

Returns for the 2nd New Jersey Regiment during the American Revolution
Bruce Duty
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Many of us have been asked at a reenactment by a member of the public: “well, how many men did they have in a regiment?” Usually the response starts off something like “well they were supposed to have X men in each company, and have X companies per regiment....” etc, etc. Most 18th century regiments were *authorized* to have somewhere between 600 and 1000 men. Few ever made it close to their establishment. Probably only a couple American Continental regiments ever made it to their established manpower quota, and even then it didn’t last very long.

A better answer to such a question would be: “Congress authorized the regiments to be a certain size, but they never came close to those strengths for a number of reasons. In reality the 2nd NJ regiment averaged around....”, and the rest of this article is intended to finish that answer.

March 1776 – at Quebec – 216 men

An impressive total actually when you consider that they just spent the entire Canadian winter at the end of a long supply line. Seven of the other regiments in the American army in Canada had less than 100 men at this time. The regiment’s authorized strength at this time was 733 men in eight companies.¹

September 1776 – at Ticonderoga New York – 250 men (29/38/3/180)²

Along with the rest of the Northern Army under Horatio Gates, the 2nd NJ was waiting for General Guy Carleton’s invasion from Canada that never came.

May 1777 – New Jersey – 142 men (17/27/4/94)

While most of the New England regiments are in New York waiting to see what Burgoyne does, the rest of the army is waiting in New Jersey to see what Howell does. The result was the Brandywine-Germantown campaign in which Philadelphia was captured.

December 1777 – Valley Forge – 164 men (18/29/2/115)

March 1778 – Valley Forge – unknown because it was detached in New Jersey. However we can get an idea of it’s probable strength because we know that the average strength of the other three NJ regiments at Valley Forge was 82 men. The regiments were down to less than company strength.

¹ A company in 1776 was authorized 1 Captain, 1 First Lieutenant, 1 Second Lieutenant, 1 Ensign, 4 Sergeants, 4 Corporals, 1 Drummer, 1 Fifer, and 76 Privates for a total of 90 men per company.

² when the manpower figures are broken out like this, it means (Officers/NCOs/staff officers/privates)

May 1778 – Valley Forge – 152 men (7/25/0/120)

The regiment doubles its strength in less than two months by receiving 9-months “drafts” from the militia.

4th July 1778 – New Jersey – 373 men (16/35/4/318)

We have no exact figures for the manpower strength for the 2nd NJ at Monmouth, but since this is only a week since the battle, and the 2nd NJ did not take very many casualties in the battle, we can be pretty sure this is close. The regiment’s strength is at an all-time high, but still nowhere near its authorized strength.³

Again the regiment doubles its strength in less than two months by receiving 9-months “drafts” from the militia.

February 1779 – New Jersey – 481 men (18/38/5/420)

The only time the 2nd NJ regiment gets close to its authorized strength. Part of the reason is because the 4th NJ regiment has been disbanded and its personnel distributed to the other NJ regiments.

March 1779 – New Jersey – 328 men (14/40/5/269)

Notice the rapid decrease in manpower in only one month. The 9-month’s men are starting to leave.

October 1779 – New York – 308 men (16/44/3/245)

The 2nd is with Sullivan’s Division campaigning against the Indians in New York State.

December 1779 – New Jersey, Jockey Hollow – 280 men (9/38/3/230)

The 2nd is about to weather the worst winter of the century in log huts with scant clothing, food, or other supplies.

January 1780 - New Jersey, Jockey Hollow – 124 men (3/22/4/95)

The devastating winter of 1779-80 has taken a toll of the 2nd NJ. Compare this to February 1779’s figure. The regiment has lost over half its strength in a month.

June 1780 – New Jersey, Jockey Hollow – 278 men (17/38/5/218)

The regiment has weathered the bad winter of 1779-80 and is about to march out of Jockey Hollow on its way to the Battles of Connecticut Farms and Springfield.

October 1780 – West Point New York – 250 men (14/33/5/198)

³ A company in 1778 was authorized 1 Captain, 1 First Lieutenant, 1 Ensign, 3 Sergeants, 3 Corporals, 1 Drummer, 1 Fifer, and 53 Privates for a total of 64 men per company. Regimental strength was 588 men.

September 1781 – Yorktown – 165 men⁴

This figure is deceiving because 5 companies of New Jersey troops were serving with Lafayette's Light Division. You could probably add another 80 men to its strength.

So we have seen the 2nd NJ Regiment with a high of 481 men, and a low of possibly 82. Added to those amounts would be about 10-15% for campfollowers. That's an average regimental strength of 240 men. Deducting about 10 men for regimental officers and staff leaves an average company strength of about 26 men throughout the war. This is using the 1778 organization with nine companies.

Bruce Duty

2nd NJ Regt.

Helms' Coy.

References

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⁴ A company in 1781 was authorized 1 Captain, 1 Lieutenant, 1 Ensign, 1 First Sergeant, 4 Sergeants, 4 Corporals, 1 Drummer, 1 Fifer, and 64 Privates for a total of 78 men per company. Regimental strength was 717 men.