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Lynn resident enjoys role as war re-enactor

By Kait Taylor / For the Item

LYNN - As a Marblehead Police officer, Paul Belyea was the good guy five days a week. But on the weekends, the recently retired officer likes to be a little bad.

For the past 43 years, Belyea has become a British soldier in Revolutionary War re-enactments all over the country. He will stay in the Bay State this weekend for a re-enactment at Old Sturbridge Village.

Belyea said he always had an interest in the Revolutionary War period in history class, but he decided to take part after seeing "soldiers" performing Leslie's Retreat right by his Lynn home in 1975.

"I knew someone in Saugus who did Scottish infantry," he said. "The next thing you know, I was ordering a musket and having my uniform made."

Belyea said he favored the Redcoats because portraying a Colonist seemed a little too rag-tag.

"The British seem to appear more professional, with more military bearings than the colonial side," he said. He is now "fighting" in the Eighth Regiment for the Crown.

Soon after, Belyea was participating in three events a month, leaving work on a Friday to travel as far as Canada or the Carolinas, where he would set up camp with hundreds or thousands of other "re-enactors," living the life of a young, single, Revolutionary soldier with no electricity or plumbing, only to be back to work on Monday.

Even after he settled down and married, Belyea continued to train, drill, and perform re-enactments, but with a slightly different outlook.

"I noticed right off how family-friendly the Rev Units were. We watch each others' kids, and nobody wants to see anybody get hurt. In a medium sized-company, it's like a big family where everybody knows everybody else and some of the people have been working together for 15-20 years. It can be dysfunctional, and we don't always agree, but it can be quite interesting."



For the past 43 years Paul Belyea, center, has become a British soldier in Revolutionary War re-enactments all over the country. He will stay in the Bay State this weekend for a re-enactment at Old Sturbridge Village.

Now, when Belyea goes to a re-enacted event, he stays in a cheap motel with his wife, and constructs a tent for show.

Though some might think battle re-enactments are equal to that of any play, they're actually much more relaxed.

[Click here to view a video of the 2009 re-enactment at Old Sturbridge Village.](#)

Belyea says many times soldiers don't know exactly what's going to happen unless there has been a request to be historically accurate. The commanders speak with each other beforehand to settle who will win, lose, die or retreat, setting it up so that the Americans win on Saturday, British on Sunday, or vice versa. There is really no telling what will happen, so it becomes quite a show.

"The only one I'm aware of that's rehearsed is Lexington and Concord," said Belyea. "They want it to be a smooth, perfect operation."

One thing's for sure: you won't hear Belyea speaking in an English accent. Though they haul wood and water for meals and live in tents, battle re-enactments are no Plimouth Plantation, which means the phrases and accents are not mandatory. Lucky for Belyea, who says, "I tried it - I started talking and for the first sentence it was fine but after that it sounds like Yiddish."