

Colonel James Holmes' Fourth New York Regiment

After the taking of Fort Ticonderoga on May 10th of 1775, the Continental Congress called on New York and the New England Colonies to raise troops for a campaign into Canada. The New York Provincial Congress authorized to supply four Regiments totaling 3,000 soldiers under the command of General Philip Schuyler. Unlike the first three New York regiments which embarked at the end of August, 1775 down Lake Champlain into Canada, the Fourth New York Regiment spent the most time between Albany and Ticonderoga. Colonel James Holmes effort to clothe and equip his men never came to full fruition, leaving the regiment posted in rear area garrisons. None-the-less, the Fourth New York Regiment played the important role of forwarding supplies to aid the invasion of Canada. This vital chain in the supply line meant the regiment saw the entire campaign at Ticonderoga or up Lake George. By virtue of just being there in December, the Fourth New York was the main man power and muscle to aid Henry Knox in his Noble Train of Artillery.

Those captains appointed by the New York Provincial Congress to the Fourth New York, spent much of the summer of 1775 recruiting men from Dutchess, Westchester, Kings, Queens, and Richmond counties. Once mustered, these captains marched their companies to Albany to receive their clothing and equipment. Earlier in June of 1775 The New York Provincial Congress ordered cloth purchased for clothing the four New York regiments.

Peter T Curtenius as Commissary of this Congress be desired to purchase on the public Credit the following quantities of Coarse Broad Cloths vizt. Coarse blue broad cloth sufficient to make 712 Short Coats & Crimson cloth for cuffs & facings for the said Coats & that if blue cloth cannot be had, that in such Case he purchase blue Coating for that purpose—Light Brown coarse broad cloth sufficient to make 712 Short coats, with blue cloth sufficient for Cuffs & facings.—Grey coarse broad Cloth sufficient to make 712 Short Coats with green Cloth sufficient to Cuffs &



facings.—Dark brown coarse broad Cloth sufficient to make 712 Short Coats with Scarlet cloth sufficient for Cuffs & facings for the same.

The intention of these orders to the New York commissary was supply, “short coats,” of a military cut, with various color combinations to distinguish between regiments. These orders overestimated merchants’ stocks of these colors of cloth. By July the New York Provincial Congress simplified their orders to Peter Curtenius stating merely, “Uniform coats made for all the Non-commissioned Officers & Men to be raised in this Colony; that the Coats of each regiment be made with different Cuffs & facings.”

No matter the color of the body of the coat, the only distinction requested was the cuff & facing color. The Fourth New York Regiment received blue facings for their clothing. Although the New York Provincial Congress described “light brown” coats turned up with blue, in practice their coat body cloth varied from shades of light brown, drab, and grey--which these coats were often actually called. The Correspondence of the New York Provincial Congress copied a letter from an anonymous mate from on Lake Champlain who made comment on the status of the area around Ticonderoga in September of 1775. He distinctly pointed out the clothing of the Fourth New York as, “at Lake George a company, Capt Woodward, 25th of grey with blue...” Nathan Woodward’s company of the 4th NY received at least part of their complement of regimental coats, enough for the writer to indicate the uniformity amongst them. This same color combination was described in a pension record of Nathan Lockwood. In November of 1819 he described his service.

A private in the Company commanded by Captain Jonathan Platt in the 4th New York Regiment commanded by Colonel James Holmes...Deponent was in service at Ticonderoga...the uniform worn by the Deponent & other privates in said Regiment was gray cloth turned up with blue.

On July 12th 1775 the New York Committee of Safety defined the preferred set of clothing to be worn in addition to the regimental coats:



Russia drilling sufficient to make 1,500 waistcoats, and as many pairs of breeches, and have them made up; and that he also purchase as much low price linen as will make 3,000 shirts, and get that number of shirts made. That he purchase 1,500 hats, 1,500 pairs of shoes, and 3,000 pair of course woolen homespun knit hose. That he also purchase cheap and proper linen, or other material, sufficient to make 3,000 cravats.

The numbers of waistcoats, breeches, hats, and shoes only account for the first two regiments of the four to be raised. The Fourth New York was raised to late to receive these large amounts of additional clothing items, receiving only short coats as the only uniform item worn by the regiment. Philip Van Cortlandt wrote to the New York Provincial Congress from Albany on August 28th 1775 describing the Fourth Regiment:

Agreeable to verbal orders received from Colonel Holmes, when last in New York, made all the dispatch in my power to this place, where I arrived with the 26th instant...The day I arrived came up the following Captains, with their Companies; Captain Herrick, Captain Palmer, Captain Benedict, and Captain Mills...many of the men wanting shirts, shoes, stockings, underclothes, and, in short, without anything fit for a soldier except a uniform coats.



Holmes' Regiment only received bits and pieces of other clothing through the summer of 1775. Nathan Woodard requested at Albany on August 28th 1775 his company be supplied with "Ten Coats four shirts & 26 pair of shows & 20 weast-Coats & 20 Pair of Breeches 20 Hats." This certainly was not the full complement of his company. Similarly Colonel Holmes requested Peter Curtenius in an undated letter sets of clothing for Captain Mill's Company which included:

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| Becker Holmes | one pair of Drilling Breeches |
| Henry Rich | one pair of shoes |
| Thomas Golden | one pair woolen stockings |
| Shubal Cunningham | one pair of wolling stockings |
| Joshua Baker | one shirt |
| Lewis Miller | one Shirt Checkt |
| Samuel Baker | a Jacket |
| | pr of Breeches Brown Cloth |
| | One pair of Shoes |
| | One pr of Cotton Stockings |
| | One shirt white |
| | One stock |
| | A jacket and pr Breeches |
| Charles Parsons | one pr Drilling Breeches |
| | two Chekt Shirts |
| | one Jacket |

Additionally, Holmes wrote to Curtenius again requesting on August 4th 1775 "Please to Deliver to the Bearer herof Mr. Robert Benson one



hundred and forty four Coats including Six Sergeants Coats- also as many Shirts, Hatts, shoes, stockings, Wescoats & Breeches as is in proportion for 2 companys." Likewise, Captain Joseph Benedict's Company was provided with the following clothing on August 9th, 1775:

15 vests

15 pairs of breeches

25 shirts

30 pairs of stockings

18 pairs of shoes

~~12 black silk handkerchiefs~~

3 hats

30 knapsacks

52 coats

52 blankets

While a handful of men did receive waistcoats, breeches, shirts, shoes, and hats out of military stores, this was not the case for all the men within companies. Full strength companies mustered from 50 to 70 men. Likely those men with serviceable clothing brought from home served in that clothing, with a handful of garments issued to those recruits in dire need.

Saddlers among other craftsmen in New York worked producing the bayonet belts, cartouche pouches, and musket slings. An anonymous letter in the New York Provincial Congress proceedings from October 4th 1775 noted, "All our troops are furnished with belts and pouches for nineteen cartridges, bayonet belts, musket slings, blankets, coats, canteens, haversacks, &c." Yet arming his regiment proved to be Colonel Holmes' hardest task. The New York Provincial Congress wrote Robert Boyd on June 23rd 1775, to "set on foot a manufactory of Guns Barrells, Bayonets and Steel Ramrods," Henry Watkeys to, "furnish locks for the muskets and to mount stock & finish them in compleat workmanlike manner as the sample shown to him," and an unknown "Sadler" in, "making scabbards for Bayonets and straps and buckles for the Musquets." These newly contracted New York produced military arms were to be derived from a British pattern weapon. The New York Provincial Congress meeting on June 30th defined the appearance of these guns.

1st That said Henry Watkeys agrees to doth herby agree to and with the said Leonard Lispenard, Richard Montgomerie, James Clinton & Thomas Smith, that said Henry Watkey shall & will use his utmost Dilligence to finish all the muskets (the Barrells, ramrods & bayonets being first provided by the congress) in the following manner, towit; The lock to be made agreeable to the Lock now delivered to him, marked Grice 1760, and the stock & mounting to be finished & the musket barrel polished agreeable to the musket now delivered to him marked N1 20 and that said henry Watkeys agrees to deliver the said muskets in small parcels as they are finished & compleat the whole work with all possible dispatch.

While the congress specifically requested locks copied from those made by gun maker Joseph Grice in Birmingham, England, the remaining details of these guns are unknown. A number of them certainly were produced and these newly made weapons were used in addition to weapons purchased and confiscated by the colony. Yet by the end of August, few if any of these weapons were shouldered by the Fourth New York Regiment.



Colonel Goose Van Schaick writing from Albany mentioned on August 29th 1775, "Col Van Cortlandt is also arrived here with fives Companies of Holmes' Battalion, who have not arms sufficient to supply one Company." This was confirmed by Philip Van Cortlandt who wrote to New York Congress from Albany on August 28, 1775 stating, "Dear Sir: Agreeable to verbal orders received from Colonel Holmes, when last in New York, made all the dispatch in my power to this place, where I arrived the 26th instant...not more than thirty guns, with four companies, fit for service." The New York Provincial Congress proceedings from October 4th 1775 mentioned that most arms had been issued to the First and Second Regiments, leaving the Fourth deficient.

The first and Second regiment and some part of the other Regiments are armed with the best of musket and bayonets and other with firelocks of the widest bore, which could be found, repaired where it was necessary, and fitted...A great part of our arms have been procured by purchase; some have been hired—and from necessity, to compleat some Companies, a few arms have in some places been impressed... The fourth or Colonel Holmes' Regiment is now at the outpost; part of the Regiment was obliged to be detained at Albany, until arms could be procured for them.

While the New York Provincial Congress planned to fulfill their pledge to the Continental Congress in 1775, their ability to raise thousands of soldiers was compromised by the colony's material limitations to supply so many men for campaign. The 4th New York Regiment exemplified the struggle to equip men for war. Ironically, it was the lack of clothing and arms for Holme's men which left them relegated to the rear, in the right place and time to play a crucial role in the service of Henry Knox. Without deliveries of small arms, men of the Fourth New York at Ticonderoga helped deliver the big guns, which ultimately delivered Boston into freedom from British occupation.



Shirts

Best: Hand-stitched checked, striped, or white linen shirt narrow band cuffs with thread Dorset buttons or made for sleeve-buttons (cuff links).

Acceptable: Machine stitched checked, striped, or white linen shirts.

Unacceptable: Cotton calico or plaid shirts.

Neckwear

Best: Silk, linen, or cotton neckerchiefs; linen neck stocks, or linen rollers, well-tied around the neck.

Acceptable: Machine hemmed neckerchiefs or linen rollers.

Unacceptable: Military horsehair or leather neck stocks.

Hats and Caps

Best: Hand-finished, round-blocked, hats made of black wool or beaver felt, cut round, and left plain or cocked in appropriate civilian styles.

Acceptable: Knit-wool Monmouth, Dutch mutt, or Kilmarnock caps, oval-blocked hats made of black or white felt in cocked or round styles.

Discouraged: Grey or brown wool felt hats, cut down felt caps.

Unacceptable: Slouch hats from unfinished blanks, straw hats, fur caps.



Coats

Best: Hand-finished, well-fit, wool broadcloth regimental short coats of drab, grey, or brown with blue collars, cuffs, and lappels.

Acceptable: Well-fit wool broadcloth regimental short coats of drab, grey, or brown with blue collars, cuffs, and lappels with minor visible machine stitching.

Unacceptable: Baggy coats, coats and jackets made of cotton canvas or damask upholstery fabric.

Jackets and Waistcoats

Best: Hand-finished, well-fit waistcoats of drab, brown, white, green, red or blue broadcloth, kersey, or serge, made single or double breasted, skirted or square cut, with or without sleeves.

Acceptable: Well-fit, waistcoats of linen, linsey-woolsey, cotton, cotton velvet, wool plush or silk, in solid colors or simple patterns, made single or double breasted, skirted or square cut with minor visible machine stitching. Sleeved waistcoats are acceptable as the primary outer garment.

Unacceptable: Regimental waistcoats, cotton canvas, upholstery fabric waistcoats, extremely long or baggy



Breeches and Trousers

Best: Hand-finished, well-fit trousers of linen or hemp canvas or checked linen, leather breeches, or breeches in black, brown, drab, kersey, linsey-woolsey, serge, cotton velvet, wool plush, broadcloth with buckled or tied knee bands.

Acceptable: Well-fit breeches or trousers with minor visible machine stitching.

Unacceptable: Regimental breeches, fringed trousers, baggy breeches, overalls.

Leg wear

Best: Just stockings or well-fit, hand-finished spatterdashers or half-gaiters of black, brown, or drab wool, or black leather.

Acceptable: Well-fit canvas spatterdashers, or spatterdashers with minor machine finishing.

Discouraged: Wool leggings. Indian Leggings

Unacceptable: Military gaiters, baggy spatterdashers



Socks and Stockings

Best: White or grey wool yarn or worsted stockings or socks, when worn with trousers.

Acceptable: White, grey, black, brown, blue, or green stockings or socks of wool yarn, worsted, linen or cotton.

Unacceptable: Red, yellow, or polyester stockings.

Shoes

Best: Hand-finished, short or long quartered shoes with round toes, made of black-waxed calf leather, fitted for buckles. Shoe boots, half-boots high-lows, of black waxed-calf.

Acceptable: Machine made, black leather, shoes with buckles or ties, high-lows.

Discouraged: Moccasins.

Unacceptable: Modern Footwear, modern moccasins, civil war bootees, or riding boots(except for field officers).



Cartridge Pouches

Best: Soft cartridge pouches black or fair leather with approximately 19 round cartridge blocks, narrow black or buff leather straps, or linen webbing shoulder straps.

Acceptable: Small, simple leather shot pouches with narrow leather shoulder straps, or belt loops.

Discouraged: Belly boxes or shoulder converted belly boxes.

Unacceptable: British 36 or 29-hole cartridge pouches, New Model American pouches.

Powder Horns

Best: Plain, empty, powder horns with narrow leather straps.

Acceptable: No powder horn to go with a cartridge pouch.

Unacceptable: Native styled powder horns, or black powder filled horns.



Arms

Best: Old pattern Dutch, French, British, commercial or American made muskets.

Acceptable: New York style fowlers, English fowlers, either plain or modified for a bayonet.

No weapon at all.

Unacceptable: Virginia or Pennsylvania styled long rifles, later French model muskets.

Side Arms

Best: Waist or shoulder belt mounted bayonet.

Acceptable: None, small axes carried in a knapsack.

Discouraged: Sheathed tomahawks, belt axes, carried in a belt.

Unacceptable: Horse pistols, naval pistols, unsheathed bayonets, tomahawks, or belt axes.



Knapsacks and Tumplines

Best: David Uhl or similar plain single-envelope knapsacks, worn with a leather or hemp tumpline.

Acceptable: Plain single envelope knapsacks, drawstring canvas snapsacks, or hemp tumplines. Painted canvas Benjamin Warner or similar pattern knapsacks, blanket rolls.

Unacceptable: British painted or goatskin knapsacks.

Canteens

Best: Tin canteens of kidney or half-moon shape. Wood cheese box, or staved canteens of documented period pattern with narrow leather or linen webbing strap.

Cheese box canteens should have narrow leather keepers or narrow iron staples to retain the strap.

Unacceptable: Wool canteen covers, jacked leather canteens, covered glass bottles, copper canteens, stainless steel canteens, gourd canteens, and Petite Bidon.

Blankets

Best: 2-3 point check, Dutch, or rose blankets.

Acceptable: Plain white or Hudson Bay blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets.

