



My View

I do not know about you, but I am getting sick and tired of being called a *reenactor*. No one seems to know who started coining the

phrase or when it began to be used commonly, but I think it is time to stop!

Newspapers, television, and historians use it without thinking about what it really means. In the old days we use to see them label our events "*encampment*," or "*muster*," or "*battle*." Today, even three guys camped at an historic site are habitually identified by the media as a "*reenactment*." Worse yet, they come up with a hybrid term like "*encampment reenactment*" or an abridged one like "*enactment*." This is embarrassing! Granted, most of these are well meaning people who are finally paying significant attention to us, but they really do not understand what we do.

We, on the other hand, should know better. Bastardized terms like "*reenacter*," "*reenactor*," or "*reenacting*" (and hyphenated equivalents) are now part of the vernacular and can only fuel the confusion. As editor of this publication, I have done everything I can to reduce or eliminate the use of the term entirely.

Personally, I can only remember doing one true reenactment from the North American Colonial Period in over 30 years of doing this stuff. It was a raid on a house in Bronx County (NY), where a handful of Colonials tried containing a smaller handful of *Hessians* in the winter of 1777. Conversely, the largest I have attended was the Siege of Yorktown, in 1981, where we had 25% of the actual numbers. How can you reenact something where you do not have the actual numbers or scale? Let's get real!

Now, by way of contrast, we can all bring up those that recreate the American Civil War. Their participation numbers are truly amazing. They can actually put out full sized companies --- but when you give it some thought, they still cannot match the proportions that took part in the original conflict.

Setting aside the issue of scale, to me the image of a reenactor is one of, for lack of a better term, a *Yahoo*. He is the guy in the battered tricorne, haversack hung to his knees, white cotton/poly breeches cut too big, high-top suede moccasins, and two beefy flintlock pistols stuck in his pirate belt. It is an image that most of us will have little difficulty conjuring up. It may seem like an exaggeration, but it is out there even to this day. Therefore, my question, is it a true image of what you do? Is this the image you want the public to have of you or your organization?

Like the media, the general public paints us all with one brush. They make no differentiation between units or umbrellas. They probably don't even know what period is being portrayed! Invariably, the 3rd New York, in their gray regimental coats, are approached with the line "Are you guys the Confederates?"

Clearly we have a long way to go, but if we do not educate them, who will? If you consider yourself a *living historian* or an *historical interpreter*, be sure to call yourself that. If your unit puts on professional programs for historic sites and/or communities, you are not some gun nuts in funny outfits having a "shoot-em-up."

We have a lot of fun doing what we do and you will find humor to be a great way to reach the public. However, be sure to never make light of what you are doing. Take yourselves seriously and they will take you (and the rest of us) seriously.