

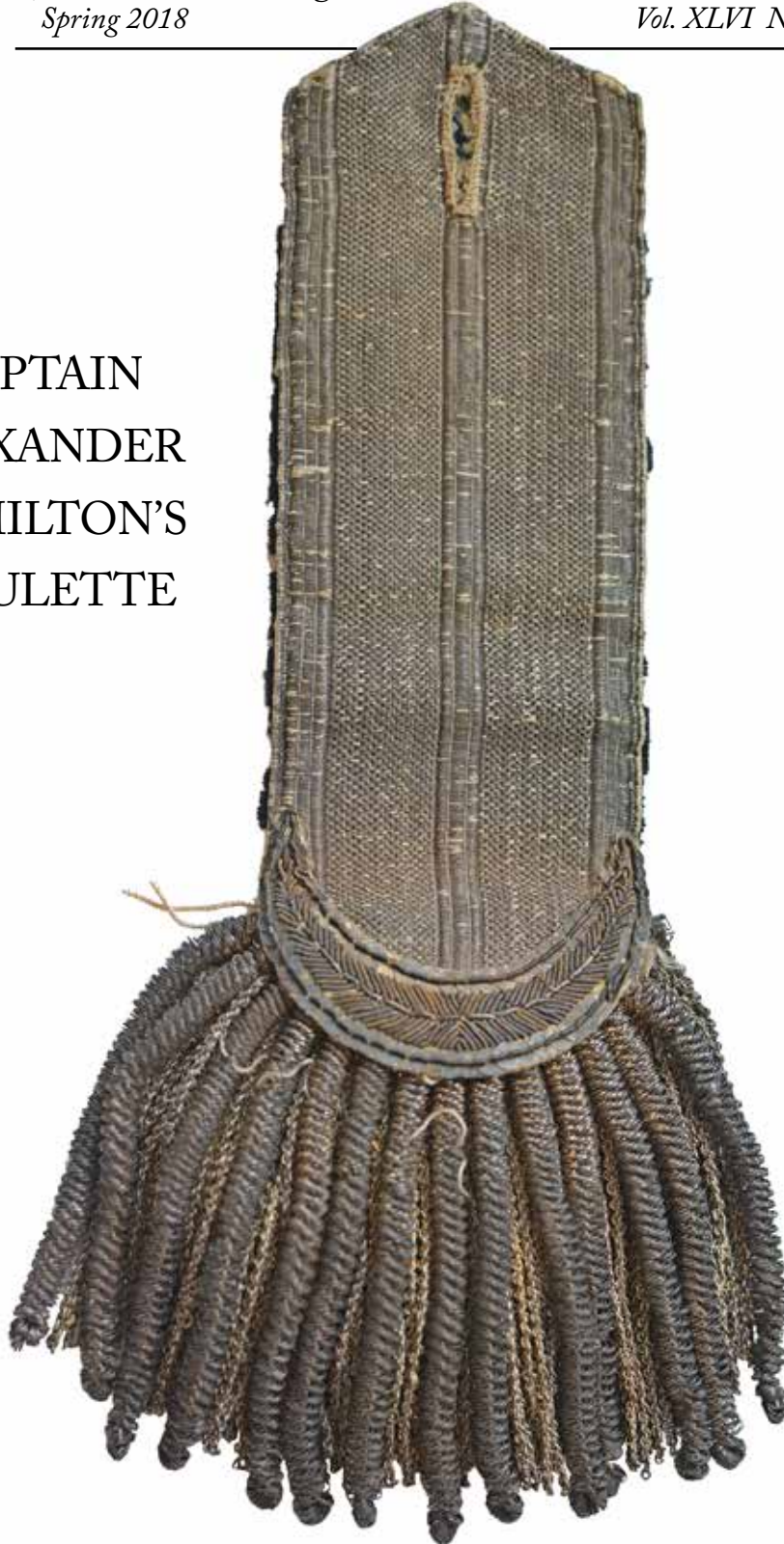


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CAPTAIN
ALEXANDER
HAMILTON'S
EPAULETTE





Capt. Alexander Hamilton's Epaulette

Philip D. Weaver
2nd New York

Most historians are familiar with Alexander Hamilton as an aide-de-camp to General George Washington with the rank of lieutenant colonel. However, in the spring of 1775, when the American Revolution was in its infancy, young Alexander Hamilton was actually a private in Capt. Edward Fleming's New York City independent company, the Corsicans. He was one of many gentlemen members of these Silk Stocking companies listed as potential officers for the upcoming conflict, but would be passed over that initial year.¹

Come 1776, the Committee of Safety resolved to raise an artillery company for the general defense.² It was then determined, based on a recommendation of Col. Alexander McDougall, of the 1st New York, that the Provincial Congress appoint

Alexander Hamilton captain of the "Provincial Company of Artillery of the Colony."³

The company served with distinction throughout the New York campaign of 1776 and notably at the Battle of Trenton on 26 December 1776. By the time Hamilton was promoted to "Lieutenant Colonel and Principal Aide-de-camp to General Washington" on 1 March 1777, attrition had taken its toll and what was left of the company was simply absorbed into the Continental Artillery.⁴

One of Hamilton's men, Uriah Chamberlain, deserted the company and his description appeared in *The New York Journal* on 25 April 1776. He had on when he went away a deep blue coat, turned up with buff, a pair of leather breeches, and a new felt hat.⁵

A single gold strap-type epaulette, said to have been worn by

Hamilton, is in the Fort Ticonderoga Museum collection. According to Matthew Keagle, the museum curator, the epaulette was purchased from Hamilton's great-great-nephew, Schuyler Hamilton, in 1941. Barring the discovery of a matching epaulette, it was, in all likelihood, worn by him in 1776.

For once he left the artillery and became a staff/field officer. He was destined to never wear the single epaulette of a company-grade officer on his uniform again.

The gold epaulette is the perfect color to go with a blue regimental coat with buff facings. The blue backing is coarse woolen broadcloth, stitched down with a simple running stitch of natural or gold colored thread. The pad below the fringe is a pale yellow buff colored silk, with some light batting inside.

The pad might be discolored white silk, but that is highly unlikely.

The present color of the pad suggests the maker tried to match the color of Hamilton's regimental coat facings. In this case, the presumption is that they were a pale yellow-buff colored wool and not the orange tinged buff wool worn by General Washington and his staff.

The photographs shown here were taken by the museum's staff. Even though the epaulette appears rather dark, it is gold, as it is not tarnished the same way silver would be. Also, when placed on display under the right lighting, the epaulette is clearly a very nice yellow gold.

The strap portion of the epaulette is made of one piece of gold lace a bit over two inches wide. The point is formed by just folding two corners down. The crescent on the other end is formed by sequins, generally referred to during the period as spangles, stitched down with a thick gold thread of some type.

The same thread appears to be used to stitch the herringbone pattern within the crescent. The fringe is a classic twisted bullion design. Multiple rows of thin bullion are topped with a single row of heavier bullion.

Looking through the large moth hole in the wool, there is no buckram or other form of stiffening between the lace and the wool.

The square-ended buttonhole is cut into the wide lace and sewn with a hand-sewn buttonhole stitch.

On one side, it appears the buttonhole stitch pulled out in the making and needed to be over-cast again. The wool backing was added after the buttonhole was sewn, as it was slit for the button and just lightly whip-stitched, with blue thread, to the back of the finished buttonhole in the lace.

The silk pad is joined to the raw edge of the blue wool with a crude cross-stitch in blue thread.



Measurements:

- The total length, including fringe: 20.96 cm (8 1/4")
- The length not including fringe: 15.56 cm (6 1/8")
- Width of the strap: 5.29 cm (2 1/16")
- Width of the fringe: 11.11 (4 3/8").

*Photographs and Measurements
provided by Fort Ticonderoga*

Capt. Alexander Hamilton's Epaulette

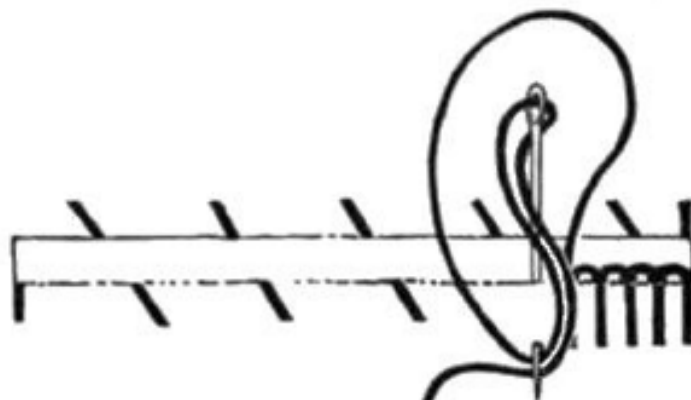


Fig.1. This drawing shows how to sew a buttonhole by hand. Such a buttonhole stitch was used on the epaulette. It creates a small knot along the slit with each stitch. The angled single stitch was used to hold the material in place and hold the lining to the front material prior to stitching the button hole. In the case of this epaulette, the buttonhole was first sewn in the lace and the blue liner was then attached to the finished buttonhole with the same angle done with navy blue colored thread.

No attachment, or remnants thereof, can be found on the epaulette, except the buttonhole. So, for wearing, the epaulette had to have slipped under a thin strip of lace (probably gold), at the right shoulder point of Hamilton's regimental coat and then attached to a button near the color line.

Notes

1. "Officers belonging to a Battalion of Independent Foot Companies in New-York City," E.B. O'Callaghan, ed. *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*. Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, 1857, 8:601-603. This list is undated but estimated to be late July 1775. "List of Gentlemen who were deemed Qualified to Serve as Officers in the Provincial Army." *The Historical Magazine, and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History, and Biography of America*. New York: Charles B. Richardson, 1863. 7:194-195. This is a transcript and Hamilton's first name was not legible, but is likely him. (For additional information, see *Company of Military Historians Military Uniforms in America Plate #562*, "New York City Independent Militia 1776-1776.")
2. *Journals of the Provincial Congress, Provincial Convention, Committee of Safety and Council of Safety of the State of New-York: 1775-1777*. Albany, NY: Thurlow Weed, 1842. 1:239, Resolution of the Committee of Safety, 6 Jan 1776.
3. Journals, 1:359, Resolution of the Provincial Congress, 14 March 1776. Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*. Washington, D.C., 1837-53, 4th Series, 5:303 & 378.
4. Francis B. Heitman. *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution, April, 1775, to December, 1783*, Reprint of the New, Revised, and Enlarged Edition of 1914, With Addenda by Robert H. Kelby, 1932. Baltimore MD: Genealogical Publishing company, 1982. p. 269, Entry for Alexander Hamilton. Fred Anderson Berg. *Encyclopedia of Continental Army Units: Battalions, Regiments and Independent Corps*. Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1972. p.49, Entry for the New York Artillery Company.
5. *The New-York Journal; or, The General Advertiser*, 25 April 1776.