Researching Members of the British Regular Military During the American Revolution

Many British soldiers came to North America as combatants in the American Revolution, participated in the war for years, some returning to Europe, while others remained and settled post-war in the British colonies.

A basic timeline for a British soldier of the American Revolution could include: birth; enlistment; regimental history (if they stayed in one military group or moved between multiple units); service during the war (posts, battles, taken prisoner, wounds); discharge and resettlement or retirement.

Note: "Regular" soldiers in the British Army who were dispatched from Great Britain are usually not considered loyalists, unless they had already retired from the British Army before the outbreak of the American Revolution and had settled in the Thirteen Colonies. Crossover did sometimes occur, where loyalist men were recruited into established regiments rather than new provincial/loyalist regiments, or when a provincial regiment became a regular British regiment, but this was not the standard route.

Primary Sources

☐ Muster Rolls

The official function of muster rolls was that of enumeration of a particular military unit or crew of a ship, recorded by officers for administrative purposes to distribute pay.

Information which can be found in musters: location of military posts; participation in particular campaigns and battles; assignments given (e.g. guard, expedition, recruiting); advancement through the ranks by commissioned and non-commissioned officers; illness, injuries, and deaths; post abandonments; missing in action; taken as prisoner; transfers; and discharges.

The following musters were produced by the British War Office (originals at The National Archives, UK).

- [16th (Buckinghamshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/3320),1767-1769; 1778-1787.
- [22nd (Cheshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/3872), 1773-1785.
- [29th (Worcestershire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/4493),1765-1783.
- [34th (Cumberland) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/4866),1759-1761; 1768-1787.
- [35th (Dorsetshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/4949),1760-61, 1765-1782.
- [38th (1st Staffordshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/5171-5172),1775-1789.
- [42nd (Royal Highland) Regiment of Foot, 1st Battalion](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/5478-5479), 1760 - 1767, 1774 - 1786 (*members settled in New Brunswick)*.
- [53rd (Shropshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/6316-6317),1759-1766; 1776-1798.
- [62nd (Wiltshire) Regiment of Foot](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/7164),1772-1783.
- [84th (Royal Highland Emigrants) Regiment of Foot:]() Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/8741 & 8806),1778-1798 (*members settled in New Brunswick*).
- [British Legion](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/11099),1782 - 1783.
- [Elford's Corps](): Muster Books and Pay Lists (WO 12/10700), 1782 -1783.
- [Royal West India Rangers: Muster Books and Pay Lists](): (WO 12/11233, 11237-8, 1806-1819.

☐ **British Headquarters Papers/ Carleton Papers** created by Guy Carleton includes a variety of documents about loyalist and many British and German soldiers who settled in Canada, digitally indexed on [Library and Archives Canada's website]().

☐ **Discharge Papers & Pension Documents**

- [Pension Documents (WO 42/59-63) : 1776 - 1881](). Great Britain, War Office.
- Royal Hospital Chelsea: Soldiers Service Documents WO 97. [Available online]() through The National Archives.

☐ **Documents Created by the British War Office**

- [Headquarters Records : America (WO 28/2-10) : 1775 - 1785]().
- [Army Lists (WO 65/164-166) : 1770 - 1783]().
- [The Army List (WO 65) : 1740 - 1784]().

- Monthly Returns to the Adjutant General : North America (WO 17/1489 - 1498) : 1758 - 1786.
- American Rebellion Entry Books (WO 36/1-4) : 1773 - 1783, 1798 - 1799. Great Britain. War Office.

☐ **Hessian Documents**

The term "Hessian" refers to the special German auxiliary troops, serving under their own officers, used by Great Britain during the American Revolution. A treaty agreement existed between King George of England and German rulers, who received payment rather than going directly to the soldiers.

Hessian Documents of the American Revolution : 1776 - 1783 from the Lidgerwood Collection held by the Morristown National Historical Park, New Jersey, is the largest source of primary documents on Hessians involved in the American Revolution. Transcripts include accounts of military campaigns and offer a record of the life and experiences of the German soldiers in America. They also give insight into the patriot, loyalist, and British forces.

☐ **Other Military Records**

- British Military and Naval Records (Library and Archives Canada) cover the defense of present- day Canada, c. 1757 to 1876, available online through LAC.
- Cornwallis, Charles, 1st Marquis Cornwallis, 1738-1805. Cornwallis Papers : 1614-1854.
- Great Britain. Army. Nova Scotia District. Headquarters Office Papers for Nova Scotia : 1774-1907.
- Haldimand, Frederick, Sir, 1718-1791. Papers and Correspondence : 1758-1784.
- New York Historical Society. Early American Orderly Books : 1748 - 1817.
- Pattison, James, General, 1724-1805. Papers : 1777 - 1781.

☐ **Personal War Accounts**

- Andre, John, 1750-1780. *Journal and Maps : 1777-1778*.
- Digby, William. *The British Invasion From the North: The Campaigns of Generals Carleton and Burgoyne, from Canada, 1776-1777 . . . of the 53d, or Shropshire Regiment of Foot*.
- Johnson, John, Sir, 1742-1830. *Orderly Book of Sir John Johnson During the Oriskany Campaign : 1776 - 1777*.
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- Pope, Richard, (fl.1770s). *Military Journal and Commonplace Book : 1775-1777*.

- Peebles, John, d.1824. *Notebooks : 1740-1816*.

☐ Settlement Musters

Using the term muster roll in the wider sense, muster rolls sometimes included groups of veterans, their children, and wives, as well as civilian settlers.

- Great Britain. Army. Muster Rolls and Settlement Lists : 1784, the 74th Regiment, 70th Regiment, 42nd Regiment, and Regiment of Specht included for New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.
- Nova Scotia. Public Records. Papers Related to the Early Settlement of the St. John River : 1765-1815.
- Ward Chipman Muster Rolls, 1777-1785 includes some soldiers of British regiments settling in what became New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island.

☐ Land petitions & grants

Petitions were requests for land which could include descriptive information about the petitioner's circumstances, while grants provide the location in detail of where property was given by the government.

- New Brunswick: New Brunswick Land Grants available online through the Provincial Archives of New Brunswick.
- Nova Scotia: Commissioner of Crown Lands fonds, Nova Scotia Land Papers, 1765-1800 available online through the Nova Scotia Archives.
- Ontario: Land Petitions of Upper Canada, 1763-1865 available online through Library and Archives Canada.
- Quebec: Land Petitions of Lower Canada, 1764-1841 index plus digitized images available via Library and Archives Canada.

Online Resources

- The National Archives, United Kingdom, is the institution which holds the most relevant collections relating to the British armed forces. Helpful guides:
  - Military and maritime records: an overview
  - Army regiments
  - British Army muster rolls and pay lists c.1730-1898
  - British Army officers up to 1913
  - British Army soldiers up to 1913
  - Courts martial and desertion in the British Army 17th-20th centuries

- [British Regiments in Canada](#) (Rootsweb)
- [GENUKI: British Military Records, UK and Ireland](#)
- [The On-Line Institute For Advanced Loyalist Studies – Regular Army/ Royal Navy](#)

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