

Mount Holly hosts a Revolutionary battle

By Mark Zimmaro Staff writer | Posted: Sunday, December 11, 2011 5:50 am

MOUNT HOLLY — The sounds of cannons blasting could be heard from blocks away as the soldiers marched through the streets to the dull thumping of a drum.

Through the loud and smoky streets, the British Army pushed the Colonials down the crowded avenue and into Mill Creek Park.

The Red Coats, along with American loyalists and a group of battle-ready mercenaries, once again battled the Colonial Army in at the Battle of Iron Works Hill in Mount Holly.

It was the 235th anniversary of the important skirmish during the Revolutionary War. Although it wasn't a major battle, historians mark the heavy importance of the clash in Mount Holly, which is noted as a key distraction while Gen. George Washington prepared to cross the Delaware River.

"What happened here in Mount Holly was extremely important," said Burlington County Historian Joe Lauffer, who narrated the battle on Saturday. "We diverted the Hessian Army so Washington could win in Trenton."

According to the Battle of Iron Works Hill website, two-thousand Hessian troops stationed themselves on the mount off High Street by Dec. 24, 1776. They exchanged cannon fire with Col. Samuel Griffin's 600 Continental forces encamped at the hill across the Rancocas Creek.

"Right over there, there were four cannons firing over Mount Holly," Lauffer said, pointing to a wooded area up on a hill.

Hessian Col. Kurt Von Donop mistakenly thought the Colonists had more troops gathered in town and left his position near Bordentown to wage battle with them. His decision left those 2,000 troops too far away to assist the British and other Hessian forces when the Battle of Trenton took place on Dec. 26.

A few dozen Revolutionary War re-enactors portrayed the series of events in Mount Holly on Saturday. Actors dressed as loyalists stayed true to character barking their loyalty to the English crown.

"I'm here fighting for the good guys," said Burlington City resident Eliza Vincz, who was representing the American Loyalist 1st Battalion of New Jersey Volunteers. "In reality, the Loyalists were doing the right thing. People forget about that. It's so awful that history is only remembered in black in white, or in this case red and blue."

Live history was visible from the historic downtown section of Mount Holly and the blasts of cannons could be heard from much further away. Each blast shook windows on the old buildings as both children and adults held their ears at the anticipation of the next big boom.

"It was a lot louder than I thought it would be, but this is fun," said Lori Ricciardi of Lumberton.

The Ricciardi family drove to Mount Holly to take advantage of a unique opportunity to enhance their son Luke's school lesson. A third grader at Ashbrook Elementary School in Lumberton, Luke is now learning about the Revolutionary War.

"It's really cool," he said, while marching behind the British Army down High Street. "I had no idea what a re-enactment was. I didn't think it would have all of this."

Aside from the battle, a whole day of activities and sites was available for visitors. The Burlington County Prison Museum hosted the British encampment while the Colonists were huddled together at a small camp in Mill Race Village.

There was also a military surgeon, 18th-century cooking, blacksmithing, artillery firing, and recruit drilling for children.

"It was a great turnout and a beautiful day for this," Lauffer said. "Usually it's a lot colder. But this is a great event. And this is truly the way to learn history."