

The Road to Philadelphia – 1777

By Jim Purky



The British Are Coming! Fife & Drum British Centre Company Regiment On The March.

The Philadelphia Campaign of 1777 to 1778 provides interesting fodder for wargamers who are interested in the American Revolution (or “AWI”). The battles run the gamut from small skirmish level encounters such as Cooch’s Bridge, moderate-sized battles such as the action at Paoli, and on up to larger European-style battles along the lines of Brandywine, Germantown and Monmouth Court House. In a word, the Philadelphia Campaign of 1777-1778 offers something for everyone, from skirmish scenarios to large set piece battles.

An interesting aspect of the AWI is its hybrid nature – part European-style warfare, but with its own unique twists that set it apart from a standard linear warfare table top slug fest. For example, cavalry played a minor role, if any, during the Philadelphia Campaign as it was used largely for scouting purposes or the screening of the army as it advanced. So you really do not need to have cavalry if you intend to fight the larger battles of the campaign.

Likewise, artillery played a lesser role on the battlefield, compared to its role in European battles during the Seven Years War (1756 to 1763). The generally poor quality of the roads and a dearth of quality draft horses limited the mobility of artillery during the AWI, placing an emphasis on lighter 3-pound and 6-pound cannon rather than the heavier artillery used in European land wars. As a result, artillery does not rule the table top in AWI wargaming. For most wargamers, two or three cannon per side will prove to be sufficient, meaning that one can invest more funds in building the core infantry component of the armies.

Uniforms of the Continental Army

The appearance of the American Continental Army of 1777 – 1778 was anything but “uniform”, comprised as it was of an assortment of colors including brown, grey, blue and even the occasional red coat. Brown was the first official color for Continental uniforms, adopted by the Continental Congress on November 4, 1775. This color scheme was never completely implemented because some regiments had already chosen different colors. In some instances, capture British red coats were dyed a nutmeg brown, using indigo as the dye, so that the troops would not be mistaken for British soldiers. As uniforms wore out on campaign, they were often replaced by whatever manner of cloth was available, thus increasing the variety in the soldiers’ appearance. The linen hunting shirt was an economical and widely available alternative to the woolen uniform coat and so it became the de facto service dress of the Continental soldiers in the field.



Maryland Regiment of the Continental Line – Fife & Drum Miniatures

The Second Continental Congress authorized a purchase of 5,000 uniforms from France on August 6, 1777, issuing a contract for brown and blue coats, both with red facings (cuffs and lapels). These uniforms did not actually reach North America until the spring of 1778 and they were subsequently issued to the army via a uniform lottery on October 28, 1778 as follows: Brown Coats/Red Facings (Massachusetts, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire); Blue Coats/Red Facings (North Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey, New York). Note that this does not imply that all regiments in one of the lottery states all wore the new coats.

The classic “Continental Blue” coat with red facings and white small clothes did not become the official uniform color until the General Order of October 2, 1779, which fixed blue as the color for all branches of service with distinctive differences in linings and facings. The blue coats of the infantry regiments were to be lined in white and have white buttons. The states were distinguished by different facing colors grouped as follows: White (New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut and Rhode Island), Buff (New York and New Jersey, Red (Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware and Virginia) and Blue (North & South Carolina, and Georgia).



Continental Regiment in Blue Coats with Red Facings – Fife & Drum Miniatures

The origins of the use of the blue coat is uncertain, noting that seven of the original thirteen colonies used blue coats for their state or militia troops prior to the American Revolution. George Washington made his first appearance before the Continental Congress in 1774 wearing his blue Virginia state regimental uniform coat and this might have influenced his eventual selection of blue as the official color of the Continental Army uniform coat. Finally, there is the theory that blue was simply the color of cloth provided by the French!

Head gear tended to trend towards the individual soldier's personal tastes – these are ornery, independent-minded colonials mind you, who were likely as not to wear what they darned pleased. I like to mix a variety of tricorne/cocked hats, brimmed hats, round hats with one side turned up, and jockey caps with a flat front plate into my Continental regiments. This gives the regiment a bit of a disorderly rag-tag appearance. You can further enhance this look by using multiple colors for waistcoats/vests and breeches. For example, a stand of Continental infantry might have one figure with blue trousers, one with brown, two with tan and two clad in white or grey. Early in the war, the soldiers tended to wear knee breeches and stockings, but Washington preferred long leggings or “overalls” which were shaped to the leg and fastened at the ankle with four buttons and a strap under the shoe. Overalls provided better protection against foreign objects getting lodged inside the shoe and had the added cost savings benefit of eliminated the need to provide the men with stockings.

The American Continental Army can include a large component of civilian militia troops, who would naturally be wearing their own civilian clothes colored light brown or grey, along with some blues and greens. While the militia generally could not stand toe to toe with the British soldiers on any battlefield, you could deploy your militia in heavy cover or on the periphery of the battlefield, and watch them create considerable havoc and discomfort to the Crown forces. The militia accounted for 20% of Washington's army at Brandywine and this provides a reasonable guide for the number of militia to use in a wargame army.

British Uniforms on Campaign

The British army is a little easier to tackle, given that there is more documented information about the different regimental uniforms and flags. Many of us have grown up thinking that the British soldier was clad in the standard red coat, white small clothes, a cocked hat (tricorn) and some sort of back pack. This is a description of the official Royal Clothing Warrant of 1768 that governed the theoretical appearance of each regiment.



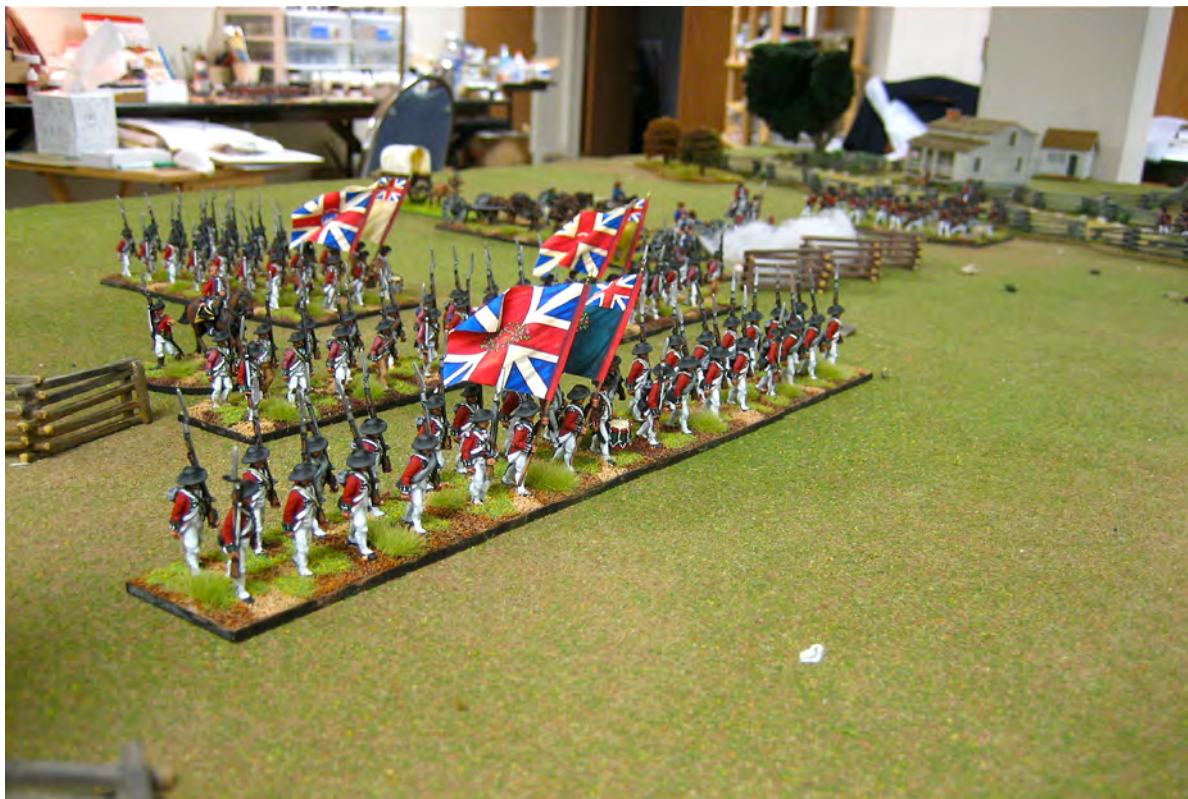
British Light Infantry ("Light Bobs") – Fife & Drum Miniatures.

In practice though, the appearance of the British soldier on campaign was quite different from the 1768 Warrant. Effectively, the uniform was adapted to the conditions of the terrain in the British colonies. For starters, the long tailed coats were trimmed back and shortened to facilitate movement through the brambles and the bushes, so to speak. The knee breeches and half gaiters (or spats) were replaced by a more practical set of trousers called "overalls" that resembled stirrup pants, lacking a cuff (which could get tangled in the brush), but incorporating gaiters as part of the pants leg, buttoning down at the foot to keep dust and water out of the soldier's shoes and stockings. Back packs were quickly discarded by the British army and replaced with a more practical blanket roll or a tumpline.



Battle of Germantown, by Xavier della Gatta

The tricorne or cocked hat was replaced with a more practical wide brimmed hat that was usually turned up or pinned up on the left side. The wider brim offered more protection from the sun than did the standard cocked hat and was probably a more comfortable fit for the soldier. This is the hat that we have come to associate with the corps of British light infantry. In fact, it was adopted by the entire army. Much of what we know about the appearance of the British soldier on campaign comes from a series of painting created by Xavier della Gatta, covering the battles of Germantown and Paoli in 1777.



Organizing Your Forces

Someone once told me that any historical army can be adequately represented on the table top with a maximum of twelve units (battalions or regiments) and over the years I have found this to be a good rule of thumb whenever I am planning wargame armies for a new historical period. I have further found, from experience, that the average player can comfortably handle four maneuver elements augmented by a couple of artillery models. I call this “Jim’s Rule of Fours”. Consider that historically, we find a competent army commander with four corps or divisions under his command; a division commander with three or four brigades under his control; a brigade commander with three or four battalions or regiments under his command. The same phenomena seems to translate well to wargaming.

With the Rule of Fours in mind and a belief that a dozen units is enough for most table top games, the easy math guides me to create three brigades, each containing four battalions, in my standard army organization. On the American side, I will end up with one militia brigade and two brigades of Continental or State regiments. To this I will then add one artillery model and a crew of four to six men plus a limber team to move the cannon around the battlefield. Finally, a brigade commander is added, based on a round stand with enough space to create a mini-diorama on the command stand.

My British army will likewise have three brigades, but I have a considerable variety of troop types to choose from: perhaps a brigade of Hessian allies or a brigade of Loyalist regiments; an elite brigade comprised of some converged grenadiers, converged light infantry, and the British Guards. I like to keep at least two of my brigades as standard redcoats, so I might paint a brigade of elite units and a brigade of Hessians and two brigades of redcoats. This allows me to pick and choose from a smorgasbord of forces, depending on the scenario that I am gaming. I could also add a brigade of light cavalry to each army, but as noted previously, cavalry rarely played a role on the battlefields around Philadelphia, so you really don’t need them.

I like to use a figure to man ratio of 1 to 10 for AWI wargaming; this means that one casting represents ten actual soldiers. Given that the regiments tended to vary from about 200 to 400 men, this means that you can build your army with infantry regiments of 20 to 40 castings. A 24-figure battalion of infantry, for example, could be based on four stands with six figures per stand mounted in two ranks. To my eye, this provides sufficient “heft” to yield the most visual impact without taking up too much area on the table top. Occasionally I will field a couple smaller 12 or 16 figure battalions if the scenario calls for smaller units or specialized units. At the other end of the size spectrum, some of the Hessian, Grenadier, Light and Guards battalions had 500 to 600 men, implying a 50 or 60 figure unit on the wargame table. For these larger battalions, I would suggest dividing them into two “wings” of 25 to 30 figures for the sake of playability.

Let me provide an example of how to build an AWI army using historical orders of battle as a reference point. The book “The Philadelphia Campaign 1777-1778” by David Martin (Combined Books – 1993) provides detailed orders of battle for the British and American armies for the battles of Brandywine and Monmouth Court House. Using the American OOB for Anthony Wayne’s Fourth Division in Washington’s army, we find it comprised of two brigades totaling 1,750 men (or 175 figures at a 1:10 ratio). The table below illustrates how I transform the historical brigade into a wargame brigade. The figures in the parentheses represent the total number of men or wargame figures.

<i>Historical Formation</i>	<i>Wargame Units at 1:10</i>	<i>Comments</i>
1 st Pennsylvania Brigade Col. Thomas Hartley (850)		
1 st PA (335) 2 nd PA (21) 7 th PA (100) 10 th PA (231) Hartley's Regt. (155)	1 st PA (32) 2 nd PA (none) 7 th PA (12) 10 th PA (24) Hartley's 16) Total Figures: 84	Eliminate the small 2 nd PA and amalgamate it with the 7 th PA. Round units up or down to multiples of 4
2 nd Pennsylvania Brigade Col. Richard Humpton (900)		
4 th PA (150) 5 th PA (241) 8 th PA (369) 11 th PA (138)	4 th PA (16) 5 th PA (24) 8 th PA (36) 11 th PA (16) Total Figures: 88	Round up the 4 th PA to 16 figures Round 11 th PA from 14 to 16 figures to maintain a 4x multiple
Total Division: (1,750)	Total Figures (172)	

As you can see from the conversion in the table, you will have to amalgamate some of the smaller units together to create a viable wargame battalion of at least 12 figures. Thus in Colonel Hartley's Brigade, the 21 actual men in the 2nd PA regiment are transferred into the 7th PA regiment to yield 121 actual men, or 12 wargame figures. We round up the number of figures in the 10th PA from 23 to 24 figures and Hartley's Regiment is rounded up from 15 figures to 16 figures. I try to keep wargame units in multiples of four figures as this is the minimum number of figures that I wish to put on a movement stand. Eight figures is the largest movement stand that I use, so the larger units are rounded down to 32 figures. If I need more than 32 figures, then I would add another stand of eight figures to get the unit up to 40 figures. This is all a matter of my own personal taste, so feel free to experiment and adjust your battalions' sizes to your own liking.

After our conversion of real men to wargame units, we end up with two Pennsylvania brigades, each comprised of four battalions. Hartley's brigade ends up with 84 figures (compared to 850 actual men) while Humpton's brigade has 88 figures (compared to 900 actual men). The total brigade adds up to 172 figures, which is a few short of the 175 figures that we might expect from the 1,750 men in our 1:10 ratio. This gives you a couple of extra figures to use as you see fit, or assume that the brigade mustered a smaller number of men to the ranks on the day of your battle. Artillery can then be added, assigning one 6-pounder to each brigade.

Finally, I will finish off Wayne's Division by adding a brigade commander mounted as a single figure on a 2-inch round stand. Brigadier General Anthony Wayne would be represented by two figures placed on a 2-inch round stand.

A similar organization of the British army would result in the following wargame units:

<i>Historical Formation</i>	<i>Wargame Units at 1:10</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Major General Charles Grey's Brigade (1,509)		
15 th Regiment (367) 17 th Regiment (233) 42 nd Regiment (597) 44 th Regiment (312)	36 24 60 30 <hr/> 150 figures	42 nd could be divided into two "wings" of 30 figures.
Brigadier General James Agnew's Brigade (1,383)		
33 rd Regiment (368) 37 th Regiment (308) 46 th Regiment (312) 64 th Regiment (395)	36 30 30 40 <hr/> 136 figures	

The conversion of the British forces into a wargame organization are a little easier to accomplish, given that the majority of regiments had 300 or more men, thus eliminating the need to shift or amalgamate individual regiments. I note that the 42nd Highlander Regiment would have 60 figures using our 1:10 ratio. If this is deemed to be too big a battalion, one could divide the regiment into two "wings" and use them as you would a battalion of infantry. If you do not like variable sized battalions, an alternative organization is to take the average number of men in the brigade and allot an equal number figures to each regiment. For example, Grey's Brigade of 1,509 soldiers would yield 150 figures divided by four regiments, or approximately 36 figures per regiment Agnew's brigade would average 34 figures per unit using the averaging method.

Finally, I would finish off each brigade with a round command stand featuring the brigade commander. You could also add a "wing" or "column" commander to lead your army. For example, at Brandywine, Cornwallis commanded one wing of the army and Knyphausen commanded the other wing. Both brigades would also receive one 6-pounder cannon.