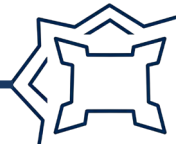


Defiance & Independence: British and German Army Women



Coming from as far as England and Germany women followed the British Army and their German Auxiliary forces to North America. These soldiers' wives earned a living as they served alongside their husbands as laundresses and nurses, both vital to the health of the army. Women were also contracted to help produce necessary clothing for soldiers, including making breeches and trousers from old tents, to prepare the British Army in Canada for campaign in the spring 1777. Along with their children, women officially drew rations from the army. In the British army, women were allotted a half ration and children a quarter ration. In June 1777, the Orderly Book of the 40th Regiment of Foot recorded the number of women allotted to each company.

"Four Women Pr Compy of Companys of 50 & 8 Women Pr Compy of Companys of 100 are Allowed to Embark with their Respective Regiments and to be Victualud According to the Former Regulations the Remainder of the Women and Children of their Corps will be sent to NYork where A proportion of provisions & Qrs or Old Camp Equipage will be provided them."

While laundry, nursing, and sewing was important and encouraged by the British Army, the un-licensed sale of liquor by women who acted as, petty sutlers was discouraged. The British Grenadier Battalion Orderly Book recorded orders from Three Mile Point, north of Ticonderoga, on July 2, 1777.

"As much evil is like to Arise from the Intemperance and irregularity of Savages, it is positively Ordered that no Officer should give them Liquor, and that no soldier, Soldiers Wife, Suttler, or follower of the Army should presume to sell them any."



General Orders on July 23, 1777 repeated the prohibition against the uncontrolled sale of liquor within the army and its allies. As General Burgoyne's Army advanced south towards Saratoga, the ranks of women who followed the British army swelled dramatically with the arrival of loyalist refugees. By October 1777, the army was purportedly trailed by two-thousand women, though just three hundred women were officially attached to the army's companies of British & German soldiers. Hannah Winthrop of Cambridge, Massachusetts described the women who followed the captured British Army of General Burgoyne in a letter to Mercy Warren in a letter on November 11, 1777.

"Last thursday, which was a very stormy day, a large number of British Troops came softly thro the Town via Watertown to Prospect hill, on Friday we heard the Hessians were to make a Procession in the same rout; we thot we should have nothing to do with them, but View them as they Passt. To be sure, the sight was truly astonishing, I never had the least Idea that the Creation produced such a sor-did set of creatures in human Figure—poor, dirty, emaciated men, great numbers of women, who seemd to be the beasts of burthen, having a bushel basket on their back, by which they were bent double, the contents seemd to be Pots & kettles, various sorts of Furniture, children peeping thro the gridirons & other utensils, Some very young Infants who were born on the road; the women with bare feet, cloathd in dirty raggs such Effluvia filld the air while they were passing, had they not been smoaking all the time, I should have been apprehensive of being contaminated by them."

Whether an experienced soldier's wife or a loyalist refugee, when the army was on the move these women had to carry all of their personal possessions with them. They carried all their belongings in packs, baskets or market wallets. Blankets were tied to bags, or carried tied around the body. When the Army was ordered to march these women quickly grabbed all their effects and were ready to follow the Army at a moments notice.



By the 1770s, everyday clothing for British women consisted of a gown worn over a shift. Stays provided the correct fashionable conical silhouette with pockets, and two or so petticoats. An apron protected the front of the petticoats and was most commonly of an easily-laundered material such as white or checked linen. A handkerchief covered the bosom for fashion, sun protection, and modesty. Women dressed their hair and covered it with a white cap.

This was fashionable, but also practical, as it helped keep rarely-washed hair free of dust. When outside, a hat or bonnet helped keep off the sun. The style for women's shoes of this period was for high-heels, with fabric uppers, closing like men's shoes with buckles.

Images of camp followers show them following the current fashions wherever possible. Despite the challenges of life on campaign, like all people, they strove to maintain their identities by dressing as they might in civilian life. In this era, self-identity and self-respect were largely tied up with self-presentation. They were defined by their clothing, and therefore women dressed respectably and fashionably. Yet these were hard-working women, and on campaign they had minimal access to consumer goods. At times they wore more relaxed working garments, and occasionally adopted pieces out of their husband's military wardrobes, especially essentials like shoes and hats.

Shift

Best: Hand-stitched in white linen with sleeves gathered into narrow cuffs at the elbows. Cuffs should close with sleeve buttons, or ties threaded through buttonholes. Neck opening should be large; with a gown or jacket on, the shift should only barely be visible around the neckline.

Acceptable: Machine-stitched (ideally hand-finished) in white linen with elbow length sleeves.



Unacceptable: Long sleeves, obvious machine sewing, gathered neckline, neck or sleeve ruffles longer than 1.25 inches.

Stays

Best: Hand-sewn, fully boned stays with worsted or linen exterior fabric, the most common colors being dark green, blue or white. Stays should create a proper 1770s silhouette, which is to say a smooth conical torso. Most stays in this period are back lacing.

Acceptable: Machine-sewn stays which produce the correct silhouette. Partially boned stays, leather stays. No stays, if worn with a bedgown, or other loose-fitting garment. This is acceptable only for women doing serious manual labor, those portraying the ill, or those in a state of undress early in the morning, or after retiring for the evening.

Unacceptable: Unboned bodices.

Upper body garment

Best: Hand-sewn, stomacher-fronted or center-front closing English style gown in worsted or linen. Printed cotton textiles must be well-documented to the period. By the 1770s gowns are far and away the most common wardrobe choice for British women. To that end, the majority of reenactors portraying English women should be dressed in gowns to accurately simulate the period.

Acceptable: Hand-finished gown, fitted jacket, or bedgown.

Unacceptable: Sleeveless bodices. Fitted garments such as gowns or jackets worn without stays. Short gowns (a uniquely American garment, unlikely to be worn by European women). Garments made of printed cottons with designs not documented to the period, such as modern calicos, and cabbage roses.



Petticoats

Best: Multiple hand-sewn petticoats in wool or linen, solid-colored, striped, or matching a gown or jacket. Length should be between low-calf and ankle.

Acceptable: One or more hand-finished petticoats of the proper length.

Unacceptable: Modern skirts, petticoats without sufficient fullness, or shorted than mid-calf.

Pockets

Best: Pockets of linen or cotton worn under petticoats, plain quilted or embroidered.

Unacceptable: Pockets worn over petticoats.

Apron

Best: Hand-sewn, white or checked. Most aprons are linen, or wool for work. Aprons should be long enough to cover a majority of the petticoat, and at least a yard in width.

Unacceptable: Very short or very narrow aprons. Wildly colored aprons. Aprons longer than the petticoats they are worn with. Decorative aprons with ruffles or lace (unless portraying an officer's wife).

Neck kerchief

Best: White linen or cotton cut in a triangle, or a square folded into a triangle, large enough to be draped around the shoulders and cover the bosom. Less commonly: checked material, colors, or printed cotton. Neck kerchiefs can be worn under the neckline of the gown or pinned to the front of the gown.

Acceptable: Any sort of neck kerchief properly worn. The vast majority of images show everyday women wearing some sort of handkerchief covering.

Unacceptable: Anything Else.



Cap

Best: There are a wide variety of cap styles in use in the 1770s. In general, cap and hair styles have some height and volume in this period. Caps should be hand-sewn out of fine white linen or cotton organdy. Most cap styles have a gathered or pleated ruffle around the face. Caps may be trimmed with silk ribbon. Caps should be starched if possible.

Unacceptable: Mob caps (circular caps consisting of one piece of material gathered to create both caul and ruffle). Caps worn down over the forehead. No cap.



Hair

Best: This will depend on social class. That said, hair styles in the 1770s are fairly large. Even women camp followers are probably attempting to follow fashions. Hair should be put up under a cap, with most of the volume on top (not at the back) of the head. Some hair should show above the forehead, and this hair may have some volume to it. Dressing hair with po-made and minimal powder is encouraged.

Acceptable: Hair pulled back or pinned up on top of the head and covered with a cap.

Unacceptable: Hair worn in a bun at the back of the head. Hair down, or left completely undressed. Large, elaborate high fashion styles.

Hats or Bonnets

Best: Flat, shallow-crowned straw, felt, or fabric covered hat with a diameter no more than 18". Black silk bonnet with flat brim and gathered crown. Some soldiers' wives (perhaps especially German wives, who are depicted doing so) likely wore their husband's black felt hats.

Unacceptable: Hats folded down over the ears. Straw hats with rounded modern crowns.

Cloaks

Best: Wool cloaks, mostly commonly red, closed with ties. Most images of cloaks show them being mid-calf- to waist-length. Wool, silk, linen, or leather mitts for forearms. German camp followers are occasionally depicted wearing cast-off regimental coats.

Unacceptable: Celtic-style or fantasy cloaks. Cloaks closing with decorative metal clasps.



Stockings

Best: White or grey wool yarn or worsted stockings with back seams, ending above the knee. Stockings should be held up with leather or cloth tape garters tied above or below the knee.

Acceptable: White, natural, or colored stockings of wool yarn, worsted, linen or cotton.

Unacceptable: Striped stockings, polyester stockings, athletic socks, modern tights. Though stockings with decorative "clocks" were occasionally worn in the period, few modern reproductions are accurate.

Shoes

Best: Wooden-heeled women's shoes with buckles, with fabric exterior, especially hardwearing worsteds.

Acceptable: Black, brown or red leather heeled shoes with buckles or low-heeled shoes with buckles, or men's shoes.

Unacceptable: Modern shoes.

Jewelry

Best: No jewelry, outside of officer's wives impressions.

Acceptable: Small period earrings, non-obtrusive studs in non-earlobe piercings.

Unacceptable: Obvious modern jewelry, especially in any non-earlobe piercings



Carrying Goods and Personal Items

Best: Pockets under petticoats, appropriate baskets, market wallets, military packs. Wheel barrows along with baskets, for petty-sutler impressions.

Unacceptable: Haversacks, modern baskets.

Blankets

Best: White Handwoven British Army Issue blanket with white or brown stripes and Government Stamp, 2-3 Point, Dutch, or Rose blankets.

Acceptable: Plain white blankets.

Unacceptable: Civil War grey blankets, or modern olive drab blankets.