

AN ILLUSTRATED ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

UNIFORMS AND CLOTHING

FROM 1775 - 1783

VIRGINIA MILITIA

&

FIRST VIRGINIA

REGIMENT

ROBERT DUCOTE

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Purpose

The purpose of this encyclopedia is to provide lists of uniform articles available to Virginia Militia and the First Virginia Regiment from 1775-1783, based on research delineating when and where items were issued or available, and to provide preferred and recommended vendors and materials to aid new recruits in securing their basic kit, including uniforms and gear.

Anything not listed on this list should not be purchased without consulting your unit sponsor.

Background

It is very difficult to specify what civilian clothing and uniform items were worn during specific battles, periods of times, and weather conditions. Militia troops seldom wore the same clothing items and would often receive clothing dependent on where they were physically located and what was available.

When discussing clothing of militia, one must take into account the high probability of veteran continentals amongst the ranks. This encyclopedia will recommend increased integration of Virginia continental uniforms and equipment into recommended items as the timeline progresses from 1775 to 1783.

As for continental troops and uniformity, General Washington and his general officers often strove for uniformity, but fell short due to failed imports, captured depots, and limited availability of one type or color of material. “The individual Virginian’s equipment [clothing] would also depend on what was available when he received his ‘issue.’” Uniformity of the regiment, or at least the company, was desired, but if blue breeches were available the

soldier received blue. The next man, perhaps from the same company, might be the first to get an issue out of the next bale and these breeches might be green.”¹

This discussion expounds on the standard “regimental and linen small clothes” uniform. None of the quotes below show direct issue to any Virginia militia unit. They are, however, tied by means of what the Continental Army was ordering for uniformity and what items Virginia was issuing to its Virginia state troops. “While each state had the responsibility for clothing their own regular corps and, in some cases militia, due to failures in Continental Clothing departments, they also undertook to supply their quota of Continental troops.”² One must assume the Virginia military stores did not create separate stores for Virginia Continental, state troops, and militia; particularly, after the invasion of Virginia by Cornwallis and supplies became limited.

I have chosen to primarily address the items that are most under discussion: regimental coats and hunting shirts, weskits, breeches and overalls,

gaiters/leggings, bodyshirts, and headgear. I also, briefly, discuss other uniform items not falling into the above aforementioned categories, such as accoutrements.

“In the 18th century, colonial governors expected their militiamen to supply most of their own arms, accoutrements, and clothing.”³ The backcountry militia companies commonly wore the same garments in which they pursued their daily livings on the frontier. On top of the common garments, “a kind of loose frock, reaching halfway down the thigh, with large sleeves, open before [in front] and so wide as to lap over a foot or more when belted.”⁴ A wide range of bodyshirts, stockings, garters, breeches, footwear, gaiters and leggings, cravats, weskits, top garments, hunting shirts, headgear, accoutrements, and weapons were available to militiamen. The aforementioned items are discussed in detail in following chapters.

Bodyshirts



◀ Bodyshirts were made from 100% linen in various cloth weights. Bodyshirts were an essential piece of colonial clothing as it also filled the role of a night shirt to sleep in. Medium weight, white linen bodyshirts were most common; however, heavier weight linens of various colors and patterns were also common.

Stockings & Garters



◀ A wide range of 100% wool knitted stockings of various colors are appropriate for militia clothing. Basic, natural, solid colors should be used in lieu of bright or striped pattern stockings.



▲ Garters were used to hold the stockings up just below the knee and above the calf. Black leather garters were most common; however, died leather garters of brown or red are appropriate. Common brass buckles were most common.

Breeches

(1)



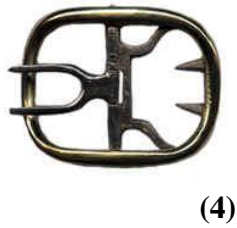
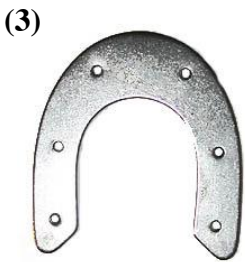
◀ As mentioned earlier with stockings, breeches were also available in many cloths and linens of various weights and colors. To stay safe, basic, natural, solid colors should be used in lieu of bright or stripped patterns. (1) Natural and brown linens are best worn in the Summer, buckskin in the Spring and Fall, and green or blue wools in the Winter. (2) Brass Knee buckles were used to keep the breeches around the knee closed; tie strings are also appropriate

(2)



Footwear

▼ Footwear most likely used by militiamen are the common “rough-side out” (1) black leather shoe and (2) black leather Hi-Lo boots. (3) Heel plates should be used to protect the leather and wood heels of the footwear and add additional years of use to them. (4) Common brass shoe buckles are recommended vice ornate buckles of upper class gentry.



Gaiters & Leggings

(1)

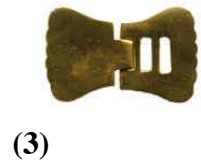


◀ Many types of full-gaiters, half-gaiters, and leggings could be found in colonial America. During 1775 and 1776, militiamen, more likely than not, did not wear gaiters or leggings. It was not until 1777 that militiamen started to alter the “common clothing” to hunting or frontier clothing; thus, the use of (1) heavy linen full-gaiters and wool leggings. By 1780, an increase of continental army veterans began to fill the ranks of militia regiments. With the increase of veterans came the increase of military clothing and items such as the (2) half-gaiter commonly known as “spatterdashes.”



(2)

Cravats & Neckstocks



▲ In keeping in line with a more civilian appearance for 1775-1776, a (1) white linen cravat is appropriate; for 1777-1779 hunting appearance, a dark colored silk scarf; and for 1780-1783 continental-militia mix appearance, a (2) black linen, horsehair, or leather neckstock. A (3) brass buckle is often used to secure military style neckstocks.

Weskits and Sleeved Waistcoats

► Weskits remained consistent throughout the war. Durable weight linens for summer months and wool for winter months. Longer mid-18th century weskits may have still been worn during the early war years, but most often the latest short weskit style was worn by all classes of colonials. Common cloth and colors were red linen belted-weskit, blue linen weskit, natural hemp linen weskit, red wool weskit, green wool weskit, and white wool weskit.



◄ Linen and wool sleeved weskits could be worn as outer garments or underneath hunting frocks to provide an additional layer of warmth during the winter months.

Frock Coats & Hunting Frocks

(1)



◀ The longer (1) 1750s style frock coat was still common for farmers and lower class colonials during the early war years. As the war progressed, the frock coats became shorter and sometimes replaced by a sleeved weskit and hunting frock combination. (2) Hunting frocks were often made of heavy, durable linen with capes and decorative fringe along the bottom and the opened front.

(2)

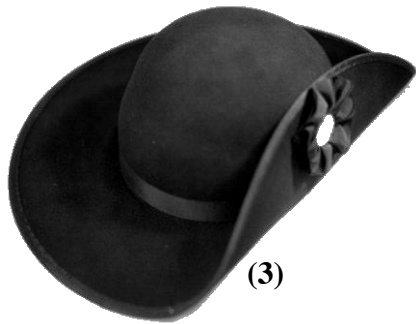


Regimentals Coats



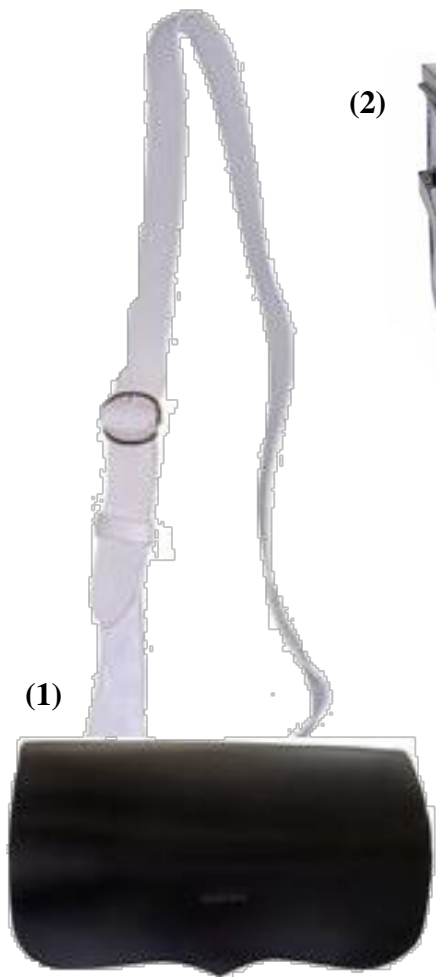
▲ By 1780, when more Virginia continental army veterans were filling the ranks of militia regiments, the common regimental was of blue wool faced red. Earlier Virginia continental veterans may have been issued brown regimentals faced red, but would have been outdated by 1780.

Headgear

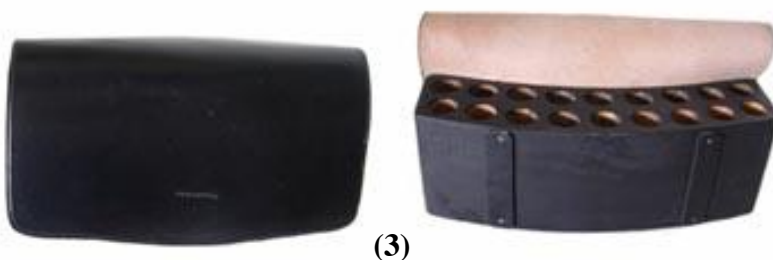


◀ The possibilities of headgear are too great to cover. Based on paintings and sketches of the period, it is likely a civilian style (1) & (2) tricorn would have been worn from 1775 to 1776; a slouch hat, (3) round hat from 1777 to 1783; and a military style (4) & (5) cocked hat from 1780 to 1783.

Cartridge Boxes, Hunting Pouches, & Powder Horns

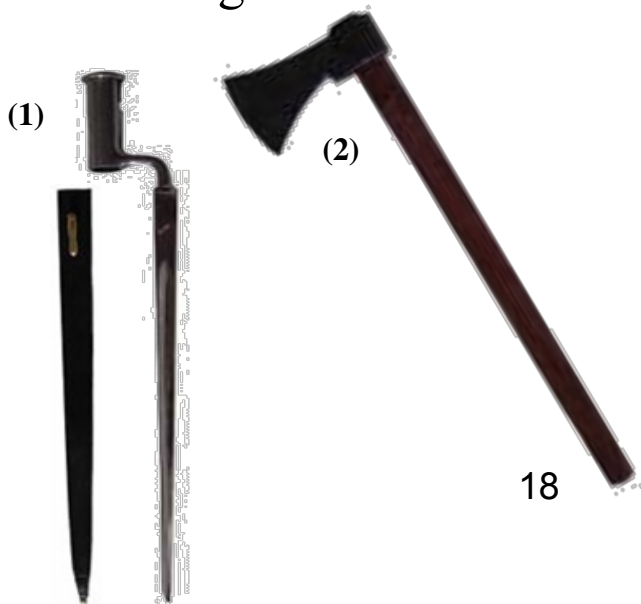
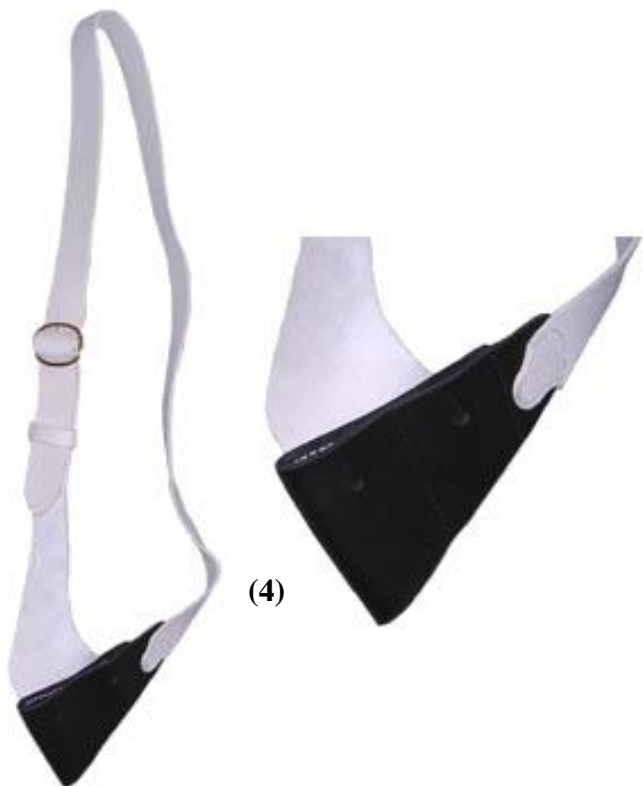
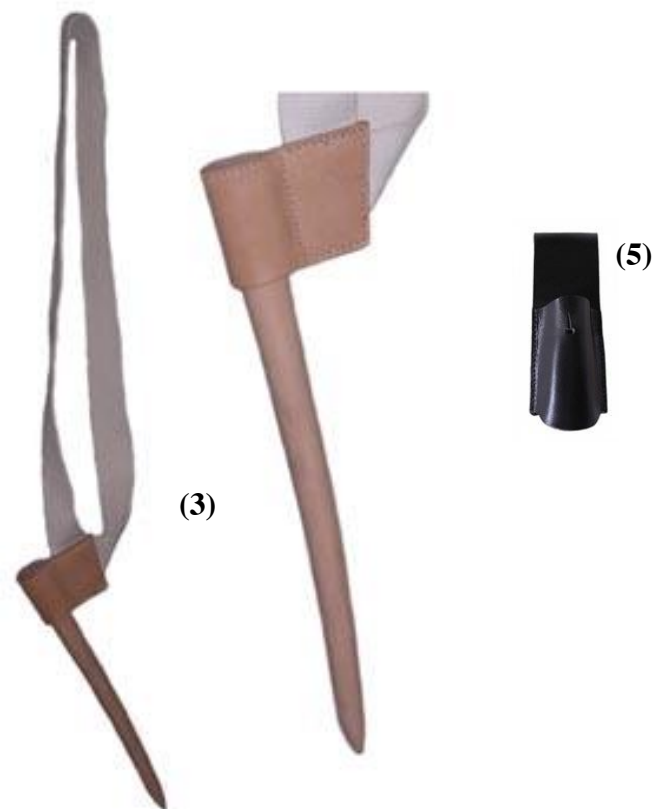


◀ Throughout the war, a great many cartridge boxes, hunting pouches, and powder horns were available for use. I have identified a few different types: (1) Shoulder Cartridge Box, (2) Tin Cartridge Box, (3) Belly Cartridge Box, and (4) Hunting Pouch which would be used in conjunction with a (5) Powder Horn with (6) Powder Measure. Carriage slings were either webbing or leather.



Bayonet & Tomahawk Carriages

◀ Like cartridge boxes, many different (1) bayonet and (2) tomahawk carriers were available. Often the type of bayonet carriage used was determined by the type of cartridge box used. Those using a shoulder cartridge box would most likely use a (3) shoulder bayonet carriage or (4) double frog bayonet carriage; belly box cartridge wearers would likely use a (5) belt frog that slides onto the cartridge box belt. Carriage slings were either webbing or leather.

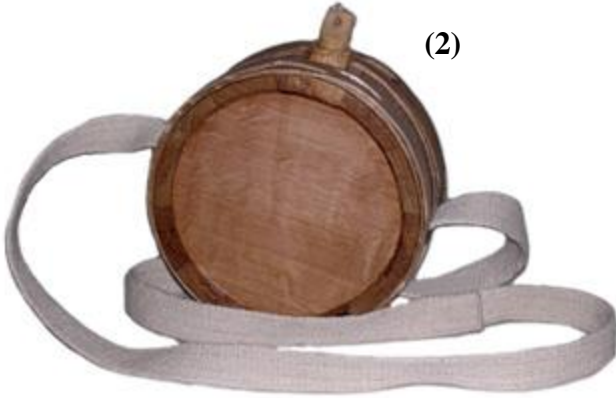


Canteens

(1)



(2)



(3)



(4)



(5)



▼ Throughout the war, (1) tin, (2) wood, and (3) leather canteens were used. Tin canteens were suspended by hemp rope and were sometimes covered with wool. Wood canteens and leather canteens were normally suspended with (4) leather straps and (5) brewers pitch was used to keep them from leaking.

Haversacks & Knapsacks

(1)



(2)

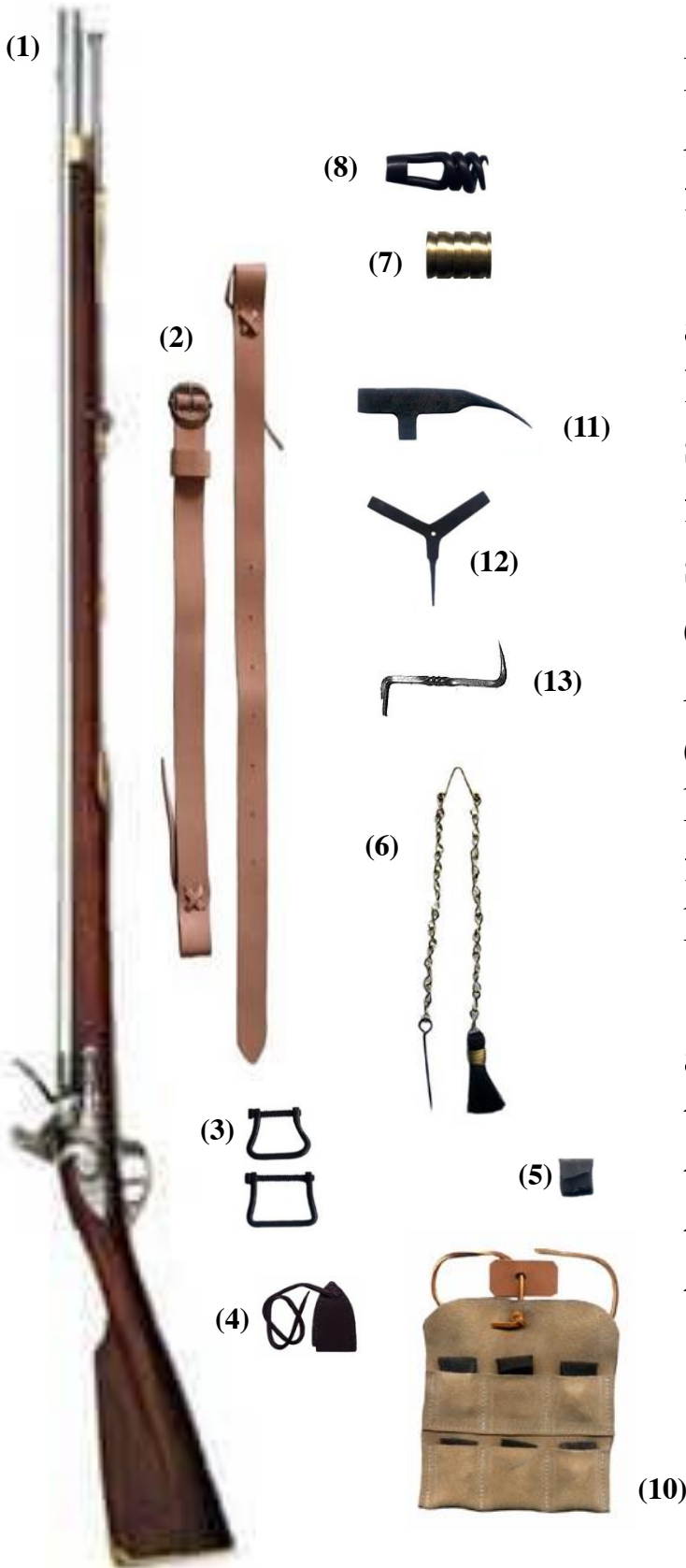


(3)



▼ (1) Natural colored linen haversacks were the overwhelming standard for continental and militia troops throughout the war. Militia likely used snapsacks or trumlines from 1775 to 1776; (2) canvas weight linen knapsack-haversacks also known as “double knapsack-haversacks” from 1777-1779; and either doubles or (3) “New-Invented” knapsack-haversacks from 1780-1783.

Weapons



◀ Militia mustered with British supplied (1) muskets, American made rifles or fowlers.

Some of the accessories used were (2) leather slings, (3) sling swivels, (4) hammer stalls, (5) flints, and cleaning tools such as (6) whisk and pick, (7) pump, and (8) worm. Additional accessories are (9) leather and lead flint holders and a (10) flint wallet for additional flints and holders.

The choices for tools are the (11) Pickering musket tool, the (12) British triangular musket tool, and the (13) American musket tool.



Personal Items

▼ A (1) fork, (2) knife, (3) horn spoon, (4) tin cup, (5) tin plate, (6) wood bowl, and (7) pocket knife were essential to every soldier. These items were carried in either a haversack or knapsack.



(6)



(7)



(4)



(2)

(1)



(5)



(3)

Winter Items

▼ There is not abundant documentation on winter clothing items. Wool fingerless gloves or mittens are recommended both appropriate; however, the fingerless gloves are more useful during musket firing.



1775 to 1776 – Civilians Take Up Arms!

Preparatory Events for Revolution

“There were fierce debates within the Virginia House of Burgesses prior to 1775, as relations between Virginia and the Royalist British government continued to deteriorate. Virginia held a series of three conventions to discuss relations with Great Britain. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry were among the key participants of the three Virginia Conventions. The first convention was held in Williamsburg, but the next two were held in Richmond to protect the gathering from interference from Lord Dunmore, the last colonial governor of Virginia.”⁵

“In March 1775, in the St. John’s Church in Richmond, Patrick Henry made his famous speech uttering "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death!" By this point, King George had declared all 13 North American colonies to be in a state of open rebellion. Lord Dunmore ordered all the gunpowder in Williamsburg seized, to keep it out of the hands local patriot forces. Soon after the Battles of Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts, George Washington was selected to become commander of the new Continental Army.”⁶

Battle of Great Bridge

“Lord Dunmore evacuated Williamsburg for Norfolk in the fall of 1775. Norfolk, as was the rest of south side Virginia, was considered to be a more loyalist area. Great Bridge became the focus of British defensive strategy against local militia. Lord Dunmore organized the Queen’s Own Loyal Virginians, which consisted of local Tories and a regiment of former slaves, called Lord Dunmore's Ethiopians. A hastily built British fort secured the land approaches and main bridge to Norfolk, and patriot positions were set up opposite. On December 9, 1775 the British attacked with 600 British regulars and the Queen’s Own across the "great bridge" but were immediately repulsed in a bloody counter-fire from the redoubt held by local Virginia militia under Colonel William Woodford. In all the British lost between 62-102 in the engagement, depending upon various historical military accounts.”⁷

“The battle forced Lord Dunmore to withdraw from Norfolk on January 1, 1776 and the British began a naval artillery barrage of the town. Norfolk was now occupied by Virginia patriot forces. The former colonial governor was compelled to leave North America for Britain all together by the summer of 1776. Many loyalists from

1775 to 1776 – Civilians Take Up Arms!

Norfolk and the surrounding areas left Virginia with
Dunsmore.”⁸

Bodyshirt: Linen Bodyshirt

Stockings: Wool Stockings

Garters: Leather Garters

Breeches: Linen or Wool Breeches

Footwear: Black Leather Shoes or Hi-Lo Boots

Gaiters & Leggings: None

Cravats & Neckstock: White Linen Cravat

Weskits: Linen or Wool Weskits

Top Garment: Linen or Wool Frock Coat

Headgear: Tricorn Hat, Wool Kit Cap, or Canadian Fur Cap

Cartridge Box: Leather Belly or Shoulder Cartridge Box

Bayonet Carriage: Leather Bayonet Carriage or Double-
Frog Bayonet/Tomahawk Carriage

Tomahawk Carriage: Leather Tomahawk Carriage (if
double-frog carriage is not used)

Haversack: Natural Linen Haversack

2nd Cartridge Box: Leather Hunting Pouch & Powder Horn

Canteen: Wood, Leather, or Tin Canteen

Knapsack-Haversack: Bed Roll or Linen Knapsack-
Haversack

1777 to 1779 – Battle Experience Transforms Appearances

Collier-Matthew's Raid

“In May 1779, a British fleet entered the Chesapeake Bay commanded by Vice Admiral Sir George Collier. Also with the British was an expeditionary force of 1,800 troops led by Major General Edward Matthews. This British force attacked and destroyed Portsmouth's very lightly defended Fort Nelson. It then plundered and burned the shipyard and town, destroying naval stores and taking 130 vessels. This same British force then turned on Suffolk and the surrounding towns.”⁹

Relocation of the Capital to Richmond

“Patrick Henry served as first governor of Virginia from 1776-1779 while the capital was still located in Williamsburg. The Collier-Matthew's Raid put pressure on Governor Henry and the Assembly to move the capital inland to Richmond, which would be a more secure location from British attack. The ease at which the British captured Portsmouth highlighted Virginia's military weakness in 1779. Thomas Jefferson was governor of Virginia from 1779-1781. The relocation to Richmond was complete by April of 1780.”¹⁰

Bodyshirt: Linen Bodyshirt

Stockings: Wool Stockings

1777 to 1779 – Battle Experience Transforms Appearances

Garters: Leather Garters

Breeches: Linen, Wool, or Buckskin Breeches

Footwear: Black Leather Shoes or Hi-Lo Boots

Gaiters & Leggings: Linen Full-Gaiters or Wool Leggings

Cravats & Neckstock: Silk or Linen Scarves

Weskits: Linen or Wool Weskits, or Sleeved Waistcoats for use with Hunting Frocks

Top Garment: Linen or Wool Frock Coat, or Heavy Linen Hunting Frock

Headgear: Fantail or Slouch Hat, Wool Kit Cap, or Canadian Fur Cap

Cartridge Box: Leather Belly or Shoulder Cartridge Box

Bayonet Carriage: Double-Frog Bayonet/Tomahawk Carriage

Haversack: Natural Linen Haversack

2nd Cartridge Box: Leather Hunting Pouch & Powder Horn

Canteen: Wood, Leather, or Tin Canteen

Knapsack-Haversack: Bed Roll or Linen Knapsack-Haversack

1780 to 1783 – Continentals in the Ranks

Leslie's Raid

“In October 1780, Major General Alexander Leslie arrived at Portsmouth from New York with orders, "to proceed up the James River... to seize or destroy any magazine the enemy may have at Petersburg or Richmond". His force of 2,500 troops never made it further than Smithfield. In contrast with the Collier-Matthews Raid, there were Virginia militia in the area. Instead of risking direct confrontation with the Virginia militia, Leslie evacuated Portsmouth on November 15, 1780 in order to assist Cornwallis in the Carolinas. On November 16, 1780, General Von Steuben arrived in Richmond to take command of all military forces in Virginia.”¹¹

Benedict Arnold's Raid

“On December 20, 1780, 27 British ships arrived in the Chesapeake Bay carrying an expeditionary force commanded by traitor and newly appointed Brigadier General in the British Army Benedict Arnold. He was initially instructed to complete a strong garrison and fortifications at Portsmouth. He was to concentrate on destroying any supplies or equipment that would be useful to the Continental Southern Army, which had been very

active in the Carolinas by this time. After occupying Portsmouth and building a defensive fortified line with several redoubts around the town, Arnold's force went up the James River and burned parts of Richmond after weak defense from the Virginia militia in the area. The same fate was in store for Petersburg, as warehouses and public buildings were burned to the ground."¹²

Lafayette Comes to Virginia

“In mid-April of 1781, a group of New England infantry commanded by the French twenty-nine year old Major General Marquis de Lafayette entered Virginia. He had already proven himself to be an extremely talented officer while serving under George Washington at the Battle of Brandywine. This force was combined with Pennsylvania troops under General Anthony Wayne. The combined force reached Richmond just in time to prevent the British from burning the entire capital.”¹³

Cornwallis Enters Virginia

“Following the series of costly battles in North Carolina, the British Army of the South under Major General Lord Charles Cornwallis entered Virginia in April 1781. The British followed a path to Petersburg, where they joined by troops under the traitor Benedict

Arnold who had been in the area since the previous December. At Petersburg, cavalry under Colonel Banastre Tarleton began a raid to the west. From Petersburg, the British Army traveled down the south bank of the James River passing through Smithfield and Suffolk ending at Portsmouth. Tarleton's Dragoons also rejoined the main British force along the way. The British had to constantly maneuver against the Continental Army already in Virginia under Lafayette."¹⁴

“From there, British naval ships transported the British Army to Yorktown and Gloucester Point on the York River. On August 2, Cornwallis arrived at Yorktown, which was thought to be a naturally strong defensive position. Immediately the British, along with a number of Hessian mercenaries, began construction of two rings of defensive lines.”¹⁵

Tarleton's Raid

“Cornwallis directed Tarleton and his cavalry force to destroy Virginia's few manufacturing centers and disrupt its government. Tarleton's Dragoons advanced seventy miles in twenty-four hours burning warehouses and seizing several plantations along the way. They captured seven state assemblymen in Charlottesville, their

furthest penetration west, and narrowly missed capturing Governor Thomas Jefferson at Monticello. Following Tarleton's Raid, Thomas Nelson Jr. became governor of Virginia."¹⁶

The Continental and French Armies Come to Virginia

“The main force of combined French and American forces arrived in Virginia in the autumn of 1781. The French Army left Newport Rhode Island to join Washington's Army at Hudson, New York, which had taken up positions opposite the British in occupied New York City under General Sir Henry Clinton. Using a strategy of deception, the British were convinced a combined French and American attack was coming on New York. While the British were fortifying their defensive positions the French and American Armies slipped away undetected on a forced march spanning 15 days and 250 miles to reach Virginia. The majority of the troops were then brought by French ships from the top of the Chesapeake Bay to Williamsburg by September 24, with the remaining continuing the journey overland. Along the way, George Washington visited his home at Mount Vernon for the first time in six years from September 9-12. From Williamsburg the combined

American and French Army marched down the Old Williamsburg-Yorktown Road. The army encamped at Endview Plantation for a night, which is now a Virginia War Museum property. They joined the forces under Lafayette already harassing Cornwallis. In total there were 17,600 American and French troops opposite the 8,300 British soldiers entrenched at Yorktown.”¹⁷

Battle of Yorktown

“Upon the arrival of the combined American and French Army at Yorktown, Cornwallis abandoned his outer line of defenses on September 30 while expecting reinforcements by sea from New York. The original British outer defensive lines were considered to be very formidable by George Washington. At the same time, 4,000 American troops began work on an American defensive line. These lines provided excellent positions for the heavy French siege guns which the Continental Army desperately lacked during previous campaigns. From these new heavy artillery positions, every portion of the British inner defensive positions were now within range. The siege operations of Yorktown began on October 9, 1781 with sustained heavy artillery fire on the British defensive line.”¹⁸

“On October 14, 1781 the British lost two very important redoubts on the left flank of their defensive lines. During the assault, 400 French troops stormed Redoubt 9. Colonel Alexander Hamilton led 400 Continentals during the heroic assault on Redoubt 10. Both were captured in less than 30 minutes in very heavy fighting. Then on October 16 the British tried a direct counter-assault on the middle of the French-American lines. However, the British effort was repulsed. Finally, the British attempted to evacuate their forces across the York Rive to their fortified position at Gloucester. However, the British ships that were to carry the British troops on their escape were scattered or sunk in a violent storm. With their escape through Gloucester cut off and the French fleet still blockading the entrances to the York River and Chesapeake Bay, Cornwallis was forced to consider surrender.”¹⁹

“On October 17, 1781 the British asked for terms of surrender. The final articles of surrender were signed at Moore House the next day. One October 19, the Army of Cornwallis officially surrendered and laid down their weapons, in a procession that was more than a mile long. Because of various delays in leaving New York, Clinton

arrived with a strong fleet and 7,000 troops on October 28. With the British fleet off Cape Charles, Clinton learned of the surrender and returned to New York in dismay.”²⁰

“The British prisoners taken at Yorktown were placed in prisons in Winchester, Virginia and Maryland. Although the Battle of Yorktown effectively ended all fighting during the Revolutionary War, the French kept garrisons in Williamsburg and Yorktown during the following year. The Continental Army spent the following winter in New York. The Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the war and recognized the independence of the United States, was signed on September 3, 1783.”²¹

Bodyshirt: Linen Bodyshirt

Stockings: Wool Stockings

Garters: Leather Garters

Breeches: Linen, Wool, or Buckskin Breeches

Footwear: Black Leather Shoes or Hi-Lo Boots

Gaiters & Leggings: Linen Spatterdashes or Wool Leggings

Cravats & Neckstock: Black Linen or Leather Neckstocks

Weskits: Linen or Wool Weskits, or Sleeved Waistcoats for use with Hunting Frocks

Top Garment: Continental Regimental Coat or Heavy Linen Hunting Frock

Headgear: Fantail or Slouch Hat, Military Cocked Hat, Wool Kit Cap, or Canadian Fur Cap

Cartridge Box: Leather Belly or Shoulder Cartridge Box

Bayonet Carriage: Double-Frog Bayonet/Tomahawk Carriage

Haversack: Natural Linen Haversack

2nd Cartridge Box: Black Tin Cartridge Box

Canteen: Wood, Leather, or Tin Canteen

Knapsack-Haversack: Linen Knapsack-Haversack or “New-Invented” Knapsack-Haversack

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