



Uniform of the Black Watch in America, 1776-1783

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NOTES AND ANTIQUITIES

UNIFORM OF THE BLACK WATCH IN AMERICA, 1776-1783

Few British regiments are better known to Americans than The Black Watch and few have seen as much service in this hemisphere. It campaigned against the French from Ticonderoga to Martinique, it fought the Indians up and down the Alleghenies, and, during the Revolution, saw constant action from 1776 to the end. It was in this last war that The Black Watch relinquished for at least once in history its most distinctive article of dress, the kilt—a sacrifice to the underbrush and brambles of the American landscape.

When the organization, officially then the 42nd, or Royal Highland, Regiment of Foot, landed on Staten Island in 1776 its private battalion soldiers were dressed in short coats of red trimmed with blue, white vests, bonnets ornamented with a red and white “diced” band and some sort of feathers, rough kilts of the old “belted-plaid” pattern with the “Black Watch” tartan, white goats-skin purses or “sporas,” red and white checked cloth stockings, and low buckled shoes. Their armament included a musket, bayonet, broadsword and pistol; their equipment, a cartridge box worn in front of the body, a broad belt of black leather over the right shoulder from which hung the sword, a knapsack and a haversack.¹ Gradually this was altered until by the middle of the war the men were uniformed and equipped as shown in the accompanying illustration.

This new dress has been described as being “the same as the British Regiments of Infantry that have short coats, except that they continue to wear the Bonnet.”² The sword was replaced by the handier hatchet and the sword belt now supported an additional cartridge box. The pistols had disappeared and the white breeches worn by the rest of the infantry had supplanted the familiar kilt and purse. It was in this uniform that it was inspected in 1784 at Halifax.

¹ Great Britain, War Office, MS inspection return, 42nd Foot, May 30, 1775, and Royal Warrant, December 19, 1768, reprinted in *Jour. Army Historical Research*, V (1926), 27; I. H. Mackay Scobie, “Highland Military Dress,” *ibid.*, I (1921-22), 44-55; I. H. Mackay Scobie and R. F. K. Wallace, “Black Watch Uniform,” *ibid.*, XIII (1934), 121-23; Great Britain, Treasury, MS list of clothing to be admitted into Ireland duty free, January 14, 1773, reprinted in *ibid.*, XIV (1935), 217; Charles M. Lefferts, *Uniforms of the American, British, French, and German Armies in the War of the American Revolution* (New York, 1926), 164, 182-90.

² MS, “List of Officers . . .,” in New-York Historical Society.



**UNIFORM OF THE BLACK WATCH AS ADOPTED FOR SERVICE IN
NORTH AMERICA, 1776-1783**

There is good reason to believe that at times some of the men wore the common brown or blue fatigue overalls and that other variations were allowed, but it is quite apparent that the famous tartan was laid aside until some time after the regiment had left the United States.³

HARRISON K. BIRD

FIRST "STEAM" GUN IN ACTION

March 10, 1863, Jacksonville, Florida, was occupied by Federal forces under cover of their gunboats on the St. Johns River. These were colored troops com-

³ Great Britain, War Office, MS inspection return, 42nd Foot, June 9, 1784, reprinted in *Jour. Army Historical Research*, V (1926), 27; deserter descriptions 1779, reprinted in Lefferts, *Uniforms*, 164; Charles Foulkes and E. C. Hopkinson, *Sword, Lance & Bayonet* (Cambridge, 1938), 74, 75.