, these pins appear almost handmade.

From Gaede, Frederick C., *The Federal Civil War Shelter Tent*, Alexandria, Virginia: O'Donnell Publications, 2001.

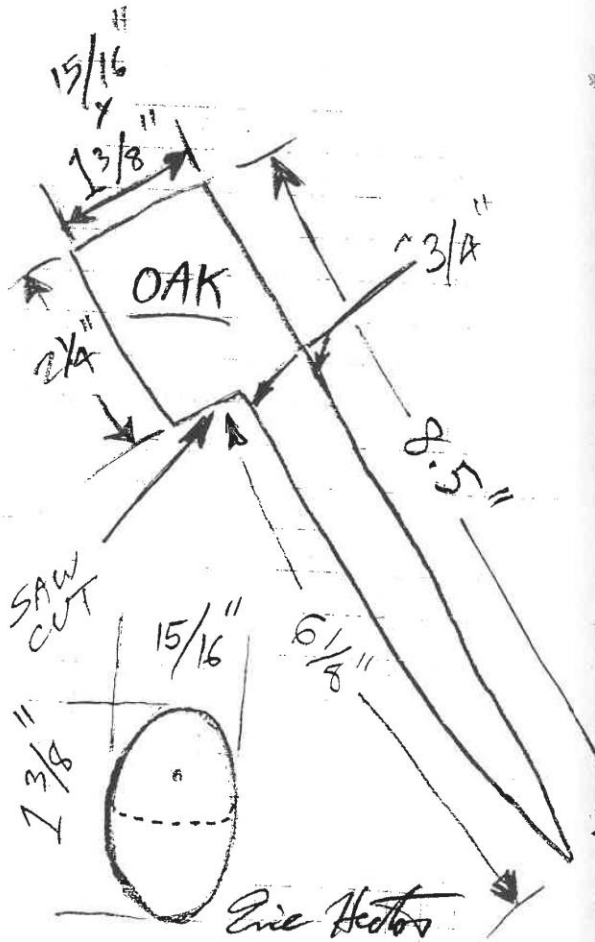


Fig. 102. Tent pin fashioned by Private James Chapman, 3rd New Hampshire Volunteers, accompanying half No. 7. New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord, NH. Courtesy Eric Hector.



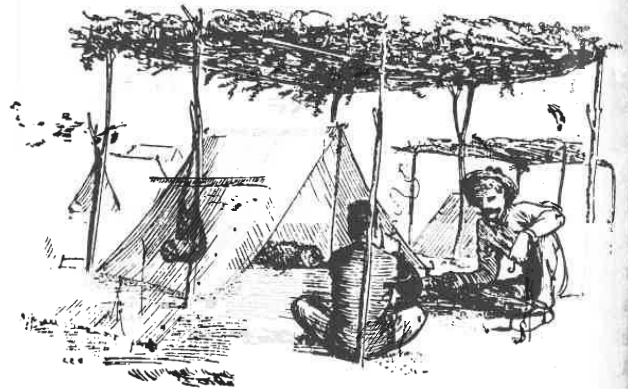
THE "PUP" TENT.



THE DOG OR SHELTER TENT.



SHELTERS AS SOMETIMES PITCHED IN SUMMER.



SHADED SHELTERS.

Gaede, Frederick C., *The Federal Civil War Shelter Tent*, Alexandria, Virginia: O'Donnell Publications, 2001 as well as

Billings, John D., *Hard Tack and Coffee: Or the Unwritten Story of Army Life*, George M. Smith & Co., 1887

Figs. 97, 98, 99 and 100. Four illustrations of shelter tents that accompanied popular accounts of soldier life. The one at upper left was drawn by George Coffin and published in *Hinman's Si Klegg*, 580. The three above were drawn by Charles Reed and included in *Billings's Hardtack and Coffee* (reprinted 1970), 52, 53, 54. In two cases the artists have shown muskets serving as poles, although forked saplings are also well represented.