

SAR Reenactment

By Ryan Rose

At elementary schools throughout the region, a group of old soldiers are waging a war. Storming cafeterias with muskets and cannonballs, these militiamen called for reinforcements from the pre-teen audience. Soldiers moved through the crowd, engaging the tweens in conversation and combat. Picking volunteers at random, the "colonists" draft O fifth-graders into America's first full-fledged fighting force: the Continental Army. "The Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming!"

Ignore the calendars on the wall - right now its 1776 and the American Colonies are at war with the British. The ragtag army takes shape in the school cafeteria as the militiamen raise their muskets and take aim at the enemy. "The Redcoats are coming, the Redcoats are coming!" "Fire!" Youngsters in the audience yell "boom" and "bang." Others fall to the ground pretending to be hit by enemy fire. American forces eventually overtake British troops, and the battle is over -for now.

Like a time machine, the Sacramento Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution takes local students back to a time when America was barely an idea. Players wear authentic replications of original militiamen uniforms. Wearing leggings and buckled shoes, the men look as if they have stepped out of history books or portraits of old. The women actors are equally as believable.

The skits and clothing capture the attention of the young audience. Whether by accident or deliberate, the Sons of the American Revolution have discovered a brilliant new teaching technique. The normally squirrely students remain transfixed. At the conclusion of the presentation, students continue to discuss the Revolutionary war. For this reason the group continues to stage these historical re-enactments.

For the past six years, members of the Sons of the American Revolution and their wives have traveled to different schools preaching the good news of the Revolutionary War. The acting troupe consists of Chuck and Dee Highbaugh, (Massachusetts soldier "Sergeant Chuck" and Nancy Hart) Ron and Patty Proffer, (Tennessee mountain man and Molly Hayes) Jim Faulkinbury, (N.Y. militiaman) and El Dorado Hills resident Tom Chilton, president of the Sons of the American Revolution, who portrays a doctor.

Champions of "freedom," the men and women involved in these productions see the exercise as a win-win situation. They get out of the house and teach young people lessons Americans should never forget. "They are so impressionable at this age," said Chilton. Yet the heroes they portray are not much different from the people they are outside of costume. They drip history. The group's actors are relics of a time when words like honor, loyalty and sacrifice meant something far different than it does now. The aura released by these most genuine of folk is overwhelming, like the strong scent of a confectionery store; and just as appealing. Behind their act are people that have seen the real-life drama that comes with protecting American freedoms. They are America's best - veterans. Having once risked their lives to save the freedom of others, these same men and women now devote their days to teaching. Maybe it is in their blood, but for members of the Sons of the American Revolution there is nothing better than telling the tales of how the U.S. was founded.

According to Chuck Highbaugh, the group has performed before 3,000 students and received thousands of thank you letters from fans. "I received a letter from a little girl, and what she said... I have always remembered, 'I didn't know people had to die so we can be free,' she told me," Highbaugh recalled. "That has always stuck with me."

The mini-drama presented by the Sons of the American Revolution teaches students not only about the great costs of freedom, but also information on colonists' uniforms, early American flags and living conditions. (Many of the children gasped when they heard people did not bathe regularly in early America.) Chilton said the presentation enhances the American history curriculum taught in fifth-grade classes. "They learn [about the Revolution] in classes, but I think they really enjoy when someone is simply paying attention to them - talking to them," said Highbaugh.

With no plans of stopping, these veterans continue to fight in their schoolyard war - battling to educate the hearts and minds of future patriots.

This article appeared in June 2, 2004, edition of the El Dorado Hills Telegraph.