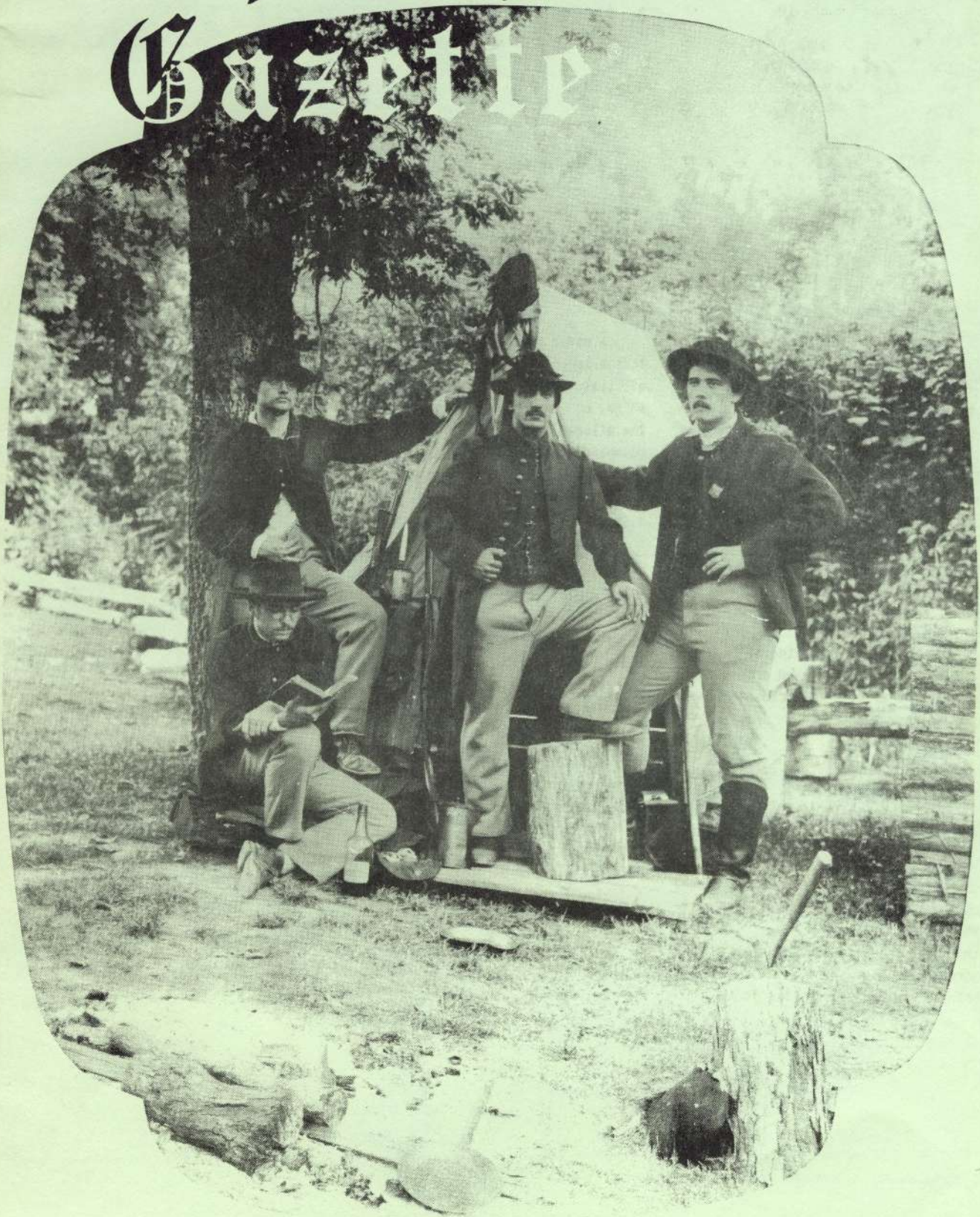


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Camp Chase- Gazette

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History Preserved, Through Knowledge Shared

Confederate Coffee; No grounds for joy.

AUTHORS NAME LOST, BUT A MEMBER OF
DOUGLAS'S TEXAS BATTERY

Re-enactors are continually searching for ways to improve the authenticity of their camps and their kit bags. Much attention has been given to recreating meals of our forefathers but almost no information or effort is available on the drinks used by soldiers (other than passing the canteen of sour-mash around on a cold night.) This article will hopefully add some insight into the drinking habits of the southern armies who suffered greatly from the lack of coffee.

As early as the fall of 1861 coffee had disappeared from the tables of all but the wealthiest citizens. Early the next year the Confederate government admitted the hopelessness of supplying coffee to their troops and they deleted this item from the list of rations issued to troops. Citizens and soldiers were forced to satiate their thirst on coffee substitutes and the capture of "real coffee" from Union troops was always something to write home about.

B.I. Wiley, in his *LIFE OF JOHNNY REB* noted that parched peanuts, potatoes, peas, corn, rye, and dried apples were all used to brew coffee substitutes. *TEXAS IN TURMOIL* by Ernest Wallace adds to this list parched sweet potatoes, barley, and okra seeds. Several modern herbals and health food books were also consulted. No source gave detailed instructions for preparing the various potions so I began to experiment with

each plant to see what variety of coffee substitutes I could make on my own. I assure you that my research was done over the loud protests of my wife and any friend who happened to drop by and was offered a cup of "coffee".

I began my search by classifying coffee substitutes into three categories. The first group of alternate herbs included wild grasses and their roots or tubers. These plants are found over most of the United States and all are found in eastern or southern states. The second group of proxy drinks were made from fruit and seeds of common plants. In most cases this produce can either be found in a local yard or grocery store. The final grouping of coffee substitutes includes such stock as rye, barley, corn, oats, and dried apples. I can not bring myself to waste the talents of these later items on mere coffee and I am saving them instead for their natural uses (if the still doesn't blow up their might be a later article on this group).

The most common wild grasses mentioned as coffee substitutes include Chicory, Salsify, and Dandelions. Chicory is also known in various regions as blue sailors, succory, or wild endive. Quantities of this herb are imported every year but it grows wild throughout the nation. Salsify is also known as oyster plant or goats-beard and it is also found nation-wide.

Dandelion is also known as lawn curse and is found in yards throughout America. The roots of any of these three plants may be picked the year round even when local tradition recommends a given picking season.

Also grouped with the wild grasses is the Chufa plant which is known in some areas as nutgrass or earth almond. Unlike the first three herbs only the tubers of the Chufa are used in preparing coffee. This plant may also be dug the year round and as with all of the root plants a rainy day to moisten the soil makes collection much easier. The tubers of the Chufa and the roots of the grasses are scrubbed and washed until clean.

All four plants are prepared by roasting over a slow fire or in an oven until they are dark brown inside and break with a snap. It does not hurt the final taste if some of the roots are even scorched. After drying, the burnt offerings are ground up until they resemble canned coffee and as such they can be stored. The coffee proxy is made by boiling the herb-grounds in water until a coffee colored drink is obtained. Most sources say that Chufa tastes the most like real coffee. Remember that Chicory is much stronger than coffee and unless you are from Louisiana use it sparingly.

In this first group of substitutes I will also add the wild grass known as

Cleavers. This plant, also known as goosegrass, is the closest relative to actual coffee found in North America. It prefers damp shaded ground in woods or near sea coasts and its fruit is best when gathered in early summer. Like the roots it is roasted over a slow fire until it is a deep brown in color. After being ground, it is boiled in water and gives of an aroma similar to foccee. Most sources agree that it tastes like coffee and it is the only coffee substitute that actually has caffeine.

At this point I rushed out into the local fields to gather my produce. After four hours in the 100 degree heat, after stirring up innumerable rattlesnakes and tarantulas, and after being the main course for the local chigger convention, I gave up and called on my local health food store. This herb shop had roasted dandelion and chickory roots for sale at very reasonable prices. I was surprised at how tasty the dandelion was and at its low price I will keep it around for friends who like herb teas instead of coffee. The chickory I was already familiar with and I can attest to the strong flavor. Three ounces of Chicory in a pound of coffee will make the coffee yield 10 or more cups to the pound. Still scratching my chigger bites I decided to move on to more available substitutes.

Although parched peanuts were listed as a coffee substitute I have been unable to find any peanut that even vaguely tastes like coffee to me. I have ground and roasted both the peas and the shells of three kinds of peanuts and when boiled they all taste like peanut-butter soup. I was interested to find in an 1870 Department of Agriculture publication that the peanut was a substitute for chocolate. No matter what other sources say they still taste like peanuts to me.

I mugged the oak tree in the front yard for oak acorns. When these were



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chopped fine with a blender and roasted over a slow fire they made a very pleasing coffee substitute. I have used acorns from live oaks, post oaks, and scrub oaks and I can taste no difference between the three products. Like the grasses they are cooked until a dark brown and a few burnt offerings do not seem to make any difference in overall taste. The grounds are boiled until the water reaches the desired color and then it is ready to drink.

A surprise among the coffee substitutes is okra seeds. The seeds of okra are parched over a slow fire until dark brown or black and then they are boiled in water which soon turns the appropriate color. I found that the bigger okra pods were easier to work with and farmers at produce markets will often discount the price on the larger, tougher okra pods. It might take a little time to skin out the little peas and it is best not to work around water since okra quickly turns to slime when moistened. This substitute was one of the best that I have tried and if done carefully it is not too slick.

For drinkers who have a sweet tooth, the simplest coffee substitute is a tablespoon of molasses in a cup of hot water. A similar tasting drink can be made by slicing yams into chips and drying the chips over a slow fire. Once the chips are a deep brown they should be ground up and placed near the fire again until they are a dark brown or even burnt a little. When boiled in water this yields a coffee-like drink with the sweetness of molasses. My wife has finally put her foot down and reclaimed her kitchen so my research is at an end. My friends are all thankful to my wife as they were long

since tired by being my guinea pigs in tasting my various brews. Good Lord willing and the revenues don't show, I can get on with my research into the finer points of dried apples, corn, and rye.

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Wallace, Ernest, TEXAS IN TURMOIL, Stack-Vaughn Company, Austin, Texas, 1965

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Camp Gossip

who wrote "Confederate Coffee, No Grounds for Joy. Its a fine example of a Humorous yet informative article. I hope we hear more from him in the future. The field report on Ballestone Mansion, done from both sides was a new approach could we have more of these from time to time.

Ron Colbert
Shorewood, IL

(EDITORS NOTE: The name of the gentleman from Texas who wrote the article Confederate Coffee, No Grounds for Joy, is Mr. Ken McElroy of Bedford, Texas and hopefully he will submit future articles. In regards to a two-sided field report ever becoming a standard is based on whether or not there are any easterners wishing to pursue it. The problem is coordination in time for publication.)

Dear Bill Keitz,

I recently received my December issue of the Camp Chase Gazette. I was very pleased with the issue until I read the Camp Gossip page. The very first entry, from a member of the First Maryland Artillery, made mention of a "another outfit" called the First Maryland Artillery with a "half scale something that they call a cannon and do what I think is a Confederate impression since they wear gray clothes." As I read this I realized that the "other outfit" was the battery to which I belong. After a few phone calls, one to the author of the article, (letter) we got everything straightened out, but I would like this letter to be printed so that our reputation will not be damaged further in the future.

Our group does re-enactments in the D.C. area and is strictly Confederate. We have worked very hard this season on the cannon, uniforms, authentic camp, and overall impression and will continue to do so.

If the author of last month's article had taken the time to contact us or even ask us at the event he saw us at, we would have been more than happy to have given him the information he desired.

Sincerely,
G. M. McGaha
Beltsville, MD 20705

Dear Bill,

One item that bugs me is the astronomical number of flags—Union and Confederate—on a battlefield. It seems that for every man with a musket there are

three or four flags or guideons to follow.

We've all seen events that are closed and have uniform, camp, and weapons restrictions. Mayhaps it would do to add a flag restriction too!

Confederately yours,
Charles E. Stanley
Lakefield, IN 46536

Dear Bill,

I read the review on Ballestone mansion by Charles Cubbison. He of course has the right of his own opinion but the way he cut down the event was just not justified. Maybe I haven't been to as many re-enactments as Mr. Cubbison but I'm in total agreement with Mr. Ron Tunison's review that "This event was all around the best authentic Civil War event ever." I think that Ballestone was for the Authentic re-enactor and the fact that it was run more like the Military of the 1860's made the event even better. We need more Military feeling at events and I hope this is just the start.

I am looking forward to next's years Ballestone with the 5th New York as the host and all of the Military feelings included.

Sincerely yours,
Bob Lawrence
Hewlett, NY 11557

Mr. Keitz,

The Camp Chase just keeps getting better all the time. I would like to re-up for another year. The new size is great. I would like to thank the Texan

Dear Mr. Keitz,

I've exhausted every available resource I know of, and have come to you hoping you could assist me in one way or another.

In past issues you showed the Drill for Bayonet and because of it my men have added to their background and their overall look as an authentic unit.

I'm looking for the correct way to form a company into a skirmish line. Possibly you could get me in touch with someone who could provide me with the answer to my question.

I and my father enjoy your magazine very much, keep up the good work.

Sincerely,
Dennis B. Meehan
1 West Palisades Blvd.
Palisades Park, NJ 07650
Apartment A-3-4

Dear Bill,

The new expanded format is great. Your publication has a great deal to do with the enjoyment & growth of interest in the Civil War era. All one has to do is to take a good look at "Upcoming Campaigns" in the C.C.G. planned for 1980" already. Our hats' are off to you and your staff for the long hours and excellent work done. With everyone pulling together we shall all see continued

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