

NOTE: 18th CENTURY "MONKEY" BRIDGE

A search here did not uncover any reference to three-strand rope bridges in the pre-20th century military experiences in America and Europe. The bridges described in our collection of engineering manuals and other military treatises of the 18th and 19th centuries are conventional in design and include flooring or other wide treadways. The earliest description found of any rope bridge appears in Colonel Sir Howard Douglas, Essay on the Principles and Construction of Military Bridges and the Passage of Rivers in Military Operations (London: Egerton, 1816; UG335D7), plate 9.

Although a "Monkey Bridge" does not appear to have been prescribed for conventional military forces in that era, it may have been used occasionally as an expedient. The simplicity of such all-rope bridges appear well-suited to the wilderness areas of colonial America. However, simple rope bridges would not have sufficed for the passage of large bodies of foot soldiers or artillery or cavalry. It is more likely that the all-rope bridge would have been used by unconventional forces, i.e., rangers.

In fact, US Army doctrine on modern rangers and mountain operations prescribes rope bridges, including a three-strand type similar to a "monkey" bridge. US Army Engineers classify that type of bridge as a "field expedient." See:

U.S. Dept of Army. The Engineer Soldier's Handbook: Field Manual 5-13, dated Jul 1964. pp. 260-261. AuthPub-FM.

_____. Mountain Operations: FM 31-72, dated Jan 1959. pp. 61-62. AuthPub-FM.

_____. Ranger Training and Ranger Operations: FM 21-50, dated Jan 1962. pp. 244-46. AuthPub-FM.

_____. Suspension Bridges for Mountain Warfare: Technical Manual 5-279, dated Jan 1944. 104 p. AuthPub-TM.

See esp Chap 4.

To uncover specific use of monkey bridges in the 18th century will require study of the primary sources of that era, especially journals and reports of military figures and other explorers who may have recorded building such devices.