

A Cheer by Another Name

By Robert Braun

When researching historical events or issues for interpretation, it has been a common practice to consult a variety of primary sources in order to establish a pattern of usage. Where records of specific practices (the salute, for example) are lacking, we frequently rely on so-called "unimpeachable" sources for the answer. In the case of the salute, the unimpeachable source is the *Revised Army Regulations*. As a specific reference work and guide for our Civil War ancestors, we should do well to follow the prescriptions of the *Regulations* literally. But there are pitfalls to any literal interpretation of an "unimpeachable" source, unverified by records/indications of actual practice (the *Regulations* prescribe "dark blue trousers"!) And when we interpret literally the records/indications of actual practice unverified by an unimpeachable source, we MAY have a case similar to that of the Civil War period

cheer, or "Huzza".

The accounts that record the mention of "the boys raised a cheer", or "We 'huzzah-ed' until we were hoarse", or "[the city of] Racine gave us three times three" are too numerous to recount here. Suffice it to say that enough sources mention the use of "three huzzahs" to make such cheering a standard practice in Civil War re-enacting today. This author, since fledgling re-enacting days, considered cheering by shouting the word "huzzah" a bit odd... but many first and accounts specifically mentioned it. The volume of the accounts seemed to verify this literal interpretation, thereby making "three huzzahs" standard fare.

Enter an unimpeachable source: a recent reprint of the *American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) by Noah Webster. While the work is unpaginated, the word "huzzah" may be found in the "H's" as follows:

HUZZ'A, *n.* A shout of joy; a

foreign word used in writing only, and most preposterously, as it is never used in practice. The word used is our native word hooa, or hooraw. (Italics original.)

According to Mr. Webster in 1828, the work "huzza" was only used in writing, and not in the spoken word! Therefore, to utter a correct cheer, properly articulated, one would need to shout "hooa" or hooraw". But if you were to **write** about it, you would use the "most preposterous" word "huzza".

Clearly, our re-enacting penchant for shouting the Huzzah today should be tempered with the realization that the real cheer should be "Hooa" or "Hooraw". As for the "tiger" in "three cheers and a tiger", this author is still of the opinion that a "tiger" is a deep, resonate growl-turned-cheer, rather than some ancient chant or other verbal expression. Likely, the actual origins and sound of the so-called "tiger" await discovery.