

The Flags of the First New Hampshire Regiment 1775 - 1784

By Jim Hayden

There is much conjecture and little substantial proof when it comes to the study of flags carried by the 1st New Hampshire Regiment during the American Revolution. Unfortunately, there are no flags attributed to the unit which have survived, to our knowledge. This brief work will not attempt to restate the history of flags carried through the war in general, but will only look at research along with some admitted conjecture which has been done within the last few years pertaining to the flags under which the 1NH served.

The Early Years

There is no description of any colors for the unit from 1775-1777. During the year 1775 there may have been a few regimental colors in and around the camp in Cambridge, but no mention of any belonging to the New Hampshire regiments.

On February 20, 1776 in General Orders issued from headquarters in Cambridge, orders are given that each Regiment must have a Standard (Regimental Colors) as well Colors for each Grand Division. They are to be small and light. The number of the Regiment (the 1NH was designated the 5th Continental Regt.), along with a Motto was to be marked on the colors. Colonels were to select the Motto and a color that related to the uniforms. It also appears that by May there still were not many of these standards made, as several letters continue to urge the Colonels to hurry with their Colors. By this time, the 1NH has left Cambridge for NY and later to Canada. There is no indication that colors for the unit had been made by this time.

The "2nd NH Colors" of 1777

The only known flags from NH which have survived hang in the Headquarters Building of the New Hampshire Historical Society in Concord. Traditionally, they were captured by the British 9th Regt. of Foot at Ft. Anne, NY from the 2nd NH Regt. in July, 1777. Unfortunately, recent research shows that the 2nd NH was probably not at Ft. Anne. Other researchers have ventured the idea that the colors may have been taken at Hubbardton, Vt. on July 7, 1777, where the 2nd NH was involved in a rear guard action and sustained heavy casualties, but there is no evidence to support this.

There are several descriptions of the colors which were captured at Ft. Anne by the 9th Regt. Surgeon Julius Wasmus of the Brunswick Dragoon Regt. Prinz Friedrich describes the capture of "2 taffeta regimental flags and 2 similar nautical flags" The descriptions are similar but not exact. The description of the buff standard includes the words "American Congress" in the center along with the words "We Are One". The flag on

display in Concord only has the later, however it may appear on the reverse which has not been seen since the flag was returned to America in 1912 and placed in it's current permanent frame.

Lt. Col. Christian Julius Praetorius, also a German officer also describes the capture of the flags, but only lists two. He also drew pictures of the colors. Luckily his sketches have survived. The sketches, with very few exceptions are very close to the surviving colors.

There are also several other German and British descriptions of these colors. Most are at least close to the originals. So where did they come from? One of the most plausible explanations is put forth in a paper by Steven G. Strach in an edition of The Company of Military Historians Newsletter. He sets forth the possibility that the colors may actually have been captured at Ft Ticonderoga, along with several others and other military supplies when the fort was hastily abandoned by the American troops on July 6th, 1777.

One of the colors, the "blue standard" is clearly the flag of the 2nd NH, no matter where it was captured. It is marked "NH 2d Regt". The biggest question involving these colors arises from the so called "buff standard". There are several different ideas regarding this standard. These ideas, again including some from Mr. Strach, include the possibility that it was an attempt at a "national standard", or that it might have been a nautical flag of some kind, which usually involved a more nationistic device. The device on the center of the flag is that designed by Benjamin Franklin of 13 interlocked rings, each with the name of a state on it and a sun burst with the words "We Are One" in the center. This device appears on Continental Currency as well as minted Continental Dollar coins of the period.

Unless there is more information which comes forward, we will probably never know exactly where these colors came from. There is a possibility that they may have been a second set of colors carried by the 2nd NH. As such, they may have been an attempt at a national standard, or may have been a brigade standard. In either case, they may have also been carried by the 1st NH Regiment. We do know that we received replacement colors for two flags the following year. One color was a green standard, the other was white.

Three years ago the 1st NH began to research the "buff standard" closer. The staff at the NH Historical Society were more than helpful in this endeavor. Through close examination of the existing flag when it first arrived at the museum in 1912, it was determined that the flag was made of Taffetta Silk. It is important to know that unbleached (white) taffetta actually fades and discolors over time to a yellowish color. The existing colors had apparently hung over or near the mantle of the descendants of

Col. Hill of the 9th for years. This further added to the discoloration of the colors. So while it is impossible to tell what the original color of the flag really was, it does appear through looking at the seams and referring to the original reports that the color may have originally actually been white and has changed to a buff color over time.

For a good illustration of this flag check out Standards and Colors of the American Revolution Pg. 31.

The Colors of 1779

While we don't have any clear information regarding colors made for the Regiment in 1779, we do know from the following sources that colors were ordered and made for Col. Cilley's (1st NH) Regiment. These colors would have been made while the Regiment was on the Sullivan Campaign against the 7 Nations of the Iroquois, and probably would have been delivered after their return.

All of these sources come from the Collections of the New Hampshire Historical Society , Vol. VII, "Records of the NH Committee of Safety", Published for the Society by G. Parker Lyon, Concord, 1863

Note: "R.G." stands for Receiver General

"Thursday, Feb'ry 4th 1779

Ordered the R.G. to pay Samuel Sawyer Nineteen Pounds four Shillings, for Taffity to make Coulors for Col. Cilley's Regiment.

August 21st, 1779

Ordered for R.G. to pay Mr. Thomas Odiorne 9.0 pounds, for so much Advanced for Colours for Col. Cilley's Regt.

Decem'r 3rd, 1779

Ordered the R. Gen. to pay Mr. Thomas Odiorne Nine pounds Eleven Shillings, being the balance due him for purchasing Colours for Col. Ciley Regt." It appears the colors were taffeta, provided by Samuel Sawyer. Thomas Odiorne must have paid for the colors in advance (and then been reimbursed). We still do not have a description of these colors.

Poor's Brigade Standard of 1779

The only colors that we know the 1NH actually fielded under are those of General Poor's Brigade during the Sullivan Campaign against the 7 Nations of the Iroquois. New Jersey Major John Ross made a sketch of the Order of Battle for Maj. Gen John Sullivan's army during the campaign. In it, he drew matching colors for Gen. Maxwell's (NJ) Campaign and Gen. Poor's (NH + 6MA) Brigade. The flag shown for Poor's is Green with a white union in the corner containing 13 large dark green stars arranged in three rows of 4 -5-4 . There is also a scroll of white with dark green ends in the middle of the field. There is no text on the scroll. Maxwell's colors were in blue. There is little else known about the flags.

There is an excellent set of illustrations of these flags on pg. 186 of Standards and Colors of the American Revolution.

1780-1784

Like the early war period of the war, there is very little mention of flags for the 1NH for the last few years of the war. From various correspondence between officers, Gen. Washington, The Board of War, etc. It does appear that attempts were being made to procure colors, but there are very few accounts of them being made.

In April, 1779 Von Steuben regulated that each regiment was to have two Colors; one for each battalion. On May 10, 1779, the Board of War wrote to Gen. Washington that each regiment was to have two colors, one being the "standard of the United States" and the other a Regimental Color to match the facing color of the regiment. At this time, they still were not settled on what the "US Standard" would be. Throughout the rest of this year it appears they are still debating what the colors would look like. In September, Gen. Washington writes to the Board of War saying that he agrees the "union and emblems" should be in the center and the number of the Regt and the State should be in the "curve of the serpent".

On February 28, 1780, the Board of War writes to Gen. Washington saying that the Colors shall be provided by the Commissary General of Military Stores, with two standards per unit, conforming to the plan. The colors would be a Standard of the U.S. and the other a Regimental Standard, with the "ground" to match the facing color of the regiment.

In July, 1782 estimates are given to create 100 new standards for the army. This is later cut to 50. It appears from other correspondence that the flags are not issued until March of 1783. Again there is no mention of the 1NH receiving these colors.

Conclusion

Based on the lack of any definite information regarding the 1NH Colors, it was decided in 1998 to recreate the "Buff standard" of 1777 for the unit to carry. While there is no clear indication that this was a flag carried by the unit, it does appear that if this was a second color from the 2NH, it might have been a brigade or an attempt at a national standard. It also may be the color of another unit and may have actually been that of the 1st NH. This of course is a long shot, but there is a slight chance that this might be the case.

The recreated colors the 1NH carries are made of unbleached silk, sewn together in two pieces, the seam running horizontally. The colors are the same size as the original (5 ft vertical by 5 1/2 ft horizontally). The union or canton is made up of 4 red and 4 blue alternating painted triangles, forming the outline of the crosses of the British Union. The central device is painted in gold with light brown shadowing and black lettering. The device is the thirteen interlocked rings with state names on each. New Hampshire is at the top.

The reproduced flag we carry was painted by Joe Stokes and the lettering was done by his daughter Bethany. Both are members of the 1st NH.

After 3 years of service, the flag is naturally "fading" to a buff color.

Another flag we often carry is the Poor's Brigade Standard of 1779. The flag is made of 2 pieces of light green raw silk and is stitched horizontally. The union or canton is white silk, stitched in. The green stars are thirteen pointed and painted on. The scroll is white silk, stitched on and the ends or turnovers of the scroll are painted dark green.

The reproduced flag was created by Jim and Karen Hayden.

Sources:

A New Look at the Regimental Colors of the Second New Hampshire Regiment

1777; Strach, Steven; in the Company of Military Historians Newsletter.

Standards and Colors of the American Revolution; Richardson, Edward;

University of Pennsylvania Press; 1982