

The American Revolution and “Rotations”

In the time of war, time is essential. Although George Washington likely had a mechanical clock or watch of some sort, we are told that he definitely had a “pocket sundial” or “ring dial” gifted to him by the Marquis de Lafayette. I think we can reason that Washington’s officers also had one, and perhaps some of the enlisted men. For sure, in the rank-and-file, one soldier in a group or company would have been in charge of reporting the time. Failing the luxury of a mechanical time-piece, he would have used a sundial and an hour glass, so I will go forward on that premise.

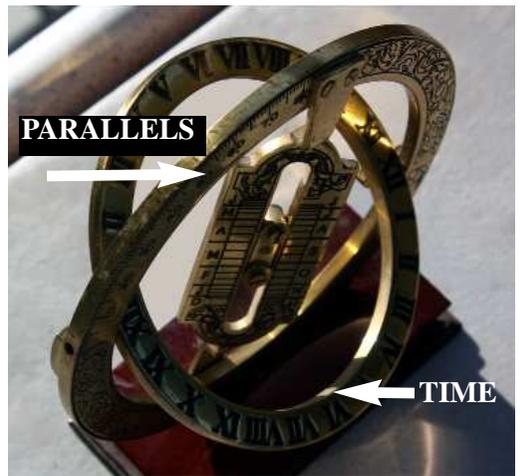
A rooster can be depended upon for an alarm clock, but after that, one is on his own. In the American Revolution, there would have been a 24-hour time-keeper, using whatever he could to track the time of day and night.

Sundials are quite accurate, very accurate with practice and experience, but there is a condition—one has to be able to see the sun. Nevertheless, when the sun is out, it provides a means to both tell time and confirm it when other methods are used. I will venture to say that the mechanical watches of the Revolution needed to be constantly maintained, and if immersed in water or damaged in battle, well... they became expensive ornaments.

We are told by the Franklin Mint that George Washington’s “ring dial” was as seen in the first adjacent photograph. After some preliminary “programming” the device was placed on a flat surface (although I think one could hold it) and the sun did the rest, as seen in the second photograph. In the case the time would have been a bit before 6:00 a.m.

I think we can reason that a call went out to all of Washington’s companies to “synchronize sundials,” and if he were given a time of say 5 minutes to 6 a.m., you can bet that was the time.

American spies would have had one of



The dial shown here is positioned for the 70th parallel and the first third of May. One would now rotate it right or left to the desired parallel.

these “time pieces” to report British troop movements and thereby calculate the troop’s arrival at a certain destination.

Masons will recall the words, “As the sun rules the day...,” and it certainly does; faithfully and with absolutely no mistakes.

By the way, if the sundial did not work on a sunny day, it was time for lunch.



Paintings and stamps depicting critical moments in the American Revolution. Time was the most important factor in controlling the movements of Washington's army. Everyone had to be on "the same page," as it were, and it was the sun that was the common denominator. (USA #1688a-e, 1689a-e)