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# THE SENTINEL

The FORT HARRISON CHAPTER of the SONS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

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Zealous in the CAUSE of *Virtue* and *Liberty*

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“Nothing short of Independence, it appears to me, can possibly do...To see men without [clothes] to cover their nakedness—without Blankets to lay on—without Shoes, by which their Marches might be traced by the Blood from the feet—and almost as often without Provisions[...]; Marching through frost & Snow, and at Christmas taking up their Winter Quarters within a day’s March of the enemy, without a House or Hutt to cover them till they could be built & submitting to it without murmur, is a Mark of patience & obedience which in my opinion can scarce be parallel’d.”

~George Washington, letter to John Bannister, 21 April 1778

## Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes

Reminder: The minutes of each Chapter meeting are read aloud, in their entirety, during the first following Chapter meeting by Recording Secretary Randy Heneberger, after which attending members approve the minutes either as read or with amendments thereto. The approved minutes then are distributed by Corresponding Secretary David Dean to each Chapter member either by email or snail mail. Therefore, always refer to the minutes distributed to you to review all past and upcoming Chapter events and important dates. Except for certain selected meeting highlights, The Sentinel newsletter no longer will reprint meeting minutes that already have been distributed to members.

## Editor’s Note

May the New Year greet and keep every Fort Harrison Compatriot in good health, happiness and good fortune.



## Little-Known Facts About the American Revolution:

### Uniforms of the Continental Army

Beyond its basic purpose to clothe and provide warmth to the soldier in cool weather, a military uniform for many centuries has identified its wearer as being part of a military force that, with all the trappings of his unit’s heritage and reputation, has conferred a sense of pride and camaraderie to foster a stronger fighting spirit. In short, uniforms helped armies win battles, and battles won helped win wars.

Since ancient times, the chaos of battle has compelled organized military units to wear distinctive uniforms to quickly and easily identify individual soldiers and units as friends or foes. The advent of gunpowder and firearms greatly contributed to the confusion of war as clouds of black powder smoke hung low on battlefields and hid formations and individuals rushing toward each other. Bright uniform colors were utilized to help soldiers more easily recognize each other and their units’—and the enemies’—positions through natural fog and the white smoke of massed musketry fire.

The Second Continental Congress established the Continental Army in 1775 and authorized outfitting the troops with brown uniform coats. However, a shortage in brown cloth forced some colonial regiments to settle with blue or grey uniforms. In 1778 a large shipment of army uniforms was supplied by France and issued to North Carolina's continental regiments. The French-made uniforms consisted of a blue coat faced with red collars, cuffs, and lapels. During the colonial era colorful facings typically comprised the most distinctive components of military uniform coats and jackets, which were many and varied.

Colonial volunteer units in need of uniforms and equipment sometimes were left to their own devices to provide the necessary kit for their men and were purchased either by the soldiers themselves or by their commanding officers. Thus, a mixed assemblage of army uniforms saw their way onto the early battlefields of the Revolutionary War. Generally, colonial soldiers were outfitted with the following:

- Hat, turned up on three sides,
- Shirt, made of linen or cotton,
- Stock, of black leather (a formal necktie traditionally worn by equestrians),
- Coat, made of wool; usually with collar, cuffs and lapels of a distinctive color,
- Waistcoat or vest, usually made of linen or wool,
- Trousers, made of wool, linen or cotton; either breeches gathered just below the knee, or full length.

The Continental Congress authorized a standardized Army uniform in 1779, whereupon General George Washington ordered that uniforms consist of blue coats, white waistcoats, and facings of varying colors. Blue coats were determined to provide the greatest contrast with the bright red coats worn by British troops. As such,

New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut and Massachusetts soldiers wore white facings, linings and buttons.

New York and New Jersey troops wore buff facings with white linings and buttons.

Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland and Virginia soldiers wore red facings with white linings and buttons.

North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia troops wore blue facings with white linings and buttons.

In addition to the blue coats, the Continental Army also wore white, off-white or beige waistcoats, breeches with long-sleeved hunting shirts, white stockings, and black or dark shoes.

While military uniforms tended to provide positive influences upon those who wore them, they also could play against the enemy's psyche. The hunting shirt—designed either as a pullover or buttoned in front—worn by some Continental Army and militia units was made of brown homespun linen and finished out with rows of fringe along the edges. General Washington declared that, “No [uniform] can be cheaper nor more convenient...” and explained that troops outfitted with the hunting shirts created “no small terror to the enemy who think every such person is a complete marksman.”

In 1782, blue coats with red facings became the standard uniform for all Continental Army regiments and personnel, except for generals and staff officers. However, continual clothing-material shortages throughout the war effectively limited standardization. A 2014 Washington Post article, “Revolutionary War uniforms are not so easy to pin down,” explained that:



Soldiers then wore a rainbow of colors. And the hated British weren't the only ones in red coats. Some American soldiers wore them, too. One Connecticut regiment had red coats with yellow accents. The 4<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment had white coats with red accents. The drummers for one New Hampshire regiment had green breeches and canary yellow coats. If they got coats at all. Uniforms were hit and miss, and many soldiers suffered without boots or coats... Nearly every unit was different. [One researcher] has counted 66 styles of uniform between 1775 and 1783, just for Connecticut alone... Many uniforms were modeled after European designs, especially if the commander came from there. Casimir Pulaski ordered fur trim for the uniforms worn by his men. It was what he was used to back home in Poland.

### Rank Insignia of the Continental Army

Variations of insignia and accoutrements of rank during the first years of the Revolution comprised a confused set of standards that today seem overdone if not excessive. A rational system prevailed in 1779 that simplified the identification of Continental Army officers and men:

Commanders wore a gold lace epaulet on each shoulder with three silver stars.  
Major Generals wore a gold lace epaulet on each shoulder with two silver stars.  
Brigadier Generals wore a gold lace epaulet on each shoulder with one silver star.  
Colonels wore a gold lace epaulet, with silver or gold trim, on each shoulder.  
Lieutenant Colonels wore a silver lace epaulet on each shoulder.  
Majors wore a gold lace epaulet on each shoulder.  
Captains wore a gold epaulet on the right shoulder.  
Subalterns wore a gold epaulet on the left shoulder.  
Senior NCOs wore a red cloth epaulet with a brass crescent on each shoulder.



Sergeants wore a red cloth epaulet on the right shoulder.  
Corporals wore a green cloth epaulet on the right shoulder.  
Privates wore no insignia.

Additionally, colorful cockades—badges of ribbon affixed to the tri-corner hat—identified wearers as men of rank or special status, such as Aides-de-Camp.

A cursory glance at the Continental Army's badges of rank clearly reveals a direct link to today's U.S. Army officers' rank insignia. Army uniforms since the Revolution have significantly evolved to keep pace with new types of warfare and ever greater demands for protection, camouflage, utility and comfort for troops, especially when deployed and engaged in combat. As with the rank and file fighting formations that characterized large engagements during the Revolutionary War, the era of colorful and readily visible soldiers on the battlefield has long passed into history.

Continental Navy and Marine Corps uniforms and insignia will be topics of future issues of *The Sentinel*.

*Internet Sources: Outfitting an American Revolutionary Soldier; J. Lloyd Durham, 1992. What Type of Uniforms Did Revolutionary War Soldiers Wear? Rebecca Beatrice Brooks, 2017.*

### Revolutionary War Slang

**Gluepot:** One who officiates a marriage; that is, one who joins together a husband and wife. "Ezra and Mary were married this morning at the Gloucester Street Church. Parson Filcher was the gluepot."