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Book Review: The Royal American Regiment: An Atlantic Microcosm, 1755-1772

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Alexander T. Campbell, *The Royal American Regiment: An Atlantic Microcosm, 1755-1772* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), 356pp. Cloth \$34.95.

Historians have rarely challenged the image of British regulars as an oppressive military force in pre-1775 North America. Even those critical of the motives of colonial gentry or who posit that the American Revolution was just as much about local, in addition to foreign, rule remain largely silent on the redcoat character. Through a careful study of Britain's Royal American Regiment, an almost four thousand man force that fought and served throughout North America and the Caribbean during the Seven Years War and after, Alexander Campbell presents an alternative portrait of the British infantry. He expands beyond a focus on the military exploits of the Regiment to explore their participation in, and contributions to, "the broader social, economic, demographic, religious, and civil framework of the first British Empire."¹

From chronicling the wartime business activities of James Prevost, the Swiss mercenary who originally proposed the idea of a mixed regiment of foreign Protestants and colonials, to discussing the myriad postwar civilian pursuits of the Royal Americans in the final chapter, including marriages to the daughters of both French-Canadian and British colonial gentry, Campbell aptly demonstrates that British soldiers were actively engaged in expanding and solidifying the British presence in North America beyond simply their martial feats.

Throughout the work, Campbell makes a number of important historiographical claims, arguing that the Royal Americans in fact developed amiable relationships with most Native American communities and were not, as is usually argued, at fault for Pontiac's Rebellion in 1763, that the common Protestant rituals and military experience they shared with New England colonial auxiliary forces enhanced an identification with Britain among its colonial subjects, and that the thousand original recruits for the regiment, and hundreds more who joined later, who came from Germany, Switzerland, Scotland, and other Protestant nations played a role in expanding the conception of British identity.

¹ Alexander T. Campbell, *The Royal American Regiment: An Atlantic Microcosm, 1755-1772* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010), p. 11.
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To be candid, the chapters on the battlefield experiences of the Royal American Regiment, also known as the 60th Regiment of Foot, and on daily life in the ranks of the British Army, while making some points about the expansive nature of the British redcoat experience, may be of interest primarily to military historians. Alternatively, the sections on relations with Native American communities and on the recruitment of the myriad Europeans and colonials who constituted the Regiment's ranks are especially illustrative and important for Campbell's larger themes of movement and diversity of experience and background. One significant addition could have been discussion of public memory regarding the Royal American Regiment. Campbell provides a thorough and concise description of the historiography on the Regiment and while some of these works certainly seem to indicate that later events, especially the American Revolution, influenced subsequent portrayals of pre-1775 British regulars, the discussion could have been enhanced. Specifically, Campbell mentions "anniversaries marking events like the founding of Pittsburgh or the battle at Bushy Run" as well as the "memorial plaques" that "local historical societies or fraternal organizations" set up concerning the Royal Americans.² Since Campbell notes that these activities occurred after the first full history of the Regiment appeared in 1879, a final chapter on these events could possibly have shed light on what remembering the Seven Years War revealed beyond just praising the Regiment's service, about late nineteenth century American conceptions both of self and of the nation's history.

Overall, Campbell succeeds in his attempt to place the Royal American Regiment's service within a broad Atlantic World framework. By exploring the diverse ethnic composition of the Regiment's ranks, the variety of service locales, and the myriad commercial, cultural, diplomatic, humanitarian, and other activities of its numerous members, from the officers on down to those in the ranks, Campbell widens our view of the role and influence of British regulars in the Atlantic World. They did not simply drill and shoot, but expanded the British presence in North America and enhanced connections between continental Europe, Britain, and North America through their varied pursuits. While the numerous aspects of the Atlantic World experience that Campbell argues the Royal Americans engaged in or showcased are beyond the

scope of this review, especially important, in both Campbell's work and in the larger Atlantic World framework, is the theme of migration. The sheer fact of recruiting large numbers of German and other European Protestant troops for duty in North America clearly fits this theme, but Campbell also emphasizes that other aspects of the Royal American experience, including the family members who followed some of these recruits and the later settlement schemes by a number of Royal American officers who sought to bring more European migrants to North America, indicated the important role in Atlantic World migration played by this specific unit. Campbell thus successfully argues that "the 60th Foot's cast of disparate faces was remarkably active in the far-flung places and transnational spaces that constituted the eighteenth-century Atlantic World" and he helps capture the soldier as a sound analytical subject for Atlantic World historians.³

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