

# MORNING REPORT

of Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers.

Being the ramblings of a soldier who has smelled too much of Congress's gunpowder and King George's lackeys.

## MAY, 2007

The renderings of this Instant include—

**COMMENT:** You'll notice some differences in the look—just not the ones I wanted.

**CALENDAR:** 12-13 May; Ti opening weekend.

2-3 Jun: Fort at No. 4.

**DUES, MEMBERSHIP, &c:** Culling the list.

**MORE MEMBERSHIP:** Adding to the list.

**TWIRLING THE DISTAFF:** More shifty information.

**RESEARCH:** You're not the only one who thinks drilling can be a waste of time.

**RANGERS:** How old?

And MUCH, MUCH more! Well, at least much more.



### COMMENT

As an experiment, I sent out the last news-letter in PDF format and nobody seems to have had any problems with the alteration so I will continue to do just that. This time, I tried using Caslon, an 18<sup>th</sup>-century font that uses the long-s and ligatures but it has not worked well so I have resorted to another font. I am going to continue to work on getting a version of Caslon to function and look good but, . . . Caslon makes use of the long-s—the one that looks like an “f” without the cross-bar—and ligatures—two or three letters wedded together.

As they are available with Caslon, I used to use the series of stars as a divider between topics but stopped when the news-letter started being sent out via the ether—your machine needs to have the font style available which most do not. Because of the Caslon problems, I could not use those stars again but, I have found stars with another font and am using them. Now, I have a question: Does anyone know/remember what the stars represent?



### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**12-13 May: Opening Weekend; Fort Ticonderoga.**

Our traditional start to the season. It's a bit different weekend this year, however. In preparation for the 250<sup>th</sup> of the attack on Ti, the site is building a replica of part of the French Lines to use for the reenactment and has asked folks to help with the work. They are

having several work weekends over the summer—the 2d weekend of each month—and this happens to be one of them. Sun. being Mother’s Day, the site will be working on the lines Sat. only. Jim and I have talked a bit about it and have set Sat. a.m. formation for 9:00 and then move on to work on the lines during the day. We’ll meet/drill/whatever for a while afterwards and Sun. is open. The fort lets us pretty much have our own way so it would be nice of us to help them in other ways. An example of the fort being nice to us is that they are willing to leave the back gate open if anyone wants to arrive Fri. eve.

For doing the Lines thing, wear modern not-your-best clothes and work gloves for working on the Lines. Much of the work will entail lifting and bulling the logs and will go on rain or shine—forecast is for partly cloudy & temps around 60. Everyone will meet at the log soldier’s hut at 10:00 for plans, procedures, safety, and dividing into teams. Breaks will be taken as a group and bring plenty of water. Each volunteer will get a ticket for a free lunch at the fort’s restaurant. If you have a power drill—there will be generators—and ½”, 5/8” and 1” augers that can go through 12” logs, please bring ‘em. Forget battery drills—they’ll too quickly. Plan to work until 5:00.

### Next Month

#### **2-3 Jun: Rev War Encampment; Fort at No. 4; Charlestown, NH.**

I have yet to receive the details for this event. I do know that the fort opens at 10:00 so you must be ready to go by then. No cars will be allowed in the camps after 9:00 a.m. If you want to arrive there after 9:00 p.m. Fri. eve., you must let them know. They do not allow any hay for the tents and you must pocket or pick up cartridge papers. I also know that the battles are at 2:00 on Sat. and 1:00 on Sun.

Question: Do you want to stay in one of the buildings? A special request has to be made for such a thing to happen. During the CL show, we had the Johnson lean-to with the fort’s north entryway in our living room. Great fun!

**Directions:** Charlestown is just across the river from Springfield, VT. **VT Rt. 11** goes through Springfield and across the **bridge to NH**—that’s **Exit 7 off of I-91**. Once across the bridge, keep going **straight for about a quarter-mile** and the fort entrance will be on your right. If you come up to a “T” with NH Rt. 12, you’ve gone too far. Charlestown village is just a couple miles down Rt. 12.

### Something to go see

19 May: Armed Forces Day and Military Encampment; Springfield Armory, Springfield, MA.

WHITCOMB’S IS NOT PART OF THIS EVENT. It is a time-line activity at a rather neat museum. If you have much interest in the history of firearms but have never visited the armory, you are missing out on a neat experience. This might be a good opportunity to see the site and reenactors from other periods.

26-27 May: Plattsburgh Military Timeline; Plattsburgh, NY.

We can participate in this one if anyone wants to but we have to let them know.

### Next Year

6-8 Jun: West Boylston, MA, Bicentennial.

25-27 Jul: 250<sup>th</sup> of Siege of Louisbourg; Louisbourg, NS. (Frog & Feather)



## **DUES, MEMBERSHIP, &c.**

Over the years, we have developed quite a mailing list. In the process of revamping our house, I’ve decided to revamp the mailing list. Those who have sent their membership form and paid their dues need not be concerned. If you have not paid your dues and wish to continue as a member, please get a check to me right now. And please send me the member form even if you sent one last year—that part of the records needs to be revamped as well. If

you receive mailings as a courtesy, please let me know you wish to continue to receive said mailings. If I do not hear from someone one way or the other, their name will be culled from the list.



## MORE MEMBERSHIP

We have a new member—who actually has fallen in with us at a couple events already. He’s Derek Ross, PO Box 721, Hague, NY 12836; 518-543-6168; [derekross119@yahoo.com](mailto:derekross119@yahoo.com). He has, on occasion, dressed as a savage and for a few years beat up sheepskin on the Ft. Ti fife and drum corps. You may remember the savage playing drum with some of the current corps in our camp Sat. eve. last year—that’s him and looked rather odd (a savage playing snare looked odd, not him). He had hoped to audition for the Old Guard last year but injured his hand and hopes to try again this year. Oh, by the way, he’s Naomi Beuerlein’s boyfriend so, if they break up, we’ll probably lose a member.



## TWIRLING THE DISTAFF

The following article originally appeared in *The Brigade Dispatch*, Spring 2006 and is the result of research done by Paul Dickfoss of Dubois Co., 3d NY Regt. I thought it rather appropriate given last month’s topic.

### What are Brown Linen Shifts?

#### Introduction

Most women, when choosing fabric for a shift, choose white or off white linen. Not all shifts were white however. Brown, which is probably the brownish color of unbleached linen, and several fabrics, which are probably unbleached, are also described. Since most extant shifts and those in paintings are from the upper economic levels, it would be expected that they would use finer, whiter linens.

Nonetheless, some extant shifts are of unbleached linen.<sup>1</sup> In modern photographs, even unbleached usually looks more white than brown; so what color would an artist chose from the palette? Most people in the 18<sup>th</sup> century were poor however. So how common were brown or unbleached linen shifts?<sup>2</sup>

Looking at shifts worn on runaways from four colonies, this paper provides a beginning look at the color of women’s shifts worn by the lower sort from as close to 1760 to 1783 as was available (Table 1).

#### Unbleached (Brown) Linens

Most oznabrig and tow in the American colonies is attributed in the literature to the coarse, unbleached, undyed, flax or hemp linen. This gives a brownish to grayish mottled look to the cloth that slowly whitens during washings and with time in the sun. Generally speaking, in the south, oznabrig is the unbleached fabric most often described whereas in the northern colonies tow predominates. Usually, the term unbleached is not used as a descriptor in period works. Brown or gray was used and is probably better because of the wide range of colors unbleached linens take on.<sup>3</sup>

It is recognized that oznabrig may refer to stripe, check or dyed common linens or cottons that came out of Osnabruck, Germany throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This however seems unlikely in the case of shifts since the only shifts within the time period considered are described as shades of white or brown. It is mostly recognized that the change to cotton

occurred sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Tow, and tow and linen when used for shirts, is sometime referred to as striped; but this has not been found for shifts.

As stated previously, both oznabrig and tow will slowly whiten with time. From experience however this whitening takes a definite effort to occur. Without laying the garment in the sun for weeks, the garment will retain the brownish grayish color for the majority, if not the entire, life of the garment. Even when whitened, oznabrig and tow are usually referred to as “whitened” not as “white”. This provides considerable doubt that the garment in question is a true white opposed to a light shade of tan or gray. It should also be noted that laundered garments are not always dried in the sun. Setting wet clothes in front of a fire or hanging them indoors is often more practical -- especially in cold months.

**Table 1: Shift descriptions from north to south in chronological order by state.**

Shift Description	Year	Position/Trade	State	Page #
Cotton and Linen shift	1770	Stolen	Rhode Island	17 V1
a flannel shift	1774	Indian [Servant]		71 V2
One Holland Shift, one Tow and Linen Ditto	1781	Stolen		13 V2
Three shifts, two brown country made linen and one above half whitened.	1777	Servant	New Jersey	9
A tow shift...a tow shift	1778	Servant		10
Good shifts of brown homespun linen	1780	Slave		11
two shifts	1776	Irish Servant	Pennsylvania	9-10
white linen shift	1776	Negro Slave		10
coarse brown linen shift with white sleeves	1777	Apprentice, Thief		17
two good shifts	1778	Servant		20
Five or six homespun flax linen shifts, some of them with fine sleeves	1778	Servant		20
one new fine shift	1778	Hired Servant		21
a tow shift	1782	Apprentice		23
osnabrug shift	1768	Virginia born Negro Slave	Virginia	Purdie & Dixon
osnabrug shifts [x2]	1768	Negro Slaves		Purdie & Dixon
he took with him a woman's shift	1768	Convict Servant Man		Purdie & Dixon
an oznabrigs shift	1769	Welsh Indented Servant		Rind
oznabrig shift	1770	Mulatto Slave		Rind
an oznabrig shift	1770	Congo new Negro Slave		Rind
an Osnabrug Shift	1771	Mulatto Slave		Purdie & Dixon, Rind

Osnabrug...Shift	1772	Negro Slave		Purdie & Dixon
oznabrig shift	1772	Negro Slave		Rind
one ruffled and two plain shifts	1772	Servant		Rind
several white Linen Shifts	1773	Negro Slave		Purdie & Dixon
her shift is of rolls	1773	Negro Slave		Rind
a brown linen shift	1773	Negro Slave		Rind
Osnabrug Shift	1774	Negro Slave		Purdie & Dixon
white Cotton Shift	1774	Mulatto Slave		Purdie & Dixon
two Osnabrug Shifts one new, the other old	1774	Negro Slave		Purdie & Dixon
an oznabrig shift	1774	Negro Slave		Rind
oznabrig shift	1774	Negro Slave		Rind
oznabrig shift	1774	Negro Slave		Rind
an Osnabrug Shift	1775	Negro Slave		Dixon & Hunter
1 or 2 white linen shifts	1775	Mulatto Slave		Pinkney
three cotton and three linen shifts	1776	Mulatto Slave		Purdie
her shift of our own manufactory	1776	Negro Slave		Purdie

Furthermore, these fabrics are coarse, utilitarian linens designed for durable working class laborer's, servant's, and slave's clothing. Laying garments in the sun requires constant attention to protect them from theft, and (after whitening) the fabric is still a coarse fabric. Due to the nature of work these people performed, it is unlikely most working class people would take the time to bleach their work clothes.

Homespun linen can be of many qualities but is generally recognized as being coarser and usually unbleached. In fact a description for a man's shirt advertised in a New Jersey newspaper includes "two shirts, one homespun, one white."<sup>4</sup>

Occasionally, other linen fabrics such as rolls and dowles are described as the fabric for shifts. Both of these are coarse linens and were probably unbleached.

#### Rhode Island<sup>5</sup>

Only four shifts are described from 1760 to 1783 in Rhode Island newspapers. None of these include color. One shift stolen along with "One Holland Shift" is described as "Tow and linen".

#### New Jersey<sup>6</sup>

At least six shifts are described on runaways advertised in New Jersey newspapers from 1776 to 1782. In fact, all those described were either brown or unbleached linen to some degree. One argument some may have is that slaves wear brown shifts and servants and apprentices wear white. All these brown or unbleached shifts, except one, were on servants not slaves, suggesting that brown shifts were not restricted to slaves.

#### Pennsylvania<sup>7</sup>

Between 13 and 14 shifts are described in The Pennsylvania Evening Post from 1775 to 1783. There is only one Negro slave described in this set; and she has a "white linen shift". Only one shift is described as brown and that is on a 13 year old apprentice whose mother

has fair hair -- obviously a Caucasian. Five or six others are described as homespun and one as tow. These are on a servant and an apprentice.

#### Virginia<sup>8</sup>

In Virginia newspapers 32 shifts are described from 1760 to 1777. These are owned by 20 slaves, and only three servants. Of these shifts, 15 are described as oznabrig and one of “our own manufactory”. At least four are described as white linen and one as white cotton. Only one is described as brown linen in 1773; but one other just outside the period under consideration (1752) is brown (Table 2).

**Table 2: Pre 1760s and post 1783 shift descriptions also considered in this study.**

Shift Description	Year	Position/Trade	State	Page #
One Shift	1784	Stolen	Rhode Island	155 V2
with several Aprons and Shifts	1736	English [Servant]	Virginia	Rind
a Shift and Apron of Princes Linen	1737	Convict Servant Londoner		Parks
an old Dowlas Shift	1738	Servant		Parks
an old Oznabrig Shift	1739	Negro [Slave]		Parks
Oznabrig Shift	1745	[English] Servant		Parks
a white Linen Shift	1746	Irish Servant		Parks
a brown Linen Shift	1752	Convict Servant		Hunter

#### Conclusions

Brown shifts are probably not dyed brown but are the natural unbleached color of linen. Runaway descriptions often mention brown linen and a range of fabrics that were likely unbleached. It is possible most shifts described on runaways were made of varying shades of unbleached linen (Table 3). We may never know which was more common however it is certain that a fair number of shifts worn by the poor should be of unbleached linen.

**Table 3: Colors of shifts reviewed in this study by decade.**

Color	1730s	1740s	1750s	1760s	1770s	1780s	Total	Percentage
Unbleached	0	0	1	0	6	0	7	10
Presumed Unbleached	2	1	0	4	22	1	30	44
Whitened	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
White	0	1	0	0	9	0	10	15
Wool Presumed White	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1
Not Described	4	0	0	1	13	1	19	30
Total	6	2	1	5	52	2	68	101

#### Notes

1. Sharon Ann Burnston personal communication. Rarely, unbleached shifts show up in museum collections although those that are found may be early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many extant linen shifts that are now white may have been far darker in the past. We now see them in their present whitened state because of washings and exposure to light.
2. A great thanks is extended to Don Hagist who provided references on runaway descriptions and is the best editor I have ever worked with. As always my wife, Laura, and daughters Anna, Sara, and Maria deserve special thanks for allowing me time to pursue this work.
3. Most fabric definitions are from Howard, Bryan Paul, *Had On and Took with Him: Runaway Indentured Servant Clothing in Virginia, 1774-1778*; Texas A&M University PhD. Dissertation, 1996; p. 255 for tow and p. 240-241 for flannel and baize. The other book consulted was Montgomery, Florence M., *Textiles In America 1650-1870: A Dictionary Based On Original Documents, Prints And Paintings, Commercial Records, American Merchants' Papers, Shopkeepers' Advertisements, And Pattern Books With Original Swatches Of Cloth*; New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984.
4. Cleary, Michael, *Clothing and Textiles in New Jersey 1776-1782* A study based on the New Jersey Archives, Newspaper Abstracts, Second Series, Volumes 1-5. Plainfield, New Jersey: ©Michael Cleary, 1976. See page 19.

5. Taylor, Maureen Alice, *Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains From Rhode Island Newspapers Volume 1: The Providence Gazette, 1762-1800*. Camden, Maine: Picton Press,, 1995. Taylor, Maureen Alice and Sweet, John Wood, *Runaways, Deserters, and Notorious Villains From Rhode Island Newspapers Volume 2: Additional notices from The Providence Gazette, 1762-1800 as well as advertisements from all other Rhode Island Newspapers from 1732-1800*. Rockport, Maine: Picton Press, 2001.
6. Cleary, Michael, *Clothing and Textiles in New Jersey 1776-1782* A study based on the New Jersey Archives, Newspaper Abstracts, Second Series, Volumes 1-5. Plainfield, New Jersey: ©Michael Cleary, 1976.
7. Huesken, Sue, and Karen Mullian, *Had On and Took With Her: Clothing in Female Runaway Servant Advertisements from the Pennsylvania Evening Post as Published by Benjamin Towne between 1775-1784*. NJ: SK Shortgown Research, 2003, pp. 17 and 20.
8. *The Virginia Gazette, 1760-1777*, in database form, provided by The Virginia Center for Digital History, <http://people.uvawise.edu/runaways/>. Database searches were done by searching for "shift" only.



## RESEARCH

Occasional comments are made concerning the necessity of drilling. Following are some thoughts on that subject printed in 1779 by Roger Stevenson, a British officer, in his pamphlet, *Military Instructions for Officers Detached in the Field: Containing a Scheme for Forming a Corps of a Partisan*.

*The greatest advantage derived from the exercise, is the expertness with which men become capable of loading and firing, and teaching them an attention to act in conformity with those around them. It has always been lamented, that men have been brought on service, without being informed of the uses of the different manoeuvres they have been practicing; and, having no idea of any thing but the uniformity of the parade, instantly fall into disorder and confusion when they lose the step, or see a deviation from the straight lines they have been accustomed to at exercise. It is a pity to see so much attention confined to show, and so little given to insyruct the troops in what may be of use to them on service. Though the parade is the place to form the characters of soldiers, and teach them uniformity, yet being confined to that alone is too limited and mechanical for a true military genius.*



## RANGERS

I thought I'd put in a bit about the ages of the original Rangers drawn from the 43 men for whom we know the ages.

For all the men, including officers, the median age is 24 while the mean is 26.2. Two men enlisted in their 40s and two enlisted at age 15. Nine enlisted after age 35 and thirteen teen-agers served in the corps. Those in command came from the older men with the average age being 35.7 but that becomes even higher when you take out Nathan Taylor, the only officer in his 20s (22, actually). Similarly, serjeants tended to be older than the men but younger than the commissioned officers. Manassah Sawyer received a promotion to serjeant when only 18. The mean age of the other ranks comes out to be 24.3 with the oldest privates being Samuel Fifield at 45, Samuel Stevens at 39, and John Martin at 38. Removing these three men from the calculation drops the mean age nearly two years.

When compared with the army as a whole, Whitcomb's actually is somewhat older. Sources for the entire army put an average age around 23 but Whitcomb's is over 26. Only eighteen of the forty-three men whose ages are known (42%) enlisted before their 23d birthday. Removal of the officers and one or two of the oldest privates drops the average age of the Rangers to about 23, however. Whitcomb may have wanted more responsible men in his command when you consider the kind of duties expected of them. With that in mind, to be one of the thirteen teen-agers in the unit speaks well of their maturity.

**Quando Omni Flunkus Moritati  
Carpe Potus**



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# *Benjamin Whitcomb's Independent Corps of Rangers*

A non-profit corporation established in 1975 to re-create the life style of the Rangers in the War of Independence, 1776-1781.

Quondo Omni Flunku< Moritati