

**The United States Sanitary Commission Records**  
**Series 7 Statistical Bureau Archives**  
**Camp Inspection 1861-1864**

*Historical Background of the Camp Inspection Returns*

The inspection of the Union Army volunteers' camps began informally in July of 1861 when two employees of the United States Sanitary Commission, a voluntary civilian organization formed in 1861 to take care of the health of volunteers in the Union Army and Navy during the United States Civil War, examined the camps at Fort Monroe. Their report fueled the worst fears of the Commission that the camps were woefully inadequate. This report prompted Frederick Law Olmsted and Dr. Elijah Harris, officers of the Commission, to examine the twenty camps of volunteers near Washington. They concluded that these camps also lacked proper sanitary facilities. These facts and the thought of having troops ineptly cared for during the war prompted the Commission to devise a systematic inspection of all the volunteer troops. One tangible result of the Commission efforts was the creation of a pamphlet-size document known as a **camp inspection return** which measured 9"x 6" folded, with a series of questions regarding the fitness of the camp, troops and medical facilities and related topics. As each camp inspection return was sent back to the Commission, a number was assigned to the return.

*Guides for access to Camp Inspection Returns*

The **index** provides access to the returns by state. Each state is subdivided by regiment. This same index may be used for access to the **abstract reports** (see page 000).

A numerical/chronological **list of returns** provides basic information about each return. Entries include the number assigned to the camp inspection return, the regiment inspected, military department, location of camp and the date the inspection was concluded. In order to determine if a specific regiment was examined by the Commission's inspectors, first consult the **index**.

*Camp Returns*

The original inspection returns, numbering more than fourteen hundred, underwent five known design changes from 1861 to 1864. The returns were numbered 19, 19A, and letters A, C and K. The last form, K, is substantially different from the other returns (see page 000). Returns numbered 19 and 19A comprise the bulk of the returns. The geographic areas covered include Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

The first type of return, issued in 1861, was No. 19. The inspector was a physician or lay person, always male (see, for example, Return #20). This return contained one hundred and seventy-nine questions on a range of subjects beginning with general information such as the name and location of camp, state, military department and date of inspection; other questions looked directly at the environment of the camp. The site of the camp was considered extremely important and the return contained questions concerning the type of soil, subsoil and drainage of the camp. The quality of the tents and the condition of the tents' surroundings were also examined. Questions about the type of blankets, clothing and under-clothing of the soldiers detailed further information about the camp facilities and soldiers. The inspector was also prompted by the return to examine the type of food and quality of water readily available. The morale of the soldiers was also studied, particularly the availability of liquor and the amount of intoxication among the troops. Related questions were also asked about the soldiers' morale, noting the availability of entertainment and correspondence with family. Questions were also asked regarding the surgeon on duty and his medical background, noncombatant regimental nurses (male and female) and the care of the sick.

The next type of camp inspection return issued by the Commission was No. 19A (for example, see Return #191). This return was an improved version of No. 19. This revised return was issued shortly after No. 19. The questions were now organized into twenty-one subject areas and the number of questions increased from one hundred and seventy-nine to one hundred and eighty, with several questions expanded into subsections.

The third type of inspection return was FORM A (for example, see Return #1226). This return was issued around March 1862. A special note was added to the form dated March 1, 1862, which indicates that the Commission was probably not completely satisfied with the previous reports. The note stated: "Inspectors will be careful to remember that the answers of the Return are expected to present evidence of INVESTIGATION. Except in a few necessary cases, the answers are not intended to be those of the persons whom the inspector examines, but to express his own conviction after due inquiry and reflection."

Form A is the most detailed of the camp returns. Eleven more questions were added to Form A raising the total to one hundred and ninety-one questions from one hundred eighty. Several of the questions underwent extensive expansions. For example, No. 19A (question 7) asks for "Name of the commanding officer?" Form A asks in addition if he was educated at West Point and if he had any previous military experience. Form 19A's question 56, under the category PERSONAL CLEANLINESS, asks "Does each man (as a rule) wash his head, neck, and feet once a day?" Return A omits this question but expands the examination of hygiene into five parts.

Two other categories were added to Form A, GENERAL INSPECTIONS and COURT MARTIAL. The court-martial section is particularly interesting because it concerns discipline in the camps and the punishment or fines imposed upon the troops. For example, the return recorded indecent behavior in any place of divine worship and incidence of profane language.

There were two other types of camp inspection returns issued, Forms C and K. Both reports were issued around 1863 to 1864. Form C (for example, see Return #1235) contains one hundred and eighty questions. Similar in appearance to the other camp inspection returns, Form C differs from Form 19, Form 19A and Form A by consolidating information about camp locations. The result is a more streamlined appearance for the camp inspection return.

Camp inspection return K (which did not have the word "form" before the letter K; see Return #1460 for example) was known as the "inspectors' report." It contains only eighteen questions, and was issued late in 1864. Wartime shortage of paper may have accounted for the shortened return. The report has been reduced to basic questions regarding the name of the regiment inspected, the location of the camp and the general condition of the troops. All of the subject categories have been eliminated.

One feature of all of the different types of returns is the blank section for additional remarks. These occasional remarks provided further information about the regiment not easily recorded in the questions. An example is the commentary of inspector Julius Nichols, M.D., regarding the 1st German Rifles later known as the 8th New York Volunteers. Nichols recorded that this troop from Germany was among the first in service to the United States.\* He also remarked on the good health of the soldiers, the respect between soldiers and officers and the excellent discipline of the regiment (see Return #1113). In contrast, another regiment, the 53rd New York Volunteers known as D'Epineuil Zouaves did not fare as well. The inspector remarked that the regiment, consisting of American enlisted men and line officers and French field officers, was very popular in the beginning. But, very soon after they arrived at camp in Annapolis, the men began to desert their posts. The problems, according to the inspector, escalated due to a number of factors including cultural clashes between the Americans and the French, neglect of the soldiers by the officers, and other related issues (see Return #904). A dramatic example of a near disaster occurred at the camp of the 54th Pennsylvania Volunteers. The inspector reported that an "A tent" at Camp Curtin burning anthracite coal in a California stove had its occupants completely asphyxiated dur-

ing the night. It was noted that the men were restored to consciousness (see Return #891).

Scattered throughout the returns are reports filed by inspectors reviewing the camps of the African-American troops. The bulk of the reports pertain to the Corps D'Afrique scattered from numbers 1415 to 1444. The camp inspection returns in many instances provide valuable insight about the health of the soldiers, the environment of the camp site and the discipline of the officers and the troops.

Directly related to the original camp inspection returns is a separate section of letters and abstract reports. The letters and agent reports date mainly from 1861. It appears that these letters predate the numbered returns. These agents' reports may be the reports that pushed the Commission to develop the camp inspection returns. The states represented are California, Illinois, Indiana, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Abstract Reports (Box 118) were generated from the camp inspection returns. The report partially covers the camp inspection returns from numbers one to four hundred and fifty. The reports are single elongated pages organized in the same order as the camp inspection returns. The index for the camp inspection returns can also be used for access the abstract reports. The abstract reports lists the regiment and other pertinent information. This information is followed by a list of topics and a number assigned to this topic. For example, next to the word "clean" a number has been assigned, such as 7. An examination of the camp inspection returns along with the abstract reports indicates that 7 was considered excellent on a scale of one to seven, one being the lowest rating.

The last items in this series are the two-volume State Register of Camp Inspections from July to December 1861 and from June 1862 to March 1863. The registers are abstracts of information apparently derived from the camp inspection returns. These registers do not represent all of the states; the states that are represented are grouped according to their geographic location. Next to each state's name is a gross numeric breakdown of data from the camp inspection returns.

### *Bibliography*

Charles A. Stille. History of the United States Sanitary Commission, Being the General Report of Its Work During the War of the Rebellion. New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868.