

## 4th New York Uniforms in 1775: When a Jacket is a Vest

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Ever since I got into Revolutionary War Living History over thirty years ago, I have been interested in the New York Line of 1775. While nearly all of the known documentation on these regiments references the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> battalions, experience teaches us we must still look at all four regiments as a group, rather than individually, in order to get a true picture of what was going on. Admittedly, I am still trying to get that true picture, but things get clearer every year.

One of the most interesting things is determining what was a jacket for the Yorkers of 1775.

I had some notes squirreled away on this subject. After Paul Dickfoss presented readers of *The Brigade Dispatch* with his recent findings, I was prompted to pull them out. Plus, I had recently reviewed some research notes on the Revolution in New York and the Northern Department of the Continental Army, provided to me by prolific researcher Don Londahl-Smidt. So there was much to draw on.

Among Don's extensive material were some juicy tid-bits on the New York Line of 1775 that have never been published before. The most striking for me was this memo from Col. James Holmes of the 4<sup>th</sup> New York (ca. 1775) to Peter T. Curtenius, commissary for the Colony of New York:

New York Augt, 4. 1775

Please to Deliver unto the Bearer hereof Mr. Robert Benson one hundred and forty four Coats including Six Sergants Coats – also as many Shirts, Hatts, shoes, stockings, Wescoats & Breeches as is in proportion for 2 companys.<sup>1</sup>

There were 72 men per company in the New York Line, at the time. Consequently, this memo requests enough clothing for two fully equipped companies, including sergeants' coats. The smallclothes listed in this memo are what were to be made available to the men (sans the cravats or stocks), but only in limited quantities. Stoppages were to be taken from the men's pay for each article issued, at the wholesale price.

Unfortunately, there was a mix-up as to what the men were entitled to, thanks to an incorrect recruiting advertisement. The men of the 1<sup>st</sup> New York took enough of the available quantity of smallclothes to outfit their entire regiment, leaving about half the quantity to be split up among the other three battalions. To make matters worse, the 1<sup>st</sup> New York company commanders never really made the stoppages.<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler, Col. Alexander McDougall, commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> New York, complained of the aforementioned stoppage problem and that the men were only entitled to a regimental coat, a blanket, and a knapsack gratis. In this letter, McDougall did not mention a waistcoat as Col. Holmes did, but referred to this same garment as both a "vest" and later as a "jacket."<sup>3</sup>

There are two documents, in the papers of Col. Alexander McDougall, by 1<sup>st</sup> New York Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant Philip Henning, where the term "vest" and "jacket" indicate the same garment. One document contains an inventory of goods his regiment took on 9 August 1775 that includes, in part, 143 coats, 103 "vests," 106 pairs of breeches,

114 hats, 48 pairs of shoes, and 365 pairs of stockings. The other is a summary of additional equipment and clothing deliveries to Sgt. Henning, through 7 October 1775, that lists 50 “jackets,” 50 pairs of breeches, 2 coats, and 74 pairs of stockings.<sup>4</sup>

Moving back to the 4<sup>th</sup> Regiment, among the sources I used for the *Military Uniforms in America* plate (see note 4) and a follow-up article on the plate were two accounts of clothing provided to Captain Joseph Benedict’s Company, on 9 August 1775. Between the two, they included 15 “vests,” 15 pairs of breeches, 25 shirts, 30 pairs of stockings, 18 pairs of shoes, 12 black silk handkerchiefs (crossed out), 3 hats, 30 knapsacks, 52 coats, and 52

blankets between them. The quantity of 52 coats suggests this company was under strength. The quantity of the other articles is more in line with what was to be issued to the New York soldiers than what Col. Holmes sought for the two unnamed companies five days earlier.<sup>5</sup>

Don Londahl-Smidt also provided me a transcription of another document related to the 4<sup>th</sup> New York. This one was an undated report from Col. Holmes to New York Commissary, Peter T. Curtenius, of men from Capt. Daniel Mills’s company, from the Bedford area of Westchester County, wanting smallclothes. For readability and printing ease, the text has been lined up.

Becker Holmes	one pair of Drilling Breeches
Henry Rich	one pair of shoes
Thomas Golden	one pair woollen stockings
Shubal Cunningham	one pair of wolling stockings
Joshua Baker	one Shirt
Lewis Miller	one Shirt Checkt
Samuel Baker	a Jacket & pr of Breeches Brown Cloth
	One pair of Shoes one pr of Cotton Stockings one shirt white one stock
	a jackets and pr Breeches
Charles Parsons	one pr Drilling Breeches two Checkt Shirts one Jacket

The above is the under Cloaths wanted for Captain Mills Compy which you will please to furnish<sup>6</sup>

Except the brown cloth jacket and breeches, which are a conundrum, all appear to be the small clothes that were to be made available to the recruits of the New York Line in the summer of 1775. When put in context with the other documents described earlier, the jackets for Samuel Baker and Charles Parson are more than likely vests (i.e. sleeveless waistcoats). Yet, when looked at as a stand-alone document, a researcher could mistakenly think the garment to be some kind of sleeved waistcoat.

While working on this article, I found two additional undated documents in

the National Archives filed with the company muster roll to support the above. One was a summary of a stores issue to Captain Mills’s company which includes 14 shirts, nine pairs of breeches, three “jackets,” 18 pairs of stockings, 19 pairs of shoes, and one hat. The other was a detailed list showing the issuance of smallclothes spread between thirty different men. On this second list, are two “jackets.” There are no “waistcoats” or “vests” included. So, at least as far as Mills’s company is concerned, we see a consistent use of the term “jacket.”<sup>7</sup>

The use of the misleading term “jacket” can be quite maddening. Period

advertisements for deserted soldiers (or runaway indentured servants or slaves) show jackets as common items of clothing. However, a jacket could be described in more detail as being “with sleeves” or “without sleeves.”

Two deserters from Captain Edward Norwood’s Company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maryland Battalion of the Flying Camp are reported in the 16 October 1776 issue of the *Maryland Journal*. They were wearing a “Yellow striped waistcoat without sleeves” and a “Scarlet cloth jacket without sleeves, new buckskin breeches” respectively. Conversely, a deserter from Captain Alexander Johnson’s company of the 5<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Regiment, listed in the *Pennsylvania Packet* on 19 March 1777, was wearing a “Gray jacket with sleeves, blue breeches, felt hat.”<sup>8</sup>

Among the papers and notes Don let me review was a deserter description from *The New York Packet and General Advertiser* in 1777. Here, Lt. Henry Vanderburgh of Col. Lewis Dubois’s 5<sup>th</sup> New York Regiment reported 22-year-old Sgt. Charles Ross had deserted and “carried off with him a suit of Continental cloaths, red jacket with sleeves, pewter buttons, flannel over-hauls, wollen hat.”<sup>9</sup>

The examples above leave us with the question that may never be answered, “What’s a jacket?” Though, in comparing the confusing terminology in the sources presented above for the New York troops of 1775, one can clearly see that the jacket they so often refer to was an under garment (“jacket without sleeves”) that was also called a “vest” or “waistcoat.”

To further complicate this confusion, a “jacket with sleeves” could be either an outer garment or an under garment. Plus the

term “jacket” could also mean an outer garment that is considerably shorter than a traditional period coat. The most common item of this nature would be a sailor’s jacket, which is not that uncommon from a modern sailor’s pea coat.

There is one example for the 1775 New York troops, that I know of, where the term jacket and vest were used in the same document, but refer to different garments. A clothing bill, dated 25 August 1775, for Lamb’s Artillery Company, includes a charge for making 73 jackets and a separate charge for making 16 vests and 16 breeches. Because there are so many jackets on the bill, I think this is a case where the jacket is an outer garment of some type, and the vest is the under garment. Now what that outer garment is will take further investigation and will be left to a future discussion.<sup>10</sup>

Though the information presented here is specific about the battalions raised by the Province of New York in 1775, I hope it will give researchers of the American War of Independence pause to consider that a “jacket” may not be a jacket at all.

*I thank Don Londahl-Smidt for the staggering amount of military research notes he has compiled over the years and for his willingness to share his findings. Specifically, I thank him for the information used herein. I also thank Dr. Larry Maxwell, of the recreated 4<sup>th</sup> New York, for helping me to identify the men in the Mills’s Company documents.*

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## The Men on Mills's List

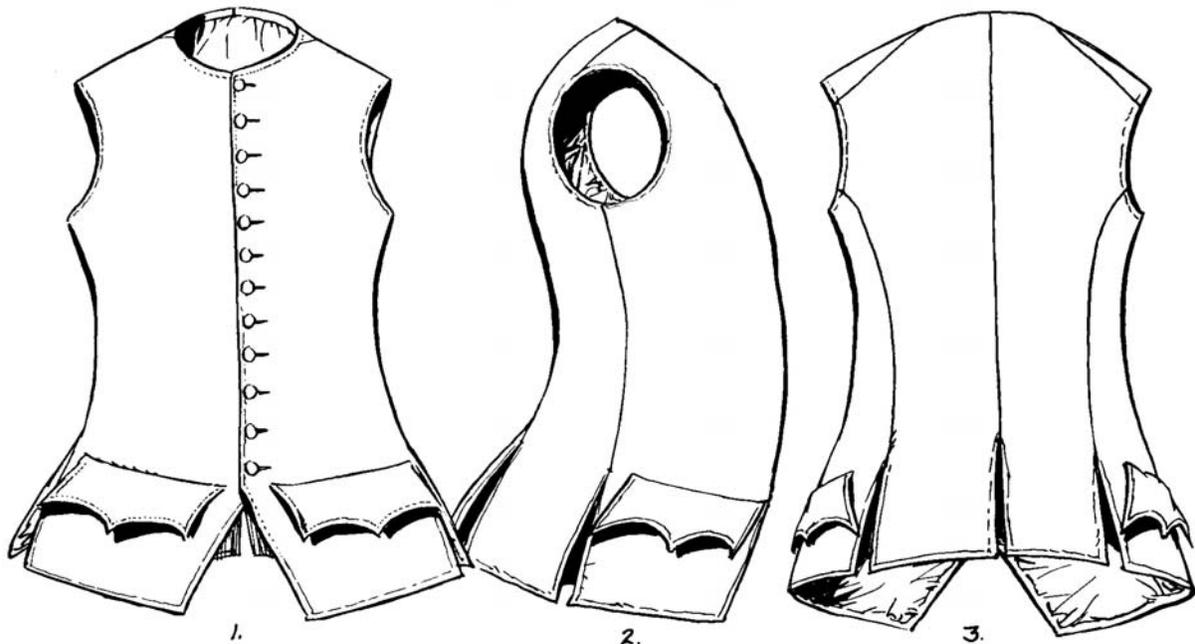
Deep down, all former soldiers want to be remembered for their service and as a good example to their fallen comrades. So, with all the study I have done on the New York Troops of 1775, particularly the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, my first inclination is to try to identify the men. Luckily, the commander of the recreated 4th New York, Dr. Larry Maxwell, has been doing extensive work on the men of the 4<sup>th</sup> battalion and was able to identify them rather easily. From there I was able to gather additional information. It also helped that Captain Mills was a very good administrative officer and kept copious records. Many of these records still exist today.

Daniel Mills, the captain, did not fare so well after his service in the 4<sup>th</sup> New York. The New York Society of Cincinnati mini-biography of Mills explains that he was commissioned a captain in Goose Van Schaick's unnumbered New York Continental Battalion on 28 February 1776, but died in service on 22 April 1776 or 1777. Heitman's *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April 1775, To December, 1783* shows that Mills was commissioned as a company captain in the 2<sup>nd</sup> New York on 21 November 1776 (but to rank from 9 February 1776) and died on the aforementioned date in 1777. Since Heitman's research is often brought into question regarding New York troops serving in 1776, it was better to find a reference more concrete. Luckily the muster roll of his company in Van Schaick's Battalion clearly lists that Mills was appointed captain 19 November 1775 and died of unspecified causes on 22 April 1776. These dates should be taken as being more accurate, and they indicate that Mills's commission preceded the date of the Battalion. The Continental Congress did not authorize the raising of the new battalion and the commissioning of Van Schaick as colonel until 8 January 1776.<sup>11</sup>

All the men on the report, except Samuel Baker, are listed on Mills's Company's muster roll taken at Fort Ticonderoga on 5 October 1775. Becker Holmes, a 5' 10" carpenter, was enlisted 2 August 1775. Henry Rich, a 5' 7" laborer, enlisted on August 13, but was discharged at Fort George, at the southern end of Lake George, on 29 September. No reason is given for the discharge. Thomas Golden was also a laborer. He stood 5' 9" tall and enlisted 23 July, but was listed as being sick at Fort George. Shubal Cunningham was the tallest of these men at 6' 2". A weaver by trade, he enlisted 20 July, but deserted at Albany on 2 Sept. 1775. Joshua Baker, who was also a laborer, stood but 5' 4" tall. He was enlisted on 1 August and deserted at Halfmoon on 23 September. These were two of thirteen men who deserted the company. The other two, Lewis Miller, enlisted 6 July 1775, and Charles Parsons, enlisted on 8 July, were both sergeants of imposing size. Miller was a 5' 11" laborer and Parsons was a 5' 10" sadler.<sup>12</sup>

Of them all, only Shubal Cunningham filed a pension application with the federal government, while he was living in Beekman, Dutchess County, NY. Since the term "deserted" in the 18<sup>th</sup> century did not mean they deserted to the enemy, but more or less were absent without leave (AWOL), it is unclear whether he returned to Mills's command. According to his pension application, he did return to the army. He saw service in Horton's company of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NY in 1776. He served at the Battle of Long Island, New York and the Battle of White Plains; crossed the Hudson River later at Kings Ferry; and marched across New Jersey. He said he was at Trenton at the capture of the Hessians and was then discharged on New Year's Day. He then immediately enlisted for 3 years in Capt. Samuel Pell's Company of Col. Philip Van Cortlandt's 2<sup>nd</sup> New York. He served at the Battle of Saratoga, was at winter quarters in Pennsylvania, and then was at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse that spring.<sup>13</sup>

Of this group, it is Charles Parsons who goes on to greatest fame. He started out enlisting as a sergeant in the 4<sup>th</sup> New York on 8 July 1775. Parsons was “taken out” of the company on 25 September as regimental Quarter Master Sergeant. In late fall 1775, he followed Mills and became his 2<sup>nd</sup> lieutenant in Van Schaick’s Battalion. He was promoted to 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant that winter. Heitman has these commissions as 2<sup>nd</sup> New York, but that is a mistake. This book lists him as 1<sup>st</sup> lieutenant in the 1<sup>st</sup> New York when officially organized 21 November 1776, but his commission is backdated to 26 February 1776, captain-lieutenant 9 January 1778, and a captain as of 26 March 1779. He served until the end of the war in 1783 and was one of the longest serving officers in the New York Line. He was an original member of the New York State Society of the Cincinnati. A Massachusetts native and father of seven children, Parsons was awarded a New York State land bounty in 1790 for his war service. He lived out his life pursuing “agricultural and commercial pursuits” in Williamstown, Massachusetts. He died in 1814.<sup>14</sup>



Illustrated here are three views of a typical late 18<sup>th</sup> century waistcoat. In the case of the under (small) clothes worn by the 4<sup>th</sup> New York Battalion, ca. 1775, this garment was also called a vest or jacket. The illustration by George C. Woodbridge from *Collector’s Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Revolution*, George C. Neumann and Frank C. Kravic, (Harrisburg, PA, Stackpole Books, 1975), page 271 is used with the kind permission of BAR Founder George C. Neumann and the Estate of BAR Founder George C. Woodbridge.

## Notes

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1. Document #6513, (National Archives Microfilm Publication, M859, Roll 20), *Miscellaneous Numbered Records (The manuscript File) in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1775-1790s*, Record Group 93, National Archives Building, Washington, DC. Provided courtesy of Don Londahl-Smidt. Beyond the specific discussion, this document is particularly important because it is more evidence that sergeants' coats were probably issued to the New York troops in 1775. There is no known source officially authorizing them or ordering them made, though Curtenius reported an ability to get wool to make them.
2. Philip Schuyler Papers, Manuscript Division, New York Public Library, (Microfilm made at the New York Public Library, Ratio 14, 1971, 39 rolls, Roll 13), Box 27, Letters to Schuyler, January-February 1776, Col. Alexander McDougall to Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler, 2 January 1776, Here-in-after *PSP*.
3. *PSP*.
4. Alan Archambault and Philip D. Weaver, *Military Uniforms in America*, "Enlisted Men. 4th Battalion, New York Provincial Forces, 1775," pl. 657 (1990); Philip D. Weaver, "Update on 4th New York Uniforms in 1775," *MC&H*, 55, no. 4 (Winter 2003-2004): 247-248; A True inventory of all the Goods [illegible] Here Taken the 9 of August 1775 and an Account of Provisions &c. Delivered to Philip Henning, QM Sargent from 8 Aug to 7 Oct, *Alexander McDougall Papers, 1757-1795*, 4 rolls, Roll 1, New York Historical Society, Manuscript Department.
5. Col. James Holmes to Peter T. Curtenius, 10 August 1775, (National Archives Microfilm Publication M246, 138 rolls, Roll 70, Jacket 50-3, Frame 392, Washington), *Revolutionary War Rolls 1775-1783*, Record Group 93, National Archives Building, Washington, DC. These items and "every other article necessary" were specifically to outfit 52 men for campaign.
6. Berthold Fernow, editor, *Documents Relating to the Colonial History of the State of New York*, Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Co., 1853-1887, vol. 15 p. 529. Here-in-after *Fernow*. Mills was the 6<sup>th</sup> rated captain in the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion commanded by Col. James Holmes. Document #4177, *Miscellaneous Numbered Records*, Record Group 93, Roll 15. Provided courtesy of Don Londahl-Smidt.
7. Stores for Capt. Mills's Company, undated, *Revolutionary War Rolls*, Records Group 93, Roll 70, Jacket 50-3, Frame 399-400.
8. *Uniforms of the American, British, French, and German Armies in the War of the American Revolution 1775-1783*, by Lt. Charles M. Lefferts, New York, NY: J. J. Little and Ives Company, 1926, 107 & 128. The term "deserted" was not necessarily opprobrious. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it essentially meant "absent without leave (AWOL)" as opposed to "deserted to the enemy."
9. *The New York Packet and General Advertiser*, Thursday, March 13, 1777, Volume I, No. 44. Provided courtesy of Don Londahl-Smidt.
10. Document #4213, *Miscellaneous Numbered Records*, Record Group 93, Roll 13. A transcript of this document has been passed around by some of my fellow New York Line researchers for many years. To my surprise, I recently learned that Don Londahl-Smidt also originally found this document as well.
11. *New York State Society of the Cincinnati: Biographies of Original Members & Other Continental Officers*, by Francis J. Sypher, Jr. Fishkill, NY: New York State Society of the Cincinnati, 2004, 323. Here-in-after *Cincy*. *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April, 1775, to December, 1783*, Francis B. Heitman, Reprint of the New, Revised, and Enlarged Edition of 1914, With Addenda by Robert H. Kelby, 1932, Baltimore MD: Genealogical Publishing company, 1982, 394. Here-in-after *Heitman*. Muster Roll of Captain Daniel Mills's Company, 17 December 1776, *Revolutionary War Rolls*, Records Group 93, Roll 77, Jacket 163. *Fernow*, 45-46.
12. Muster Roll of Captain Daniel Mills's Company, 5 October 1775, *Revolutionary War Rolls*, Records Group 93, Roll 70, Jacket 50-2; Height and Size Roll of Captain Mills's Company, *Revolutionary War Rolls*, Record Group 93, Roll 70, Jacket 50-2. Transcription of the muster roll was provided courtesy of Dr. Larry Maxwell.
13. Pension application of Shubal Cunningham (S43425), (National Archives Microfilm Publication M804, Roll 238), *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files, 1800-1900*, Record Group 15, National Archives Building, Washington, DC. Dr. Larry Maxwell provided notes from this file.
14. *Cincy*, 323; *Heitman*, 427.

**Notes and Queries**  
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Readers may remember my recent article *4th New York Uniforms in 1775: When a Jacket is a Vest*, where I reviewed how the terms vest, jacket, and waistcoat describing the same article of clothing. Naturally, right after it was published in the Autumn 2007 issue of *The Brigade Dispatch*, I found another clothing bill for the 4th New York

buried in a pile of other material provide to my renowned researcher, Marko Zlatich.

Since Marko left no restrictions on sharing this information, I thought to present it to you below. Here we see the use of the misspelled term "waistcoat" to identify the garment.

Phil Weaver  
Merchant (CCM)

New York Augt 28 1775

Sir

be please to Send by the Bear hearof Sargeant Morris Ten Coats  
Twenty four Shirts & 26 pair of Shows & 20 Weast -  
Coats & 20 Pair of Breeches 20 Hats 4 Camp Kittles  
24 Pair of Stockings 6 Mugs for Capt Woodard  
Company of the 4th Battalion

/s/Nathan Woodard

**Notes**

Document #5397, (National Archives Microfilm Publication, M859, Roll 17), *Miscellaneous Numbered Records (The Manuscript File) in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War*

*Records, 1775-1790s, Record Group 93, National Archives Building, Washington, DC. Source provided courtesy of Marko Zlatich.*

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