



## The American Revolution in East Florida



18<sup>th</sup> century militia man

### *The 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Colonies*

The American Revolution pitted brother against brother, friend against friend. Like any other war, it was the civilian population that bore the brunt of the conflict.

Many people do not know of Florida's role in the American Revolutionary war. Florida provided a strong support base for British forces in the colonial south. The loyalists had a very deep devotion to their King and Country. To them it was not a war for independence - it was a civil war.

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### **A Safe Place to Call Home**

East Florida had a small professional regiment of soldiers. They were scattered throughout the colony protecting the frontier from Indian attacks and guarding the coast from pirate invasions.

To help defend their homes, many of these proud loyal subjects banded together for what they believed to be their common cause to preserve their way of life.

When the American Revolution began in 1776, the population of British East Florida was only a total of 4,000 people.

After the war began, there was a rapid increase of loyalist families flocking to the safety of British Florida. The majority of loyalists came from Georgia and the Carolinas. Because of their support to the King, many were forced from their home at gunpoint, arriving with no more than the clothing on their backs.

These loyal British subjects maintained their allegiance to King George. Many continued to provide services of a military nature, or other beneficial types of services.

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### **People Respond**

For the most part East Florida was protected by citizens formed into local militia; many of them were volunteers. These units were raised by the royal governor. The militia were paid for their service, and served for a fixed time period.

There were two distinct groups of loyalist volunteer units. The East Florida Rangers were a cavalry unit mainly consisting of frontiersmen. These men knew the lay of the land and were excellent horsemen.

The East Florida Militia was an infantry unit made up of townspeople and frontiersmen. Many free blacks and slaves also served.

They wore a mixture of town and frontier dress; such as hunting coats, trousers, a variety of headgear and buckskins. The men from the coastal region wore the jackets, hats, and breeches found in the colonial towns.

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## A Militia Man's Life

Militia men had a personal flintlock musket or pistol which fired round lead balls that were not very accurate. They may also have had a long frontier knife or bayonet to attach to their weapon.

They had a cartridge box to carry ammunition and a round wood or tin canteen for water. They carried food and small items in a haversack made of linen with a three button flap. A knapsack made of linen or canvas, painted to be waterproof, held extra clothes, shoes and other personal items.

The food ration for a militia man consisted of a pound of bread, a pound of meat (salt fish, beef or pork), about 5 ounces of dry beans or peas, and rum. Fresh meat included local cattle or hogs.

Preparation of food was up to the soldier, but many times it would become a group meal with others pooling their limited food resources.

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## The Battle of Thomas Creek

The battle of Thomas Creek took place on May 17<sup>th</sup> 1777 when the British formed their forces into three columns and attacked the rebels. It was in a location near Thomas Creek somewhat south of where it empties into the Nassau River.

Surprised and greatly outnumbered by the British and their allies, almost half of the rebels fled as soon as the battle started. About 50 rebels stayed and continued to fight bravely.

It wasn't until the British Regulars and militia with fixed bayonets, turned the rebel flank that the American's mounted their horses and fled under heavy enemy fire.

The rebels lost eight killed, nine wounded and thirty-one captured. The Indians in retaliation fell upon the captives and murdered all but 16, who were saved by a British officer with much difficulty. Only 42 of the rebels escaped to the safety of Georgia.

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## Loyalist Stronghold

The colony of East Florida was a major support base for British operations in the southern colonies. Many believe that Florida was George Washington's third front.

Florida was major stronghold because of the support by the colonists and the provisions that were provided to British soldiers in the other colonies. It was invaded several times from Georgia by Continental soldiers. The two incursions into East Florida ended in defeat for the Continentals.

It was this strong showing of force from the militia, men who had been driven from their homes, that turned the tide in this fighting.

When the American Revolution was over, these same loyalist were sad because many of them had to leave the country of their birth. They too believed in America.



This is the regimental crest of the 16<sup>th</sup> Foot, the professional soldiers of the British army who were scattered ineffectually throughout Florida. It was the local militia that repelled Continental army invasions.