

Tony Horwitz paints two different pictures of Civil War reenactors: farbs and hardcores. Hardcores tried to live the Civil War experience as much as possible and scorned the farbs who paid little attention to authenticity. Olustee's reenactors seemed mostly of the type who would be held in disdain by a super-hardcore like Rob Hodge, but who were no farbs either.

Interestingly, there seemed to be somewhat of a split on the Union and Confederate sides. More Union reenactors seemed focused on the authenticity of their uniforms. One reenactor paid over a thousand dollars for the buttons alone. Furthermore, many of them slept on the ground under large tarps or in pup tents. Your average modern tent camper has much more comfortable conditions.

Confederates seemed a more mixed bunch. Some were very dedicated to authenticity and roughing it, like their Union counterparts. But many more were in larger, more comfortable tents often with cots. Most interestingly, a large number of Confederates brought families including children with them while nearly all Union reenactors came alone or only with fellow reenactors.

As far as their mentality toward the Civil War, nearly all the reenactors seemed not to bear any grudge about the conflict. On the Union side, every reenactor I spoke with believed the conflict to be about preserving the Union. One went so far as to quote Lincoln's famous comment about being willing to free all or none of the slaves, whichever would preserve the Union. Confederates seemed equally uninterested in the slave issue, although as Horwitz portrays in the book they seemed to have a few colorful characters in their ranks that harbored strange ideas about the war.

Based on my experiences at the Olustee reenactment, I think most reenactors actually fall somewhere in between the two extremes given in Horwitz' book. Like any hobby, they have some people on the extremes but most just do it because its fun. And like most hobbies, people doing the hobby like to do it well.