



THE BEDFORD COUNTY MILITIA

The Bedford County Militia consisted of three battalions throughout the course of the Revolutionary War. This essay will discuss the structure of that military force. In the year 1777 the First Battalion consisted of six companies, and the other two battalions consisted of eight companies. By the year 1781 enough men were recruited to enable all three of the battalions to consist of eight companies.

At the start of the Revolutionary War, Bedford County was not populated as heavily as the counties in the eastern part of the state. In those eastern counties more than one company could be formed from the recruits of a single township area because of the large number of residents making up the available manpower pool. The total number of men who enlisted, or were otherwise recruited, in York County at the beginning of the war alone, numbered 4,621 according to the April, 1778 return. Such a large number of men did not even inhabit the whole of Bedford County in that year. Unlike the militia of those heavily populated eastern counties, the Bedford County Militia was composed of the 22/24 companies noted above, each such company made up of men from a rather widespread region.

The *First Battalion* was made up of recruits from the Bedford, Brothers Valley, Cumberland Valley, Quemahoning and Turkeyfoot Townships. These townships comprised the area of western and southern Bedford County. In the year 1777 the western and southern portions of Bedford County included what is the majority of present-day Bedford County and the whole of present-day Somerset County. Bedford County included what was Bedford and Cumberland Valley Townships. Somerset County included what was Brothers Valley, Quemahoning and Turkeyfoot Townships.

The *Second Battalion* was composed of recruits from the townships of Ayr, Bethel, Colerain and Dublin - all of which lay in eastern Bedford County. In the year 1777, this region from which the Second Battalion was recruited included basically what is today Fulton County.

The *Third Battalion* was formed out of the remaining area of Bedford County, and included men recruited from the Barree, Hopewell and Frankstown Townships, which made up northern Bedford County. In 1777, the region from which the Third Battalion was recruited included primarily what is today encompassed by Blair and Huntingdon Counties. Blair County was formed almost entirely out of the area that was Frankstown Township in 1777. Present-day Huntingdon County was composed of Hopewell, Barree and a portion of Frankstown Townships.

An example of the sparsity of residents - and, in turn, the available recruits - can be seen in the fact that in the year 1775 Frankstown Township (as noted above, from which the whole of present-day Blair County comes) was home to only about sixty-three taxable families. In the 1775 tax assessment there appeared only fifteen additional single freemen. These figures might be a little deceptive because they do not reflect the total number of men of recruitment age; they are only indicative of the number of households that could be taxed for property. The Federal Tax (or Class Tax as it was known because it divided the residents up into classes from which recruits could be chosen) that was taken in the latter part of the year 1781 shows that there were 104 men "able-bodied and between the ages of eighteen and fifty-three years" in the entire area under the jurisdiction of Frankstown Township. By comparison, the Class Tax levied on able-bodied men of the township of Manheim in York County (an area of size roughly equal to Frankstown Township), in the year 1777 recorded 291 men who would be available recruits for the militia.

The low number of men available to be recruited into the Bedford County Militia required it to differ in many ways from the militias raised in the other (i.e. eastern) counties of Pennsylvania. Because of the fact that the companies could not be divided up into numerous classes, such classes could not be called out for tours of duty on a routine, alternating basis. Also, because of the low number of men

comprising each township area, when they were called out for duty there would be few able-bodied men to defend their homes and farmsteads. This latter situation is well documented in the petitions sent by the inhabitants of this frontier region to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania in their attempts to elicit help from the more populous areas of the state. One other aspect of the Bedford County Militia which differed somewhat from the other county militias is embodied in the word "frontier". Because of the fact that this area was indeed a portion of the western frontier, the threat of Indian incursions was very real. Just as real was the threat of a possible invasion from the west by the British. The atmosphere of constant threat from these forces led to the creation of Ranging Companies to patrol the frontier, rather than companies of militia that were drilled and trained to engage in direct combat.

In the year 1781 the numbering of the battalions and companies changed. What had been the Second Battalion in 1777 now became known as the *First Battalion*. The township areas from which the men had been recruited for the Second Battalion stayed the same in 1781 under the name of the First Battalion with the one exception that the area of Cumberland Valley Township was now included in this battalion's jurisdiction.

In 1781, what had been the Third Battalion in 1777, now became known as the *Second Battalion*. The township areas from which this newly named Second Battalion drew its recruits stayed the same as in the year 1777 when it was known as the Third Battalion with the one exception of the inclusion of Dublin Township in its northern Bedford ranks.

Finally, in 1781, the battalion that had been known in 1777 as the First Battalion of the Bedford County Militia, now became known as the *Third Battalion*; the recruitment region stayed the same as it had been in 1777.

A statement of a rather general nature can be made that residents of any particular county and township area within that county were recruited into battalions and companies raised in those very particular county/township areas. Therefore, a resident of Frankstown Township in 1777 would more than likely have been recruited into a company of the Third Battalion while a resident of the town of Bedford would have entered into his militia service in the First Battalion.

The description of the structure of the Bedford County Militia, as given in the foregoing essay, was derived from the Pennsylvania Archives, 2nd Series, Volume XIV, Pages 644 through 653 and also Pages 657 through 665.

QUARTERLY MEETING

Don't forget to attend the 2nd 1991 Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR (to be held at Kings Family Restaurant on Saturday, May 18 at 12:00 noon).

AT THE LAST MEETING

During the last quarterly meeting of the Blair County Chapter (March 16), a motion was approved to prepare a "New Member Package" which would include a copy of the Chapter Constitution and By-Laws, a list of the current membership and other materials to help new members get acquainted with the society. Larry Smith will work at developing this package.

Approved at the last quarterly meeting was a motion to contact the court houses of Blair, Bedford, Fulton and Huntingdon Counties with the proposal to install placques bearing the names of all Patriots buried within those respective counties somewhere in the court houses. This will provide visitors to those court houses with a record of Patriots buried in the counties, which they might not have access to otherwise, while also drawing attention to the Society of the Sons of the American Revolution.

Compatriot Robert Cassidy is currently pursuing the possibility of placing markers on the gravesites of Patriots John Shirley and Nicholas McGuire at the Nelson Cemetery in Blair County.

In related concerns, Compatriots Larry and Bernard Smith are currently planning a gravesite dedication ceremony to be held on Saturday, September 21, 1991 at the St. Johns United Church Of Christ in the town of Bedford for Patriot Johan Simon Clar (an ancestor of Larry and Bernard). The Blair County Chapter will sponsor this dedication, and members of the chapter are invited to attend. The ceremony will begin at 1:00pm inside the church and conclude with dedicatory remarks at the gravesite in the church yard.