

Update on 4th New York Uniforms in 1775

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In 1977, Fellow Eric Manders presented his groundbreaking research on the New York Line regimental coats of 1775 in *MC&H*. It shattered a long-held misconception that the regiments were outfitted in numerical sequence according to desired coat colors. He concluded, based on contemporary documents and accounts that, “it seems...likely that the 1st Regiment actually wore blue coats faced with scarlet, the 2nd blue faced with crimson, the third a variety of different colored coats with green, and the 4th a variety with blue.”¹

In this article, Manders references a misdated document of an eyewitness description of Nathaniel Woodward’s company of the 4th New York at Lake George on 25 September 1775 as being clothed in “grey and blue.” This was the only known specific reference to the battalion’s coat colors, until now.²

Nathan Lockwood, a member of Captain Jonathan Platt's Company, made a deposition on 15 November 1819 for his application for a pension from the federal government. It reads, in part:

According to the best of his recollection he was enlisted in the year 1776, or if not that year, then in the year 1775, as a private in the Company commanded by Captain Jonathan Platt in the 4th New York Regiment commanded by Colonel James Holmes, and that this Deponent was enlisted by David Dan the first Lieutenant of the of the aforesaid Company and this Deponent doth further depose & say that he did faithfully & truly serve as a private in said Company for more than nine months, that this term expired while the Deponent was in service at Ticonderoga & at the request of the officers this Deponent and others remaining about one month beyond the term of their enlistment. That the Regiment to which the Deponent belonged to, although called the 4th New York Regiment, was nevertheless in the service of the Congress & the Officers commissioned by the Congress: is that the uniform worn by the Deponent & the other privates in said Regiment was gray cloth turned up with blue with white metal buttons having on them the letters U.S.A.³

At the time of Lockwood’s application, David Dan, the aforesaid first lieutenant, provided an affidavit confirming Lockwood’s service in Platt’s Company.⁴ There is also a microfilmed copy of a company muster roll, taken at Ticonderoga on 4 October 1775, showing Lockwood’s enlistment in Platt’s Company on 25 July 1775.⁵

Platt was the seventh rated captain in the 4th New York at that time. Historians have considered the company as being recruited exclusively out of Westchester County.⁶ Specifically, members of the company with pension application records on file with the National Archives and Records Administration indicated they were from Bedford, Pound Ridge, Lewisboro, and Courtlandt in New York. Yet, some of the men were from Stamford, in Fairfield County, Connecticut. All of these towns are very near the border between Connecticut and New York.

After the 1775 campaign, Lockwood returned home and later served in what appears to be Westchester County units levied in 1778, 1780, and 1782. His highest rank was as an ensign in his last tour.⁷ Therefore, his documented service in the 4th New York in 1775 was his only enlistment in the Continental Army during the war and the only time he likely served in a company that wore regimental coats.

This is welcome news for uniform researchers. Thanks to Lockwood's detailed pension application, we can state with a high degree of certainty that the color description of Woodward's company in September 1775 was valid. We also now have two companies of the 4th New York documented in gray coats turned up with blue in 1775.

Unfortunately, the "USA" buttons, which Lockwood refers to, are a conundrum. Since the United States was not even a concept in 1775, perhaps he remembers them on another unit's uniform when he was on levy service. Perhaps the 4th New York's buttons in 1775 were marked with something else. For now, the detail of the regimental coat buttons of the 4th New York, if anything, remains an open question.

Finally, we should look at Lockwood's offering that only the *privates* were in those regimentals. If this statement is true, what were the officers and NCOs wearing? As is the case with the buttons, perhaps this was simply an error of omission by an aging veteran. The incongruity is, perhaps, the most interesting part of Lockwood's pension application.

To date, no records of any kind indicate a uniform for any of the New York Line's officer corps in 1775. However, New York's Commissary, Peter Curtineus, notes in a report to the New York Provincial Congress that some of the wool "will do for sergeant's coats."⁸ This suggests the sergeants might have worn a different uniform entirely. Therefore, Lockwood's deposition statement that the uniform worn by the privates in the regiment was "gray cloth turned up with blue," is not at all inconsistent with known facts.

Having reviewed hundreds of Continental Army pension applications in recent years, I conclude the following. The researcher is more likely to find movement of an individual soldier (where he served and with whom) in one of these application files but, on rare occasions, something regarding the soldier's uniform may be found. Searching solely for uniform references is not recommended for it will prove to be a long and laborious task. But by gathering all you can and recording it, who knows what you might stumble on?

I thank Member Dr. Larry Maxwell, who discovered this important reference in Pvt. Nathan Lockwood's pension application. He has researched all the members of Capt. Jonathan Platt's company and graciously provided most of the demographics and roster information that was used here.

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Notes

1. Eric I. Manders, "Those New York Coats of 1775 - A Dissenting View," *MC&H*, 33, no. 2 (Summer 1981): 69-71.
2. State of New York, *Journals of the Provincial Congress, Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety, and Council of Safety, 1775-1777*, 2 vols. (Albany 1842) 2: 219, 229; Alan Archambault and Philip D. Weaver, *MUIA*, "Enlisted Men. 4th Battalion, New York Provincial Forces, 1775," pl. 657 (1990).
3. Pension application of Nathan Lockwood (W.20524), Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, (National Archives Microfilm Publication, microcopy 804, roll 533, Washington), Record Group 15, National Archives, Washington, DC.
4. Pension application of Nathan Lockwood, RG 15, NA.
5. Folio 50-2, Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783, (National Archives Microfilm Publication, microcopy 246, roll 70, Washington), RG 93, NA.
6. Berthold Fernow, editor, *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, vol. 15 (Albany, NY, 1887), 529.
7. Pension application of Nathan Lockwood, RG 15, NA.
8. *Journals of the Provincial Congress ...* 2:45 (3 July 1775).