

# Handful of Minutemen F

When 150 British regulars stormed ashore that May morning in 1778, even Col. Joseph Durfee, used to seeing the redcoats in action, must have felt awe at the resplendent troops of King George III.

In the 18th century, British regiments were raised by a favored officer or gentleman who was paid by the Crown for each soldier he enlisted. Commissions in his command were sold to such other officers or gentlemen who could afford them, and

common soldiers were recruited by the formula: "By lies they lured them, by liquor they tempted them, and when they were dead drunk they forced a shilling (signifying enlistment) into their fists."

Unreliable the system may have been, but it brought into the army tough, hardened and often desperate men who made good soldiers.

Durfee didn't know it at the time, but he and his 19 minutemen were facing Maj. Edmund Eyre and his

54th Regiment of Foot. It was a veteran fighting force, and Eyre had been in plenty of tight spots before. But this day he was overconfident.

This didn't help the morale of the handful of men watching the fighting force come ashore. Clad in homespuns and without a uniform within the group, perhaps save for Durfee himself, they watched as a trained unit spread before them.

An English regiment had 10 companies, eight for line

duty, one of light infantry and a grenadier company. The elite grenadiers were picked for strength and courage and given detached duty or posts of honor in battle. The fast, light infantry was used for reconnaissance or skirmishing.

Uniforms, patterned after German models, were brightly and highly ornamental and often impractical. Scarlet coats had colored linings, facings, piping, lace, and brass or pewter buttons. Stiff collars and high leather stocks restricted movements of the head.

The regiment probably wore the small fur hats with a brass plate on the front. Officers wore cocked hats with cockades and plumes. None of the hats worn had a visor or brim to shield the eyes.

The cipher plate bore the inscription "GR" meaning in Latin, Georgus Rex, or George the King. Under that would be the unit designation, in this case 54. A white woolen vest, washable britches that came to the knee and had a sailor's buttoned front, white knee stockings and black wool spatterdashes, to protect the ankles during field maneuvers.

Each enlisted man carried his Brown Bess musket and a bayonet, leather ammunition pouch, a wooden canteen, extra flint, boxes of the lead ball bullets, black powder horns, and knapsacks with spare goods, food, and a rolled blanket.

To wash his white britches, powder his hair or wig and clean brightwork and belts often took the British soldier three hours a day, but this was part of the discipline that made him so reliable in battle.

The Brown Bess rifle was about .75 caliber, and had a barrel alone that was 46 inches long. It was introduced into the British army by the Duke of Marlborough and was a standard weapon for over 100 years.

In command of the British regulars was Eyre.

## HAPPY BIRTHDAY AMERICA!



## CHASE ADVERTISING

**JOHN HOYLE**  
**HEADQUARTERS FOR**  
**BICENTENNIAL IDEAS**

- COMMEMORATIVE COINS • CALENDARS
- PLATES • DECALS • BUMPER STICKERS

P.O. BOX E443  
NEW BEDFORD, MA.  
TEL. 995-2778

P.O. BOX 6145  
PROVIDENCE, R.I.  
TEL 401-438-3400

Research has shown that Eyre's military career began on May 15, 1760 when he was commissioned an ensign in the 24th Regiment of Foot. Later, in 1762, he was promoted to the rank of captain, and was transferred from the 24th to the 54th Regiment, an infantry unit.

On the 26th of October, 1775, Eyre was promoted to major. It was part of the same 54th Regiment that Eyre led up from Newport to raid Fall River.

Whether Eyre came ashore and actually led his men, or sent subordinate officers in the longboats to set the fires while he remained aboard one of the larger ships in the Taunton River, is unknown. But Eyre's later military record points to a type of officer that would have wanted to lead his men in all encounters.

Some two years after the Battle of Fall River, on Nov. 17, 1780, Edmund Eyre was promoted to lieutenant colonel. History again identifies him at still another battle of the Revolutionary War. Now in full command of the 54th, he led his men in the attack on Fort Griswold at the 1781 Battle of New London, Conn.

According to Lloyd D. Whitman, curator of the Museum at Fort Griswold, Eyre's commanding officer had great praise for the way Eyre led his men in that attack. It is interesting to note that Eyre's commanding officer in that military encounter was none other than the former American officer turned traitor, Benedict Arnold.

Since Eyre was transferred to another regiment, the 64th, in March of 1782, there is every reason to suspect that, like Durfee, Eyre managed to survive the Revolution and returned to his native England.

In 1881, the 54th Regiment which Eyre had commanded at the Battle of Fall River became the 2nd Battalion, The Dorset Regiment. It still exists today in the British Army as the Devonshire and Dorset Regiment and has a long and honorable battle record.

# ***Faced Tough Regiment***



## **Redcoats Stand Review**

Sir Christopher Welby-Everard, president of the 10th Foot Royal Lincolnshire Regimental Association, whose predecessors fought the colonials 200 years ago

at Concord and Lexington, views American members of the ceremonial regiment, one of many to participate in battle re-enactments across the nation.