

# Revolutionary War Uniforms

The American Revolutionary War lasted from 1775-1783, and when it started, the Continental Congress moved fast to adopt brown as the official color of the Continental Army uniform, but that didn't last long. With the unexpected start to the war, the Continental Congress moved quickly to determine a uniform color, but the color brown was never really embraced by the troops. In general, officers preferred blue for uniforms and by 1778 the entire army agreed. The Continental Congress gave George Washington the privilege of creating the first "official" Continental Army uniform, and in 1779 the Continental Army accepted the design for its national uniform. However, providing the men with an official uniform was an ongoing matter of evolution.

## **First Official Uniform:**

The uniform designed by General Washington included a blue coat lined with either red or white fabric. The color of the lining depended on the branch of service. Infantry soldiers wore uniforms lined with white while those who served with artillery units wore uniforms lined with red. Even though official uniforms were agreed to and adopted by the Continental Congress, not every soldier of the Continental Army owned one. Fabric supplies were scarce and the men had more important matters drawing them away from the labor force. People were busy distributing or obtaining critical supplies and uniforms were not a top priority.

Continental Army Uniform Details; the blue uniform adopted by the Continental Army was a modified European style. The clothing used to make the uniforms was imported from the French who were allies to the Colonists or they were made from captured British uniforms. Along with the blue coat the uniform consisted of:

- White or buff waistcoat (vest)
- White or buff breeches or overalls
- Cuffs, lapels, and collars were different colors depending on regional affiliation. Facing colors were as follows:

**Facing Colors Related to Region**

White facings:	New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut
Buff facings:	New York, New Jersey
Red facings:	Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia
Blue facings (white button holes):	North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia

While the official color was blue, other colors of uniforms were still in use and uniforms were not supplied to non-commissioned officers or drummers and fifers. In fact, in July of 1778 a lottery was held to decide how the latest shipment of uniforms would be distributed among the infantry. The lottery was held in two parts and conducted by George Washington's aides. This

shipment included brown or blue uniforms and the lottery helped to decide who received which uniform. Distribution fell as follows:

#### Blue Uniforms

- North Carolina
- Maryland
- New Jersey
- New York

#### Brown Uniforms

- Virginia
- Delaware
- Pennsylvania
- Massachusetts
- New Hampshire
- Hazen's Regiment

By 1778, another 100,000 uniforms were imported from France for the 1779 campaign. This time the uniforms were sized like French uniforms but with alterations in mind. The pattern left extra material so alterations could be made easily if the uniform was too small or if the sleeves needed more room. The coat buttoned to the waistband with tin or brass buttons bearing the inscription USA (in Roman letters). However, only a small percentage of patriots had uniforms.



Uniforms for Continental Infantry, 1779-1783

By June of 1780, officers in the Continental Army wore blue coats with yellow buttons that were lined with buff. The coats also bore two white epaulets and were worn with white or buff breeches and waistcoats.

There's always a story behind the colors used in uniforms. In the case of the Continental Army, the colors chosen were the colors of the Whig party in England. The Loyalists known as the Tories also wore blue coats, but with red cuffs and collars.



Union Cocade



**Continental Soldier**

of the American Revolutionary Soldiers came in a variety of colors, shades and different styles as can be seen in the picture on the right.

The absence of uniforms caused problems for the Continental Army as the American Revolutionary Soldiers were not able to easily identify their commanders on the battlefield. The decision was made to introduce the use of cockades to distinguish the leaders. A cockade was a wide, ornate, knot of ribbon or a rosette worn on the hat. The colors of the cockades indicated the rank of the commander to the American Revolutionary Soldiers. The first colors used as cockades were as follows:

Field Officers: Pink or Red  
Captains: Buff or Yellow  
Junior Officers: Green

The Continental Army then adopted the black cockade

The American Revolutionary Soldiers came from all walks of life.

The Continental Congress raised the first 10 companies of Continental troops based on a one-year enlistment. Riflemen and Sharpshooters from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia were used as light infantry and later became the 1st Continental Regiment in 1776.

The enlistment period was later extended to 3 years. The American Revolutionary Soldiers in the Continental Army were citizens who had volunteered to serve in the army and were paid but were generally motivated by their strong sense of Patriotism.

In 1775 the Continental Congress adopted brown as the official color for uniforms in 1775 but there was a shortage of brown cloth, so some regiments dressed their soldiers in blue and gray. Congress did not adopt a Continental uniform until 1779 but the American Revolutionary Soldiers attempted to have clothing similar to the others in the company or regiment.

The militia, including the Minutemen, had no uniform at all. Instead, they dressed in hunting shirts. Consequently the pictures and paintings



**Continental Army Soldiers**

which changed to black and white when France became an ally as a mark of the French-American alliance. The black-and-white cockade thus became known as the "Union Cockade".

The militia, including the Minutemen, had no uniform at all but wore hunting shirts. The hunting shirts were either made of buckskin or from homespun linen. They were styles as a long loose over shirt or as a loose wraparound jacket, both allowed ease of movement. Hunting shirts generally had rows of distinctive fringes and were comfortable to wear. The American Revolutionary Soldiers wore leggings or breeches and stockings with the hunting shirts. Other members of the militia wore the clothes that they would use at home. The above picture shows typical clothes worn by the American Revolutionary Soldiers of the militia.

Living on the edge of the Indian country, frontier families built cabins, cleared tracts in the wilderness and cultivated maize and wheat. The men wore leather made from the skin of deer or sheep, known as buckskin\* (see below); the women wore garments of cloth they spun at home. Their food consisted of venison, wild turkey and fish. They had their own amusements -- great barbecues, dances, housewarmings for newly married couples, shooting matches and contests for making quilted blankets. Quilts remain an American tradition today.

**The Revolutionary War uniforms** evolved significantly over the eight years of the conflict. Here are some snapshots:.

- April 19, 1775 Lexington and Concord

The Minute Men wore what they wore day to day. When called out, they grabbed their firelock and rushed to the muster point.

- Washington's General Order of July 24, 1776

Washington recommended hunting shirts as part of the clothing bounty to be provided by the Continental Congress. He considered it the most practical garment for troops. In his July 1776 General order, he wrote:

"No dress can be cheaper, nor more convenient, as the wearer may be cool in warm weather and warm in cool weather by putting on under cloaths which will not change the outward dress, Winter or Summer -- Besides which it is a dress justly supposed to carry no small terror to the enemy, who think every such person a complete marksman."

- Washington's General Order of October 2, 1779

This order set the standard for the "classic" Revolutionary War uniform that the modern observer recognizes. It fixed blue as the color for all forces in the Continental line.

Blue coat with white facings: New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut

Blue coat with buff facings: New York, New Jersey

Blue Coat with red facings: Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia (This was also the primary uniform of the colonial troops in the French and Indian Wars.)

Blue coat with Blue facings and buttonholes edged with narrow white tape: North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia

- From the Varick transcripts of Washington's General Order of October 2, 1779, Library of Congress;

Regardless of the general orders, there was considerable diversity of uniform styles in the various states and regiments based on what material was available at the time. While it is very dramatic for a Color Guard to be in matching uniforms, diversity represents the reality of the Revolutionary War.

Despite the many disadvantages of the American Revolutionary Soldiers the War of Independence was won. There were 36 major battles in the war but the smaller conflicts and battles took the number to over 100. A total of 35,000 American Revolutionary Soldiers served in the Continental Army, backed by 44,500 militia. Details of many of these battles can be found in Revolutionary Battles. But, as in all wars, victory came at a price.

- 25,000 men died during the war
- 8000 died in battle
- 17,000 died of sickness, missing in action and other causes
- 9000 soldiers suffered serious wounds and injuries
- 40% - 45% of American colonists supported the revolution
- 15% - 20% of American colonists were loyalists
- The remaining colonists took a neutral stance



**Independent Companies, 1775**



**First Maryland,  
Circa 1780**

### **American Infantry Uniform in 1779**

Why is he in a blue coat?

Armies of this period wore distinctive colored coats for quick identification. The British wore red, the French wore white and the Americans, when they could, wore blue. There were exceptions to the color coding of coats but in general, it worked. Why the Americans didn't wear Green or Brown to help them hide behind rocks and trees is a good question.

This private is wearing a blue coat with red facings. The facings (the collar and cuffs) are supposed to identify where the unit is from in the states. Red facings are supposed to mean the unit is from the mid-Atlantic colonies, Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland or Virginia. The small clothes (shirt, vest and

pants) are white. The private is carrying his full kit as he is on sentry duty. He is armed with a Brown Bess musket captured from British supply houses at the start of the Revolution. He also has a cartridge box to hold his ammo, a bayonet scabbard to hold his bayonet, and a haversack to carry his personal belongings.

A Corporal would have a green patch on his shoulder and a Sergeant a red one. Many Americans carried the much more accurate flint-lock rifles, which they used for hunting game and protection against hostile Indians.

\*Buckskin clothing was made from the tanned hides of the game shot to provide meat for the colonists living on the edge of civilization. The designs were a combination of those worn by the Indians and the woven clothing of European immigrants. For instance, the fringe of leather used by Indians helped to dry clothing after rain. Leather was more durable and resistant to tearing by rough and thick vegetation encountered during the hunts. Many were lightly decorated with beads to demonstrate a level of kinship with their native neighbors.

William C Orchard has made a comprehensive study of all the beads used by native Americans, published in his 1975 book for the Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation: "Beads and Beadwork of the American Indians". In this book he states that on 12 October, 1492, Columbus presented natives on Watling Island with strings of small glass beads; this was the start of a growing influx of European glass beads into the Americas.

Before they were able to obtain these European beads, American natives used shell, soft stone, pearls, native copper and bone to produce beads. Some shells, such as dentalia, marginella and olivella, needed almost no work before they could be strung on thin cords to make necklaces, earrings and other ornaments. Shell is a fairly soft material that could be worked very easily with stone tools and drilled to produce small beads. "Wampum" beads of purple and white were made with enormous effort from the inner parts of mussel or clam shells, carefully cut and drilled to make long strings or woven into belts - it was the considerable work that went into making them that dictated their value. Gradually the increasing supply of European glass beads meant that the manufacture of native beads ceased completely.

{From the History of Ohio; 1881 History of Hamilton County Ohio History of Hamilton County Ohio with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches. Compiled by Henry A. Ford, A.M. and Mrs. Kate B. Ford, L.A. William & Co., Publishers} **THE CLOTHING**

“Almost every article of clothing not made of deerskin, as many a hunting shirt and pair of leggins was, and, indeed, about all the cloth to be found in some of the old cabins, was the product of her toil. She spun flax and wove linen and woolen for shirts and pantaloons, frocks, sheets and blankets. Linen and wool, the "linsey-woolsey" of the primitive day, furnished most of the material for of the men and women, though some was obtained from the skins of wild beasts. Men commonly wore the hunting shirt, a kind of loose frock reaching half-way down the thighs, open before, and so wide as to lap over a foot or more upon the chest. This generally had a cape, which was often fringed with a ravelled piece of cloth of a different color from that which composed the garment. The capacious bosom of the shirt often served as a pouch, in which could be carried the smaller articles that a hunter or woodsman needs. It was always worn belted, and was made of coarse linen, linsey, or buckskin, according to the taste or fancy of the weaver. In the belt was worn a bunting or "scalping knife," unhappily too ready at hand, as was sometimes proved at the cost of a human life, Upon occasions of deadly quarrel. Breeches were made of heavier cloth or dressed deerskins and were often worn with leggins of the same material or some kind of leather, while the feet were frequently encased in moccasins after the Indian fashion, which were quickly and easily made, though they often needed mending. The buckskin breeches or leggins were very comfortable when dry, but seemed cold when wet, and were almost as stiff as wooden garments would be when next put on. Hats or caps were generally made of coonskin, wildcat, or other native fur. The women, when they could not procure "store duds," dressed in linsey petticoats, coarse shoes and stockings, and wore buckskin mittens or gloves, not for style, but when any protection was required for the hands. All of her wearing apparel, like that of the men, was made with a view to service and comfort, and was quite commonly of home manufacture throughout. Other and finer articles were worn sometimes, but they were brought from former homes or bought at the stores in the settlements along the river, in the former case being often the relics handed down from parents to children. Jewelry was not common; but occasionally some ornament was displayed.”

### **Accouterments**

**Continental:** The continental soldier carried a musket and bayonet. The most common model carried by both sides throughout the Revolutionary war was the .75 caliber Short Land Pattern Musket commonly referred to as the 'Brown Bess'. There were also many locally made muskets that were close copies. The Brown Bess Firelock was the standard weapon of the British army from about 1710 to 1839. It had several models over time that differed primarily in the barrel length.

Later the Charleville .69 caliber Musket was imported from France. Charleville is a town about 65 miles east of Paris which had a large arms manufacturing plant. The Charleville firelock was easier to clean and being of a slightly smaller caliber, allowed the soldier to carry more ammunition. Supporting accouterments are the bayonet, cartridge box, haversack and canteen.

**Militia:** Early in the war, the militia carried whatever the soldier used at home. In the east, this was often a fowling piece used to put dinner on the table. This smoothbore could use small pellets for birds and rabbits or a single ball for deer. In the backcountry of Pennsylvania, Virginia and the Carolinas, the long rifle was popular for deer, turkey and defense. The long rifle was made by gunsmiths in almost every county. The counties around Philadelphia were famous worldwide for their gunsmiths who made rifles of graceful design and superb accuracy. These Long Rifles were often made for use in the wilds of Kentucky.

Hence they are interchangeably called Kentucky long rifles or Pennsylvania long rifles. The accouterments of the militia soldier are a long rifle or musket, "possibles" bag, powder horn, tomahawk, wooden canteen and haversack.

---



Museum Collections, Revolutionary War Tricorn (genuine); black cockade. 1776-1780.

Worn By: John Shethar; Wool, linen, silk, metal.

Overall: 5 1/2 x 17 3/4 x 10 in.

Black wool felt cocked hat (tricorn) with linen half lining; right front with black silk cockade; left front with circular button with covering of thin, loosely woven wire holding loop of black cloth tape.

#### Gallery Label

According to the accession records, this hat was worn by John Shethar of Connecticut, an ancestor of the donor. Shethar was made a lieutenant in the 2nd Continental Dragoons December 31, 1776, and promoted to captain October 11, 1777. He resigned from military service March 8, 1780.

---

While my Patriot ancestors would have worn their buckskin hide hunting clothes during their service to the Revolutionary War and the Tandy Leather Company was my source for the uniform I wear, many of you may be more interested in the cloth uniforms described above.

Compatriots who may be interested in buying a uniform may find an interest in the following form for a custom made ensemble which may be ordered to meet the color criteria of your Patriot ancestor. This is an example of some sources available with contact information to learn of the costs.

We hope this information provides some enlightenment to the new and seasoned Compatriot.

Michael B. Gunn, CCSAR

April 4, 2014



# AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY UNIFORMS

By Bernice's Daughter DARLENE NEUHAUS  
5757 Monterrey Drive Ft. Worth, TX 76112  
(817) 496-4160 or Cell (817) 875-3577 e-Mail: dmneuhaus@peoplepc.com

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

CITY: \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ & ZIP CODE: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ e-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

HEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_' \_\_\_\_\_" WEIGHT: \_\_\_\_\_ LBS

## CUTAWAY COAT

REGULAR COAT SIZE: \_\_\_\_\_ CHEST: \_\_\_\_\_" BACK SHOULDER TO SHOULDER \_\_\_\_\_"

SLEEVE LENGTH: \_\_\_\_\_" STOMACH: \_\_\_\_\_" BACK NECK TO WAIST \_\_\_\_\_"  
(UNIFORM COAT 36 - 48 / 10% ADDITIONAL CHARGE FOR LARGER SIZES)

COLOR COMBINATION: AVAILABLE COLORS: NAVY, RED, WHITE, **TAN**, BLACK, CREAM, DARK GREEN  
COAT COLOR: \_\_\_\_\_ LINING COLOR \_\_\_\_\_ COLOR  
OF COLLAR, CUFFS, **(Tan is GASSAR standard)**

REGULAR STANDUP STYLE COLLAR HEIGHT: 3 (\_\_\_\_) **(GASSAR Standard)**  
LAPEL TAB OVER COLLAR STYLE (\_\_\_\_) 2" LAID BACK COLLAR STYLE (\_\_\_\_)

BUTTONS: GOLD (\_\_\_\_) **(GASSAR Standard)** BRAID: GOLD (\_\_\_\_), **(GASSAR Standard)**

VEST SIZE: \_\_\_\_\_ VEST COLOR: \_\_\_\_\_ PANTS WAIST: \_\_\_\_\_" PANTS COLOR:  
**(Tan vest is GASSAR standard)**

\_\_\_\_\_ CHECK (\_\_\_\_) LONG PANTS INSEAM: \_\_\_\_\_" STRAIGHT BOTTOM (\_\_\_\_) or

INSET (\_\_\_\_) (\_\_\_\_) KNEE BRITCHES INSEAM 2" BELOW KNEE: \_\_\_\_\_" CALF: \_\_\_\_\_"

(\_\_\_\_) Regular pattern, zipper & drawstring waist or (\_\_\_\_) Opening waist, belt loops and side pockets +  
\$20

## COMPLETE FOLLOWING FOR PANTS SOFTWARE PATTERN MAKING (SEE MEASUREMENT CHART)

RISE: FRONT \_\_\_\_\_" BACK \_\_\_\_\_" SEATED CROTCH \_\_\_\_\_"

LEG CIRCUMFERENCE: DOWN FROM CROTCH SEAM @ 5" \_\_\_\_\_ 8" \_\_\_\_\_ 14" \_\_\_\_\_"

WAISTBAND TO FLOOR AT CENTER FRONT \_\_\_\_\_" 2) SIDSEAM \_\_\_\_\_" 3) CENTER BACK \_\_\_\_\_"

SHIRT NECK: \_\_\_\_\_" SLEEVE: \_\_\_\_\_" RUFFLES: FABRIC (\_\_\_\_) or LACE (\_\_\_\_)

TRICORN HAT: BLACK SIZE: \_\_\_\_\_ SMALL \$30 (\_\_\_\_) LARGE SPECIAL ORDER \$65 (\_\_\_\_)

SOCKS: YES (\_\_\_\_) or NO (\_\_\_\_) SHOE BUCKLES: YES (\_\_\_\_) or NO (\_\_\_\_) HERO (\_\_\_\_) or SAR (\_\_\_\_)