

An Open Letter from our Founder – Clark A. Kirby

Dear Possible Recruit,

I have been reenacting for over eight years and thought the time had finally come to start my own unit. In this part of the country, most wish to be a Confederate reenactor. I understand this since I began with the same thought. However, I quickly learned that a problem develops when there are no “Yankees” with which to “fight”. Event hosts tell you that they have way too many Confederates but could use more Union soldiers. So, you wind up buying not only the Confederate “gray” uniform, but a Union Blue one as well, just so you can play. Once you see the situation, you start to realize that you really could not fight against “Old Glory” and that it is a good thing that the Union Army won. Then you try to decide which branch of the Army you wish to portray: Artillery, Cavalry, or Infantry. As for the artillery, cannons are very interesting for they make a lot of noise, but for upwards of \$20,000 for a reproduction 3” Ordnance Rifle and limber, that may not be in your budget. So, you look at the cavalry. But then you would need a horse, and an authentic McClellan saddle would set you back almost \$1,000 and that does not include the uniform, saber, pistol, and carbine much less a horse, a trailer, or the towing vehicle. Please be aware that a reenactor portrayal of either artillery or cavalry without the necessary gear is frowned upon. That leaves the infantry, the good ol’ foot soldier that made up the bulk of the Union Army, which is the impression we use. Everything that you need to be an infantryman, a brand new reproduction rifle, wool uniform, and accouterments would cost less than \$1,000, much less if you make your own uniform or buy used items. You don’t even have to buy it all at once because we have some loaner items. Believe me when I tell you that at the first large event you attend and you look up and down the ranks of thousands of fellow reenactors, with the flags flying and the drums beating, then you will feel the power of the Union Army and you will know that you made the right choice.

Civil War reenacting began during the Civil War Centennial in the early 1960’s. From those days when there were no period reproduction items, where guys would wear J.C. Penney work clothes into “battle”, to the present time, where one may find everything imaginable, that is completely authentic, from sack coats with hand stitched buttonholes to pegged sole brogans, readily available, even locally. Since there are only three civil war battlefields in Texas (Sabine Pass, Galveston, & Palmito Ranch), all on the Texas coast, nearly all Texas reenactments are held on private land that was never a real battlefield. Land is leased by an event producer, sometimes a town’s chamber of commerce or a local Sons of Confederate Veterans (SCV) Camp and the event is advertised to the public. They buy hay for the horses to eat, straw for the “soldiers” to sleep upon, water tanks to hold clean water for canteen refilling, and food to feed the reenactors at the traditional Saturday night party. The event date arrives and the public pays to get into the event and guess what, they think you are an actor! During the event, some of us go through the crowds and speak to the audience, sometimes performing in “first person”, as if we had been transported back 140 years. Some demonstrate the firing of these neat old single-shot muzzleloaders. Some even have their “leg cut off” by the surgeon after the battle. Nearly all of us veterans have been either in a feature film or a video about the civil war.

In order to pull this all off, we must look good. We must be trained in how to be a soldier in the Union Army. The unit will do this for you every time you come to a practice drill or an event. You will be instructed how to properly wear your uniform, why there were no neatly

pressed creases in trousers, and how to oil your brogans so that your stockings stay dry when we cross muddy ground. You will be taught how to position your leather accouterments and how to roll authentic paper and black powder blank cartridges, and how to keep them dry at wet events. We will practice how to “fall in”, in two ranks, shoulder to shoulder. You will learn how to do the facings and how to march without swinging the arms, just like they did 140 years ago. You will learn how to execute a flank march, wheelings, and “by file rights or lefts”, so that we can attend parades. And, we will practice “on the right by file, into line”, “at the double quick”, and “forward into line” the commands that put us into a battle line so we can be the “firstest with the mostest” against our “enemy”. We will learn how to safely load and fire these percussion rifle-muskets. We will learn how to “stack arms”, the manual arms positions used during the civil war, and “recover arms“, all just like back when. If you would like to learn all this, our hobby is for you. You will be instructed by veterans of many years in the hobby, those who have “seen the elephant” and learned to prefer camp coffee boiled in their tin cup over an open fire. You will enjoy the camaraderie of fellow reenactors, sitting around the campfire on a crisp evening, sometimes drinking to each other’s health before retiring for the night in an authentic shelter half tent, with your “pard” who is already snoring. You will learn to “freshen” your salt bacon in your tin cup overnight so that you can eat it without fail for breakfast, or you may choose to be “motel militia” and spend the night in a local motel and have breakfast in the café on the way to the event. We will always strive to have two events per month. It will always be your choice as to what events you attend and how deep you intend to get into your impression.

You may have a thousand questions. Believe me, that will be just a start. You will learn all kinds of interesting things as a recruit. And, after you have been in the unit for a while, you may even be promoted to corporal or sergeant. One of my pards recently became a general, in a field ceremony on the battlefield of Perryville, KY, to lead thousands of reenactors. And, all this time you will have gone to large and small reenactments, the Granbury’s and the Gettysburgs. You will like something about all of them.

If any of this is still interesting to you, please click on the membership application link on our website and fill it out and mail it in to me or click the e-mail button on the form. This will make you a full-fledged member. There are no dues this year so that will allow you to concentrate on buying your uniform and equipment. But, before you buy a thing, please attend one of our upcoming events as our honored guest. I will be notifying you of these, soon via our electronic newsletter. Welcome to the world of civil war living history, where we make history come to life!

Sincerely yours,

Clark A. Kirby
Founder-UAV