

What Do You Wear to a Revolution?

by: Crosby Milliman

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An account of a Bicentennial project comprising for the most part excerpts from the final report to the Maine American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of the Arnold Expedition to Quebec in 1975 (AEQ-75)

In the fall of 1775, 1,100 soldiers under the command of Col. Benedict Arnold attempted to cross 500 miles of wilderness through Maine and Canada to storm Quebec City. Their purpose was to deprive the British of their most important base north of the thirteen colonies. General George Washington approved the venture and personally issued his orders to the troops in Cambridge, Massachusetts, from where they departed in mid-September on an expedition comparable in all military annals only to Hannibal's crossing of the Alps.

After two months of dragging hastily constructed, 400-pound bateaux through rapids, carrying them over portages, and tramping in woods and swamps, 500 did reach the St. Lawrence River. The others either died or were turned back by illness, lack of provisions, or just faint-heartedness.

The survivors, exhausted and half starved, many of them barefoot and nearly naked, their ammunition all spoiled by water, were in no condition to storm the fortress, though a delay was strategically disastrous. After a month of recuperating, and on the eve of enlistments running out, an attack was launched in a blizzard on the night of December 31st.

It failed. Many were killed, more captured, Arnold himself wounded. The survivors were humanely treated by the British and later sent home. For a more detailed account of the original Arnold Expedition, read "Benedict Arnold, Both Hero and Traitor" by Gene Miller in ASAC Bulletin Number Twelve, Fall-1965.

For its Bicentennial Project, the Arnold Expedition Historical Society (AEHS) sponsored by the re-enactment of the Arnold Expedition to Quebec in 1975 (AEQ-75). Further support came from the Main American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, the participants themselves, the Maine Army National Guard, contributions from food producing companies in Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut, the generous participation by the people and communities along the way. The principal dates of this truly grassroots commemoration of American heritage were as follows:

September 20th and 21st, 1975 — Initiation of activities, issuance of orders in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and activities in Rowley, Newburyport, and other Massachusetts communities.



September 22nd through 25th, 1975 — Limited participation with the AEQ-75 Fleet and activities in southern Maine.

September 26th through October 5th, 1975 — March to Quebec by the volunteer force, conducting commemorative activities in specific communities through Maine and the Province of Quebec, culminating activities with a mock battle on the Plains of Abraham and spectacular parade through Quebec City on October 4th.

The AEHS goes back as far as 1947, but AEQ-75 didn't come along until about 1971 when a couple of the members got to dreaming and thinking out loud over the possibility of re-enacting Arnold's March. Typically, I read about these initial plans in Maine's "Down East" magazine. It sounded like something I had always wanted to do. At the time I thought it was the Walter Mitty coming out in me; but later I would realize that it was the George Plimpton. It had also been my initial intention and request to merely recreate as authentically as possible one of the original "unattached irregulars" from New Hampshire. Subsequently, I would be appointed not only New Hampshire State Coordinator by the AEHS but Technical Advisor, Chairman of the Authenticity Committee, and Major Return Jonathan Meigs, Commanding, Arnold's 3rd Division, AEQ-75. Although highly trained in the service to command I had never had the opportunity. The "Meigs" assignment finally gave me the chance to prove something to myself one way or the other.

From the downbeat of the drums and the very first note of the fifes AEQ-75 imparted a spirit and enthusiasm that seemed to set a pattern of attitudes and feelings that pervaded and flourished throughout the whole experience. It was these attitudes and these feelings, demonstrated not only by my colleagues but by the thousands of spectators all along the Arnold Trail, that gave real meaning to the Project and revealed to me personally that among other

things there was indeed another heretofore untouched dimension of arms collecting — the life and times, the ways and means of the men and women who employed those 200-year old arms we cherish today.

It should be noted that participation in the re-enactment was strictly on a voluntary basis. We did it because we wanted to do it, and we did it at some considerable personal expense. Some of us could afford it, while others were obviously over extending themselves. Communities along the way provided a major assist in the expense of AEQ-75 by feeding the participants each evening, and some towns provided breakfast and lunch. The estimated cost of this community participation was \$7,180.00. Taking everything into account it is roughly estimated that the expense of the re-enactment was shared about equally between the participants, the communities, and a Federal grant.

However, the total cost of AEQ-75 goes well beyond this. It is estimated that the average cost to participants was about \$300.00 per person. This alone would total \$180,000.00. This figure is based on the cost of authentic costumes, functional 18th century fire arms and accoutrements and the cost of transportation to and from the starting point. When the cost of the National Guard participation, costs to participating communities, cost of food, contributions by private industries, cost of the volunteer fleet, and personal costs to the planners for transportation, telephone, postage, necessary coordinating trips to Quebec, trips to quarterly meetings over a two-year period, all are considered, the total cost of AEQ-75 may well have exceeded a quarter of a million dollars. When AEQ-75 reached its climax at Quebec City, with an assemblage of approximately 1,700 participants, it is estimated that the cost of the production may have reached a million dollars. Even though this estimate is a "horseback" guess, it is based on thorough familiarity with every conceivable aspect of the planning and execution of the re-enactment over a two-year period; and if anything, it may be modest. It is impressive, especially after having been cautioned about the "insurmountable logistics" by experienced "experts," that AEQ-75 was put together and implemented at considerable personal expense on the parts of hundreds of people and at a total accountable cost of only \$12,833.86.

It may be of interest here to learn of some of the logistics and how they were funded, without going into detail. For the most part, disbursements were made against an account made possible by a Federal matching grant through the State of Maine American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, participant contributions of \$10.00 per person, and several contributions of larger amounts from generous participants of the federal and AEQ-75 matching money: \$1100 used to pay for group insurance for the 600 male participants; \$5600 was used to defray the cost of 14 authentic bateaux; \$3700 was used to purchase subsistence items, including coffee, eggs, luncheon meat, juices, fruit, fresh produce, dry cereal, flour and condiments; \$2000 was used for miscellaneous purposes, includ-

ing propane gas and motor fuel for the three mobile kitchens, paper plates, cups and plastic utensils, paper bags for midday lunches, garbage and trash disposal, custodial, fire guard and security services at the armory in Quebec City.

What motivated people to become involved in such an undertaking? Now that it is all over it is felt that each participant, in his own way, perhaps unknowingly so, must have had a desire to involve himself in something, anything, that might help him re-establish values, re-assess his faith in his heritage, and renew his knowledge of the precepts established by those who labored through untold hardships to give us what we have today. AEQ-75 was but a vehicle by which to do this. And only the uninvolved would continue to wonder why we would engage in a mock battle we knew we couldn't win, playing out of the role of a brilliant commander whose name would ultimately become synonymous with treason as a consequence of later actions.

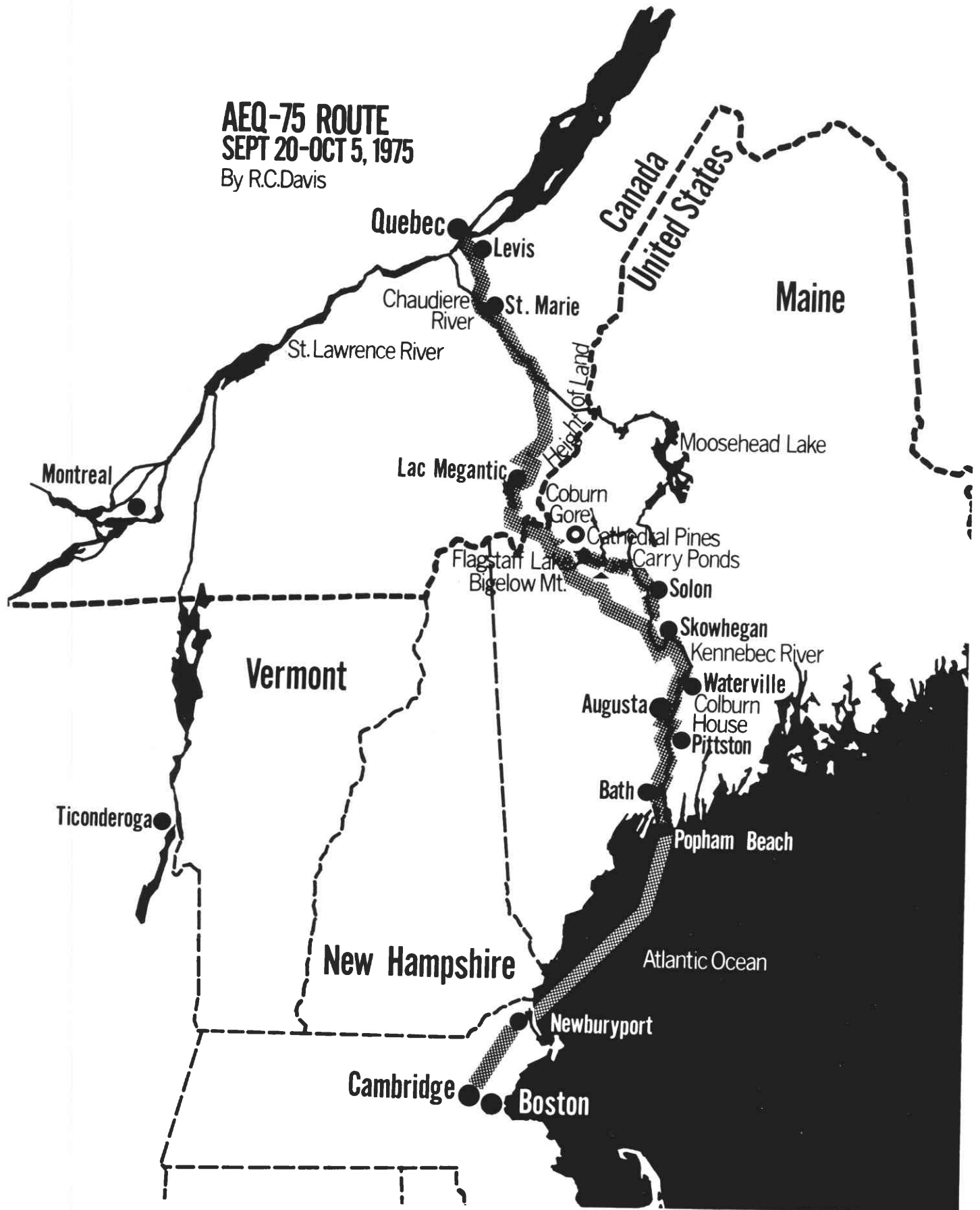
Our attitudes and feelings are virtually impossible to describe. They developed as the march progressed. The event had been chronicled as a grass roots, people-to-people re-enactment. The people-to-people theme worked beyond our greatest hopes. It brought together on a common level people of almost every walk of life, of all classes, and of varying community backgrounds. Unique in this turmoiled world today, AEQ-75 brought together people of two great nations, all experiencing the same emotions, the same thoughts. Among them there seemed to be a common understanding, an innocence, a simplicity, a deep abiding interest that permeated every conceivable aspect of the re-enactment. Unique, for where else on Earth could a 1000 fully-armed men move out in the open and cross an international border in clearly marked military vehicles to celebrate their country's 200th birthday on extremely hallowed ground of another country?

The AEQ-75 re-enactment provided no political overtones. Fortunately there was no government involvement. There were no controversies (although the press attempted to create some!). There were no axes to grind and no issues at stake. There was only a charm, a warmth that only those who participated could understand.

Simply, the re-enactment involved a group of about 800 men, women and children dressed authentically as they imagined their forefathers might have dressed. We attempted in our own ways to relive a bit of history by recapturing a simple feeling of relationship and fellowship one towards another. We structured ourselves along the military lines of the original Arnold expedition. Yes, it was military in a way, but it was this aspect that gave the re-enactment body and held it together. The organizational structure was accepted as a family unit, which provided identity and security. We all adhered to and faithfully followed a plan. It was an unsophisticated plan but it was intricate in that it detailed the daily course of living and activity, thus reducing normal concern for sustenance and well being to comparatively few.

The experience can be likened to nothing. Perhaps that was the charm of the whole thing. There was a sadness

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when it came abruptly to an end in Quebec City at the final banquet. There was a reluctance to let go of it. Many of the 14 company organizations have retained their identity in hopes of holding on to the satisfying feeling acquired during the three weeks of AEQ-75. It was an adventure not likely to be forgotten by any of us who were involved.

Much of the success of the project can be attributed to the extent and detail of the planning effort; however, that can only be considered a simple ingredient. AEQ-75 was successful because the participants themselves and the good people in the communities along the Arnold Trail made it so. It is a known fact that the best laid plans can go for naught if the people who are to execute them are lacking in heart and spirit. The attitudes and feelings of the participants and the people along the way far surpassed the expectations of all of us involved in the planning. That was one intangible aspect for which we could only hope for the best — and the best we got.

To make AEQ-75 work (and there were many who said it couldn't), hundreds of people had to be contacted and were in some way committed. For the most part written communication was the norm, personal contact the exception. Very few of our requests for help were rejected. There were the inevitable misunderstandings, but they were inconsequential. Personality differences were always resolved. Interest and participation often came from unexpected quarters. There was always encouragement. Any disappointments always seemed to be followed by achievements; one accomplishment beget another.

The far-reaching effect of this no-small-undertaking is overwhelming. AEQ-75 literally involved thousands of people. The 23 participating communities through which the expedition passed involved well over a thousand workers. Others such as the bateaux builders, the owners and crews who manned the volunteer fleet of 13 sloops, schooners, and brigantines, the National Guard personnel, the boy scouts who carried the flags of both participating countries, their province and states, the commercial contributors, the Canadian agencies and departments contacted, the Canadian defense force participants, the police forces in both the United States and Canada, just to name a few, exceeded several thousand. With no exaggeration, spectators numbered in the hundreds of thousands. Eighty thousand turned out just for the "battle," not to mention the final parade down through the old city of Quebec which event the Canadians claimed received a bigger turnout than their famed Winter Carnival. In fact our wonderful neighbors to the north gave us our most pleasant surprise. Canadian enthusiasm and interest in AEQ-75 from the national level down to the provincial community, from Ottawa to Ste. Marie, surpassed anything from within our own country. Among other cherished souvenirs, I received a personal welcoming letter from Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. It was this kind of interest that served as one of the prime motivating factors throughout the planning and got us through the first week and a half of rain.

Our own country, not including the enthusiastic and unselfish participating communities, was something else. AEQ-75 was rejected by the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration in all our attempts to obtain endorsement of the project even though it was endorsed by the Bicentennial Commissions of seven states, had tacit approval by the National Government of Canada, and enthusiastic approval and support by the city of Quebec. At first we thought this lack of cooperation by our own National Administration was the consequence of our association with the latter day traitor. By the time it sunk in that we were commemorating heroes-all, we were underway without the help of the ARBA. Later the ARBA revealed that there were no provisions for re-enactments, an unwitting confession of their lack of imagination and resourcefulness. Perhaps it was this same sort of vacillation and indecision that disillusioned Arnold with the Continental Congress 200 years ago.

The capitol of Maine, Augusta of all places, was the only contender for a booby prize. However, the local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, saved our overnight encampment on Capitol Park from becoming a disaster. At the very last minute, indeed second, it was the famed DAR who got wind of our plight, fed us, and made us feel welcome and comfortable as possible under the circumstances. It had become apparent that the city powers-that-be had procrastinated with our project until it was too late.

Even the Governor of Maine did not see fit to greet or visit with or send a written greeting or acknowledge the existence of the AEQ force while we were in his state. This met with some criticism and disappointment particularly from the President of the AEHS, the Director of AEQ-75, and the three companies of volunteers from my division, all natives of Maine.

There were many who had expressed nothing but pessimism for the project until they were confronted with it and then, their enchantment with it was amusing. Some even confided that if they had known that it was going to be as it was, they would have become involved. In the meantime the lack of endorsement by the ARBA had no affect whatsoever on the outcome, and the Governor's lack of good taste affected no one but himself.

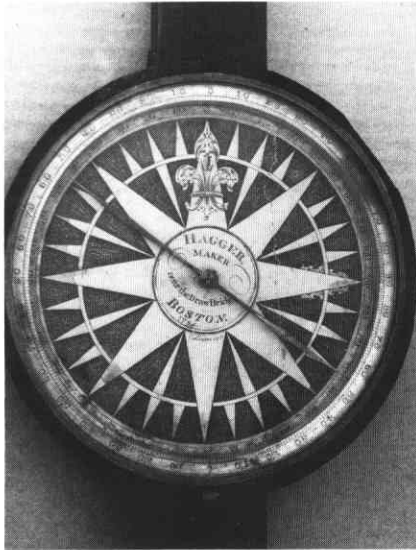
Finally, and before we leave the near disaster of Augusta, I take this opportunity to refer you back to my display at the meeting in Valley Forge, of my personal authentic uniforms, accoutrements, and souvenirs. The supplemental 15-minute film of the "battle" on the extremely hallowed Plains of Abraham did at best give you only an added taste of what we experienced all along the route of the original expedition. The souvenirs are especially cherished for not only do they bring back fond memories but for the most part were fashioned by the hands of my own men and women. Of particular significance is the large triangular plate for MERIT, fashioned in ceramics after the original medal of the Revolution which served as the inspiration for the latter day Purple Heart medal. This plate, the only medal of its kind by AEQ-75



Meigs Division, AEQ-75, being welcomed at Rowley, Mass. 2 Sept. 1975

was awarded at the final banquet in Quebec City to Karen my wife. Coming along in "Meigs' tin tent" (camper) and putting up with me was one thing, what this dear woman did for all of us from Augusta on was something else. Karen did at 3:30 in the morning on Capitol Park in Augusta come forth and take over the cooking for my entire division. A half hour before the division's professional cook was nearly asphyxiated by a stove leak in the CD mobile kitchen, and he and some fifty men sleeping around the truck were saved by a quick thinking sentry. Had the sentry not awakened me and clearly appraised me of what had just happened to the cook I wouldn't have had time before a massive explosion to get back into the truck and turn off the malfunctioning valve. Now, where do you find a replacement cook at that stage of the reenactment. You don't! Karen proved to be a God-send and dearly appreciated by all, as could be subsequently attested to by other divisions' chow lines getting shorter and mine getting longer.

The movie I showed at the meeting in Valley Forge was prepared poste haste especially for me by the National Film Board of Canada from the cutting room floor. It is a bit "tongue in cheek" reflecting the great rapport the men, women and children of my division had with the Canadian TV and film crews who covered us all the way from Cambridge. Aside from the humor and entertainment factors, it was my intent to show how the patriot soldiers dressed and behaved in battle 200 years ago. The final touch in our striving for authenticity was the immense research and near 100 percent handwork by all the men, women and children associated in any way with the project, as revealed in the movie, from my own daughter's big red division flag to the paper cartridges, overlooking of course my wristwatch and the Colonel's "walkie talkie."



Close-up of the paper compass card of a wooden surveyor's compass made by William Guyse Hagger, Boston. Wooden compasses are not made outside of New England.



18th Century redware crock, glass onion bottle, pewter mug, clay pipe, knife, and pipe tamper, and books, all valued possessions of officers serving at an outpost fort.



Soldiers were not allowed to stray beyond the sound of the drum beat at frontier forts, for fear of getting lost. The drum was continually beat during the day. It also was the only instrument used to communicate commands during the Revolution (bugles did not come into use until the 19th Century except for cavalry bugle horns). This drum with 13 white stars and blue shell could be of the period of the Revolution.



"Major Meigs" sternly but kindly regards his troops

All materials except Major Meigs from the Guthman Collection.