The Spirit of the Corps: The British Army and the Pre-National Pan-European Military World and the Origins of American martial culture, 1754-1783


Abstract

"The Spirit of the Corps: The British Army and the Pre-national Pan-European Military World and the Origins of American Martial Culture, 1754-1783," argues that during the eighteenth-century there was a transnational martial culture of European soldiers, analogous to the maritime world of sailors and the sea and attempts to identify the key elements of this martial culture, as reflected in the mid-eighteenth-century British Army, and briefly describes its transmission to the army of the United States. "The Spirit of the Corps" describes a pan-European military world had it origins in the wars of religion that engulfed Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, and was a long established institution by the eighteenth-century. "The Spirit of the Corps" suggests that honor provided the justification and raison d'etre for the pan-European military world, and could be found embodied in the officer's gentlemanly sense of honor, and the espirit de corps of the rank and file. "The Spirit of the Corps" goes on to describe other important elements of the pan-European martial culture which included: weak military discipline and a relative loose control over soldiers which resulted in the soldier's life being viewed as one of relative freedom, the operation of an implicit contract between followers and leaders, a military community that included non-combatants, women, and children, a process of martial enculturation, a sense of military style that extended into drill and uniforms, and espirit de corps which loomed especially large during an era when nationalism and ideology were relatively minor factors. "The Spirit of the Corps" concludes by arguing that the Continental Line of the American Revolution was imbued with the culture of the British Army, and the pan-European military world; in its turn, this pan-European martial culture was, transmitted to the regular army of the United States were its presence could be seen clearly as late as 1940, and in some ways, can still be detected today.
The British then pulled out of advantageous positions on the Hudson river to reinforce Pennsylvania. Washington had saved his army and forced it through training while camped for the harsh winter. With the aims of the British in America scaled right back, Clinton, the new British commander, withdrew from Philadelphia and based himself in New York. Britain offered the US a joint sovereignty under a common king but were rebuffed. The King then made it clear he wanted to try and retain the thirteen colonies and feared that US independence would lead to the loss of the West Indies (something Spain...