

Norwell residents involved in reenacting the Revolutionary War



A group of British foot soldier-reenactors poses for a photo in Norwell earlier this week. They are, front from left, Daniel Campanelli and Derek Campanelli of Norwell, and back from left, Paul Gaughran of Pembroke, and Nick Hough and William Hough of Norwell. William and Nick have taken part in about a dozen events each, and this weekend (Aug. 7-8) they'll participate in "Rebels and Redcoats," an event in Old Sturbridge Village.

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Norwell — William Hough had a unique experience while taking part in a recent parade by the Bunker Hill Monument.

He was booed.

And so were the fellows he was traveling with.

The jeers didn't get to them though.

The men remained calm, halted, and fixed their bayonets.

They then backed the guy who'd done the booing up against a fence.

He put his hands up.

A Norwell resident, Hough is an avid re-enactor of historic military battles fought during the Revolutionary War. Hough's a grenadier, and his group portrays "His Majesty's 10th Regiment of Foot," and the 'majesty' referred to in the title is King George.

They're British soldiers, that is.

And that might explain the booing.

William and his son Nicholas Hough, 22, are among a group of seven local residents who take part in historical reenactments of the Revolutionary War.

And they're all on the British side.

Nick's a member of the "First Foot Guards," as are Norwell residents Rory Nolan, Steven Cole, brothers Derek and Daniel Campanelli and Pembroke's Paul Gaughran.

In an interview at their home on Mt. Blue Street last week, William and Nick Hough talked about some of the events they've taken part in during the past year, how they got involved in reenacting military history and why they're so passionate about it.

"It's a spectacle," William Hough said. "It's reliving history. Doing something worthwhile. And you certainly get a feeling of accomplishment at the end."

"What's cool about the American Revolution," Nick added, "is it all happened around here."

Nick said he also enjoys the social component of the events, hanging out with his fellow 'soldiers' in camp, in a period environment.

"Acting like you're in a regiment," he said. "It's a fun thing to do. Something very different."

And a number of his friends are involved as well.

William and Nick have taken part in about a dozen events each, and this weekend (Aug. 7-8) they'll participate in "Rebels and Redcoats," an event in Old Sturbridge Village.

They'll camp out in tents. They'll eat there, and they'll sleep there.

At this event, the soldiers involved won't be reenacting a specific Revolutionary War battle, but rather they'll stage a typical battle that might have taken place between the British and colonist sides.

There will be horses and cannons and muskets, and on the British side, red coats aplenty.

And, "We have to stay in character the whole time," Nick said.

William said those who take part in these reenactment events really try to get everything right. And that means the uniforms, the buttons, the hats, the muskets, and the bayonets that affix to the muskets.

For the battles, they use gunpowder — not bullets, or musket balls — that's rolled up in paper packs, and loaded into the weapon. It fires with an explosion, but there's no projectile.

Not everything is always rosy though.

The meals in the camp are period as well, and generally consist of venison or fish stews, which Nick dislikes, and a lot of salt pork.

It's also hot in those uniforms, and they're not cheap.

(They estimated they spent about \$1,400 on their first batch of uniforms, gear and supplies, and they unloaded another \$700-\$1,000 for their muskets.)

And, there's another thing.

"At most battles," Nick said, "the colonists never die."

In the reenacted battles, Nick said those who participate (the reenactors) generally 'die,' or lie down on the ground, when they're tired, or if they're surrounded and obviously getting 'shot' at.

"It's kind of an honor system," Nick said, adding: "You put on a show when you die."

For whatever reason, though, Nick said many of those who portray the colonists never give up the fight, even in the reenactments and even when they're sorely outnumbered.

So, there's the potential for some bad blood between the two sides of *reenactors* in the battles.

In playing their roles at various events, including non-battle scenes, when William, Nick and some of those on the British side see colonists in the street, they jeer them, and call them 'traitors' or 'treasonous.'

They even heckled a guy once who was reading the Declaration of Independence.

They get theirs too, though.

One kid, William said, asked if he was a pirate.

Becoming British soldiers

A 2006 graduate of Norwell High School, Nick currently attends U-Mass Boston where he's finishing up an art degree. He also works at Rite-Aid pharmacy. A native of Cohasset, William builds fiberglass racecar bodies through his company William J. Hough Composites.

How did these guys become British soldiers, or British-soldier reenactors?

By chance.

The Hough's said they didn't necessarily choose to join forces with the British, in a reenactor sense, but that's simply how they first learned these Revolutionary War reenactments were taking place. They heard about a particular British regiment, the "First Foot Guard," attended the group's practice session, and soon thereafter they were signed up and attired in red.

Joining the British side does have its perks though, Nick said.

"The British Army was very particular in how they did everything," he said. "Everything about them was more interesting."

While the colonists were kind of “rag-tag,” with dirty clothes and beards, Nick said the British soldiers were fastidious about their uniforms and appearance.

William offered another point to consider.

“What you have to understand,” he said, “is we were all British back then.”

He added that the phrase always attributed to Paul Revere —“The British are coming. The British are coming.” — is quoted incorrectly. According to Hough, Revere actually said: “The Regulars are coming. The Regulars are coming.”

Nick said those who take part in the reenactments are encouraged to participate in numerous events each year so they know what they’re doing, and can remain safe while doing so.

They sharpen their skills, including affixing bayonets, at the Quincy Armory.

William said it took him all winter long to learn how to use a musket.

After all this time, energy and work, then, what’s it like to get booed in Boston, by one’s own countrymen, when dressed in the uniform of another country, the country from which your current country was at the time trying to break?

“At most events people boo us and tell us to ‘go home’,” said Nick, but he added that’s not necessarily a bad thing.

“That means they’re getting into it and enjoying it,” he said. “And you’re doing it right.”

They also meet a lot of spectators, many of whom want to have their photograph taken with an authentic British soldier-portrayer. During a Harborfest event in Boston on Fourth of July weekend, Nick said he posed for “thousands of photographs,” with passersby.

“They’re on stage all day long,” said Vera Hough, William’s wife and Nick’s mom.

The beginning of it all

The first reenactment event Nick Hough took part in was the battle of Lexington Green, which on April 19, 1775, began the Revolutionary War.

There were 3,000 or more spectators on hand to witness the reenactment, Nick said, and many of them were camped out to do so.

The event’s dress rehearsal even drew a crowd of 1,000.

“It was so cool,” Vera said. “Now it’s part of our life.”

During the weekend of Sept. 11-12, the Hough’s will travel to New York to participate in a reenactment of the battle of Fort Ticonderoga, a skirmish that was depicted on the big screen in “The Last of the Mohicans.”

They took part in that event last year and had a great time.

“It’s impressive to watch,” said Vera Hough.

She added that the boys' involvement in military reenacting has allowed the family to travel to parts of the country they've never before seen, and she singled out the area around Fort Ticonderoga, New York as being particularly beautiful.

Other upcoming events will be held in Philadelphia, Wilmington, Del., and on Saturday, Nov. 20, the groups will march in Plymouth's Thanksgiving parade.

For more information about local historical reenactments, check out the website: battleroad.org.