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**THESE RELICS OF BARBARISM:  
A HISTORY OF FURNITURE IN BARRACKS  
AND GUARDBOUSES  
OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1800-1880**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE/HARPERS FERRY CENTER

THESE RELICS OF BARBARISM:  
A HISTORY OF FURNITURE  
IN BARRACKS AND GUARDBOUSES  
OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY, 1800-1880

Prepared for

Harpers Ferry Center  
Harpers Ferry, West Virginia

by

David A. Clary

David A. Clary and Associates  
Bloomington, Indiana

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## INTRODUCTION

This report offers a history of the furniture used by enlisted men in barracks and guardhouses of the United States Army before 1880. It approaches the subject along three avenues--administrative history, the history of regulations, and the observations of people who were there--and then reconciles the three bodies of information in a summary chapter. More than half of the report is appendixes, which are intended to be, as completely as possible, a convenient source book on the subject. The reader is warned in advance that many of the footnotes are substantive; I apologize to those who believe (as do I) that expansions of the text ought to appear at the bottoms of pages, but the economic facts of life forbid that.

There is much in this report that may surprise some readers, especially those of an antiquarian bent. We today are accustomed to an Army that is highly bureaucratized, with a rule or regulation governing every aspect of the soldier's life. Rigid specifications, centralized procurement, and general issues now make every barrack room more or less identical to every other.

But that was not always the case. During the 19th century the Army only haltingly moved from an age of handicrafts without policy to one of policy without handicrafts. As a result, the only thing uniform about the Army was its uniform. Except for clothing and hardware procured and distributed from central sources, most of the Army's material inventory was assembled locally and without guidance from above. It was not until the 1870s that the Army's managers began seriously to address the refinement of specifications and the imposition of uniform standards servicewide. Accordingly, no two army posts--or barrack rooms or even bunks--were the same for the first full century of the Army's existence.

No one, if a project like this is to come to a successful conclusion, can work without the help of others. That is the case here, as the full list of people (Bibliography) who in offered support during the course of this

work attests. I wish to offer special thanks to some whose services were far beyond the ordinary, including John Demer of the National Park Service, Harpers Ferry Center, who managed the contract and did everything in his power to help the work go on apace. His colleague, William L. Brown III, offered helpful information at the start of the work and excellent, detailed comments on the draft report. The number of archivists and librarians who helped to make the research possible is too great to list here, but special citations were earned by Michael P. Musick and Robert Matchette of the Military Archives Division of the National Archives; Alice Wickizer and her staff of the Government Publications and Documents Department of the Indiana University Library; Richard C. Davis and Mary Elizabeth Johns of the Forest History Society; and John Slonaker and Dennis Vetock of the United States Army Military History Institute, who made me feel a very honored guest, almost waiting on me hand and foot. Don Loprieno of New Windsor Cantonment provided some critical information about that place otherwise unavailable to me, and Ronald B. Hartzer of my staff, who is now working on a history of a district of the Corps of Engineers, answered some questions about Corps procedures in the 19th century. Presents came in the mail, in response to an appeal, from Wil Ebel, Raymond Scott, Herbert M. Hart, and Arthur A. Hart. Joseph R. Blaise deserves special notice for granting an interview and explaining many of the facts of army life before World War II. And not least, I wish to thank my son, Jesse B. Clary, for outstanding technical assistance in the mechanics of assembling the appendixes. Responsibility for any errors, however, rests with me alone.

Finally, as an author obsessed with a subject, I owe a great debt to my wife for her patience and willingness to be a sounding board. She has, fortunately, never in her life seen a bedbug, but she has heard of little else for several months. Although she has not said so, surely she must share the sentiments expressed in the title of chapter 19.

David A. Clary  
Bloomington, Indiana

PART I

FOUNDATIONS  
(1775-1800)

"Some of what are called military posts,  
are mere collections of huts made of logs,  
adobes, or mere holes in the ground, and  
are about as much forts as prairie dog  
villages might be called forts."

--William T. Sherman, 1874

## ANY SUCH STRESS AND STRAIN

Keep in sight the interesting historical truth that no language, so far back as our acquaintance with history goes, has known any such ordeal, any such stress and strain, as was to await the English in this huge new community it was so unsuspectingly to help, at first, to father and mother. It came over, as the phrase is, came over originally without fear and without guile--but to find itself transplanted to spaces it had never dreamed, in its comparative innocence, of meeting; to find itself grafted, in short, on a social and political order that was without precedent and example and incalculably expansive.<sup>1</sup>

So said Henry James about the English language in America during the 19th century, and so should we remember as we ponder the words of our own past. The student of history, especially that of material culture, must ever bear in mind that language is a constantly changing thing. Of no other tongue is that more true than of what H. L. Mencken called "the American Language" in the first century after the Declaration of Independence, especially during its "period of growth"<sup>2</sup> after 1812, as America, its language, and even such small details of its social life as the beds of its soldiers, departed ever farther from their English origins. The meanings and usages of words changed then more even than they change now, and many words had several meanings or connotations at a given moment.

This report is about "furnishings" and "furniture" in barracks and guardhouses of the United States Army before 1880. Hoving too closely to the literal meaning of "furnishings" would leave little to discuss in that context. For of all the words and phrases that must concern us here, the term "furnishings" has evolved the least in American usage. As applied to objects, in the 19th century it meant chiefly "unimportant appendages; mere externals."<sup>3</sup> That meaning extended from the action of the verb "to furnish" (provide or supply incidentally, or pay), and for

most of the 19th century the Army "furnished" very little to its men that most people today would call "furniture" (although, in its bureaucratic way, the Army regarded appurtenances that the soldiers made for themselves to be items "furnished" to them). The Army "furnished" weapons, uniforms, blankets, food, pay, medical care, and supervision--most of which, like the tools with which the soldier erected his bed, were officially on loan from the Army anyway.

It was only very late in the 19th century that the word "furnishings" acquired an additional sense of "articles of furniture, apparatus, etc."<sup>4</sup> For most of the century the actual meaning of the term was usually apparent only in context, and the usual connotation was of an accessory or appurtenance incidental to something more important. "Bed furnishings," for instance, were mattresses and bedding for a bedstead. ("Bed" itself referred to the bedding, and not to the bedstead.)

The word "furniture" has evolved much more in America than has "furnishings." Originally, in the 17th century on both sides of the Atlantic, the word meant "the equipment or accouterments belonging with a gun, as powder, shot, match, etc.," and secondarily "defensive covering for the body; armor." But both definitions were probably obsolete in America by the early 18th century. "Furniture" meaning household equipment also goes back in American usage to the 17th century, but until well into the 19th century its chief application was to the furnishings of a bedstead--mattresses, sheets, and other bedding. The first written American use of the word that seems to connote chairs and the like was in Benjamin Franklin's 1771 autobiography, but multiple connotations persisted for more than a century. By far the commonest was of an accessory or furnishing--table furniture meant eating implements; kitchen or stove furniture included lids, pots, skillets, stovepipe, and so on; hospital furniture usually meant dressings and incidentals. "Bed furniture" in the sense of bedding (as opposed to the bedstead) also persisted throughout the period.<sup>5</sup>

The point of this discussion is that the meanings of what may seem to be even the most obvious terms should never be assumed when they are in a

historical context. Nor will current dictionaries offer much help. But historical dictionaries of English, American English, and Americanisms offer a great deal of help when it is necessary to translate a term in an old source into a picture of the object it refers to. The murky etymology of the word "bunk," for instance, may provide some understanding of what the earliest army bunks, of which we have little description, really were like. Even the infamous "bedbug," so much a part of army life in the past, has a lexicographic history different in America from that in England. Other terms whose histories can shed light on the objects they name include "puncheon," "palliasse," "bedsack" (an American original), and others. The discovery of when the term "palliasse," for instance, came into the language affords the first clue to when the object itself came into use--with the interesting fact that at first it was chiefly a military artifact.

As if the potential misinterpretations lurking in a changing language were not enough, bureaucratic procedures affect the definition of the subject of this report. Although "furnishings" and "furniture" had many connotations, when meant as the contents of buildings, the only "furniture" the Army acknowledged in the 19th century was desks, chairs, andirons, and tongs for offices. Even they were not, properly speaking, regarded as furniture, but as fixtures of buildings. So, too, with bunks or bedsteads, except those in hospitals, which in the 1850s became "medical supplies." That was natural enough during the long period when bunks were wooden structures built along with (often into, if built at all) barracks, but the classification continued after the introduction into barracks of the first manufactured bedsteads in the 1850s, and until the wholesale replacement of the wooden bunks in the 1870s--but calling iron bedsteads "bunks" gave that old word a new definition. After the early 1870s, the iron bunks became part of the "camp and garrison equipage" of the Army.

The Army's classifications of its possessions reflected its systems of fiscal appropriations, procurement, manufacture, distribution, and accounting or bookkeeping. The subject of this report was scattered throughout those systems and occasionally rearranged. To clarify discussion, the

"furniture" addressed in the text that follows includes items of clothing (blankets, bedsacks, pillow sacks, mosquito netting, bedding generally); fuel and straw (straw for bedding); camp and garrison equipage (cooking implements, and bedsteads in the last years); subsistence rations (candles); barracks and quarters (bunks, bedsteads for most of the period, interior finish, fire extinguishers, stoves and ranges, etc.); and so on.

In short, this report attempts to trace the material history of the condition and contents of barracks and guardhouses, as appurtenant to the buildings. It does not address incidental contents, such as the weapons and uniforms of the soldiers.

## Notes

1. Henry James, "The Question of Our Speech" (1905), quoted in H. L. Mencken, The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States, with Supplement I and Supplement II (reprint ed., 3 vols., New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1978), 1:138. Mencken's work is the outstanding treatise on the subject, and is essential to anyone who encounters or must use American English.
2. *Ibid.*, title of part IV. 104-63.
3. The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary: Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically (2 vols., New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), hereafter cited as OED. Dictionary references in this report are to the entries for the words under discussion, unless otherwise stated.
4. *Ibid.*
5. A Dictionary of American English on Historical Principles (4 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938-1944), hereafter cited as DAE. See also the OED, and A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles (2 vols., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), hereafter cited as DAHP. The OED, as might be expected, offers the most extensive reference on the history of words in the English language generally, although its coverage of American usage is uneven, and of pure Americanisms very incomplete. In a purely American context, reliance on or cross-reference to the other two dictionaries is essential, although they are not as widely available as the OED.

In the context of this discussion, it should be noted that two centuries-old definitions of "furniture" are still current: the fittings, rigging, and general equipment of a ship or boat; and the trappings or housings of a horse. The term "furniture" today commonly connotes, before all else, the usable large contents of a house or office. But it seems to have acquired that meaning in a roundabout way, by

back-formation from terms like "furniture wagon" (for moving household goods), "furniture dealer," and "furniture factory," which entered the American language in the middle decades of the 19th century (DAE, DAHP).

Similarly, although today we commonly take the term "bed" to include the bedstead as well as the mattress and other trappings, that is also a recent extension of the term. "Bedstead" means literally the place for a bed, which, as explained, traditionally meant the mattress (if any) and bedding. But it transferred to the movable item (rather than its place in a room) in logical fashion before the mid-19th century, as the equipment was intended to be furnished with a bed. A bed formerly was created only by the act of sleeping, whereas now a bed may still exist when not in use (OED, DAE). This will come up again, along with "bunk" and other mutating words, in later chapters of this report.

BOOTHS AND HUTS OF VARYING SHAPES AND SIZES  
(1775-1800)

The story of the furniture issued to American soldiers before 1800 may be quickly told. There was, almost literally, none. Because of the nation's reluctance to admit the need for a permanent military force, and its miserly attitude toward federal expenditures, the few soldiers in national service received little more than the most basic necessities during the early years of the republic.

Nor was there much public sympathy for the plight of the common soldier. The colonial experience with British occupation forces left lingering resentment toward all things and people military. Many of the new nation's leaders believed that armies posed an inherent danger to liberty. They remembered with bitterness the quartering of British troops among the people--one of the principal complaints that sparked the Revolution--and the King's military intimidation of the citizenry. Finally, there was the prevailing 18th-century belief, imposed by military doctrine, that even a citizen army should be kept in check brutally. "Let officers be men of sense," remarked Alexander Hamilton, "but the nearer soldiers approach to machines perhaps the better."<sup>1</sup> In short, those who set the course of the young republic cared naught how the soldier lived, except that he be mostly out of sight.

Before the United States could begin to formulate a policy on the creature comforts of the enlisted soldier, it must develop one on the existence and management of an army. In that endeavor the nation heeded its antimilitary traditions and the faith of many of its leaders in the militia, the experience of the Revolution, and the example of the British. But mainly, military policy grew, step by reluctant step, under the pressures of events. Amid the push and pull of conflicting philosophies and realities, the soldier made his bed.

The basic tenet of early American philosophy was that armies existed only to conduct wars; they had no legitimate purpose (consistent with liberty) in peacetime. They gathered when war broke out, at which time were established the administrative structures required to keep the forces effective. One of the first positions authorized in the Continental Army was that of the quartermaster general. Following British practice, that office existed only in wartime and was associated with armies in the field rather than in garrison. The quartermaster general's reach also was much wider than it is today. In effect the chief of staff to the commanding general, he was responsible for intelligence, operations planning, and the issue of march orders to general officers; explored the field of operations, opened and maintained roads, built bridges, and inspected forts; laid out camps and assigned quarters; procured camp equipment and tents, and lumber for the huts used as winter quarters; and was in charge of transport--including horses, wagons, and boats to move and supply the Army. There was no need for permanent quarters in the mission of the Continental Army and accordingly no need for its quartermaster general to build or install fixtures in them.<sup>2</sup>

The persistently short supplies of the Continental Army are so well known as to be almost an American legend.<sup>3</sup> The troops suffered from perennial shortages of food, forage, fuel, straw, clothing and blankets, shoes, and transport. That the Army's needs could not be met can be attributed to unsound currencies, limited domestic materials and manufactures, absence of popular support, congressional interference or inaction, and plain ineptitude. The inexperienced Americans seemed unable to develop a smoothly working administrative system for army supply. The Quartermaster Department, repeatedly reorganized, had several changes in leadership, and came into frequent conflict with departments for purchasing, for clothing, and for subsistence--which themselves were in a constant state of flux. A precedent for the future was instituted toward the end of the war, as Superintendent of Finance Robert Morris gradually took over the purchasing responsibilities of all supply departments, turning increasingly to contracting for rations, and gradually reducing the procurement activities of the Army. When most wartime accounts had been settled, the office of the quartermaster general was abolished by law July 25, 1785.<sup>4</sup>

The administrative chaos and inexperience of the supply departments had unhappy effects on the troops. They suffered for lack of clothes, blankets, food, and shelter. Even when supplies were available, wagons to deliver them often were not, as in the winter of 1780-81. The deprivations that season, following the ghastly winter at Morristown in 1779-80, contributed importantly to the causes of the mutinies of the Pennsylvania and New Jersey regiments in early 1781. The Army managed to survive that crisis, but the shortages of money and supplies persisted into the last campaigns.<sup>5</sup>

With successive quartermasters general flitting from pillar to post to channel supplies to the armies, the troops were left to their own devices to shelter themselves. At the start, when the fledgling Army converged around Boston in 1775, no formal provision was made for quarters. As winter approached, the men turned to and produced "booths and huts of varying shapes and sizes, with or without windows," scattered among the earthworks.<sup>6</sup> One contemporary observer described them as follows:

Some are made of boards, some of sailcloth, and some partly of one and partly of the other. Others are made of stone and turf, and others again of Birch and other brush. Some are thrown up in a hurry and look as if they could not help it--mere necessity--others are curiously wrought with doors and windows done with wreaths and withes in the manner of a basket.<sup>7</sup>

That is the earliest description of the quarters of the American Army; anything more about the bedding or internal fixtures of the huts must come from conjecture. It is likely that brush and straw, along with whatever blankets were available, were the rule.

In throwing together their rude shelters, the soldiers themselves had established the first policy on army housing. It was effectively ratified by the high command that same winter, because the shortage of domestic cloth made tents hard to come by. Thereafter, as the troops went into winter quarters they were to return their tents to the quartermaster

general, who arranged for them to be washed, repaired, and stored for reissue in the spring. In the winter, the men were to live in huts, which they built themselves.<sup>8</sup>

In succeeding winters the provision of quarters became somewhat more organized, although it remained hampered by shortages. The system established was that the men erected and outfitted their own huts, while the quartermaster general's organization provided the tools and materials. In the early winters the huts typically were built of fence rails, sod, and straw for the roofs. If boards were available, they were used for walls and floors; otherwise split logs (called "puncheons"<sup>9</sup> in American usage) did the duty, leveled or chinked with clay, moss, or straw. At Valley Forge, each hut was supposed to have two windows, and each took about two weeks to build--providing it actually was completed. During the winter of 1777-78 straw was in such short supply that many thatched roofs went unfinished, and many men had to sleep on brush or bare ground. When combined with the shortages of food, shoes, clothing, blankets--chiefly because of the breakdown in transportation--such conditions help to explain why fully a third of the 9,000-man Army was declared unfit for duty at the end of December 1777.<sup>10</sup>

Of what we should today regard as furniture in those hovels there is little record. Doubtless many soldiers, with time on their hands and materials available, made simple stools, tables, shelving, perhaps even some sleeping platforms or bunks. At the least the beds would have been composed of straw and the men's blankets and overcoats. The inhospitable conditions and the crowding would have led the men to sleep together at least in pairs, and probably in groups, to share blankets and body heat--not to mention lice, fleas, bedbugs, and the like. The shared camp kettles and mess pans or trenchers (most of the latter and the utensils probably were of wood and made by the soldiers) and related cooking gear, along with whatever personal effects the men might carry with them (or create by whittling to pass the time), would round out the contents of the huts.<sup>11</sup>

The general squalor of the huts was masked by the fact that the only source of light in most of them--except when candles, which were supposed to be among the rations, were available--came from open fires, which filled the huts with smoke. That was a last touch of misery, for as one soldier wrote home from Valley Forge, "My eyes are started out from their orbits like a rabbit's eyes, occasion'd by a great Cold & Smoke."<sup>12</sup>

With experience as a teacher, the Continental Army gradually became expert at erecting its rude shelters. By the winter of 1782 the men were rather comfortably housed at New Windsor in two-room cabins built for 16 men.<sup>13</sup> It had also refined what would be the standard practice of the American Army for almost a century: The Army in the field (which, because of the Indian wars, virtually all of the American Army almost always was) was provided tents in the summer and tools and limited materials with which to build quarters for the winter (which might be occupied for some years). Certain basic items of camp and garrison equipage (kettles, mess pans), clothing (blankets and, in time, bedsacks), subsistence (candles), and necessary straw and fuel (usually cut by the soldiers) would be furnished by the supply officers, but the soldiers must provide the labor and most of the materials to erect their quarters and their fixtures. Only at "permanent fortifications" along the seacoasts and borders might "permanent quarters" be erected, but since those defenses were to be manned chiefly during wartime, such quarters had a low priority. As one historian of army supply has pointed out, a veteran of the Revolution upon entering a barrack sixty years later, or even during and after the Civil War, would have found himself in surroundings little changed from what he had known.<sup>14</sup>

Only two items of barracks furniture, it is reasonably certain to say, were established in the American Army by the end of the Revolution. Both were importations from England--the "bunk" certainly well before the Revolution, and the "palliasse" probably so. Their actual appearance is open to somewhat more speculation, although there was likely a general pattern for each with considerable variation in practice--two traditions that would endure for decades.

The need for each is rather apparent if it is recalled that a pile of straw requires some confinement if it is not to become scattered when slept upon. It is also desirable that men not sleep directly on floors, even if insulated by straw. The bunk, therefore, probably came into being first and may have a considerable antiquity.

The word "bunk," however, may not be so old, and it is highly possible that it was an American coinage later exported to England, for the earliest recorded written use (in the sense of a sleeping place) was in America in 1758, during the French and Indian War: "Our mes being all of[f] duty we made us up 2 straw bunks for 4 of us to lay in."<sup>15</sup> The etymology of the word is obscure and has been related both to "bank" (from the Danish bank, meaning bench), and to "bunker" (from the same root). Both reinforce the general belief among lexicographers that the word first meant the storage bunkers (actually, tiered shelves) in ships' holds and came by analogy to apply to boxlike military sleeping places; only during the 19th century did it extend generally to a sleeping place, although the suggestion of box, recess, bench, or berth remained inherent in the word.<sup>16</sup> The most basic form of bunk, then, may be a box on the floor to contain bedding straw.

From the foregoing, it can also be deduced that the earliest army bunks were so called because they were constructed as parts of the buildings they were in, with later free-standing arrangements acquiring the name by extension. Although they probably were removable--boards being valuable commodities, and it being necessary to disassemble bunks to clean them of vermin--the bunks were by 1780 linked inextricably in the Army's official mind with the buildings they were in. An order of that year says, "The Brigades who hutt are to be allowed no more [boards] than are necessary for making Doores windows and Bonks."<sup>17</sup>

The bunks of the Continental Army were probably simple wooden boxes or platforms with board sides to restrain the straw. Whether they were routinely built in tiers is open to question. The fact that that ultimately became standard practice would reinforce the analogy with tiered ships' bunkers, especially when attached to hut walls. A bunk-filled barrack room would closely resemble a ship's hold.

Straw may also be contained by bagging, so mattresses and bedticks have an ancient history. The military answer to that need was the "palliasse," which is defined as "a sack or mattress of stout material filled with straw and serving as an underbed; a straw mattress . . . ." The word comes from the French root word paille, straw, from the Latin palea, meaning chaff or straw. Apparently it came into British use in Scotland during the 16th century, then in England in the 18th century, first with the French spelling, later as "palliasse," in which form it enjoyed use in the American Army for a few years. The earliest written uses of the term all have military associations,<sup>18</sup> and the connection with bedding straw is inherent. There is therefore every reason to believe that by the time of the American Revolution it was an established item of military supply in the British forces.

The Americans drew upon British precedent for much of their early military history. It is likely that, if the British Army issued palliasses to its men, then the American Army would accept that as customary practice. But because of the persistent material shortages that plagued the Continental Army, especially in tenting cloth, it is not likely that very many of the American soldiers actually enjoyed palliasses during the war. But the principle was certainly established, and the later American Army was more fortunate. Although subject to shortfalls, a palliasse to each pair of men was probably as routinely an item of supply (at least in winter) as blankets, such that by 1801 the War Department saw fit only to regulate the amount of straw purchased to fill them.<sup>19</sup>

As for their appearance, that of 18th century palliasses can be deduced from information of a later period. They were probably of canvas or ticking drill and likely measured no more than six feet long by four feet or less wide, deep enough to hold a truss (36 pounds) of straw, which was inserted through a fly or slot in the center of the top face, secured by ribbon ties. The straw, depending upon local source, would have been of wheat, millet, rye, or barley.

The winter quarters of the Continental Army varied considerably during the Revolution and often were indifferently assembled. Sometimes, as at

Valley Forge, fence rails were looted from the surrounding countryside and used to assemble more or less capacious huts for, commonly, 12 men each. But various shortages led to greater overcrowding. In 1782, however, the Continental Army attained perfection as it built its last encampment at New Windsor, New York. The Army was victorious and by now professional, and General Washington desired that it present a professional appearance before its French allies. He demanded that all structures be built to a high standard, following a common pattern, and even ordered the demolition of several buildings that failed to meet his idea of perfection.<sup>20</sup>

In little more than two months the soldiers built over 700 timber huts and a large assembly building. It was an achievement of which they could be proud, and it set a standard for later years. Indeed, when the new American Army first addressed the question of soldier housing in the 19th century, it was to memories of the New Windsor Cantonment that its leaders referred.

The "Regulations for Hutting" that guided construction were propounded by Quartermaster General Pickering, at Washington's orders, on November 4, 1782. They demanded:

. . . Each hut is to be thirty-nine feet long and eighteen feet broad, divided in the center by a log partition forming two rooms each 18 by 16 feet in the clear. . . .

The sides of the mens huts are to be seven feet, and those of the officers eight feet high; the doors of the former five feet high to be made in the center of the front of each room--of the latter six feet high in the center of the front of their hut--in both to be two feet and a half wide.

A window of two feet by two feet is to be cut in each room of the soldiers huts, within six inches of the [mantlepiece]: each hut of the officers is to have two windows in front each equally distant from the door and the end of the hut, two feet wide and two feet and a half in height.

The roofs are to be formed with rafters sufficiently braced, and lathed and shingled. The pitch of the roofs to be at 45 degrees, which will raise the ridge pole to a perpendicular height above the plates for upper logs of the sides equal to half the breadth of the hut.

The beam serving as a [mantletree?] to the chimney of a soldiers hut is to be three feet from the end of the hut, and about five feet from the ground or four feet from the floor,--the lower cross sticks to be six feet asunder,--which gives to the bottom of the chimney a measure of six feet by three feet in the clear: from thence the chimney rising in a curve, as regular as may till it gains a perpendicular height of six feet, should there measure two feet six inches by one foot four inches, in the clear from thence the two sides to rise perpendicularly, and the front with a small inclination forward, so that at the top of the chimney which is to be eighteen inches above the ridge pole, it shall measure two feet and a half by one foot and a half in the clear. . . .

To the Chevalier de Chastellux, who visited the New Windsor encampment, the quarters were "spacious, healthy, and well built, and consist in a row of 'log-houses' containing two rooms, each inhabited by eight soldiers when full, which commonly means five or six men in actual fact . . . .But it will appear surprising in Europe, that these barracks should be built without a bit of iron, not even nails, which would render the work tedious and difficult were not the Americans very expert in working with wood."

There is little record of furniture in the eight-man rooms, although it is known that the men built bunks, in which they slept in pairs, and it is believed that the bunks were built onto the hut walls. In view of the generous space available and the limited tool and iron inventory, the simplest arrangement would have been one bunk--no more than a low box for the straw, on the floor or slightly elevated, each of which was common in the civilian world--in each corner. But two-level bunks could

not have been unknown to the Americans from some British practice and would have freed floor space and reduced the fire danger if built into corners opposite the fireplaces. Alternatively, a simple bench or shelf across one wall would have equally, and more simply, served the need. Any other furniture, such as simple benches, tables, stools, and shelving, is open to speculation but probably appeared to the extent that time and tools permitted. The men, however, were more interested in going home than in improving their quarters at New Windsor. When peace arrived at last, the Continental Army, and its last encampment, faded away.

Ineffective as it may sometimes have appeared, the administrative apparatus to supply the Army during and immediately after the Revolution was far better organized than it was to be for many years after the establishment of government under the Constitution of 1787.<sup>21</sup> The dissolution of the system began almost immediately after the Treaty of Paris, along with the general dissipation of the Army. In June 1784 the military establishment hit bottom when Congress in effect abolished it: The entire Army was discharged except for 25 privates to guard public stores at Fort Pitt and another 55 at West Point. The states were expected to provide garrisons for the western posts.<sup>22</sup>

The following March Congress authorized a regiment of 700 men for three years (to be raised from the states) but abolished the quartermaster, commissary, hospital, marine, and clothier departments, turning their functions over to two commissioners under Secretary of War Henry Knox. Knox had to assume the quartermaster's duties personally. Such a system was inherently inadequate and soon became corrupt as well. Supply was so poorly managed that for the next three years the pitiful little Army was almost literally kept starving.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the widespread antimilitarism, some sort of army was necessary to guard the border and intimidate the Indians. But supplying it was comparatively expensive because of the distances involved. The War Department's recourse was to the contract system, with competitive bidding but no apparent standards of quality. Contractors were to

provide and deliver rations to the military posts on an annual basis. The first such contract went to James O'Hara of Philadelphia to provision troops at Forts Pitt, Harmar, and McIntosh. His service was satisfactory, but the next year a lower bidder got the contract and the men went hungry. There was considerable uncertainty from year to year, but it was inevitable that to cut costs some contractors would reduce the quality of food or otherwise fall short in performance. Separate contracts for clothing and essential hardware worked somewhat better, being concentrated in Philadelphia, but without supervision the army inevitably suffered.<sup>24</sup>

This rickety supply system provided to the soldier only his clothes, blankets, food, and basic equipment--and to the greatest extent everything but food was drawn from Revolutionary leftovers. The men provided everything else they required through their own labor; that included their buildings and furniture. The military posts were small, stockaded log and puncheon huts built of materials at hand in the surrounding forests, using tools included among the army equipage. With only open fireplaces to heat the small barracks, rum was a popular commodity.<sup>25</sup>

Little is known about the furnishings of those frontier outposts. The character and quality of any furniture, like those of the buildings themselves, probably depended upon the skills and tools available among the men and the time available for construction. To call the huts rustic would probably have been to pay them a compliment. But it is a reasonable supposition that the men provided themselves some form of the wooden bunks that became the 19th-century rule--provided there was space available in a given barrack. Among rural Americans at the time, sleeping in lofts or on pallets was common practice; it may also have been the case in barracks. A "bunk" in a loft would therefore be nothing more than sideboards to box in the straw.

Whatever the actuality, the men would sleep in pairs or groups as they had during the Revolution, and for the same reasons. For other furniture, any group of people with minimal tools can fabricate stools,

benches, and tables of the simplest sort from the products of the forest (and the crates that rations arrived in). Given skilled woodworkers in a garrison--almost inevitable in the 18th century, when people all over America built their own homes--some of the furniture might be tolerably well made. But in any case, such items were appurtenances of the buildings, the size and nature of which would determine the nature of the contents. None of the posts was intended to last more than a winter when actually built; impermanence would not call for elaborate furnishings.

So little is known about the surroundings of the soldiers at that time because nobody but the soldiers themselves, few in number, seemed to care (and the soldiers left precious little record of their own). The direction of the Founding Fathers' thinking about military defense may be seen in the Constitution. Article II of the Bill of Rights asserts that "a well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." This provision reflects more than the Jeffersonian fear of standing armies and belief that with the militia the states could defend the nation on a do-it-yourself footing. It had a practical side as well. If the military burden could be passed to the states through the militia system, there would be no need for an army--and consequently no need to arm, clothe, feed, or pay one--nor to house one, something that Article III of the Bill of Rights forbade the government from passing on to the citizenry: "No soldier shall, in time of peace, be quartered in any house, without the consent of the owner, nor in time of war but in a manner to be prescribed by law."

By 1789 the need for some sort of national force to bolster the ineffective militia system could no longer be denied, as warfare with the Indians in the Northwest rose to new heights. In its first act under the Constitution, Congress established an army of 886 officers and men. At the end of April 1790 the legislators authorized an expansion of the force to 1,273 officers and men (while cutting the monthly pay of a private from \$5.00 to \$3.00, of which \$1.00 was deducted for clothing and medical expenses). The following year a second infantry regiment was added.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the United States Army had its uneasy birth.

But this was not for many years to be an army of forts and barracks. Like the Continental Army, the new Army was created to take the field--this time against the Indians. The provision of army supply was devoted solely to that purpose and conducted by the customary means of low-bid contracting. The result was that inadequate supply was added to the other shortcomings of the poorly planned, disastrous Harmar Expedition of 1790. Clearly something better was needed, so while adding that second infantry regiment in 1791, Congress determined that the services of a quartermaster were necessary. But the parsimonious Samuel Hodgdon, who got the job, was not up to it. Economy ruled, supply contracts went to unconscionably low bidders, and the clothes, shoes, and tents supplied to the troops were little more than trash. The management of supply--like that of the troops and militia--during the St. Clair Expedition (an even worse disaster than Harmar's of the year before) was so weak that half the supplies were abandoned during the hasty retreat. A congressional committee, investigating the debacle, made much of the "gross and various mismanagements and neglects in the Quartermaster's and contractors' departments."<sup>27</sup>

So in its own muddling, amateurish way, Congress resumed tinkering with the military establishment. In March 1792 it authorized the recruitment of the two infantry regiments and one artillery battalion to full strength and the raising of three more infantry regiments and four troops of dragoons for three years; ended the pay deductions for uniforms and medical supplies; and allowed an enlistment bounty of \$8.00. The same legislation also authorized a quartermaster general--the Army's first contractor, James O'Hara, got the job--to organize supply. But responding to the request of the ambitious Secretary Alexander Hamilton, the lawmakers transferred to his Treasury Department the responsibility for purchase of army supplies,<sup>28</sup> thus setting the stage for bureaucratic conflicts that would bedevil the Army for years. Finally, to complete the national defense package, on May 8, 1792, the Militia Act became law. That law established the principle of universal military obligation, and it also required that militiamen arm and equip themselves.<sup>29</sup>

Thanks to the Indians of Ohio, the highly competent Anthony Wayne was enabled to rise to command of the Army. Determined to avoid another disaster, he instituted a long training program, resisting all attempts to force the Army into the field until his men were prepared. The attentions of his quartermaster general went to supplying the projected expedition, with emphasis on improvements in transport. There was a general overhaul of procurement procedures, and inspections of supplies were instituted. But the quality of clothing and other cloth items remained low, as much for want of sources of supply as because of low-bid contracting without good specifications. With the quartermaster therefore serving an army in the field, there was little thought of barracks in the early 1790s.<sup>30</sup>

As if to emphasize that this was an army without a permanent base, Congress in March 1792 reorganized it once again, this time as the Legion of the United States. The force was to consist of four sublegions of 1,280 men each under brigadiers general. Anthony Wayne became commanding major general and pursued the training of his new-fashioned force. His efforts finally brought success in the Battle of Fallen Timbers and Treaty of Greenville in 1795.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime Congress' transfer of military purchases to the Treasury Department had begun to cause difficulties. By the spring of 1794 that activity had fallen into the hands of Tench Coxe, commissioner of the revenue. It soon overwhelmed him, and he begged for relief. Upon the recommendation of Hamilton, Congress established the office of purveyor of public supplies in the Treasury Department to procure "all articles of supply requisite for the service of the United States." Tench Francis was the first tenant of the office. In the same legislation Congress established the position of superintendent of military stores in the War Department. The superintendent's duty was to receive all supplies from the purveyor and distribute them to the Army--with the exception of rations, which were delivered directly to posts by the contractors. Samuel Hodgdon received appointment to the job.<sup>32</sup>

After war with the Indians ceased in 1795, O'Hara thought the position of quartermaster general unnecessary, so he submitted his resignation. In fact, without a campaign to supply, it appeared that he would have nothing to do, since the supply of posts fell to the superintendent of military stores.<sup>33</sup> But in two actions that year and next, Congress reestablished the grade of staff--which continued in existence until March 1797. The quartermaster general lost his military duties of planning logistics for campaigns but now oversaw the supply of posts. In June 1796 O'Hara's resignation was accepted, and another Philadelphia businessman, John Wilkins, Jr., assumed the office (without military rank). Wilkins stayed for six years.<sup>34</sup>

Congress continued to tinker with army supply to the end of the century. In 1797 it deprived the quartermaster general of his deputy and of the services of regimental quartermasters. The next year, with a Navy Department in existence, a threat of war with France in the air, and the Hamiltonians declining in influence, the lawmakers returned procurement authority from the Treasury Department to the War and Navy Departments. But the arrangements only became more confused. The Treasury Department was supposed to inspect and revise the procedures of the other departments, and the purveyor of public supplies continued actually to execute all contracts (except those for rations) at the behest of the other secretaries. The War and Navy Departments handled their own subsistence directly. For the Army, the single greatest expense was the transport of supplies to the frontier posts.<sup>35</sup>

A belief that the Navy would be the nation's first line of defense, coupled with Republican fears (especially after the Whiskey Rebellion) that the Army would be used to suppress the opponents of the Federalists, served to keep the Army small during the late 1790s. So, too, did the eventual easing of tensions with France. But the foundations for future policies--and disasters--had been laid, and the Army, since November 1796 no longer a "Legion," was now a permanent organization with a permanent need for supplies and for housing.

After the Jay Treaty of 1794 and the Treaty of Greenville of 1795, elements of the Army occupied military posts in the Northwest abandoned by the British. A start was also made on coastal fortifications, although those were chiefly unoccupied at century's end. Whether new or old, the quarters of the troops were much as they had been in the 1780s and required constant repair or annual reconstruction.<sup>36</sup> But there was a degree of stability now, and longer tenure would suggest that the troops might provide themselves with some comforts. Buildings large enough to accommodate them likely had some form of wooden bunks in which rested palliasses for pairs of men, but how many had anything more it is now impossible to say. The subject was so mundane that no one wrote about it, and the first official statement related to furnishings for the men appeared in 1801.

One thing is clear: The United States Army was already well on its way to earning its longstanding reputation as the best fed and worst housed military force in the world. The quarters of the troops at the end of the 18th century were not officially quarters but continuations of the winter hutting of earlier campaigns, despite the fact that by that time some of those temporary encampments had been occupied for several years. As the frontier advanced, forts became obsolete, and all were regarded as candidates for abandonment at any moment. The Army made the least investment in building and maintaining them that it could get away with, and needless to say it was not about to spend money for too much comfort within them. It was a pattern that was to persist for decades.

So the soldier of 1800 enjoyed the same "furniture" as his predecessors all the way back to the Continental Army. He got straw to sleep on and a blanket to sleep under, and he did not sleep alone. In fortunate circumstances he might rest in a loft, on a pallet, or in a bunk, and on a palliasse. From his camp and garrison equipage he shared cooking kettles and trenchers or mess pans with the other men of his unit. For heating, his hovel had an open fireplace. For lighting, he and his mates might have a few stubs of candles from among the rations. For interior finish, his barrack might or might not have a board or puncheon floor and a window or two. The walls would be either the flat sides of puncheons or

unbarked logs, since they would have been thrown up in a hurry. The finish of any woodwork, shelving, doors, or trim would be that left by the most basic hand tools; sawmills and planing mills at the posts were yet to come.

Finally, not least among the things that a soldier would notice as he fell onto his bed were the hordes of bedbugs that emerged to feast upon him and remind him that, so long as he remained in the Army, he would never want for company.

## Notes

1. Hamilton to John Jay, Mar. 14, 1779, quoted in Walter Millis, Arms and Men: A Study in American Military History (New York: Putnam's, 1956; reprint ed., New York: New American Library, n.d.), 18. Tactics that called for volley fire and massed bayonet charges required stern discipline.
2. Erna Risch, Quartermaster Support of the Army; A History of the Corps, 1775-1939 (Washington: Department of the Army, 1962), 2. This excellent volume is the standard work on the subject. In Europe, Germany for instance, the wider role of the quartermaster general persisted into the 20th century.
3. Ibid., 1-73. See also the chapters on the Revolutionary period in William A. Ganoë, History of the United States Army (rev. ed., New York: Appleton-Century, 1942); and Russell F. Weigley, History of the United States Army (New York: Macmillan, 1967).
4. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 70-73.
5. Ibid., 56-58, 62-64, 67-70.
6. Ganoë, History of the United States Army, 3.
7. Quoted in Weigley, History of the United States Army, 52, and Risch, Quartermaster Support, 52.
8. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 16-17. There was always a shortage of tents; ships were even stripped of their sails to provide materials for them.
9. Originally, as related to buildings, "puncheon" meant "a short upright piece of timber in a wooden framing which serves to stiffen one or more long timbers or to support or transmit a load; a supporting post;

a post supporting the roof in a coal-mine; formerly also a door post." OED. That is still the commonest definition in England, but it seems never to have migrated to America. Here, the standard definition (which the OED acknowledges as an Americanism) is "a thick, heavy piece of rough timber, usually split from a log and having at least one hewed surface. Also in generic sense." (DAE). The DAE's earliest source is 1725, which describes a town fortified all around "with Punchins." As most commonly used for the next century, the word meant logs split in half, generally to erect stockades or buildings by setting them up in trenches. This, by the way, is echoed in the use of the term "stockaded" into the late 19th century (by which time it had about driven out "puncheon") as a description of buildings or their walls. It universally implies that the walls are of upright logs or puncheons rooted in trenches, without foundations--common in army construction for many decades. In the 19th century the term "puncheon" became more loosely applied to split timbers, sometimes even just thick slabs. The distinction was the absence of dressing--they were at best hewn on no more than one side. "Puncheon tables," "puncheon floors," "puncheon benches," "puncheon doors," and so on were common in the 19th century; they were all built of puncheons, whether half-timbers or slabs depending upon the writer's use of the terms, and would be encountered in barracks. A late use of the term in 1887 identified puncheons specifically as "the side-cuts from logs squared for sawing." The discussion of "puncheon" in DAHP substantially echoes that in DAE. Great care must be taken in using sources employing this word in early American history, first to determine whether the influences on the source were chiefly English or American, and second to see whether distinctions are properly drawn with "picket," which is also frequently used to describe forts and pioneer construction. A "picket" wall or fence or stockade may or may not be of puncheon; the term usually means that the tops of the wall members are sharpened.

10. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 29-35; Ganoë, History of the United States Army, 50; Charles K. Bolton, The Private Soldier Under Washington (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 75. Ganoë says that straw was in short supply because farmers refused to transport it. Risch points to a general lack of transportation that ultimately forced the

resignation of yet another in the one of failed quartermasters general in the first years of the Revolution.

11. It should be pointed out here that those huts were not regarded as barracks, but as the seasonal counterparts to the summer tents. The Continental Army was always in the field and consequently had no barracks, technically speaking, even where, as around New York, it occupied the same quarters for several years. There was a general tendency to put two tentloads of men, 12 in all, to a room, although there was wide deviation and persistent crowding. Sixteen men, eight to a room, was fixed by regulation by 1782 at New Windsor, although in practice the rooms there were usually not full because of the many absences.

12. William Matthews and Dixon Wecter, Our Soldiers Speak, 1775-1918 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1943), 54.

13. Ganoë, History of the United States Army, 84. The word "cabin," by the way, and especially "log cabin," did not become common until years later, the latter popularized by the Whig campaign of 1840. The soldiers described the structures usually as "huts," sometimes as "houses."

14. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 212, 441-42.

15. DAE's first citation.

16. OED says that the word is of unknown etymology, but possibly related to "bank." Its earliest listed written usage is 1815, and its earliest American usage is dated 1866, referring to a sleeping-car berth. Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged (New York: G. C. Merriam Co., 1966), not always a reliable source, suggests that the word is short for "bunker." Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language Enlarged from the Concise Edition (Nashville: Southwestern Co., 1972), which is more trustworthy, traces the word to the Danish bank, and says that "bunker" is a Scottish extension of "bank," meaning a bench.

The word was transferred to the more general connotation of a sleeping place probably during the 19th century and chiefly in America. The first bunks for soldiers, then, literally were bunks, but eventually anything the soldier slept on was called by the same name. The more literarily fastidious of the Army's hierarchy managed to avoid calling single bedsteads "bunks" until the 1870s, evidently seeing the original meaning inherent in the word to the end. The free-standing, two-story wooden models prevalent in the later period could carry the name "bunk" comfortably because they resembled nothing so much as storage bunkers.

17. DAE. Another quotation from 1780 is, "The bunks and lining of the bomb proof were taken out." "Bonk" was early variant spelling.

18. OED. The word does not appear in DAE at all, reflecting the fact that it quickly gave way in American army use to "bedsack" and never enjoyed currency in the civilian world. It persevered in Britain, according to the OED, where as late as 1883 the War Office advertised for "Tenders for the Supply of Forage and Straw for Pallasses, for Military Services." Of "bedtick," OED says: "A large flat quadrangular bag or case, into which feathers, hair, straw, chaff, or other substances are put to form a bed," with citations from the 17th through the 19th centuries. Neither OED nor the two Websters recognize "bedsack." The DAE defines it erroneously as "a sack made to hold (army) bedclothes for convenience of carrying them." But it offers a civilian usage in 1661, with the next ones from Niles' Register in 1811 and 1814, and the Army regulations of 1861. DAH offers the same four citations, but more correctly defines the object as "a stout cover or case for bedding, a bed-tick . . . ." DAE defines "bed-case" as "a bed-tick," and shows a long history of the term's use in Colonial times, with the last recorded usage in 1808.

19. On April 28, 1801, Secretary of War Henry Dearborn issued the Army's first real regulations of any stripe, those governing barracks and quarters allowances and the delivery of fuel and straw. On the latter, he said: "One truss of straw weighing thirty-six pounds, is allowed for

each palliass for two men." This was published in 1808 in U.S. War Department, An Act for Establishing Rules and Articles for the Government of the Armies of the United States with Regulations Respecting the Same (Washington: Dinmore & Cooper, 1808), the first general regulations (cited hereafter as 1808 regulations). But the word "palliass" had disappeared by the time of the first revised regulations in 1812, although the straw ration remained one truss (36 pounds) to each pair of men.

A "truss" is an old English unit of measure, still current, for hay and straw. The term derives from a root word meaning to tie into bundles. The three most standard trusses are a bundle of old hay weighing 56 pounds, a bundle of new hay weighing 60 pounds, and a bundle of straw weighing 36 pounds. Webster's Third New International Dictionary.

20. The account of New Windsor is based partly on material provided by Mr. Don Loprieno, interpretive programs assistant, New Windsor Cantonment State Historic Site, New York. Mr. Loprieno also provided copies of the hutting regulations and an excerpt from Chastellux's memoirs, the sources of the two quotations. See also James Meehan, "Demonstrating the Use of Log House Building Tools at the New Windsor Cantonment," APT Bulletin 12(1980):39-44; James W. Wensyel, "The Newburgh Conspiracy," American Heritage 32(April-May 1981):40-47. On construction, see part V below.

21. L.D. Ingersoll, A History of the War Department of the United States, with Biographical Sketches of the Secretaries (Washington: Francis D. Mohun, 1880), 179.

22. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 75-76.

23. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 83-84.

24. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 78-79.

25. Ganoë, History of the United States Army, 93.

26. See appendix N, and Weigley, History of the United States Army, 90-91. There is some confusion about numbers, and actual strengths before 1816 are mostly unknown.

27. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 90-92; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 84-94, 99-100 (quotation at 100); Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 180-81.

28. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 92; Risch, Quartermaster Support, 100.

29. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 93-94.

30. Ibid., 102-05

31. Weigley, History of the United States Army, 92-93. The Legion became the Regular Army again November 1, 1796. Except for Wayne, the highest ranks in the Legion actually were lieutenant colonels. Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register and Dictionary of the United States Army, from Its Organization, September 29, 1789, to March 2, 1903 (2 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 1:139-41.

32. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 82-83. The legislation passed in April. Tench Coxe was one of the more interesting characters of early American history. Born in Philadelphia in 1755, he was a neutralist during the Revolution and served as a member of both the Annapolis Convention and the Continental Congress of 1788. Becoming a Federalist that year, he served as assistant secretary of the treasury and commissioner of the revenue until dismissed by President Adams in 1797. He thereupon switched to the Republican Party and was rewarded with the post of purveyor of public supplies in 1803. When that office was abolished in 1812, he sought but failed to get the position of commissary general of purchases and stores in the War Department, a post that went to his old foe (see below) Callender Irvine. A life-long merchant, Coxe

was equally as much an economic nationalist as Alexander Hamilton, advocating the development of manufacturing industries in the United States, a revenue tariff, unrestricted interstate commerce, and confinement of import and coastal trade to American vessels. He was such a zealous supporter of cotton culture in the South, and textile industries in the North, that he is known as the "father" of the American cotton industry. He died in Philadelphia in 1824. See the entry on Coxe in the Concise Dictionary of American Biography (2nd ed., New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 207, hereafter cited as CDAB.

33. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 109-10.

34. *Ibid.*, 111-12; Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 181.

35. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 84, 109-11; Ingersoll, History of the War Department, 181.

36. Risch, Quartermaster Support, 109.