



On Colorizing Photographs

A visitor to the *MI* table at the recent Ohio Civil War Show in Mansfield was surprised to learn that the photographs reproduced here are not colorized. He assumed that *Military Images* followed the lead of various books and videos that have been praised for breathing new life into old photos by the addition of color to the original black and white.

This is not the first time an individual has believed that a color-tinted image in *MI* is a modern modification. When I explain to the individual that he or she is mistaken, I am always mindful to put the matter into context:

You will not find modern colorization techniques used in *Military Images*. *MI* draws a hard line on not manipulating images. *MI* believes the original tinting, bumps, bruises, scratches and dents are part of the history of the photograph and should be preserved.

In a word: Authenticity.

The only changes permitted are pre-print digital adjustments for contrast and color levels using the industry standard photo-editing software Photoshop. These practices are roughly equal to the lighting adjustments made by photographers using film in the pre-digital era.

MI acknowledges that there is a place for colorized images as long as they are labeled as such. Color helps us appreciate subtle distinctions in ways that black and white images cannot, provides us with a better sense of what 19th century soldiers and sailors may have looked like, and attract folks of all ages and walks of life today, who might not otherwise notice them.

But that place is not on the cover or pages of *MI*.

During the Civil War, photographers colorized images as a matter of routine—as many of us know today who bemoan the button or waist belt plate obscured by heavy gold tint! These pioneer camera operators were motivated by social and business pressures to wow their audience with new and exciting ways to market their photographs.

All things considered, the photographers and colorists of yesteryear are not much different than the Photoshop technicians, producers and editors of today.

Editor & Publisher

Bring Your Best Images to the Gettysburg Show
 We'll scan them for free at the *MI* table during the 43rd Annual Civil War & Collectors' Show in Gettysburg, Pa., June 27-28, 2015. Selected images will be published in future issues.

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