

The Uniforms of The First New Hampshire Regiment 1775-1784

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General History of the Uniform and Background

During the years of then Revolution, most American regiments went through a number of uniforms. The styles and colors varied according to the availability of materials. While we have been able to locate several mentions of uniform components in deserter descriptions, and we have found the orders of what the unit was supposed to be equipped with, it is almost impossible to know when they were received, if they were received and how many men got them, With very few exceptions, there was not A uniform, but rather components of a uniform issued. The rest was pieced together as best as we can tell.

The 1st NH began the war in civilian clothing, being composed of minute and militia companies responding to the "Lexington Alarm". As the war progressed, the unit was issued several different uniforms, including two different sets of brown coats with red facings, brown coats with white facings and green coats with maroon facings From our recent research we can find no mention of the unit ever having been issued the traditional blue coats with white facings as prescribed for New England regiments by Washington in his 1779 uniform regulations.

By the end of the war, the unit was brigaded into one administrative unit with the remnants of the 2nd and 3rd NH Regiments/ At this time they were issued somewhat fancier captured British uniforms dyed brown (with British Lace attached).

Small clothes also were of several colors: from tan, brown, green and red to white. Pants varied from breeches, to overalls, and no doubt included leggings of some kind during the 1779 Sullivan Campaign. During the savage winter encampments at Valley Forge and Redding (CT), a soldier would have been lucky to have clothes at all.

Through various sources, such as military records and descriptions of deserters from contemporary newspapers, we are able to piece together a rough idea, as mentioned above, of what the 1NH, or at least individual companies wore during most of the war. It is important to remember that not all companies were dressed the same at any given time, and a deserter description was given for that individual only.

The Uniform History

The following information contains all currently known sources regarding the uniform along with attached auxiliary information regarding the unit.

May 22, 1775

Regiment is authorized in the NH State Troops as the 1st NH Regt. Organized June 3, 1775 in Medford, MA. Adopted into the Continental Army and assigned to the Main Army June 14, 1775. Assigned July 22 to Sullivan's Brigade.

Source: Wright, Robert: The Continental Army; US Army, Center of Military History; Washington, DC; 1989; pg 197

Prior to Fall, 1775

No set uniform. Civilian clothes were worn.

November 27, 1775

The British Brig "Nancy" is captured. The red wool for british uniforms is dyed brown and used to clothe NH and MA troops.

Uniform: Coat - Brown w/ red facings

Breeches - Brown

Waistcoats - Red

Source: Documents and Records Relating to NH; Concord, 1874

January 1, 1776

In the reorganization of the Continental Army, the unit's designation is changed to the 5th Continental Regiment. French styled buttons with the numeral 5, known to have been used by the 5th Continentals have been found at Mt. Independence (VT) where the unit would have been in 1777. prior to Saratoga.

Source: Wright, Pg 197 October 8, 1776

Uniform to consist of:

1 Regimental Jacket 1 Jacket without sleeves (waistcoat)

1 Pair buckskin and 2 Pair Linen or woolen breeches

1 Hat or Leathern Cap 2 Shirts

1 Hunting Shirt 2 Pairs Overalls

2 Pairs Stockings 2 Pairs Shoes

1 Blanket

Source: Kidder, Frederick; History of the New Hampshire Regiment ; Peter Randall, Publisher; 1973, 1975; Pg 62

January 1777

On Jan. 1, 1777 the unit's designation reverts to the 1st NH Regt. Source: Wright, Pg 197
Congress Orders: "That a suit of clothes be annually given to each NCO & private soldier to consist for the present year of 2 linen hunting shirts, 2 pr. overalls, a leathern or woolen waistcoat with sleeves, 1 pr of breeches, a hat or leathern cap, 2 shirts, 2 pr. of stockings, 2 pr. of shoes" Source: Kidder

February 17, 1777 The Continental Congress begins ordering ready made uniforms from France, through the Secret Committee. A contract dated Aug 6, 1777 is issued for 5,000 uniform coats in blue or brown, both faced with red and lined in white.

Source: Zlatich, Marko; General Washington's Army 1:1775 -1783; Osprey; London; 1994

May 27, 1777

A deserter description from Capt Amos Morrill's Co. wearing "Brown clothes" appears in the (Exeter) NH Journal.

Source: Lefferts, Lt Charles M.; Uniforms of the American. British. French and German Armies in the War of the American Revolution; WE., mc; Old Greenwich, CT; Pg 117

July 19, 1777

A description of 2 deserters from Capt. Isaac Farwell's Co. wearing different uniforms appears in the Independent Chronicle. The descriptions include:

-A Suit of white clothing bound with black ferret and buttons.

-A sailor's jacket and long trousers.

Source: Ibid.

July 19, 1777

A description of a deserter from Capt. Nathaniel Hutchin's Co. wearing a blanket coat and blanket overalls appeared in Freeman's Journal (Portsmouth, NH). A second deserter's clothes were not described.

Source: Ibid.

September 6, 1777

from an order of Congress:

“It might be impracticable to obtain a sufficient quantity of clothing for regimental coats for the troops, and for that reason 2 hunting shirts were to be substituted. (but) the clothier general has been (able) to furnish most of the troops with regimental coats instead of hunting shirts...”

Source: Kidder

January 21, 1778

New Hampshire Board of War established to clothe and equip Continental regiments from NH.

Source: Zlatich (Vol 1) Pg 37

March 1778

Board of War sent to Exeter green serge to be made into coats, waiscoats and breeches.

Source: Ibid.

March 16, 1778

“Exeter, March 16th 1778 - Sr by the Bearer have sent to you the Following Articles for Clothing which is wanted immediately to be made up

12 Ps Green Serge for Coats & Breeches

- 2 3/4 allow'd for Coats & 1 1/4 for breeches

37 1/2 yds fine plain for facing Coat & 3/8 yd to each Coat

6 Ps Druggett for Coat Lining 1 1/2 yd each

2 Ps Coating for Waiscoats 3/4 yd each

9 Ps Linen & 44 yd fine tent cloth for Breeches Lining 1 1/2 yd each

12 1/2 lbs thread 2 oz to a suit

11 1/2 yd Duck for Coat Lining & Staying for Waiscoats 1 3/4 yd each

200 Hooks & Eyes for Coat 2 Pr. Each

abt 290 doz Buttons for Coat 2 3/4 doz each

175 doz Ditto for Breeches & Waiscoat

10 Buttons each & 2 Larger for Breeches

The above are Computed to make abt 100 suits of Regimentals, abt the same Quantity is left at Exeter for 100 suits more, the price we give at Exeter is 4 Dollars a suit but perhaps you may have them done for less - there is 300 suits of the same makeing in Boston at 3 Dollars per suit - they must be well made as they will be examined by some person apponited for that purpose - I am in great haste”

Capt. Ephraim Robinson to Board of War

Source: New Hampshire State Papers, XVII, 219, 220

May 30, June 25 and July 29, 1778

Board of War despatches 805 hats, 501 pairs leather breeches, 229 blankets, 1925 shirts, 56 pr hose, 493 pairs overalls, 148 waistcoats, 105 rifle frocks, 885 pairs shoes and various amounts of cloth to the NH Continental Regiments.

Source: Zlatich (Vol 1) Pg 37

May 30, 1778

NH's Commissary of Military Stores ships to Valley Forge “12 yellow regimental coats, 12 pairs green breeches and 12 jackets for the drummers and fifers of the 1St and 3rd regiments”

Source: Commissary Papers Box 3, RG 12 NH Records and archives,
also from Zlatich, pg 46 with illustration on Pg 31.

August 9, 1778

An article in Freeman's Journal reported deserters from the 1st NH wearing:

Waiscoats: red Shirts: white

Breeches: Green Cocked Hats

Coats: Green Regimentals faced red, w/ yellow (brass) buttons

Source: Freeman's Journal, Aug 9, 1778 (NH Archives)

August 1778

5 deserters matching above uniform descriptions reported.

Source: Documents and Records Relating to NH; Concord, NH. 1874

August 25, 1778

Deserters from Capts. Isaac Fawell & Jason Waits companies reported wearing green regimental coats turned up with red in the Connecticut Courant.

Source: Lefferts, pg 117

October 28, 1778

Lottery is held to determine which coats (blue or brown) from France (ordered earlier in the year) would be issued to units. New Hampshire drew brown. Uniforms received are described by Continental Clothier Geo. Measam as being of good quality cloth, lined with white serge (finer wool), white waiscoats and breeches. The breeches were made for knee buckles which were not supplied. Coats were well cut, being large and warm with the lapels made to button over the breast and belly, with plainn white buttons and slash sleeves made to button underneath. The coats and waistcoats were lined with white serge and the breeches with strong brown linen. Stockings were lead colored.

Source: Zlatich (Vol I) Pg 18

November 16, 1778

The New Hampshire regiments were issued 1105 French made brown coats faced in red with slash style cuffs; white waistcoats and breeches, brown overalls and lead colored stockings.

Source: Papers of the Continental Congress (National Archives)

and Zlatich (Vol 1) Pg. 37

Spring, 1779

From the Board of War's follow up of Washington's ordinance of 3/29/79:

Coats of strong blue with white facings for NH, MA, RI & CT troops. Waiscoats and Breeches of white. Overalls if possible Smallclothes to be of wool in winter and linen in summer.

* There is no indication that the 1 NH was ever issued these uniforms.

Source: Finke & McBarron; Continental Army Uniforms and Specifications. 1779-81; Military Collector and Historian, Vol XIV. No. 2; Washington, DC; Summer, 1962

March 1779

NH Board of War sent it's Continental troops 909 black stocks, 2,846 pairs of shoes, 1,086 leather knee garters, 20 pairs boots and 243 1/2yds. linen

Source: Zlatich & Marko; General Washington's Army: Vol. 2. 1779-83; Osprey: London; 1995

1779

Private Nathan Davis reported that the regiment's uniform consisted of a short rifle frock, vest, tow trousers, shoes, stockings and a blanket. This is consistent with the uniform issued to soldiers on the Sullivan Campaign. Upon nearing home, following the campaign, the troops were ordered to shave their faces, place evergreen sprigs in their hats and flour their hair.. Davis writes:

“No one could be exempt from this duty. Not a negro or mulatto could escape the honor of a white top to his neck the sight of nearly 3.000 men in reags and tatters, nearly naked

(but with powdered hair)... must have afforded merriment to even the most grave and sanctimonious.”

Source: Katcher; Uniforms of the Continental Army; Geo. Shumway, Publisher; York, PA; 1981

June 1, 1779

French uniforms being made at this time had USA buttons on the Uniforms. Breeches were being made with 5 buttons on each leg, including the knee band (no knee buckle).Also:

“All buttons on coats, vests and breeches must be well fixed with strong leather thongs which will go from button to button inside. All the coat collars must be able to button with the hi' lapel button, hut made in such a way that the soldier can button or hook it up around his neck in cold or stormy weather The coats must have hooks and eyes to fasten the hack and the front together as is the practice with troops.”

150 dozen white metal buttons marked NH were also ordered for use on the hats of the NH troops.

Source: Letter to France from the Continental Board of War dated June 11. 1779 from The Company of Military Historians' Newsletter; Winter, 1780; pg 164-165

November 25. 1779

From an order of the Continental Congress:

“Officers of the line and staff (are) entitled to receive... 1 hat; 1 body coat; 4 stocks; 4pr. breeches, 2 for winter (wool) and 2 for summer (linen); 4 pr. shoes; 1 waiscoat; 4 shirts; 4 vests, 1 for winter, 3 for summer; 6 pr. stockings. 3 pr worsted (wool), 3 of thread (lighter wool or cotton).’

Source: Kidder, Pg 57

March 10, 1780

NH State Clothier had issued to the NH Continentals:

636 coats, 596 vests, 333 breeches, 22 linen overalls, 151 woolen overalls, 170 shirts, 673 stockings, 1679 shoes, 1128 hats and 8 hunting shirts,

Due to a shortage of cloth in NH, the Continental Clothier supplied these articles.

Source: Zlatich (Vol 2) Pg. 18

June 30, 1780

Col Henry Dearborn reported to the state Board of War that 1/5 of the troops were totally destitute of a shirt, except for old jackets without sleeves with old stockings drawn over the arms.

Source: Ibid.

August 9, 1780

A combined French and Spanish fleet captures a large stock of British clothing off Cadiz, Spain.

Source: Ibid. Pg 6

June 18, 1781

From an Order of the Continental Congress:

“That all NCO & soldiers.. be annually furnished with: 1 regimental coat frill made; 1 pr cloth breeches; 1 cotton vest; 1 pr woolen overalls; 2 pr woolen hose, 2 pr woolen socks, 1 felt or leathern

September, 1781

The captured British clothing arrives from Spain:

3,683 coats, 2714 breeches, 737 waistcoats, 3,781 shirts, 3,752 stocks, 7,495 pr. shoes, 3,312 plain and laced privates' and 217 sergeants' hats, 6 silver laced sergeants; caps and 2,271 pr shoes. The British uniforms were sent to Mjr. Gen Heath at Continental Headquarters, Newburgh, NY where the coats were dyed brown.

Source: Zlatich (Vol 2), Pg 6

November 14, 1781

From a letter to Gen John Stark from Maj. Gen. W. Heath, dated Continental Village, November 14, 1781(in part):

“I am happy in the prospect of the army's receiving a competent supply of clothing this year. A part of it is now in the store made up by the regimental tailors. Every regiment, whether present or not, will have strict justice done it. I think the paymasters of the two New Hampshire regiments had best come down immediately with their returns, made out and signed, conformable to the ordinance of clothing and late order, that they may be present at the distribution.”

Source: Memoir of General John Stark

November 29, 1781

From the response of Stark to Heath, dated Saratoga (in part):

“In your observations on the clothing, you mention that the materials are to be sent, and the clothes are to be made by the regimental tailors. I must observe that there is but one tailor in the New Hampshire Line, and he a drunken rascal, that could be hardly compelled to make three coats in a winter.”

Source: Ibid.

December 12, 1781

Again from Heath to Stark, dated Headquarters, Hudson Highlands (in part):

“The soldiers will receive ample supplies of clothing, but it will be late before it is ready. The paymasters of the New Hampshire regiments have drawn shoes, hose, some overalls, shirts, &c. for the most necessitous men. These will be conveyed to Albany in a few days, when all the detachments will join their corps. The paymasters of the regiments think that the clothing can soon be made up for the men of your line.”

Source: Ibid.

December 12, 1781

From a letter from Stark to Heath:

“I am sure it is not practicable for the troops that are here to go to the Mohawk River until they are clothed. Indeed I am obliged to detain the six month's men to do the necessary camp duty on account of the nakedness of the Continental Troops.

In the last duty report, only 36 `three years and during the war' men, including sergeants, were fit for duty in the two regiments. The remainder are so naked that they cannot procure fuel for their own use.

If there is a possibility of sending some blankets, shirts, overalls, stockings and shoes, they might afford a temporary relief, and I dare say they would prove satisfactory.”

Source: Kidder, Pg 75

NOTE: It is apparent that the two previous notes crossed in the mail.

December 1781

The clothing situation is so bad in the NH line that they are the first units designated to receive the captured British uniforms.

Source: Zlatich (Vol 2). Pg 18

Early 1782

The Line troops of NH, NY, NJ and the 10th MA Regt. received the dyed captured British coats. Uniforms are described in the orderly book of the 2nd NH Regt. as a Brown-dyed British coat, faced and cuffed white, narrow white lace on outside of facings, collar and upper end of cuffs, blue diamonds with white binding at the corner of the turnbacks; British hat, white waiscoat, linen overalls, white star on the breast of coat (see note following), black stock and white shirt.

Source: Ibid. Pg 6, 44

July 7, 1782

Washington orders service chevrons to be worn. They are to be of herring-bone form, extending from seam to seam, three inches from and parallel with the shoulder seam, on the left arm of rank and file for each 3 years of faithful service. Order is later clarified to make chevrons the facing color of the coats.

Source: Ibid. Pg 8

Prior to September 1782

“Completely outfitted in these uniforms, hats, waistcoats and breeches, the two remaining (NH) regiments decided at some time before (this date) to embellish their coats with stars resembling French decorations.”

Source: Ibid. Pg 18 (illustration on Pg. 31 - the uniform for 1NH would have had buttons set singly rather than in pairs)

December 2, 1782

Continental War Office orders that all coats for 1783 will be faced in red, with white linings and buttons.

Source: Ibid. Pg 8

Hunting Shirt: 2 yds brown Russia sheeting, thread and fringe.

Body shirt: 3/8 yds white Irish linen.

Shoes: 1 Pr.

Stockings: 1 pr of white yarn

Hat: felt, finished with metal button, white looping.

Stock: Black leather lined with white jean.

Source: Ibid. Pg 10

January 1783

Washington orders the Continental Clothier at Newburg, NY to issue the two NH regts. new uniforms.

Source: Ibid. Pg 18

February 14, 1783

Washington orders:

“that the coats issued the previous year would have to be turned and worn again, but that their length must be shortened, and that scarlet only sufficient for the capes, cuffs and perhaps half facings would be furnished.”

Scarlet cloth was so scarce, it was dispersed to regiments by ~ lottery.

Source: Ibid. Pg 9

March 1, 1783

The 1st NH is reduced to 9 companies and redesignated the “The New Hampshire Regiment” The 2nd NH is reduced to 4 companies and redesignated “The New Hampshire Battalion”

Source: Wright, Pg 197

At the same time an inspection return for the New Hampshire Battalion lists:

167 rank and file, in use 1 color, 210 muskets, 210 bayonets, 210 cartridge boxes. 1 drum, 3 fifes. 224 coats, 223 vests, 84 hose, 176 shoes, 298 shirts, 148 hats, 114 blankets, 3 watch coats. 78 knapsacks, 6 canteens, 12 axes, 1 pick and 9 portmanteaus (leather cases).

Source: Zlatich (Vol 2), Pg 19

June 1, 1783

The NH Regt and the NH Battalion are consolidated. The new unit is called The New Hampshire Battalion to consist of 5 companies.

Source: Wright

June 5, 1783

Specifications for the materials used in 1783 uniforms from Samuel Caldwell, former assistant to the Continental Clothier:

Coat: of an average size, 15/8 yds blue 6/4 cloth for outside, 1/5 yd scarlet cloth for facing, 1/2 yds. oznabrigs for pockets, staying and sleeve linings, 1/2 yds white shalloon for skirt lining and facing the forepart, 32 large buttons, 2 small buttons. 4 hook and eyes.

Vest: skirts 5/8 yd white 3/4 cloth, 3/8 yd oznabrigs for pockets and staying, 1/4 yds flannel for lining, 11 small buttons.

Breeches: 3/4 yd white 6/4 cloth, 1 5/8 yds dowlas or best oznabrigs for lining and pockets. 2 lg buttons. 12 small buttons.

Woolen overalls: 1 3/8 yds blue 6/4 duffil, 5/8 yd oznabrigs for pockets and stays, 2 lg and 5 sm buttons.

Linen overalls: 2 1/4 yds ravens duck, 1/4 yd oznabrigs for pockets.

cap, 4 shirts, 2 pr linen overalls, 4 pr strong shoes, 1 blanket~, 1 rifle shirt, 1 pr woolen gloves, 2 pr shoe buckles & 1 clasp for stock every 2 years... summer clothing to be issued on the 15th day of April, - winter clothing on the 1st day of November”

Source: Kidder, Pg 68

January 1, 1784

The New Hampshire Battalion is disbanded in New Windsor, NY.

Source: Wright.