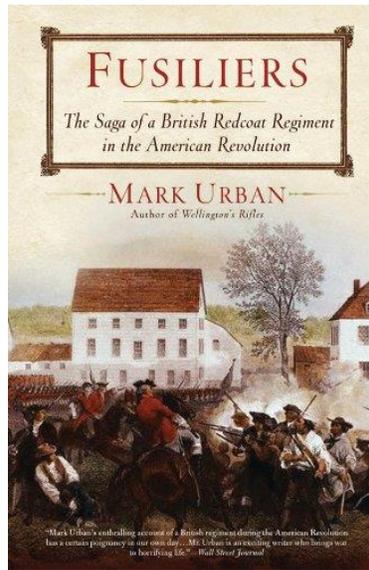


BOOKS IN REVIEW



Fusiliers: The Saga of a British Redcoat Regiment in the American Revolution

by Mark Urban
Walker & Company
400 pages.

Review by Joe Wagner

After years of reading about the Continental side of things, it was refreshing and revealing to find out what the army on the other side of the battlefield was thinking and doing. This book, written by a British military writer, gives us a completely different perspective on the war and some fresh insights into our British opponent. The author, Englishman Mark Urban, is an editor for the BBC, former defense correspondent, and wrote the very well received book *Wellington's Rifles*.

What makes the story so gripping are the loads of original sources and detail concerning the Royal Welsh Fusiliers and the characters we follow in the book through their years of regimental service in America. There's Lt. Frederic MacKenzie, who in 1775 was adjutant of the 23rd on the march to Lexington and Concord, and after serving for the entire war with the regiment, leaving as a Major, in 1799 was named Secretary of the royal Military College. There was Sergeant Roger Lamb, known to us all through his diary, and his Guilford Courthouse movie appearance, who as a Corporal in another regiment, was captured at Saratoga, escaped, and given his choice of joining any British unit, chose the 23rd.

The numbers in this book speak to mind-numbing research. Some examples – 60 men served continuously in the 23rd from Battle road to the return to England in 1783. In the spring of 1783, 7,556 civilian loyalists applied to leave New York for St. John's (3,656), the Canadian mainland (1,218), Nova Scotia (681) and other destinations in America. Many Fusiliers took the same route, 54 of them separating from the army to stay in America. Of the 247 enlisted men of the

23rd returned to England in 1783, 142 immediately separated from the Army, while 115 stayed on and served as a nucleus for training new recruits.

The 23rd regiment – the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, was one of the backbone units of the British Army in America. They were at Battle Road in '75, at Yorktown in '81, and most everything in between. They were General Howe's personal regiment during his command of the British forces, they were favorites of General Cornwallis, and their Light and Grenadier companies played key roles at Bunker Hill, Camden, and Guilford Courthouse, to name a few of their engagements. Just a few of the things I learned from reading this very detailed and well-written history of a British regiment of the revolution:

- The officers generally spent far more time working on their promotion purchases and avoiding combat than managing the regiment. The price of the Lt. Colonelcy that meant field command of the regiment was 900 Pounds. More often than not, as it worked out for the 23rd, the actual field command of the unit devolved to a Captain.
- The training and tactics developed for the Light Companies (Light Bobs) in the British Army in America were a direct result of the experiences of the 23rd Lights and other units at Lexington and Concord. We often read about the British Army sailing away to Halifax, Nova Scotia after abandoning Boston in early 1776. What we learn in this book is that General Howe spent that springtime in Halifax completely retraining and reorganizing his light forces, to adapt to the fighting methods of the Massachusetts militia. These new ways of using light troops would impact the revolutionary battle field throughout the war (causing a win at Camden and a loss at Cowpens for example), and carry over into the British military establishment in time to affect the Napoleonic Wars.
- Of the approximately 1,250 musketeers that served with the Fusiliers during the war, 75 were killed in action and 400 died of disease. There were 193 desertions. The regiment lost more men to "sweetheart" desertions from the winter in Philadelphia than in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown combined. A total of 88 men served as officers in the regiment in America.

Urban's descriptions of battles are excellent and very clear, giving the necessary facts to provide understanding without too much discussion or descent into detail. He highlights the specific contributions and tribulations of the 23rd in these engagements, and there is an emphasis throughout on the impact of the Light Bobs and Grenadiers as key elements of British tactics. Aside from the many new things I learned, I liked this book for the unabashed positions taken by the author concerning "his" army and the British side in the Revolutionary War. For example, after discussing the American outcry over the bayonet "massacres" at Paoli and the Waxhaws, Urban says it showed "*the tendency for Britain's enemies to respond to defeat with allegations of massacre*". After reading dozens of books on the revolution, I've never seen that view before.

Read this book.