

Daily Life at
Historic Fort Hays

Memorabilia of a Fort Hays Cavalryman

On the trail west, Fort Hays provided troops to protect not only the settlers, but also the Indians whose territory they crossed. The fort was operational from 1869 to 1889 and seldom had more than 200 soldiers stationed there at one time. In viewing the artifact collection from the fort, it is easy for the mind to recreate a key trooper of that day, the cavalryman.

Putting all these artifacts side by side gives one a feeling of immediacy with that soldier of the frontier. He was a hardy survivor of the rugged trail west, and these treasured relics let him live again. We will let the photographs of these items tell their own story.

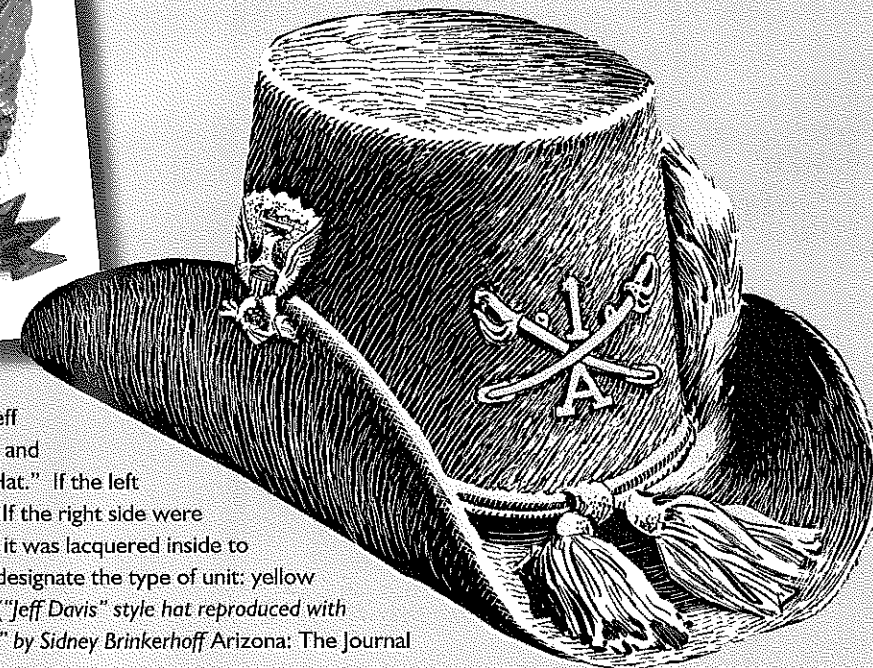
This compilation and its accompanying descriptions were prepared by Marshall Clark, a KSHS Archeology Lab volunteer, as part of a series of articles focusing on daily life at historic Fort Hays.



The man himself becomes real when we see the regular military button of the day, featuring the federal eagle. Even more specifically illustrating this point is the button with the "C" signifying cavalry. A saber blade, the ultimate cavalry weapon, is also present in the collection. Yet another item, the brass base for an epaulette, would have held the soldier's rank, either officer or non-commissioned officer status.



The most interesting item in this grouping is an insignia emblem, showing the eagle, arrows, and stars of the army. It is identifiable as a pin used to hold up the side of a "Jeff Davis" hat. The hat was designed for enlisted men and was also known as a "Kossuth Hat" or a "Hardee Hat." If the left side were up, the hat belonged to an infantryman. If the right side were pinned, it was a cavalryman. Made from black felt, it was lacquered inside to keep it stiff. It was worn with a cord of a color to designate the type of unit: yellow for cavalry, blue for infantry, and red for artillery. ("Jeff Davis" style hat reproduced with permission from "Military Headgear in the Southwest" by Sidney Brinkerhoff Arizona: The Journal of Arizona History 4(4): figure 3.)



Where there was a cavalryman, there had to be a horse. What better representation than a horse-shoe? Of great interest is the picket pin. When out in the field, the spike was driven into the ground and its attached ring provided a perfect hitching place for the mount. Of course, the spur represents the rider's control of the animal.

