

Enthusiasts re-enact Battle of Iron Works Hill

By: MARK ZIMMARO Burlington County Times

MOUNT HOLLY - Rifles blasted and soldiers marched emphatically through the streets of downtown Mount Holly.

On Saturday, the annual reenactment of the Battle of Iron Works Hill took place as actors dressed in authentic 18th century garbs and took on the roles of the soldiers who fought the historic skirmish more than 200 years ago.

Lewis Trauffer was one of them. Participating in the event for the fourth straight year, the tall Collingswood resident trotted through the streets portraying a Hessian soldier. His white overall pants and thick coat were perfect replicas, paying close detail to the artifacts of the Revolutionary War. His grenadier hat took about 40 hours to make, he said.

"It's a labor of love," Trauffer said. "Everything is handmade and tailored. Most of the guys doing this have been doing it for 20 years plus. It's a fascination."

The battle of Iron Works is famous for being a decoy for the much larger Battle of Trenton, where Gen. George Washington famously crossed the Delaware and surprised the British troops. The Colonials ended up losing the skirmish at Iron Works Hill in Mount Holly, but they were able to successfully delay the Hessians' return to Trenton, which led to victories at Trenton and Princeton.

Saturday's reenactment celebrated the 234th anniversary of the event.

Rancocas High School sophomore James Bevan found a way to incorporate his drumming skills into the historic battle. The Lumberton resident is part of R.V.'s national championship winning marching band. On Saturday, he marched on the British side beating an 18th century style drum to spar on his fellow troops.

"It's a lot of fun participating in these events," Bevan said. "I've been to Delaware and Canada for different reenactments. You really learn a lot about history by doing this."

Saturday's menu was chock full of events that replicated Colonial times in Burlington County.

Numerous historic demonstrations at both the British and Colonial encampments took place, including field cooking and a military surgeon. Guided tours of the schoolhouse, prison museum and Friends Meetinghouse at High and Garden streets were also offered to visitors.

The battle, taking place a couple hours before dusk, was of course the main attraction.

"It was fun learning how this battle was a distraction so General Washington could take Trenton," said Eastampton resident Audrey Griffon who was in attendance with her friend Robert Dozier of Hainesport. "It was a fun day and the weather wasn't too bad at all."

Weather wouldn't have stopped Dave Niescior of Cherry Hill from participating. The man dressed as a British soldier recalled last year's event being much colder. Nonetheless, he was determined to make his return.

"Reenacting really gives you a better sense of what the soldiers went through," Niescior said. "It's not exactly perfect. No one is freezing and no one is actually starving or anything like that. But it still gives you a better picture of what is going on when you are marching with the other soldiers."

The event was highlighted by a flag-raising ceremony of a reproduction of the first national banner, created by the Bergen County Historical Society. The society intends to fly the flag over every historic battleground and site in the 13 colonies, with Mount Holly being one of the first stops.

Mark Zimmaro can be reached at 609-871-8059, mzimmaro@phillyBurbs.com or twitter.com/mzimmaro.

December 12, 2010