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**The Continentals: A comparative analysis of a late eighteenth-century  
standing army, 1775–83**

**Scudieri, James Domenic, Ph.D.**

**City University of New York, 1993**

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THE CONTINENTALS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF A LATE  
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY STANDING ARMY, 1775-83

By

JAMES D. SCUDIERI

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

1993

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## PREFACE

All Ph.D. dissertations are exercises in perseverance and self-discipline. This one has proven to be particularly so. It is the culmination of a program in graduate work begun no less than fifteen years ago, punctuated by nearly five years of active duty overseas when the project perforce ground to a halt.

Prof. David Syrett, Queens College of CUNY, has been a harsh taskmaster. But I could not have completed this work without him. Personnel in research institutions have demonstrated their impressive expertise and inexhaustible patience. I must single out Robert S. Cox, William L. Clements Library; Dorothy Twohig, The Papers of George Washington at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville; Mary L. Robertson, Huntington Library; Richard J. Sommers, U.S. Army Military History Institute; Elizabeth Talbot Rice, National Army Museum, London; and the staffs of the United States Military Academy Cadet Library, National Archives, Library of Congress, New-York Historical Society, New York Public Library, Monmouth County Historical Association Library, Princeton University Library, and Morristown National Historical Park.

I owe considerable thanks to my colleagues in the History Department at the United States Military Academy. The workload in any military organization is unending and

does not slow down because someone is away. I know many of them assumed yet greater responsibilities in order to permit me the opportunity to research and write. The support I received from my superiors was critical. Thanks are due Col. Robert A. Doughty, Department Head; Col. Charles F. Brower III, Deputy Head; Col. James M. Johnson, Military History Division Chief, and Col. Kenneth Hamburger, former Military History Division Chief. I am also grateful for the grant from the Faculty Development Research Fund (FDRF) during AY 1991-92.

Though trite, I must acknowledge the assistance of my mother who personally typed all of the early drafts before historians entered the computer age. I wish she could witness this task brought to fruition. Requiescat in pace. Finally, my wife Yon Hui patiently bore years of spousal inattention so that I could devote the necessary hours.

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## CHAPTER ONE

## PROLOGUE

The Continentals: Scope and Context

The fighting that broke out in Massachusetts in 1775 between the colonists and the English government gave rise to a baffling eighteenth-century conflict. The eight-year struggle which ensued has presented historians with a puzzling set of contradictions. Was it primarily a national revolution or a colonial war of pacification? What aspect of the fighting determined the outcome: engagements between conventional forces? the battle effectiveness of citizen militia bands? the guerrilla war of frontiersmen against the British regulars and their Indian allies? the use of the militia to overawe the Tories and enforce the writ of the Continental Congress? or could it be said to be the slow but successful development of American line regiments? This dissertation examines the latter question.

At the outset colonial military organization and experience to date set the terms of the patriots' ideas about their military effort. There appeared to be a plausible link between the resort to a locally-recruited militia and the colonists' assertion of their rights as Englishmen. The basic terms of their political demands seemed to find embodiment in the right to bear arms in a militia. In the long run, however, this initial

preoccupation with a militia impeded the recruitment and training of a line army.

Legally, the defenders of Breed's Hill in June 1775 were as much members of the "Continental Line" as were their successors who stormed Redoubt Number Ten at Yorktown in October 1781. Yet few historians would dispute the remarkable progress in the professional development of the Continental Army between war's beginning and the peace settlement of 1783.

Research to date, however, has dealt with the struggle to establish a viable standing army within the context of a newly-emerging nation-state, especially a republic. For example, Lynn Montross' work on the Continental Army remains an interesting narrative of purely American history though it is nearly forty years old.<sup>1</sup>

Robert K. Wright has produced a meticulously-researched monograph on the Continental Army. However, it is strictly an administrative and organizational history. He discusses only British and Hessian, i.e. Hesse Cassel, battalion organizations and those very briefly. There is no mention of the other German states involved in the war, the Loyalists, nor the French.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Lynn Montross, Rag, Tag, and Bobtail: The Story of the Continental Army, 1775-1783 (New York: Harper & Bros., 1952).

<sup>2</sup>Robert K. Wright, The Continental Army, Army Lineage Series (Washington, D.C.: U.S.A. Center of Military History, 1983).

Finally, Mark E. Lender and David Kirby Martin have written a superb analysis of the Continental Army. Yet their discussion is concerned with an examination of America's first standing army and its place within a republic. There is no attempt to analyze the characteristics of the army outside this national framework.<sup>3</sup>

But what of the capabilities of the American regulars in terms of eighteenth-century military history? How in fact does the Continental Army "stack up" when compared and contrasted with its allies and enemies? Late eighteenth-century armies were sophisticated institutions. Historians have written monographs on various aspects of these forces. Yet no one has formulated a comprehensive analysis of the Continentals' own abilities when compared with the other regular troops involved in the war. The dissertation's context is a comparative analysis of conventional military forces. Thus, it will also examine the British, Loyalist, German, and French forces in America. This approach mirrors the advice of French historian Andre Corvisier:

But it has seemed to me that military history . . . can no more than religious or economic history be allowed to remain locked within a national framework. An effective innovation in the organization of armies does not often remain the exclusive property of a single country; a victorious leader usually gives rise to imitators. Thus an overview permits us to bring the

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<sup>3</sup>Mark E. Lender and James Kirby Martin, A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789, The American History Series, ed. Abraham S. Eisenstadt and John Hope Franklin (Arlington Hts., Ill.: Harlan Davidson, 1982).

different aspects that a military circumstance assumes, according to the makeup of each society.<sup>4</sup>

The historical stereotype of the eighteenth-century regular was the well-drilled automaton recruited for life who required some three to five years to train to perfection. Is this model in fact the measuring stick against which the Continentals should be judged? How could the Continentals match such a standard on the battlefield with an army which started virtually from scratch? How could patriot leaders ever hope to field an army which could beat its foes with their mastery of the intricacies of formalized linear warfare?

The officers of eighteenth-century armies have been depicted as the idle, rich aristocracy. How professional was the American officer corps in comparison with its allies and enemies?

The study focuses on the attempt to establish professional line infantry in Washington's main army. Was it the model for the rest of the Army? How did the establishment of formal military institutions -- or lack thereof -- affect the battlefield performance of the line regiments? How successful was the colonial effort to create a European-style regular army as measured by its ability to challenge its foes or cooperate with its allies on equal terms on the field of battle? The finished product will

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<sup>4</sup>Andre Corvisier, Armies and Societies in Europe, 1494-1789, trans. Abigail T. Siddall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. viii-ix.

contribute to the task outlined by historian Don

Higginbotham:

In sum, our charge is to cut clearer pathways into the lives and minds of Washington's Continentals -- to determine why they enlisted, why some stayed with the army while many left, why they demonstrated against inadequate conditions, and why they often fought so well.<sup>5</sup>

The Continental Army which emerges from this analysis is in every sense of the term a true eighteenth-century regular army. It shares far more similarities with its European equivalents than heretofore acknowledged, sometimes in its failings as well as its successes. The high degree of success of colonial leaders in creating a viable standing army virtually from scratch is in fact incomprehensible without an understanding of the key characteristics of the other armies in America. Patriot leaders could never field a military force that mirrored the stereotype of the period discussed earlier; however, neither could the European forces which fought the war both with and against the Continentals. The challenges facing armies on active operations in America from 1775-83 were ones of degree and not kind.

The role of Friedrich von Steuben in the professional development of the Continental Army in this context was both critical and decisive. His first major contribution was his work at Valley Forge where he established a standard drill

<sup>5</sup>Don Higginbotham, "The Early American Way of War: Reconnaissance and Reappraisal," William and Mary College Quarterly, 3rd ser., 44 (April 1987):261.

for the main army, a uniform system which provided the Continentals with the tactical articulation essential to the successful execution of linear warfare. As Inspector General his primary mission became the enforcement of that standard throughout the army. But von Steuben's contribution did not end with his famous Blue Book. Washington came to rely on his drill master's talents more and more. The office of Inspector General emerged as the Commander in Chief's primary instrument to institutionalize military excellence in the main army and all the departments, a challenge of herculean proportions in an army which had lacked formal military institutions in 1775.

This focus on the Continental Line of Washington's main army has resulted in an emphasis on Northern operations in the Middle Atlantic States. Such an emphasis does not intend to denigrate the importance of the other departments of the army. On occasion this analysis will refer to them as well to illustrate certain trends. Likewise, the militia will receive little mention throughout the dissertation except in so far as it may be related to the development of the line regiments, principally as a source of replacements. This subordination -- indeed, virtual omission -- should not be interpreted as a denial of the contribution of patriot militia in winning the war. Such an issue is simply irrelevant to a study of the development of a regular army.

#### The Art of War in the Eighteenth Century

The exact period of the American Revolution was significant in terms of timing. Perhaps the greatest misperception about the military affairs of the eighteenth century is its dismissal as a single stagnant epoch -- that of linear warfare.<sup>6</sup> Continued and gradual tactical evolution and sophistication characterized the age.<sup>7</sup> The war in America came at a time when linear tactics had attained their highest state of perfection. The soldier of the Seven Years' War was a far more efficient instrument than his predecessor had been in the War of the Spanish Succession.

Technological innovation did not characterize the military art in the eighteenth century. The major breakthrough occurred at the very beginning of the period. The turn of the century witnessed the demise of separate bodies of pikemen and matchlockmen in an infantry unit in favor of a generic musketeer. This transformation was possible because of the marriage of flintlock musket and socket bayonet.

The matchlock musket had been a cumbersome weapon to use in the field. Its owner needed a forked rest upon which to

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<sup>6</sup>This section is introductory. The writer does not intend to spark an historiographical debate. For the most recent surveys, see Christopher Duffy, The Military Experience in the Age of Reason (New York: Atheneum, 1988) and Archer Jones, The Art of War in the Western World (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>7</sup>By far the most exhaustive examination of this subject is Brent Nosworthy, The Anatomy of Victory: Battle Tactics, 1689-1763 (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1990).

support it in order to fire due to its weight. Later, lighter versions did dispense with this rest. The need to maintain a length of constantly-burning slow match was inconvenient at the very least and dangerous at worst. Rates of fire were low, about one round a minute, due to the need to handle powder and ball separately. The flintlock was simplicity itself in comparison. Superior metal resulted in a lighter piece with just as much "punch." The use of a stone flint eliminated the need for a burning match. Rates of fire increased to two to three rounds a minute with the adoption of prepared, paper cartridges.<sup>8</sup> Misfires dropped from 50 percent to 33 percent and eventually to 15 percent.<sup>9</sup>

The development of the bayonet was critical to render the pikeman obsolete. The early plug variety was clearly unsatisfactory; it negated the user's firepower. The socket bayonet which slipped over a musket's barrel and locked into place was a true milestone. Now the infantryman could be both musketeer and pikeman.

This combination of musket with socket bayonet transformed the battlefields of Europe and the New World. Infantry again became the preeminent arm of battle. Firepower now held far more potential than melee power. Moreover, the flintlock musket represented the peak of

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<sup>8</sup>David Chandler, The Art of War in the Age of Marlborough (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1976), pp. 75-81.

<sup>9</sup>Jones, Art of War, pp. 269-70.

technological development for the duration of the eighteenth century and beyond. Generally speaking, the smoothbore flintlock reigned supreme for approximately a century and a half, circa 1700-1850.

The tactics of the eighteenth-century battlefield remain incomprehensible unless one understands the capabilities and limitations of infantry universally armed with this musket. It was a hopelessly inaccurate piece. Hence, the emphasis was on quantity of fire versus quality. Ideally, firefights took place at ranges of sixty yards or less. Thus, infantry formations generally stabilized at three to five ranks deep, down to a universally-adopted three-rank formation by the Seven Years' War. Only the fringe areas of Europe had not completely undergone this technological and tactical transformation by the time of the War of Spanish Succession.<sup>10</sup>

Firepower became even more efficacious as the century progressed. The Prussians pioneered the use of iron ramrods over wooden ones to help speed firing. The Prussians soon established themselves as the masters of linear infantry firepower. Their strict training regimen clearly produced the finest infantrymen in Europe. Frederick the Great's

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<sup>10</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 67-68, 115. The fringe areas in this case include Iberia secondarily but principally Russia and Sweden. These European powers utilized the linear formations but retained bodies of pikemen within their infantry units. See too P. Condray, comp. Swedish and Russian Armies of the Great Northern War (Alexandria, Va.: Editions Brokaw, 1986).

soldiers could achieve the phenomenal rate of fire of five rounds per minute by utilizing a system of platoon firing.

The European powers tried two methods of delivering firepower on the battlefield, fire by rank and platoon firing. Fire by rank was relatively straightforward. Each rank fired in turn across the entire frontage of the battalion. This system certainly looked impressive but was fraught with difficulties. Maintaining fire control across a battalion's front was difficult at best. Improper coordination between ranks could result in a vulnerable time span, albeit a short one, when the entire battalion might be unloaded at the same time.<sup>11</sup> The conservative French and Austrians preferred this method of delivering firepower. The French only adopted platoon firing in 1755.<sup>12</sup>

The English and Dutch in fact pioneered the use of platoon firing. Indeed,

By 1709 the British had devised, albeit still in rough form, the most effective controlled fire system that would be used at any time during the history of the smooth-bore musket.<sup>13</sup>

The Prussians copied and elaborated upon this system. It was difficult to master but without an equal. A platoon was a grouping of companies or other subunits of an infantry battalion. On order, all ranks within a platoon fired.

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<sup>11</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 115-21 passim. More than one method of fire by rank existed. This discussion has been simplified.

<sup>12</sup>Nosworthy, Anatomy of Victory, pp. 59-61.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

Generally speaking, only two platoons fired at any one time. The delivery of volleys therefore progressed up and down a battalion's front. Some portion of the unit was always loaded. This system required very well-trained troops.

Developments in movement matched the changing nature of firepower on the battlefield. The Prussians again provided the impetus. Armies in 1700 did not march in step. There was thus a greater distance both between soldiers in a rank and between ranks than most historians appreciate. The Prussian adoption of the cadenced step in the 1730s made possible the stereotypical shoulder-to-shoulder formations of linear warfare. Moreover, formation changes could be more elaborate and accomplished more quickly. The emergence of true "maneuver" in the modern sense was due to this Prussian desire to speed up their infantry formations.<sup>14</sup>

These developments posed a serious dilemma for eighteenth-century commanders by 1760. An attacker now faced the possibility of suffering considerably more casualties on the advance than in previous wars. This predicament suggested two possible solutions. An attacking line could absorb losses, close ranks, continue the advance, unleash its first volley as close as possible, and charge with the bayonet. The key here was not the actual use of the bayonet but rather its threatened use, i.e. shock. As an historian of another conflict stated, "The essence of

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 180, 185-87.

shock tactics was the deliberate acceptance of a higher risk in order to achieve a more decisive result."<sup>15</sup> This maneuver also prevented the loss of fire discipline discussed below, but required exceptionally steady troops.

The alternative was to utilize an advance which integrated both fire and movement, realizing that the defender who was standing fast could always produce greater concentrations of fire. Soldiers typically preferred this method since instinct beckoned them to fire back at their antagonists as soon as possible. Officers had to guard against a collapse of fire discipline as well as the potential demise of the advance itself.

The reaction of generals to this apparent impasse was fairly consistent. Charles XII had favored an unhindered advance at the start of the century.<sup>16</sup> The French opted for the bayonet over firepower as capitalizing on national temperament. Even Frederick the Great, who expended much effort improving the already-excellent infantry inherited from his father, preferred the uninterrupted advance over fire and movement. Yet he admitted the need to pay greater attention to the development of firepower on the attack after Leuthen in 1757.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Paddy Griffith, Battle Tactics of the Civil War (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 143.

<sup>16</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 127-28.

<sup>17</sup>Nosworthy, Anatomy of Victory, pp. 189-92, 234.

This emerging supremacy of the infantry saw a consequent decrease in the proportion of cavalry in a field army. Cost was certainly an influential factor as well. Despite the cavalry's abandonment of the indecisive caracole fire tactics in favor of shock tactics imitated from the Swedish horse under Gustavus Adolphus, horse soldiers composed a maximum of 25 percent of an army between 1740-80 contrasted with 33 percent or more between 1618-1715.<sup>18</sup>

Cavalry still possessed considerable combat power but their effectiveness against unbroken, properly-formed infantry in good morale was virtually nil. Horse soldiers had to target enemy flanks and rear as well as capitalizing on an opportunity to turn an enemy reverse into a rout.

The Prussians again established the standard. Frederick expended a great deal of effort reforming his cavalry arm. It developed the final gallop at the end of a charge while still maintaining formation in order to hit the foe with concentrated combat power. By the Seven Years' War, several other European armies had trained their horsemen to similar though somewhat inferior standards.<sup>19</sup>

The progress of artillery during the century was perhaps the most far reaching of all. Gunners emerged from an association of skilled craftsmen into a specialized corps of

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<sup>18</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 28-31.

<sup>19</sup>Nosworthy, Anatomy of Victory, p. 347. The section which analyzes the Continental cavalry and its ability to support the infantry discusses cavalry operations in greater detail.

technicians, a combat arm in their own right. Granted, their weak spot remained a civilian corps of drivers, a failing which seriously hindered the guns' ability to play a continued and fluid role throughout a battle. The double-bracket gun carriage also mitigated against mobility. Nations also maintained a bewildering variety of calibers in their inventories.<sup>20</sup> The French and Spanish favored one generalized system; the remaining powers, another.<sup>21</sup>

Artillery fire was rarely decisive on the eighteenth-century battlefield, but it could provide invaluable fire support to the infantry. The boom of enemy guns even with few casualties inflicted was terribly demoralizing, especially to green troops. Infantry frequently sought artillery support even at unprofitable ranges. Frederick was remorseless in chastising and exhorting his commanders to avoid excessively long-range bombardments.<sup>22</sup> Armies typically deployed two types of field artillery. Larger position pieces of circa eight pounder and above delivered preliminary bombardments and moved little in the course of an action. Smaller regimental guns of circa six pounder or below accompanied the infantry whether on attack or

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<sup>20</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 142-47, 177.

<sup>21</sup>Hughes, Firepower, pp. 14-15.

<sup>22</sup>Jay Luvaas, ed. and trans., Frederick the Great on the Art of War (New York: Free Press, 1966), p. 160.

defense.<sup>23</sup> The use of this regimental artillery represented the only true offensive role of artillery.<sup>24</sup>

The composition of these armies reflected the rigid social strata of the civilian world. Generally speaking, the enlisted men came from the lower classes; the officers, from the upper classes. Moreover, the armies operated under several precepts and philosophical reservations typical of the Age of Reason.

Recruiters were unable to find sufficient men to fill the ranks. The lot of the common soldier was a harsh one -- brutal by current standards. However, these draconian measures were not wholly inappropriate. The generally low quality of the rank and file drew some desperate sorts into the army who were capable of perpetrating serious excesses.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, one military historian stated that these commoners could ". . . behave with quite bestial savagery."<sup>26</sup>

A system of ostensibly-voluntary recruitment simply could not produce enough hardy souls to opt for enlistments ranging from twenty or twenty-five years to life.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Nosworthy, Anatomy of Victory, pp. 306-15.

<sup>24</sup>Chandler, Art of War, pp. 147-48.

<sup>25</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, p. 99.

<sup>26</sup>Michael Howard, War in European History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), p.66.

<sup>27</sup>Geoffrey Parker, The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500-1800 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 46-50.

Enlistment practices lacked the strict regulations of today. Hence, some "volunteers" found themselves virtually shanghaied. Recruiters left no potential source untapped with their focus on economically-expendable members of society.<sup>28</sup> Even the disaffected found themselves in uniform, usually posted far from their homes. The defeated of enemy armies, preferably veterans, were another sought-after pool of men. The use of foreigners flourished. The French and Austrian armies contained about 33 percent and 20 percent foreigners. The Prussians made the greatest use of non nationals, no less than 66 percent by 1751.

One result was rife desertion, the typical course of action to escape harsh conditions. By the mid-eighteenth century it was rarely a collective phenomenon but rather an individual act executed by two to three soldiers, principally due to homesickness.<sup>29</sup> Between 1756-63 Prussia alone suffered eighty thousand desertions; in 1756 the army had had a total strength of sixty thousand! The French lost seventy thousand men; the Austrians, sixty-two thousand.<sup>30</sup>

The officer corps naturally presented the opposite picture. The commanders of the armies usually mirrored a

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<sup>28</sup>M. S. Anderson, War and Society in Europe of the Old Regime, 1618-1789, Fontana History of European War and Society, ed. Geoffrey Best (London: Fontana Paperback Press, 1988), pp. 163-64.

<sup>29</sup>Corvisier, Armies and Societies, pp. 178-79.

<sup>30</sup>Hew Strachan, European Armies and the Conduct of War (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983), p. 9.

"who's who" of that nation's titled nobility. The officer corps emerged as a largely aristocratic preserve in order to provide a viable outlet for lordly energies. Dominance in leadership positions was the carrot to balance the stick of disbanding the bands of warriors maintained by medieval barons. The monarch was no longer a lord primus inter pares; he was truly "king of the hill." The golden age of absolutist rulers had arrived.

The officers of the eighteenth century took to the field with prodigious amounts of personal baggage. This individual ostentation has clouded certain professional trends. One milestone of this age was the greater professionalization of military institutions.<sup>31</sup> Staff officers became more than glorified aides de camp. Officer education became a concern of all major military powers. There were definite limits to the scope of this recognition of the importance of officer training, but the trend was a significant development.<sup>32</sup>

The armies of the Age of Reason supported the ideals of the time. War may have been "the sport of kings" but it also was the classic continuation of policy by other means. The spirit of limited war dominated the century. The embryonic notion of a balance of power in Europe with no single nation enjoying complete mastery reflected the spirit

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<sup>31</sup>Anderson, War and Society, pp. 176-77.

<sup>32</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, pp. 50-52.

of the age. Strategic objectives were thus narrow in scope. The wars of the seventeenth century had wrought utter and total destruction upon the land and the people. Memories of these excesses sparked a genuine desire to avoid such devastation again. The notion of mercantilism placed a premium on economics, whether dealing with the home front or distant colonies. A peasant in the army was one less to till the soil; hence, the predilection to recruit foreigners. Home governments expected their armies to conduct operations with the absolute minimum impact upon their civilians; the enemies' were subject to lesser standards depending upon the specific situation. Total war could not have been further from rulers' minds.<sup>33</sup>

Armies thus campaigned with significant brakes. Their long-service, thoroughly-trained professionals were difficult to replace. Hence, battle was not necessarily a war winner. The threat of desertion severely curtailed the decisiveness of pursuits. Furthermore, logistics was an ever-present millstone. A commander had to contemplate the decision to engage in battle very carefully.<sup>34</sup> Custom precluded widespread foraging as well as the need to prevent

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<sup>33</sup>Warfare in the New World, primarily between colonists and Indians, was a major exception to this state of moderation. See Howard H. Peckham, The Colonial Wars, 1689-1762, The Chicago History of American Civilization, ed. Daniel J. Boorstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964) and Douglas Edward Leach, Arms for Empire: A Military History of the British Colonies in North America, 1607-1763 (New York: Macmillan, 1973).

<sup>34</sup>Howard, War in European History, pp. 71-72.

desertion. Armies were dependent upon stockpiles of supplies in major fortresses or cities known as magazines. All forces consequently had to cope with a line of communications as fragile as it was essential.<sup>35</sup> Their operating radius was generally limited to some five to seven days' march from the nearest magazine. Despite the shortcomings, eighteenth-century logistical systems relied heavily on magazines. Foraging was only a supplementary method used sparingly.<sup>36</sup>

The restrictions placed on armies in the field pushed them to focus on the attack and defense of fortified localities. The age of limited war was the golden age of sieges. The French held the reputation as the finest engineers. The work of Sebastien le Prestre de Vauban became legendary. His three systems of fortifications set the standard for well over a century. Additionally, he perfected a systematized approach to besieging such that the fall of a fortress was virtually a foregone conclusion, given attacker patience and time. Sieges were thus cost effective in lives and could be strategically important during the course of a campaign. Hence, one historian's assessment stated, "The dominance of fortifications in the

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<sup>35</sup>Strachan, European Armies, pp. 10-12.

<sup>36</sup>Jones, Art of War, pp. 272-73. The standard reference which emphasizes the criticality of logistics remains Martin van Creveld, Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 26-39. These pages discuss the eighteenth century.

eighteenth century was well-nigh crippling to the offensive."<sup>37</sup>

The start of the century witnessed the acknowledgement of the superiority of French military institutions. The age of the Sun King, however, was about to end. The French Army began to live on past glories and suffered from several, glaring internal problems. Its reputation died on the field of Rossbach in 1757. By the end of the Seven Years' War the Prussian military system was the acknowledged master in Europe of the art of war. Regardless of their propensity to desert, the vaunted Prussian infantry performed splendidly.

Frederick's continued reforms gave him a genuine combined-arms team. His road to military excellence had been slow and tortuous, but the results spoke for themselves. The Prussians successfully established the first truly "professional" army with regular, effective, and uniform training with a minimal expected standard.<sup>38</sup> Herein lay the secret of superior Prussian tactics and maneuvers. Only the Prussians stressed continuous training for both officers and enlisted men throughout their careers.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Strachan, European Armies, p. 11. Two excellent studies of forts and sieges are Christopher Duffy, Fire and Stone: The Science of Fortress Warfare, 1660-1860 (Vancouver, Canada: David & Charles, 1975; London: Newton Abbot, 1975) and Christopher Duffy, Siege Warfare, vol. 2: The Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great, 1660-1789 (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1985).

<sup>38</sup>Anderson, War and Society, pp. 168-69.

<sup>39</sup>Nosworthy, Anatomy of Victory, pp. 196, 345.

Nothing works as much magic as battlefield success which now appeared as proof positive of the soundness of Prussian military institutions. The rest of Europe, friend and foe alike, revered the eighteenth-century Sparta and envied the capabilities of the Prussian Army. Emulators multiplied, even to the point of slavish imitation.<sup>40</sup> The Prussians became the uncontested model "in a way that none had ever been in the past."<sup>41</sup>

The French searched thoughtfully for answers to explain the wretched battlefield record of their army in the Seven Years' War. They declined to turn their military into a mere carbon copy of the Prussian. But they too were enamored with the superb army of their recent foe. As late as 1786 this fascination still existed. None other than Marie Jean Paul Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, wrote to George Washington from Paris on 6 February of his travels around the continent. Lafayette visited his former enemies in Britain and the German states. He devoted several lines to lavish praise of Frederick's personality and demeanor. He was no less flattering about the army:

It is with the Highest satisfaction that I saw the Prussian Army -- Nothing can be compared to the Beauty of the troops, the discipline that is diffused throughout, the simplicity of their Motions, the Uniformity of their Regiments -- it is a plain Regular Machine that Has Been set these forty years, and Undergoes no alteration But what Can Make it simpler and lighter -- Every supposition in war, and every motion

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<sup>40</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, p. 313.

<sup>41</sup>Anderson, War and Society, p. 157.

deriving from it, Has Been from a Constant use to much inculcated into their Heads, that it became almost a Mechanic for them -- were the Resources of France, the Alertness of Her men, the intelligence of Her officers, and National Ambition and Moral delicacy Applied to such a Constant system, we Could Be as Superior to the Prussians as our Army is now inferior to theirs -- and that is saying a great deal -- . . . <sup>42</sup>

The legend would live through the end of the century and beyond. The legacy of Frederick finally ended in the Jena campaign of 1806, with as resounding a crash as the French had endured at Rossbach.

The incredible fascination with Prussian military institutions and the fervent belief that they represented the highest state of the military art by 1765 underlined the phenomenal progress in the tactical articulation of armies between 1700-1763. If Frederick's triumphant legions were now the standard against which Western armies measured their ability, then the task of establishing a viable regular army was clearly one requiring years of constant devotion to duty backed up by the political and economic clout of the centralized, monarchical nation state.

This outline of the art of war in the eighteenth century is rather theoretical; some historians may say idealistic. Several important qualifications remain in order to understand the conduct of linear warfare under actual field conditions.

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<sup>42</sup>George Washington Papers, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Va. The writer is indebted to project editor W. W. Abbott for bringing this letter to his attention.

The predilection for limited warfare was not without its exceptions in Europe itself in addition to the New World. The desire to spare civilians from the horrors of war due to the economic cost could disappear once on enemy soil. For example, Marlborough laid waste large tracts of Bavaria during his march to the Danube in 1704. Campaigns in Eastern Europe frequently revealed a desperate ferocity by both antagonists, especially operations against the Turks.

The sharp dichotomy between the officers and enlisted men suffers from the existence of numerous exceptions. One cannot merely dismiss the common soldiers as the proverbial scum of the earth and the officers as the idle, rich aristocracy.<sup>43</sup>

The armies of long-service professional soldiers could not absorb the cumulative casualties of the notoriously indecisive battles and hence long wars of the period. Battle and disease killed veteran soldiers far faster than any army could replace them. Over time the composition of units changed. The battalion of well-trained automatons became filled with increasing numbers of raw troops. If these ill-trained replacements outnumbered the veterans, the unit's reliability under fire became highly suspect. One historian even believes that the "average" regiment in fact had "one good battle" in it.<sup>44</sup> One should not assume that a

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<sup>43</sup>The dissertation discusses these exceptions as necessary in the course of comparative analysis with the Continentals.

unit of "regulars" was necessarily a superbly-trained body of troops. Additionally, militia also took to the field as required.<sup>45</sup>

Moreover, the increasing efficacy of firepower was not without disadvantages. Even the unmatched Prussian infantry could produce five rounds a minute only for a short period of time. Indeed, the need to achieve a continuous fire with the infantry acting according to the second nature brought about by years of rigorous training actually contained the seeds of disorder:

You began by firing by platoons, and perhaps two or three would get off orderly volleys. But then would follow a general blazing away -- the usual rolling fire when everybody blasted off as soon as he had loaded, when the ranks and files became intermingled, when the first rank was incapable of kneeling, even if it wanted to. The commanders, from subalterns to generals, would be incapable of getting the mass to perform anything else: they just had to wait until it finally set itself in motion forwards or backwards.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, during a prolonged firefight the volleys were in fact little more than the sum total of the individual infantryman's reloading and firing as fast as he could. Even the ordered three ranks began to break down.

Such a trend greatly reinforces the notion that a unit's first volley was the most important. Its loading process

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<sup>44</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, p. 315.

<sup>45</sup>For example, the Hessian garrison regiments were militia.

<sup>46</sup>G. H. Berenhorst, Betrachtungen uber die Kriegkunst, 3 pts. (Leipzig: n.p., 1798-99), 1:255 quoted in Christopher Duffy, The Army of Frederick the Great, Historic Armies and Navies Series (Vancouver, Canada: David & Charles, 1974), p. 89.

had taken place in an unhurried manner prior to engaging in battle. The soldiers' initial volleys after action commenced were markedly more effective than later ones. Under the stress of prolonged fire combat, soldiers erred more frequently. For example, they rammed more than one round down the barrel or forgot to remove the ramrod before pulling the trigger. The potential collapse of fire discipline could be the first step to a greater disorder developing in a unit.

These qualifications do not invalidate the general outline of linear warfare presented above. Indeed, they merely reinforce the preeminent requirement for tightly-disciplined infantry recruited for lengthy enlistments to conduct the sophisticated drill and movements of the time.

How then could American colonists in 1775 hope to challenge the King's famous redcoats, the very same soldiers who pioneered the use of platoon volleys? What chance did these amateurs have of preventing a debacle and suffering the same fate as the French at Quebec in 1759, decisively devastated by famed British musketry?

This perplexing question lies at the heart of this dissertation. The fledging United States successfully created a regular standing army which demonstrated the ability, albeit perhaps not often, to stand up to the enemy on the field of battle utilizing formal linear tactics. How was this accomplishment possible?

## CHAPTER TWO

## RECRUITMENT

## Social Origins

Studies of the background of the enlisted men in the Continental Army are frustrating exercises due to the paucity of surviving records. The demographics of the common soldiers did not affect their performance in battle. However, a review of the historiographical debate is useful since this topic involved what little comparative analysis American historians have accomplished.

Older views underlined the importance of the citizen soldier.<sup>1</sup> This interpretation is appropriate for the early period of the war, 1775-76, when the patriots' field armies were little more than collections of amateurs. More recent historiography instead has argued that the common soldiers in fact came from lowly social origins, much like the rank and file in other armies of the period in accordance with the stereotype.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, the composition of the American rank and file changed during the later war years, 1777-83.

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<sup>1</sup>Don Higginbotham, The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), pp. 404, 412-13 and Howard H. Peckham, The War for Independence: A Military History, The Chicago History of American Civilization (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), pp. 203-4, 208 discuss the citizen soldier viewpoint.

<sup>2</sup>See particularly Lender and Martin, A Respectable Army, pp. 90-97; Robert Middlekauf, "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution," Huntington Library Quarterly 43

Studies of the Continental Line from specific states reinforced this generalized view. A study of the Maryland Line echoed the above conclusions.<sup>3</sup> Another of the Virginia troops continued the historiographical trend.<sup>4</sup> Extensive research in the records of the New Jersey Continentals mirrored the other findings.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of who joined the patriot army remains a controversial one. The citizen-soldier school surely rests on firm ground for the period 1775-76. Their opponents have identified a distinctly different group for the rest of the war, 1777-83.<sup>6</sup> However, their dismissal of these clearly

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(1980):135-48; and Robert Middlekauf, The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789, The Oxford History of the United States, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 511.

<sup>3</sup>Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," William and Mary College Quarterly, 3rd ser., 30 (January 1973):124-25.

<sup>4</sup>John R. Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," Proceedings of the Sixth Military History Symposium: Military History of the American Revolution, ed. Stanley J. Underdal (Washington, D.C.: Office of Air Force History; HQ, U.S.A.F.; and U.S.A.F. Academy, 1976), p. 161.

<sup>5</sup>Mark E. Lender, "The Enlisted Line: The Continental Line of New Jersey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1975), pp. iii, 112-15, 118-24, 297-300; Mark E. Lender, The New Jersey Soldier, New Jersey's Revolutionary Experience Series, no. 5, ed. Larry R. Gerlack (Trenton: N.J. Historical Commission, 1975), pp. 17-18; and Mark E. Lender, "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade: The Continental Line as an American Standing Army," in The Military in America from the Colonial Era to the Present, ed. Peter Karsten (New York: Free Press, 1980), pp. 27-44.

<sup>6</sup>James Kirby Martin, "A 'Most Undisciplined, Profligate Crew': Protest and Defiance in the Continental Ranks, 1776-1783," in Arms and Independence: The Military Character of the American Revolution, ed. Peter J. Albert and Ronald

poorer sort as mere outcasts of American society may yet prove to be a hasty generalization.

Historian Fred Anderson may have suggested a partial explanation. He believed that a significant recruiting pool had existed in colonial America during the French and Indian War consisting of males available for military service due to a temporary state of prolonged dependence upon family.<sup>7</sup> Such a theory could provide additional insight into the origins of patriot soldiers. Enlistees in this category were not necessarily society's dregs but only temporarily without status.

The thrust of this subchapter has been to demonstrate the superficiality of what little comparative analysis has taken place in the historiography of the Continental Army.

#### Terms of Service

There has been virtually no effort to compare and contrast the American recruiting system with those of other armies, as well as scant analysis of the actual patriot recruiting process.

Probably the most controversial topic was length of service. Military officers and their supporters in Congress vociferously decried the use of short enlistments.

Washington, of course, was very outspoken in his

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Hoffman, *Perspectives on the American Revolution* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), pp. 123-26 mentions this dichotomy.

<sup>7</sup>Fred Anderson, *A People's Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), pp. 28, 33.

denunciation of such practices. On 20 August 1780 he reminisced, ". . . the system appears to have been pernicious beyond description, . . ." He added that all of the army's misfortunes had originated from these short enlistments. He firmly believed that a "permanent [i.e. long-service] army" created at the beginning of the struggle would have drastically altered the course of the war by eliminating the liabilities experienced between 1775-78.<sup>8</sup> On the eighth of the same month Nathaniel Peabody, a member of Congress, wrote to Josiah Bartlett:

For all this enormous toil and expence, What have we in return? A few raw undisciplin'd troops raised for a short period; by the time they are inured to a Camp life, And with great fatigue to the officers, and expence to the United States, a little disciplin'd, and become in a degree martialists, Capable of rendering Service, the terms for which they inlisted expire!<sup>9</sup>

Ostensibly, the patriots learned their lesson early in the war. The armies of 1775 and 1776 were short-term forces serving only one year -- with predictable results in action. These green troops simply could not compete with British and German professionals on the field of battle. Congress finally relented and in June 1776 began raising units with

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<sup>8</sup>George Washington, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799, 39 vols., ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1931-44), 19:408.

<sup>9</sup>E. C. Burnett, ed., Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, 8 vols., Papers of the Department of Historical Research, no. 299, ed. J. Franklin Jameson (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1921-36; reprint ed., Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1963), 5:362.

enlistment terms of three years or the duration of the war, although haphazardly.<sup>10</sup>

Congress attempted to standardize enlistments on 16 September when it passed the famous "eighty-eight battalion resolve." All troops were expected to sign up for the duration of the war. This position weakened with the realization that many men would be hesitant to join the army for an indefinite period of time. Hence, Congress approved enlistment terms of three years as well on 12 November.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, Congress possessed very limited control over the recruiting service. The states established operating procedures. Variations on war-duration and three-year terms of service in fact continued right up to war's end. The deteriorating economic conditions of the national government during the later war years hurt recruiters' attempts to find men willing to sign up for long periods of time.

How successful were the patriots in recruiting a long-service army for the duration of the war? Records are scattered and inconsistent. They did not cover the period

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<sup>10</sup>Worthington Chauncey Ford et al., eds., Journals of the Continental Congress, 34 vols. (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1904-37; reprint ed. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1968), 5:471, 486-88.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 5:762-63; 6:945. Congress' concern over the willingness of men to enlist for an indefinite period is further evidence in support of a modified Anderson thesis as discussed on pages five and six.

1777-83 uniformly. Reports were not standardized in format even for a particular year.<sup>12</sup>

The following series of ten tables analyzes the terms of service of Continentals in the main army at different unit levels. Table 2-1 reflects the data on the 324 soldiers in Jackson's Regiment sometime in 1778. Only 4 men or 1.23 percent were serving a fixed term less than three years while 275 or 84.88 percent had signed up for three years and 45 or 13.89 percent were war-duration recruits. A troop return depicted in Table 2-2 dated 27 October 1778 tallied 4,380 enlisted men who would be leaving the army by the spring due to short enlistments. This figure represented 14.22 percent of Washington's total enlisted infantry strength in the main army of 30,812.

A breakdown of 380 Sixth Massachusetts troops on 23 September 1779 shown in Table 2-3 tallied only 77 or 20.26 percent war-duration men and 52 or 13.68 percent nine-months' recruits. The remaining 251 or 66.05 percent had signed on for three years but 241 or 63.42 percent of them were due to leave the service within the first six months of 1780. This latter statistic reflected the expiring enlistments of the initial group of three-years' men. Table 2-4 tabulates the results of a survey of the eight regiments of Pennsylvania soldiers and their terms of

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<sup>12</sup>This lack of uniformity did not necessarily indicate a lack of professionalism. Officers clearly submitted reports to provide a specific type of information at a given time.

service as of 15 October 1779. No less than 2,360 or 92.19 percent of the 2,560 had signed up for the war. Table 2-5 reflects the situation two months later in Stark's Brigade of four regiments on 20 December. Of 1,210 men 406 or 33.55 percent were war-duration enlistees. The rest were all serving a fixed term: 714 or 59.01 percent were due to leave the army in 1780 and 90 or 7.44 percent in 1781.

Table 2-6 shows the breakdown of enlistments in the main army of 20,191 enlisted men on 29 February 1780. An impressive 12,510 or 61.96 percent had joined for the war. The remainder were serving fixed terms which expired between 1780-82. The majority were due to leave in 1780, 6,728 or 33.32 percent of the total force. This approaching loss of one-third of the army also reflected the expiration of the first group of three years' men.

Table 2-7 is a breakdown of eleven regiments of the Pennsylvania Line on 13 May 1780. An overwhelming 2,834 or 98.85 percent of the men were serving war-duration enlistments. Table 2-8 tabulates the obligations of 21,680 men in the main army nine days later. A sizable 62.74 percent had signed up for the war. However, another 7,241 or 33.40 percent would be out of the army by 29 September; 836 or 3.86 percent were serving a fixed term after the twenty-ninth.

Table 2-9 shows the situation in the Fourth Massachusetts Regiment with 390 men on 26 August 1781. The unit had 181 or 46.41 percent war-duration recruits.

TABLE 2-1

## TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, [1778]

## JACKSON'S REGIMENT

<u>Company</u>	<u>Fixed Term ( &lt; 3 Years)</u>	<u>Fixed Term ( 3 Years)</u>	<u>War Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
1	1	50	11	62
2	0	44	8	52
4	3	47	2	52
6	0	49	5	54
7	0	43	10	53
8	<u>0</u>	<u>42</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>51</u>
Total	4	275	45	324
Percent	(1.23)	(84.88)	(13.89)	

SOURCE: Henry Jackson Papers, Library of Congress,  
Washington, D.C.

TABLE 2-2

## TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 27 OCTOBER 1778

## MAIN ARMY

	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(&lt; 3 Years)</u>	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(3 Years)</u>	<u>War</u> <u>Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
N.H.	27			
Mass.	1,172			
R.I.		No return available		
Ct.	212			
N.Y.	313			
N.J.		No return available		
Pa.		All troops enlisted for the war		
Del.	All troops enlisted for the war or three years			
Md.	426			
Va.	796			
N.C.	733			
9-Months' Men	<u>701</u> (two regiments)			
Total	4,380	?	?	30,812
Percent	(14.22)			

SOURCES: "Return of the number of Men whose term of Service will expire between this time and the Spring," Microfilms Publications M247, Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, 168/152/6/431, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Charles H. Lesser, ed., The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army, Clements Library Bicentennial Studies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 89-90. References to the Papers of the Continental Congress cite roll/item/volume/page. Many do not have a volume number.

TABLE 2-3

TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 23 SEPTEMBER 1779

## SIXTH MASSACHUSETTS BATTALION

	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(9 Months)</u>	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(3 Years)</u>	<u>War</u> <u>Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
	52	251	77	380
Percent	(13.68)	(66.05)	(20.26)	

SOURCE: "Return of the Sixth Massachusetts Battalion," War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C. This collection consists of documents unavailable on microfilm.

TABLE 2-4

TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 15 OCTOBER 1779  
 PENNSYLVANIA LINE (SAMPLE)

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>War Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
1st	232	256
2nd	424	452
3rd	370	394
5th	318	342
6th	215	244
7th	222	247
9th	231	255
10th	<u>348</u>	<u>370</u>
Totals	2,360	2,560
Percent	(92.19)	

SOURCE: Pennsylvania in the War of the Revolution, Battalions and Line, 1775-83, 2 vols., Pennsylvania Archives, 2nd ser., 10 and 11 (1880), 1:296.

TABLE 2-5

TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 20 DECEMBER 1779

## STARK'S BRIGADE

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>Fixed Term Expiring 1780</u>	<u>Fixed Term Expiring 1781</u>	<u>War Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
Angell's	112	0	212	324
Sherburne's	176	37	22	235
Webb's	131	27	120	278
Jackson's	<u>295</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>52</u>	<u>373</u>
Total	714	90	406	1,210
Percent	(59.10)	(7.44)	(33.55)	

SOURCE: Continental Army MSS, U.S. Army, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

TABLE 2-6

## TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 29 FEBRUARY 1780

## MAIN ARMY

	Fixed Term Ending . . .			War	Total
	<u>1780</u>	<u>1781</u>	<u>1782</u>	<u>Duration</u>	
N.H.	506	53	0	441	1,000
Mass.	2,273	44	1	1,809	4,127
R.I.	124	0	0	367	491
Ct.	1,495	75	6	1,444	3,020
N.Y.	267	12	8	1,301	1,588
N.J.	73	7	8	912	1,000
Pa.	33	5	0	2,834	3,049
Del.	0	0	0	334	334
Md.	627	201	52	1,612	2,492
Va.	<u>1,330</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1,456</u>	<u>3,090</u>
Total	6,728	409	78	12,510	20,191
Percent	(33.32)	(2.02)	(0.39)	(61.96)	

SOURCE: Papers of the Continental Congress, 46/39/1/51. Brodhead's Regiment (Pennsylvania) and Gibson's Regiment (Virginia) were counted only in the total column in this report.

TABLE 2-7

TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 13 MAY 1780  
 PENNSYLVANIA LINE (SAMPLE)

<u>Regiment</u>	<u>War Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
1st	250	252
2nd	427	428
3rd	346	347
4th	213	217
5th	266	270
6th	212	218
7th	220	224
8th	?	(182)
9th	211	211
10th	345	345
11th	<u>344</u>	<u>344</u>
Total	2,834	2,867 (3,049)
Percent	(98.85)	

SOURCE: Pennsylvania in the War of the Revolution,  
 1:297.

TABLE 2-8

## TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 22 MAY 1780

## MAIN ARMY

	<u>Fixed Term before</u> <u>29 Sept. 1780</u>	<u>Fixed Term after</u> <u>29 Sept. 1780</u>	<u>War</u> <u>Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
N.H.	518	60	459	1,037
Mass.	2,578	132	1,936	4,646
R.I.	139	17	377	533
Ct.	1,737	139	1,760	3,636
N.Y.	337	31	1,487	1,855
N.J.	105	15	1,019	1,139
Pa.	29	6	3,094	3,129
Del.	0	0	345	345
Md.	634	255	1,670	2,559
Va.	<u>1,164</u>	<u>181</u>	<u>1,456</u>	<u>2,801</u>
Totals	7,241	836	13,603	21,680
Percent	(33.40)	(3.86)	(62.74)	

SOURCE: "Return of the non-commissioned officers & privates engaged to serve to the 29th of September inclusive, and to fixed periods beyond the last day of September next, and during the war, distinguishing those serving in the State Lines -- In the additional Corps of Infantry The Corps of Cavalry -- the Corps of Artillery and the Artificers engaged to serve during the war -- Extracted from returns made previous to the first of January last, together with a return of the number of men which have died, deserted &c since --," Papers of the Continental Congress, 46/39/1/225.

TABLE 2-9

TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 26 AUGUST 1781

## FOURTH MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT

<u>Fixed Term Expiring</u> <u>Oct '81-July '82</u>	<u>Fixed Term Expiring</u> <u>After July '82</u>	<u>War</u> <u>Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
8	201	181	390
Percent (2.05)	(51.54)	(46.41)	

SOURCE: William Shepard Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

TABLE 2-10

## TERMS OF SERVICE, CONTINENTAL INFANTRY, 1782

## THIRTEENTH MASSACHUSETTS REGIMENT (SAMPLE)

	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(&lt; 3 Years)</u>	<u>Fixed Term</u> <u>(3 Years)</u>	<u>War</u> <u>Duration</u>	<u>Total</u>
Smith's Company	17	22	21	60
Percent	(28.33)	(36.67)	(35.00)	

SOURCE: Ebenezer Smith Account Book, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Only 8 men or 2.05 percent were serving a fixed term which expired between October 1781 and July 1782 and the terms of 201 or 51.54 percent would expire after July 1782. Finally, Table 2-10 tallies the men's obligations in a company of the Thirteenth Massachusetts Regiment. War-duration recruits totaled 21 or 35.00 percent of the 60 men. Another 22 or 36.67 percent were on three-year terms and 17 or 28.33 percent on shorter terms of service.

This data is far from conclusive. However, several tentative conclusions are possible. Nothing need be said for the early war period, 1775-76. All soldiers were serving one-year terms or less. There was a trend in the later war years for enlisting increasing numbers of war-duration recruits and three-years' men. One can surmise so based on the figures for 1778. The data is clear for 1780 when some two-thirds of the main army were war-duration troops. The Middle Atlantic states accounted for the overwhelming majority of these soldiers, especially Pennsylvania. Two key New England states, Massachusetts and Connecticut, recruited large numbers of troops for fixed terms, including short ones. Virginia fell between these two extremes.

Short enlistments became the "quick fix" of the states which expected to raise more troops quickly. For example, on 19 April 1779 John Fell, a member of Congress, recorded in his diary that Rhode Island intended to raise another

1500 men but for one year.<sup>13</sup> In December surgeon James Thacher of the Massachusetts Line expected few men to reenlist, and those for terms of nine months to a year.<sup>14</sup>

Massachusetts strove to raise its quota of men to fill the reorganized line regiments in June 1780. On the fifth and twenty-third proclamations announced the need to enlist these troops essentially by any method which showed results, but for six months' service.<sup>15</sup> Replacements were not forthcoming by October. Congress stated that if they still were not by the first of December, then the states could reduce the proposed terms of service to a minimum of one year.<sup>16</sup> Washington informed Gates and Brig. Gen. Peter Muhlenberg on 18 July 1781 that Virginia Governor Thomas Jefferson had a plan to raise another five thousand men for eighteen months' service.<sup>17</sup> Joseph Reed wrote to Washington on the same day on behalf of the Pennsylvania legislature that his state had obtained no less than 2,700 men in addition to 600 riflemen -- also for eighteen-month terms.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Burnett, Letters, 4:164.

<sup>14</sup>James Thacher, M.D. A Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War, from 1775-1783, 2nd ed. (Boston: Cottons & Barnard, 1827), p. 178.

<sup>15</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, 22/11/109; 88/74/141.

<sup>16</sup>Ford, Journals, 18:895.

<sup>17</sup>Washington, Writings, 19:196-97.

<sup>18</sup>Letter, 18 July 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of Continentals after 1776 were serving terms for the duration of the war or three years, the result of determined efforts on the part of the patriot leadership. For example, Maj. Gen. William Heath warned his recruiters that all men should sign up for three years or the war and should not presume to join the army for less time. Three years later he chastized the officers in certain regiments for "various practices" used to convince the three-years' men to reenlist for the war.<sup>19</sup>

Short enlistments did hurt unit cohesion and aggravated the difficulties in formulating campaign plans. But historians must turn elsewhere for the major problems with the recruiting system.

#### The Bounty War

Historians of the American Revolution rarely fail to mention the use of bounties. But there has been no comprehensive analysis of their spiraling cost. The importance of these incentives lies in the counterproductive competition which caused lasting damage in the recruiting service.

The states desperately sought to attract suitable recruits with enticements. Congress too conceded the need to offer cash bounties and land grants, sometimes a blanket or "suit of clothes" as well. For example, one company

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<sup>19</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 25 May 1778 & 12 August 1781, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

commander recorded twenty coats, twenty-three hats, twenty-four pairs of breeches, fifty-one shirts, forty-eight frocks, forty-three pairs of overalls and stockings, and forty-seven pairs of shoes for twenty-four of his soldiers in the form of bounties.<sup>20</sup>

As early as July 1775 men in one regiment were reenlisting in another based on promises of leave or monetary benefits. Complaints immediately began to flow into Army Headquarters.<sup>21</sup> Congress approved a ten-dollar bounty for three-year recruits and the additional rifle companies in June 1776.<sup>22</sup> The amount rose to twenty dollars in September; war-duration enlistees also received one hundred acres. Then in October Congress added further inducements. New soldiers could select either a free suit of clothes or an additional twenty dollars; one blanket annually or eighteen shillings; and a pay bonus of twenty shillings paid semi-annually.<sup>23</sup>

State modifications of Congressional bounties began almost immediately and soon reached epidemic proportions.

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<sup>20</sup>Undated memo, "An Account of Cloathes Dilivered to My Company at Sundries Times for Bounties," Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, Orderly Book Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca.

<sup>21</sup>General George Washington's Headquarters, Massachusetts (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, 1748-1817, no. 15, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>22</sup>Ford, Journals, 5:486.

<sup>23</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 23/12A/1/204; 23/12A/2/35, 50, 71; 79/65/1/145.

For example, in October 1776 Maryland offered ten dollars in lieu of Congress' land grant of one hundred acres. John Hancock wrote to Maryland officials in his capacity as President of Congress on 4 November 1776 to explain the "extremely detrimental" effects of that state's substitute offer.<sup>24</sup> New Jersey issued instructions on 28 May 1777 which included a bounty of forty dollars, a suit of clothes, and a regimental coat; the last item would be forthcoming on 1 October.<sup>25</sup> Thomas Wharton, Governor of Pennsylvania, wrote Washington to inform him of his state's addition of eleven dollars to the Congressional bounty. John Francis and Francis Lightfoot Lee informed the Commander in Chief that his home state had its own twenty-dollar bounty.<sup>26</sup>

The "bounty war" attained new peaks early in 1779. South Carolina offered 500, 400, and 350 dollars to those who joined within one, two, or three months respectively. After that time, the bounty was one hundred dollars.<sup>27</sup> On 27 January Congress authorized Washington to issue bounties

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 23/12A/2/57, 84/70/59, 79.

<sup>25</sup>Microfilms Publications M859, Miscellaneous Numbered Records (The Manuscript File) in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1775-1790s, 12/409, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>26</sup>Letters, 2 March and ? April 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>27</sup>"South Carolina Legislative Enactments," 4-29 January 1779, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

up to two hundred dollars.<sup>28</sup> Congress, however, rescinded this authority on 9 March, substituting two hundred dollars to war-duration recruits.<sup>29</sup>

Congress also tried to reenlist Continentals whose terms of service were about to expire. If a soldier was due to leave the service by 30 June and he signed on again, he would receive two hundred dollars; if after 30 June, one hundred dollars.<sup>30</sup> One army source reported Congress' terms as four hundred dollars to any soldier who reenlisted for the war and a ten-dollar bonus per man to the officer who signed him up.<sup>31</sup>

The states maintained keen competition in March and April. Virginia dangled four hundred dollars and three hundred acres in front of potential war-duration recruits. North Carolina offered three hundred dollars to any soldier who would reenlist for at least one more year. Rhode Island expended two hundred dollars, a suit of clothes, and a six-pound monthly bonus just to raise some one-year men.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ford, Journals, 13:108.

<sup>29</sup>Microfilms Publications M853, Numbered Record Books Concerning Military Operations and Service, Pay, and Settlement of Accounts, and Supplies in the War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, 1775-1790s, 28/12-13, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 28/298-99.

<sup>31</sup>Nathaniel Webb Orderly Book, 8 February 1778, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

<sup>32</sup>Burnett, Letters, 4:110-11, 164.

The trend continued into 1780. A Connecticut circular of 30 June pledged an immediate four-pound bounty to anyone who signed up within the next three days. In July 1780 Maryland added fifty acres, a free suit of clothes, and no taxes on the land until four years after discharge.<sup>33</sup> South Carolina legislators went out of control. By September 1779 they had raised the bounty to a flat five hundred dollars and one hundred acres. Still the state insisted on raising the cost of attracting recruits yet further. In 1782 the Legislature attempted to raise thirteen hundred troops for three years or the war. That state went so far as to offer "one sound Negro," aged ten to forty, for each year of service. The following year South Carolina offered ten guineas to all three-year enlistees. Securing a volunteer netted a reward of three guineas.<sup>34</sup>

State officials understood that this bounty war was counter productive but they disagreed on the solution. Delaware legislators had suggested as early as 2 June 1777 to divide the country into recruiting districts and to limit the bounty to a flat eight pounds. The New Jersey Assembly voiced its firm conviction in December 1779 that there must be "no general and unilateral provisions" regarding bounties to bind all the states. They viewed the issue as an

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<sup>33</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 80/66/2/166, 46/39/3/478.

<sup>34</sup>"South Carolina Legislative Enactments," 8 January-26 February 1782 and 6 January-16 March 1783.

economic one and such factors varied among the different regions.<sup>35</sup> On 7 December 1779 Congress asked all states to abolish their individual bounty offers, repeating the plea on 24 January 1780 and acting by keeping only a fifty-dollar bounty with a two-dollar bonus to war-duration recruits.<sup>36</sup>

Such practices caused severe resentment in the ranks. "Old timers" were envious of the impressive bonuses collected by newcomers. Some of the more enterprising deserted to rejoin the army and thus collect the latest emoluments. Congress attempted to appease them by giving all soldiers who had joined the army prior to 23 January 1779 a bonus of one hundred dollars.<sup>37</sup> Many still became professional bounty jumpers, a profitable occupation if one could avoid discovery and almost-certain execution.

Maj. Gen. Alexander McDougall castigated these individuals. He emphasized that such conduct was a general court martial offense "of the most Enormous, flagrant nature" and the culprits could expect the death penalty upon conviction.<sup>38</sup> A brigade court martial tried a deserter for absconding with some four thousand dollars in multiple

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<sup>35</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 82/68/515, 151/138/2/128.

<sup>36</sup>Ford, Journals, 15:1358; 16:82; 18:895.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 14:758.

<sup>38</sup>After Orders, 6 March 1777, Everett Orderly Book, Orderly Book Collection, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

bounty payments.<sup>39</sup> Even honest men were tempted to take advantage of the situation. Washington explained to a Congressional Committee in 1779 that those who contemplated enlisting saw fit to delay since they greedily expected to profit from the bounty competition.<sup>40</sup> Surgeon Thacher echoed the veterans' laments on 29 May 1780 that new soldiers had received ten times the bounty given to the gristled professionals still in the ranks.<sup>41</sup>

Historians have devoted little attention as well to the administrative burden and attendant frustrations these constantly-fluctuating bonuses thrust upon company officers and sergeants. For example, one orderly book contained papers dating across a stretch of forty-four months.<sup>42</sup> In many cases company commanders and subordinates had to do double work. For example, the soldiers of Huntington's and Webb's Regiments once received only a partial payment of the bounty due them.<sup>43</sup> Heath reported that Massachusetts was giving a three-hundred-dollar bonus to its war-duration men, of which only one-third was currently on hand.<sup>44</sup> The entire

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<sup>39</sup>Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book, 7 September 1780, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>40</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 187/169/6/339.

<sup>41</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 193.

<sup>42</sup>Receipts, 3 June 1777-9 February 1781, Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book.

<sup>43</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 10 July 1779, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>44</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 29 January 1780.

process would have to be repeated in order to pay the balance.

The bounty war was extremely counter productive on its own. Combined with the declining condition of patriot finances, it crippled the recruiting efforts of the Continental Army. The bounty war encouraged desertion, already the bane of eighteenth-century armies. Moreover, it also made short enlistments more attractive. The significant degree of patriot success in signing on large numbers of war-duration and three-years' men in the midst of this legislative anarchy was truly a major accomplishment.

"Looking for a Few, Good Men"<sup>45</sup>

The thirteen states in fact organized virtually every unit established by Congress in the quotas allocated to each of them.<sup>46</sup> The issue in this discussion is not the number of units but rather the size of those units. Washington's correspondence is replete with pleas for the states to fill up their regiments according to Congressional regulations. His cries seemingly fell on apathetic or helpless ears. The Commander in Chief's line regiments rarely attained authorized strength figures.

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<sup>45</sup>The phrase is a current U. S. Marine Corps recruiting slogan.

<sup>46</sup>See Wright, The Continental Army for specifics. He traces all regiments in excruciating detail throughout the book.

The inability of the Continentals to secure sufficient men to bring their units up to strength required some radical solutions. The patriots who so dreaded the perceived threat posed by their regular army resorted to a draft. The reader should bear in mind that the temperament of the Age of Reason and mercantilism frowned upon conscription. It disrupted a civilian populace who could otherwise make a sound economic contribution to society. The British rarely resorted to the press gang. Only Russia depended upon conscription routinely to raise her army; Prussia and the various German states, occasionally and most reluctantly so with many allowances for exemptions. None of the other armies in America used a draft to obtain recruits.<sup>47</sup>

The draft was extremely unpopular. Each state established its own procedure. Selectees usually came from established militia units and not society at large. State officials set a quota for a particular area. Local officials in turn spread their quota among the available militia units. The decision to draft also resulted in the widespread use of substitutes, yet another impediment to sound recruiting practices.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>"Drafting" in the British Army defined another practice. It is discussed below.

<sup>48</sup>Higginbotham, War of American Independence, pp. 392-93 contains a very brief explanation of the draft.

For example, a New Jersey Act dated 28 May 1777 delegated the task of acquiring recruits to local justices of the peace and militia field officers. Officials divided the militia into "classes," i.e. groups of eighteen and held a review. If volunteers were not forthcoming, one draftee would come from each class.<sup>49</sup> The militia draft system invariably functioned poorly. Pennsylvania officers from the Continental Line had complained in October 1777 to Congress that citizens spent so much money on hiring substitutes that none remained to pay bounties to volunteers.<sup>50</sup> The ever-vocal Wayne informed Thomas Wharton, Governor of Pennsylvania that:

Your militia act allowing Substitutes, and to whom is given so enormous a bounty, will of itself in a short time reduce you more than all the other accumulated expenses of the war and unless immediately put a stop to, will inevitably prevent your continental regiments from Recruiting a single man; . . .<sup>51</sup>

A Board of War despatch dated 27 November echoed these sentiments precisely. It added that the use of substitutes not only hurt the recruiting service but also encouraged desertion.<sup>52</sup>

In spite of such strictures, the hiring of substitutes continued unabated. George Lux wrote from Baltimore to his

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<sup>49</sup>The Manuscript File, 12/409.

<sup>50</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 51/41/7/169.

<sup>51</sup>Letter, 21 November 1777, Wayne Papers, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>52</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 157/147/1/399.

friend Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene on 28 April 1778 that Maryland politicians would allow its citizens to hire substitutes before resorting to a draft.<sup>53</sup> The Virginia General Assembly's draft law of 1780 levied 1/15 of the males in the militia aged eighteen through forty-nine except those already in the field or on the frontier. However, there were numerous provisions to avoid service. Quakers, Mennonites, and draftees could hire substitutes. A militia unit could form a monetary fund and hire a substitute. A draftee could earn exemption by apprehending and turning in a deserter. The Assembly even threatened citizens convicted of misbehavior with drafting to the Continentals to serve for the duration of the war. Likewise, the efforts of Massachusetts to sign up soldiers for Continental service from existing militia units in June 1780 allowed for exemptions. The legislation encouraged volunteers, drawings by lot, and a draft.<sup>54</sup>

Debate was inevitable over the widening net cast by recruiters. Arguments raged pro and con over the relative advantages and disadvantages of accepting certain men. At one time or another the Continentals accepted British and German deserters, French Canadians, and blacks.

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<sup>53</sup>Nathanael Greene, The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, 5 vols., ed. Richard K. Showman (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976), 3:365.

<sup>54</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 22/11/109, 85/71/1/401-4, 88/74/141.

The disagreement over the relative merits and disadvantages of accepting deserters was especially sharp. The Commander in Chief's views were well known. His recruiting instructions of 13 January 1777 prohibited the enlistment of British deserters and "the disaffected." His principal criticism of the Pennsylvania Line on 10 April 1778 was that their recruiters accepted too many deserters into the ranks. On 19 September he told the Board of War that he was "decisively of Opinion against it."<sup>55</sup> Yet that same year an anonymous individual cited the previous practice of Frederick the Great to demonstrate that there was nothing wrong with the recruitment of deserters. Indeed, the country got a better soldier. He was already trained and joined the army fully equipped. Finally, he had to fight well lest he suffer capture and death. The writer saw nothing wrong with the use of deserters provided that officers treated them well and maintained tight discipline.<sup>56</sup> Rhode Island's directives to its recruiters in July 1780 specifically excluded deserters.<sup>57</sup> Congress, however, never succeeded in establishing a single policy.

Prisoners of war were quite literally a captive audience and received considerable attention from recruiters.

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<sup>55</sup>Washington, Writings, 7:7-8, 11:238-39; 12:470.

<sup>56</sup>"Thoughts about the Objectives made against Inlisting Deserters of the Enemy," Papers of the Continental Congress, 157/147/1/549.

<sup>57</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 22/11/136.

Proponents could also argue that such men made good soldiers since they were trained and used to military life.

Washington nonetheless objected to the recruitment of prisoners to the Board of War on 30 November 1776. He argued that enemy prisoners made poor soldiers. They were afraid of falling into the hands of their prior employer and communicated that fear to other soldiers. Moreover, they were prone to desert to get back to the enemy with intelligence details of what they had seen. Even so he authorized Capt. Nicholas Dietrich, Baron de Ottendorf, to sign up Germans for three-year terms on 2 December.<sup>58</sup>

The scheme was generally not a success. Some German prisoners even wrote to Congress on 19 November 1778 to protest their ineffective utilization.<sup>59</sup> One soldier, a former indentured servant, claimed that love of this new country had motivated him to join Ottendorff's Corps. However, once in action he surrendered and joined a Hessian grenadier battalion in order to be able to return to his homeland. Even upon capture, he escaped and finished his service with the same German unit as a surgeon.<sup>60</sup>

The patriots enjoyed little better success with British prisoners. Word soon spread from command to command that

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<sup>58</sup>Washington, Writings, 6:317, 324.

<sup>59</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 57/43/89-90, 92.

<sup>60</sup>Johann Carl Buettner, Narrative of Johann Carl Buettner, Heartman's Historical Series, No. 1 (New York: Charles Fred Heartman, n.d.), pp. 41, 43-45, 52-53, 60-61.

the Commander in Chief wanted neither deserters nor prisoners in the Continental Army. Twice in a single month Heath told his recruiters not to sign up British prisoners and deserters.<sup>61</sup>

One interesting aspect of U. S. Army history is the fact that the Continental Army integrated blacks in its units. A segregated army belonged to a future age. However, Congress decreed on 16 January 1776 that free blacks previously in the service could reenlist; recruiters could accept no others.<sup>62</sup> The states, however, continued to sign up blacks as they pleased, especially in New England.<sup>63</sup>

The result of all these efforts was still a perennially understrength army. For example, in five weeks Varnum's Brigade at Valley Forge declined from 1,463 effective rank and file to 1,274, yet only 19 recruits came in.<sup>64</sup> The heart of Washington's main army on 30 May 1778, just before the Monmouth campaign, consisted of sixty-nine infantry regiments in seventeen brigades. According to the Congressional reorganization of 27 May 1778 these units

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<sup>61</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 1 and 25 March 1778.

<sup>62</sup>Ford, Journals, 4:60. For further details regarding blacks see Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History & Culture, 1961).

<sup>63</sup>For example, the famous First Rhode Island regiment in the 1780s was almost 100 percent black.

<sup>64</sup>Strength reports, 22 December 1777-31 January 1778, Papers, 1777-80 of James M. Varnum and John Stark, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

should have deployed 34,776 rank and file.<sup>65</sup> They instead had 18,363 rank and file or 55.88 percent of stipulated strength.<sup>66</sup> There was in fact no time to implement this latest organizational change until after the march through New Jersey. The sixty-nine regiments should have fielded 44,160 rank and file according to the Congressional guidelines of 4 November 1776, reducing them to 44.00 percent of authorized strength.<sup>67</sup>

The picture was no better later in the war. The main army's return for July 1781, when Washington soon needed to make major strategic decisions, listed only twenty-two regiments in seven brigades as the fighting core. These units should have fielded 13,464 rank and file in accordance with the major Congressional reorganization and reduction of the army approved on 21 October 1780 and effective 1 January 1781.<sup>68</sup> They in fact deployed 6,922 or 51.41 percent of authorized strength.<sup>69</sup> This condition followed a net increase of 2,384 men recruited by New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut between 1

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<sup>65</sup>Ford, Journals, 11:538-39.

<sup>66</sup>Charles H. Lesser, ed. The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army, Clements Library Bicentennial Studies (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 68-69.

<sup>67</sup>Ford, Journals, 4:322.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 18:959-60.

<sup>69</sup>Lesser, Sinews of Independence, pp. 206-7.

January and 1 June.<sup>70</sup> On 21 August Washington bemoaned to the Committee of Conference from Congress that a captured document of the enemy boasted of being able to field more Americans in the loyalists' Provincial Corps alone than the rebels had in the Continentals.<sup>71</sup>

The patriots' inability to maintain their line units up to strength was a major failing of their war effort throughout the duration of the conflict. It affected every aspect of operations. Washington's inability to assault New York City from July 1778 to war's end, even with French assistance, rested primarily on the paltry size of the main army with its skeleton regiments. The Commander in Chief also had to weigh very carefully any decision to reinforce another department with detachments from his meager forces. The Southern Department in particular drained the main army of valuable troops in 1780-81. The tactical ramifications were as serious. Victory in battle did not necessarily go to the bigger battalion. However, the small Continental line regiments wielded reduced combat power. Their ability to absorb casualties and to continue the fight was questionable. One result was the amalgamation of understrength regiments and the commensurate loss of unit cohesion and morale.

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<sup>70</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 171/152/10/137.

<sup>71</sup>Washington, Writings, 23:30.

In this sense the Continental Army's recruiting service failed. There are several likely, logical explanations. The unpopularity of service in the regulars and the steady decline of patriot finances were formidable obstacles for recruiters to overcome. Moreover, in a society marked by a labor shortage and virtual subsistence agriculture the troop quotas set by Congress were far too ambitious. The revolutionary and political role of the patriot militia necessitated significant commitments of men. Ordinary home defense duties tied down troop resources as well. Finally, the threat of Indian raids and depredations obsessed residents along the long frontier.

The numerically weak state of Continental line regiments was the most glaring example to those in the service how few Americans were willing to sacrifice for the cause -- at least in their eyes. Forced amalgamations of sadly-understrength battalions were frustrating experiences. The perceived refusal of society at large to support the army with additional manpower was a powerful fuel to the fire of civil-military hostility and alienation.

#### The Recruiting Service

Recruiting duty was a regimental responsibility. Commanders detached officers to return to their native state to sign on additional men. As early as 10 July 1775 superiors required colonels to send away one subaltern per

company immediately.<sup>72</sup> On 31 March 1777 Heath detached a subaltern and a sergeant per company for recruiting duty.<sup>73</sup> The Connecticut units sent one subaltern per brigade on 1 May 1779 for the sole purpose of meeting recruits en route to camp.<sup>74</sup> Two colonels dallied five days awaiting the arrival of militia drafts.<sup>75</sup> Recruiting duty could absent an officer from his unit for long periods of time. The job was not necessarily either desired or rewarding. Capt. Alexander Graydon of the Third Pennsylvania commented how he used to canvass local taverns to find potential recruits. He recalled that many characters drank freely at government expense with no intention of signing up. He also mentioned a large brute who instigated a brawl with the entire recruiting party. Graydon himself laid low the miscreant with a blow to the head. The fellow was considerably changed in behavior afterwards.<sup>76</sup>

The recruiting officers received considerable attention themselves. Stories abounded of their slipshod conduct and outright peculation. They received a mere \$2 2/3 weekly for

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<sup>72</sup>Numbered Record Books, 12/21.

<sup>73</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 31 March 1777.

<sup>74</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 1 May 1779, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisc.

<sup>75</sup>Jonathan Lawrence Diaries and Transcripts, 15 and 19 May 1777, New York State Library, Albany, N.Y.

<sup>76</sup>Alexander Graydon, Alexander Graydon's Memoirs of His Own Time, ed. John Stockton Little (Philadelphia: Lindsey & Blakiston, 1846; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1969), pp. 133-34.

subsistence. Recruits were allowed \$1 if in quarters or \$1 2/3 if on the march.<sup>77</sup> On 14 April 1777 Congress exhorted the states to investigate their recruiting officers and take action as needed. By the twenty-ninth Congress wanted to know the names of all recruiters and the sums forwarded to them. If recruiting officers failed to reconcile their accounts with the muster master or his deputy within a month, they faced court martial. Congress authorized pay masters and their deputies on 23 July 1777 to advance monies to officers who could produce a copy of their formal appointment as recruiters. They then had to produce ten recruits and verify the expenditures for subsistence and bounties; otherwise, pay masters would disburse no additional funding. Congress issued similar pronouncements on 6 February 1778, including the threat of court martial for failure to reconcile accounts.<sup>78</sup> The threat became reality for an ensign of Greaton's Regiment. Convicted of signing up soldiers under several assumed names and collecting their bounties, the officer was sentenced to death.<sup>79</sup>

The Commander in Chief wanted to see the army out of the recruiting business altogether. He told a Congressional

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<sup>77</sup>The Manuscript File, 111/31705.

<sup>78</sup>Ford, Journals, 7:261, 309; 8:576; 10:1345-46.

<sup>79</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 6 May 1778.

Committee on 19 July 1777 that the individual states should delegate all functions to local, reliable officials.<sup>80</sup>

Col. Lewis Nicola recommended drastic reforms of the recruiting service in 1778. He suggested the use of officers excess to an organization for recruiting duty. He pressed for the recruitment of men for the army in general and not by regiment. He also advised the establishment of a central office collocated with Congress to oversee all recruiting affairs.<sup>81</sup> The Board of War echoed the need for a single recruiting system for the country on 18 February 1780.<sup>82</sup>

A comprehensive reform of the recruiting service was beyond the ability of a Congress struggling to maintain a voice in a highly-decentralized process. The competition among states continued. Washington formally forbade the enlistment of men from one state into a regiment from another on 1 February 1781.<sup>83</sup> This attempt at reducing counterproductive rivalry only served to perpetuate the existence of thirteen different state agencies and failed to resolve all problems. Greene ordered a Court of Enquiry to investigate some dispirited soldiers recently joined the

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<sup>80</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:440.

<sup>81</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 74/60/359.

<sup>82</sup>Ford, Journals, 16:248.

<sup>83</sup>Numbered Record Books, 49/42.

North Carolina Line who claimed that they in fact should belong to the Virginia Line.<sup>84</sup>

Problems continued. Wayne's mother, Elizabeth, wrote her son on 14 February 1779 to plead the cause of her neighbor's son, Samuel Harry. Some two years ago a recruiting sergeant had slipped him some money while he was asleep and claimed that Harry had formally enlisted by accepting the cash. The same noncommissioned officer had now returned to insist on the legitimacy of the enlistment.<sup>85</sup>

Congress issued a standardized form as early as the first year of the war; unit orderly books recorded its receipt.<sup>86</sup> Recruiters were expected to use these forms, usually published but sometimes hand printed, faithfully. They filled in the blanks with a recruit's name, his residence, the commander's name, and the date. Remaining specimens show that each state had its own stockpile. The certificate clearly spelled out the term of service, which reflected the variations discussed above. Some forms did not assign a soldier to a specific regiment but only to that

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<sup>84</sup>Major General Nathanael Greene's Orders, Southern Army, 26 October 1782, South Carolina (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, 1748-1817, no. 160, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>85</sup>Letter, 14 February 1779, Wayne Papers.

<sup>86</sup>Enclosure, November 1775, Phillip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

state's Continental Line. Later editions also had space for witnesses' signatures.<sup>87</sup>

Success could often depend upon cooperation with state authorities. For example, Wayne ordered Captain Craig of the Third Pennsylvania to Philadelphia on recruiting duty, directing him to obey the instructions of the President of Congress and to obtain funds from the county lieutenant.<sup>88</sup> Recruiters were encouraged to follow state guidelines faithfully and execute their duties in front of the local justice of the peace. Finally, recruiters would "on no account" exchange or discharge anyone after he had legally enlisted lest someone claim that he had been formally released from any obligation to serve.<sup>89</sup>

In spite of this detailed guidance disputes arose throughout the war. The most notorious was the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Line in January 1781. The state was known for its almost exclusive use of war-duration enlistments. Yet the major grievance of the soldiers was over their precise terms of service, for the war or three years. Proper documentation was lacking.<sup>90</sup> Officers dutifully recorded Washington's directive warning all of them to heed the recruiting instructions of Congress issued on 3 October

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<sup>87</sup>The Manuscript File, 1/1-49.

<sup>88</sup>Letter, 16 September 1778, Wayne Papers.

<sup>89</sup>Numbered Record Books, 48/230-32.

<sup>90</sup>Chapter Four discusses this incident in greater detail.

1780.<sup>91</sup> Problems continued. Even late in the war one may read of the necessity of convening courts of enquiry to settle the terms of service of enlisted soldiers.<sup>92</sup>

The action-loving Wayne spent considerable time writing to Wharton about the mundane details of the recruiting service. For example, Wayne sent the Governor a list of officers detached for recruiting duty who awaited the politician's orders. He suggested that the officers scour the back country in a concerted manner to find more men. The general sent more officers on such duty within a month but asked the Governor's permission to allow them to recruit throughout the state without regard to county boundaries.<sup>93</sup>

The diverse and widely-scattered recruiting system posed a real challenge to officers to ensure that new soldiers joined their regiments promptly and were properly equipped. The account books of Capt. Alexander Lawson Small and Lt. William Bradford for November 1776 reveal that they held forty-nine recruits a minimum of four weeks and a peak of sixteen weeks and two days before despatching them to their regiment.<sup>94</sup> Yet another soldier wrote that he left his home

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<sup>91</sup>General Orders, 6 February 1781, William Torrey Orderly Book, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>92</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 19 February 1782, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>93</sup>Letters, 10 February/27 March/10 April 1778, Wayne Papers.

<sup>94</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 71/58/493-94.

town and reported to his unit only twelve days later.<sup>95</sup> An ensign ordered to replace a lieutenant on the recruiting service was told to send any new recruits to the regiment suitably clothed.<sup>96</sup> Complaints in May 1777 mentioned scattered detachments on the march and officers absent from escort duty. The Commander in Chief himself deplored the shoddy execution of recruit escort duty when officers drank and gamed their way back to their regiments.<sup>97</sup> Some locals in July did not hesitate to complain of wandering recruits who appeared as the proverbial lost sheep. One group in August simply left the route of march. They had trouble keeping their eyes on the recruits along with the deserters and prisoners of war whom they were also escorting!<sup>98</sup>

Officers in camp on occasion divided newly-joined soldiers among the regiments of a single brigade for equitable distribution or even to any regiment of a particular State Line. For example, the Virginia recruits arriving at Valley Forge in April 1778 were assigned to the brigade whose officer had enlisted them. However, the recruits were permitted twenty-four hours to decide which regiment within the brigade they cared to join. This option

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<sup>95</sup>Nathaniel Cowdry Diary, 6 and 18 July 1780, New York State Library, Albany, N.Y.

<sup>96</sup>Regimental Orders, March 1777, Fourth Regiment Orderly Book.

<sup>97</sup>Extract, General Orders, ? May 1777, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>98</sup>Numbered Record Books, 16/49-50, 77.

allowed them to check if any friends were present in certain units. The senior officer of each state's Continental Line greeted new soldiers arriving in July 1780.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusions

In summary, what mattered in the long run, of course, was that the Continentals survived in spite of the maintenance of fourteen mutually-exclusive recruiting agencies. Close to dissolution on several occasions, the main army remained in the field throughout the war.

Five key points emerge from a comparison of patriot and European recruiting practices. The first is American historians' excessive emphasis on the soldiers' lowly socio-economic status. Current research has demonstrated numerous exceptions in the European armies and thus the limited applicability of the stereotype.

For example, few Englishmen desired to serve in His Majesty's regulars. Nevertheless, even the peacetime army did not resemble the stereotype. Most men were of respectable yet modest origins but had experienced some temporary or permanent displacement due to the changes ongoing within society.<sup>100</sup>

Even the despised "Hessian mercenaries" did not conform to the stereotype. The recently-published journal of Pvt.

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<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 16/47, 23/15-16.

<sup>100</sup>Sylvia B. Frey, The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 3-12 passim.

Johann Döhla from the Anspach-Bayreuth Regiment reveals a pious individual and not a wild brute of the gutter.<sup>101</sup>

Johann Gottfried Seume insinuated that he had been shanghaied into the service of Hesse Cassel. He had been a theological student. His immediate comrades included the ubiquitous prodigal son, a banker-tradesman, a fringemaker, a discharged secretary, a former monk, a steward, an ex-sergeant of Prussian hussars, and even a cashiered major.<sup>102</sup>

The French Royal Army resembled the stereotype even less. The enlisted men who went to America came from decent families. They often listed their father's craft, trade, or profession on their enlistment papers. Many came from Alsace-Lorraine.<sup>103</sup>

The second key point is that not a single army which fought the war wholly conformed to the stereotype of an armed force composed exclusively of men recruited for life. Indeed, their terms of service mirrored the Continentals.

The British Army numbered only 48,647 men on paper upon the outbreak of the war yet grew to some 110,000 by 1781.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Johann Conrad Döhla, A Hessian Diary of the American Revolution, ed. and trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990).

<sup>102</sup>Margarete Woelful, trans., "Memoirs of a Hessian Conscript: J. G. Seume's Reluctant Voyage to America," William and Mary College Quarterly, 3rd ser., 5 (October 1949): 555-56n5.

<sup>103</sup>Lee Kennett, The French Forces in America, 1780-1783, with a Foreword by Jaques Godechot, Contributions in American History, no. 65 (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1977), p. 23.

The usual enlistment for life would have been inappropriate since these additional forces faced disbandment at war's end. On 16 December 1775 legislation introduced enlistments of three years or the war, the identical terms of service in the Continentals after 1776. Impressed soldiers served for five years. The American Revolution thus transformed the composition of the line troops. Between 1775-83 an average 27 percent of the infantry consisted of war-duration or three-year recruits.<sup>105</sup>

The American Provincial Corps, the tory regular army, was as much a creature of necessity as its patriot opponent. The Corps signed up men for two years or the war.<sup>106</sup>

Not even all the German soldiers who arrived in 1776 were veterans of long service. For example, the infantry companies from Hesse Cassel contained 90 privates increased to 105 prior to embarkation.<sup>107</sup> These fifteen additional

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<sup>104</sup>Edward C. Curtis, The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution, Yale University Publications (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1926), pp. 1, 51; Robin May, The British Army in North America, Men at Arms Series, ed. Martin J. Windrow (Reading, England: Osprey Publishing, 1974), pp. 5-6.

<sup>105</sup>Charles M. Clode, The Military Forces of the Crown: Their Administration and Government, 2 vols. (London: John Murray, 1869), 1:18, 25-27; J. A. Houlding, Fit for Service: The Training of the British Army, 1715-1795 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 117-18, 127.

<sup>106</sup>Letter, Col. Beverley Robinson to John Shaw, April 1777, Manuscript Sources for Research on the American Revolution, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>107</sup>Journal of the Honourable Fusilier Regiment von Alt-Lossberg, Manuscripts of the German Forces in America, 1776-83, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

men or 14.29 percent were raw troops though serving life terms. The replacements periodically sent across the Atlantic resembled the stereotype even less. Hesse Cassel scoured the Holy Roman Empire and signed up war-duration foreigners who served in America beginning in 1777. By war's end an estimated 5,644 of 18,970 soldiers or 29.75 percent were fresh troops recruited as replacements.<sup>108</sup>

The French Royal Army again defied the stereotype. It never used life-time enlistments. Officials established the term of service at six years in 1682, increased to eight in 1762.<sup>109</sup> The majority of French troops in America were serving their first eight-year enlistment. The leavening of older soldiers was not veteran. The army was bereft of experience.<sup>110</sup>

Thus, sizable numbers of enemy soldiers possessed no greater military experience than the rebels whom they fought. Officers at times faced training and leadership hurdles every bit as challenging as the patriots; the French, secondarily so. Too many European soldiers possessed no previous idea what war was like and also lacked

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<sup>108</sup>Rodney Atwood, The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 204-5, 254. The statistics for the percentage of recruits was calculated using Atwood's figures for troop shipments to America.

<sup>109</sup>Corvisier, Armies and Societies, p. 173; Lee Kennett, The French Armies in the Seven Years' War: A Study in Military Organization and Administration (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1967), p. 72.

<sup>110</sup>Kennett, French Forces in America, p. 23.

the training which could have partially compensated for their lack of experience.

The third key point is the crippling effects of the patriot bounty war. The European armies also used bounties but only one was in effect at any one time. For example, the British started at 1 1/2 guineas.<sup>111</sup> French entrance into the war transformed its scope; the bounty rose to three pounds sterling.<sup>112</sup> It increased again in 1779 to 3 1/2 guineas plus the right to establish a business after the war anywhere desired, regardless of corporate objections.<sup>113</sup> Officials deliberately linked the shorter enlistment terms of three years or the war with high bounties.<sup>114</sup>

The fourth key point is that the "track record" of the Continental Army in maintaining unit strengths was particularly dismal, despite an enemy line of communications across three thousand miles of ocean. Between 1775-83 the British infantry averaged 80 percent of authorized strength.<sup>115</sup> This figure is still 25 to 35 percentage points higher than the examples cited above for Washington's

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<sup>111</sup>May, British Army in North America, pp. 9-10.

<sup>112</sup>Henry Belcher, The First American Civil War, 2 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1911), 1:259.

<sup>113</sup>Franklin Wickwire and Mary Wickwire, Cornwallis: The American Adventure (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), pp. 53-54.

<sup>114</sup>Richard Glover, Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army, 1795-1809 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 241; Houlding, Fit for Service, pp. 117-18.

<sup>115</sup>Houlding, Fit for Service, p. 127.

main army. The New Jersey Assembly once commented ruefully that recent tory incursions had raised six new corps and drew replacements for many more.<sup>116</sup>

The fifth key point simply emphasizes the patriot liability of excessive decentralization which amounted to waging war by committee. There were very minor differences in the recruiting services of the various forces. All relied on regimental recruiters. Only the Americans had no Inspector General of Recruiting whose writ demanded obedience and conformity. The British maintained an Inspector General of Recruiting at Chatham, close to London and the ports for overseas embarkation.<sup>117</sup> No one in the American Provincial Corps could recruit without a warrant from the British commander in chief.<sup>118</sup> A Massachusetts tory, Edward Winslow, also served as Muster Master General.

The inability of the patriots to establish efficient recruiting practices affected every aspect of operations, strategic and tactical. The patriots had plenty of regiments. But they remained skeleton formations, crippled by the bounty war and starved of replacements, thus thwarting the desires of the Commander in Chief for accomplishing some decisive action almost without exception.

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<sup>116</sup>Letter, 3 April 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>117</sup>Glover, Peninsular Preparation, p. 218.

<sup>118</sup>King's American Regiment Orderly Book, 12 December 1776 and 16, 31 March 1777, Orderly Book Collection, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

## CHAPTER THREE

## THE ENLISTED RANKS: STRUCTURE

Pay and Rations

A comparison of pay rates at first appears hopelessly complicated due to differing monetary systems and the subsequent decline of the patriot paper currency. This analysis converted all figures to a monthly rate in pounds sterling based on a thirty-day month.<sup>1</sup> The Continentals are contrasted only with the British. The soldiers of the American Provincial Corps received the same emoluments as their English comrades. The German forces also were entitled to the identical rates of pay and rations while in British employ.

A comparison of pay rates shows that the Continentals were in truth the highest-paid soldiers in the eighteenth-century. Table 3-1 illustrates this fact. An American private in 1775 earned double that of his British opponent, two pounds sterling to one. Rates were not as favorable for corporals and sergeants, but they were still advantageous. An American corporal earned an additional fourteen shillings. A sergeant only garnered a further three

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<sup>1</sup>Prior to decimalization, the pound sterling contained twenty shillings. A shilling subdivided into twelve pence. A gold guinea was worth twenty-one shillings; a silver crown, five shillings. The patriot dollar was based on the Spanish duro. Five dollars in specie equaled one pound sterling.

TABLE 3-1

## COMPARISON OF MONTHLY RATES OF PAY

(Pounds Sterling)

<u>1775 (1:1 Ratio)</u>	<u>Continental</u> s	<u>British</u>
Private	2 -/-	1 -/-
Corporal	2 4/-	1 10/-
Sergeant	2 8/-	2 5/-
<u>1778 (4:1 Ratio)</u>	<u>Continental</u> s	<u>British</u>
Private	1 13/2	1 -/-
Corporal	1 16/-	1 10/-
Sergeant	2 10/-	2 5/-

SOURCES: Washington, Writings, 4:57; Ford, Journals, 11:539; Treatise on Military Finance, p. 32; Continental Journal, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

shillings. In 1778 American pay rates were now expressed in dollars instead of pounds. Moreover, the regulation passed on 27 May that year came at a time when the depreciation of the dollar reached four to one.

But the deterioration in patriot fiscal conditions has greatly complicated an objective analysis of pay. The rampant inflation did eventually destroy the value of army pay and eventually made a mockery of the soldiers' stipulated salaries. However, this process was gradual.

For example, even at this quarter value, American soldiers still received more pay than the British. A private got over thirteen shillings two pence more; a corporal, approximately six shillings; a sergeant, five shillings. This pay advantage after the onset of a ravaging inflation hardly supports the stereotype of devastated military pay.

Historians heretofore have not just failed to highlight the vastly more generous pay scale of the patriot soldiers in specific figures. These differences were more lopsided still because pay was an even more sensitive issue among the English soldiers. The British at times not only failed to pay the troops in a timely manner, but an amazingly complex system of stoppages took away large chunks of the private's mere pound per month. Hence, he saw preciously little of his pay in actual coin.<sup>2</sup> British officials acknowledged the

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<sup>2</sup>Curtis, Organization of the British Army, pp. 22-24.

low pay and exorbitant stoppages which hurt recruiting, but reform came well after the war.<sup>3</sup> And others envied the British as the best-paid soldiers in Europe!

Patriot pay scales, conversely, represented actual monies given to the soldiers, unlike their hapless British opponents. The Americans suffered from few levies upon their pay, losing \$1 2/3 monthly to defray the cost of their clothing effective 4 November 1775 only to be granted a uniform allowance on 8 October 1776.<sup>4</sup>

Most significantly of all, the Continentals did not languish for most of their careers without pay. Over two centuries of myth surrounding the financial destitution of patriot soldiers has obscured the facts. Company officers had to maintain detailed accounts of allocated funds. Orderly books documented the receipt of monies by paymasters and their disbursement to the men.

Continental pay records show that the troops did receive the pay due them, albeit late. For example, the funds for July and August 1776 arrived in the fall.<sup>5</sup> One lieutenant paid out eighty pounds to twenty men while two more junior officers received twelve pounds each to distribute. A list of fifteen soldiers shows that they got sums between two and

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<sup>3</sup>A Treatise on Military Finance (London: n.p., 1796), pp. 13, 76-82 covers the issue in detail including post-war reforms.

<sup>4</sup>Ford, Journals, 3:322; 5:855.

<sup>5</sup>Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, 10 September 1776.

seven pounds each.<sup>6</sup> Monies to settle all arrears of pay were on hand by 25 October.<sup>7</sup> Any outstanding pay abstracts for December were requested in February 1778 so paymasters could disburse funds as soon as the money arrived.<sup>8</sup>

The onset of inflation in 1778 slowly reduced the value of pay but did not change the trend discussed above. For example, Heath told his several detachments who had not marched due to lack of pay to be ready to move at a moment's notice; the money was expected momentarily.<sup>9</sup> Six brigades of the main army were paid for February and March.<sup>10</sup> Regimental paymasters collected monies for April and May in the summer.<sup>11</sup> Paymasters were even ordered to make sure they paid the light-infantry detachments under Brigadier Scott as soon as possible if they had not already done so. They then received funds for June and July.<sup>12</sup> One regimental officer collected large sums to pay the troops

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<sup>6</sup>Orderly Book of the Fourth Regiment, 9 April 1777 and undated entry between March and July 1777.

<sup>7</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 25 October 1776.

<sup>8</sup>"Valley Forge" Orderly Book, 15 February 1778, Orderly Book Collection, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

<sup>9</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 20 May 1778.

<sup>10</sup>Regimental Orders of the Eighth Massachusetts, 5 June 1778, Orderly Book Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca.

<sup>11</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 8 August 1778, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>12</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 24 September and 1 October 1778, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

for August and September.<sup>13</sup> Regimental paymasters received funds for November on 11 February 1779.<sup>14</sup> Some were still paying October's wages as late as 23 February.<sup>15</sup>

There was a similar "track record" for the latter war years. The soldiers got their pay on 20 August 1779 for May through July and on 31 January 1780 for November and December.<sup>16</sup> Deputy paymasters were still disbursing money for September and October 1779 pay on 16 March 1780 and requested regimental records for November and December.<sup>17</sup> Military pay continued to be a steady but delayed commodity: on 22 August 1780 for January through March; on 11 May 1781 for January through March; and on 28 August 1781 for the balance of January in specie.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, the patriots were not the ill-paid soldiery of legend. Field conditions often resulted in late pay just like in any other army of the period. The only liability, admittedly a significant one, was the decline in American financial fortunes after 1777 which devalued the soldiers'

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<sup>13</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 4 December 1778.

<sup>14</sup>Nathaniel Webb Orderly Book, 11 February 1779.

<sup>15</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 23 February 1779.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 20 August 1779 and 31 January 1780.

<sup>17</sup>Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 16 March 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>18</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 22 August 1780; 11 May 1781; and 28 August 1781.

pay. However, this trend was very gradual and applied predominantly to the 1780s.

Moreover, there is further evidence that funds were not always short. Congress decreed on 17 September 1778 that commanding officers were responsible for all excess monies until they could be turned in to the Paymaster General.<sup>19</sup> Paymasters soon learned of this Congressional resolution.<sup>20</sup> This requirement merely reinforced legislation of 6 February which established comprehensive regulations for preventing fraud.<sup>21</sup> Congress was especially concerned with the monies drawn to pay soldiers who had died, deserted, or been captured. Why would an administrative machinery bereft of funds bother to pass such detailed accounting procedures?

Rations are even more difficult to compare due to the disruptions only to be expected in the course of actual operations. The rebels established a standard ration on 4 November 1775.<sup>22</sup> The War Office set the allowance for the British.<sup>23</sup> However, the ration often changed depending upon availability.<sup>24</sup> British commanders periodically issued

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<sup>19</sup>Ford, Journals, 12:924-25.

<sup>20</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 1 October 1780.

<sup>21</sup>Ford, Journals, 10:132-35.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 3:322.

<sup>23</sup>Public Record Office, War Office 60/23, 17 February 1781 cited in David Syrett, Shipping and the American War, 1775-1783: A Study of British Transport Organization (London: Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 188-89.

<sup>24</sup>Curtis, Organization of the British Army, pp. 89-93.

TABLE 3-2

## COMPARISON OF WEEKLY RATION ALLOWANCES

<u>Commodity</u>	<u>American</u>	<u>British</u>
Bread/Flour (pounds)	7	7
Beef (pounds)	7	3.5
Pork (pounds)	5.25	2
Salt Fish (pounds)	7	-
Butter (pounds)	-	3/8
"Pease" (pints)	3	3
Rice (pounds)	.5	.5
Spruce Beer/Cider	7 quarts	-
Rum	-	14 gills

SOURCES: Ford, Journals, 3:322; PRO, WO, 60/23, 17 February 1781 cited in Syrett, Shipping and the American War, pp. 188-89. American allowances for beef, pork, and salt fish were mutually exclusive; the British received both beef and pork. British figures were converted from two-thirds rations (per six soldiers) to full rations (per four soldiers) and then divided to obtain the weekly individual equivalent.

their own variations.<sup>25</sup> Table 3-2 reveals a strong similarity in the food servings per soldier. The daily staple was one pound of bread or flour. The American meat ration was more generous, seven pounds per week versus five and a half. The redcoats also looked forward to a rum ration. The Americans often substituted spruce beer, cider, or even molasses. The American allowance for liquid refreshment was far more generous, four times that of the British, but one should bear in mind the relative potency of the beverages concerned.<sup>26</sup>

Though not as advantageous as pay scales, patriot food allowances were still marginally more favorable than the British. Identical issues in bread, peas, and rice suggest that patriot leaders copied from established British practice. Hence, they had every intention of giving American soldiers superior rations. Obviously, though, authorizations and reality in the field often differed.

Food could be as contentious an issue as pay. Regulations meant little in the face of shortages. Price fixing was not binding.<sup>27</sup> The Americans' fiscal chaos and

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<sup>25</sup>Sir William Howe, General Orders by Major General the Honourable William Howe, Collections of the New-York Historical Society 16 (1883) (New York: NYHS, 1886), p. 291 contains one such food issue.

<sup>26</sup>The table compares weekly ration allowances, thus permitting a reduction in the number of fractional amounts.

<sup>27</sup>Allen McLane Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y. contains a list of food staples and the stipulated prices effective 1 July 1778.

periodic logistical collapse seriously mitigated against providing the patriot soldiers with a steady supply of food.

However, stereotypes of scarecrow-like patriot soldiers have clouded two important qualifying factors concerning food supplies. First, the main army's ration problems did not result from a genuine lack of food but rather the breakdown in transportation arrangements to move provisions. By far the best example was the disastrous winter quarters at Valley Forge. Greene told Knox that hundreds of horses had starved to death, thereby compounding the problem.<sup>28</sup> McDougall wrote Congress and cited the poor situation of horses and forage as the cause of the army's near ruin.<sup>29</sup> The lack of a Quartermaster General during the course of these woes only complicated efforts to solve them.<sup>30</sup>

The transportation headaches did not end with the new campaign year. Indeed, Congress resolved on 12 September 1778 to permit the Commander in Chief and Quartermaster General to formulate a reduction of the stationary teams as well as the use of more oxen instead of horses.<sup>31</sup> Richard

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<sup>28</sup>Greene Papers, 26 February 1778, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y. Greene's formal appointment as Quartermaster General became effective three days later.

<sup>29</sup>The Papers of Alexander McDougall, 23 April 1778, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y..

<sup>30</sup>The army not only had no Quartermaster General from 8 November 1777 but Thomas Mifflin and Stephen Moylan held the office on three separate occasions previously.

<sup>31</sup>Ford, Journals, 12:906. The term "stationary teams" probably refers to draft animals kept in camp.

Henry Lee told Greene that officials were having problems establishing large magazines, even just of bread. He blamed distance and unsafe water transportation.<sup>32</sup> Leading patriots despatched a circular to all states, requesting precise reports of state resources. Besides information on foodstuffs it sought details on horses and oxen.<sup>33</sup>

The army certainly understood the criticality of transportation. Encampments formed a complete wagon park where all wheeled assets were divided into four areas: contractors' forges and ammunition, commissary, Wagon Master, and Forage Master.<sup>34</sup> During a provisions crisis in mid-1780 Washington authorized local patriot Moose Foreman to resort to extraordinary means to supply the army, beginning with the impressment of as many horse teams in New Jersey as he deemed necessary.<sup>35</sup> On 9 April 1781 Washington bemoaned the lack of transportation to move badly-needed provisions, a scarcity brought on by teamsters' refusals to take certificates as payment.<sup>36</sup> Timothy Pickering explained that the Quartermaster General's department was so short of

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<sup>32</sup>Gates Papers, 5 October 1778, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>33</sup>Circular, 11 November 1778, Committee of Congress, Monmouth County Historical Association Library Collection, Freehold, N.J.

<sup>34</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 3 July 1779.

<sup>35</sup>Letter, Washington to Moose Foreman, 20 July 1780, Monmouth County Historical Association Library Collection, Freehold, N.J.

<sup>36</sup>Washington, Writings, 21:429.

horses that he loaned two of his own riding animals to conduct public business.<sup>37</sup>

Herein lay the source of so much misery. Thus, bitter comments from the main army about starving in the midst of plenty were quite likely, but not necessarily from simple civilian apathy.

Second, the Continentals were not a perennially-hungry lot. The heroic depictions of a starved soldiery tell but a half truth. The ration situation in fact depended heavily upon specific circumstances at a given point in time. Thus, a British intelligence estimate after Monmouth assessed the main army: "They have plenty of provisions . . ." <sup>38</sup> Boston had large stockpiles of flour, hard bread, salt beef, and salt pork.<sup>39</sup> Troops in the Hudson Highlands one summer received an additional quarter pound of meat and fish daily.<sup>40</sup> Then another pound of bread or flour and a pound of beef or fourteen ounces of pork or fish joined the daily ration a month later until further orders.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Letters and Papers of William Alexander, 5 June 1781, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y..

<sup>38</sup>British Headquarters, Intelligence Memo Book [Great Britain Army Memo Book], 21 July 1778, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>39</sup>Returns, August-November 1778, Gates Papers. The figures are in numbers of barrels and pounds.

<sup>40</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 6 July 1780, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>41</sup>Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book, 10 August 1780.

There were problems. For example, certain regiments complained that some provisions were "extremely bad" before Boston.<sup>42</sup> One regiment noted that they had neither bread nor flour for eight consecutive days. The hapless Sherburne's Regiment suffered over twenty casualties, victims of food poisoning from some state-supplied cheese.<sup>43</sup>

Many patriot troops did come upon hard times. Private Martin summarised his military career as one of constant shortages.<sup>44</sup> Surgeon Thacher had grim memories of the food situation during the winter quarters at Morristown.<sup>45</sup> Several regiments suffered from food shortages in 1780. The Twelfth Massachusetts had reduced rations for all men except those going on guard and fatigue duty.<sup>46</sup> The headquarters of Maj. Gen. Robert Howe reported a deteriorating situation with regard to provisions, especially bread.<sup>47</sup> The Fifteenth Massachusetts and its comrades lost half a pound of bread and four ounces of meat from the daily ration until

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<sup>42</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 23 March 1776.

<sup>43</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 3 May 1778 and 11 May 1779.

<sup>44</sup>Joseph Plumb Martin, A Narrative of Some of the Adventures and Suffering of a Revolutionary Soldier, ed. George F. Scheer, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1962; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 285-86.

<sup>45</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 177.

<sup>46</sup>Ebenezer Sprout Orderly Book, 21 January 1780.

<sup>47</sup>Robert Young Orderly Book, 25 February 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

further notice.<sup>48</sup> The Eleventh Pennsylvania had no provisions for two days and no meat three days later. The soldiers' rations were soon little or none.<sup>49</sup>

However, there could not always have been very many hungry Continentals in the main army. A board of field officers once told Washington that they deemed the inclusion of fish in the daily ration as wholly unacceptable.<sup>50</sup>

How could commanders put a starving army on extra rations or decline substitute items? A detailed examination of the evidence thus discredits the stereotype and highlights the fluctuating fortunes of Continental units on campaign with regard to food -- no different a situation than that faced by any army in the field.

Historians have also ignored the issue of combat readiness as it related to food supplies. The main army would have been largely ineffective had food been always short. Thus, other indicators of adequate rations were the orders from all levels of command to carry a stipulated number of rations preparatory to the conduct of active operations. For example, Heath's division packed four days' provisions in anticipation of rapid movement.<sup>51</sup> Washington

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<sup>48</sup>Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 1 May 1780.

<sup>49</sup>Nathaniel Cowdry Diary, 21, 24 August and 3 September 1780.

<sup>50</sup>Board letter, 16 April 1782, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>51</sup>Division Orders, 20 October 1776, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

specified that all troops would deploy with three day's rations -- no excuses.<sup>52</sup> Throughout the latter stage of the Monmouth campaign units constantly drew rations two days at a time in order to be ready to move daily without delay.<sup>53</sup>

This policy became standard practice and continued even during the latter war years in spite of debilitating inflation. Clearly it would have been abandoned if the army lived only a hand-to-mouth existence all year round. For example, Washington once stipulated that the men prepare two days' salted provisions, bread or flour, two days' cooked rations, and be ready to move as soon as possible.<sup>54</sup> The main army later got two days' provisions and prepared to march at a moment's notice.<sup>55</sup> Army Orders required all soldiers to carry two days' rations ready cooked.<sup>56</sup> One soldier mentioned drawing four days' allowance of meat when his unit expected to march.<sup>57</sup> Wayne ordered his men to have

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<sup>52</sup>General Orders, 19 April 1777, Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York.

<sup>53</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment, 17-27 June 1778, N.J. & N.Y. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 60, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>54</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 20 July 1779.

<sup>55</sup>Stephen Griffing Journal, 26 January 1780, New York State Library, Albany, N.Y.

<sup>56</sup>General Orders, 7 June 1780, Journal of Nathan Beers.

<sup>57</sup>Nathaniel Cowdry Diary, 6 November 1780.

two day's rations at all times.<sup>58</sup> Such instructions would have been impossible if the army were always starving.<sup>59</sup>

Additionally, His Majesty's regulars experienced the same kind of irregular ration issues. The British soldier could not take provisions for granted. He was never certain of a proper meal from one day to the next.<sup>60</sup> The British too tried price fixing.<sup>61</sup> Such inconveniences, even hardship, were simply part of soldiering.

The Continentals were thus little different from other soldiers of the time with regard to pay and rations. They were in fact the highest paid soldiers in the world. Their food allowances sometimes exceeded what their British opponents received and appeared lavish compared to what other European armies expected. Their misfortunes merely underlined how economic power begets military strength. They were far from being unpaid, starved scarecrows.

Finally, eighteenth-century logistical operations were a daunting challenge for any army. Campaigns in North America with its rugged terrain and sparse population utterly taxed

<sup>58</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 4 October 1781, Orderly Book Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca.

<sup>59</sup>Armies limited ration issues to a few days at a time lest the soldiers consume, trade and/or discard the lot.

<sup>60</sup>Wickwire, Cornwallis, pp. 56-57.

<sup>61</sup>Caleb Jones, Orderly Book of the "Maryland Loyalists Regiment," June 18th, 1778 to October 12th, 1778, ed. Paul Leicester Ford (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Historical Printing Club, 1891), pp. 49-50 contains a price list dated 5 August 1778.

every army's supply and support services. The Continental Army's fledgling structure only naturally faced greater hurdles in such an operational setting. The maintenance of steady pay and rations in the field was a far different proposition than in peacetime garrison.

#### Equipment

Eighteenth-century European powers were pre-industrial societies which lacked the capacity to supply their armies' needs from current production. Previous stockpiling in magazines was the practical solution to wartime demands. These depots were usually formidable fortresses as well and, hence, notable objectives.<sup>62</sup> Their logistical importance explains in part the predilection of commanders to engage in siege operations.

The thirteen colonies had no stocks to distribute to the Continental Army. Militia laws had required men to bring their personal weapons and accessories. The patriots were forced to scrounge muskets from any and all sources. Congress and the states purchased weapons from local gunsmiths. Committees of Safety contracted for copies of the second model of the famed British "Brown Bess" in 1775. Congress standardized these duplicates in July and November.<sup>63</sup> They joined Brown-Bess originals which had

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<sup>62</sup>Fort Ticonderoga in Upper New York State remains the best New World example.

<sup>63</sup>Ford, Journals, 2:188, 190; 3:322.

found their way into colonial hands during the series of various Indian wars as well as a host of other musket types. The variety of calibers in use was sufficient to tax the energies of the most ambitious quartermaster and they were a paltry supply compared to the demand for small arms.

The rebels would simply have been unable to wage war without the foreign shipments from France. The French Army was reequipping with the Model 1777 Charleville so five older patterns went to the Americans.<sup>64</sup> These imports were critical on two counts. First, they filled the quantitative need. Second, they drastically simplified logistics concerns since the patriots phased out the other mixed calibers and standardized issues with these .69 caliber muskets after 1777. The sheer volume of the shipments was alone impressive.

The French shipped enough muskets to America to equip several armies. For example, some thirty thousand muskets went to America in 1777 alone.<sup>65</sup> An undated note showed 775 arms from Martinique and 250 from St. Eustatius. One record credited Nantes for two shipments, one of no less than 5,300

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<sup>64</sup>Harold L. Peterson, The Book of the Continental Soldier: Being a Complete Account of the Uniforms, Weapons, and Equipment with Which He Lived and Fought (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1968), pp. 23-38 passim. This source is valuable for detailed examinations of all equipment.

<sup>65</sup>Col. John W. Wright, "Some Notes on the Continental Army: First Installment," William and Mary College Quarterly, 2nd ser., 11 (April 1931):87-88.

muskets and a second of 1,500. Another memo a month later noted the arrival of 511 chests of arms.<sup>66</sup>

French aid continued unabated throughout the war. Another 291 chests of arms arrived from France in 1779.<sup>67</sup> A request on 15 June arms asked for no less than 100,000 muskets and associated equipment.<sup>68</sup> A large powder shipment from St. Eustatius in 1780 included twenty-four boxes of arms.<sup>69</sup> The packing list for one shipment in 1781 listed 25,000 muskets alone.<sup>70</sup> The French shipped an estimated 100,000 muskets to the patriots by war's end.<sup>71</sup>

The Americans were fortunate; their ally produced fine weapons. The barrel fastened to the stock with three bands. These muskets were lighter and stronger than Brown Bess. All British muskets were .75 caliber. The barrel fastened to the stock with pins, making repair harder.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Henry Knox Papers, 16 April and 26 May 1777, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid, 6 March 1779.

<sup>68</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 158/147/3/417.

<sup>69</sup>Knox Papers. The note is otherwise undated.

<sup>70</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 182/165/59.

<sup>71</sup>Gunther Rothenberg, The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), p. 121.

<sup>72</sup>Specimens were examined in the West Point Museum. Mr. Robert Fisch, Arms Curator, provided valuable assistance. One disadvantage of the French weapons was their inability to use captured ammunition. Brown Bess could fire .69 caliber cartridges if necessary.

There are two significant observations concerning these musket shipments. First, the changeover was a gradual one. For example, one march column relegated the soldiers with the worst weapons as baggage and wagon guards. Regiments exchanged arms so that the small remaining number of "King's arms" were concentrated in one regiment.<sup>73</sup> Maj. John Andre on Howe's staff reported that almost all small arms captured from the rebels were French-made.<sup>74</sup>

Second, the patriots needed large, constant arms shipments to compensate for shameful negligence with regard to weapons care. The Commander in Chief was especially annoyed at the constant attention he had to draw to the conditions of arms. For example, on 19 May 1776 he ordered soldiers' pay docked for repair costs due to negligence. He sarcastically commented on 19 July 1777 that an annual arms issue would be necessary along with clothing given the current rate of wastage.<sup>75</sup> The problem resulted from short enlistees taking weapons home, soldiers' lack of individual discipline, and the shortcomings of officers and NCOs. Knox estimated that five to seven thousand muskets were lost each campaign.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Unidentified unit, Continental Army MSS, 19 January and 24 October 1777, U.S. Army, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

<sup>74</sup>John Andre Journal, 28 September 1777, Schoff Revolutionary War Collection, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

<sup>75</sup>Washington, Writings, 5:61; 8:388.

This shameful waste certainly declined dramatically under the watchful eyes of von Steuben and his inspectors. For example, one return listed 215 or 6 percent of 3,577 muskets in bad condition.<sup>77</sup> An annual roll for 1780 listed 23 brigades of the army with 8,422 musket issues and 847 losses due to damage.<sup>78</sup> Board of War secretary Richard Peters' claimed that five thousand muskets above the requirements of an annual muster were added to allow for wastage. Peters added that the last return at war's end showed only three missing muskets, properly accounted for, thanks to von Steuben's efforts.<sup>79</sup>

However, the poor condition of weapons continued to reflect the lack of professionalism among some junior officers; even von Steuben could accomplish only so much.

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<sup>76</sup>Cited in Friedrich Kapp, The Life of Frederick William von Steuben, Major General in the Revolutionary Army, with an Introduction by George Bancroft (New York: Mason Bros., 1859), p. 117 but cites no source. Kapp used the von Steuben Papers extensively. The writer has not come across this specific comment nor is it referenced in the detailed card listings under Knox at the Manuscript Department of the New-York Historical Society.

<sup>77</sup>Gates Papers, 25 July 1777.

<sup>78</sup>"Ledger of Military Stores for the Main Army in the Field," 1780, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Two of the brigades were detached light infantry.

<sup>79</sup>Cited in Rudolph Cronau, The Army of the American Revolution and Its Organizer (New York: By the Author, 340 E. 198th St., 1923), p. 54. There is no footnote. Cronau too cited the von Steuben papers extensively. Unfortunately, the writer has not discovered this particular passage nor is it referenced in the detailed card listings under Peters at the Manuscript Department of the New-York Historical Society.

For example, regimental commanders were reminded of their responsibility to check arms and ammunition with the greatest exactness.<sup>80</sup> One year later general officers were furious that hundreds of stands of arms were on hand yet soldiers were returned unfit for duty due to lack of muskets -- a stupendous example of neglect and inattention by company officers and NCOs.<sup>81</sup> Washington was beside himself with anger to learn that certain lieutenants had the effrontery to authorize soldiers leaving the service to take their muskets and equipment with them. The next day he ordered an immediate inspection.<sup>82</sup> Three months later one brigadier scolded his company commanders for remissness and bitterly noted "how little attention" they paid to their mens' arms.<sup>83</sup> There were far too many of such incidents and subsequent exhortations in the mid and latter war years to dismiss them as isolated occurrences.

Thus, the wastage of muskets rested primarily upon the inadequate leadership qualities of the officers at company and battalion levels, proof that perhaps Washington's greatest challenge was finding a sufficient number of dedicated officers to lead his regiments.

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<sup>80</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 27 August 1778.

<sup>81</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 7 August 1779.

<sup>82</sup>Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 5-6 May 1780.

<sup>83</sup>Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book, 18 August 1780.

This shortcoming cost the patriot cause heavily. Congress could ill afford the expenses to repair the large number of arms damaged annually. For example, on 4 June 1781 Philadelphia alone had 2,924 muskets awaiting repair at a cost of one pound sterling in specie each.<sup>84</sup> The fiscal crisis no doubt slowed the repair process. A lack of repaired muskets returning to field units created artificial shortages which generated demands for new muskets. The patriots found themselves in a vicious cycle. No wonder 100,000 French muskets came to America during the war.

Outside agencies diverted resources as well. For example, Pickering wrote to John Jay on 6 September 1779 about five thousand arms destined for Virginia -- well away from the main army. On 4 June 1781 the Board of War estimated transportation costs for 2,700 muskets headed for Fredericksburg and another 1,300 for Baltimore. Two days later officials alluded to a letter of 31 May which sought funds to repair 1,500 stands of arms for delivery to southern militia units.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the main army, the other departments, state line establishments, and the militia all expected to receive weapons from the Board of War.

Officials soon paid similar attention to bayonets to reduce losses. One report showed 32 or 1.08 percent of 2,970 as bad.<sup>86</sup> They requested no less than fifty thousand

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<sup>84</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 160/147/5/283.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 157/147/2/469; 160/147/5/277,281.

spares from the French on 15 June 1779.<sup>87</sup> The 1780 roll tallied 7,901 issues and 165 damaged.<sup>88</sup>

Ammunition was another concern. One round consisted of a lead ball and black powder prepacked in paper cartridges. These greatly facilitated the average rate of fire of two to four rounds per minute.

Unfortunately, the Continental Line never attained parity with the British in ammunition issue. The patriot soldier's average load fluctuated from a maximum of twenty-five to fifty rounds, a reflection of the precious nature of gunpowder. Moreover, the basic load of ammunition at times was far less. Meanwhile, the standard British ammunition issue was sixty rounds.<sup>89</sup> This figure represented no less than 150 to 240 percent of the prevalent patriot issue of twenty-five to forty rounds.

For example, Washington commented bitterly to the President of Congress on 10 July and 4 August 1775 that the powder on hand was enough for a paltry nine rounds per man. This figure rose to twelve to fifteen rounds during the winter of 1775-76.<sup>90</sup> McDougall's Brigade authorized twenty-four rounds per man while in New York but also permitted the issue of any additional ammunition on hand up to sixty

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<sup>86</sup>Return, 25 July 1778, Gates Papers.

<sup>87</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 158/147/3/418.

<sup>88</sup>Ledger of Military Stores, 1780.

<sup>89</sup>Howe, General Orders, p. 442.

<sup>90</sup>Washington, Writings, 3:325, 387, 394-95.

rounds each.<sup>91</sup> After the debacle on Long Island, Heath limited his men to twenty-five rounds.<sup>92</sup> Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler did the same with his men at King's Bridge.<sup>93</sup> The Third New Hampshire received orders to insure all men had forty rounds.<sup>94</sup> The Eighth Massachusetts did likewise with two flints.<sup>95</sup> The Ninth Massachusetts followed suit.<sup>96</sup>

The latter war years had mixed fortunes. The Second Massachusetts once had only twenty rounds per man.<sup>97</sup> Possibly a year later officers issued even six-months' men forty rounds.<sup>98</sup> Conditions improved very late in the war. One return marked fifty rounds per man for nearly everyone.<sup>99</sup> This last figure was the peak issue attained during the war.

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<sup>91</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade, 13 August 1776, New York (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 36, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>92</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 12 September 1776.

<sup>93</sup>Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, 12 September 1776.

<sup>94</sup>Regimental Orders for the Third New Hampshire, 26 January 1778, Orderly Book Collection, The Huntington Library, San Marino, Ca.

<sup>95</sup>Regimental Orders of the Eighth Massachusetts, 23 May 1778. Two flints were standard issue.

<sup>96</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 17 August 1778.

<sup>97</sup>William Toffrey Orderly Book, 20 April 1779.

<sup>98</sup>Ebeneazer Smith Account Book, undated entry [1780?], Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>99</sup>Company Roster, 1782-83, William Shepard Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Washington tried to compensate for fewer rounds with more efficacious firepower. On 29 June 1776 he instructed all soldiers to load with a ball and four to eight buckshot and fire a devastating first volley at twenty to thirty yards.<sup>100</sup> McDougall's Brigade conformed later.<sup>101</sup> Maj. John Andre on Howe's staff commented this use of buckshot caused a six to one proportion of wounded to killed.<sup>102</sup>

All of these efforts would have been in vain without a continuous supply of powder. Quality gunpowder was the "black gold" of the eighteenth century. The early war years witnessed a scramble to secure adequate stockpiles<sup>103</sup> Agricultural America could never produce sufficient powder to meet the insatiable demands of the army. Importation of gunpowder was thus even more critical to the survival of the patriot cause than the generous musket shipments.<sup>104</sup>

Flints were fortunately not a qualitative issue. Patriot sources did not cite flints as a concern aside from the usual shortages. However, historians of the British

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<sup>100</sup>Washington, Writings, 5:198.

<sup>101</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade, 6 October 1777, N.Y., N.J., & Pa. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 49, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>102</sup>John Andre Journal, 8 October 1777.

<sup>103</sup>Orlando W. Stephenson, "The Supply of Gunpowder in 1776," American Historical Review 30 (January 1925):271-81.

<sup>104</sup>The most concise summary of this issue is Erna Risch, Supplying Washington's Army, Special Studies Series (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1981), pp. 335-39, 342-46.

Army do discuss the inferiority of British flints compared with the Americans.<sup>105</sup> The French shipped hundreds of thousands of flints to their allies by war's end. One stockpile which came into New Hampshire had 235,000.<sup>106</sup> One staff paper authorized 180,000 flints, or 6 per man.<sup>107</sup> The successful professionalization of the army insured that those issued received proper care. Detailed ledgers encouraged proper accountability. Negligence could not escape scrutiny -- and hence punishment. Brigade returns one year showed 47,344 issues and only 205 losses.<sup>108</sup>

Cartridge box shortages though dogged the army. These were another critical accoutrement. If they did not repel moisture, the ammunition would be ruined. The typical item was a black-painted wooden box encased in leather. Washington took particular interest in them. On 13 October 1776 he wrote the President of Congress that only the best and thickest leather could produce a quality cartridge box. On 22 October and 3 November he objected to a Board of War suggestion that painted canvas could replace leather. He also stressed the need to use a hardwood like oak and not

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<sup>105</sup>Curtis, Organization of the British Army, p. 21. Glover, Peninsular Preparation, p. 86 cites bad weapons in general.

<sup>106</sup>Knox Papers, 26 May 1777.

<sup>107</sup>"Estimate of Arms Ammunition & Accoutrements for 30000 Foot," February 1780, Knox Papers.

<sup>108</sup>"Ledger of Military Stores," 1780.

poplar.<sup>109</sup> The main army still had insufficient cartridge boxes. One expedient consisted of a tin cannister, distributed to "proper men." Sometimes soldiers actually had both a cartridge box and a tin cannister and they had to surrender the latter to a comrade who had nothing.<sup>110</sup>

The crisis eased somewhat, probably due to French aid. Brigade quartermasters were ordered to keep the extra tin cannisters full of spare ammunition.<sup>111</sup> Lasting solutions cost money. An estimate to manufacture 1,300 new cartridge boxes on 4 June 1781 cost £1,218/15/- in specie.<sup>112</sup>

Even flags were short. On 20 February 1776 Washington authorized a regimental color or standard and a Grand Division color per regiment.<sup>113</sup> Many regiments carried no flags at all though. For example, In September 1778 the main army fielded fifty-two regiments in fifteen brigades.<sup>114</sup> A report to the Commander in Chief dated the fifth showed only seventy-four flags or 71.2 percent in service: twenty-six regimental standards, one regimental

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<sup>109</sup>Washington, Writings, 9:366, 415.

<sup>110</sup>Unidentified unit, 3, 13 October 1777, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>111</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book, no. 60, 17 June 1778.

<sup>112</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 160/147/5/285.

<sup>113</sup>Washington, Writings, 4:341.

<sup>114</sup>Lesser, Sinews of Independence, pp. 84-85. The count does not include militia or state line who served.

color, and forty-seven Grand Division colors.<sup>115</sup> Flags for Continental units thus remained an individual unit concern for most of the war.<sup>116</sup>

In 1779 the army developed a systematic two-flag system for each regiment based on the work of Washington, von Steuben, and the Board of War. The two flags were the Standard of the United States and the Regimental Color. Unfortunately, Washington learned on 28 February 1780 that the plan could still not go forward until material arrived from France.<sup>117</sup> There is no evidence which suggests that they were ever able to implement this plan.

The patriots could never compete with the well-established British system of a King's color and regimental color. The deleterious effects on morale of this flag shortcoming, the symbols of regimental pride and a rallying point in battle, can well be imagined.

Bluntly stated, the Continentals would have utterly failed to maintain even basic arms and accoutrement levels

<sup>115</sup>Washington, Writings, 12:470 facing plate.

<sup>116</sup>For details of specific regiments see Gherardi Davis, Regimental Colors in the War of the Revolution (New York: n.p., 1907) and Edward W. Richardson, Standards and Colors of the American Revolution (n.p.: University of Pennsylvania Press & Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution and Its Color Guard, 1982).

<sup>117</sup>"Correspondence of George Washington, Commander-in-Chief, with the Board of War, with the Secretary at War, Benjamin Lincoln, and (through his secretary Jonathan Trumbull) with Timothy Pickering, Quartermaster General, 1779-83 about FLAGS for the Army," Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

without French aid. The thirteen states had a colonial economy and were in no position to equip a sizable field army from domestic stocks. The ever-present fiscal crisis after 1777 compounded the problem. The increasing professionalization of the army over the long haul at least reduced the wastage levels of the early years. As in all matters of supply, the ad-hoc, decentralized structure of the patriot war effort frustrated true efficiency.

#### Uniforms

The eighteenth century marked the evolution of military costume to the extent that it personified the monarch and nation. The infantry adopted a common coat color. In most cases the selection of color was purely economic. Either a government official granted a contractor a monopoly or a certain dye cost the least. Moreover, by 1770 all of the major powers enacted uniform changes so that the cut and pattern copied current Prussian practice which streamlined and tightened the fit. Thus, soldiers all appeared in the same clothing. Only the coat color and minor regimental details distinguished the nationality.

Hence, the British became famous for their red coats. The Austrians and Spanish used white; the French, grey-white. The Russians wore green. The German states adopted either blue or white, a reflection of the kingdom's gravitation towards Prussia or Austria.

Modern historians have prematurely dismissed this aspect of military history as the outdated preferences if not fetishes of those in authority then and the topic of specialist collectors today. These gaudy uniforms, however, performed several useful functions. Colorful dress greatly aided easy identification of friend from foe on a battlefield shrouded in prodigious amounts of smoke. These distinctive, showy costumes were a significant psychological factor. Tall, imposing headgear made the soldier look and feel bigger and daunted the enemy. Wide shoulder belts suggested great girth. Some minor distinction could become a regimental trademark. Finally, a complete uniform was necessary simply to keep a soldier warm. Evenings in the field could be quite cool, even during the summer months in the northern states.

Such dress was a critical and very effective builder of unit esprit de corps. It developed the soldiers' pride in themselves, their comrades, and their regiments. Wayne stated the case succinctly to Governor Wharton:

For my own part I would rather risk my life, Reputation and the fate of America, at the head of five thousand troops neatly uniformed than with double that number, equally armed and disciplined covered with rags and crawling with vermin.<sup>118</sup>

Wayne's views notwithstanding, the Continentals established a record of scruffiness unsurpassed in the century. The development of Continental Army uniform

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<sup>118</sup>Wayne Papers, 22 November 1777.

remained sporadic and subject to great fluctuation for the duration of the war. Officers at all levels of command worked hard to keep their men properly uniformed, but dedication was not enough. Their poverty stood in stark contrast to the other forces in America.

Even the worst-off enemy regiments in the South late in the war merely mirrored patriot conditions. Few soldiers took to the field according to the stipulations of dress regulations and all armies adopted numerous field expedients to campaign in the rugged conditions of North America. Overalls replaced breeches and gaiters. Highland plaids soon gave way to more serviceable trousers. British and German officers shed their gold or silver lace and swords for plainer dress and muskets. But these were concessions made to suit conditions.

Providing the Continentals with a uniform was a monumental task from the onset of hostilities. The New England army of 1775 was truly adopted militamen. They fought in their daily civilian clothes. Congress decreed on 4 November 1775 that brown would be the army's preferred coat color.<sup>119</sup> In fact there was a bewildering array in use. Brown coats with variously colored facings were common but several other coat colors appeared: blue, light blue, green, grey, unbleached linen, and even red. At least three

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<sup>119</sup>Ford, Journals, 3:323.

line regiments wore captured British red coats: Henley's and Webb's Additional Regiments and the First Connecticut.<sup>120</sup>

There could be a direct relationship between the ability of commanders to provide their men with a complete uniform and combat effectiveness. For example, two regiments famous for their battlefield accomplishment and discipline were Col. Samuel Webb's Additional Regiment and Col. John Haslet's Delaware Regiment. Webb clothed his men entirely in red coats faced with yellow. Haslet's troops wore smart blue coats faced with red and topped by a form of miter cap, the headgear of elite German grenadiers.<sup>121</sup>

Webb worked especially hard to insure that his regiment was well turned out. Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull wrote to the Commander in Chief when Webb requisitioned a large stock of hunting shirts.<sup>122</sup> Washington then

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<sup>120</sup>Col. John R. Elting, USA (Ret.), ed. Military Uniforms in America, vol. 1: The Era of the American Revolution, The Company of Military Historians Series (San Rafael, Ca.: Presidio Press, 1974) and Malcolm McGregor and John Mollo, Uniforms of the American Revolution, Macmillan Color Series (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1975) are the standard current references. Peterson, Book of the Continental Soldier, pp. 218-38 contains some comprehensive uniform details. Useful but dated are Lt. Charles M. Lefferts, Uniforms of the American, British, French, and German Armies in the American Revolution, ed. Alexander J. Wall (New York: NYHS, 1926) and John C. Fitzpatrick, The Spirit of the Revolution: New Light from Some of the Original Sources of American History (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), pp. 117-38.

<sup>121</sup>Elting, American Revolution Uniforms, pp. 76-79; McGregor and Mollo, Uniforms of the American Revolution, p. 178 and plate 82.

<sup>122</sup>Letter, May 1777[?], Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

questioned the colonel on 7 June, asking Webb why he took 500 to clothe a regiment of 205 rank and file.<sup>123</sup> Webb confiscated a cache of red coats captured at sea soon after their arrival on shore. He had Washington's permission to collect the uniforms and documentation signed by the Quartermaster General effective 28 June.<sup>124</sup> The unit continued to wear red. One officer bought himself one.<sup>125</sup>

These units were not only the exception but demonstrated serious irregularities in the distribution process. The clothing for Webb's regiment had consumed a great deal of time, coordination, and correspondence. Webb's industriousness in "beating the system" had to be at the expense of another unit. The Clothier General's operation was clearly an inefficient one. But the periodic, arbitrary requisitions of line officers which were little more than confiscations only aggravated the situation.

Washington considered the ubiquitous hunting shirt as a substitute as early as 10 July 1775 when he called it an easy solution to the uniform problem, and one which would eliminate sectional distinctions.<sup>126</sup> He extolled its virtues again to the main army. It was not only practical

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<sup>123</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:196-97.

<sup>124</sup>Samuel B. Webb, Correspondence and Journals of Samuel Blachley Webb, 3 vols., ed. Worthington C. Ford (New York: n.p., 1813; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1969), 1:216.

<sup>125</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 25 January 1778.

<sup>126</sup>Washington, Writings, 3:325.

but it also struck terror in the hearts of the enemy who feared that all wearers were the dreaded riflemen.<sup>127</sup>

Two factors were decisive in the development of an effective uniform policy, French imports and the virtual cessation of hostilities after the success at Yorktown. An example of the former was a stockpile for the main army. It contained 4,614 brown coats faced red; 3,613 blue coats faced red; 8,439 white waistcoats; and 3,343 white breeches. Thousands of pairs of hose and shoes were also in the shipment. A lottery on the twenty-eighth determined the distribution of the coats. The Continentals from New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and North Carolina won the blue coats. The soldiers of New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, and the two Canadian battalions received the brown coats.<sup>128</sup> This event marked the beginning of a preference for blue coats over brown among the troops. Washington commented about another stockpile of uniform coats on 3 March 1779. It consisted of 1,500 blue coats faced red and 750 brown coats faced red with vests and breeches. The shipment was at Philadelphia.<sup>129</sup>

Even so basic an item as a hat could be a luxury. One battalion commander actually ordered his adjutant to report

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<sup>127</sup>General Orders, 24 July 1776, Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, Manuscript Collection, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.

<sup>128</sup>General Orders, 28 October 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>129</sup>Washington, Writings, 14:184.

the name of the company commander whose men had appeared on parade in slouched hats to the Brigade Major.<sup>130</sup> He should not have bothered. The Continental Army fought the war wearing a bewildering variety of headgear besides the typical cocked hat. Light infantry usually sported various caps in most armies. The Continentals had to adopt them in the line as well. Many regiments from Pennsylvania used them. Virginia units frequently made do with a round hat similar to that worn by Continental marines.<sup>131</sup> At least Washington could occasionally congratulate the troops. All but three regiments received new hats.<sup>132</sup>

Washington issued a comprehensive set of uniform regulations to bring standardization. It recognized the blue coat as standard. Four groupings of states received the unique facing colors of red, buff, white, and blue; musicians wore reversed colors.<sup>133</sup> Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence to determine to what extent the main army conformed to these regulations. Congress followed up with a new annual clothing allowance in 1781. It generously authorized a complete outfit, including a coat, hunting shirt, vest, breeches, socks, hose, and hat, one set of wool

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<sup>130</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York Regiment, 3 April 1777.

<sup>131</sup>See the sources cited in footnote 118 for specifics.

<sup>132</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 15 May 1782.

<sup>133</sup>Orderly Book, 2 October 1779, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass. The unit is unidentified.

overalls and two of linen.<sup>134</sup> As usual, however, regulations and reality were different matters.

Acquisitions still depended upon the precarious fiscal situation, local purchases, French shipments, the availability of transport, the quality of material, and luck. For example, a group of officers were incensed that soldiers were unfit for duty due to want of clothing yet stocks existed in public stores.<sup>135</sup> Clothing returns of the Sixth Massachusetts were not encouraging, showing 164 or 55.4 percent and 18 or 6.1 percent of 296 coats were unserviceable or missing. Within 3 months the figures were 134 or 43.8 percent and 131 or 42.8 percent of 306 coats. The unit had hunting shirts too but their condition was no better.<sup>136</sup> One unit's long-term soldiers received uniforms in the winter. The six-months' men got nothing.<sup>137</sup>

Patriotic women rescued the soldiers at least once. Mrs. Esther Reed and the women of Philadelphia generously donated 7,500 pounds sterling for clothing the main army in June 1780.<sup>138</sup> On 11 December Washington wrote a stinging

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<sup>134</sup>Undated entry, Ebenezer Smith Account Book.

<sup>135</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 14 July 1779.

<sup>136</sup>Returns of the Sixth Massachusetts Battalion, 9 September and 1 December 1779, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>137</sup>Ebenezer Sprout Orderly Book, 20 January 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>138</sup>Marie Jean Paul Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected

letter to Benjamin Lincoln, the latter now serving as head of the Board of War. A stockpile of ten thousand uniforms sat at a French port since American agents could not agree who was responsible to send them. Another shipment was waiting in the West Indies for some eighteen months.<sup>139</sup> At one stage McDougall's troops were in such a sorry state that the officers checked the men in their rooms.<sup>140</sup>

Historians have also ignored the political ramifications of a main army dressed as ragamuffins. Proper uniforms were critical to Washington's army which had come to personify the American cause in foreign eyes. A well-turned-out main army symbolized the willingness and ability of the patriots to continue the struggle to a successful conclusion. In other words, foreign assistance was most welcome but was no substitute for the Americans' own efforts.

For example, a Congressional Committee and a French dignitary visited the troops on 23 April 1780. The reviewing troops had been drawn from the different brigades and specifically ordered to appear in blue coats with blue, red, and yellow facings.<sup>141</sup> On 11 June 1780 Lafayette wrote to

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Letters and Papers, 1776-1790, 4 vols. ed. Stanley J. Idzerda et al. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 3:58n3.

<sup>139</sup>Washington, Writings, 20:462.

<sup>140</sup>Papers of Alexander McDougall, ? 1781.

<sup>141</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 17 April 1780, Continental Army MSS, U.S. Army, Manuscript Collection, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J. Blue coats faced yellow was most unusual in the infantry.

Heath that French troops had arrived. The need to "attend to the dignity of the American Army" was greater than ever. He warned Heath not to discuss the uniform regulations as if they were "a novelty." The Marquis also expressed his conviction to the Commander in Chief on 4 July that the dress of the Continentals was very important given the French presence. He urged that suits of regimentals be issued as soon as possible with every attempt to ensure uniformity at least within the brigade.<sup>142</sup>

The lack of vigorous campaigning after Yorktown aided the clothing situation on two counts. The virtual cessation of operations reduced wear and tear on uniforms and equipment. The consequent, gradual reduction of the army meant that fewer troops remained in service which cut down upon the demands made on the logistical services. For example, Heath noted that ample clothing was on hand so all units should present a soldierly appearance.<sup>143</sup> Washington was so pleased with the dress of the troops on 18 October 1782 that he wrote to President John Jay and informed him so.<sup>144</sup> He told Heath essentially the same thing on 5 February 1783.<sup>145</sup>

However, even with a greatly-reduced army and little actual campaigning the situation was not always so good. On

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<sup>142</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters, 3:53-54, 67-68.

<sup>143</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 25 March 1782.

<sup>144</sup>Washington, Writings, 25:275.

<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 26:97.

6 January 1782 Washington called for all brigadiers to come to Headquarters the next day at 11 AM to discuss measures to clothe the troops decently.<sup>146</sup> Even later the amalgamated First and Third Connecticut had to take coats from its light infantry to supply dire needs elsewhere in the battalion.<sup>147</sup>

Moreover, in a war fought over rugged terrain and all-year round, the army made preciously little provision for seasonal clothing. Overcoats were hard to come by. Blankets became as difficult a commodity to obtain as a uniform coat; indeed, they often substituted for one as well, sometimes worn Indian fashion. Congress offered two dollars on 4 November 1775 to any recruit who brought his own blanket. The soldier could keep it too.<sup>148</sup> On 23 December Washington appealed to the Massachusetts Legislature to collect blankets from residents, so desperate was the army's need. General Orders on the twenty-eighth stated the Commander in Chief's expectation that departees would sell their blankets to reenlistees or newcomers.<sup>149</sup>

Washington consequently expended considerable ink over clothing issues. For example, he wrote to the contractor Otis and Andrews on 14 September 1778 on various clothing topics. He was particularly anxious to secure material to

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<sup>146</sup>Numbered Record Books, 57/98-99.

<sup>147</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 7 April 1783.

<sup>148</sup>Ford, Journals, 3:323-24.

<sup>149</sup>Washington, Writings, 4:178, 190.

make overalls for wear over breeches in winter.<sup>150</sup> Clothier General James Mease told the Commander in Chief that about six hundred blankets were enroute.<sup>151</sup> Numbers, however, were deceiving. Brigadier Varnum requested one hundred blankets. The soldiers received them six days later but they were unhappy as all were small.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, Washington complained to the Board of War on the eighteenth that four blankets had to be combined to obtain a normal-sized one.<sup>153</sup> When new uniforms arrived, Washington directed on 2 November that all old clothing be turned in. The order raised such an outrage that he rescinded it on the eighth. Old clothing, even in poor condition, still provided additional warmth in winter.<sup>154</sup>

Frustrated line officers wanted action. For example, officers from two regiments at Bristol and Warren complained to Gates as head of the Board of War that their men suffered from a lack of seasonal clothing. The local depot could not help due to the fiscal situation, yet the officers were told that an adequate supply could be bought "at a fair price."<sup>155</sup> The revised Congressional uniform allowance

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<sup>150</sup>Ibid., 12:452.

<sup>151</sup>Letter, 6 October 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>152</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 23 and 29 October 1778.

<sup>153</sup>Washington, Writings, 13:105.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., 13:198, 214-15.

<sup>155</sup>Letter, 24 May 1779, Gates Papers.

passed in 1781 authorized a blanket and pair of gloves a year but no overcoat.<sup>156</sup> When eleven Massachusetts regiments received shirts, shoes, and hose, only a portion got blankets.<sup>157</sup>

Perhaps the most precious item of all for the hapless infantryman was shoes. The seriousness of the problem was evident by Washington's voluminous correspondence. He complained to Mease on 23 June 1777 that soldiers could not perform their duty due to lack of shoes; those on hand were too small. On 18 July 1778 the Commander in Chief denounced the "thin French pumps" sent to the main army which fell apart when wet. He needed shoes as soon as possible; even fifty thousand would not be too many.<sup>158</sup> Mease wrote that he sent 3,129 pairs of shoes.<sup>159</sup> But these were a proverbial "drop in the bucket." By 18 October Washington was down to seven thousand flimsy pairs and none else.<sup>160</sup>

The army even contributed soldiers to make moccasins or to work in shoe factories. These troops should have been drilling and training. Washington told the Board of War on 15 April 1779 that his small army could ill afford such diversions of personnel. By 2 October he asked for an

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<sup>156</sup>Undated entry, Ebenezer Smith Account Book.

<sup>157</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 29 January 1780.

<sup>158</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:292.

<sup>159</sup>Letter, 4 October 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>160</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:432-33; 13:105.

investigation of the Hides Department, in sheer bewilderment at their inability to deliver adequate stocks when his brigadiers had been obtaining a good supply just by tapping local sources. As late as 10 April 1782 Washington still bemoaned the lack of shoes on hand in spite of need due to heavy consumption.<sup>161</sup>

Negligence compounded all these problems. Items were often made shoddily. For example, a return for Wesson's regiment showed only 33 or 10.9 percent of 303 coats as unserviceable. However, 204 or 66.7 percent of 306 overcoats, 276 or 90.2 percent of 306 breeches, 259 or 48.4 percent of 535 shirts, 145 or 35.3 percent of 411 pairs of shoes, 219 or 68.7 percent of 319 hats, 211 or 77.3 percent of 273 blankets, and all 7 pairs of overalls were unserviceable.<sup>162</sup> The gradual pace of professionalization also took its toll. For example, a battalion commander expressed his dissatisfaction over the results of a regimental court martial. All troops had better understand that they cannot dispose of any military clothing was the gist of his message.<sup>163</sup> Too many never learned the lesson.

In summary, historians have concluded prematurely that Washington's soldiers were perennially unpaid, starving, and ill clad. In fact, the line infantrymen generally did

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 14:391-92; 16:389-90; 24:111.

<sup>162</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 12 October 1778.

<sup>163</sup>Marinus Willett Orderly Book, 25 April 1777, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

receive their pay, albeit late and in increasingly devalued paper currency. Likewise, the men experienced both plenty and lean times with respect to food supply. Much depended upon the specific situation.

The Americans never really kept the main army properly uniformed and equipped. French imports of stands of arms usually met basic equipment needs. Yet throughout the war the main army's leaders struggled to reduce waste and inefficiency which consumed valuable stockpiles. Von Steuben's appointment as Inspector General went a long way to imbuing soldiers with the responsibility to insure proper maintenance and care of equipment. The main army was never well uniformed. Indeed, Washington's regulars were a roughshod lot by any standard. Washington's command, the centerpiece of the patriot war effort, suffered from the chaotic state of their finances and logistical services which prevented meaningful and lasting reform in all areas.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE ENLISTED RANKS: CONDITIONS

Military Justice

Both military discipline and the civilian criminal justice system of the period were notoriously harsh by today's standards. The drastic penalties were meant specifically to deter certain desperate characters and to insure the maintenance of social order. Thus, Washington's desire to imitate the harsh punishments of a typical standing army should not have surprised historians.

Washington initially labored under the unique difficulty of forming a regular army from militia units. This liability not only meant the lack of unified military institutions but also an absence of any sense of subordination within the soldiers. No better example illustrates these problems than the New-England army of 1775. For example, Pvt. Amos Clark wrote to his mother and brother about some eleven hundred men sent to seize Quebec. Clark observed somberly that the departing men were not expected home by year's end, a harsh demand given the reality of a winter campaign. He noted the unreasonable attitude of army superiors who insisted that the troops remain in the field until January.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Amos Clark Letters, 12 September and 29 October 1775, Continental Soldiers' Letters, 1775-76, de Coppett Collection, Princeton University, Princeton, N.J.

Additionally, Benjamin Thompson, a Boston resident, observed on 4 November that the rebel host was most wretchedly clothed and quite dirty in appearance. Worse, all ranks practiced independence and levelism to the detriment of Washington's and Maj. Gen. Horatio Gates', the Adjutant General, calls for order and subordination.<sup>2</sup>

The famous American riflemen were the worst of all. Rifleman Jesse Lukens wrote to his friend John Shaw, Jr. on 13 September concerning the "remissness" of discipline. Twice a contingent of riflemen had broken open the guard house to free a comrade. Five hundred men with loaded muskets and fixed bayonets greeted a third attempt by thirty-two riflemen. The incident ended peaceably.<sup>3</sup> The marksmen remained a very bad influence on the line troops.

These examples highlight the unsuitability of short-term militiamen as regular soldiers. The individual soldier must first have demonstrated a sense of self-discipline before formal drill and training could make him part of a fighting team. The latter reinforced the former; it could not succeed alone. The recruit had to understand that the sacrifice of a considerable measure of personal freedom was necessary for the successful performance of the unit as a team. William Tudor, the army's first Staff Judge Advocate,

<sup>2</sup>Henry Steele Commager and Richard B. Morris, eds. The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution As Told by Participants, 2 vols. (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958), 1:153-54.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 1:155-56.

pointed out to Congress in June 1775, "When a man assumes the Soldier he lays aside the Citizen, & must be content to submit to a temporary Relinquishment of some of his civil Rights."<sup>4</sup>

Congress thus dutifully approved a system of disciplinary regulations for the service known as the Articles of War on 30 June 1775, little more than two weeks after the formal creation of the Continental Army. Unfortunately, the Articles fell far short of the army's needs. Firstly, they affected only those who joined the service after 30 June. They were not retroactive. The rest could refuse to abide by them and be subject only to whatever rules existed for that particular colony.<sup>5</sup> Washington's only other alternative was to discharge them, hardly a viable course of action.

Furthermore, the Articles lacked teeth though being somber and moralistic. It encouraged all ranks to attend "Divine Service" with public reprimands and fines for irreverance and fines for profane language.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the practical aspects of maintaining discipline on a day-to-day basis received insufficient attention. General courts

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<sup>4</sup>"Rules & Articles for the Government of the Continental Troops," Papers of the Continental Congress, 48/41/1/1.

<sup>5</sup>Ford, Journals, 2:112-22. The first page cites the restriction.

<sup>6</sup>For all of this emphasis on religiousness, the main army was hardly a New Model Army in temperament. See the discussion in Chapter Five under Morale and Motivation.

martial covered a wide range of offenses but meaningful punishments were few. The maximum penalties included a one-month prison term, a fine of two-months' pay, drumming out of the army, reductions in rank, and thirty-nine lashes. The death penalty applied only to those who abandoned their post while in battle or who forced the capitulation of a fortress by their refusal to remain at their posts.<sup>7</sup>

Two possible answers could explain why Congress failed to pass adequate legislation to ensure that order and harmony reigned in the army. The first was pragmatic. Members of Congress were practical politicians. Draconian punishments would deter potential recruits. Secondly, the rebels began the conflict with much ideological enthusiasm. They believed passionately in their cause. Perhaps they genuinely had faith that their forces, aroused by the struggle for liberty, were not just any ordinary army.<sup>8</sup>

However, Congress did pass amendments to the Articles of War on 7 November. The death penalty now covered mutiny and sedition; the conduct of treacherous correspondence with or giving intelligence to the enemy; desertion; and misbehavior

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<sup>7</sup>Ford, Journals, 2:112, 116, 119.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Royster, A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History & Culture, 1979), pp. 3-23 passim, 27, 31-32, 38-39, 43 contains some stimulating comments on the latter subject.

before the enemy, shameful abandonment of one's post, or encouraging others to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Patriot political leaders still failed to establish a graduated system of punishments. The codes allowed for no intermediate punishment short of death but greater than thirty-nine lashes. This lack of alternatives between seemingly paltry penalties and death greatly complicated officers' efforts to mete out swift justice.

Congress therefore issued a revised Articles of War on 20 September 1776. These regulations remained in force for the duration of the war. They also stipulated the death penalty for failure to do the utmost to thwart mutiny and sedition; striking a superior or disobeying orders; sleeping at one's post; sounding a false alarm; causing harm to anyone carrying provisions to the army; casting away arms and ammunition; leaking the watchword; relief of the enemy with aid; and plundering. Corporal punishment expanded in scope as well and the maximum limit rose to one hundred lashes.<sup>10</sup> But Congress' efforts still missed the mark.

Commanders and soldiers alike had to deal with the inadequacies of the Articles of War for the duration of the conflict. Its effects on the morale and effectiveness of the enlisted men are difficult to judge. An understanding of why the patriot military-justice system evolved as it did

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<sup>9</sup>Ford, Journals, 3:331-32.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 5:790. 797-99; 806.

requires a closer examination of its disciplinary methods compared with those of the other armies of the time.

Such a comparative analysis of the participants' military justice systems leads to several astounding conclusions. Leading patriots naturally sought to establish a regular army which resembled the British Army with which they were most familiar. The Articles of War were a clear imitation of the British system of military justice, though initially "watered down" to conform with patriot sensibilities about the unique nature of their cause as well as to draw recruits. Ultimately, however, the Continentals wound up imitating one of the harshest and most legalistic military-justice formulae in Europe. Such judicial systems were extremely bureaucratic and lacked a scheme of graduated punishments. German methods practiced in America appear milder in certain ways, contrary to expectations. The French were outright enlightened -- or lax -- in comparison. Patriot soldiers who fought America's battles after 1776 thus endured one of the most severe military-justice systems in existence, second only in severity to the British.

For example, as early as June 1775 Tudor as Staff Judge Advocate pointed out that the general court martial covered too many offenses. He recommended an expanded role for regimental courts martial.<sup>11</sup> Lafayette commented on 30 December 1777 that the predilection for courts martial was

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<sup>11</sup>"Rules & Articles for the Government of the Continental Troops."

very English and quite bad, reflecting a "love of lawyers, speakers, and of that black apparatus of sentences and judgments; . . ." He concluded, "There is no proportion in the punishments."<sup>12</sup> A board of general officers echoed this latter sentiment. They advocated the addition of sentences to hard labor on public works.<sup>13</sup> Washington discussed this shortcoming with Congress as late as 3 February 1781.<sup>14</sup>

Congress did increase the maximum lashes permissible on 15 June 1781 to five hundred as well as sentences on public works "for a reasonable term".<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the shortcomings remained. Maj. Gen. William Alexander, Lord Stirling, wrote to Washington about officers' complaints over time lost on frequent courts martials at brigade and division levels. He recommended their replacement with two general courts martial under a Judge Advocate and a deputy.<sup>16</sup> Superiors exhorted subordinates in August-September 1782 and again in November to distinguish between atrocious and intermediate crimes.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Marie Jean Paul Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, Memoirs, Correspondence, and Manuscripts of General Lafayette, 3 vols. (London: Saunders & Otley, 1837), 1:148-49.

<sup>13</sup>"Meeting of General Officers," August 1778, Papers of the Continental Congress, 168/152/6/317.

<sup>14</sup>Washington, Writings, 21:178.

<sup>15</sup>Ford, Journals, 20:65.

<sup>16</sup>Letter, 9 July 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>17</sup>Numbered Record Books, 64/165-66, 67/123-24.

Washington was painfully cognizant of the inadequacies of the Articles of War. The Commander in Chief had to balance the need to maintain order with the mens' privations, sacrifices which often drove the soldiers to misbehavior. In retrospect two centuries later the historian may question Washington's inconsistency. There were numerous instances of the same crime meriting different punishments. He dealt with each case individually.<sup>18</sup> He did not shirk from exercising clemency.

For example, Washington ordered a stay of execution for ten soldiers and pardoned all ten four days later.<sup>19</sup> Surgeon Thacher discussed five soldiers sentenced to death on 20 April 1779 for desertion and robbery. Three received pardons at the last minute because the Commander in Chief was "always tenderly disposed to spare the lives of his soldiers." On 20 February 1780 the surgeon witnessed another soldier executed for robbery and one pardoned.<sup>20</sup> In June 1778 Washington heard about a private in Colonel Angell's regiment sentenced to three hundred lashes, i.e. one hundred each for desertion, false reenlistment, and perjury; he reduced the punishment to one hundred total.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Current American military law requires all commanders to consider every case individually as well. Any specification of penalties based on the offense alone is punishable as "command influence."

<sup>19</sup>General Orders, 17 and 21 August 1778, Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book.

<sup>20</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, pp. 158, 186.

Yet Washington's concern over discipline is the only clear-cut case of his disregard for Congressional guidelines in his otherwise faithful record of respect for civilian supremacy. The Commander in Chief did not shrink from approving cumulative penalties to circumvent the Congressional limit of one hundred lashes in effect for most of the war. A private of the Third New York received 150 lashes for being drunk on parade and abusing his sergeant.<sup>22</sup> On 8 February 1778 three civilians each received 250 lashes for smuggling flour, cattle, and sheep to British-held Philadelphia.<sup>23</sup> A corporal of Malcolm's Regiment was sentenced to a cumulative 165 lashes for threatening a lieutenant, drunkenness, and neglect of duty.<sup>24</sup> On 16 April a private of the Second Virginia was convicted of desertion, forging a discharge, and reenlisting in the Twelfth Pennsylvania under false pretenses. Each crime was liable to one hundred lashes; the soldier received three hundred. On 29 May he approved a sentence of two hundred lashes for a private in the Tenth Pennsylvania found guilty of desertion and attempted escape upon apprehension.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Washington, Writings, 12: 49.

<sup>22</sup>Lt. Col. Marinus Willet Orderly Book, 5 June 1777.

<sup>23</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:435-36.

<sup>24</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Regiment, 1 March 1778, Pa. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 57, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>25</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:435-36; 11:266, 487.

The other departments also violated the Congressional limit of one hundred lashes throughout the war. A soldier from Vose's Regiment was sentenced to four hundred lashes, one hundred each for enlisting three times and changing his name once. Heath did remit one hundred of the lashes. A private in Jackson's Regiment merited no less than five hundred lashes for refusing to join his company when ordered. Heath again remitted one hundred of the stripes. One enterprising infantryman in Nixon's Regiment wound up with three hundred lashes for desertion and multiple enlistments and two others got two and three hundred lashes each for stealing and killing a cow.<sup>26</sup>

Washington was no mere martinet. He believed that punishments had to serve as exemplary lessons. He observed so to Col. Christopher Greene in October 1780 and added that he did not seek them, especially capital punishment. He frowned upon deliberate brutality. On 9 July 1779 he wrote to Maj. Richard Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee, rejecting his suggestion that deserters be decapitated. Unfortunately, Lee had already acted. On the tenth the Commander in Chief expressed his disapproval. He feared the bad effects such an act would have on the army and the country.<sup>27</sup>

Contemporaries were not insensitive to the pitfalls of meting out fierce corporal punishments. Thacher questioned

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<sup>26</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 10 May 1777, 20 January 1780, and 30 January 1780.

<sup>27</sup>Washington, Writings, 15:388, 399; 20:228.

whether the use of such lessons to impress others did not also lose the soldier himself who in the aftermath lost all ambition to be a good example.<sup>28</sup> Superiors pointed out that the goal of any punishment was to "reclaim those who are not [lost] to all Sense of Virtue of Military Pride." They believed that the army needed other modes of punishment to awaken feelings of honor and better influence soldiers.<sup>29</sup>

Nonetheless, American military leaders became some of the most prolific floggers of the eighteenth century. The lash became the primary instrument with which to dispense military justice. Indeed, the use of other punishments was so rare that they stand out when reported. A cavalryman had to run the gauntlet of one hundred men for plundering. Another was put on the wooden horse for an hour with a carbine tied to each foot for insulting a woman.<sup>30</sup> Heath agreed with the sentencing of a private in Brook's regiment to picketing for three minutes for leaving his guard position. However, he added that he disapproved of picketing as a punishment in regiments of foot ever again.<sup>31</sup>

Other case studies included two soldiers in the amalgamated First and Third Connecticut who were picketed ten minutes each for playing cards. Another had to run the

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<sup>28</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 183.

<sup>29</sup>Numbered Record Books, 64/165-66; 67/123-24.

<sup>30</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 1 November 1777.

<sup>31</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 5 March 1778.

gauntlet of the regiment twice for defaming a sergeant. Two men were sentenced to forty and thirty blows each with rods for fighting with knives.<sup>32</sup> Two men from the First New Hampshire were forced to run a gauntlet of five hundred files for desertion and forging discharges.<sup>33</sup>

Moreover, unit orderly books also reveal a marked tendency to mete out the maximum corporal punishment for a wide variety of offenses. Three soldiers received the maximum penalty of thirty-nine lashes, two for desertion and one for theft.<sup>34</sup> Three soldiers each got thirty-nine lashes, two for desertion and the third for uttering an inimical speech about America.<sup>35</sup> A soldier of Livingston's regiment was sentenced to one hundred lashes for desertion.<sup>36</sup> Yet a private of the Third New York also merited a hundred stripes for stealing nine dollars.<sup>37</sup>

The latter war years were no different. A private of the Fourth Pennsylvania received one hundred lashes for stealing some money. Privates in the Eighth Virginia and Hale's Regiment got the same punishment, one for plundering

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<sup>32</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 15 March 1778, 8 and 15 March 1780.

<sup>33</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, 11 June 1780.

<sup>34</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade, 12, 15, and 16 August 1776, Orderly Book no. 49.

<sup>35</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 15 September 1776.

<sup>36</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 1 May 1777.

<sup>37</sup>Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book, 9 June 1777.

and the other for attempted desertion.<sup>38</sup> A private from Bailey's Regiment wound up with one hundred lashes for desertion and false reenlistment while another soldier of the Ninth Massachusetts was sentenced to one hundred lashes for robbery and plundering.<sup>39</sup> A sergeant of the Ninth Pennsylvania was reduced to the ranks and sentenced to one hundred lashes for receipt of stolen goods.<sup>40</sup> Two soldiers in Howe's Brigade were sentenced to one hundred lashes each for stealing some public clothing.<sup>41</sup>

Flogging was also the preferred method to discipline soldiers after comparatively minor infractions. A soldier in Bolding's regiment received ten lashes for falling asleep on post.<sup>42</sup> A private of the Seventh Pennsylvania was sentenced to thirty lashes for stealing some wheat.<sup>43</sup> One orderly book communicated the threat of five lashes to any soldier who did not cock his hat properly.<sup>44</sup> A bold private from the Corps of Invalids got fifty lashes for taking a

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<sup>38</sup>Regimental Orders for the Third New Hampshire, 28 January 1778.

<sup>39</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 15 October 1778.

<sup>40</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 13 February 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>41</sup>Young Orderly Book, 28 February 1780.

<sup>42</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 1 May 1777.

<sup>43</sup>Regimental Orders for the Third New Hampshire, 28 January 1778.

<sup>44</sup>Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, 3 November 1778, Continental Army MSS.

desk from a general officer's quarters.<sup>45</sup> Two men in the First/Third Connecticut found themselves with sentences of thirty lashes each for wasting musket cartridges.<sup>46</sup>

Again, the trend continued throughout the war. A private of the Second New York was sentenced to eighty lashes for being absent without official leave (AWOL).<sup>47</sup> A group of five soldiers convicted of "plundering public horses" were all flogged: one got eighty-nine lashes; one, fifty; and three, forty.<sup>48</sup> A register of courts martial for the Fourth Massachusetts listed fourteen cases. Three were found not guilty, but ten or 91 percent were sentenced to floggings ranging from fifty to one hundred lashes.<sup>49</sup>

Only the British meted out greater numbers of lashes since they had no cap on flogging. For example, on 24 November 1775 a private of the Tenth Regiment convicted of quitting his post while on sentry duty and stealing a few articles from stocks previously forbidden to personnel received five hundred lashes. A grenadier from the Marines was accused of striking an officer and exhibiting insolent,

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<sup>45</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 20 April 1779.

<sup>46</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 15 February 1780.

<sup>47</sup>Col. Philip van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment of 1777, 13 January 1780, New York (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, No. 101, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>48</sup>Benjamin Mooers Orderly Book, 16 September 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>49</sup>William Shepard Collection, 14 January-11 June 1781.

mutinous behavior. He was acquitted of the first charge since the officer was out of uniform and his identity was thus unknown. However, the soldier was convicted on the second charge and received eight hundred lashes. On 3 January 1776 a private of the Forty-Third Regiment and his wife were found with stolen goods. His punishment was no less than an incredible one thousand lashes. His wife alone merited one hundred, over double the Congressional limit of thirty-nine then in effect.<sup>50</sup>

Numerous other examples of these types abound ad nauseam, ferocious punishments affecting both British and loyalist soldiers. British military justice in comparison to the American was not only tougher but it was harsher than previous years in certain ways. The lash average for desertion in 1775-83 was 802 compared with 777 for 1757-63. In other words, "If a deserter were caught, he would feel the weight of the lash as never before in British military history."<sup>51</sup> Reform would also be a long time in coming. A formal lash limit similar to the American system did not occur until 1812 when the ceiling became three hundred.<sup>52</sup>

Conversely, though German troop discipline was known throughout Europe for its harshness, an analysis of

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<sup>50</sup>Howe, General Orders, pp. 263-64, 287-88.

<sup>51</sup>Arthur N. Gilbert, "The Changing Face of British Military Justice, 1757-1783," Military Review (April 1985): 81-82.

<sup>52</sup>Clode, Military Forces of the Crown, 1:155 cites the lash limit.

surviving records does not justify this reputation. The punishments were severe enough, but they do not stand out for their severity when compared with those meted out to British and American soldiers, patriot or loyalist. Indeed, one Hessian officer wrote to his brother that standards were not the same as the last war when soldiers could expect immediate blows if they did not work tirelessly.<sup>53</sup>

German military justice frequently included not only punishments other than the lash, but also flogging sentences very much lower than those discussed above. For example, a sergeant received forty-one blows with a broadsword for dueling. A private earned thirty-five lashes with a rod for drunkenness. Another merited thirty lashes for theft.<sup>54</sup> A jäger convicted of inducing another to rob a merchant received 150 lashes with his shirt on.<sup>55</sup> One captured deserter received twenty-four lashes; another, thirty lashes.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup>William L. Stone, trans. Letters of Hessian and Brunswick Officers during the American Revolution, The Era of the American Revolution, ed. Leonard W. Levy (Albany, N.Y.: Joel Munsell's, 1891; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), p. 206.

<sup>54</sup>Döhla, Hessian Diary, pp. 103, 108, 201.

<sup>55</sup>Diary of the Hesse Hanau Jäger Corps, p. 75, MSS of the German Forces in America, 1776-83, Morristown National Historical Park, Morristown, N.J.

<sup>56</sup>Lt. John Charles Philip von Krafft, Journal of Lieutenant John Charles Philip von Krafft, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution (New York: NYHS, 1882; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 181, 192.

While the Continentals shunned it, the Germans relied heavily on the use of the gauntlet formed of two hundred men. For example, a grenadier court-martialed for stealing while on watch had to run the gauntlet twelve times. Another soldier, referred to as "one rascal," was allowed two days to run it eighteen times. Deserters fared the worst. One was sentenced to twenty-four trips through the gauntlet. Officers sentenced another to death but reduced his punishment to thirty circuits spread over three days.<sup>57</sup>

The French Army again defied the stereotype. A regiment contained two corporals expert in the use of the lash.<sup>58</sup> Yet the French not only rarely resorted to flogging but in general frowned upon corporal punishment as inconsistent with their notion of individual motivation.<sup>59</sup> The famous Maurice de Saxe once lamented that his countrymen feared use of the lash "because false ideals of what constitutes personal rights have destroyed its use."<sup>60</sup> Lafayette even decried Frenchmen in patriot ranks as a very bad influence. French soldiers needed to be under their own officers.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 156, 159, 166, 186.

<sup>58</sup>Kennett, French Forces in America, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Simes, The Military Guide for Young Officers, 2nd ed. (London: n.p., 1776), p. 4.

<sup>60</sup>Maurice de Saxe, Reveries on the Art of War, ed. and trans. Brig. Gen. Thomas R. Phillips, Military Classics Series (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co., 1944), p. 79.

<sup>61</sup>Lafayette, Memoirs, 1: 63.

Lafayette cited the benefits of the French method of decentralization. Officers practiced minimal bureaucracy and proportionate punishments such as confinement to barracks. They usually dispensed justice at unit level; only very serious charges went to court martial.<sup>62</sup>

Ironically then, Washington's Continentals, fighting for the cause of liberty, after 1776 had to cope with one of the worst military-justice systems in existence in terms of enlightenment and efficiency. How incongruous that the German and French soldiers were better served by the law.

#### Discipline

One must go beyond individual crimes and punishments to determine how professional the Continentals became over the course of their eight-year existence. This sub-chapter thus investigates other individual and collective functions which were common and repetitive for a regular army.

One critical barometer of army competence was its sick rate, i.e. what percentage of the rank and file were unfit for duty due to sickness. Such statistics were a measure not only of individual soldier training, but also an indicator of officer and noncommissioned-officer concern for the welfare of their troops. Army returns cover the period July 1775 to July 1783, a total of ninety-seven months, but statistics for eighty-nine survived.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 1: 148-49.

These records suggest strongly that the Continental Army dramatically improved its professionalism. One mitigating factor could be the generally smaller forces maintained in the field during the latter half of the war, but it likely played a minimum influence on these statistics.

The winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge cost the main army its highest rate of sickness for the entire war. The costliest month for the duration of the conflict was February 1778 when 35.5 percent of the rank and file were sick. In March the rate was 33.5 percent, the third highest during the war. For December the rate was 32.2 percent, the fourth highest. The seventh-highest rate was 28.0 percent in January and April. The smallest percentage of rank and file who were sick during that winter quarters, December to May inclusive, was 27.1 percent in May and that figure still represents the ninth highest for the war.

Further analysis yields some instructive insights. A yearly average was computed for comparative purposes. The figures are: 1775, 13.1 percent; 1776, 20.1 percent; 1777, 23.6 percent; 1778, 24.4 percent; 1779, 10.5 percent; 1780, 9.6 percent; 1781, 10.8 percent; 1782, 14.1 percent; and 1783, 10.9 percent. The average for 1775, when the army was in the midst of a friendly population and enthusiasm for the war was high, is greater than all those rates for 1779-83, except 1782. The figure kept climbing and peaked in 1778.

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<sup>63</sup>The data in Lesser, Sinews of Independence, pp. xxx-xxxii formed the basis of this statistical analysis.

The statistics were also studied by dividing the war into three phases: July 1775 to November 1777; the winter of 1777-78, i.e. December 1777 through May 1778; and June 1778 to July 1783. The respective averages are 18.9 percent, 30.7 percent, and 12.3 percent. Since the winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge was part of the experience of the pre-reforms main army, another calculation was made dividing the war into two phases: July 1775 through May 1778 and June 1778 to July 1783. The respective figures are 21.2 percent and 12.3 percent.

A convenient example to illustrate this trend is a comparison of the statistics from Valley Forge, 1777-78 and Morristown, 1779-80. The winter at Morristown was in fact far harsher than the more famous one at Valley Forge. The snows came early and bitter cold dogged the army. While the figures for December 1777 through May 1778 respectively are 32.2, 28.0, 35.5, 33.5, 28.0, and 27.1 percent, those for December 1779 through May 1780 are significantly lower: 10.8, 11.1, 11.0, 9.7, 10.2, and 9.7 percent respectively.

An analysis of sick rates in four different ways thus demonstrates conclusively that the percentages for 1779-83 are in fact the lowest of the war. Washington's regulars dramatically dropped their sick rate as their professionalism improved.

Besides curbing sickness, armies had formal procedures and plans to lay out camps and maintain order. Troops had to bivouac in such a manner as to facilitate rapid

deployment. Officers and sergeants had to enforce zealously rules for field sanitation and check their men to ensure that they were preserving uniforms, arms and equipment. Free time in camp was an opportunity for soldiers to improve themselves and their surroundings and not a period of idleness. A system of guards and pickets with coded passwords and a schedule of reliefs protected the camp from intrusion by spies or a surprise attack.

Washington's army did establish and maintain these minutiae of the encampment. The orderly books consumed volumes of pages with passwords, countersigns, and the breakdowns of various details for guards and pickets. However, the main army experienced a long and difficult transition from amateurs to genuine regulars with unstinting attention to detail. Rev. William Emerson wrote to his wife on 17 July 1775 and described the great variety in the rebel lines with camps as different in form as their owners in dress, each tent showing the temper and taste of its occupants.<sup>64</sup> Washington lamented to Maj. Gen. Israel Putnam on 25 August 1776 the scattered, wasteful firing of pickets and other men in camp which discouraged enemy desertion.<sup>65</sup>

Affairs became worse before they got better. Part of Wyllys' regimental camp caught fire.<sup>66</sup> As the main army

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<sup>64</sup>Commager and Morris, Spirit of 'Seventy-Six, 1:154-55.

<sup>65</sup>Washington, Writings, 5:486-87.

<sup>66</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 18 October 1777.

settled at Valley Forge, the lack of camp discipline continued. Washington was so enraged over the prevailing disorder that he authorized a summary flogging of twenty lashes on 22 December 1777 for any soldier who discharged his musket in camp without cause.<sup>67</sup> Dr. Benjamin Rush, admittedly no friend of the Commander in Chief, visited the main army at the same time and observed, "The encampment dirty and stinking, . . ." He concluded, "The troops dirty, undisciplined and ragged; guns fired 100 a day; pickets left 5 days and sentries 24 hours, without relief; bad bread; no order; universal disgust."<sup>68</sup>

While Washington's troops had made progress in battle, they still had much to learn about the myriad requirements of an army in the field. The main army typified the rest. The patriot troops knew what to do. But summoning the discipline, individual and collective, to enforce regulations to a uniformly high standard was a major hurdle.

Lasting results were evident in the latter half of the war, i.e. after 1778. Von Steuben's efforts played a major role in the transformation of the main army.<sup>69</sup> However, he was far from alone in his work. Success was due to the

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<sup>67</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:191.

<sup>68</sup>Esmond Wright, ed. and comp., The Fire of Liberty: the American War of Independence Seen through the Eyes of the Men and Women, the Statesmen and Soldiers Who Fought It (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), pp. 117-18.

<sup>69</sup>Chapter Six analyzes the critical role of von Steuben in detail.

unceasing exhortations, inspections, and corrections of officers and non-commissioned officers. For example, new instructions required the burning of the powder of one cartridge daily in every hut in order to purge the air.<sup>70</sup> The main army began the practice of striking tents three times weekly for four hours to air the grounds.<sup>71</sup> One commander reemphasized the critical role and responsibilities of sergeants to check on their men frequently and to avoid neglect of duty<sup>72</sup>

Summary punishments encouraged the soldiers to maintain camp discipline. Fifteen lashes punished the unauthorized discharge of a firearm in camp; twenty lashes, for pulling up floor boards in barracks. The commander of the Second Massachusetts expressed his expectations that his officers would visit their men at least twice daily and submit written reports.<sup>73</sup> The general of the day had to supervise the policing of camp.<sup>74</sup> One unit still addressed the unauthorized discharge of muskets in camp but believed the culprits were recruits recently arrived. The orders encouraged veterans to exhort the new soldiers to conserve

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<sup>70</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, 27 May 1778.

<sup>71</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 20 August 1778.

<sup>72</sup>Regimental Orders, March 1779, Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book.

<sup>73</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 24, 26 and 27 July 1779.

<sup>74</sup>General Orders, 1 August 1779, Simeon Belding Orderly Book.

their ammunition lest they run short in battle when they shall be expected to use the bayonet rather than withdraw.<sup>75</sup>

The Second Massachusetts formed a detail of two men per company to police the grounds from fifty yards in front of the soldiers' huts to fifty yards behind the officers' quarters.<sup>76</sup> Senior officers zeroed in on garbage littering the camp. Each division established its own patrol zone to police. A detachment of three sergeants and thirty privates set to work burying animal carcasses two days later.<sup>77</sup> Commanders of battalions were reminded to insure the proper construction and use of "sinks," i.e. field latrines.<sup>78</sup>

The fruits of constant drilling and disciplining were clear late in the conflict. Washington spent considerable time touring the camps during the final years of the war. The Commander in Chief was pleased with what he saw. On 20 May 1782 he praised two New York regiments in General Orders. On 5 June he praised the entire army for improvements over last month. On the tenth he mentioned that the soldiers of the Second Massachusetts Brigade were every bit as good as their comrades in the First Brigade. He cited the light company of the Eighth Massachusetts as

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<sup>75</sup>Regimental Orders, August 1780, Everett Orderly Book.

<sup>76</sup>Regimental Orders, 29 January 1781, William Torrey Orderly Book.

<sup>77</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 27 and 29 October 1781.

<sup>78</sup>Francis Tufts Orderly Book, 10 January 1782, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

well. On the fourteenth he extolled the light company of the Tenth Massachusetts in particular for preserving uniforms and maintaining an excellent military appearance.<sup>79</sup>

On 29 August General Orders detailed the main army's Order of Battle used both for engaging the enemy and establishing an encampment. The Commander in Chief further commented that this occasion was the first time when the entire main army, now six thousand strong, was decently uniformed, well armed, properly equipped, and in tents of a regulation model.<sup>80</sup> Washington concluded on 18 October to President John Jay that ". . . our Army is better Organized, disciplined, and cloathed than it has been, at any period since the commencement of the War."<sup>81</sup>

The dramatic change in the tone of Washington's correspondence over the eight-year struggle is unmistakable. Granted, he still had to deal with the financial distress which saddled every effort of the logistic services. Nevertheless, the patriots successfully established a regular army and now kept it in the field in spite of the fiscal disaster of the weak central government. Historians must acknowledge that the army which Washington praised in

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<sup>79</sup>Maj. Edward E. Boynton, comp., General Orders of George Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the Revolution, Issued at Newburgh on the Hudson, 1782-83, with an Introduction by Alan C. Aimone (n.p., 1883; reprint ed., Harrison, N.Y.: Harbor Hills Books, 1973), pp. 21, 27-29, 53-54.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-59.

<sup>81</sup>Washington, Writings, 25:275.

General Orders and in his correspondence was small when compared with the thousands originally envisioned.

While the main army never achieved the desired size, it attained a high state of combat readiness thanks to the development and maintenance of standard procedures. The efforts of officers and enlisted men had not been in vain.

Unfortunately, discipline did not always prevail. The rules of war did not prohibit an army from appropriating any plunder. The precepts of limited warfare did not question the legitimacy of looting one's enemies. Plundering was a favorite pastime of all armies in the eighteenth century, compensation for low pay and irregular rations. Officers and noncommissioned officers had to watch their men constantly. In truth, leaders' vigilance often depended on the particular area marched through and the attitude of the local populace. Commanders were far less faithful in curbing their troops' conduct in enemy country.

The American Revolution is an interesting arena in which to analyze the behavior of the armies since there was considerable difficulty in identifying friend from foe. All participants were also waging a campaign of "hearts and minds" of sorts which should have resulted in meticulous control over the soldiers' predilections for rapine.

Nonetheless, civilians, whether patriot or tory, had good reason to fear the presence of Washington's regulars as much as any others. The Continental Army, in spite of the lofty goals of the Revolution, was no less prone to pillage

than its allies or enemies. It was in fact no different than any other army of the period. This conduct was due in part to the necessity to resort to impressment of supplies when normal logistical channels failed to deliver needed stores. Stories of apathetic civilians and enriched contractors provided plenty of rationalization. Commanders were well aware that there was a fine line between necessary impressment and malicious plunder.

Yet Washington's sensitivity towards the potential alienation of civilians because of depredations perpetrated by his troops was in vain throughout the entire war. For example, soldiers in New York City tore down a statue on the Broadway.<sup>82</sup> Heath castigated his troops for their wanton pillage of fields and gardens, labeling them a scourge instead of a protection for the people.<sup>83</sup> The troops even sacked Lord Stirling's residence!<sup>84</sup> General Orders on 7 September castigated the soldiers for "unbounded Licentiousness . . . in plundering & destroying everything they can lay their hands on."<sup>85</sup> Heath had to address damaged and burned fences and buildings as well.<sup>86</sup> The

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<sup>82</sup>Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, 10 July 1776.

<sup>83</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 18 August 1776.

<sup>84</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade, Orderly Book no. 36, 31 August 1776.

<sup>85</sup>General Orders, 7 September 1776, Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book.

<sup>86</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 2 May 1777.

cries of the inhabitants continued. The troops were told that they could expect death upon conviction of plundering.<sup>87</sup> The incidents still did not abate.

Rampaging troops from Valley Forge plundered residents on both sides of the Schuylkill.<sup>88</sup> The troops even marred the main army's sterling performance at Monmouth Courthouse by plundering of such a degree that the Commander in Chief demanded an inspection of packs and stated that future offenders would invariably be punished with death.<sup>89</sup>

Renewed depredations marked the main army's return to New York. Civilians reported their poultry disappearing at night.<sup>90</sup> The soldiers found themselves restricted to camp as a result of their "ill behavior and irregularity."<sup>91</sup> The commander of the First/Third Connecticut chastized his men about pulled fences, burned rails, milked cows, and trampled

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<sup>87</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 11 September 1777.

<sup>88</sup>Col. Philip van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment of 1777, 25-26 December 1777, Pa. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 56.2, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>89</sup>General Orders, 30 June 1778, Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington's Connecticut Brigade, N.J. & N.Y. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 61, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>90</sup>Division Orders, 23 September 1778, Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>91</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 25 October 1778.

fields.<sup>92</sup> Wing Orders mentioned the complaints of local residents concerning their gardens and potato yards.<sup>93</sup>

Even during the dreadful winter quarters at Morristown in 1779-80 when Washington's army needed all the friends it could gather, officials cited all inhabitants' property "at prey." The Commander in Chief was "astonished and mortified."<sup>94</sup> Yet the marauding continued. Wheatfields became off limits.<sup>95</sup> Greene had to plead for the closest cooperation of all officers to prevent the burning of fences and the breakup of enclosures<sup>96</sup> Commanders lamented public buildings "pulled to pieces" and woods consumed by fire.<sup>97</sup> During the Yorktown campaign Virginia residents suffered numerous burned rails despite the availability of wood.<sup>98</sup>

This wanton conduct of the army did not escape the notice of foreigners. Baron Ludwig von Closen, an officer in Rochambeau's army, made an interesting observation about the conduct of Washington's troops in the field:

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<sup>92</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 4 and 13 June 1779.

<sup>93</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 9 August 1779.

<sup>94</sup>Col. Philip van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment of 1777, 29 December 1779 and 28 January 1780, Orderly Book no. 101.

<sup>95</sup>Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 27 March 1780.

<sup>96</sup>Benjamin Mooers Orderly Book, 25 September 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>97</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 4 and 18 April 1781.

<sup>98</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 7 October 1781.

It is to be noted that the American army paid neither for wood nor forage, and in a way, for nothing in this country. The soldiers plunder a great deal (and almost by turns). One must, however, do justice to General Washington and to the principal officers in this army and say that they give orders and take all possible precaution to prevent such marauding; but since the subalterns are too much interested in it, . . . these orders are not very strictly followed. Perhaps they are almost impossible to enforce, . . .<sup>99</sup>

Even late in the war orders called for the preservation of private property and forbade the wanton destruction of grain, grass, and produce.<sup>100</sup> "No insults or depredations to be committed . . . on any pretext whatever, . . ."<sup>101</sup>

The Continental Army's behavior in the field was thus no different than any other eighteenth-century army with regard to plunder. No punishments, even outright executions, failed to eliminate the problem for the duration of the war.

The enemy armies in America were certainly far from guiltless in this regard. The records of the British Army are full of entries of draconian punishments meted out to pillagers of one sort or another -- also in vain. The British Articles of War recognized it as a capital offense. During the Philadelphia campaign of 1777 Howe issued orders that any soldiers or followers who strayed beyond the camp outposts, plundered, or engaged in devastation of any kind

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<sup>99</sup>Baron Ludwig von Closen, The Revolutionary War Journal of Baron Ludwig von Closen, ed. and trans. Evelyn M. Acomb, with an Introduction by Evelyn M. Acomb (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History & Culture, 1958), p. 259.

<sup>100</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 22 June 1782.

<sup>101</sup>Army Orders, 11 July 1782, Wayne Papers.

would be put to death immediately by the Provost.<sup>102</sup> The Anspacher Döhla believed the British to be the most prone to stealing of anyone.<sup>103</sup>

The Germans had the reputation among Americans of being utter despoilers, a characterization greatly exaggerated by patriot propaganda and fears of these dreaded "mercenaries." The jäger officer Ewald viewed some plundering as a legitimate exercise according to the rules of war. Prosperous inhabitants were thus "fair game" as the enemy. He did decline a share of any of the booty when the homes of local notables were plundered on the night of 20 November 1776. He also mentioned the destruction of fifty houses of the "disloyal" along the route of march in June 1777.<sup>104</sup>

Long before the Revolution of 1789 French soldiers of the eighteenth century had earned a reputation as being the most ill disciplined and most accomplished pillagers in Europe, in spite of harsh penalties if caught by the military police.<sup>105</sup> Yet primary sources do not mention any significant instances of widespread looting. Rochambeau's command was meant to be a showpiece to France's New World ally. Moreover, the reforms begun after the Seven Years'

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<sup>102</sup>Howe, General Orders, p. 480.

<sup>103</sup>Döhla, Hessian Diary, p. 72.

<sup>104</sup>Capt. Johann Ewald, Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal, ed. and trans. Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 18-19, 65.

<sup>105</sup>Kennett, French Armies in the Seven Years' War, pp. 83-86.

War were bearing fruit with a renewed discipline. The army's coffers were usually full and all Americans had already demonstrated a willingness to trade and cooperate with any army who could pay in hard currency.

What mattered, however, was that the Continentals were as keen a lot of plunderers as ever walked an eighteenth-century battlefield. Their conduct with regard to looting was indistinguishable from any other army. In spite of the strict orders of commanders who were only too aware of the possible political ramifications, soldiers and their followers continued to leave the encampment, plunder the local inhabitants, and return to camp. They sacked on the march. Floggings and executions did not stop them.

The gist of this comparative analysis has thus shown the dramatic improvements of the main army in curbing its sick rate and maintaining orderly encampments. Unfortunately, greater professionalization did not curb the soldiers' propensity for plunder.

#### Desertion

Desertion was the bane of all eighteenth-century armies which lost thousands of soldiers annually. Yet no historian has compared desertion rates among the armies which fought in America.

A comparative analysis of admittedly-incomplete data shows that the patriot soldiers had the highest desertion rate of any army in the war. The overall desertion rate of

the Continentals for the duration of the conflict was an estimated 18.2 percent.<sup>106</sup> Nearly one-fifth of its soldiers abandoned the patriot cause illicitly. A more recent study stated that even this figure is too low. Dismissing the 1775-77 period due to sketchy data, James Edmondson computed a desertion rate of 17.8 percent for 1778 and an average of 10 percent for 1780-83. Moreover, he believed that the reports of sick absent soldiers contained many who in truth had deserted. He concluded that the average desertion rate for the Continentals for the war was closer to 20-25 percent.<sup>107</sup> Losses could be even higher within some state lines at certain times. For example, the New Jersey Continentals suffered a staggering 42-percent desertion rate in 1777, followed by a 10-percent annual average thereafter.<sup>108</sup> The North Carolina troops left at an overall rate of 10.5 percent.<sup>109</sup> These rates include the exploits of bounty jumpers.

Statistics for desertion for the other forces are sketchy at best. The British recorded only 3,701 deserters

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<sup>106</sup>Thaddeus Tate, Jr., "Desertion from the American Revolutionary Army," (M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1948), pp. 9-11.

<sup>107</sup>James Howard Edmondson, "Desertion in the American Army during the Revolutionary War," (Ph.D. dissertation, Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1971), pp. x, 11-14, 217-18, 236-40.

<sup>108</sup>Lender, New Jersey Soldier, p. 22.

<sup>109</sup>Hugh F. Rankin, The North Carolina Continentals (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1971), pp. 392-93.

for the duration of the war among their forces in North America and the West Indies, a miniscule figure considering that British strength in the theater reached some 92,000 between 1780-81.<sup>110</sup> Even if one arbitrarily doubled the number of deserters to account for other factors, the resulting desertion rate is still only 8.04 percent of peak British strength, less than half of the more conservative figure for Continental desertion.

On the other hand, the German troops have earned a reputation as inveterate deserters. Prisoners of war were especially vulnerable. Yet substantive figures cannot support this characterization. Desertion increased during the latter war years. This rise was due to the obvious decline in British fortunes and the lower quality of replacements. Opportunity was also a key factor. The unending war of small posts provided small detachments with many chances to desert. Total Hessian losses to desertion were thus high, amounting to slightly over 3,000 out of just under 19,000 or nearly 16 percent.<sup>111</sup>

These statistics confirm the analysis of French historian Corvisier discussed in Chapter One. Desertion was very much an individual exercise. Ideology seemingly played little role in determining the decisions of the rank and

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<sup>110</sup>Frey, British Soldier in America, p. 72.

<sup>111</sup>Atwood, The Hessians, p. 204.

file. The primary motivating factor for the would-be deserter in any army was self-interest.

There is no adequate explanation for the extremely high desertion rate for the Continentals. A major factor was probably their proximity to home compared with the other soldiers in America except the loyalists, statistics for whom are lacking. Nonetheless, the patriot soldier's propensity to desert in even greater numbers than the British and Hessian "mercenaries" says little for the attachment of the rank and file to the cause. The departure of a fifth to a quarter of the enlisted men was a powerful statement in itself.

#### Mutinies

The stereoytype of patriot mutinies has been as examples of abused men driven to the limits of endurance who still remained faithful to the cause. But there has again been no effort to compare these incidents with those of other armies of the period. Against what were typical mutinies directed?

A comparison of the Continental-Army incidents and outbreaks in European armies in fact yields similar conclusions. Mutiny was the ultimate tool of those who believed the relationship between soldier and superior had been violated and no other course of action could secure redress of their grievances. Mutiny was thus a collective protest over specific slights concerning troops' conditions

of service. At no time did the recalcitrant troops call into question the service owed to superiors in any army.

There had been minor examples of mutiny in the Continentals earlier but only a few men were involved or officers quickly settled the affair. For example, the fiery Anthony Wayne, while still a colonel, had to put down a mutinous company in Fort Ticonderoga. In November 1777 Enoch Poor's Brigade refused to march. A captain died in the struggle after himself killing a mutineer. Ebenezer Learned's Brigade moved from New Windsor only after they received a portion of the wages due them. Two mutinies erupted during the trying winter at Valley Forge and two more the following spring. On 1 January 1780 sixty Massachusetts soldiers paraded out of camp without authorization; they returned without a struggle. A few weeks later Lancaster, Pennsylvania was the scene of protest over lack of pay. In the spring of 1780 thirty-one soldiers turned to armed revolt; thirteen died in its suppression.<sup>112</sup>

Signs of greater potential trouble existed in 1779. The Board of War contacted Congress on 17 June about vague enlistment contracts. The term "for three years or the war" was subject to varied interpretation in the Pennsylvania and Maryland units. The enlisted men argued that three years

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<sup>112</sup>Allen Bowman, The Morale of the American Revolutionary Army, with an Introduction by Arthur Pope (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Public Affairs, 1943), p. 34 contains the most succinct account of these earlier incidents.

was the maximum to serve; the officers, the minimum.<sup>113</sup> Combined with severe shortages of food, pay, and clothing; the existence of foreigners and enemy deserters in the ranks; and the sight of some new troops receiving a hard-currency bounty, the end result was the worst series of mutinies in the history of the Continentals.

The progress of these affairs is well known and need not be repeated in any detail.<sup>114</sup> Two Connecticut regiments, the Fourth and the Eighth, began trouble on 25 May 1780; Pennsylvania troops ended the business quickly. The disturbance of six Pennsylvania regiments on 1 January 1781 was far more serious. Civil officials negotiated with their disgruntled soldiers. However, when the New Jersey Line followed suit on 20 January, Washington ordered its immediate suppression with force, including summary executions.

There was a thread of continuity in all of these mutinies. The troops turned to violent protest specifically over deteriorating conditions of service: terms of enlistment, lack of pay and clothing, and poor food. For example, the oft-quoted Joseph Plumb Martin, a Connecticut soldier, explained that in May 1780 the main army was starving and naked; at one point the men had eaten nothing in four days except some black birch bark.<sup>115</sup> Surgeon

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<sup>113</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 158/147/3/457.

<sup>114</sup>The issue is not what happened but why.

Thacher described the Connecticut soldiers' predicament: circumstances of neither present nor future recompense, their suffering from civilian insensitivity, pay five months in arrears, and currency with no value when they were paid. The Pennsylvania troops in turn had questions over their terms of enlistment; had gone without pay for a year; and had endured nakedness and famine.<sup>116</sup>

What became the issue for superiors was discipline. When the Pennsylvania Line mutinied, Washington was unsure whether "the spirit of defection" would spread. The subsequent uprising of the New Jersey troops required immediate, violent suppression: "I prefer any extremity to which the Jersey troops may be driven, to a compromise." The Commander in Chief concluded, "Unless this dangerous spirit can be suppressed by force there is an end to all subordination in the Army, and indeed to the Army itself."<sup>117</sup>

Mutiny was thus the ultimate form of protest. It strained the bonds formulated between officers and men and threatened to destroy the fragile unit cohesion so carefully developed over the months and years. In fact, Lafayette told the Chevalier de La Luzerne that one light company

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<sup>115</sup>Martin, Narrative, pp. 172, 182.

<sup>116</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, pp. 193, 240-41.

<sup>117</sup>Washington, Writings, 21:58, 130, 136.

refused to participate in the outbreak because the men would not abandon their captain.<sup>118</sup>

The willingness of the mutineers to continue to serve was never an issue. The Pennsylvanians assured authorities that they would fight to the last man under their own officers should the British advance. They handed over two spies sent by Clinton to effect their defection.<sup>119</sup> Commenting on these mutinies and their causes, Baron von Closen concluded, "In Europe, they would do the same for less."<sup>120</sup> Indeed, mutinies in European armies were over the same issues.

No English regiment mutinied during the Revolution. Several cases involving Scots occurred in Britain but not in the theater of war. The Seventy-Eighth Highland Regiment was seething with discontent in September 1778. Its soldiers objected to physical abuse, pay in arrears, and an unpaid bounty. Violence erupted at embarkation time. The disturbance ended peaceably as officials agreed to all the conditions. The Seventy-Sixth Regiment complained about similar conditions in March 1779. Again, the authorities

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<sup>118</sup>Marie Jean Paul Gilbert Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected Letters and Papers, 1776-1790, 4 vols., ed. Stanley J. Idzerda et al. (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1979), 3:317-18.

<sup>119</sup>Lt. John Shreve, "Personal Narrative of the Service of Lieut. John Shreve of the New-Jersey Line of the Continental Army," Magazine of American History, September 1879, p. 575.

<sup>120</sup>Von Closen, Revolutionary War Journal, p. 54.

settled without bloodshed. The regiment embarked for America where it served in the Southern campaigns.<sup>121</sup>

These outbreaks did not always end so happily. Soldiers of the Forty-Second and Seventy-First Regiments in April 1779 refused to be drafted to a non-Highland unit. They surrendered after suffering thirty-one casualties. Three of them received reprieves after sentences to be shot.<sup>122</sup>

The German forces also experienced some altercations. In March 1777 the Anspach-Bayreuth Regiment boarded their transports in preparation for the passage to America. The soldiers were not used to the cramped, cold conditions of life on a ship. The result was that "during the day a full insurrection and rebellion arose." The mutineers simply left the ships. The line troops and jägers exchanged shots. The officers threatened and cajoled. The Margrave himself appeared and spoke to his subjects. The crisis ended without further incident. The same regiment became a hornet's nest of discontent on 14 May 1783 when an officer arbitrarily arrested one soldier over a minor incident which was more misunderstanding than anything else. There was "strong resistance in the regiment" for over two hours. The soldier suffered no punishment and was released.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>121</sup>John Prebble, Mutiny: Highland Regiments in Revolt, 1743-1805 (n.p.: Martin Secker & Warburg, 1975; reprint ed., Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 116-31 passim, 138-40, 150-53.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid., pp. 154-79 passim.

<sup>123</sup>Döhla, Hessian Diary, pp. 4-8, 223.

Thus, the enlisted men of all the armies exhibited similar attitudes about mutiny. They understood that it was a desperate last resort. However, in all cases they were objecting to some aspect of their treatment. They often felt slighted and aggrieved that their officers could allow such things to pass. They did not question the validity of their service. Whether Continentals, Scots, or Anspachers, they all retained loyalty to their ultimate superior, whether Congress, the King, or the Margrave. The Continentals were no different in this regard than any other eighteenth-century army.

A comparative analysis of conditions in the Continental Army vis-à-vis other European forces has thus revealed no substantive differences in conduct with respect to desertion, mutinies, and plunder. Gradual but persistent patriot efforts towards greater professionalization resulted in effective encampments with due regard to emplacement, security, sanitation, and discipline. Perhaps the most incredible discovery thus far is the conclusion that the American form of military justice was one of the most brutal and bureaucratic, second only in severity after the British system which it imitated.

## CHAPTER FIVE

## ON CAMPAIGN

Morale and Motivation

Studies of patriot morale thus far are either old, restricted themselves solely within an American context, or barely mentioned the topic. For example, Allen Bowman's dated view of patriot morale rested upon the belief that the Continental Army was a unique standing army. He concluded that its morale was unlike other regular armies, similar to an irregular, fluctuating force, thus making it doubly precarious. He placed considerable emphasis on personal motivation and individualism.<sup>1</sup>

Howard Applegate's study of the Middle Department suggested several possible motivators. He believed that a major feature of their service was to harmonize their individual ambitions and goals with those of mankind.<sup>2</sup> Mark Lender's monograph on the New Jersey Continentals saw largely non-ideological reasons for service, particularly hopes for personal social mobility.<sup>3</sup> Neither source examined the topic beyond the American context.

<sup>1</sup>Bowman, Morale of the American Revolutionary Army, pp. 5, 103-4.

<sup>2</sup>Howard Louis Applegate, "Constitutions Like Iron: The Life of the American Revolutionary War Soldiers in the Middle Department, 1775-1783," (Ph.D. dissertation, Syracuse University, 1966), pp. 436-48.

<sup>3</sup>Lender, "The Enlisted Line," p. iii.

Robert Middlekauf recognized that fear of punishment was an insufficient motivator in any army. He briefly mentioned other potential factors and then examined the "face of battle" in the eighteenth century. He concluded that the Continental soldiers by war's end were probably more nationalistically minded than many other Americans as well as being on psychological and moral ground between militia and British professionals.<sup>4</sup> Christopher Duffy in his survey of limited war stated clearly his belief that the "rebel" soldiers bore both similar backgrounds and motivation as their European counterparts; he did not elaborate further.<sup>5</sup>

Charles Royster has analyzed this relationship between ideals and actions so critical for the survival of the rebel cause at length. He stresses the national character of the struggle, its dependence upon a worthy defense, and the desire to emulate the political successes against the mother country before 1775. He believes that the patriots were convinced of the justness of their cause; hence, American war-making differed morally from the British. Religion and politics were thus the two most powerful explanations of motivation.<sup>6</sup> However, this philosophical debate was largely among political and military leaders and is inadequate when

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<sup>4</sup>Middlekauf, Glorious Cause, pp. 497-509.

<sup>5</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, p. 316.

<sup>6</sup>Royster, Revolutionary People at War, pp. vii-x, 3-18 passim.

addressing the common soldiers, except perhaps for the period of his rage militaire in 1775-76.

One may begin by stating clearly that Washington's troops certainly did not compose a New Model Army with powerful religious convictions as a basis of dedication and discipline.<sup>7</sup> This failure was not due to any lack of effort by authorities. Washington very early banned both profanity and cursing. He required all men not on duty to attend divine service.<sup>8</sup> When events had prevented divine service on several Sundays, senior officers asked the chaplains to hold a meeting to determine alternate days and times.<sup>9</sup>

Commanders throughout the war encouraged such godliness. One general expected that all troops would be at divine services with officers attending as examples. Barely a week later the enlisted men heard about Congress' resolution about no profanity.<sup>10</sup> Orders from superiors again reminded soldiers to attend divine services.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Chaplain (Maj.) John W. Brinsfield, "Our Roots for Ministry: The Continental Army, General Washington, and the Free Exercise of Religion," Military Chaplains' Review (November/Fall 1987):23-31 contains an overview of religion in the patriot army.

<sup>8</sup>Washington's Headquarters Orderly Book, 30 June and 4 July 1775.

<sup>9</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book, no. 49, 7 October 1777.

<sup>10</sup>Division Orders, 26 October and 1 November 1778, Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>11</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 24 July 1780.

The Continentals failed to respond to any call for religious enthusiasm. This areligious if not anti-religious attitude should come as no surprise to historians. Standing armies of the eighteenth century were products of the Age of Reason. The Continental Army was no different. For example, one soldier noted the weekly series of divine services in his diary impassionately and without the slightest comment. He merely observed that eight to ten women attended once and no minister was on hand on another occasion.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Washington and his officers wanted a pious soldiery with strong convictions about God and His approval of the righteousness of the cause. They had no desire to produce troops indoctrinated with a fanaticism.

The American Provincial Corps, the other major army composed of Americans, is an interesting comparison since it also promoted religiosity with the same lack of success. For example, authorities often required attendance at divine services.<sup>13</sup> Regimental Orders for 29 August 1778 scheduled divine services the next day one hour prior to marching.<sup>14</sup>

Instead, the men of Washington's army responded to the same incentives as any other army of the period. Attempting

<sup>12</sup>Nathaniel Cowdry Diary, 15 October and 12 November 1780.

<sup>13</sup>Brigade Orders, 9 August 1777; Brigade After Orders, 27 September 1777, King's American Regiment Orderly Book.

<sup>14</sup>Caleb Jones, Orderly Book of the "Maryland Loyalists Regiment," June 18th, 1778 to October 12th, 1778, ed. Paul Leicester (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Historical Printing Club, 1891), p. 71.

to gauge deep, higher-level motivation in a largely silent, documentless group is an exercise in fruitlessness. Instead, the historian must turn to practical military principles to understand the state of enlisted men's morale, lessons applicable to all armies in all eras. Likewise, the material bonuses offered periodically to the men were in fact critical for the maintenance of morale, precisely why all eighteenth-century armies relied upon them. Indeed, patriot leaders instituted them early in the war even with the different type of soldier in the ranks in 1775-76. These incentives supported economic motives.

The Continentals had mixed motivation in two general spheres, ideological and economic. Given the social origins of most of the rank and file after 1776, few likely understood the political and constitutional aspects of the struggle. Any ideological links were at a more immediate level. However, once signed on as soldiers, they became the personification of the former colonies' refusal to give up. Congress required all soldiers to take an oath of office effective 3 February 1778.<sup>15</sup> The pledge acknowledged the United States' independence and the abolition of any allegiance to Britain and George III.

This oath gave the unsophisticated soldier a tangible purpose to which he could attach his loyalty. Enlisted men could understand this commitment although many did not stay

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<sup>15</sup>Ford, Journals, 10:115-18 .

true. It substituted for the King. The Continental regular represented the primary military instrument of the cause.

The Commander in Chief provided more personal targets of loyalty. Washington's stature in the eyes of his contemporaries became legendary. He shared their hardships in so far as an eighteenth-century commander was expected -- and beyond. Moreover, he was generous in praising the main army for its accomplishments. He thanked his men for enduring the painful winter at Valley Forge.<sup>16</sup> Lavish praise came for the successful siege at Yorktown.<sup>17</sup>

More importantly, regimental pride was very much alive in Washington's army. It could not match British longevity, depth, nor consistency. The maintenance of sectionalism with separate state designations actually helped. Much rested upon individual regimental or brigade accomplishments over time. For example, Haslet's Delaware Regiment soldiered on long after his death. Reduced to a company, it fought like lions in the Southern campaign after being detached from the main army. The Maryland regiments earned laurels for battlefield excellence from Long Island in August 1776 to Guilford Courthouse in March 1781. The Second Rhode Island Regiment established its reputation from the battles for the Delaware forts in late 1777 through its famous stand at the Battle of Springfield in June 1780. In

<sup>16</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, ? March 1778.

<sup>17</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 20 October 1781.

such units the Continentals surely wanted to excel in front of their comrades every bit as much as their British opponents. Recognition of prowess meant further esteem, not to mention other possible rewards.

Officers reinforced this feeling late in the war with the creation of formal military decorations specifically for enlisted men. Brig. Gen. John Paterson established a white stripe of tape to be worn on the left sleeve to indicate four years of faithful service.<sup>18</sup> Washington superceded this initiative in August 1782 with similar stripes in the facing color for every three years' service.<sup>19</sup> He also created the famous Badge of Military Merit.<sup>20</sup>

Leadership also clearly played a major role. Officers like Colonels Haslett and Webb mentioned above for their supreme efforts to uniform their men were daily inspirations. Soldiers returned the genuine concern of their officers for their welfare with long and faithful service. This reciprocity was particularly important at small-unit level, i.e. company and battalion.

The small rewards which came along from time to time must also receive credit, no matter how trivial they may

<sup>18</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 17 June 1782.

<sup>19</sup>Washington, Writings, 24:487-88; 25:7.

<sup>20</sup>See Allen Pennell Wescott, "For Military Merit," in Military Analysis of the Revolutionary War: An Anthology, with an Introduction by Don Higginbotham (Milwood, N.Y.: KTO Press, 1977), pp. 52-53 for details. This badge is now the Purple Heart issued to service members of all ranks for wounds recieved in action.

appear. Armies were not composed of many teetotalers. The liquor ration, especially in the form of a reward or celebration, was most welcome. For example, Heath specified that soldiers would receive a half pint of rum in the event of a real alarm, one gill at first and the rest later. One month later soldiers learned that three days' rations of rum at one gill per man were on hand.<sup>21</sup> Wayne scheduled a gill of rum per man daily at three in the afternoon.<sup>22</sup>

Booty was a legitimate reward just as in other armies, the proverbial spoils of war and the military equivalent of naval prize money. For example, when supply officials sold captured powder, the proceeds went to the men who took it.<sup>23</sup> Captured provisions were en route to Philadelphia. The Commissary General of Purchases would sell the items and credit the captors.<sup>24</sup> Soldiers in the storming of Stony Point shared the stores taken there.<sup>25</sup>

Cash incentives provided further motivation. One hundred dollars was offered to the man who captured an enemy

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<sup>21</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 12 September and 19 October 1776.

<sup>22</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 6 September 1781.

<sup>23</sup>Col. William Prescott's Massachusetts Regiment, 3 August 1775, Mass (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 18, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>24</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book no. 57, 5 March 1778.

<sup>25</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 7 August 1779.

cavalryman, horse and gear included.<sup>26</sup> Army sources reported a Congressional pay bonus of one month because the soldiers were living in fabricated huts and not in houses.<sup>27</sup>

The establishment of authorized sutlers, often one per brigade, was popular.<sup>28</sup> Problems of control did not result in their elimination. Officials required the renewal of licenses, but declined to shut them down.<sup>29</sup>

Celebrations boosted morale periodically as well. The Declaration of Independence was read to main army units.<sup>30</sup> The 4 July celebration in 1778 included thirteen-gun salutes and a feu de joy by the infantry. This latter maneuver was also excellent training in fire discipline. Soldiers received a green bough for their headgear.<sup>31</sup> Officers exempted all Irishmen from duty on Saint Patrick's Day.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, Washington's army fell far short in its support of women. Female camp followers were standard ingredients in any field army. Walter Blumenthal analyzed this topic some time ago. He traced British and German

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<sup>26</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 27 October 1776.

<sup>27</sup>Col. Philip van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment of 1777 Orderly Book no. 56.2, 3 January 1778.

<sup>28</sup>Third New Hampshire Orderly Book, 26 January 1778

<sup>29</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 8 February 1781.

<sup>30</sup>Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, 9 July 1776.

<sup>31</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book no. 60, 3 July 1778.

<sup>32</sup>Stephen Griffing Journal, 16 March 1780.

ratios of men to women from 8:1 and 30:1 respectively in May 1777 to 4.5:1 and 15:1 respectively in August 1781. Figures for the patriots were lacking. He cited a dearth of correspondence for any but authorized followers. He concluded that the women with the American forces were better behaved though too few. He cited their contribution to camp cleanliness and suggested a relationship between a lack of women and increased desertion.<sup>33</sup>

As late as January 1783 Washington was engaged in debate with the Superintendent of Finance over establishing a 15:1 ratio for women in the army. He wrote on the twenty-ninth, resentful of outside interference from other departments. Moreover, he viewed their official position as an extravagance costing an additional 52,560 rations annually. Washington argued that while some units contained larger numbers of women, the expense was far less than budgeting a 15:1 ratio based on the paper strength of the entire army.<sup>34</sup>

Blumenthal, moreover, failed to carry his comparison to a logical conclusion. The patriot position frankly appeared to discourage the presence of women and frustrate official recognition as much as possible. Whether this view was due to some Puritan assumptions regarding the women's character

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<sup>33</sup>Walter Hart Blumenthal, Women Camp Followers of the American Revolution, Women in America from Colonial Times to the 20th Century Series (Philadelphia: G. S. MacManus, n.d.; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1974), pp. 16, 18-19, 26, 60, 63, 80.

<sup>34</sup>Washington, Writings, 26:78-79.

is not known. That this position hurt morale there can be little doubt. An army which began the war bereft of rudimentary field skills in sanitation and always short of supplies needed all the help it could get. The women fulfilled vital functions in washing, cooking, sewing, and cleaning. The leaders in European armies acknowledged this contribution and did not shrink from transporting women followers across three thousand miles of ocean.

This analysis has avoided case studies of individual soldiers' dedication to the cause. Their utility in a study of major trends is questionable. For example, Joseph Plumb Martin is perhaps the most famous patriot enlisted man of the war. Yet he was clearly neither ordinary nor average.<sup>35</sup> John Shy admits in his masterful analysis of Lt. William "Long Bill" Scott and his family that the "hard core" who remained privates for much of the war remains a mystery beyond being something less than the average colonial American.<sup>36</sup> For every Martin and Scott's two eldest sons who served for the war in the ranks one could cite disgruntled soldiers like the one who cursed Congress and vowed to desert as soon as he could get a pair of shoes. He received one hundred lashes for expressing his opinions.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup>He served first as a member of the famed Light Infantry but also in the more selective Sappers and Miners.

<sup>36</sup>John Shy, A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Independence (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 168-73.

<sup>37</sup>"Valley Forge" Orderly Book, 22 February 1778.

The high desertion rate of the Continentals reinforces this thesis that basic military principles and incentives governed the state of morale and motivation. Limited unit pride, uneven leadership, and a ramshackle financial administration hurt efforts to keep men in the army.

Finally, the Continentals merely mirrored the European rank and file's lack of any traditional ideological motivation to "the cause." The British soldier substituted a violent, primitive patriotism which bred a hate of everyone who was not "English."<sup>38</sup> The soldiers also liked their officers' "clean, no nonsense language."<sup>39</sup> The ages and backgrounds of the rank and file, mostly mature men from respectable families and occupations, aided the development of "publick spirit."<sup>40</sup>

By far the "ultimate and most important motivator" was their regimental esprit de corps which bred a powerful sense of loyalty. The men wished to stand high in the eyes of their comrades.<sup>41</sup> The regiment gave those who had failed in civilian life a second chance.<sup>42</sup> For example, at the Yorktown surrender Captain Graham of the Seventh Regiment observed a corporal throw down his musket violently and

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<sup>38</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, pp. 30-32.

<sup>39</sup>Middlekauf, Glorious Cause, p. 505.

<sup>40</sup>Frey, British Soldier in America, p. 111.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 117, 121, 132.

<sup>42</sup>Wickwire, Cornwallis, p. 65.

exclaim, "May you never get so good a master again!"<sup>43</sup> The Continentals could not compete with the scope, depth, and continuity of British regimental pride, instead placing a premium on effective, inspirational unit leaders.

Some Europeans even believed that the Tories exhibited more idealism in their continued loyalty to the Crown than their patriot brothers. The Chevalier Goislard de Villebresme observed that the soldiers had "far more devotion than their compatriots showed in defending their liberty."<sup>44</sup> One German officer noted the dedication of some 250 Georgia and Carolina farmers who banded together and took to the wilderness to keep alive the Royal cause. At one time they subsisted on roots and herbs for six days.<sup>45</sup>

The loyalist regulars had no less an appreciation for minor amenities. One sale of rebel horses and cattle netted the captors over seventy-nine pounds sterling; seventy pounds went to two widows. Senior officers reminded the men that they benefitted directly from the proceeds of captured

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<sup>43</sup>Wright, Fire of Liberty, p. 236.

<sup>44</sup>G. Brodnier, Les Officiers de l' Armee Royale combattants de la Guerre d'Independence des etats-Unis de Yorktown a l'An II (Vincennes: n.p., 1983), p. 352 quoted in Duffy, Military Experience, p. 285.

<sup>45</sup>Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, p. 238.

booty sold at auction.<sup>46</sup> They also enjoyed a gill of rum mixed with water on 25 August 1778 after a hot, dry march.<sup>47</sup>

The German troops were largely professional soldiers. Some deployed to America out of simple loyalty to the desires of their Prince. Many saw the colonial rebellion as an opportunity to see action and escape the mundane existence of garrison life. Here was the chance to travel to the New World. At least a few contemplated eventual resettlement.<sup>48</sup> For example, many soldiers of the Anspach-Bayreuth regiment, captured at Yorktown, accepted patriot invitations to stay in America as citizens in May 1783.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the Continentals behaved just like any other standing army of the period in terms of morale and motivation. The issue is one of degree and not kind.

#### Field Effectiveness

An army on campaign must be able to execute a multitude of procedures to be an effective fighting force. Moreover, it should conduct these tasks with regularity to a set standard. These requirements were in addition to the drill

<sup>46</sup>King's American Regiment Orderly Book, 16 and 29 August 1777.

<sup>47</sup>Jones, Maryland Loyalists Orderly Book, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup>"Report on German Auxiliary Troops Employed by Great Britain in the War of American Independence, 1776-83," pp. 24-26, Record Group 165, General and Chief of Staff, World War I Records, German, 800-11.4, National Archives, Washington, D.C. American officers compiled these notes based on captured German sources.

<sup>49</sup>Döhla, Hessian Diary, p. 222.

movements and tactical evolutions used in linear warfare. Washington's army, sprung from militiamen, had no body of knowledge from which to draw such practices.

A key ingredient in Continental Army success was the ability to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) as necessary and build upon previous efforts. This gradual but constant evolution reflected considerable professional expertise. The "bureaucratization" of the army was necessary for it to emerge from its amateur beginnings. In combination these SOPs became a highly-functional field manual, though never assembled as such. For example, on 10 July 1775 Washington lamented that military leaders expended eight hours to compile a troop return which would have been ready within an hour in a regular army, a report which revealed a shortfall of two to four thousand men less than estimated.<sup>50</sup> This situation would change for the better.

The Continental Army soon established meticulous reporting procedures for the accounting of all personnel. Officers compiled formal troop returns weekly and monthly.<sup>51</sup> Additionally, company-grade leaders filled out morning reports daily. These printed documents were very detailed to account for every soldier, his location, and condition. One blank, pre-printed morning report was titled "Captain

<sup>50</sup>Washington, Writings, 3:330.

<sup>51</sup>The monthly reports form the basis of Charles Lesser's editing effort. They dealt primarily with the main army. These statistics were the predecessors of today's Unit Status Report (USR).

\_\_\_\_\_ Coy in \_\_\_\_\_ Regt."<sup>52</sup> Another composed three columns: sergeants, drummers, and rank and file. Fourteen lines followed which categorized the soldier's precise status.<sup>53</sup> Another bore the title "MORNING Report of \_ Comp. of Foot in \_\_\_\_\_ Regt" and contained separate columns for privates and corporals.<sup>54</sup> The weekly and monthly reports included the same detail at regimental level, sometimes at brigade, including all officers.

Officials required property as well as personnel accountability. A "Size-Roll" contained the names and descriptions of every individual in a company.<sup>55</sup> This form also detailed all items issued to a particular soldier.<sup>56</sup> One specimen even had a by-name index.<sup>57</sup>

General officers demanded accurate, timely submission of these reports. Subordinate commanders adopted this insistence upon punctual exactness. For example, the colonel of the Third New York told his company commanders to

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<sup>52</sup>Henry Jackson Papers, July 1777, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>53</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, May-June 1778.

<sup>54</sup>Papers of Varnum and Stark, 23 December 1779.

<sup>55</sup>Gates Papers. The blank forms contain no dates except for "177\_."

<sup>56</sup>For example, see the entry dated 10 July 1779 in Col. Josiah Starr's First Connecticut Regiment of 1777, New York (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 83 New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>57</sup>William Shepard Collection, 1782-83.

adjust their returns as soon as changes occurred. All commands were reminded to submit their monthly returns.<sup>58</sup> The prompt turn-in of weekly returns every Friday demanded the strictest attention.<sup>59</sup> A special order required a field return that afternoon conducted by the brigadiers for exactness and counting only men on location fit for duty in case of action.<sup>60</sup> A complaint from higher headquarters of late returns communicated the stern warning to fix the problem immediately.<sup>61</sup> Heath told four Massachusetts regiments that their share of new clothing on hand would be forthcoming upon receipt of their troop returns.<sup>62</sup> Superiors emphasized the criticality of accurate returns. The Commander in Chief advanced, retreated, acted, or defended based on the statistics in these returns.<sup>63</sup>

When Brig. Gen. Edward Hand became Adjutant General on 8 January 1781, he personified officialdom's demands for punctuality and attention to detail in all reports. His missives to unit commanders whose returns were incorrect or

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<sup>58</sup>Regimental Orders, 21 February 1777; General Orders, 30 May 1777, Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book.

<sup>59</sup>After Orders, 28 March 1777, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>60</sup>Brig. Gen. Jediah Huntington's Connecticut Brigade Orderly Book no. 61, on 22 June 1778.

<sup>61</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 28 August 1778.

<sup>62</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 29 January 1780.

<sup>63</sup>General Orders, 26 March 1780, Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book.

missing were both biting and insistent. For example, he scolded Lt. Col. Edward Antil, Second Canadian Regiment:

Your Regimental Returns are so complex that I am unable to bring them under any general Head. The remarks on them, tho' they may be plain to you are altogether unintelligible to me, for this reason I have it in orders from his Excellency to require your attendance here, that we may fix on some plan which may be plain and consistent with the Rules laid down by Congress, & Genl. Orders.<sup>64</sup>

He told Col. Elias Dayton of the Second New Jersey that Washington was most unhappy and determined to arrest commanders who failed to submit monthly returns in a timely fashion. He chastized Dayton again. There was still no return and Washington was fuming.<sup>65</sup>

Even generals did not escape his scrutiny and criticism. He complained to Brig. Gen. James Clinton that his unit returns failed to account for the transfer of two men to the Sappers and Miners and one to the Commander in Chief's Guard. These three soldiers now belonged to other units -- a long standing SOP. Maj. Joseph Torrey of the Second Canadian Regiment received the same general comments about a soldier transferred to Washington's Guard. Hand closed with

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<sup>64</sup>"Letters Sent by Brig. Gen. Edward Hand, Adjutant General of the Continental Army," 27 March 1781, War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records, Record Group 93, National Archives, Washington, D.C. The hapless Antil had been a prisoner from August 1777 to November 1780 so he missed over three years of the main army's continuing professional development.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 28 March and 2 May 1781.

the words, "who ought long since to have been struck off your Rolls agreeable to repeated General Orders, . . ." <sup>66</sup>

Diligence in filling out these returns was closely connected with dedicated constancy in calling roll. One regiment told all companies to assemble at sunrise to conduct roll call. <sup>67</sup> The Second Massachusetts provided detailed instructions for roll call. Addenda to these procedures came two days later. <sup>68</sup> Wayne demanded all personnel to attend the roll calls at retreat and tatoo under their field officers. <sup>69</sup>

Subordinate units were also responsible to go to their higher headquarters to submit their reports and receive the orders of the day. The system applied throughout the chain of command from regiment to brigade to division to army headquarters, and sometimes wings. Brigade majors had to pick up daily orders at noon. They submitted the weekly return at orderly time every Saturday, soon changed to Friday. Orders later established noon as the new time for orderly hour. <sup>70</sup> Strength reports were due in the Wing

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 27 May 1781 and 12 February 1782.

<sup>67</sup>Regimental Orders, 5 January 1776, unidentified unit, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>68</sup>Regimental Orders, 10 and 12 August 1779, William Torrey Orderly Book.

<sup>69</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 27 September 1781.

<sup>70</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 17 and 28 August 1776; 19 April 1778.

orderly room too.<sup>71</sup> All general officers had to visit headquarters daily at two in the afternoon. The regiments learned later that the day's General Orders were ready at three. Within three days army headquarters required an orderly sergeant from each division to visit the Adjutant General's office daily.<sup>72</sup>

Other rosters kept track of officer duties, often at regimental level. For example, the Fourth Massachusetts maintained lists of officers serving on courts martial and fatigue duties. Afterwards, it had another roster for officers on courts martial.<sup>73</sup>

After personnel and property accountability, camp security received close scrutiny with incredibly-detailed instructions. They always changed depending upon the particular location, the number of key points to defend, and troop availability. Hence, such orders filled page after page in unit orderly books. These instructions formed various fatigue parties and work details as well as guards. For example, Schuyler limited his requirements to one fatigue party and a magazine guard while at Harlem.<sup>74</sup> Two

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<sup>71</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 26 July 1779.

<sup>72</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 5 July, 26 and 29 September 1781.

<sup>73</sup>William Shepard Collection, July-September 1781 and October 1781-February 1782.

<sup>74</sup>Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, 15 August 1776.

line regiments split a guard detail of twenty privates.<sup>75</sup> A "Piquet Guard" contained one field officer, two captains, four subalterns, four sergeants, and one hundred rank and file. Brigadiers were responsible to insure communication among their regiments.<sup>76</sup> One regiment alone contributed forty to fifty men for guards, fifteen to twenty for fatigues, and a varied number for miscellaneous duties.<sup>77</sup>

This attention to detail lasted to the end of the war. One brigadier tasked two sergeants and ninety privates from his five regiments for guard and fatigue duties.<sup>78</sup> Orders required more camp guards to complete the chain of sentinels due to the wide intervals between brigades.<sup>79</sup> The Second Canadian Regiment recorded a host of personnel requirements from Brigade. There were five different guards to post on one day alone. A "Slate of Details" appointed no less than four commanders to lead all the guard details.<sup>80</sup>

Additionally, precise guidance governed the conduct of these guards besides their composition. A set of

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<sup>75</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 20 March 1777.

<sup>76</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 12 September 1777.

<sup>77</sup>Regimental Orders for the Third New Hampshire, 14-16 January 1778.

<sup>78</sup>Brigade Orders, 9 August 1780, Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book.

<sup>79</sup>Second Massachusetts Orderly Book, 8 September 1780.

<sup>80</sup>Benjamin Moeers Orderly Book, 19 and 25 September 1780.

"Instructions for Officers of Guards" has survived but the document has many damaged pages.<sup>81</sup> The amalgamated First and Third Connecticut issued a long SOP for officers of the day and guards.<sup>82</sup> Particular care went into the formulation of instructions in the event of attack. Orders eliminated the beating of drums in camp unless sounding an alarm. The initial signal was the boom of three guns firing. Then the drummers could beat to arms. More detailed guidance would be forthcoming.<sup>83</sup> Schuyler repeated the use of beating to arms only if attacked.<sup>84</sup> The three-gun signal was maintained. The Second Connecticut Brigade would be the first brigade to carry up and pass on the alarm with its own three-gun firing at one-minute intervals. The remaining brigades would fire only two guns. Brigade "calls" would then be fifteen minutes apart.<sup>85</sup>

The comprehensive arrangements for security with guards and alarm procedures included strict accountability for departures from camp. Orders prohibited any but authorized reconnaissance parties with the main army before Yorktown to approach enemy lines. Another regulation required officers

<sup>81</sup>Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, 18 May 1778, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>82</sup>Regimental Orders, 8 September 1779, Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book.

<sup>83</sup>Heath Papers,, Orderly Books, 21 August 1776.

<sup>84</sup>Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, 21 August 1776.

<sup>85</sup>Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, 27 January 1779, Continental Army MSS.

in charge of such groups to report all casualties immediately upon returning to camp.<sup>86</sup>

This sophisticated development in army administrative techniques greatly facilitated the army's ability to wind down operations at the end of the war. Each regiment could furlough one field officer and each company, one officer, one noncommissioned officer, and two privates at a given time. Soldiers who had earned badges of distinction received preferential consideration due to their years of service.<sup>87</sup> In 1783 large numbers of soldiers received extended furloughs. They possessed pre-printed discharges with the caveat that the furlough did not become a discharge until the ratification of a peace treaty.<sup>88</sup> Washington, Heath, and Howe reference the SOP which explained the details several times.<sup>89</sup>

The guidance issued to execute specific operations was even more impressive than the administrative techniques because they formed the heart of an ad-hoc field manual. For example, the Continentals developed detailed

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<sup>86</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 30 September and 4 October 1781.

<sup>87</sup>General Orders, 11 December 1782, Francis Tufts Orderly Book.

<sup>88</sup>Unidentified unit, Continental Army MSS. The forms are otherwise undated.

<sup>89</sup>Col. Joseph Vose's First Massachusetts Regiment, 3-13 June 1783, N.Y. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 175, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

instructions to conduct a route march. A set of "Marching Orders" specified movement by files from the center with one artillery piece flanked by the marching infantry. Two vedettes were three hundred yards out from the advance, flank, and rear guards, which in turn were one hundred yards from the main column. In action the vedettes fell back on their main bodies but the flank guards stayed out.<sup>90</sup>

Such a scheme of maneuver not only placed a premium on 360-degree security, but also tried to avoid a repetition of the Braddock fiasco. Whatever front was attacked was expected to hold pending the arrival of reinforcements from unthreatened sectors.

Moreover, while no eighteenth-century army moved like lightning, the Continentals refused to slow the march pace to that of the trains. The regimental baggage had to catch up. For example, the lieutenant in charge of the Third New York's baggage-train teams was told to follow the regiment as best as he could.<sup>91</sup> At least one division, Greene's, tried to compensate for the slower pace of the baggage by having it depart two hours before the infantry left during a movement.<sup>92</sup>

Washington was intimately involved in this process. He advised Brig. Gen. William Maxwell to maintain the strictest

<sup>90</sup>Unidentified unit, 17 January 1777, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>91</sup>Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book, 11 March 1777.

<sup>92</sup>Benjamin Mooers Orderly Book, September 1780.

secrecy before his march; prevent the disaffected from gaining intelligence; use good guides; and tell his officers the plan at the last minute lest the soldiers learn it as well.<sup>93</sup> The Commander in Chief then thanked another group of troops "for the good order and regularity" of their movement from the last encampment.<sup>94</sup> Troop columns were preceded by 150 axemen drawn from 4 divisions and a brigade who marched with the pickets and prepared the road with timber. The "Order of March" specified four divisions, the artillery park, and four more divisions, thus separating the troops of the first and second lines. Again, the baggage trains came last, in the same order as the infantry brigades. One officer per brigade was responsible for policing stragglers.<sup>95</sup>

These stipulations for road marches were not doctrinaire either. Instructions advised maximum flexibility in the formulation of brigade and division guards. For the moment advance and rear guards contained one lieutenant, three NCOs, one drummer, and twenty privates at battalion level and one captain, two lieutenants, six NCOs, and forty to fifty privates at brigade. These guards posted themselves one hundred paces from the main body and deployed their own

<sup>93</sup>Letter, 5 September 1780, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>94</sup>General Orders, 10 September 1780, William Torrey Orderly Book.

<sup>95</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book no. 49, 30 September and 1 October 1780.

forward patrols in groups of four men. Regimental flank guards contained one subaltern, two NCOs, and sixteen privates deployed eighty to one hundred paces from their parent unit. All advance, rear, and flank guards always moved with fixed bayonets. Wing guards once the march commenced consisted of 2 captains, 3 subalterns, 3 sergeants, 3 corporals, and 117 privates until further notice effective 22 June 1778.<sup>96</sup>

Marching orders directed a column of two platoons for the first line, two brigades on the center road and one each on flank roads. The same formation applied for the second line of two brigades and the two regiments of the reserve. The two divisions on the flanks were fifty rods from the center. One hundred men from the reserve regiments guarded their flanks. The light infantry were at least a mile to the army's front. Drum signals were passed from the right front brigade left and back as stipulated on the eleventh.<sup>97</sup> The main army moved in three divisions. The center had the artillery park and four brigades.<sup>98</sup> Officers were warned to check excess straggling.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup>General Orders, 1 June 1778, Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts and Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, Continental Army MSS. The latter repeated the orders of 1 June but with some differences in details. For example, it stated that these instructions were the rule for all marches.

<sup>97</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 14 August 1778.

<sup>98</sup>Samuel Adams Diary, 8 September 1778, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.

<sup>99</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 20 October 1778.

Specific instructions integrated the use of military music as well. Drum beating became prohibited except for signaling. Three long rolls indicated a halt front to permit the rear to catch up. The "common march" restored movement while the rear continued to catch up. The "grenadier's march" quickened the pace.<sup>100</sup> The brigadier of the day initiated signals passed forward by battalion.<sup>101</sup>

Operations thus became quite sophisticated by the latter war years. For example, orders detailed the usual minutiae but added instructions on how to pass a defile. Units advanced quickly on as wide a front as possible. Leaders remained at the bottleneck until their command completely passed it. Marches were in platoon frontages; section frontages were substituted if the defile were too narrow.<sup>102</sup>

The main army conducted numerous movements during its stay in the North. These acclimated the troops to vigorous marching and tested the workability of SOPs. For example, a route march in August 1780 with all its baggage included crossing the Hudson twice. One participant categorized the

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<sup>100</sup>Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington's Connecticut Brigade Orderly Book no. 61, 27 June 1778. The bulk of the same instructions appear in Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts.

<sup>101</sup>Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book no. 60, 27 June 1778.

<sup>102</sup>Ebenezer Sprout Orderly Book, 21 January 1780.

concentrated force as "all together formidable."<sup>103</sup> Units covered fifteen miles on the seventh alone.<sup>104</sup>

River crossings became another specialized operation discussed in detailed SOPs. When Maj. Gen. John Sullivan took three brigades from the main army on his devastating raid of the Iroquois lands, the troops crossed the Susquehanna and the shallower and narrower Tioga on 11 August 1779 according to formally-established procedures and only after a proper leaders' reconnaissance had scouted the river line on the tenth.

No less than three regiments protected Sullivan and his subordinates during their search. During the crossing, artillery prepositioned on the west bank fired into the woods opposite the crossing site to flush out ambushers. The Second New Jersey and Second New York Regiments also deployed to the far bank early and functioned as security forces to protect their comrades in the water. Light troops posted along the near river bank provided covering fire if required. The men were over the Susquehanna without the loss of a man or any equipment. The troops immediately fanned out upon landing on the west bank and formed 100 yards in from the river on a frontage of 330 yards.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup>Caleb Gibbs Diary, 8 August 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>104</sup>Nathaniel Cowdry Diary, 7 August 1780.

<sup>105</sup>Frederick Cook, ed., Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779 (n.p., 1887; reprint ed., Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1972), pp. 3, 69,

The main army conducted another crossing of the Hudson involving five brigades of infantry, two from Connecticut and three from Massachusetts. General Orders on 30 May 1782 spelled out precise procedures for its accomplishment. Boats of a regiment kept abreast of one another only far enough apart to prevent interference. The lead regiment was two hundred yards ahead of the rest and one of its companies one hundred yards further forward. Remaining intervals were 75 yards between regiments and 150 yards between brigades. General officers' boats led their formations, major generals fifty yards forward and brigadiers, twenty-five. Army staff personnel came last except for the Inspector General, the Adjutant General, and Quartermaster General. Women were banned from the boats. Colored flags flown by the brigadiers signaled by day; a set sequence of musket shots, at night.<sup>106</sup>

The army was far from perfect. For example, throughout the war some units would fail to submit a troop return in a timely fashion. But these failures were now the exception and not the rule. Moreover, certain cases were virtually inevitable for units detached from the main army's encampment. Surviving documents also demonstrate that standardization of forms was not total, though the

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85, 109, 124-25, 138-39, 150, 170, 259-60. The pages cite the testimony of nine participants as written in their journal entries for 10 and 11 August.

<sup>106</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 31 August 1782.

differences were admittedly minor. But these personnel accountability procedures developed by the Continentals easily matched those of European armies.

The lapses in proper security measures were far more serious. At least they were few. The legendary capture of Charles Lee on 13 December 1776 reflected the second in command's imprudent habits. Detached from his troops in order to secure lodging, British light dragoons surprised his miniscule escort. The famous ambush of Wayne's division at Paoli on 20 September 1777 by rampaging, bayonet-wielding British troops was a sorry demonstration of Wayne's attention to detail. A year later a detachment of Third Continental Dragoons, similarly surprised, was annihilated on 28 September 1778.<sup>107</sup>

But these failures stand out as isolated cases and merely reinforce the conclusion that the Continental Army successfully developed the field skills necessary to maintain an army in the field. The three incidents were a direct reflection of negligence by those in command, all of whom enjoyed envious reputations as leaders; they did not demonstrate any systemic problem in the army.

The success of Washington's army in establishing viable field SOPs is all the more remarkable when one considers the extremely limited published material available for

<sup>107</sup>See [D. Bennett Mazur], The Massacre of Baylor's Dragoons, September 28, 1778: Excavation of the Burial Site (n.p., 1968) for an attempted reconstruction of the incident.

inspiration. The patriots easily adapted British methods of personnel record keeping, but there were few sources to assist with the formulation of field SOPs. The plethora of published manuals were drillbooks. They described how a unit should move and fire on the battlefield. They were not field manuals. They did not explain the mechanics of how to fight a battle nor to survive in the field. Other books had very limited utility.

For example, the famous Maurice de Saxe mentioned nothing about passing a defile. His discussion of river crossings was cursory and concerned itself more with prevention than execution.<sup>108</sup>

Frederick the Great was no more helpful. He too made no mention of passing a defile. His post-Seven Years' War writings did not discuss river crossings either.<sup>109</sup> His earlier notes covered both the river crossing and defending against one. However, these comments do not go into the tactical detail required for an SOP as the Continentals were formulating.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>Saxe, Reveries, pp. 93-96.

<sup>109</sup>Luvaas, Frederick the Great on the Art of War. At this time he was more concerned with the specific adaptations forced on him by enemy improvements, especially the Austrians.

<sup>110</sup>Frederick II, Instructions for His Generals, trans. Brig. Gen. Thomas R. Phillips, Military Classics Series (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co., 1944), pp. 68-70.

The compilation of detailed instructions for personnel and property accountability as well as specific types of operations and their subsequent execution were perhaps the army's finest accomplishments and demonstrated its high level of professional expertise. Washington could be justly proud of the progress made since he first took command of amateurish New England militia in June 1775.

#### Combat Effectiveness

Four factors accounted for the drastic increase in the combat effectiveness of Washington's army. First, a gradual learning process, largely through ordeals by fire, brought precious experience. Second, the recruiting of the rank and file after 1776 insured that such experience was not lost every year. Third, von Steuben's training provided the Continental Line with the requisite tactical articulation to conduct linear warfare. Fourth, the long duration of the conflict eventually diluted the quality of the opposition. These conclusions become evident with a reanalysis of the actions of the main army and some of its key detachments as well as a comparative analysis of the enemy forces.

The debacle on 27 August 1776, the main army's first true baptism of fire, was proof positive that it could not engage the enemy in linear warfare with a fair prospect of victory. Frankly, one must question the ability of the army to win the Battle of Long Island even if they had not been outgeneraled and outflanked. The exceptional performance of

a small few cannot win a battle unless the majority perform at least adequately. Most did not.

Officers had hoped to balance the odds. Washington emphasized the strength of "our advantageous works."<sup>111</sup> Much faith rested upon field works after the experience at Boston.<sup>112</sup> The regiments had adopted two-deep line with "well open files," a more flexible formation than the densely-packed European three-deep line. One company from each battalion deployed fifty paces back to form a local reserve.<sup>113</sup>

Unfortunately, such measures were insufficient combat multipliers. The fighting in front of the American fortifications decided the battle. The outflanking of the army was a leadership failure, but the rapid disintegration of the army reflected its amateur composition, a condition worsened by the creation of new brigade arrangements two weeks before the battle due to promotions.<sup>114</sup> A Hessian chaplain noted the rout, "The slaughter was horrible, more especially by the English troops, upon whose ranks the

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<sup>111</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book no. 36, 12 August 1776.

<sup>112</sup>Unidentified unit, 31 July 1776, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>113</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 9 and 10 September 1776.

<sup>114</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Orderly Book no. 36, 12 August 1776.

Germans drove the rebels like sheep." The result was a terrible sight of Americans shot and hacked to pieces.<sup>115</sup>

Frankly, the main army of 1776 lacked tactical articulation. It was without the discipline and spirit to cope successfully with adversity. Hence, the army broke and failed to rally. There was little effort at any kind of fighting withdrawal.

The enemy troops were also far more resourceful than expected. Both the British and Germans fought the battle in two-deep line, belying patriot evaluations of being inflexible blockheads.<sup>116</sup>

There were exceptions to this dismal performance. Some units demonstrated calm while under continued artillery bombardment.<sup>117</sup> A few regiments stood and fought magnificently. Atlee's Pennsylvania Musketry Battalion did well in the early stages of the battle. Smallwood's Regiment of Marylanders and Haslet's Regiment of Delaware men salvaged patriot honor by their stand on the American right. The gallant holding action of half of the Marylanders in the wake of total defeat was truly heroic.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>115</sup>Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, pp. 186-87.

<sup>116</sup>See the comparative analysis at the end of the chapter for a more detailed discussion.

<sup>117</sup>For example, see the commendation of Webb's Regiment mentioned on 29 October in Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Orderly Book no. 36.

<sup>118</sup>Washington Papers, Charlottesville. See the letter from Lord Stirling dated 29 August.

Conversely, the actions at Trenton and Princeton were small but well-conducted battles. They were critical morale boosters in the wake of unending defeat and retreat throughout the year. One significant factor which contributed heavily to victory was the improved performance of the troops. The small number of Continentals remaining in service were far better equipped mentally to face British and German veterans in December 1776 than they had been in the summer. The grueling campaign of constant retreating hardened the survivors to the rigors of active duty. Washington explained to the President of Congress on 24 December that his effective strength would soon be down to some 1,400-1,500, a figure reduced to 800 on 19 January.<sup>119</sup> These hardy few were ready psychologically to strike back at the enemy who had been chasing them for four months.

One historian has suggested that the Continentals enjoyed a tactical advantage at Trenton since the Hessians had to deploy their five-company battalions into eight platoons.<sup>120</sup> This organizational anomaly was certainly far more clumsy to implement with the musketeer units than the four-company grenadier battalions. However, there is no reason to believe that it contributed to defeat. German troops were thoroughly trained in its mechanisms. The utter surprise of the American attack combined with the effects of

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<sup>119</sup>Washington, Writings, 6:432; 7:29.

<sup>120</sup>Wright, Continental Army, p. 94.

a German Christmas celebration weighing upon them were far more important. Likewise, the loss of their commander and several key officers demoralized them.

The enemy acknowledged the improved qualities of the Continentals at this time. Lt. Col. William Harcourt, commander of the British Seventeenth Light Dragoons, told his father that the rebels possessed the prerequisites to be good troops. They showed extreme cunning, great industry in digging and felling wood, and activity and spirit of enterprise upon any advantage. They remained ignorant of proper precision, order, and the principles of moving large bodies of troops.<sup>121</sup> After the Battle of Princeton a junior British Guards officer felt that Washington must have fielded fifteen thousand men to have inflicted so many losses.<sup>122</sup>

The battles in Pennsylvania in 1777 were more encouraging yet. These were far different from the one-sided actions in New York the previous year. The fighting qualities of the Continentals had improved dramatically. This army contained the first batch of three-year and war-

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<sup>121</sup>? Hare, ed. The Harcourt Papers, 2 vols., [2nd ed.] ([Oxford]: n.p., [1905]), 2:207-9 quoted in Commager and Morris, The Spirit of 'Seventy-Six, 1:524. The footnote reference is incomplete. The original edition, edited by Edward William Harcourt and published in 1880, consisted of fourteen volumes.

<sup>122</sup>Ensign Glyn's Journal on the American Service with the Detachment of 1,000 Men of the Guards Commanded by Brigadier General Mathew in 1776, p. 40, Princeton University Library, Princeton, N.J.

duration men. Though serving the first year of service of their current enlistment, such troops had a different attitude about soldiering than the one-year men who had preceded them. They had joined for the long haul. A fair number were probably also veterans of previous campaigns who had signed up again.

The main army which withdrew from the Brandywine and Germantown had lost the fields of battle but were not beaten morally, especially after the latter action. There was no rout. Moreover, the patriots had fought ferociously. Greene's Division Orders of 13 September thanked his troops for their efforts. Though they had given up the field, the enemy loss was serious, the worst since the start of the war.<sup>123</sup> Washington reported the next day, "Our troops have not lost their Spirits, . . ." <sup>124</sup> Col. Alexander Scammell told Jonathan C. Chadbourn that, "The Officers and men engaged, as far as I can judge, behaved as well as ever officers and men did."<sup>125</sup> Wayne told Washington that his men accomplished "a neat little stand." They were now convinced that the enemy can be driven back. Even though they had retreated, the soldiers gained confidence and finally doubted the enemy's.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>123</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:156.

<sup>124</sup>Washington, Writings, 9:220.

<sup>125</sup>Letter, 26 September 1777, Schoff Revolutionary War Collection, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich..

<sup>126</sup>Letter, 4 October 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

The British admitted so as well. A woman who held a pass to enter Philadelphia overheard several officers say that Germantown was their worst drubbing since Bunker Hill. The rebels had attacked with great judgement and supported it with equal bravery.<sup>127</sup> Thomas McKean, the new President of Congress, told Washington that he had learned from a captured Continental,

"That a wounded Hessian told one of them, that he had fought French & Spaniards, but that the Rebels would beat them both, and that tho' the English had got the ground, which they called victory, it was agreed on all hands that the British had not met with so great a loss since they came to America."<sup>128</sup>

The enemy credit heaped upon the main army continued. Andre noted that at Brandywine he had never seen the rebel troops so "wound up to such a pitch of confidence." The defeated Americans were still an army; the British had taken few prisoners. Andre concluded, "Washington will quit the field with a more respectable Army than last year."<sup>129</sup>

The patriot soldiers at Brandywine and Germantown already had "seen the elephant." They were now experienced if not veteran troops. Their cohesion was better than 1776. The Hessian Colonel C. E. C. von Donop summed up the

<sup>127</sup>Ibid. See the letter dated 7 October 1777 from Jonathan Mifflin to Nicholas Biddle.

<sup>128</sup>Letter, 8 October 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>129</sup>Andre Journal, 28 September and 8 October 1777.

situation well on 2 September, "We have allowed the rebels too much time in which to become soldiers."<sup>130</sup>

The principal deficiency with the main army was still an absence of tactical articulation. The sense of discipline bred from rigorous drill was absent. Hence, Continental Army units did not maneuver well. Worse, they thus lacked the ability to recover from the unexpected. John Adams recognized their shortcomings during the parade through Philadelphia before battle, "Our soldiers have not quite the air of soldiers. They don't step exactly in time. They don't hold up their heads quite erect, nor turn out their toes so exactly as they ought."<sup>131</sup>

Greene chided his men on 7 October for running from victory at Germantown. He acknowledged that the fog had robbed them of the opportunity to turn the enemy's surprise into a rout. He explained how they must learn to retreat and rally briskly as a partial withdrawal to change positions was often necessary. They should not consider any retreat as general unless so told. McDougall agreed with Greene and noted on 14 February 1778 that the retreat had become disorderly "as the panic had seized them."<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Hans Huth, ed., "Letters from a Hessian Mercenary," trans. C. V. Easum, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, October 1938, p. 499.

<sup>131</sup>Wright, Fire of Liberty, p. 85.

<sup>132</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:171; 3:283.

Washington's address to the troops the day after Germantown placed considerable blame on the fog. It prevented the brigades from firing and supporting one another. He also faulted an as-yet undetermined cause for the sudden retreat.<sup>133</sup> That cause was in fact the lack of expertise in drill and the commensurate confidence to react calmly to the unexpected, attributes which could come only with systematic training. The main army learned that drill at Valley Forge. The marriage of formalized training and discipline with veteran soldiers made a formidable combination and was critical to the army's professional development. The main army had finally achieved the skill level to challenge enemy regulars on equal terms.

The confused action at Monmouth Courthouse on 28 June 1778 remains the best example of the main army's capability once it had acquired genuine tactical articulation. The admittedly-disorderly retreat of Lee's advance guard was quickly halted by Washington with the main body unlike the contagious panic seen at Germantown. Indeed, the subsequent combat was the finest performance of Washington's army as a whole during the entire war. Two regiments from Varnum's Brigade calmly stood and repelled British cavalry attacks with " . . . a cool well distinguished fire . . ."<sup>134</sup> The

<sup>133</sup>General Orders, 5 October 1777, Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book no. 49 and unidentified unit, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>134</sup>James McHenry Papers, 28 June 1778, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

delaying action with volley fire and the bayonet by three Pennsylvania regiments under Wayne vanquished a battalion of the vaunted British grenadiers, killed their commander, and captured their color.<sup>135</sup> Only a little while earlier, these five regiments had been falling back in disorder as part of the advance guard. Moreover, the troops of the main body had gone immediately into action after a forced march of eight or nine miles over a dry, sandy road without water.<sup>136</sup> The men gloated with the knowledge that they had defeated the same British troops who had beaten them at the Brandywine, especially since only some 3,500 Americans were engaged at Monmouth Courthouse due to the terrain.<sup>137</sup>

Unfortunately, such skills were a perishable commodity in an army which still experienced significant personnel turnover. The challenge facing Washington's army as it returned to New York and New Jersey was to maintain and perfect its expertise. It had to be prepared to engage the enemy in a major action should he venture out as well as constantly conduct small-scale operations.

The Continentals accomplished both missions successfully. The sophisticated state of Continental assault tactics which now combined both volley fire and the

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<sup>135</sup>The flag of the Second Grenadier Battalion and the sword of Lt. Col. Henry Monckton remain in this country. They are on display at the Monmouth County Historical Association's Library in Freehold, N.J.

<sup>136</sup>Samuel Adams Diary, 28 June 1778.

<sup>137</sup>David Griffith Papers, 30 June 1778, Monmouth County Historical Association Library, Freehold, N.J.

followup bayonet charge was particularly impressive. The so-called war of small posts occupied the troops for the rest of the war. For example, Wayne told Brig. Gen. William Woodford that all patrols had not yet returned but probability dictated that the enemy was out in force. Hence, any further movement was temporarily unadvisable.<sup>138</sup>

Foreign officers noted the Continentals' skill as well. The jäger officer Johann von Krafft observed on 10 June 1780 that the rebels conducted "constant short attacks".<sup>139</sup> The Marquis de Chastellux said on 12 December that the combat capabilities of the Continentals were quite evident. The British disparaged their rebel foe yet always took extreme precautions.<sup>140</sup> On 2 July 1781 von Krafft added, "The Rebels were at times extraordinarily bold."<sup>141</sup>

Such missions continued unabated. Wayne had hatched an ambush plan against British foragers around Bergen in New Jersey. He explained to Cols. Sharp Delaney and Francis Johnston that patriot soldiers would gather cattle as bait. The Sixth and Seventh Pennsylvania Regiments would defend a defile "& with the point of the bayonet to dispute the pass

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<sup>138</sup>Wayne Papers, 28 October 1779.

<sup>139</sup>Von Krafft, Journal, p. 113.

<sup>140</sup>Marquis de Chastellux, Travels in North America in the Years 1780, 1781, and 1782, 2 vols. ed. and trans. Howard C. Rice, Jr. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History & Culture, 1963), p. 173.

<sup>141</sup>Von Krafft, Journal, p. 142.

at every expense of blood . . ." Then the First and Second Brigades would come up, fire, and charge with the bayonet.<sup>142</sup> Heath organized an advance party. The 325 rank and file chosen for this mission worked closely with the cavalrymen from Sheldon's Legion.<sup>143</sup> Maj. Lemuel Trescott of the Sixteenth Massachusetts executed a masterly raid across Long Island Sound on 3 October.<sup>144</sup>

The same intrepidity characterized the army's limited conduct of major conventional operations. The large British troop crossing into New Jersey under Lt. Gen. Wilhelm Knyphausen in June 1780 prompted the only major engagement in the North since Monmouth Courthouse. Scattered patriot units needed time to concentrate. Detached Continentals in regimental and brigade strength presented daunting resistance to the enemy advance. The Second Rhode Island Regiment under Col. Israel Angell particularly distinguished itself "& gave the Enemy great opposition."<sup>145</sup> When Stark's Brigade received its marching orders, "animation and composure seem to pervade every countenance . . ."<sup>146</sup> And before Yorktown the Commander in Chief ordered:

If the enemy should be tempted to meet the army on its March the general particularly enjoins the troops to

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<sup>142</sup>Wayne Papers, 26 July 1781.

<sup>143</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 21 August 1781.

<sup>144</sup>Heath, Memoirs, p. 288.

<sup>145</sup>Caleb Gibbs Diary, 23 June 1780.

<sup>146</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 201.

place their Principle reliance on the Bayonet, that they may prove the vanity of the boast which the British make of their peculiar prowess in deciding Battles with that weapon, . . . .<sup>147</sup>

Finally, a comparison of the Continentals with the other armies in America demonstrates how soldiers on both sides were learning new skills and honing old ones while on campaign.<sup>148</sup> All were also gaining precious combat experience. The Continentals could conduct linear warfare as well as the enemy by mid-1778. The British and German regulars adapted to American conditions as early as 1776. Individual unit drill, training, and experience were key. A closer examination of these factors is necessary.

Linear warfare in Europe relied almost exclusively on the three-deep line for close-order combat. Von Steuben's Blue Book merely institutionalized the American practice of reducing the line to two ranks and increasing the distance between files. However, the Continentals derived no benefit from this conversion. Doctrine notwithstanding, all other armies in the war followed suit. The British had adopted two-deep line for use in North America in 1759.<sup>149</sup> The outbreak of the Revolution hastened its return. The American Provincial Corps merely aped the British. Moreover, they taught their German allies to use the same tactics, agreed at an officers' conference on 16 August

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<sup>147</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 27 September 1781.

<sup>148</sup>See Chapter Nine for a discussion of light-infantry operations.

<sup>149</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, p. 287.

1776. Many of the older Hessian officers, veterans of the Seven Years' War, did not like the adoption of two-deep line and more open files.<sup>150</sup> Over a year later Colonel von Donop complained on 2 September 1777 that the formation lacked solidity to storm entrenchments or to resist cavalry.<sup>151</sup> Jäger officer Ewald continued to criticize the formation as late as 1781. He believed that it worked well in woods but would lead to disorder in open country and could not engage European troops in normal close order successfully.<sup>152</sup> Nonetheless, the French infantry in America used it as well, as one of their officers noted on 9 July 1781.<sup>153</sup>

Some even blamed the use of two-deep line with more open files for the shocking defeat at Cowpens. Sir Henry Clinton believed that the "loose, flimsy order" was responsible for the panic which ensued after the unexpected fire of the Continentals.<sup>154</sup> Tarleton himself used the formation as an excuse for the disaster. He noted the inability of this loose manner of forming to deal with unexpected shock.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup>"Report on German Auxiliary Troops," p. 23. The Report cites the history of Infantry Regiment No. Eighty-Three.

<sup>151</sup>Huth, "Letters from a Hessian Mercenary," p. 499.

<sup>152</sup>Ewald, Diary of the American War, p. 340.

<sup>153</sup>Von Closen, Revolutionary War Journal, p. 92.

<sup>154</sup>Sir Henry Clinton, The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1786 with an Appendix of Original Documents, ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 247.

The adoption of two-deep line by all participants enhanced everyone's firepower capability given emerging reservations about the effectiveness of the third rank. The formation was also partly a concession to terrain and the recognition of the lack of any viable threat from large bodies of cavalry, especially heavy horse. However, the formation did lack depth. The spread-out files placed greater challenges on command and control. Of note is the continued predilection of the British for a good volley and bayonet charge, a procedure longingly copied by the Continentals. No one sought prolonged firefights.<sup>156</sup>

However, any comparative analysis must also recognize that using the various national armies as a whole as the common denominator is misleading. The real comparison was at regimental/battalion level. Given the personnel turmoil discussed in Chapter Two, every army had to guard against a dilution of unit quality, one which could lead to disaster in battle. Hence, as the patriots improved dramatically from their sorry performance early in the war, albeit in limited numbers, the British and Germans had to deal with a decline in individual unit capability.

Indeed, the effects of troop quality on combat performance is particularly enlightening during the latter

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<sup>155</sup>Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton, A History of the Campaigns of 1780 and 1781 in the Southern Provinces of America, Heritage Series of Reprints on South Carolina in the Colonial and Revolutionary Period, no. 11 (n.p., 1781; reprint ed., Spartanburg, S.C.: Reprint Co., 1967), p. 221.

<sup>156</sup>See the discussion in Chapter One.

war years. Heretofore, the inexperience and lack of training of patriot units early in the war has hindered comparative historical assessments of the Continental Army. The best examples were seen later in the war. For example, the British Twenty-Second Regiment at Springfield fired two volleys with no effect.<sup>157</sup> More important still was the transfer of veteran units from the main army to the Southern Army in 1780-81. Their contribution to the patriot cause in this harsh theater was invaluable. Moreover, on occasion they clearly outclassed the opposition.

Probably the most famous example of all was the Battle of Cowpens in January 1781. No one should denigrate the superior leadership qualities of Brig. Gen. Daniel Morgan. He deployed Continentals, militia, and a small cavalry contingent superbly. On the other hand, Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton entered battle rashly overconfident.

However, the unit compositions at Cowpens are an excellent case study how Continental infantry could actually outclass enemy troops on occasion. Morgan's Continentals were not only veteran Marylanders, survivors of numerous actions up North and the debacle at Camden, but also Greene's light corps.<sup>158</sup> They were thus elite troops.

Tarleton meanwhile failed to account for the fragile nature of his command. The Seventh Regiment, the Royal

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<sup>157</sup>Von Krafft, Journal, p. 112.

<sup>158</sup>General Orders, 14 February 1781, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

Fusiliers, was one of the senior corps of the British Army. But it deployed to the South full of new recruits. Tarleton himself mentioned the need to end the wasteful firing of some of that regiment's men even before battle commenced. The veteran Seventy-First Highlanders bore the brunt of the fighting. The rest of the command fell into an "unaccountable panic" after the unexpected about face and volley from the Continental regulars.<sup>159</sup>

Furthermore, Tarleton's hated Legion was probably brought up to strength with numerous deserters from the Americans defeated at Camden, soldiers with great incentive to "saue qui peut" at the first sign of impending defeat. No wonder the Legion horsemen twice refused to charge at the end of the battle to salvage the tide of battle or even cover a retreat. Only the small detachment of Seventeenth Light Dragoons heeded orders. Hence, many of Tarleton's men exhibited no more steadiness in the face of the unexpected than the Continentals at Germantown.

Lt. Col. Henry "Light Horse Harry" Lee experienced another such example when he attacked some British troops with his legion about twelve miles from Monk's Corner in July 1781. The Nineteenth Regiment surrendered without firing a shot when threatened with a cavalry charge. It contained new troops recently arrived from Ireland.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup>Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, pp. 216-18.

<sup>160</sup>Henry Lee, Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States, 2 vols. (Philadelphia:

In summary, the Continentals were thus no different from any other regular army of the period in terms of morale and motivation. They responded principally to material incentives, inspirational leadership, and unit esprit de corps. Officers were stupendously successful in establishing procedures for the mundane but rigorous accounting of personnel and property along with repetitive tasks like camp security, route marches, the passage of defiles, and river crossings. The creation of a genuine standing army rested on the successful marriage of this creativity and experienced soldiers with tactical articulation, a skill acquired at Valley Forge. From that point on the Continentals had the potential to be the equal or superior of any enemy unit. The final key factor was not tactics as both sides adapted to American conditions quickly. Rather, the inevitable decline in unit quality associated with a prolonged war in this period dogged many British and German regiments during the latter war years.

## CHAPTER SIX

## TRAINING AND DRILL

Organization

The various formations of the Continental Army are well known and thoroughly documented. But there has been little analysis of these organizations to date. This section will examine their effectiveness and occasionally highlight similarities and differences with European units. Familiarity with their structure is necessary to appreciate the challenge of training and drill.

The basic tactical formation of linear warfare was the infantry regiment. American regiments were invariably one-battalion organizations. The principal exception was the Second Canadian Regiment which retained its unique four-battalion arrangement throughout the war.<sup>1</sup> This one-battalion structure essentially followed British and Provincial practice, though some multi-battalion regiments did exist. The principal German contingents followed suit. The Hessians formed one-battalion regiments prior to embarkation.<sup>2</sup> The Brunswickers did likewise.<sup>3</sup> French

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<sup>1</sup>Ford, Journals, 4:75.

<sup>2</sup>Journal of the Honourable Fusilier Regiment von Alt-Lossberg, p. 1; Carl Leopold Baurmeister, Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals, 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces, ed. and trans. Bernhard A. Uhlendorf (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), p. 15.

regiments now uniformly contained two battalions as a result of the reforms of the Duc de Choiseul initiated after 1763.<sup>4</sup>

The strength of a battalion was in its rank and file, the privates and corporals who formed the ranks (frontage) and files (depth). Officers and sergeants generally deployed along the flanks and rear to maintain command and control. They contributed nothing to a unit's firepower.

Infantry battalions of the late-eighteenth century were not composed of all the same troop types. Nearly all had one company of grenadiers; some included one of light infantry. The grenadier company contained the biggest and strongest men. They no longer used the primitive hand grenade prevalent earlier in the century. Their principal function was to spearhead assaults and other hazardous but critical missions. They formed on the right of the battalion, the position of seniority and honor. The light infantry company fulfilled the need for skirmishers. They formed on the left of the battalion. These flank companies usually formed ad-hoc, elite battalions while on campaign.<sup>5</sup>

Table 3-1 compares the distribution of infantry companies in American battalions with their European counterparts. Table 3-2 details the various names and

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<sup>3</sup>"Report on German Auxiliary Troops," pp. 2, 13.

<sup>4</sup>L. Dussieux, L'Armee en France: Histoire et Organisation, 3 vols. (Versailles: L. Bernard, 1884), 1:353.

<sup>5</sup>Chapter Nine contrasts the Corps of Light Infantry and the conventional and differing roles of European flank companies.

functions of infantrymen in the American Revolution. Historians often mix up these troop types. The varied designations for line infantry simply reflected national preferences in terminology. All executed the linear tactics of massed firepower and the bayonet charge. The Continentals spent most of the war attempting to formulate the most effective formations to implement similar tactics.

The Continental Army changed organizations several times. The army of 1775 was simply an adopted New England militia force, each colony with its own organization. They generally opted for large battalions/regiments of eight to ten companies.<sup>6</sup> This force is not considered further.

After 1775 the Continental Army adopted three major structures. Table 3-3 compares the authorized strength in rank and file of these companies and battalions with British, German, and French units. Since the flank companies operated away from their parent regiments on campaign and thus would not contribute to the latter's effective numbers, this analysis omits them.

Several points stand out from studying these tables. First, the Americans were obviously patterning their organizations after the British Army, an understandable choice. Second, the Anglo-American battalions consisted of a larger number of smaller companies. The Europeans chose a

<sup>6</sup>Peter Force, ed. American Archives, 4th ser., 6 vols. (Washington, D.C.: M. St. Clair & Peter Force, 1837-46), 2:411-13, 648, 744, 766-67, 1145, 1163, 1580-81, and 1613-14 describes the organization of these New England units.

TABLE 6-1  
DISTRIBUTION OF INFANTRY COMPANY TYPES  
WITHIN A BATTALION/REGIMENT

Nationality	Line	Type	
		Grenadier	Light
<u>Continental</u>			
1776	8	0	0
1778	8	0	1
1781	8	0	1
Britain/ Provincial	8	1	1
Hesse- Cassel	5	1	0
Brunswick	5	1	0
Anspach- Bayreuth	4	1	1/2
Anhalt- Zerbst	2	1	1/2
Hesse- Hanau	3	1	0
Waldeck	4	1	0
France	4	1/2	1/2

Notes

1. The table does not include the British additional companies which stayed in England.
2. The half company of light troops in the Anhalt-Zerbst and Anspach-Bayreuth formations were called divisions and contained jägers with rifles.
3. The French did not split the flank companies in half. One deployed with each of the regiment's two battalions.

SOURCES: Ford, Journals, 3:322, 11:538-39, 18:894-95; Curtis, Organization of the British Army, p. 4; "Report on German Auxiliary Troops Employed by Great Britain in the War of American Independence, 1776-83," pp. 13-20 passim; Dussieux, L'Armee en France, 1:353.

TABLE 6-2

## SUMMARY OF TROOP TYPES IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

<u>Nationality</u>	<u>Line of Battle</u>	<u>Function</u>	
		<u>Skirmishing</u>	<u>Assaults</u>
American	Continental Line musket man	light infantry	light infantry
English	center company battalion company musket/hat man fusilier Highlander	light infantry	light infantry grenadier
Germans	musketeer fusilier	jäger	grenadier
French	fusilier	chasseur	grenadier

Notes

1. The American and British light infantry's primary role was to skirmish but they were equally adept at spearheading assaults, the Americans after 1778.
2. The British fusilier and Scottish kilted Highlander were uniformed differently but functioned like ordinary line infantry until the Napoleonic Wars.
3. The German fusilier was trained to fight in two-deep line and skirmish with a portion of the battalion only after the Revolution.
4. The German jäger was armed with a rifle.

TABLE 6-3  
 COMPARISON OF AUTHORIZED RANK AND FILE STRENGTH OF  
 INFANTRY COMPANIES AND BATTALIONS  
 (MINUS FLANK COMPANIES)

	Company	Battalion	Cos per Bn
<u>Continental</u>			
1776	80	640	8
1778	56	448	8
1781	68	544	8
British/ Provincials	41	328	8
British/ Provincials (reinforced)	59	472	8
Hessians	112	560	5
Brunswickers	113	565	5
French	109	436	4

SOURCES: Ford, Journals, 3:322, 11:539, 18:959-60; Curtis, Organization of the British Army, pp. 4-5; Howe, General Orders, p. 256; Journal of the Honourable Fusilier Regiment von Alt-Lossberg; "Report on German Auxiliary Troops Employed by Great Britain in the War of American Independence, 1776-83," pp. 2, 13; Kennett, French Forces in America, p. 22. Estimates were used in determining the rank and file strengths for the French units.

smaller number of larger companies. However, a comparison of the command and control personnel authorized in these units revealed only miniscule differences. Desired tactical flexibility probably governed the battalion structure.

The American companies were supposed to be stronger than their British equivalents. Yet at battalion level these differences were less evident. The American battalion in 1776 was by far the largest, but the patriots reduced it in 1778 only to increase it in 1781. The British also raised the authorized company strength of units in North America on 25 August 1775 from forty-one rank and file to fifty-nine.<sup>7</sup>

One historian has explained these fluctuations in great detail, suggesting that the American organizations were superior to the British in several respects, in particular the 1776 organization.<sup>8</sup> Frankly, such an evaluation appears exaggerated. The patriots were struggling to form a genuine regular army. For all of their colonial military tradition, they lacked both experience and detailed knowledge of linear warfare to weigh the minutiae of how many rank and file, sergeants, and officers plus or minus one or two would form the ideal unit to conduct classical linear combat. All armies had the habit to include field-grade officers at battalion headquarters as company

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<sup>7</sup>Howe, General Orders, p. 256. See his entry for 20 November 1775. Evidence is inconclusive as to how well the British implemented the increase.

<sup>8</sup>Wright, Continental Army, pp. 47-49, 126-27, 158-59.

commanders in their own right. American line officers also performed many staff positions as additional duties.<sup>9</sup>

The fluctuations were in fact due to causes beyond the realm of organization. An infantry company in 1776 was authorized one captain, two lieutenants, one ensign, four sergeants, four corporals, seventy-six privates, and two musicians.<sup>10</sup> The shortage of recruits after Royster's rage militaire ended suggested that the army would be better off with smaller companies, and hence battalions, in 1778 which might actually be filled to authorized strength. Thus, the strength of the company dropped to one company commander, one lieutenant, one ensign, three sergeants, three corporals, fifty-three privates, and two musicians. There was also a light infantry company.<sup>11</sup> Late-war realism saw the reduction of the total number of battalions effective in 1781. The compensation was a larger company than that authorized in 1778. So, a company rose to a captain, two ensigns, five sergeants, five corporals, and sixty-three privates.<sup>12</sup> These formal figures meant little since a Continental regiment at full strength was a rare event.

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<sup>9</sup>Infantry battalions tended to follow an approximate 10:1 ratio of rank and file to officers and sergeants regardless of nationality.

<sup>10</sup>Ford, Journals, 3:321.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 11:539. The colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major all counted as company commanders in their own right. A captain-lieutenant substituted for a lieutenant in the colonel's company.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 18:959-60.

Indeed, the most significant problem with the patriot's battalion structure was its instability due to the seemingly insoluble problem of a lack of recruits. The pitifully small size of companies soon rendered battalions combat ineffective. Commanders were forced to institute ad hoc reorganizations. Thus, during the Monmouth campaign the regiments of the main army had not yet implemented the structure approved by Congress on 27 May. Nearly a year would pass before they completed the process. Instead, all units reconfigured so that battalions contained at least 80 files but no more than 111, i.e. 160 to 222 rank and file.<sup>13</sup>

Another example was the outright disbandment of Sherburne's Regiment, one of the Additional Regiments of December 1776.<sup>14</sup> Heath amalgamated the First and Eighth Massachusetts Regiments as well as the Ninth and Tenth.<sup>15</sup> During the siege at Yorktown the regiments of the Jersey Line were consolidated into one battalion.<sup>16</sup>

Doctrinally speaking, the Continentals should have had an advantage since American units deployed in two-deep line. Every musket could fire. European armies maintained the three-deep line despite the acknowledged ineffectiveness of

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<sup>13</sup>Regimental Orders of the Eighth Massachusetts, 7 June 1778.

<sup>14</sup>General Orders, 2 May 1780, Journal of Nathan Beers.

<sup>15</sup>After Orders, 17 February 1781, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>16</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 7 October 1781.

the third rank's firepower. However, in America all armies adapted quickly and soon used two-deep line as well.<sup>17</sup>

American regiments bore a number and state designation which highlighted the confederated nature of the patriot war effort. Only once did this scheme differ. The main army of 1776 used a number and "Continental Regiment" without any specific state identification. This experiment becomes all the more interesting when one recalls that at the time of establishment there was as yet no independent nation. This system disappeared the same year and unit titles reverted to those with state affiliations. Washington observed in November 1777 that there was too much parochial feeling in the thirteen states to implement such a scheme successfully after a further suggestion to utilize a similar idea.<sup>18</sup>

The Continentals lacked the tradition of the European armies but certainly not the same penchant for rank and position. For example, the commander of the Third New York stipulated that the regiment would deploy its companies in strict seniority: right, left, and so forth with the junior companies in the center.<sup>19</sup> When Washington reorganized the main army's regiments into brigades in mid-1777, he did so "by rank" as well as trying to make the brigades of equal size. In other words, he assigned the senior regiment of a

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<sup>17</sup>Chapter Five analyzes formations and tactics in depth.

<sup>18</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:125.

<sup>19</sup>Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book, 21 February 1777.

state line to its first brigade; the next senior to the state's second brigade; and so on.<sup>20</sup>

Armies of the late-eighteenth century lacked permanent organizations higher than the battalion/regiment. Commanders usually composed brigades and divisions just prior to the commencement of a campaign. Regimental guns of three or four pounder often supported the infantry directly in the proportion of two guns per battalion.

The main army used these higher formations with a considerable degree of success. Infantry and artillery developed what today's U. S. Army calls an "habitual relationship," i.e. the same battery or company of guns provided direct fire support to a specific brigade on a continuing basis. However, such a development merely carried the long-standing practice of regimental guns to the next level and was by no means an American initiative.<sup>21</sup>

The Commander in Chief took a strong interest in the composition of these higher formations. One of his first actions upon assuming command of the New England troops was to organize them into divisions of two brigades with six regiments each in July 1775.<sup>22</sup> He preferred to obtain Congressional permission or to see their initiative but he

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<sup>20</sup>Washington, Writings, 9:103-4.

<sup>21</sup>Chapter Nine contains a brief discussion of the Continental Artillery and its support of the line infantry.

<sup>22</sup>Washington, Writings, 3:354-56.

decided that he could wait no longer.<sup>23</sup> He also formed brigades with the heterogonous force assembled at New York City.<sup>24</sup> Washington personally labored and placed every regiment in its brigade when the main army reorganized in 1777. His correspondence was filled with letters to brigadiers, telling them which regiments formed the brigade and under whose division the brigade fell.<sup>25</sup>

As the war dragged on, these formations achieved a certain degree of stability in all the armies. However, commanders were clearly more concerned with operational demands than brigade or division integrity. The Continentals' formations also suffered from the ubiquitous shortage of men which led to regimental amalgamations which in turn destroyed brigade and division compositions. The strain of active operations could cause considerable turmoil. Thus, Heath complained to Washington in 1776 that Fellow's Brigade and others was no longer part of his division. Which units were under his command?<sup>26</sup>

The size of the main army also raised concerns regarding the command and control over the infantry divisions. Washington did not have enough major generals to create separate commanders of multiple-division formations. His

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<sup>23</sup>Washington's Headquarters Orderly Book, 22 July 1775.

<sup>24</sup>Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, 31 July 1776.

<sup>25</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:40, 88-89, 98, 99-100; 10:94.

<sup>26</sup>Letter, 3 September 1776, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

solution was to create an ad-hoc grouping of divisions known as a wing. This expedient was highly unsatisfactory.

There was no proper chain of command to control these wings. Washington asked the President of Congress on 22 January 1777 to appoint three lieutenant generals to lead an independent command of several divisions.<sup>27</sup> The request became an issue over the threat posed to civil liberties. Washington never got his three-star generals. The main army thus did not solve the problem which dogged it to war's end.

There was also a sloppy use of terminology between "Wings" and "Grand Division." Washington himself was confused over the precise meaning of "Grand Division." He had used it to describe the divisions he had created in July 1775.<sup>28</sup> Later he told Col. Joseph Ward on 21 April 1777 that he was unsure of Congress' intent by its use of the term. He did not know if Congress was referring to a major general's command or a higher formation. He intended the division to consist of three brigades of four regiments each under a major general.<sup>29</sup> Washington's perplexity is understandable when one considers that he had raised the issue with Congress of lieutenant generals to command higher formations only three months previously.

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<sup>27</sup>Washington, Writings, 7:49.

<sup>28</sup>Washington's Headquarters Orderly Book, 22 July 1775.

<sup>29</sup>Washington, Writings, 7:448.

Finally, and most seriously, the wings did not simply add another "layer" of command and control but cut across existing ones in two ways. First, lacking Congressional approval for lieutenant generals, certain major generals had to perform double duty as both wing and division commanders. Second, these wings interfered with the traditional deployment of a field army into two lines.

For example, the "Order of Battle" for 4-5 December 1777 drew up the army in the typical linear formations of the period: a first line, a second line, and a small reserve in a third line. However, the first line also contained two wings, a left and a right. The first line thus had no single commander. The wings also lacked depth as they only included the first line. Each wing received two regiments of cavalry for flank protection.<sup>30</sup> The wing commanders could not influence the battle to any great degree. Each controlled half of the front line and no other infantry.

This lack of clear command and control above the division with multiple responsibilities hurt the army during the Monmouth campaign. Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, the second in command recently returned from captivity, took over Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene's former division on 23 May 1778, the latter having assumed the duties of Quartermaster General. At the same time Washington assigned the three senior major generals the left and right wings and the second line in

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 10:138-39.

action. The confusing dichotomy inherent in this arrangement should have been clear when Washington specified that these three generals would retain control over their divisions for the present, but revert to wing and second-line commanders if battle commenced.<sup>31</sup>

Lee disagreed with the Commander in Chief over this proposal. Lee argued that to group a number of divisions into a wing only when in action doomed the wing commander to control of an organization about which he knew preciously little with impending battle staring at him. Washington's only response was to call the wings temporary formations until Congress approved the appointment of lieutenant generals.<sup>32</sup> Such approval never came.

The army leadership never resolved the issue. After returning to New York state, the main army still used these wings. Orders required units of the left wing to be ready to march within an hour's notice.<sup>33</sup> The main army's order of battle divided the army into two wings of two to three divisions each. This establishment continued for the duration of the campaigning season.<sup>34</sup> Later deployment

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<sup>31</sup>General Orders, 11 June 1778, Regimental Orders of the Eighth Massachusetts.

<sup>32</sup>Letters, 15 June 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville. The two letters also appear in Charles Lee, Lee Papers, Collections of the New-York Historical Society 4-7, 1870-73 (New York: NYHS, 1871-74), 2:399, 403.

<sup>33</sup>Wing Orders, 24 September 1778, Caleb Clapp Orderly Book.

<sup>34</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 19 July 1779.

instructions divided the first line into two wings. The advance corps and second lines were separate entities.<sup>35</sup>

The Americans did possess sound organizations to wage war at the tactical and operational levels which differed from their European counterparts only in minor aspects. Considering the scratch nature of the Continental Army, the establishment of regiments in coherent brigades and divisions with the eventual ability to fight as organized entities was a phenomenal accomplishment. However, at no time were either the brigades or divisions true combined-arms teams in the modern sense. There was adequate artillery support, but no provision for cavalry support beyond temporary attachments on a case-by-case basis.

Unfortunately, the higher echelons for the simultaneous control of a multiple-division main army remained faulty throughout the war. The main army alone suffered from this deficiency. None of the other departments contained sufficient troops for this issue to arise.

#### The Early Days, 1775-77

Washington had to face the reality of the eighteenth-century battlefield. The execution of linear tactics required a high degree of training and proficiency with drill due to the level of tactical articulation attained by the end of the Seven Years' War. Unless the Continentals

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<sup>35</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 7 June 1780.

could learn to fire and maneuver as a team, they were doomed to tactical inferiority for the duration of the war.

Understandably, the patriots again followed known British practice. They therefore generally delegated this critical function down to regimental level. Unfortunately, inexperienced officers and NCOs lacked sufficient expertise to drill and train their troops properly. Some attacked the task with alacrity; others, hardly at all. The result was a hodge-podge effort with no set standard nor any designated overseer to evaluate their progress.

For example, one battalion commander admitted that the men did not drill well. He called for greater efforts by all officers as an example for the men. At least one officer would attend drill daily at 11 a.m. except Sunday. Then the sergeant major or adjutant would put the men through the motions at 3 p.m.<sup>36</sup> Officers expressed their frustration with the taskings on their units to build field works and to post various fatigues. These activities took soldiers away from the regiment and consumed precious time which could have been spent drilling. Leaders focused on loading and firing drills for quickness and calmness.<sup>37</sup>

Heath addressed his wish for the daily exercise of off-duty soldiers and the careful instruction of new recruits in

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<sup>36</sup>Regimental Orders, 29 September 1775, Col. Jedediah Huntington's Eighth Connecticut Regiment of 1775, Mass. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 23, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>37</sup>Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, 18 July 1776.

the different points of their duty. Two days later he congratulated the units of the First Brigade for the exactness of their exercise. He exhorted the Second Brigade to keep practicing. He focused on the importance of learning priming, loading, and firing first. He even forbade pulling the trigger in drill unless a piece of wood substituted for the stone flint.<sup>38</sup> Schuyler too issued specific instructions to his command. He wanted the off-duty soldiers exercised in small squads. Again, the emphasis was on priming, loading, and firing. He included the fifers and drummers.<sup>39</sup> McDougall even told the Connecticut militia to practice firing from a parapet to prevent confusion in manning the lines.<sup>40</sup>

These individual regimental efforts continued through 1777. Lieutenant Colonel Willett told his officers of the Third New York that corporals and sergeants would drill the troops in the presence of the officers. He called for three levels of expertise in order to monitor progress. He emphasized that officers could not be too attentive to this order so important for the discipline of the battalion.<sup>41</sup> Heath would not let a shortage of weapons interfere with

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<sup>38</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 17 and 19 August 1776.

<sup>39</sup>Philip J. Schuyler Orderly Book, 19 and 23 August 1776.

<sup>40</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book, no. 36., 24 August 1776.

<sup>41</sup>Regimental Orders, 21 February 1777, Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book.

training. He required those with muskets to drill daily. Soldiers without firearms could practice maneuvers.<sup>42</sup> Willett required drill to begin at 3 p.m.; the next day he promised to punish corporals and sergeants who did not exercise their men. He directed the NCOs to drill in front of the sergeant major and two days later he specified that all soldiers not on duty would drill in the afternoons at the sound of the "Long Roll." Finally, he demanded that officers not on duty also attend roll call and drill.<sup>43</sup>

Washington even criticised the musicians on 4 June 1777 in General Orders and called for their immediate improvement or reduction. On the twentieth he required the shortest men to deploy in the front rank to ease firing from the second rank.<sup>44</sup> One commander told his recruiters on 9 July to devote the utmost attention to drill and instruction while in quarters.<sup>45</sup> Yet another unit recognized the critical functions of priming, loading, and firing. Leaders also discussed key maneuvers: advancing and retiring in line, deployment from line to column, negotiating passes, and retirement in column -- all important movements in action.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 1 April 1777.

<sup>43</sup>Regimental Orders, 2, 3, 5, 7 April and 4 June 1777, Lt. Col. Marinus Willett Orderly Book.

<sup>44</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:181, 268.

<sup>45</sup>Numbered Record Books, 16/50-51.

<sup>46</sup>Unidentified unit, 12 and 18 June 1777, Continental Army MSS.

The years 1775-77 were thus not wasted. Contrary to the assertions of many historians, the sources demonstrate that commanders recognized that drill and training necessitated the active involvement of both officers and NCOs. But the enforcement of such a philosophy was not so easy. Officers were very much concerned with the drilling of their soldiers. However, their participation in training was often sporadic and inconsistent within the main army.

Leaders also approached the monumental task of training an army with considerable common sense. Arms drill zeroed in on the critical motions for priming, loading, and firing. Likewise they practiced the principal maneuvers for use in action. Training thus focused on those basics essential for battle. McDougall highlighted the importance of this training and drill to Washington. The patriots should focus on maneuver and discipline. Otherwise, the troops would execute movements in action in a panic because they knew that the British were very skillful in their practice.<sup>47</sup>

The main army which limped into winter quarters at Valley Forge was still an incomplete instrument for battle. No less than seven different drill manuals were in use simultaneously.<sup>48</sup> Von Steuben himself later commented how

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<sup>47</sup>George Washington Papers, 19 May 1777, Presidential Papers Series, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>48</sup>Russell F. Weigley, Morristown, National Park Service Handbook no. 120 (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Dept. of the Interior, 1983), p. 43. Thanks are due to Prof. Russell F. Weigley, Temple University, for his assistance on this

he created his drill notes because he judged these mixed elements of French, Prussian, and English drill as inappropriate.<sup>49</sup> This variety would not have mattered as much in a stable army. But the Continentals had considerable personnel turmoil. Officers and NCOs could and did change regiments often within the same state's line. They thus found themselves in a new unit with a completely different drill in use. Von Steuben captured the situation:

There was no Established System of Maneuver no Settled Regulations for Discipline and good Order, or an Uniformity in the Service, Each Regiment had a Particular Order of march, and a different discipline. Each Col. had his Own Manner of Exercising his Troops, each Brigadier a different way of forming his Guards, Detachments, &c. The Brigades and Regiments in which our Army was divided were so unequal in their Numbers that it would have been impossible to Execute any Manaeuvre or Even to make any arrangement.<sup>50</sup>

However, even the enemy acknowledged both its accomplishments and its steady progress to date. Col. Carl Emil Curt von Donop wrote bitterly to the Prince of Hesse Cassel on 2 September 1777 that, "We have allowed the rebels too much time in which to become soldiers." He believed that French officers had drilled the army.<sup>51</sup>

Leading patriots realized the need to appoint a knowledgeable officer to the position of Inspector General.

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matter. Unfortunately, he could not recall from which primary source he derived this information.

<sup>49</sup>The Papers of Baron von Steuben, 27 May 1778, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>50</sup>"Memorandum, August 17th[?], 1778," p. 4, von Steuben Papers.

<sup>51</sup>Huth, "Letters from a Hessian Mercenary," p. 499.

The principal candidates were foreign officers due to their expertise and experience. Most gave up in disgust. For example, Baron de Kalb told the Comte de Broglie on 25 December that the main army teemed with colonels; plans for quarters were unknown; and he expended considerable time just finding his way about camp. He ended by saying that he no longer bothered making suggestions for improvement.<sup>52</sup> Von Steuben himself aptly summarized previous attempts to create a "New Model Army" of sorts:

. . . some others undertook to introduce Military Discipline in the Army, but they met with so many obstacles that they gave up their Enterprize and contented themselves with showing their Courage and Intrepidity on Every Occasion.<sup>53</sup>

Col. Henry Leonard Philip, Baron d'Arendt had volunteered to serve as an Inspector of Infantry answerable to the Commander in Chief.<sup>54</sup> But Congress appointed Brig. Gen. Thomas Conway to the position of Inspector General on 13 December, charging him to promote discipline, reform abuses, conduct reviews, and monitor the proper exercising of the troops. He would inspect returns of men and material closely at the start and end of the campaigning season. Finally, he would investigate grievances and check pay books.<sup>55</sup> On 30 December the Commander in Chief noted that

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<sup>52</sup>Commager and Morris, Spirit of 'Seventy-Six, 1:647.

<sup>53</sup>Memorandum, August 17th[?], 1778, pp. 2-3, von Steuben Papers.

<sup>54</sup>Letter, 7 August 1777, Washington Papers, Library of Congress.

Conway made no mention of instructions from the Board of War. Once he had them, he could rely upon Washington's support. "I shall issue any Orders which may be judged necessary to have them carried into execution." Yet on 2 January 1778 Washington informed the President of Congress that the establishment of an Inspector General was not really a recent topic as Conway implied; moreover, the major issue rested upon the development of a set of drill regulations by a foreign officer of ability. He especially recommended Baron d'Arendt.<sup>56</sup>

The Conway Cabal has clouded any fair appraisal of the Irishman. He was ambitious and heavily involved in patriot politics. However, he was no incompetent and much was expected of him. For example, John Adams referred to Conway as one of "three capital Characters here" and the only infantryman among them in a letter to James Warren on 19 June.<sup>57</sup> He had spoken to Washington about using engineers with the main army. Their judicious use would save much time and labor on the march and in the formation of camps.<sup>58</sup>

Conway did in fact have realistic ideas how to reform the army. He presented Washington with a plan for implementation once it had concentrated. Conway would train

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<sup>55</sup>Ford, Journals, 9:1023-26.

<sup>56</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:226-27, 249-50.

<sup>57</sup>Burnett, Letters, 2:386.

<sup>58</sup>Letter, 2 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

one to two officers and NCOs drawn from all regiments in battalion, brigade, and division maneuvers for a period of one month. These leaders would then return to their regiments and train their own soldiers. Conway also stated that he witnessed this method in action in the Imperial, i.e. Austrian, and French armies where officials trained no less than 200,000 men within three months. He added that the Board of War wanted him to appoint instructors who could drill the troops by day and write the regulations by night. Once approved, the entire army would receive published versions. Conway concluded that this course of action reflected the practices of the four major European powers.<sup>59</sup>

But the Cabal doomed Conway to impotence. No primary staff officer could succeed in the main army without Washington's support. Conway's political advancement to major general and his alleged ridicule of the Commander in Chief insured that he would not get the chance to reform the army.<sup>60</sup> Conway ruined his chances with two haughty letters on 6 and 22 April 1778 threatening resignation. A personal appearance before Congress on 21 May did not help.<sup>61</sup> Congress accepted his resignation on 28 April.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup>Letters, 29 and 31 December 1777, Washington Papers, Library of Congress. Von Steuben would implement a similar scheme, known today as "train the trainer."

<sup>60</sup>Washington was convinced that Conway got his promotion in October. Richard Henry Lee assured Washington on the twentieth that was not so. Burnett, Letters, 2:527-28.

<sup>61</sup>Burnett, Letters, 3:211n10, 260.

Valley Forge and the Blue Book

The ordeal of Washington's army at Valley Forge has passed into history as an example of the triumph of the American spirit against incredible odds. This analysis is solely concerned with the effort to train the main army and not other aspects of that winter encampment.<sup>63</sup>

Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane sent Washington an introduction for Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin, Baron von Steuben, touted as a former Prussian lieutenant general.<sup>64</sup> He reached Valley Forge in February. He lacked a Prussian title and was no veteran general.<sup>65</sup> But the former Prussian staff captain and baron from Hohenzollern-Hechingen had an abundance of common sense. He was not merely starting from scratch. The troops had to "unlearn" the bits and pieces from over a half dozen manuals.

<sup>62</sup>Ford, Journals, 10:399.

<sup>63</sup>By far the two most useful monographs on Valley Forge are John Ford Reed, Valley Forge, Crucible of Victory, Bicentennial Series on the American Revolution (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1969) and John B. Trussell, Jr., Birthplace of an Army: A Study of the Valley Forge Encampment (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 1976).

<sup>64</sup>Letter, 4 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>65</sup>For personal details see Friedrich Kapp, The Life of Frederick William von Steuben, Major General in the Revolutionary Army, with an Introduction by George Bancroft (New York: Mason Bros., 1859) and John McAuley Palmer, General von Steuben (New Haven, Ct.: Yale University Press, 1937) among the host of biographies.

Von Steuben first organized the training cycle. Washington permitted the formation of a "model company" drawn from his modest bodyguard and one hundred men from the line regiments throughout the army on 17 March 1778.<sup>66</sup> Von Steuben personally drilled this group. His success was crucial to further progress. He could not instruct all the Continentals singlehandedly. These men returned to their parent regiments to act as unit instructors.<sup>67</sup>

Von Steuben left nothing to chance. His aim was to insure the individual proficiency of each soldier in the new drill. He then progressed to platoon- and company-level routines. He proceeded to the next lesson only when the men had mastered the previous one. His teaching began on 23 March with posture. The final lesson, the seventh, started on 29 April. The training period thus lasted some six weeks. In that time von Steuben introduced standard slow and quick steps and taught the soldiers how to march in compact masses including wheeling, changing formations, and the oblique step. He reduced the manual of arms to ten steps. The troops also received bayonet training.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Washington, Writings, 11:98.

<sup>67</sup>This method of imparting training to a large group of soldiers expeditiously is quite a modern concept. Today's U. S. Army refers to it as "train the trainer." Note that a "step" in drill often consisted of more than one "motion."

<sup>68</sup>"Military Instructions, 1778," von Steuben Papers. The Instructions compose a twenty-seven page manuscript of von Steuben's lesson plans.

Von Steuben won the confidence of the army by the demonstrated proficiency of the model company. It showed soldiers from several states marching and drilling as one. Such uniform precision exhibited by men from different regiments was heretofore unheard of. The rest of the army trained for five weeks. Dutiful officer scribes copied von Steuben's "Military Instructions" for distribution to the regiments. There was no time for printing.<sup>69</sup>

The techniques learned at Valley Forge transformed the main army. In about three months it learned a single system of drill. Von Steuben had brought the Continentals to state-of-the-art tactics in barely ninety days. For the first time the main army possessed the tactical articulation necessary to prosecute linear tactics successfully. Officers and enlisted men alike could well have deemed the accomplishment miraculous. The plodding, single-file "Indian files" which consumed so much time to form into line of battle were gone. Regiments now conducted formation changes smoothly and quickly. The troops could deliver true platoon volleys. Bayonet training ended the Continentals' inferiority complex when confronting enemy regulars, thus eliminating a long-standing psychological liability.

Patriot leaders followed up this ad-hoc training program with the publication in March 1779 of the Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United

<sup>69</sup>For example, Webb's Additional Regiment Orderly Book, Continental Army MSS appended it to the 18 May 1778 entry.

States.<sup>70</sup> This manual, the Blue Book due to its binding, became the standard drillbook of the United States regular army beyond the War of 1812 until supplanted by the work of Winfield Scott. Von Steuben went further than the scope of the "Military Instructions." It was a treatise on training and doctrine, its efficacy demonstrated by its longevity.

Here was the clearest case of the main army setting the standard for the rest of the Continentals. The patriots distributed copies army wide as soon as they became available. Col. Timothy Pickering informed von Steuben that corrections to the copper plates were complete. Fifty copies were already finished; he sent thirty of them to the Southern Army. He hoped to have twenty-five more copies ready by week's end. Pickering later regretted the problems encountered in publication but expressed his resolve to produce two to three hundred copies at the first chance.<sup>71</sup>

Historians usually summarize von Steuben's work as an eminently practical, simplified version of other manuals since it was geared towards American soldiers who were different from their European counterparts. Such a view is simplistic. Modern historians often fail to appreciate the

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<sup>70</sup>U. S. War Department, Office of the Inspector General, Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States (n.p., 1794; reprint ed., New York : Dover Publications, 1985). This version is very effective since it is an actual reproduction and not just a reprint. The only difference in the 1794 edition from the 1779 original was the addition of an appendix with the United States Militia Act of 1792.

<sup>71</sup>Letters, 26 May and 22 June 1779, von Steuben Papers.

complexity of the mission to drill soldiers in eighteenth-century linear tactics. Von Steuben did eliminate many features from essentially Prussian drill.<sup>72</sup> But simplification is a relative term. The manuals of the time were very specific, highly-detailed directives. Verbatim execution was necessary for meaningful results. A better understanding of von Steuben's work results from comparing it to other drillbooks of the period, whether used by the patriots before 1778 or by other armies.

The Blue Book contained twenty-seven articles for the "Manual Exercise." The summary of priming and loading highlighted fifteen required motions. Three more were necessary for making ready, aiming, and firing, bringing the total motions to eighteen.<sup>73</sup> The only difference in practice was the use of the command "Take Aim" instead of "Present." Washington ordered it on 26 August 1778.<sup>74</sup>

In comparison, perhaps the most famous manual of all was Humphrey Bland's work. His "Manual Exercise" contained no less than ninety-three articles. Priming and loading alone

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<sup>72</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 97/78/13/537-38 contains a letter from Colonel von Knoblauch to Congress sometime in August 1779 in which he stated how he proposed a system of discipline to von Steuben and provided him a copy of the Prussian drill regulations.

<sup>73</sup>Regulations, pp. 16-29.

<sup>74</sup>Washington, Writings, 12:360. The wording in the order is "Take Sight."

took twenty-one motions; make ready, present, and fire, another five for a total of twenty-six motions.<sup>75</sup>

William Windham designed his drill book for England's Norfolk militia so it was actually easier than most. He began with a rejection of the many Prussian motions designed for show and effect. Still, there were fifty "Words of Command." Typically, to go from the initial step to load through pulling the trigger consumed four blocks of instruction: priming and loading, make ready, present, and fire, a total of twenty-two motions.<sup>76</sup>

The British manual devised in 1764 listed thirty-five commands with eighty-five motions. Priming and loading took fifteen motions; positioning each rank in firing, another three, a total of eighteen. An American edition also pointed out on the last page that several maneuvers practiced by British troops in Europe had been deleted due to the nature of operations in America.<sup>77</sup>

Pickering published his own manual in 1775 while a Massachusetts militia colonel as conflict loomed over the

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<sup>75</sup>Humphrey Bland, A Treatise of Military Discipline (n.p., n.d.), pp. 28-32.

<sup>76</sup>William Windham, A Plan of Discipline Composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk (London: n.p., 1759; reprint ed., Ottawa, Ontario: Museum Restoration Service, 1969), pp. xv, xxvi, 1-22 passim.

<sup>77</sup>Great Britain, Adjutant General's Office, The Manual Exercise, As Ordered by His Majesty, in 1764, American ed. (New York: n.p., 1775; reprint ed., West Point, N.Y.: U.S. Military Academy Library Special Collections Division, 1975), pp. 3-12, 34.

horizon. His "Manual Exercise" took forty-two steps. Priming and loading again consumed the most motions, here ten. Shoulder, make ready, present, and fire required six more, bringing the total to sixteen.<sup>78</sup>

The feared redcoats did not even have a single system. Three principal drillbooks were in use throughout the century.<sup>79</sup> These were certainly similar but each regiment maneuvered differently though all adopted the same cadence.<sup>80</sup> Conformity supposedly came in 1792 with the adoption of David Dundas' drillbook but true uniformity waited till after 1795 with the reforms of the Duke of York.<sup>81</sup> There was also little importance attached to target practice, a mere four balls per soldier per year.<sup>82</sup> Indeed, the latest research indicates that the British Army was in fact abysmally trained in peacetime due to a lack of time and opportunity.<sup>83</sup> Two examples of drillbooks follow.

Captain Grant's work in 1756 was as complicated as Bland's. It too required twenty-six motions to go through

<sup>78</sup>Timothy Pickering, An Easy Plan of Discipline (Salem, Mass.: n.p., 1775), pp. 16-21, 32-33.

<sup>79</sup>Col. J. F. C. Fuller, D.S.O., British Light Infantry in the Eighteenth Century, (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1927), p. 191.

<sup>80</sup>Wickwire, Cornwallis, pp. 55, 59.

<sup>81</sup>Glover, Peninsular Preparation, pp. 116-17, 120-21.

<sup>82</sup>Col. H. C. B. Rogers, The British Army of the Eighteenth Century (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1977), p. 68.

<sup>83</sup>Houlding, Fit for Service, pp. vii-x, 388-95.

the entire firing sequence.<sup>84</sup> Gen. Richard Cavan published his manual just prior to the outbreak of the war. It was even more complex; there were thirty-six motions in thirteen articles in order to prime, load, and fire.<sup>85</sup> Their German allies were famous for their mastery of Prussian drill, though the Hessians were clearly superior to the rest. Prussian regulations showed fifteen required motions.<sup>86</sup>

French drill had been woefully inadequate for most of the century. Training and doctrine was understandably in a state of flux due to the defeats in the Seven Years' War. New Royal Instructions reached the army in 1750, 1753, 1754, and 1755. The Ordonnance du Roy of 6 May 1755 finally brought the army up to date.<sup>87</sup> A revised musketry drill came out on 1 January 1766. Priming, loading, and firing consumed eleven commands and fourteen motions.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup>Capt. Arch<sup>d</sup> Grant, The New 1756 Platoon-Exercise, As Practised in 1756 (Edinburgh: n.p., 1756), pp. 9-15.

<sup>85</sup>[Richard Lambert Cavan], A New System of Military Discipline Founded upon Principle by a General Officer (London: n.p., 1773), pp. 86-96.

<sup>86</sup>I. Landmann, trans., Elements of Tactics, and Introduction to Military Evolutions for the Infantry by a Celebrated Prussian General (London: By the Author, 1787), pp. 10-14.

<sup>87</sup>J. A. Houlding, French Arms Drill of the 18th Century, 1708-1760, Historical Arms Series, no. 19 (Alexandria Bay, N.Y.: Museum Restoration Service, 1988), pp. 21, 23, 53.

<sup>88</sup>Ordonnance du Roi, pour Regler L'Exercice de L'Infanterie du 1.er Janvier 1766 (Paris: n.p., 1766), pp. 60-70. A more accessible source is Edward P. Hamilton, The French Army in America, Historical Arms Series, no. 7 (Ottawa, Ontario: Museum Restoration Service, 1967), pp. 9-12, 22, 93-108 passim.

Thus, von Steuben's drill differed little with respect to the basic essentials to deliver section volleys. He did tend to use fewer motions than mostly older works: eight less than Bland and the Platoon Exercice, and eighteen less than the New System. But his count of motions was only four less than Windham's; the same as the famous British '64 and the Prussian regulations; and actually two more than Pickering and four more than the latest French drill. March maneuvers for field use were essentially the same. He did eliminate numerous parade-ground routines.

Historians have also placed great emphasis on von Steuben's comments on the patriots: "The American Soldier, under my orders, is at the same time a member of the Republic."<sup>89</sup> Hence, they frequently determine that von Steuben created pioneer training and management methods in a brutal age. For example, at Valley Forge he stated:

The Inspectors and Officers of Battalions will explain with mildness what the soldiers are to do: They are not to be used ill, Either by abusive Words, or otherwise but their faults are to be pointed out with patience. There will be no other punishment for the soldier who is inattentive to Instruction but to Make him Exercise for a whole hour after the others have done.<sup>90</sup>

True, such passages were common in the Blue Book as well:

In teaching the recruits, they [sergeants and corporals] must exercise all their patience, by no means abusing them, but treating them with mildness, and not

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<sup>89</sup>May [?] 1778, von Steuben Papers. Unfortunately, this passage appears in an incomplete piece of correspondence.

<sup>90</sup>"Military Instructions, 1778," p. 7.

expect too much precision in the first lessons, punishing those only who are wilfully negligent.<sup>91</sup>

There were also several references to caring for the men, especially in times of sickness.<sup>92</sup>

However, these conclusions do not stand up to comparison. For example, Windham stated that an officer had to proceed "with a great deal of patience, . . ."<sup>93</sup> Even Lt. Gen. F. C. von Saldern, the caustic Prussian Inspector of Infantry, believed "Rigour must not be used, but Patience when attention and good will are not wanting: . . ."<sup>94</sup>

Von Steuben's genius was in tailoring the Blue Book for his audience. Frankly, he assumed that the Americans knew nothing and wrote accordingly. Besides the elementary topics of maneuvering and firing, he included extremely detailed chapters on organization in the field, the handling of baggage, inspections, drum beats, the treatment of the sick, the preservation of arms and ammunition, and reviews. Five chapters addressed the minutiae of establishing, maintaining, and guarding camps. There was even a chapter entitled "Of the Points of View" which explained the use of landmarks for guidance in march direction and alignment. Finally, a set of instructions provided the Continentals

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<sup>91</sup>Regulations, p. 145.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., pp. 118, 135, 138.

<sup>93</sup>Windham, Plan of Discipline, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup>Gen. F. C. Saldern, Principles of the Prussian Tactics and Military Evolutions, trans. D. Dundas (n.p., 1786), p. 2.

with a discussion of their responsibilities, outlined by rank from regimental commander to private soldier.<sup>95</sup>

The Blue Book thus represented a quantum leap in training and administrative guidance compared with what the main army had before and which now applied uniformly to all regiments. The Baron's work reflected his straightforward, common-sense approach to military affairs and the Americans acknowledged so. Young John Laurens told his father Henry on 25 March 1778 how von Steuben set such an example by himself descending to be a drill sergeant.<sup>96</sup> Henry thus told James Duane on 7 April:

Baron Stuben has condescended to Act the Drill Master as well as the Inspector in Camp, he has hit the taste of the officers, gives universal satisfaction and I am assured has made an amazing improvement in discipline.<sup>97</sup>

Lafayette called him "sensible" on 14 April.<sup>98</sup> Washington lauded the German to the President of Congress on 30 April. Von Steuben understood the army's predicament with no uniform discipline or maneuvers. He created them and drilled a company himself. His merits were innumerable.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Regulations, pp. 153-55 list the Contents.

<sup>96</sup>John Laurens, The Army Corespondence of Colonel John Laurens in the Years 1777-8, Now First Printed from Original Letters Addressed to His Father Henry Laurens, President of Congress, comp. William Gilmore Simms (New York: n.p. for the Bradford Club, 1867), p. 147.

<sup>97</sup>Burnett, Letters, 3:153.

<sup>98</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters and Papers, 2:26.

<sup>99</sup>Washington, Writings, 11:328, 331.

Hence, the accolades heaped upon von Steuben over the last two centuries were certainly well deserved. However, historians have failed to give Conway his due and frequently misunderstood the nature of von Steuben's training regimen. These misinterpretations do not change the conclusion that von Steuben's work at Valley Forge was essential for the successful professionalization of Washington's line infantry and their ability to challenge the British on equal terms.

#### Von Steuben as Inspector General

Congress formally appointed von Steuben as Inspector General on 5 May 1778.<sup>100</sup> Congress' action gave Washington his preeminent primary staff officer. He served to the end of the struggle. At first he had to proceed cautiously. For example, he noted how his "Military Instructions" were an interim measure based on immediate need. He understood that he could not distribute a set of regulations without the prior approval of the Board of War. Peters responded to continue his good work with a view to establishing permanence since he saw much thus far of a temporary nature.<sup>101</sup> Washington admitted that the army had not yet become used to the position. What mattered now was that the new regulations were critical for drill and camp procedures.<sup>102</sup> Congress began to spell out his functions on

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<sup>100</sup>Ford, Journals, 11:465.

<sup>101</sup>Letters, 27 May and 2 June 1778, von Steuben Papers.

15 June. Washington had to approve any new rules first. Line officers were responsible to exercise their respective commands with Division and Brigade Inspectors assisting. The latter had to try out new maneuvers first. Generals established orders of march subject to regulations.<sup>103</sup>

Congress defined the responsibilities of his office more clearly on 20 August. The Inspector General would draft rules and regulations for the exercise of troops in maneuvers and evolutions to include camps, garrisons, guards, etc. He would personally review every regiment in the field monthly; he or one of his assistants, at least one regiment in three in garrison. He would examine the troops' health, fitness, losses, the state of arms, etc. and report deficiencies to both the Commander in Chief and the Board of War. He could comment on the adequacy of the Articles of War. His direction governed all troop exercises. The Assistant Inspector General would be a brigadier and native American. Six Sub-Inspectors were created: four in the infantry, one for Light Troops, and one for Cavalry. Congress amalgamated the duties of Brigade Inspector and Major of Brigade. All inspectors held the same command equivalent as line officers but were exempt from common camp and garrison duties. Furthermore, they were answerable only

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<sup>102</sup>General Orders, 15 June 1778, Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts.

<sup>103</sup>Numbered Record Books, 24/183, 25/24-25.

to Congress, the Board of War, and the Commander in Chief. Inspectors merited respect based on duty and not rank.<sup>104</sup>

Before war's end, von Steuben extended his writ throughout the entire Continental force and not just the main army. Congress had thus created a staff department with sweeping powers. A report from the Board of War on 21 January 1779 essentially echoed Congress' previous outline of von Steuben's duties.<sup>105</sup> The Board of War finally approved the Regulations on 27 March.<sup>106</sup> He devoted most of his energy to their distribution and enforcement army wide and insuring units maintained high levels of readiness.

For example, the Second Maryland Brigade in 1779 was deemed to be in as good an order as could be expected.<sup>107</sup> General Orders on 12 April required all brigade inspectors and adjutants to report to the orderly office the next day to copy Chapters Five and Six of the Regulations. They would implement them immediately with the strictest adherence. Two hours in the morning and afternoon were designated exercise times.<sup>108</sup> A directive on 4 May told all officers to obtain a copy of the instructions for recruits. Training would begin the next day "which our Circumstances

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<sup>104</sup>Ford, Journals, 11:819-22.

<sup>105</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 159/147/4/82-87.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 158/147/3/143.

<sup>107</sup>The Manuscript File, 111/31474.

<sup>108</sup>Numbered Record Books, 28/92.

have hitherto obliged us to neglect, . . . " again for two hours, morning and afternoon, with a further hour in the late afternoon for commanders to instruct officers. The regimen remained without deviation until further notice.<sup>109</sup>

Regiments soon learned that von Steuben would be checking on the meticulous use of the Regulations in every regard.<sup>110</sup> Heath's troops received the Regulations with the warning that they could expect von Steuben to visit as soon as he was able.<sup>111</sup> Washington informed the main army again that the Baron would examine every detail of unit operations.<sup>112</sup> Headquarters announced his forthcoming inspection of newly-arrived Massachusetts levies prior to their dispersal among the various regiments.<sup>113</sup> Webb's Additional Regiment noted an IG inspection by von Steuben.<sup>114</sup> Von Steuben personally complimented the amalgamated First/Third Connecticut; only Webb's Regiment was better.<sup>115</sup> The Baron began his look at the New York

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<sup>109</sup>Ibid., 28/145-48.

<sup>110</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 12 May 1779.

<sup>111</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 30 June 1779.

<sup>112</sup>General Orders, 2 July 1779, William Torrey Orderly Book.

<sup>113</sup>General Orders, 31 July 1779, Simeon Belding Orderly Book.

<sup>114</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 5 September 1779.

<sup>115</sup>Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book, 6 September 1779.

Brigade.<sup>116</sup> Three further inspections and musters occurred in Webb's Regiment alone.<sup>117</sup>

Washington was determined that all regiments would conform with the guidelines and said on 17 July 1780:

Our system has been simplified as much as it would bear and every thing of useless ornament has been rejected[;] what remains ought therefore to be rigidly observed.<sup>118</sup>

On 13 August regiments divided their new recruits into two groups. Raw soldiers immediately learned the drill and nothing else. Those with previous experience could assume other duties as well.<sup>119</sup> The Commander in Chief scolded the officers of at least one regiment after an inspection went poorly, "but is an aggravation of neglect."<sup>120</sup> Instructions on 25 February 1781 clearly stated that new recruits would commence drilling immediately and learn their duties as per the Regulations.<sup>121</sup> Lack of recruits not quality of drill was the Connecticut Line's worst problem on 27 April 1780.<sup>122</sup> The Third Pennsylvania did well.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Stephen Griffing Journal, 21 December 1779.

<sup>117</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 2 March and 3 April 1780; 1 February 1781.

<sup>118</sup>Washington, Writings, 19:191.

<sup>119</sup>Numbered Record Books, 41/48-49.

<sup>120</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 12 February 1781, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>121</sup>Numbered Record Books, 50/21.

<sup>122</sup>The Manuscript File, 111/31475-76, 31647.

<sup>123</sup>Unidentified unit, 1 June 1780, Continental Army MSS.

A schedule on 19 April 1782 showed von Steuben would inspect the Third and Tenth Massachusetts within the week as well as gunners and artificers. Units again heard to drill their recruits on 10 May with the regulations "from which there is not to be the least deviation."<sup>124</sup> On 17 May he pointed out what maneuvers to do and gave necessary directions to the soldiers.<sup>125</sup> An inspection of the Ninth Massachusetts revealed only 1 musket lost of 366 and 3 bayonets of 366. The regiment had none lost in service out of 386.<sup>126</sup> Washington praised the troops for their performance in drill and maneuvers.<sup>127</sup> He thanked von Steuben on 18 June for his work. The brigade reviews were now complete. He congratulated the Second Connecticut Brigade.<sup>128</sup> Forms showed the sophisticated nature of these inspections. They were titled "Proof of Inspection and Muster" and "Inspection Return."<sup>129</sup>

These IG inspections continued in thorough detail. For example, the First Connecticut Brigade had too many absent officers. The Sixth Connecticut stood out; the rest had numerous deficiencies. The New York Brigade was "extremely

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<sup>124</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>125</sup>Numbered Record Books, 59/106-7, 61/65.

<sup>126</sup>Henry Jackson Papers, 20 May and 10 June 1782.

<sup>127</sup>General Orders, 17 June 1782, Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book.

<sup>128</sup>Numbered Record Books, 62/15-17.

<sup>129</sup>Returns, December 1782, William Shepard Collection.

neglected." During the last campaign at least two-thirds of the bayonets and other equipment were "either lost or ruined from want of care." The report praised the Third New York but castigated the Fifth. The latter would disintegrate "without some speedy remedy." The Maryland Division was still not under the new arrangement and contained some "illegally chosen" sergeants who were enlisted as NCOs, "a very bad practice and ought to be absolutely forbidden." The Delaware Regiment was in the best condition. Another look at the Connecticut brigades revealed the worst-maintained arms in the army. The soldiers still carried a lot of the old nineteen-round cartridge boxes. Several officers were on furlough -- inappropriate while on campaign.<sup>130</sup>

Von Steuben and his inspectors thus became involved with virtually every aspect of daily operations -- but not without resistance. Congress itself wrote Washington on 24 January 1779 about its second thoughts. The Inspector General as a separate department implied the virtual independence of the Commander in Chief.<sup>131</sup> Yet the legislative body confirmed the prerogatives of the office in its amended plan for the Inspector General on 18 February 1779.<sup>132</sup> Washington then recommended to Congress that it abolish the Muster Department on 20 August 1779. No colonel

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<sup>130</sup>The Manuscript File, 111/31470, 31473. These are undated.

<sup>131</sup>Burnett, Letters, 4:41.

<sup>132</sup>Ford, Journals, 13:196-99.

could muster his own regiment and the Inspector General was quite capable of dealing with the duty. Von Steuben agreed.<sup>133</sup> The army learned that the Inspector General had incorporated the Mustering Department.<sup>134</sup>

One Massachusetts and one New York or New Hampshire regiments found out that von Steuben would exercise them the next day. He would also select twenty-two men for the Corps of Light Infantry.<sup>135</sup> Congress also formulated the plan which reduced the Adjutant General's Department to impotence on 24 August 1780, formally adopting it on 14 September. The Inspector General and his Assistant assumed those duties.<sup>136</sup> On 18 December inspectors received instructions to verify troop musters. The Commander in Chief got abstracts from the Inspector General monthly; the inspector for a separate army did likewise. They also kept accounts of arms and accouterments with the regimental officers.<sup>137</sup> The army learned that the Assistant Inspector General could now reject any man he deemed unsuitable to join the light infantry companies.<sup>138</sup> Brig. Gen. Edward Hand as Adjutant

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<sup>133</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 169/152/7/599.

<sup>134</sup>General Orders, 1 March 1780, Ninth Connecticut Orderly Book, The Revolutionary War Misc. Collection, Military History Research Collection, U. S. Military History Institute, Carlisle, Pa.

<sup>135</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 22 July 1780.

<sup>136</sup>Ford, Journals, 17:765-66; 18:854-60.

<sup>137</sup>Numbered Record Books, 47/90-92, 48/78-88 passim.

General told Lt. Col. Edward Antil of the Second Canadian Regiment and Captain Richard Cox, the Brigade Major for the New Jersey troops, that yet another new system gave no role to adjutants in inspections and mustering.<sup>139</sup>

The Baron was certainly proud of his accomplishments. On 26 April 1778 he wrote to the Privy Counselor Baron de Frank in Hechingen and detailed his perquisites: a salary equal to 16,400 French livres, his own table and staff maintained by a separate commissary at no cost, plus twenty-seven horses and equipment. He also had a captain, two lieutenants, and forty dragoons. On 4 July 1779 he explained how he had served for five weeks as a volunteer drilling troops after his arrival.<sup>140</sup>

The Office of Inspector General in fact became the most powerful staff officer in all the patriot forces, not just in the main army. One historian views this development as an example of American innovation and willingness to deviate from European precedent when appropriate since the Adjutant General and Quartermaster General were far more important in their armies.<sup>141</sup> Two others cite the precedence of comprehensive inspection criteria which were a function of

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<sup>138</sup>General Orders, 1 February 1781, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>139</sup>Hand Letters, 19 February 1782.

<sup>140</sup>Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, pp. 238, 244-46.

<sup>141</sup>Wright, Continental Army, pp. 145-46.

command; hence, inspectors general became answerable directly to the commander alone.<sup>142</sup>

These interpretations are not without merit but they miss the mark. The preeminence of the Inspector General was the direct result of Washington's confidence in von Steuben as demonstrated at Valley Forge. The issue was more one of personalities than staff functions. The Commander in Chief saw the Inspector General as his vehicle to institutionalize military excellence at every level.

Hence, von Steuben's role expanded beyond functioning as de facto Chief of Staff. Even the senior staff officer of an army lacked the wide range of authority vested in von Steuben. His office had swallowed up both the Adjutant General's and the Muster Master's principal duties by 1780. His power to select soldiers for the famed Corps of Light Infantry removed what was commonly the prerogative of commanders, whether in the gaining or losing unit. Washington's faith in his drillmaster was implicit. No responsibility was too great to challenge the Baron.

The Commander in Chief's increasing trust in and dependence upon the Baron becomes more evident still by examining the missions given to von Steuben as "special assignments," i.e. tasks beyond the purview of the Inspector General. For example, Washington was not averse to giving

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<sup>142</sup>David A. Clary and Joseph W. A. Whithorne, The Inspectors General of the United States Army, 1777-1903 (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Inspector General and Center of Military History, 1987), pp. 37n13, 43.

his drillmaster a dual assignment, serving as Inspector General and in a line command simultaneously. He announced von Steuben's temporary assumption of command over Woodford's, Scott's, and the North Carolina Brigades soon after Monmouth Courthouse.<sup>143</sup> Washington gave him a division in 1781 during the Yorktown campaign as well. This assignment was not even a special case. His position was part of the main army's formal Order of Battle; he led Pennsylvania and Maryland troops.<sup>144</sup> This dual responsibility is all the more remarkable when one considers the frequent antipathy between line and staff, the number of officers competing for line positions, and the increasing resentment against foreign officers.

When Washington approved preparations to commence for Wayne to assault Stony Point in the summer of 1779 with the Corps of Light Infantry, the Commander in Chief was not satisfied in leaving matters in Wayne's capable hands alone. First, Washington made von Steuben his messenger to Heath on 1 July, informing the commander that the Inspector General would be establishing his department in his division area. Von Steuben would now be close to the troops preparing for action. Then on 5 July Wayne was told to talk to von Steuben himself regarding an adequate number of copies of the Blue Book, at least one per captain and field

<sup>143</sup>General Orders, 29 June 1778, Col. William Malcolm's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book no. 60.

<sup>144</sup>Washington, Writings, 23:147.

officer.<sup>145</sup> Washington never explained why the commander of the Light Infantry Corps had to deal directly with the Inspector General over book issues.

In the summer of 1780 affairs at strategically-important fortress West Point were not well. Garrison commander Howe seemed unable to deal with day-to-day administrative matters and troop management quickly and efficiently.<sup>146</sup> Washington sent von Steuben a personal request via aide Alexander Hamilton on 25 June. The letter suggested that the Inspector General remain at West Point until some positive change occurred. Meanwhile, he could assist the commander on site based on his observations. Hamilton labeled the communication a private letter with the general's wishes and not commands.<sup>147</sup> The drillmaster obeyed immediately.

Washington had cause to turn to von Steuben in 1781 as well. His home state of Virginia was reeling under the blows delivered by the turncoat Arnold at the head of British and loyalist troops. He could not take the main army. Perhaps von Steuben could go and bring order out of chaos and raise fighting men out of farmers. This latest assignment was perhaps the Prussian's greatest challenge.

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 15:356, 373.

<sup>146</sup>These alleged shortcomings were not spelled out clearly, perhaps the reason for Washington's subtle move.

<sup>147</sup>Alexander Hamilton, The Papers of Alexander Hamilton, 26 vols, ed. Harold C. Syrett et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961-79), 2:344-45.

The despatch of von Steuben reflected Washington's staunch and unswerving faith and dependence upon him more than his ability to influence the dismal course of events. He faced many hurdles in the South. For all his greatness, Thomas Jefferson made a poor war governor. There were few Continental troops available, and fewer still likely to be raised. The militia typified the liabilities of part-time soldiers attempting to fight regulars in conventional warfare. The drillmaster toiled ceaselessly. He functioned as recruiter, inspector, and quartermaster simultaneously.

Jefferson did place all militia once embodied under von Steuben's command. But Thomas Nelson, soon to become Governor himself, lamented the inability to defend Richmond.<sup>148</sup> The Baron admitted to Greene that the destitute state of the troops precluded his forming more than a battalion of 150 men.<sup>149</sup> Jefferson sent the state commissaries to von Steuben's headquarters to subsist the troops better and to obey his orders. Greene feared that the British would do great damage to Virginia before von Steuben could collect a sufficient force to check them.<sup>150</sup>

As if these trials were not enough, Greene begged for more men and supplies as well. In February 1781 he commented bitterly that three Southern states would fall to

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<sup>148</sup>Letters, 4 and 6 January 1781, von Steuben Papers.

<sup>149</sup>Letter, 8 January 1781, Greene Papers, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>150</sup>Letters, 9 and 13 January 1781, von Steuben Papers.

the British if reinforcements did not come from the north. Consequently, von Steuben selflessly sent reinforcements to Greene instead of keeping the troops for himself. Greene acknowledged this assistance gratefully on the seventh. He asked for more help from Virginia on 10 February, telling von Steuben he was sure that Cornwallis' objective was the destruction of the Southern Army and so his assistance was more necessary than ever.<sup>151</sup>

Nevertheless, Greene told the discouraged inspector that he could garner honor from his efforts. His presence was very necessary as it prevented confusion, though he wished that he could join him further south. A month later von Steuben was still lamenting the need for all types of military stores to the Board of War.<sup>152</sup>

The Baron's efforts notwithstanding, Washington had to send Lafayette with twelve hundred elite Continental light infantry from the main army in order to stave off defeat. However, they ventured no further than Virginia. They united with the German's pitifully meager force, setting the stage for another coup by the main army.

Washington's trust in von Steuben's abilities to create order out of chaos and efficiency from disorganization led to these extraordinary missions. He had become the Commander in Chief's crisis manager, ready to report to the

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., 7 and 10 February 1781.

<sup>152</sup>Ibid., 6 April and 3 May 1781.

site of the latest disaster, present or potential, in order to right matters as best as he could.

In summary, the patriots had developed sound organizations from company through division for the prosecution of linear tactics. Confusion resulting from the use of wings in the main army was the only exception. Hence, von Steuben arrived to find neither disorganized nor untrained troops but rather understrength units partially and haphazardly drilled.

His "Military Instructions" of 1778 used at Valley Forge were a mere stop-gap measure. The Blue Book was his true tactical system. Both revolutionized the operations of first the main army and soon the entire Continental establishment. Von Steuben's work was clearly responsible for the ability of patriot line infantry to conduct linear tactics on a par with friend and foe alike.

Washington's dependence on von Steuben did not represent a sophisticated assessment that contemporary European staff structures would not suit American needs. The Commander in Chief's reliance on his drillmaster was based on demonstrated proficiency and personal loyalty. This interpretation also cites von Steuben's frequent despatch on special duties. These assignments were not the proper purview of the army's Inspector General. They were further demonstrations of Washington's desire to use his drillmaster as the institutor of military excellence.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## THE OFFICER CORPS

General Officers

The general officers of the Continental Army were responsible for the implementation of Washington's desires to fight the British according to the precepts of linear warfare. This section analyzes their social origins, attitudes, willingness to serve over the long haul, and effectiveness as leaders.

Washington's background is well known and requires no recapitulation here. With his landed wealth he lacked only a title to blend with Europe's aristocracy. Congress also commissioned twenty-nine major generals during the war.<sup>1</sup> This study surveyed their backgrounds.<sup>2</sup> Given the prestige of this high rank, one might expect a concentration of America's social elite to have dominated these positions. However, their social origins varied. Six or 20.7 percent were foreigners from France or the German states whose

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<sup>1</sup>Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, April 1775-December 1783, 2nd ed. (Washington, D.C.: Rare Book Shop Publishing Co., 1914), p. 9.

<sup>2</sup>Biographical data came from the relevant volume of the Dictionary of American Biography or Roger J. Spiller, ed., Dictionary of American Military Biography, 3 vols. (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 1984). See too Mary Theresa Leiter, Biographical Sketches of the Generals of the Continental Army (Cambridge, Mass.: John Wilson & Son, 1889).

justification for high rank rested upon their noble titles, military experience, or both. Four or 13.8 percent were former British officers. Only three or 10.3 percent had genuine upper-class origins. Philip Schuyler represented the preeminent patriot family of New York State. William Alexander owned considerable acreage in New Jersey and claimed a title in Scotland as Lord Stirling. Arthur St. Clair was the largest land owner west of the Alleghenies.

The other sixteen were essentially members of the middling classes, albeit from generally prosperous elements. Artemas Ward, Thomas Mifflin, and Samuel Parsons were college graduates. Parsons became a lawyer. Israel Putnam, William Heath, and Benjamin Lincoln were farmers. John Thomas was a physician. Nathanael Greene was the son of a Quaker preacher. He helped his father with their anchor forge and gristmill. Henry Knox was a bookseller. So too was the infamous Benedict Arnold, as well as druggist and general trader. Alexander McDougall was a merchant.

Several factors contributed to this situation. Given the sparse population of America, the "upper crust" was particularly small. Moreover, one should not assume that they coveted a Continental commission even as a general officer. The absence of a noble class with formal titles meant that no single group in society viewed military service to the state as a class obligation. A gentleman planter, doctor, lawyer, or merchant could fulfill both

military duty and social obligation by leading militiamen or troops of the state line while remaining at home.

Another barometer was past support of the revolutionary cause. Many of the major generals had already risked charges of treason by serving in various patriot political assemblies or voicing strong convictions publically. For example, McDougall had been imprisoned for a time due to some inflammatory material which he had written. All of them had already exhibited their dedication to the cause. This dual requirement of relative social standing and belief in the cause was important since rebel political leaders had to allay their whiggish fears of a standing army by insuring that army commanders had a genuine stake in the contest.

These major generals certainly composed an elite within the army. Nine of the twenty-nine or 31.0 percent, nearly a third, received direct commissions, i.e. they never served in any lower rank. Only one or 3.4 percent had ever been a company-grade officer. Arnold had been a captain, but in the Connecticut militia. To a certain extent this lack of junior-officer-grade experience among the major generals was due to the scratch nature of the army upon its creation.

The military background of the army's generals thus rested upon the war of 1756-63. Virtually all of the major generals had seen service then. Artemas Ward had been with the unsuccessful Maj. Gen. James Abercromby. Charles Lee, Horatio Gates, Richard Montgomery, and Arthur St. Clair were

all veteran officers of the British Army. The balance had seen action as militia officers, Arnold as a private.

Two qualifications need to be made with regard to that period which heretofore have been overlooked. Firstly, the campaigning during the French and Indian War was critical for the Continentals' general officer corps. They had "seen the elephant" in that war. They knew first hand the reality of combat conditions and the fog of war. Secondly, however, this experience was quite limited. They might have led battalions and regiments then, but now they were expected to command brigades and divisions, and sometimes wings. They were still unprepared for high command.

The army's generals thus mastered their trade the hard way -- on campaign. They learned from their mistakes and deployed their improved troops to advantage in the later war years. In retrospect their performance appears uneven. Historians should not be surprised at this mixed "track record" of Washington's subordinates. The battlefield was a painful and unforgiving training ground.

Washington's generals served their chief poorly at the Battle of Long Island, admittedly their first major action. Samuel Miles, colonel of the Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment, recounted how he maintained communications with Putnam, Sullivan, and Lord Stirling, informing them of enemy activity which bore watching to the American left. Yet Miles and his men became surrounded and were captured.<sup>3</sup>

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McDougall criticized Putnam's generalship on 21 May 1778 which he believed had led to the fall of Forts Clinton and Montgomery on 6 October 1777. Putnam had ignored Parsons' warnings of enemy reinforcements and impending arrival. There had been no council of war; no gun signals; detachments and outposts had not come in; and public stores had remained in the village.<sup>4</sup>

Greene erred grievously in his conduct of the 1776 campaign. The storming of Fort Mifflin on 26 September 1776 and the fall of Fort Mifflin soon after were major American disasters which rested upon his shoulders. A far more experienced and mature Greene conducted the skillful Southern campaign in 1780-81. The fiery Wayne was clearly negligent at Paoli on 21 September 1777. He was courtmartialed but acquitted "with the highest honors."<sup>5</sup> A wiser Wayne successfully assaulted Stony Point on 16 July 1779. He extricated his command from almost certain annihilation at Greenspring Farm on 6 July 1781.

Knox provides an excellent example of the adage that a little knowledge can be a dangerous thing. At Germantown on 4 October 1777 he was professionally adamant that the patriots had to take the Chew House and neutralize its tiny

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<sup>3</sup>Letter, Miles to ?, 17 November 1776, Manuscript Sources for Research on the American Revolution, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 1 November 1777.

garrison. Consequently, the building became a cauldron, sucking up more troops and guns in hopeless attacks which consumed two hours and forty minutes by Knox's own estimate when he credited the British occupation of the Chew House as playing a major role in the American defeat.<sup>6</sup>

He also contributed to Washington's confused state of mind about British troop concentrations on the right flank at Brandywine. Maj. John Skey Eustace, Sullivan's aide, lamented, "Gen'l Washington & Gen. Knox laughed at my intelligence and sent me back to Gen. Sullivan without an answer."<sup>7</sup>

By far the best example of the generals' deficient leadership was the Monmouth campaign, usually cited as the splendid baptism of fire of a rejuvenated main army. Granted, Washington himself was the model of indecisiveness. He had to balance the need to maintain patriot morale with an attack by his now well-trained troops against the folly of risking the destruction of the main army in battle given the reality of French intervention. But his generals utterly failed to persuade him to adopt a single course of action for the forthcoming campaign.

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<sup>6</sup>Knox Papers, 6 October 1777.

<sup>7</sup>Certificate of John Skey Eustace, dated 28 October 1777, item sold at auction, listed in Benjamin catalog vol. 59, no. 11, December 1946 cited in Samuel Stelle Smith, The Battle of Brandywine, Bicentennial Series on the American Revolution (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1976), p. 13.

This divisiveness had already lasted for some two months as the main army had emerged from its dismal winter at Valley Forge. For example, Knox told Washington that only necessity could justify the army remaining idle. Yet the same day engineer Brig. Gen. Louis L. du Portail categorically condemned the grandiose plans of his peers who judged the Continentals to be the equal of the British. Du Portail was adamant in his belief that the patriots were still not a match for a regular army and could not stand in the open against British and German troops.<sup>8</sup>

A council of war on 17 June decided nothing. The generals then spent two days writing their impressions. Their thoughts were full of conditions and provisos, partly due to the lack of intelligence on British intentions.<sup>9</sup> Eleven were against seeking a general action. Lafayette and Wayne strongly favored decisive battle. Greene and Cadwalader could reach no conclusion.<sup>10</sup> Another meeting on 24 June in the field accomplished little beyond the detachment of additional troops to an advanced guard. But a concerned Lafayette later wrote to the Commander in Chief that the patriots were ". . . going to loose an occasion

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<sup>8</sup>Letter, 23 April 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>9</sup>The patriots were discussing campaign plans in anticipation of the British withdrawal from Philadelphia, which in fact happened on 18 June.

<sup>10</sup>Letters, 17-18 June 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

which may be reputed as one of the finest ever offered."

Von Steuben agreed as did Du Portail now.<sup>11</sup>

The return of Charles Lee from captivity as Second in Command in May 1778 greatly exasperated this divided opinion. His radical military views were well known, as well as his singular lack of cooperation with Washington during the couple of months prior to his capture in December 1776. Lee had also not witnessed the thorough overhaul of the main army and the superb training effort of von Steuben. "Boiling Water" had no reason to change his ideas.

The opposing views thus became not merely strategical considerations but highly partisan positions. Historians will probably never know to what degree the offensively-minded generals desired an American victory at Monmouth to disarm Washington critics as much as to thrash the redcoats. But Lee represented the antithesis of their perspective at a time when many were still reeling from the perception of just having defeated the Conway Cabal.

The formation and deployment of the advanced guard eventually placed under Lee consequently suffered from a pathetic lack of cohesion and unity of command as well as an absence of proper planning. For example, it included twelve regiments drawn helter skelter from nine brigades of the main army instead of merely sending already established

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<sup>11</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters and Papers, 1:86. Note the changed attitudes of du Portail and von Steuben from 17 June.

brigades.<sup>12</sup> Varnum's and Scott's Brigades were transferred intact but the latter was split into two detachments. Maxwell's New Jersey Brigade was already operating independently. The ensuing confusion is evident by contemporary references to certain brigadiers' detachments instead of their usual commands.<sup>13</sup> It also contained Lafayette and Wayne, both spoiling for a fight and openly hostile to Lee. The American advanced guard needed to be a finely-coordinated team. It clearly was not.

The generals were so preoccupied with their personal differences and their political overtones that they failed to appreciate how the advanced guard had an independent role until the main army joined it for battle, a function potentially fraught with danger. The maintenance of a proper supporting distance was crucial lest the British overwhelm Lee's command before Washington could enter the fray with the balance of the main army. When ADC Hamilton joined the advance guard, he wrote Washington on 26 June:

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<sup>12</sup>Regimental distribution is based on the main army's June 1778 return in Lesser, Sinews of Independence, pp. 72-73.

<sup>13</sup>Samuel Stelle Smith, The Battle of Monmouth, Bicentennial Series on the American Revolution (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1968), pp. 28-29 lists the advance guard. His research is based upon the testimony in U.S. Army, Continental Army, Proceedings of a General Court-Martial Held at Brunswick, in the State of New-Jersey, by Order of His Excellency Gen. Washington, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States of America, for the Trial of Major-General Lee, July 4th, 1778 (Philadelphia: John Dunlop, 1778; reprint ed., New York: n.p., 1864).

We are intirely at a loss where the army is, which is no inconsiderable check to our enterprise; if the army is wholly out of supporting distance, we risk the loss of the detachment in making an attack.<sup>14</sup>

Hamilton's words proved prophetic indeed on 28 June during the battle. First, Lee's troops traversed terrain, the West and Middle Morasses, which acted as bottlenecks which would greatly slow Washington's ability to reinforce them. Second, Sir Henry Clinton turned decisively to face the patriots. He did so with the rearguard formed of no less than five crack grenadier battalions, two British and three German, one of elite light infantry, plus cavalry, as well as the First Division composed of the Guards Brigade with two composite battalions and three line brigades with another twelve: nine line, two fusileer, and one Scot, all veteran British troops.<sup>15</sup>

Lee soon faced half the British army with a command formed of haphazard detachments led by several generals whose lack of cooperation bordered upon insubordination. No wonder the advanced guard quickly fell back in precipitate retreat. It narrowly escaped annihilation. Lee did not

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<sup>14</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:505-6.

<sup>15</sup>Letter [copy], Clinton to Lord George Germain, 5 July 1778, Monmouth County Historical Society Library Collection, Freehold, N.J. Clinton's notes generally tabulated units at brigade level. He also omitted several Provincial corps. The writer determined regimental distribution by consulting the 1777 Philadelphia campaign organization and then tracing the service of all regiments in America. See Philip R. N. Katcher, Encyclopedia of British, Provincial, and German Units, 1775-1783 (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1973) and C. T. Atkinson, "British Forces in North America, 1774-1781: Their Distribution and Strength," Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research 16 (Spring 1937):3-23.

shine on the twenty-eighth but he caused his subsequent court martial with his insistence upon challenging the Commander in Chief.<sup>16</sup> Washington's supporters were only too happy to quash another troublemaker. For example, in August 1783 the now-redcoated Arnold discussed the Lee affair with Sir Henry Clinton. He said that officers generally approved of Lee's conduct but they sided with Washington on the basis that the confrontation had become an issue of popularity.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the entire campaign was a nadir in the generals' leadership talents. Divided over strategy and nursing smoldering resentment over the Conway affair, the main army's generals failed to recommend a single course of action to their commander. The engagement at Monmouth Courthouse did witness the sterling performance of patriot line infantry in battle. But the generals behaved poorly. They mishandled the advanced guard and nearly lost it.

At least the patriot generals often demonstrated a remarkable sense of ingenuity. Whether patriot talents for improvisation stemmed from a unique American characteristic from life in a developing land or merely from having to wage war with limited means is problematical. Such ingenuity often meant the difference between victory and defeat.

Knox's odyssey in transporting artillery from Fort Ticonderoga to Dorchester Heights remains the best example.

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<sup>16</sup>Proceedings of a General Court-Martial contains specific details of this episode throughout.

<sup>17</sup>Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 96n19.

The only alternative was Washington's plan to assault the city with his inexperienced, ill-disciplined army. Glover's famed Fourteenth Massachusetts rescued the main army three times during the war. On Long Island in August 1776 the evacuation to Manhattan succeeded without the loss of a man nor any equipment. On 24 December the same year they transported the pitifully small remains of the main army across the Delaware for the surprise against Trenton. At Newport in August 1778 they rescued Sullivan's command following the withdrawal of the French fleet.<sup>18</sup>

Whatever their talents for expediency, the army's general officers made up for their lack of aristocratic titles with an obsession for the most petty issues of rank, affairs of honor, and questions of competence. For example, Varnum denounced the system of promotions in effect and requested retirement. Conway complained about injured character to Washington since he was one of the most experienced in his rank yet he had the smallest command. Maj. Gen. Adam Stephen railed about Brig. Gen. Charles Scott and his dismal performance at Brandywine and Germantown.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Consult George Athan Billias, General John Glover and His Marblehead Mariners (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1960) for a regimental history.

<sup>19</sup>Letters, 25 August 1776, 1 September and 9 October 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville. Varnum remained in the army until March 1779. Stephen himself was cashiered the same month as his polemics poorly camouflaged his drunkenness on the field of battle.

Greene bemoaned to von Steuben, "What a cursed thing it is to be poor." -- especially as an officer.<sup>20</sup>

The hapless Sullivan was often under a cloud, though in the eyes of Washington detractors. James Duane told George Clinton in 1777 about an abortive raid against Long Island which Sullivan had executed poorly.<sup>21</sup> Sullivan told Washington outright that a party in Congress was persecuting him. He later informed the Commander in Chief that a court of enquiry had cleared him; it cited accidents out of his control which frustrated the operation. The next year he again turned to Washington; he wanted to resign.<sup>22</sup>

The trying winter at Valley Forge witnessed a veritable explosion of general officer squabbles. Lincoln wrote from Boston to explain that he entered active duty as a major general and was thus senior to all brigadiers. He asserted as basic principle the violation of right involved in serving under someone who had once been a subordinate. For over two weeks Washington and Brig. Gen. Casimir Pulaski exchanged a stormy correspondence. The Pole did not want to obey generals senior to him in rank or date of rank based on his position as Commander of Cavalry. He pleaded his good

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<sup>20</sup>Greene Papers, 28 May 1780, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>21</sup>Letter, Duane to Clinton, \_\_\_\_\_ 1777, Manuscript Sources for Research on the American Revolution, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>22</sup>Letters, 6, 12 October 1777; 2 March 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville. Sullivan left the army in November 1779.

heart since he accepted such a low rank compared with his position as Commander in Chief in Poland.<sup>23</sup>

Certainly one of the most time-consuming affairs for the Commander in Chief was over Woodford. A board of seven general officers gave their opinions on the disputed seniority of the brigadiers in the Virginia Line, information forwarded to Congress for final decision.<sup>24</sup>

Washington wrote to Brig. Gen. George Weedon on 29 March, asking him to stay in the army despite Congress' resolution making Woodford the senior brigadier. The Commander in Chief told the President of Congress on 10 April that both Weedon and Muhlenburg would resign over the dispute.<sup>25</sup>

That same day Muhlenburg summed up his feelings:

But Your Excellency will Acknowledge that much depends on opinion & whenever an officer degrades himself in the Opinion of his Brother Officers of inferior Rank his Influence & Authority become despicable.<sup>26</sup>

Three days later Washington heard from Weedon. That general flatly refused to serve under someone so long his junior, especially Woodford who had resorted to "ungentlemanly Steps" to obtain preferment.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1-19 March 1778 passim.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 4 March 1778.

<sup>25</sup>Washington, Writings, 11:173, 239. Weedon did resign, in August, but Muhlenburg stayed on.

<sup>26</sup>Letter, 10 April 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 13 April 1778.

Col. James Armstrong of the Eighth North Carolina summed up the feelings of many to Washington. He said that the army needed to end the clashes among senior officers during the next campaign.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Greene became involved and wrote to Weedon on 27 April, telling him how he believed Congress acted in a humiliating manner and should have not altered the standing of officers of the same rank.<sup>29</sup>

Perhaps the height of absurdity concerned McDougall, locked in a petty squabble with Heath. On 28 August 1782 McDougall faced no less than seven counts of conduct unbecoming an officer in a court martial whose proceedings consumed twenty-five pages. He was convicted of calling Heath a knave and reprimanded by the Commander in Chief.<sup>30</sup>

The statistics for generals leaving the army underline the severity of this infighting. By war's end seven or 24.1 percent, nearly a quarter, of the major generals had resigned. Congress appointed fifty-eight brigadier generals who rose no higher. Fourteen or 24.1 percent, again nearly a quarter, resigned. Five more or 8.6 percent retired. One or 1.7 percent turned down the commission. Two others or

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 10 March 1778.

<sup>29</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:362.

<sup>30</sup>"Opinion of the Court Martial Respecting Major General MacDougall" (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 163, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

3.4 percent were appointed so late in the war that they never received formal commissions.<sup>31</sup>

Washington's generals served their chief well. While combat veterans of the French and Indian War, they were unprepared for high command. They perforce had to learn from their own mistakes. They did so and demonstrated an admirable sense of capitalizing on field expedients. They were not a social elite in the traditional sense. Unfortunately, they still expended much energy on seemingly petty issues of precedence which often required the personal attention of the Commander in Chief. As a result, a quarter of the major generals and a third of the brigadiers left the service prior to war's end. Such examples did not fail to set the tone for the remainder of the officer corps.

#### Battalion- and Company-Grade Officers

The quality of officers leading the infantry companies and battalions of Washington's army was probably the single-most critical issue related to unit effectiveness. These men lived and fought with the troops daily. Their example and conduct influenced their soldiers significantly.

Tracing the background of these officers is a true demographic challenge and requires a dissertation of its

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<sup>31</sup>Leiter, Biographical Sketches contains a list of all the generals at the beginning of the book. Note that the raw numbers of brigadier generals is at variance with Heitman, Register of Officers, who tallies all brigadiers together. There are only forty-four who rose no further in his list.

own. An examination of a roster of patriot officers, even discounting militia and state-line officers in Continental pay, lists a staggering number of men who led Continental soldiers, about thirteen thousand.<sup>32</sup> Attrition partially explains this plethora of officers. Many resigned their commissions after serving for a relatively brief period.

However, command was still the prerogative of social betters, even in a classless society. This personnel turmoil did not result in a revolutionary breakthrough in the composition of military leadership. Congress' delegation of officer appointments at company and field grades to the states helped insure that commissions went to those of wealth and influence with strong local ties.

Historian Mark Lender has conducted a thorough investigation of the New Jersey Continentals. He discovered that 84 percent of the New Jersey officers came from the wealthiest third of society and almost 32 percent from the richest tenth. None came from the poorest third and only 16 percent from the middle third. The few poorer officers never advanced further than captain while the highest ranks were held by men of considerable prominence in the state. Indeed, petitions for commissions included recommendations from leading citizens. Few men held commissions from the ranks, less than 2 percent.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers averages 24 entries per page and consumes 550 pages, some 13,200 names.

The evidence suggests similar conclusions regarding the other states. This analysis chose a random selection of three regiments from the three main areas of the country: the First Massachusetts, the First New York, and the First South Carolina. Two units served with the main army; one stayed in the South. The military careers of their field officers was traced. Only three of twelve colonels and lieutenant colonels or 25 percent ever served as company officers. Time spent as company officers was prevalent among the majors: ten of fourteen or 71.4 percent.<sup>34</sup>

A random selection of 409 officers which cut across state lines revealed that a mere 22 or 5.4 percent were promoted from the ranks. Not one progressed beyond company grade and only three attained the rank of captain or captain lieutenant. Moreover, eight of the cases dated from 1775 when the Continental Army was in its infancy.<sup>35</sup>

Rank in the early days, the period of Royster's rage militaire, came more readily to those of humbler means. For example, Lt. Joseph Hodgkins and Capt. Nathaniel Wade served at Bunker Hill. They became captains in the main army but rose no further. Wade left the service after 31 December 1776 and was a lieutenant colonel and then colonel of

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<sup>33</sup>Lender, "New Jersey Brigade Social Structure," pp. 35-36.

<sup>34</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers supplied the raw data. There is also a section on field officers by regiment.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid. The random selection consisted of a group in alphabetical order. Note that a captain lieutenant is a senior lieutenant and not a junior captain.

militia from 1777 through 1780. Hodgkins served until July 1779. Both came from Ipswich, Massachusetts; one was a carpenter and the other a cobbler.<sup>36</sup>

The British were shocked at this levelism. One officer was aghast at the collection of American prisoners taken at Quebec in December 1775. Two majors were a blacksmith and hatter. The captains included a butcher, tanner, tavern keeper, and shoemaker.<sup>37</sup> One Hessian categorized the Continental officer corps in 1776 as "artisans."<sup>38</sup> A Brunswick officer noted that his former secretary had become a captain in the rebel forces.<sup>39</sup>

This egalitarian trend in officer composition was quite shortlived since the Continentals soon developed into one of the most elitist-minded officer corps in the West. This attitude permeated their behavior. They became obsessed with every aspect of honor, glory, rank, prerogative, and privilege. They were aristocrats in all but title.

For example, the officers sought battle for glory's sake as much as their European counterparts. This emphasis placed a premium on field commands and exacerbated the

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<sup>36</sup>Robert A. Lively and Herbert T. Wade, ed., This Glorious Cause . . . : The Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. vii.

<sup>37</sup>Wright, Fire of Liberty, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup>Baurmeister, Revolution in America, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup>Stone, Letters of Brunswick and Hessian Officers, p. 176.

tensions between line and staff. For example, Washington told Maj. Michael Ryan that adjutants and brigade majors were still officers but were no longer eligible for promotion within the line.<sup>40</sup> Capt. Allen McLane considered the loss of his independent command to inclusion under Maj. Henry Lee as a deathblow since he would no longer be noticed unless Lee reported him in dispatches.<sup>41</sup> Greene reported the death of John Laurens in his Army Orders.<sup>42</sup> Greene wrote to Maryland Col. Otho Williams later on 17 September 1782 and told him of Laurens' death in a "paltry little skirmish" due to a "love of military glory."<sup>43</sup>

The disputes over rank were often as trivial as they were unending. As early as 1775 Washington established boards to rank order all regiments and their officers.<sup>44</sup> On 22 November Washington had to state in General Orders that first lieutenants were sadly mistaken in their belief that they would receive company commands from captains who failed to recruit to strength.<sup>45</sup> Col. Daniel Hitchcock wrote to

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<sup>40</sup>Letter, 10 April 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>41</sup>Allen McLane Papers, 9 June 1779.

<sup>42</sup>Maj. Gen. Nathanael Greene's Orders, Southern Army Orderly Book no. 160, 29 August 1782.

<sup>43</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:375n1. This letter will appear in its own right in a future volume not yet published at the time of writing.

<sup>44</sup>Col. William Prescott's Massachusetts Regiment Orderly Book no. 18, 5 August 1775.

<sup>45</sup>Washington, Writings, 4:108.

Washington about the stigma hanging over him for not being promoted after leaving his law practice to join the army.<sup>46</sup>

A group of officers to include Wayne petitioned the Commander in Chief in 1777 because they were disgusted by the promotion system:

. . . from these causes, the Officers of the American Army are disgusted with trifling occurrences and any opportunity serves as an excuse for resignation. . . . We cannot help complaining of eccentric promotions, promotions not calculated to reward the meritorious, which only prefer the favorite and tend to disgust the army. Our honor as Soldiers obliges us to dwell on this article."<sup>47</sup>

Col. Tench Tilghman, one of Washington's secretaries at the time, debated rank issues with Heath. Concerning the introduction of brevets he concluded, "there will be no end of applications for them." That same month Capt. Jeremiah Hill protested the promotion of a captain from outside his regiment to a majority within it. He wanted to know why this exception from standard practice occurred. He asked how this other captain merited the promotion and not he.<sup>48</sup>

A major in the Tenth Pennsylvania required a date of rank determination board because of the time lag between the existence of the vacancy and his assumption of duty. The

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<sup>46</sup>Letter, 19 August 1776, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>47</sup>[Anthony Wayne] AL to Washington, 1777, Schoff Revolutionary War Collection.

<sup>48</sup>Letters, 6 and 10 September 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

difference amounted to only two months but caused much rancor among fellow officers.<sup>49</sup>

The winter at Valley Forge witnessed a proverbial tidal wave of officer discontent over rank. One result was a flood of resignations by company and field officers which cut across state lines. Eighty-eight requests for discharge alone have survived over a three-month span. Ostensibly, the officers pleaded family distress or ill health as the basis for resignation. But the depth of dissatisfaction was well known. On 5 March a Congressional Committee told Parsons, "The Gentlemen will not lose any of their pretensions to rank." On the eighteenth First Lt. Daniel Collins stated openly that he desired a discharge due to being superceded in rank "by those whose Merit I have no reason to think is greater than mine."<sup>50</sup>

A disgusted Varnum forwarded a batch of such petitions, "Upon the pernicious Principle that Officers have a Right to leave the Service when they please I must mention . . . " In March and April the subalterns of the Virginia Line complained to Washington about the battalion reductions from ten to eight companies, a move which would render many of them excess. They argued that a compact existed between the

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<sup>49</sup>"Valley Forge" Orderly Book, 20 February 1778.

<sup>50</sup>Letters, 3 March-19 June 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

country and the officers. Promotion was absolute property and a right. Only failure to perform duty could stop it.<sup>51</sup>

In August 1778 a board of generals led by McDougall, Parsons, and Knox settled the seniority of Maryland's field officers. Another board considered the field officers and captains of Connecticut. A third had to quiet the discontent among captains and majors in Ross' Brigade.<sup>52</sup> Wayne faced the ire of exchanged officers from two regiments who found themselves in different units. They claimed that their positions in their old regiments were sacrosanct during their captivity. Wayne referred the matter to Governor Wharton.<sup>53</sup> A board had to settle the rank of subalterns in the First Connecticut Brigade.<sup>54</sup>

Washington approved the complete rank ordering of all officers in the Massachusetts Line accomplished by a board of general officers.<sup>55</sup> The reorganization of the army resulted in another.<sup>56</sup> Nine days later the arrangement of the officers of the Pennsylvania Line appeared. The

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 20 March 1778 and March-April 1778. The subalterns' complaint is otherwise undated.

<sup>52</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 11, 18, 27, 29, and 31 August 1778.

<sup>53</sup>Wayne Papers, 5 January 1779.

<sup>54</sup>Brigade Orders, 15 February 1779, Webb's Additional Continental Regiment Orderly Book, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>55</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 1 August 1779.

<sup>56</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 8 January 1781.

document ran to three and a half pages.<sup>57</sup> Parsons called on Washington to settle a grievance of the subalterns. They believed that captain lieutenants held no seniority over lieutenants since their position no longer existed formally on the establishment. Then in the midst of the siege of Yorktown Washington received a protest because an outsider was awarded a company command in Hazen's Second Canadian Regiment.<sup>58</sup> Washington created a board to settle the rank disputes among the captains of the Massachusetts Line.<sup>59</sup> He approved a board arrangement of the Massachusetts subalterns.<sup>60</sup> The Commander in Chief blessed another for Connecticut subalterns.<sup>61</sup> Greene was still dealing with rank disputes in the North Carolina Line late in the war.<sup>62</sup>

The more junior officers assailed each other with even greater venom than their superiors. Surgeon Thacher mentioned an actual gun battle between Pennsylvania and Massachusetts troops prompted by an officers' brawl on 26 December 1776. A drunk Pennsylvania lieutenant colonel

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<sup>57</sup>Unidentified unit, 17 January 1781, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>58</sup>Letters, 10 July and 2 October 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>59</sup>Francis Tufts Orderly Book, 8 February 1782.

<sup>60</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 26 March 1782.

<sup>61</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 12 June 1782.

<sup>62</sup>Greene Papers, 5 November 1782, New-York Historical Society.

charged the quarters of a Massachusetts colonel who had permitted his son to set up his shoemaking trade.<sup>63</sup>

McDougall ordered the arrest of Colonel Livingston "for Traducing the Conduct of General MacDougal In ordering the Betrayal of the Continental troops" on 23 March 1777. Livingston was convicted of using abusive language. Lt. Col. William Heth lodged a complaint against Brig. Gen. William Maxwell. Not only was the charge unfounded but Heth was apparently drunk; Washington referred the case to court martial.<sup>64</sup> Lt. Col. Pierre Regnier of the Fourth New York petitioned Washington for a transfer or discharge. He could bear Col. Henry B. Livingston no longer.<sup>65</sup> A lieutenant was discharged for loudly announcing the cowardly behavior of a fellow officer in the regiment and refusing to name whom. The adjutant of Jackson's regiment was cashiered for repeated disobedience of and abusive language to a major.<sup>66</sup> Col. Timothy Bigelow of the Fifteenth Massachusetts continued to injure the character of Col. John Lamb by alleging cowardice at Quebec on 31 December 1775. Authorities convened a court of inquiry four and a half years later!<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 70.

<sup>64</sup>Regimental Orders for the Fourth New York, 8 June and 26 October 1777.

<sup>65</sup>Letter, 24 March 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>66</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, 24 May and 7 June 1778.

<sup>67</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 17 July 1780.

The case of Col. Israel Angell was more amazing still. Despite the magnificent stand of the Second Rhode Island Regiment at Springfield, he had to defend his conduct at a court of inquiry. He was cleared five days later.<sup>68</sup> Lt. Col. Tobias Fernald wrote to Washington about an ensign in his Tenth Massachusetts. He questioned his character and pointed out that he was a former private.<sup>69</sup> Hazen expressed his surprise to Gates over the acquittal of a Major Reed.<sup>70</sup>

The officers also took privilege for granted. One regiment's lieutenant colonel was absent recruiting. Yet the major was on furlough and not present with his unit.<sup>71</sup> Varnum issued an order restricting officers within one mile of camp unless they possessed a pass from the commandant.<sup>72</sup> Congress passed a resolution on 11 September 1778 which banned officers' horses within forty miles of camp except at their own expense and with Washington's permission.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>Second Massachusetts Orderly Book, 13 and 18 September 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>69</sup>Letter, 26 July 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>70</sup>Gates Papers, 25 February 1783. The questioning of board results by officers is contrary to good discipline.

<sup>71</sup>Henry Jackson Papers, 19 September 1777.

<sup>72</sup>Journal of Nathan Beers, 5 September 1778.

<sup>73</sup>General Orders, 24 September 1778, Caleb Clapp Orderly Book. This prohibition was necessary due to the scarcity of forage and the difficulty the army experienced in transporting the commodity in the required quantities. Naturally, the regulation was unpopular with officers.

So many officers were absent from camp that Washington offered a free pardon on 29 March 1779 to all AWOL officers as well as deserters who came in no later than 1 May!<sup>74</sup> Washington, buried by an avalanche of officer leave requests, announced, "The frequent Application made by officers at this Critical point of time for leave of absence is a circumstance as amazing as painfull to the General."<sup>75</sup>

Wayne's Division Orders highlight this sense of privilege extremely well. These instructions allocated one soldier servant with weapon to subalterns; one with and one without to captains; and two without to field officers. Wayne had to add that these allowances were generous so he expected conformity. He also banned officers from crowding the trenches at a mere whim to sightsee.<sup>76</sup>

The mentality of many of these officers becomes clearer still when examining their conduct on a daily basis. The cases brought to court martial underline their propensity to take privilege for granted; their fondness to try the slightest affair of "honor"; and a cold-blooded desire to strike at a rival in any manner possible. Indeed, one sad commentary noted how too many officers did not understand the seriousness of a court martial. They brought forward charges in a frivolous manner. They derived satisfaction

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<sup>74</sup>Heath, Memoirs, p. 186.

<sup>75</sup>General Orders, 7 July 1778, Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book.

<sup>76</sup>Brigade Orders by Anthony Wayne, 16 October 1781.

from causing a rival vexation even if acquitted.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, peers rendered personal judgements and showed considerable indulgence with unprofessional behavior. Washington thus battled for the duration of the war to develop a truly professional officer corps.

For example, a surgeon was found guilty of receiving kickbacks from sick enlisted men in return for a recommendation for discharge. An officer was convicted of procuring captured enemy horses for private use.<sup>78</sup>

A captain in the North Carolina Brigade was found guilty of forgery and reprimanded in General Orders. A lieutenant of the Twelfth Pennsylvania was cashiered on the thirtieth for engaging in private contracts with enlisted soldiers.<sup>79</sup> A board of officers voted to hang Thomas Shanks, a cashiered lieutenant from the Tenth Pennsylvania, as a spy. Grenadier Sgt. William Sutherland, a deserter from the Forty-Fifth Regiment, testified how Shanks was free to roam while in captivity, as per the instructions of his superiors.<sup>80</sup> A lieutenant on duty with the Third Maryland convicted of

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<sup>77</sup>Sebastian Bauman Papers, 25 September 1779, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>78</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 24 September and 31 October, 1776.

<sup>79</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, On 29 and 30 May 1778.

<sup>80</sup>Letter, 2 June 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

disobedience of orders merely received a reprimand by the brigade commander in front of the officers.<sup>81</sup>

The Commander in Chief himself protested the court martial sentence of a captain convicted of refusing to comply with a General Order. He was only reprimanded by the regimental commander. Washington condemned the "altogether inadequate" sentence and feared the "mutinous and dangerous spirit" encouraged by such leniency.<sup>82</sup>

A lieutenant in Putnam's Regiment challenged a captain to a duel and used foul language against him. A court martial cashiered him on but restored his rank.<sup>83</sup> An ensign convicted of disobedience of orders and unauthorized absences from camp was sentenced to be reprimanded.<sup>84</sup>

Washington chastized those officers who bought plundered works of art.<sup>85</sup> Lt. Col. Jotham Loring of the Third Massachusetts was dismissed for multiple instances of disobedience, fraud, and abuse.<sup>86</sup> Col. Richard Butler of the Ninth Pennsylvania was tried for inciting mutiny and abusing a captain, allegedly telling sergeants to ignore the

<sup>81</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, 3 June 1778.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 7 June 1778.

<sup>83</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 31 August 1778.

<sup>84</sup>General Orders, 11 November 1778, Journal of Nathan Beers.

<sup>85</sup>General Orders, 22 July 1779, Allen McLane Papers.

<sup>86</sup>Division Orders, 12 August 1779, Simeon Belding Orderly Book.

junior officer. The colonel was convicted on one charge alone and sentenced to be reprimanded.<sup>87</sup> A captain lieutenant of the First North Carolina was cashiered for constantly playing cards in camp, even breaking his arrest to return to the games and permitting his soldiers to play at will.<sup>88</sup> Washington's orders in this regard were well known. The subaltern was being outright defiant.

Maj. Gen. Robert Howe protested the court martial findings for an ensign of the Second Massachusetts. Convicted of leaving his guard, he was merely reprimanded. Howe argued that the punishment was far too lenient given the ensign's position and responsibility. Three days later a disgruntled Howe announced that officers could not leave guard nor sleep, violations being an unpardonable breach of orders.<sup>89</sup> A captain in the First New Jersey stabbed a lieutenant and was acquitted. Washington protested the sentence, stating that the captain's violence was not justified as there was insufficient provocation.<sup>90</sup> The colonel of the Second Canadian Regiment found himself tried by General Court Martial on charges of disobedience of orders and unmilitary conduct for allegedly halting his

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<sup>87</sup> [Unidentified] Orderly Book, 21 September 1779, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Mass.

<sup>88</sup> Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 1 October 1779.

<sup>89</sup> Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 28 February and 3 March 1780.

<sup>90</sup> Ninth Connecticut Orderly Book, 29 April 1780.

command on the march. Hazen was acquitted in the belief that he was acting on the orders of the division commander.<sup>91</sup>

A captain of the Second Massachusetts received nothing more than a reprimand for allowing over fifty prisoners to escape. Three lieutenants and one ensign were tried for being AWOL between five and thirty days. A court of inquiry deemed the excuses of all four sufficient.<sup>92</sup> The surgeon of the Third Massachusetts was tried by general court martial for defaming a lieutenant in the Sixth by calling him a "damned rascal" among other things. The doctor was acquitted.<sup>93</sup> A captain from the Regiment of Invalids was excused for exceeding his furlough forty-eight days.<sup>94</sup> A lieutenant of the Eighth Massachusetts remained AWOL and failed to report back to camp in spite of the Congressional Resolution of 6 December 1779. A General Court Martial cashiered him.<sup>95</sup>

This pride of place, individual and collective, gone to excess, played a role in larger issues as well. The battle with political authorities over half pay was thus a key element in self image. Half pay became a mark of their

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<sup>91</sup>Benjamin Mooers Orderly Book, 17 September 1780.

<sup>92</sup>Francis Tufts Orderly Book, 11 and 27 January 1782.

<sup>93</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 16 March 1780.

<sup>94</sup>Eighth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 27 June 1782.

<sup>95</sup>Francis Tufts Orderly Book, 18 December 1782.

"professionalism." The Continental officers wanted to demonstrate that they were every bit as much the worthies as their British counterparts. It was far more than an attempt to receive financial recompense for a military career of great sacrifice over the years in the midst of an increasingly apathetic nation. On 15 May 1778 Congress granted half pay for seven years to those who served to war's end. The officers were not satisfied. They renewed vigorous debate in 1779. Congress approved half pay for life on 21 October 1780.<sup>96</sup>

The weakened condition of the main army after the Yorktown campaign, however, became a source of rising resentment. The political nationalists may have panned the officers in the ensuing Newburgh Conspiracy.<sup>97</sup> Nonetheless, such a maneuver would have been impossible but for their overweening hubris. They had so built up both their self image and outrage over very real grievances that the officers contemplated betraying the Revolution. In this context Washington's stand at Newburgh was perhaps his finest hour. The lesson was not lost on the politicians either. Congress modified half pay for life on 22 March 1783 to five years' full pay.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup>Ford, Journals, 11:502; 18:958-59.

<sup>97</sup>Richard H. Kohn, "The Inside History of the Newburgh Conspiracy: America and the Coup d' Etat," William and Mary College Quarterly, 3rd ser., 27 (April 1970):187-220 pushes this interpretation heavily.

<sup>98</sup>Ford, Journals, 24:207-8.

After 1776 the Continental officer corps thus had no trouble developing its own corporate identity. They formed a true brotherhood in arms as Washington himself wanted. For example, on 26 September 1776, after the debacle at Long Island, he wrote to the President of Congress, ". . . till the bulk of your Officers are composed of such persons as are actuated by Principles of honour, and a spirit of enterprize, you will have little to expect from them."<sup>99</sup>

An excellent case study of this mentality was the outpouring of sympathy for Maj. John Andre during his captivity and eventual execution for spying with the now-despised Arnold. An officer attached to Headquarters noted the widespread sympathy for the prisoner.<sup>100</sup> The tough Hamilton commented bitterly that the Commander in Chief declined to remit the death penalty for this fine fellow.<sup>101</sup> Even Tallmadge sympathized for this "most elegant and accomplished gentleman" though he functioned as his interrogator.<sup>102</sup>

Unfortunately, this spirit was often grossly exaggerated. The patriot leaders often appeared as

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<sup>99</sup>Washington, Writings, 6:108.

<sup>100</sup>Theodore Woodbridge Diary, October 1780, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>101</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 2:448-49.

<sup>102</sup>Benjamin Tallmadge, Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1858; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 36-39.

caricatured noblemen, albeit without titles. For example, the burial services for Enoch Poor resembled an official state funeral. Six brigadiers were pall bearers. The entourage of officers numbered in the hundreds and included the Commander in Chief himself.<sup>103</sup> The officers should have expended more energy in learning their trade.

Officer expertise was the sum of training and experience. The last major conflict with significant operations had been the French and Indian War. While some colonels were veterans, the overwhelming majority of company officers were too young to have seen action in that war. For example, Wayne and other officers informed Washington sometime in 1777 that the constant rotation of officers due to resignations gave them an army both young and raw, yet they expected them to perform like veterans.<sup>104</sup> The Frenchman Moré noted at Valley Forge:

He was surrounded by his officers, who for the most part were, like me, on their first campaign. Many of them had been far from imagining, a short time before, that they were intended for a military career.<sup>105</sup>

Hence, there was no great body of combat experience upon which the patriots could draw for their junior leaders.

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<sup>103</sup>Theodore Woodbridge Diary, September 1780.

<sup>104</sup>[Anthony Wayne] AL to Washington, 1777, Schoff Revolutionary War Collection.

<sup>105</sup>[Albert Charles Moré], Chevalier de Pontigbaud, A French Volunteer of the War of Independence, 2nd ed., ed. and trans. Robert B. Douglas (Paris: Charles Carrington), p. 42.

Officer training did not exist per se.<sup>106</sup> The multitude of drillbooks in print could not teach them how to perform the myriad responsibilities of their positions. These manuals' primary function was to serve as guidebooks to explain how regiments should execute fire and maneuver as a team. At best such works touched on certain minutiae peculiar to officers. For example, the famous drillbook designed for the Norfolk militia and widely adopted in America contained four pages addressing "Exercises of the Officers and the Manner of Saluting."<sup>107</sup>

One solution was reading. There can be no doubt that eighteenth-century literature included a solid body of military thought. These works were often imported in their original form or available in English, either as British editions or American reprints. Moreover, upper-class Americans had access to these books via colonial library holdings.<sup>108</sup> They were reasonably well educated; their reading provided a firm grounding on topics like strategy and command.<sup>109</sup> Finally, these men represented the last

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<sup>106</sup>The Prussian service was the major exception.

<sup>107</sup>Windham, Plan of Discipline, pp. 23-26.

<sup>108</sup>J. B. Harley, "The Spread of Cartographical Ideas between the Revolutionary Armies," in Mapping the American Revolutionary War, The Kenneth Nebenzahl, Jr. Lectures in the History of Cartography at the Newberry Library (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 64.

<sup>109</sup>John Morgan Dederer, War in America to 1775: Before Yankee Doodle (New York: New York University Press, 1990), pp. 71-86 passim.

generation who studied fortifications as part of a general process of education.<sup>110</sup>

The critical question was whether or not this leisurely pre-war pursuit continued during the war with any sense of command emphasis. The answer is a qualified yes. For all their aristocratic pretensions, the limited evidence indicates that the Continental officer corps understood that reading extant literature could go far to compensate for lack of training and experience. Washington understood so and wholeheartedly supported a comprehensive reading program for officers.

Washington valued European military texts even more than its soldiers. He viewed reading as an excellent source of officer professional development. During his experience in the French and Indian War, he told his Virginia officers on 8 January 1756 to read "Blands and other Treatises." On 10 November 1775 he advised Woodford to read Bland's The Partisan and Essay on the Art of War along with Young's Instructions for Officers. His "General Instructions" to regimental commanders in 1777 stated that officers needed books and the time to read them.<sup>111</sup> Smallwood reported from Wilmington that he had obtained the library books Washington

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<sup>110</sup>Duffy, Fortress in the Age of Vauban and Frederick the Great, pp. 275-76.

<sup>111</sup>Washington, Writings, 1:271; 4:81; 10:238.

wanted. They were a valuable collection not otherwise extant in America.<sup>112</sup>

The famous Blue Book became the most accessible source to assist with officer training after 1778, although it was primarily a drillbook. Thus, Washington expressed his expectations that all officers would be thoroughly familiar with its contents through diligent study.<sup>113</sup> On 9 March 1778 John Laurens even queried a fellow officer about borrowing "La Tactique de Ghibert" as well as a work by Mesnil Durand.<sup>114</sup>

Washington's example was not in vain. That lucid observer, jäger Captain Ewald noted in December 1777:

I was astonished when American baggage fell into our hands . . . to see how every wretched knapsack, in which were only a few shirts and a pair of torn breeches, would be filled with such military works as "The Instructions of the King of Prussia to His Generals," Thielke's "Field Engineer," the partisans Jenny and Grandmaison. . . . This was a true indication that the officers of this army studied the art of war while in camp, which was not the case of the opponents of the Americans, whose portmanteaux were rather filled with bags of hair powder, boxes of sweet-smelling pomatum, cards (instead of maps), and then often, on top of all, novels or stage plays.

Ewald's comment might have been slightly exaggerated but he was obviously impressed. He also did not hesitate to "call the shots" as he saw the facts. Much later, on 7 May

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<sup>112</sup>Letter, 3 March 1778, Washington Papers,, Charlottesville.

<sup>113</sup>General Orders, 9 October 1779, [Unidentified] Orderly Book.

<sup>114</sup>Laurens, Army Correspondence, p. 141.

1780, he unreservedly labeled a British engineer captain as barely capable to be an errand boy for an engineer in a European army.<sup>115</sup> But reading was no substitute for experience. Texts could only suggest proper methods. The field and company officers of the main army thus turned out to be a very "mixed bag."

Washington's biggest stumbling block was the uneven quality of his officers. For example, a company officer of the Second Connecticut related his daily activities early in the war. There was a multitude of entries which read, "spent all day at home."<sup>116</sup> Washington recommended that officers check all returns before signature and submission.<sup>117</sup> General Orders throughout July 1776 corrected wayward officers. They encouraged officers to visit their men to insure proper cleanliness. Brigade majors were chastized about their failure to doublecheck that regiments turned out the required number of work parties. Superiors demanded that returns of the number of cartridges made be submitted daily.<sup>118</sup>

However well intentioned, the disobedience of Washington's orders in an action on 16 September precluded

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<sup>115</sup>Ewald, Diary of the American War, pp. 108, 236.

<sup>116</sup>Elihu Clarke, Jr. Diary, April-December 1775 passim, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>117</sup>General Orders, 2 January 1776, unidentified unit, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>118</sup>General Orders, 11, 13, and 16 July 1776, Peter Kinnan Orderly Book.

greater enemy casualties. Superiors emphasized that only the Commander in Chief or an aide de camp could change his orders. Three days later officers had to be reminded not only to convey higher orders but also to insure that they were obeyed.<sup>119</sup>

Wayne wrote the Massachusetts Governor and Council in pure exasperation on 25 March 1777, "For God's sake, rouse your field and other officers from their lethargy."<sup>120</sup> Washington himself castigated the officer in charge at the Schuylkill for failing to swing a bridge to the Philadelphia side as ordered yesterday. The Commander in Chief made him answerable for any ill consequences.<sup>121</sup> Officers read that they must understand the need to execute orders promptly. They did not have the prerogative to question nor to know the basis for orders all the time. Otherwise, military movements would not be smooth and sure like the workings of a clock.<sup>122</sup>

At Valley Forge Washington demanded, "The Cmdg Officers of Regiments are desired to see their orders punctually

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<sup>119</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 17 September 1776.

<sup>120</sup>Arthur St. Clair, The St. Clair Papers, 2 vols., comp. William Henry Smith, The Era of the American Revolution, ed. Leonard W. Levy (Cincinnati, Ohio: Robert Clarke & Co., 1882; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 1:388-89.

<sup>121</sup>Letter, 14 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>122</sup>Unidentified unit, 10 October 1777, Continental Army MSS.

carried out as the Genl. is determined to grant no longer Indulgence to any Officer." Three days later a captain in the Thirteenth Virginia was cashiered for cowardice while leading a scouting party. He ordered a retreat when he had a considerable advantage.<sup>123</sup> Authorities cashiered an ensign for abandoning his detachment in the woods.<sup>124</sup> Private Martin recounted the difficulty of light-infantry duty in the summer of 1778. He added that the men were stuck in the rain through the night while the officers stayed in houses and joined them at dawn.<sup>125</sup> Regimental commanders had to mind their requirement to check their troops' arms and ammunition with the greatest exactness.<sup>126</sup> Washington scolded the duty officers for irregular passports and outright neglect of duty. He deprecated the "worst tendency" to lead soldiers to disobedience via officer example.<sup>127</sup> On 23 November with the campaigning season over, Surgeon Thacher noted how the officers relaxed discipline to the point of dissipation.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup>General Orders, 20 and 23 January 1778, Regimental Orders for the Third New Hampshire.

<sup>124</sup>Regimental Orders for the Eighth Massachusetts, 30 May 1778.

<sup>125</sup>Martin, Narrative, pp. 136, 148.

<sup>126</sup>General Orders, 27 August 1778, William Torrey Orderly Book.

<sup>127</sup>General Orders, 24 September 1778, Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book.

<sup>128</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 152.

These discouraging cases continued through the later war years. Superiors were disgusted to receive returns with large numbers of soldiers unfit due to lack of weapons while hundreds of stands of arms were on hand for immediate issue.<sup>129</sup> They expressed the greatest disappointment that the distribution of the Blue Book had not greatly facilitated daily operations. Officers in regiments needed to get down to business "and Introduce an exact Conformity to the Regulations."<sup>130</sup> An ensign convicted of leaving his guard post appealed by pointing out that his peers frequently did so and they were not punished!<sup>131</sup> A lieutenant was dismissed from the service for absenting himself from guard for a considerable length of time despite his orders.<sup>132</sup> That same day two lieutenant colonels were reprimanded, one for excess absence and the second for illegally obtaining permission to pass the lines with horses.<sup>133</sup> Washington was incredulous upon learning that junior officers were permitting discharged soldiers to keep arms and equipment:

How officers of Comp'YS Could venture to assume this Power upon any Conditions and How Commandants of

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<sup>129</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 17 August 1779.

<sup>130</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 12 February 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>131</sup>Robert Young Orderly Book, 28 February 1780.

<sup>132</sup>Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book, 27 March 1780.

<sup>133</sup>Ninth Connecticut Orderly Book, 27 March 1780.

Brigades and Regt. Can suffer it -- Excites the Amazements of the Gen'l.<sup>134</sup>

Martin acknowledged the occasion in the summer of 1780 when von Steuben himself ceased their grueling labor in the heat. "He had more sense than our officers, but they did not feel the hardships which we had to undergo, and of course cared but little, if anything at all, about us."<sup>135</sup> Washington issued blistering General Orders on 17 July when he told his officers that the time had long passed for them to focus only on "Essentials." They needed to concentrate on the "Minutiae of military service."<sup>136</sup> Company commanders were scolded for paying so little attention to the condition of the soldiers' arms.<sup>137</sup> In early 1781 subaltern Jeremiah Greenman noted how the enemy caught his regiment napping while on guard in the vicious no mans' land of Westchester County.<sup>138</sup> Timothy Pickering complained to Washington about problems simply implementing orders to move to a certain place and halt.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>134</sup>General Orders, 5 May 1780, Fifteenth Massachusetts Orderly Book.

<sup>135</sup>Martin, Narrative, p. 193.

<sup>136</sup>Numbered Record Books, 40/84-85.

<sup>137</sup>Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book, 16 August 1780.

<sup>138</sup>Robert Bray and Paul Bushnell, eds., Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783: An Annotated Edition of the Military Journal of Jeremiah Greenman (De Kalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 199-200.

<sup>139</sup>Letter, 6 July 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

One company commander reminded his officers and NCOs that they were responsible for the cleanliness of the soldiers' rooms.<sup>140</sup> Even in 1783 Washington had to exhort officers to check the health and cleanliness of their soldiers by visiting the barracks four times a day.<sup>141</sup>

This examination of officer professionalism in the execution of duty has focused greater attention on the latter war years deliberately. The repeated injunctions of the Commander in Chief to perform adequately made sense during the early years of the conflict. But their continuation throughout the war indicates significant problems with the main army's company and field officers. These difficulties were not only the product of high personnel turn over. They reflected an officer corps often more concerned with privilege than responsibility who in turn thus limited the success in establishing viable military institutions.

All was not total gloom. Surgeon Thacher praised those officers who tried to alleviate the sufferings of their men on 29 May 1780.<sup>142</sup> Wayne sang the praises of a lieutenant colonel for his boundless bravery in action. He concluded, ". . . -- he is deservedly become the Idol of his

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<sup>140</sup>Ebenezer Smith Account Book, 20 January 1783.

<sup>141</sup>General Orders, 17 June 1783, Ebenezer Huntington Orderly Book.

<sup>142</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, pp. 192-93.

Soldiers."<sup>143</sup> On 21 November a French observer commented favorably on American officers' bearing, command voice, and march manners. He also noted their lack of special privileges on the twenty-third due to the fiscal state of the country.<sup>144</sup>

A comparison of the Continental officer corps with the Europeans reinforces the elitist nature of the patriot leaders as well as their shortcomings. While the British aristocracy tended to dominate the high ranks of its officer corps, the purchase system did not eliminate those of more moderate means from the more junior ranks.<sup>145</sup> Much scope existed for promotion in wartime since authorities often filled vacancies by seniority, merit, or special cases such as orphans from military families and the sons of impecunious officers -- all without purchase.<sup>146</sup> These men suffered genuine hardship making ends meet on their meager pay.<sup>147</sup> They were little different socially and

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<sup>143</sup>Wayne Papers, 26 July 1780.

<sup>144</sup>Chastellux, Travels in North America, pp. 90, 103.

<sup>145</sup>Simes, Military Guide, pp. 292-94 lists the costs of commissions as of 9 February 1773.

<sup>146</sup>Rogers, British Army of the Eighteenth Century, pp. 45-46, 48, 54.

<sup>147</sup>See [Alan Guy], "'This Insulting Misfortune': Regimental Officers and the Problem of Personal Pay, 1714-1775," The National Army Museum Annual Report (1979-80):10-21 for details. Treatise on Military Finance, pp. 28-33 tabulates pay rates and allowances for officers.

economically than most American officers, sometimes worse off.

More importantly, this officer corps was not the collection of idle, inexperienced nobility so often portrayed in stereotypes. For example, 249 of 293 colonels, or 85 percent, appointed between 1714-63 already had at least 15 years' service. No wonder Houlding concluded:

Considering these several sets of statistics we cannot do other than conclude that the British army was, during our period, led by an officer corps of the most considerable experience, made up of men who, by and large, entered the service for life and got on by steady, competent service. This was careerism.<sup>148</sup>

The German officers resembled the stereotype of European aristocratic hauteur even less. For example, one estimate for 1779 judged over half of the Hessian officers were non nobles.<sup>149</sup> The Hessian nobility was so small that many commoners were officers. Authorities consequently encouraged great frugality. Officers could expect to attract their wrath if they fell into debt.<sup>150</sup> The German officers were thus quite thrifty minded, in striking contrast to the Americans and British.

The German officer in British service made an astute observer, often exposing the hypocrisy of the rebel officers and their cause. For example, one decided that the American decision to become a patriot or loyalist rested upon which

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<sup>148</sup>Houlding, Fit for Service, p. 115-16.

<sup>149</sup>Lowell, The Hessians, p. 44.

<sup>150</sup>Atwood, The Hessians, pp. 46-48, 50-51.

side permitted him to make more money.<sup>151</sup> Quartermaster Carl Bauer attacked slavery, "The punishment is barbaric and contrary to human principles." Lt. Col. August von Dincklage could not comprehend the patriot emphasis on freedom yet their refusal to free those under their power. Lt. Johannes Heinrich Henkelman's memory of a middle-class American family, a group well represented in the patriot officer corps, was that the wood they burned in a day would have lasted him a week at home.<sup>152</sup>

The French officer corps, meanwhile, fit the stereotype as the "citadel of privilege and tradition." Officers received the whitest flour for their bread. They even got linen night caps; some twelve hundred accompanied Rochambeau's expedition. Openings for merit and those of moderate means were virtually non-existent. One commoner advanced no further than lieutenant and took thirty years to reach that rank.<sup>153</sup>

The social pretensions of the American officer corps suffered on two counts. In spite of the eighteenth-century horizontal integration of social class which made officers in all armies fellow brothers in arms, a philosophy which Washington's subordinates certainly believed, the patriots

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<sup>151</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>152</sup>Ernst Kipping, The Hessian View of America, Bicentennial Series on the American Revolution (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1971), pp. 26, 28.

<sup>153</sup>Kennett, French Forces in America, p. 20.

came to resent the plethora of foreign officers in the army. Their influence was understandable in the artillery and engineers, the technical branches. But many expected -- and received -- high rank and infantry commands. Native officers soon tired of the competition, especially since many claims of the foreigners' vast experience were exaggerated or outright spurious.

For example, Maj. Gen. Arthur St. Clair wrote to James Wilson in Congress on 10 February 1777, "Most of the foreigners that have yet been employed are mere adventurers, . . . "<sup>154</sup> Laurens on Washington's staff condemned the Baron de Arendt to his father on 8 January 1778 "as great a Rascal as any in the Army . . . an Indolent worthless Creature. . . . G.W. must be willfully blind . . . "<sup>155</sup> Washington himself criticized his beloved von Steuben's attempt to secure a line command on 24 July:

In a word, although I think the Baron an excellent officer, I do most devoutly wish, that we had not a single foreigner among us, except the Marquis de Lafayette, who acts upon very different principles from those which govern the rest.<sup>156</sup>

Comraderie found its limit in competition.

Finally, the length of the war hardened many officers' attitudes towards the enemy. For example, jäger Captain Ewald, made a prisoner at Yorktown, noted that the American

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<sup>154</sup>St. Clair Papers, 1:382.

<sup>155</sup>Burnettt, Letters, 3:23.

<sup>156</sup>Washington, Writings, 12:227-28.

officers hated the foe as did the common soldiers.<sup>157</sup> Sublieutenant Jean-Baptiste-Antoine de Verger of the Royal Deux-Ponts Regiment said on 20 October 1781 that the American officers became very jealous over French aid to captured British and German officers. The patriots sought no friendships; they brought up unpleasant topics instead.<sup>158</sup>

In summary, the main army's general officers usually served Washington well considering their diverse backgrounds and considering that whatever military experience they possessed did not prepare them for high command. They learned their trade in the field. Unfortunately, their obsession with rank, position, and honor demanded numerous courts of inquiry and frequently the intervention of the Commander in Chief himself.

More importantly, the main army struggled throughout the war for effective leaders at company and battalion levels. The levelling tendencies in officer composition largely disappeared after 1776. Washington's junior officers were every bit the social elite of America. Indeed, in certain cases they easily matched or even surpassed their European brothers in arms with their propensity for extravagance and the visible trappings of social station, especially the

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<sup>157</sup>Ewald, Diary of the American War, p. 339.

<sup>158</sup>Anne S. K. Brown and Howard C. Rice, Jr., eds. and trans., The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army, 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 1:151.

Germans. An excessive concern over issues of honor, rank, and precedence consumed countless hours of the generals in laborious adjudication.

This aristocratic-like hauteur would have been far more tolerable if the junior officers had matched their bravado with genuine leadership. Unfortunately, many of them failed to develop a keen sense of responsibility to match their expectations of privilege. The constant exhortations and corrections of Washington and his generals even in the late war years prove beyond doubt that the uneven quality of company and battalion officers was the weak link of the main army. This shortcoming was all the more glaring given the sheer professionalism of the opposition with their long-established military institutions and officers accustomed to serving for years on end.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

## STAFF OPERATIONS

Primary Staff

Armies in the eighteenth-century lacked complete staffs in the modern sense.<sup>1</sup> The most glaring deficiency to the current reader was the lack of intelligence and operations officers as known in modern armies. However, this omission was neither total nor uniformly addressed. Moreover, the increasing professionalization characteristic of the period provided the patriots with many precedents to imitate.

British staff organization by 1775 was lagging behind continental developments. There was no Commander in Chief per se between 1770-78 until the appointment of Sir Jeffrey Amherst, and he had to share power with the Secretary of State. The Secretary at War was a highly-undefined post.<sup>2</sup> His duties were largely financial.<sup>3</sup> The Adjutant General was responsible for the discipline, arming, and clothing of the soldiers, as well as the promulgation of all orders and regulations. The Quartermaster General planned troop movements, operations, quartering, and the establishment of defensive works. Both came under the Secretary at War, but

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<sup>1</sup>The current staff functions are: G-1, Personnel; G-2, Intelligence; G-3, Operations; and G-4, Supply.

<sup>2</sup>Wickwire, Cornwallis, pp. 60-61.

<sup>3</sup>Clode, Military Forces of the Crown, 2:255-59 discusses his role at length.

were responsible directly to the King.<sup>4</sup> A host of commissaries handled supply functions.

French Army staff policies had vacillated throughout the century, victims of domestic politics and defeat on the battlefield. The marechal de camp was the rough equivalent of a commander's chief of staff and was a position of distinction.<sup>5</sup> But the formal general staff established in 1766 by Pierre de Bourcet was abolished in 1771 and not restored until the war ended in 1783.<sup>6</sup>

The greatest progress in staff organization was arguably the Prussian though Frederick the Great was for all intents and purposes his own chief of staff. The trend throughout the century was for the Quartermaster General to assume ever more intelligence and operational functions. The formal conversion of his staff to the Prussian general staff came after the Revolution, between 1786-97.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, the patriots had many sources of inspiration when forming the staff of the army. For convenience, this section examines main-army staff operation functions along the lines of a modern staff. Primary emphasis focuses on

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<sup>4</sup>Rogers, British Army of the Eighteenth Century, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup>Donatien Marie Joseph de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau, Memoirs of the Marshal Count de Rochambeau, trans. M. W. E. Wright (Paris: French, English, & American Library, 1838; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1971), p. 103.

<sup>6</sup>Brig. Gen. J. D. Hittle, U.S.M.C. (Ret.), The Military Staff: Its History and Development (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 91-92.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-57.

the effect of the staff on the capability of the line infantry. The reader should bear in mind that the chief staff officer of the Continental Army also functioned as Washington's primary staff officer for the main army.

The work of the Adjutant General (AG) became one of the army's greatest success stories. This post was first in line to become the preeminent staff position given his responsibilities to issue regulations and the Commander in Chief's orders.<sup>8</sup> Congress copied the British adjutant system and appointed Gates, a British Army veteran, as the first Adjutant General. Gates served for a year, establishing the basis for detailed reports and attention to detail which gave the Continental Army one of the most efficient personnel accounting systems of the time.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps more importantly, effective leaders followed his tenure in office. A total of five adjutants served by war's end. The office was vacant for five months in 1777, but Alexander Scammell and Edward Hand provided firm direction for the last six years of the war.<sup>10</sup> Hand's biting correspondence to regimental commanders and brigadiers who

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<sup>8</sup>This responsibility made the AG a frequent visitor at HQ, including meal times and "off" hours.

<sup>9</sup>Wright, Continental Army, p. 432 contains an Appendix which lists the army's principal staff officers throughout the war. Alternatively, Ford, Papers of the Continental Congress contains all appointment orders for the army's primary staff.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

failed to deliver timely troop returns remain as classic examples of staff officers in action.<sup>11</sup>

Strategic intelligence functions were not as formalized but no less effective. The Commander in Chief placed a premium on security. A British intelligence estimate wondered if he would attack New York City or starve out the garrison with French naval assistance. Five days later the British wanted to know his precise location along with those Continentals still in New Jersey and their commanders.<sup>12</sup> On 21 November 1780 Chastellux commented, "Indeed secrecy is strictly observed in the American army; . . ." He was impressed with Washington's reluctance to discuss operational details with all but a few.<sup>13</sup>

But Washington had intelligence needs well beyond simple operational security. He required timely information on the enemy at both the strategic and tactical levels. He evolved a highly secret operation where Maj. Benjamin Tallmadge of the Second Continental Light Dragoons became the main army's de facto intelligence chief who reported directly to Washington. Tallmadge's exploits were classic cloak and dagger. Using the cover name John Bolton, his two most

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<sup>11</sup>Indeed, Hand's sharp tongue with commanders would today be considered a violation of the relationship between line and staff, except when he wrote at the specific request of Washington. See Chapter Five's "Field Effectiveness" for a detailed analysis of the personnel reporting system.

<sup>12</sup>British Intelligence Memo Book, 21 and 26 July 1778.

<sup>13</sup>Chastellux, Travels, p. 92.

effective agents worked in New York City itself, Messrs. Culper Junior and Senior. The operation reads like James Bond. An elaborate scheme involving family contacts permitted routine meetings without arousing suspicion. They exchanged messages with disappearing ink.<sup>14</sup>

More importantly, Tallmadge functioned as a genuine G-2. The relatively fixed position of the main army after June 1778 facilitated his work. Indeed, he noted how he began in July 1778 and continued his operations until war's end, proof positive of their value to the Commander in Chief.<sup>15</sup> Washington acknowledged the importance of this ongoing project by telling him on 20 November 1778 to observe the strictest silence about "C\_\_\_\_" and appointing Tallmadge the sole authority for all intelligence efforts.<sup>16</sup> The cavalryman assessed the information received and even recommended courses of action. For example, he obtained details about enemy fortifications in Suffolk County, Long Island from his operatives as well as personal reconnaissance in November 1780. He advised Washington to launch a raid. The Commander in Chief approved; the attack was a tremendous success.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup>Morton Pennypacker, General Washington's Spies on Long Island and in New York (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Long Island Historical Society, 1939), pp. 2-13 passim, 51-52. This very dated secondary source remains quite useful.

<sup>15</sup>Tallmadge, Memoirs, p. 29.

<sup>16</sup>Washington, Writings, 13:296.

<sup>17</sup>Tallmadge, Memoirs, pp. 39-41.

Washington appreciated this priceless asset and also suggested methods to improve the operation. On 21 March 1779 he wrote Tallmadge with instructions on how to conduct spying and topics of interest. On 27 July the same year he told Tallmadge of a precious supply of disappearing ink for his use.<sup>18</sup> His "command interest" insured the efficacy and longevity of Tallmadge's covert activities.

Likewise, the transfer of the main army from New York to Virginia in 1781 was possible because of successful strategic intelligence and counter-intelligence operations, albeit without Tallmadge's involvement. Having learned of the planned movement of a French naval squadron to the Chesapeake from the West Indies, Washington first collected every detail about the opposing fleets in July and August.

For example, Elias Dayton was trying to confirm the arrival of a large British fleet off Sandy Hook, supposedly carrying Cornwallis' army. Two days later Caleb Webster wrote from Fairfield concerning the departure of an enemy fleet to pick up Cornwallis. The same day Lafayette reported the arrival of the Royal Navy off Hampton Roads with frigates and thirty transports. Next month Thomas Wickes informed the Commander in Chief from Fishkill that two British ships had come into New York and claimed to have spotted twenty French ships of the line off Bermuda. David Forman in New Jersey sent Washington a detailed list of

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<sup>18</sup>Washington, Writings, 14:276-78; 15:483.

Thomas Graves' fleet; two weeks later he mentioned the presence of twenty large ships off Sandy Hook.<sup>19</sup>

Washington synthesized the intelligence available to him very effectively without slacking. Information continued to funnel his way in September. Col. Mordecai Gist told him from Baltimore of de Grasse's return to the Chesapeake with twenty-eight ships of the line. Heath learned that twenty-six ships passed Stamford. In the midst of Washington's aggressive intelligence gathering, his opponents took British command of the sea for granted, a fatal assumption. Washington secured de Grasse's willingness to remain in American waters until the end of October, thus postponing his original departure date of the fifteenth. Finally, the Commander in Chief continued to follow all naval reports closely until the end of the siege.<sup>20</sup>

Washington's subsequent deception of Clinton as to the army's true objective was an intelligence coup of the first order. It had to be; it was also crucial to the plan. The scope of previous preparations for an attack on New York helped the patriots. They only needed to maintain the illusion. Washington's use of counter intelligence was masterful. He fed disinformation to a suspected spy who told the British precisely what Washington wanted them to hear, particularly about American interest in shore

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<sup>19</sup>Letters, 28 and 30 July and 11, 13, and 28 August 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 4, 7, and 17 September 1781.

conditions along New Jersey and Long Island.<sup>21</sup> The chance interception of patriot dispatches which summarized the Weathersfield Conference between Washington and Rochambeau in May added to the illusion since the decisions reached at that conference were now moot points for a movement to Virginia.<sup>22</sup> American and French troop concentrations in New Jersey simply reinforced the notion of an impending allied attack against New York. The construction of baking ovens at Chatham made the feint more believable still.<sup>23</sup>

These successes in strategic intelligence could not mask uneven performance in obtaining timely tactical intelligence. Tallmadge was far too preoccupied with his covert operations in New York City to focus personal attention on Washington's fluctuating needs. The Commander in Chief had no one individual upon whom he could rely.

For example, a major factor which contributed to the patriot victory at Stony Point on 16 July 1779 was the complete information available on the enemy garrison and their positions due to thorough reconnaissance, details garnered from a variety of sources. Heath informed Washington that Col. Rufus Putnam had checked the ground at

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<sup>21</sup>Elias Boudinot, Journal or Historical Recollections of American Events during the Revolutionary War, Eyewitness Accounts of the American Revolution (Philadelphia: Frederick Bourquin, 1894; reprint ed., New York: Arno Press, 1968), pp. 41-42.

<sup>22</sup>Washington, Writings, 22:155-56. See his letter to Rochambeau dated 3 June 1781.

<sup>23</sup>Rochambeau, Memoirs, p. 62.

Stony and Verplanck's Points on the second. Putnam's later report was very detailed and included notes from Nixon's Regiment which had occupied Stony Point in the previous spring. Wayne reconnoitered himself as well. He gave Washington a sketch on the third. He informed the Commander in Chief later of his final examination of the enemy stronghold with Cols. Richard Butler and Christian Febegeer of the Light Infantry and why he wanted three columns to form the assault, one of them a feint.<sup>24</sup>

Capt. Allen McLane, former commander of an independent cavalry troop now integrated with Lee's Legion, gathered more details. McLane daringly walked into Stony Point himself and reported to Washington. On the day of the assault he executed instructions from Washington to confiscate all teams and wagons in the target area immediately to reduce the raiders' chance of discovery.<sup>25</sup> Surprise was complete; they had assessed Stony Point's weak points superbly. One enemy source insisted that the patriots were led into the work by two deserters.<sup>26</sup>

Unfortunately, such attention to detail did not mark the earlier war years. For example, the lack of a body of

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<sup>24</sup>Letters, 3, 13, and 15 July 1779, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>25</sup>Allen McLane Papers. His formal report to Washington does not survive; it may have been verbal given its sensitivity. He did mention on 12 July that Lee sent him on a reconnaissance. The order on behalf of Washington came from Hamilton.

<sup>26</sup>Von Krafft, Journal, p. 87.

capable horse and poor attention to detail blinded Washington to Howe's outflanking maneuver at Long Island on 27 August 1776. Stirling recounted how his command had suddenly learned of the British turning movement and had no escape route but across a creek.<sup>27</sup>

Conversely, both Maj. Gen. John Sullivan and Col. Theodorick Bland of the First Continental Light Dragoons dutifully reported to Washington at the Brandywine that cavalry scouts had spotted British troops on the patriot right. This intelligence was spotty and at times conflicting.<sup>28</sup> Washington and Knox were unable to form a concrete picture of British intentions. They scoffed at Sullivan's aide when he brought the news.<sup>29</sup>

Even though a superbly-drilled main army battled at Monmouth Courthouse on 28 June 1778, the Commander in Chief had not been well informed of British positions. He had few horse immediately available. Most were detached from the main army working with the New Jersey militia under Maj. Gen. Philemon Dickinson, Morgan's light corps, and the New Jersey Continentals under Maxwell. Unfortunately, they secured little intelligence of value to report to Washington. Dickinson stated before the battle that the

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<sup>27</sup>Letter, 29 August 1776, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 11 September 1777.

<sup>29</sup>Certificate of John Skey Eustace, dated 28 October 1777, item sold at auction, listed in Benjamin catalog vol. 59, no. 11, December 1946 cited by Smith, Brandywine, p. 13.

American cavalry were too few to stand their ground against superior numbers of British and loyalist mounted troops.<sup>30</sup>

A senior commander of cavalry could have managed tactical intelligence operations for the main army. But Washington did not enjoy the benefit of such a staff officer. The promising appointment of Casimir Pulaski as Commander of Horse was a failure.<sup>31</sup>

The difficulties in intelligence gathering palled in comparison with the chaos of the Quartermaster's Department. The hapless Quartermaster General (QMG) had too many functions. Ostensibly, he was responsible for the quartering and movement of troops in the field to include the layout of camps. However, the perennially deficient, sometimes desperate state of the main army's logistics system weighed heavily upon his shoulders. Historians have written detailed analyses of the harried QMG and his host of commissaries.<sup>32</sup> This study is concerned only with their impact on the ability of the line infantry to function effectively and the ramifications to staff development. It considers the organization of the logistics departments and their interactions with one another only in this context.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup>James McHenry Papers, 22 June 1778.

<sup>31</sup>See the discussion in Chapter Nine.

<sup>32</sup>Risch, Supplying Washington's Army is the standard reference. See too James A. Huston, Logistics of Liberty: American Services of Supply in the Revolutionary War and After (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991).

The constant shortages experienced in the main army were proof positive that the logistic services failed to support the Continental Line. The proper questions are to what extent were these deficiencies serious enough to impact upon unit efficiency and how did they affect staff operations?

At various stages of the war the lack of food and equipment threatened the outright dissolution of the army. For example, Greene wrote to Deputy Quartermaster General James Abeel about his concerns over provisions. He concluded, "But above all things and first and foremost send on provisions, provisions."<sup>34</sup> On 26 July 1779 Maj. Gen. John Sullivan lamented to Timothy Pickering, Assistant Quartermaster General, that the wretched condition of the soldiers with regard to clothing made orders to have them do duty cruel. He added a requirement for one thousand blankets and five thousand shirts as soon as possible.<sup>35</sup>

Heath observed on 1 November 1780 that his brave soldiers "illy clad, and destitute of blankets, were in a shivering condition." On 6 May 1781 he told Washington that

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<sup>33</sup>E. Wayne Carp, To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984) is an administrative history of these organizations.

<sup>34</sup>Letter, 5 June 1779, Greene Papers, New-York Historical Society. Greene served as Quartermaster General from 2 March 1778 to 5 August 1780. Wright, Continental Army, p. 432.

<sup>35</sup>John Sullivan, Letters and Papers of Major-General John Sullivan, Continental Army, 3 vols., ed. Otis G. Hammond, Collections of the New-Hampshire Historical Society 13-15 (Concord: NHHS, 1930-39), 3:86.

hunger could disperse the troops soon.<sup>36</sup> Member of Congress James Lovell told Samuel Holten on the eighth that foreign troops could easily garrison West Point since they were paid and could feed themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Even Greene's herculean efforts during the Monmouth campaign were insufficient. Transportation assets were as much of a challenge as foodstuffs. Brother Jacob told him as early as mid-April that assembling teams would be a problem as the season was already late. Greene resorted to the combination of private shipments and public goods in a supply convoy, opening himself to criticisms of conflict of interest. Cousin Griffin Greene at least approved.<sup>38</sup>

Over a month before the battle on 20 May he advised Deputy Quartermaster General Moore Furman to begin prepositioning wagons and forage along several routes immediately; he would notify Furman later as to the exact locations as he feared that all the exertions of the department would still fall short of the needs of the main army. He closed, "Spare neither pains nor expence . . ." This establishment of supply depots was prescient but expensive. By 1 June Greene had already drawn on the

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<sup>36</sup>Heath, Memoirs, pp. 241, 261-62.

<sup>37</sup>Burnett, Letters, 6:83.

<sup>38</sup>Letters, 12 April and 24 May 1778, Greene Papers, William L. Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Treasury for four million dollars, "and it seems to be but a breakfast for the department, and hardly that."<sup>39</sup>

He still had problems in the Wagonmaster's Department as well. He informed President Henry Laurens on 1 June that he had ordered portemanteaus and valises as per Washington's request of 27 May to reduce baggage requirements. But on the seventh he learned from Col. James Abeel, a Deputy Quartermaster, that some wagoners drove only nine to ten miles a day while they could go twenty. Others did not prepare their loads the day before, thus leaving late in the day and stopping after moving a mere three to four miles.<sup>40</sup>

So by 26 June Lafayette told Washington that his advance guard would have overtaken the retreating British but a want of provisions slowed progress.<sup>41</sup> Hamilton echoed this distressing situation the same day.<sup>42</sup>

Greene lasted another two years. He resigned in August 1780, effective 30 September.<sup>43</sup> His letter to Congress reflected both his disgust with the bankrupt state of his department as well as his objections to the new arrangements of "specific supplies."<sup>44</sup> The continued decline of patriot

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<sup>39</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:395, 422.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 2:420, 427-28.

<sup>41</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters, 2:92.

<sup>42</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:504.

<sup>43</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers, p. 261.

<sup>44</sup>Letter, 26 July 1780, Greene Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

currency had forced the expenditure of increasing sums of inflated currency. For example, one minor commissary expended a staggering 246,567 pounds sterling plus change within twenty-two months.<sup>45</sup>

The climactic Yorktown campaign witnessed both the most effective all-round logistic support of the main army during the entire war and the tenuous, ad-hoc nature of patriot supply services. Three factors contributed to this relative success. First, Quartermaster General Timothy Pickering, his assistants, and the other staff departments worked diligently and effectively to prepare the march routes and insure adequate supplies of foodstuffs and transportation. The degree of coordination among officials scattered along the route was most impressive. Such efficiency was essential to execute the planned movement by land and sea for both the Americans and their French allies.

For example, Pickering informed the Commander in Chief that route reconns were underway ahead of the army, checking in particular for roads which would support wheeled transport. He recommended that all officers' baggage be kept separate from the formal train. Second in Command Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln told Washington that Deputy Quartermaster General Col. Henry Dearborn knew exactly how many transports were needed to move the French artillery,

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<sup>45</sup>Julius Deming Account Book, June 1778-April 1780, Library of Congress.

baggage, and sick. Charles Stewart, Commissary General of Issues, commented that the Virginia Governor's plan to swim cattle had failed but he was arranging the slaughter of the beasts and the transportation of the meat.<sup>46</sup>

Second, the appointment of Robert Morris as Superintendent of Finance was decisive. Morris brought business savvy and determination to the new office. The movement of the allied armies sparked a spate of wheeling and dealing to insure minimum disruption of logistical operations due to the fiscal weakness of the cause. When the main army marched through Philadelphia, he avoided a pay crisis by borrowing money and issuing the troops hard currency.<sup>47</sup> He concerned himself with every aspect of financing the expedition: obtaining funds in whatever form, negotiating for supplies in spite of later payment, and even initiating requests for needed items. For example, he noted in his diary on 21 August his efforts to stockpile more flour. He found four thousand barrels and credited Pennsylvania's quota of specific supplies. When he learned of another three thousand barrels in New York which could not be moved due to a lack of casks, he was able to get the Commissary General of Issues to deliver old casks. This stockpile of seven thousand barrels was thus at the main army's disposal for September and October.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup>Letters, 21 August; 1 and 26 September 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>47</sup>Boudinot, Journal, p. 42.

He then wrote the Governor of Maryland on 28 August that his state's quota of specific supplies was desperately essential to the success of the march. Donaldson Yates, Quartermaster of Delaware and Maryland, was obtaining boats for transportation between Head of Elk and Virginia. James Calhoun was rounding up whatever supplies were ready. He told Washington that he had directed the Commissary General to stockpile three hundred barrels each of flour and salt meat with twelve hogsheads of rum at Head of Elk.<sup>49</sup>

Meanwhile, the Maryland Legislature noted to Washington that barrels were available, but the French with their hard money could make matters difficult.<sup>50</sup> Working effectively as the financier of a bankrupt cause was no easy task.

Third, Washington left nothing to chance. To coin a modern phrase, he micromanaged the operation from start to finish by making personal inquiries and using line officers to implement orders. He especially watched the procurement of boats. McDougall reported that he had collected and delivered the boats as per his orders but did not know their mission.<sup>51</sup> Knox told one of his gunner officers to impress horse teams immediately if short.<sup>52</sup> Aide Lt. Col. Tench

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<sup>48</sup>Robert Morris, The Papers of Robert Morris, 5 vols., ed. E. James Ferguson (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973), 2:79-80.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 2:142-43.

<sup>50</sup>Letter, 19 September 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid, 10 July 1781.

Tilghman told Col. Philip van Cortlandt that a road in New Jersey was difficult for the movement of boats; he should keep an alternate road open.<sup>53</sup> He exhorted Lincoln on 28 August to monitor the boat situation closely. They could ferry both allied armies but the Americans came first.<sup>54</sup>

The next day Cortlandt wrote Washington to tell him that he was implementing his latest orders; the requested boats were due that evening. Virginia Governor Thomas Nelson, Jr. congratulated Washington regarding de Grasse's arrival and promised to supply all needs in abundance. Aide de camp Lt. Col. David Humphreys wrote to Gist, a Maryland line officer, that the Commander in Chief wanted to know as soon as possible how many ships and tonnage could be definitely obtained from Baltimore and the bay area. He was to be "explicit and expeditious."<sup>55</sup>

These combined efforts represented a major triumph over transportation difficulties and food shortages which had often enough doomed the army to helpless suffering. They insured that essential support did not frustrate the progress of the march. They did not shower the army in plenty. However, this relative success was in stark

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<sup>52</sup>Sebastian Bauman Papers, 21 August 1781.

<sup>53</sup>Letter, 27 August 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>54</sup>George Washington, Fifty-Five Letters of George Washington to Benjamin Lincoln, 1777-1799, comp. A. J. Bowden (New York: George H. Richmond, 1907), p. 36.

<sup>55</sup>Letter, 29 August and 2 September 1781, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

contrast to the destitute supply situation which had dogged the main army since the end of the Monmouth campaign.

Generally poor logistical support was not the only challenge faced by the line troops. Indeed, historians have overlooked an even more damaging, long-lasting impact on the professional development of Washington's troops. The logistics departments lacked the men to execute all necessary missions. They thus depended upon the infantry regiments for drafts to assist with various assignments.

The constant drain of manpower from the Continental Line for extraneous purposes wreaked havoc with training schedules. The rigorous demands of linear warfare necessitated constant practice. Yet the regiments drilled without numerous comrades detached for these other duties.

For example, Wadsworth's Brigade lost one captain, two subalterns, four sergeants, four corporals, one fifer, one drummer, and fifty skilled carpenters.<sup>56</sup> Even the meager garrison of Fort Ticonderoga lost two men per regiment to make cartridges.<sup>57</sup> Four regiments each contributed one captain, three subalterns, three sergeants, three corporals, one fifer, one drummer, and forty-five privates for hospital guard duty.<sup>58</sup> Varnum's Brigade once counted 833 rank and

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<sup>56</sup>Peter Kinnan Orderly Book, 24 July 1776.

<sup>57</sup>Unidentified unit, 1 August 1776, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>58</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 13 April 1777.

file of which 502 or 60.3 percent were "on command."<sup>59</sup>

Commanders selected their best men to make moccasins.<sup>60</sup>

The pernicious practice only worsened later in the war. A detachment of eight soldiers left their regiment to make cartridges.<sup>61</sup> Greene told Washington on 25 February 1779 that the shortage of wagoners resulted in the diversion of more soldiers from the line, a practice which hurt discipline and frustrated officers.<sup>62</sup> Each brigade sent a sergeant and twelve men for duty in the wagon park.<sup>63</sup> The Quartermaster's Department drafted every line soldier familiar with making tents or former ship's carpenters.<sup>64</sup>

Six men per brigade with picks and shovels reported to the Quartermaster's Department at Morristown.<sup>65</sup> A fatigue party of 3 captains, 3 lieutenants, and 150 rank and file departed camp to repave roads for the Quartermaster General.<sup>66</sup> Twenty-five and twelve men respectively found

<sup>59</sup>Varnum and Stark Papers, 23 August 1777. This astounding total probably included some detachments on legitimate infantry missions.

<sup>60</sup>Brig. Gen. Alexander McDougall's Brigade Orderly Book no. 49, 8 October 1777.

<sup>61</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 11 March 1778.

<sup>62</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 175/155/1/111.

<sup>63</sup>Caleb Clapp Orderly Book, 3 July 1779.

<sup>64</sup>Army Orders, 6 October 1779, Heath Papers, Orderly Books.

<sup>65</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 21 February 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>66</sup>Stephen Griffing Journal, 15 April 1780.

themselves drafted to serve as wagoners.<sup>67</sup> Two hundred men had to help gather forage "for a few days."<sup>68</sup>

This unending diversion of manpower was all the more damaging since commitments were only too frequently open ended. Commanders often did not know when their soldiers would return. Naturally, one result was rising tension between line officers and staff colleagues.

The main army experienced a deep, unremitting conflict between line and staff. The line officers not only resented the logistics departments' inability to provide essential goods and services, but also reinforced perceptions that a line command was a far more honorable pursuit and "support types" of every ilk were lazy and corrupt, feelings which quickly communicated themselves to the men.

For example, Heath had to tell commanders to take care of wagoners and drivers supporting them by feeding them and keeping them from abuse.<sup>69</sup> Wayne and other officers addressed the Commander in Chief sometime in 1777 about problems linked to "the unlicensed chicanery of the Staff."<sup>70</sup> Richard Peters at the War Office wrote to Washington despondently about the peculation of commissaries

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<sup>67</sup>Second Massachusetts Orderly Book, 25 and 30 September 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>68</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 5 August 1781.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid, 23 October 1776.

<sup>70</sup>[Anthony Wayne] AL to Washington, 1777, Schoff Revolutionary War Collection.

and their followers. "But how to keep so constant a Watch upon these People as to prevent their Mal Practices is a Question of some difficulty."<sup>71</sup>

Wayne complained to Governor Wharton that the Clothier General stated plenty of shirts were in camp yet there were none in store. The soldiers were wearing waistcoats next to their skin.<sup>72</sup> Greene's reaction to Joseph Reed on 9 March 1778 upon his appointment as Quartermaster General was, "I am taken out of the Line of splendor."<sup>73</sup> He told Woodford on the sixteenth that his acceptance rested upon fear of the ruin of the next campaign due to "the Mismanagement of the department."<sup>74</sup> Abe Clark admitted the shortcomings of logisticians to Lord Stirling by referring to the "indolence Ignorance Dissatisfaction or avarice of the Commissariat."<sup>75</sup> A frustrated Sullivan informed Washington on 27 November, "There is neither faith honor or Integrity in the Suppliers of this Department."<sup>76</sup>

Greene told Jeremiah Wadsworth,

I cannot help congratulating you upon your timely and happy retreat from the Commissary department. You must

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<sup>71</sup>Letter, 5 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>72</sup>Wayne Papers, 10 February 1778.

<sup>73</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:307.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 2:316.

<sup>75</sup>Letters and Papers of William Alexander, 15 July 1778.

<sup>76</sup>Sullivan, Letters and Papers, 2:447.

be a child of fortune. You have saved your reputation free from reproach.<sup>77</sup>

Lafayette became even angrier on 28 October. He informed Vicomte de Noailles of a planned raid on Long Island frustrated by "A worthless fool of a quartermaster general and his assistants, who were no less fools than he, . . . The curs were so stupid . . ." because they had failed to assemble the boats requested well ahead of time.<sup>78</sup>

The antipathy between line and staff permeated every element of the Continentals. The main army simply typified the emotional conflict. This psychological dichotomy is all the more remarkable when one considers the relatively small size of the Continental Army. There was massive cross fertilization among line and staff officers. Yet the hostility was as bitter as the conflict between the field army and the bureau system in the nineteenth century.

This proverbial Pandora's box of logistical difficulties also prevented the Quartermaster General from focusing most of his energies on his operational duties. Hence, this key staff officer was in no position to develop into the preeminent individual of the staff. Greene's predecessors, Thomas Mifflin and Stephen Moylan, had also followed a damaging policy of locating themselves close to Congress

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<sup>77</sup>Letter, 2 April 1780, Greene Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>78</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters and Papers, 3:209-10.

instead of with the Commander in Chief. This lack of a true operations officer with the main army had two results.

First, lacking operations officers in the modern sense, Washington resorted to a typical eighteenth-century practice; he called for councils of war with his general officers, the field commanders. Later historians and soldiers alike usually condemn these councils as the crutch of an indecisive leader. Yet they in fact substituted for the absence of a modern operational staff which would have presented several possible courses of action and its recommendation. Moreover, Washington did not hesitate to push his own views at these high-level conferences.

For example, on 8 September 1775 he addressed all his generals with the proposal of an amphibious attack across Boston harbor with a supporting attack against Roxbury. This attack would preclude the need to winter in New England as well as disbanding one army and creating another in the face of the enemy.<sup>79</sup> The idea appeared impractical when one considered the undisciplined, raw state of the troops in the army, biting criticisms he was quick to note himself.<sup>80</sup> The generals persuaded him to abandon such wild notions.

Conversely, the British withdrawal from Philadelphia in 1778 prompted a series of councils of war which remain the

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<sup>79</sup>Washington, Writings, 3:483-84.

<sup>80</sup>For example, see *Ibid.*, 3:307-10, 338, 391, 406, 474, 487. His criticisms range from basic discipline and cleanliness to officer professionalism.

most infamous of the war for their divisiveness instead of decisiveness. Washington also solicited written opinions from the generals at a council on 17 June.<sup>81</sup> But this time Washington's subordinates could reach no consensus. The Commander in Chief himself appeared to vacillate over the proper course of action. Aide de camp Alexander Hamilton's oft-quoted assessment labeled the meeting as a tribute to the most honorable society of midwives.<sup>82</sup> This failure to agree on a specific course of action would haunt the main army at Monmouth Courthouse on 28 June.<sup>83</sup>

Second, other staff members filled the void as operations officers. Hence, the Inspector General became the most important staff officer after 1778. This development did not result from any sophisticated design to deviate from European practice where the Adjutant General or Quartermaster General were supreme. The Commander in Chief came to rely on von Steuben based on proven capability and demonstrated expertise. Within two years the Inspector General was not only Washington's de facto chief of staff but he had also assumed certain responsibilities formerly under the purview of the Adjutant General, the Mustermaster General, and even some command prerogatives.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 12:115-17.

<sup>82</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:510.

<sup>83</sup>See Chapter Seven for a detailed examination of this episode.

<sup>84</sup>Chapter Six deals with von Steuben's sweeping powers as Inspector General at length.

The famous Blue Book is an excellent example. Besides covering drill and training, the Regulations provided at least initial guidance on the establishment and maintenance of camps. Such a topic was clearly the Quartermaster General's business -- or so many had believed.

Others contributed to the success of operations. Perhaps the most forgotten staff officers were the cartographers. Washington commented to the President of Congress about the pressing need for accurate maps on 26 January and 19 July 1777.<sup>85</sup> Congress thus authorized Washington to appoint a geographer and surveyor of roads with guides and to establish pay and allowances for the department on 25 July.<sup>86</sup> Robert Erskine served as Geographer and Surveyor to the Army of the United States from 27 July 1777 until his death on 2 October 1780. Simeon de Witt replaced Erskine from 4 December 1780 to the end of the war.<sup>87</sup> The Quartermaster General was responsible for the selection of road march routes and camp sites but the geographers had to produce the maps the army used in the field and the schematics of the camps' layouts.

The patriots benefitted in the map arena from the rich military literature of the period.<sup>88</sup> Texts and

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<sup>85</sup>Washington, Writings, 7:65; 8:443.

<sup>86</sup>Ford, Journals, 8:580.

<sup>87</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers, pp. 196, 217-18.

<sup>88</sup>Chapter Seven discusses this phenomenon.

instructional manuals provided European and American officers alike the same basic tools. These publications also insured standardized scales in fortification plans, color conventions, and common terminology.<sup>89</sup>

Unfortunately, the Americans lacked the ability to engrave multiple copies of the same map. Hence, they were probably short of multiple copies of the same map for daily campaign use. Conversely, the early war years probably witnessed major British advantages in cartography with their prolific London map sellers. They could thus obtain multiple copies of a single map.<sup>90</sup>

Nonetheless, the cartographers performed well throughout the war. The Commander in Chief understood the inestimable value of their services. Indeed, on 3 March 1779 he warned Erskine about the lack of security as he toiled at home. His duties were not a secret; British officers of the captive Convention Army had already seen some of his work, noting its accuracy and great value. Washington wanted him to move closer to camp.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>J. B. Harley, "The Contemporary Mapping of the American Revolutionary War," in Mapping the American Revolutionary War, The Kenneth Nebenzahl, Jr. Lectures in the History of Cartography at the Newberry Library (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 7-19.

<sup>90</sup>J. B. Harley, "The Map User in the Revolution," in Mapping the American Revolutionary War, The Kenneth Nebenzahl, Jr. Lectures in the History of Cartography at the Newberry Library (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 86-87, 91.

<sup>91</sup>Washington, Writings, 14:182-83. The Convention Army consisted of those troops captured at Saratoga in 1777.

Several successful operations relied on accurate, timely map support. For example, the well-known assault on Stony Point required maps. Erskine provided Washington with a draft of the adjacent country as requested.<sup>92</sup> When the main army moved from New York to Virginia, the geographers again contributed their precious skills. Washington asked de Witt on 29 August 1781 to survey immediately the road to Princeton if not already done as well as the route via Maiden Head to Trenton, Philadelphia, Head of Elk, Daily, Chester, and Wilimington Christiana Bridge. Washington would issue further orders when de Witt reached Head of Elk. Meanwhile he needed to know about towns, villages, and any special buildings along the way as soon as possible. He even advised de Witt to provide rough traces to save time.<sup>93</sup>

Finally, as Washington became more secure in his position as Commander in Chief vis-à-vis personal confidence, he showed less unqualified respect to men who advertised their past military exploits in Europe. He placed greater credence in demonstrated skill and personal loyalty to him. Thus, men like Conway, Lee, and Gates faded into the background, to be replaced by von Steuben, Lafayette and Greene. This practice was true whether filling line or staff positions.

#### Personal Staff

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<sup>92</sup>Letter, 3 July 1779, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>93</sup>Washington, Writings, 23:68-69.

Four points stand out regarding Washington's headquarters staff. Firstly, it was small; only twenty-nine men served as aides de camp or military secretaries for the duration of the war.<sup>94</sup> This lack of personnel made little difference in terms of battlefield control. The headquarters could cope with the Commander in Chief's biggest battles. Indeed, the performance of the aides in action at Monmouth Courthouse on 28 June 1778 prompted Hamilton to inform Elias Boudinot on 5 July, "What part our family acted let others say."<sup>95</sup>

The challenge was out of action. Ostensibly, aides were couriers and secretaries drafted correspondence, but surviving documents demonstrate that everyone was involved in managing the voluminous quantity of paperwork generated at Headquarters. Matters of routine management along with Washington's numerous other responsibilities taxed the energies of this small staff to the utmost.

For example, the flow of daily communication within the main army depended upon Washington's personal staff initially. The primary staff could not execute their duties until they received instructions from the Commander in Chief.<sup>96</sup> Thus, an aide or secretary had to draft the daily

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<sup>94</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers, p. 13 lists the individuals. Two men served as both ADCs and secretaries.

<sup>95</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:510.

<sup>96</sup>An analysis of the correspondence in Washington, Writings; Washington Papers, Library of Congress; and

General Orders. The Adjutant General would then assume his duty of promulgation. SOPs dictated unit pickup at higher headquarters.<sup>97</sup> The Quartermaster General could begin neither route reconnaissance nor provisions stockpiling without formal notification of an impending operation.

Moreover, Washington's penchant for personal intervention in critical issues generated yet more correspondence. Thus, Washington's micromanagement of the logistics support for the Yorktown campaign discussed above created more work for the aides.

Additionally, countless issues arose in the course of the normal duty day. The staff had to write the responses for myriad personnel actions: resignation requests by officers, dates of rank determinations, and queries from subordinate commanders about some deserving fellow. The ubiquitous financial and supply problems produced reams of paper though few solutions. The Commander in Chief also dealt directly with Congress, the Board of War, the other military departments, naval officials, various state officials, and foreign officers and dignitaries.

One cannot say with certainty what the impact of this massive administrative burden was on staff efficiency, aside from the demands for lots of hard work. But the sheer

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Washington Papers, Charlottesville reveals just how little correspondence the Commander in Chief wrote himself. Historians have taken this fact for granted.

<sup>97</sup>See the section in Chapter Five for a discussion of this system at division levels and lower.

volume of paperwork to deal with Washington's myriad responsibilities detracted from their ability to focus their time to solve the problems of the main army.

This paperwork "overload" led Washington to delegate often to aides the task of writing to field commanders to discuss army matters to include operational issues. These commanders in turn responded directly to the aides.<sup>98</sup>

For example, on 12 March 1777 the recently-arrived Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton received a despatch from Lord Stirling about discharge certificates for an infantry company. Hamilton responded the same day. Then on the thirteenth he wrote to Maj. Gen. Adam Stephen about the inoculation of one of his line regiments. The next day he wrote to the battalion commander concerned. On 30 June he told Brig. Gen. Charles Scott to beware a trap since the British had left Amboy in a hurry and abandoned stores; Washington was concerned.<sup>99</sup>

This dependence on his aides sometimes applied to operations in the field as well. For example, Washington detached Hamilton as a forward observer of sorts with the advance guard during the Monmouth campaign. Hamilton fulfilled this assignment faithfully. He wrote to the

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<sup>98</sup>The discussion of the logistical support of the Yorktown campaign above included two such examples.

<sup>99</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:204-7, 229-30; 277-78.

Commander in Chief twice on 26 June 1778 alone, although he could provide little tangible intelligence.<sup>100</sup>

Secondly, regardless of their prestigious positions which permitted daily contact with high ranking officers, their jobs were not necessarily stepping stones to further military careers. Of the twenty-nine staff officers, only ten or 34.48 percent rose to battalion command or a staff equivalent after service on Washington's staff.<sup>101</sup> This percentage is rather small when one considers how many aides came from line duty.

This statistic did not mean, however, that Washington was averse to using his name and influence on occasion to benefit members of his staff. For example, the storming of Redoubt No. Ten at Yorktown by the Corps of Light Infantry was a major opportunity to make a reputation. Two light-infantry battalion commanders who participated were Lieutenant Colonels Alexander Hamilton and John Laurens, both still serving as aides.<sup>102</sup> General Orders for 31 July 1781 even announced Hamilton's appointment to command.<sup>103</sup> On 6 June 1783 Washington wrote to the Secretary at War, informing him that secretary Jonathan Trumbull merited a

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<sup>100</sup>Ibid., 1:504-6.

<sup>101</sup>Heitman, Register of Officers, p. 12. This analysis checked the individual biographical entries of all twenty-eight within the body of Heitman's book.

<sup>102</sup>Washington, Writings, 23:146 lists the order of battle.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 22:438.

lieutenant colonelcy. He had promised him the vacancy left by Robert Harrison.<sup>104</sup>

Thirdly, this limited largess did not prevent Washington's military "family" from adopting a jingoistic-like loyalty to the Commander in Chief. Such devotion to one's immediate superior should have benefitted staff efficiency as it eliminated much intrigue. But this unqualified dedication to Washington backfired in the face of challenges, real or perceived, to Washington's control.

The Conway Cabal remains the best example. At times the entire incident appeared to anger the sensibilities of the headquarters staff more than the Commander in Chief himself. Their sense of outrage communicated itself to Washington. The result was the most serious rift in the officer corps until the Newburgh affair in 1783.<sup>105</sup>

Brig. Gen. Thomas Conway typified the liabilities of many of the foreign officers. An Irish veteran of the French Army, he had an inflated view of his worth and soon concluded that Washington was ruining the rebel cause. He not only orchestrated his own appointment as Inspector General and thus a promotion to major general, but he first began a correspondence with several officers known to be

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<sup>104</sup>Ibid., 26:476. Trumbull had served two years almost to the day at the time Washington wrote.

<sup>105</sup>Bernard Knollenberg, Washington and the Revolution, A Reappraisal: Gates, Conway, and the Continental Congress (New York: Macmillan Co., 1940) is still the standard reinterpretation. Knollenberg's thesis, however, focuses on Washington's flaws rather than the role of his "family."

hostile to Washington.<sup>106</sup> He wrote a letter to Gates in which he praised the victor of Saratoga and denigrated Washington. Gates' aide, Col. James Wilkinson, leaked the contents of this inflammatory document. However, there was considerable controversy establishing just what was said.

Washington's protective staff soon went on the offensive, already unhappy because Congress made Conway Inspector General on 13 December 1777. Laurens told his father Henry Laurens, then President of Congress, on 1 January 1778 that there was disgust over Conway's appointment. Whatever knowledge he possessed was irrelevant since his promotion to the position "has given a deep wound to the line of brigadiers." He told his father on the third that the most damning passage of Conway's letter to Gates read, "Heaven has been determined to save your country, or a weak general and bad counsellors would have ruined it."<sup>107</sup> Yet the President of Congress wrote to fellow member Issac Motte on the twenty-sixth, "I have seen the Letter this day (the 27th) it is true Genl. Washington was misinformed, the letter does not contain the words which had been reported to him, but ten times worse in every view."<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>For example, see his letter to Thomas Mifflin on 11 November 1777 in Gates Papers. There is nothing controversial in it.

<sup>107</sup>Laurens, Army Correspondence, pp. 100, 102.

<sup>108</sup>Burnett, Letters, 3:52.

Hamilton, far more bombastic, was still fuming on 13 February to George Clinton, "He is one of the vermin bred in the entrails of this chimera dire, and there does not exist a more villainous calumniator and incendiary."<sup>109</sup>

Accusation and recrimination followed. Washington's sense of balance was gone. He told Conway on 9 November about the controversial passage.<sup>110</sup> Conway informed Gates of his decision to submit his resignation since the campaigning season was at an end. Gates later told Conway that he was anxious to learn the source of the leak. He then asked Washington and wrote another letter to Henry Laurens. Conway finally told Gates that he could not discover which of two officers with Stirling and Mifflin had passed the extract of the letter, but Stirling had immediately given it to Washington. Wilkinson admitted his disloyalty but also said that the damning passage was not in the letter.<sup>111</sup>

That same day Washington repeated the supposed contents of the letter to Gates.<sup>112</sup> As late as May Washington made reference to "another impertinent Letter" from Conway dated

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<sup>109</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 1:428.

<sup>110</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:29.

<sup>111</sup>Letters, 18 November, 3, 8, and 11 December 1777; 4 January 1778, Gates Papers.

<sup>112</sup>Washington, Writings, 10:263-65.

23 April over the issue of a divisional command.<sup>113</sup>

Conway's career would soon be at an end.

The line commanders became involved as well. Lafayette assured Washington on 30 December that no one else could hold together the revolutionary army for even six months.<sup>114</sup> Sullivan commented on 3 January that while Conway admitted that he wrote a letter, Wilkinson assured him that no such paragraph existed.<sup>115</sup> Greene told relative Jacob Greene on 7 February about a "horrid faction" forming to ruin the Commander in Chief with Mifflin said to be at the head of it and Gates strongly suspected to favor it.<sup>116</sup> Throughout March well wishers, civilian and military, wrote Washington expressing their support and pleasure to learn that the conspiracy had failed.<sup>117</sup> On the eighteenth, Wilkinson expressed his resentment that an investigative board questioned his integrity. His response was to challenge Lord Stirling to a duel.<sup>118</sup>

Whether or not a concerted conspiracy existed to replace Washington in the winter of 1777-78 may never be known but

<sup>113</sup>Letter, 18 May 1778, Charles E. Hart Autograph Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. The addressee is not known but believed to be Gouverneur Morris.

<sup>114</sup>Lafayette, Memoirs, 1:136.

<sup>115</sup>Sullivan, Letters and Papers, 2:2.

<sup>116</sup>Greene, Papers, 2:277.

<sup>117</sup>Letters, March 1778 passim, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>118</sup>Letter, 18 March 1778, Gates Papers.

is in fact irrelevant. What mattered was that Washington's headquarters staff believed that one did. They communicated their fears and resentment to many line officers and to Washington himself. Worse, the bitter feelings which rocked the encampment at Valley Forge did not simply disappear with the supposed crushing of the alleged conspiracy. This simmering resentment would bedevil the general officers of the main army and affect their performance in the forthcoming Monmouth campaign.<sup>119</sup> Laurens even fought a duel with Lee after the Second in Command's court martial.<sup>120</sup>

Finally, the strain and immediacy of living and working at Headquarters generally promoted closeness among the members of Washington's military family and towards the boss himself.<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, more intimate details are largely lacking. One officer temporarily attached to Headquarters wrote little regarding daily routine on the personal staff but discoursed about topics ranging from Rome and the rise of Christianity to beekeeping.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup>See the discussion in Chapter Seven under "General Officers."

<sup>120</sup>See Hamilton, Papers, 1:602-4 for details. Hamilton was Laurens' second, so he left a "Narrative of an Affair of Honor between General Lee and Col Laurens".

<sup>121</sup>See Emily Stone Whiteley, Washington and His Aides-de-Camp (New York: Macmillan Co., 1936) for a survey. This dated work at least provides amusing anecdotal material.

<sup>122</sup>Theodore Woodbridge Diary.

However, not everyone was content nor did all believe Washington merited his fast-developing legendary reputation. The most significant "renegade" in this regard was Alexander Hamilton. His argument with the Commander in Chief over a perceived slight is not as significant as Hamilton's bitter explanation of the incident later. He told Philip Schuyler on 18 February 1781 that he had had reservations about "the General's" character nor had felt any friendship towards him over his three years of service at Headquarters. In another letter to James McHenry the same day, he referred to "The Great man" who would one day "repent his ill-humour."<sup>123</sup>

Perhaps more significant were Joseph Reed and Thomas Mifflin. Both served in Washington's family during the early war years yet became associated with anti-Washington factions later, the former within Congress itself and the latter with the Conway Cabal.

In summary, the Commander in Chief's personal staff was adequate for battlefield control. The ADCs demonstrated the ability to facilitate the Commander in Chief's control in action coolly and rationally, particularly demonstrated at Monmouth Courthouse. But they were too few to support Washington's multiple responsibilities. He trusted them implicitly, often permitting them to correspond directly with general officers commanding in the field over various issues. Their unquestioned loyalty to their superior was as

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<sup>123</sup>Hamilton, Papers, 2:563-67, 569.

commendable as it was firm. However, they were at times overprotective trying to shield him from criticism, resulting in serious feuds within the officer corps. The Conway Cabal remains the best example of this attitude.

The primary staff began as an imitation of British practice. The AG established a commendable record of providing the Commander in Chief with timely, accurate strength reports. Benjamin Tallmadge approximated the functions of a true G-2 but he was not the sole agent of Washington's often elaborate strategic and tactical intelligence operations. Intelligence functions were thus never completely systematized, though quite effective after 1778. The Quartermaster General fulfilled his stipulated duties of route reconaissance and camp site selection. But the main army's logistics services were clearly unable to support the line troops consistently and adequately. The QMG then had to devote more energy in this sphere at the expense of operational functions. Thus, other staff officers filled this power vacuum. The most important individual in this regard was clearly the Inspector General.

The logistical woes of the Quartermaster General did facilitate the development of the Inspector General as the preeminent staff officer of the army. But von Steuben's rise was due primarily due to his proven talents and obvious loyalty to Washington. The drillmaster's dominance should not lessen the clear success stories of other staffers: the Adjutant General's personnel accounting system, Tallmadge's

covert operations to obtain strategic intelligence, and the mapping feats of Erskine and his assistants.

A far more damaging effect in the long run than the ubiquitous food and equipment shortages was the continued demand for manpower from the line troops to help the staff execute their missions. These soldiers should have been with their regiments training to conduct linear warfare.

These failings among the logistics staff agencies fed a bitter rivalry between line and staff officers. In spite of the considerable mobility between command and staff positions, this tension created a damaging schism within the officer corps, one which matched the bitterness of the line officers versus the bureaus in the nineteenth century.

For all of these shortcomings, the main army did form an effective staff in the course of active campaigning which could match the professionalism of their European equivalents. This development perhaps underlined best the radical difference in the complexion and capability of Washington's army between 1775 and 1783.

## CHAPTER NINE

## SPECIAL AND AUXILIARY FORCES

The Continental Army and Corps d' Elite

The notion of elite troops in the Continental Army usually conjures up visions of sharpshooting riflemen. The mythology of the American Revolution has always held a special regard for the legendary marksmanship of the patriots, especially the deadly riflemen. The resurgence in studies of the war due to the Bicentennial went a long way to correct this misconception. Few historians today would dispute the minor role played by the riflemen in the struggle. Their reputation for accurate fire was often well deserved but the opportunity for them to shine was very limited. Perhaps their finest hour was at the two battles for Saratoga in 1777. The wilderness of upper New York State suited their tactics. So too did the composition of the patriot army, a true mix of regulars and militia.<sup>1</sup>

However, the rifle was not suited to the tactics of linear warfare. It was slow to load, giving it a third of the rate of fire of a musket. Moreover, it could not accommodate a bayonet. True marksmanship came only with much practice. Not too many dedicated the necessary time;

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<sup>1</sup>Significantly, both actions witnessed the successful use of militia as line infantry.

hence, few achieved notoriety with the weapon. A typical battle produced prodigious amounts of smoke which negated much of the range advantage anyway. The rifle was more fragile than a musket. Serviceability especially suffered when exposed to the elements.<sup>2</sup> The rifle was the product of a craftsman. Each was unique and came with its own bullet mold.<sup>3</sup> Ammunition compatability was thus non existent.

Two examples will show both the capabilities and limitations of riflemen in action. Certainly their greatest accomplishment was the sniping of Brig. Gen. Simon Fraser, who fell mortally wounded after a marksman's third shot at Bemis Heights at an estimated range of three hundred yards.<sup>4</sup> Yet when "Light-Horse Harry" Lee resisted the British crossing at Reedy's Fork on 6 March 1781, he posted twenty-five riflemen with one sole purpose: shoot Lt. Col. James Webster. When he came within what was point-blank range, all of them fired; eight or nine got off a second round. Not one hit Webster who seemed to live a charmed life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Col. John W. Wright, "The Rifle in the American Revolution," American Historical Review 29 (January 1924):295, 298-99.

<sup>3</sup>See Peterson, Handbook of the Continental Soldier, pp. 40-44 for details of these weapons.

<sup>4</sup>See Mark Mayo Boatner, III, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution, Bicentennial ed. (New York: David McKay Co., 1974), p. 754 and Rupert Furneaux, The Battle of Saratoga (New York: Stein & Day, 1971; reprint ed., 1983), p. 235 for a discussion of this incident.

<sup>5</sup>H. Lee, Memoirs, 1:325-26. Webster ran out of luck at Guilford Courthouse.

While historians have generally laid to rest the legend of the riflemen, much discussion persists over the critical importance of light infantry and skirmishing tactics. For example, one account states that British officers Maj. Robert Rogers with his green-coated rangers and Lt. Col. Henri Boquet with the Sixtieth Regiment in skirmish operations during the French and Indian War influenced numerous American commanders of the Revolution, including Washington himself.<sup>6</sup> Another view believes that the British never adapted adequately to colonial conditions.<sup>7</sup>

The American wilderness was certainly excellent country in which light infantry and rangers could operate independently. War on the frontiers often took this form between small numbers of regular troops supported by skirmishing militia, rangers, and Indians. For example, Washington told Gov. George Clinton on 16 August 1777 that he sent Col. Daniel Morgan with his rifle regiment to reinforce Gates' Northern Army primarily to counter the Indians believed to be with the invading British forces in quantity.<sup>8</sup> But the main army and the Continentals in the various departments were usually fighting a different kind

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<sup>6</sup>Maj. James H. Silcox, Jr., "Rogers and Boquet: The Origins of American Light Infantry," Military Review (December 1985):64.

<sup>7</sup>Eric Robson, "British Light Infantry in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: The Effect of American Conditions," The Army Quarterly and Defence Journal 63 (January 1952):221.

<sup>8</sup>Washington, Writings, 9:78.

of war. Hence, Washington continued to develop a Continental Army capable of conducting formal linear warfare. Even its best units, the Corps of Light Infantry, were meant to fight the British with linear tactics.

The Corps gained its greatest successes and renown not as skirmish troops but rather as assault troops. They thus functioned as much as grenadiers as light infantry. These elite troops were certainly capable of engaging the enemy with skirmish tactics. Yet after 1778 their light-infantry functions became far less pronounced than their ability to storm fortified enemy positions.

Tracing the evolution of American elite troops is as much an adventure as the soldiers' exploits. Their history is a disjointed one. While their origins clearly rested with the famous riflemen, their ultimate direction in terms of function would be far different.

Congress authorized numerous units of riflemen and rangers in 1775-76. Some were autonomous units of battalion strength. Others were independent companies. Some rifle companies were part of an otherwise musket-armed battalion.<sup>9</sup> The first Continental troops raised as such were ten independent companies of riflemen: six from Pennsylvania, two from Maryland, and two from Virginia. Congress authorized them on 14 June 1775. Within a month the ten

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<sup>9</sup>This assortment of light troops is covered throughout Wright, Continental Army. Only highlights of those units intended to accompany the main army are discussed here.

became thirteen, the additional companies coming from Pennsylvania whose men now formed a battalion.<sup>10</sup> These latter formed the famous First Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment.<sup>11</sup> The Maryland and Virginia companies became a battalion as well on 17 June 1776. Ten days later Congress augmented them with six more companies.<sup>12</sup>

The significance of these units was in fact their short active service life. The First Pennsylvania's fate remains uncertain. It may or may not have gradually phased out its rifles for muskets.<sup>13</sup> Their comrades from Virginia, Maryland, and Connecticut were virtually annihilated during the fall of Fort Washington. The Commander in Chief, moreover, appeared to be in no great hurry to replace them.

The main army and the departments relied on ad-hoc formations of riflemen and skirmishers for the rest of the war almost without exception. For example, Heath ordered three companies of rangers formed for his division, one per brigade.<sup>14</sup> Morgan's famous group was drawn from various line units between 1 and 13 June 1777. Moreover, Washington

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<sup>10</sup>Ford, Journals, 2:89, 104, 173.

<sup>11</sup>Consult Lt. Col. Oscar H. Stroh, USA, (Ret.) Thompson's Battalion and/or the First Continental Regiment (Harrisburg, Pa.: Graphics Services, 1975) for a regimental history.

<sup>12</sup>Ford, Journals, 5:452, 486.

<sup>13</sup>Secondary sources are both vague and contradictory. Primary sources examined to date do not address the issue.

<sup>14</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 18 October 1776.

had to to issue instructions to commanders requiring them to turn in rifles to Morgan's new unit in exchange for muskets. If there were not enough rifles to equip all of Morgan's men, Washington granted permission to buy the rest locally.<sup>15</sup> When he arrived at the Northern Army, Morgan assisted a three-hundred-man detachment of musket-armed light infantry under Maj. Henry Dearborn.<sup>16</sup> Gates told Morgan that he had formed them in the same ad-hoc manner.<sup>17</sup> During the Monmouth campaign, Morgan's Light Corps contained six hundred men.<sup>18</sup> Approximately half were his riflemen. He received an additional twenty-five men from each brigade authorized by Washington. The North Carolina brigade contributed its two light companies instead.<sup>19</sup> Eighty rank and file with a captain from the Commander in Chief's Guard also joined Morgan.<sup>20</sup> These soldiers functioned as detached

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<sup>15</sup>Washington, Writings, 8:156, 236-37.

<sup>16</sup>Henry Dearborn, Revolutionary War Journals of Henry Dearborn, 1775-83, ed. Lloyd A. Brown and Howard H. Peckham, Era of the American Revolution Series, ed. Leonard W. Levy (Chicago: Caxton Club, 1939; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), pp. 104.

<sup>17</sup>Letter, 29 August 1777, Gates Papers.

<sup>18</sup>Washington, Writings, 12:140.

<sup>19</sup>Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington's Connecticut Brigade Orderly Book no. 61, 22 June 1778.

<sup>20</sup>Elijah Fisher Diary cited in Carlos E. Godfrey, M.D., The Commander-in-Chief's Guard, Revolutionary War (Washington, D.C.: n.p., 1904; reprint ed., Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co., 1972), p. 60.

skirmishers. They harassed the retreating British column along with the New Jersey militia.<sup>21</sup>

The Continentals reorganized their battalion structure to nine companies with one of light infantry very gradually. Congress authorized the creation of these light companies on 27 May 1778.<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, the main army was unable to reorganize the infantry prior to the Monmouth campaign. Light companies were still being organized over a year after the Congressional authorization.<sup>23</sup>

Once established after the return to New York, the Corps became a permanent feature of the main army as well as its major detachments. Washington grouped the light companies together for active operations. They usually returned to their parent regiments at the end of the campaigning season for winter quarters. For example, all light infantry were ordered back to their respective regiments at the end of the 1779 campaign.<sup>24</sup> The next winter the corps broke up on 30 November 1780.<sup>25</sup> The entire chain of command from the Commander in Chief to battalion commanders emphasized the

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<sup>21</sup>Morgan's command technically belonged to Lee's advance guard. The latter's command and control over Morgan, however, was tenuous at best.

<sup>22</sup>Ford, Journals, 11:538-39.

<sup>23</sup>Wright, Continental Army, explains the process in his organizational section of each state line.

<sup>24</sup>Col. Philip van Cortlandt's Second New York Regiment of 1777 Orderly Book no. 101, 3 December 1779.

<sup>25</sup>Thacher, Military Journal, p. 233.

elite nature of these soldiers. Selections reflected on the "good of the Service and Honor of the Regiment."<sup>26</sup> Only light infantry could wear red and black feathers.<sup>27</sup>

However, the demand to keep the light companies up to strength put a significant burden on the line regiments which were always short recruits. For example, Muhlenburg's Brigade was required to make good all losses in its light companies. In spite of scant resources, all brigades were expected to fill up the light infantry.<sup>28</sup> As a result, the Corps of Light Infantry did not consist simply of one light company of authorized strength from each regiment as per the regulations. These levies on the line were not necessarily equal but rather proportioned based on parent unit strength. A breakdown of Nixon's, Peterson's, Learned's, and the North Carolina Brigades showed this practice. The next day one regiment stated its inability to field a complete light company; it could provide only a portion.<sup>29</sup>

Washington formed a new light division on 16 July 1780 and wanted each regiment to contribute twenty rank and file.<sup>30</sup> This figure was, however, a guideline. A

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<sup>26</sup>Numbered Record Books, 40/79-80.

<sup>27</sup>General von Steuben's Division, 29 August 1780, N.Y. and N.J. (American), Early American Orderly Book Collection, no. 121, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>28</sup>Col. Josiah Starr's First Connecticut Regiment of 1777 Orderly Book no. 83, 10 July 1780.

<sup>29</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 28-29 July 1779.

<sup>30</sup>Washington, Writings, 19:188-89.

regiment's exact contribution would be proportional to its numbers.<sup>31</sup> Von Steuben recommended forty-two rank and file per company.<sup>32</sup> Early in 1781 the companies contained twenty-five rank and file "for the present."<sup>33</sup> As discussed above in Chapter Six, the Inspector General's office reserved the right to reject any man upon inspection, in this case the Assistant Inspector.<sup>34</sup> The quota became fifty rank and file within two weeks.<sup>35</sup> On 19 August the Connecticut Line had to contribute fifty rank and file as well.<sup>36</sup> One light company fluctuated between forty-six and fifty-five rank and file over a three-month period.<sup>37</sup>

The Corps came into its own in 1779. Von Steuben recommended the formation of two-battalion regiments. Each battalion would contain four companies.<sup>38</sup> Washington ordered the establishment of sixteen light companies into four battalions drawn from three divisions on 15 June. The battalions would consist of one each of Pennsylvania,

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<sup>31</sup>Numbered Record Books, 40/79.

<sup>32</sup>"Plan for the Formation of the Light Infantry," Letter Book, 1780, von Steuben Papers.

<sup>33</sup>William Torrey Orderly Book, 1 February 1781.

<sup>34</sup>Numbered Record Books, 49/41.

<sup>35</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 16 February 1781.

<sup>36</sup>Numbered Record Books, 54/165-66.

<sup>37</sup>Rufus Putnam Weekly Returns, 25 October 1782-14 January 1783, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

<sup>38</sup>"Formation of the Army," von Steuben Papers.

Maryland, and Virginia men and the fourth of both Pennsylvanians and Virginians.<sup>39</sup>

By 1 August 1780 the Corps consisted of eight-company battalions. There were three battalions in a brigade. The entire force could field two brigades. Lafayette received the prestigious command.<sup>40</sup> He told the Vicomte de Noailles on 2 September that he had eighteen hundred rank and file.<sup>41</sup> In 1782 the Corps reassembled in late August. It consisted of five battalions, each with four companies. Four of the battalions were combined into two regiments.<sup>42</sup>

Such an ad-hoc organization did present several problems. The troops lacked the staff support of their parent units. For example, Wayne, who commanded the distinguished group in 1779, complained that the entire Corps suffered from problems in the sphere of Quartermasters. His officers proposed the creation of brigade quartermasters who would forward copies of all transactions to the line.<sup>43</sup>

Continental commanders came to rely upon these troops to execute a wide array of tasks deemed particularly important. American light infantry were thus able to perform a

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<sup>39</sup>Washington, Writings, 15:283.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 19:299, 303.

<sup>41</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters and Papers, 3:156-57.

<sup>42</sup>Numbered Record Books, 64/41-44.

<sup>43</sup>Letter, 4 July 1779, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

multitude of missions. The conduct of skirmish operations was just one of many of their talents. For example, in 1778 all units had to form a contingent of light infantry from the best officers and men to function as a "quick-reaction" force of sorts.<sup>44</sup> The next year a mixed body of scouts consisting of eight musketeers with twelve riflemen preceded Sullivan's expedition when they found the Indian town of Carrough.<sup>45</sup> One light-infantry detachment of 150 rank and file collected a day's provisions and prepared to move out the next day on a special mission.<sup>46</sup> Lafayette's command in 1780 boasted support from four guns, one hundred riflemen, and Lee's Legion of three hundred men, half infantry and half mounted.<sup>47</sup> It was thus a task force of all arms. Morgan used his Maryland and Delaware light infantry as crack line infantry at Cowpens on 17 January 1781 -- with chilling success in British eyes.<sup>48</sup>

The most famous exploits of the Corps of Light Infantry remain their assaults on Stony Point on 15 July 1779 and Redoubt Number Ten at Yorktown on 14 October 1781. Wayne's corps in 1779 heavily outnumbered the British defenders but the enemy was well fortified with artillery support in

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<sup>44</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 8 August 1778.

<sup>45</sup>Stephen Griffing Journal, 12 September 1779.

<sup>46</sup>Ephraim Stearns Orderly Book, 10 August 1780.

<sup>47</sup>Lafayette, Selected Letters and Papers, 3:156-57.

<sup>48</sup>See the discussion of this action in Chapter Five.

detached redoubts with a double line of abatis on a small peninsula which became an island at high tide. The terrain was extremely rough.<sup>49</sup> The light infantrymen braved the swamps in the middle of the night, outflanked the defenses, and attacked with unloaded muskets and fixed bayonets. Moreover, despite the confusion of a night attack, the American soldiers exhibited tight discipline. There was no massacre of enemy wounded nor prisoners.<sup>50</sup>

At Yorktown Lafayette's s Light Division organized an assault of a forward British redoubt. Again, the Americans heavily outnumbered the foe but had to penetrate field fortifications in the dead of night and traverse ground torn up by the besiegers' artillery fire.<sup>51</sup> The redoubt was far more imposing than anything at Stony Point.<sup>52</sup> The assault troops repeated their feat of attacking with fixed bayonets and unloaded muskets. They carried the position in record

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<sup>49</sup>The author surveyed the battlefield in August 1990 and May 1991. It has lost none of its ruggedness.

<sup>50</sup>The standard reference for specific details remains Henry P. Johnston, The Storming of Stony Point on the Hudson, Midnight, July 15, 1779: Its Importance in the Light of Unpublished Documents, Era of the American Revolution Series, ed. Leonard W. Levy (New York: John T. White & Co., 1900; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press. 1971).

<sup>51</sup>Martin, Narrative, pp. 235-36 said the large holes in the ground could fit an ox. Martin participated in the attack as a member of the Sappers and Miners.

<sup>52</sup>The author traversed the terrain in June 1986. The redoubt has been reconstructed.

time and maintained their tradition of firm discipline. There were no atrocities against the prisoners.<sup>53</sup>

These missions were hardly typical for light troops. In Europe such tasks went to the crack grenadiers. The Corps of Light Infantry demonstrated more than the high level of tactical articulation attained by the Continentals after 1777. The Corps was also proof that the patriots had produced elite troops which could conquer enemy line infantry and even challenge the cream of the European armies in America. The proficiency of the Corps of Light Infantry as elite troops negated any need for a separate contingent of grenadiers. Washington did contemplate the creation of a separate corps of grenadiers. Gates forwarded such a plan from Col. Richard Humpton.<sup>54</sup> Washington responded on the twenty-eighth that any scheme for grenadiers would have to wait until the line regiments were up to strength.<sup>55</sup> The idea never progressed further; it had become superfluous.

Their double role as light troops and grenadiers in fact copied standard British practice. His Majesty's commanders frequently used their light infantry in a dual role as well.

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<sup>53</sup>A large number of sources discuss the siege and this foray. Among the best is Henry P. Johnston, The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis, 1781, Era of the American Revolution Series, ed. Leonard W. Levy (New York: Harper & Bros., 1881; reprint ed., New York: Da Capo Press, 1971).

<sup>54</sup>Letter, 19 April 1777, Washington Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>55</sup>Washington, Writings, 7:486.

Probably the best example of British light infantry executing a grenadier mission was their assault along the beach against the New Hampshire men at Bunker Hill on 17 June 1775. This Anglo-American habit was not generally followed by the other armies of the time. European forces could call on the services of a host of grenadier and guard units to perform assault missions without relying on their relatively few and specialized light troops.

Hence, the emphasis of historians on light infantry and skirmishing in the tactical operations of the war has been grossly exaggerated, both in the context of the Continentals specifically and the Revolution's influence upon the art of war in general. Washington's determination in forging a true eighteenth-century army did indeed pay rich dividends. The tactical articulation achieved by the Continental Line after 1777 and the high state of combat readiness shown by the Corps of Light Infantry demonstrated categorically that by 1779 there was little difference in combat skills among the antagonists on both sides. By the latter half of the war each army had to struggle to maintain its effectiveness in light of losses and insufficient replacements.

Experiences at the operational and tactical levels of war in America merely reinforced contemporary trends. The patriots' enemies functioned every bit as well in such encounters. The relatively poor showing of the British flank companies during the Concord operation merely reinforces the view of historian J. A. Houlding on the poor

state of training in the peacetime British Army.<sup>56</sup> The inadequacy revealed itself in the very first action. Conversely, an interesting contrast is the British triumph over superior numbers of inexperienced French troops at La Vigie on St. Lucia in October 1778, a victory due in large measure to their battle-hardened light troops.<sup>57</sup> Even the supposedly dense-brained Germans adapted quickly. Jäger Captain Ewald noted the mixed use of jägers and grenadiers on patrol as early as December 1776.<sup>58</sup> Von Krafft mentioned his joining an-hoc chasseur company of some one hundred men drawn from eleven regiments on 25 July 1778.<sup>59</sup>

Furthermore, Washington used his line regiments but little in his war of posts around New York City. Such duty went to either the light infantry to maintain skirmishing skills or to one of the various legions composed of mixed horse and foot. The four Continental cavalry regiments turned legions after 1780 could serve better in this role.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Houlding, Fit for Service, pp. x, 388-94.

<sup>57</sup>The best discussion of this action is in the classic Hon. J. W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, 13 vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1899-1930), 3:268-71 and Reginald Hargreaves, The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean, 1655-1783 (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1968), pp. 323-24.

<sup>58</sup>Ewald, Diary of the American War, pp. 35, 39, 43.

<sup>59</sup>Von Krafft, Journal, p. 56.

<sup>60</sup>Ford, Journals, 18:960. Congress' legislation on 3 October 1780 became effective with the new year.

The Commander in Chief's Guard has entered none of the preceding discussion because it was not a typical guard unit. Washington formed it on 11 March 1776 by taking four men from each line regiment. He had to reraise it on 30 April 1777 with levies from four Virginia regiments. On 17 March 1778 he augmented them with one hundred men from the line to form the model company for von Steuben, its sole claim to fame. It did fight in battle but its principal role was to protect Headquarters, Washington's person, and important public papers.<sup>61</sup> The final demand on the line for manpower was in 1780, two men from each regiment.<sup>62</sup>

The eliteness of this bodyguard is also questionable given the discovery in June 1776 that two guardsmen were involved in a plot to assassinate all the staff officers and blow the magazines in collusion with Tory Governor Tryon from Connecticut. A third soldier betrayed the plan.<sup>63</sup> Massachusetts troops replaced the Guard on 6 June 1783.<sup>64</sup> It never achieved the same notoriety as the Light Infantry.

In summary, the principal difference between the Continental and European armies was their origins. In a sense the participants came from opposite poles of experience. The Continentals were striving to systematize

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<sup>61</sup>Washington, Writings, 4:387-88; 7:494-95; 11:98.

<sup>62</sup>Second Pennsylvania Orderly Book, 19 March 1780, Continental Army MSS.

<sup>63</sup>Force, American Archives, 4th ser., 6:1054.

<sup>64</sup>General Orders, 1782-83, p. 86.

their methods and achieve credible states of professionalization. The European armies had to dust off the combat experience of the last war and break away from the ossifying effects of the intervening peace. That both sides succeeded is perhaps the foremost lesson of the war.

### Cavalry

The subject of cavalry and its support of the main army has been a controversial topic for many decades. Historians throughout the twentieth century have criticised Washington's handling of cavalry. One early view stated that the Commander in Chief lacked the mental alertness to recognize the need for and proper use of mounted troops.<sup>65</sup> A second decried the inability of the army to win the war without a balanced force.<sup>66</sup> Yet another pointed out how no cavalry was formed until the war was twenty months old.<sup>67</sup>

Cavalry was by far the weakest link in the main army's combined arms team.<sup>68</sup> Placing the blame for this

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<sup>65</sup>Charles Francis Adams, Studies, Military and Diplomatic, 1775-1865 (New York: MacMillan Co., 1911), pp. 60, 72.

<sup>66</sup>Col. Glenn I. Epperson and James P. Simpson, "The American Revolutionary War: Battle Order of the Cavalry I," Daughters of the American Revolution Magazine, December 1968, p. 819.

<sup>67</sup>Donald Vincent Lockey, "Cavalry of the Continental Army during the American Revolution, 1775-1783," M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1971, p. 102.

<sup>68</sup>The standard monograph on the patriots' four regular cavalry regiments remains Burt Garfield Loescher, Washington's Eyes: The Continental Light Dragoons (Fort Collins, Col.: Old Army Press, 1977).

shortcoming upon Washington's shoulders is far too simplistic. One must examine the issue within the context of specific operations. The positional warfare of the siege of Boston in 1775-76 hardly had occasion to reveal a need for horse soldiers. The New York campaign was another matter. The raw state of the army was already a cause of concern. Washington's prompt return home of the Connecticut volunteer cavalry unit was a frank admission that they would be more of a liability than an asset.<sup>69</sup> Capt. Alexander Graydon of the Third Pennsylvania has left an illuminating description of them. He labeled them true irregulars. They were composed of old-fashioned men, probably farmers and heads of families. Most were middle-aged but many were "beyond the meridian of life" dressed as if in the last war. Fowling pieces largely substituted for sabers and carbines. They marched as a gaggle dangerously extended. They lacked forage. As knights of old, they disdained dismounted work and other duties.<sup>70</sup> Is it any wonder that the Commander in Chief declined their services?

He did understand the value of a body of cavalry and wrote enthusiastically to the President of Congress on 21 June concerning a troop of forty horsemen offered by Capt. John Leary, Jr. Washington pointed out their utility on the

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<sup>69</sup>See his gentle letter of 9 July to Connecticut's Governor explaining his actions. Washington, Writings, 5:240.

<sup>70</sup>Graydon, Memoirs, pp. 155-56.

march for reconnaissance and intelligence gathering and hoped that the offer of a second troop was possible. On 11 December he wrote the President of Congress about the value of Sheldon's Volunteer Horse. "From the Experience I have had this campaign, of the Utility of Horse, I am convinced there is no carrying on the War without them, . . ." <sup>71</sup>

He demonstrated this understanding in the Philadelphia campaign. The main army did not lack cavalry, though one may criticize their handling. Washington controlled them closely and their meager numbers meant that they were spread out thinly at Brandywine. They could not be both the army's eyes and ears as well as a viable battlefield instrument. Yet surviving correspondence from the day of the battle showed that Col. Theodorick Bland of the First Continental Light Dragoons provided sufficient warning to both Washington and Sullivan about the British presence on the American right. <sup>72</sup> The ensuing defeat was not the fault of deficient cavalry reconnaissance.

The Monmouth campaign in the summer of 1778 witnessed Washington's worst use of cavalry. He ordered the Second Continental Light Dragoons to join Gates' army on 29 May. <sup>73</sup> Troop returns for the First, Third and Fourth Continental

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<sup>71</sup>Washington, Writings, 5:163-64; 6:350. Sheldon's unit became the Second Continental Light Dragoons.

<sup>72</sup>Letter, 11 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>73</sup>Washington, Writings, 11:481-82.

Light Dragoons with the main army are lacking for both May and June 1778.<sup>74</sup> One historian has estimated this body of horse at two to three hundred men.<sup>75</sup> This group could have had a powerful effect on the battlefield on 28 June. Instead of preserving this combat power, Washington dissipated it by detaching it as part of the forces harassing the British withdrawal. Indeed, Maj. Gen. Philemon Dickinson reported that the small number of American horse could not stand their ground before the enemy superiority in numbers of mounted troops.<sup>76</sup> Yet Washington worsened this dispersal on 24 June by telling Dickinson that Lt. Col. Anthony W. White's Fourth Light Dragoon contingent would join the detachment under Brigadier Scott.<sup>77</sup>

The main army's war of posts in the North from the summer of 1778 to the end of the war suffered from the economic and financial weakness of the patriots. The cavalry naturally fared the worst. Washington's desire to employ cavalry was thus even more constrained than with his line regiments. The Continental Light Dragoons were

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<sup>74</sup>Lesser, Sinews of War, pp. 68-70, 72-74.

<sup>75</sup>Theodore Thayer, The Making of a Scapegoat: Washington and Lee at Monmouth, National University Publications Series in American Studies, ed. James P. Shenton (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1976), p. 45.

<sup>76</sup>James McHenry Papers, 22 June 1778.

<sup>77</sup>Washington, Writings, 12:113. The correspondence does not state clearly whether White's group represented the entire regiment. It probably did since White was de facto unit commander. Col. Stephen Moylan was functioning as Commander of Cavalry in the wake of Pulaski's resignation.

particularly sensitive to the patriots' mounting fiscal woes. The price of horses skyrocketed; fodder became scarcer. The Board of War had to forbid the seizure of horses on 12 June 1778 as a solution which violated the freedom and sovereignty of the people.<sup>78</sup> The conversion of the four regiments of Continental Light Dragoons into Legionary Corps of horse and foot effective 1 January 1781 rested upon economic and operational considerations both.<sup>79</sup>

Under the circumstances the Commander in Chief made the best of conditions ill suited to the raising of large numbers of cavalry. The army's regular cavalry did all that could be expected of them. One must bear in mind that the enemy with their far healthier economic situation never fielded more than two British light dragoon regiments and they sent one back to England after the withdrawal to New York in July 1778.<sup>80</sup> Both sides had to supplement the regulars with numbers of locally-raised horse soldiers till war's end. Chief engineer Duportail noted to the Comte de St. Germain that the British could not follow up their victories because they had so little cavalry.<sup>81</sup> A study of British cavalry operations further concluded that Northern

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<sup>78</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 84/70/273-75.

<sup>79</sup>Ford, Journals, 18:960.

<sup>80</sup>Katcher, Encyclopedia of British, Provincial, and German Units, pp. 21, 24.

<sup>81</sup>Letter, 12 November 1777, Revolutionary War Miscellaneous Collection, Military History Institute Research Collection, Carlisle Barracks, Pa.

operations were limited by a lack of horses and forage, American harassment, inadequate leadership, and the army's confined position. The Southern campaign witnessed active and successful cavalry operations.<sup>82</sup>

Unfortunately, Washington did not suppress a trend of detaching cavalrymen for miscellaneous duties. It became a baneful habit of the Continental Army for the duration of the war. For example, two days before the Battle of Brandywine, Peters wrote Washington about the need to conform to a Congressional resolution regarding speedy intelligence. The Board of War lacked the means so the Commander in Chief would have to employ troopers from Bland's and Sheldon's Regiments as express riders.<sup>83</sup>

Perhaps the presence of a single cavalry commander could have eliminated this pernicious practice. The appointment of Brig. Gen. Casimir Pulaski as Commander of Horse on 15 September 1777 was intended to concentrate the cavalry as a powerful battlefield command.<sup>84</sup> But Pulaski was a combative individual intent on squeezing as much prerogative as possible from his appointment. Washington had to tell him on 1 March 1778 that he had to obey the orders of superiors based on date of rank, regardless of branch. Pulaski

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<sup>82</sup>Eldon L. Jones, "British Cavalry in the American War of Independence," M.A. thesis, Duke University, 1965, p. 2.

<sup>83</sup>Letter, 9 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>84</sup>Ford, Journals, 8:745.

resigned sometime in mid month. Washington then placed Col. Stephen Moylan of the Fourth Continental Dragoons in temporary charge of the cavalry.<sup>85</sup> But he never found an effective replacement. The cavalry never recovered from the lack of a single directing head. The early appointment of Lt. Col. Augustus Mottin de la Balme as Inspector of Cavalry on 8 July 1777 was no substitute<sup>86</sup>. The horse remained a branch of penny packets and detachments.<sup>87</sup>

### Artillery

The Continental artillery was without a doubt the greatest American success story of the entire war -- surprisingly so. By the mid-eighteenth century gunners were well established as one of the scientific branches along with the engineers. Indeed, in the British Army these two officer groups did not purchase their commissions.<sup>88</sup> The colonies lacked virtually any experience in this sphere. The poor showing of the artillery under Col. Richard Gridley

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<sup>85</sup>Letter, 20 March 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>86</sup>Ford, Journals, 8:539.

<sup>87</sup>Before judging too harshly, historians should bear in mind that such was the fate of the United States Cavalry throughout its history until the formation of the Cavalry Corps by Maj. Gen. Joseph Hooker in May 1863.

<sup>88</sup>The Royal Military Academy, Woolwich educated artillery and engineer officers since its establishment by Royal Warrant of 30 April 1741. Harley, "The Spread of Cartographical Ideas," p. 54.

at Bunker Hill presaged chronic problems in this branch until his replacement by Knox as of 17 November 1775.<sup>89</sup>

The bookseller Knox did not have practical experience but brought a solid theoretical knowledge as well as a flair for improvisation to the position. Not many officers would have attempted to drag guns from Fort Ticonderoga to Boston in the midst of a Northern winter. Yet he successfully brought fifty-five brass and iron pieces to the main army at Boston, thus allowing Washington to bring the siege to a favorable conclusion.<sup>90</sup>

Knox worked with Washington and Congressional officials throughout the war to forge a self-sufficient branch capable of providing powerful support to the line infantry. For example, he spoke with Congressional commissioners about essential reforms. Knox wanted to establish laboratories with large stocks away from the seat of war where artificers could construct items like gun carriages and ammunition wagons but also close to a large-scale foundry. He also called for the founding of an ordnance board and a school similar to Woolwich where officers could learn the fundamentals of gunnery and fortifications.<sup>91</sup> On 28 November 1776 Congress finally authorized the establishment

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<sup>89</sup>Gridley remained in service until 1 January 1781 as a colonel of engineers. Heitman, Register of Officers; p. 262.

<sup>90</sup>Henry Knox Papers, 15 November 1775-24 January 1776, New-York Historical Society, New York, N.Y.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 31 September 1776.

of an artillery yard which would function as a training center for all artillerymen.<sup>92</sup> He was also making his case for greater pay for gunners, an increase of 25 percent, due to their detached duty directly with the line infantry.<sup>93</sup>

He wrote to Washington about his belief that the American artillery chief should be as autonomous as the British Master General of the Ordnance.<sup>94</sup> Yet the resolution of Congress dated 12 February 1778 gave him no control over the design nor procurement of guns, fuses, portfires, and other accessories.<sup>95</sup> On 30 December he complained again about the authority vested in the Commissary General of Military Stores. Knox was powerless to affect preparations prior to the start of a campaign yet was responsible for the artillery's performance in the field.<sup>96</sup>

For all his perceived "empire building," Knox fulfilled his pledge to give the line infantry close fire support. For example, artillery returns for the main army from 16 and 22 January and 21 March 1777 listed the available guns with their respective brigades of the line. These guns were a

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<sup>92</sup>Ford, Journals, 6:987.

<sup>93</sup>Knox Papers, ? December 1776, NYHS.

<sup>94</sup>The British Master General of Ordnance (MGO) controlled both the artillery and engineers and was independent from the Commander in Chief.

<sup>95</sup>Letter, 15 June 1778, Washington Papers, Charlottesville.

<sup>96</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 57/43/137.

mixture of brass and iron pieces but were all light pieces, three or six pounders and the odd howitzer. They were still an integral element of a brigadier's combat strength.

Returns for West Point and vicinity in early 1781 showed the addition of four and nine pounders, probably the fruits of imports and prizes taken from the British.<sup>97</sup>

Knox provided the same quality support to the Commander in Chief at the strategic level of war. When Washington persisted in his desire to attack New York City in 1781, Knox prepared an estimate of necessary ordnance. He listed 68 guns between 12 and 32 pounder, 36 mortars of 5 to 13 inches, 18 5 1/2 or 8 inch howitzers, and a staggering 1,140,400 pounds of powder.<sup>98</sup>

The former bookseller was also open to innovation. A drawing depicted "A Carriage for a Cannon if the trunnions be broken off." An undated letter to Knox from 1778 with an illustration discussed Saxe's Reveries and a half pounder gun capable of firing up to four thousand paces.<sup>99</sup> Two undated memoranda reveal his intent to reprint the famous

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<sup>97</sup>Returns, March-April 1781, Knox Papers, NYHS. The French Valliere system semi-standardized four and eight pounders. The British preferred three and nine pounders. Homogenous batteries composed of guns of the same type did not become typical until the American Civil War. Until then, mixed batteries of guns and howitzers were common.

<sup>98</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 188/169/8/55-56.

<sup>99</sup>Knox Papers, 1 March 1777 and ? 1778, NYHS.

artillery manual by Mueller and distribute copies throughout the army to include some militia.<sup>100</sup>

The tireless senior gunner sought constant improvement in his branch. Thus, while the main army wintered at Valley Forge, artillery officers compiled a table of "Ranges and Altitudes of Cannon Balls" for more effective fires.<sup>101</sup> A two-page report entitled "Ammunition and Apparatus necessary for the the following ordnance" tallied a "basic load" of ammunition and powder as well as tools. Three and six pounders carried 23 percent of the load as case versus solid shot. Another paper tallied the stores needed for two ten-inch mortars with one hundred shells.<sup>102</sup> His involvement in such matters could become extremely technical. For example, he conducted a laborious correspondence with a Major Shaw and Capt. Sebastian Bauman. The subject concerned thin bottoms on sample shells and carcasses manufactured at the furnaces of Messrs. Foench and Ogden.<sup>103</sup>

Washington complimented the Continental Artillery after the Battle of Monmouth for their superlative support as

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<sup>100</sup>"Proposals for Printing by Subscription Muller's Treatise on Artillery" and "List of Subscribers for Muller's Treatise on Artillery," Papers of the Continental Congress, 51/41/7/10-17.

<sup>101</sup>Sebastian Bauman Papers, 6 March 1778.

<sup>102</sup>Knox Papers, 7 January 1780, NYHS. Case shot was similar to cannister. See the introduction in Chapter One.

<sup>103</sup>Sebastian Bauman Papers, October and November 1779 passim. Carcasses were incendiary shells.

testified by enemy observation.<sup>104</sup> The respected von Steuben noted on 4 July 1779 that Knox ". . . thoroughly understands his trade, and fills his present position with much credit."<sup>105</sup> This praise was well deserved. Washington did not have the problems with the artillery which dogged his efforts to create a strong cavalry arm.

### Engineers

Washington could not draw on the talents of a native American for the command of a corps of engineers. Moreover, these men required multiple talents. In addition to their scientific knowledge, they needed combat skills to accompany the line infantry in assaults on fortified positions. The British service provided little inspiration with its small group of engineers.<sup>106</sup> Congress approved the creation of a body of engineers on 27 December 1776 and three separate companies of enlisted sappers and miners on 27 May 1778.<sup>107</sup> The Commander in Chief had reason to be dissatisfied, however. The two organizations did not function well, either together or as separate entities. The officers dallied and disagreed over the construction of

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<sup>104</sup>Brig. Gen. Jedediah Huntington's Connecticut Brigade Orderly Book no. 61, 29 June 1778.

<sup>105</sup>Stone, Letters from Hessian and Brunswick Officers, p. 253.

<sup>106</sup>The British Royal Engineers was a very small corps of strictly officers.

<sup>107</sup>Ford, Journals, 8:380, 11:541-42.

fortifications at West Point for months on end.<sup>108</sup> The demands of daily operations in 1777 and 1778 also precluded an effective integration of the two groups.

Col. Louis Lebeque Duportail became Chief of Engineers on 22 July 1777.<sup>109</sup> His appointment did not please Washington immediately. When he needed field works to guard the fords across the Schuylkill, he told John Armstrong to build them quickly with the assistance of the engineer officers "& the whole of them should be rather calculated for Dispatch than any unnecessary Decorations or Regularity which Engineers are frequently too fond of." He then ordered Duportail to take orders from Armstrong and execute the works speedily.<sup>110</sup>

The American engineer officers also complained to Greene in February 1779 and then Congress about a lack of authority over their soldiers.<sup>111</sup> Congress admitted the poor showing of the "Artificers" on 1 May 1779 by publishing the criticisms of the Board of War. They could not afford the

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<sup>108</sup>For details about this ongoing project see Lt. Col. Dave Richard Palmer, The River and the Rock: The History of Fortress West Point, 1775-1783, The West Point Military History Library, ed. Col. Thomas E. Greiss and Jay Luvaas (New York: Greenwood Publishing Corp., 1969).

<sup>109</sup>Ford, Journals, 8:571.

<sup>110</sup>Letter, 14 September 1777, Washington Papers, Charlottesville. He was probably dealing with the John Armstrong who was a former brigadier of Continentals who switched to Pennsylvania militia service.

<sup>111</sup>Papers of the Continental Congress, 175/155/1/100-106.

exorbitant costs of daily wages as the British could. For the present the army would have to resort to the diversion of infantry for such tasks.<sup>112</sup>

Congress created a unified Corps of Engineers on 11 March 1779.<sup>113</sup> The main army read copies of the detailed regulations governing the corps through July and August.<sup>114</sup> Too few officers had applied for commissions with them.<sup>115</sup> But Congress' measure was not in vain. Duportail now held undisputed command over all engineers, whether officer or enlisted man. Quality soldiers from the line transferred to the Sappers and Miners, especially after 22 July 1780 when Washington required one man per regiment to go to the corps.<sup>116</sup> The famous Joseph Plumb Martin himself joined them on 1 January 1781 and soon rose to sergeant.<sup>117</sup> Heath thanked the engineer officers for their efforts which laid the great chain across the Hudson at West Point without incident.<sup>118</sup> The Sappers and Miners provided superb support to the Corps of Light Infantry in its attack on Redoubt No. Ten at Yorktown as well as throughout the siege.

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<sup>112</sup>Ford, Journals, 14:602-3.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., 13:305-6.

<sup>114</sup>Simeon Belding Orderly Book, 30-31 July and 2-4 August 1779.

<sup>115</sup>Richard Buckmaster Orderly Book, 11 August 1779.

<sup>116</sup>Washington, Writings, 19:224.

<sup>117</sup>Martin, Narrative, pp. 194n8, 194-96.

<sup>118</sup>Heath Papers, Orderly Books, 11 April 1781.

The American Corps of Engineers was thus heavily dependent upon foreign officers for its informed and talented leadership. However, the successful combination of separate bodies of officers and enlisted men under a single head placed the corps years ahead of their British counterparts. The British Army contained no permanent body of enlisted sappers until the creation of the Royal Military Artificers in 1788.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the American configuration permitted much more effective support to the line regiments for the rest of the war.

In summary, the accomplishments of the main army's specialist and auxiliary forces were mixed. Historians have laid to rest the mythology of sharpshooting riflemen, yet the historiography persists in focussing excessive attention on the American development and flair for skirmish tactics.

For example, the Corps of Light Infantry represented the apogee of martial achievement in the Continental Army. However, their fighting skills were as much as grenadiers as typical skirmishing light troops. Their most memorable feats were their missions as elite, assault troops at Stony Point and Yorktown.

Cavalry support was a weak link in Washington's army. The horse soldiers were particularly vulnerable to the deteriorating patriot currency. They also never recovered from the absence of a single directing head. The lack of a

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<sup>119</sup>Rogers, British Army of the Eighteenth Century, p. 37.

Commander of Cavalry contributed to the unfortunate tendency to parcel out the few cavalry available in penny packets, a trend which prevailed until the mid nineteenth century. The four Continental Light Dragoon regiments were thus hard pressed both to conduct reconaissance and intelligence missions and to function as a viable battle cavalry.

Historians have neglected these organizational and doctrinal issues and instead have tended to blame Washington without qualification. The Commander in Chief usually deployed his cavalry effectively as he fully appreciated their utility.

The Continental Artillery was ineffective under Gridley but rendered true yeoman service under Knox. The development of artillery which provided efficient, close support to the line infantry is all the remarkable when one considers the scientific and technical natures of the branch. Knox demonstrated an unstinting dedication, flexibility, and a flair for improvisation. His officers usually matched his determination to achieve excellence.

The engineer troops were "late bloomers" and especially dependent on the talents of foreign officers. They finally came into their own when Congress appointed Duportail as Chief Engineer over a unified branch of officers and enlisted men. This corps then became a model to emulate in other armies and was in fact well in advance of their British opponents. Their service at Yorktown was critical to wage a successful siege. They could not match French experience but they were their professionl equals by 1781.

## CHAPTER TEN

## CONCLUSIONS

The Continentals: A Fresh Assessment

This essay has explored the characteristics of Washington's main army in the context of an eighteenth-century standing army, i.e. how it compared and contrasted with its allies and enemies in the American Revolution. The most recent research of historians on the social origins of the enlisted ranks discussed in Chapter Two barely scratched the surface of comparative analysis.

Washington's army after 1777 possessed the attributes of any regular army of the period. The notion of a unique standing army to fit American conditions simply does not bear close scrutiny. It recruited and organized as did most armies of the period. Its systems for pay, rations, military justice, and discipline mirrored those in European armies. It faced similar challenges in curbing desertion and mutinies. Moreover, the motivation of those Continentals who attempted desertion and mutiny in retrospect appears no different than the soldiers in other armies. The motivation and morale of its soldiers was also similar to other armies with perhaps different emphases.

Thus, regimental field and combat effectiveness naturally depended upon unit esprit de corps, officer

effectiveness, and personal loyalty to a commander, perhaps Washington himself, but not patriotism in the modern sense.

The Continentals relied on regimental recruiters just like all other eighteenth-century armies. The main difference was the lack of an inspector for the recruiting service who could exercise a centralized guiding hand. Without this single direction, the army suffered from the uncontrolled activities of fourteen separate recruiting agencies. In spite of Washington's constant complaints about short terms of service, these were not a serious problem after 1777. War-duration and three-year terms accounted for the majority of recruits as far as one can judge given the limited evidence by 1780. Moreover, these enlistment conditions were virtually identical to those used by the British, loyalist, German, and French armies in America. None relied exclusively on the long-service professional in the ranks for life or twenty or more years. Hence, all armies faced similar challenges in preparing their new soldiers for battle in the latter war years.

The bane of the Continental recruiting service was the bounty war. The combination of unregulated competition with the declining fiscal health of the patriot cause was a recipe for administrative anarchy in the unending search for more men to join the colors. This chaotic state of affairs encouraged bounty jumpers and increased desertion. The patriot need for additional manpower became so acute as to warrant the drastic resort for the age to drafting. This

system worked poorly at best though the burden usually fell on established militia and not the population at large.

Washington's Continentals have symbolized eternal sacrifice in war for the cause of liberty for over two centuries yet the sources do not support the typical conclusions regarding a perennially starved, unpaid soldiery. Surviving documents prove that the soldiers' lot for pay and rations varied considerably and depended upon specific circumstances at a given time. The troops in fact were usually paid, albeit late and usually with increasingly devalued paper currency. At times they literally starved; at others, however, they received increased food allowances. Thus, the conditions varied just like in other armies.

There was nothing extraordinary about the equipment of the Continental line regiments. Research, however, confirms the importance of French aid. Imports from France allowed the Continentals to standardize muskets with the .69 caliber Charleville. Tighter property accountability after 1778 finally reduced the criminal wastage of muskets that could exhaust available stores faster than supply officials could replenish stocks, although the problem never disappeared.

The Continentals never went into battle with an ammunition issue equal to the British. The King's soldiers carried sixty rounds. The patriots did eventually stabilize the basic issue at forty rounds. However, there is no evidence that this imbalance influenced any combat results.

The stereotype of the "ragged Continental" is one of the few traditions confirmed by a reexamination of the sources. Even French imports could not keep pace with demand for all types of clothing. This failure had significant morale ramifications. The infantry regiments of the Western powers generally wore a single coat color which came to symbolize the unifying power of the monarchical nation state. The patriots' image in foreign eyes consequently suffered, an important obstacle in the propaganda war to secure allies.

More importantly, the failure of the Continental Army to solve the uniform shortage impaired the men's morale. Congress specified brown coats in 1775 and Washington substituted blue in 1779 but the regulations were meaningless. The psychological benefits accruing from standardized uniforms were largely lost. Historians can never be sure as to the degree of moral inferiority reinforced by this lack of proper dress, especially early in the war. Once professional military institutions took hold after 1778, this poverty could have become a trademark of shared hardship of sorts.

Washington's determination to establish a genuine standing army led to aping the British military justice system with two unfortunate results. First, officers struggled to mete out swift and sure justice in spite of a labyrinth of bureaucratic requirements that placed excessive emphasis on courts martial and formal proceedings. The French system in particular would have formed a better model

for imitation. It wisely delegated the overwhelming majority of cases at company and regimental levels without complex procedures nor formal hearings.

Second, patriot officers became some of the most avid floggers of the eighteenth century, second only to their British cousins. Washington's commanders could not match the common eight hundred to one thousand lash sentences of the British Army, but they successfully petitioned Congress to raise the lash limit from thirty-nine in 1775 to one hundred in 1776. Moreover, there are numerous examples of regular officers violating the latter Congressional limit by sentencing soldiers to multiple punishments, including the Commander in Chief himself. Congress relented again and increased the limit to five hundred lashes in 1781.

The sources show the improved state of discipline in Washington's army in two key areas: health and camp maintenance. The statistics for the sick rate of the main army are proof positive that the Continentals developed into a far more professional force in the latter half of the war. A comparison of the figures for the sick at Valley Forge in 1777-78 and Morristown in 1779-80 merely underlines a trend evident in all the percentages, whether one considers the war in three phases or two. Leaders were not ignorant of the principles of establishing camps in the field from the beginning of the war. However, in spite of detailed security arrangements with set procedures for guards and passwords, a patriot field site was still chaotic for most

of the war. Soldiers came and went. Indiscriminate shots rang out. Sanitation suffered. Only the constant attention of the entire chain of command accomplished lasting change. Indeed, these perennial problems highlighted Washington's shortage of dedicated junior officers and NCOs.

Unfortunately, in spite of Washington's constant harangues, Continental troops remained accomplished pillagers throughout the war wherever they ventured. Local residents had cause to fear the appearance of the Continentals just as much as any other army. The supposed propaganda war for the "hearts and minds" of the populace meant little to the line infantry on campaign.

The Continental Army experienced the highest desertion rate of any army in the war, surpassing even the much-maligned German "mercenaries." Desertion in all armies late in the eighteenth century was an individual action based on self-interest, and the patriot army was no different. The harshness of the soldiers' lot made life as one of Washington's regulars every bit as unattractive as it was to the lower classes of the Old World.

Mutiny in the Continental Army was not the last resort of a "patriotic" soldiery often depicted by historians. There was a remarkable similarity in the phenomenon in all armies. Mutiny was the final, desperate, collective action of soldiers who believed their superiors had failed to right serious grievances. Whether disgusted Continental, slighted Highlander, or aggrieved German, none questioned the right

of their service nor their loyalty to it. They merely wanted their wrongs addressed by proper authority.

The silence of the overwhelming majority of the rank and file render judgements on morale and motivation very tentative. Likewise, the citation of a few individual cases does not really shed light on the tens of thousands of Continentals who passed through the ranks. The chief incentives appear to have been no different than those in other armies. Economic incentives were critical as they appealed directly to the soldier's self-interest. The quality of officers at company and battalion levels was very important. Caring and proficient leaders engendered powerful unit esprit de corps. This factor was particularly important in Washington's army since it lacked the regimental pride of the British Army based on past glories.

Certainly the most telling proof of increased professionalism in the army under field conditions was the gradual development of standard operating procedures (SOPs). These guidelines were the result of common sense and hard work. Published manuals provided little inspiration since they were essentially drillbooks which explained the intricacies of fire and movement for infantry companies and battalions. Likewise, the classic texts read by officers lacked the highly specific detail needed for these SOPs. Those procedures developed for route marches and river crossings in particular remain sterling proof of the Continentals' sophistication in the art of war after 1778.

Judgements of the combat effectiveness of the Continentals are flawed unless one also considers the opposition. The patriots in fact did not have to fight the stereotypical automatons of Frederick the Great for most of the war, although the British and German troops encountered in 1775 and 1776 came close to that stereotype. They also won nearly every open-field engagement as a result. The raw patriot soldiers could not battle these professionals with a reasonable chance of victory. After 1776 the European armies faced the very same challenges as the Continentals, i.e. finding more men to serve in the ranks and providing them a modicum of training so that they could execute the demanding tactics of linear warfare. Thus, the Continentals not only got better, the opposition frankly deteriorated. This interpretation does not intend to denigrate the accomplishments of the Continentals on the field of battle. Chapter Five discussed several specific examples of their prowess in battle and their gradual improvement over the years. However, an analysis of all the armies is essential to a proper understanding of how a patriot army created from scratch was able to defeat European regulars after 1776.

The changing structure of Washington's infantry regiments also reflected the losing contest to find enough men to fill the ranks rather than subtle nuances learned about the art of war. Battalion organization thus went through three major permutations during the war in 1776, 1778, and 1781. The only exception to this interpretation

was the permanent establishment of light-infantry companies at battalion level in 1778 until the end of the war.

The early war years, i.e. 1775-77, were hectic times for the development of the main army. Commanders at all levels worked to train and drill their soldiers but there was neither consistency nor uniformity in their efforts. Hence, the regiments learned several different styles of drill. Some worked ceaselessly; others, hardly at all.

The appointment of von Steuben as Inspector General was the most important single event for the professional development of the army. He was able to establish his credibility with officers and men quickly, no mean feat given the rising resentment towards pretentious foreigners among all ranks. His common sense served him well. His "Military Instructions" of 1778 and the Blue Book became lasting testimonies to his talents as a trainer of troops.

Historians, however, have placed too much emphasis on von Steuben's quotations about unique American soldiers and training methods that placed a premium on patience and gentleness. The major manuals of the period all stressed the same need to train the soldier with mildness and understanding, starting with individual mastery of techniques and gradually progressing to squad, platoon, and company. Perhaps the drillmaster's words about his patriot charges were intended for outside consumption.

Von Steuben's emergence as Washington's preeminent staff officer depended principally on issues of personality. Von

Steuben had demonstrated his qualities by overhauling the main army at Valley Forge. He was also unstintingly loyal to the Commander in Chief. Thus, Washington utilized him not just as some de facto chief of staff, but rather as his agent for the institutionalization of military excellence throughout the army. No wonder the Inspector General's office came to swallow up the Mustermaster General's and certain Adjutant General's duties by 1780. The IG could even reject candidates from the line for the regiment's light company, formerly a commander's prerogative.

Washington's faith in von Steuben became so implicit that he used him as his trouble shooter on demand. The drillmaster took over a division temporarily at the end of the Monmouth campaign. He commanded one in his own right in the Yorktown campaign. Even the accomplished and aggressive Wayne had to seek his assistance when planning the assault on Stony Point. When Robert Howe's tenure as garrison commander at West Point was fraught with difficulties, Washington sent a personal, unofficial appeal to von Steuben to stay there and assist Howe. When Greene struggled in the South and the British threatened Virginia, Washington again asked von Steuben to bring order out of chaos.

Washington's other general officers were a mixed bag. They rose quickly; hence, they could not match the pedigree of Europe's generals. Many, however, brought valuable experience from military service in Europe or the French and Indian War. They were not complete novices to war for the

most part, although this experience was at the lower levels of command and not with the large units they led in the Revolution. As Washington became more confident of his abilities, he challenged their advice more and more. Major postings also passed to those generals who were politically reliable in terms of intra-army machinations. Thus, Conway gave way to von Steuben and Gates yielded to Greene.

The officers of the Continental Army aped their aristocratic brothers in arms and adopted all the characteristics of and expected the perquisites of nobility though without the titles. They placed great stock in the social conventions of an aristocracy at war, no matter how trivial. They expended much energy on issues of precedence and date of rank, no matter how petty. One result of these obsessions was their resignation in droves during the winter at Valley Forge. They also dueled with relish. Historians have heretofore failed to credit this hubris as a major element in the decision of the officers of the main army to rally at Newburgh in 1783 and contemplate armed action against the civil authority.

Moreover, patriot officers were by no means the least affluent military leaders in the war, coming as they did from the elite of their locality. The French officers of Rochambeau's expeditionary force clearly ranked in the forefront in terms of social position and material wealth. Yet the Continentals could easily match their British opponents and surpassed the impoverished German officers

hands down. The Hessians commented on these materialistic aspects of the cause for which the Americans fought.

Unfortunately, the officers at company and battalion levels often could not match their social pretensions with demonstrated leadership. The quality of company- and field-grade officers was Washington's primary cause for concern throughout the war. Upon them depended his drive for professionalization. When it foundered, their failings were the principal reason. Thus, until the end of the war orderly books contained case after case of officers disciplined or dismissed for incompetence or wrongdoing.

Washington himself emerged as a genuine Great Captain for several reasons. Washington's reputation among historians has alternatively been sacrosanct, suffered considerably, and been resurrected. The vagaries of historiographical trends, however, cannot tarnish his genuine accomplishments. Clearly, success influences any evaluation heavily and he won what many before and since deemed a hopeless conflict. Perhaps most important of all for an emerging republic, he best personified the military chief who took civilian overlordship for granted. He also stifled within himself the excess hubris of his class exacerbated by rank better than any of his contemporaries.

This analysis disagrees with the notion of Washington as the fabled Cunctator who risked nothing if he could help it. Indeed, he willingly took up the gauntlet to engage in major battle every year from 1775 to 1778. Only the much-reduced

size of the main army after 1778 precluded his long-desired attack on New York City, especially after he had to detach reinforcements to the Southern Army in 1780.

One is also hard pressed to explain the drastic differences in Washington's performance as commander. The Trenton-Princeton campaign was a stroke of genius noted by the elder Helmuth von Moltke in the next century.<sup>1</sup> But his conduct of the Monmouth campaign was his strategic nadir, ironically when he wielded probably the finest army ever.

The primary staff elements did affect the performance of the line troops. The AG soon established a superb system of personnel accountability to rival that of any other army's. The quality of intelligence gathering varied through mid-1778. Benjamin Tallmadge then functioned as de facto G-2 for the main army till war's end. His focus was largely strategic intelligence concerning the British in and around New York City. Washington thus continued to rely on a host of individuals to supplement Tallmadge's work, especially for a special operation such as the storming of Stony Point.

Clearly, the spotty record of logistical support limited the operational options available to Washington with increased severity after 1779 as patriot finances sunk to unheard of levels. Furthermore, the Quartermaster General came to devote more and more energy to keep the army fed and

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<sup>1</sup>William Milligan Sloane, "Von Moltke's View of Washington's Strategy," The Century Magazine, February 1907, p. 521.

supplied at the expense of his operational responsibilities. The harried QMG of the main army was not in a good position to become the preeminent staff officer. To a certain extent von Steuben was merely filling a power vacuum.

However, the worst effect on the line troops of the inadequate staff departments have heretofore gone largely unmentioned by historians. The logisticians' insufficient personnel and weak purchasing power forced the infantry regiments to detach line troops on various missions. These assignments separated soldiers from their companies when the Continentals should have been dedicating every available minute to both individual and collective training in order to master the tactics of linear warfare. Soldiers thus served in every imaginable duty outside the regiment. They foraged, sometimes impressing outright what they needed. They made small arms cartridges and moccasins. They built and repaired boats. They should have been drilling instead.

Washington's personal staff was woefully inadequate to cope with the voluminous correspondence with which he dealt on a daily basis. He functioned in several capacities and the staff never grew to accommodate these multiple roles. There is no evidence to conclude that this failing adversely affected the staff's ability to issue directives. But historians have failed to emphasize how dependent Washington was upon his "military family" to draft the initial set of orders and instructions without which the primary staff, and hence the rest of the army, could not operate daily.

The curse of the headquarters staff was in fact the fanatical devotion they developed towards the Commander in Chief after 1776. The depth of antipathy engendered by the Conway Cabal was a direct reflection of this attitude. Whether or not there was a formal plot to replace Washington with Gates late in 1777 is irrelevant; the staff convinced Washington that there was. The subsequent hostility to any disagreement with the Commander in Chief over strategic and operational issues spread to the general officers as well. One result was the miserable performance of the high command in the Monmouth campaign and the demise of Charles Lee.

The ability of the main army to establish a genuine corps d' elite in its ranks speaks highly of its professionalization. The Corps of Light Infantry was the equal of both European chasseurs and grenadiers. The soldiers were certainly adept at skirmishing operations. However, their greatest accomplishments were the assaults on Stony Point and Redoubt No. Ten as shock troops. Conversely, the Commander in Chief's Guard did not rank as an equal. It was a very small unit and accomplished its primary mission to guard Washington and important headquarters baggage and papers. While it did participate in combat, it never earned the laurels won by the light infantry or even some line units.

The best example of the tremendous professional expertise present in Washington's main army by the latter half of the war was the Yorktown campaign. Washington

demonstrated his strategic acumen and understanding of the role of seapower. Washington's subordinate commanders provided sound leadership and served their chief well, from Heath who remained in the North to the three division commanders in Virginia. The army moved from one theater to another in record time with remarkably few problems. In spite of the dismal financial state of the country, logistical support proved adequate and did not threaten the conduct of operations. Such failure would have been particularly embarrassing with French troops accounting for over half of the troop strength. Three factors contributed immeasurably to this logistical triumph: Washington's micromanagement of many details by using line officers as couriers; the dedication of quartermaster and commissary officials; and the talents of Robert Morris as Superintendent of Finance.

The finest examples of the skill of the Continentals in this campaign were the successful prosecution of the siege according to the principles of Vauban as well as the creation from scratch of unit SOPs to conduct the siege. That the siege was the last major operation in America was a fitting tribute to the successful development of a truly professional main army over the last six years.

In retrospect the harsh assessments of Washington's handling of cavalry seem excessive. One must examine the role of horsemen in each campaign to judge Washington's understanding of the mounted arm as a support for the line

regiments. Only the Monmouth campaign suggests any real deficiency on Washington's part when he detached them for skirmishing rather than concentrating them for a decisive blow against Clinton's rear guard with the infantry.

Unfortunately, the four Continental Light Dragoon regiments suffered acutely from two key failures: the steady decline of patriot economic fortunes and the lack of a single commander with the vision to use them as battle cavalry. Horses and associated equipment became prohibitively expensive as the fiscal situation worsened. Hence, in 1781 the four regiments became Legionary Corps of mixed infantry and cavalry. Pulaski's selection as Commander of Cavalry was sound. No one could predict that he would be a prima donna who would shortly resign. The Americans never found a replacement. The light dragoons became mere scouting troops deployed in penny packets, a role which would plague the U. S. Cavalry for decades.

The Continental Artillery was the only genuine completely American success story of the war. The talented leadership of Knox throughout the conflict of this scientific branch reflected well upon his ability and flexibility. The line regiments thus enjoyed direct artillery support at brigade level from late 1776. At times the theoretical foundation of Knox's education foundered, e.g. his obsession with subduing the Chew House at Germantown. But the Continental Line was as well served by their gunners as any in Europe for the duration of the war.

The establishment of engineers was another matter. Congress' creation of a formal Engineer Corps with officer engineers and enlisted sappers and miners under Duportail was finally decisive in establishing a viable organization in the war's waning years as witnessed at Yorktown.

#### The American Revolution and Eighteenth-Century Warfare

Ironically, the stunning success in the creation of a genuine patriot regular army leads to the conclusion that generals could learn little that was new in terms of conventional warfare at the tactical and operational levels from the eight-year struggle in America. It was not a transitional war. The experience of the American Revolution merely confirmed current trends. For example, the war saw the widespread use of soldiers with minimal training due to the need to replace losses. Yet all the major powers experienced the same phenomenon in the Seven Years' War.

The sources do not support the frequently-cited issue of the lessons to be learned about light infantry with good reason.<sup>2</sup> First, Washington and his generals understood the severe tactical limitations of riflemen. Their use fell off as the war continued; Bemis Heights was their swansong. With the possible exception of the First Pennsylvania, the Continental Army did without an established body of riflemen

<sup>2</sup>Europeans did discuss the patriot militia as citizen soldiers and the potential of trained militia having no fear of the regulars. See Orville T. Murphy, "The American Revolutionary Army and the Concept of the Levée en Masse," Military Affairs 23 (Spring 1959):13-15.

for the balance of the war. The main army's only resort to such troops after 1778 was during the siege of Yorktown. Washington used a body of riflemen.<sup>3</sup> Second, the standard smoothbore, muzzle-loading musket was not a weapon which facilitated individual marksmanship. Third, Washington's emphasis was always to create a line army capable of conducting formal linear tactics.

The Corps of Light Infantry's fame rested upon its exploits as grenadiers and not as light infantry. Moreover, European armies were all experienced in the use of light troops, though some clearly more than others. For example, in 1772 Guibert estimated that light units accounted for 20 percent of the French Army.<sup>4</sup> The poor showing of the light companies in the Concord expedition merely confirms the convincingly-argued thesis of historian J. A. Houlding concerning the wretched state of peacetime training in the British Army discussed in Chapter Six.

The European armies clearly needed to delineate better the role of light troops on the field of battle and develop them as part of the regulars.<sup>5</sup> However, by the time of the Revolution, leaders had digested the lessons of the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War. British

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<sup>3</sup>The unit consisted of Virginia militiamen under a Colonel Lewis. Washington, Writings, 23:148.

<sup>4</sup>J. A. Guibert, Essai general de tactique, 2 vols. (n.p., 1772; reprint ed., Paris: n.p., 1804), 1:33 cited in Duffy, Military Experience, p. 268.

<sup>5</sup>Duffy, Military Experience, pp. 277-79.

and French units in America both contained a company of light infantry. The German units had a small, integral subunit of jägers or else the riflemen were detached as necessary.<sup>6</sup> Work remained to be done to "regularize" the light troops further, but one could argue that the patriots needed to do the same vis-à-vis the integration of regulars and militia on the field of battle.

Likewise, the enthusiastic stories told back in Britain about war experiences in America did not dwell on the importance of skirmishing light infantry.<sup>7</sup> Rather, they concerned a debate about proper close-order tactics. This debate was not new. One side had favored rapid fire; the other, a few well-delivered volleys followed up by the bayonet.<sup>8</sup> Now most British veterans of America stressed the efficacy of firepower over the bayonet.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, diehards proclaimed bayonet shock as "practically obsolete" and preferred the permanent adoption of two-deep line to increase the frontage of fire.<sup>10</sup> The debate raged to a certain extent even as the war continued. Both Tarleton and Clinton blamed the defeat at Cowpens principally upon

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<sup>6</sup>See Table 3-1.

<sup>7</sup>Glover, Peninsular Preparation, pp. 115-16 suggests so.

<sup>8</sup>A. J. Barker, Redcoats (London: Gordon Cremonisi), p. 11.

<sup>9</sup>Piers Mackesy, The War for America, 1775-1783 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 518.

<sup>10</sup>Fortescue, History of the British Army, 3:530.

tactics. Clinton underlined the disaster wrought by the "loose, flimsy order" too often used against the rebels.<sup>11</sup> Tarleton too cited the "loose manner of forming" and the troops' subsequent wide extension with no multiplicity of lines.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the issues concerned three- versus two-deep line, file distances, and musketry versus the bayonet, not the alleged supremacy of light infantry.

The only exception was the German troops. Most of their armies gravitated towards Prussian military usage and Frederick the Great placed the least emphasis on light troops of any leader in Europe. Hence, German officers returned from the war talking about the need for better integration of light troops in battle plans.<sup>13</sup> This concern was legitimate given the lack of attention devoted to the topic in the majority of German states.

Rochambeau's officers had no need to leave America questioning French methods. The army had done splendidly, proving the efficacy of the reforms enacted since the closing years of the Seven Years' War.<sup>14</sup> The newfound discipline of the infantry was especially heartening.

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<sup>11</sup>Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 247.

<sup>12</sup>Tarleton, Campaigns of 1780 and 1781, p. 221.

<sup>13</sup>Higginbotham, War of Independence, p. 433 emphasizes lessons learned about skirmish parties and individual marksmanship at the tactical level. He credits the insight to the British as well.

<sup>14</sup>Kennett, French Armies in the Seven Years' War, pp. 138-44 discusses the successes of these reforms.

Vigorous debate remained over doctrine, but not concerning light infantry, which the army possessed in plenty. The disagreement remained between the partisan advocates of l'ordre mince and l'ordre profond, line versus column.<sup>15</sup>

There were ramifications to study in the difficulty of winning a guerrilla war against an armed populace and militia with a regular army. But the monarchs and generals no more wanted to analyze such a proverbial Pandora's box than to enact drastic social reforms which would yield a superior soldier for the ranks who could form a genuine reserve to backup the active army. That lesson would come only out of necessity after 1806 as a response to the French conflagration of 1789.

The American Revolution was thus a fairly typical eighteenth-century conflict, a protracted war of exhaustion. Washington and his generals thus strove to create a genuine regular army to challenge the British in conventional linear tactics. The patriots succeeded beyond reasonable expectations. However, their effort was insufficient to achieve victory. Peace came only after some four years of coalition warfare had dissipated British strength.

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<sup>15</sup>Robert S. Quimby, The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth Century France (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957) analyzes this debate at length.

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