

## **Important Reading for the New Reenactor**

**by Mark B. Richardson**

**When I think of getting started in the hobby of reenacting, I remember thinking I had a pretty good knowledge of the issues surrounding the causes of the American Revolutionary War, who the major players were, what the major battles were and what the outcome was. In spite of that, I dared to ask, "What books should I be reading?" With that question, I quickly came to learn that I really didn't know very much at all. I received some advice then from a "wise" person who probably had six months more experience in the hobby than I did at the time, but the advice was taken, and it has served me well, so I will pass it on now. I thought I would be reading dry volumes about battles from some out dated reference books, but the advice I received was very different. Simply put, I was told to learn about the soldiers first, who they were, where they came from, what their job was, what their equipment was and what it took to be a soldier. With that in place, the history part would naturally come along. So, in light of this advice, I will share some reading materials that I found most useful when I began this hobby in the spring of 1975 and three books I read later on.**

**The very first book I purchased was Harold L. Peterson's, *The Book of The Continental Soldier*. This became my bible in the early years of reenacting. While the focus of the book is on the American Army, each chapter lays out the essential weapons, artillery, accoutrements, medical needs, camp life, music, horse, clothing, rank and organization of the army. In addition to the very readable text, Peterson provides an excellent bibliography. One thing I came to appreciate over the years, in terms of judging a book by more than its cover, was to look at the authors list of references and/or their bibliography. Also, I've become an avid believer in reading footnotes. What makes a particular book successful for me is that it will lead me somewhere else, and Peterson certainly does that.**

**I think the next two books I'm going to recommend were purchased together at a book store in Yarmouth, Massachusetts on Route 6A. Both books are part of a series produced by The Company of Military Historians. Edited by John R. Elting, *Military Uniforms in America: The Era of the American Revolution, 1755-1795* is a wonderful look at uniforms and clothing associated with the era of the French and Indian War through the early Constitution period. American, British, Loyalist, French**

and German soldiers are depicted in colorful scenes in their typical field uniforms. The book also provides some basic unit information about how they were organized, equipped, and deployed during their service in North America. The footnotes are useful as is a glossary of terms at the end. Next up is *Weapons of the American Revolution and Accoutrements*, by Warren Moore. Here the weapons and equipment of the era are shown and described in detail. Firearms of all sorts, edged weapons, pole arms, powder horns and essential pieces of equipment are laid out for the reader to absorb. This is a reference book which can leave the reader with an appreciation for the variety military and civilian weapons used during the Revolution.

Then there are the George C. Neumann books. Perhaps the best known private collector of Revolutionary War era weapons, George's books include:

*The History of Weapons of the American Revolution*, *Battle Weapons of the American Revolution*, *Swords & Blades of the American Revolution*, and with Frank J. Kravic, *Collector's Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*. All of these books provide most useful information to anyone beginning the hobby of Rev War reenacting. Again, the detailed photographs and descriptions illustrate for the reenactor the message that is possible for us to "get it right" when it comes to portraying the lives of 18th century soldiers.

To get a feel for people living during the time leading up to the Revolution, particularly in Massachusetts, look to *A People's Army*, by Fred Anderson, *The Minutemen and Their World* by Robert A. Gross, and *The Boston Massacre* by Hiller B. Zobel. *The Boston Massacre* underscores the importance of trade guilds and secret societies in Boston. It addresses how organizations such as the Freemasons and the Loyal Nine manipulated the Sons of Liberty and the mob mentality on the streets of Boston to make them a formidable force against government officials and the soldiers of the King. In *The Minutemen and Their World*, you'll learn that the American Revolution was more than a military rebellion or a fight for independence. Truly, small communities throughout New England were involved in a religious revolution as well as an economic, social and agricultural revolution. Gross does an excellent job of leading us through the turmoil of Concord during the years leading up to the Revolution, but I think Concord becomes typical of many New England towns that were actually growing old by the time of the Revolution. Fred Anderson provides us with an excellent look into the life of Provincial Soldiers

during the French and Indian War. We learn what was expected of these men from their British counterparts in the Regular Army and what they expected of themselves. We learn that these were religious men who understood the camaraderie of soldering as well as the serious nature of their work. We can see how these men were shaped and prepared to for what would ultimately become the American Revolutionary War.

For anyone becoming a reenactor, these and many more books will begin to fill up your home library shelves, but the question comes up as to where to find these books. Certainly one can look to their local library, but I haven't found most of these books in libraries close to me. In recent years, I haven't seen them on the shelves of any of the large chain bookstore either, but it may be possible to order them. I have seen them, some with great regularity, on "eBay," the king of on-line auction houses (look under Revolutionary War, American Revolution or Rev War). Also, many of them and other interesting books can be purchased from the ever so useful sutlers, such as, Jas Townsend & Son, Inc., who provide us with the necessary tools of our trade. Another source would be the bookstores of Eastern National located at our national park sites, such as the Battle Road Visitors Center, off Route 2A in Lincoln, Massachusetts. Anyway, I think reading becomes as much of this hobby as any other part of it. It's something we do during the winter months when we long for the start of the next campaign season, and it's something we all talk about around the campfires of many events. So, I wish you all good reading, and I hope you enjoy the hobby of reenacting the American Revolutionary War.