

## **Some Thoughts on the Hobby of Reenacting**

**By Mark B. Richardson**

**As I look back on the twenty-five years I've already spent in this hobby of reenacting, I think of the 225th anniversary events of the American Revolution coming upon us this year. I find myself thinking about a younger generation (and us baby boomers, too) who might choose to become involved in such a hobby for the first time. With all the events I have behind me, one question is still asked, "What makes someone want to become a reenactor?" Well, the answer to that question isn't easy or simple. In fact, it's about as difficult as one can imagine, because it's a very individual answer that lies with every reenactor. While we all may share some reasons in common, we don't all share the same reasons. Then again, if you ask me today, my answer may be different tomorrow. So, with all the many hobbies one can pass away time with and spend money on, why did I become a reenactor? In my case in particular, why did I become an American Revolutionary War Reenactor?**

**At an early age, I knew that one of my ancestors was William Bradford, the second governor of Plymouth Colony and author of the Mayflower Compact. (In fact, my middle name is Bradford.) As a very young boy, my family took me to visit Plymouth Plantation. While not as grand an experience as it is today, that experience made a lasting impression on me. I knew I was connected to a past history. (I have another story about taking my own children to Plymouth when they were very young, but that may be another essay sometime.)**

**As a young boy of the post World War II era, like so many others, I grew up playing with toy soldiers. Among the ones I enjoyed the most were my Civil War soldiers. My parents gave me my first set of Marx soldiers, and I saved my money to purchase another. While my collection of blue and gray began to grow, I met a new friend, Bee Zee. Not only did Bee Zee have Civil War soldiers, he had lead Civil War soldiers. We put our armies together and played for hours, reenacting battle scenes from various pictures we gathered on the Civil War. This was the time of the 100th anniversary celebrations of the Civil War.**

**Now Bee Zee had an older brother, Andy, and Andy was quite an interesting guy. Not only was he was an antique gun collector, he was a Civil War reenactor. I can still remember him decked out in his blue suit**

of clothes, with his rifled musket and accouterments. While only 12 years old at the time, I listened to his stories, and I wanted to go off as a drummer boy to reenact the Civil War. My parents said I was too young, and I had to be content to play with my toy soldiers and read what I could. While not knowing then of any particular ancestors who fought in the Civil War, once again, I was making another connection with the past.

Well, the Centennial of the Civil War came and went, and boyhood turned into the Beatles, football, high school, drumming in bands, girls, surfing, college and the counter culture. The mid to late 60s and early 70s were a whole other era. One thing was sure though, it was a time when I began asking who I was, where did I come from and where was I going? With Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, Americans had turned against their government, but (at least for me) not their country. America had its problems, but they were problems that could be fixed. Ironically, along came President Gerald Ford and the bicentennial of our country. America was about to have a birthday party, and we were all invited. As a nation, we were about to connect with our past.

At the time, I was working at a children's home in central Massachusetts. A coworker of mine (Larry) belonged to the local militia reenactor group, and he told me they were getting ready to march to Concord bridge for the opening celebration of the bicentennial of the Revolution. Larry asked if I wanted to join. While somewhat interested in joining, what actually drew me to the event was the protest that was planned against the event and the presence of President Ford. It wasn't the protest itself that attracted me, but people such as Pete Seeger who were scheduled to perform at the event. Any reason to see Pete Seeger perform was a good reason. It just happened to be the night before the reenactors were to have their parade.

During the overnight hours, I listened to the speeches and watched the performers. During the early morning of April 19, 1975, it was time for President Ford and the reenactors to have their place in the sun. First, Paul Revere was to ride by and cross the famous North Bridge, but the roadway was so packed with spectators, the park rangers had to push people aside to clear the way. With that done, it was time for the reenactors to parade. I watched them as they came, holding themselves erect, decked out in colonial costumes, carrying their muskets and flags, they came on, marching slowly and proudly. It was a sight all right. The first reenactors over the bridge stepped to the side and saluted those who crossed behind them. They too stepped aside and saluted those who were

behind them. Soon the whole road was lined with colonial reenactors, all paying homage, not only to each other, but surely to those who had passed over that bridge two hundred years earlier. The British reenactors were there too, and they paid homage to their fallen comrades as well. For me the scene was a true celebration of our national heritage. Once again, it was time for me to connect with my past.

I joined the local militia group and shortly thereafter found my own connection to the past. An ancestor of mine, Ephraim Fairbanks, had once been a member of the very same militia group I had just recently joined. He had marched to the sound of the church bells ringing on April 19, 1775, and on to Boston. I had once again found my link to the past, and I was about to dive into the hobby with everything I had. Little did I know then that I would watch my children grow up between rows of white canvas tents, making what I hoped would be a link to their past.

So, that's my reason for becoming an American Revolutionary War Reenactor. I do it to remember those who came before me. There are other reasons why I have continued after 25 years to remain in the hobby, but that's another essay. For anyone thinking of becoming a reenactor for whatever reason, one of them should be to commemorate those who came before us. One thing is for certain, the three holidays of Memorial Day, Independence Day and Veterans Day will become something very special to anyone coming into the hobby. It is symbol of appreciation and affection for those who came before us which drives us to turn out each year and bring their stories to life.