

His Excellency's Guard



On March 11, 1776, George Washington issued a General Order directing his Commanding Officers to select four men from each regiment. These men would be used to form his personal guard. He was very specific in his request:

“His Excellency depends upon the Colonels for good Men, such as they can recommend for their sobriety, honesty and good behavior; he wishes them to be from five feet eight inches high, to five feet ten inches; handsomely and well made, and as there is nothing in his eyes more desirable than Cleanliness in a Soldier, he desires that particular attention be made in the choice of such men as are clean and spruce.”

The official designation of this new unit was “His Excellency's Guard,” or the “General's Guard.” However, enlisted soldiers would refer to the unit as “The Life Guards” or “Body Guards.”

Two months after its formation, they were at the center of what came to be known as the Hickey mutiny. This attempt to infiltrate Washington's inner circle in order to assassinate him was eventually uncovered and resulted in the arrest of a

number of "Life Guards," including Sergeant Thomas Hickey, an Irish migrant who deserted from the British army and reenlisted in the Continental Army. He was court martialed, found guilty and became the first member of the Continental Army to be executed. Following this incident, Washington ordered that no foreign born soldier could be assigned as a guardsman.

Captain Stephen Jackson who, at the young age of 17, fought and was wounded at the battle of Yorktown, was chosen to become one of Washington's "Life Guards." In fact, Washington is known to have once stopped at Jackson's home in Rockaway NJ in 1780 to partake of refreshments. Jackson was the 4th great grandfather of my sister-in-law.

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