



2^d Pennsylvania Regiment, Spring 1780

Private Lieutenant Sergeant Infantrymen on the march Col. Walter Stewart

Drummers

THE SECOND PENNSYLVANIA REGIMENT

(Spring 1780)

(Plate No. 469)

The most brutal winter of the 18th Century was drawing to a close, much to the relief of the Pennsylvania soldiers of Washington's army who had endured the bitter cold, lack of food and 28 major snowfalls in their huts at Jockey Hollow since the previous December. Although ragged in appearance, the men of the eight regiments that made up Gen. Arthur St. Clair's Pennsylvania Division at Morristown in 1780 seemed much better drilled and equipped than their counterparts who weathered the winter at Valley Forge two years earlier.

The second Pennsylvania Regiment was perhaps the better off of these troops. With 320 men in the ranks, it was the largest in the Division.¹ It was also gifted with a concerned and able commander in the person of Col. Walter Stewart. Nicknamed "the Irish Beauty" by the ladies of Philadelphia,² the handsome Stewart was just 24 years old that spring but was already a respected officer known for his interest in his men.

The unit was originally formed from the First Pennsylvania Battalion in December, 1776. Its efficiency was adversely affected by problems in organization that included the change or resignation of its first three commanders within 17 months of its formation. Stewart took command on July 1, 1778 just after the Battle of Monmouth. His previous command, the 13th Pennsylvania Regiment (sometimes known as the Pennsylvania State Regiment) was formed from a core of soldiers composing Miles' Rifle Battalion and Atlee's Musketry Battalion. When the enlistments of those men expired, the remainder was merged with the numerically weaker second regiment.³

Here we see the regiment halting along a roadside near Morristown in the early spring of 1780. In the center, Col. Stewart sits astride his horse. He is wearing the uniform in which he was painted full length by Charles Wilson Peale in 1781. The blue faced red coat is edged in silver trim. The buttons on the white waistcoat are spaced in twos with silver tape trim around each button hole. In his hat he wears a black and red plume.⁴ The officers of the regiment were all "properly armed with swords and espontoons," noted Division Inspector Josiah Harmar. "Their uniform is genteel and cut a handsome appearance."⁵

The men were issued new regimental coats, blue with red facings, sometime around January, 1780.⁶ The last issue of regimentals had been made to the Division at Fredricksburg on Nov. 28, 1778, and must have been quite worn out by the Morristown encampment.⁷

Deserter descriptions indicate members of the unit were wearing blue faced red regimental coats as early as May, 1777.⁸

New vests and overalls "of sundry colours" had been issued around the beginning of 1780 as well.⁹ While the plate shows a variety of natural shades, it is conceivable that other colors were also used. There are strong indications the overalls were lined in brown linen, with pockets of the same material.¹⁰ In November, 1778, all the regiments of the Pennsylvania Division except the 10th drew two pair of overalls.¹¹ It is likely two pair were again issued to each man in 1780. Nearly every man had one pair of socks as well.¹²

Accoutrements were described as "midling" and the arms "of different calibers, complete with bayonets, bright and fit for service." The variety of firelocks can be seen in the plate. Swords were "wanting" for all the Sergeants, and the supply of ammunition was incomplete with a number of the soldiers needing flints, screw drivers and worms.¹³ Judging by later inspection returns, most of these deficiencies were made up by summer.

The regiment was in great need of hats and blankets, as was most of the Division. Harmar described the few hats among the Pennsylvanians as "all round bound"¹⁴ and observed that in the Second Regiment several men were "with neither shirt nor shoe."¹⁵

The problem of having sufficient headgear seemed an eternal one for the Pennsylvania soldiers. In early November, 1778, Col. Stewart had been sent to Philadelphia by Gen. Anthony Wayne to procure clothing. While he wrote Wayne that "1,500 or more" shirts were on their way to the troops "I am sorry to inform you we shall be very deficient in hats, how far I can't with certainty say at present."¹⁶ Hats had not arrived when the new clothing was issued on Nov. 28, 1778, and so Wayne ordered that the old hats "which do not admit of being properly cocked, have the fore part of the brim cut 3/4 of an inch and the back part cocked up, and bound round with white tape or linen. The women of the several regiments to be employed in the binding of them."¹⁷ It seems that new hats had still not arrived by the summer as a July 1779 letter from Stewart mentions the deficiency and states the men are "Suffering Exceedingly on Account of the Warm Woolen Caps they are oblig'd Many of them to wear."¹⁸

As mentioned earlier, Stewart took particular interest in the appearance and well being of his men. Obviously the lack of headgear annoyed him and he took matters in his own hands. In July, 1779, he sent Captain Johnathan Patterson of the 4th Company to Middle-

town, Connecticut to order 470 leather caps for the regiment from Captain George Starr, the Commissary of Hides and person in charge of the leather factory at Middletown.¹⁹ In his note to Captain Patterson (published in the Summer, 1956, Company Journal) Stewart asks for five different styles of caps: 62 of the "Grenadier Pattern,"²⁰ 62 for Light Infantry, 284 for battalion troops, 36 for Sergeants, Fifers and Drummers and 26 for officers. He added they were to be bound in white leather, with the officers' caps of "superior quality." Battalion caps were to be "of the same pattern as Colo. Megg's" 6th Connecticut Regiment, which was uniformed with leather caps in 1777.²⁰

Previously there has been doubt that the Second Pennsylvania Regiment ever received these caps. However, records in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania show they were indeed issued. When the regiment was inspected on June 1, 1780, Inspector Harmar noted the men were "Clean and the ranks well dressed Compleat with Leather Caps."²¹ Our plate, though, shows the unit before the arrival of the long awaited headgear.

The Ensign in the background carries a peculiar flag shown in the Peale painting of Stewart. Upon close examination it appears to be a white flag of substantial size on which is painted a coiled snake. Under the snake is a blue riband that may have borne the unit designation or motto.²²

The drummer to the right of the plate carries a period drum having a painted design similar to the one in the collection of Company member William Guthman.

The men are also equipped with the "New Invented Knapsack and Haversack" believed to have been used by Pennsylvania, Maryland and Virginia troops.²³

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FOOTNOTES

1. Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereafter HSP), Inspection Return of the Second Pa. Regt. of March 1, 1780, Box 15b, Society Misc. Collection, Muster Rolls. The March returns in the collection show the strengths of the other Pa. units as: 1st, 190 men; 3rd, 230; 4th, 142; 5th, 220; 6th, 150; 7th, 150; 9th, 120; 10th, 188.
2. Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle* (Boston, 1962), pp. 186-187.
3. William H. Egle and John B. Linn, *Pennsylvania in the War of the Revolution 1775-1783* (Harrisburg, 1880), II, pp. 401-786.
4. Examination of the Charles Wilson Peale painting when on display at Yale University, Hartford, Conn., Spring 1776. It is the author's opinion that the Peale miniature said to have erroneously been identified as Major Benjamin Fishburn of the Third Pa. Regt. and actually show Col. Stewart is not a miniature of Stewart either (JCMH, Vol. XXVII, No. 4, pp. 181-184). The author bases his opinion on a close examination of the Peale full-length painting and the differences in facial characteristics and uniforms of the two portraits.
5. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of March 1, 1780.
6. *Ibid.*
7. HSP, Lt. William Stoy's Orderly Book for Major John Murray's Company, AM 634, Society Archives.
8. Lt. Charles M. Lefferts, *Uniforms of the American, British, French and German Armies in the War of the American Revolution* (Greenwich), p. 126.
9. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of March 1, 1780.
10. HSP, *op. cit.*, Inspection Return of the Pennsylvania Division of Foot, Jan. 1, 1780.
11. HSP, *op. cit.*, Remarks on the Pennsylvania Division, Review III, Oct. 1, 1779.
12. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of Jan. 1, 1780.
13. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of March 1, 1780.
14. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of Jan. 1, 1780.
15. HSP, *op. cit.*, Return of March 1, 1780.
16. HSP, *op. cit.*, MS letter from Walter Stewart to Anthony Wayne, Nov. 29, 1778, Wayne Papers, Vol. VI.
17. HSP, Lt. William Stoy's Orderly book, *op. cit.*, Brigade Order of Nov. 28, 1778.
18. Irving Browning, Caps For The 2nd Pennsylvania, JCMH, VIII (Summer, 1956), 40.
19. *Ibid.*
20. *Ibid.*, 41.
21. HSP, *op. cit.*, Inspection Return of the Second Pennsylvania Regiment, June 1, 1780.
22. Examination of the Peale portrait.
23. Manuscript Archives, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.