Heavy Artillery

“Red Infantry”

A number of key Southern cities, including Wilmington, Savannah, Charleston, Mobile, and Richmond, were guarded throughout the war by regular garrisons stationed in earthen or permanent masonry fortifications. These works bristled with guns of heavy caliber, and were manned by units specifically raised and designated as Heavy Artillery. Such service was attractive to many soldiers, since it avoided the onerous rigors of active campaigning. Their duties were primarily “parade ground” in nature, although the “heavies” were often called on to fulfill provost responsibilities or act as prison guards. These units were generally well drilled both as artillery and infantry. Being close to bases of supply, they were also usually well uniformed, and their distinctive red trimmed gray jackets or red kepis set them apart from front line troops. They were frequently chided as “bandbox soldiers” by front line troops.

Crutchfield's Virginia Heavy Artillery Battalion 1865

Yet, in 1865 many of these heavy artillerymen had the opportunity to prove their metal in combat, fighting alongside their veteran infantry brethren. When Richmond fell that April the heavy artillery garrison units were formed into a combined command under Colonel Stapleton Crutchfield. This unit was well known for its excellent military bearing and proficiency of drill. Armed in most cases with obsolete .69 caliber smoothbore muskets, these “Red Infantrymen” joined in the retreat from the burning Confederate capital. At Sayler’s Creek on April 6th, they fought valiantly until overwhelmed, losing heavily. Particularly distinguished were the 10th and 19th Virginia Heavy Artillery Battalions and the elite Savannah Volunteer Guards unit of the 18th Georgia Heavy Artillery Battalion. Crutchfield himself was killed, but the garrison troops courageous stand earned the respect of friend and foe alike