THE GREAT COURSES®

Topic
History

Subtopic
Modern History

The American Revolution

Professor Allen C. Guelzo
Gettysburg College

Transcript Book

PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

Copyright © The Teaching Company, 2008

Printed in the United States of America

This book is in copyright. All rights reserved.

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above,
no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted,
in any form, or by any means
(electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise),
without the prior written permission of
The Teaching Company.

Allen C. Guelzo, Ph.D.

Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era,
Director of Civil War Era Studies, and Associate Director
of the Civil War Institute, Gettysburg College

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo is the Henry R. Luce Professor of the Civil War Era, the director of Civil War Era Studies, and associate director of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. He was born in Yokohama, Japan, but grew up in Springfield, Pennsylvania. He holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Pennsylvania, where he wrote his dissertation under the direction of Bruce Kuklick, Alan C. Kors, and Richard S. Dunn. Dr. Guelzo previously taught at both Drexel University and Eastern University in St. Davids, Pennsylvania. At Eastern University, where he taught for 13 years, he was the Grace Ferguson Kea Professor of American History and, from 1998 to 2004, the founding dean of the Templeton Honors College.

Dr. Guelzo is the author of numerous books on American intellectual history and on Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War era, beginning with his first work, *Edwards on the Will: A Century of American Theological Debate* (Wesleyan University Press, 1989). His second book, *For the Union of Evangelical Christendom: The Irony of the Reformed Episcopalians* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), won the Albert C. Outler Prize for Ecumenical Church History of the American Society of Church History. He wrote *The Crisis of the American Republic: A History of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era* for the St. Martin's Press American History series in 1995 and followed that with a new edition of Josiah G. Holland's 1866 biography, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, in 1998 for the Bison Books series of classic Lincoln biography reprints from the University of Nebraska Press.

Dr. Guelzo's book *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (William B. Eerdmans Press, 1999) won both the Lincoln Prize and the Abraham Lincoln Institute Prize in 2000. In 2003, his article "Defending Emancipation: Abraham Lincoln and the Conkling Letter, 1863" won *Civil War History*'s John T. Hubbell Prize for the best article of that year. Dr. Guelzo's book *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (Simon & Schuster, 2004) also won the Lincoln Institute Prize and the Lincoln Prize for 2005, making him the first double Lincoln laureate in the history of both prizes. His article "Houses Divided: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Political Landscape of Illinois, 1858" was

featured in the September 2007 issue of *The Journal of American History*. His book on the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates that Defined America*, was published by Simon & Schuster in 2008.

Dr. Guelzo has written for *The Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *First Things*, the *Claremont Review of Books*, and *Books and Culture* and has been featured on NPR's *Weekend Edition Sunday* and Brian Lamb's *Booknotes*. He is a member of the board of directors of the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Abraham Lincoln Institute, and the Historical Society of the Episcopal Church; a member of the advisory councils of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission; a research associate for the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania; and a member of the American Historical Association, the Organization of American Historians, the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic, the Society of Civil War Historians, and the Union League of Philadelphia.

Dr. Guelzo has been a fellow of the American Council of Learned Societies (1991–1992), the McNeil Center for Early American Studies (1992–1993), the Charles Warren Center for American Studies at Harvard University (1994–1995), and the James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions at Princeton University (2002–2003).

Among his other honors, Dr. Guelzo has earned the Lincoln Award of the Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia, the Lincoln Medal of the Union League Club of New York City, and the Medal of Honor of the Daughters of the American Revolution. In 2005, he was nominated by President George W. Bush and confirmed by the Senate as a member of the National Council on the Humanities.

Professor Guelzo's other Teaching Company courses include *The American Mind*; *Mr. Lincoln: The Life of Abraham Lincoln*; and *History of the United States, 2nd Edition*, which he team-taught with Professor Patrick N. Allitt and Professor Gary W. Gallagher.

Dr. Guelzo lives in Paoli and Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, with his wife, Debra.

Table of Contents
The American Revolution

Professor Biography i
Course Scope 1
Lecture One The Imperial Crisis, 1763–1773 4
Lecture Two The Ancient Constitution 18
Lecture Three “A Soldier What’s Fit for a Soldier” 33
Lecture Four “How the British Regulars Fired and Fled” 47
Lecture Five Standoff in Boston, 1775 62
Lecture Six Bunker Hill 77
Lecture Seven The King, the Conqueror, and the Coward 92
Lecture Eight Conquering Canada, Reconquering Boston 106
Lecture Nine Common Sense 121
Lecture Ten An Army Falls in Brooklyn 136
Lecture Eleven “A Glorious Issue” 151
Lecture Twelve Joy in Princeton 166
Lecture Thirteen “Congress Are Not a Fit Body” 181
Lecture Fourteen “America Is Not Subdued” 195
Lecture Fifteen “A Day Famous in the Annals of America” 209
Lecture Sixteen “Not Yet the Air of Soldiers” 223
Lecture Seventeen With Washington at Valley Forge 238
Lecture Eighteen The Widening War 252
Lecture Nineteen The French Menace 265
Lecture Twenty Vain Hopes in the Carolinas 281
Lecture Twenty-One “The Americans Fought Like Demons” 295
Lecture Twenty-Two The Reward of Loyalty 308
Lecture Twenty-Three A Sword for General Washington 322
Lecture Twenty-Four “It Is All Over” 335

Table of Contents
The American Revolution

Maps and Battle Plans 350
Timeline 358
Glossary 363
Biographical Notes 367
Bibliography 378

The American Revolution

Scope:

This Teaching Company course is devoted to a survey of the American Revolution, from its outbreak at Lexington and Concord in April, 1775, until its close with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and the dispersion of the American Continental army. It is a story concerned mostly with a war—an 18th-century war in particular—which requires some understanding of what the nature of 18th-century warfare was and how it shaped the American Revolution for both American and British soldiers. This course begins with a very short overview of the issues that brought the North American British colonies into conflict with the British Empire, and moves from there at once to the outbreak of hostilities between American and British forces. The 24 lectures in this series are built around three important questions:

1. What were the armies and navies which fought the Revolution like? How different was the British regular from the American militiaman and Continental regular? What was combat in the 18th century like?
2. What were the major campaigns of the Revolution? How important were Trenton, Saratoga, and Yorktown? What difference did the formal intervention of the French in 1778 make?
3. Who were the leaders of the Revolution? In particular, how much of a difference was made by the military leadership on both sides—by George Washington, Nathaniel Greene, Lord George Germain, Sir William Howe, and even King George III?

We will take the road to Revolution in the first three lectures by examining the political conflict that originated over imperial policy-making in 1763 and include a survey of the chief enforcers of that policy, the British army in North America. In Lecture Four, we stop for a close look at the British army—its men, tactics, and weaponry. Then, in Lectures Five through Twelve, I will introduce the first campaigns of the war—the organization of a Continental army under George Washington, the abandonment of Boston by the British, the ill-fated American invasion of Canada, the British capture of New York, and the miraculous rallying of American fortunes at Trenton and Princeton. Lecture Thirteen will shift attention to the Continental Congress—or rather, the ways in which the Congress failed to support its own army. Lectures Fourteen through Seventeen return us to the

fighting, this time covering the second phase of the war with Gen. John Burgoyne's doomed expedition to Albany, Sir William Howe's brilliant but feckless capture of Philadelphia, and the long winter of the Continental army at Valley Forge.

Lectures Eighteen and Nineteen describe the French alliance and the decision of France to intervene in the American war, the expansion of the war around the globe as an infant American navy is developed, and the fateful decision of the British government to shift the bulk of its military resources to fighting the French for control of the West Indies. North America became, in effect, a sideshow to what quickly became a second Great War for empire. But it was a sideshow only from the imperial perspective. In Lectures Twenty and Twenty-One, we will see that the British, even though much reduced in their capacity to make war in North America, could still cause serious trouble for the Americans, as Sir Henry Clinton turned his military attention to the American South. Lecture Twenty-Two pauses to look at those who gambled on British victory and lost—Loyalists and Indians—those who remained loyal to the American cause and suffered for it, and those who betrayed it (in this case, Benedict Arnold). In Lecture Twenty-Three, we return to the British "Southern Strategy," only to find that the British were too thinly stretched to grasp victory, and instead the principal British Southern army was forced into humiliating surrender at Yorktown. Lecture Twenty-Four takes a final look at the war as a world conflict, how the British Parliament finally declared that the war in America was unwinnable, how peace was negotiated, and what happened to the Revolutionary generation once its work was done.

The American Revolution was the greatest political irruption of modern times—"modern" meaning the centuries from the end of the Reformation and the beginning of the Enlightenment until now. It attempted, for the first time, to give political shape to the intellectual breakthroughs the Enlightenment had created in religion, science, economics, and literature. Its passionate devotion to demand *rights* rather than deference to *status* represented a decisive break with every notion of society that had prevailed since the Roman Empire. The people who fought against it—starting with the Loyalists and the British armies—were neither evil nor cunning; many of them, in fact, sympathized with the American cause. But they were hamstrung in their struggle "to keep the past upon its throne" by the sheer distance existing between Britain and the colonies at its periphery.

Both sides fought their way through the Revolution in remarkably similar, and conventional, ways. The decisive factor, in military terms, would turn

out to be the French intervention, less for what it gave the Americans directly than for the distraction it gave the British. Along the way, we will meet a most remarkable cast of characters—perhaps the most remarkable ever assembled at one time in America—and especially George Washington, the indispensable man, who won a war, not with dash or genius, but with patience and cunning. And we will also meet the British cast—one of the most unhappy collections of talented but inadequate leaders who ever came together in one decade of British history: King George III, convinced that the slightest concession to the Americans would mean the disintegration of his empire; the Howe brothers, calm, brave, competent, and sure that military victory in North America was impossible for Britain; and Lord George Germain, who insisted on war in order to wipe out the stain of personal cowardice. And through it all we will include in our reckoning the players of the vast and varied roles of Indian chiefs (Joseph Brant), radical journalists (Thomas Paine), militiamen (those who ran as well as those who stood and fought), runaway slaves (Col. Tye), and German mercenaries (Johann Ewald).

It is the story of how the American nation was made—by ideas and by words, by combat and by endurance, by very ordinary and very extraordinary men and women. This is, as it turns out, also the way we have remade it in every American generation.

Note: Many quoted passages in this course reflect the spelling and punctuation of the colonial era.

Lecture One
The Imperial Crisis, 1763–1773

Scope: For decades after the first colonies were established, the king and the Church of England were largely content to neglect them. All along, Americans thought of themselves as fully English; after all, they had fought side by side with the British in the French and Indian War. That very war, however, had brought Britain close to financial collapse, so in 1765 Parliament passed the Stamp Act to force Americans to shoulder their share of the burden of victory. The North American colonists were outraged at such taxation without representation. The Stamp Act was repealed, but Parliament taxed a variety of other commodities. Finally, Parliament repealed all offensive taxes except on tea—a move that led to the Boston Tea Party of 1773.

Outline

I. In this series of 24 lectures, we will discuss not so much the economics or ideology or politics of the American Revolution as the Revolution's mechanics as an armed uprising against the most dominant military power in the world.

- **A.** The first two lectures will cover the causes that impelled us to a separation with the British Empire, and in Lecture Three, we study the British army of the 18th century.
- **B.** Lectures Four through Eight review the first part of the Revolution, followed in Lecture Nine with a brief turn to the movement toward independence.
- **C.** Lectures Ten through Twelve address the campaigns of 1776, while Lecture Thirteen deals with the unhappy civilian-military relationship between Congress and the Continental army.
- **D.** Lectures Fourteen through Seventeen reveal the disasters and triumphs that befell the American cause, ending with the Valley Forge winter of 1777 to 1778.
- **E.** In Lectures Eighteen through Twenty-One, the scope of the war widens to include France. We also see that the war in North America loses none of its desperation, especially for the losers

whom we'll meet in Lecture Twenty-Two: Indians, Loyalists, mutinous soldiers, a traitorous general, and a British spy.

F. In the final two lectures, we look at the critical American victory at Yorktown, and the way the peace was constructed and what became of people who had made both the war and the peace.

II. We start in 1763 in what was the high summer of what we may now call the "first British Empire."

A. The first colonies were established as private commercial ventures, some covers used by religious and political dissidents.

B. The colonies were left to run themselves.

1. They invented their own local legislatures.
2. They set up their own churches.
3. They formed their own armed militias.

C. So long as the colonies presented no expense to the royal treasury, the king and the Church of England were largely content to neglect them.

D. This attitude of "salutary neglect" persisted until 1660, when the home government realized that the colonies now posed a threat to the balance of the British economy.

1. Between 1663 and 1772, American purchases of British goods rose from 3 percent of all British exports to nearly 50 percent, and one-third of all British imports came from America.
2. Almost one-third of Britain's merchant fleet had been constructed in its American colonies.
3. Immigration from Britain and the German states and a healthy birthrate had increased the work force from 250,000 in 1700 to almost 2 million by 1763.

E. Beginning in 1660, the home government began imposing new regulations on colonial trade, including the first comprehensive Navigation Act (1660), the Wool Act (1699), the Molasses Act (1733), and the Iron Acts (1750 and 1757).

F. At first, few Americans balked.

1. The costs could be passed off to consumers.
2. Smuggling could get around the import regulations.
3. They took the regulations as indicating that the colonies had come of age.

G. Americans thought of themselves as fully and properly English.

1. Americans fought side by side with the British in the Seven Years' War, known in America as the French and Indian War.

2. Americans rejoiced to have played a role in the British victory.

III. The Seven Years' War had left Britain victorious but near financial collapse.

A. Imperial planners saw the Americans prospering under English government and concluded that it was time to levy direct taxes on the colonies' interior economies, as had long been done in England.

B. In 1765, Parliament passed a Stamp Act for the colonies, requiring all legal documents, newspapers, college diplomas, and other products of the print trade to display a revenue stamp.

IV. At that point, the lid blew off everything in America.

A. The North American colonies had developed ad hoc legislatures of their own. These legislatures were the only places where the colonists felt their interests were represented, as none of the colonies was entitled to send representatives to sit in Parliament in London.

B. The Stamp Act did not last long.

1. Mobs threatened Stamp Act agents.

2. Clubs and societies calling themselves the Loyal Nine or the Sons of Liberty staged mock burials of the corpse of Liberty.

3. The colonies convened a Stamp Act Congress to determine a joint response in October 1765.

4. Colonial merchants were dragooned into agreeing to boycott British imports.

C. By March 1766, members of Parliament finally arranged for repeal, but in their retreat, they passed the Declaratory Act, insisting on the principle of Parliament's right to pass legislation—including tax legislation—for the colonies.

1. The language of the Declaratory Act suggested that the colonies were no more than settlements.

2. It suggested that the colonists lacked all the rights to self-government that the English had at home.

V. In 1767, Parliament tried again to impose a scheme of taxes on the colonial economies, in the form of duties on a variety of imported commodities. This attempt further inflamed the situation.

- **A.** A new system of customs officers provoked confrontations in colonial ports.
- **B.** On March 5, 1770, the 29th Regiment opened fire on a Boston crowd that had attacked them with stones, ice balls, and chunks of firewood; five Americans were killed.
- **C.** Parliament repealed the offensive taxes except on tea.
  - **1.** The tax on tea was a way to assist another colonial venture, the East India Company and to assert Parliament's right to govern the colonies.
  - **2.** On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of Boston's Sons of Liberty, disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded three merchant ships and pitched the contents of 342 chests of East India Company tea into Boston Harbor.

Suggested Reading:

Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, chap. 8.

Nash, *The Urban Crucible*, chap. 11.

Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, chap. 1.

Questions to Consider:

1. What forced Great Britain to change its attitude toward its colonies?

2. What was the legal status of the colonial assemblies?

Lecture One—Transcript
The Imperial Crisis, 1763–1773

Long, long ago, in the year 1976, in a city not very far away—namely Philadelphia—I was a poor graduate student giving tours of the Old City of Philadelphia, which had been the epicenter of the American Revolution. I worked then for a tour company which operated out of Valley Forge and ran tour buses from there into Philadelphia, where we'd spend about two hours on foot seeing the ins-and-outs of the Betsy Ross House, Christ Church, Benjamin Franklin's print shop and post office, the Arch Street Quaker Meeting House, and the Liberty Bell Pavilion.

You'll notice an important omission from my list, and that's Independence Hall. That summer of 1976 was the Bicentennial of American Independence and the marching armies of tourists had only one stop in mind: Independence Hall. The result was that day after day the queue to get into Independence Hall with my tour groups was wrapped around the outside of that venerable shrine of American Independence to the tune of 45 minutes or more. That was just too much of a chunk out of my two hours to spend standing in line, and so day after day and group after group we took a pass on Independence Hall.

There was one exception—almost—to this tale of frustration. On July 6, two days after the big party celebrating exactly the 200th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, I took into Philadelphia a busload of one of the more unusual tourist groups to visit the City of Brotherly Love that summer: They were the members of the Bicentennial Wagon Train. This was a buckskin-clad collection of hardy sons of the pioneers who had crossed the United States eastward from the Pacific Coast in a train of Conestoga wagons to commemorate the achievements of the frontiersmen, and I was the one who was going to bus them from their encampment in Valley Forge into old Philadelphia.

July 6 was possibly the worst day imaginable for such an adventure because it was also the day chosen by Queen Elizabeth II to pay her visit to Philadelphia, and the crowd forecast was rising toward 250,000 people. But when our bus finally snaked its way through the royalty-struck multitudes around Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell Pavilion, Independence Hall itself was nearly empty. The Queen was across Chestnut Street at the Liberty Bell Pavilion, and the vast throng had gone to get a closer look at

the Queen. I turned in a froth of jubilation to my busload full of these paragons of American frontier history, and I excitedly announced that for the first time that summer we could walk right into Independence Hall.

Their response? They wanted nothing of it. These descendents of Wild Bill, Buffalo Bill, and the Bill of Rights wanted, instead, to go across the street and see the Queen of England, the monarch at whose ancestor—their ancestors—had so brazenly cocked a snook. George III, I thought, never had it so good.

There is, of course, a moral to this story. Americans are amazingly inconsiderate toward the history of their own Revolution. We know more than we usually give ourselves credit for about the Revolution; maybe we know more about it than the average American knows about almost any other era in American history. But we don't know very much about what a very unlikely event it was. We can usually understand some allusion to the sufferings of the Continental army at Valley Forge; but who were those soldiers? We can fix certain images in our heads: Images of unerring American riflemen picking off red-coated British soldiers whose generals served them up, unthinkingly, in solid rows of walking targets while the Americans crouched Indian-style behind rocks and trees. But why did the British fight that way? And why did the Americans end up fighting in just the same way? We can see in the mind's eye George Washington serenely sitting on a white horse, or in his bateaux as he crosses the Delaware. But do we understand why he lashed out angrily at his army as a collection of misfits, scum, and mutineers? And who really defeated the British army? Was it the Continentals? Or was it the French, who intervened in the American war, not as a gesture of friendship so much as a first step to converting the Americans colonies into French ones. Above all, why was it that the American Revolution was really won, not in America at all, but in the Caribbean?

As you might guess from the kinds of questions I've been asking, what I would like to do, in this series of 24 lectures, is to talk strictly about the Revolution. Not so much about its economics or its ideology or its politics, but about its actual mechanics as a Revolution; an armed uprising against the most dominant military power in the world. Many, if not most, of the characters will be soldiers: some by profession, many more by accident, and many more still because they had no realistic choice. A number of the names and places will be familiar to almost everyone: Washington, Jefferson, Lafayette, Lexington and Concord, Valley Forge, Yorktown. But many of the other names will not be familiar to us. People like Johann

Ewald, a German mercenary officer who ended up as a major general in the Danish army; and there will be places like Valcour Island and Fort Mifflin.

In the first two lectures, we'll look briefly at what Thomas Jefferson called "the causes which impelled us to a separation." In Lecture Three, we'll try to understand the institution which had the burden of dealing with the American revolt: the British army of the 18th century. In Lecture Four through Lecture Eight, we'll review the year and a half of the Revolution that occurred as those lectures cover it, pause for a brief turn to the movement to independence in Lecture Nine, and then return in Lectures Ten through Twelve to the campaigns of 1776. Lecture Thirteen will deal with the unhappy civilian-military relationship between Congress and the Continental army, and then we'll move, in Lectures Fourteen through Seventeen, to the disasters and triumphs which befell the American cause so dramatically in 1777, ending with the Valley Forge winter of 1777–1778.

In the next lectures, we'll watch the scope of the war widen to include France, and also watch its focus shift as the British deploy their scarce military resources to the West Indies and elsewhere. But, as we'll see in subsequent lectures, the war in North America loses none of its desperation, especially for the losers who we'll meet in Lecture Twenty-Two: Indians, Loyalists, mutinous soldiers, a traitorous general, and a British spy. In the final two lectures, we'll look at the critical American victory at Yorktown, and the way the peace was constructed and what became of people who had made both the war and the peace. At the end, we will have swept away many of the cobwebs of misunderstanding from the event which made us a free and independent nation. I suspect, at the end, we will also find ourselves saying, like Wellington at Waterloo, that it was very much "a near run thing."

The year 1763 was the high summer of what we may now call the "first British Empire." It was not an empire the British had planned to create. In fact, a united Britain was itself a comparatively recent creation, formed by the gradual subjugation of Wales, Scotland and Ireland to English rule and to England's kings. The first colonies planted by the British along North America's Atlantic seaboard were organized, staffed, and supported as private commercial ventures, not an imperial plan. Some of these commercial ventures—like the Massachusetts Bay Company—were really covers used by religious and political dissidents to escape the heavy hand of conformity to the king's government or to the official religious establishment, the Church of England. But even the strictly commercial

ventures—like the Virginia Company—were slow starters compared to the riches generated by British conquest of the sugar islands of the Caribbean. But either way, for the sake of God or profit, the British colonies in North America were left largely to run themselves, to invent their own local legislatures, to set up churches of their own liking, and to form their own armed militias. So long as they presented no bills to the royal treasury, neither the king of England nor the Church of England paid much attention. To the contrary, the only time the king and the Church seemed to awaken to the possibilities of America was for the convenience it offered first as a support station for military plunder of Spain and Spain's far larger empire in South and Central America, and second, America was mainly useful as a dumping ground for Britain's unproductives and social incorrigibles.

This attitude of "salutary neglect"—as Robert Walpole called it—persisted from 1607 and the first British colonial plants in Virginia and Maine, until 1660 when the home government awoke to the startling realization that all those unproductives, once dumped in America, had turned out to be wonderfully productive after all, and so much so that America was beginning to threaten the balance of the British economy. By 1700, British imports of American goods were beginning to achieve a growth twice the size of all other imports. Exports of British goods to America were beginning to grow three times faster than all other exports. Between 1663 and 1772, America's purchases of British goods rose from three percent of all British exports to nearly half, while a third of all of Britain's imports came from America.

Shipbuilding in America cost roughly half of what it cost in the British Isles, and the result was that by 1775, almost a third of Britain's merchant shipping fleet had been constructed in its American colonies. Nor did the Americans lack for a ready workforce. Immigration—not just from the Britain Isles, but from the German states—along with a healthy domestic birth-rate, had swollen the population of the North American colonies from 250,000 in 1700 to almost 2 million by 1763, with the Virginia colony and the Pennsylvania colony leading the pack with 350,000 and 300,000 settlers respectively.[1] At length, it occurred to the imperial government that this

---

[1] John J. McCusker & Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607–1789* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 39, 40; Lawrence Henry Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West, 1763–1766* (New York, 1967), 12–13, 17; Marc Egnal, "The Economic Development of the Thirteen Continental Colonies, 1720 to 1775," *William & Mary Quarterly* 32 (April 1975), 191–222.

could not go on unregulated: It would beggar the mother country, either by sucking British production and labor across the Atlantic, or by Americans undercutting British exports on world markets.

In a lumbering, piecemeal, and unmethodical way, Britain struggled to rein in its rambunctious North American colonies and turn them into paths which would guarantee a larger share of the colonies' prosperity for the empire they belonged to. Beginning in 1660, the home government began imposing new regulations on colonial trade: The first comprehensive Navigation Act in 1660, which required certain American exports to be shipped only in British vessels; the Wool Act of 1699, which forbade the dumping of cheap American wool on British wool markets; the Molasses Act of 1733, which outlawed imports of sugar and molasses to America from all except the British sugar islands in the West Indies; the Iron Acts of 1750 and 1757, which prohibited any new growth in American iron manufacturing. At first, like the frog being slowly boiled in the pot, few Americans balked at this. After all, the navigation legislation only touched the colonies' external import/export trade. It did not touch intercolonial trade; it did not touch the interior domestic economies of the colonies. The new costs of export could, after all, be passed off to consumers. The new import regulations, well they could be flagrantly ignored by large-scale smuggling, especially since the imperial government was too stingy to provide for sufficient oversight and enforcement of its own laws in America.

Besides, in a backhanded sort of way, British trade regulations were a compliment to the colonies' coming-of-age as part of the empire. Although America had originally been populated by assemblies of what upstanding members of English society regarded as oddballs and riff-raff—by Puritans, Quakers, convicts, the bankrupt, the chronically under-employed—those who survived the rigors of transportation and settlement found themselves in a place where there were no aristocrats with prior possession of the land, government so minimal that it scarcely seemed to be there, and labor in such short supply that the right set of skills could land profitable employment almost anywhere. By the time the third generation of these cast-offs was born in America, they had forgotten most of what made their grandparents Puritans, Quakers, or debtors and they were now preening themselves on the thought that they were fully and properly English as much as any Londoner.

Benjamin Franklin's father was a Boston tallow chandler who apprenticed young Benjamin to his brother James, a printer. But young Benjamin and his brother quarreled and Benjamin ran away from his apprenticeship to

Philadelphia, and managed to do so without any serious thought of being tracked down and returned. Eventually he set up his own printing establishment and in his words "raised myself" to a sufficient "state of affluence and some degree of celebrity in the world"; so much so that he was able to retire from business at age 42 and have his portrait painted in a wig as though he had been to the gentry born. Americans like Franklin wanted to think of themselves as Englishmen, not as the provincial boors their forebears had been.[2]

The happiest moment for Americans yearning to be part of the English world arrived with the beginning of the brushfire wars that Britain and France began over control of North America from 1715 onwards. Americans participated in these wars, rarely getting out of them much more than the satisfaction of having fought under English command, until these wars culminated in the Seven Years' War, from 1754–1763, which was better known in America as the "French and Indian War." In that war—the Seven Years' War or French and Indian War—American and British troops fought in the same campaigns and under the same great commanders: Jeffrey Amherst, James Wolfe and Lord George Howe. When British forces finally captured Quebec and Montreal—the two great French strongholds in North America—and compelled the French to surrender their own colonies in Canada and the Mississippi river valley to Britain, Americans rejoiced to have played so signal a role in this worldwide British victory. At that point, the American colonies seemed truly to have come of age as common subjects of a common king, and contributing taxpaying members of a common empire.

Unhappily, the same Great War for Empire—the Seven Years' War—which created such ruddy feelings of shared cultural and political identity, was also the undoing of that identity. The Seven Years' War left Britain victorious, but also near financial collapse. For one thing, Britain had borrowed money to the hilt to finance the war and was now staring a deficit of £146 million sterling in the face. The costs of servicing that debt—just the servicing alone—were going to be £4.7 million per annum. That was what the government had to pay to service its debt and that didn't touch the

[2] Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings*, ed. Jesse Lemisch (New York, 1961), 16; Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1988), 175; Kenneth Silverman, A *Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1976), 189; Carl & Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1942), 147.

ordinary annual costs of government, which even in peacetime ran up to £8 million sterling a year. The price tag just for retaining 7,500 British soldiers in North America as a protective garrison was £290,000 per year, and 7,500 soldiers do not go very far when their posts have to stretch from Halifax to Quebec, Niagara, Detroit, the forks of the Ohio, Louisiana, and eventually all the way to west Florida. Nor was it likely that the hapless British taxpayer could be asked quietly to pay up. Wartime taxes during the Seven Years' War had eaten up anywhere from a third to three-fifths of ordinary British incomes. These taxes included customs, excises, a land tax, a window tax, and a stamp tax on public papers. Exasperated imperial planners in London cast their eye across the Atlantic, where an English-speaking people were prospering under the shield of an English government which laid on them only the costs of regulating and redirecting their external trade. It was high time, the people in London concluded, that the Americans be made to pay their fair share of the burdens of victory, as well as the ongoing costs of protection. It was time—in other words—to stop merely taxing trade, but doing in America what had long been done in England: levying direct taxes on the internal economies of the colonies.[3]

The agency for doing this was Britain's ancient legislature—the Parliament, in its two houses of Commons and Lords—which had held the purse strings of the English government since the days of the Tudor kings in the 1500s. In 1765, with the flush of victorious cooperation still on everyone's cheeks, Parliament passed a Stamp Act for the colonies, requiring all legal documents, newspapers, college diplomas and other products of the print trade to display a revenue stamp. At that point, the lid blew off everything in America.

One reason why it did was because during the long period of salutary neglect, the 13 North American colonies, and the island colonies of the West Indies, had each developed their own ad hoc legislatures. I say ad hoc because strictly speaking, Parliament was the only legislature of the British people, whether they were in London, Jamaica, or New York. But it had been easier—or at least a lot less complicated and a lot less costly—to let the colonials develop their own little assemblies to tax themselves and

---

[3] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West*, 4–5, 180–3, 200–01, 205, 223; Thomas Conway, The *War of American Independence, 1775–1783* (New York, 1995), 3–5; Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution: A History* (New York, 2002), p. 17; Gary B. Nash, The *Urban Crucible; Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* Cambridge, MA, 1979), 250–56, 323.

therefore foot their own bills instead of sending the bills to Parliament. The bills of the Seven Years' War, however, had been incurred *by* Parliament, but *for* the Americans, and it now made sense for Parliament to make its own assessment on the population of the colonies.

To the colonists, however, the colonial assemblies were the only legislatures they had ever known. Moreover, these legislatures were the only places where their interests were represented because none of the colonies was entitled to send representatives to London to sit in Parliament. The idea that Parliament in London would suddenly reach over the heads of these colonial assemblies to impose taxes—like the compulsory purchase of revenue stamps for documents—which had nothing to do with trade regulation on the high seas but which were clearly designed to raise revenue for Britain from the internal economies of the Colonies, was like turning the only universe the colonists had ever known upside down. It also opened the possibility that Parliament might not stop there: Once Parliament had exercised a power of directly taxing the colonies, and solely for revenue, there was no telling where it might end. Suddenly, Americans who thought they had shucked off the unsophisticated steeple hats and brown broadcloth of their Puritan and Quaker grandparents began to wonder if their virtue-loving grandparents had been right all along about the evils of British life.[4]

The Stamp Act did not last long. Mobs threatened Stamp Act agents and ransacked the homes of colonial officials; clubs and societies calling themselves the Loyal Nine or the Sons of Liberty staged mock burials of the corpse of Liberty. A Stamp Act Congress was convened by the colonies to determine a joint response in October 1765, and colonial merchants were dragooned into agreeing to boycott British imports. By March 1766, members of Parliament with big export constituencies finally arranged for the repeal of the Stamp Act. But even in retreat, they planted a single marker flag known as the Declaratory Act, which conceded the practical folly of the stamp tax, but insisted on the principle of Parliament's right to pass legislation—including tax legislation—for the colonies:

---

[4] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 5–8; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: The Rumbling of the Coming Storm, 1766–1770* (New York, 1967), 22–3; Stanley Weintraub, *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire, 1775–1783* (New York, 2005), 16; William Macdonald, ed., *Select Charters and Other Documents Illustrative of American History, 1606–1775* (New York, 1899), 281 Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West,* 224, 229, 252–6, 274.

> Whereas several of the houses of representatives in his Majesty's colonies and plantations in America, have of late, against law, claimed to themselves … the sole and exclusive right of imposing duties and taxes upon his Majesty's subjects in said colonies and plantations … be it declared … that the said colonies and plantations in America have been, are, and of right ought to be, subordinate unto, and dependent upon the imperial crown and Parliament of Great Britain. … [A]ll resolutions, votes, orders and proceedings, in any of the said colonies or plantations … to make laws and statutes as aforesaid, is denied … and hereby declared to be, utterly null and void to all intents and purposes whatsoever.

Wow. *Plantations*. That word rankled in American ears because it suggested that the colonies were no more than mere settlements, rather than full-scale English institutions with all the rights to self-governance that Englishmen had at home.[5]

It was going to rankle more: In 1767, with the imperial debt load getting worse rather than better, Parliament again returned to a scheme of taxes on the colonial economies, this time trying to ease the pain by spreading the taxes around as duties on a variety of commodities that the colonists imported from elsewhere, from paint to tea. This just might have worked if the Stamp Act had not already aroused colonial prickliness, and had these taxes not called into being a new system of customs officers who clumsily provoked one confrontation after another on the docks and wharves of colonial ports. As it was, the mobs and the boycotts were ready to spring back to renewed life, and the conflicts now verged so closely [to] riot conditions in Boston that in September of 1768 the British army's commander in chief had to peel off two regiments of infantry from garrison duties on the frontier to calm the situation there. Instead of calming it, however, they made it worse: On March 5, 1770, two officers and 12 men of the 29th Regiment opened fire on a Boston crowd which had attacked them with stones, ice balls, and chunks of firewood. Five Americans were

---

[5] Nash, *Urban Crucible*, 274, 292–304; Macdonald, *Select Charters and Other Documents*, 313, 317; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West*, 300, 310, 329–333, 395, 400–407; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: The Rumbling of the Coming Storm*, 13.

killed. The soldiers were tried and two were found guilty of manslaughter, but this did little to appease inflamed colonial tempers.[6]

Nor were they made any happier by Parliament's decision, once again, to repeal the offensive taxes. All of them, that is, but the tax on tea, which was serving the double purpose of underwriting an imperial government bailout of another colonial venture—the East India Company—and also "as a mark of the supremacy of Parliament, and an efficient declaration of their right to govern the colonies."[7] The Americans were, by this point, in no mood to applaud imperial generosity to others at American expense. On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of Boston's Sons of Liberty, thinly disguised as Mohawk Indians, boarded three merchant ships tied up at Griffin's Wharf with cargoes of tea in their holds and pitched the contents of 342 chests of East India Company tea—worth over £90,000 sterling—into Boston Harbor. This Boston Tea Party might have almost been laughable—Mohawks for pity's sake—had it not been for the destruction of the East India Company's property. No one in London was laughing now, and the curtain on large-scale violent confrontation was now about to go up.

---

[6] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 4; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 112–13, 14; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: The Rumbling of the Coming Storm,* 89–90, 107–8, 113; Macdonald, *Select Charters and Other Documents,* 322, 327.

[7] Wood, *The American Revolution*, 36.

Lecture Two

The Ancient Constitution

Scope: Through the centuries, the British monarchy had begun to lose power to the Parliament, where, in the time of the Hanoverians, the House of Commons was divided into the Tories, who were loyal to the king, and the Whigs. Although the Hanoverian kings disliked the Whigs, it was the Whigs who had invited them to the throne, so they had to endure a succession of Whig-led governments. When the Seven Years' War ended, Hanoverian king George III, determined to impose his will on the Parliament and appointed a series of prime ministers to help him do so, ending finally in 1770 with Sir Frederick North, better known as Lord North.

Across the ocean, Americans saw Whig John Locke's account of the creation of governments as a description of how their own societies and governments had come into being—America was for them the state of nature. King George III, Lord North, and the majority in Parliament saw things differently and chose to adopt a series of punitive measures in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party's wanton destruction of property. "Honest Tom" Gage was appointed military governor for Massachusetts, and believed he could bring order to the state. He was mistaken.

Outline

I. English society was composed of three orders: the monarchy, the nobility, and the common people, represented respectively by the king and, in Parliament, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons.

A. During the Tudor dynasty of the 1500s, the monarch was the major player.

1. Even though the king was supposed to be dependent on Parliament for money, both Henry VII and Henry VIII were rich enough on their own and did not have very much in the way of government that needed paying for.

2. Consequently, Parliament had little actual power to restrain the king.

B. The nobility posed more of a threat to the king, so Henry VIII and Elizabeth I created a bureaucracy of professional civil servants who are entirely loyal and entirely dependent on the monarch's good will.

C. The easing out of the nobles from their role in government left a vacuum. James I, the first of the Stuart kings, ascended the throne after the death of Elizabeth, who had no children.

1. James I planned to reshape English politics around the newly popular idea of kingly Absolutism.

2. The chaos and instability that Europe suffered through the 1500s and 1600s, made this idea quite appealing.

D. When James's son Charles came to the throne in 1625, he found the gentry in the Commons difficult to deal with.

1. They hemmed him in with statute law and refusals to vote for taxes.

2. By 1642 he had provoked the Commons so greatly that they resorted to the sword, and the terrible English Civil Wars ensued.

3. Charles I was seized, tried, and executed, and England became a republic, albeit briefly.

E. The Commons proved no better at ruling than the king had been.

1. In the 1650s the country descended into military rule under the Puritan Oliver Cromwell.

2. When Cromwell died in 1658, England invited the king's exiled son to return to England as Charles II.

3. Charles II had learned his father's lesson to deal carefully with Parliament.

II. Charles's brother James inherited the throne in 1685, without having learned their father's lesson.

A. James imagined he could go back to the drawing board of Absolutism.

B. Parliament proceeded to teach the lesson all over again with the Glorious Revolution of 1688.

1. With less bloodshed than the Civil Wars of 40 years before, they exiled James across the channel.

2. In his place, Parliament invited James's daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange, to rule, followed by Mary's sister Anne.

3. When Anne died childless in 1714, Parliament invited another foreign prince, George, the Elector of Hanover and Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg, to reign as George I.

III. It was now clear who had the upper hand, and it was neither the king nor the nobility.

- **A.** Theoretically, the king was ruler of all he surveyed.
  1. He was chief of the British army and navy.
  2. He was head of the Church.
  3. He was sovereign of a united kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.
- **B.** In practice, his powers were limited.
  1. He had only a veto power over Parliamentary legislation, which he dared not use.
  2. He could choose his great officers of state from whatever party or faction in Parliament held the upper political hand against the others.

IV. The two most general divisions in the House of Commons were the Whigs and the Tories.

- **A.** The Tories were loyal to the king and the Church and to holding onto the remains of the nobility's economic power, and they believed that Britain was going to the dogs.
- **B.** The Whigs were distinguished by factionalism and ideological complexity.
  1. They saw themselves as the upright party of country living.
  2. They were the party of those who loved the Protestant religion.
  3. The Whigs also possessed the most talented political thinkers, such as John Locke, James Harrington, John Trenchard, Thomas Gordon, and Joseph Addison.
  4. They saw themselves as the party of virtue and the Tories as the party of power.

V. The Hanoverian kings, George I, George II, and George III, naturally disliked the pretensions of the Whigs.

- **A.** However, it was the Whigs who had invited German George I to the throne in the first place, so the Hanoverians had to endure a succession of Whig-led governments.

B. The Whigs took full advantage of this by casting themselves as the saviors of England whenever things had run into a muddle.

VI. By the 1770s, the "great offices of state" had grown into a mazy bureaucracy.

A. The principal office was that of first lord of the treasury, nominally the king's "prime minister."

B. The treasury was then followed by the three secretaries of state: for the Northern Department (diplomatic correspondence with northern Europe), the Southern Department, and the American colonies.

C. Military forces were divided between the first lord of the admiralty and the commander in chief of the army.

D. These were followed by seven other offices of lesser stature.

E. The real power lay with the prime minister, the secretaries of state, and the heads of the army and navy.

VII. When the Seven Years' War ended, George III had been on the throne for three years and could see where the drift of events was taking Parliamentary politics, and he determined above all things to impose his will on the drift.

A. He forced William Pitt's resignation as secretary of state for the Southern department and replaced him with his beloved mentor, John Stuart, the 3rd Earl of Bute.

1. Bute's ministry was brief and disastrous. He was succeeded by George Grenville.

2. Grenville devised the Stamp Act, and its impending failure pulled him down in 1765.

B. The king then turned to Pitt and to Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham, for a new government.

1. Pitt was sick and struggling, so *de facto* power fell into the hands of Charles Townsend, Chancellor of the Exchequer.

2. Townsend self-destructed by designing the elaborate tax plan for the colonies that resulted in the Boston Massacre in 1770.

C. In 1770, the king got a prime minister he could really appreciate in Sir Frederick North, better known as Lord North.

VIII. The Americans did not see matters as the Whigs did.

- **A.** While the Whigs liked to see themselves as the "country party" they had been the government for most of the preceding half-century, and their leaders were only occasionally drawn from the commoners.
- **B.** While John Locke had based Whig political theory on compacts made by people emerging from a "state of nature," no one in England had ever seen a state of nature.
- **C.** The Americans looked at Locke and the Whigs through the other end of the telescope.
  - **1.** In America, nine-tenths of the colonists were farmers and really were "the country."
  - **2.** Three-quarters of the colonists were descendants of radical religious dissenters who had long ago concluded that England was a moral quagmire.
  - **3.** Americans recoiled in distaste at the low-life characters England shipped to the colonies as soldiers and officials.
- **D.** When Locke talked about governments emerging from a "state of nature" he imagined he was inviting his readers to a thought experiment.
  - **1.** In a state of nature, people banded together and created a government. It was the people who created the government from the ground up, not from the top down.
  - **2.** Americans read this account of the creation of government, as a description of how their own societies and governments had come into being; America was for them the state of nature, and the colonial governments that they had created while the Crown was practicing "salutary neglect" were their own to change as they pleased.
  - **3.** For an Englishman, Locke was a mere hypothesis; for Americans, Locke was drawing from real life.

IX. King George III, Lord North, and the majority in Parliament did not view matters in this way.

- **A.** They were horrified at the Boston Tea Party's wanton destruction of property.
- **B.** The secretary of state for the colonies, William Legge, 2nd Earl of Dartmouth, advised Lord North to punish Boston by removing its custom house and holding its assembly elsewhere.

C. Parliament adopted three punitive measures known as the Intolerable Acts, designed to hold up Boston as an example to the rest of British America.

1. The Boston Port Bill closed the port of Boston to all traffic until restitution was made for the destruction of the tea.

2. The Impartial Administration of Justice Act provided for the trials of colonials—especially those indicted for the Boston riot—outside of Massachusetts.

3. The Bill for Better Regulating the Government of Massachusetts Bay annulled the colony's charter and put it under direct Crown control.

D. A military governor was appointed for Massachusetts, the commander in chief for North America, Maj. Gen. Thomas Gage.

1. Gage was the younger son of a family that had been staunch royalists since the Civil Wars.

2. During the French and Indian War, he survived a major ambush at the Battle of the Monongahela River in 1755 while under the command of Edward Braddock, and he won a series of promotions, rising to the rank of major general.

3. In 1758 he married an American wife, Margaret Kemble.

4. At the war's end he was appointed commander in chief of the postwar forces in America in 1763.

Suggested Reading:

Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*.

Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-Clouds Gather in the West*, chap. 13.

Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation*, chap. 17.

Questions to Consider:

1. How would you characterize the succession of British prime ministers between 1760 and 1770?

2. Why did the Whig theory of government resonate so strongly with Americans?

Lecture Two—Transcript
The Ancient Constitution

I've used the phrase "imperial government" so far without actually giving you much idea of what it means. Just what exactly was this "imperial government" and who were its chief operators? The longest answer to that question was found in what the English political writers liked to call the "balanced" government of the ancient—even if unwritten—constitution of England. English society was understood to be composed of three orders: the monarchy, the nobility and the common people. These three orders were represented by the king and, in Parliament, the House of Lords and the House of Commons. Getting to this place in theory had required a great deal of practical civil bloodshed. If we take things back to the Tudor dynasty in the 1500s—Henry VII, Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary, and finally Elizabeth I—in that environment the king was clearly the principal player. Even though the king was supposed to be dependent on the will of Parliament for money, the miserly Henry VII and the prodigal Henry VIII both had substantial incomes of their own to tap and not very much in the way of government to pay for. Henry VII had come to power through a coup and he piled up wealth for himself through fines, punishment, and confiscations of the property of the losers. Henry VIII, under the cover of religious reformation, seized and sold off the vast properties of the English church and then appointed himself its head so that he could clean out what was left. Even though Parliament, based on the Magna Charta, enjoyed privileges that no other European assembly possessed in the 1500s, whatever restraint Parliament had on the king through authorizing taxes was very, very tenuous. If anything, when the king came to Parliament for money, it was considered unthinkable for the request not to be appropriately rubber-stamped.

The English kings were actually in more danger from their nobility than Parliament: The nobility were over-mighty and nearly unmanageable, owning enormous properties that paid them greater incomes than the king and nurturing confidence that they had about as much right to rule in their sphere as the king. In fact, given the history of upstart nobles who had deposed a sitting king and successfully planted the crown on their own heads, their ambitions to rule did not always stop with their own sphere. The vice of the French, it was said, was lechery; the vice of the English was treachery. Henry VIII and his daughter Elizabeth had to constantly smack down top lofty earls and dukes—the Percy family which wore the title of Earls of Northumberland; the Howard family who wore the title of Dukes of

Norfolk—either that or they were going to find themselves coming to an unpleasant end like Richard III on Bosworth Field.

Henry and Elizabeth proved surprisingly successful in dealing with the nobility, partly because adopting the religion of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s gave them a stick to beat the tradition-laden nobles with; partly because the economic power of the nobility was already beginning to slip slowly away and into the hands of a lesser gentry; and partly because Henry and Elizabeth stopped filling the "great offices of state" with noblemen and instead created a bureaucracy of professional civil servants and officers of state who were entirely loyal to them because they wrote their paychecks, and were entirely dependent on the monarch's good will for staying in their jobs.[8] As the power of the British nobility faded, it became a question as to who would fill the vacuum. The first to answer this question were the Stuart kings of England, James I and Charles I, who came to power peacefully when the last of the Tudor monarchs, Elizabeth, died without marrying and producing an heir.

James I liked to think of himself as a deep scholar of politics and he planned to reshape English government around the newly popular model of kingly Absolutism. It may be hard to understand why kings claiming to have absolute power would ever be *popular*, until you reflect on the chaos and instability that Europe suffered through the 1500s and 1600s from civil wars, religious wars, and the blood-soaked ambitions of noblemen using civil and religious wars to come to power. In that context, a single, absolute king looked like stability—even relief—but only at first.

James I suffered little grief from his lords, but the gentry who sat in the House of Commons were another matter. When James's son, Charles, came to the throne in 1625, he quickly found that the gentry in the House of Commons were going to be even more maddening to deal with, not because they threatened him with the sword—as the nobility did in the days of old—but because they hemmed him in with statute law and refusals to vote taxes. This was not what kingly Absolutism was supposed to be about, and by 1642 King Charles I had managed to provoke the House of Commons so greatly that they did, in fact, resort to the sword and thus followed the terrible English Civil Wars, including the seizure, public trial, and legal execution of Charles I and England's brief fling as a republic.

---

[8] G.R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (Cambridge U.P., 1953), 32–3.

Very brief fling as it turned out: The Commons proved no more adept at governing England than the king, and the 1650s were marked by a descent into military rule under that capable Puritan country squire, Oliver Cromwell. When Cromwell died in 1658, England was weary enough of controversy that it invited the king's exiled son to return to England as Charles II. The rascally and worldly Charles II had learned his father's lesson: Tread noisily as a king, but carry a very small stick when dealing with Parliament. When Charles died in 1685, his brother James inherited the throne. But James had not learnt the lesson his brother had: James II imagined he could go right back to the drawing board of Absolutism and Parliament proceeded to teach the lesson all over again with a second revolution in 1688—the so-called Glorious Revolution—which with substantially less bloodshed than the Civil Wars of 40 years before booted James across the channel into an exile he never returned from. In his place, Parliament invited James's daughter Mary and her Dutch husband, William of Orange, to rule England. They were followed by Mary's sister Anne; and when Anne died childless in 1714, Parliament invited yet another foreign prince, German George, the Elector of Hanover and Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg. He would come to England, and he would wear the ermine as King George I (more about these titles, incidentally, in Lecture Seven when they really start to take on some effective meaning).

By this time in English political history, it was very clear who had the upper hand, and it was neither the king nor the nobility. Theoretically, the king was monarch of all he surveyed: the chief of the British army and navy, head of the Church, sovereign of a united kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. In practice, the king had only a veto power over Parliamentary legislation which he dared not use, an army and a navy which were controlled by a Parliamentary bureaucracy, and the dubious privilege of choosing his great officers of state from whatever party or faction Parliament held the upper political hand against the others.

There *were* parties: The two most general divisions in the House of Commons were between the Whigs and the Tories. The Tories had little to distinguish themselves, apart from an unyielding loyalty to the king and the Church. Also they were distinguished—if you can call it that—by holding the remaining pieces of the nobility's economic power in their hands. They were also characterized by the fairly sulky view that Britain was probably going to the dogs, thanks largely to the Whigs. The Tories, of course, were opposed by the Whigs and they were distinguished by entirely too much factionalism and ideological complexity. The term whig tells a great deal about how the Whigs saw

themselves, because the term was derived from the 17th-century insult word *whiggamore*—in other words a country bumpkin[9]; a redneck—but the Whigs took this title as a badge of pride. They saw themselves as the upright and pious party of fresh air and country living; of small gentry who minded their own business, who loved the Protestant religion in its most Protestant forms; and who looked suspiciously at the gaggle of immoral and effeminate courtiers and influence-peddlers who surrounded the monarchy in that great urban cesspool: London.

The Whigs also possessed the most talented of England's political thinkers, John Locke, whose *Two Treatises on Government* taught that all governments, including monarchies and parliaments, originally began in self-protective agreements made by the people. There was also James Harrington, who never stopped glorifying the idea of a republic in England; then there were the satirists, John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, the authors of *The Independent Whig* (1720) and *Cato's Letters* (1720–1723); and also the journalist, Joseph Addison of *The Spectator.* Addison was also the author of the Whigs' most popular piece of stage propaganda, *Cato: A Tragedy* (1713).

These Whigs, from Locke to Addison, saw themselves as the party of virtue and they suspected that the Tories were nothing but the party of power. Power—in this case and especially the case of the king—really had as its only surviving outlet the power of patronage; of appointment to office. But the Whigs were chary of underestimating even this power because patronage was based not on merit or virtue, but on royal favor; and favor can be cultivated by the unscrupulous, and the unscrupulous use patronage only for corruption and self-interest.[10]

The Hanoverian kings—which is to say George I, George II, and in 1760 George III—naturally disliked the pretensions of the Whigs, and the three Georges never stopped suspecting that the next Oliver Cromwell was lurking somewhere back among the back-benchers in the House of Commons. But since it was the Whigs who had united on inviting German George to become king of England in the first place, the Hanoverians had no choice except to suffer a succession of Whig-led governments; and maddeningly enough, the Whigs took full advantage of this by casting themselves as the saviors of Britain whenever things had been run into a muddle. (The most annoying example of this being William Pitt, to whom

---

[9] Sir George Clark, *The Later Stuarts, 1660–1714* (Oxford, 1955), 101.

[10] Isaac Kramnick, *Republicanism and Bourgeois Radicalism: Political Ideology in Late Eighteenth-Century England and America* (Ithaca, 1990), 172–3.

King George II reluctantly turned in 1756 at the low point of the Seven Years' War, and who promptly turned the war into a smashing success, not only for England, but for the Whigs.)

By the 1770s, the "great offices of state" had grown into a mazy bureaucracy, which sometimes seemed to operate in complete disregard of both king and Parliament. The principal office was that of the first lord of the treasury, who was nominally the king's "prime minister"; there was no actual office of "prime minister" but the first lord of the treasury had, by custom, become that. The treasury was then followed in importance by the three Secretaries of State: one for the "Northern Department"—meaning the diplomatic relations and correspondence with northern Europe—one for the "Southern Department;" and a third for the American colonies. The military forces were divided between the first lord of the admiralty, who was responsible for the Royal Navy's operations, and the commander in chief of the army. These offices were then followed by seven other offices of lesser stature: the Lord Privy Seal, Lord Chancellor, Chancellor of the Exchequer, and so forth; but the real power lay with the prime minister, the secretaries of state, and the heads of the army and navy. Since the Hanoverians liked to think of themselves as soldier-kings, the office of commander in chief was filled by someone besides the king only intermittently; however, it was really, purely, an administrative post and had no say in strategy or even the size of the army. The first lords of the admiralty, however, were real potentates in their own right. The first lords of the admiralty purchased materials, ran dockyards, built ships, and transported the army.[11]

When the Seven Years' War ended, George III had been on the throne for three years. Americans have ended up demonizing George III so thoroughly that it is hard to grasp that in reality he was not an ogre. He was, to be sure, not outstandingly bright; there was a strain of mental illness that ran in the Hanoverians, and the young George himself suffered under a learning disability so severe that he had not learned to read until he was 11. But he was intelligent enough to see pretty plainly where the drift of events was taking Parliamentary party politics, and he was determined above all things to impose his will on that drift. So with the Seven Years' War all but won when he came to the throne, he forced William Pitt's resignation as secretary of state for the Southern Department, sending him off with a consolation prize in the form of a peerage, as Earl of Chatham.

---

[11] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 26–7; Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775–1783* (Lincoln, NE, 1993), 12–20.

The king replaced William Pitt with his own beloved mentor, John Stuart, the 3rd Earl of Bute. He might have been the king's favorite, but he was not terribly competent; and Bute's ministry was brief and disastrous: Bute himself went to pieces and resigned in 1763. Bute was succeeded by one of Bute's protégés, George Grenville, who lasted just long enough to devise the Stamp Act and have its impending failure pull him down in 1765. The king then turned unwillingly to the Whig leadership—back to William Pitt and to Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham—for a new government. But Pitt was sick and struggling, and so the *de facto* power of the government descended into the hands of Charles Townsend as Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Alas for Charles Townsend, he self-destructed in the same way as Grenville; because it was Townshend who designed the elaborate tax plan for the colonies that finally erupted in the Boston Massacre in 1770. Finally, in 1770, the king got a prime minister he could really appreciate: Sir Frederick North, who was known by the courtesy title of Lord North, because he was the heir of the Earl of Guilford and would eventually inherit that title in 1790. Lord North was a clear-eyed and earnest man, but he was also a pliable one, and it was that characteristic which the king intended to use in order to control Parliament and command the American colonies.[12]

Being commanded was not a position the Americans really wanted to see themselves in. However much the Whigs liked to talk of themselves as the "country party"—as opposed to groveling Tory hangers-on who made up the "court party"—the fact is that the Whigs had *been* the government for most of the preceding half-century, and their leaders were only occasionally, like William Pitt, drawn from the commoners. However much a Whig political theorist like John Locke might base Whig political theory on compacts made by the people emerging from a "state of nature," no one in England had ever seen a state of nature. When Locke was asked to draft a constitution for the new colony of South Carolina in 1669, his *Fundamental Constitutions of Carolina* created precisely the same kind of hierarchical government that governed life at home in England.

The Americans, however, looked at Locke and the Whigs through exactly the other end of the telescope. The Whig grandees might talk about being

[12] Merrill Jensen, *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763–1776* (New York, 1968), 38–41; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West*, 366; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 11; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: The Rumbling of the Coming Storm* , 114–6.

the "country party" and the party of "virtue," but in America nine-tenths of the colonies were farmers; they really were "the country," both in the sense of playing country to the handful of cities on the American seaboard—New York, Philadelphia, Boston, Charleston—and in playing country to the metropolitan center of the empire in London. As for virtue, three-quarters of these colonists were descendents of radical religious dissenters who long before had concluded that England was a moral quagmire.[13] Very little was needed to make Americans recoil in distaste at the lowlifes England shipped to the colonies as soldiers and officials. It made about the same impact as a New York rap artist would make, transported to the stage of a temperance hall in Kansas.

Above all, when John Locke talked about governments emerging from a "state of nature," Locke imagined that he was inviting his readers to a thought experiment. Imagine, wrote Locke, "human beings in their original social condition, without government or society, in a 'state of nature.'" No one, Locke reasoned, would be safe from anyone else, so people banded together, chipped in some of their property in the form of taxes and some of their liberty for the sake of protection and created a government. The point Locke wished people to notice was that it was the people who created the government from the ground up, not from the top down, as though God had created kings and created the rest of the human race to obey them. That also meant that the same people could remake their government if they liked. Americans read this, and instead of seeing in it merely a thought experiment, they recognized it as a description of how their own societies and governments in America had come into being. America *was* for them the state of nature; and the colonial governments that the American colonists had created while the Crown was practicing "salutary neglect" were their own to change as they pleased. An Englishmen who had never known anything but the three-fold world of kings, Lords and Commons would never mistake Locke for anything other than a hypothesis; for the Americans, Locke was drawing from life. They had been practicing Whig politics long before John Locke invented them.[14]

[13] Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *As Various as Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans* (New York, 1993), 140; J.D.C. Clark, *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832* (Cambridge U.P., 1994).

[14] Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett (New York, 1965), pp. 395, 401, 405, 460–461; Bernard Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA, 1967).

This might have been the view of the Americans, but it was definitely not the view of things from the perspective of George III or of Lord North, and it was certainly not the view of a majority in Parliament, even Whigs who were horrified at the Boston Tea Party's wanton destruction of property. Nor was Boston the only town with a tea party of sorts. The captain of the tea ship *Polly* worked its way up the Delaware River to Philadelphia in December of 1773, and when it did, a menacing crowd of 8,000 convinced the *Polly*'s captain to take his ship back down the river without even trying to unload. The tea ship *Nancy*, bound for New York, was met at the bar off Sandy Hook by the city's Sons of Liberty and persuaded to put back to sea. When a second ship, the *London*, tried to dock with 18 chests of tea hidden in its hold, the Sons of Liberty—who had been tipped off—boarded the *London*, dumped the tea in the harbor, and made a bonfire of the wooden tea chests. What happened in Boston was only the most outrageous example of what was beginning to look like a pattern of violent resistance to the rules of law and the rules of property in the colonies[15], which explains why reaction in Britain to the Boston Tea Party was just as violent as the tea party itself.

When word of the Boston riot reached England in January of 1774, it was greeted as the prelude to "a general and open rebellion." The secretary of state for the colonies—the pious William Legge, 2nd Earl of Dartmouth—who was otherwise friendly to the Americans, had even given a colonial college a sizeable gift for its establishment and for which the grateful colonial college named itself for him. The Earl of Dartmouth advised Lord North—who was, incidentally, his stepbrother—that something would have to be done to punish "the Town of Boston by removing the Custom House from thence & holding the [colony's] assembly for the future in another place." Not just the government; the members of Parliament were even angrier. On March 7 , Lord North brought a sheaf of documents into Parliament testifying to the details of the Tea Party. After furious but swift debate between March and May, Parliament adopted a series of three punitive measures known as the Intolerable Acts, designed to hold up Boston as an example to the rest of British America.

The first of these three statutes was the Boston Port Bill, which closed the port of Boston to all traffic as of June 1, 1774, and kept it closed until "reasonable satisfaction hath been made" for the destruction of the East India Company tea. The second act was the Impartial Administration of

---

[15] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm, 1770–1776* (New York, 1967), 93, 98–9.

Justice Act, which provided for the trials of colonials—and especially those indicted for the Boston riot—out of Massachusetts, where the civil courts would otherwise have given them only a slap on the wrist, to "some other of his Majesty's colonies, or in *Great Britain*." Thirdly, there was the Bill for Better Regulating the Government of Massachusetts Bay, which simply and frankly annulled the colony's charter and put it under direct Crown control.[16] To put teeth into these measures, a military governor was appointed for Massachusetts: the commander in chief for North America, Maj. Gen. Thomas Gage.

Thomas Gage was an unusual man to get the ticket for suppressing rebellion in America. For one thing, the Gage family had, for generations, loyally picked the side of the king in the king's troubles with rebellions and lost: lost in the Civil Wars of 1640s; lost again supporting the hapless James II. In fact, Thomas Gage looked like he had been *born* as something of a loser. As the second son of the 1st Viscount Gage, the Gage family estate would settle entirely on his older brother and not on him. So, like the second sons of many a well-born English family, Thomas Gage took up a commission in the army, and found himself attached to the 44th Regiment just as it was shipped to America for the French and Indian War. America was good to Thomas Gage: He survived a major disaster when the 44th Regiment, under the command of Edward Braddock, was ambushed at the battle of the Monongahela River in 1755. Gage succeeded to command of the 44th, won promotion to general—first as a temporary brigadier, then permanently to major general—and in 1758 married an American wife, Margaret Kemble. When the Seven Years' War ended, Gage determined to stay in America, and he was appointed commander in chief of the postwar British forces in America. As we'll see in the next lecture, Gage managed this task remarkably well. He was known as "Honest Tom" Gage, and one sympathetic member of Parliament said that Gage "is the unfittest person on earth to argue another Englishman into slavery." When he set up his headquarters in Boston as the new military governor of Massachusetts in the summer of 1774, Gage was determined "to avoid any bloody crisis as long as possible." He was convinced that he could head off any further confrontations by quietly fanning his troops into the countryside to disarm the restless Massachusetts colonists. Of course, he was wrong.[17]

---

[16] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm, 1770–1776* (New York, 1967), 93, 98–9.

[17] David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York, 1994), 37.

Lecture Three
"A Soldier What's Fit for a Soldier"

Scope: The average British soldier was young, likely out of work, and illiterate. He was paid little, trained minimally, disciplined severely, and retained for life. On the other hand, officers, who bought their commissions, were drawn entirely from the class of gentlemen. Both officers and men wore a red wool coat whose purpose was both identification (each regiment had different colors on lapels and cuffs) and intimidation in battle. The system of the regiment, the primary building block of the British army, dated back to the 1640s and 1650s. The British soldier's principal weapon was the Short Land Service musket or "Brown Bess," a flintlock, single-shot, muzzle-loading, .75-calibre musket. Although it was not particularly accurate, when used in mass volleys, it confused and demoralized the enemy and made way for the real lethal weapon of the time, the bayonet.

Outline

I. "Honest Tom" Gage was in England when news of the Boston Tea Party arrived and was summoned by King George III for consultation.

- **A.** Gage believed that dealing with the Americans would not be expensive and that four regiments sent to Boston would do the trick.
- **B.** Gage was to implement the closure of the port of Boston and the reorganization of the Massachusetts colonial government.
- **C.** If all went well, all of the colonial governments could be remodeled on the same pattern.
- **D.** The king equipped Gage with the 4th, 5th, 38th, and 43rd regiments and directed them all to Boston.

II. Who were the British soldiers that arrived in Boston in June 1774?

- **A.** The customary image of the British soldier of the Revolution is that of a collection of Britain's dregs, but the reality is somewhat different.
  - **1.** The average British soldier was probably about 23 years old and about 5-foot-6-inches in height.

2. He had most probably been an agricultural laborer; weavers and shoemakers made up the next largest categories.
3. It was a volunteer army; the average soldier probably enlisted because he was out of work.
4. He was as likely to be Scottish or Irish as he was to be English.
5. He was probably illiterate.

B. The enlistment bounty was a guinea and a crown.
1. The soldier's pay was eight pence a day, subject to "stoppages" for uniforms, tools, and such, thus reducing it to almost nothing.
2. Soldiers could earn extra pay for various tasks and in peacetime could work civilian jobs in their off-hours.

C. Strictly speaking, no one enlisted in the British army; they enlisted or were recruited for service in a particular regiment, the basic organizational unit of the army.
1. Unless a regiment was on foreign service, the recruit usually joined it at once and underwent basic training.
2. Training was not very arduous; the bulk of the recruit's education was in drill.
3. Enlistment was for life.

D. Discipline was severe but was held to be necessary for proper behavior and subordination.
1. Flogging was not abolished until 1881.
2. Desertion, cowardice, striking an officer, mutiny, murder, and rape were all flogging or hanging offenses.
3. Lesser offenses could be punished by solitary confinement, riding a wooden horse, caning or beating, or name-calling.

E. Officers were drawn entirely from the class of gentlemen.
1. Like the ranks, they were almost equally divided among Scots, Irish, and English.
2. There was no military academy for officers until the establishment of Sandhurst in 1796; most officers bought their commissions at prices that kept the lower classes out.
3. The lowest officer rank, ensign, cost £400, and every grade upward had to be bought with subsequent purchases.

- **F.** Officers and men stood out together because of their uniform, a "full-bodied" red wool coat.
  - **1.** The coat featured a divided rear skirt, oversize folded-back cuffs, and folded-back lapels and skirt-corners.
  - **2.** The uniform included a sleeveless white vest, reaching down to the waist or the upper thigh, white knee-breeches, knee-high gaiters, and a wool-felt brimmed black hat.
- **G.** The purposes of the uniform were identification and intimidation.
  - **1.** Identification meant each regiment was entitled to adopt a distinctive color for the lapel and cuff facings of its uniforms.
  - **2.** Intimidation is what came into play on the battlefield, advancing in lurid red.

III. The regiment was the primary building block of the British army.

- **A.** No formal organization existed above its level, though regiments could be grouped together as a brigade on an ad hoc basis for war service or for particular campaigns.
- **B.** There was only one grade of officer above the regimental command rank of colonel, and that was simply general.
- **C.** The regimental system was not that old, dating back to the English Civil Wars of the 1640s and 1650s.
  - **1.** Oliver Cromwell's New Model Army of 1644 created a standing system of regiments.
  - **2.** After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, a number of these regiments were taken over into permanent service.
- **D.** Each regiment was to be divided into eight battalion companies, along with a grenadier company and a light infantry company.
  - **1.** The battalion companies, each with three officers, three sergeants, three corporals, and 56 privates, were the principal fighting components of the regiment.
  - **2.** Grenadiers were originally grenade-men—experts with hand grenades—but by the 1750s had developed into elite assault troops.
  - **3.** The light companies carried lesser and lighter equipment and were usually assigned the job of skirmishers or as flankers.
  - **4.** By 1774, the jobs of the grenadier and light infantry had blended together, as fast-moving shock troops.

- **E.** The total number of regiments, and of the soldiers in them, fluctuated wildly. At the beginning of the Seven Years' War, the total strength of the army was only about 24,000 men.
  1. Parliament begrudged every penny spent on the army.
  2. The outbreak of the Seven Years' War prompted a massive military build-up to the unprecedented level of 203,000 men; 32 regiments containing 30,000 men were posted to the American theater of war.
  3. As soon as the war ended, the cutbacks began, and only a token presence remained in major American outposts.

IV. The British soldier's principal weapon was the Short Land Service musket, or "Brown Bess," first introduced in 1718.

- **A.** It was a musket that featured a 3-foot-6-inch-long barrel with no rifling and was utterly unreliable for hitting targets at more than 80 yards.
- **B.** It was bored for .75 calibre ammunition that crushed bone and tissue.
- **C.** It was a single-shot, muzzle-loader that had to be manually loaded and reloaded each time it was discharged.
- **D.** It was a flintlock; the mechanism for firing was a single integrated system consisting of a trigger, a hammer, a flint, and a frizzen.
- **E.** Flintlock muskets' technological limitations dictated that the fire not be wasted in individual target shooting but used in massed volleys that opened the way for the real decider of battle in the 1700s, the 17-inch-long bayonet.

Suggested Reading:

Reid, *British Redcoat*, *1740–1793.*

Shy, *Toward Lexington*, chap. 7.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 3.

Questions to Consider:

1. How does the real image of the 18th-century "redcoat" clash with the mythological image?
2. How was the British regiment deployed for battle?

Lecture Three—Transcript
"A Soldier What's Fit for a Soldier"

"Honest Tom" Gage was in England for the first time since shipping out to America 20 years before when news of the Boston Tea Party arrived, and on February 1, 1774, he found himself summoned by King George III—as the currently-available expert in American affairs—for consultation. To judge by the king's report of the audience, Gage was clear that "if we take the resolute they will undoubtedly prove very meek." Much of the stiffening which went into the making of the Intolerable Acts was based on Gage's advice about how to make the Americans blink. Still, Gage dismissed any idea that resolution would prove all that expensive: "he thinks … four regiments … if sent to Boston are sufficient to prevent any disturbance."[18] So it was to Thomas Gage that the king and Lord North turned to implement the closure of the port of Boston and the reorganization of the Massachusetts colonial government. If all went well, then the remodeling of Massachusetts could, conceivably, be followed by the remodeling of all of the colonial governments on the same pattern, and thus there would be an end to any future colonial disturbances. To give Gage the tools he would need, the king equipped General Gage with the 4th, 5th, 38th, and 43rd regiments and directed them all to Boston.

Who were these British soldiers who stepped off onto the streets of Boston in the June of 1774? What did four regiments amount to, and what did those mysterious regimental numbers mean? The customary image of the British soldier of the Revolution is that of a collection of Britain's dregs—its poor, its unemployed, its criminals looking to avoid a long spell in jail—managed by sadistic sergeants and commanded with abounding stupidity by chicken-brained officers drawn from the aristocracy. Aside from the fact that these types are likely to be found in any organization, now as well as then, the British army was large enough a service in 1774 that some examples of all of the above were certain to be found there. But were the "common soldiers" of the British army, as the Duke of Wellington so endearingly put it in 1812, really "the scum of the earth"? Did they really enlist, as Wellington claimed, "from having got bastard children—some for minor

[18] John Shy, "Thomas Gage," in *George Washington's Opponents: British Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution*, ed. G.A. Billias (New York, 1969), 21–2.

offences—many more for drink”? Was the British army really, as Wellington’s opposite number—Napoleon Bonaparte—charmingly described it, an army of lions, commanded by jackasses?[19]

If we were to create an average British soldier from among those who disembarked with General Gage in Boston, we would have to say that he was probably about 23 years old, about 5-foot-6-inches in height, and had been an ordinary agricultural laborer. After farm laborers, weavers were the next largest trade category represented in the army, followed by shoemakers. Although at times during the Seven Years’ War the army was authorized by emergency “Recruitment Acts” to use press-gangs to snatch unwilling subjects of the king into the king’s service, the British army was otherwise very largely a volunteer service. In fact, in 1779, an authorized impressment only managed to gather up about 2,200 new recruits. The overwhelming volume of the rank and file of the British army was volunteers. Our average soldier probably enlisted of his own free will, and usually because he was—well—out of work. For others, enlistment was an opportunity to *escape* from work, from dreary apprenticeships, or from the slow pace of rural life. There was an even chance that our soldier was either Scottish or Irish—English recruits made up only 30 percent of the army’s manpower—and he was probably illiterate: Only a third of the ordinary rankers in the British army could read and write.

Our recruit was rewarded—sometimes actually, lured—by the offer of a guinea and a crown: the crown for drinking the king’s health; and the guinea, worth a pound and a shilling, or about $150 in today’s equivalent in cash. This came as an enlistment bounty and would rise to £3 sterling or about $850 by 1778. Our recruit had four days before he had to swear a formal oath before a justice of the peace, so it was perfectly possible to have second thoughts and back out, and recruiting sergeants, who tried to drink men into insensibility and sign them into the army, could easily face a court martial. The soldier’s actual pay would be eight pence a day; but the eight pence would be subject to a number of stoppages for uniforms, tools, and the like so that the soldier’s pay could easily be reduced to almost nothing. However, soldiers could earn extra pay for military construction work, hauling firewood, and in peacetime, taking civilian jobs in their off hours. (One of the resentments which helped produce the Boston Massacre was the

[19] Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (New York, 1969), 321–2; Michael James Farrelly, *The Settlement After the War in South Africa* (New York, 1900), 57.

willingness of off-duty British soldiers in Boston to hire themselves out at wages which undercut the local Boston workforce.)[20]

Strictly speaking, no one actually enlisted in the British army. They enlisted, or were recruited, for service in a particular regiment, which was the basic organizational unit of the British army. Unless a regiment was on Foreign Service, a recruit usually joined the regiment at once and underwent his basic training under the eyes of the regiment's noncommissioned officers: its corporals and its sergeants. It has to be said that basic training—if that's what we can call it—was not a very arduous affair. There were very few physical requirements and there was little enough in the way of physical training: no runs, no bends and thrusts, no chin-ups, no push-ups, no rope climbing. The bulk of the recruit's education and training was in drill. First in personal drill: how to stand, how to march; then in the manual of arms: how to use a weapon; and finally in formation drill, by squad, by company, or by battalion—which is to say groups of companies—and then finally by the entire regiment. On the other hand, if the training was—shall we say—limited in scope, the enlistment was not. Except in the cases of emergency regiments, an enlistment of a recruit was understood to be for life.[21]

Whatever the lightness of the burden of training, the discipline behind it bordered on what today might be described as an "atrocity." The nickname "bloody-back" for British soldiers, as it turned out, was something more than a comment about the soldier's standard red issue coat. Flogging with the cat-o'-nine-tails was not actually abolished as a punishment in the British army until 1881, and floggings in the army of the 18th century were frequent and severe, sometimes amounting to as much as a thousand lashes. Desertion, cowardice, striking an officer, mutiny, murder, rape: all of these were flogging or hanging offenses. Lesser offenses could be punished by solitary confinement in a "black hole," riding a wooden horse, caning or beating, or sometimes punishment came in the form of a blue-aired string of name-calling: "bugger, rascal, villain, scoundrel, with a volley of oaths." Some of this doubtless had a sadistic edge to it; but as one regimental

---

[20] Michael Stephenson, *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence Was Fought* (New York, 2007), 41; Stephen Brumwell, *Redcoats: The British Soldier and the War in the Americas, 1755–1763* (Cambridge U. Pr., 2002), 58, 60–1, 63, 73, 83; Stuart Reid, *British Redcoat, 1740–1793* (London, 1996), 7; Michael N. McConnell, *Army and Empire: British Soldiers on the American Frontier, 1758–1775* (Lincoln, NE, 2004), 95.

[21] Reid, *British Redcoat, 1793–1815* (London, 1997), 19.

surgeon claimed in 1787, such discipline was "absolutely necessary, for the proper behaviour, and subordination of the privates."[22]

The officers who held the king's commission were another story entirely from the men in the ranks. They were, unlike the rankers, drawn almost entirely from "gentlemen," a category which seems to point us toward the basic image of the blue-blooded but clueless British officer: the classic Col. Blimp. Yet the term "gentleman" could embrace a wide variety of roles and individuals, and the officers of the British army ranged from sons of the aristocracy—this is what we would expect, people like Thomas Gage—and from the landed gentry, to men who came from the families of the clergy, merchant classes, the professions, even the sons of serving army officers. A surprising number of British army officers actually even sat in Parliament. These officers also embodied the same ethnic diversity as the men in the ranks: Less than a quarter of the British officers serving in America in the Seven Years' War were English, another third were Scots, and probably an equal amount Irish, so that the officers of the army actually reflected the ethnic makeup of the ranks remarkably well. What really served to separate the officers from the ranks was the "purchase" system. There was no military academy for the training and vetting of British army officers; in fact, there would not be until the establishment of Sandhurst in 1796. Most officers simply bought their commissions, and the prices were bluntly effective in screening out the lower classes. Purchasing the lowest officer rank—that of an ensign, equivalent today of a 2nd lieutenant—cost about £400 sterling, almost six years' equivalent to that ensign's pay. Even if someone could scrape the barrel to pay for an ensign's commission, he was not likely to get much farther, because every next grade up the ladder of officer ranks had to be filled by subsequent purchases. By the time someone managed to make lieutenant colonel—the second-in-command of a regiment—he would have spent close to £4000 in purchases.[23]

What distinguished both officers and men of the British army were their uniforms. Upon enlistment, the British soldier—like the ones coming off the ships in Boston—was issued a "full-bodied" red wool coat with a divided rear skirt and oversized folded-back cuffs and facings from the lapel on downwards all the way to these turned back skirt-corners. Also along

[22] Brumwell, *Redcoats*, 101–3.

[23] Brumwell, *Redcoats*, 87–8; John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, NJ, 1965), 347.

with the red coat would come a sleeveless white vest, reaching down to the waist or the upper thigh, while knee-breeches, knee-high gaiters and a wool-felt, brimmed, black hat trussed up at three corners, completed the soldier's kit. This clothed the soldier pretty effectively. Well maybe not effectively for every purpose: British soldiers stationed in Florida frequently went on duty without their red woolen coats. Others, stationed in the other direction, in forts along the Great Lakes, actually cut leggings and jackets from blankets to wear over their uniforms. But clothing the soldier was only part of the uniform's job; the other parts of that job were identification and intimidation. Identification in this case meant "the regiment," because each regiment was entitled to adopt a distinctive color for the lapel and cuff facings of its uniforms and distinctive metal buttons stamped with the regiment's number. In the case of this uniform, we're looking at a uniform of the 35th Regiment of Foot; this was known as the Orange Lilies Regiment. The color, of course, is reflected in the cuff facings and in the lapel facings of the coat. This instantly identified a soldier wearing this coat as a member of the 35th Regiment. In fact, the 35th Regiment had been in America for the French and Indian War and would serve again through the Revolution beginning at Bunker Hill, which we'll deal with in just a few lectures. Identification was only one of these purposes, however. Intimidation is what came into play on the battlefield, because few things were more likely to inspire panic on the part of one's enemies, and confidence on the part of one's friends, than a unified human red wave advancing, dressed in lurid red coats.[24]

The regiment to which the soldier belonged was the primary building block of the British army. No formal organization existed above the level of the regiment, although regiments could be grouped together as a brigade on an ad hoc basis for war service or for particular campaigns. In fact, there was really only one grade of officer above the regimental command rank of colonel, and that was simply general, or major general; the rank of brigadier general, for the command of groups of regiments as brigades, was bestowed—like brigade organization itself—only on a temporary basis, and a colonel could serve as a brigadier without ever enjoying achieving the rank of general. Surprisingly, the regimental system in the British army was not that old. Prior to the English Civil Wars of the 1640s and 50s, there was almost nothing which could be called a regular army. Much of what passed for a military establishment was simply the old medieval system, in which

[24] McConnell, *Army and Empire*, 54, 63, 64, 65, Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 148–153.

the king called upon his nobility to raise and equip forces for him, or to call out the county militia, or the "trained bands."

It was Oliver Cromwell and his New Model Army of 1644 which created a standing system of regiments. After the restoration of the British monarchy in 1660, a number of these regiments were taken over into permanent English service. General George Monck's regiment of the New Model Army, formed in 1650, was taken over into the restored monarchy's service in 1660 when Monck marched to King Charles II's support from the village of Coldstream on the Scottish border. Hence, in time, this regiment became known as the "Coldstream Guards." Not until the 1750s, however, did the regiments of the army finally lose their last tie to the medieval past, when they abandoned the use of their colonel's name as the general identifier of the regiment—such as Barrel's Regiment of Foot—and substituted a sequence of numbers as regular "line" regiments. Our friends here in the Orange Lilies had originally been known as the Belfast Regiment—they had been raised in Northern Ireland—but in 1747 they are renumbered as the 35th Regiment of Foot.

Each regiment was to be divided into eight battalion companies, along with a grenadier company and, after 1771, a "light" infantry company. Taken together, a regiment would amount to about 450 officers and men. The eight battalion companies, each with three officers—a captain, a lieutenant, and an ensign—three sergeants, three corporals, and 56 privates were the principal fighting components of the regiment. Grenadiers, as their name implies, were originally grenade-men who were supposed to be experts with hand-grenades and who wore tall, conical caps in order to give them a freer space for wind-up and toss than the regular issue, three-cornered or flat-brim hat would do. In practice, grenades were useful only during sieges and attacks on fortifications, and by the 1750s, the grenadier companies had developed instead into elite assault force which could be called up to smash through any lines of stubborn enemy resistance. The "light" companies carried lesser and lighter equipment to enable them to move quickly, and they were usually assigned the job of skirmishers—forming a thin open-order curtain in front of the main line of the regiment—and when the regiment was on the march, the light company would serve as flankers, guarding the regiment from ambush as it marched along the road. These flank companies—the grenadiers and the light infantry—were critically important. An unwary enemy who allowed skirmishers to approach too closely to their own lines would risk having the skirmishers pick off their officers, or pepper their lines with annoying fire and bring down their artillery's horses. But light infantry also required a

considerable investment in training, because fighting in loose order also made it more difficult to relay commands, and they could be easily massacred if they were caught out in the open by enemy cavalry.[25]

By 1774, the tasks of the grenadier and light infantry companies had blended together in order to make them fast-moving shock troops. In the Seven Years' War, British officers began experimenting with detaching the grenadier and light companies of several different regiments and forming them as one temporary unit for special fast-moving operations. In battle, the grenadier company of a regiment was traditionally drawn up on the right and the light infantry company was drawn up on the left, and both would move out ahead of the regiment as skirmishers to clear the regiment's path.[26]

The total number of regiments in the British army, and the soldiers in them, fluctuated wildly. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, the total strength of the British army was only about 24,000 men. A parsimonious Parliament begrudged every penny spent on the army, never forgetting that the army had once been the instrument of overthrowing both king and Parliament. These troops had to be spread out to garrison British possessions in the West Indies, Ireland, Gibraltar, Minorca in the Mediterranean, and Scotland, and to guard against civil unrest in England. Regular British soldiers had only been deployed to North America in 1664 to seize New York from the Dutch, in 1676 to suppress Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, and in the brush-fire wars of the early 1700s. Even then, the largest force dispatched to America numbered scarcely more than 1,000 men, and as late as 1754, the total number of British soldiers stationed in the 13 colonies was only 790, in three under-strength regiments.[27]

The outbreak of the Seven Years' War and the unlikelihood that colonial militia could handle the French and the Indians on their own prompted a massive military buildup to the unprecedented level of 203,000 men. Of these, 32 regiments—containing some 30,000 men—were posted to the American theater of war. But as soon as the Seven Years' War ended, the cutbacks began; as quickly as 1764, there were little more than 10,000 British troops left in North America. In the postwar years, the entire British army sometimes had only 38,000 men under arms, with between 12–15 half-strength regiments and about 5,500–8,500 men assigned to garrison all

---

[25] Alessandro Barbero, *The Battle: A New History of Waterloo* (New York, 2006), 81–3.

[26] Reid, *British Redcoat, 1740–1793*, 30; McConnell, *Army and Empire,* 53.

[27] Robin May, *Wolfe's Army* (London, 1974), 15.

of Canada and the 13 colonies at various times. Even paring the garrisons down to company-strength, there were only enough British troops to maintain a token presence in the major outposts. Some forts, like Ticonderoga and Crown Point in upstate New York—which had been fought-over viciously during the Seven Years' War—were used for artillery storage, or in the case of Crown Point burned down after an accidental fire was ignited in a chimney.[28]

Even with the constant cutbacks and reshufflings, many of these regiments in their short histories developed important identities of their own. The 10th Regiment of Foot, for instance—and when I say 10th Regiment of Foot, "foot" simply means foot-soldiers or infantry—was first recruited in 1685 in Lincolnshire, in the north of England, and it saw continuous action under that most famous of English generals, John Churchill, the Duke of Marlborough. Their service continued through the rising series of wars between France and Britain in the first half of the 18th century. In addition, the 10th Regiment did garrison duty in Gibraltar from 1730–1749 and in Ireland for the next 18 years, until being assigned to North America in 1767. We will hear more about the 10th Regiment of Foot.

The 29th Regiment of Foot, to take another example, was recruited in 1694. Like the 10th Regiment, it fought under Marlborough, but they were sent to America in 1745 as one of the few contingents of regulars stationed in North America. They took up garrison duties at Halifax, in Nova Scotia. The need for constant vigilance against Indian attack resulted in the birth of one of those calcified military traditions for which the regiments of the British army became quaintly notorious. In this case, the requirement was the regiment's officers must always be armed, even when off-duty, an order which today is represented by the officer of the day wearing a sword in the officers mess. The 29th Regiment also became the first regiment to recruit West Indian blacks as regimental drummers, a practice they kept up until 1843. It was the 29th which managed to touch off the Boston Massacre, and although the regiment was pulled out of Boston and sent to garrison east Florida in 1771, they would soon enough be back for further work in New York and Canada, as we shall see.

---

[28] Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 44; Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 35, 114, 269, 330; Robin May, *The British Army in North America, 1775–1783* (London, 1974), 6; McConnell, *Army and Empire*, 116; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West*, 202.

The 42nd Regiment of Foot—to give you yet another example—was recruited from the Scottish Highlands as a police force for the unruly Highlanders, and they won the nickname "The Black Watch" from the dark pattern of their adopted tartan. They did most of their fighting, however, in North America after being shipped there in 1758, and they lost over half their numbers in an effort to capture Ticonderoga from the French. They were cycled back to Ireland in 1767, then back to Scotland in 1775, where they would not stay for long. There was a future for them in America, too.

The principal weapon carried by our newly arrived British soldier was the Short Land Service musket, or "Brown Bess," as it was known by the 1780s. The Brown Bess had been first introduced in 1718, and it was—and let me unpack these terms as we go—flintlock, single-shot, muzzle-loading, .75 calibre musket. Here's what all that means:

It was a musket. It featured a 3-foot-6-inch-long barrel with no rifling—no spiral grooves to ensure accuracy—on the inside of the barrel. Rifled muskets did exist in the 18th century, but they were difficult to load and therefore, slow to fire. The rifle was more accurate than the musket, but it was twice as expensive to manufacture, and some rifles could take as much as 15 minutes to load properly. The Brown Bess musket was utterly unreliable for hitting targets at more than 80 yards, and its shallow muzzle velocity—somewhere between 660 and 800 feet-per-second—could not guarantee that it would penetrate targets it even hit above 100 yards. Although the smooth bore of the barrel made it significantly easier to load than a rifle, it still could only be loaded one shot at a time. If accuracy and swiftness of fire were the principal considerations, then the British army of 1774 would have been just as well off as if it has been armed with longbows and spears.

Then there was this business of .75 calibre: Here was where the difference was made, because the .75 calibre round, lead slug which the Brown Bess fired would, when it finally did hit something within 80 yards, cause enormous amounts of damage. The ball it fired was half an inch in diameter, and because it was round, it did not "tumble" as it entered a human body, but instead crushed bone and tissue in front of it and delivered wounds to the abdomen or the chest which left little hope for survival; that is, when the target wasn't simply killed outright.[29]

---

[29] Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 131, 163.

Thirdly, the Brown Bess was a single-shot, muzzle-loading affair. In other words, the Brown Bess had to be manually loaded and reloaded each time it was discharged. For each round, the soldier had to stand the musket on its butt, empty a paper-wrapped charge of gunpowder down the muzzle, drop the lead ball in—usually contained with the paper cartridge—and then ram the whole business home with a thin metal rammer. This brings us fourthly to it being a flintlock. Once loaded, the mechanism for firing the Brown Bess was a single integrated system consisting of a trigger, which, when pulled, allowed a hammer with a screwed-down piece of flint to strike a moveable frizzen; this struck off a spark which, in turn, ignited a small sprinkle of gunpowder in a pan below the frizzen. The flash this produced shot upwards sending a small puff of smoke into the air and downwards through a hole in the barrel, which set off the powder charge in the barrel and discharged the ball.

A well-drilled infantryman could get off three shots in a minute, which, of course, was not really the point. Because combat in 1774 was not ultimately a matter of firepower, simply because the firepower was not reliable enough to make it nothing but a matter of firepower. Flintlock muskets could make horrible wounds, but their technological limitations dictated that the fire of the Brown Bess not be wasted in individual, one-on-one target shooting, but in massed volleys, to succeed by volume rather than by unit, so to speak. Even so, the ultimate purpose of the volley was not so much to cause casualties as it was to disrupt, confuse and demoralize the enemy and open the way for the use of the real decider of battle in the 1700s: the 17-inch-long bayonet that was affixed to the business end of the barrel when the time for finishing things up arrived. Soldiers might stand for quite some time, blazing away at each other; but a unit which had been stopped or wracked by musket fire had to be pushed before it would collapse or run away. That push was what the bayonet delivered.

The question is: Would all of this work for the British army on Americans? That was what both General Gage and our "average" British soldier were about to discover.

Lecture Four
"How the British Regulars Fired and Fled"

Scope: Soon after returning to Boston, Thomas Gage saw that dealing with the Americans would be far more difficult than he had anticipated, and he asked the king for 20,000 men to control the situation, of which he was sent but a fraction. After the meeting of the First Continental Congress, however, the king promised Gage ample reinforcements and three new generals. Gage's initial inaction irritated his men, but the action soon began in April 1776, when the first clashes between the British and rebel militia took place at Lexington and Concord, where the British sorely underestimated the abilities of the American militia. The British took a terrible beating. News of the fight at Lexington and Concord resulted in a flood of militia volunteers coming to Boston just when Gage's new British generals arrived, bent on sorting out the situation.

Outline

I. With the return of Thomas Gage and the arrival of new British regiments, Boston had the largest concentration of British military force on the continent.

- **A.** After the Massachusetts legislature reelected Samuel Adams as clerk of the House of Representatives, Gage carried out his orders.
  - **1.** Henceforth, the legislature would meet in Salem, not Boston.
  - **2.** Gage would veto the appointment of any officers suspected of having a hand in the Tea Party.
- **B.** The Massachusetts House promptly responded with a boycott of British goods.
  - **1.** Gage retaliated by canceling the proposed meeting of the legislature in Salem.
  - **2.** The legislature called its own session to meet in Cambridge and resumed all the functions of the old legislature, including a secret authorization for buying arms and ammunition.
- **C.** Gage sent a battalion to seize the provincial gunpowder stores in the Provincial Powder House, only to find that militia units had been withdrawing powder all summer.

D. More alarming was the reaction of the colony.

   1. Signal fires were lit and militia units were called out.

   2. Cambridge Loyalists fled to Boston.

   3. In Boston, a committee was formed under Paul Revere to monitor future British troop movements in and out of Boston.

   4. In Rhode Island, the militia seized the artillery in Fort George.

   5. In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 400 militiamen stormed Fort William and Mary and took 100 barrels of gunpowder.

   6. In February 1775, when Gage again attempted to seize colonial weapons and stores at Salem, a battalion of the 64th Regiment of Foot was forced to withdraw by militia.

E. Gage began to have second thoughts about dealing with the Americans.

   1. He began constructing defenses across Boston Neck on September 2.

   2. He got only a fraction of the 20,000 men he had requested from the king and the Earl of Dartmouth.

II. Colonial legislatures up and down the Atlantic seaboard passed resolutions in support of the Bostonians.

A. Where royal governors tried to suppress the resolutions, the legislatures reconvened themselves as provincial congresses.

B. The members of the Virginia House of Burgesses called for a "general congress" of all the colonies in Philadelphia, resulting in the meeting of the First Continental Congress on September 5, 1774.

   1. It swore continued loyalty to the Crown but also recognized the Massachusetts Provincial Congress as the legitimate government of Massachusetts.

   2. It called for more boycotts and invited the Quebec province to join them.

   3. It drew up a bill of grievances to submit to the king.

C. The king reacted by sending General Gage reinforcements.

   1. He was sent nine regiments and battalions from two others, plus his contingent of marines.

   2. He also got three new generals: William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton.

III. Gage's inaction soon angered even the officers, but he was secretly scouting the area and began to plan to seize the colonial munitions at Concord.

A. On April 14, 1775, Gage received orders from the Earl of Dartmouth to arrest the participants in the Provincial Congress, which he attempted to carry out.

B. By the time he carried it out, almost every detail of his search-and-destroy mission was already known by the Americans.

1. On April 15, the Provincial Congress in Worcester adjourned.
2. Select companies of the town militias were to remain on 24-hour alert as "minutemen."
3. In Concord, people began moving the military supplies out of the town, and Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott rode over the roads that led to Lexington and Concord.
4. Revere and Dawes reached Lexington sometime after midnight on April 19 and roused Adams and Hancock as well as the Lexington militia.
5. Halfway to Concord, Revere was caught by Gage's advance screen, and Dawes, narrowly escaping capture, turned back to Lexington. Prescott raised the alarm in Concord just before 2 am.

C. The British marched through Cambridge, turning northwest toward Lexington.

1. It was clear that all surprise had been lost; the British advance guard led by Maj. Pitcairn could hear bells and warning shots and see signal beacons in the distance.
2. Beside the town's common, Pitcairn's light infantry faced 60 to 70 Lexington militiamen.
3. The meeting was unexpected, and officers on both sides urged calm and also resolution.
4. However, someone fired either without orders or accidentally, resulting in the light infantry killing several Lexington men and wounding many others.

D. Col. Smith, arriving at Lexington Common, called his companies back to order and put his men on the road back to Concord.

E. Once in town, Smith sent seven companies of light infantry across the North Bridge to establish a protective west-facing line.

F. In their haste, the British paid no attention to the gathering of a sizeable number of militiamen to the north, on Punkatasset Hill, where five companies had hurriedly assembled, commanded by Col. Barrett.

G. The British did not think the militia posed much of a threat—probably the single greatest mistake the British would make in the conflict.

H. James Barrett marched his men through a ridge 300 yards west of the North Bridge, shook them out into line of battle, and had them load their muskets.

1. Barrett put his companies into column and began marching down by divisions, to the North Bridge.
2. The British light infantry at the bridge fired a volley, killing the captain of the Acton militia.
3. The militia waited until they had closed to 50 yards, then fired a volley that knocked down half of the eight British officers, killed three rankers, and wounded nine more.
4. Under the weight of the militia fire, the British gave way and fled.

I. Back in Concord, Col. Smith heard volley firing and took two of his grenadier companies out to the bridge. Around noon on April 19, he turned the head of his column back toward Boston. He almost didn't make it.

1. Fresh militia companies continued to show up, and they took up positions at choke points along the road to harass the British.
2. When the column reached the outskirts of Lexington, the Lexington militia were ready with another ambush.

J. By around 2 pm, just when the exhausted, disorganized British were running low on ammunition, they came upon the 4th, 23rd, and 47th regiments and the Royal Marines under the command of Lord Percy.

1. Percy extricated the survivors of the expedition.
2. Seventy-three British officers and rankers had been killed, 174 wounded, and 25 missing.
3. The American militia lost 50 dead and 39 wounded.

IV. Word of the fight at Lexington and Concord flew rapidly out to the other colonies throughout New England and southward.

  A. A flood of militia volunteers from all over New England flowed toward Boston.

  B. Gage could scarcely believe he was under siege and failed to declare martial law.

  C. On May 25, Gage's new subordinates—Howe, Burgoyne, and Clinton—arrived, ready to take charge.

Suggested Reading:

Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, chaps. 13–15.

Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, chap. 5.

Shy, "Thomas Gage," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents.*

Questions to Consider:

1. What misconceptions have sprung up about how the Americans fought at Lexington and Concord?
2. How did the rebels in the colonies circumvent the efforts of royal governors to shut down the colonial legislatures?

Lecture Four—Transcript
"How the British Regulars Fired and Fled"

Thomas Gage arrived back in Boston in mid-May 1774, followed a month later by his four new regiments. He already had 12 regiments scattered in various places in British North America, and there was one regiment—the 64th Regiment of Foot—on permanent assignment on Castle Island in Boston Harbor. But with the arrival of the new troops, Boston now became the largest concentration of British military force on the continent. Gage received a surprisingly mild welcome considering that the news of the Boston Port Bill arrived three days before he did, sparking angry public meetings in Boston and in other towns up the coast which depended on Boston for coastal trade. But Gage, himself, was well-known and liked in America, and the city of Boston laid on a public banquet at Faneuil Hall to welcome him.

It did not take long for even this modest politeness to cool down. The Massachusetts legislature met on May 25, almost in the hope that if they kept on doing things as though nothing had happened, nothing would, and they reelected the most radical of the Boston Sons of Liberty—Samuel Adams—as the clerk of the House of Representatives. But Gage had his orders. Henceforth, he decreed, the legislature would meet not in Boston, but up the coast in the town of Salem, and he would veto the appointment of any legislative officers suspected of having a hand in the Tea Party. The Massachusetts House of Representatives promptly replied by proposing the tried-and-true method of boycotting British goods in the colony and establishing a Committee of Correspondence, with Dr. Joseph Warren as its Chair, to coordinate responses in New York and Philadelphia. When Gage retaliated in September by canceling the proposed meeting of the legislature in Salem, the legislature called its own session to meet across the Charles River from Boston, in Cambridge, where they convened themselves as the Massachusetts Provincial Congress and immediately resumed all the functions of the old legislature, including a secret authorization for buying gunpowder, muskets and bayonets, and artillery.[30]

Gage might have gathered up his troops and at that moment lunged across the river from Boston to Cambridge and bagged the entire Provincial Congress. But Gage was wary of provoking a Cambridge Massacre to go

[30] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 156–62, Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 61.

along with the Boston one of 1770, especially since he understood clearly that the New England town militias would surely try to intervene and make a fight out of any effort that way. But if he could not take prisoner this obstreperous Provincial Congress, then perhaps at least he could deprive them of the *means* of resistance. In the early morning hours of September 1, 1774, a picked battalion from the 4th Regiment of Foot rowed up the Mystic River and seized the provincial gunpowder stores in the Provincial Powder House, six miles north of Boston in Somerville. Gage had actually waited too long to seize the powder—the militia units had been withdrawing powder from The Powder House all summer—but what was genuinely alarming was the reaction of the colony: Signal beacons were lit, militia units were called out from as far away as Connecticut, and Loyalists in Cambridge abandoned their homes and streamed into Boston for safety as refugees.

Inside Boston, a committee of observation was formed under the silversmith, Paul Revere, to monitor future British troop movements in and out of Boston. In Rhode Island, the militia seized the artillery in Ft. George and dragged it through the streets of Providence, meaning "to make use of them, to defend themselves against any power that shall offer to molest them." In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 400 militiamen stormed the tiny six-man garrison of Ft. William and Mary, hauled down the British flag, and made off with 100 barrels of gunpowder. In February 1775, when General Gage attempted a second seizure of colonial weapons and supplies up the coast at Salem, a battalion of the 64th Regiment of Foot was surrounded by hastily-called militia and forced to withdraw. Taken aback by the violence of these reactions, General Gage began having second thoughts about the ease with which the Americans were likely to be brought to heel "but" as he wrote "by first making a conquest of the New England provinces." Gage began throwing up defenses across Boston Neck on September 2, 1774, and to the king and the Earl of Dartmouth, he upped the estimate of the forces he would need to 20,000 men. This was not the message either the king or Dartmouth wanted to hear. They sent him a contingent of 700 Royal Marines and instructed him to get on with the job he had been sent to do.[31]

---

[31] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 162–3; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 44–5, 50–1, 56, 62–3; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 19; Thomas J. Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies: The Story of Bunker Hill* (New York, 1960), 43.

Massachusetts was not the only place in America fermenting with rage over the Intolerable Acts, because it was easy to see that if the new scheme of royal control was made to work in Boston, it would be probably be applied everywhere else too. Arthur Lee, a Virginian living in London but a member of a widely-networked Virginia family, warned his brother Richard Henry Lee that if the ruin of Boston was successful, "you may be attacked and destroyed, by piece-meal" and "every part will in its turn feel the vengeance which it would not unite to repel." Pennsylvania's lieutenant governor, John Penn, reported despairingly in September 1774 that Americans were convinced there is "a formed design to enslave America," and even if the Intolerable Acts applied only to Massachusetts, they were, "nevertheless," said Penn, "held up as an irrefragable argument of that intention." Colonial legislatures up and down the Atlantic seaboard passed resolutions in support of the Bostonians, and where royal governors tried to suppress the resolutions, the legislatures did as the Massachusetts legislature had done and reconvened themselves as provincial congresses. The members of the Virginia House of Burgesses went a step further and called for a "general congress" of all the colonies in Philadelphia.

This First Continental Congress convened on September 5, 1774, and only sat until October. But as much as it swore its continued affection and loyalty to the Crown, it also recognized the Massachusetts Provincial Congress as the legitimate government of Massachusetts. The Continental Congress also called for more boycotts, invited the Quebec province to join hands with them, and drew up a bill of grievances to submit to the king.[32]

The king was not amused. "The die is now cast," the king wrote, "the Colonies must either submit or triumph," and in short order General Gage got his reinforcements. The 10th Regiment—the Lincolnshire Regiment—the 52nd Regiment, the second battalion of the 59th, and two companies of the 64th were pulled off station from Canada, while the 18th Regiment—the Royal Irish—were re-deployed from Philadelphia, the 47th Regiment from New Jersey, and the 23rd—the Royal Welsh Fusiliers—from New York, along with two companies of the 65th Regiment who had been in Boston back in 1768. In all, Gage was given nine regiments and battalions from two others, plus his contingent of Marines. He also got three new generals to

---

[32] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 239–58; Randall 261–4, 269; Jensen, *Founding of a Nation*, 471–82; Edmund Cody Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (New York, 1941), 56–8, Conway, 18; "Declarations and Resolves of the First Continental Congress," in Macdonald, ed., *Select Charters and Other Documents*, 357–61.

assist him in commanding these troops: William Howe, who had fought under the legendary James Wolfe in the Seven Years' War. It was Howe who was largely responsible for the innovation of introducing light infantry companies to British army line regiments; along with Howe came John Burgoyne, who had won laurels during the Seven Years' War as a hard-hitting but well-liked cavalry commander; and then there was Henry Clinton, who was the son of the former royal governor of New York and who was actually born in America.[33]

What Gage was going to do with all of these people was far from clear. He was not eager to repeat the Salem debacle, but cooping up 3,000 British soldiers in a town of 15,000 inhabitants sooner or later would mean trouble: boredom, drunkenness, and desertion began to take their toll. The 23rd Regiment lost 27 deserters that winter, some of them enticed by promises from the Provincial Congress of rewards of 300 acres of New Hampshire land, and even the officers began grumbling audibly about their commanding general's inaction: "One active campaign, a smart action, and burning two or three of their towns," wrote the Marine contingent's commander, Maj. John Pitcairn, "will set everything to rights." In fact, Thomas Gage was already secretly scouting the area westward from Boston to Worcester, where the Provincial Congress was now meeting. When his scouts reported a major buildup of supplies at Concord, Gage began to plan a large-scale, select operation to reach out and grab the colonial munitions there. An added attraction was the report that two of the Provincial Congress's most radical members, Sam Adams and John Hancock, were staying in Lexington, on the road to Concord, and thus could be bagged along with the colonial supplies. In early April, Gage began ordering the 38th and 52nd regiments out on practice maneuvers to Watertown, and on April 14, HMS *Nautilus* arrived in Boston with orders from the Earl of Dartmouth, prodding Gage to "arrest the principal actors and abettors in the Provincial Congress." The next day, Gage ordered the commanders of his 11 regiments and battalions to relieve their light and grenadier companies of further duty, and he then organized them into a mobile strike force under the command of Lt. Col. Francis Smith of the 10th Regiment and Maj. Pitcairn of the Royal Marines. An advance screen of 10 officers and 10 sergeants galloped out ahead on the morning of April 18, 1775, to secure road crossings and to prevent American express riders from warning the militia along the route to Lexington and Concord. That evening, Col.

---

[33] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 259; Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 417.

Smith's 850 light infantry and grenadiers were ferried in navy longboats across the Charles River to Lechmere Point.[34]

Unhappily for Thomas Gage, almost every detail of his search-and-destroy mission was already known by the Americans. There were few secrets that could be kept in Boston, and it was not hard to guess that something was up when the regiments' flank companies were being detailed off for some unspecified duty. On April 15th, the Provincial Congress in Worcester prudently adjourned and dispersed. Select companies of the town militias were designated as "minute" companies, ready to turn out at a minute's notice, and were to remain on 24-hour alert as "minutemen." In Concord, the people began moving the military supplies out of the town, and three express riders—Paul Revere, William Dawes, and Samuel Prescott—bolted out over the roads that led from Boston to Lexington and Concord. Revere and Dawes reached Lexington sometime after midnight on April 19 and roused Sam Adams and John Hancock, who promptly packed and fled, as well as the Lexington militia. Halfway to Concord, Revere was snared by Thomas Gage's advance screen and Dawes, narrowly escaping himself, turned back to Lexington. But Prescott, the third of the express riders, eluded the British screen, and he arrived in Concord just before 2 am on April 19 and raised the alarm. In a wide fan westwards from Boston, signal fires were lit, church bells clanged, and sleepy-eyed militiamen turned out in town after town to face the British menace. Sylvanus Wood, a "minuteman" from Woburn, "heard Lexington bell about one hour before day" and "concluded that trouble was near."[35]

The British menace, meanwhile, marched through Cambridge, turning northwest through Menotomy—modern-day Arlington—toward Lexington. An advance party of six light companies under Maj. Pitcairn took the lead, and they came up to the outskirts of Lexington at about 4:30 am. By that time, it was clear to the British that all surprise on this expedition had been lost. The advance screen reported the capture of Revere; that showed the word of the expedition was already out. Along the road into Lexington, Pitcairn's advance

---

[34] Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 413–8; Shy, "Thomas Gage," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents*, 28; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 6; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 69, 89, 114; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976), 113.

[35] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 130–2, 143–7; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 259; Wood, in John C. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, 1980), 7.

guard could hear bells and warning shots and see signal beacons in the distance. They did not need a lengthy explanation to understand what that meant. Pitcairn and the light infantry swung through Lexington and then peeled right to the side of the town's open common—or "green"—where they found themselves facing between 60 and 70 Lexington militiamen, "a body of country people," as they were described, "drawn up in military order with arms and accoutrements." Neither the regulars nor the militia had planned on meeting this way, and the officers on both sides nervously urged calm, but also resolution. Capt. John Parker of the Lexington militia told his men, "Don't fire unless fired upon! But if they want to have a war let it begin here!" Maj. Pitcairn turned his lead companies, from the 4th and 10th Foot, from column into line, but turned back toward the militia with the warning: "Throw down your arms, ye rebels … disperse, damn you, disperse … " No one on either side was able, afterwards, to say for sure what happened next. But someone either fired without orders or suffered some accidental discharge of their loaded musket—something the Brown Bess was prone to—and the British light infantry promptly opened fire, and at only 30 yards distance, killed two militiamen in their place, wounded five others who quickly died thereafter, and shot down one other. Nine other Lexington men were wounded.[36]

Only now, at this moment, did Col. Smith and the rest of this expedition come up to Lexington Common, and "desirous of putting a stop to all further slaughter," Smith angrily called his companies back to order. It was certain now that General Gage's mission had been discovered, but Smith was an orders-are-orders man, and after delaying "a considerable time there," put his men on the road to Concord. Smith at least took the precaution of sending an express rider of his own back to Boston to apprise Gage of the situation, but by daybreak, his column had reached Concord without any further annoyance except the continued clamor of bells and the fire and smoke of signal beacons. A thin sprinkling of local militia temporarily barred the way, but they quickly retreated in the face of the greater British numbers. Once into the town of Concord, Smith sent seven companies of light infantry across the North Bridge that spanned the Concord River to establish a protective west-facing line, while the grenadiers ransacked the town, looking for weapons and for gunpowder.

---

[36] Lt. Col. Francis Smith to Thomas Gage (April 22, 1775), in *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770–1783 (Colonial Office Series)*, ed. K.G. Davies (Dublin, 1975), 9:103; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 189; Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763–1789* (New York, 1971), 60–1.

They found little except for three big 24-pounder cannon, whose wooden gun-carriages they proceeded to burn. Two companies of light infantry, which were sent across the river and two miles west of the town to search the farm of militia's commander—a miller named James Barrett—found next to nothing.[37]

In their haste, the British paid no attention to the gathering of a sizeable number of militiamen to the north, on Punkatasset Hill, where five full companies—two from Concord, and one each from Acton, Bedford and Lincoln—had hurriedly assembled, commanded by Col. Barrett, dressed, as he was described in "an old coat, a flapped hat, and a leather apron." Not that the British thought the militia posed much of a threat. British regular officers routinely referred to the American militia as "the worst soldiers in the Universe," and General James Murray—the one-time governor of the Quebec province—dismissed the American militiaman as "a very effeminate thing, very unfit for and very impatient of war." This was probably the single greatest mistake the British would make in this conflict, because in fact, substantial numbers of these militiamen were veterans of the French and Indian War. Capt. Parker of the Lexington militia had served under James Wolfe at Quebec, and many of them probably knew their way around field drill and weapons-handling better than many of their opposite numbers in the British ranks.

Once James Barrett, in his leather apron, mustered his companies together on Punkatasset Hill, he marched them to a ridge 300 yards west of the North Bridge, shook them out into line of battle, and had them load their muskets. They waited there, hoping—as Capt. Parker had done at Lexington—that if anyone started a fight, it should be the British. But one Concord lieutenant of militia, Joseph Hosmer, seeing the smoke from the bonfire of the artillery carriages in the town and mistaking this for the burning of the town itself, said loudly enough for everyone to hear: "I have often heard it said that the British have boasted that they could march through our country, laying waste our hamlets and villages and we would not oppose them. And I begin to think it is true." Pointing to the rising column of smoke, Hosmer added, "Will you let them burn the town down?" That was enough for James Barrett, who put his companies back into column and began marching down "by divisions … from their left in a very military manner" to the North Bridge, a fifer squeaking the tune "The White Cockade." The British light infantry at the North Bridge fired a volley, instantly killing the captain of

[37] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 207–09.

the Acton militia. The militia waited to return the fire until they had closed to 50 yards, then fired a volley that knocked down half of the eight British officers, killed three rankers, and wounded nine more. "The weight of [the militia fire] was such that we was obliged to give way," reported one of the surviving British officers, "then run with the greatest precipitance."[38]

Back in the center of Concord, Col. Smith pricked up his ears at the sound of volley firing, and immediately took two of his grenadier companies out to the bridge where he met the fleeing remnants of his light infantry. He watched the militia file over the bridge and take up positions behind a stone wall, and then after 10 minutes he ordered his men to fall back into Concord. Smith had done his job, the troops had done their job; now it was time to go. Around noon on April 19, Smith turned the head of his column back toward Boston. He almost did not make it. Fresh militia companies continued to show up, and they took up positions at choke points along the road to harass the retreating British. At Meriam's Corner, the Framingham and Sudbury militia, drawn up in line-of-battle by five officers who had served in the French and Indian War, ambushed the British column, taking down every officer in the 5th Regiment's light infantry company. The British threw out flankers to clear the space beside the road, but when the column reached the outskirts of Lexington, the bloodied Lexington militia were ready with another ambush, hitting the last unwounded officer of the 10th Regiment and wounding Col. Smith in the thigh. By now, around two o'clock in the afternoon, the British were exhausted, disorganized, and running low on ammunition. "We must have laid down our arms, or been picked off by the rebels at their pleasure," wailed one British officer, only to stumble at that moment into the arms of the 4th, 23rd, and 47th regiments and the Royal Marines, all under the command of Lord Hugh Percy, the eldest son of the Duke of Northumberland and colonel of the 5th Foot, whom a worried Thomas Gage had sent to the support of his expedition when he learned from Smith's express rider of the loss of its surprise.

Percy extricated the survivors of the expedition, but not without a continuing running fight all the way back to Charlestown, across from Boston. Seventy-three British officers and rankers had been killed, another 174 wounded, and 25 missing: 273 in all. Half of the light company of the 5th Foot was killed or wounded. The 10th Foot's light company was commanded by a sergeant and counted only 12 men standing, and the Royal

---

[38] Mackesy, *The War in America*, 30; Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 125; Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride,* 211–14.

Marines—who covered the retreat as rear-guard—lost 27 killed and 40 wounded. The wounded, of course, in many cases had to be left behind, and of the eight wounded men whom Col. Smith left behind in Concord, seven never rejoined their regiments. That was because two of them married Concord women and settled there. The American militia lost 50 dead and 39 wounded. "For my part," wrote the clear-eyed Lord Percy,

> I have never believed, I confess, that they would have attacked the King's troops, or have had the perseverance I found in them yesterday. … Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob, will find himself very much mistaken. They have men amongst them who know very well what they are about, having been employed as rangers against the Indians and Canadians. …[39]

Word of the fight at Lexington and Concord flew like the swallows. Paul Revere, who was turned loose by the British screening force because they had no way to keep prisoners, spent the next three weeks carrying a circular letter throughout New England. Other express riders carried the news further southward. A rider shouted the news to New London, Connecticut by seven o'clock on the evening of April 20, and another express rider carried the news to New York City by the twenty-third. Philadelphia had the news on the morning of April 24, Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia, had the news in hand by April 28. Charleston, South Carolina, heard about Lexington and Concord on May 9. At the same time, as this news was flooding westward and Southward, a flood of militia volunteers was heading in the other direction toward Boston where somewhere between 13 and 15,000 militia men—not only from Massachusetts, but from Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire—all pitched themselves in a camp that formed a rough semi-circle around Boston, all the way from Roxbury to Lechmere. Thomas Gage, stunned by the rout of his troops, scarcely could believe that he was now under siege, and he failed even to declare martial law in the town of Boston. His report on the Lexington and Concord affair arrived in England, but two weeks *after* the Provincial Congress deposited its own lurid report to the British press. "We want to get out of this cooped up situation," wrote one frustrated British lieutenant. "We could now do that I suppose but the General does not seem to want it. There is no guessing what he is at."[40]

---

[39] Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, 222, 232, 254, 264, 320–1; Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World*, 131.

[40] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 87–8.

If Thomas Gage could not sort out this situation, there would soon be those willing to do it for him. On May 25, Gage's new subordinates—William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton—all arrived in Boston, and they were more than happy to take charge.[41]

[41] Shy, "Thomas Gage," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents*, 46.

Lecture Five
Standoff in Boston, 1775

Scope: Although the new Continental army was challenging to recruit and organize, Thomas Gage found it far more difficult to recruit and replace the British troops he had lost. In addition, many members of Parliament opposed the war that King George so adamantly supported. Meanwhile, the conflict began to spread with the American capture of a British post at Ticonderoga.

On the same day, John Adams's proposal to the Second Continental Congress to declare the colonies "free, sovereign and independent states" was met with horror by many of his fellow delegates, for whom reconciliation was the overwhelming desire. The Second Continental Congress also authorized the creation of a combined colonial army, with George Washington as commander in chief and senior general. Washington knew the hardship of war as well as the hardship of being a gentleman farmer who, like many, had to deal not only with threat of what the king's men might do but also with what their own slaves might do if incited to rebel.

Outline

I. When the Provincial Congress reassembled on April 21, it had to create a Continental army, and what they came up with was a mirror image of the British system.

- **A.** But the militiamen were used to their local companies and officers, and reshuffling them into regiments and creating accurate rolls took longer than expected.
  - **1.** The Provincial Congress had authority only over the Massachusetts militia and could to nothing about the militia units that had joined from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire.
  - **2.** Fitting the militia companies into regiments was like trying to piece together parts from different puzzles.
  - **3.** The camps were disorderly, and the regiments so unevenly filled that recruiting parties had to be sent out into the countryside.

B. On April 20, the president of the Provincial Congress's Committee of Safety sent a letter to Gage suggesting everyone talk matters over.

C. Gage was having difficulties making up his mind.

   1. On one hand, he immediately moved to disarm the civilian population of the city.

   2. On the other hand, he waited until June 12 to declare martial law.

D. Gage was convinced that he had too few soldiers to attempt further operations outside Boston.

   1. From Lexington and Concord he realized that every rebel could be replaced locally, but every redcoat lost was replaceable only by a three-month-long transatlantic process.

   2. New orders authorized him four more infantry regiments, so he felt there was no point in taking further action until those troops arrived.

II. Gage was not the only Englishman who was surprised and uncertain.

A. When Parliament met in mid-January, 1775, it was clear that many members were uneasy about the Intolerable Acts.

   1. On February 1, William Pitt asked for suspension of the acts and recognition of the say of colonial legislatures in all tax matters.

   2. Sir Charles Pratt supported Pitt's plea and called the Intolerable Acts a "Bill of war."

B. Some senior serving officers gave notice that they would not serve in an American war.

C. Merchants hurt by boycotts of their products begged for restoration of commerce.

D. Even within Lord North's cabinet, the Earl of Dartmouth thought Chatham's plan was worth considering.

E. The king, however, was adamant, and Parliament would swing behind him and Lord North.

   1. An address to the king, assuring him full support in Parliament, passed the House of Commons.

   2. In November, the Earl of Dartmouth was replaced as secretary of state for America by a militant hardliner, Lord George Germain.

III. Meanwhile, the conflict began to spread beyond New England.

- **A.** The Congress's Committee of Safety authorized Benedict Arnold to recruit a regiment of volunteers and raid the tumble-down British post at Ticonderoga in western Massachusetts and seize the weaponry there.
- **B.** When he arrived, he learned that the Green Mountain Boys, commanded by Ethan Allen, had a similar mission.
  - **1.** Arnold overtook Allen 20 miles from Ticonderoga and struck a deal. Allen would allow Arnold to share command of an attack.
  - **2.** At daybreak on May 10, 1775, 83 Green Mountain Boys surprised the corporal's guard at Ticonderoga and seized the supplies.

IV. On the same day, at a Second Continental Congress, Massachusetts delegate John Adams proposed that the Congress ought to declare the colonies "free, sovereign and independent states."

- **A.** This opinion was received with horror by his fellow delegates, for reconciliation on equitable terms, not independence, was the overwhelming desire of the Continental Congress.
- **B.** On May 16, Richard Henry Lee moved that Congress authorize the creation of a combined colonial army, "the American Continental army," specifying four major generals and making George Washington, commander in chief and senior general.

V. Born in 1732, Washington had never really wanted to be anything but a soldier.

- **A.** When his half-brother, Lawrence, a regimental captain, died in 1752, George inherited the estate and his brother's post.
  - **1.** Within two years he was appointed lieutenant colonel and sent by the royal governor of Virginia to clear the French out of some land that Virginia claimed near the forks of the Ohio River.
  - **2.** This incident triggered the French and Indian War, and opened up a great opportunity for Washington when General Edward Braddock invited him to join staff of two regiments of British infantry, sent over to deal with the French.
  - **3.** Braddock and his troops met with disaster at the hands of the French and the Indians in an ambush at the battle of Monongahela. Washington took command of the Virginia

militia accompanying Braddock and covered the retreat of the regulars.

4. The action made Washington into a hero, but no further action or permanent confirmation of his temporary rank of captain were forthcoming.

B. In 1759, he married a wealthy widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, took his seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses, and retired to the life of a gentleman farmer.

VI. Washington soon learned the hardships of being a Virginia planter.

A. The imperial government had restricted the purchase and development of new land in the west.

B. The new taxes of the 1760s, beginning with the Stamp Act, alienated Washington still more.

C. In 1774, he was selected as one of the Virginia delegates to the First Continental Congress.

VII. A well-to-do Virginia planter had a great deal at stake in defying the authority of the British Crown, but the planters' apprehension of what the king's men might do was not as great as their fear of what their own slaves might do.

A. Slave labor had been part of colonial life for 150 years, the ugly secret at the foundation of American prosperity.

B. Slavery was fed by a highly lucrative flow of captive Africans across the Atlantic.

C. The British North American colonies received only about 10 percent of the 11 million Africans transported to the New World between 1500 and 1830, but black slavery was present in each colony.

VIII. Slaves accounted for 20 percent of the population of the 13 colonies.

A. They were an asset and a threat—indispensable labor with the threat of revolt.

B. To rebel would be to risk losing the support every planter would enjoy from the British regulars in the event of a slave uprising—unless the British were inciting the uprising themselves.

C. Two days after Lexington and Concord, the royal governor of Virginia, John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore, attempted to raid the colonial powder magazine at Williamsburg.

D. When militia mustered across the colony and threatened to march to Williamsburg, Dunmore himself threatened to arm his own slaves and any others who joined him.

E. In November, Dunmore issued a proclamation declaring he would free any slave who agreed to bear arms on the Royalist side.

F. This proclamation brought many of Virginia's undecided gentry over to the Continental Congress's side.

IX. Washington arrived in Philadelphia in May for the opening of the Second Continental Congress, wearing his old uniform.

A. Washington had the requisite military experience and represented the interests of the largest of the colonies.

B. Congress offered him command of the Continental army—which did not yet exist.

C. He set out for Boston, where the new army was embroiled with the British at Bunker Hill.

Suggested Reading:

Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, chap. 4.

Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics*, chaps. 3–4.

Randall, *George Washington*, chaps. 10–12.

Questions to Consider:

1. What role did American slavery play in driving the Virginians into the arms of the rebellion?
2. How important was the attitude of the king in forming the British response?

Lecture Five—Transcript
Standoff in Boston, 1775

The New England militiamen who spent the last week of April 1775 staring defiantly across the bay at the British garrison in Boston were really more of an armed mob than an army. This was not because they lacked for formal military training or experience; as we saw in Lecture Four, many of these militiamen had fought in the French and Indian War only 12 years past. What they lacked was large-scale organization, because the largest unit any of them belonged to was a town company. The Massachusetts Provincial Congress, back in October, had made plans for coordinating the various town militias under the command of six general officers—Jedidiah Preble, Artemas Ward, Seth Pomeroy, John Thomas, William Heath, and John Whitcomb; all of them veterans of the French and Indian War—but by the time the Congress prudently scattered on April 15 before General Gage's sweep toward Lexington and Concord, the Congress's plans for a "Constitutional army" had not gone much further than paper. Lexington and Concord changed that: When the Provincial Congress reassembled on April 21, it suddenly had the soldiers, and now it had to invent the organization. What they came up with was a mirror image of the British system: regiments of 600 men each, in 10 companies, plus an artillery regiment.

But the militiamen who had turned out for the alarm on April 19 were used to their own local companies and their own officers, and reshuffling them into regiments with provincial regimental officers and creating accurate regimental enlistment rolls took more time than anyone expected. Not until the end of June did the Massachusetts militia finally sort itself out into 26 regiments, under the overall command of Artemas Ward. Unhappily, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress had authority only over the Massachusetts militia. They could do nothing about the militia units which had joined them from Rhode Island, Connecticut, and eventually New Hampshire. Over time the New Hampshire men were organized into three regiments, like the Massachusetts militia, and these were placed under John Stark, Enoch Poor, and James Reed. The Rhode Islanders were also outfitted as three regiments, with all of them under the overall command of Nathanael Greene, about whom we'll hear a whole lot more in Lecture Twenty-One. The Connecticut legislature, sitting in a specially called

session, took the hint from the other colonies and created six regiments for its troops as well.[42]

All of this looked much more impressive than it really was. Fitting the militia companies into regiments was like trying to piece together parts from different puzzles, and the artillery regiment had little powder and fewer artillery pieces to harass the British by dropping shot onto their heads in Boston. A headquarters of sorts was improvised on the common in Cambridge, with the kitchens of Harvard College pressed into service to cook meals. But the camps of these militia regiments were disorderly, and the regiments were so unevenly filled that recruiting parties had to be sent out into the countryside, thus reducing the number of men actually present to hold the long semicircle line from Medford to Roxbury. That became thinned out now to a very thin shield indeed. On April 20, Dr. Joseph Warren, the president of the Provincial Congress's Committee of Safety, actually sent a letter to General Gage in Boston, gingerly suggesting that everyone sit down and talk matters over. Warren even offered to allow Loyalists in the hinterlands to seek refuge in Boston if Gage would allow any rebel sympathizers who wanted to leave Boston likewise to exit. But Gage was having organizational difficulties of his own, mostly about making up his mind what to do. On the one hand, he moved immediately to disarm the civilian population of the city of Boston. On the other hand, he waited until June 12 to declare martial law, and he ignored a blustery demand by the commander of the small Royal Navy flotilla in Boston, Admiral Samuel Graves, that the navy blow everything in Massachusetts that the navy's guns could reach to smithereens.

Gage did not want to go down as the man who had caused a war in America, but he was convinced, after Lexington and Concord, that he had too few soldiers on hand to attempt any further operations outside Boston. The debacle along the roadsides had taught him one very important lesson: that every American who was killed or wounded could be replaced by recruits from over the next hill or in the next colony, but every redcoat who Gage lost was irreplaceable, except by a long process of supply and reinforcement across the Atlantic Ocean that could take as long as three months. Besides, new orders from the Earl of Dartmouth—which arrived on May 25 along with Generals Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne—authorized Gage to divert to Boston four more British infantry regiments: the 35th Regiment (the "Orange Lilies," whose uniform we saw in Lecture Three), the 40th, the 49th, and the 63rd

[42] Robert K. Wright, *The Continental Army* (Washington, DC, 1986), 12–19.

Regiments of Foot, all of them headed from the Caribbean to New York. There was no point, in Gage's view, to undertaking any further actions until those diverted troops had arrived in Boston.[43]

Gage was not the only Englishman who was surprised and uncertain about the turn of events in the colonies. When Parliament met in mid-January 1775, it was clear that many members were uneasy about the provocation offered by the Intolerable Acts. On February 1, 1775, the aged William Pitt, now Earl of Chatham, rose to ask for a suspension of the Intolerable Acts and recognition of the say of the colonial legislatures in all tax matters. Sir Charles Pratt, the 1st Earl Camden, supported Pitt's plea and denounced the Intolerable Acts as a "Bill of war; it draws the sword, and in its necessary consequences plunges the empire into civil and unnatural war." With Lord Jeffrey Amherst and Admiral Augustus Keppel in the lead, senior serving officers, who had the privilege of declining service in posts outside the British Isles, quietly gave notice that they would not serve in an American war. Merchants from London, Norwich, Manchester, Liverpool, and Newcastle—all of them hurt by colonial boycotts of their products—begged for "such healing remedies as can alone restore and establish the Commerce between Great Britain and her Colonies on a permanent Foundation." Even within Lord North's cabinet, the Earl of Dartmouth, as the secretary of state for America, thought Chatham's plan was worth considering.

It was George III who was adamant. So long as the king and Lord North, as his prime minister, could present the challenge in America as a make-or-break proposition on which the entire empire hung, Parliament would swing behind them. An address to the king, assuring him of full support in Parliament, passed the House of Commons 278 to 108, and the House of Lords 104 to 29. In November, the Earl of Dartmouth—who was having those second thoughts about the Intolerable Acts—was replaced as secretary of state for America by a militant hardliner, Lord George Germain.[44] (More about him in Lecture Seven.)

As both British and Americans glowered at each other across the waters of the Massachusetts Bay, wondering what they could possibly do next, the conflict began to burst the boundaries of New England. Two weeks after Lexington and Concord, a wealthy Connecticut merchant and militia

[43] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 87; John R. Alden, *A History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1969), 178–9.

[44] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 280, 288–9, 299; Macdonald, ed., *Select Charters*, 368; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 24.

captain named Benedict Arnold put a proposal into the hands of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress. So long as the "army of observation" around Boston lacked artillery, it could do little to hurt the British across the waters of the Bay. But to the west, the tumbledown British post at Ticonderoga warehoused 78 cannon—from light 4-pounders to the big knock-the-walls-down 24-pounders—and along with them 6 mortars, 3 howitzers, round shot, musket balls, flints: everything they could possibly need. Arnold wanted the chance to seize these lightly-guarded prizes, and the Congress's Committee of Safety obligingly commissioned him a colonel and authorized him to recruit a regiment of volunteers for an expedition into western Massachusetts and then into New York. When Arnold got on site, he learned that he was not the only one with an eye on Ticonderoga. The western counties of New Hampshire—the ones bordering on New York—had been a constant source of low level friction between the two colonies, New Hampshire and New York, and the county militia there had been carrying on a bushwhacking resistance to New York authority since 1770. This militia, known as the Green Mountain Boys, was commanded by Ethan Allen, who ultimately hoped to carve out an independent domain of Vermont between New Hampshire and New York. The supplies at Ticonderoga would obviously go a long way toward helping Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys achieve their goal, and since Ticonderoga was on New York territory, raiding Ticonderoga for those supplies would put a further twist in New York's tail.

Benedict Arnold overtook Ethan Allen 20 miles from Ticonderoga, and since both of them wanted Ticonderoga, they struck a deal: Ethan Allen would allow Benedict Arnold to share command of an attack on Ticonderoga; Arnold would drape the protective authority of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress around Allen's raid. Together, at daybreak on May 10, 1775, 83 Green Mountain Boys surprised the corporal's guard at Ticonderoga and seized the supplies. Seeing no other British forces on the ground to challenge him, Arnold borrowed a schooner the Green Mountain Boys had captured on Lake Champlain, and with 150 men sailed it north, up the lake to Fort St. John, 20 miles south of Montreal, where he captured a 70-ton British sloop. Not only had he taken Ticonderoga, but by Arnold's action the highway into Canada suddenly

stood open, and the governor-general of the Quebec province, Sir Guy Carleton, had only about 800 regulars in all of Canada to contest that.[45]

On the same day that Allen and Arnold captured Ticonderoga, a Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia. With the news of Lexington and Concord still ringing in his ears, Massachusetts delegate John Adams believed that the time had finally arrived for "the People of all the States to institute Governments for themselves, under their own Authority, and that, without Loss of Time, We ought to declare the Colonies, free, Sovereign and independent States," and only then offer "to enter into Negotiations with Britain." This opinion, as Adams ruefully admitted, was received with what he called "horror, terror and detestation" by his fellow delegates. Reconciliation on equitable terms, not independence, was the overwhelming desire of the Continental Congress. "We do not want to be independent. We are loyal subjects to our present most gracious Sovereign." In June, an "Olive Branch Petition" was drafted by John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, assuring the king that "we not only most ardently desire [that] the former harmony" of the colonies and the Empire "may be restored, but that a concord may be established between them upon so firm a basis as to perpetuate its blessings, uninterrupted by any future dissensions … " (More about this "Olive Branch Petition" when we come to Lecture Seven.)

Nevertheless, petition or no, when the news of the capture of Ticonderoga arrived in Philadelphia, the Congress did nothing to deplore it or apologize for it, or to treat it as some kind of mistake. Anything but: On May 16, Virginia delegate Richard Henry Lee moved that Congress authorize the creation of a combined colonial army, "the American continental army," and as a first gesture, an all-light infantry force of "expert riflemen" was to be recruited from Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland and forwarded to Boston. Congress also assumed, in diplomatically vague terms, responsibility for the "army of the united colonies" gathered around Boston. That suggested in fairly broad terms that the Continental Congress was converting the New England militia directly into a Continental army, something which would have come as an unwelcome surprise to militiamen who still thought of themselves as temporary volunteers.

The Congress, however, was specific, it was not vague on this point; Congress was specific about at least one aspect of this new army: its

---

[45] Thomas A. Desjardins, *Through A Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775* (New York, 2006), 9; Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 97–8; Mackesy, *The War for America*, 79.

generals and general staff. Deferring to Massachusetts, Artemas Ward was designated as the first of four Continental major generals; followed by Charles Lee, who had seen service in the British army in the Seven Years' War as a major; Philip Schuyler, an influential New York patrician who was a veteran of the French and Indian War; and the 57-year-old Israel Putnam of Connecticut. As commander in chief and senior general of them all, the Congress turned to a 43-year-old Virginia squire, George Washington.[46]

Born in 1732, George Washington had never really wanted to be anything other than a soldier. His adored half-brother, Lawrence, had won a captaincy in a regiment of American volunteers raised in 1740 by Admiral Edward Vernon to attack the Spanish in the Caribbean, and it was Lawrence Washington who educated young George on the northern Virginia estate he named for his former commander, Mount Vernon. When Lawrence Washington died in 1752, George was in line to inherit Mount Vernon, and with it his brother's post as major in the district militia. Within two years, Washington was appointed lieutenant colonel of the militia, and he was sent by the royal governor of Virginia to clear the French out of land that Virginia claimed near the forks of the Ohio River. As it turned out, the French were there in greater strength than Washington had realized, and Washington and the militia battalion he commanded were surrounded, captured, and paroled back to Virginia. This event turned out to be the trigger which began the French and Indian War, but instead of it covering Washington with blame, it opened up his greatest opportunity yet. In 1755, the imperial government decided to dispatch two regiments of regular British infantry, the 44th and 48th foot, to America under General Edward Braddock to deal with the French. Braddock invited Washington to join his staff, and even wangled Washington a temporary commission as a captain in the regulars.

Unhappily, Braddock and his troops met with disaster at the hands of the French and Indians in an ambush at the battle of the Monongahela. Washington took command of the Virginia militia accompanying Braddock, and screened the retreat of the regulars (among who, incidentally, was a junior officer in the 44th Foot, named Thomas Gage). The Virginians, Washington reported to the governor of Virginia, performed heroically.

[46] Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Britain Sails into the Storm*, 329, Merrill Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation* (Madison, 1959), 85; "Petition to the King," in Macdonald, *Select Charters*, 383–4; *Journals of the Continental Congress*, ed. W.C. Ford (Washington DC, 1904–37), 2:90, 100.

“The Virginians behaved like Men, and died like Soldier’s; for I believe out of 3 Companys that were there that Day, scarce 30 were left alive.” The fault for the defeat lay with “the dastardly behaviour of the English Soldiers” who “exposed all those who were inclin’d to do their duty, to almost certain Death.”[47] The Monongahela ambush and the way he covered the retreat of those who survived it made Washington into something of a hero, but it did not get him any further combat action, and it certainly did not get his temporary regular rank of captain in the British army confirmed. In 1759, he married a wealthy widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, took his seat in the Virginia House of Burgesses, and hung up his blue militia uniform in favor of the life of a gentleman farmer.

Like many Virginia planters, Washington soon learned that he was not quite the master of his situation at Mt. Vernon. For one thing, any ambitions he had for purchasing and developing new land in the west were restricted by regulations on western land speculation imposed by the imperial government. The crops he grew—principally tobacco—required shipping to Britain to find markets, and that put him at the mercy of brokers who charged punishing commissions and fees. “That many families are reduced, almost, if not quite, to penury and want, from the low ebb of their fortunes, and Estates daily selling for the discharge of Debts, the public papers furnish but too many melancholy proofs of,” Washington complained. The imposition of the new taxes of the 1760s, beginning with the Stamp Act, alienated Washington still more. “The Stamp Act, imposed on the Colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain engrosses the conversation of the speculative part of the Colonists,” Washington wrote in the fall of 1765, “who look upon this unconstitutional method of Taxation as a direful attack upon their Liberties, and loudly exclaim against the violation.” By 1769, Washington had become convinced that “our lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom.” Fully as much as any English Whig, Washington suspected that “a regular, systematic plan [had been] formed to fix the right and practice of taxation upon us.”[48] With words like that, in August 1774, he was selected as one of the Virginia delegates to the First Continental Congress.

---

[47] Willard Sterne Randall, *George Washington: A Life* (New York, 1997), 136–7.

[48] GW to George Mason (April 5, 1769) and to Bryan Fairfax (July 4, 1774), in *Writings of George Washington*, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston, 1834), 2:351, 353, 389; Marc Egnal, “The origins of the Revolution in Virginia: A Reinterpretation,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 37 (July 1980), 401–428.

It's worth wondering what a well-to-do Virginia gentry planter thought he had to gain from defying the authority of the British Crown, especially since Virginia planters had a good deal more than Samuel Adams or Ethan Allen to lose by such defiance. The Scottish nobles who rose in rebellion behind Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1745 offered a terrifying example of how savagely the empire's English overlords punished rebellion, since they lost their lands, their titles, and sometimes even their lives to English vengeance. But the fire that the king's men could light in *front* of the Virginia gentry was not nearly as frightening as the fire that could be ignited *behind* them among their slaves. By the 1770s, slave labor had been a part of colonial life for 150 years, and it was the ugly secret that lay at the foundation of American prosperity. The colonies had been established on the backs of various forms of forced labor—convicts, indentured servants, prisoners-of-war—but slavery emerged as the single most important system of compulsory labor, largely because it was fed by a highly lucrative flow of captive Africans across the Atlantic. Although the British North American colonies only received about 10 percent of the 11 million African slaves transported to the New World between 1500 and 1830, black slavery was a presence in each one of those colonies, from 4,000 slaves in Rhode Island to 170,000 in Washington's Virginia. (Even at the end of his life, Washington owned 316 slaves.)

Overall, slaves accounted for 20 percent of the population of the 13 colonies, and these slaves were both an asset and a threat. They were an asset in that they worked the fields and performed the skilled crafts that Washington needed at Mt. Vernon; but they were a threat because of the ever-present possibility of a slave revolt. The famous English dictionary-maker, Samuel Johnson, thought it was hypocrisy of the highest order for American slave owners to whine about the slavery of British taxation: "How is it," said Dr. Johnson, "that we hear the loudest yelps for liberty among the drivers of Negroes?" But it was precisely the close observation of real enslavement by the slave owners which bred into them a dread of British control, lest they find themselves reduced to the same circumstances *vis-à-vis* Great Britain as their own slaves *vis-à-vis* themselves.[49]

---

[49] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 7; Wood, *The American Revolution*, 56; Gipson, *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-clouds Gather in the West*, 25–6; Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 376; Randall, *George Washington*, 277.

Still, it would have been folly for Virginians like Washington to have made rebellion respectable, or lose the implicit support every planter would enjoy from British regulars in the event of a slave uprising; unless, of course, the British were inciting that uprising themselves. Two days after Lexington and Concord, the royal governor of Virginia, John Murray, the 4th Earl of Dunmore, attempted his own version of Thomas Gage's preemptive strike against colonial military supplies by raiding the colonial powder magazine in Williamsburg and moving the powder to the safer confines of HMS *Fowey* in the James River. This touched off militia musters across the colony of Virginia, and a threat of "marching to Williamsburgh." Dunmore took counsel of despair and fled to the *Fowey* himself, and from there, on May 1, he volleyed back at his colony with a plan "to arm all my own Negroes and receive all others that will come to me whom I shall declare free." The very whisper that Dunmore planned to recruit and arm the slaves of Virginia planters and turn them against their masters chilled Virginia blood. "Massacres and instigated insurrections were the words in the mouth of every child," remembered one British official.

Dunmore finally issued a proclamation in November, declaring "all indented servants, Negroes, or others (appertaining to Rebels) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops as soon as may be, for the more speedily reducing the Colony to a proper sense of their duty, to His Majesty's crown and dignity." That brought any fence sitters among the Virginia gentry down onto the Continental Congress's side with a thump. Nothing Dunmore could have done, said one planter, could equal his "Damned, infernal, Diabolical proclamation declaring Freedom to all our slaves who will join him." Eventually, nearly 1,000 slaves fled to Dunmore's standard, 300 of them being formed into what Dunmore called his "Ethiopian Regiment." Among the runaways was one of George Washington's grooms—Harry—a Gambian born in 1740 in Africa, sold into slavery in 1763, and who served out the balance of the war as a member of an unarmed service unit called the Black Pioneers.[50]

George Washington had a great many other things to consider when he arrived in Philadelphia in May for the opening of the Second Continental

---

[50] Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York, 2005), 160–2, 166, 428; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill, 1982), 256–7; Francis Berkeley, *Dunmore's Proclamation of Emancipation* (Charlottesville, 1941), 11; James W. Walker, *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone, 1783–1870* (Bristol, UK, 1976), 1–12.

Congress than slaves, although this could not have been far from his mind. He took his old uniform out of packing and he wore it as a discreet way of suggesting to the Congress that the time for talk about reconciliation with Britain was already over. But the uniform also succeeded in suggesting a few other things to the Continental Congress. Washington was put in charge of a committee to plan the defense of New York City. He was then appointed chair of the standing committee on military supply. Ultimately, his "easy, soldier-like air and gestures" persuaded the Congress that Washington not only had the requisite military experience, but also represented the interests of the largest of the colonies, and on those grounds, on June 15, Congress offered Washington overall command of the Continental army—an army which did not actually yet exist. He wrote a small acceptance speech, begging that "it may be remembered by every gentleman in the room that I this day declare with the utmost sincerity I do not think myself equal to the command I am honored with." But the next day, he began planning to join the "army of observation" outside Boston, and on June 23, with his new major generals Charles Lee and Phillip Schuyler in tow, Washington headed off northward. He rode, carrying with him the news that his new army—without waiting for its commander in chief to show up—had managed to embroil itself already in a stand-up slugging match with the British army at a point across from Boston, across the Charles River, called Bunker Hill.[51]

---

[51] *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 2:91; Randall, *George Washington*, 286.

Lecture Six
Bunker Hill

Scope: After Thomas Gage's long awaited British reinforcements finally arrived in Boston, he was ready to strike. The Americans, however, got wind of his plans and quickly produced a remarkably professional fortification on Breed's Hill. With British men ready to move forward, the question in the air was whether the rebel militiamen could stand up to the British regulars. The answer came after the order to fire when close to 100 of British general Howe's men were killed outright. The next time the British surged forward, however, the American militia turned and fled. When Washington later arrived in Boston, instead of finding an army suffering from the sting of defeat, he found disorganization, no supplies, quarrelling officers, and an unjustified confidence in the militias' abilities. More troubling he found a general reluctance of these American soldiers to put aside their regional alliances and become part of a national army.

Outline

I. The geography of Boston made it a splendid port but a terrible fort.

A. Boston sat atop a peninsula in its broad, open harbor.

1. But this tiny-necked peninsula had only a meager moat. Along its southeast side, the Dorchester heights were less than a mile away, placing the town in range of bombardment.

2. On the tip of another small peninsula facing Boston was Charlestown, behind which rose a succession of three hills: Morton's Hill, Breed's Hill, and Bunker Hill, where the Charlestown peninsula was attached to the mainland. Even moderate artillery could drop solid shot into the town and into the midst of British admiral Samuel Graves' flotilla in Boston Harbor.

B. Graves saw the danger posed by the Charlestown hills and asked Thomas Gage to post a regiment there. Gage chose to await reinforcements.

C. On May 27, a party of Massachusetts and New Hampshire forces seized Noddle Island, across to the northeast from Boston.

1. Gage sent a small contingent of British marines aboard the converted schooner *Diana* to clear the Americans off.
2. During the firefight between the Marines and the militia, the Americans forced the *Diana* to run aground, boarded her, and burned her in full view of the British garrison.
3. The next morning the American cannon put so many holes in the sloop *Britannia* that she had to be towed out of range.

D. To Gage's advantage, the Americans had no long-range siege guns.

1. The American commanders were also reluctant to seem too aggressive and thereby sacrifice their claim to being innocent victims of British tyranny.
2. By the end of May, Gage also had his reinforcements and William Howe, Henry Clinton, and John Burgoyne to lead them.

E. Gage was ready to strike on June 18, depositing the bulk of the troops under Henry Clinton at Lechmere Point, opposite the rebels' camp at Cambridge; another 1,500 under William Howe would seize the Dorchester heights and head up through Roxbury to smash the Americans.

F. Word of these plans had swiftly leaked out. After weeks of delay, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress's Committee of Safety and its president, Dr. Joseph Warren, resolved that Bunker Hill should be securely kept and defended.

1. Three Massachusetts regiments, along with 200 of Israel Putnam's Connecticut militia and an artillery company, were sent to the Charlestown peninsula on the evening of June 16.
2. After some uncertainty about what to do, they set to work to produce a remarkably professional fortification.
3. By first light the oblong redoubt was nearing completion, armed with the 4-pounder guns taken off the *Diana* two weeks before.

G. That morning, Admiral Graves, seeing the redoubt, revised his attack plans.

H. By one o'clock, Howe had a strike force in navy longboats and landed his light infantry and grenadiers, plus the 5th, 38th, 43rd, and 52nd regiments on the Charlestown peninsula to attack the redoubt from behind.

I. Israel Putnam headed for Cambridge to collect reinforcements, most of whom managed to reach the peninsula just as Howe and senior officer Robert Pigot's men were ready to move forward.

J. The British officers, and probably the American officers, were unsure whether the rebel militiamen would stand up to the British regulars.

1. The chief challenge for the American officers would be to restrain their own forces from firing as soon as they saw the British.
2. Israel Putnam, arriving with reinforcements, told his men, "Don't fire till you see the whites of their eyes, then fire low," and advised them to pick off the commanders first.
3. John Stark pounded stakes into the ground at 40 yards to mark the spot the British would have to cross before his men started firing.
4. The British came, crossing Stark's stake line.
5. The rebel order to fire came, and the rebel muskets roared.
6. The British reeled and stopped. Of the 350 men in Howe's light infantry vanguard, 95 had been killed and dozens more were wounded and down.
7. The British began to drop back by twos and threes; then they all turned and ran.

II. William Howe quickly formed up his elite flank companies and sent them back up to the stone wall.

A. They reached the line marked by the dead of the first attack when the rebel muskets fired again.

1. Hundreds of men went down, and the rest staggered back.
2. Pigot pushed his regiments up the hill and they were mown down again.
3. Howe called for Clinton's reserves to cross over to Charlestown, and Clinton rallied the fragments of Pigot's regiments.

B. Howe did not know that the Americans were running out of ammunition, both for their artillery and their muskets.

1. The volleys that had cut down Howe's light infantry had used up approximately 13,000 musket balls.
2. Although the Americans' casualties were slight, the militiamen were exhausted, thirsty, and worried about their firepower.

C. The next time Howe and Clinton surged forward, Howe wheeled the 5th and 52nd regiments to the left so that the full weight of the British attack was concentrated on the redoubt.

  1. Now there were more British targets than the Americans could bring down.

  2. The Americans began scrambling over the rear walls of the redoubt and running toward Bunker Hill.

  3. They left 140 dead, with 271 wounded and 30 missing.

D. The British were, however, in no shape to pursue.

  1. Of the 2,300 soldiers funneled into the fight for Breed's Hill (or as it became known, Bunker Hill), 226 were dead and 828 wounded, more than 250 of whom would die of their wounds over the next few weeks.

  2. These losses were not easily replaceable across 3,000 miles of ocean, and they had hit the ranks of veteran officers that were trained professionals.

III. On the American side, instead of feeling like a humiliating defeat, Bunker Hill became a cause for self-congratulation.

A. This attitude would prove a stumbling block to George Washington, who rode into Cambridge on July 2 with a troop of cavalry and his commission to organize a regular Continental army.

  1. Washington assumed that the militiamen were as eager as he had been to become real soldiers.

  2. But such soldiers would not have buckled at the first charge.

  3. They would not have found themselves short of ammunition because a regularly organized ordnance staff would have supplied it.

  4. They would not have exhausted themselves digging a redoubt because there would be a specialty pioneer corps to do it for them.

  5. They would have been equipped with bayonets of their own.

B. What Washington found instead was disorganization, nonexistent supplies, quarrelling officers, and a wholly unjustified attitude that the ordinary militiaman was the apple of God's eye.

  1. The militia could not be relied on to stick around the camp or to be regular and disciplined when they were there.

  2. New England governors meddled in the officer appointments.

3. Washington had to persuade the militiamen to join the Continental regiments rather than disbanding and going home to brag.

C. He wanted to make it clear that the Continental army was a *national* army, not just a collection of state units.
   1. Washington intended that the Continental regiments would identify themselves by number, not by regional origins, but the militiamen did not show any eagerness to join up as Continental soldiers.
   2. Washington could prevail on only 9,600 of the 16,000 militia who had been in and around Cambridge through the summer of 1775.
   3. In every battle ahead of him, Washington would have to augment his meager supply of Continentals with callouts of state militia, and nearly every case, they would contrive to lose battles for him, mostly through organizational unpredictability.

Suggested Reading:

Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, chaps. 9–14.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 13.

Wright, *The Continental Army*, chaps. 2–3.

Questions to Consider:

1. Does the result of Bunker Hill sustain or discount the reputation won by the militia at Lexington and Concord?
2. What factor made the British victory at Bunker Hill “dear-bought”?

Lecture Six—Transcript
Bunker Hill

The geography of Boston made it a splendid port, but a terrible fort. In the 18th century, Boston sat atop what was nearly an island in its broad, open harbor. This near-island was tethered to the mainland, like a balloon, by a thin neck of land which the spring tides nearly put under water. The Back Bay and Commonwealth Avenue were still an engineer's dream, 50 years in the future, and the West End was still part of the Charles River. This island-balloon lay in the harbor with its upper tip pointing northeast, and the tether attaching to Roxbury on the southwest.

By the way I've described this, it may mystify some of you why this shouldn't have been a perfect defensive location for the British; because merely by posting a guard across the Neck, Thomas Gage should have been able to make Boston into a castle and the harbor—the bay—its moat. The problem was that Boston's tiny-necked peninsula only actually had a very meager moat. Along the southeast side of the peninsula, the Dorchester Heights were less than a mile distant, and heavy siege artillery placed there could get the town within range of bombardment. Worse still, another small peninsula, flanked by the Mystic River, jutted down into the harbor less than half a mile from Boston's North End. On the tip of that peninsula facing Boston was Charlestown. But just behind Charlestown rose a succession of three hills—Morton's Hill, Breed's Hill (67 feet high) and, the back of those two, Bunker Hill—and that was where the Charlestown peninsula attached itself to the mainland. From those hills, even moderate-sized artillery could drop solid shot into the town, or drop it onto the wharves of the North End and into the midst of British admiral Samuel Graves' little flotilla in Boston harbor.

Admiral Graves saw the danger the Charlestown Hills posed as early as the retreat from Lexington and Concord, when he begged Gage to post Lord Hugh Percy's 5th Regiment of Foot there. But Gage could not afford to place Percy or any other part of his garrison in a place where they might easily be cut off from Boston. Gage, instead, sat down to await reinforcements. Just how much havoc the Americans might have been able to wreak in the meanwhile was underscored on May 27, when "a party of the Massachusetts and New Hampshire forces, about 600" men in all, seized Noddle Island, across to the northeast from Boston (now, it's East Boston and Logan Airport). Gage needed Noddle Island, not only to prevent any further

encirclement of Boston, but also because of the cattle and the sheep that grazed there, and so a small contingent of Royal Marines were put on board the converted schooner *Diana* and sent over to clear the Americans off. This brought reinforcements from the American side, principally the Connecticut militia and their irate and eccentric commander, Israel Putnam, along with two 12-pounder guns. While the Royal Marines and the militia got into quite a frenzied little firefight, the American 12-pounders forced the *Diana* and her little 4-pounder popguns to tack and swerve and to run aground. Under cover of night, the militia boarded and burnt the *Diana* in full view of Boston's British garrison. The next morning, when one of Graves' sloops, the *Britannia*, tried to pick up where the *Diana* had left off, the *Britannia* was hit so many times by the American cannon that she had to be towed out of range by her longboats. The message of the geography was simple and direct: let the Americans get artillery up on the Dorchester or the Charlestown heights, and the British in Boston would become ducks in a barrel.[52]

What worked to Thomas Gage's advantage was that—as we saw in Lecture Five—first, the New England militia had no long-range siege guns to plant on the Charlestown or Dorchester heights, and they were dogged by the reluctance of their commanders to look too aggressive and thus sacrifice their claim to being the innocent victims of British tyranny. Second, by the end of May, Gage had his reinforcements and three new and experienced officers to lead them: William Howe, Henry Clinton, and John Burgoyne. On June 12, Gage was at last ready to act. He planned to strike suddenly on June 18, depositing the bulk of the British troops under Henry Clinton at Lechmere Point, directly opposite the rebels' central camp and headquarters at Cambridge, and they would move inland at once. Another 1,500 British soldiers under William Howe would be landed down at Dorchester Point. They would seize the Dorchester heights, then swing up through Roxbury and smash the Americans in Cambridge from the other side.[53]

Word of these plans leaked out as swiftly as the plans to march on Lexington and Concord had leaked out back in April. Old Israel Putnam had been urging the Massachusetts Provincial Congress's Committee of Safety, and its president, Dr. Joseph Warren, to occupy the Charlestown hills for

---

[52] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 108–9; Diary of Caleb Haskell, at Boston 1775 http:// boston1775.blogspot.com/2007/05/fighting-on-noddles-island-and-hog.html; Henry B. Dawson, *Battles of the United States, by Sea and Land: Embracing those of the Revolutionary and Indian Wars, the War of 1812, and the Mexican War* (New York, 1858), 48–9.

[53] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 8–9; Alden, *American Revolution*, 80.

weeks, but it was not until June 15 that the Committee of Safety resolved that "possession of the hill called Bunker's Hill in Charlestown be securely kept and defended; and also some one hill or hills on Dorchester be likewise secured." Three Massachusetts regiments—Col. James Frye's regiment, under the temporary command of Lt. Col. James Brickett (Frye was hobbled with gout); Col. Ebenezer Bridge's regiment; and Col. William Prescott's regiment—along with 200 of Israel Putnam's Connecticut militia and an artillery company under Richard Gridley were sent over onto the Charlestown peninsula on the evening of June 16. In all, they numbered about 900 men and as soon as they occupied Charlestown, they at once realized that they had no idea what to do. Prescott was in overall command of the expedition, and he had been told to fortify "Bunker's Hill." But both Putnam and Gridley argued that Breed's Hill was the key height on the peninsula, and after two hours' of back-and-forthing, Prescott finally agreed to let Gridley construct an oblong *redoubt*, an earthen fort 160-feet-long and 80-feet-wide thrown up by soldiers with shovels and spades with six-foot-high walls and some openings for Gridley's artillery, and to do it on Breed's Hill. Covering the rest of the hilltop would be a hastily-thrown-up wall of earth and stone facing toward Boston. Down the hill to the right was Charlestown, now mostly deserted by its fearful inhabitants; down the hill to the left ran a lane with a stone fence that covered the flank of the hill all the way down to the Mystic River.[54]

However much time they wasted wrangling over what to do and who was going to do it, once the Americans set to work they produced a remarkably professional fortification. There was good reason for that, too: William Prescott had fought in the French and Indian War, as had Israel Putnam. In fact, William Howe's elder brother—the well-loved Lord George Howe—had died in Putnam's arms at the battle for Ticonderoga in 1758, the first time Ticonderoga was being fought over. Richard Gridley, commander of the artillery, had been the engineer who swung two cannon up the cliffs protecting Quebec and enabled the legendary General James Wolfe to achieve his crowning victory over the French there in 1759. So the militiamen laid down the muskets, took up the shovels, picks, and spades, and by first light the American redoubt was nearing completion, armed with the 4-pounder guns taken off the *Diana* two weeks before, and all of this protected by a ditch to create a further obstacle to anyone trying to attack the redoubt.

---

[54] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 17; Horace E. Scudder, "The Battle of Bunker Hill," *Atlantic Monthly* 36 (July 1875), 81–2.

Capt. Thomas Bishop, of the 20-gun sloop *Lively*, was the first British officer to notice the figures at work on top of Breed's Hill by the dawns early light; he fired a warning shot to awake the rest of the British flotilla. An irritated Admiral Graves clambered up to the roof of the Boston house he had requisitioned for a headquarters and saw at once through his telescope that this was no cheap affair of sticks and leaves. With a report from Graves in hand, General Gage called an early morning council of his senior officers—Lord Hugh Percy, Robert Pigot, and Howe, Clinton and Burgoyne—and revised his attack plans.

Henry Clinton urged an immediate landing of 500 infantrymen on the neck of land that connected Charlestown to the mainland in order to cut off the rebels' line of retreat from the Charlestown peninsula, and force them to surrender. Gage demurred; there were two New Hampshire militia regiments just above the Neck, and 500 British soldiers might as easily find *themselves* bagged, instead of bagging the rebels on Breed's Hill. William Howe countered with another plan: land four regiments, plus 10 light and grenadier companies from the other garrison regiments, on the other side of the Charlestown peninsula, and drive off the Americans posted to the left of the hill while Pigot made a demonstration in front of Breed's Hill. The Marines under Maj. Pitcairn—remember him from Lexington and Concord—would clear out Charlestown. Howe's force would do the dirty work of cutting off the American retreat and attack the redoubt on Breed's Hill from behind, while Pigot and the Marines pressed it from in front. Meanwhile, Admiral Graves' eight ships and a battery of heavy 18-pounders and 24-pounders on Copp's Hill, on Boston's north tip, would lob shot over at the redoubt. Henry Clinton would command a reserve force of 600 men who could be committed if the need for mopping-up reinforcements was called for. The whole operation, Howe promised, would require no more than 2,300 of Gage's 3,500 troops.[55]

Amazingly, by one o'clock William Howe had his strike force into navy longboats, and landed his light infantry and grenadier companies, plus the 5th, 38th, 43rd, and 52nd regiments, on the Charlestown peninsula. Israel Putnam, sizing up the seriousness of these British intentions, took off for Cambridge to collect reinforcements: nine regiments of Massachusetts militia plus the New Hampshire regiments of John Stark—he who had been a captain in Robert Rogers' Rangers in the French and Indian War—James

[55] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 134–5; Scudder, "The Battle of Bunker Hill," 84–5.

Reed, and Andrew McClary. They also scooped up among the reinforcements the unlikely figure of Dr. Joseph Warren. Most of these reinforcements managed, after many wrong turns and detours, to reach the Charlestown peninsula just as Howe and Pigot were ready to move forward. Howe took up a musket himself, and promised his men that he would ask none of them "to go a step further than where I go myself at your head,"[56] and at three o'clock in the afternoon they all stepped off, flags flying, light infantry and grenadiers out as skirmishers, headed for the stone fence going down the left of Breed's Hill, where the Connecticut militia waited.[57]

The question uppermost in the minds of the British officers—and probably in the minds of the American officers too—was whether the rebel militiamen behind the wall, within the redoubt, would stand up to the fierce attack of British regulars with their disciplined ranks of steel bayonets aimed at their entrails. The militia had done well enough at Lexington and Concord, to be sure, but that was with overwhelming numerical superiority and the advantage of woods and fences to hide behind. Out in the open, watching those relentless ranks of red-coated, white-cross-belted British infantry bearing down on them might unnerve even the most well-trained veterans. Perhaps the Americans would have time to get off one volley, but then the infantry would be at them and on top of them with their bayonets, and the result would be a general pig-sticking. Would the American militiamen stand up to that?

In this situation, the chief challenge for the American officers would be to restrain their men from doing the natural thing: firing as soon as they saw the British. The reason they should not do that—they should not yield to that natural impulse—is because if they fired too soon, their smoothbore muskets would never hit targets, and they might not have time enough to reload and get off a second volley. Israel Putnam, who had finally come up with the reinforcements, barked at his men, "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes, then fire low." First of all, he added, "Pick off the commanders." (This is often been told as a story of American ingenuity fighting British regulars. This is actually, though, advice that was current on most European battlefields; it was not original with Old Put.) At the far end of the stone wall that ran down Breed's Hill, near the river bank, John Stark

---

[56] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 235; Scudder, "The Battle of Bunker Hill," 87–8.

[57] Henry I. Kurtz, "Bunker Hill, 1775: 'A Dear Bought Victory,'" *History Today* 25 (September 1975), 615; Henry B. Carrington, "Bunker Hill," *The Bay State Monthly* (May 1884), 297.

and his New Hampshire militiamen had pounded stakes into the ground at 40 yards to mark the spot where his men would have to wait for the British to cross before opening fire.

On the British came, crossing Stark's stake line, bayonets at the level. Then the rebel order to fire came, and the rebel muskets roared out, and the redcoats reeled and stopped as though a gigantic brake had been clamped on them. Of the 350 men in Howe's light infantry vanguard, 95 were killed outright and dozens more wounded and down. "I never saw sheep lie as thick in the fold," snarled John Stark. Then the British began to drop back, by twos and threes, reluctantly, and then all of them turned and ran. The light company of the 35th Regiment lost every officer and sergeant; only eight of the 52nd Regiment's grenadiers made it back.[58] Meanwhile, General Robert Pigot, with the 38th, 43rd, and 47th regiments plus Pitcairn's Marines, were struggling to attack the front of Breed's Hill, moving up toward the redoubt. American skirmishers hiding in the abandoned buildings of Charlestown forced Pigot to peel off the 47th Regiment and the Marines to clear out the ground in front of the town. All the while the 38th and 43rd regiments tried to scale the slope of the hill moving directly up toward the redoubt. Here, as well, the blast of American musketry mowed them down, and back down the hill they went.[59]

It took William Howe no more than 10 or 15 minutes to recover from the shock of seeing his elite flank companies decimated and retreating. He formed them up, and back against the stone wall running down the side of Breed's Hill they went, with the men of the 5th and 52nd regiments leading. They reached the line marked by the dead of the first attack, with Howe determinedly and quite fearlessly trudging with them, when again the wave of rebel muskets erupted. Down went 144 men of the 5th Regiment and 100 of the 52nd, and back they staggered, too. Pigot, likewise, pushed his regiments back up the hill, back up toward the redoubt and flat to the ground they tumbled again, like hay before the reapers. "There," William Howe admitted, "was a moment I never felt before." But William Howe had not devised this plan so that he could apologize for its failure afterward. His company and regimental officers, including Robert Pigot, begged him to call off the attacks, but Howe was not going to be the next British general

---

[58] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 257; Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* (Boston, 1851), 140.

[59] Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 73; Carrington, "Bunker Hill," 298–9; Kurtz, "Bunker Hill, 1775," 615.

who found that he could not subdue the Americans. He called for Henry Clinton's reserve force—500 more Marines and the 63rd Regiment—to cross over to Charlestown, and Clinton rallied the dispirited fragments of Pigot's regiments and got them ready for a third try. Howe himself would personally take the 5th and the 52nd forward in a third attack against the stone wall.

What Howe did not know was that the Americans were running out of ammunition, both for their artillery and their muskets. The volleys that cut down William Howe's light infantry and grenadiers had used up approximately 13,000 musket balls. That fact alone doesn't argue very highly for the accuracy of 18th-century weapons. Although Col. Prescott had sustained only two dozen wounded and two or three killed up to this point, the militia was exhausted, thirsty, and anxious about having enough firepower to stop another British attack. This time, as Howe and Clinton surged forward, Howe smartly wheeled the 5th and 52nd to the left so that the full weight of the British attack was not as it had been before, divided between the redoubt and the stone wall. Now the full weight of the attack was concentrated on the redoubt. This time, the American volleys from the redoubt had more British targets than they could bring down, and the marines and the 47th Regiment made it to the ditch around the redoubt. "The bayonet, the bayonet, form up, form up," Maj. Pitcairn was crying when he was shot in the chest. In the face of those terrible bayonets, the rebels' "fire went out like a spent candle" and they began scrambling over the rear walls of the redoubt and running toward Bunker Hill behind them. The Connecticut and New Hampshire men at the stone wall were now themselves exposed, and they too fell back. Israel Putnam could not get them to rally on Bunker Hill and the tangled mass struggled over Charlestown Neck in disorder. Behind them, they left 140 dead militia, with 271 wounded and 30 missing. Prominent among those casualties was Dr. Joseph Warren, killed in the final melee in the redoubt.[60]

The British, however, were in neither shape nor mood to pursue them. Of the 2,300 British soldiers funneled into the fight for Breed's Hill—or as it became better, but mistakenly, known, *Bunker Hill*, from the original orders of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety that they entrench Bunker Hill—an unbelievable 226 were dead and 828 wounded and of the wounded more than 250 would die of their wounds over the coming weeks. Not even the greatest battles of the Seven Years' War, of the Great War for Empire, had

---

[60] Frothingham, *Siege of Boston*, 149, 152, 192–4.

been this costly by proportion. At the Great Battle of Minden in 1759, the British and Allied forces had suffered no more than five percent of their combined armies as casualties. The desperate battle of Zorndorf in 1758 did not cost the Prussians more than 36 percent of their strength in casualties, and even General James Wolfe's great victory at Quebec took a toll of 14 percent of Wolfe's 4,800 Regulars. At Bunker Hill, British losses totaled 43 percent. Only Edward Braddock's disaster at the Monongahela had inflicted worse losses. Not only were these losses not easily replaceable because of 3,000 miles of ocean intervening between Boston and any possible replacements, but they were a disaster because these losses had hit the ranks of the veteran officers the hardest. The veteran officers of the British army were the professionals who were trained, and who knew how to manage these ungainly masses of men. Of those officers, 92 had been killed, including Maj. Pitcairn, the survivor of Lexington and Concord. 92 killed and wounded out of 250. William Howe wrote to his brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, "I freely confess to you, when I look to the consequences of it, in the loss of so many brave officers, I do it with horror. The success is too dearly bought." Thomas Gage was even gloomier over the results of Bunker Hill: "The trials we have had show that the rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be," he reported in writing to the Earl of Dartmouth, "In all their wars against the French they never showed so much conduct, attention and perseverance as they do now." That was in Gage's private report. In Parliament, news of the battle at Bunker Hill brought forth the savage wisecrack, "Eight more such victories and we will have no one left to report them."[61]

On the American side, Bunker Hill ought to have felt like a humiliating defeat, especially after the jubilation of Lexington and Concord. Instead, the price in British lives with which the Charlestown peninsula had been sold, and the remarkable way in which the militia had twice traded equal musket fire with regular British infantry, became a cause for a kind of gritty self-congratulation. "I wish we could sell them another hill at the same price," smirked the Rhode Islander, Nathanael Green.[62] These thoughts comforted those who forgot that, the third time, even the best-trained New England militia had not been able to stare down an irresistible wall of oncoming bayonets.

---

[61] Fleming, *Now We Are Enemies*, 330, 335; Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth (June 25, 1775), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 9:199–200; Jensen, *Founding of a Nation*, 614–5; Mackesy, *War for America*, 30.

[62] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 74.

To no one would this attitude prove more of a stumbling block than to George Washington, who rode into Cambridge on July 2 with a troop of cavalry and his commission to organize a Continental regular army. The next day, Washington took formal command in a ceremony under a great elm tree on Cambridge Common. It was natural, Washington wrote indulgently after setting up headquarters in the Cambridge home of Harvard president Samuel Langdon, "that troops formed under such circumstances should not at once possess the order, regularity, and discipline of veterans." But he assumed that, with the opportunity to join a regular army, the militia around Boston would be as eager as he had been to become *real* soldiers. The soldiers he would make of them would never have buckled at that third charge; they would not have found themselves short of ammunition because a regularly organized ordnance staff would have supplied it; they would not have exhausted themselves digging out a redoubt because there would be a specially organized pioneer corps to do it for them. They would have been equipped with bayonets of their own to mount on their own, a perfectly controlled counterattack; that's soldiering as far as Washington understood. Instead, what Washington had to deal with was disorganization, nonexistent supplies, quarrelling officers, and a cocky and wholly unjustified attitude which assumed that the ordinary militiaman was the apple of God's eye.

Within a week, Washington was becoming irritated to discover that "a vital and inherent principle of delay" seemed to prevail about supplying the troops, and he was learning that "no dependence can be put on the militia, for a continuance in camp, or regularity and discipline during the short time they may stay."[63] He had to fend off the attempts of New England governors to meddle in the appointment of officers for the new Continental regiments, and then he had to persuade the militiamen to enlist in the Continental regiments rather than simply disbanding and going home to boast of their great victory as militiamen. Above all, he wanted to break the deadly spirit of provincialism in the militia and make it clear that the Continental army would be a national army, not just a collection of state units or town militia companies. Like the British line regiments, Washington intended that the new Continental regiments would identify themselves by number, not by regional origins. The three New Hampshire militia regiments would become the 2nd, 5th, and 8th Continental regiments; the two Rhode Island regiments would

---

[63] GW, Answer to an Address of the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts (July 4, 1775), To the President of Congress (July 10, 1775) and To Governor Trumbull (July 18, 1775), in *Writings of George Washington*, ed. Sparks, 3: 14, 20, 24, 32; Randall, *George Washington*, 292–3.

become the 9th and 11th Continentals; and the five Connecticut regiments would become the 10th, 17th, 19th, 20th, and 22nd Continentals.[64] Away with the state identification, away with the local regional loyalties: Washington planned a Continental, a genuinely national, army.

Or at least he would have one if the militiamen agreed to switch over and sign up as Continental soldiers, which they did not show themselves eager to do. Of the 16,000 militia who had been in and around Cambridge through the summer of 1775, Washington could only prevail upon 9,600 of them to reenlist in the new Continental regiments, and even then he had to allow one-year-only enlistments in order to get people to sign up. In every battle ahead of him, Washington would be forced to augment his meager supply of Continentals with call-outs of state militia, and in nearly every case they would contrive to lose battles for him, not through cowardice or inexperience, but through sheer organizational unpredictability. Washington had no use for what he called the "chimney-corner heroes." "To bring men to be well acquainted with the duties of a soldier, requires time," Washington explained, and "to bring them under proper discipline and subordination, not only requires time, but is a work of great difficulty, and in this army, where there is so little distinction between the officers and soldiers, requires an uncommon degree of attention."[65]

It certainly did require an "uncommon degree of attention," because if Lexington and Concord had not been enough to galvanize the king and Lord North into decisive action, Bunker Hill was.

---

[64] Alexander McKenzie, "Washington in Cambridge" *Atlantic Monthly* 36 (July 1875), 93–4; Wright, *The Continental Army*, 51–2.

[65] GW to The President of Congress (February 9, 1776) and Joseph Reed (February 10, 1776) in *Writings of George Washington*, ed. Sparks, 3:279, 286.

Lecture Seven

The King, the Conqueror, and the Coward

Scope: In Philadelphia, the Second Continental Congress issued a Declaration of "Taking up Arms" as well as an Olive Branch Petition to the Crown, suggesting reconciliation, both of which the king refused outright. Instead the king and Parliament issued what were effectively declarations of war. The king then dismissed Thomas Gage and turned over command of the British military in Boston to William Howe. He also replaced the Earl of Dartmouth with Lord George Sackville Germain. Howe the Whig and Germain the hawk were an odd pair, but they agreed that America could best be conquered by striking a blow at either the rebel army or the rebel Congress and by urging the many Loyalist Americans to take over the work of pulling down the rebel government.

Outline

I. While the British were appalled by their victory at Bunker Hill, the Americans were exhilarated by their defeat. What they saw as a moral victory gave them a useful surge of self-confidence, but they took out of it some less useful lessons.

- **A.** They came away with the certainty that free-born militia were better, man for man, than an army of professional hirelings.
  1. They had not bolted at the first sign of the oncoming redcoats.
  2. They had inflicted great casualties, proving their superior marksmanship.
- **B.** In Philadelphia, the Second Continental Congress greeted the news of the Bunker Hill fight by issuing "A Declaration … setting forth the Causes and Necessity of their taking up Arms" on July 6.
  1. The Declaration denied any intention of dissolving the union with Britain. But it declared the colonists were resolved to be free.
  2. The Declaration was followed on July 8 with a petition asking the king to suggest a means of reconciliation.
  3. This statement could be interpreted as an "olive branch," or as a firmly crafted statement of what the king's real alternatives were.

C. What the militia and Congress had alike missed, in the first flush of pride, was that all the marksmanship and fortitude at Bunker Hill had gone for nothing.

1. Their officers were prone to quarrelling with each other.

2. They had no organized supply system to keep them fed with ammunition.

3. Once things got into a pinch, they broke and ran.

II. In England, Bunker Hill produced exasperation rather than caution.

A. Thomas Gage could report only minimal progress, a long list of killed and wounded, and recommend the employment of a large army, or, if not that, suspension of land operations and calling in the navy to blockade the America coast.

B. Lord North advised the king to treat the standoff in America as a foreign war.

C. The Earl of Dartmouth conceded that some additional land forces would be needed, to be followed in early spring with further commitments.

III. The arrival of the Continental Congress's Declaration on "Taking up Arms" and the Olive Branch Petition infuriated George III.

A. On August 23 he issued his own proclamation declaring that the rebellion be suppressed and the traitors brought to justice.

1. On October 26, Parliament seconded the proclamation with an "Act Prohibiting Trade and Intercourse with America," shutting down all trade and commerce with the 13 colonies represented by the Continental Congress and making all ships or vessels belonging to the colonies forfeited to the king.

2. It was a declaration of war.

B. The Americans were unmoved.

1. The total effective force of the British army was only about 38,000 parceled out amongst stations around the world.

2. The Royal Navy mustered only 18,000 sailors and 270 ships of various sizes and conditions.

3. Like the army, the navy was spread around the world.

C. Nevertheless, George III stood firm.

1. He was prepared to strip the West India garrisons of their regiments and send them to Boston.

2. And he set about recruiting mercenaries to fill their places.

D. The idea that the king would hire foreigners, for pay, to kill his own subjects, struck Americans as a horrific example of cheap despotism; however, the use of mercenaries had a long and distinguished tradition in European warfare, stretching back to the later Middle Ages.

1. Beginning in the mid-1600s, European armies began recruiting more and more of their armies from their home populations.

2. But George III brought over into the British service entire regiments of German soldiers, the biggest contingent of which was 17 regiments and a jäger corps from Hesse-Kassel (which is why all the Germans tended to be referred to as "Hessians").

3. Between August 1775 and February 1776 some 18,000 German troops were signed up for British service.

IV. The king recalled Thomas Gage in September for "consultation" and on October 10 Gage turned over command in Boston to William Howe.

A. William Howe, like his two older brothers, had had a spectacular military career and had been elected to Parliament for Nottingham in 1758. Nevertheless, he had never had an independent command of his own until now.

B. The Howe brothers were all Whigs.

1. William Howe had opposed the Intolerable Acts.

2. He had assured his Nottingham constituency that he would decline orders to serve in America, though when the orders materialized, he went.

V. The strangest change among the king's servants was in the critical post of secretary of state for the American colonies.

A. The king nudged aside the Earl of Dartmouth and replaced him on November 10, 1775, with Lord George Sackville Germain, youngest son of the Earl of Dorset.

1. Like many younger sons, Sackville went into the army.

2. He rose to lieutenant colonel of the 28th Regiment, commanded the 6th Dragoons, and was elected to Parliament and promoted to major general in 1755.

3. The smudge on his reputation came when he was court-martialed for failure to obey orders during the Seven Years' War; however, he managed to keep his seat in Parliament.

4. When his widowed aunt died in 1769 he inherited her estate and took her surname.
5. He worked his way back into the king's good graces by supporting the Stamp Act and all the subsequent Parliamentary legislation for the colonies.
6. By 1775 he had acquired a reputation for hawkishness in American affairs.

B. Howe and Germain made an odd couple but they agreed entirely on four points.

1. America was too big to be conquered inch by inch.
2. Much of America was populated by people still loyal to the king.
3. It would be vital to strike a blow at the head of the rebellion, either at the rebel army or the rebel Congress.
4. It would be equally vital to get the Loyalists to take over the work of pulling down the rebel government.

C. They also agreed that Boston was the wrong place to attempt to launch such a blow.

1. Howe and Germain envisioned abandoning Boston and taking New York City, while a second British army would be built up in Canada.
2. Both armies could then cut off or crush New England and the southern colonies would learn from this example and return to their ancient loyalty.

Suggested Reading:

Jones, "Sir William Howe," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents.*

Mackesy, *The War for America*, chaps. 2–3.

Weintraub, *Iron Tears,* chap. 2.

Questions to Consider:

1. What was the original purpose for recruiting German mercenaries for the American war? How did this become a symbol of British bad faith toward the colonies?
2. What were the major points of the North American strategy developed by Howe and Germain?

Lecture Seven—Transcript
The King, the Conqueror, and the Coward

The Duke of Wellington once said that next to a battle lost, the most terrible thing was a battle won. He might have been speaking about the British army and Bunker Hill. The Americans, by contrast, seized on the Bunker Hill fight as a kind of moral victory, and while it gave them a useful surge of self-confidence in staring down British regular infantry, they took out of it—as we saw a little bit in the last lecture—a number of dubious lessons, chief among which was the certainty that free-born militia volunteers were better, man for man, than an army of professional hirelings. To tell the truth, the New England militia had stood up to the best the British infantry could hurl at them and did it much better than anyone could have predicted. They had not bolted and run at the first sign of the oncoming redcoats and their bayonets, and the stupendous casualties they inflicted were proof that the individual American was a far better marksman than the individual British infantry. Thomas Jefferson—one of the Virginia gentry like Washington—who had only just arrived in Philadelphia as a Virginia delegate to the Second Continental Congress, wrote pretty cheerfully that "although war would be expensive," nevertheless, after Bunker Hill, "nobody now entertains a doubt but that we are able to cope with the whole force of Great Britain, if we are but willing to exert ourselves."[66]

In Philadelphia, the Second Continental Congress greeted the news of the Bunker Hill fight with something of the same jubilation by issuing "A Declaration … setting forth the Causes and Necessity of their taking up Arms" on July 6. This Declaration asserted, "We fight not for glory or for conquest," and that "we mean not to dissolve that union [with Britain] which has so long happily subsisted between us." But they were of "one mind resolved to die freemen rather than to live slaves." The Congress followed that on July 8 with a petition to the king asking "whether it may not be expedient … that your majesty be pleased to direct some mode, by which the united applications of your faithful colonists … may be improved into a happy and permanent reconciliation."[67] It's hard to know whether the Congress intended this "Olive Branch Petition"—as the document became

---

[66] Jefferson to George Clymer (July 5, 1775) in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, Julian P. Boyd, ed. (Princeton, 1950), 1:136.

[67] Macdonald, *Documents*, 380, 384.

known—as an expression of continued humility, or as a firmly crafted statement, built on the ruins of Bunker Hill, of what the king's real alternatives were in dealing with the Americans. John Adams, who was hot for independence, thought the "Olive Branch Petition" was a "measure of Imbecility" because Bunker Hill had rendered all hope of reconciliation moot, and Adams liked that. What the militia and the Second Continental Congress alike missed, in the flush of pride, was that all their marksmanship and fortitude at Bunker Hill had gone for nothing. Their officers were prone to waste time quarreling with each other, they had no organized supply system to keep them fed with ammunition, and once things got into a pinch, they broke and ran beyond any hope of recall or rally, something the regulars had very obviously *not* done at Bunker Hill even after their merciless mowing-down. Congress and the militia would—as Washington was discovering in the camp at Cambridge—be a long, long time learning why Bunker Hill was, after all, an American *defeat*.

The British, for their part, showed no better capacity for learning lessons. The officers who had commanded the badly damaged infantry certainly absorbed a useful lesson in caution, and this was particularly pressed onto William Howe, who would never again launch a direct, frontal attack at an American defensive position. But in England, Bunker Hill produced exasperation rather than caution. The first rumors began dribbling in from merchant ships about a full-scale battle as early as July 18, and the news only went from bad to worse. In his report to Lord Barrington, as the secretary of state for war, Thomas Gage was the first source of this exasperation when, after all his inaction and pleas for reinforcements, he had to admit that he had achieved only "some success against the rebels … attended with a long list of killed and wounded." The conclusion Gage drew from the Bunker Hill fight was even more galling to read: "A small body acting in one spot will not avail. You must have large armies making diversions on different sides, to divide their force." So, either "a large army must at length be employed to reduce these people," or else all British operations on land should be suspended, and the Royal Navy called in to blockade the American coast. When the first wounded from Bunker Hill were off-loaded from ships at Plymouth Harbor in the south of England in September, the news appeared even more stark: "We learn here," reported one letter from Plymouth, "by the sick & wounded Soldiers who are landed that there is not above 2000 Soldiers, including Officers, at Boston fit to do Duty, and these are averse to the Service. They declare," and this is a

startling admission, "that up to 60,000 Men would not be able to bring the Americans under Subjection."[68]

Lord North was the first to respond, the day after Thomas Gage's official papers arrived, advising the king that the standoff in America now "must be treated as a foreign war." The Earl of Dartmouth reluctantly conceded that "some addition to the land force" would have to be made "immediately, perhaps two thousand men," to be followed "early in the spring" by still larger commitments of troops. They all resolved that there should be no more kid glove treatment: "it is said, the same force will be employed, as if the inhabitants were French or Spanish enemies."[69] The arrival of the Continental Congress's declaration on "Taking up Arms" and the obsequious Olive Branch Petition only infuriated George III. He had no inclination to look as though he was negotiating with a successful rebellion. Instead, on August 23, 1775, the king issued his own proclamation. In that proclamation, he declared that since

> many of our subjects in divers parts of our Colonies and Plantations in North America, misled by dangerous and ill designing men … have at length proceeded to open and avowed rebellion, by arraying themselves in a hostile manner … and traitorously preparing, ordering and levying war against us … we have thought fit … to issue our Royal Proclamation, hereby declaring, that not only all our Officers, civil and military, are obliged to exert their utmost endeavours to suppress such rebellion, and to bring the traitors to justice …

Not only must they do all these wonderful things, but they must treat the rebellion as something to be stomped upon as though it was a poisonous snake. [There would be] no reconciliation as far as George III was concerned.

When Parliament convened on October 26, 1775, they seconded the king's proclamation with an "Act Prohibiting Trade and Intercourse with America." This bill shut down "all manner of trade and commerce" with the 13 colonies represented by the Continental Congress, and it made "all ships or vessels of or belonging to the inhabitants of said colonies … forfeited to

---

[68] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 19; *The Diary and Letters of His Excellency, Thomas Hutchinson*, ed. P.O. Hutchinson (Boston, 1884), 489.

[69] *Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, 503; Jensen, *Founding of a Nation*, 646.

his Majesty, as if the same were the ships and effects of open enemies."[70] This was, in effect, a British declaration of war.

The American response was unmoved. "I know not," said John Adams, "whether … the act of Parliament called the Restraining Act, or Prohibitory Act, or Piratical Act, or Plundering Act" had the most apt title; but for his part he thought that the best title for the Prohibitory Bill would be the "Act of Independency," because the result of it would be to drive the Continental Congress further toward declaring total independence of Britain, and force the faint-hearts and the reconciliationists in the Congress to realize that from the perspective of the king their necks were already in the noose, and they might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. "King, Lords, and Commons," John Adams wrote, "have united in sundering this country from that, I think, forever. It is a complete dismemberment of the British Empire. It throws thirteen Colonies out of the Royal protection, levels all distinctions, and makes us independent in spite of our supplications and entreaties."[71] Besides, what exactly did King George have to throw at America? If this was a war, what kind of a war could you expect George III actually to mount against all of America? As we saw in Lecture Three, the total effective force of the British army was only about 38,000 men, and that had to be parceled out amongst stations all around the world. The outpost at Gibraltar claimed 7,700 of these men; England and Scotland had only 9,500 from which reinforcements for America could be pared away. The Royal Navy only mustered 18,000 sailors on the books, and 270 ships of various sizes, and many of those ships had been hurriedly built during the Seven Years' War of green or poor timber and wore out quickly during the ensuing decade of peace. Budget cutbacks had defunded the royal dockyards to the point where a third of all new naval construction was being done in private shipyards. As with the army, the Royal Navy had the same world-wide responsibilities, beginning with the need to keep a sizeable fleet in home waters to deter the French from any dreams of revenging the Seven Years' War. As a result, Admiral Graves had only 29 ships on the North American station, and only three of them—*The Preston*, *Somerset,* and *Boyne*—were ships-of-the-line. (Ships-of-the-line being the battleships of the 18th century, with multiple tiers of heavy naval cannon.) The rest of the North American flotilla was mostly an assortment of lightly-armed sloops

[70] Macdonald, *Documents*, 389–96.

[71] George Fisher, *The Struggle for American Independence* (Philadelphia, 1908), 1:441.

and schooners.[72] What was it the king thought he was doing by treating this as a war against America? What was he going to make war with?

However, this should not have fooled any Americans about the depth of the king's resolve. When Parliament opened in October 1775, George III swept aside any hesitations about undertaking a war in America: "I am unalterably determined at every hazard and at every risk of every consequence to compel the colonies to absolute submission. It would be better totally to abandon them than to admit a single shadow of their doctrines." Did the king lack for soldiers in America? He was willing to immediately strip the West Indies garrisons of the 27th Regiment and the 2nd Battalion of the 55th Regiment and send them to Boston, to be followed by 21more regiments of infantry and a cavalry regiment, the 16th Light Dragoons. (Only one other cavalry unit, the 17th Light Dragoons, had been dispatched to America.) To fill their places in the various garrisons they were being taken out of, the king and his cabinet set about recruiting mercenaries from Germany.[73]

The idea that the king of England would recruit foreigners—and for hire—to hunt down and kill his own subjects struck Americans, then and now, as one of the most horrific examples of cheap despotism that George III could have offered. Actually, the use of mercenaries had a long and distinguished tradition in European warfare and stretched all the way back into the later Middle Ages, when kings and nobles found that it was more effective to hire professional companies of soldiers to do their fighting than putting themselves at the head of a mob of one's own untrained, undependable and ill-armed peasants. You could, of course, call out your retainers, but if they didn't know what they were doing you might be in more danger from them than from your enemy. Italian *condottiere*, Swiss *Reislaufer*, and German *Landsknechts* became only the most famous of these mercenary companies with long histories in European conflict. In fact, as late as the 18th century, almost a third of the French army was made up of foreign volunteers, and two regiments of Irish and Scottish volunteers, in French pay, ended up fighting for Scotland and Bonnie Prince Charlie at the disastrous Battle of Culloden in 1745. The upside of using mercenaries was that it quickly placed a professional fighting force at your disposal and did it without disturbing your domestic economy by dragging your own farmers from

[72] "Disposition of H.M.'s Ships and Vessels in North America" (June 16, 1775), in *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 9:174; Mackesy, *War for America*, 39, 169; Nathan Miller, *Sea of Glory: The Continental Navy Fights for Independence, 1775–1783* (New York, 1974), 29.

[73] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 22.

their fields or your own merchants from their counting-houses. On the downside, mercenaries were expensive, and since the mercenary's chief loyalty was to whomever paid him, mercenaries had been known to desert to the side of whomever looked most likely to win. Beginning in the mid-1600s, European armies began gradually moving toward recruiting more and more of their armies from their home populations, where personal loyalty to the king or the nation might—at least in theory—supplement shortfalls in the soldier's pay, and where a shared language was vital to coordinating the increasingly more complicated battlefield movements of the armies.

Even so, mercenaries would remain a regular presence in large European armies for another 50 years after the American Revolution. George III had a direct conduit to the supply of German mercenaries, since the first of the Georges in 1714 was also a German prince, the Duke of Brunswick-Luneburg and the Elector of Hanover (he had both of those titles). The term *elector*, incidentally, requires a little digression here because it's an odd title. Understand that strictly speaking there was no such thing as a nation called *Germany* in 1775. Germany was a cultural designation; what we called "Germany" was really a congeries of small principalities, duchies, and whatnot which made up the so-called Holy Roman Empire. The only thing that bound them together was the fact that they all spoke the German language. The office of emperor of the Holy Roman Empire sounds like it should be very important, but by the 1700s it really was not. The office was in fact elective, and in 1775, nine of the most important German princes were designated as *electors* and cast votes for the next emperor. Four hundred years before this, the Holy Roman Empire had been a force to reckon with, but over that time, the power of the empire and its emperor had declined pretty steeply, and the power of the electors and their fellow-princes had grown. The office of German "emperor" was now routinely filled by whoever was also the current emperor of Austria; think of it as imperial multitasking. The vote that was taken for emperor among the electors of the empire was, with a few unpleasant interruptions, pretty much *pro forma*. Then, after having elected an emperor who was powerless, the various princes of the empire went off and did pretty much as they pleased until they had to come together and elect another one.

That brings us back, then, to the elector of Hanover and prince of Brunswick-Luneburg, George III. As a perfectly titled German prince—even though he was born in England, raised in England, spoke English, was king of England and thought of himself as an Englishman, he was still a

German prince—George III was in a natural position to call for the services of German troops, and not only from the principality that he was the *titular* ruler of Brunswick, but also from the German states of Hesse-Kassel, Hesse-Hanau, Waldeck, Ansbach-Bayreuth, and Anhalt-Zerbst. Unlike the old days, when kings negotiated directly with the commanders of mercenary companies, George III negotiated with the other German princes by treaty. He took over into British service entire regiments of German soldiers (not just like in the days of the 1500s; companies of free-booters). The troops the king bid for included a German *freikorps,* mostly second-rate support troops from Anhalt-Zerbst; two regiments of infantry and a jäger battalion, jägers being the German version of light infantry, and that from Ansbach-Bayreuth; a regiment of dragoons and seven regiments of infantry from Brunswick; two regiments and another *freikorps* from Hesse-Hanau; and the biggest contingent of all, 17 regiments and a jäger corps from Hesse-Kassel. The fact that so large a proportion of these mercenaries were from Hesse-Kassel is why all of the Germans hired by the British to fight in the Revolution tended to be referred to simply as "Hessians." Strictly speaking, not all of them were; but most of them were and the name stuck. Between August 1775 and February 1776, some 18,000 German troops were signed up for British service and they were paid for—to their princes, mind you, not to the individual soldiers—at an average of £7 sterling a head. Originally, the intention was to use the German mercenaries as just replacement garrisons for British regular infantry now being sent to America, but the manpower needs were such that German regiments soon found themselves joining the British line regiments on active duty in America. Not that they objected; Johann Ewald, the son of a postmaster and a captain in the Hesse-Kassel jäger corps, "wished for nothing more," he wrote, "than to get to know the enemy in battle," and he felt sure that it would not take more than one battle to end this war in America and do it "without shedding the blood of the King's subjects in a needless way." [74]

It was not just the numbers of the army that the king planned to reconstitute for the American war; he also intended to do some replacement at the top of the army command, starting with Thomas Gage. Gage had had his orders, and he had obeyed them without much energy. He had been given reinforcements and a second chance in June, and the result was Bunker Hill. It was now time for him to go. Gage was recalled in September 1775 to

[74] Jensen, *Founding of a Nation*, 646–7; Mackesy, *War in America*, 62; Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, ed. Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven, 1979), 8, 25.

England for "consultation"—that was the word—and on October 10 he turned over command in Boston to William Howe and sailed to England, from which he would never return to what was, after all, his real home: America.[75] He was not officially relieved as commander in chief for North America until April 1776, but by that time, everyone had known for quite a while that Thomas Gage's career was over. He would never hold a real command again, and he would die in 1787 after a long illness. By seniority, the next commander in chief in North America should have been Sir Guy Carleton, the governor-general of Canada. But the king wanted William Howe, largely because of Howe's experience in fighting in North America during the French and Indian War, and perhaps partly because Howe was distantly related to the king: his grandmother had been George I's half-sister. Howe also was clearly the hero of Bunker Hill, because apart from Howe's determination Bunker Hill would have been much worse than simply a humiliation for the British army. If anyone seemed to be the man for the American command, it was William Howe.

About time, too, since William Howe had spent most of life in the shadow of his two older brothers. His oldest brother, Lord George Augustus Howe, was one of the most practical and well-loved British commanders in America during the French and Indian War. His death at Ticonderoga in 1758 made Lord George Howe one of the heroes of the French and Indian War, certainly to Americans. Lord George Howe's next older brother was Sir Richard Howe. Richard had gone into the Royal Navy at age 13, commanded his first ship at age 19, won his first ship-to-ship victory at 20, and rose to flag-captain at age 22. Dick Howe was now a vice-admiral and had earned himself a knighthood and, after the death of his older brother, inherited the family title. It is only then that we come to William Howe, who was three years younger than "Black Dick" Howe. Truth be told, William Howe had enjoyed a fairly spectacular career up to this point: lieutenant in the Duke of Cumberland's Light Dragoons at 18, lieutenant colonel in the 58th Regiment at 30, the man who commanded the "forlorn hope" detachment of 24 men who scaled the heights of Abraham and led James Wolfe's army to its miraculous victory at Quebec. He had been elected to Parliament in 1758 for Nottingham, and even promoted to major general in 1772. But somehow William Howe had always come in third knot on the kite, and the prestige of an independent command of his own had always eluded him. Until now.

---

[75] John R. Alden, *General Gage in America* (Baton Rouge, 1948), 280–81.

The one hitch in taking command in America was politics, because the Howe brothers—Richard and William—were Whigs. William Howe had opposed the Intolerable Acts from his seat in Parliament, and he assured his Nottingham constituency that he would decline orders to serve in any war in America. That is, until the orders actually materialized: Duty called, he explained, and added that "a man's private feelings ought to give way to the service of the public at all times," and so off to America he went. Maybe it was just ambition which changed his mind, because a command opportunity like this was not likely to come calling again. Or maybe he had simply concluded that if anybody understood Americans and could preside over a reconciliation between the king and what were presumed to be the majority of his still-loyal colonial subjects, it certainly would have to be William Howe. Either way, William Howe had finally become the man of the hour.[76]

By far, however, the strangest shake-up among the king's servants was in the critical post of secretary of state for the American colonies, the office which would have direct oversight of the American war. There, the king gently nudged aside the less-than-enthusiastic Earl of Dartmouth, and replaced him on November 10, 1775, with the administrative surprise of the British 18th century: Lord George Sackville Germain. George Germain was actually born a Sackville, which is to say that he was the youngest son of Lionel Cranfield Sackville, the 7th Earl of Dorset. He was, like so many of the younger sons of the British aristocracy, shoved off into the army for a career. He went up to lieutenant colonel of the 28th Regiment, commanded the 6th Dragoons, was elected to Parliament, and was promoted to major general in 1755. He ought to have been eating off golden platters by that time but at the height of the Seven Years' War, at the climactic battle of Minden on August 1, 1759; he failed to obey orders to move his cavalry to the attack. For this he was court-martialed and sacked from the army. He denied any wrong-doing, however, and he clung successfully to his seat in Parliament. When his widowed aunt, Lady Betty Germain, died in 1769, he inherited her estate and took her surname, hence Lord George Germain. Germain worked his way back into the king's good graces by supporting the Stamp Act and all the subsequent Parliamentary legislation for the colonies, and by 1775 he had acquired quite a reputation for hawkishness in American affairs. "His plan has always been to crush the [New] England governments and church," wrote one observer, and on no point was he more in tune with

[76] M.A. Jones, "Sir William Howe: Conventional Strategist," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents*, 49.

the king. But he was not a lovable man; he was a cold and saturnine man, living forever with the ghost of Minden on his shoulder. The remembrance of Minden would always give critics of the king's American policies a stick to beat those policies with.[77]

William Howe the diffident conqueror and George Germain the cowardly warrior made an odd couple in many respects. But on these four points they were entirely agreed. First, America was too enormous to be conquered inch by inch, even by the 30,000 or so infantry the government had scraped together. Second, much of America, however, was populated by people still loyal to the king. Third, it would therefore be vital to strike a blow—a quick, savage, and decisive blow—at the head of the rebellion, either at the rebel army or at the rebel Congress. Fourth, it would be equally vital, once that blow was struck, to rouse the loyal population of America and let them take over the work of pulling down the rebel government.

What they also agreed upon, in specific terms, was that Boston was the wrong place to attempt to launch such a blow. Cramped and hostile, Boston offered no effective way of striking the Americans except by another head-on attack like Bunker Hill. Instead, in the imagination of both Howe and Germain, the British would abandon Boston in the spring and resituate Howe's army by taking New York City. At the same time, a second British army would be built up in Canada, so that both armies could together seize the Hudson River corridor and pinch off the home of the rebellion in New England. New England could either be isolated or crushed as the situation dictated, and the southern colonies would gratefully profit from this example and return to their ancient loyalty.

All this would hinge, however, on whether Howe could pull off something as dicey as an evacuation of Boston under the eyes of the rebels, and then capture New York. It would also hinge on whether the Americans, rather than a British army, got to Canada first. In the fall of 1775, that was a race the Americans looked like they were about to win.

---

[77] Mackesy, *War for America*, 53; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 36–7; *Diary and Letters of Thomas Hutchinson*, 555.

Lecture Eight

Conquering Canada, Reconquering Boston

Scope: After the Treaty of Paris in 1763 surrendered all of Canada to Britain, the British managed the French-speaking region quite well thanks to governor-general Sir Guy Carleton. The Americans, however, had a plan to invade and conquer Canada. When Britain's St. John's garrison near the Canadian border surrendered, Carleton lost more than half of the British regulars left in Canada. Benedict Arnold led a second prong of the Canada attack, forcing Carleton to abandon Montreal and almost capturing Quebec. When Burgoyne's British forces arrived, Arnold was forced to retreat to Montreal. But the Americans still had Ticonderoga and the badly needed artillery it provided—artillery that arrived in Boston shortly before the British evacuated the city.

Outline

I. French Canada spread from along the St. Lawrence Riverway and the Great Lakes down to what is now Illinois to touch France's other great North American colony.

- **A.** France and England had fought a series of ever-escalating wars in Europe and proxy wars in North America that climaxed in the Seven Years' War, which in America became the French and Indian War.
- **B.** Ultimately, the French had neither the numbers nor the command of the seas necessary to support Canada.
- **C.** The Treaty of Paris in 1763 surrendered all of Canada to Britain.
- **D.** Of the 76,000 colonists, or *habitants*, in Canada, only two percent spoke English. Most were French and Catholic at a time when English Protestants were deeply suspicious of Catholicism.
- **E.** Nonetheless, the British managed French-speaking Canada more adeptly than they had their 13 English-speaking colonies, owing largely to Canada's governor-general, Sir Guy Carleton.
  1. He stood up for their trading rights.
  2. He promoted French-speaking Canadians in public office.
  3. He ignored the prevailing Roman Catholicism of the province.

4. He lobbied Parliament for the Quebec Act of 1774, confirming Canadian property titles and giving Roman Catholicism legal standing in Canada.

F. The Quebec Act caused some discontent among the *habitants*.

1. It imposed the use of English Common Law.
2. It denied the Canadians a provincial legislature.
3. It provided for the public support of Protestant churches.

G. Nevertheless, Carleton was able to send two of the five regiments under his control to reinforce Thomas Gage in Boston.

II. The Continental Congress wanted as many of the North American British provinces in the same boat with it as possible, as well as the West Indies.

A. In December 1774, the colonial assembly in Jamaica protested the "unrestrained exercise of legislative Power" by Parliament.

1. The West Indians had a great deal to lose economically by any loss of trade with the 13 colonies.
2. The white sugar planters of the Caribbean needed the protection of the British army from uprisings by their slaves.

B. In Canada, however, there was enough discontent among the *habitants* to make the idea of Canada becoming the 14th colony in the Continental Congress look worthwhile.

C. Arnold laid out a plan to Congress.

1. The conquest of Canada would add territory and resources to the Congress.
2. It would prevent the British from using the Hudson River corridor to strike the American army around Boston from behind.

D. Arnold met with George Washington and Philip Schuyler, who had been appointed to create a "Northern Department" to protect the northern border, to discuss his plan.

1. Schuyler already had his own plans for a Canadian invasion.
2. He had three Connecticut regiments and four newly raised New York regiments, and an artillery company, along with Ethan Allen's Green Mountain Boys.
3. Schuyler also had a talented subordinate, Richard Montgomery, who fumed at Ticonderoga while Schuyler organized his Northern Department.

4. In August, Montgomery bolted up Lake Champlain with about 1,200 men to Fort St. John, where Guy Carleton had posted the 7th and 26th regiments as the first line of defense for Montreal.

E. When Schuyler caught up with Montgomery, he found that Montgomery's raw levies had stumbled into an ambush, launched two inept attacks on Fort St. John, and were on the point of mutiny.

1. Schuyler left and headed back to Ticonderoga.
2. Montgomery began a siege of Fort St. John. The ultimate surrender of the St. John's garrison meant a loss of more than half of the British regulars left in Canada.
3. The road to Montreal was now undefended.

III. Carleton was facing other problems.

A. In August, Washington informed Schuyler of a second prong to the attack on Canada to Quebec via the Kennebec River, with a strike force of 1,000 men under the command of Benedict Arnold. This plan would either force Carleton to allow Schuyler to reach Montreal or to allow Quebec to fall into the Americans' hands.

B. Despite poor planning, unanticipated early frosts, and the sheer forbidding hostility of the Maine woods, Arnold's expedition reached Quebec after 51 days, to the astonishment of Guy Carleton.

1. With Montgomery now advancing on Montreal and Arnold threatening Quebec, Carleton had only a Hobson's choice before him.
2. On November 11 he ordered Montreal abandoned and headed for Quebec, narrowly escaping capture by Montgomery's force.

C. If Arnold had struck Quebec at that moment, Canada might well have fallen to the Americans for good because Carleton could only muster 200 men.

1. Arnold, however, had only managed to bring 550 men up the St. Lawrence, after desertion and hardship had thinned his ranks.
2. He decided to wait for Montgomery, who did not arrive till December 1, when a nasty winter was setting in, and he brought only 300 men with him.
3. They tried laying siege to Quebec as they had to Fort St. John.

D. On December 30, they decided on a surprise attack under the cover of a snowstorm.
   1. Arnold fought his way into the lower town from the North, while Montgomery led another 200 men in from the south.
   2. Montgomery was cut down, and his party fell back. And Arnold, also wounded, abandoned the attack.
   3. Arnold fell back into a long encirclement of Quebec that ended on March 4, 1776, when a British relief force under General John Burgoyne arrived and the Americans retreated to Montreal.

E. It was now Carleton's turn to take the offensive.
   1. He forced Arnold from Montreal on June 9, and pursued him all the way to Fort St. John. He stopped there until October, waiting for reinforcements.
   2. When he finally moved his troops onto Lake Champlain, he found Arnold blocking his way with a makeshift fleet of 13 gunboats.
   3. Carleton managed to sink or scuttle the gunboats, but then he pulled back to Canada to wait until the following spring.

F. Ticonderoga still remained securely in American hands.

IV. If Arnold and Montgomery had done nothing else on their Canadian venture than prevent a British descent on Ticonderoga in 1775 and 1776, their effort would have been more than worth it.

A. The nearly 100 pieces of artillery in storage there was what Washington's army around Boston needed more than any other type of weaponry.

B. Artillery on the 18th-century battlefield was the checkmate to the bayonet.
   1. Well-served field guns firing solid iron balls or shotgun-like blasts of grapeshot and canister could break up oncoming formations of attacking infantry better than volleys of musket fire.
   2. The impact was as much psychological as physical.
   3. The troops in an attacking infantry company could see the ball from a 6-pounder coming slowly toward them and know what it would do to them.

C. Washington particularly needed the bigger 18-pounder and 24-pounder guns, short-barreled howitzers, and siege mortars, because these had the range or the high-angle trajectory to reach targets in Boston from his positions.

D. Washington had Henry Knox, a Boston bookseller and civilian engineer, commissioned colonel of his artillery and sent him off to Ticonderoga to retrieve the unwieldy arms.

E. By the time the guns arrived at the end of January, Washington was aware that Howe and the British intended to evacuate Boston as soon as the spring thaws allowed the ships to move in Massachusetts Bay.
   1. On March 4, 1,200 laborers started working on Dorchester Heights, throwing up two redoubts spiked with Knox's artillery.
   2. Howe moved up the evacuation timetable and on March 17, 9,000 British soldiers, their dependents, and more than 1,000 Loyalists left Boston for the last time.

Suggested Reading:

Desjardins, *Through a Howling Wilderness*, chaps. 10–11.

Smith, "Sir Guy Carleton," in Billias, *George Washington's Generals and Opponents.*

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles,* chap. 14.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did Washington need artillery in order to besiege Boston?
2. How would you contrast the roles played as colonial governors played by Thomas Gage and Guy Carleton?

Lecture Eight—Transcript
Conquering Canada, Reconquering Boston

Canada was once the jewel in the crown of the French colonial empire. The domain of French Canada sprawled over millions of acres along the vast St. Lawrence Riverway and the Great Lakes, and reached all the way down to what is now Illinois to touch France's other great North American colony, Louisiana. The French had begun poking around the mouth of the St. Lawrence as early as 1534, only 40-odd years after Columbus first made landfall in the Americas. By 1608, Samuel de Champlain had planted a fur trading center at the site of what is now Quebec, and struck up a strategic alliance with the Algonquin Indian tribes of the region: the Cree, Ojibwa, Ottawa, Huron, and Micmac. On the other hand, the French also made enemies of the Five Nations of the Iroquois—the Mohawk, Oneida, Cayuga, Onondaga, and Seneca—who lived on the south side of the St. Lawrence. The French made even greater enemies in the English who settled New England in the 1630s and seized New York in 1664. For a century, England's bogeyman had been Spain. From 1660 onward, it was France, and France and England fought a series of ever escalating wars in Europe, and proxy wars in North America, to settle matters between them. These wars coalesced and climaxed in the Seven Years' War—the Great War for Empire—which in America became the French and Indian War. Ultimately, the French had neither the numbers nor the command of the seas necessary to support Canada. The two principal towns of Quebec and Montreal fell to the great British commanders, Wolfe and Amherst, and the Treaty of Paris in 1763 surrendered all of French Canada to Britain.[78]

Possessing Canada extinguished all practical French rivalry to English domination of North America as far west as the Mississippi River. But it also provided problems: The vast interior of Canada contained only about 76,000 French colonists—or *habitants*—of whom only two percent spoke English. The population was not only predominantly French but Catholic too, and at a time when Catholicism still rang in Protestant English ears with overtones of subversion and authoritarianism. Surprisingly, the British were much more adept at managing their problems in French-speaking Canada than they had been in the 13 English-speaking colonies, something which had a great deal to do with the unlikely success of the taciturn but

[78] Taylor, *American Colonies* (New York, 2001), 93.

vigilant English governor-general of Canada, Sir Guy Carleton. Born in 1724 into the ruling Protestant minority in Ireland—a place where one learned very quickly how delicately a ruling minority had to control a hostile majority—Carleton bought a commission in the 25th Regiment in 1742, became a favorite of James Wolfe, and commanded the 2nd battalion of the 60th Royal Americans at the battle for Quebec. He was named as the interim lieutenant governor of the Quebec province in 1766, and was confirmed as governor-general of all Canada in 1768. Carleton had the uncommon good sense not to try to beat the *habitants* into English shapes. He stood up for the *habitants*' trading rights, he kept or promoted French-speaking Canadians in public office, and he turned a blind eye to the prevailing Roman Catholicism of the province. "This Country must, to the end of Time, be peopled by the Canadian Race," Carleton wrote, and he intended doing nothing which flew in the face of that fact. In 1770, in fact, he left for England to lobby Parliament for what eventually became the Quebec Act in 1774, confirming Canadian property titles and giving Roman Catholicism legal standing in Canada. As he discovered when he returned to Quebec in September 1774, he could not make everyone happy. The Quebec Act also imposed the use of English common law, denied the Canadians a provincial legislature, and provided for the public tax support of Protestant churches. But affairs in Canada remained quiet enough into 1775 that Carleton felt able to send two of the five regiments under his control to reinforce Thomas Gage in Boston.[79]

This happy situation did not last for long. The Continental Congress wanted as many of the North American British provinces in the same boat with it as possible, and that included the West Indies. The West Indies colonies in fact had seen anti-Stamp Act protests in the 1760s, fully as much as the continental colonies; and in December 1774, the colonial assembly in Jamaica joined with the other colonies in protesting the "unrestrained exercise of legislative Power" by Parliament. The West Indians had a great deal to lose economically by any loss of trade with the 13 colonies, and West Indian protests against the Prohibitory Act in December rose to the point where one governor in the West Indies warned the House of Commons that the Prohibitory Act would "starve the islands, and uniting them in the same cause with North America, drive them into revolt also." In September 1775, George Washington felt bold enough to make a direct

[79] G.P. Browne, *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, volume five; Paul H. Smith, "Sir Guy Carleton: Soldier-Statesman," in *George Washington's Opponents*, 105.

overture “to the inhabitants of the island of Bermuda” for the support of “your brother colonists.”

But for all the reports that the “reigning toasts” in the West Indies “are *Washington*, *Lee* and *Independency* to America,” the white sugar planters of the Caribbean needed the protection of the British army from uprisings by their slaves, because the slave population of the British West Indies not only dwarfed the tiny elite of whites, but it lived under an infinitely more bestial and lethal rule than the slaves of the mainland colonies. There would, at the end of the day, be no ruffling by the West Indian colonies of the imperial waters. They would remain loyal. Canada, though, was a different matter. There was just enough simmering discontent among the *habitants* to make the idea of Canada becoming the 14th colony in the Continental Congress look worthwhile. On May 27, 1775, the Continental Congress addressed the Canadians in “hopes of your uniting with us in defense of our common liberty.”[80] Not only was there an appeal, there was also—thanks to Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold’s capture of Ticonderoga in May—enough military momentum near the Canadian border to make a liberating expedition north to Montreal and Quebec seem reasonable. As early as mid-June, Arnold had laid out a plan to the Congress to move up Lake Champlain, rally the *habitants* to his flag, storm the thinly defended town of Montreal, and then finish the job by capturing Quebec. This would not only add territory and resources to the Congress, but it would prevent the British from using the Hudson River corridor to strike the American army around Boston from behind. When Arnold learned that Congress had appointed George Washington and Charles Lee to command what became known as the “main army” around Boston, and had selected the New York grandee, Philip Schuyler, to recruit a New York army and create a “Northern Department” to shield the colonies’ northern border, Arnold arranged an interview with both Schuyler and Washington to sell them on his plan for attacking Canada.

Philip Schuyler, as Arnold discovered, already had his own plans for a Canadian invasion. He had only three Connecticut regiments with which to protect New York City and the entire interior of New York, to which he managed to add four newly raised New York regiments and an artillery

[80] Andrew Jackson O’Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 129, 142–3; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 68; Washington to “The Inhabitants of the island of Bermuda” (September 6, 1775), in *Writings*, 3:78.

company. He did have Ethan Allen's rough-and-ready Green Mountain Boys that he might be able to call on—that is if they didn't decide that Schuyler was more of a threat to them than the British. But if Schuyler had little in the way of resources to spare for an expedition to Canada, the British in Canada had even less to spare to defend it. What was more, Schuyler had a wonderfully talented subordinate in Richard Montgomery, an Irish-born British army officer who had served in the Seven Years' War, sold his commission as a captain in the 17th Regiment in 1772, and used the proceeds to move to New York to buy land and to marry into another family of New York grandees: the Livingstons. Montgomery had not been eager to get involved in the fighting in 1775, but when the Continental Congress offered him a commission, he felt he had to go. "The will of an oppressed people … " he said, "must be respected." Once in motion, Montgomery did not want to stop. Encamped at Ticonderoga under Schuyler, Montgomery fumed while Schuyler patiently and ploddingly organized his Northern Department. In August—fearing that the campaigning season was slipping away—Montgomery bolted up Lake Champlain with about 1,200 men and a gaggle of schooners, sailboats and *bateaux*, and then up the Richelieu River to Fort St. John, where Guy Carleton had posted the 7th and 26th regiments as the first line of defense for Montreal.

Schuyler had to play catch-up with his subordinate, Montgomery, and when he did finally overtake Montgomery near the Canadian border, he discovered that Montgomery's raw levies had stumbled into an ambush, had launched two hilariously inept and uncoordinated attacks on Fort St. John, and were on the point of mutiny. Schuyler looked and this and concluded that this really was Montgomery's affair, and pleading an attack of gout, Schuyler headed back down the Richelieu and Lake Champlain to Ticonderoga. Montgomery, however, was too far committed to think about breaking off his operations. Instead, he began a siege of Fort St. John which lasted—on and off—until the beginning of November 1775, when, to the general surprise of all concerned, the St. John's garrison surrendered. Suddenly, Carleton had lost more than half of the British regulars left in Canada, and the road to Montreal—only 25 miles to the north—lay undefended.[81]

Nor was Montgomery, Carleton's only problem: Late in August 1775, Washington wrote to Phillip Schuyler to inform him that he had decided to

---

[81] Michael P. Gabriel, *Major-General Richard Montgomery: The Making of an American Hero* (Cranbury, NJ, 2002), 70; Smith, "Sir Guy Carleton," 116; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 77.

launch a second prong to the attack on Canada, "to penetrate into Canada, by way of the Kennebec River, and so to Quebec." He would organize a strike force of 1,000 men, put it under the command of the irrepressible Benedict Arnold, and let this second prong of the attack "distract Carleton" and either force him to "leave [Schuyler] a free passage" into Montreal or "suffer [Quebec] to fall into our hands." Schuyler seems to have been unenthusiastic about this plan, and at length Washington learned why.

Washington allowed Arnold to recruit two battalions of infantry under Roger Enos and Christopher Greene, and one battalion of Virginia and Pennsylvania riflemen under a French and Indian War veteran named Daniel Morgan, yet another survivor of that battle of the Monongahela. They were recruited from the troops encamped at Cambridge, and Washington approved a plan which would ferry them from Massachusetts, by boat, to the mouth of the Kennebec river. They would then move up the Kennebec, cross overland to Chaudière Pond, and from there move down the Chaudière River to Quebec. Either Carleton would have to pull troops away from the defense of Montreal to meet Arnold's invasion, or else he would have to stay put where he was and let Arnold walk into an undefended Quebec.

Arnold's expedition cleared Newburyport, Massachusetts on September 16, 1775, and began moving up the Kennebec River on September 24. What ensued was a nightmare of poor planning, unanticipated early frosts, and the sheer forbidding hostility of the Maine woods. Food ran low; ungainly *bateaux* had to be hauled from point-to-point on the river to avoid rapids; shoes wore out. One battalion simply quit and abandoned the expedition. It was, said one member of Benedict Arnold's little army, "perhaps the most prodigious march ever accomplished by man." It took them until November 8, 51 days after leaving Newburyport, to reach Quebec, and the fact that they had done it at all was a tribute to both Benedict Arnold's untiring leadership and the sheer determination of his volunteers. "The oppressive weight of our *bateaux*, the miry state of the earth from the rain, the thickets, hills and swamps," wrote that same soldier, "were difficulties which were surmounted with an alacrity that would have astonished the most extensive imagination."[82]

It certainly astonished Guy Carleton. The governor had gone up the St. Lawrence River to supervise a last-ditch defense of Montreal, and all that was left in Quebec were seven cannon, the crew of a British sloop, and a mixed

---

[82] Washington to Philip Schuyler (August 20, 1775), in *Writings*, 3:63–4; Desjardins, *Through A Howling Wilderness*, 20, 61, 67, 117.

bag of English and Canadian militia, most of whom "cannot be depended upon … " said Carleton. With Montgomery advancing on Montreal and Arnold now threatening Quebec, Carleton had only a Hobson's choice before him, and on November 11, 1775, Carleton ordered Montreal abandoned. He would go down river to Quebec, but in fact he almost didn't make it: An advance party of Montgomery's force planted themselves astride the St. Lawrence and demanded Carleton's surrender. Only by slipping into a rowboat and drifting downriver under cover of darkness did Carleton manage to escape to Quebec. Meanwhile, the *habitants* were showing ominous signs of restlessness. This time, in this war, the French Canadians were determined not to be on the losing side.

If Benedict Arnold had struck Quebec at that moment, Canada might well have fallen into American hands for good. Guy Carleton could, at best, muster only about 200 men: the remnants of the 7th Regiment and the small battalion of Allan MacLean's 60th Royal Highland Emigrants. But Arnold had only managed to bring 550 men up to the St. Lawrence after desertion and hardship had thinned his ranks, and he decided to wait until Montgomery could join him and they could pool their forces. Montgomery did not arrive at Quebec until December 1, when winter was already setting in with a peculiarly Canadian fury, and even then Montgomery brought only 300 more men with him. Montgomery and Arnold tried laying siege to Quebec as once had been done to Fort St. John, but on December 30, 1775, Montgomery and Arnold decided on a surprise attack under the cover of a snowstorm. It came within an ace of succeeding: Arnold fought his way into the lower town of Quebec from the north, while Montgomery led another 200 men in from the south. But a single blast of British grapeshot cut Montgomery down, and his party fell back in dismay. Arnold, himself wounded, abandoned the attack. Instead, Arnold hunkered down into a dismal encirclement of Quebec, occasionally reinforced by contingents of militia or Continental infantry sent up Lake Champlain to Montreal. Finally, on March 4, 1776, the standoff ended. A flotilla led by HMS *Isis* and carrying a British relief force under General John Burgoyne tacked up the St. Lawrence to Quebec, and the Americans retired upriver to Montreal.[83]

It was now Guy Carleton's turn to take the offensive, but he had hardly more success from his end than the Americans had from theirs. In early June 1776, Carleton brushed back an American counterattack at Trois Rivières, halfway between Montreal and Quebec. This forced Benedict

---

[83] Mackesy, *War for America*, 79–80.

Arnold not only to abandon the siege of Quebec, but to evacuate Montreal on June 9, 1776, with Carleton nipping at his heels all the way back down to Fort St. John. There, however, Carleton stopped until October: waiting for more reinforcements, and building up a flotilla of prefabricated vessels to use for transport down Lake Champlain to attack Ticonderoga. But when Carleton finally moved his troops by boat out onto Lake Champlain, he found the way barred at Valcour Island by a makeshift fleet of 13 gunboats that Benedict Arnold had hastily, but ingenuously, built from scratch. Arnold's little flotilla fought gamely until it had all been either sunk or scuttled, but it gave Carleton enough cause to break off his campaign and pull back to Canada until the following spring. The great fort at Ticonderoga, where all this had begun with Arnold and Ethan Allen the previous May, remained quite securely in American hands.[84]

If Benedict Arnold and Richard Montgomery had done nothing more in their Canadian campaign than prevent a British descent on Ticonderoga in 1775 or 1776, then really their efforts would have been more than worth it. This is because when Arnold and Ethan Allen originally captured Ticonderoga, they bagged what amounted to an insignificant garrison of British soldiers, a crumbling and repair-needy stone fort, and nearly 100 pieces of artillery in storage. Artillery, of course, is what Washington's main army around Boston needed more than any other kind of weaponry. But getting it from Ticonderoga—in New York—to Boston was no snap-the-fingers matter. The guns themselves would have to be inspected to determine which were fit for service, teams and teamsters would have to be hired to drag them overland, and crews and officers would have to be trained how to use them. On the other hand, taking the trouble to retrieve this cache of artillery might be exactly what Washington needed to remake his new army into an effective European-style fighting force, because artillery on the 18th-century battlefield was the ultimate checkmate to the bayonet. Well-served field guns, ranging from 3-pounders to 12-pounders, and firing solid iron balls or shotgun-like blasts of grapeshot and canister, could break up oncoming formations of attacking infantry better—and with more terrifying impact—than volleys of musket fire. Once broken up by artillery fire, those formations were unlikely to rally and keep on coming.

---

[84] Charles H. Jones, *History of the Campaign for the Conquest of Canada* (Philadelphia, 1882), 74–79; Smith, "Sir Guy Carleton," 122; Desjardins, *Through a Howling Wilderness*, 193; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 79–80.

Like the bayonet, however, the real value of artillery was as much psychological as it was physical. A 6-pounder field gun—we call it a 6-pounder, and we use the pound as the measure, because it's from the weight of the shot a particular gun fires; hence a 6-pounder gun fires a 6-pound ball—could only hit a target 1,200 yards away less than one out of five times: not particularly accurate. At 520 yards, however, a 6-pounder could hit a patch of ground covered by an attacking company of infantry just about every time, and at 520 yards, every man in that advancing company of infantry could see that 6-pounder, and could imagine what it would be able to do—to at least some of them—every time it fired. Even more unnerving was the relatively low muzzle velocity of these cannon, which is about 900 feet-per-second. A 6-pounder gun fired a round shot on a flat trajectory about three feet high, which meant that it usually hit the ground about 400 yards away from where it was originally fired. That round shot had sufficient momentum that it bounced onwards for perhaps another 400 hundred feet before slapping the ground again, and then caroming onward for another 100 yards before rolling to a stop. This meant that any attacker would not only have to look at a cannon being aimed in *his* direction and watch it being fired at him, but he would have to watch the shot skidding madly toward *him* like a bowling ball being thrown at him by King Kong. If that was not enough to unstring the most rigid infantry discipline, then the results of the shot's impact—shattering bones and skulls, mangling flesh, and spattering clots of blood, especially if the ball had just made its first ground hit and was caroming upwards through every line in your formation—would unstring the discipline of even the most cohesive and effective unit of regular infantry.[85]

What Washington particularly needed—and which Ticonderoga had in surplus—were the much bigger 18-pounder and 24-pounder guns. He also needed short-barreled howitzers and siege mortars, because all of these were the guns which had the range—or in the case of mortars and howitzers—the high-angle trajectory, to reach targets in Boston from his positions around Boston. But to who was he to turn to retrieve this artillery from Ticonderoga, and to who was he to turn to manage and organize it once it had been retrieved? Richard Gridley, who had supervised the artillery at Bunker Hill, was 65 years old and in poor health. Who else in the American camp knew enough about artillery? These were town militia. Actually, someone did: A 25-year-old Boston bookseller named Henry Knox, who had volunteered his services as a civilian engineer to the New

---

[85] Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 155–6.

England militia, and who now broached the idea to Washington of fetching the Ticonderoga artillery himself. Washington arranged for him to be commissioned colonel of his artillery, and sent him off to Ticonderoga on November 16, 1775, with orders to move the "Cannon Mortars, Shels, lead & ammunition" and to spare "no trouble or expence" in bringing them to Boston. Move them Knox did, in another one of those operatic improvisations which the Americans were starting to look very good at. At Ticonderoga, Knox selected 52 cannon, along with nine large mortars and two howitzers, and proceeded to build "42 exceeding strong sleds, and have provided 80 yoke of oxen to drag them as far as Springfield" (meaning Springfield, Massachusetts). "It is not easy to conceive the difficulties we have had in getting [the Cannon] over the lake owing to the advanced season of the year and contrary winds," Knox wrote in his diary on December 17, "Three days ago it was very uncertain whether we should have gotten them until next spring." But now, he said, "please God they must go."[86]

By the time Knox managed to haul all the guns back to Cambridge at the end of January, Washington was already aware that William Howe and the British intended to evacuate Boston as soon as the spring thaws permitted the unhindered movement of ships in Massachusetts Bay. Having gone to all this trouble to acquire the means for a fight, Washington had no intention of letting Howe sail blissfully away. On March 4, 1776, 1,200 laborers set to work on Dorchester Heights, throwing up two redoubts spiked with Knox's artillery. William Howe's first instinct was to attack and clear the Americans off the Heights. But to what end? Instead, Howe simply moved up his evacuation timetable, and on March 17, 9,000 British soldiers, their dependents, and over a thousand Loyalists who feared American reprisals were packed into 78 ships and cleared Boston Harbor for the last time. Samuel Labaree, a soldier in one of the Massachusetts regiments, was awakened that morning by the long roll of drums beating to arms. His regiment formed up, marched over Boston Neck, and "were met by two men who had just thrown open the gates … to receive us into the town." Labaree

[86] Washington to Henry Knox (November 16, 1775), in *Writings*, 3:160; "Knox's Diary during his Ticonderoga Expedition," *New England Genealogical and Historical Register* (July 1876), 321–2; Francis Samuel Drake, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox* (Boston, 1873), 21.

and his fellow Continentals were just in time to enter Boston and to catch sight of the last of the British ships "sailing out of the harbor."[87]

Where were they bound to? Washington was certain he could guess: "The enemy's fleet and army," he told Israel Putnam, "are bound to New York … and if possible, [to] secure the communication by Hudson's River to Canada." So, to New York Washington and the Continental "main army" would go.

---

[87] Mackesy, *War for America*, 80; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 79; Labaree, in John C. Dann, ed. *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, 1980), 10.

Lecture Nine
Common Sense

Scope: William Howe and Lord Germain determined that British success in America depended on Howe's ability to destroy Washington's army and seize New York, and on the ability of southern Loyalists to overthrow the rebels. Poor communication, unclear objectives, and the uncertainty of the participation of southern Loyalists, however, jeopardized the plan. Furthermore, British general Clinton tried unsuccessfully to attack Charleston, and British forces found Americans difficult to evict from Canada.

In London, the king had granted the newly appointed commander of the navy in North America, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, and his brother William, powers to negotiate with, as well as fight against, the Americans. Their negotiating powers, however, were never tested. By the time "Black Dick" Howe arrived in America on July 20, 1776, the colonies had already declared themselves free and independent states. Although almost no one had come to the First Continental Congress wanting such a break with Great Britain, the actions of the king and his army had weakened existing ties, and the power of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* caused the tide to turn toward independence.

Outline

I. George Washington and William Howe could both see that control of the Hudson River Valley would make or break the American rebellion.

- **A.** By controlling the Hudson, the British could strategically cut the colonies in half.
  - **1.** The southern half would probably then return to the king.
  - **2.** The northern half would be isolated and face a multipointed invasion from New York and Canada.
- **B.** British success, so envisioned by Lord George Germain and Howe, would depend on two things.
  - **1.** Howe would have to destroy Washington's army and seize New York.
  - **2.** The Loyalists of the southern colonies would have to take an active part, raising their own militias to overthrow the rebels.

C. Believing that the rebellion could be suppressed in one strenuous campaign, Germain arranged substantial reinforcements for Howe, of Hessians, five regiments of elite infantry, and a cavalry regiment.

D. Germain wasted no time in rallying the southern Loyalists.
   1. Assurances that the king's followers would rally if enough British military force were shown came from the deposed royal governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin.
   2. Maj. Gen. Henry Clinton was detached from Howe's army in January to take command of an expeditionary force to reinforce Loyalist recovery of the southern colonies.
   3. Germain provided Clinton with eight regiments of infantry under major general and Earl Cornwallis and a navy flotilla under Admiral Peter Parker.

E. Germain also sent a relief force for the rescue of Guy Carleton and Quebec—seven infantry regiments and assorted Hessians under Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne. These forces would use the spring and summer of 1776 to secure control of the Hudson River Valley.

F. The plan suffered from three defects.
   1. Organizing, coordinating, and communicating news of these disjointed forces, both to each other and across the ocean to Germain in London was difficult.
   2. The objective of the plan was not unified. Howe had two separate tasks: destroy Washington's army and occupy New York City. It was not clear which he should do first.
   3. The assumption was that the southern colonies contained so many Loyalist apples waiting to fall into their laps.

II. When Henry Clinton finally reached Cape Fear on March 12, he discovered neither Loyalists nor any British troops or British ships were there to greet him.

A. The Parker-Cornwallis fleet did not appear until April and May.

B. Determined to do something, Clinton agreed to attack Charleston.
   1. But Washington had earlier sent his second-in-command, Maj. Charles Lee, to Charleston to supervise the construction of defenses.
   2. By the time Clinton, Cornwallis, and Parker appeared off the harbor mouth in June, there was already a small fort on the tip of Sullivan's Island, which formed the north lip of the harbor.

3. Clinton landed troops north of the fort on June 28, while Parker's ships tried to pound it to pieces.
4. The fort's militia commander, William Moultrie, manned his guns with surprising resourcefulness, and the fort's palmetto-log bulwarks absorbed the British shot instead of splintering and breaking.
5. Clinton finally gave up the whole project.
6. After three weeks he ordered the expedition to head north to join William Howe.

III. In the meantime, Guy Carleton and his reinforcements under Burgoyne were having difficulty evicting the Americans from Canada.

A. It took from June until October 1776 for Carleton and Burgoyne to recover the road south to Lake Champlain; Benedict Arnold's improvised navy at Valcour Island stopped British plans for further campaigning in the Hudson Valley in 1776.

B. Germain and Carleton engaged in quarreling and backbiting, with Germain criticizing the slowness of Carleton's pursuit and confining Carleton to the administration of Canada, leaving offensive operations down the Hudson to Burgoyne.

IV. Germain's appointment was not greeted happily by Parliament, as he was unpopular and considered impractical and ambitious.

A. Whigs complained about the injustice in forcing the Americans into "unconditional submission."

B. Lord North proposed a peace commission for America, an idea that Germain found contemptible.

1. But the newly appointed commander of the navy in North America, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, made it clear that he would not accept his commission unless he and his brother William were granted powers to negotiate with, as well as fight against, the Americans.
2. In May of 1776, the king grudgingly granted the concession, authorizing the Howe brothers to offer pardons to deserving subjects who would return to their allegiance.
3. The Howe brothers were even empowered to offer a political settlement.

V. But when “Black Dick” Howe arrived in America on July 20, it was too late for negotiating. On July 4, the Continental Congress had adopted a resolution declaring the United Colonies free and independent states.

A. Almost no one—apart from a few of the most radical New Englanders—had come to the First Continental Congress wanting a complete break with Great Britain.

1. Most thought an overthrow of British authority in America lacked legitimacy.

2. Many Americans feared that such an overthrow would lead to some new and wholly fearful authority, most likely mob rule.

B. But the imperial army had cut these arguments to shreds.

1. The colonies now had a professional army, the instrument of an independent nation, not of a grievance committee.

2. The various provincial conventions and legislatures began petitioning the Continental Congress for recognition as the legitimate governments of their colonies. The Congress approved them and urged other colonies to set up their own conventions.

3. In May 1776, the Congress passed a blanket resolution putting all governmental power under the authority of the colonists and ordering the suppression of imperial authority.

VI. The greatest gift England made to American Independence was Thomas Paine.

A. Uneducated and a failure at corset-making, school-teaching, and tax-collecting, he set out for America with a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin.

1. He was hired as the editor of a failing Philadelphia newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Magazine*.

2. In short order he boosted circulation to 1,500, denouncing slavery, all proposals for compromise with England, and on January 1776, denouncing the entire principle of royalty in a sensational pamphlet called *Common Sense*.

B. The legitimacy of self-government came from natural law, Paine argued, drawing on the work of John Locke.

1. Men were born equal in nature and monarchy was an unhappy historical accident. America needed no human king.

2. What reason and nature dictated instead was a republic, with a representative assembly and a president to secure freedom.

C. Paine's 77-page pamphlet sold 500,000 copies, making it the single greatest American bestseller before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. *Common Sense* turned the tide of American opinion.
   1. On June 7, 1776, Virginia's Richard Henry Lee rose to offer an independence resolution to the Continental Congress.
   2. A committee composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson was created to write a preface, or Declaration, to the resolution.
   3. Jefferson did most of the writing, and on July 4, the resolution and the declaration were formally adopted.

Suggested Reading:

Gruber, "Richard Lord Howe: Admiral as Peacemaker," in Billias, ed., *George Washington's Generals and Opponents.*

Maier, *American Scripture*, chap. 3.

Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, chaps. 5–6.

Questions to Consider:

1. What was the substance of Thomas Paine's argument against monarchy?
2. On what two factors was British success in 1776 dependent?

Lecture Nine—Transcript
Common Sense

George Washington could see as easily as William Howe that control of the Hudson River Valley was what might make or break the American rebellion. Controlling Boston simply put the British at the far end of the 13 colonies and laid before them the disheartening prospect of having to march from one end in New England to the other, wherever that might be. But control the Hudson and you cut the colonies, at least strategically, in half. The southern half would probably then come to its senses and return to the king's obedience, while the northern half would be rendered isolated and trembling before a multi-pointed invasion from Canada and New York. This depended, of course, on two things: William Howe would have to destroy Washington's army and seize New York, and the Loyalists of the southern colonies would have to take an active part in their own salvation by raising their own Loyalist militias to overthrow the wicked rebels who had seized control of their colonial legislatures. This certainly was the strategic plan favored in London by Lord George Germain as secretary of state for the American colonies, and by William Howe in America. "There is not common sense in protracting a war of this sort," Germain wrote in September 1775, before assuming his new responsibilities. "I should be for exerting the utmost force of this Kingdom to finish the rebellion in one campaign" against Washington, and then let the defeat of Washington take the air out of the rebellion's sails.[88] To that end, Howe asked—and Germain got for him from Parliament—substantial reinforcements. Not only the Hessian mercenaries, but four regiments of elite infantry; a battalion drafted from the three regiments of the Brigade of Guards—those guards regiments were the 1st or Grenadier Guards, the Coldstreams, and the 3rd Regiment of Foot Guards; so a battalion of draftees from that Brigade of Guards—the 42nd Regiment, the Scottish Highlanders of the Black Watch; the 71st Highlanders, also known as Fraser's Highlanders; plus a regiment of cavalry, the 16th Queen's Light Dragoons.

In addition to this, Germain wasted no time in rallying the Loyalists of the southern colonies. The deposed royal governor of North Carolina, Josiah Martin, assured the imperial government in London that "nothing was wanting but the appearance of a respectable force there to encourage the

[88] Mackesey, *War for America*, 55.

King's friends to show themselves, when it was expected they would be able to prevail." With that in view, William Howe's erstwhile colleague from Bunker Hill, Maj. Gen. Henry Clinton, was detached from Howe's army in January and instructed to take command of an expeditionary force with which he would rendezvous at Cape Fear, on the Carolina coast, and Clinton would use that expeditionary force to reinforce Loyalist recovery of the southern colonies. Germain provided Clinton with eight regiments of infantry—the 15th, 28th, 33rd, 34th, 37th, 46th, 54th, and 57th Regiments of Foot—all of them under major general and Earl Charles Cornwallis; plus Clinton was given a navy flotilla under Admiral Peter Parker. Meanwhile, the relief force Germain had sent to the rescue of Guy Carleton and Quebec—a force that included another seven regiments of British infantry: the 9th, 20th, 21st Fusiliers, 24th, 29th, 31st, 53rd, and 62nd Regiments of Foot, along with assorted Hessians, all under a one-time Howe colleague in Boston (another one of them) Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne—would use the spring and summer of 1776 to secure control of the northern end of the Hudson River Valley. They would be prepared to meet William Howe's victorious troops coming up from New York to complete the noose around New England's neck.

This was a wonderfully well-conceived plan, but it suffered—unhappily for the British—from three defects. The first defect was the sheer difficulty involved in organizing, coordinating, and communicating news of all of these disjointed forces, both to each other in America and to Germain in London. We might even have difficulty recollecting all the numbers of the regiments I just reeled off. Imagine how difficult that was going to be if you had to remember it with all of that ocean in between America and London. In 1704—just to give you an idea of what distances weighed in those days—the Duke of Marlborough's march from the Rhine River to the Danube (that was all of 350 miles) was considered a military miracle of the 18th century. Transfer that to America: Campaigning in America would require a good deal more in that case than the miraculous. Any orders coming from London to any of those regiments, commanders, or generals—Clinton, Howe, Burgoyne—would take, on average, six weeks to get from Germain in London across the Atlantic Ocean to Howe as the commander in chief in North America, and then relays of those orders to Clinton down at Cape Fear or Burgoyne in Canada—all of that and package into it the 1,200-mile-long American seaboard separating them—would take additional time, especially if both Burgoyne and Clinton were wandering around the American countryside in the Carolinas, New York, or Canada without a convenient forwarding address. By return, it would take

something like a month to get reports and results from America back to London, so that the entire circuit of command might be delayed as long as three months, allowing for time, travel, and consultation on either side of the Atlantic. Any plan which involved close coordination, or which relied on the good sense or the brazenness of commanders in the field to take the initiative; that was going to need an especial blessing of fortune to pull things off successfully.[89] That's the first problem.

The second problem was in the details of the plan. Whether Lord George Germain realized it or not, his order to Howe violated one of the "nine principles of war"—the one in this case which demands *unity of objective*—because Germain was giving Howe what amounted to *two* separate tasks: destroy Washington's army *and* occupy New York City. It might have been thought that accomplishing the first would automatically guarantee success in the second. What it really guaranteed was uncertainty on William Howe's part whether he might more efficiently use the resources he had in hand to do whichever seemed easiest or foremost at the moment. Which should come first: Washington's army or New York City? The chicken or the egg?

The third problem was the assumption—which almost no one on William Howe's staff or in Lord George Germain's offices questioned—that the southern colonies were just so many Loyalist apples waiting to fall into British laps. Just how badly off the mark this assumption was ought to have been demonstrated in late February 1776, when the Scottish-born Loyalist, Donald MacDonald—a venerable 80-year-old veteran of the massacre of Scottish forces at Culloden in 1745—raised a force of 1,600 Highland Scots from among the Loyalists of North Carolina, and set off with them to rendezvous with Henry Clinton's expedition at Brunswick, near Cape Fear. MacDonald's Scots Loyalists were intercepted on February 27 at the bridge over Moore's Creek, about eight miles from the coast, by a hastily thrown-together force of rebel North Carolina militia and a regiment of the new Continental army, the 1st North Carolina. The Scots adopted the same tactics which had been used at Culloden—a head-on attack across the bridge and across the creek—and with approximately the same results. The Loyalists lost about 50 killed and wounded; another 850 were taken prisoner, including old Donald MacDonald.[90]

---

[89] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 52.

[90] John Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York, 1997), 4–5.

The action at Moore's Creek Bridge, at least for the time being, put the quietus on North Carolina Loyalism. That should have been a warning light to Lord George Germain about how reliable the southern Loyalists might actually be. Another warning light, this time about the difficulties of long distance command coordination, should have been set off by the fact that Henry Clinton did not make it to Cape Fear to greet the Loyalists until March 12, when he discovered no Loyalists left to greet. Not that this would have made much difference, because Henry Clinton found no British troops or British ships there to greet him, either. The Parker-Cornwallis expedition that he was supposed to take charge of did not actually set sail until mid-February 1776, and the north Atlantic in mid-February does not generally give the gift of easy sailing. The first elements of the Parker-Cornwallis fleet did not actually appear off Cape Fear until April 18; the last straggler did not show up until May 31, 1776. Lacking Loyalist allies, Clinton—even when he had all of these members of his force together—was a stranger in a strange land. It was only from the pleas of South Carolina's royal governor-in-exile, Lord William Campbell, and only because a scouting report from Charleston suggested that South Carolina's great port was open for the taking, that Clinton decided he needed to do something in the Carolinas, and so he agreed to attack Charleston.

But any element of surprise Clinton might have had just by showing up unannounced in the Carolinas had long since been lost. As early as January 1776, Washington took the precaution of sending his second-in-command, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee, to Charleston to supervise the construction of defenses for the city. By the time that Clinton, with Cornwallis and Parker, appeared off the harbor mouth on June 1, there was already a small fort on the tip of Sullivan's Island, which formed the north lip of the harbor. Clinton landed troops north of the fort on June 28, while Parker's ships tried to pound it to pieces; but the fort's militia commander, William Moultrie, manned his guns with surprising resourcefulness. His artillerymen hit Parker's flagship, HMS *Bristol*, 70 times and nearly took out Admiral Parker for good measure. Adding to the Admiral's dismay was the unusual resilience of the fort's palmetto-log bulwarks, whose spongy qualities absorbed British shot instead of splintering and breaking. Far from being intimidated by the Royal Navy, Maj. Gen. Charles Lee found that Moultrie's militiamen were "brave to the last degree. I had no idea that so much coolness and intrepidity could be displayed by a collection of raw recruits." When a British shot cut down the fort's flagstaff, bearing the

palmetto-tree flag of South Carolina, Sgt. William Jasper climbed up on the parapet in full view of the British gunners and replanted the flag.[91]

Henry Clinton, meanwhile, landed Cornwallis' infantry on the far end of Sullivan's Island, only to discover that this far end was really a separate island unto itself, with a seven to eight-foot-deep channel separating it from Sullivan's Island. When he found he could not get across the channel without coming under fire from rebel militia, Henry Clinton just gave the whole project up. The entire American loss in this attempt to take Charleston amounted to 10 dead and 22 wounded. Directionless, Clinton loitered for three weeks and then ordered his expedition to head north and to join forces with William Howe.[92]

The Charleston fiasco was not the only bad news the British were dealing with. The unexpected boldness of Arnold's and Montgomery's assault on Canada was followed, once the Americans had failed to take Quebec, by the unexpected difficulty that Guy Carleton and his reinforcements under John Burgoyne were having in evicting the Americans from Canada altogether. It took from June at Trois Rivières until October 1776 at Valcour Island for Carleton and Burgoyne just to recover the road southwards just to Lake Champlain, and the stand of Benedict Arnold's little improvised navy at Valcour Island brought down the curtain on any plans for further campaigning in the Hudson River Valley in 1776. It didn't help either that Lord George Germain and Guy Carleton quickly found grounds on which to quarrel, backbite, and shift blame, starting with Germain's refusal to appoint Carleton's brother as quartermaster general for Burgoyne's force. Germain stiffly criticized the slowness of Carleton's pursuit, and made it clear that in the future, Carleton should confine himself to the administration of Canada and leave offensive operations down the Hudson to John Burgoyne. The king was happy just at having saved Quebec, so much so that he rewarded Carleton with a knighthood (and so he becomes Sir Guy Carleton). But Burgoyne, meanwhile, was called back to London for planning for the next year's expedition—Burgoyne is called back to London and very obviously *not* Guy Carleton—for consultation, and that happens in December 1776. Burgoyne proceeded to spend the winter thereafter filling Lord George Germain's ear with still more criticism of Carleton, which was music to Germain's ear, and further poisoning the

[91] Mackesy, *War for America*, 86; Buchanan, *Road to Guilford Courthouse*, 5.

[92] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 81–82.

atmosphere between the governor-general of Canada and the secretary of state for the American colonies.[93]

There was plenty in the great plan that already looked like it was going off the rails, and that didn't even touch the continuing low rumble of dissent in Parliament over the American war. Lord George Germain's appointment as secretary of state for the American colonies in November 1775 was not greeted very happily with Parliament. He "is not a popular Man, & reckoned impracticable and ambitious," wrote one Member of Parliament, and the general consensus was that the king wanted Germain in the cabinet principally to stiffen the backbone of his Prime Minister, Lord North. North would need some stiffening: Whigs looking for a stick to beat the government with found it in "the folly and unjustice of the Government in endeavouring to dragoon the Americans into unconditional submission." Whig members of Parliament like Thomas Coke of Holkham remembered that "Every night during the American War did I drink to the health of General Washington as the greatest man on earth."[94]—that from a Member of Parliament! Germain's decision to recruit Hessian mercenaries only aggravated these irritated rumblings in Parliament. Charles James Fox, who at age 27 was the member of Parliament representing the West Sussex town of Midhurst, wrote that he would never vote for taxes for "so ignoble a purpose, as the carrying on a war commenced unjustly, and supported with no other view than to the extirpation of freedom." Edmund Burke, who represented Bristol in Parliament and who had served as the Earl of Rockingham's secretary, denounced the war in America as "natural wickedness and folly," and Burke complained that the war was being lost because the British forces labor "under every disadvantage (except the distance of her Enemy), that can be imagined."[95]

When Parliament reconvened on January 25, 1776, to consider the treaties for the Hessians, Fox led a forlorn hope against the treaties. He lost, but the loss was sufficiently vigorous to support a timid suggestion from Lord North that this might be a good moment for reflection on the virtues of a peace commission for America. Germain thought the idea was contemptible, but North had on his side the newly appointed commander of

---

[93] Mackesy, *War for America*, 105–07; Ira D. Gruber, "Richard Lord Howe: Admiral as Peacemaker," in Billias, ed., *George Washington's Generals and Opponents*, 126.

[94] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 41, 46–7.

[95] L. G. Mitchell, *Charles James Fox* (Oxford U. Pr., 1992), 28; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 49.

the Royal Navy in North America, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, the older brother of William. Howe. "Black Dick" Howe, as he was known, made it clear that he would not accept the naval appointment for North America unless he and his brother William were granted powers to negotiate with, as well as fight against, the Americans. In May 1776, the king grudgingly granted this favor and authorized the Howe brothers to "induce … a Submission" by the Americans "to lawful authority." The "inducement" was supposed to come in the form of pardons "to such of our subjects who shall appear to deserve it" and who "shall return to their allegiance," and the pardons would also go to any of the colonies which will dissolve "any provincial congresses" and any "bodies of men armed … and acting under the authority of any Congress or Convention." The Howe brothers were even empowered to offer the colonies a political settlement that promised to remove all internal taxation of the colonies, and which allowed the colonies to fund their defenses for themselves through their own legislatures. "Black Dick" Howe went off with the king's commission in his sea trunks on May 11, confident that if the Americans were still in earnest about everything in their Olive Branch Petition of the year before, then a peace agreement could be wrought "with candor and discussion … into a plan of permanency." But by the time that "Black Dick" Howe arrived in America, and by the time that William Howe's adjutant, Lt. Col. James Paterson, finally obtained a meeting with George Washington on July 20, 1776, to apprise Washington that "Lord Howe and General Howe" had been given "great powers" for "effecting an accommodation," it was already too little, too late. Sixteen days before, all olive branches, petitions, and commissions for reconciliation had been rendered moot. The Continental Congress had adopted a resolution declaring that "these United Colonies are, and of a right ought to be, free and independent states."[96]

Almost no one, apart from a handful of the most radical New Englanders, had come to the First Continental Congress wanting a complete and utter break with Great Britain. In the first place, an overthrow of British authority in America lacked political legitimacy. There had been revolutions, uprisings, and overthrows of power before this—the Dutch against Spain in the 1500s; the Bohemians against the Austrians in 1612; the English Civil Wars and the Glorious Revolution—but all of those revolutions had linked themselves to some previously-existing authority with which they could

[96] "Memorandum of What Passed at the Interview between His Excellency General Washington and Colonel Paterson," in Sparks, ed., *Writings of George Washington*, 4:509–11.

justify themselves. The Dutch lined up against the Spaniards, but did it under the banner of Prince William of Orange; the Bohemians rebelled against the Austrians, but they did it under the flag of the Elector Palatine; and the English rose in rebellion against King Charles II, and then against James II, under the authority of Parliament. But any American move toward independence lacked that sanction, because the colonial legislatures were, after all, only ad hoc affairs, and the Continental Congress was the ultimate ad hoc creation. In that case, there were many Americans who were fearful that the overthrow of British authority would mean the manufacture of some entirely new and maybe wholly fearful authority. They had no farther to look for this authority than in the streets of their own towns, where Sons of Liberty had tarred and feathered agents of the Crown, and where mobs threw private property into Boston harbor. "If the disputes with Great Britain continue," warned the New Yorker Gouverneur Morris, "we shall be under the worst of all possible dominions: we shall be under the dominion of a riotous mob." After all, if British law no longer was to operate in the colonies, what would be the status of law? What would be the status of property titles? What new laws might govern trade? Who would be allowed to vote? "It is [in] the interest of all men, therefore, to seek for reunion with the parent state," concluded Gouverneur Morris, because nobody could predict what a new state might look like.[97]

Alas for those voices of restraint, the imperial government cut down every pillar that they rested upon. The action at Lexington and Concord called forth the creation of the Continental army, and even though it was insisted that the Continental army was only created for defensive purposes, professional armies are the instruments of independent nations, not grievance committees. The various provincial conventions, congresses, and legislatures which sprang up as alternatives to the royal governors, royal councils, and royal charter assemblies now began petitioning the Continental Congress for recognition as the legitimate governments of their colonies in May 1775. Congress not only approved the petitions, but began urging other colonies to set up their own provincial conventions and congresses. Finally, on May 15, 1776, the Continental Congress passed a blanket resolution which put "all the powers of government … under the authority of the people of the colonies" and ordered "that the exercise of

[97] Jensen, *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781* (Madison, WI, 1959), 93; Gordon Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), 314–19.

every kind of authority under the … Crown should be totally suppressed."[98] For all practical purposes, each colony was by that measure being given a free pass by Congress to declare its own independence.

But the greatest gift that England unwittingly made to American Independence came in the form of an uneducated son of a corset-maker—who had failed at corset-making, who had failed at school-teaching, who even failed at tax-collecting—who therefore did as so many improvident Englishmen had done before him and sailed in 1774 for America. His name was Thomas Paine, and he had exactly one thing working in his favor: He had a letter of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, the Pennsylvania colony's agent and lobbyist in London in 1774. Putting on a bold front and flourishing Franklin's letter got Paine hired as the editor of a failing Philadelphia newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Magazine*, and in short order Paine boosted circulation to over 1,500 denouncing slavery and "all plans, proposals, etc." for compromise with England, and then, on January 10, 1776, denouncing the entire principal of monarchy in a sensational pamphlet entitled *Common Sense*. Anyone who was worried about the legitimacy of a self-created American government like the Second Continental Congress, need worry no longer, Paine announced, because natural law itself showed what true government was like. "I draw my idea of government from a principle in nature." In the original state of nature—and here Thomas Paine was drawing on pure John Locke, whose ideas about the "state of nature" we encountered back in Lecture Two—"mankind" were "originally equals in the order of creation." Monarchy was an unhappy historical accident, and it has "laid (not this or that kingdom only) but the World in blood in ashes." Nor was the vaunted British version of monarchy any real improvement on the bloody history of monarchies: "In England a King hath little more to do than to make war and give away places; which in plain terms, is to empoverish the nation and set it together by the ears." As far as anyone with reason should be concerned, "of more worth is one honest man to society and in the sight of God, than all the crowned ruffians that ever lived." America needed no human king for legitimacy. Who is America's king? "I'll tell you, friend, he reigns above; and doth not make havoc of mankind like the Royal Brute of Great Britain." What reason and nature dictated was a republic, with an annual representative assembly and a president, and securing "freedom and property to all men, and above all things, the free exercise of religion." It

[98] Pauline Maier, *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence* (New York, 1997), 37.

was high time for Americans to cut loose from Great Britain and stop worrying about the legitimacy of their actions. "The sun never shined on a cause of greater worth" than American Independence, "'Tis not the affair of a city, a county, a province or a kingdom; but of a continent."[99]

Paine's 77-page pamphlet sold 500,000 copies; that made it the single greatest American bestseller before *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852. It was "read at every place of public resort," and Paine himself estimated that *Common Sense* enjoyed "the greatest sale that any performance ever since the use of letters." By April 1776, John Adams wrote that there was nothing to be heard in America but "Common Sense and Independence," and Washington added that "'Common Sense' is working a powerful change … in the minds of many men."[100] The tide of American opinion had turned, and on June 7, 1776, Virginia's Richard Henry Lee rose to offer an independence resolution to the Continental Congress. A committee composed of Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson was created to write a preface, or a Declaration, to the resolution, but Jefferson did most of the writing. And on July 4, after two days of debate and revision of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, the resolution and the declaration were formally adopted. There was a new star in the political constellations of human government.

The question was whether it would last. Even as the Congress was debating and revising, Maj. Gen. William Howe and his army struck.

---

[99] "Thomas Paine—World Citizen and Democrat," in Philip Foner, ed., *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine* (Secaucus, NJ, 1948), xi–xii; "Common Sense," in Merrill Jensen, ed., *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763–1776* (Indianapolis, 1967), 405, 409, 418–9, 431–2, 434.

[100] Maier, *American Scripture*, 33–34; Jack Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress* (Baltimore, 1979), 88–100; Washington to Joseph Reed (April 1, 1776), *Writings*, 3:347.

Lecture Ten

An Army Falls in Brooklyn

Scope: The optimism of the July 4 declaration was short-lived. Washington's army was poorly manned, poorly supplied, and poorly trained. His officers had little practical experience and what experience they did have varied, so there was no single set of commands with which to train. And some officers such as Charles Lee were more of a hindrance than a help to Washington.

When Admiral Howe arrived in New York in July, he sent to Washington a proclamation stating the proposed peace terms, which Washington refused. What Washington accepted, however, was Charles Lee's assumption that the British would attack the west side of Manhattan in order to force open the Hudson River. Washington and Lee were proven wrong, leading to a disastrous defeat of American forces on Long Island. Only a nor'easter that kept Admiral Howe's ships from cutting off the Americans on Long Island and William Howe's still unexplained decision to halt his pursuit at four in the afternoon on the day of the battle prevented further losses for Continental forces.

Outline

I. Four months after July 4, the heady optimism of the time had evaporated, and the American Revolution looked like it was about to breathe its last breath.

  A. Washington had guessed rightly that Howe's withdrawal from Boston was for the purpose of striking at New York City, so Washington began to take steps toward defending New York.

  B. Two weeks after the British left, Washington himself was on his way to New York to continue strengthening the city's defenses.

  C. Washington's organizing powers had instilled confidence in the army.

    1. He had managed to get rid of most of the troublesome militia units.

    2. In addition to Knox's artillery, Washington had 27 regular Continental regiments with about 14,000 officers and men, plus a reserve of 7,000 militia.

3. By August he had sorted the regiments into five divisions, each of which was formed from a brigade of Continental regiments and a collection of militia.
4. The commanders were Israel Putnam, Maj. Gen. William Heath, Joseph Spencer, John Sullivan, and Nathanael Greene, the officer whom Washington would come to regard as his first and best.

D. Washington knew, however, that there was much less to this army than met the eye.

1. As many as 4,000 Continentals were sick and unfit for duty or else they were doing garrison work at detached points.
2. Only one of the line regiments was anywhere near full strength; most were only slightly over halfway to full recruitment.
3. Supplies of weapons and powder were thin.
4. The recruits could not be taught full-scale battlefield maneuvers without full complements of men and without necessary weaponry.
5. Likewise, officers were getting no experience in practicing battlefield evolutions.
6. To make matters worse, some of the officers had only the sketchiest ideas of drill and maneuver, while others who had experience did not always have the same experience, or work with the same sets of commands, as others.

E. Even the soldiers who had records of service were proving disappointing, starting with Charles Lee.

1. Lee had served in the British army for 16 years, and at the end of the Seven Years' War he wangled an appointment as major general in the army of the king of Poland. He turned up in America asking for Washington's backing for a new military appointment.
2. Former major generals were scarce in North America, and Congress commissioned him.

F. What Lee had to offer in the way of experience was cancelled, Washington soon came to learn, by his insufferable arrogance.

1. In the spring of 1776 Washington sent Lee ahead of the army to New York to oversee the construction of defenses for the city.

2. Lee disregarded the advice from New York's own Committee of Safety about the best places to erect batteries and fortifications, believing the best strategy would be to allow the British ships to crowd into the harbor, where artillery planted on Brooklyn Heights and the tip of Manhattan could sink them like target practice.
3. Lee was also convinced that if the British attempted to land troops on Manhattan, it would probably be on the west side, so he had the west ends of Manhattan's streets barricaded and threw up more artillery emplacements there.
4. He also laid out a new fort in the Highlands to command the Hudson River if the British got through.
5. It was an intelligent and ambitious plan, but it was wrong.

II. When Washington arrived in April with his Continentals, Lee was off to Charleston to quell a Loyalist uprising and stave off Henry Clinton's approach.

A. William Howe was not in New York either. After leaving Boston, Howe had sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, to refit, recruit, and rendezvous with the first reinforcements that Germain had sent.

1. The plan was for him to rendezvous in New York with his brother, Admiral Lord Richard Howe, and with Clinton's expedition returning from the Carolinas.
2. Howe and an advance flotilla sailed into the Lower Bay on June 25. The rest of his armada of transports began arriving shortly.
3. Instead of sailing into range of Charles Lee's artillery batteries, Howe made an unopposed landing on Staten Island.
4. In all, Howe would have about 22,000 men.

B. Admiral Howe soon joined his brother arriving on Long Island on July 12.

1. The day after his arrival Admiral Howe issued a proclamation stating the proposed peace terms and sent letters out to the governors of the colonies and to George Washington.
2. Washington agreed to meet with both brothers on July 20, but only to inform them that the Americans were not interested in begging pardons for defending their rights, and that Admiral Howe's offers were better directed to the Congress in Philadelphia.

3. Admiral Howe did as directed, and a delegation from Congress came to New York and repeated Washington's declaration that Americans had nothing to seek pardon for.

C. On August 12 the remaining contingents of William Howe's army arrived.

III. Thus began for George Washington four months of unrelieved woe.

A. Still operating under Charles Lee's assumption that the British would attack the west side of Manhattan in order to force open the Hudson River, he hurried toward the construction of two more forts, Fort Washington and Fort Lee.

B. But on August 22, Howe offloaded 15,000 of his troops and 40 cannons on the western beaches of Long Island.

C. At first, Washington thought this was a feint and sent only modest reinforcements to John Sullivan's division posted on Gowanus Heights to cover Brooklyn and Manhattan's rear door facing Long Island.

1. But no attack on Manhattan materialized, while more British and German troops were seen landing on the west end of Long Island.
2. Washington gradually stocked Gowanus Heights with individual brigades from his five divisions.
3. Now his forces were dispersed thinly over more territory than they could hope to defend, and he had sabotaged his own unity of command.

D. Howe, however, cared less about fooling around with the Hudson River; what he wanted was to destroy Washington's army.

1. Henry Clinton, the son of a former royal governor of New York, knew the environs of New York better than most of the Americans defending it.
2. Clinton pressed for using Long Island geography against the Americans: While Cornwallis attacked the American brigades on Gowanus Heights, Clinton would slip past their left flank through the unguarded Jamaica Pass, attack their rear, crushing the rebel army between his division and Cornwallis's.

E. It all went off better than Howe or Clinton could have hoped.

1. Clinton captured the Jamaica Pass and rolled into the rear of American forces on Gowanus Heights; American troops on

the right flank collapsed and those in the center folded and ran.

2. By evening the defeated Americans had been forced into a perimeter around the village of Brooklyn.
3. The numbers bespoke the disaster: The British forces lost 61 killed and 267 wounded; the Hessians lost only two killed. Washington never got an accurate count of his losses, but he estimated them at between 700 and 1,000 killed, wounded, or captured.
4. More than three-quarters of Washington's losses were men who had simply thrown down their weapons and surrendered, and that included two major generals.

F. A nor'easter that kept Admiral Howe's ships from cutting off the Americans on Long Island entirely and William Howe's decision to halt his pursuit at four in the afternoon of August 27 gave the Americans some time to pull their forces out of the thick of the battle.

IV. Why Howe called a halt to the battle when the three remaining hours of daylight would have allowed him to overrun the Americans in Brooklyn has never been entirely clear.

A. Was it a statement of caution based on the lesson Howe learned at Bunker Hill?

B. Was it part of the brothers' larger peace strategy?

C. Was it more likely because Howe's army was as disorganized by its victory as Washington's was by its defeat?

Suggested Reading:

Randall, *George Washington,* chap. 13.

Schecter, *The Battle for New York*, chaps. 6–9.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 15.

Questions to Consider:

1. To what extent was the American defeat at Long Island attributable to Charles Lee?
2. Why did William Howe call so hasty an end to his pursuit of Washington's army?

Lecture Ten—Transcript
An Army Falls in Brooklyn

On the Fourth of July, 1776, the day the Continental Congress voted the United Colonies into independence, nothing could have seemed like a better bet than "this Glorious Cause." True, the Northern army—whom we last saw in Lecture Eight—had abandoned Quebec and lost Montreal, but it was still at the Canadian border and, at least on paper, it was still a threat to Guy Carleton and John Burgoyne. Henry Clinton's attack on Charleston—with which we opened Lecture Nine—was collapsing in on itself, and the main British field army had pulled out of Boston and sailed over the horizon, perhaps for good. "The remarkable interpositions of heaven in our favour cannot be too gratefully acknowledged," wrote John Adams's wife, Abigail, on June 17, 1776, from the family homestead in Quincy to her husband in Philadelphia. "We wanted powder, we have a supply. We wanted guns, we have been favoured in that respect. We wanted hard money, 22000 dollars"—Spanish dollars—"and an equal value of plate are delivered into our hands." Even George Washington was feeling buoyant at the prospect for the American cause:

> We have maintained our ground against the enemy … disbanded one army [the militia regiments around Boston] and recruited another [the Continental army] within musket-shot of two-and-twenty regiments, the flower of the British army … and, at last, have beaten them into a shameful and precipitate retreat out of a place the strongest by nature on this continent … [101]

Four months later, all of this optimism had evaporated, and the American Revolution looked like it was about to breathe its last. The person they had the most to thank for this unwelcome gift was Maj. Gen. William Howe.

Washington had not been wrong to guess that Howe's withdrawal from Boston was only for the purposes of regrouping and then striking at New York City. Even before the British sailed away from Boston, Washington had taken the first steps toward putting New York "in the best posture of defence, that the season and circumstances will permit, disarming all such persons

[101] Abigail Adams to John Adams, June 17, 1776, in Adams Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; Washington to John Augustine Washington (March 31, 1776), in *Writings*, 3:340.

upon Long Island and elsewhere … whose conduct and declarations have rendered them justly suspected of designs unfriendly to the views of Congress." Only two weeks after the British left Boston, Washington was on his way to New York City to continue himself the strengthening of the city's defenses. He wrote: "A rigid and strict discipline was observed throughout the army" as it marched southward. Another soldier that was part of the army wrote, "All the commissaries and the stewards in the army were proclaiming almost continually that they issued more than one hundred thousand rations a day" (presumably to 100,000 American soldiers).[102]

That was a well-intentioned exaggeration of Washington's numbers, but it did reflect the confidence that Washington's organizing powers had instilled in this new Continental army. By March 1776, Washington had managed to rid himself of most of the troublesome militia units, either by recruiting them into the new Continental regiments, or by dismissing them and sending them home. In addition to Henry Knox's artillery, this gave Washington 27 regular Continental regiments—or line regiments—with approximately 14,000 officers and men, plus a reserve of 7,000 militia that he could call up. By August 1776, the line regiments would be sorted into five divisions, each of which was formed from a brigade of Continental regiments matched with a collection—one hesitates quite to call them a brigade—of militia regiments.

The first of these divisions in Washington's "main army" was old Israel Putnam's division—with Putnam commanding James Clinton's Massachusetts brigade of the 3rd, 13th, 23rd, and 26th Continentals—matched with two militia brigades under John Morin Scott and John Fellows. Fellows's brigade was designed for eventual transformation into an all-Continental brigade, and so it was known as the Vacant Brigade. For now, it had only a single regiment of Continentals—from Marblehead, Massachusetts, under John Glover—together with three regiments of Massachusetts militia. Washington's second division was under Maj. Gen. William Heath—William Heath, who had commanded the Suffolk militia, harrying the British on the road back from Concord—and Heath's division had a single brigade of Pennsylvania and Massachusetts Continentals, the 3rd, 5th, 16th, 27th, and a newly raised and as yet unnumbered Continental regiment from Connecticut, plus a brigade of New York militia under yet another Clinton, George Clinton. Joseph Spencer, a cranky 60-year-old

[102] Samuel DeForest, in Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 42; Washington to Charles Lee (January 8, 1776), in *Writings*, 3:231–2.

veteran of the colonial wars who was commanding a division largely because he had refused to serve under Israel Putnam, he had a brigade of Massachusetts and Connecticut Continentals—in this case the 10th, 17th, 20th, 21st, and 22nd Continental regiments—plus a brigade composed of seven Connecticut militia regiments.

The strongest of Washington's divisions belonged to John Sullivan, a lawyer, a delegate to the Continental Congress, and now a major in the New Hampshire militia; he was the one who had covered the initial retreat of the American army in Canada after the defeat at Trois Rivières in June. Sullivan, now commanding a division, had two brigades of mostly Continentals: One under William Alexander, whose somewhat fanciful claim to a Scottish peerage allowed him to call himself Lord Stirling; and the other under Alexander MacDougall, a Scottish-born New York merchant. Finally, Washington's last division was commanded by the officer he would come to regard as his first and best: Nathanael Greene, whose first brigade was commanded by John Nixon and composed of six Continental regiments—including the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment—and a brigade of New Jersey militia under Nathaniel Heard. In each of these divisions, a brigade of Continentals matched with a brigade of militia.

There was, however, much less to this force—this "main army"—than met the eye, and no one knew that better than George Washington. "We expect a very bloody summer at New York," Washington would write at the end of May 1776, "and I am sorry to say that we are not, either in man or arms, prepared for it." As many as 4,000 of Washington's Continentals were sick and unfit for duty, or else doing garrison duty at detached points. Organizationally, only one of the line regiments was anywhere near its full strength; most of them, at 400 men apiece, were only slightly over halfway to full recruitment. Their supplies of weapons and powder were so thin that in December, when the enlistments of the Connecticut militia expired, Washington ordered the Connecticut militia out on full parade, instructed them to ground their muskets, and then confiscated them all in order to arm the Continentals.[103]

What this meant in terms of combat readiness was that Washington's line regiments in his "main army" could not be taught full-scale battlefield maneuvers, because the half-empty regiments would be still recruiting new men and those new men would, in their turn, have to be taught all over again. Those without weapons or with insufficient supplies of powder or

[103] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 55–56.

bayonets could not be instructed in firing or using their muskets. This meant, in turn—this is like a fall of dominoes—that Washington's officers were gaining no experience in practicing battlefield evolutions, because their companies and regiments were nowhere near the size and manageability they would be when they actually came under fire. It was one thing to give orders to a new but under-strength company of infantry, and then learn what to expect by watching them execute those orders. It was another thing entirely when those companies eventually grew to twice that size, required twice that space, and required an eye for alignment that the officers were unused to because they had drilled them when they were half that size. It didn't help matters, either, that some of these officers of Washington's had only the sketchiest knowledge of drill and maneuver themselves. Many of them—as I've said before—had served in the French and Indian War, but not as upper division officers. Learning how to maneuver large clumps of soldiers includes vital little tricks that only come with experience, things like remembering to allow three beats between a preparatory command and its actual execution—preparatory command; one, two, three, actual execution command—you have to learn by practical experience how to pull that off. You have to learn, by actually doing, how to time your commands at the right point; you have to learn to drill with a drummer who is going to beat the commands, because in the middle of a battle no one's going to hear you shouting it. You have to learn, by experience, when to stand recruits down at ease, when they should stack arms, and so on, because you can't keep them standing at attention all day long. You have to learn what to do with the incorrigibly awkward.

Others, who had experience dating back to the French and Indian War, didn't always have the same experience as each other; they didn't work with the same sets of commands as others. Without practicing under conditions of full readiness, what these officers were likely to teach was *wrong*, and so would have to be redone, or else it would differ from unit to unit. Someone who served at one part of the French and Indian War had learned one set of commands, someone who had been in the French and Indian War learned a different set of commands; they were going to be put together in the same division or the same brigade, they would be given entirely contradictory commands, their troops would be confused, and the result could be very costly, indeed. Orders given by a regimental commander could easily be incomprehensible to men whose company commander had trained them to respond to an entirely different set of commands. Of course, Washington *could* have decided to consolidate his under-strength Continental regiments and be content with 13 or 14 full

regiments rather than 27 half-empty ones, because then he could get them drilled properly. But if he did that, that would defeat his purposes, too, because if you shrank the number of regiments down to 12, 13, 14 regiments you might get fully recruited, full size, full-strength regiments, but you'd also be shrinking the pool of trained officers who were learning how to give directions. That would also be the same as conceding that he was never going to be able to get the Continental army anywhere near the strength that it needed to be.

Even the officers who could boast of substantial records of service in the British army or in the Great War for Empire were proving to be less than the sum of their parts to Washington, starting with Charles Lee. At age 45, Charles Lee had served in the British army for 16 years, including service with the ill-fated 44th Regiment as part of Edward Braddock's Monongahela expedition of 1755. He was garrulous, lean and leathery; he had the profile and the beak of a chicken-hawk; and he was deliberately sloppy of dress and fond of showing off his unconventionality, which included marrying the daughter of a Seneca chieftain. He rose to the rank of major in the 103rd Regiment—the Royal Bombay Fusiliers—and he saw service in Portugal at the end of the Seven Years' War under John Burgoyne. But in the great military downsizing that followed the war, the 103rd was disbanded and its officers were put on half-pay, and in 1765 Lee decided to seek his fortune elsewhere and wangled an appointment as a major general in the army of the king of Poland. In 1774, his roving eye turned back to America, and in the spring of 1775 he turned up on the doorstep of George Washington at Mount Vernon, looking first for advice about buying land, and then for Washington's backing for a new military appointment, this time from the Continental Congress. Former major generals being in short supply in North America, Congress commissioned him one of its first four major generals, junior only to Washington. But what Lee could offer in the way of experience was, as Washington quickly learned, cancelled by the man's insufferable arrogance. "General Lee," Washington wrote in March 1776, "is the first officer, in military knowledge and experience, we have in the whole army … honest and well-meaning, but rather fickle and violent, I fear, in his temper."[104]

Washington would soon revise even that estimate downwards. In the spring of 1776, before the British attack on Charleston and before Lee was sent

[104] Washington to John Augustine Washington (March 31, 1776), *Writings*, 3:345.

there to deal with it, Washington sent Charles Lee ahead of the army to New York City to oversee the construction of defenses for the city. Lee, however, quarreled over jurisdiction with the New York Provincial Congress, disregarded the advice of New York City's Committee of Safety about the best places to erect batteries and fortifications, and proceeded to inform Washington on February 19, 1776, that the harbor of New York was "so encircled with deep navigable water" that it would be impossible to keep the British out, so why try? It did not take a professional soldier to see that, in fact, the British *could* pretty effectively be kept out of New York Harbor. As deep and navigable as the harbor of New York City was, it could be pinched off pretty effectively by mounting artillery to command the narrow water neck of Hell Gate—between upper Manhattan and Long Island—and the Narrows, where the west shore of Long Island and the east point of Staten Island closed to less than a mile distance. Lee believed that the British navy could force any of those points at their pleasure. What he thought would be more effective would be to allow them to crowd into the waters of the harbor, where artillery planted on Brooklyn Heights and on the tip of Manhattan could sweep the harbor and the East River and sink them all like target practice. Lee was also convinced that if the British attempted to land troops on Manhattan, it would probably be on the west side, and so he had the west ends of Manhattan's streets barricaded, and he threw up more artillery emplacements there. In the event the British managed to roll over Manhattan anyway, Lee laid out a new fort in the Highlands to command the Hudson River. It was an intelligent and ambitious plan. Its only problem was that it was all wrong.

Lee was not on hand in New York City when Washington arrived there in April with his Continentals. The emergency triggered by the Loyalist uprising in North Carolina and the prospect of Henry Clinton descending on the Carolina coast sent Lee to Charleston to defend yet another threatened city. But neither—when he arrived there, to Washington's puzzlement—was William Howe on hand. In fact, once Howe had departed Boston, Howe and the battered remnants of his Boston garrison had sailed to Halifax, Nova Scotia, the principal British naval base in North America, there to refit, recruit, and rendezvous with the first reinforcements which Lord George Germain had collected for Howe. From there on June 11, Howe set off for New York. There, he would rendezvous again, first with his brother—Admiral Lord Richard Howe, bearing in one hand his peace commission and in the other a fleet of 30 warships and more than 100 transports bearing the balance of Germain's expeditionary force—and then, secondly, he

would rendezvous at New York with Henry Clinton's errant expedition from the Carolinas.

William Howe and an advance flotilla sailed into New York's Lower Bay, just beyond the Narrows, on June 25, 1776. Four days later, the rest of his armada of transports began arriving, until, as one amazed New Yorker wrote, "[The lower bay] was something resembling a wood of pine trees trimmed." On July 2, incredulous that the Americans had not set up artillery on either side of the Narrows, Howe and his fleet of transports cruised majestically into the main harbor of New York, and instead of obligingly sidling up inside range of Charles Lee's artillery batteries, he turned and made a completely unopposed landing on Staten Island, "out of reach of shot from either shore," as he reported. When the last of Howe's troops finally arrived in August 1776, he would have 30 regiments of regular British infantry, and 13 more of German mercenaries; in all, about 22,000 men.[105]

Admiral "Black Dick" Howe soon joined his brother. "Black Dick" sailed from England first to Halifax, and then to Long Island, where he arrived on July 12. Since the balance of his brother's army was still *en route*, "Black Dick" Howe decided to move ahead with his peace commission. The day after his arrival, Admiral Howe issued a proclamation stating the proposed peace terms, and he sent letters out to the governors of the colonies and a letter to George Washington. After some to-ing and fro-ing over protocol, Washington agreed to meet with the brothers Howe on July 20, but only for the purpose of informing them that the Americans were not interested in begging pardons for what was only the defense of their rights, and that Admiral Howe's offers were better directed to the Congress in Philadelphia. Which "Black Dick" Howe did, and a delegation from the Congress headed by Benjamin Franklin and John Adams duly trundled up to New York, repeated Washington's declaration that America had nothing to seek the pardon of the king of England for, and went home. On August 12, 1776, the last contingents of William Howe's army—including the Highlanders and the German mercenaries—arrived, and it was now time to appeal to force.[106]

Thus began, for George Washington, a tale of woe which had no relief for the next four months. Washington still operated under the same assumption that had governed Charles Lee: that what the British wanted was to force

---

[105] Barnet Schecter, *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution* (New York, 2002), 99; Washington to John Augustine Washington (July 22, 1776), *Writings*, 4:17.

[106] Gruber, "Admiral Richard Howe," 239.

open the Hudson River as the first step in a campaign to move north up the Hudson Valley, and so they would probably attack the west side of Manhattan. With that in view, Washington hurried forward the construction of the two forts begun by Lee: Fort Washington, the upper end of Manhattan; and Fort Lee, across the Hudson from it. But William Howe had no intention of forcing open anything. Instead, on August 22, Howe offloaded 15,000 of his troops and 40 cannon on the western beaches of Long Island. At first, Washington thought this was a feint, and he sent only modest reinforcements to John Sullivan's division, which had been posted on Gowanus Heights to cover the village of Brooklyn and Manhattan's rear door, facing Long Island. But no attack on Manhattan materialized, while more British and German troops were seen landing on the west end of Long Island. Washington now began making daily trips over to Long Island to assess the situation, pulling one of William Heath's brigades over, followed by the brigades of John Nixon and William Heard, to Long Island as further reinforcements. By the evening of August 26, Washington had gradually stocked Gowanus Heights with a brigade here and a brigade there from his five divisions, and he had so many troops on Long Island by this point that he had to appoint Israel Putnam as a temporary area commander of them all. In doing so, as he would soon find out, it was George Washington's turn to violate the "principles of war." His forces were dispersed thinly over more territory in Manhattan and Long Island than they could hope to defend, and he sabotaged his own unity of command by putting different units from different divisions under the command of a different officer.

William Howe, on the other hand, knew exactly what he wanted to do at this moment, and that was destroying *Washington's army*, rather than fooling around with the Hudson River. Howe also had a clear chain of command. He had two divisions, now under Henry Clinton and Charles Cornwallis, and he had the Hessian division under Leopold Philip von Heister. What was more, Henry Clinton—who was the son of a former royal governor of New York—Howe knew the environs of New York City better than most of the Americans who were defending it. It was Clinton who pressed on William Howe a plan for using the Long Island geography against the Americans. While Cornwallis would attack the American brigades on Gowanus Heights, Clinton proposed slipping past their left flank through the unguarded Jamaica Pass, bouncing into the American

rear, and crushing the whole rebel army on Long Island between the upper millstone of his own division and the nether millstone of Cornwallis.[107]

On the evening of August 26, Clinton—with an advance guard of 4,000 men—set out under cover of darkness toward Jamaica Pass, to be followed by another 6,000 as soon as the pass was secured. Meanwhile, a British brigade under General James Grant would press the American right flank on the Gowanus Heights, and von Heister—with the Hessians and two Highlander regiments, the Black Watch and Fraser's—would push against the American center, which straddled the Flatbush Pass. It all went off better than Howe or Clinton could have hoped. Not only did Clinton easily capture the Jamaica Pass and roll into the rear of Israel Putnam's line on Gowanus Heights, but the American troops on the right flank collapsed before James Grant's attack. In the center, Sullivan's division—which had been posted on the east side of the Flatbush Pass—folded and fled, leaving Sullivan himself to be captured by three Hessian grenadiers. Lord Stirling's—and it always is strange describing an American commander as Lord Stirling, but that was what he claimed to be—5th Continentals, the Maryland Continentals, made a doomed last stand on the west side of the Flatbush Pass to cover the American retreat. But the overwhelming tide of Howe's army finally forced Stirling to tell his Marylanders to run and save themselves. Only a handful made it to safety, and Stirling himself surrendered to the Hessian general, von Heister.

By evening, the defeated and disorganized Americans had been backed into a tiny perimeter around the village of Brooklyn with the East River at their backs, and Admiral Howe's ships were ready to sink any American ships which tried either to reinforce or retrieve them. The magnitude of the disaster could be seen just in the numbers. The entire British forces lost 61 killed and 267 wounded. The Hessians, with the toughest job of all in the center, had lost only two killed. Washington never did get an accurate count of his losses, although he estimated them at between 700 and 1,000 killed, wounded, or captured. It was the figure for that last category–the captured; the prisoners–which was the most humiliating, because more than three-quarters of Washington losses were men who had simply thrown down their weapons and surrendered, and that included two major generals. Only a nor'easter, which began to blow that night, kept "Black Dick" Howe's ships

[107] Schechter, *Battle for New York*, 136–7; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 234–5.

from ascending the East River and cutting off the Americans on Long Island entirely.[108]

That nor'easter, and the peculiar decision of William Howe to call a halt to his pursuit at four in the afternoon of the twenty-seventh, allowed the Americans to curl up within their Brooklyn perimeter and lick their wounds, and it allowed Washington to ferry Thomas Mifflin's brigade of Pennsylvania Continentals and John Glover's Marblehead Continentals across to Brooklyn under the veil of the foul weather. Exactly what induced William Howe to pull his punch, when the three hours of more daylight that he still had that day would have allowed him to overrun what was left of the Americans in Brooklyn, has never been entirely clear. Sometimes it's been explained as a statement of caution: That Howe had learned a savage lesson at Bunker Hill about crowding the Americans too hard. Sometimes Howe's decision has been explained as part of the larger peace strategy that he and his brother were pursuing. Hurt the Americans just enough—this logic runs anyway—to convince them to give up on their own, and without the kind of on-your-knees submission that Lord George Germain and the king thirsted for. But the real explanation for Howe's hesitation may simply be more mundane: That Howe's army was as disorganized by its victory as Washington's had been by its defeat. Regiments were jumbled, key officers were either down or could not be located, and that broke, of course, the chain of command. This was, after all, William Howe's first large-scale field command. He had done very well indeed, but he lacked the sureness which comes from experience to know what to do next. William Howe would, therefore, take no chances.[109]

On the other hand, George Washington would.

[108] Schecter, *Battle for New York*, 153–4; Randall, *George Washington*, 312.
[109] Mackesy, *War for America*, 88.

Lecture Eleven

"A Glorious Issue"

Scope: By September 1776, Congress determined that it was better to secure the Continental army than to secure New York City, so Washington began pulling his troops up the island. In mid-September, Continental troops and militia fled when Howe entered the city through Kip's Bay. The city was now occupied by the British, and increased British security snagged American Nathan Hale, who was hung the next day.

Neither the British nor the Americans were without problems. The British had to grapple with the length and fragility of its lines of communication, supply, and recruitment. Washington faced the fact that the one-year enlistments the Congress had imposed on him were soon to expire and Charles Lee continued to be a thorn in his side. Howe then resumed pursuit of Washington's army, forcing it to cross over the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Tom Paine managed to turn the Americans' resulting despair into hope and inspiration with a new pamphlet, *The American Crisis*. The arrival of reinforcements inspired Washington further to plan a surprise strike on Trenton, which he successfully carried out on December 26, 1776.

Outline

I. Rain throughout the days of August 28 and 29, 1776, kept Admiral Howe's ships out on the East River, giving Washington cover for a pull-out from Brooklyn.

- **A.** His extraordinary success in pulling 9,500 men from certain siege and capture on Long Island was promptly rewarded by mass desertions by the newly rescued militia.
- **B.** Washington would probably have preferred abandoning Manhattan altogether, except for his direct order from the Continental Congress to defend New York City.
- **C.** By mid-September, even the Congress had to agree that securing the army was more important than securing the city.

    1. Between September 12 and September 14, Washington began slowly pulling his army back up to Harlem Heights (at the modern-day 124th and 125th streets).
    2. Washington also recruited Capt. Nathan Hale to slip into Howe's camps and find out where Howe's next attack would land.

II. William Howe chose this moment to ferry a force of 4,000 across the East River to Kip's Bay, halfway up the east side of Manhattan.

- **A.** He meant to divide the American line of retreat in half, cutting off all of Washington's army below that line.
- **B.** The 900 Connecticut militia that Washington had posted to watch Kip's Bay and the north-south post-road broke and fled.
    1. A furious Washington galloped down the post-road, calling up troops from William Heath's division to repel the British landing.
    2. Panic spread from the militia to the Continentals, who also broke and ran, infuriating Washington.
- **C.** Israel Putnam, who had been left in command of the 3,500 troops still in the city, hurriedly slipped them to safety along the Hudson River, although they had been forced to abandon all of their equipment.
- **D.** The city was now occupied by the British, who began marking the property of known rebels as default to the king.
    1. Heavy skirmishing went on between the British and the Americans below Harlem Heights on September 16, and on September 21, a fire burned almost one-fourth of the buildings in the city.
    2. The fire gave the occupiers a case of the jitters, and in the increased security measures they seized Nathan Hale on September 21 and hung him the next day. His last words were an approximation of a quotation from Washington's favorite play, Addison's *Cato: A Tragedy*: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

III. In mid-October, Howe moved again.

- **A.** This time he planned to jump back across the East River, landing at Throgs Neck, marching up the Westchester County side of the East River to a point across from the north tip of Manhattan and surprising the Americans from behind.

1. This time the British ran into American scouts and pickets.
2. Washington had time to cross over from Manhattan and position his army in the path of the British at White Plains.

B. At the urging of Nathanael Greene, Washington left around 2,000 men to hold Fort Washington. It was the first of several decisions he would come to regret.
   1. He arrived at White Plains on October 22 with about 13,000 men.
   2. Until almost the last minute he discounted the importance of Chatterton's Hill, a steep ridge on the other side of the Bronx River that covered a possible escape route and gave British artillery enough elevation to hit the Americans' lines.
   3. Washington posted six Continental regiments plus two regiments of militia on Chatterton's Hill.
   4. When Howe pulled up to Washington's positions at White Plains, he attacked Chatterton's Hill with 4,000 British and Hessian soldiers.
   5. The American militia collapsed, followed by the Continentals, and Washington found his entire position at White Plains untenable.

C. Once more, Howe and the weather came to the rescue, as a downpour on October 29 brought Howe's army to a halt and Washington used the protection of the storm to slip across the Hudson.

D. He wanted to abandon Fort Washington as well, but was talked out of it by Nathanael Greene.

E. On November 15, Howe gained possession of Fort Washington and summoned the garrison to surrender. Four days later, Fort Lee, across the Hudson, was abandoned to Cornwallis and 4,000 British regulars.

IV. The great dilemma of the British army in this war was the length and fragility of its lines of communication, supply, and recruitment.

A. British strategy rested on the assumption that the bulk of the fighting in America was better done by American Loyalists.

B. Capt. Johann Ewald, an officer of a Hessian jäger unit, also thought that Howe did not want to inflict so great a humiliation on the Americans that they would resort to partisan or guerilla warfare.

V. Washington faced some daunting problems as well.

A. The short one-year enlistments that the Congress had imposed on him in Boston were beginning to run out and would reduce his army to 7,500 in a few weeks.

B. Charles Lee, who Washington put at the head of a contingent of 2,000 New Jersey Continentals, continued to be a thorn in his side.

C. On December 1, Washington learned that General Howe had resumed pursuit, and Washington ordered a retreat to the Raritan River in northern New Jersey.

1. By the time they reached Princeton, Washington's army was down to 3,700 men, and Lee was inventing excuses for his Continentals not to join them.

2. On December 7 the last fragments of Washington's Continental army crossed over the Delaware River and into Pennsylvania.

3. In November, the Howe brothers issued an amnesty proclamation, and over 3,000 Americans flocked to swear allegiance to the king and to receive papers guaranteeing their lives and property.

4. Congress fled Philadelphia for Baltimore.

VI. Traveling with Washington's army on the retreat through New Jersey was Thomas Paine.

A. The repeated defeats, the fading numbers, and the depleted morale of the Continental army fired his temper, and by the time the Delaware was reached, he had written *The American Crisis.*

1. "These are the times that try men's souls," the pamphlet began famously.

2. Paine pointed out that the retreat had been orderly and the American forces had showed no fear.

B. Within a day, *The American Crisis* was circulating through the army and spirits were lifting.

VII. The British did Washington another favor when a squadron of the 17th Dragoons crept up on the headquarters of Charles Lee, captured him, and carried him off to New York.

A. Within a few days, Lee's replacement, John Sullivan, brought Lee's 2,000 Continentals into Washington's camp and 600 New Hampshire militia arrived from Ticonderoga. These additions brought Washington's numbers up to 7,600.

B. On December 13, Howe proposed to call off further military operations for the winter, another "gift" for Washington.

C. With the arrival of his reinforcements, however, Washington had begun planning a surprise strike at Trenton, where a Hessian brigade had been stationed.

   1. On Christmas night, using the storm as cover, Washington attempted to cross over the ice-choked Delaware with 2,400 Continentals, while 800 Pennsylvania militia would cross just below the town and seize the exit road.

   2. Only some of the men managed to get across, but that was more than enough. On the morning of December 26, they hit Trenton fiercely, and the Hessians surrendered.

D. But the greatest capture Washington achieved at Trenton was the initiative.

Suggested Reading:

Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, chaps. 12–14.

Schecter, *Battle for New York,* chaps. 10, 12–17.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles,* chap. 16.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did Paine's *American Crisis* have such a mesmerizing effect on American morale?

2. Why did Washington wait until the end of December to launch a counter-stroke at the British?

Lecture Eleven—Transcript
"A Glorious Issue"

Washington came over to Brooklyn during the day of the Battle of Long Island, but all hope of taking meaningful command of the American army had disappeared in the confused retreat. The best that Washington could do was try to rally the dispirited survivors and dig in more deeply around the village of Brooklyn. The rain came pounding down throughout the day on August 28, 1776, keeping "Black Dick" Howe's ships out of the East River, and it continued into the twenty-ninth, giving Washington sufficient cover to call on Glover's Marblehead fishermen in the 14th Continental Regiment and stage a pull-out from Brooklyn across the river. Somehow, Washington managed to extricate all of his Continentals and militia from the jaws of the vise around Brooklyn and pull back to the safety of Manhattan. He lost only three stragglers, who fell into British hands.

Washington's extraordinary success in scooping up the 9,500 men left of his "main army" from certain siege and capture in Brooklyn was promptly rewarded by mass desertions by the newly rescued militia. The battle, Washington wrote,

> has dispirited too great a proportion of our troops, and filled their minds with apprehension and despair. The militia, instead of calling forth their utmost efforts to a brave and manly opposition in order to repair our losses, are dismayed, intractable, and impatient to return [home]. Great numbers of them have gone off; in some instances, almost by whole regiments …[110]

Washington would probably have preferred abandoning Manhattan altogether at this point, except for a direct order from the Continental Congress to defend New York City.[111] But could he defend it? In 1776, New York City occupied only about a square mile of the lower end of Manhattan, and it scarcely existed as a city north of Chambers Street. If Washington concentrated on defending the city, there were still 14 miles of Manhattan for the British to cross over onto and strike him from behind. He

---

[110] Washington to the President of Congress (September 2, 1776), *Writings*, 4:72.

[111] Douglas Southall Freeman, *Washington* (abridg. Richard Harwell, New York, 1995), 290.

struggled to parcel out his army as best he could to defend Manhattan, but by mid-September even the Continental Congress had to agree that securing the “main army” was more important than securing the city. Between September 12 and 14, 1776, Washington began slowly pulling his army back up the island—back up Manhattan—to Harlem Heights at a line of about modern-day 124th, 125th streets. He also recruited a former Connecticut schoolmaster, Capt. Nathan Hale, to slip into Howe’s camps and find out where Howe’s next attack would land.

William Howe chose this moment, when the Continentals were still strung out along the spine of Manhattan, to hit Washington with another beautifully timed blow. On the morning of September 15, 1776, Howe loaded a landing force of 4,000 onto 75 flatboats and ferried them across the East River to Kip’s Bay, on the east side of Manhattan and about halfway up the island, just a little bit south of where the modern United Nations headquarters stands. The plan was to throw a line of British infantry across the width of the island, snip the American avenue of retreat in half, and cut off everything of Washington’s army which was still below that line. The 900 Connecticut militia that Washington had posted to watch Kip’s Bay and the north-south post-road, broke and fled at the first sight of the British. Washington himself galloped down the post road, calling up troops from William Heath’s division to repel the British landing. It did no good. The British had already secured a beachhead, and the panicked militia spread their panic to the Continentals, who also broke and ran. Washington was furious to the point of recklessness. “Are these the men with which I am to defend America?” he roared in a rare spasm of public temper. Washington’s staffers finally had to lead him away, lest he be captured by the British.[112]

Yet again, William Howe failed to seize his moment. Old Israel Putnam, who had been left in command of the 3,500 troops still in the city, hurriedly formed them up, skirted well to the left of the British beachhead, and slipped just beyond the extended reach of the British from Kip’s Bay. Not that this was really an occasion for rejoicing, because Putnam’s division had been forced to abandon all of their equipment; and that meant the city itself was now open to occupation by the British, who marched down Broadway and then fanned out across the city to begin marking the property of known rebels as forfeit to the king with the painted letters *GR*, Georgius Rex. A good deal of heavy skirmishing went on between the British and Americans below Harlem Heights on September 16, and on September 21 fire burned a

[112] Schecter, *Battle for New York*, 186.

mile-long gash into the city which destroyed almost a fourth of New York's buildings. The fire gave the occupiers a bad case of jitters, and the increased security net they threw around the city as a result snagged the unhappy Nathan Hale, who was captured on the evening of September 21 and hanged the next day. His last words being, more or less a quotation from Washington's favorite play, Joseph Addison's *Cato: A Tragedy*: "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."[113]

It was not until mid-October—when it became clear to William Howe that Guy Carleton and General John Burgoyne had been stymied in their attempt to move down the Hudson River Valley by Benedict Arnold's little stand at Valcour Island—that William Howe got moving again, this time in yet another dramatic attempt at outflanking, surrounding, and compelling the surrender of Washington's army. Howe planned to jump back across the East River, landing not back on Long Island, but at Throgs Neck, on the New York mainland. From there, he could march up the Westchester County side of the East River to a point across from the north tip of Manhattan, cross over behind Washington's position on Harlem Heights, and surprise the American from behind. This time, the British blundered into American scouts and pickets, and Washington had time to cross over from Manhattan himself and plant his army squarely in the path of the British at the village of White Plains, where Washington had a supply depot and where a chain of hills offered a good defensive position. At the urging of Nathanael Greene, Washington left 1,200 men behind to hold Fort Washington, on the very north tip of Manhattan. On further thought, he sent another 800, because holding open a route over the Hudson, as he put it, "was an object of so much consequence."[114]

It was the first of several decisions he would regret. Washington arrived at White Plains—beside the Bronx River—on October 22, 1776, with about 13,000 men, moving with agonizing slowness because of all the transport wagons he had been forced to abandon in New York City. Until almost the last minute, he discounted the importance of Chatterton's Hill, a steep ridge on the other side of the Bronx River which, on reflection, not only covered

---

[113] Schecter, *Battle for New York*, 214; Frederic M. Litto, "Addison's Cato in the Colonies," *William & Mary Quarterly* 23 (July 1966), 431–49. The exact wording from *Cato* is: "What pity is it/That we can die but once to serve our country." See Joseph Addison, *Cato: A Tragedy*, eds. C.D. Henderson & M.E. Yellin (Indianapolis, 2004), 84.

[114] Washington to the President of Congress (November 16, 1776), *Writings*, 4:178–9.

a possible escape route if things went badly, but gave British artillery enough elevation to hit the American lines across the Bronx River. Washington hastily posted Alexander MacDougall's brigade of three Continental regiments, plus two regiments of militia and then three more Continental regiments under Lord Stirling, who had been returned to the army after a prisoner exchange. But when Howe pulled up to Washington's positions at White Plains, he saw the isolated occupiers of Chatterton's Hill as a gift, and on October 28, 1776, he hit Chatterton's Hill with 4,000 British and Hessians. The American militia collapsed, followed by the Continentals, and Washington at once found his entire position at White Plains untenable unless he wanted to retreat into Connecticut, which he did not. If he allowed himself to be bottled up into New England, then any combined British forces which secured the Hudson River Valley that fall or the next spring would have Washington and New England safely in the bag and ready to be crushed.

Once more, though, William Howe and the weather came to Washington's rescue. A downpour on the twenty-ninth ground Howe's army to a halt, and Washington used the protection of the storm to slip away to the west and across the Hudson. Washington wanted to abandon Fort Washington as well and move all of his troops to the New Jersey side of the Hudson River, but he was argued out of this by Nathanael Greene. Greene feared the moral impact of quitting Manhattan altogether, and Greene believed that the fort was so safely perched over the Hudson that the British had no prospect of taking it that winter. Greene was wrong. The fort was badly sited—another gift of Charles Lee—under-supplied, and what's more, one of the senior officers of the garrison, in fact, deserted to the British on November 2 and sold them the complete plans and dispositions of the fort for £60. On November 15, Howe sent Lord Hugh Percy's nine-regiment division, Earl Cornwallis's reserve brigade—with the Highlanders of the Black Watch—and his division of Hessians to press the curtain of American skirmishers and pickets back into Fort Washington. By "about 3 o'clock in the afternoon all the different attacks had succeeded," wrote John Peebles, a grenadier officer in the Black Watch in his diary, "and we were in possession of all the High Grounds in the environs of Fort Washington, having taken and killed a good number … and driven the rest into the Fort."[115] The British, poised to pound Fort Washington to pieces with

[115] Randall, *Washington: A Life*, 317; *John Peebles' American War: The Diary of a Scottish Grenadier, 1776–1782*, ed. Ira D. Gruber (Mechanicsburg, PA, 1998), 63.

artillery and then finish off the remnants with the bayonet, summoned the battered garrison to surrender. The fort's commandant, Col. Robert Magaw, saw only slaughter in continuing the fight, and surrendered some 2,000 men, along with four big 32-pounder cannon, 37 lighter cannon, and two howitzers. Four days later, Fort Washington's smaller companion fortification across the Hudson, Fort Lee, was abandoned to Cornwallis and 4,000 British regulars. Capt. Johann Ewald, who had only arrived with his Hessian jäger company a few weeks before and had seen his first battle in America at White Plains, wanted to pursue the retreating garrison of Fort Lee, and he even got close enough to skirmish with them. But he was recalled by a jovial order from Earl Cornwallis: "Let them go, my dear Ewald, and stay here. We do not want to lose any men. One jäger is worth more than ten rebels."[116]

Cornwallis had put his finger on one major reason why William Howe seemed so dilatory in pressing Washington and the main Continental army, first at Brooklyn, then at Harlem Heights, and then after White Plains: Unless Howe had a clear and indisputable opportunity to corral and destroy Washington's army, then every battle he fought which left some remnant of Washington's army afield meant that the British had lost casualties which it would take 3,000 miles of ocean and an infinity of bureaucratic and Parliamentary wrangling to replace, while Washington had only to look over the next river to find new recruits and bring his army back up to strength. This was the great, irreducible dilemma of the British army in this war. Its lines of communication, supply, and recruitment were long and fragile. British strategy, accordingly, rested on the assumption that the bulk of the fighting in America was better done by American Loyalists, with the British regulars and Hessians used only for the first big blow that would encourage the Loyalists to appear and take charge. Capt. Ewald also thought that Howe had a second reason in mind for hesitating: He did not want to inflict so great a humiliation on the Americans that, consumed with fury, they would dig in their heels and resort to *partisan*, or guerilla, warfare. In the vast reaches of North America, there was no way a British army of any size could suppress a partisan rebellion. In 1765, the British had experienced so much difficulty in containing the Indian war started by the Ottawa chieftain, Pontiac, that they had abandoned all but a handful of western outposts in order to avoid further friction with the Indians; it was a war they could not win. American partisans might easily be able to do the

[116] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 18; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 86.

same thing on a continental level, so better to teach the Americans a teachable lesson, and then offer an accommodation which would spare lives and spare suffering on both sides. "Now I perceived what was afoot," Ewald wrote in his journal. "We wanted to spare the King's subjects and hoped to terminate the war amicably, in which assumption I was strengthened … by several English officers."[117]

This was small comfort to George Washington and his "main army." The short enlistments Congress had imposed on him back in Boston—because short enlistments were the only way to get the New England militia to sign up as Continentals; they would only commit for a year. Washington had wanted people to commit for the duration of the war, but there were many, many fewer takers for a duration commitment than for a one-year commitment, so the Continental Congress imposed one-year terms for enlistment on Washington—were now coming back to haunt the Continentals, because the Maryland and New Jersey regiments would be coming to the end of their terms of enlistment by the end of December. Washington's "main army" still had, on paper, some 10,400 men, if you counted all the noses. But the expiration of enlistments, and the simple desertions by the disheartened militia, would reduce that number to 7,500 in a few weeks. Washington also had another headache on hand in the person of Charles Lee, his second-in-command, who had now returned from his glowing success in defending Charleston. Washington put Lee in command of a reserve contingent of 2,000 Continentals in northern New Jersey, but having Lee in command of anything was proving almost as dispiriting as the militia. Lee weighed Washington's sinking prestige against his own, began interpreting Washington's orders as he saw fit, and assuring members of the Congress by letter—behind Washington's back—that "I foresaw, predicted, all that has happened … Had I the powers I could do you much good."[118]

On December 1, Washington's scouts warned him that General Howe had resumed pursuit, and Washington was compelled to order a retreat over the Raritan River in northern New Jersey. But Howe kept nipping at his heels, forcing Washington to retreat further and further into New Jersey. By the time they reached Princeton, Washington's army was down to 3,700 men. Charles Lee was scenting his own opportunity to look good by comparison, and was inventing ingenious excuses why he should not bring his 2,000 Continentals in North Jersey to join Washington. It looked, in fact, like Howe might keep

[117] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 18.
[118] Freeman, *Washington*, 309.

on chasing Washington all the way to the Delaware River and maybe all the way to Philadelphia, on the other side of the Delaware. On December 7, 1776, Washington was forced to cross the last pitiful fragments of the Continental main army over the Delaware River and into Pennsylvania. "I am wearied almost to death with the retrograde motion of things," Washington wrote. Washington preferred to be on the attack; he loved holding the strategic initiative. He would rather hit an enemy than wait to be hit by him. But his army now was, as he wrote, "such as cannot give or promise the least successful opposition"; and the main army's powers of opposition were not the only things which were waning. In November, the Howe brothers issued an amnesty proclamation, and over 3,000 Americans flocked to swear an oath of allegiance to the king and received papers guaranteeing their lives and property. "The conduct of the Jerseys has been most infamous," Washington wailed, "Instead of turning out to defend their country, and affording aid to our army, they are making their submissions as fast as they can." Congress, watching William Howe approach the Delaware River, fled Philadelphia for Baltimore. It was now just five months since the Declaration of Independence, and already one of its signers—Richard Stockton of Princeton—was arrested, recanted, and signed a declaration of allegiance to the king.[119]

Traveling with Washington's army on the retreat through New Jersey was the author of *Common Sense*, Thomas Paine. The repeated defeats, the slumping shoulders, and the fading numbers of the Continental "main army" fired his temper. On November 22, Paine began writing another pamphlet, working away at it during stops on the retreat, and finally had a finished copy ready to print by the time the Delaware River was reached. He published it in the *Pennsylvania Journal* on December 19, 1776, and began selling it as a separate pamphlet four days later. It was called *The American Crisis*, and it showed that Paine had lost none of his talent for invigorating prose. "These are the times that try men's souls," he began. "The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman." At the same time that he could raise a storm of passion, he also showed he had a capacity for calming storms of panic: Yes, America was panicking, but "all nations have been subject to" panics, and panics "in some cases … produce as

[119] Washington to John Augustine Washington (November 19, 1776), to Major-General Lee (December 1, 1776), and to John Augustine Washington (December 18, 1776), *Writings*, 4:184, 199 230; David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York, 2004), 132, 162–4.

much good as hurt …" They show who is loyal and who is treacherous: "They sift out the hidden thoughts of man, and hold them up in public to the world." Besides, he went on, the retreat has been "a great credit to us, that with a handful of men, we sustained an orderly retreat for near a hundred miles … The sign of fear was not seen in our camp." Paine argued, give the army just enough time to be "collecting"—in other words to be recruiting; to be refitting; to be rearmed—and "we have the prospect of a glorious issue."[120] Within a day, *The American Crisis* was circulating through Washington's little army, "read in camp to every corporal's guard … Hope succeeded to despair, cheerfulness to gloom, and firmness to irresolution."[121]

The British, as seemed to be their habit, conferred a present of their own on Washington on the night of December 12 through December13, when a squadron of the 17th Lite Dragoons, led by a hard-riding lieutenant named Banastre Tarleton—who had been tipped off by local Loyalists and a captured courier—crept up on the headquarters of General Charles Lee, captured Washington's truculent subordinate, and carried him off to New York. With Lee gone, command of Lee's contingent devolved onto John Sullivan, who now brought Lee's 2,000 Continentals into Washington's camp as reinforcements on December 20. On December 22, a short-handed brigade of 600 New Hampshire militia arrived from Philip Schuyler's frozen little "Northern army" at Ticonderoga. These reinforcements only brought Washington's numbers up to 7,600, but that was twice what he had the week before. If he did not use them now to win some dramatic victory they might all disappear after a few weeks, and for good. "If every nerve is not strained," Washington confided to his brother on December 18, "I think the game is pretty near up."[122]

Then, on December 13, William Howe delivered another present: In general orders that he drew up that day and briefed his generals on the next, Howe proposed to call off further military operations for the winter. He needed to attend to the pacification of New Jersey and New York, and whatever was left of Washington's army in the spring could be finished off at leisure. Howe himself would return to winter in New York City. He would leave three brigades on the Jersey side of the Delaware: one of Hessians under Carl von Donop at Bordentown, the Black Watch at Burlington, and another

[120] Paine, "The American Crisis No. 1," in *Life and Major Writings*, 51, 54, 55, 57.

[121] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 142.

[122] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 150; Washington to John Augustine Washington (December 18, 1776), *Writings*, 4:231.

Hessian brigade at Trenton under Johann von Rall. One further brigade would serve as backup at Princeton. Overall command of this Delaware River watch would be given to James Grant, who had commanded a brigade in Lord Hugh Percy's division.

The Hessians did not much enjoy their detail. The river towns were small and uncomfortable places to billet soldiers, and von Rall in Trenton was kept exhausted by intermittent bushwacking by local New Jersey militiamen. Von Rall also grew nervous on rumors that Washington was gathering boats for a lunge across the river, but his fears were dismissed by General Grant. Then, late on Christmas day, a winter storm howled down on Trenton, and von Rall concluded that no one—not even Washington—would venture out in such weather.

How wrong he was. With the arrival of his reinforcements, Washington began meticulously planning out a surprise strike at Trenton, and on Christmas night he planned on using the storm as his cover. He would cross over the ice-choked Delaware at McConkey's Ferry and Johnson's Ferry with 2,400 Continentals, while 800 Pennsylvania militia would cross the river just below Trenton and seize the one exit road that led east and south out of Trenton. Only Washington's men at McConkey's Ferry actually managed to get across the river in the sleet and snow, but that was more than enough. Washington positioned one division under John Sullivan—who was also back with the army after a prisoner exchange—southwest of the town. The other, under Nathanael Greene, he positioned on the northwest of Trenton. Washington himself would move personally with Greene's division. Together with nine of Henry Knox's 12-pounder artillery, at about 7:30 on the morning of December 26, 1776, they hit Trenton like a thunderclap. Von Rall rallied his Hessians and determined on a quick and immediate counterattack. But the counterattack failed, von Rall was shot down, and the leaderless Hessians surrendered. Washington lost exactly two dead and two wounded; the Hessians lost 918 men—896 of them prisoners and wounded—along with piles of weapons, ammunition, and even a collection of musical instruments from a Hessian military band.

But the greatest capture Washington achieved at Trenton was the initiative. "Confound the turncoat scoundrels and the cowardly Hessians together," one Loyalist wrote in his diary, "This has given them new spirits, got them fresh succours, and will prolong the War, perhaps for two years. They have recovered from their panic, and it will not be an easy matter to throw them

into confusion again."[123] Indeed it would not. Washington's victory at Trenton was small in scale, but exquisite in its timing. It gave new wind to American sails, and it showed that his main army was by no means down for the count. That wind would be freshened in just a few more months by an even more amazing British catastrophe, this time to the North.

---

[123] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 260; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 259.

Lecture Twelve
Joy in Princeton

Scope: Despite the victory at Trenton, Washington still had to convince his soldiers to reenlist. After a touching appeal by Washington, 1,200 of his men reenlisted, giving him a total of 3,300 Continentals. Several militia units turned up as well. A second Battle of Trenton and a strike at Princeton were also successful for Americans in early 1777. No battles were fought for three months thereafter, so Washington took this time to reorganize his army, deciding first that militia would be used only for garrison and reserves and second, that the brigade, not the regiment, was the most effective tactical unit.

Lord Germain had prophesied that New Jersey was a colony that would produce a wellspring of Loyalists. After Trenton, however, those Loyalists were badly shaken. With the king's army gone, the king's victims were looking for revenge, not just on Loyalists but on any fence-sitters as well, and many had to leave their homes. New Jersey Loyalist slaves, however, did not mind leaving their homes and many happily ran for freedom.

Outline

I. Washington's surprise at Trenton threw the British occupation of New Jersey into a panic and moved Carl von Donop, who was in overall command of the outposts at Trenton, Burlington, and Bordentown, to order a pullback to Princeton.

- **A.** Washington's instincts were to keep von Donop retreating.
- **B.** A council of his officers, however, pointing to the bad weather, the number of prisoners, and the pitiful condition of the men, advised a retreat to safety back in Pennsylvania.
- **C.** Short-term enlistments were also going to run out on December 31.
  1. Washington implored the Philadelphia financier Robert Morris to obtain enough hard cash to offer a $10 bounty to every man who would reenlist.
  2. He paraded Greene's and Sullivan's divisions to make a personal appeal, to no effect.

3. Then he made a second appeal, one of his rare moments of forceful eloquence, and the men in the ranks began to waver, and by ones and twos, then by companies, they stepped forward, until 1,200 men had volunteered.

II. All told, Washington managed to hold on to about 3,300 Continentals.

A. The militia now decided to come to Washington's aid as well.

1. These militias were untrained, undisciplined, and spoiling to avenge themselves on Loyalists who had fingered them to the British.
2. But they were there, and if Washington did not use them, they could just as easily melt away again.

B. Washington called a council of war and persuaded his officers to strike at von Donop in Princeton. He needed to move quickly because the British were not sitting idle.

1. Earl Cornwallis had taken personal command of the scattered forces left in New Jersey.
2. Cornwallis collected two brigades-worth of troops (including von Donop's Hessians) and set off for Trenton where they met the Continentals who held them back.
3. By evening, Washington estimated that Cornwallis had lost 500 killed and wounded.

C. But Washington knew that Cornwallis would begin looking for a way to cross the creek in order to pin the Americans against the Delaware.

1. Instead of waiting for the attack, Washington pulled his army back over the creek under cover of night, swung south and east, and arrived at Cornwallis's rear.
2. Cornwallis's men were just waking at Trenton when they were surprised by the sound of heavy cannon in their rear.

D. British Lt. Col. Charles Mawhood had spied advance elements of Washington's men coming northward on Quaker Road.

1. Mawhood decided to attack. His men hit Nathanael Greene's men in the middle of an apple orchard just off the Quaker Road.
2. Mawhood's men were outnumbered nearly three to one, but the regulars stood their ground and advanced with the bayonet.
3. But there were more Americans coming up, and the 17th Regiment finally retreated and then fought its way back to Cornwallis.

4. The 55th Regiment was surrounded at Princeton by Sullivan's division and surrendered.
5. The 40th Regiment was battered into submission by American artillery under young Alexander Hamilton.
6. Mawhood's force lost almost half its numbers: 222 killed and wounded out of 446 men.

E. Washington took little joy from this victory. His goal had been the great British supply depot at New Brunswick, and Mawhood's resistance had cost him the entire day and allowed Cornwallis to get his own troops moving in pursuit.

F. Washington now swerved north toward the Watchung Mountains of northern New Jersey and an encampment at Morristown.

1. But Howe was unwilling to take any more chances and ordered a general retreat to Perth Amboy.
2. The next three months would see skirmishes and ambushes all across New Jersey but no major battles.

III. Morristown was a settlement with a population of between 250 and 300 people and some 50 or 60 buildings that had to accommodate the tired, hungry, and ill-clothed Continentals.

A. Some Continentals could be lodged in various structures, but the rest had to build log huts in the snow, and some froze to death.

B. Only 800 of the $10 bounty men permanently reenlisted.

C. Smallpox swept through the camp, forcing Washington to decree mandatory inoculations.

IV. During this time, Washington experimented with a dramatic reorganization of the army.

A. His experience of the last year had led him to two important conclusions.

1. The militia was useful for nothing but reserve and garrison duties, and Congress would have to pay for a full-fledged professional army.
2. The brigade, not the regiment, was the most effective tactical unit.

B. Reorganizing an army, however, only works if there is a real army to reorganize.

1. While the new Continental regiments were enlisted, Washington could not afford to have the militias go home.

2. He did not want the new Continental army to be filled with riff-raff, and he charged those who were recruiting officers to take only gentlemen.

V. New Jersey's Loyalists were caught between a rock and a hard place.

A. New Jersey had seemed to be most likely to fulfill Lord George Germain's prophecy that the Loyalist sympathy would rise up and end the Revolution.

1. William Howe began appointing recruitment and got 850 Loyalists by November.
2. This lasted until exactly after Trenton; once the British began their retreat back to their Raritan River enclave, the Loyalists and the families of recruits began looking for reassurance from their neighbors that their Loyalist enthusiasm would not be held against them.
3. That reassurance was not forthcoming.
4. Howe's regulars had been kept pretty well in hand, but the same could not be said of the Hessians, for whom plunder was a means of improving one's income.

B. Now the king's army was gone and the king's victims were eager for revenge, so the New Jersey Loyalists found themselves in danger.

1. Washington issued a proclamation demanding that anyone who had signed the king's oath surrender and take the oath of allegiance to the United States of America within 30 days.
2. But even those who had not taken the king's oath, but who had only tried to keep their heads down, were not exempt from harassment and threats.

C. One group of Loyalists that had no difficulty about fleeing was New Jersey's black slaves.

1. The calling out of the militia and the back-and-forth of the armies had created an atmosphere of instability which, of itself, loosened the bonds of slavery.
2. Once the British army moved into New Jersey, slaves in Monmouth ran off and boarded the British ships in New York harbor.
3. In February there were enough slaves behind British lines to form a regiment of Black Pioneers and Guides, organized as a field engineer battalion.

4. Titus Corlies, a Monmouth County slave, organized a partisan unit of black Loyalists that specialized in scouting, raids, barn-burnings, and ambushes of rebel New Jerseyans.

Suggested Reading:

Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, chaps. 16–17.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles,* chap. 10.

Wright, *The Continental Army,* chap. 5.

Questions to Consider:

1. What motivated Americans to volunteer for service with the Loyalist militia?
2. What were the most important elements of Washington's reorganization of the army at Morristown?

Lecture Twelve—Transcript
Joy in Princeton

Washington's surprise at Trenton threw the British occupation of New Jersey into a panic. Carl von Donop—who was in command of the outposts at Trenton, Burlington, and Bordentown—now imagined himself outmaneuvered and cut off by unseen Americans, and he ordered a pullback to Princeton, where he furiously began throwing up entrenchments. "Thus had the times changed!" wrote Johann Ewald, who had missed the action at Trenton because he was out on patrol duties.

> The Americans had constantly run before us. Four weeks ago we expected to end the war with the capture of Philadelphia, and now we had to render Washington the honor of thinking about our defense. Due to this affair at Trenton, such a fright came over the army that if Washington had used this opportunity we would have flown to our ships and let him have all of America.

William Howe blamed the mishap at Trenton on Johan von Rall's "amazing" mishandling of his men, and Howe criticized von Donop's hasty withdrawal as by no means commendable. But whoever was to blame, Howe had to admit that, "The rebels have taken fresh courage upon this event … and their success will probably produce another campaign." This bland suggestion that the war would require another full-dress campaign, and therefore stretch things out into 1777, was not news that Lord George Germain wanted to bring into Parliament. "All of our hopes were blasted by that unhappy affair at Trenton," Germain later complained, and the king warned Lord North that since Trenton "will undoubtedly rather elate the rebels, who till then were in a state of the greatest despondency," it would have exactly the opposite effect on the government's majority in Parliament.[124]

No one hoped more fervently that this would be so than George Washington. The victory at Trenton kept the wolf from the door, but there was no guarantee that even with that victory Washington would continue to

---

[124] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 44; George III to Lord North (February 24, 1777), *The Correspondence of King George the Third with Lord North, from 1708 to 1783* (London, 1867)2:56; Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington's War: The Forging Of A Revolutionary Leader And The American Presidency* (Naperville, IL, 2004), 35; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 88.

have much of an army to bolt the door with. All of his instincts were to keep von Donop retreating, but a council of officers pointed to the weather, the management of the huge take of prisoners, and the pitiful condition of the men, and they counseled a retreat to safety back in Pennsylvania. Those short-term enlistments, which had worried Washington all through the year, were also going to become a problem because they were about to run out on December 31, 1776; and the elation of victory would chill quickly in the snow and ice, and freeze many attempts to get soldiers to reenlist. Washington implored the Philadelphia financier, Robert Morris—one of the few members of the Congress who had not fled Philadelphia—to beg or borrow enough hard cash to offer a $10 bounty to every man who would reenlist. Washington paraded Greene's and Sullivan's divisions—the men who had fought at Long Island, Harlem, and White Plains; men whose regiments had dwindled away in battle or in the dreary gloom of the retreat across New Jersey—and he made a personal appeal to them and "entreated us to stay." The drums rolled, but no one stepped forward to volunteer. Washington rode sorrowfully down the lines, wheeled his horse around, and made a second appeal to the men of the army.

> My brave fellows, you have done all I asked you to do, and more than could be reasonably expected; but your country is at stake, your wives, your houses, and all that you hold dear. You have worn yourselves out with fatigues and hardships, but we know not how to spare you. If you will consent to stay one month longer, you will render that service to the cause of liberty, and to your country, which you probably can never do under any other circumstances.[125]

George Washington had never been known as having a special gift for words. His letters and reports are straightforward and unadorned with the literary turns and elegance that 18th-century English letter writers abound in. He was a soldier, and even though he had been away from soldiering for 20 years, he was not a novelist by any stretch of the imagination. But from somewhere within him there came moments when this tightly-reined-in and stiff-upper-lipped gentleman planter could reach out and touch the ordinary soldiers in his regiments with uncommon force, and this was one of them.

The men in the ranks began to waver, arguing out loud with each other even as they stood shivering in their ranks, making bargains—"I'll stay if you stay"—and finally someone bawled out, "We cannot go home under such

---

[125] "The Battle of Princeton," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 20 (1896), 515–519.

circumstances." By ones and twos, then by companies, they stepped forward, until 1,200 men—almost the entire strength of these two divisions of Continentals—stood there. Should we get them to sign something? one of Washington's officers asked. No, Washington replied, "Men who will volunteer in such a case as this, need no enrollment to keep them to their duty."[126]

All told, Washington managed to hold on to about 3,300 Continentals. Equally good news came in the form of the militia, who—after Trenton—now decided to come off their comfortable fences and rise to Washington's aid. Thomas Mifflin recruited 1,500 Pennsylvania militia; John Cadwalader of Philadelphia put together a brigade of 1,700 Philadelphia artisans, dockworkers, and shopkeepers; and New Jersey militia units—which had lain low during the retreat—now turned up in such numbers that not even all the captured Hessian equipment from Trenton was sufficient to arm them. They were untrained, undisciplined, and spoiling mainly to take revenge on Loyalists who had come forward to point the finger at them to the British. At least they were there, and if Washington did not use them for something, they could just as easily melt away—after having eaten up his stores, and after having been issued his precious collection of captured Hessian equipment—and it might just go with the winter snow. Washington called a council of war, and this time he persuaded his officers to lunge once more across the Delaware into New Jersey, this time to strike at von Donop's quivering defenses at Princeton.[127]

He needed to move quickly, because the British were not sitting idly by. Earl Cornwallis had packed his bags to take winter leave in England. But when the news from Trenton arrived, he didn't even bother to unload from the ship he was ready to board, and instead Cornwallis rode 50 miles to take personal command of the scattered forces that had been left across New Jersey under the oversight of General James Grant. Cornwallis collected two brigades worth of troops—including the unhappy von Donop's Hessians—and set off for Trenton, where they collided with the Continentals just outside the town at the bridge over the Assunpink Creek. Cornwallis tried to force his way over the bridge, but three regiments of Virginia Continentals had fixed themselves on the other side first. "Well, boys," announced Charles Scott, who was the colonel of the 3rd Virginia

---

[126] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 273; Freeman, *Washington*, 324; Randall, *Washington: A Life*, 32.

[127] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 275.

Continentals, "you know the *old boss* has put us here to defend this bridge; and by God it must be done … Bring down your pieces, fire at their legs, one man wounded in the leg is better [than] a dead one for it takes two more to carry him off and there is three gone. Leg them, dam 'em, I say leg them." Leg them they did: The Hessian grenadiers made up the first assault wave, and lost 31 killed and wounded. Then the British regulars pressed forward, and again the attack ground to halt. By the time evening fell, Washington estimated that Cornwallis had lost 500 killed and wounded. One of Thomas Mifflin's Pennsylvania militiamen, William Hutchinson of Chester County, stared wide-eyed at the mowed-down piles of British and German dead: "Their dead bodies lay thicker and closer together for a space than I ever beheld sheaves of wheat lying in a field over which the reapers had just passed."[128]

This second battle of Trenton on January 2, 1777, provided another feather in Washington's cap, but it was not one he could afford to linger over. Earl Cornwallis was no fool, and the next day he would surely begin feeling for a ford over the Assunpink Creek to cross over and turn Washington's flank so that the Americans could be pinned against the Delaware River. "We've got the Old Fox safe now," Cornwallis promised, "We'll go over and bag him in the morning." The Old Fox, however, was determined to keep the initiative in his hands. Instead of waiting for Cornwallis to strike, Washington pulled his army back from the Assunpink Creek, under cover of night, swung south and then east—across the present day I-95/Route 1 corridor—and arrived on January 3 just six miles south of Princeton in what was presumably Cornwallis's rear, across his line of retreat, and on top of the supplies and equipment stored in Princeton. Johan Ewald could only admire Washington's skill, as one professional soldier to another: "This clever man … had made such a forced march under cover of darkness that he arrived at daybreak." While Cornwallis's men were rubbing the sleep from the eyes at Trenton, a dull thumping—"a heavy cannonade … surprised everyone."[129]

The "heavy cannonade" was caused by British Lt. Col. Charles Mawhood of the 17th Regiment, who had been posted by Cornwallis with the 17th, 40th, and 55th regiments to cover Princeton in Cornwallis's absence. Mawhood

---

[128] Hutchinson, in Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 146; Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 290, 307.

[129] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 49; Howe to Lord George Germain (January 5, 1777), *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, ed. Charles Ross (London, 1859), 1:27.

had actually been ready to move to Cornwallis's support down the post road to Trenton—which is modern Route 206—with the 17th and 55th regiments when he spied advance elements of Washington's men coming northwards and parallel to him on the Quaker Road. Mawhood pondered his situation, and then decided to attack. He shook out the 55th and 17th regiments into line-of-battle, the gaps caused by the battles of the previous fall being filled in with a draft of recruits intended for the Black Watch and some odds-and-ends of grenadiers, light infantry, and dragoons who were catching up with their units under Cornwallis. Nathanael Greene, advancing on the left of the Quaker Road, wheeled his division of Continentals around to face the oncoming British, and they hit each other in the middle of an apple orchard just off the Quaker Road.

Mawhood was outnumbered nearly three-to-one, but the British regulars stood their ground, and then on Mawhood's orders they advanced with the bayonet. They caught one of Greene's officers—General Hugh Mercer—and stabbed him, wounding him mortally. But there were more Americans coming up the road, including John Cadwalader's Philadelphia militia and the Maryland and Delaware Continentals; and there was George Washington who took personal command of the militia and led them directly at the British, who now finally cracked and retreated. Mawhood and the 17th Regiment fought their way clear to join Cornwallis near Trenton. The 55th Regiment fell back to cover Princeton, standing and retreating in remarkably good order all the way to the grounds of Princeton College, where they were surrounded by Sullivan's division and surrendered. The 40th Regiment, left to its own devices in Princeton, barricaded themselves into the College's main building, Nassau Hall, until the Americans brought up a battery of artillery commanded by a 20-year-old lieutenant named Alexander Hamilton and battered them into submission.[130] (There is a note here for alumni of Columbia University, since Alexander Hamilton, as a former Columbia student, was having a great deal of fun opening up his artillery on Princeton. Not quite a football game, but maybe a Revolutionary War forerunner of it.)

In any case, Mawhood's little force lost almost half its numbers in this fight: 222 killed and wounded out of 446 men. For the Continentals on the other hand, it was a good time. One civilian in the town remembered several

---

[130] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 326–39; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 88; Richard Ketcham, *The Winter Soldiers* (Garden City, NJ, 1973), 309.

Continentals "came into our house … some of them laughing outright, others smiling, and not a man among them but showed joy in his countenance." Washington, however, took little joy out of his victory. His real goal had been the great British supply depot at New Brunswick, and Mawhood's spirited resistance at Princeton had cost him the entire day and allowed Cornwallis to get his own troops moving in pursuit. Instead, Washington now swerved due north toward the Watchung Mountains of northern New Jersey and an encampment at Morristown, New Jersey, where he could still threaten New Brunswick, but could also use the Watchung Mountains to hinder any British attempt to strike at him.[131]

He needn't have worried about British attempts to strike at him, because William Howe was unwilling to take any more chances. On January 6, 1777, Howe ordered a general retreat of all of Cornwallis's command to Perth Amboy, at the mouth of the Raritan River, where they could be supplied and reinforced by water by "Black Dick" Howe's navy. They straggled, said Johan Ewald, "like an army that is thoroughly beaten. Everyone was so frightened that it was completely forgotten even to obtain information about where the Americans had gone." The next three months would be pockmarked by skirmishes and ambushes all across northern New Jersey, but no major battles would follow. New Jersey had been redeemed, and the British were once more cooped up; this time—into the Amboys, Manhattan, Staten Island, and Long Island—for the remainder of the winter.[132]

Morristown was a settlement of between 250 and 300 people. It amounted in all to maybe 50 or 60 buildings, and they now had to find a way of accommodating a sudden new population explosion of hungry, tired, and ill-clothed Continentals. Some of the Continentals could be lodged in homes, barns, and mills—some of them even in the Morris County jail—but the rest had to build their own log huts in the snow before they could get any cover from the elements. The Pennsylvania Continentals were "obliged to lye under half Worn out Tents in the severest Cold Weather" and several were found "froze to Death in their Tents & the Ice made Six inches thick in two Nights." Only 800 of the $10 bounty-men decided permanently to

---

[131] *George F. Scheer and Hugh Rankin,* Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolution Through the Eyes of Those Who Fought and Lived It *(Cleveland, 1957), 219;* New Jersey in the American Revolution, 1763–1783: A Documentary History *ed. Larry R. Gerlach (Trenton, 1975),* 294–5.

[132] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 355; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 50.

reenlist; and then smallpox swept through the camp and forced Washington to decree mandatory inoculations.[133]

But the months of relative inactivity and the expiration of the original Continental enlistments gave Washington a chance to experiment with a dramatic reorganization of the army. He had learned a great deal from the past year about how best to handle and fight these troops, and he had come to two important conclusions: First of all, the militia was useful for nothing else but reserve and garrison duties. The Congress was going to have to take on the burden of paying for a full-fledged professional army, rather than the half-and-half affair which had prevailed until then. Washington won an authorization from Congress to raise a new Continental army of 88 regiments, with each regiment now drawn from a particular state and identified with that state in the regimental title. From now on it would not be the 1st Continentals or 5th Continentals, but the 1st Pennsylvania Regiment, the 5th Virginia Regiment, and so on.

The second thing he had learned was that, breaking with the long tradition of the British army, he concluded that the brigade—not the regiment—was the most effective tactical unit. Regiments were too small to have any impact on their own, and if they were only grouped together as brigades on an ad hoc basis in the British fashion, they would never learn how to operate together. The brigade had sufficient hitting power to sway a battle, as Washington had seen at Trenton and Princeton. In the spring of 1777, he created 10 permanent brigades for his "main army" at Morristown, each containing four to five regiments, all of them drawn from the same state. There would be four Virginia brigades under Peter Muhlenberg, George Weedon, William Woodford, and Charles Scott; three Pennsylvania brigades under Anthony Wayne, John DeHaas, and Thomas Conway; two Maryland brigades under William Smallwood and a French volunteer, Philippe-Hubert de Borre; and a New Jersey brigade under William Maxwell. Each brigade, in turn, was paired with another brigade to form a division, and the division commanders would be Nathanael Greene, Lord Stirling, John Sullivan, Benjamin Lincoln, and Adam Stephen. The divisions were expected to pack enough punch that they could operate

---

[133] John W. Rae, *Morristown: A Military Headquarters of the Revolution* (Mt. Pleasant, SC, 2003), 22, 25–26; Robert Morris to John Hancock (January 16, 1777), in *Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 6 January 1, 1777–April 30, 1777,* online at http://memory.loc.gov.

independently against anything except the entire massed strength of William Howe's army.[134]

Reorganizing an army, however, only works if there is a real army to reorganize. While the new Continental regiments were being enlisted, Washington could not afford to have the militia go home, and—like them or not—he was reduced to begging the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety on January 19 to extend the stay of the militia at Morristown. "I must depend chiefly this winter on the militia, to enable me to act offensively, or even to make a stand." He did not want the new Continental army filled with riff-raff: To one of the newly-commissioned colonels, who was responsible for recruiting the officers and men for a new Continental regiment, Washington wrote, "Take none but gentlemen … in your choice of officers." He'd had his fill of New England-style democracy. "Do not take old men, nor yet fill your corps with boys, especially for captains."[135]

No one, however, was more securely wedged between a rock and a hard place in New Jersey than New Jersey's Loyalists. If there was any place in America which seemed to be the fulfillment of Lord George Germain's prophecy that once Washington and his Continentals had been given a good drubbing, the vast well of American Loyalist sympathy would spring to arms and bring an end to the Revolution on its own, it was New Jersey in the fall of 1776. As soon as it was safe enough, William Howe began appointing recruitment officers, and selected a prominent Loyalist and former New Jersey attorney-general, Cortlandt Skinner, to raise five battalions of Loyalists infantry—about 2,500 men—"under the command of gentleman of the country nominated by himself." By November, Skinner had enlisted 850 Loyalists.[136]

This rush of Loyalists' enthusiasm lasted until exactly after Trenton, and once the British began their retreat back to their Raritan River enclave, the Loyalists who had so cheerfully signed up for the king's pardon and the families of those who had enlisted in Cortlandt Skinner's New Jersey Volunteers began looking furtively for reassurance from their neighbors that their Loyalist enthusiasm would not be remembered too clearly. That was a

[134] Wright, *Continental Army*, 112; Edward Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York, 2005), 214.

[135] Washington to Col. George Baylor (January 9, 1777) and to the Council of Safety of Pennsylvania (January 19, 1777), *Writings*, 4:269, 281.

[136] William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) in the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, 1887), 4–5.

reassurance unlikely to be easily forthcoming. Howe's regulars had been kept pretty well in hand during the march across New Jersey, but the same could not be said of the Hessians, for whom plundering and confiscation were an accepted means of improving a soldier's income. (In Germany, the expectation of being let loose on a conquered countryside was understood as a prime motivation for enlisting.)

With the king's army gone and the king's victims eager for revenge, the plight of New Jersey's Loyalists became perilous. On January 25, 1777, Washington issued a proclamation demanding that anyone who had signed the king's oath to surrender "such oath … and take the oath of allegiance of the United States of America" within 30 days. But even those who not taken the king's oath, or even those who had tried to keep their heads down between Loyalists and rebels, were not exempt from harassment and threats. The rebel governor of New Jersey, William Livingston, denounced "the skulking Neutral, who, leaving to others the Heat and Burden of the day, means in the final Result to reap the Fruits of that Victory for which he will not contend," and his New Jersey militiamen took him at his word. Dr. Jonathan Odell, a physician in Burlington and a part-time missionary for the Church of England's Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, was already a marked man for his Loyalist sympathies, but he made matters worse for himself when he agreed to act as an interpreter for Carl von Donop. As soon as von Donop was gone, "two captains and a number of armed men" came hunting for Odell, forcing him to "leave my wife and three Children (the youngest not five weeks old) and to ramble as a refugee, God knows where." James Moody, a wealthy Sussex County farmer, at first tried to stay neutral, "a silent, but not unconcerned spectator of the black cloud that had been gathering." Nevertheless, he had been threatened repeatedly, and when the British withdrew from New Jersey the threats became more vivid. Finally, in the spring of 1777, "he saw a number of armed men marching towards his house," and he took leave of them for the safety of New York, where he joined Cortlandt Skinner's Loyalist battalions.[137]

One group of New Jersey Loyalists, however, had no difficulty leaving home—no regrets—and they were New Jersey's black slaves. The calling out of the rebel militia, and the back-and-forth of the armies in New Jersey, created an atmosphere of instability which, just on those terms alone,

[137] "General Washington's Proclamation" (January 25, 1777), *Writings*, 4:297; Freeman, *Washington*, 332–3; *New Jersey in the American Revolution*, ed. Gerlach, 235–6, 244.

loosened the bonds of slavery, and in Somerset County slaves boasted that "it was not necessary to please their masters, for they should not have their masters long." Once the British army moved into New Jersey, slaves in Monmouth county ran off and did not stop running until they "were on board the enemy's fleet" in New York Harbor. In December alone, 50 slaves in Bergen, Essex, Somerset, and Middlesex counties took French leave of their masters, seeking what the black Loyalist Boston King called "the happiness of liberty, of which I knew nothing before." In February, enough slave refugees had collected behind British lines that a regiment of Black Pioneers was organized as a kind of pick-and-spade battalion for doing fatigue work. Titus Corlies, a Monmouth county slave, organized a partisan unit of black Loyalists under the *nom-de-guerre* of Col. Tye, and he specialized in scouting, raids, barn-burnings, and ambushes of rebel New Jerseyans.[138] The Revolution, which had begun as resistance, had now become a war; and worse than a war, it was taking on the lineaments of a *civil* war. It would be fought, not only between rebels and Loyalists, not only between regulars and Continentals, but between factions of rebels against one another.

---

[138] Graham Russell Hodges, *Slavery and Freedom in the Rural North: African Americans in Monmouth County, New Jersey, 1665–1865* (Madison, WI, 1997), 92–102.

Lecture Thirteen
"Congress Are Not a Fit Body"

Scope: In early March 1777, the Continental Congress returned to Philadelphia after a tedious spell of inactivity in Baltimore, where it had fled the British advance to the Delaware River. The delegates were facing tasks they had never experienced before, such as the establishment, outfitting, and management of an army. Congress tried to pass much of this responsibility onto the states, but the states had their own militia to support. Congress's solution was to create myriad committees to carry out myriad functions, both executive and legislative. However, there weren't enough people in Congress to carry out both legislative and executive functions. After all, the Congress was an ad hoc body with no legal standing to govern the states and with no power to levy taxes. In addition, states were suspicious of the Congress's attempts to control them and to form any kind of a union. Unable to solve these challenges, the Congressional delegates were disposed to blame the costly, dangerous army—and Washington. And they also managed to take steps to form an alliance with France.

Outline

I. In March 1777, the Continental Congress returned to Philadelphia from Baltimore, where it had fled the British advance to the Delaware River.

- **A.** The delegates vested broad powers in General Washington and left for Baltimore.
- **B.** In Baltimore, by mid-January, the number of congressional delegates had dwindled considerably.
  - **1.** Of the 345 members who served in the Second Continental Congress from May 1775 until its final adjournment in 1788, not more than 65 had met together at one time in the first two years of the war. In time to come, that number would drop as low as nine.
  - **2.** The turnover rate among the membership at large was not encouraging either.

II. These delegates were also facing tasks that none of them had ever faced before.

A. Those who had served in the colonial legislatures had argued with royal governors, voted taxes for various public works, and appointed a handful of colonial offices.

B. They were wholly unprepared for what awaited them as members of the Continental Congress, and that was especially true of the affairs of the Continental army.

1. They had been called upon to authorize the creation of an army and all it entailed and then finding some way to pay for it all.

2. Congress coped by forming committees: 114 in 1777 alone, and 3,429 during the course of the war.

C. Congress's first instinct had been to lay as much of the war-making responsibility onto the states as it could.

1. But the states had militias of their own to outfit, so Congress resorted to creating the committees to do these jobs itself, starting in September 1775, with a Secret Committee responsible for arming and equipping the Continental army.

2. This move soon necessitated the creation of myriad other committees to handle such issues as import agreements, warfare at sea, the Continental treasury, and medical affairs.

D. The reality was that the Continental Congress was first a legislative body, but the war forced it to take on executive functions as well.

1. No one really had time or expertise for both functions, but no one was willing to give up being both.

2. But the Congress had become obsessed with concentrating power in its hands alone.

III. The Continental Congress suffered from two major structural defects that kept it from exercising the power it was intent on holding.

A. First, it was an ad hoc body that had no legal standing.

B. Second, it had no power to levy taxes directly on the people of the states or on the states themselves.

1. Congress had no assets of its own.

2. It could raise money only by borrowing at home or abroad, or by printing it in the form of promissory notes, paper currency and "quartermaster's certificates" in lieu of hard coin to contractors and soldiers.

IV. The failure to find some independent means of funding the Congress produced a nightmare.

A. Army officers who were Continental quartermasters often tapped their own funds and credit to feed and equip their troops.

B. By 1779 the army was £2 million in debt and mistrust of army credit was widespread.

C. Congress hoped that printing its own unsecured paper currency would persuade farmers and merchants to part more readily with supplies, but the unsecured Continental bills only drove prices up and created a black market for operating in hard coin.

V. The primary object of the colonial rebellion had been to throw off the British yoke.

A. In many places the vacuum created by the annihilation of British rule was filled by replacing them with Americanized elites.

B. In other states, the crowds in the streets were determined to prevent the substitution of one unpopular government for another unpopular government. These states became laboratories for experiments in republican politics.

1. In Pennsylvania, the office of governor was eliminated as "too monarchical" and replaced with an executive committee and a single-house assembly elected through broadly democratized voting rights.
2. Twelve of the new revolutionary governors rose from the lowest ranks of colonial society.

C. If the states were so disinclined to trust the "great men" within their own boundaries, they could not be expected to be any less resentful at the attempts of an alien Congress to control them.

1. The first call for a "plan of union" was offered in Congress by Richard Henry Lee as part of the same resolution that triggered the Declaration of Independence.
2. A committee formed in June 1776 and led by John Dickinson produced a draft set of "articles of confederation" clearly aimed at refashioning Congress into a national government with exclusive and sovereign powers over the states.
3. Suspicions of the states, and between the states, kept the Articles of Confederation stalled in Congress until the end of 1777, and unratified by the requisite number of states until 1781.

VI. None of this boded well for George Washington in the winter of 1776–1777.

- **A.** Expenses and conflicts were mounting because the war was dragging on, and many thought the war was dragging on because the wrong people were fighting it.
  - **1.** A standing professional army such as Washington promoted was the bête noire of every republican political theorist.
  - **2.** Therefore, it was easy to blame the Continental Congress's frustrations on Washington's Continental army.
- **B.** It was also easy to blame Washington himself.
  - **1.** Congress saw Washington as a would-be Caesar—except that he routinely lost battles.
  - **2.** John Adams was suspicious of the way members of Congress "idolized" Washington.
  - **3.** Congress created new headaches for Washington by foisting on him a string of European military officers with dubious records.

VII. There was one thing the Congress did manage to do right, and that was to take steps to form an alliance with France.

- **A.** For years, Louis XV had wanted a rematch of the war which had cost him pride and his American possessions, and his successor, Louis XVI, and his advisor, the Comte de Vergennes, believed that the weakest link in Britain's chain of empire was the American colonies.
- **B.** But the Congress and the Continental army would have to prove that it could do more than merely avoid defeat before France would take any risks.

Suggested Reading:

Buchanan, *The Road to Valley Forge*, chaps. 10–11.

Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, chaps. 1–3.

Rakove, *The Beginnings of National Politics*, chaps. 7–9.

Questions to Consider:

1. What factors crippled the ability of the Continental Congress to function effectively?
2. In what ways was the Continental Congress more of a hindrance than a help to Washington and the Continental army?

Lecture Thirteen—Transcript
“Congress Are Not a Fit Body”

In early March 1777, the Continental Congress straggled back to Philadelphia from Baltimore, where it had fled during the crisis of the British advance to the Delaware River. “Straggled” is the operative word here, because both Congress’s retreat and its relocation had not been pleasant to behold. William Whipple, who represented New Hampshire in the Congress, remembered that, “The near approach of the enemy” in December “struck such a panick in all orders of the people” in Philadelphia that “the contagion seized the nerves of some members of Congress,” as well. It dismayed Congressman Whipple to realize that if the British “wod get possession of Philad., many in that City” would be only too happy “to receive & it’s probable invite them.” The delegates of the Congress, threatened as they were, had voted to vest “large Powers in General Washington”; in fact they gave Washington what amounted to temporary dictatorship powers, and then they took their hats and coats, and collectively they left as fast as they could for Baltimore. But in Baltimore, panic gave way to—and was replaced by—boredom and futility. “We live here in a Convent,” complained Benjamin Rush, a Philadelphia physician and a member of the Pennsylvania delegation to the Congress. “We converse only with one another. We are precluded from all opportunities of feeling the pulse of the public upon our measures.” Matthew Thornton, who had only taken his seat a few months before, wrote sarcastically that in Baltimore “the man with Boots has very great Advantage of a man with Shoes,” because “the Carriages are stoped by the Depth of the mire in the middle of the Street.” Thornton snarled that from the time he had left home in New England, “The prayers, & Graces became Shorter at every Stage, untill we hear neither.” In Baltimore, “the Religion is, take all advantage, pay your Debt, & do as you please.” Oliver Wolcott, also sitting in the Congress, summed up the prevailing attitude in a letter that he wrote to his wife on January 14, 1777: “I Wish these troublesome Times were over.”[139]

---

[139] Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 232–3; Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 128; Samuel Adams to James Warren (January 1, 1777), Oliver Wolcott to Laura Wolcott (January 14, 1777), Matthew Thornton to Meshach Ware (January 23, 1777), and William Whipple to Joseph Whipple (January 9, 1777), *Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 6 January 1, 1777–April 30, 1777.*

One reason for this boredom and inactivity was that a sizeable number of the Congress's members had headed for home rather than Baltimore. In mid-January 1777, the Congress had "no delegates attending from … Delaware, and but one from … New York, who … is not empowered to give the vote of that state." Congress, in fact, had to end up lecturing the various state governments—for they were states now, no longer provinces or colonies—on the "Necessity of every State being properly represented in Congress to add Weight & Reputation to the Counsels of America." The razor-tongued Matthew Thornton warned his friends in New Hampshire "the necessity of having good men, in Congress, is so evident, that I shall only beg they may be sent in time." Not that the Continental Congress had ever been a very large body to begin with: Of the 345 individuals who served in the Second Continental Congress, from its convening in May 1775 until its final adjournment in 1788, not more than 65 met together at any one time in the first two years of the revolution. In time to come, that number would, in fact, drop as low as nine. They were already operating under their second president, John Hancock of Massachusetts, who had succeeded the first president of the Congress, Peyton Randolph of Virginia (and succeeded Randolph, incidentally, just in time to be the man who signed the Declaration of Independence with his memorably large, bold handwriting; hence the phrase, putting your John Hancock on something.) They would have a third president before the end of 1777, though, in the person of Henry Laurens of South Carolina. The turnover rate among the membership at large was not much more encouraging than the turnover rate among the presidents of the Continental Congress. John Adams, writing to Abigail Adams from Baltimore, was downcast at the "melancholy prospect before me of a congress continually changing, until very few faces remain, that I saw in the first Congress … Mr. [Samuel] Adams, Mr. [Roger] Sherman, Col. Richard Henry Lee, Mr. [Samuel] Chase and Mr. [William] Paca, are all that remain. The rest are dead, resigned, deserted or cutt up into governors, etc., at home."[140]

It didn't help, either, that these delegates were facing tasks which none of them had ever faced before. Those who had served in the colonial legislatures had never really had to do much more than argue with royal governors, vote taxes for odds-and-ends of public works, and appoint a handful of colonial

---

[140] To the New York Convention (January 28, 1777), *Letters of Delegates to Congress: Volume 6 January 1, 1777–April 30, 1777*and journal entry for January 24, 1777, in *Journals of the Continental Congress*, ed. W.C. Ford (Washington, 1907), 7:61; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 234.

offices. In Massachusetts, for instance, the entire colonial service—which had to be appointed by the Massachusetts colonial legislature—was composed of exactly six people; that didn't take a long time to make decisions about. Rarely did these colonial legislatures deal with more than two or three bills in a single session, and single sessions were likely to last no longer than a few weeks in a year. In Pennsylvania, where William Penn's Quakers dominated the legislature, the colonial assembly was elected each October 1, met briefly on October 14, and adjourned until early January the following year. They sat together for a month or two as a legislature, adjourned again until May, and then disbanded until one last brief session at the end of September. With a schedule like that, the Pennsylvania legislature failed to enact any statutes at all in one year out of every three. As a result, the people who came from the colonial legislatures to sit in the Continental Congress were wholly unprepared for what awaited them as members of the Continental Congress. That was especially true concerning the affairs of the Continental army.

Only five members of the Congress had acquired any previous experience in British army service in the wars for empire, and only one of those, Roger Sherman of Connecticut, had put in time as an organizer of supplies. Yet the Congress had been called upon since 1775 to authorize the creation of an army, nominate a senior general—George Washington—commission major generals and brigadier generals, set up departments for feeding the army, equipping the army, storing and distributing supplies, signing contracts, constructing barracks, managing hospitals, and then finding some way to pay for it all. This was a logistical challenge which even the British found daunting, and they had to cope with 3,000 miles of ocean as an extra. The Congressional method for coping with these demands was to appoint committees. In fact, in 1777 alone Congress created 114 committees, and over the course of the Revolution it would create 3,429 of them. Given the unpredictable numbers of delegates who actually showed up to do business, these committees tended to be three-member affairs, and many of them showed that inexperience and ineptitude were not improved or dispelled when a larger number was involved, whether that number was 65 or just three.[141]

---

[141] John M. Murrin, "Political Development," *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*, eds. J.P. Greene & J.R. Pole (Baltimore, 1984), 439; Joan de Lourdes Leonard, "The Organization and Procedure of the Pennsylvania Assembly, 1682–1776," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 72 (July 1948), 220; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783*

The first instinct of the Congress had been to fob as much of the war-making responsibility onto the states as it could. While the Continental army was still encamped around Boston, the Congress loftily ordered the Massachusetts Provincial Congress to provide "wood and hay, on the most reasonable terms." They then asked Pennsylvania to outfit ships to harass the British. They ordered Philadelphia to create an inventory of cloth "in this City" for uniforms, and instructed New Jersey's delegates in the Congress to arrange for transporting "a quantity of Gunpowder," with all the bills to be sent to Congress. (Congress would presumably pay for them.) But the states—instead of taking orders from Congress about supplying the army—had militia of their own to outfit, and directives sent to them by Congress were easy to ignore in places where local needs cried out much more loudly. Congress resorted to creating the committees to do these jobs itself, starting in September 1775, with a Secret Committee responsible for arming and equipping the Continental army. Since British imperial policies over the previous century had ensured that no domestic colonial foundries and arsenals existed to compete with those in the home islands, the Secret Committee was soon finding out that it had to branch out into import agreements, and this necessitated the creation of another committee in November 1775, the Committee of Secret Correspondence. Warfare at sea also became more than the Secret Committee could handle, and in January 1776, a Marine Committee was formed; followed by a committee to oversea the Continental treasury; another one to handle accounts payable; a medical committee; and a Board of War. All until John Adams found that he was spending every waking minute between six in the morning and noon in committee meetings of various uninspiring sorts.[142]

That might have been the moment to suggest that the Congress was trying to do too much *as a Congress*. In other words, the Continental Congress was, first of all, a legislative body; it was created for discussion, deliberation, and legislative action. But the war forced it to take on executive functions as well, and even if many of those executive functions were hived-off to committees, it was still committees of the same people who were performing legislative functions at the same time. No one really had time for both functions; no one really had the expertise to perform both. The problem was that no one in Congress was much willing to give up being both legislature and executive. Well might Samuel Chase, sitting in

---

(Chapel Hill, NC, 1984), 20; Thomas Fleming, *Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge* (New York, 2005), 13.

[142] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 23.

the Congress, object that "Congress are not a fit body to act as a council of war; they are too large, too slow, and their Resolutions can never be kept secret." Well might John Adams agree that Congress needed to create separate executive offices filled with professionals experienced in what Adams called "either military or commercial branches of knowledge or business." And well might John Dickinson of Pennsylvania urge the Congress to create "a Chamber of Accounts, an Office of Treasury, a Board of War, and a Board of Admiralty." They could suggest these things for all that they liked; it was all for naught. The Congress had become so obsessed with concentrating power in its hands alone that they wouldn't even take a formal recess until 1784. Even the "dictatorial powers" the Congress conferred on Washington during the emergency of December 1776 were only for six months or less, "unless sooner determined by Congress."[143]

Yet, for all its obsession with keeping control of American affairs securely its own hands, the Continental Congress suffered from two major structural defects which crippled it from actually exercising all that power with any effectiveness. The first problem with Congress was that the Congress was: an ad hoc body. It had no legal standing, and it neither replaced the old royal colonial governments in America nor could it override the authority claimed by the new rebel state regimes. It had been created as a consultative agency at the height of the Boston port crisis, and it simply continued to sit as though it had been unanimously declared to be an American supra-legislature. But no state recognized it as having sovereign authority and no state felt obliged by more than self-interest or circumstances to obey its dictates. Presumably the states recognized the Congress as having some sort of standing simply by virtue of the fact that they were sending delegates to it. But what that standing was, exactly, remained maddeningly unclear all the way through the Revolution. The second structural problem the Congress suffered from grew out of the first: that Congress had no power to tax, either to levy taxes directly on the people of the states, nor power to levy taxes on the states themselves. Since the Congress had no assets of its own, it had only two ways to raise the money necessary to pay for its biggest and most necessary expense: the army. One was to borrow money, either at home or abroad, and the other was to print it, by issuing promissory notes, IOUs, paper currency, and eventually "quartermaster's certificates" in lieu of hard coin paid to contractors and soldiers.

---

[143] Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics*, 195–8; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 233.

The failure to find some independent means of funding the Congress produced a nightmare far greater than any of the military setbacks the Continental army experienced, because that failure to find a reliable means of funding meant that Congress starved, froze, and disarmed its own men instead of simply doing as the British did (shooting them in battle, which might have been more merciful). Continental army quartermasters—the officers who oversaw the army's equipment and Continental army commissaries—bought its food, waited for eternity to get money from the Congress, and since the army could not wait nearly that long to be fed and equipped, army officers tapped their own funds and credit. James Reed, who was Washington's adjutant-general and assistant deputy commissary, spent £4000 of his own money, and then as he related it, "took to borrowing of my neighbors till they were all Dry." Deputy quartermaster Udny Hay offered to sign a loan himself if the governor of New York would issue bonds that would enable him "for getting the army a proper supply of provisions." By 1779, the army commissary department alone—just the commissary department—was £2 million in debt, and mistrust of army promises had grown so thick that one Continental forage master reported that people "say they would not Trust their Father if in public service." Congress hoped, helplessly, that printing its own unsecured paper currency would help persuade farmers and merchants to part more readily with supplies. It was wrong. Unsecured Continental paper money only drove prices through the roof and created a black market for operating in hard coin. By the close of 1777, Congress had printed 31 millions of new Continental dollars; by 1779, that figure had reached $200 millions. By 1779, it took 40 of those dollars in paper to purchase the equivalent of what a Spanish gold dollar in hard coin would buy.[144]

It would be a fine thing to be able to say that eventually the states came to their senses and rescued their heroic soldiers from such desperate ends, but they didn't. The primary object of the colonial rebellions had been to throw off the British yoke. In many places, the vacuum created by the annihilation of British imperial authority was simply filled by the replacement of one collection of political elites. The old elites—the Loyalists, imperial officials, and royal governors—were simply tossed out, and they were replaced with another Americanized collection of elites. In New York, royal governor William Tryon was *out*; Maj. Gen. Philip Schuyler, the Hudson River *grandee*, was in. In Virginia, Lord Dunmore was *out* as the king's governor; but Patrick Henry was *in* by vote of the House of Delegates. In

[144] Rakove, *Beginnings of National Politics,* 212; Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 30, 71–2.

many places like those, all that the revolution succeeded in doing was replacing one elite with another. But in other states, the hold of the surviving colonial elites on events was so weak, and the determination of the crowds in the streets to prevent the substitution of one unpopular government for another unpopular government was so strong, that the states were turned into laboratories for experiments in republican politics. Readers of John Locke and the English Whigs—who assumed that republicanism meant just one thing—now discovered that it could mean many things; and not all of them good. In Pennsylvania, the rebel provincial convention debated not just independence, but "whether the future legislation of this State should have the power of lessening property when it became excessive in individuals," and the new Pennsylvania state constitution of 1776 altogether eliminated the office of governor as "too monarchical" and replaced it with an executive committee and a single-house assembly elected through broadly democratized voting rights, without "setting-up distinctions, and creating *separate*, and *jarring interests* in a society." As it was, 12 of the new Revolutionary governors rose from the lowest ranks of colonial society: George Mathews of Georgia was the son of an Ulster immigrant and a one-time Continental soldier; Thomas Johnson, a small-time lawyer from rural Maryland; George Walton, also of Georgia was a carpenter's apprentice and militia officer. Nineteen of the members of the Pennsylvania Provincial Convention and the Pennsylvania Constitutional Convention were merchants, so you might think: 19; a healthy chunk of elite Pennsylvania society was represented there. But so were two teachers, two surveyors, a rope maker, a baker, a tailor, a grocer, and a tanner. Only two of the 92 members of these assemblies had college degrees.[145]

If the states were so disinclined to trust the "great men"—the elite, within their own boundaries—then they could not be expected to be any less resentful at the attempts of an alien Congress to control them, something which became painfully apparent when the Continental Congress began discussing the creation of some form of confederated government for America. It would, again, be a fine thing to say that the revolutionary

[145] Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1969), 89, 137, 169, 230; Wood, *The American Revolution*, 66–70; Jackson Turner Main, *The Sovereign States, 1775–1783* (New York, 1973), 190–1; John N. Shaeffer, "Public Consideration of the 1776 Pennsylvania Constitution," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 98 (October 1974), 426–7; Robert Gough, "Notes on the Pennsylvania Revolutionaries of 1776," *PMHB* 96 (January 1972), 97–8.

generation clearly understood the principle of Aesop's fable—"united we stand, divided we fall"—but again, they didn't. The first call for a "plan of union" among the colonies—now states—was offered in Congress by Richard Henry Lee as part of the same resolution that had triggered the Declaration of Independence. Lee had asked "That a plan of confederation be prepared and transmitted to the respective colonies for their consideration and approbation." On June 12, 1776, the Congress had responded by forming—that's right—a committee, to accomplish this purpose; this time a committee of 12 members, with Pennsylvania's John Dickinson as the leading light. Dickinson's committee produced a draft set of "articles of confederation," and managed to do it in exactly one month; it was a document that was pretty clearly aimed at refashioning the Continental Congress into a real national government with exclusive and sovereign powers over the states.

In Article 18 of Dickinson's draft, Dickinson and his committee awarded the Confederation Congress the

> sole and exclusive right and power of determining on peace and war and peace … settling all disputes and differences … concerning boundaries, jurisdictions, or any other cause whatever—coining money and regulating the value thereof … establishing and regulating post offices … appointing general officers of the land forces in the service of the United States.

All of it provided, of course, as a sop to state anxieties, provided "the Delegates of nine colonies freely assent to the same."

That restraint, however, was not enough. Suspicions of the states, and the suspicions between the states, over how they would be represented in this Confederation Congress—how taxation was apportioned, how control of the unsettled territories to the west was going to be established—all of these factors kept these Articles of Confederation checkmated in Congress until the end of 1777, and kept them unratified by the requisite number of states until 1781.[146]

As you can imagine, none of this boded very well for George Washington's peace of mind in the winter of 1776 to 77, since people as unhappy, untrusting, and incapable as the delegates to the Congress were soon bound to turn away from the problems they knew not how to solve,

---

146 *Journals of the Continental Congress* (June 7th and July 12th, 1776), 5:425, 546, 550–52; Jensen, *Articles of Confederation*, 128, 133, 136, 183, 238.

to inventing ones they felt they could solve. Expenses and conflicts were mounting because the war was dragging on. Why was it dragging on? Easy answer: because the wrong people were fighting it and losing it. A "standing" professional army of the sort that Washington wanted to create—and to a measure had created—in the Continental Congress that was the *bete noire* of every republican political theorist, because professional armies owed their pay, and therefore their loyalty, to kings, and they preferred the rule of kings because kings gave armies license to plunder and rob the people. It didn't improve that reputation that George III's first turn to enforcement of British imperial tax policies relied on the British army. "What is the Tendency, what has been the effect of introducing a standing army into our Metropolis?" an indignant—always indignant—John Adams asked all the way back in 1772. He answered his question by saying that the result of introducing a professional army into the life of any people was nothing but the promotion of "horrid Rancour, furious Violence, infernal Cruelty, shocking impiety and Profanation, and shameless, abandoned Debauchery."[147] It was easy to explain the frustrations of the Continental Congress by locating the source of those frustrations: not in the Congress, or in the failings of the states. No, the culprit responsible for Continental Congress frustration was George Washington's Continental army. Or sometimes the source of that frustration was in George Washington, himself.

However much George Washington comes down to us as "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," in the winter of 1777 nothing was easier for the Congress than to see George Washington as a would-be Caesar, with this single but outstanding difference from Caesar: Washington routinely lost battles. Even John Adams, in February 1777, announced that he was "distressed to see" members of Congress "disposed to idolize an image which their own hands have molten. I speak here of the superstitious veneration that is sometimes paid to General Washington." James Lovell, who sat with Adams as part of the Massachusetts delegation in the Congress, added that George Washington was guilty of "such blunders as might have disgraced a soldier of three months standing." Of course, these same critics of professional soldiers did not have any corresponding hesitation about professional soldiers when they showed up from Europe—like so many celebrity bounty hunters—hoping for promotion and reward. The Congress created new headaches for Washington by foisting upon him a string of dim military bulbs with

---

[147] Shy, *Toward Lexington*, 385.

dubious service records in unrecognizable places: people like Col. Armand de la Rouerie, Count Charles-François Broglie, and Col. Transon du Coudray; names not easily recognizable and with good reason. With plenitude of talent like that on hand, though, it was easy for the armchair generalissimos in Philadelphia to begin speculating on what other officer might make a better commander for the main army.[148]

There was, however, one thing which the Congress did manage to do right. The final part of Richard Henry Lee's independence motion of June 7, 1776, declared "that it is expedient forthwith to take the most effectual measures for forming foreign alliances." It took no great genius to understand just which foreign alliance might yield the most immediate harvest for the American cause: France. Nor were the French going to be very surprised by overtures from the Continental Congress. As early as 1765, the king of France, Louis XV, had been spoiling for a rematch of the war which had cost him his royal pride and his American possessions, and his principal foreign policy adviser, the Duc de Choiseul, frankly pointed to the American colonies as the best place to foment trouble for the British empire. In 1768, Choiseul actually selected a Bavarian soldier of fortune, Johann de Kalb, to visit America and gather information which might be useful in the event of an eruption there. Both the French king's successor in 1774, Louis XVI, and Choiseul's—Charles Gravier, the Comte de Vergennes—inherited the belief that the weakest link in Britain's chain of empire was her American colonies, and Vergennes was frankly delighted when George III's unyielding Proclamation of Rebellion in August 1775 made an American war inevitable.[149]

But the idea of France intervening in a foreign war when she had not yet recovered financially from the previous one, much less the idea of Europe's "Most Catholic Majesty" making common cause with a pack of Protestant republican rebels, gave Vergennes and Louis XVI pause. They would put no money on slow horses. The Congress and the Continental army would have to prove that they could do more than merely avoid defeat before France would risk involving its navy, treasure, and credibility in a clash with Britain. That proof, once again, is what William Howe and the British army in North America proceeded to supply.

---

[148] Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 268, 270; Arnold Whitridge, "Washington's French Volunteers," *History Today* 24 (September 1974) 593–5; James Thomas Flexner, *George Washington in the American Revolution, 1775–1783* (Boston, 1968), 194–5.

[149] Mackesy, *War in America*, 1, 27–9.

Lecture Fourteen

"America Is Not Subdued"

Scope: Trenton and Princeton broke the happy bubble of self-congratulation in which Lord George Germain had ended the year 1776. Parliament did not welcome the reassessment of what would be needed to win the war, but the Whig opposition was too weak to slow the king or Lord North's government. Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne presented to Lord George Germain a plan for invading from Canada with two strike forces. Sir William Howe would then bring his army north to rendezvous with Burgoyne at Albany, and they would jointly subdue New England. Germain happily put Burgoyne in command. The forces were far short of Burgoyne's request, but he managed to retake Ticonderoga before he was stalled by his supply train's slow progress. Philip Schuyler, preparing to block Burgoyne's progress to Albany, was recalled by Congress and replaced by his second in command, Horatio Gates. Burgoyne slowly got his army to Fort Edward, where he learned that Howe would not be joining him at Albany.

Outline

I. Lord George Germain ended the year 1776 exultant.

- **A.** His insistence that aggressive war was the only acceptable response to the uproar in America had all the appearance of working.
  1. The Northern army was in retreat.
  2. Loyalists were renewing their allegiance to the king and began shouldering the responsibility for suppressing the rebellion.
  3. General Howe had grown so confident that the end was near that he had peeled off part of his army under Henry Clinton and sent it off to a successful invasion and occupation of Newport, Rhode Island.
  4. In Parliament, Lord Germain introduced a bill to expedite the arrests of the Americans by suspending the operation of the writ of *habeas corpus* in the colonies.

B. This happy bubble burst on the news of Trenton and Princeton.

1. Through most of 1776, the Whig opposition had given up on opposing the king's demand for war, but the news of Trenton and the *habeas corpus* bill brought them back.

2. Still, the *habeas corpus* bill passed by 195 to 43.

II. Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne landed in England on December 9, 1776, and met with Lord Germain the next day to propose a plan of his own for the reconquest of America.

A. "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne has come down in historical reputation as an arrogant incompetent with a total lack of military sense, which is surely about 90 percent untrue.

1. Young Burgoyne joined as a junior officer in the 13th Light Dragoons in 1740, and in due course promotion opened up for him.

2. In the Seven Years' War, he demonstrated aptitude for command, and he rose to lieutenant colonel of the 11th Dragoons in 1759, and was commissioned to raise a new regiment of light dragoons, the 16th, which became known as "Burgoyne's Light Horse."

3. In 1761 he won a seat in Parliament, where, in 1774, he urged the North government to use persuasion rather than force.

B. The English aristocracy regarded him as a mannerless *parvenu*.

1. When in 1775 it was clear that the North government was planning a military solution in America, he changed his views and put himself forward for seconding to America with Howe and Clinton.

2. He was hardly on the ground in Boston before he began advertising plans of his own for ending the standoff and wrote letters denigrating Gage, Howe, Clinton, and Carleton.

C. Complaints about Carleton were music to the ears of Lord Germain.

1. Germain and Carleton had already had run-ins.

2. After the defeats at Trenton and Princeton, Germain was ready to hear from a general with plans to do what Carleton had not done.

III. On February 28, 1777, Burgoyne laid before Germain a series of "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada."

- **A.** The plan was to finish the job Carleton had abandoned the previous fall, with a few added strategies designed ultimately to crush the heart of the rebellion by subduing New England.
- **B.** Once New England was subdued, the Loyalists of the southern colonies would return with the tide and everyone would resume loyalty to the king.
- **C.** Germain put Burgoyne in command and informed Carleton that he was henceforth to concern himself with Canadian affairs only.
- **D.** As Burgoyne left London, he realized at the last minute that he had failed to communicate at all with William Howe and dashed off a note from shipboard.
- **E.** When Burgoyne arrived at Quebec in May 1777, and presented his orders to Sir Guy Carleton, the governor-general complied.

IV. "Gentlemanly Johnny" marshaled his forces with surprising speed, but from the beginning, two shadows fell across his path.

- **A.** The first was numbers. Burgoyne would have to make do with a top strength of 7,300; far fewer than he had requested in London.
- **B.** The second shadow was one that Burgoyne would discover much later—too late, in fact.
- **C.** Shorthanded as he was, Burgoyne set out southward toward Lake Champlain and easily dislodged American rebels from Fort Ticonderoga.
- **D.** But now the landscape began to tell on Burgoyne. After 18 days he was only three miles below Ticonderoga, owing to the laggardliness of his artillery-heavy supply train.

V. Meanwhile Philip Schuyler and his Northern army destroyed whatever roads and bridges the British might try to use.

- **A.** He had about 3,000 Continentals under his command and perhaps as many as 1,500 militia, and he warned the Congress that unless he got more, he would be forced to retreat further.
- **B.** The Congress's response was to send Schuyler orders to report in person to Washington, preparatory to a court-martial, and turn his department over to Horatio Gates.

1. Gates had originally been seconded by Washington to the Northern Department to assist Schuyler, but the two had quarreled over authority, and in the spring of 1777 Gates had a choice of either submitting to Schuyler or going back to his old job with Washington.
2. Instead, he went to Congress and denounced Schuyler.

C. This should have cost Gates his credibility, but as Schuyler's reputation sank, Gates looked better and better, and by August, Gates was in charge of Schuyler's department.

D. Washington sent him what reinforcements he could spare, including Benjamin Lincoln of Massachusetts and Benedict Arnold.

VI. Burgoyne did not get his army moving until July 24, and then it took 10 days to travel the 16 miles overland to Fort Edward, where the second shadow fell across his path.

A. A letter from William Howe, written on July 17, informed Burgoyne that instead of joining him at Albany, William Howe had put his entire force on transports and was sailing to the Chesapeake Bay.

B. Burgoyne was utterly on his own, with no good choices.

Suggested Reading:

Furneaux, *Saratoga*, chaps. 4–6.

Ketchum, *Saratoga*, chaps. 15–18.

Pancake, *1777: The Year of the Hangman*, chaps. 6, 8.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 18.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why did Germain and Burgoyne believe that a Hudson Valley strategy would bring the Revolution to a close?
2. Why was Horatio Gates selected for command of the Northern army?

Lecture Fourteen—Transcript
“America Is Not Subdued”

Lord George Germain ended the year 1776 in a state of tremendous self-congratulation. As secretary of state for the American colonies, his insistence that aggressive war was the only acceptable response to the uproar in America had all the look of working. The Americans had been cleared out of Canada, and their Northern army was in retreat. George Washington and the “main army” had been forced to abandon New York City, then all of New Jersey; and it could, by all reports, scarcely keep itself together. Loyalists were flooding in to renew their allegiance to the king and to begin shouldering the responsibility for suppressing what was left of the rebellion. General Howe had grown so confident that the end was near that he had peeled off part of his army under Henry Clinton and sent it off to a successful invasion and occupation of Newport, Rhode Island. Newport, in turn, would form an additional base in the upcoming campaigning season of 1777, because from there, and from elsewhere, it would be an opportunity finally to launch a three-pronged attack on the home of the rebellion: New England. From New York City; from Canada; sealing off the Hudson Valley; and then from Albany eastward to link up with Clinton’s division from Rhode Island: that, Howe was confident, would finally snuff out the last embers of rebellion. Howe would need to keep only 8,000 men in New Jersey to keep Washington and the main Continental army at bay, if indeed Washington had any army left by the spring of 1777.

In Parliament, Germain and Lord North introduced a bill to expedite the arrests of the rebel kingpins in America by suspending the operation of the writ of *habeas corpus* in the colonies. They were already planning for the post-war retribution. Then, of course, there would be rewards all around: knighthoods for William Howe, Henry Clinton, and Guy Carleton; and leave for the winter in England for Clinton and John Burgoyne.

This happy bubble burst on the news of Trenton and Princeton. Lt. Col. William Harcourt—the commander of Howe’s 16th Light Dragoons—wrote dismally to his father, the 2nd Earl Harcourt, that

> The Americans though they seem to be ignorant of the precision and order, and even of the principles, by which large bodies are moved, yet they possess some of the requisites for making good troops, such as extreme cunning, great industry in moving ground and felling of

> wood, activity and a spirit of enterprise upon any advantage. Having said thus much, I have no occasion to add that, though it was once the fashion of this army to treat them in the most contemptible light, they are now become a formidable enemy.

This kind of reappraisal was received even less happily in Parliament. Through most of 1776, the Whig opposition—in this case, William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham, Charles James Fox and Edmund Burke, in the House of Commons—had by this point given up on opposing the king's headlong demand for war in America and simply stayed away from debate in Parliament because they regarded it as an exercise in futility. But the news of Trenton and the *habeas corpus* brought them back to the House. Edmund Burke wrote to his constituents in Bristol that:

> The [*habeas corpus*] act … is among the fruits of the American war,—a war in my humble opinion productive of many mischiefs, of a kind which distinguish it from all others. Not only our policy is deranged, and our empire distracted, but our laws and our legislative spirit appear to have been totally perverted by it. We have made war on our colonies, not by arms only, but by laws. As hostility and law are not very concordant ideas, every step we have taken in this business has been made by trampling on some maxim of justice or some capital principle of wise government … America is not subdued. Not one unattacked village which was originally adverse throughout that vast continent has yet submitted from love or terror. You have the ground you encamp on, and you have no more. The cantonments of your troops and your dominions are exactly of the same extent. You spread devastation, but you do not enlarge the sphere of authority. The events of this war are of so much greater magnitude than those who either wished or feared it ever looked for, that this alone ought to fill every considerate mind with anxiety and diffidence.

For the moment, however, the Whig opposition still fell far short of commanding any hesitation on the part of the king or Lord North's government. The *habeas corpus* bill passed a sullen House of Commons by a comfortable margin of 195 to 43, even though the 43 did not represent the number of Whig MPs who simply refused to show up and vote. But Edmond Burke could only complain to Charles James Fox that "the popular humour we float in" is a "sort of heavy lumpish acquiescence in government, without much respect or esteem for those that compose it." It

would, in other words, take a good, earthshaking military disaster to transform "acquiescence" into dissent. That would come more quickly than Burke or Fox could have imagined.[150]

Maj. Gen. John Burgoyne landed in England on December 9, 1776, on leave from the Canadian war front to consult with Lord George Germain. In fact, he was in Germain's office the next day, not so much to consult as to propose an already-conceived plan of his own for the reconquest of America. "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne has come down in historical reputation as a foppish, arrogant incompetent with plenty of Mayfair style but a total want of basic military sense. This is surely about 90 percent untrue. His father, John Burgoyne, an army captain and a "man of fashion," had neither money nor family connections to guarantee his son's future—apart from an education at Westminster School—and no career to recommend but that of the army, which young Burgoyne joined as a junior officer in the 13th Light Dragoons in 1740. Burgoyne, nevertheless, had made a lifelong friend at school of James Stanley, the eldest son of the Earl of Darby; and in 1742, Burgoyne eloped with Stanley's sister, the Lady Charlotte. The Earl of Darby disapproved; but even the black sheep son-in-law of an Earl was still the son-in-law of an Earl, and in due course Burgoyne found the gates of promotion in the army opened unto him. He also gambled heavily—so heavily that he was forced to sell his commission in 1751 to pay off some of his creditors—and he fled with his wife to France to escape the others.

After seven years of somewhat more economical living in France, the old Earl of Darby finally relented, paid off his son-in-law's debts, settled an income of £400 a year on his daughter, and got Burgoyne another commission in the 11th Dragoons. This was just in time for the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, and Burgoyne soon demonstrated more than the usual English aristocrat's aptitude for command. Dragoons were the heavy cavalry of the British army: They were armed with heavyweight, wrist-breaking sabers and sawed-down carbines; they rode into action, dismounted, and peppered enemy infantry with a disorienting spray of musketry; or else they charged home with their heavy sabers, cracking skulls and shoving wavering infantry units over the brink into chaos. It was

---

[150] Harcourt in Scheer & Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats*, 221; Burke, to Charles James Fox (October 8, 1777) and "Letter to John Farr and John Harris, Esqrs., Sheriffs of the City of Bristol, on Affairs of America. 1777," in *The Works of the Rt Honourable Edmund Burke* (Boston 1869) 2:202–205; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 94.

precisely the kind of warfare Burgoyne rejoiced in. He rose to lieutenant colonel of the 11th in 1759, and he was commissioned to raise a new regiment of light dragoons—the 16th Light Dragoons, whom we've already seen in action; that was, of course, when they captured Washington's second-in-command, Charles Lee—and this regiment became known simply as "Burgoyne's Light Horse." In the closing phase of the Seven Years' War, Burgoyne managed to capture the city of Valencia with only his cavalry, and overran an enemy encampment at Villa Valha in modern day Portugal. He came out of the war a hero to his men, largely because he strongly opposed the notion that the men in the ranks were just dumb brutes waiting to be kicked into obedience "like spaniels by a stick," and Burgoyne urged instead that the men in the ranks be led from the front by appeals to their courage and their honor as Englishmen. Burgoyne was idolized as "the soldier's friend," and in 1761 he won a seat in Parliament, where, in 1774, he urged the North government to "see America convinced by persuasion rather than the sword."[151]

Burgoyne might have been idolized by his men, but not by the English aristocracy, who regarded him as a mannerless *parvenu*. He pestered successive secretaries of state for war for promotion, a band for his regiment, and more prestigious commands; always invoking his connections to the Earl of Darby as leverage. When, in February 1775, it seemed clear that the North government was planning on a military solution to the American problems, Burgoyne quickly changed his tune about using persuasion with America and put himself right in the way for seconding to America in company with William Howe and Henry Clinton. He was hardly on the ground in Boston before he began advertising plans of his own for ending the American standoff, including a scheme which would commission him as a sort of plenipotentiary for negotiating with the Americans. Burgoyne busied himself with letters back to England denigrating Gage, Howe, and Clinton. He was given command of the reinforcements sent to drive the rebels' Northern army out of Canada, only to find that the governor-general, Sir Guy Carleton, was fully determined to keep control of the Canadian forces for himself. So another spate of letters flowed from Burgoyne London-wards, now denigrating Guy Carleton for not having pursued Benedict Arnold more vigorously, and not having recaptured Ticonderoga by the end of 1776.

[151] George N. Billias, "John Burgoyne: Ambitious General," in *George Washington's Opponents*, 145–62; "John Burgoyne," *DNB*, 7:340.

This kind of complaining was actually all music to the ears of Lord George Germain. The aggressive American secretary had already triggered an unpleasant quarrel with Guy Carleton over the appointment of a quartermaster general in Canada, and neither Germain nor Carleton was the sort who never went in for a fight without going in for a funeral. Germain had not been happy with Carleton when Carleton called off his advance down Lake Champlain in October 1776: If Carleton had moved with sufficient vigor, he could have walked over the battered forces of Benedict Arnold and Philip Schuyler in upper New York and trapped Washington from behind while Howe pounded him from in front, and ended the war before Washington could get away to New Jersey. That at least was Germain's reasoning. With the defeats at Trenton and Princeton meaning that the pursuit and destruction of Washington would now require another campaigning season in 1777, Germain was more than ready to hear from another general who had *real* battle honors attached to his name presenting a plan to do what Carleton had not done.[152]

On February 28, 1777, Burgoyne laid before Germain a series of "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada." In it, Burgoyne proposed to devote the summer of 1777 to finishing the job Sir Guy Carleton had abandoned the previous fall, although with a few significant add-ons. First of all, in Burgoyne's plan, a strikeforce would jump off from Montreal and move down the Hudson River Valley to Albany. A second, smaller force would prevent the Americans from concentrating in the path of the Montreal force by invading New York from Niagara eastward through the Mohawk River Valley, and then link up with the Montreal force at Albany. Finally, Sir William Howe in New York City would move northward up the Hudson River to rendezvous with these forces at Albany, and then the combined army—including the British division in Rhode Island—would turn and crush the heart of the rebellion by subduing New England once and for all. Once New England was under the heel, the residual Loyalism of the southern colonies would return with the tide, and everyone in British North America would resume their loyalty to the king.

The kinds of forces Burgoyne estimated were needed to achieve this were substantial: For the Montreal force, he asked 8,000 new regular infantry, 2,000 Canadian militia, and 1,000 Indian scouts recruited from the Iroquois tribes. Burgoyne modestly made no mention of himself as the commander of this expedition, but it took no long thought to guess to whom the plan

---

[152] Mackesy, *War in America*, 105–07.

pointed. Germain, for his part, was only too happy to write out orders, putting Burgoyne in command and informing Sir Guy Carleton that he would, for the future, confine himself to managing and administering affairs in Canada. On March 27, 1777, "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne left London, realized at the last minute that he had failed to communicate at all with William Howe, and sent a letter off on board HMS *Albion* to Howe. When Burgoyne stepped off his own ship, the frigate *Apollo*, at Quebec on May 6, 1777 and presented his orders to Sir Guy Carleton, the governor-general of Canada was either too circumspect to try sabotaging Burgoyne's plan, or too convinced that Burgoyne was slated to become the victim of his own delusions of victory and Carleton needed only to stand out of his way and let that happen. From either point, Burgoyne conceded, "Had that officer [Sir Guy Carleton] been acting for himself, or for his brother, he could not have shown more indefatigable zeal than he did to comply with and expedite my requisitions and desires."[153]

"Gentlemanly Johnny" marshaled his forces with surprising speed. He had on hand eight regiments of regulars, including the 9th, 20th, and 21st Regiments of Foot—the 21st being the Royal North British Fusiliers—the 24th Regiment of Foot, the 29th Regiment of Foot—those are the regiments whose pickets had set off the Boston Massacre long, long ago—and the 31st, 53rd, and 62nd Regiments of Foot as well. He was ready to begin his advance south from Fort St. John on June 12, but from the beginning, two shadows fell across his path. The first was numbers: The 29th and 31st Regiments of Foot would stay with Sir Guy Carleton in Quebec to keep a lid on things, but the six regiments this left amounted to only 3,100 infantry in the ranks. The balance of the infantry Burgoyne had requested, like it or not, had to be made up from German mercenaries—five big regiments, mostly from Brunswick; plus an assortment of jäger units and even a small detachment of dismounted dragoons—amounting in all to another 2,600 men. There was also a band of about 200 New York Loyalists, another 230 or so Canadians, and between 200–500 Indians. Even at the most generous—counting officers, cavalry, and artillery—Burgoyne would have to make do with a top strength of 7,300; "far short," as he wrote

[153] "Thoughts for Conducting the War from the Side of Canada" (February 28, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:41–6; Richard D. Ketchum, *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War* (New York 1997), 84; Billias, "John Burgoyne," 173; Burgoyne, in *The Parliamentary Register; or, History of the Proceedings and Debates of the House of Commons* (London, 1802), 12:130.

later, "of the strength computed in England." What he did have in substantial quantities, though, was artillery: 29 fieldpieces, ranging from a pair of big 12-pounders down to 19 6-pounders. But the added muscle his artillery gave him also brought with it a singular problem: how to transport them through the densely-forested terrain of northern New York. He also had to provide for his Mohawk Valley diversion, although what he provided was really only a company of jägers from Hesse-Hanau—two companies of the 8th Regiment and the 34th Regiment, minus its light companies—under the command of the 34th Regiment's Lt. Col. Barrimore St. Leger. St. Leger had, as an addition, a company of Loyalists, and still more Iroquois under the headship of Thayendanegea, or Joseph Brant, a Mohawk chieftain educated at Dartmouth, but now a major recruiter among the Iroquois for the British.[154]

Personnel was the first shadow; and the second shadow to fall across Burgoyne's path was one which Burgoyne had no way of knowing about until it was too late. (So, for the moment, we won't reveal what it was.) But however shorthanded he was, Burgoyne realized that he was not going to get any more than this, so he set out southwards, heading for Lake Champlain. At first, everything clicked as Burgoyne had planned. By June 20, the expedition had reached Lake Champlain and spread out by boat across its waters heading for the forward American post at Ticonderoga. What they found there could not have worried them very much. The garrison posted at Ticonderoga by the commandant of the Northern Department, Philip Schuyler, amounted on paper to 2,500 men under the command of Arthur St. Clair. The fort, as it was, was in poor repair and the men were just as poorly equipped; and when on June 20 a warning gun from an American picket boat on the Lake announced that Burgoyne's little armada of transports was in sight, St. Clair had no confidence that he could hold on. On the morning of July 6, 1777, the rebels silently slipped away from Ticonderoga. Burgoyne set off at once in pursuit, and there was some heated skirmishing as the Americans fled eastward toward the Green Mountains of what is now Vermont. It was the sweet smell of success. Burgoyne exultantly sat down to write to Lord George Germain that the enemy "were dislodged from Ticonderoga … and were driven the same day, beyond Skenesborough on the right, and to Hubbardton on the left, with the loss of 128 pieces of cannon, all their

---

[154] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 136; John Burgoyne to Lord George Germain (May 15, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:78.

armed vessels and bateaux, the great part of the baggage and ammunition, provision, and military stores."[155]

But now the landscape began to tell on Burgoyne. For 18 days, he budged no further south than Skenesborough—on the bay, three miles below Ticonderoga—and the reason was the laggardliness of his supply train, struggling to bump and shove its rutted way over the Indian trails of northern New York. While Burgoyne stalled, Philip Schuyler and the Northern Continental army lurched into action at Albany, sending out summons for the militia from all directions; reestablishing control over St. Clair's disorganized troops in Vermont; and destroying whatever roads and bridges between Albany and Ticonderoga that the British might try to use. Schuyler had about 3,000 Continentals under his command and perhaps as many as 1,500 more militia, and he warned the Continental Congress unless he got more—a lot more, and fast—he had no other prospect but further retreat. The Congress responded, as they had so often responded to Washington, with indignation; not at the British, not at their own failure to provide, but indignation at Schuyler. Schuyler, who was even more the top-lofty patrician than Washington, was the perfect target. On August 10, Schuyler received direct orders from John Hancock, as president of the Continental Congress, to report in person to George Washington, preparatory to a court-martial, and turn his department command over to Horatio Gates.

It's difficult to determine which was the greater humiliation for Schuyler: surrendering a command before he'd even had a chance to fight, or surrendering it to Gates. Horatio Gates was, like Charles Lee, an Englishman and a professional soldier; and, almost unbelievably, he, too, had been part of the Braddock expeditionary force—along with Charles Lee, Thomas Gage, and George Washington—which had been ambushed at the Battle of Monongahela in 1755. At the end of the Seven Years' War, Gates took early retirement on half-pay and stayed in America, where he became an acquaintance of Washington's, and was picked by Washington to become his Adjutant-General in 1775.

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing; for some people, so is a little power. Gates was originally seconded by Washington to the Northern Department to assist Philip Schuyler. But Gates and Schuyler quickly

---

[155] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 230; John Burgoyne to Lord George Germain (July 11, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:133.

spiraled down into quarrels over authority, and in the spring of 1777, Gates was left with the unappetizing alternative of either submitting to Schuyler or going back to his old job with Washington. Instead, Gates beat a path directly to Congress, and on the pretext of having information which could only be disclosed in a closed-door meeting, Gates proceeded to denounce Schuyler and complain about his own ill treatment. This should have cost Gates whatever credibility Washington's recommendations had previously obtained for him, but then came the news of Burgoyne's invasion the fall of Ticonderoga, and the news of Schuyler's recall. As Phillip Schuyler's reputation sank, Gates—the injured suitor of Congress—looked better and better, and on August 19 Gates was back in New York, this time in command of Schuyler's department. Washington, in haste, sent him what reinforcements he could spare, including two of his best officers: Benjamin Lincoln of Massachusetts and Benedict Arnold.

Burgoyne did not behave as though he was threatened by any of this. In fact, he did not get his army moving again until July 24, and then it took 10 days to make the tedious 16-mile overland trip to Fort Edward. It was there, on August 3, that the other shadow I referred to fell across Burgoyne. Three couriers from New York City had dodged through American lines with a letter from Sir William Howe, written on July 17. At first, Burgoyne was so astounded by it that he could not bring himself to inform his brigade commanders. Not only was William Howe *not* moving up the Hudson to join them at Albany, he had put his entire force aboard transports, left a small guard in New York City under Sir Henry Clinton, and was sailing in the opposite direction to the Chesapeake Bay. Nor, for that matter, would Burgoyne be meeting any welcoming party from Barry St. Leger's Mohawk Valley expedition: St. Leger found his path barred at Fort Stanwix in western New York on August 2 and he tried to starve out its 750 defenders. St. Leger fended off one relief column, but he could not encircle Fort Stanwix tightly enough to keep messengers from getting through to others. On August 22, with another American relief column bearing down on him under the command of Benedict Arnold, St. Leger gave up the siege of Fort Stanwix and withdrew. Burgoyne was now utterly on his own.[156]

"Gentlemanly Johnny" did not have very many choices. He could retreat, but that was the very thing that Sir Guy Carleton had done, and which

[156] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 272, 282; Burgoyne to Lord George Germain (August 20, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:166.

Burgoyne had gotten himself commissioned not to repeat. To go on was senseless: The whole plan for squeezing rebellion out of New England depended upon the rendezvous with Howe. What alternative, then: the senseless or the dishonorable? That put things in a perspective that "Gentlemanly Johnny" could understand. He chose the senseless.

Lecture Fifteen

"A Day Famous in the Annals of America"

Scope: "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne devised a plan to secure supplies by sending some units to Bennington, Vermont, where there was reportedly a storehouse of food and horses. Burgoyne was unaware that militia companies from New York and all over New England were converging on Bennington under John Stark. Despite losing the battles that ensued, Burgoyne decided to push on to Albany, unaware that Horatio Gates was on his way north with 10,000 Continentals and militia. Burgoyne met the first elements of Gates's army near Stillwater. His unsuccessful attacks on Bemis Heights, where Gates's forces were securely entrenched, cost him heavy losses. Assistance from Sir Henry Clinton was too little, too late. After Benedict Arnold successfully fought off one more of Burgoyne's attempts at Bemis Heights, Burgoyne retreated and surrendered. This shattering news energized Parliamentary opposition to the war, but the king was obdurate. Then came more bad news: The Americans had signed a treaty with the French.

Outline

I. The deeper Burgoyne moved into the forests, the more conditions deteriorated and supplies dwindled.

- **A.** The day after receiving Howe's letter announcing his departure for the Chesapeake Bay, Burgoyne came up with a plan.
  - **1.** He wished to send Lt. Col. Friedrich Baum and his dismounted Brunswick dragoons, along with various other units and equipment, to the town of Bennington to seize a storehouse.
  - **2.** If possible, Burgoyne wanted Baum to move south, recruiting Loyalist militia as he went, and rendezvous with Burgoyne at Albany.
- **B.** Baum had no idea that at almost the same moment, Philip Schuyler's appeals for militia support were drawing in militia companies from nearby states and concentrating them at Bennington, under the command of John Stark.

1. On the morning of August 14, Baum's skirmishers cleared out some rebel militia at a grist mill nine miles west of Bennington.
2. The militia were Stark's skirmishers, and when Baum set off the next morning he was met by more than 1,000 rebel militia.
3. Stark divided his militia regiments into three pincer-like columns that surrounded Baum.
4. Those who fought were cut down, including Baum, while the rest surrendered.

II. The debacle at Bennington was an appalling shock to Burgoyne.

- **A.** Food was running out and discipline was beginning to deteriorate.
  1. Burgoyne's Mohawk allies quit in disgust.
  2. Even the civilian Canadian teamsters were stealing horses from Burgoyne's dwindling supply of draft animals.
- **B.** Burgoyne again pondered his alternatives and decided to proceed to Albany.
- **C.** He stockpiled enough food for 30 days and on September 13 he crossed the Hudson to the Albany side, just below Saratoga, New York.
- **D.** He appears to have had no idea that Philip Schuyler had by now been replaced by Horatio Gates as commander of the Northern Department.
- **E.** By the time Burgoyne was preparing to cross the Hudson, Gates had 10,000 Continentals and militia on hand, and on September 7, 1777, Gates put them on the road north.

III. Burgoyne finished his crossing on September 15, and the next day turned southward toward Stillwater, on the Hudson.

- **A.** Three miles north of Stillwater he collided with the first elements of Gates' army.
  1. A Polish-born military engineer named Thaddeus Kosciuszko had laid out a massive redoubt along Bemis Heights, and Gates had filled it with Continentals on both right and left.
  2. This was not a position Burgoyne wanted to attack head on, but the road beside the river was the only reasonable route to Albany.

B. Burgoyne's grand assault on Bemis Heights began at 10 in the morning on September 19.

   1. Benedict Arnold, one of Gates's Northern Department officers, had guessed what Burgoyne was likely to do, and Burgoyne's attack plans swiftly went awry.

   2. By 4 pm Burgoyne was able to disengage and count his losses: 160 killed, 364 wounded, and 42 missing.

C. On the morning of September 21, an offer of assistance came from Sir Henry Clinton to bring in 2,000 men in about 10 days.

   1. Clinton did not get moving until October 3, and he understood his object as merely providing a diversion, not rescuing Burgoyne.

   2. He attacked some of the American outposts in the Hudson Highlands, and then returned to New York.

D. On October 7, Burgoyne, increasingly desperate, made another unsuccessful attempt on Bemis Heights, during which a British bullet smashed through Benedict Arnold's leg.

E. Now Burgoyne had no choice but to run.

   1. On October 9 he pulled away from his entrenchments, struggling to get safely over the Hudson again.

   2. His men were starving and those who were not starving were deserting.

   3. On the night of October 12 John Stark and his men crossed the Hudson in front of Burgoyne, closing his hope of escape across the Hudson.

F. Burgoyne concluded that there was no way out of the box the Americans had closed around them.

   1. After dickering through intermediaries, Burgoyne and Gates finally reached a settlement.

   2. On October 17, 1777, "Gentlemanly Johnny" surrendered himself, his sword, and 5,900 men.

IV. Three weeks later, news of Burgoyne's surrender arrived in England; the king was *not* happy.

A. In the House of Commons, Lord Germain was greeted with a blast of denunciation from the opposition benches.

B. Lord North begged the king to allow him to prepare peace proposals to offer to the Americans or else allow him to resign, but George III refused to part with either North or Germain.

V. Then news arrived that the Americans had signed a treaty with the French. There would now be a war with France as well.

A. France was more than merely curious about the possibility of joining the American colonies as an ally, but the French were unwilling to embrace the Americans publicly until two conditions were satisfied.

1. First, the American states had to show that they were united.

2. Second, they had to show in some dramatic way that they could do more militarily than merely avoid defeat.

B. In September 1776 the Congress authorized sending John Adams, Silas Deane, and Benjamin Franklin to represent the American cause directly to the French.

1. Adams was the Congress's best and brightest representative.

2. Franklin's inclusion demonstrated that even the Congress had to recognize that he was the most famous American in the world.

C. The tidings of Saratoga were the last push: The Americans had not only defeated, but wiped off the map, an entire British field army.

D. On February 6, 1778, the commissioners were at last able to sign two formal treaties with France, establishing commercial relations and creating a diplomatic alliance.

Suggested Reading:

Furneaux, *Saratoga*, chaps. 10, 13–14.

Ketchum, *Saratoga*, chaps. 19–21.

Pancake, *1777: The Year of the Hangman*, chaps. 9–10.

Questions to Consider:

1. What role did Benedict Arnold play at Saratoga?

2. Was Saratoga more important as a military victory or a diplomatic one?

Lecture Fifteen—Transcript
"A Day Famous in the Annals of America"

If "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne was going to brass it through to Albany on his own strength—as he now concluded to do—he would have to find some new way of keeping that strength up, because the deeper he moved into the forests, the more he found "the roads wanting great repair, the weather unfavourable, the cattle [for meat] and carriages [meaning the transport wagons] scarce." An army not only fights, it eats. If it cannot do the one, it will not be able to do the other. Conditions in Burgoyne's camp at Fort Edward were such that "at that time the army could barely be victualled from day to day, and that there was no prospect of establishing a Magazine [a supply depot] in due time for pursuing present advantages." Which is why, the day after receiving Sir William Howe's blithe announcement that Howe had taken off for the Chesapeake instead of coming up to meet Burgoyne at Albany, Burgoyne handed a plan to the commander of his German troops—General (and Baron) Friedrich Adolph von Riedesel—which would solve his supply problem and get his stalled campaign moving again. Burgoyne understood from a variety of reports and rumors that just over the mountains to the east, in Vermont, he could find a storehouse in the town of Bennington full of "corn, flour, and store cattle" and "that it was guarded only by militia." Additionally, he heard that there were also horses there that his unmounted Brunswick Dragoons could use as mounts. Burgoyne's plan would send Lt. Col. Friedrich Baum and his dismounted Brunswick Dragoons, along with a detachment of Canadian Rangers, Brunswick jägers, a company of British light infantry under Capt. Alexander Fraser, and a pair of brass three-pounder cannon, plus about 150 Indians; between, all told, 550–800 men. If Baum found it possible, Burgoyne wanted him not only to clean out that storehouse, but to set up as a separate command, moving south along the Connecticut River in parallel with Burgoyne's main force moving down the Hudson, and recruiting Loyalist militia as he went, until they all could rendezvous again at Albany.[157]

Baron von Riesedel thought this was the purest idiocy. Baum's force was much too large to risk as a raiding party, and much too small to operate as

---

[157] Ketchum, *Saratoga,* 293; William L. Stone, *The Campaign of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne* (Albany, 1877), 30; Burgoyne, in *The Parliamentary Register,* 12:138.

an independent column; and all of it across a radius of 200 miles. But Burgoyne was giving the orders, and on August 9, Baum set off. He had no idea that at almost the same moment, Philip Schuyler's appeals for militia support were drawing in militia companies from western Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York, and concentrating them at Bennington, under the command of the cantankerous New Hampshire veteran of Bunker Hill, John Stark. John Stark was piqued at not being given a commission in the new Continental army, so after Bunker Hill Stark had gone home to New Hampshire to sulk in his tent. But Burgoyne's invasion of the upper Hudson River Valley brought Stark back again, this time as a brigadier general of New Hampshire militia. Stark was no lover of Philip Schuyler; but he was no happier with the appointment of Gates, Arnold, and Benjamin Lincoln as commanders of the Northern Department. Only the need for Gates to stay on top of the situation in Albany, Arnold's departure to stop St. Leger at Fort Stanwix, and Benjamin Lincoln's wise decision to give Stark free rein mollified this "exceedingly soured" New Hampshireman. Altogether, Stark had a force of about 1,800 militia; and his basic plan was to head from Bennington straight west and hit Burgoyne either in the flank or in the rear. Stark never dreamt that Lt. Col. Baum would simplify matters by marching his little force to Stark instead.

On the morning of August 14, Baum's skirmishers came up to the village of Sancoick, nine miles west of Bennington, where he cleared out a gaggle of rebel militia, seized stores of flour at a grist mill, and began taking down oaths of allegiance to the king from local farmers. But that "gaggle" of militia actually turned out to be John Stark's skirmishers, and when Baum set off the next morning up the north bank of the Wallomsac River on the road to Bennington, he had the unpleasant surprise of over 1,000 rebel militia blocking his path. Baum brought up his brass three-pounders, began furiously throwing up entrenchments, and sent word back to Burgoyne for help. Stark responded by dividing his militia regiments into three columns: one to circle around behind Baum's left flank, where the Brunswick Dragoons were posted in a small redoubt; another to ford the Wallomsac River and slip around behind Baum's other flank; while the remaining column would stage a distracting demonstration in front of Baum's position. "There are the redcoats and they are ours," Stark growled, "or Molly Stark sleeps a widow tonight."[158]

---

[158] Frank Warren Coburn, *A History of the Battle of Bennington, Vermont* (Bennington, 1912), 29; Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 304.

Stark's plan worked perfectly. The dragoon redoubt was overrun after a sharp fight, and then the other militia column caved in the other German flank. Baum tried to pull his Brunswick grenadiers out of Stark's pincers, only to be surrounded by Stark's jubilant militia. Those who fought—like Lt. Col. Baum—were cut down, and Baum himself was mortally wounded; while the rest surrendered. Then, the next morning, August 16, almost as an encore, Baum's belated reinforcements arrived—Lt. Col. Heinrich Breymann, the Brunswick grenadier corps, the Brunswick *chasseur* battalion, and two more cannon—too late to save Baum and too small, since there were only about 700 of them, to tackle Stark's militia, who swarmed eagerly to this new attack. With some difficulty—he had to abandon both of his cannon—Breymann extricated his men from the Americans' grasp and retreated in the direction they had come. This misadventure to Bennington had cost 200 dead, 700 missing, and the four Hessian cannon. By contrast, in his report to Horatio Gates, John Stark put the American dead at 30, with another 40 wounded.[159]

The debacle at Bennington was an appalling shock to a British army which was already feeling the backbreaking strain of hacking its way through the forests, the inadequacy of its supplies, and the mounting terror that every dark tree trunk concealed an American rifleman. On August 29, Burgoyne had to restrict the slaughter of cattle from his shrinking herd of beef on the hoof "only … for the Sick, and in such cases as absolutely require it." Discipline in his ranks was beginning to deteriorate. Burgoyne's Mohawk allies—restless at the lack of plunder along the route and reluctant to be caught on the "losing side"—began taking their own measures, including looting farms along the way and killing the wife of a Loyalist, Jane McCrea. They finally quit Burgoyne's army in disgust. Even the civilian Canadian teamsters were committing "Great irregularities," which being translated means they were stealing horses from his dwindling supply of draft animals and committing other kinds of crimes. Finally, Burgoyne had to threaten "all followers of the Army" with "Garrison Courts Martial." Again, Burgoyne sat down and pondered his alternatives: "On the one hand," he wrote, "my communications were at an end; my retreat was insecure; the enemy was collected in force; they were strongly posted," and by now he knew that "Col. St. Leger was retiring from Fort Stanwix." However, Burgoyne "had," as he wrote, "dislodged the enemy repeatedly when before in force," and to order a retreat now would be to send absolutely the worst

---

[159] Stone, *The Campaign of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne*, 32; Coburn, *History of the Battle of Bennington*, 49; Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 320–22.

signal to his own jittery regiments. “I read again my orders (I believe for the thousandth time), and I was decided”: to Albany they would continue. He stockpiled enough food for 30 days, and then on September 13, he crossed the Hudson River to the Albany side of the Hudson on a pontoon bridge—just below Saratoga, New York—with the 9th, 20th, 21st, and 62nd Regiments of Foot in the lead and the German regiments bringing up the rear.[160]

Burgoyne seems to have had no clue that Philip Schuyler had by now been replaced by Horatio Gates as commander of the Northern Department, or that Gates had with him Arnold and Lincoln, plus four brigades of Massachusetts Continentals under John Patterson, having the 10th, 11th, 12th, and 14th Massachusetts; John Glover, who had the 1st, 4th, 13th, and 15th Massachusetts regiments; Ebenezer Learned, who had the 2nd, 8th, and 9th Massachusetts; and John Nixon, with the 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th Massachusetts Continentals. Along with those four brigades of Continentals, Gates had a mixed brigade of New Hampshire and New York Continentals under Enoch Poor, plus two regiments of the dreaded riflemen under Daniel Morgan—the same Daniel Morgan who had been captured at Quebec at the end of 1775 and exchanged a year later, and who had many a score to settle with the British. By the time Burgoyne was preparing to cross the Hudson River, Gates had 10,000 Continentals and militia on hand, and on September 7, 1777, Gates put them on the roads north from Albany. “Gentlemanly Johnny” was beginning to look less like the gentlemen and more like the patsy.

Burgoyne finished his crossing of the Hudson on September 15, and the next day he turned southward toward Stillwater, on the Hudson River. Three miles north of Stillwater, he collided with the first elements of Gates’s army, securely entrenched on top of Bemis Heights, with the road southwards squeezed between the Heights and the Hudson River. A Polish-born military engineer named Thaddeus Kosciuszko had laid out a massive redoubt for Gates along the Bemis Heights, and Gates had filled it with Glover’s, Nixon’s, and Patterson’s Continentals on the right and Learned’s, Poor’s, and Morgan’s men—plus the militia—on the left, all of them under Benedict Arnold. This was not a position Burgoyne wanted to attack head-on; but attack it he must, because the road beside the river was the only worthwhile highway to Albany. On the morning of September 19, Burgoyne disposed his army in three columns. On his left—right beside the Hudson River—Burgoyne posted the Baron von Riedesel and the

[160] Burgoyne, *The Parliamentary Register*, 12:140; *Orderly Book of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne*, ed. E.B. O’Callahan (Albany, 1860), 81, 84, 85, 87.

Brunswick and Hessian infantry. In the center was the cream of Burgoyne's regulars, the 9th, 20th, 21st, and 62nd regiments under General James Hamilton. On his right, Burgoyne placed Simon Fraser, his favorite brigade commander, with the 24th Regiment of Foot and three battalions of grenadiers, light infantry, and rangers. It would be Fraser's job to skirt the flank of the American redoubt on Bemis Heights and catch them from beside and behind. Hamilton's center column and von Riesedel's Germans would keep the Americans on the Heights busy until Fraser's men could surprise them, and then the combined weight of the regulars and the Germans would cause the American position on Bemis Heights ignominiously to cave in.[161]

Burgoyne's grand assault on Bemis Heights stepped off at ten o'clock on the morning of September 19, 1777. Fraser's flanking column encountered heavy going through thickets and swampland, only to reach the halfway point of their march—at the farm of a long-since-departed Loyalist named John Freeman—and find that the restless Benedict Arnold had guessed what Burgoyne was likely to do. Arnold pushed Daniel Morgan's riflemen up to the clearing around Freeman's Farm and stopped the oncoming British skirmishers in their tracks. In their turn, however, the right flank units of General Hamilton's center column then swept by, turned to the aid of Fraser's men, and swept Morgan's riflemen back; only to be hit in sequence by Enoch Poor's two New Hampshire regiments, whom Horatio Gates had ordered up to support Morgan. The rest of Hamilton's center column of Burgoyne's army now swung around to confront Poor, to be struck—like a line of swinging doors—by Learned's Continentals. Burgoyne was now in a bad way. His attack plans for Bemis Heights had gone completely astray; two-thirds of his army was clinched with Benedict Arnold's two infantry brigades and Morgan's riflemen. Six times the clearing around Freeman's Farm changed hands, and it was only at four o'clock in the afternoon, when Baron von Riesedel—acting on his own initiative—brought two regiments of Germans into action with the bayonet, that Burgoyne was able safely to disengage and begin counting his losses.[162]

Those losses at Freidman's farm were the doom of Burgoyne's invasion: 160 killed, 364 wounded, and 42 missing. The 62nd Regiment of Foot was left with only 60 men present-for-duty; Horatio Gates had lost about half of that. The exhausted armies glowered at each other through the next day, and

---

[161] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 357.
[162] Stone, *Campaign of Lieut. Gen. John Burgoyne, 48.*

then, on the morning of the 21st, a courier from New York City slipped through the lines and delivered a message for Burgoyne from Sir Henry Clinton—whom Howe, you'll remember, had left in command of the garrison of New York City. "If you think 2,000 men can assist you effectually," Clinton offered, "I will make a push … in about ten days." 2,000 reinforcements was a good deal less than what Howe should have been bringing him, but it was 2,000 more than Clinton had any obligation to try to bring him, and that convinced Burgoyne that he was going to get help at last. He would dig in just below Saratoga, and wait.[163]

It was a false hope. Sir Henry Clinton did not get moving for another two weeks—not until October 3—and when he did, he understood his object as merely providing a diversion for Burgoyne, not coming to Burgoyne's rescue. He attacked some of the American outposts in the Hudson Highlands, and then turned back again to New York City. On October 7, an increasingly desperate Burgoyne attempted to mount a second attack on the Bemis Heights position, again feeling around to his right to find whatever rainbow marked the elusive American flank. Once again, Benedict Arnold—leading Morgan's, Learned's and Poor's men—headed them off, this time at another farm clearing not far from Freeman's Farm. This was Benedict Arnold's moment: Riding a borrowed horse, he led three of Learned's regiments in a headlong charge. He had Daniel Morgan select a rifleman named Timothy Murphy who picked off Simon Fraser with his third shot. Arnold nearly overran Burgoyne's entrenchments until a British bullet smashed through the leg he had been wounded in before at Quebec, killed his horse, and brought him down under the dead animal with sufficient force to break the wounded leg.[164]

But even with Arnold out of action, Burgoyne knew now that he had no choice but to run. On October 9, 1777, Burgoyne pulled away from his entrenchments, struggling to put enough distance between himself and Gates's army to get safely over the Hudson again—back on the east side of the Hudson River—and after that, move north to get under the shelter of Ticonderoga. His men were starving, and those who were not starving were deserting. By October 11, almost 300 of Burgoyne's force had disappeared into the woods. Then, on the night of the October 12, the final blow: The temperamental John Stark crossed the Hudson in front of Burgoyne with

[163] Burgoyne, *The Parliamentary Register*, 12:142.

[164] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 400, 402; Isaac Newton Arnold, *The Life of Benedict Arnold* (Chicago, 1880), 212.

1,000 militiamen and a battery of artillery and shut the door on Burgoyne's hope of escape across the Hudson River. Burgoyne called a council of his officers the following afternoon, and concluded that there was no likelihood that they could fight their way out of the box the Americans had closed around them. Burgoyne sent a request for a meeting to Gates, hoping at the last extremity that Gates would allow his men to be paroled and return—disarmed—to Canada. The two generals dickered through intermediaries for two days, and finally an agreement was signed. On October 17, 1777, "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne surrendered himself, his sword, and 5,900 men; all that was left of his once-grand invasion force. It would be, wrote one heart-sick British lieutenant, "A day famous in the annals of America." Horatio Gates graciously returned Burgoyne's sword. Burgoyne then gallantly proposed a toast to George Washington, and Gates responded with one to George III.[165]

George III was not amused. The news of the fighting around Saratoga reached England by the beginning of November, and the news was all bad. Three weeks later, news "announcing the total annihilation" of Burgoyne's army arrived with a thunderclap; and the king "fell into agonies on hearing this account." In the House of Commons, a defiant Lord George Germain rose to make the official announcement of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga, and was greeted by a blast of denunciation from the opposition benches. Charles James Fox told Germain that he "hoped to see him brought to a second trial." (Second trial; that was the "ghost of Minden" coming back to haunt Germain. Because, remember, Germain had been court-martialed for cowardice after the Battle of Minden in the Seven Years' War.) "Yes, yes," Fox said; he hoped to see Germain brought to a second trial: a double barreled insult. In the House of Lords, the creaking old William Pitt, the Earl of Chatham, appeared to unleash a dazzling display of oratory directed against Lord North and Germain:

> No man thinks more highly than I of the virtue and valour of British troops; I know they can achieve anything except impossibilities; and the conquest of English America is an impossibility. You cannot, I venture to say it, you cannot conquer America … What is your present situation there? We do not know

[165] "Minutes of Council of War at Saratoga" (October 12–15, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:214; Stone, 121; *The British Invasion from the North: The Campaigns of Generals Carleton and Burgoyne from Canada, 1776–77, with the Journal of Lieut. William Digby*, ed. J.P. Baxter (Albany, 1887), 317.

> the worst, but we know that in three campaigns, we have done nothing, and suffered much. … Conquest is impossible: you may swell every expense and every effort still more extravagantly; pile or accumulate every assistance you can buy or borrow; traffic and barter with every pitiful German prince that sells his subjects to the shambles of a foreign power; your efforts are forever vain and impotent; doubly so from this mercenary aid on which you rely; for it irritates to an incurable resentment the minds of your enemies … If I were an American, as I am an Englishman, while a foreign troop was landed in my country, I would never lay down my arms, never—never—never!

Lord North begged the king to allow him to "prepare to lay before the Parliament proposals of peace to be offered to the Americans!" or else allow him to resign his office.[166]

But George III was obdurate; he would part with neither North nor Germain. Then, two weeks into the debate over Saratoga, news from across the channel arrived which banished any possibility of negotiating with the Americans. The Americans had signed a treaty with the French. There would now be war with France as well.[167]

The Second Continental Congress's resolution to begin negotiating with other nations as a sovereign and independent equal was more than a purely formal gesture. A Congress with no power to tax and no industrial base to produce war materials needed help from other nations to arm and equip its forlorn armies, at the very least. At the best, it might be able to entice one or more of them to join the United States as an outright ally, and shoulder some of the burden of the war itself. There was—as we saw in Lecture Thirteen—only one European nation which had the capacity to fulfill that best of hopes, and that was France. France, as it turned out, was more than merely curious about the possibility; so curious, in fact, that as early as 1775, the French foreign minister, the Comte de Vergennes, had sent a confidential emissary to Philadelphia to hold discussions with the Americans. In 1776, Vergennes persuaded King Louis XVI to allow him to

---

[166] Horace Walpole to Sir Horace Mann (December 4, 1777) and to the Countess Ossory (December 5 and 11, 1777), *Letters of Horace Walpole, Earl of Orford*, ed. Peter Cunningham (London, 1861) 7:10, 15; Christopher Hibbert, *Redcoats and Rebels: The American Revolution Through British Eyes* (New York, 1990), 201–2; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 125–6.

[167] Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 140–1.

set up a bogus front company, *Roderique Hortalez et Cie*, for the purpose of selling weapons and equipment across the Atlantic to the rebels. But the French were unwilling to embrace the Americans publicly until two conditions had first been satisfied: First off, the American states had to show that they were united. Second, they had to show in some dramatic way that they could do more militarily than simply avoid defeat.

At the end of 1776, neither of these conditions looked very much like being satisfied. In September 1776, the Congress authorized the sending of a three-man commission to represent the American cause directly to the French: John Adams, Silas Deane, and Benjamin Franklin. Putting John Adams on the commission was a demonstration of how serious the Congress was about sending its best and brightest to negotiate with the French. But sending Benjamin Franklin was a demonstration of how much even the Congress had to recognize that Benjamin Franklin was the most famous American in the world. The one-time printer's apprentice—whom we met first in Lecture One, who had parlayed shrewd entrepreneurial judgment into a series of franchised print shops—had been devoting most of his life and most of his shrewdness, since the 1740s, to imperial politics and to his numerous intellectual hobbies. By 1776, Franklin was one of the few Americans who could bask in both intellectual and diplomatic fame. His treatise on electricity in 1751 amazed the European scientific community, and when Franklin arrived in France in December 1776, he was received like a conquering hero. Although John Adams detested Franklin's unprincipled cunning, Franklin charmed the Court of Louis XVI.[168]

The tidings of Saratoga were the last push that they needed to give the French. "We have the honor to acquaint your Excellency," Franklin wrote to Vergennes, "with the advice of the total reduction of the force under General Burgoyne." The Americans had not merely defeated, they had completely wiped off the map an entire British field army. On February 6, 1778, the three commissioners were at last able to sign two formal treaties with France which established both commercial relations and created a diplomatic alliance. Meanwhile, the rejoicings of Americans across the ocean could have been heard all the way across the Atlantic. The Virginia House of Delegates greeted the news of this alliance as the sign that "we shall, under God, be perfectly secure, and it will probably compel G[reat]

[168] Esmond Wright, *Franklin of Philadelphia* (Cambridge, MA, 1986), 261, 294; Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York, 1992), 199–200.

B[retain] to a speedy recognition of our Independence." For every one of the American rebels, Saratoga and the French alliance that followed it were the best news they had had since Bunker Hill. [169] The best news for every American rebel except, surprisingly, for George Washington.

[169] Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York, 2003), 343; Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 333.

Lecture Sixteen
"Not Yet the Air of Soldiers"

Scope: Choosing not to wait for the many months it could take for Lord Germain to respond to any proposed plans, General Howe acted on his own initiative and in July 1777, sailed south with his army from Staten Island, intent on traveling as far up the Chesapeake as he could, to reach Philadelphia. They found Washington and nearly 10,000 Continental infantry blocking their road to Philadelphia at the Brandywine River. The British managed to break the Americans' fierce resistance at Brandywine, a defeat witnessed by the young Marquis de Lafayette, whom Washington had met in Philadelphia. Howe then paused again. Such a delay prompted Washington to attack, but a heavy rainstorm made fighting impossible. As Howe continued on toward Philadelphia, Washington sent four divisions to strike a blow, but Howe struck first, resulting in the Paoli Massacre. This disaster was followed by another failed attempt on the British at Germantown.

Outline

I. The rounds of finger-pointing that followed "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne's disaster at Saratoga eventually swiveled around to two people, Lord George Germain and Sir William Howe.

- **A.** Germain's political enemies hatched the story that Germain had neglected to send Howe any notice or direction concerning Burgoyne's expedition—a story that was false.
- **B.** The real culprit, then, was Sir William Howe, who had abandoned Burgoyne to his fate in the wilderness for one of two reasons.
  1. Out of pique that Burgoyne was being personally directed by Germain, instead of being subordinate to Howe as commander in chief in North America.
  2. Because Howe suffered from some kind of psychological fixation on completing the campaign that Washington had frustrated at the end of 1776.
  3. Neither of these stories was true either.

C. The real problem was the Atlantic Ocean and the three months it could require to cross it.

   1. Howe's campaign plans, written in January 1777, would not return with an approval from Germain until late May or early June.

   2. If Germain's response needed to be clarified, it would take another six months for Howe to get an answer.

D. This was why Howe was commander in chief; he was expected to act on his own initiative, and he did.

   1. Howe assumed that nothing about Burgoyne's orders precluded Howe from embarking on his own campaign to deal with Washington, and dealing with Washington might have been the best way to assist Burgoyne.

   2. In the absence of any rapid way to communicate, Howe, Burgoyne, and Germain were left with the impression that they all understood each other, until it was too late.

   3. They were all guilty of disregarding one of the primary principles of war: unity of command.

II. George Washington had become convinced by the first week of March that Howe intended to move southward again toward Philadelphia.

A. He was puzzled by Howe's movements and by reports that Howe had assembled a fleet of 20 transports in New York harbor.

   1. He concluded that Howe must be planning a severe blow.

   2. Howe was only testing the waters to see if Washington would meet him in an open fight, something Washington wanted to avoid.

B. By July 23, Howe's army had boarded transports and sailed out to sea.

III. On July 30, Howe's fleet was sighted at the mouth of the Delaware Bay, so Washington got his army onto the roads to meet him.

A. He had two divisions of some 15,000 men to manage.

B. This vast machine did not reach the Brandywine River, halfway to Philadelphia, until September 11.

C. When it did it found Washington and fewer than 10,000 Continental infantry drawn up on advantageous ground behind the Brandywine.

   1. Washington had moved his army with remarkable speed.

2. He had galloped ahead to arrive in Philadelphia on August 5, and the army paraded through Philadelphia to the delight of the Congress on August 24.

D. While in Philadelphia, Washington was first introduced to Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch Gilbert, the Marquis de Lafayette, a 19-year-old from a rich, noble French family.
   1. He had just arrived from France and was a passionate admirer of the American cause.
   2. Lafayette disarmed Washington by stating at once that he would serve without pay, and if desired, without rank, "as a volunteer."
   3. Washington invited him to join the army on its march down the Brandywine.

IV. Washington reached the Brandywine on September 9, and spread his five divisions on both sides of the main road to Philadelphia.

A. Sir William Howe saw no reason to depart from the plan which had succeeded so well at Long Island, and on the morning of the eleventh he split his divisions.
   1. One, under Hessian general Knyphausen, to attack straight across the Brandywine at Chadd's Ford.
   2. The other, under Cornwallis, would swing northward and then come down behind Washington's right flank.

B. It took Knyphausen until 4 pm to cross the Brandywine.
   1. By then, Howe and Cornwallis had crossed the forks of the Brandywine and were advancing toward Washington's rear.
   2. The American lines collapsed, but they held long enough to leave the British very weary by nightfall.
   3. The British had suffered only 89 dead and another 400 or so wounded, while Washington lost 200 dead and another 400 wounded, including Lafayette.

C. There Howe stopped for two days, sending out only flanking parties to secure communication with the ships of his brother, "Black Dick."
   1. On the fifteenth, Washington recrossed the Schuylkill and deployed along the Lancaster Pike on the flank of the British advance.
   2. Before the two armies could engage again a thunderous rainstorm descended on them, making more than isolated skirmishing impossible.

3. After the storm, Howe's army resumed its slow crawl toward Philadelphia.

D. Washington, unsure whether he would have another chance to stop Howe, sent Alexander Hamilton to Philadelphia with a letter advising Congress to evacuate, which they did, to York, Pennsylvania.

1. On September 19, Washington began sliding Anthony Wayne and his division around the left flank of Howe's advance.
2. Washington planned to hit Howe head on and then allow Wayne to drive into Howe's flank and rear.
3. But on the night of September 20, Howe struck first and overran Wayne's encampment using only the bayonet.
4. Fifty-three of Wayne's men were stabbed or hacked to death; another 220 were wounded or missing.

V. The Paoli Massacre deranged Washington's plans for attacking Howe's army, and on September 26, Cornwallis staged a triumphal entry into Philadelphia.

A. Howe then made the same mistake he had made before Trenton.

B. Washington was joined at Germantown by Alexander McDougall's brigade of Continentals and some militia.

C. He formed four attack columns.

1. One would move down the Germantown Pike and hit the British outposts just outside Germantown.
2. A second would smash into the British right flank.
3. A third would slip behind that flank and cut off any British retreat toward Philadelphia.
4. A fourth would surprise the Hessian jäger outposts between the village and the river.
5. As if to replicate the conditions at Trenton, a thick fog blanketed the region that morning, covering the American advance.

D. A thick fog worked as much against as for Washington. His divisions were late or lost.

1. They had also lost the element of surprise. Hessian Capt. Ewald had been tipped off and passed word on to Howe.
2. Howe dismissed the information, but the next morning he was awakened by the enemy firing at his headquarters.

E. For a time it seemed both Germantown and the Germantown Pike were open to Washington, but the fog and confusion took a toll.

F. By ten o'clock the Continentals were in retreat and Washington had suffered another defeat.

Suggested Reading:

McGuire, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, chap. 4.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 17.

Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, chap. 3.

Questions to Consider:

1. What conclusions can you draw about Washington as a general from his plans at Brandywine and Germantown?
2. What explains Sir William Howe's mysterious decision to move in the opposite direction, away from a junction with Burgoyne?

Lecture Sixteen—Transcript
"Not Yet the Air of Soldiers"

The rounds of finger-pointing which followed "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne's disaster at Saratoga eventually swiveled around to two people in particular: One was Sir William Howe—more about him in a moment—and the other was Lord George Germain. In subsequent years, Germain's political enemies—principally in this case, Lord Shelburne—hatched the story that Germain had carelessly neglected to send Sir William Howe any notice or direction concerning Burgoyne's expedition, and that Howe innocently sailed off in the opposite direction because Germain had failed to issue him the necessary orders to rendezvous with Burgoyne at Albany. Disregard this: Howe certainly received a copy of Burgoyne's general orders—another copy went to Sir Guy Carleton—and we know that because Howe acknowledged receipt of them.

This, in turn, suggests that the real culprit here was Sir William Howe; hence the finger that comes back to Howe. Either out of pique that Burgoyne was being personally directed by Germain—instead of making Burgoyne subordinate to Howe as commander in chief in North America—or because Howe suffered from some kind of psychological fixation on completing the campaign which Washington had frustrated at the end of 1776, the story is that Howe deliberately abandoned Burgoyne to his fate in the wilderness. Disregard this, too: Howe wrote to Germain as early as the middle of January 1777 that, "Philadelphia now being the principal object," he wanted to recover New Jersey and force Washington into the battle which would finish the Continental army off, and for good. Germain, in March, had approved this, and dispatched 2,500 reinforcements, in the form of another Highlander regiment and 2,100 Germans plus recruits, to replace Howe's losses from 1776. Howe, moreover, warned Germain in April that "it will not be in my power to communicate" with Burgoyne.

The problem was neither Howe nor Germain; so much as it was the same problem the British command structure had been struggling with since 1775: 3,000 miles of Atlantic Ocean, and the three months it could require to cross it. Howe's campaign plans, written in January 1777, would not return with an approval from Germain until late May or early June. If there was the slightest lack of clarity in Germain's response, it would take another six months' round-trip for any question from Howe to get an answer from Germain back into Howe's hands. This, of course, was why Sir

William Howe was commander in chief in North America. He was expected to act on his own initiative, and he did. He assumed that whatever Germain had in mind for John Burgoyne, nothing about Burgoyne's orders precluded him—Sir William Howe—from embarking on his own campaign to deal with Washington. In fact, dealing with Washington might be the very best way to make sure that Burgoyne had an easier time of it above Albany. Otherwise, Sir William Howe was at liberty to assist Burgoyne as circumstances required, and as far as Howe was concerned, those circumstances only required that he keep a force on the lower Hudson available to clear the river, which he did by posting a rear-guard under Sir Henry Clinton in New York City. But Clinton had no directive from Howe to move up the Hudson to Albany, and Germain assumed that Howe would have plenty of time to deal with Washington and then turn and march north to the rendezvous with Burgoyne.

In the absence of any rapid way to question these assumptions, Howe, Clinton, Burgoyne, and Germain were left with the impression that they all understood each other, until it was too late. In retrospect, Germain should never have given Burgoyne a command without making it clear that Burgoyne needed to take his orders and coordinate his movements with Sir William Howe. But Howe and Burgoyne should never have assumed that they had no responsibility to coordinate with each other. They were all guilty of disregarding one of the primary "principles of war"—unity of command—and the only worthwhile excuse which any of them could offer afterward was that the physical realities of America itself made a hash of unity of command.[170]

George Washington had become convinced by the first week of March 1777 that Sir William Howe intended to move southward again, towards Philadelphia, as he had in the fall of 1776. Alexander Hamilton, who had caught Washington's eye as a rising star and was appointed to Washington's staff as one of his three aides-de-camp, told a fellow officer that, "We have … the most decisive evidence that the enemy's operation

---

[170] James M. Hadden, *Haddon's Journal and Orderly Books: A Journal Kept in Canada Upon Burgoyne's Campaign*, ed. Horatio Rogers (Albany, 1884), 377–8; Mackesy, *War for America*, 116–8; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 90; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 176–7; Sir William Howe to Lord George Germain (January 20, 1777 and April 5, 1777), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 14:33, 66; Ira D. Gruber, "Lord Howe and Lord George Germain, British Politics and the Winning of American Independence," *William & Mary Quarterly* 22 (April 1965), 225.

will be directed … towards Philadelphia." What puzzled Washington was, first, Howe's strange lack of movement once the weather permitted campaigning in April and May; and then, in June, a peculiar heavy movement of British infantry from Staten Island into northern New Jersey. Peculiar, because Washington was also receiving reports that Howe had assembled a fleet of 70 transports, with supplies and forage, in New York harbor. Washington struck camp and moved to intercept the British infantry, but as he wrote, he "did not know whether this was intended as a real move towards Philadelphia, or whether it is to endeavour to draw us down from the heights we occupy along his whole front." Washington finally concluded that Howe must be planning "to give a severe blow to this army." Howe was really only testing the waters to see if Washington would meet him in an open fight, something which Washington was by now learning was a good idea to avoid. Howe had plans of a more dramatic nature in mind. On July 2, Washington reported that the British had abruptly withdrawn from New Jersey "and encamped upon Staten Island." Then, a week later, Howe's army disappeared onto its transports, and on July 23, stood out to sea.[171]

Washington had a suspicion that Howe was going to attempt a repeat of the strategy which had dumped the British onto Long Island the year before, by rounding the Delaware capes, heading up the Chesapeake, and landing somewhere where Howe could easily march overland to Philadelphia from the south. But Washington could not be entirely sure of that, and he also had to keep an eye on Burgoyne's thus-far-triumphant advance down the Hudson River Valley. Not until July 30, when Howe's fleet was sighted at the mouth of the Delaware Bay, was Washington sure that Howe meant to come up the Chesapeake Bay, and got the main Continental army onto the roads south to meet the British. Even Washington had to confess amazement at "Howe's … abandoning General Burgoyne."[172]

---

[171] Hamilton, "To the Convention of the Representatives of the State of New-York" (March 6, 1777) and "To Brigadier General Alexander MacDougall" (March 10, 1777), in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York, 1961) 1:200, 202; Washington, "To Robert Morris" (March 2, 1777), "To Major-General Greene" (May 27, 1777), "To Major-General Schuyler" (June 16, 1777), "To Major-General Arnold" (June 17, 1777) and "To Governor Trumbull" (July 2, 1777), *Writings*, 4:341, 437, 462, 465, 477; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 91.

[172] Freeman, *Washington*, 344.

Howe, in fact, intended to push as far up the Chesapeake Bay as the bay's water would permit him, and he disembarked an advance guard of light infantry at the mouth of the Elk River on August 25, only 30 miles south of Philadelphia. John Peebles of the Black Watch thought that this was "a pretty Country," but "the inhabitants," he wrote, "[are] almost all gone off & carried everything with them they could." It took Howe a week to offload all of his supplies, horses, and troops. He had with him two big divisions of some 15,000 men to manage. One of them, under Earl Cornwallis, had brigades under Charles Grey—this brigade, Grey's Brigade, consisting of the 15th, 17th, and 42nd, the Black Watch Regiments, and that perennially unlucky regiment of the British army, the 44th—and the brigade of James Agnew—consisting of the 33rd, 37th, 46th, and 64th regiments—plus 10 battalions of light infantry and grenadiers. The other division was under a 61-year-old veteran Hessian general, Wilhelm von Knyphausen. Knyphausen's division had one brigade of Hessians, two of British regulars, a regiment of Loyalist rangers, and a special detachment of riflemen under the command of Capt. Patrick Ferguson.

This vast machine did not actually get moving until September 3; it did not reach the Brandywine River, the half-way point to Philadelphia, until September 11. But when it did, it found Washington and just under 10,000 Continental infantry of the main army drawn up on an advantageous ground forming an extensive line behind the Brandywine. Washington, in fact, had moved his army with remarkable speed. He galloped ahead to arrive in Philadelphia on August 5, and the army paraded through Philadelphia to the delight of Congress on August 24. The main army looked to John Adams "extreamly well-armed"—no wonder, that was the first evidence of the Comte de Vergennes' arms supply—but, said Adams, "they have not yet, quite the Air of Soldiers. They don't step exactly in Time. They don't hold up their Heads, quite erect," and their uniforms varied in cut and color—that is when they had them at all—from regiment to regiment. Some wore their hats cocked, some slouched, some edged; some of the Continental main army even wore regulation British light infantry caps.[173]

It was while he was in Philadelphia that Washington was first introduced to yet another French volunteer whom Congress thought would make a fine major general, except that this time Washington was not looking at some down-at-the-heels mercenary. This man was Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch

[173] Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 127–8; Thomas J. McGuire, *Battle of Paoli* (Mechanicsburg, 2000), 10–11.

Gilbert, the Marquis de Lafayette, a zealous 19-year-old from one of the richest noble families in France, who had just arrived from France in the company of the Baron de Kalb and who had become, through Benjamin Franklin, a passionate admirer of the American cause. Passion was exactly what Washington was trying to avoid; but Lafayette disarmed Washington at once by stating at once that he would serve without pay, and if Washington desired, serve without rank "as a volunteer." Washington, who was impressed with Lafayette against all expectations, invited Lafayette to join the army on its march down to the Brandywine, because there Washington anticipated a fight which Lafayette might wish to observe.[174]

Lafayette, as it turned out, got more of a fight than he had bargained for. Washington reached the Brandywine on September 9, 1777, and spread out his divisions behind the Brandywine on either side of the main road that crossed the Brandywine headed toward Philadelphia at Chadd's Ford. Sir William Howe saw no reason to depart from the plan which had succeeded so well at Long Island, and on the morning of the eleventh Howe split his divisions: the one division under Knyphausen to attack straight across the Brandywine River at Chadd's Ford, and the other—Cornwallis's division—to swing northward, cross the Brandywine's two forks, and then come down behind Washington's right flank while Knyphausen was clinching them from in front. Knyphausen did not have an easy go of it.

Washington had posted William Maxwell's brigade on the far side of the Brandywine to bloody the noses of the British advance guard, which they did. Then it took the old Hessian until four in the afternoon to drive across the Brandywine, with the 4th and 5th Regiments of Foot leading the assault. By that time, however, Sir William Howe and Earl Cornwallis had crossed the forks of the Brandywine and were advancing in three columns down towards Chadd's Ford, in Washington's rear. Washington curled back his right flank to the Birmingham Friends Meetinghouse and sent in his two reserve divisions, under Adam Stephen and William Stirling, to hold open the jaws of the British trap. Eventually, the improvised American lines collapsed, but they held long enough, until, as Officer Peebles in the Black Watch wrote, "the wearyness of the [British] troops & the night coming on prevented any further pursuit & saved thousands of rebels." The British had suffered only 89 dead and another 400 or so wounded. Washington had lost 200 dead, 40 prisoners, and another 400 wounded, including Lafayette, who

---

[174] Charlemagne Tower, *The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1895), 1:183.

was shot below the left knee while trying to rally Stirling's division at the Birmingham Meetinghouse.[175]

There—to the puzzlement of the Hessian Capt. Ewald—Howe stopped for two days, sending out only flanking parties to Chester to secure communication with the ships of his brother, "Black Dick" Howe, in the Delaware River. "I conclude," wrote the suspicious Ewald, "that the American army would not be destroyed" if Howe could help it, in order to "pay a fresh compliment to the Opposition Party, and to bring forth a new proposal" for peace negotiations. If that was Howe's aim, neither George Washington nor the Continental Congress showed any signs of taking the hint. Washington fell back to a new position behind the Schuylkill River, again attempting to shield Philadelphia from Howe's onslaught. But Howe's lassitude brought the aggressor in Washington back to the surface, and on the fifteenth, Washington recrossed the Schuylkill and deployed along the Lancaster Pike—the modern Route 30—on the flank of the British advance. Before the two armies could lash out at each other again, a thunderous autumnal rainstorm—"the heaviest downpour in this world," according to Capt. Ewald—descended on both armies, and the mud, reduced visibility, and wet gunpowder which resulted made more than some isolated skirmishing impossible.[176]

The storm did not blow itself out until the 18th, when Howe's army—screened by the Hessian jägers—once more resumed its slow crawl toward the Schuylkill River and Philadelphia. Having missed his second chance at stopping Howe due to the storm, Washington was not sure whether he was going to get another one, and so he sent Alexander Hamilton pelting off toward Philadelphia with a letter for John Hancock, advising him that, "If Congress have not yet left Philadelphia, they ought to do it immediately without fail …" They did, and in even more of a panic than they had the previous December: all the way to Lancaster and then beyond that to York, Pennsylvania.[177]

---

[175] Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 133; Stephen R. Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777–1778* (Lawrence, KS, 2003), 69–78; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 274; Tower, *La Fayette*, 1:230–1; Samuel S. Smith, *The Battle of Brandywine* (Monmouth Beach, NJ, 1976), 18, 24.

[176] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 87; Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, 77; McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 35.

[177] Hamilton, "To John Hancock" (September 18, 1777), in *Papers*, 1:326; McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 63; David Duncan Wallace, *The Life of Henry Laurens,*

Washington, however, was still itching for a chance to strike a blow at Howe. On September 19, Washington began sliding Anthony Wayne—who was now commanding a division with two brigades of Pennsylvania Continentals under Thomas Hartley and Richard Humpton—around the left flank of Howe's advance. Washington planned to hit Howe head-on, and then allow Wayne to drive into Howe's flank and into Howe's rear in much the same way that Washington had been handled at Brandywine. Wayne halted just west of Paoli, on the Lancaster Pike, waiting for William Smallwood and Mordecai Gist to join him with 2,100 Maryland militia. But on the night of September 20, Howe struck first. He peeled off two of Cornwallis's regiments—the 42nd and the 44th—and two of Knyphausen's—the 40th and 55th—plus a troop of dragoons, put them under the command of Charles Grey, one of Earl Cornwallis's brigadiers, and sent them all after Wayne. The British surprised Wayne's pickets after midnight, and overran Wayne's encampment using only the bayonet. Smallwood and Gist chose this unhappy moment to march up King Road toward Wayne's camp where they were trampled first by a wave of Wayne's fugitives, and then attacked by the bayonets of Grey's detachment. Fifty-three of Wayne's men were stabbed or hacked to death; another 220 were wounded or missing.[178]

This Paoli Massacre deranged Washington's plans for attacking Howe's army, and late on September 22 the British forces splashed across the fords of the Schuylkill, swung to their right through the villages of Norristown and Germantown, and down the Germantown Pike to Philadelphia where Earl Cornwallis staged a triumphal entry on September 26. "The Troops marched in about noon," Capt. Peebles of the Black Watch wrote in his journal, "the Streets were crowded with inhabitants who seem to rejoice on the occasion, tho' by all accounts many of them were publickly on the other side before our arrival." There was an "alarm of fire in the Eveng," and those who remembered the fire which had consumed New York City after Washington abandoned it the year before were afraid "that the Rebels will set fire to the City." But it was only a chimney fire, and was soon put out. Capt. Ewald was surprised to find that the inhabitants of Germantown really

---

with a Sketch of the Life of Lieutenant-Colonel John Laurens (New York, 1915), 231.

[178] Charles J. Stille, *Major-General Anthony Wayne and the Pennsylvania Line in the Continental Army* (Philadelphia, 1893), 89; "Letter of an Unknown British Officer," *The Magazine of History* 2 (July–December 1905), 145–6; McGuire, *Battle of Paoli*, 146; Paul David Nelson, *Anthony Wayne: Soldier of the Early Republic* (Bloomington, IN, 1985), 54–7.

were Germans, but as he wrote in his journal, they "were against us, the most ill-natured people in the world, who could hardly conceal their anger and hostile sentiments." In a few days, Capt. Peebles felt free enough to wander through Philadelphia, looking in the windows of "the shops in Town for necessarys for the men but found very little, the shops [being] almost empty." Within five days of marching into the city of Philadelphia, Peebles was complaining of "much drunkenness & irregularity among the men, which occasions frequent Courts Martial & Punishments."[179]

This was exactly the kind of complacence which invited a response from George Washington, and Howe compounded this complacence by making the same mistake he had made before Trenton. He garrisoned his Germans north of the city, his regulars to the south of Philadelphia, and strung a series of outposts back up the Germantown Pike to Germantown to keep an eye on Washington. On the morning of October 4, 1777, Capt. Peebles of the Black Watch went off duty at six o'clock, only "about that time we hear'd a firing at German Town, which grows very heavy …" Indeed he had: Washington had been joined by Alexander McDougall's brigade of Continentals from the Hudson highlands, to which Washington added Smallwood's battered Maryland militia.

As Washington beheld Sir William Howe committing the very errors which had given the Americans their chance the previous December, Washington decided that if Brandywine was the second Long Island, Germantown could well be the second Trenton. He formed four attack columns: Sullivan's and Wayne's divisions, with Stirling in support, would move straight down the Germantown Pike and hit the British outposts just outside Germantown; Nathanael Greene's and Adam Stephen's divisions and MacDougall's brigade would strike across the Limekiln Pike and smash into the British right flank; and Smallwood's Marylanders would slip behind that flank, down the Old York Road, and cut off any British retreat toward Philadelphia. Lastly, the Pennsylvania militia under General John Armstrong would creep down the east bank of the Schuylkill River between Germantown and the river, cross the Wissahickon Creek, and surprise the Hessian jäger outposts which stretched between the village of Germantown and the Schuylkill River. As if to replicate the meteorological conditions of Trenton, a thick fog blanketed the region that morning, covering the American advance. If all went well, they could roll all the way down the

[179] Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 138–9; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 91.

Germantown Pike. Since Sir William Howe had established his headquarters at Stenton—the vacant mansion of the Logan family, set back less than a mile from the Pike—they might even snag the commander in chief for North America as well.[180]

This time, however, the fog worked as much *against* as *for* Washington. Sullivan and Wayne were an hour late getting started. Nathaniel Greene's guide got his division and Adam Stephen's lost, and that consumed valuable time as they picked their way backwards from the wrong road and then forwards on the right road. Smallwood, who had the longest and most circuitous march of all, was even further behind schedule. Nor did they really have the advantage of surprise: Capt. Ewald had been tipped off the evening before by a Loyalist for whose nearby home "I had provided protection," and his commandant, old General Knyphausen, relayed the information to Howe. Characteristically, Sir William Howe dismissed it: "That cannot be," he told Knyphausen. But—as Ewald wrote with I-told-you-so satisfaction—the next morning Sir William Howe "was awakened by the enemy cannonballs striking his headquarters." Still, for all the mistakes and the forewarnings, Sullivan and Wayne loomed out of the early morning fog on Germantown Pike like the end of the world, easily brushing the startled British light infantry battalions out of their path, and breaking through a line hastily improvised by the Guards battalion and the regiments of James Grant's brigade. Howe galloped up the Pike only to meet his light infantry fleeing in the opposite direction toward Philadelphia. "For shame, light infantry!" he shouted, "I never saw you retreat before. Form! Form! It's only a scouting party." No, it wasn't; and now Greene's and Stephen's divisions were pouring in on the right, kicking the 4th Regiment of Foot backwards in their path. For a moment it looked like both Germantown and the Germantown Pike were standing wide open to Washington.[181]

But the fog and confusion had taken a good deal off the momentum of the American attack. In a desperate effort to buy time for a rally, British Col. Thomas Musgrave and six companies barricaded themselves into Cliveden, the stone mansion of Pennsylvania chief justice Benjamin Chew, right beside the Germantown Pike. Wayne and Sullivan unwisely stopped—partly from disorganization, and partly because Cliveden looked like an easy target—to

[180] Peebles, *John Peebles' American War*, 140; Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, 94; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 277–9.

[181] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 92–3; Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, 102–3; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 279–80; Scheer & Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats*, 245.

evict the British. Musgrave's men proved a tougher nut to crack than they expected. Then, after repeated attacks, summoning Musgrave to surrender—he refused—and trying to batter the house down with artillery, Washington finally gave up on Cliveden and ordered the advance down the Pike to continue. But in the meantime, Smallwood's militia wandered off track and never got into the battle at all. Cornwallis's brigades under Grey and Agnew were coming up, and the American advance slowed, stopped, and then disintegrated. By ten o'clock, the Continentals were in retreat, and Washington had only another defeat to mourn.

There was a great deal to mourn: Sir William Howe had sustained 534 casualties, including 70 killed; Washington had lost more than twice that number. Worse still, he learned officially on October 18 of Horatio Gates's great victory at Saratoga—the kind of victory that Washington had not been able to achieve all year—and with it, Washington picked up the first beginnings of the rumors that he himself might have a new struggle facing him from Congress: This time a struggle for the very survival of his command.[182]

---

[182] Freeman, *Washington*, 361–2.

Lecture Seventeen

With Washington at Valley Forge

Scope: General Howe resigned after hearing about Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga, and his brother was relieved of his command shortly thereafter. Washington settled the Continental army at Valley Forge for the winter of 1777–1778. The weather was comparatively mild, but the soldiers were ill-clothed and poorly housed, and the food supply systems broke down. The Continental army's soldiers, like the British enlisted men, were mostly from the bottom third of American society and had signed up because they had no better prospects. The officers were much more of a departure from the British norm, as their numbers included more tradesmen than aristocrats. No battle was fought at Valley Forge, except when Washington shrewdly fought off an attempt by Horatio Gates and a faction in Congress to undermine his authority. Another victory for Washington was his appointment of Friedrich von Steuben, a Prussian officer who standardized drill schemes for American regiments. A final triumph occurred when the French ambassador to London announced the signing of new treaties with the Americans.

Outline

I. General Howe had enough men to occupy Philadelphia and keep a watch on Washington but not enough to spare for a major land operation against the river forts the American had constructed on the Delaware River.

- **A.** On October 23, Sir William and his admiral brother sent five warships to silence Fort Mifflin and prepare the way for an attack by infantry.
    1. The tricky currents of the Delaware caused two British vessels to become grounded.
    2. The burning rafts the Americans sent to destroy one of the stranded vessels instead managed to engulf the 64-gun HMS *Augusta*, which then blew up.

B. Howe's land attack against Fort Mercer went no better.
   1. The commandant of Fort Mercer, Christopher Greene, had cleverly withdrawn his men behind a wall across the interior of the fort.
   2. This turned the north part of the fort into a shooting gallery, and 153 Hessians were killed.
   3. On November 15, the Howe brothers launched another offensive, and this time they battered Fort Mifflin into surrender, which was followed by the evacuation of Fort Mercer.

C. Howe now had an open river supply line to his garrison in Philadelphia—but that was all he had.

D. The news of Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga horrified Howe.
   1. Not only had he caused the Saratoga debacle by sailing off to Philadelphia, he had also failed to destroy Washington's army.
   2. On October 22, 1777, Howe wrote to Germain offering his resignation, which Germain accepted in February 1778. Admiral "Black Dick" Howe was relieved of his command shortly thereafter.

II. With the onset of winter, Washington and his generals chose to batten down until spring in a site on the west side of the Schuylkill River, 20 miles from Philadelphia, known locally as Valley Forge.

III. The winter of 1777–1778 was difficult for both sides.

A. Sir William Howe had 16,000 British soldiers, Loyalist refugees, prisoners of war, and wives and children of soldiers to feed, adding up to some 37,000 mouths.

B. At the same time, the Continental army did not spend all its time huddled in the snow drifts. The winter of 1777–1778 was comparatively mild, but there were other serious hardships with which to cope.
   1. The plateau on which Washington had laid out his encampment was open, flat, easily defended, and destitute of shelter.
   2. The commissary and quartermaster systems were not functioning, so food came intermittently.
   3. Some of the men were without clothing.
   4. Washington had to organize foraging parties.

C. Although there was plenty of grumbling among the troops, there was no mutiny.

IV. Who were these men of the new Continental army?

A. What the muster lists of the Continental regiments is surprising.

1. As much as 40 percent of the Continentals were foreign-born, and half of that was Irish.
2. The largest segment was farmers, followed by shoemakers, weavers, and blacksmiths.
3. The average age was 21 for the American-born, and as high as 29 for the foreign-born. About 14 percent of those foreign-born were convicts sent to the colonies as indentured servants.
4. Most owned little property.
5. One must conclude that many of the Continental army's enlistees signed up because they had no better prospects.

B. The Continental army's officers were largely drawn from the top third of American society, but unlike the top third of British society, many Continental officers followed a trade.

C. The most dramatic difference between the British and Continental soldier was surely his appearance. Not until 1779 was anything resembling a uniform worn.

D. For weaponry, the Continentals were armed with the same "Brown Bess" muskets as their British counterparts.

V. There was no "military battle" at Valley Forge, but there were other battles to be fought.

A. Saratoga had made Horatio Gates a hero as well as a foil for those in the Congress who thought that the main army's problem was Washington.

B. Gates moved to York, Pennsylvania, and began handing down orders, suggestions, and appointments to Washington.

C. Washington saw through these schemes and, appealing calmly and skillfully to the president of the Congress, neatly turned the tables on Gates.

D. He succeeded in getting Nathanael Greene appointed as quartermaster general.

VI. In another great victory at Valley Forge, Washington secured the appointment as his chief of staff Lt. Gen. Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, late of the personal staff of Frederick the Great, the legendary king of Prussia grew out of his triumph over the so-called "Conway Cabal."

- **A.** Von Steuben was actually an unemployed half-pay captain in the Prussian army, but his being an ex-Prussian captain was better for Washington because he knew a good deal about drill.
  - **1.** Von Steuben standardized the various drill schemes used in each regiment.
  - **2.** He charmed the Continental soldiers into acquiring a European polish through a combination of multilanguage obscenities and genuine knowledge of his art.
- **B.** Lafayette and von Steuben were Washington's most valuable foreign assets.

VII. On March 13, the French ambassador in London formally announced his government's new treaties with the Americans. The American war was about to become a world war.

Suggested Reading:

Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter*, chaps. 5–9.

Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, chaps. 7–8.

Golway, *Washington's General*, chap. 8.

Questions to Consider:

1. What were the real conditions confronting the Continental army at Valley Forge?

2. What were the contributions made by von Steuben to the survival of the Continental army?

Lecture Seventeen—Transcript
With Washington at Valley Forge

George Washington's fight for Philadelphia, in the fall of 1777, was not really the dismal failure it's sometimes painted as. Washington thought the loss at Germantown—which we looked at in Lecture Sixteen—"was rather unfortunate rather than injurious," and Washington's officers were confident that only a series of mishaps had prevented them achieving a second Trenton. Lord Stirling was sure that "this affair will convince the world that we can out general our enemy, that we dare attack them, that we can surprise them, that we can drive them before us several miles together and that we know how to retreat in good order and defy them to follow us." George Weedon, who commanded one of the Virginia brigades, was actually certain that the army had "no Objections to another trial which must take place soon."[183]

Adding to Sir William Howe's embarrassment at Germantown, the Americans had constructed three small forts on the Delaware River—just below Philadelphia—which bottled up the Delaware River approaches to the newly captured city. Howe had enough men to occupy Philadelphia and keep a strong watch to the north of the city on Washington, but not enough men to spare for mounting a major land operation against these river forts just to the south of Philadelphia. What made this worse was that the new Pennsylvania Executive Council—and remember from Lecture Thirteen that Pennsylvania's new state constitution abolished the office of governor and replaced it with a committee, the Executive Council.—had sunk underwater obstacles in the Delaware River and fitted out a small flotilla of gunboats behind them. Washington seconded their move by sending a small-sized battalion of 200 Continentals under Lt. Col. Samuel Smith to reinforce the largest of the three forts, Fort Mifflin, on Mud Island in the Delaware. In mid-October, General Howe began building batteries on the west bank of the Delaware to bombard Fort Mifflin. On October 23, Sir William and his admiral brother, "Black Dick" Howe, dispatched five British warships to silence Fort Mifflin and prepare the way for a landing and an attack by British infantry. To the Howe brothers' dismay, the tricky currents of the Delaware

---

[183] Washington to the President of Congress (October 5, 1777), *Writings*, 5:79; Wayne Bodle, *The Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers at War* (University Park, PA, 2002), 41.

River caught the 14-gun HMS *Vigilant* on a mud bank, and then stranded the 20-gun sloop HMS *Merlin* on an uncharted sandbar. The Americans then sent burning rafts floating downriver to catch the *Merlin* on fire and burn her. Instead, the rafts managed to engulf the 64-gun HMS *Augusta*, which was trying to tow the *Merlin* off the sandbar. The ship's crew had to abandon the *Augusta*, and on the afternoon of October 24, the *Augusta* blew up, followed by the *Merlin*. So much for the naval attack.

The land attack went no better. Sir William Howe deployed a German regiment—with three grenadier battalions and two companies of jägers—to lead the assault and sent them up against Fort Mercer, the American fort on the New Jersey side of the Delaware River. The commandant of Fort Mercer—Christopher Greene, a cousin of Nathanael Greene—had only about 600 men to face the 1,500 Germans who now approached him under Carl von Donop (that's the same Hessian von Donop who had fled trembling to Princeton after Washington's victory at Trenton). The Germans easily overran the north wall of Fort Mercer, only to discover that Greene had deliberately drawn his men back from the north wall, behind a wall Greene had constructed across the interior of the fort that turned the north part of Fort Mercer into a shooting gallery. One hundred and fifty-three Hessians were killed, including von Donop, who was carried into the American encampment and died of his wounds there. Greene suffered 31 casualties. On November 15, the Howe brothers launched another combined land-and-water assault on Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer. This time British naval artillery succeeded in battering Fort Mifflin into surrender, followed by the evacuation of Fort Mercer on November 19. Finally, Sir William Howe had an open river supply line to his garrison in Philadelphia, but look what it had cost him to get it.[184]

Unhappily, that was all that he had: The news of "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga arrived in Philadelphia on October 18, and Howe's horrified reaction was an implicit recognition that he had, in large measure, made the Saratoga debacle possible by sailing off to Philadelphia. He had, at the same time—despite a major field victory at the Brandywine and two smaller successes at Paoli and Germantown—failed in the larger object of his campaign, which was to disable or destroy George Washington's army. If anything, Washington was proving to be both resilient and elusive, and it was now becoming clear to Howe that all

---

[184] Taafe, *The Philadelphia Campaign*, 122; Mackesy, *War for America*, 129–30.

Washington had to do was to keep dancing away from the British army like a butterfly and stinging like a bee to wear out the British army's long Atlantic tether. On October 22, 1777, a disappointed and fatalistic Sir William Howe wrote to Lord George Germain, offering his resignation as commander in chief of British land forces in North America. It was not a gracious letter Howe accused Germain of failing to provide sufficient troops to enable him to get Washington firmly pinned down, and it may be that Howe clung to the hope that his resignation letter would be read as an ultimatum to Germain: either fire him, or Germain resign himself. If so, it didn't work out that way. The debate in Parliament over Saratoga delayed any immediate response to Howe's letter, but the king was no more inclined to part with Lord George Germain than he was with Lord North. On February 4, 1778, Germain wrote a frosty letter, informing Sir William Howe that his resignation had been accepted and he could now return to England. A month later, Admiral "Black Dick" Howe was also relieved of command of the Royal Navy's North American naval station.[185]

None of this, however much it might have given Washington personal satisfaction to behold, made the immediate prospects of his army very appetizing. Sir William Howe made a brief sally out of Philadelphia toward Washington's field encampment at Whitemarsh on December 4, but he thought the better for attacking Washington's position and marched back into Philadelphia on December 7. With the onset now of December and winter, there was little more Washington could do than batten down until spring. The only question was: Where should he do so? There was the possibility of occupying Wilmington, Delaware, because that—as a city—would afford immediate, ready-made housing for his troops. Or he could fall back into Lancaster County, and there—if he was in Lancaster County—he could shield the Continental Congress as it was meeting in exile in the town of York. But Washington wanted to keep as close an eye on Howe as possible, and quite possibly he wanted to get as far away from the politicians as he could, too. With that in mind, he and his generals chose a site on the west side of the Schuylkill River, using the river—using the Schuylkill—as a moat between himself and Sir William Howe in Philadelphia. This location was about 20 miles to the north and west of Philadelphia and was known locally as Valley Forge, from an iron foundry

[185] Gruber, "Lord Richard Howe," 250–1; Lord George Germain to Sir William Howe (February 4, 1778), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 15:38.

located there. On December 19, 1777, the Continental army set up its winter encampment there.[186]

The Continental army's winter at Valley Forge has been stamped into the American imagination as the nadir of the Revolution, with Washington and a handful of ill-clad scarecrows gamely surviving a brutal winter on empty soup kettles while Sir William Howe and the British army frolics comfortably in Philadelphia. Neither side of that image has much to be said for it. In addition to the 16,000 British soldiers that Sir William Howe had to care for in occupied Philadelphia, there were also Loyalist refugees, civilian workers attached to his army, prisoners of war, and the wives and children of soldiers who were carried on the regimental strength to provide support services. By the end of 1777, Howe had as many as 37,500 mouths to feed in Philadelphia. To do it, he had to rely on a 3,000 mile long supply system which was, after three years of war, nearing the breaking point. That, or else he had to try to cut deals with the surrounding farm counties, which Washington was clearly going to do everything he could do to disrupt. As a result, Howe was compelled to send foraging parties into the countryside almost every other day.

At the same time, the Continental army did not spend all its time huddled in the snow drifts, barely staying alive. The winter of 1777 to 1778 was comparatively mild, especially compared to the winter previous—the winter of 1776 to 1777, and the Continental army really experienced their only serious, blizzard-like snowstorm in early February 1778. In Philadelphia itself, Capt. Peebles of the Black Watch recorded in his journal that the weather veered from "remarkably mild" in mid-December 1777, and "very pleasant" on Christmas Day, to "moderately frosty" on New Year's Day and "surprisingly mild" as late as February 3. But there were still serious hardships to cope with at Valley Forge. For one thing, the plateau overlooking the Schuylkill River—on which Washington laid out his encampment—was open, flat, easily defended, and totally destitute of shelter. The soldiers would have to construct their own encampment—their own log huts—and many of those huts were still not completed a month after moving into Valley Forge. But even more significant, the Continental army's commissary and quartermaster systems almost went dead. Both commissary general Joseph Trumbull and quartermaster general Thomas

---

[186] Benjamin H. Newcomb, "Washington's Generals and the Decision to Quarter at Valley Forge," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History & Biography* 117 (October 1993), 326–8.

Mifflin resigned their positions in the fall of 1777. The commissariat went into the hands of a succession of incompetents, and the quartermaster general's post remained vacant until March 1778. That didn't mean that the soldiers went without food all the time—food and equipment certainly came into Valley Forge—but it came intermittently, and with demoralizing unpredictability. Within days of setting up the encampment, Washington had to write to Henry Laurens—who was the new president of the Continental Congress—and he had to complain to Laurens about the "total failure of supplies," which, Washington warned, meant that "this army must dissolve." The next day, Washington added that the sole commissary officer in the camp had reported that he "had not a single hoof of any kind to slaughter, and not more than twenty-five barrels of flour." One officer recalled that "The men were literally naked … The officers who had coats had them of every color and make. I saw officers at a grand parade at Valley Forge mounting guard in a sort of dressing gown made of an old blanket or woolen bed covering." Washington eventually gave permission for something he had previously forbidden the Continental army—foraging on the countryside—and this provided some temporary relief. But another food crisis loomed up in February, and Washington was forced to organize more extensive foraging parties of upwards of 500 men, raiding larders in New Jersey as well as Pennsylvania.[187]

These were conditions which would probably have disintegrated any European army in the same situation, and to be sure, Washington's army did show some crumbling around the edges. Of the 12,000 or so soldiers who marched into Valley Forge in December, a little more than half were present for duty in February; and half of those were marked down as "sick absent." As many as 1,100 Continental soldiers actually deserted to the British. But although there was grumbling aplenty—although there were shouts of "meat, meat" when the rations wore thin—there was no mutiny in this army. "We have some as brave individuals among our officers as any that exist," wrote John Laurens, one of Washington's cadre of adoring young staff officers, who also happened to be the son of the president of the

---

[187] R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775–1783* (Princeton, 1975), 112–113; Thomas Fleming, *Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge* (New York, 2005), 129, 181, 186; Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, 45, 107, 176; Peebles, *American War*, 155, 156, 160, 162; Washington to the President of Congress (December 22 and 23, 1777 and January 5, 1778), *Writings*, 5:193, 197, 209; John B.B. Trussell, *Epic on the Schuylkill: The Valley Forge Encampment, 1777–1778* (Harrisburg, 1974), 11.

Continental Congress. Laurens wrote that the men in the ranks "are the best crude materials for soldiers I believe in the world, for they possess a docility and patience which astonish foreigners. With a little more discipline we should drive the haughty Briton to his ships."[188]

Who were these men whom John Laurens praised so fulsomely? In Lecture Three, we spent some time looking at the average British soldier, and so far we've had some occasional glimpses of their American counterparts in the militia and in the Continental line regiments. But until Washington was able to institute long-service enlistments at Morristown in 1777, the membership of the Continental army was really too fluid to characterize. The Philadelphia campaign was actually the Continentals' first campaign as a fully regular force, and Valley Forge was its first encampment. What the muster lists of these Continental regiments reveal, however, must be almost as surprising as what we learned about the British regular. In the first place, as much as 40 percent of the Continental army was foreign-born, and half of that was Irish. Like their British counterparts, the largest segment of the Continental army was farmers or farm workers, followed by shoemakers, weavers, and blacksmiths.

The average age was 21 for the American-born, but as high as 29 for the foreign-born, something that tells us that a lot of the foreign-born were immigrants who were down on their luck and who enlisted in the Continental army because it was really the only thing on offer. About 14 percent of the foreign-born in the Continental army were actually transported convicts who had been sent to the colonies before the Revolution as indentured servants. Most of the American-born soldiers owned property worth less than £45, which means that they were drawn from the bottom third of American society; 61 percent of the New Jersey brigade was taken from that poorest one-third. Put it all together and it's hard to escape the conclusion that many of the Continental army's enlistees signed up either because they had no other prospects, or because they looked at the enlistment bounty—something that came either in the form of cash or land warrants; these are kinds of things that were promised by Congress—and they signed on because those bounties were the only hope for them of gaining a few rungs on the economic ladder. As one French

[188] Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 214; John Laurens to Henry Laurens (January 23, 1778), *The Army Correspondence of Colonel John Laurens in the Years 1777–8*, ed. Wm. Gilmore Sims (New York, 1867), 112.

volunteer acidly remarked, “There is a hundred times more enthusiasm for this Revolution in any Paris café than in all the colonies together.”[189]

The officer ranks of the Continental army were much more of a departure from the British norm than the men in the ordinary ranks. After Sir Guy Carleton had fended off the American attack on Quebec, he found very much to his surprise and astonishment that among his prisoners—among the American prisoners who were officers—“one major was a blacksmith, another a hatter.” “Of their captains,” wrote an amazed Carleton, “there was a butcher … a tanner, a shoemaker, a tavern-keeper etc.” No aristocrats; no one from noble families. Although the Continental army’s officers were drawn, for the most part, from the top third of American society, even this was by no means an absolute rule; and anyway, the top third of American society was a very different species than the top third of British society. French officers fighting alongside the Americans—officers who discovered, to their astonishment, that commissions in the Continental army were “granted here to every rank of people … There are shoemakers who are colonels” in the Continental army—were convulsed in laughter when they were innocently asked by their American counterparts what “trade” the French officers—who were exclusively drawn from the nobility—they followed at home “in France.”[190] The French thought that was hysterically funny: the idea of officers following a trade. Yet this is what the American officers, for the most part, did.

But the most dramatic difference between the British and the Continental soldier was surely his appearance. British imperial regulations had prevented the colonies from developing a domestic woolens trade, so it was not surprising that at the outset of the war, the Continental Congress piously hoped that the new rebel state governments would clothe their own troops, and relieve Congress of the responsibility of manufacturing uniforms itself. What this did was to create a kaleidoscope of uniform shapes and sizes. Marveled one Hessian officer who surrendered to the Continentals at Saratoga: “Not a one of them was regularly equipped. Each had on the clothes which he was accustomed to wear in the field, in the tavern, the church, and in everyday life.” Congress did make a futile effort in November 1775 to require brown as the common coat color for Continental infantrymen; but necessity,

---

[189] Edward Papenfuse & Gregory A. Stiverson, “General Smallwood’s Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private,” *William & Mary Quarterly* 30 (January 1973), 120, 125, 127; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 29, 81.

[190] Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 64, 66; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 400.

rather than Congress, was the real tailor of the Continental army. The Marquis de Lafayette saw his first Continentals just before the battle of the Brandywine, and he described them as "rather poorly armed, and much worse clad. … In the midst of a great variety of clothing, sometimes even of nakedness, the best garments were a sort of hunting-shirts and loose jackets made of gray linen …" Not until the spring of 1778, when the spigots of French military supplies began opening up to the American army, were large shipments of brown uniform coats with red facings finally distributed pretty uniformly to the army. Not until 1779 did Washington finally prescribe what became the most familiar uniform of the Continental army: this blue standard uniform coat, with different colored facings for regiments from different states and regions; and then in 1782, standard red facings for the entire army. Washington's own headquarters guard company wore blue coats with buff facings, red vests, and buff britches. For weaponry, the Continentals were armed pretty much the same as their British counterparts: with the "Brown Bess" musket, obtained sometimes through purchase abroad, and sometimes from capture from the British.[191]

It frequently puzzles modern visitors to the encampment at Valley Forge when they realize that what they are visiting is only a Revolutionary encampment. There was no "battle" at Valley Forge, for the simple reason that Sir William Howe saw no point any longer in looking for one. That does not mean, though, that there were not other kinds of battles to be fought at Valley Forge; and not just against the cold and privation. The great victory at Saratoga made a Continental hero out of Washington's one-time adjutant, Horatio Gates. It also made Gates into a foil for those factions in the Congress who were convinced that the problem the main army in Pennsylvania had in losing battles was Washington himself. In November 1777, the Congress reconstituted its military oversight committee, the Board of War, with Horatio Gates as its new president. Nor was Gates above using those factions to his own ends. The general—whom men in the ranks snickered at as "Granny" Gates—moved to York, Pennsylvania, to stay in close contact with the Congress, and he began handing down orders, suggestions, and appointments to Washington in his capacity with the Board of War. Gates created an office of inspector general for the army, put the quartermaster general's office directly under the Board of War, and began

---

[191] Ketchum, *Saratoga*, 430; Tower, *De La Fayette in the American Revolution*, 1:217; John Milsop, *Continental Infantryman of the American Revolution* (Oxford, 2004), 21–3.

laying plans for an entirely new campaign into Canada, to be headed by the Marquis de Lafayette.[192]

Washington saw at once that this all represented schemes aimed at undermining him, and eventually replacing him with Gates as the overall commander of the Continental army. An inspector general appointed by Horatio Gates would be little better than the Board of War's mole on Washington's staff; control of the quartermaster's department would make the quartermaster subservient to the Board of War. Sending Lafayette to Canada would move Washington's best promoter to America's new French allies and send him someplace else. Appealing skillfully to the president of the Congress, Henry Laurens, through his aide and Laurens's son, John Laurens, Washington neatly turned the tables on all these schemes. Gates tried to nominate Thomas Conway as the army's inspector general; Washington calmly exposed Conway as a loud mouth who had drunkenly boasted that Gates would soon save America from "a weak general and bad counselors." Gates wanted his ally, Thomas Mifflin, reappointed as quartermaster general; Washington persuaded Henry Laurens and a congressional investigating committee to appoint instead Washington's favorite, Nathanael Greene. In mid-February, when Lafayette obediently visited Albany to scout the possibilities of Gates's proposed Canadian invasion, Benedict Arnold and Benjamin Lincoln assured him that Gates's plans for Canada were sheer lunacy. On February 19, 1778, with all of his gambits going nowhere, Gates wrote an abject letter to Washington claiming that "I am of no faction," and that he had never had anything but honor for Washington. In April, Thomas Conway resigned from the army, protesting that it had all been a misunderstanding and that he had been treated in "a most indecent manner."[193]

Washington had thus won one of his major victories in the Revolution. It was not a military victory, it was a political one; but it also showed what kind of personal and political skills Washington had been able to hone in his position. His other great victory at Valley Forge grew out of his triumph over the so-called "Conway Cabal." Rather than allow Horatio Gates to insert Thomas Conway onto his staff as inspector general, Washington had countered by suggesting the appointment to this new job of inspector

---

[192] Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 119–121, 157–9; Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, 153.

[193] Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 117, 202, 232; Tower, *De La Fayette in the American Revolution*, 2:284.

general of yet another foreign volunteer with a résumé as imposing as his name. This was Lt. General Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben; late of the personal staff of the legendary king of Prussia, Frederick the Great. Von Steuben was actually an unemployed half-pay captain in the Prussian army who had once been attached to Frederick the Great's headquarters—not to Frederick the Great's personal staff, just to his headquarters—and who had now been knocking around Europe for several years, trying to find gainful military employment in the German states. Once Steuben cannily promoted himself to Benjamin Franklin in Paris as a great Prussian general, Franklin was happy to be thus hoodwinked, and he sent von Steuben to America with a recommendation. Like Lafayette, von Steuben shrewdly saw that he would go farther with the Americans if he volunteered to serve for free; and in late February, Baron von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge.

As it turned out, von Steuben's being a ex-Prussian captain was probably far better for Washington's purposes than an ex-Prussian general, if only because a line officer—like a captain—would know a good deal more about drill than a general; and Prussian drill was what Washington wanted dinned into the heads of his men. This von Steuben did in spades: He standardized the various drill schemes used in each regiment; he bypassed the officers—who usually knew little more about drill than the men in the ranks—and created his own school of the company from picked men of each brigade; and he charmed the Continental soldiers into acquiring a European polish and precision through a mad combination of multi-language obscenities and genuine knowledge of his art. He swore at them in German; he swore at them in French; and when he could not curse them in English, he called on his interpreter, Capt. Benjamin Walker, to do it for him, "*Viens, Walker, mon ami, mon bon ami! Goddam de gaucheries of dese badauds. Je ne puis Plus. I can curse zem no more.*"[194] Along with Lafayette, von Steuben—whoever he really was—was Washington's most valuable foreign asset

Foreign assets were now what were going to change—utterly and dramatically—this War for American Independence. On March 13, the French ambassador in London formally announced his government's new treaties with the Americans, and that night Lord North's government withdrew its ambassador to the French court. The American war was about to become a World War.

---

[194] Arnold Whitridge, "Baron von Steuben, Washington's Drillmaster," *History Today* 26 (July 1976), 434.

Lecture Eighteen
The Widening War

Scope: The possibility of a French intervention heightened the costs and logistical strain of supplying the British army and the Royal Navy and would require a redeployment of British naval forces. The West Indian planters, with their own voting bloc in Parliament, would oppose any measure that weakened their protections. Parliamentary opposition to the war was growing. Lord Germain accepted Sir William Howe's resignation and ordered the British, under Sir Henry Clinton, to withdraw from Philadelphia to New York. Washington pursued Clinton and caught his rear guard at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, in New Jersey, where Charles Lee finally succeeded in completely disgracing himself by retreating. Washington took over Lee's command and successfully led his troops to victory. Washington's war then settled into a stalemate around New York City.

Outline

I. The possibility of a French intervention in the war dramatically heightened the costs and the logistical strain of supplying the British army and navy.

- **A.** Both might have to confront the French again, if not on the Continent, then certainly in America, the West Indies, Africa, and India.
- **B.** If Spain followed France, then strategic Gibraltar could be a target.
- **C.** At worst, the French army might attempt an invasion across the channel.
- **D.** Even at best, the French navy was a force to be reckoned with.

II. The most likely theater for French trouble-making would be the West Indies.

- **A.** The British West Indies were staggeringly productive, mainly through the islands' chief product, sugar.
- **B.** But the West Indian islands were also vulnerable.
  - **1.** Of the half-million settlers in the British West Indies, all but 50,000 were slaves, working under the cruelest of conditions.

2. This formula ensured rebellion and any threat of war would touch off still more rebellions, especially if the five regiments of military assigned to the islands were called away.

C. There was very little that could be done to reduce this vulnerability, thanks to the lop-sided politics of West Indian sugar. Of the 50,000 whites, the top 1 percent owned 78 percent of the land.
   1. Few of these plantation owners stayed in the West Indies for any length of time; a good percentage sat in Parliament, where they formed the "West India interest."
   2. There would be no defying the West India interest; the question was how much North America would be denuded to defend the islands.
   3. Charles James Fox's motion to send no more reinforcements to America was defeated by only 259 to 165 in the Commons.
   4. The North government authorized a new peace commission to promise the colonies full control over their own internal taxation, no garrisons of regulars in the colonies, recognition of the Continental Congress to speak for the colonies—everything short of independence.

D. Whether this offer placated the Americans or not, the French still had to be dealt with.
   1. In late March 1779, Germain ordered 5,000 of the 16,000 British soldiers in Philadelphia to leave for the West Indies, with another 3,000 to secure the British outposts on the Florida peninsula.
   2. Philadelphia would be abandoned.
   3. The remainder of the British forces in North America would be withdrawn to New York City and Halifax.

E. Sir Henry Clinton, who took over command after Sir William Howe's resignation was accepted, set about preparing to evacuate Philadelphia.
   1. News of the imminent British departure sent into a panic the 4,300 Philadelphians who had taken a loyalty oath to the king.
   2. Some 1,500 Loyalist families took up Clinton's offer to use his transports and left the city.

III. Things seemed to be looking up for Washington.

A. Conditions at Valley Forge had considerably improved.
   1. Food was regularly available.

2. Von Steuben's drill lessons had whipped the army's brigades into a semblance of European-style uniformity.
3. Enough absentees and recruits had joined the main army that Washington had 15,000 infantry and artillerymen on hand.

B. Benedict Arnold got promoted to major general, and Charles Lee was returned in a prisoner exchange.

C. The North government's peace commission request was turned down with the assurance that the United States had nothing to negotiate.

IV. Not all of this was quite as promising as it seemed.

A. Lafayette, sent on a reconnaissance mission, nearly got cut off and surrounded.

B. Back from captivity, Charles Lee was giving advice again.

1. He began with a reorganization plan for the army.
2. He wrote a letter to Henry Laurens recommending his own promotion to lieutenant general (equal in rank to Washington).
3. He advised Washington not to pursue Clinton into New Jersey, advice Washington did not take.

V. Washington resolutely sprang after Sir Henry Clinton.

A. He left a detachment to occupy Philadelphia and designated Benedict Arnold military commandant of the city.

B. He crossed the rest of the main army over into New Jersey and by June 24 was just north of Princeton and eager to hit Clinton's rear guard.

1. He divided the main army into two corps, the first and lightest under Lee, which caught up with Cornwallis's rear guard near Monmouth Court House (modern Freehold, New Jersey).
2. The other corps, under Washington's direct command, was ready to follow up as soon as Lee made contact.

C. What Lee did not count on was that Cornwallis's rear guard was much bigger than his scouts had led him to believe. Soon Lee's corps was retreating.

D. By noon on June 28, when Washington and the balance of the main army were within 2.5 miles of Monmouth Courthouse, Washington heard no musket fire.

1. Then he began to meet stragglers bearing tales of Lee's retreat, and then Lee and his staff.
2. Washington took command immediately.

- **E.** For the balance of the afternoon, British regulars and Continental line attacked and counterattacked. The temperatures were in the 90s, and men were dying from the heat.
  - **1.** The Americans stood firm, and Washington in particular had handled the situation with skill and confidence.
  - **2.** By morning, the British were gone, and Washington claimed Monmouth as a victory.
- **F.** Formal charges were lodged against Lee, who was found guilty.
- **G.** The British, meanwhile, pushed on to Staten Island.
- **H.** By July 6, Washington had reached the Hudson, north of the British lines around New York City, the same position he had once occupied nearly two years before.

VI. Unbeknownst to Washington, he had fought his last major battle in the north and the next-to-last battle of his entire career. For the next three years, he would settle into conducting the longest—and most unsuccessful—siege in American history around British-held New York.

- **A.** He planted the Continental army in encircling arc of six encampments and began building up forts in the Hudson highlands to secure the Hudson River against any British thrust from the city.
- **B.** Beyond occasional bursts of activity, Washington's war settled into a stalemate around New York City.

Suggested Reading:

Dickinson, ed., *Britain and the American Revolution*, chap. 4.

Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, chap. 6.

Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, chap. 6.

Questions to Consider:

1. What impact did the shift of British forces to the protection of the West Indies have on Washington's strategy?
2. In what ways was the Battle at Monmouth Courthouse a moment which justified all of Washington's concepts and actions up until that time?

Lecture Eighteen—Transcript
The Widening War

The French treaty forced a radical revision of the strategy Lord North's government had been following since the winter of 1775–1776. The possibility of a French intervention dramatically heightened the costs and logistical strain of supplying the British army and the Royal Navy, because both now might have to confront the French in arms; if not on the Continent, then certainly at every other pressure point in the British Empire: in America, the West Indies, Africa, and India. If Spain followed France, as it was expected the weak and debilitated Spanish Empire would, then Britain could certainly expect to add its strategic post at Gibraltar to the list of threatened targets. In the worst case scenario, the French army might actually attempt an invasion of Britain across the channel; but even at best, the French navy was a force to be reckoned with, and that would require a serious redeployment of British naval forces to secure the English Channel and the empire's vital sea routes.

The most likely theater for French trouble-making would be the West Indies: Jamaica—in the Greater Antilles—St. Kitts, St. Vincent, Dominica, Grenada, Barbados, Nevis, Montserrat, and Antigua. The British West Indies had only one-fifth the population of the 13 North American colonies, and the British-held islands of the Lesser Antilles embraced little more than 10,000 square miles. But they were staggeringly productive square miles and mainly through the islands' chief product: sugar. The West Indies trade was three times the value of Britain's trade with India, and sent 300 ships a year to London alone. Jamaica, just by itself, was worth £1.5 million in the trade per year. But the West Indian islands, in addition to being profitable, were also vulnerable. Of the half-million planters and settlers in the British West Indies, all but 50,000 of them were black slaves, worked with unbelievable cruelty on the vast sugar plantations of the islands. This formula ensured rebellion, and on Jamaica alone there were three slave uprisings in the 1760s. Any threat of war in the Caribbean—as there had been briefly in 1770 with Spain—would touch off still more slave rebellions, especially if the five regiments of British infantry assigned to the protection of the British West Indian Islands were called off elsewhere. Yet, there was very little that could be done to reduce this vulnerability, thanks to the lopsided politics of West Indian sugar. Of the 50,000 whites of the British West Indies, the top one percent owned three-quarters of the sugar

estates; in Jamaica, 467 planters owned 78 percent of the island. On St. Kitts, the entire island was dominated by just 110 plantation owners. Few of these great plantation owners actually stayed in the West Indies for any length of time: The basic formula for wealth in the West Indies was to go out to the Indies to make as much money as fast as possible, avoid dying of the myriad plagues and diseases of the tropics, and then return to England and leave overseers or junior family members to manage the West Indian estates. A good percentage of these West Indian property owners sat in Parliament, and there they formed the "West India interest." They commanded a strategic block of between 50–60 votes that could always be counted upon to demand special favors and special protection for their investments far away in the Caribbean.[195]

Since Lord North's government was, by 1778, surviving by exactly six votes in the House of Commons—that, at least, was the margin of victory over the budget in March of that year—there would be no defying the "West India interest" by the North government. The only question was exactly how much North America would be denuded to defend the islands. Charles James Fox, feeling the corrosive power of dissension rising behind him in Parliament, brutally attacked North in general and Germain in particular for waging an "impracticable" war from the first in North America. Fox's motion in February that no more reinforcements be sent to North America was defeated by only 259–165 in the Commons. It was the largest opposition vote on the war yet. In April and May of that year, there followed still more motions to break off this "fruitless, expensive and destructive war." Those motions were followed by an unannounced appearance in the House of Commons by no one less than "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne home from America on parole and eager for a formal Parliamentary inquiry which—he was confident—would expose the culpability of Lord George Germain in the Saratoga disaster. The North government reluctantly authorized a new peace commission, this time to be headed by the Earl of Carlisle, and empowered to promise the colonies full control over their own internal taxation, no garrisons of British regulars in the colonies, and recognition of the legal status of the Continental Congress to speak for the colonies. In fact, the Carlisle Commission was empowered to offer the Americans everything short of independence. But whether this

---

[195] A.J. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean* (Philadelphia, 2000), 7, 9, 17, 27, 43; Roger Norman Buckley, *The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in the Revolutionary War* (Gainesville, FL, 1998), 5; Mackesy, *War for America*, 184.

placated the Americans or not, the French threat had to be dealt with; and the only way to do so was a massive reallocation of British forces. In late March 1779, Germain, all the while swearing that "His Majesty's firm purpose" was to pursue the war in North America "with the utmost vigour," ordered away to the West Indies 5,000 of the 16,000 British soldiers in Philadelphia, with another 3,000 to be sent off to secure the British outposts on the Florida peninsula: St. Augustine and Pensacola. Philadelphia would be abandoned. The remainder of the British forces in North America would be withdrawn to New York City and to Halifax, and there they would hunker down to hold those key sites while active British military attention shifted elsewhere to the French.[196]

Command of these forces would not be remaining with Sir William Howe. On May 8, Howe received official notice from Germain that his resignation—which we mentioned in the last lecture—had been accepted, and that he was to turn over his command in Philadelphia to Sir Henry Clinton. Rumors of Howe's removal and the new peace commission had been heard by Capt. Peebles of the Black Watch as early as mid-April, all of which Peebles found "very humbling to Great Britain." Howe staged a final review of his troops; ominously enough, "in marching past the Genls. Horse started at the Colours" and unceremoniously dumped Howe onto the ground. But in addition to the review, he was also feted by a large-scale gala in his honor. Nevertheless, on May 24, Sir William Howe boarded HMS *Andromeda* and sailed out of the war for good. Sir Henry Clinton, meanwhile, set about methodically preparing to evacuate Philadelphia. On May 22, Clinton ordered all baggage and artillery loaded onto transports. "They say we are going to leave this place altogether," Capt. Peebles recorded in his journal, an observation which sent the 4,300 Philadelphians who had taken a loyalty oath to the king after the arrival of the British the previous fall into a panic at the prospect of falling into the unforgiving hands of the rebels. "All the loyal inhabitants, who had taken our protection, put their heads together and lamented that they now had to give up all their property," because that was the only way to escape rebel retaliation; they would have to abandon Philadelphia with the British. "They told us to our faces that the army had come only to make them miserable," wrote a disheartened Johann Ewald, the Hessian jäger captain. "Their entire

[196] Mackesy, *War for America*, 182–5, 188; Jerome R. Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution* (Armonk, NY, 1998), 132, 143; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 151–3; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 133; "Secret Instructions for General Sir Henry Clinton," *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 15:74.

reward that they now had from accepting British protection consisted in that they were unfortunate and the English lucky.” Joseph Galloway, the leader of Philadelphia’s Loyalists, had actually begged Sir William Howe for a pass through the lines in order to meet with George Washington and work out a deal to protect the friendless Loyalists. Howe passed the request on to Sir Henry Clinton, and Clinton refused. But Clinton at least made this concession: He would reserve his transports for the use of Loyalist refugees, and march his troops overland to New York City. Capt. Ewald estimated that some 1,500 Philadelphia families took Clinton up on his offer, “Leaving the city,” as Ewald wrote, “and turning their backs on their property.” On June 12, 1778, Clinton set his army in motion, crossing the Delaware River at Kensington and moving across New Jersey in two columns: one column under the veteran Hessian, Knyphausen, escorting a 12-mile long wagon train; and the other under Earl Cornwallis, acting as a rear-guard. One of the last units to leave Philadelphia was Johann Ewald’s jägers.[197]

Word of a British withdrawal from Philadelphia reached Washington’s ears at Valley Forge as early as May 17, and the next day Washington launched Lafayette on a large scale reconnaissance toward Barren Hill to feel out the British response. Since February—and since Washington had won the chess match over control of the commissary and quartermaster—“our prospects,” wrote one of his officers, “have … miraculously brightened.” One Rhode Island officer boasted that now at Valley Forge everyone had “a piece of good beef or pork” at every dinner, with “as good bread as I ever eat” and tea, coffee, and milk in plenty.” Not only were they being fed well at last, but they were also being trained properly: von Steuben’s drill lessons had whipped the army’s brigades into a semblance of European-style uniformity. By May 1778 enough absentees and recruits had joined the main army that Washington had 15,000 infantry and artillerymen on hand.

Benedict Arnold—still limping gamely on the leg he had nearly lost at Saratoga—finally got the promotion to major general that he wanted. He joined the main army on May 21, equipped with a sword knot and a pair of epaulets that Washington sent him as a token of admiration. Washington also received a surprise—this time courtesy of the prisoner-exchange system—in the form of Charles Lee, his one-time second-in-command, who had been so ignominiously captured by British dragoons in New Jersey at

---

[197] Fleming, *Washington’s Secret War*, 265; *John Peebles’ American War*, 175, 178, 184; M.A. Jones, “Sir William Howe,” 62; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 130, 131, 132.

the end of 1776. Lee had finally been properly exchanged, and he too rejoined the main army on May 21, 1778. When the Earl of Carlisle's peace commission tacked up the Delaware River at the beginning of June—just as Sir Henry Clinton was preparing to move the army in the opposite direction—their request to negotiate based on the North government's new offers was curtly turned down with the assurance that the United States had nothing to negotiate, starting with its own independence.[198]

Not all of this, however, was quite as promising as it seemed. The unhappy Lafayette, off to Barren Hill on his own with an independent command for the first time, nearly managed to get himself cut off and surrounded at Barren Hill. Once back in his old role as the main army's second-in-command, Charles Lee resumed his unstable career as Washington's staff nuisance. Eighteen months as a British prisoner-of-war had done little to cure Charles Lee's habitual conviction that he was the only one who knew how to make things right. Foul-mouthed, sardonic, anorexically thin, and eternally accompanied by a retinue of greyhounds—whose company he was said to prefer to human beings—there was no one whom Charles Lee imagined could not profit from his advice. That included, during his captivity in New York City, the British. Four months after his capture, in March 1777, Charles Lee offered Admiral "Black Dick" Howe's secretary a plan which, Charles Lee believed, would bring the war to a happy end for both sides: A plan involving a British landing on the Chesapeake which would capture Annapolis, Baltimore, and Alexandria, and split the colonies in half. The Howe brothers paid him no attention, and the plan—which would otherwise have amounted to treason committed by a man already in danger of being classed as a traitor—was buried in the Howe family papers until 1857; just as well for Charles Lee. Once back from captivity, though, Lee resumed his barrage of unsolicited advice, starting with a reorganization plan for the army, followed by a personal letter to President Henry Laurens recommending his promotion to lieutenant general; in other words, equal in rank to Washington. He predicted that Clinton's withdrawal from Philadelphia was only a feint, and Lee advised Washington not to try to pursue Clinton into New Jersey because the Continentals were simply unable to stand up to British regulars in an open fight. If Lee had not had

---

[198] Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 244–5, 277, 307; Washington to Landon Carter (May 30, 1778), *Writings,* 5:389; Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, 238, 241; Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, 184, 193–4; Mackesy, *War for America*, 159, 188–89, 220–1.

powerful friends in Congress, Washington might have given thought to sending him back to the British.[199]

Certainly Washington had no thought at all of taking Charles Lee's advice. Once Sir Henry Clinton began moving across the Delaware River, Washington resolutely sprang after him, breaking camp at Valley Forge on June 19 with flags flying and drums beating. He peeled off a detachment to reoccupy Philadelphia, and he designated Benedict Arnold—as a favor to Arnold's still incomplete convalescence—as military commandant of the city. But Washington crossed the rest of the main army over into New Jersey, and by June 24 was just north of Princeton and eager to hit Sir Henry Clinton's rear guard. Washington divided the main army into two corps. The first and lightest under Lee with the brigades of William Maxwell, Charles Scott, Anthony Wayne, and Daniel Morgan's rifle battalion. This corps caught up with Cornwallis's rear guard near Monmouth Court House (modern Freehold, New Jersey, between Routes 33 and 522). The other corps Washington kept directly under his own command, ready to follow up as soon as Lee made contact with the British rear guard.

Lee sent Anthony Wayne forward on the Freehold Road to grab the tail of the British army and force them to deploy, while Lee and the rest of his corps slipped around the left flank of the British deployment to cut it off from the rest of Clinton's columns. What Lee did not count on was the fact that the British rear guard, under Earl Cornwallis, was a much bigger arrangement than the 1,500–2,000 men whom Lee's scouts had led him to believe lay ahead. Lee ran into more—and more, and more—British regulars; and in short order it was Lee's *right* flank brigade, under Charles Scott, and not the British *left* flank, which was in danger of being turned and rolled up. Lee upbraided Scott furiously, "You have ruined me!" and soon Lee's corps was backing up the road it had so aggressively advanced down earlier that morning.[200]

By noon Washington and the balance of the main army, about 7,400 men, were within two and a half miles of Monmouth Courthouse. What was odd was that Washington could hear no rolls of musketry fire. Then he began meeting the stragglers, followed by the Second New Jersey Regiment; all of

---

[199] Schecter, *Battle for New York*, 280–81; Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 284–9, 299, 304, 309; Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, 204–220.

[200] Fleming, *Washington's Secret War,* 308–10; Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, 216; Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, 242.

them bearing tales of Lee's retreat. Then, topping a small rise beside the road, came Charles Lee and his staff. Washington rode down on him with the wrath of an avenging Zeus: "What does this mean, sir? Give me instantly an explanation of this retreat!" Lee, startled by Washington's rage, stammered out, "Sir? Sir?" "Why are you retreating," Washington demanded again. Because, Lee blurted out, "the contradictory reports as to the enemy's movements brought about a confusion that he could not control." Besides, Lee added, "indecently" warming to his favorite task of advice-giving, "this was exactly the kind of stand-up battle" he, Charles Lee, had "opposed … in council, and while the enemy was so superior … we could not oppose him." That was the red rag to Washington; if Lee had no confidence that Americans could fight, then he shouldn't have ordered them into battle. "You should not have undertaken it unless prepared to carry it through," And anyway, "whatever your opinions," Lee had been given orders to attack, and, added Washington, "orders were to be obeyed." Not that he was going to trust Lee with any further orders: Washington insisted on taking field command himself at this point.[201]

He didn't have much time to do it, though. Sir Henry Clinton was now on the field, sending in the Guards grenadiers and light infantry without even bothering to form them up. But this time, unlike Germantown, the Americans did not flinch. Capt. Peebles of the Black Watch watched the British regiments pour in "a heavy fire … of both cannon & musketry" until the grenadiers charged up with the bayonet, only to meet "a fresh line of the Enemy strong posted … & well supplied with Cannon," and so the British fell back. Washington, meanwhile, threw out Lord Stirling's brigade to the north, on his left; pulled Anthony Wayne's brigade back to Stirling's to form a center; and Nathanael Greene, coming up without orders but marching instinctively to the renewed sound of fighting, took up position on the right hand of the Freehold Road. For the balance of the afternoon, British regulars and the Continental line attacked and counter-attacked, British and American artillery "playing … as briskly as they could on everything within their reach." (Aided, on the American side, by Mary Ludwig Hayes, one of numerous camp women whose task in battle was to bring up water to the artillerymen—hence her nickname, "Molly Pitcher"—

---

[201] Henry B. Carrington, *Washington the Soldier* (New York, 1898), 232–3; John Laurens to Henry Laurens ((June 30, 1778), *Army Correspondence*, 197; Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter*, 245–8; Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 311–324; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 282–7; Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, 190–92, 194; Freeman, *Washington*, 398.

but whom, in this instance actually helped serve and load one of the American cannon.) The full dank weight of a New Jersey summer had by now sent the temperatures into the 90s, and as the afternoon waned, Capt. Peebles noticed that "the excessive heat … had so fatigued & knock'd up the men that a great number … died upon the Spot." It had never been Sir Henry Clinton's plan to fight a stand up battle at Monmouth; his aim was to reach New York, and he only turned to fight in order to prevent his rear guard from being sliced off. Still, the Americans had given as good as they got from the British, and Washington in particular had handled the dangerous situation that he inherited from Charles Lee like a virtuoso. "I never saw the general to so much advantage," wrote Alexander Hamilton. "He instantly took measures for checking the enemy's advance, and giving time for the army, which was very near, to form and make a proper disposition … Other officers have great merit in performing their parts well; but he directed the whole with the skill of a Master workman." Night fell, Clinton brought in his wounded; and in the morning, when the Continentals awoke, the British were already on the road and gone.[202]

Washington claimed Monmouth Courthouse as a victory, and the one thing in Washington's mind which prevented that victory from becoming a Saratoga-like triumph was Charles Lee's arrogant lassitude. Formal charges against Lee were lodged by Anthony Wayne and Charles Scott, to which Lee unwisely responded by demanding a court-martial to clear himself. This, as Washington must have known, merely allowed Lee to self-destruct in public. On August 12, Lee was found guilty by the court-martial for incompetence, disobedience of orders, and insolence toward the commander in chief. The British, meanwhile, pushed on to Sandy Hook, New Jersey, and a fleet of flatboats ferried them over to Staten Island. They made the crossing just in time, because two weeks later a French "fleet of 12 sail" hove-to off Sandy Hook, just missing a golden opportunity to trap Clinton's army against the Jersey shore. By July 6, Washington had reached the Hudson River, north of the British lines around New York City. He had, in other words, returned to the same position he'd once occupied nearly two years before.[203]

---

[202] *John Peebles' American War*, 193–4; Hamilton to Elias Boudinot (July 5, 1778), in *Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, 1:512; Nelson, *Anthony Wayne*, 80–84.

[203] Taafe, *Philadelphia Campaign*, 221, 223; Fleming, *Washington's Secret War*, 324–30, 336; "Charges Against General Lee" (June 30, 1778), *Writings*, 5:557.

Although Washington could not have known it at the time, he had fought his last major battle in the north. In fact, he had fought the next-to-last battle of his entire career. For the next three years, Washington would settle into conducting the longest and most unsuccessful siege in American history around British-held New York. He planted the Continental army in an encircling arc of six encampments—from Danbury, Connecticut, on the east, to Elizabeth, New Jersey, on the west—and he began building up forts in the Hudson highlands to secure the Hudson River against any British breakout attempt from the city along the river line. This kind of siege work ran entirely contrary to Washington's instincts, and occasionally those instincts punctuated the tedium with bursts of action. In August 1778, he authorized a joint expedition against the British garrison in Newport, Rhode Island, with Continentals locking the British in from the landward side, and the French fleet sealing them off from the sea. But the French were anxious not to sit still for too long, lest the larger Royal Navy swoop down on *them*, and eventually the French sailed off and the attack on Newport fizzled out. In June of 1779, Clinton established outposts on the Hudson River at Stony Point and Verplanck's Point, only to lose Stony Point when Washington turned loose Anthony Wayne to retake it in a nighttime bayonet attack, and so allow Wayne the opportunity to pay back the British for the Paoli Massacre. In August 1779, Washington struck Clinton's one toehold on the Jersey shore at Paulus Hook, and in January 1780, Nathanael Greene and Lord Stirling took advantage of a winter so cold that the waters of New York harbor froze over, and staged a raid across the ice to Staten Island. But beyond those isolated moments, Washington's war now settled into a stalemate around New York City.[204]

The British army might have settled conveniently and comfortably into the same stalemate, especially after watching half of its strength sail away to protect the West Indies in 1778. But the British army did not do that, and there was a very good reason why. Sir Henry Clinton had one asset which Washington did not: ships.

[204] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 106–7; Mackesy, *War for America*, 217–19; Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency George Washington* (New York, 2004), 122–3; Schechter, *Battle for New York*, 330; Freeman, *Washington*, 410, 420–21; Clinton to Germain (July 25, 1778), in *Documents of the American Revolution*, ed. Davies, 17:168.

Lecture Nineteen
The French Menace

Scope: The bulk of the French intervention in the American war for independence would be carried by the French navy. Congress's efforts to create an American navy had been stymied because American ships proved too small to be effective and privateering too lucrative to potential crews. Congress told the navy to recruit its crews from jails or from prisoners of war, so its captains, such as the notorious John Paul Jones, were often taken from the shady side of maritime life. In 1778, the British found that they could protect the channel when Vice-Admiral Augustus Keppel stopped a French fleet from leaving Brest at the Battle of Ushant. However, a fleet from Toulon under the Comte d'Estaing managed to cross the Atlantic to the Delaware Bay and then New York, but twice missed the opportunity to catch Sir Henry Clinton. D'Estaing then sailed to the West Indies, where island to island, the balance of naval power swung back and forth for many months between the British and French fleets.

Outline

I. France brought to the war a major professional—and newly reorganized—army of nearly 170,000 infantry, 46,000 cavalry, and 12,000 artillerymen.

- **A.** During the course of this war, this newly reorganized army would fight the British in Ceylon, southern India, the Caribbean, and Florida, and stage raids on the Channel Islands and Canada.
  - **1.** They would not, however, invade the British home islands; the Comte de Vergennes did not want to spread anxiety among the other European kingdoms.
  - **2.** Vergennes committed 27 French battalions to the West Indies.
  - **3.** He would dispatch only nine battalions to help the Americans.
- **B.** The bulk of the French intervention in the American war for independence would be carried instead by the French navy.
  - **1.** A new naval program was begun after the Seven Years' War.
  - **2.** By the time the American treaties were signed, the new French navy had launched 52 ships of the line; the numbers would reach 73 by 1782.

C. Although the British had superiority in numbers, confidence, and experience, British worries about cross-channel invasion guaranteed that the Royal Navy would be forced to concentrate much of its strength in home water.

D. This left French squadrons free to roam the Atlantic and Caribbean, meeting British squadrons on something close to even terms and providing the Americans with exactly the sort of aid they needed.

1. The Continental Congress was delighted at the prospect of French gold, weapons, and supplies but was still anxious about having too large a French army presence in North America, lest the French have colonial designs of their own on the American states.

2. If the principal gift of the French was warships, America would not only gain the navy it lacked, there would be no need for a major French land army in America.

II. Despite the development of a thriving American shipbuilding industry, there was no American naval equivalent of the colonial militia.

A. American shipyards had built only four warships in the century before Lexington and Concord, and none of them distinguished themselves in service or lasted long.

B. As early as September, 1775, Washington commissioned the first Continental navy warships, all converted fishing schooners.

C. Several of the New England states began converting and commissioning vessels of their own, and in October 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the creation of a four-ship American flotilla.

D. A year later, Congress authorized three 74-gun ships of the line, five 36-gun frigates, and an 18-gun two-masted brig.

1. A successful raid on Nassau emboldened the Continental navy and several of the New England state squadrons to mount a joint attack on a Royal Navy outpost in Penobscot Bay, 110 miles north of Boston, in August of 1776.

2. But the ships were too small; 14 American ships were lost, and the great ship-building program broke down.

III. It was difficult to generate money or recruits for the navy when privateering was much more lucrative.

A. Privateering amounted to legalized piracy by allowing private ship owners and their crews to raid enemy merchant shipping and reap the profits.

1. Such plundering drove British maritime insurance rates up and diverted British naval strength into the business of convoy escort.
2. Hence, crews and captains, not to mention space in shipyards, were sucked up by privateers who paid far more than the Continental navy.
3. Congress told the Continental navy to recruit its crews from the common jails or from prisoners of war, and it frequently picked its captains from the dark side of maritime life.

B. A case in point was John Paul Jones, a Scottish-born merchant officer with a murderous reputation for quarterdeck tyranny.

1. On September 23, 1779, Jones fought what remains the most famous ship-to-ship action of the war.
2. Jones was commanding the *Bonhomme Richard* when he challenged the 44-gun British frigate *Serapis* off Flamborough Head.
3. Jones headed the *Richard* across the *Serapis's* bow and entangled the British frigate's bowsprit in the *Richard's* rigging.
4. The *Serapis's* captain, Richard Pearson, called on Jones to surrender; Jones defiantly replied, "I haven't yet begun to fight."
5. Twenty minutes later, a hand grenade tossed from the *Richard* sailed down the *Serapis's* main hatch, set the ready-use ammunition on fire, and forced Capt. Pearson to surrender.
6. But in the course of the night, the *Richard's* guns had proven defective, and when the crew tried to surrender, Jones turned on them and would have shot them to keep them at their posts.
7. The *Richard* sank 36 hours after its victory.

C. Not until nearly the end of the war were the ships of the Continental navy sufficiently well built, crewed, and officered to meet to the British on equal terms in ship-to-ship actions.

IV. What is surprising is not that the Continental navy achieved so little, but that the British navy did not achieve more in the three years before the French intervention.

A. The Royal Navy expanded after 1775 to between 300 and 400 ships (102 of which carried 50 or more guns) and 110,000 sailors.

B. But the far reaches of the British Empire were tied to the home islands by the navy, and that meant that when "Black Dick" Howe came out to command the North American station in 1776, he was given only 73 ships and 13,000 sailors to create a blockade, raid coastal towns, and cooperate with the operations of the army.

1. Howe never had more than seven or eight ships to spare for blockading duties in 1776, and illicit trade between the West Indies and the American rebels was so shameless that the Continental Congress specifically exempted British merchantmen operating out of the Bahamas and Bermuda from capture by American privateers.

2. Howe was able to increase the number of blockade ships to 20 in 1777, but the energy for blockade waned again in 1778, as Howe had to worry about the French menace.

V. In April 1778, British agents in Paris and Amsterdam learned that a French fleet at Toulon on France's Mediterranean coast was being fitted for sea.

A. The Toulon fleet, under the command of the Comte d'Estaing, was bound, it was suspected, for the Atlantic and the West Indies.

B. Another French fleet of ships of the line was still at anchor in Brest, on the Atlantic coast, able to move into the English Channel.

C. The choices for the Royal Navy were not encouraging.

1. If the Brest fleet stayed put, the Royal Navy would have to establish some form of blockade, and blockading Brest was not easy.

2. But neither a "close" blockade nor a "loose" blockade was without severe drawbacks.

D. The French navy could not ignore the channel, for it was there the British put their primary forces.

1. Vice-Admiral Augustus Keppel was chosen to command the channel fleet.

2. When the Brest fleet poked its head into the channel on July 23, 1778, he was ready to meet them with 30 ships of the line.

        3. At the Battle of Ushant on July 27, Keppel forced the French to return to their port, thus proving the channel could be kept safe.
    E. The Toulon fleet, however, managed to clear the Straits of Gibraltar on May 16, 1778, and headed southwest toward the West Indies.
        1. In fact d'Estaing's target was the British North American squadron, and on July 8, 1778, he dropped anchor in the lower Delaware Bay, missing by only three weeks Sir Henry Clinton's crossing of the Delaware.
        2. He sailed to intercept the British retreat to New York at Sandy Hook, but he was too late there, too.
        3. In August he turned his head toward the West Indies.

VI. The French garrisons in the West Indies had not been idle.

- **A.** On September 7, 1778, a French force of 2,000 landed and seized the island of Dominica with only the faintest resistance.
    - **1.** In December 1778, the British struck back and landed on French-held St. Lucia with three brigades of infantry and a flotilla of seven ships under Admiral Samuel Barrington.
    - **2.** This was the moment when d'Estaing showed up in the West Indies, but Barrington held firm.
    - **3.** D'Estaing carefully veered off again, heading for the friendly French naval base on Martinique.
    - **4.** A month later, a British squadron arrived with eight ships of the line to swing the balance of power in the West Indies back again.
- **B.** Admiral d'Estaing recovered a measure of his aggressiveness over the following year, when he successfully orchestrated the seizure of the islands of St. Vincent (in June 1779) and Grenada (in July).

Suggested Reading:

Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, chaps. 7, 8, 12.

Miller, *Sea of Glory*, chaps. 5–7, 13–14, 16.

Thomas, *John Paul Jones*, chap. 8–9.

Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*, chaps. 5, 7.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why was privateering more popular than service in the Continental navy?
2. What was France's principal contribution to the American war effort, and why was this so important?

Lecture Nineteen—Transcript
The French Menace

It was taken for granted, in the diplomatic parlance of the 18th century, that the French treaties would mean a French entrance into the war on the side of the new United States. But what exactly did the French bring to this intervention? One thing, obviously, was a major professional army of nearly 170,000 infantry, 46,000 cavalry, and 12,000 artillerymen. It was also an army which had emerged from its humiliating defeat by Britain in the Seven Years' War determined to put its slipshod house in order. Between 1762 and 1774, recruitment, supply, and training of the French army were all overhauled; weapons and uniforms were standardized; summer maneuvers were arranged; a riding school was established for the cavalry; the purchase system for officers' commissions was abolished; and the structure of the army was revamped to provide two battalions for each infantry regiment, and each regiment to carry 1,990 men on the rolls. In the handful of colonial possessions left to France by the Seven Years' War—and these included the West Indian islands of San Domingue, Puerto Rico, Guadalupe and Martinque, plus a slave-trade station in Senegal in West Africa, and Pondicherie in India—each of these colonies was responsible for raising its own "legion," with French officers and native recruits in the ranks, all of which added another 12,000 soldiers to the role of the French military. Over the course of the war, this newly-reorganized French army would fight the British in Ceylon—present day Sri Lanka—in southern India, the Caribbean, and Florida; and would stage raids on the Channel Islands and even Canada. They would not, however, invade the British home islands. The Comte de Vergennes did not want to spread anxiety among the other European kingdoms that France intended to strike the British down at home and thereby force an intervention by Austria, Prussia, or Russia in order to preserve the European balance of power. No, Vergennes would commit 27 French battalions to the West Indies, where balance of power questions didn't appear so starkly and where France's real interests lay. He would dispatch only nine battalions to help the Americans; just enough to ensure that the Continental army would keep the British forces occupied in North America.[205]

---

[205] Rene Chartrand, *The French Army in the American War of Independence* (Oxford, 1991), 7–10; Jonathan R. Dell, *The French Navy and American Independence* (Princeton, 1975), 19.

The bulk of the French intervention in the American war for independence would really be carried by the French navy. The Seven Years' War had been a disaster for the French navy, and in 1761 a new naval program was begun which aimed at the building of a fleet of 80 big ships-of-the-line—the battleships of this age of wooden hulls and sail power—along with 47 fast scouting frigates. By the time the American treaties were signed, the new French navy had launched 52 of these ships-of-the-line, and would continue to build more during the war until they reached 73 by 1782. Vergennes was under no illusion that this new fleet could immediately sail out to do battle with the Royal Navy; the British still had superiority in numbers, and even more in confidence and experience. But British worries about cross-channel invasion guaranteed that the Royal Navy would be forced to concentrate much of its strength in home waters, thus leaving separate French squadrons free to roam the Atlantic and the Caribbean, and encounter smaller British squadrons in North American and West Indian waters on something close to even terms.[206]

This in turn provided the Americans with exactly the sort of aid they needed. Much as the Continental Congress was delighted at the prospect of French gold to buoy up the value of Continental currency, and French weapons and French supplies to equip the Continental army, there did in the minds of the Continental Congress remain some uneasiness about welcoming too large of a French army presence back to North America, lest the French turn out to have colonial designs of their own on the American states. John Adams, reporting to Congress from Paris, warned that:

> Although I am convinced by everything I see, and read and hear, that all the powers of Europe … rejoice in the American Revolution and consider the independence of America in their interest and happiness … yet I have many reasons to think that not one of them, not even Spain or France, wishes to see America rise very fast to power. We ought therefore to be cautious how we magnify our ideas and exaggerate our expressions of the generosity and magnanimity of any of these powers. … America has been the sport of European war and politics long enough.[207]

---

[206] Chartrand, *French Army*, 10–11; Mackesy, *War for America*, 190.
[207] David McCullough, *John Adams* (New York, 2001), 235.

On the other hand, if the principal gift of the French to the war for independence came in the form of its navy—of its warships—then this would solve two potential problems. There would be no need for a major French land army in America, and so no need to worry about how to evict it—if necessary—afterwards; and America would gain in this war what it had always lacked the most: a navy.

Although British imperial planners had encouraged the development of a thriving American shipbuilding industry, to the point where almost a third of the empire's merchant shipping had been built in American shipyards, there was no American naval equivalent of the colonial militia. Nor would there have been much to base it on: All those thriving shipyards were designed for the construction of sloops and schooners for the merchant trade, not the sort of big full-rig ships that made up the frigates and ships-of-the-line of the Royal Navy. American shipyards had only built four warships in the century before Lexington and Concord, and none of them particularly distinguished themselves in service, or even lasted all that long before their unseasoned New England timber simply rotted away. But this didn't mean, though, that Americans would not, once the war began, try to build a navy. As early as September 1775, Washington commissioned the first Continental navy warship—a converted fishing schooner, the *Hannah*—and sent her out to sea.

The *Hannah* made her first capture on September 7; unfortunately, it turned out to be a ship belonging to John Langdon, one of New Hampshire's delegates to the Continental Congress. The *Hannah* was followed in short order by several more converted schooners, one of which—the *Lee* under Capt. John Manley—picked off the British ordnance-supply vessel *Nancy*, and so delivered 2,500 muskets and 40 tons of ammunition to Washington's army around Boston. Several of the New England states also began converting and commissioning vessels of their own, and in October 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the creation of a four-ship American flotilla, and, in November, two battalions of Marines to serve with them. The first of these ships, under the command of John Barry, was a sloop fitted out with 24 guns and rechristened the *Alfred.* It was followed by the conversion and renaming of three more ships: the *Columbus*, the *Andrew Doria*, and the *Cabot*. In addition to John Barry of the *Alfred*, Congress gave command of these ships of its new tiny navy to Esek Hopkins and Abraham Whipple of Rhode Island, and Nicholas Biddle of Philadelphia, a one-time Royal Navy junior officer. A year later, Congress adopted a more

ambitious naval program: three 74-gun ships-of-the-line, five 36-gun frigates, and an 18-gun two-masted brig.[208]

Ambitious? That still seemed kind of puny by European standards, but not for one of seriousness on the part of the American sailors. In March 1776, Esek Hopkins took the *Alfred*, the *Doria*, the *Columbus*, the *Cabot*, and four smaller sloops to raid the Bahamas, where they landed a Marine detachment which captured Nassau and brought off 15 brass mortars and other artillery supplies. This emboldened the Continental navy, and several of the New England state squadrons mounted a joint attack on a Royal Navy outpost—which the British had set up in Penobscot Bay, 110 miles north of Boston—in August 1776. But the American ships were too small and too lightly-armed to do more than just launch raids. Esek Hopkins's Bermuda fleet intercepted a Royal Navy frigate, HMS *Glasgow*, and got themselves pretty badly shot up by this one British warship. The Penobscot expedition chose to make its attack just as a squadron of 10 Royal Navy ships—led by a 64-gun ship-of-the-line—appeared over the horizon, and the Americans scattered and ran downwind for their lives. Fourteen American ships were lost, and the great shipbuilding program degenerated into what Esek Hopkins disgustedly called "a political clambake."[209]

It was also difficult to generate either money or recruits for the navy when a much more lucrative possibility existed alongside it: privateering. It was still the custom in the late 1700s, and would be for another half-century, for nations to augment their regular naval forces by issuing "letters of marque and reprisal" to private ship owners. These authorized ship owners to raid enemy merchant shipping, and to reap substantial profits in prize money when the ships and cargoes they captured were sold off at auction. In real terms, privateering sometimes amounted to little else than legalized, licensed piracy. But it allowed privateers to run their own personal wars at risks of their own choosing, and the rewards they reaped from the capture of enemy merchant ships far exceeded the pittances that sailors in the Continental navy could expect from the once-in-a-blue-moon captures of British naval vessels. They could swoop down on the rich pickings in the

[208] William M. Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy During the Revolution* (New York, 1976), 8–9, 23, 31, 56–8, 71; Nathan Miller, *Sea of Glory: The Continental Navy Fights for Independence, 1775–1783* (New York, 1974), 52, 71, 85–6; William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy* (Baton Rouge, 1960), 4–5, 60–1.

[209] Fowler, *Rebels Under Sail*, 96–99, 117, 124–5; Miller, *Sea of Glory*, 101–12, 204.

Gulf of St. Lawrence and the Caribbean; they could plunder enough shipping in one voyage to make every member of the crew wealthy for life; and they could placate critics in Congress by forcing British maritime insurance rates into the sky and diverting British naval strength into the strategically-barren business of convoy escort. In the first two years of the war, 136 American privateers launched themselves at British shipping; by 1781, there were 449 of them.[210]

Crews and captains, not to mention space in shipyards, were sucked up by the privateers. The Continental navy had to be told by Congress to recruit its crews from the common jails or from prisoners of war, and it frequently plucked its captains from the darker side of maritime life. A case in point was John Paul Jones, a Scottish-born merchant officer with a murderous reputation for quarter-deck tyranny. Jones arrived in America in 1774 a few strides ahead of the law, taking the name *Jones* to throw the bloodhounds off the scent, and got a job helping to outfit the *Alfred*. The influence of a friendly Congressional delegate got him commissioned as first lieutenant of the *Alfred*, and then as master of the small frigate *Providence*, with which Jones managed to seize 16 prizes in one cruise. In 1778, in command of the sloop *Ranger*, Jones boldly raided the Scottish coast, going ashore and nearly bagging the Earl of Selkirk as a prisoner and then raiding the Irish coast and shooting up the British sloop *Drake*; and then finally after all that, slipping away to safety in the French port of Breast, with seven British prizes in tow.

On September 23, 1779, Jones fought what remains the most famous ship-to-ship action of the war. Jones was commanding a refitted and renamed French merchantman, the *Bonhomme Richard.* This was a name chosen by the French to honor Benjamin Franklin: It was the closest the French could come to rendering in French the title of Franklin's famous almanac, *Poor Richard's Almanac*. *Poor Richard*, *Bonhomme Richard*; well something did get lost in the translation. A lot more got lost in the conversion of the ship, because the *Bonhomme Richard* was an old and creaky merchant vessel, not quite good enough for formal combat. Nevertheless, Jones challenged the 44-gun British frigate *Serapis* to combat off Flamborough Head. The *Serapis* could have pounded the *Bonhomme Richard* into matchsticks. Jones's heaviest guns on the Richard were six 18-pounders; the Serapis carried 20 18-pounders. But Jones headed the *Bonhomme Richard* across the bow of the *Serapis* and entangled the British frigate's bowsprit in the *Richard*'s rigging. The *Serapis*' captain, Richard Pearson, called on Jones to

[210] Miller, *Sea of Glory*, 257.

surrender. Jones defiantly replied, "I haven't yet begun to fight." Twenty minutes later, a hand grenade tossed from the deck of the *Bonhomme Richard* down the *Serapis*' main hatch set the British ships ready-use ammunition on the main gun deck afire, and thus forced Capt. Pearson to surrender. But in the course of the fight, the *Richard*'s guns had proven defective, and when the crew—and the crew was an unwieldy mix of "part American, English, and French, and a part of Maltese, Portuguese, and Malays"—tried to surrender, Jones turned on them with his old ferocity, and would have shot them as readily as the British to keep them at their posts. The creaking old *Bonhomme Richard* sank 36 hours after its victory. Not until nearly the end of the war—when John Barry and the frigate *Alliance* captured two small British frigates, the *Atalanta* and the *Trepassy* in May of 1781; and then sank the British frigate *Sybil* in March of 1783—were the ships of the Continental navy sufficiently well-built, well-crewed, and well-officered so that they were able to meet their British counterparts on equal terms in ship-to-ship actions.[211]

What is surprising is not that the Continental navy achieved so little, but that the British navy did not achieve more in the three years before the French intervention. From about 18,000 men and 270 ships, the Royal Navy quickly expanded after 1775 to between 300–400 ships—102 of which carried 50 or more guns—and 110,000 sailors. The navy's ships-of-the-line were its most gargantuan assets. HMS *Victory*—which was built between 1760 and 1765 for the Seven Years' War, but not actually commissioned until the French intervention in the American war—was 227½ feet in length, made a top speed of eight knots, and displaced 3,500 tons. This is modest in terms of modern ship size standards. The U.S. missile frigate *Reuben James* is, today, 453 feet long, careens along at 30-plus knots, and displaces 4,000 tons. But HMS *Victory*, small as she might be by modern standards, carried a crew of 820 to 850 sailors and 149 Marines, was managed by 26 miles of rope rigging, and featured 104 guns on three gun decks, including two ship-killing 68-pounder guns mounted in her bow. Against ships like HMS *Victory*, the Continental navy could offer little except pinpricks; but pinpricks can sometimes count, too. The far reaches of the British Empire were tied to the home islands by the navy, and that meant that when "Black Dick" Howe came out to command the North American station in 1776, he was given only 73 ships and 13,000 sailors to

---

[211] Evan Thomas, *John Paul Jones: Sailor, Hero, Father of the American Navy* (New York, 2003), 33, 182; John Henry Sherburne, *Life and Character of Chevalier John Paul Jones* (Washington, 1825), 127.

create a blockade of the North American coast, raid coastal towns, and cooperate with the operations of the army. With all those jobs, Admiral Lord Howe never had more than seven or eight ships to spare for blockading duties in 1776, and illicit trade between the West Indies and the American rebels was so shameless, blatant, and open that the Continental Congress specifically exempted British merchantmen operating out of the Bahamas and Bermuda from capture by American privateers. Admiral Lord Howe turned the blockade screws more tightly in 1777, upping the number of blockade ships to 20, and picking up an average of 46 American privateers each month during the first half of the year. But the energy for blockade waned again in 1778, as Admiral Howe had to worry about the new French menace and then had to worry about his own replacement in command in September 1778.[212]

The French menace did its first menacing in April 1778, when British agents in Paris and Amsterdam learned that a French fleet at Toulon—on France's Mediterranean coast—was being fitted out for sea. The Toulon fleet, under the command—to give him the full name treatment—of Jean-Baptiste Charles Henri Hector, the Comte d'Estaing; all this was being fitted out as d'Estaing's command: He was the senior admiral of the French navy. His command would consist of 11 ships-of-the-line, a lighter 50-gun ship-of-the-line, and several frigates, bound, it was suspected, for trouble-making in the Atlantic and the West Indies. Then came the rumors that another French fleet of 18 ships-of-the-line was still at anchor in Brest, on the north Atlantic coast, where they could move at a moment's notice into the English Channel to wreak havoc there. How was the Royal Navy to respond to this?

The choices were not encouraging. If France's Brest fleet stayed put, the Royal Navy would have to establish some form of blockade, and blockading the port of Brest was no easy chore. A "close blockade," which kept ships-of-the-line on station to meet any effort by the French to emerge, offered security. It would keep the French bottled up, for sure, but it would do so at the high cost of having to supply the fleet at sea, of boredom and sickness and demoralization among the crews, and at the risk of Atlantic storms that could wreck or disable even the biggest vessels. But if the British chose to impose a

[212] Peter Goodwin, "HMS Victory," in *The Trafalgar Companion*, ed. Alexander Stilwell (Oxford, 2005), 145; Gruber, "Richard Lord Howe," 238–9, 241; W.M. James, *The Naval History of Great Britain During the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars* (1822–24; rept. London, 2003), 30–36.

loose blockade—which left only frigates on-station and allowed the rest of the fleet to retire to the navy's bases at Portsmouth and Plymouth until the frigates signaled that some action was imminent—ran the risk of giving the French in Brest a chance to steal a march, either into the channel or out into the North Atlantic, where it could threaten British convoys to Gibraltar and India. What the navy could not do under any circumstances was ignore the channel entirely, and so it was there that the British would put their primary naval resources. But that meant if the French Toulon fleet got loose through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Atlantic, then there would be precious little left over to stop them from raiding the West Indies or attacking the British North American squadron in force.

To command the channel squadron—the Western squadron—the first lord of the admiralty, John Montagu, 4th Earl of Sandwich, turned reluctantly to Vice-Admiral Augustus Keppel. I say *reluctantly*, because Keppel was an ally and a relative of Charles James Fox and the Earl of Rockingham. Keppel sat in Parliament with the Whig opposition and in 1775 had flatly declined to serve on the North American station against the Americans. Keppel might well have wished he could decline the channel assignment, too, since the channel squadron had been repeatedly stripped of warships to supply other needs, especially the needs of "Black Dick" Howe in America. Of the 20 ships-of-the-line Keppel expected to find ready when he arrived in Portsmouth to take command of the channel fleet, only six were fit to put out to sea. That translated, in Keppel's mind, into a mandate to bulk up the channel squadron, and when the Brest fleet—under the Comte d'Orvilliers—poked its head into the channel on July 23, Keppel, with his flag in HMS *Victory*, was ready to meet them with 30 ships-of-the-line. At the battle of Ushant on July 27, 1778, Keppel forced the French to beat their way back into their port. The channel could be made safe, after all.[213]

Not so the Toulon fleet under d'Estaing. The Toulon fleet cleared the straits of Gibraltar on May 16, 1778, and was shadowed by a British frigate until it seemed clear that the French were headed southwestward for the West Indies. But in fact d'Estaing's target was the British North American squadron, and on July 8, 1778, d'Estaing dropped anchor in the lower Delaware Bay. He had missed by only three weeks the opportunity to disrupt Sir Henry Clinton's crossing of the Delaware. He was determined

---

[213] Mackesy, *War for America*, 192, 197, 210; Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of Americanb Independence* (1913; rept. Gloucestershire, 2006), 61–70; Dell, *French Navy and American Independence*, 110.

not to miss Clinton again, and so he sailed off to intercept the British retreat to New York at Sandy Hook. He was too late there, too, and barring his way into New York harbor was "Black Dick" Howe and a squadron half the size of d'Estaing's. D'Estaing's fleet contained a big 90-gun ship-of-the-line, a smaller 80-gun and six 74-gun ships-of-the-line, and a small 50-gun ship-of-the-line. "Black Dick" Howe had only six small 64-gun ships-of-the-line, three 50-gun ships, and six frigates. But Howe had the advantage of the vast sandbar, which lurked like an underwater curtain across the mouth of New York harbor, and he skillfully positioned his ships in a wide arc to punish any French warship trying to pick its way over the bar. D'Estaing nosed gingerly around the harbor mouth for 11 days, then sailed off the join the forlorn little expedition which Washington hoped might recapture Newport, Rhode Island. D'Estaing didn't remain there very long, either, allowing himself to be chased off by "Black Dick" Howe in August, and turning his head, thereafter, toward the West Indies.[214]

The French garrisons in the West Indies had not been idle while d'Estaing was fumbling away his opportunities to the north. The British West Indian islands had only about 1,600 infantry in stations scattered across the Lesser Antilles and Jamaica, and on September 7, a French force of 2,000 landed and seized the island of Dominica with only the faintest resistance. In December 1778, reinforced by the diversion of Clinton's army to the West Indies, the British struck back and landed on French-held St. Lucia with three brigades of infantry, supported by a flotilla of seven ships under Admiral Samuel Barrington. This was the moment that d'Estaing chose to show up in the West Indies, arriving off St. Lucia while the British were still battling the French for control of the island. But like "Black Dick" Howe, Samuel Barrington boldly anchored his ships in a defensive half-circle to cover the British landings, and d'Estaing carefully veered off again, heading for the friendly French naval base of Fort Royal, on Martinique. A month later, a fresh British squadron, freed up from channel duties by the timidity of the French fleet at the Battle of Ushant, arrived with eight ships-of-the-line to swing the balance of naval power in the West Indies back again against another timid French fleet.[215]

---

[214] Mackesy, *War for America*, 201, 216–7; Mahan, *Major Operations of the Navies,* 54–58.

[215] Mackesy, *War for America*, 230–32; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 136–7.

Admiral d’Estaing recovered a measure of his aggressiveness over the following year, when he successfully orchestrated the seizure of the islands of St. Vincent in June 1779 and Grenada in July. But by then, contrary to every expectation, the war headlines had shifted back to North America. Sir Henry Clinton had not taken kindly to commanding a backwater in New York City, and now he had invaded Georgia.

Lecture Twenty

Vain Hopes in the Carolinas

Scope: Sir Henry Clinton's success on various small campaigns in the South, including the capture of Savannah, led him and Lord Germain to think that perhaps British victory might be found by turning attention southward. This idea was no doubt reinforced after the new Commander of the Continental army's Southern Department, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, mounted an unsuccessful effort to recapture Savannah and shortly thereafter, was forced to accept Clinton's demand of an unconditional surrender during the British siege of Charleston. Clinton's army began occupying the strategic posts in the area and adding Loyalist volunteers to their number, allowing a confident Clinton to depart and leave the occupation of the Carolinas to Charles Earl Cornwallis. Clinton and Germain found, however, that they could not always depend on the Loyalists, and the British defeats at the Battles of Cowpens and King's Mountain further jeopardized British hopes for victory.

Outline

I. Despite his feeling of self-pity at being handed command of an army whose strength had been stripped by half, Sir Henry Clinton responded decisively to Lord Germain's directive to bring Mr. Washington to action.

- **A.** He ordered the burning of Portsmouth and Norfolk in the Chesapeake and commanded a destructive raid along the Long Island Sound.
- **B.** In another successful raid, a British regiment and two battalions of Hessians overran Savannah's feeble defenses and struck inland to Augusta.
- **C.** A Swiss-born British officer named Prevost then made his way to the gates of Charleston.
- **D.** Germain was delighted at the news of the capture of Savannah and the occupation of Georgia: Perhaps victory just might be snatched from the jaws of defeat in America by turning attention southward.

II. Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln arrived to take command of the Continental army's Southern Department in January of 1779.

A. In tandem with the French fleet from the West Indies, he tried unsuccessfully to mount an attack on Savannah, resulting in 521 wounded and 223 dead.

B. Lincoln's failure to retake Savannah convinced Sir Henry Clinton that the southern colonies were ripe for a major picking.

1. In late 1779 Clinton assembled a navy fleet of more than 100 vessels as well as a large, experienced expeditionary and embarked them on December 19.

2. Bad weather kept them at sea until February 1, when they were finally able to drop anchor in the Savannah River.

3. By mid-February, lookouts in Charleston could spot the campfires of Clinton's army.

III. Meanwhile Lincoln and Washington had prepared for the British to take a second swipe at Charleston, and the citizens of the city were confident that they would be able to defend their city again.

A. But by March 20, however, the British threatened Charleston from land and sea.

B. The siege was not easy, but Continentals were proved outmatched.

1. On April 13, Lincoln's principal officers urged a breakout attempt.

2. The next day Tarleton's dragoons defeated Lincoln's cavalry at Monck's Corner.

3. On May 6, Ft. Moultrie was captured by British seamen and marines.

4. On May 8, Lincoln asked Sir Henry Clinton for terms of surrender for the entire garrison.

5. May 11, Lincoln gave in to Clinton's terms of unconditional surrender.

IV. The fall of Charleston was a low point for the Americans.

A. Clinton's army began occupying the strategic posts in the area and adding Loyalist volunteers to their number.

B. In late May, Tarleton's dragoons massacred Abraham Buford's 3rd regiment of Virginia Continentals.

C. In June, Clinton returned to New York City and left the occupation of the Carolinas in to Charles Earl Cornwallis.

V. To add insult to injury, Lincoln's replacement was Horatio Gates, who immediately decided to go on campaign.

A. Gates hoped to be able to make a defensive stand near Camden, South Carolina, and he got exactly what he wanted.

B. The cavalry detachments of the two armies collided near Camden on August 15. Gates's determination to fight only a defensive battle proved disastrous as Cornwallis's regulars attacked.

1. The North Carolina militia saw oncoming British bayonets and fled in panic.

2. Cornwallis's regulars and Tarleton's dragoons smashed into the Maryland and Delaware Continentals.

3. Gates turned and rode for his life, stopping only at Hillsborough, North Carolina, 180 miles away.

4. Less then two months later, Horatio Gates was relieved of command of the Southern Department.

VI. Clinton and Germain had exaggerated the dependence they thought they could place on the Loyalists, for they found that people swore allegiance to the Crown one day, only to swear allegiance to the Continental Congress the next.

A. In the Camden district, rebel militiamen took an oath to the king and as soon as they were issued weapons, deserted and rejoined the rebels.

B. British officers recruited Loyalists to man their advanced outposts, only to find that the Loyalist militia deserted as soon as the officers moved on.

VII. Rival militias soon substituted long-time revenge for any real identification with rebels or king's men.

A. In October 1780 at King's Mountain near Charlotte, more than 1,000 Loyalists frantically fought rebel militia, leaving 300 dead or wounded and 700 taken prisoner.

B. Banastre Tarleton and his dragoons in particular were a target for rebel vengeance.

1. Daniel Morgan tricked Tarleton into a cleverly planned trap at the Battle of Cowpens, where more than 100 British and Loyalists were killed, another 200 wounded, and 527 captured.

2. Tarleton barely escaped, only to have to report his disaster to Cornwallis.

C. Neither the Battle of Cowpens nor King's Mountain was a large-scale battle, but together, they spelled doom for Sir Henry Clinton's hopes for British victory.

Suggested Reading:

Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping*, chaps. 4–8.

Borick, *A Gallant Defense*, chaps. 7–13.

Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, chaps. 4–5, 12.

Questions to Consider:

1. How effective a field commander was Sir Henry Clinton compared to his predecessor, Sir William Howe?
2. What was Horatio Gates's key tactical mistake at Camden?

Lecture Twenty—Transcript
Vain Hopes in the Carolinas

Lord George Germain—by the grace of the king still the secretary of state for America—continued to nurse hopes, even after the French intervention, that Sir Henry Clinton might "be able to bring Mr. Washington to a general and decisive action." Clinton's response to this suggestion was the polite equivalent of a snort: "What measures I shall now pursue," he replied to Germain in the spring of 1779, "must depend so much upon circumstance that I cannot yet inform your lordship to what point I shall direct the small force which I can spare from" New York City. This view of things fit comfortably with the general atmosphere of self-pity with which Sir Henry Clinton usually surrounded himself. Saturnine and withdrawn by temperament, Sir Henry Clinton had inherited a command from a man whom the British army in North America had liked extremely well, Sir William Howe, and Clinton was convinced that, as Howe's replacement, he was hated by the army to exactly the same degree; something which was not improved by Clinton's realization that he had been handed command responsibilities for the army in North America only after it had been stripped of half its strength for operations elsewhere. Even Germain, for all of his pious hopes, limited his actual orders to Clinton to conducting raids "upon the seacoast of the revolted provinces." Apart from this, Sir Henry Clinton would be conducting little more than a holding action in North America.[216]

Whatever Sir Henry's suspicions that he had been left holding the bag in New York, he showed no sign of it in the way he responded to Germain's directive. He dispatched the grenadier and light infantry companies of the Guards regiments, the Black Watch, and a regiment of Hessians to burn Portsmouth and Norfolk in the Chesapeake. He sent the Loyalist governor of New York, William Tryon, on a destructive raid along the Long Island Sound, burning New Haven, Fairfield, and Norwalk.[217] But the most successful of these raids went the farthest afield, when, at the end of 1778, Clinton pared off the 71st

---

[216] Germain to Clinton (January 23, 1779) and Clinton to Germain (April 4, 1779), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 17:44, 96; *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775–1782*, ed. W.B. Willcox (New Haven, 1954), 87.

[217] Conway, *War of American Independence*, 113; *The Literary Diary of Ezra Stiles*, ed. F.B. Dexter (New York, 1901), 2:356; Mackesy, *War for America*, 338–9.

Regiment, the Fraser Highlanders, and two battalions of Hessians under Lt. Col. Archibald Campbell for a strike at Savannah, on the coast of Georgia. Acting jointly with a flotilla of four warships under Commodore Hyde Parker and the British military governor of East Florida—a Swiss-born officer named Augustine Prevost—Campbell easily swept down on Savannah, overran the town's feeble defenses, and struck inland to Augusta. Not only was the American resistance perfunctory, but "the inhabitants from all parts of the province flock with their arms to the standard and cordially embrace" the king's cause. Prevost, in fact, launched a strike of his own across the Savannah River, bluffing his way all the way up to the gates of Charleston, South Carolina, and only turning back when he intercepted news that a force of Continentals was on its way to Charleston's relief.[218]

The news of the capture of Savannah and the occupation of Georgia was greeted with exhilaration by Germain, who had had to endure 15 months of unrelieved bad news after Saratoga. This now—once again—set dancing in the American secretary's head the old chimera of abundant American Loyalists rising up to destroy the American rebellion on their own. Perhaps the mistakes of Burgoyne and Howe had been to expect the Loyalists of the *northern* colonies to rise up; perhaps it was the Loyalists of the *southern* colonies who were the real gold in the casket. Perhaps victory just might be snatched from the jaws of defeat in America, even at this late date, by turning the attention southwards. "The recovery of Georgia is in the present situation of American affairs an object of importance," wrote Germain directly to Archibald Campbell, "but in none of such magnitude as the possibility of rallying, not only the Loyalists of Georgia, but the loyal inhabitants of the Carolinas and affording the means of reducing those provinces."[219]

The Continentals whose arrival in South Carolina had induced Prevost to scurry back across the Savannah River were commanded by the Continental army's perennial trouble-shooter, Maj. Gen. Benjamin Lincoln, whom we last saw on trouble-shooting duty against "Gentlemanly Johnny" Burgoyne in Lecture Fifteen. Lincoln arrived to take command of the Continental army's Southern Department in January 1779, but he had less than 1,200

[218] John S. Pancake, *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780–82* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 1985), 31–2; Carl P. Borick, *A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston, 1780* (Columbia, SC, 2003), 7; Campbell to Germain (January 16, 1779), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series)*, 17:33.

[219] Germain to Campbell (January 16, 1779), *Documents of the American Revolution (Colonial Office Series),* 17:32.

South Carolina Continentals at hand. For anything more, he would have to rely on the Carolina militia and William Moultrie's tiny garrison in Charleston. Lincoln's first instinct was to launch a counterstroke across the Savannah River. But Prevost's surprise march on Charleston forced Lincoln to scrap that plan, even while it called down on Lincoln's head angry declarations of no confidence from South Carolina governor John Rutledge and the city's rebel leadership. Lincoln actually wanted to resign in disgust, but William Moultrie—who had saved Charleston from one British attack in 1776—talked him out of it. Lincoln's view of the situation was not improved in September 1779 when he tried to mount a combined attack on Savannah in tandem with Admiral d'Estaing's French fleet from the West Indies. Prevost—who'd fallen back to defend Savannah—refused a demand from d'Estaing to surrender, and in October d'Estaing and Lincoln tried to shoot their way by main force into Savannah. The attack failed, costing the combined French and American force 521 wounded and 223 dead, among them one of the most energetic of Washington's foreign volunteers, the Polish cavalryman Casimir Pulaski. Stymied by Prevost's resistance in Savannah, d'Estaing grew impatient, and finally the French sailed off on October 20, 1779, leaving Benjamin Lincoln no alternative but to march back to Charleston empty handed.[220]

Lincoln's failure to retake Savannah only served to convince Sir Henry Clinton that the southern colonies were ripe for a major picking. In the fall of 1779, Germain sent him a draft of new recruits—between 3,000–4,000 men—to refill the depleted ranks of the regiments in New York City. If those recruits could be posted to hold New York City, and if Clinton closed down the British outpost at Newport, Rhode Island, he might be able to scrape together close to 8,000 reliable troops and take the field himself in South Carolina, and perhaps transform the North American theater of the war from a backwater into triumph, and transform himself from the unappreciated commander of a holding action into the conquering redeemer of British North America. As the winter of 1779 closed in, Clinton patiently assembled a fleet of 90 transports; recruited a flotilla of five ships-of-the-line, six frigates and two sloops-of-war under "Black Dick" Howe's successor, Marriot Arbuthnot; and glued together an expeditionary force which included the 7th, 23rd, 33rd, 63rd, and 64th Regiments of Foot; regiments which now enjoyed long experience in America, like the 23rd and the 63rd, who had been at Bunker Hill, and the 33rd and 64th, which had

[220] Borick, *A Gallant Defense*, 8, 10, 12, 21; Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 33–4.

fought at Long Island. Added to those, Capt. Ewald's Hessian jägers; a regiment of Loyalists; and a detachment of the 17th Light Dragoons under Maj. Banastre Tarleton; the same Tarleton who had captured Charles Lee by surprise back in 1776. Clinton embarked this expedition on December 19, 1779, but the weather was so horrendous that they were kept at sea until February 1, when they were finally able to drop anchor in the Savannah River. The long journey inspired Capt. Ewald to a comparison with the ancient Greek historian, Xenophon, and his account of the fighting retreat of Greek infantry across Asia Minor: "I do not believe," said Capt. Ewald, "that the Ten Thousand Greeks, when they beheld the Black Sea after their difficult retreat through Asia, could have been more joyful over the sight of the sea than we were over the word 'Land.'"[221]

Sir Henry Clinton, however, did not have classical Greek literature on his mind at that moment. On February 9, the fleet set off northward to the mouth of the Edisto River, just below Charleston. Four years before, Sir Henry Clinton had made a landing at Charleston, *above* the city, with the expectation that his fleet would blow open the way through Charleston Harbor. That had not worked. This time, he would creep in through the back door. Depositing his troops on Simmons Island, Clinton cautiously secured Wadmalaw Island, then Johns Island, and the Stono River ferry. By February 16, a lookout posted in the steeple of St. Michael's Church in Charleston could see the campfires of Clinton's army on Johns Island.[222]

Neither Benjamin Lincoln nor George Washington had exactly been idle in the face of the British threat to Charleston. In November, suspecting that the British would be back for a second swipe at Charleston, Washington pared off two brigades of Continentals—Woodford's Virginia brigade, 1st, 2nd and 3rd Virginia; and Hogun's North Carolina brigade, 1st, 2nd and 3rd North Carolina; plus a detachment of dragoons under his cousin, Lt. Col. William Washington, and he sent them overland with the intention of beefing up Lincoln's forces in the southern department. But the good citizens of the city of Charleston were supremely confident that, having turned back Prevost's threat the year before, they would certainly be able to do likewise to Clinton's, and they were sure that the harbor defenses which had fended off the Royal Navy in 1776 would be able to do so again.[223] What was the worry?

---

[221] Borick, *A Gallant Defense*, 23; Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 57; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 194.

[222] Borick, *A Gallant Defense,* 27–30.

[223] Borick, *A Gallant Defense,* 35–6, 40; Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 63.

But Clinton was dealing with an entirely new deck of cards than the ones he'd used in 1776 or 1779. By the end of February 1780, Clinton had crossed his artillery over to James Island and was able to set up batteries which could bombard Charleston across the harbor. On March 10, Clinton turned inland, rebuilt a bridge the Americans had destroyed on Wappoo Creek, and poured out onto the mainland. Then 19 days later, Clinton swung across the Ashley River, and began digging siege lines across the width of the peninsula above the city. Meanwhile, on March 20, the Royal Navy chimed in. Marriot Arbuthnot's flotilla successfully navigated its way over the harbor bar, bypassing on the other side of the harbor the guns of Fort Moultrie—which had done so much damage back in 1776—and closing off the harbor. Charleston was now threatened from land and sea alike.[224]

The siege, as it turned out, was by no means a pushover. Charleston was defended by detailed entrenchments cut across the peninsula—along what is now Calhoun Street—aided by a canal, 79 field guns, a howitzer, and several mortars. What was more, William Woodford's Virginia Continentals began arriving to reinforce the garrison on April 7, but when Benjamin Lincoln convened a council of war on April 13, he found his principal officers convinced that they were lodged in a trap and urging a breakout attempt. Their tempers were not improved the next day when Banastre Tarleton's dragoons surprised and routed Lincoln's cavalry at Monck's Corner, where William Washington and Benjamin Huger had been holding open the principal American escape route along the Cooper River. On May 6, Fort Moultrie was captured by 500 British seamen and Marines, and on May 8, Lincoln asked Sir Henry Clinton for terms of surrender for the entire garrison. Clinton would accept only an unconditional surrender—no paroles, and no traditional honors-of-war ceremonies—and on May 11, Lincoln gave in. The next day, Lincoln formally surrendered his command: some 7,000 Continentals and militia, and the city of Charleston.[225]

The fall of Charleston was the American equivalent of Saratoga. This was "the most gloomy period of the revolution," recalled one American militia officer, Isaac Shelby, and the proof of it came in the ease with which

[224] Borick, *A Gallant Defense,* 54, 64, 81–5, 102–3; John Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas* (New York, 1997), 34, 38, 46, 52–3.

[225] Borick, *A Gallant Defense*, 115–6, 129, 141, 150, 167, 170–1, 189, 206, 209–20; Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 56, 60–64, 70–1; Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 64–5; Conway, *War of American Independence*, 115; Mackesy, *War for America*, 340–1.

Clinton's little army marched upcountry and began occupying the strategic posts of Camden, Ninety-Six, Cheraw, Hanging Rock, and Rocky Mount. By the end of May, Clinton could report that he had 1,500 South Carolina Loyalist volunteers "here with their arms, desiring to join us," and they got further encouragement on May 29, when Banastre Tarleton's relentless dragoons massacred Abraham Buford's 3rd regiment of Virginia Continentals. Buford's regiment had been en route with the rest of the other Virginia Continentals; they had arrived in South Carolina too late to reinforce the Charleston garrison. Buford then retreated northwards after the surrender of Charleston, but Tarleton's dragoons caught up with the Continentals at the Waxhaws, just below the North Carolina border, cutting down 113 of Buford's 350 men and capturing the rest. Sir Henry Clinton now proposed to re-erect a royal civil government for South Carolina. He was so confident that he wanted to embark upon the political reconstruction of the old order. He put Maj. Patrick Ferguson in charge of recruiting South Carolina Loyalists into regiments which would complete the job of mopping up resistance in the South Carolina uplands. "I am sanguine enough to expect the recovery of the whole of the Southern provinces in the course of the campaign," Clinton wrote to Germain. In June, feeling that everything was moving smoothly in that direction, Sir Henry Clinton boarded ship to return to New York City and his responsibilities as commander in chief North America, and left the occupation of the Carolinas in the hands of his second-in-command, Charles Earl Cornwallis.[226]

As if to confirm Clinton's prophesy, yet one more humiliation remained for the American cause in South Carolina. To replace the captured Benjamin Lincoln, Congress—without consulting Washington—appointed Horatio Gates to take charge of the Southern Department and retrieve the situation. Gates took command on July 25. Although the Southern army that he took command of now amounted to little beyond two brigades of Maryland and Delaware Continentals under Johann de Kalb—who had been sent too late to assist in any relief of Charleston—plus William Washington's mangled dragoon detachment and whatever assorted militia Gates could manage to summon. To the astonishment of his officers, Gates immediately decided to go on campaign. He was joined by 2,100 North Carolina militia and 700

---

[226] "King's Mountain: Letters of Colonel Isaac Shelby," ed. J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton, *Journal of Southern History* 4 (August 1938), 373; Mackesy, *War for America*, 346; Borick, *A Gallant Defense*, 235, 240; Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 80, 82–5, 99, 100–02; Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 72.

Virginia militia, along with 60 cavalry and 20 "partisans"—guerillas—under a lean and ferocious captain named Francis Marion. Gates hoped to be able to make a defensive stand near Camden, South Carolina; defensive so as to maximize the mettle of the militia and force the British into attacking. Unhappily, he got exactly what he wanted. Cornwallis picked up word from his scouts on August 9 that Gates was in motion toward Camden, and Cornwallis promptly assembled the 23rd, 33rd, and 71st regiments, accompanied by Tarleton's dragoons and two battalions of Loyalist militia, and marched them north to meet Gates's Continentals. The cavalry detachments of the two armies collided near Camden on August 15, and the next day, Horatio Gates drew up a line on either side of the north-running Waxhaws Road, with DeKalb and the Maryland and Delaware Continentals to his right and the North Carolina and Virginia militia to the left. Cornwallis came up the road and deployed in almost the mirror opposite: 23rd, 33rd, and 71st regiments on his right; Tarleton and the Loyalist militia on the left. It was a situation where the outcome was liable to fall to whoever got their regular infantry moving first against the opposing militia. But Gates had determined on a defensive battle. He would not take the initiative; he would not be the first to commit his regulars to an attack on the enemy militia. It was Cornwallis's regulars, which leapt to the attack. The North Carolina militia took one look at the oncoming ranks of British bayonets and fled, many of them throwing loaded, unfired muskets to the ground in their panic. Cornwallis's regulars then pivoted and smashed into DeKalb's exposed flank, while Tarleton's dragoons galloped out around DeKalb's other flank to cut off any retreat. DeKalb managed this hopeless stand with superb finesse, fighting off two British bayonet charges before being overwhelmed. Swinging to the end with his sword, DeKalb went down with 11 wounds, and died three days later as a British prisoner. Horatio Gates turned and rode for his life, not stopping for three days until he reached Hillsborough, North Carolina, 180 miles away. Less then two months later, Horatio Gates was relieved of command of the southern department and told to await a Congressional inquiry, which would, in 1782, perversely but completely exonerate him.[227]

But just like Sir William Howe in New Jersey in 1776, Clinton and Germain had grossly exaggerated the dependence they thought they could place on the Loyalists. People who swore allegiance to the Crown one day

---

[227] Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 157–172; Mackesy, *War for America*, 342–3; Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 103–7.

threw away their oaths and swore allegiance to the Continental Congress the next. In the Camden district, rebel militiamen came in, took the oath to the king, and were recruited into the Loyalist militia. As soon as they were issued weapons, they deserted and rejoined the rebels. Militia officers captured at Charleston took the oath and joined the Loyalists, only to be captured by the rebels and take the oath to Congress. British officers recruited Loyalists to man their advanced outposts, and then as soon as the officers moved on to the next post, the Loyalist militia deserted. Rival militias soon substituted long-time score settling with each other for any precise identification with rebels or king's men, and the settling of scores soon turned into bushwacking, farm-burning, and civil war. Banastre Tarleton's bloody puree of Buford's Continentals at the Waxhaws quickly turned into a license for rebel militia to take no prisoners of their own, something they liked to refer to as "Tarleton's quarter." Then, in October 1780, Patrick Ferguson, commanding 1,100 Loyalist militia, was surrounded at King's Mountain—30 miles east of Charlotte, North Carolina—by several loosely-federated bands of upcountry rebel militia. Ferguson's Loyalists fought frantically, they knew they would be given no mercy. But the thickly-wooded hillsides of King's Mountain gave the rebel militia the perfect ground on which to attack: kneeling, firing, and picking off the enemy in the perfect embodiment of the legend of the American rifleman. Ferguson was shot and killed by a volley of militia rifles, and the Loyalists attempted by groups and individuals to surrender. But the cry of "Give them Buford's pay" overcame any respect the rebels had for white flags, and it was some time before the rebel officers could prevail on their men to stop the shooting. Three hundred of Ferguson's Loyalists were dead or wounded, 700 were taken prisoner, and even then, 36 of them were singled out barn-burners, murderers, and deserters, and nine of them hanged.[228]

There was also a reckoning waiting for Banastre Tarleton in particular. Three months after King's Mountain, Tarleton and his dragoons, struggling to keep a lid on the rebel militias in the Ninety-Six district, were lured into an ambush managed by Daniel Morgan, whose rifle battalion had been detached by Washington for service in the Southern Department. Thirty miles west of King's Mountain, Morgan laid a trail for Tarleton that led to an open cattle pasture known as Hannah's Cowpens, five miles from the crossing of the Broad River. There, Morgan laid out his men—1,800 of

[228] Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 68–72, 75, 82; Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 228–35, 239.

them, including a battalion of Continentals; 1,200 militia from Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia; and two squadrons of dragoons under William Washington. He set them out with a thin curtain of riflemen in front to act as skirmishers, then a thick band of militia, and then finally, drawn up behind them, Morgan's Continental Riflemen. As Banastre Tarleton and his dragoons pursued him, Morgan planned to have the skirmishers pepper the oncoming British with rifle fire, then fall back to the militia line. The militia was to fire two volleys, then fall back behind the Continentals and by that time the oncoming attackers would be so tired, but so over-confident, that Morgan's Continentals could riddle them with volley fire and then charge home with the bayonet. Early on the morning of January 17, 1781, Tarleton's column—his dragoons, Loyalist militia, one of the two battalions of the 71st Regiment, Fraser's Highlanders—came up to the Cowpens where Morgan was deployed, and went at once, confidently and unhurriedly, to the attack; just what Morgan wanted.[229]

Morgan's trap snapped perfectly: Tarleton ordered in his dragoons to clear off the skirmishers, who promptly emptied 15 saddles and then fled back to the militia line. Hot on their heels, Tarleton's Loyalist militia charged up to the rebel militia, raising "a prodijious yell, and came Running at us as if they intended to eat us up"; or as if they thought this was going to be a repeat of Camden. Sure enough, the militia fired once, then again, and then sprinted for the rear. Tarleton mistook this for the usual rout, thinking "that We Were broke" and then he sent in the 71st—the Fraser Highlanders—and his dragoons for a mop-up "with their bayonets but in no Order." Big mistake: Instead of conducting a mop-up of a defeated mob of Americans, they collided with a rock-solid wall of Continentals. Exhausted and disorganized by their long push, the Highlanders were in no shape to stand up to a counter-attack by the Continentals' bayonets, or to fight off William Washington's dragoons, who now swept down on them to deliver the *coup de grace*. Most of the seventy-first's battalion was surrounded and captured. One hundred and ten British and Loyalists were killed, another 200 wounded, and 527 captured. William Washington nearly captured Banastre Tarleton himself.[230]

---

[229] Lawrence E. Babits, *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens* (Chapel Hill, 1998), 150–151.

[230] Pancake, *This Destructive War,* 135; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 330–1; M. Foster Farley, "The 'Old Waggoner' and the 'Green Dragoon,' 1781," *History Today* 25 (March 1975), 195; Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 317.

Tarleton escaped, only to have to report his disaster to Charles Cornwallis, camped 35 miles away. Listening to Tarleton's report, Cornwallis leaned, and leaned, and leaned upon his sword, until the sword snapped. "The late affair has almost broke my heart," Cornwallis admitted, adding to the list of things British broken by Daniel Morgan. When the news reached Charleston, British officers were "standing in the streets in small circles, talking over the affair with very grave faces." The battle of Cowpens was not a large-scale battle, nor was King's Mountain, but together they spelled the doom of Sir Henry Clinton's hopes that his genius as a commander might yet save the outcome of the war for the British Empire.[231]

[231] Buchanan, *The Road to Guildford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas,* 332–3; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 331; Babits, *Devil of a Whipping*, 143.

Lecture Twenty-One

"The Americans Fought Like Demons"

Scope: After serving Washington successfully as quartermaster, Nathanael Greene was appointed to take over the Southern army after Horatio Gates's defeat at Camden. Greene determined that his Continental troops had plenty of ways to combat the British apart from open battle, including encouraging the backcountry warfare waged by Francis Marion and other rebel militia and setting up a series of boat caches to cross the ladder of rivers that crossed the Carolina coastal plain. It was at the Battle of Guildford Courthouse, though, where Greene forced Cornwallis to admit that the Americans could in fact "fight like demons."

Outline

I. Nathanael Greene, Washington's most successful quartermaster general, was just the person to pull the disaster-wracked Southern Department of the Continental army into order.

- **A.** He was born in 1742 into a family of Quakers, but he had an aggressive spirit that bent him toward books and that led to his suspension from the family's Quaker meeting in 1773. He never looked back.
    - **1.** As commander of the Rhode Island militia, he met George Washington for the first time on July 4, 1775, in the Continental army's first encampment outside Boston.
    - **2.** Washington prevailed on the Continental Congress to commission Nathanael Greene as a brigadier general in the Continental army.
- **B.** Although Greene's development as an officer required patience on Washington's part, in February of 1778, Washington proposed making Nathanael Greene quartermaster general of the main army.
    - **1.** Greene wanted very badly to refuse, but he succeeded admirably at the job.
    - **2.** Greene reorganized purchasing, created an army script known as "quartermaster's certificates," and set up magazines and storage depots at strategic points along the army's routes of campaign.

II. After the disaster at Camden, Washington moved Greene into Gates's place, for Greene had a practical eye for what armies could and could not do.

- **A.** First, the Southern army could not rebuild itself far enough or fast enough to confront Earl Cornwallis' army in an open fight.
- **B.** Second, the vicious partisan warfare being waged throughout the backcountry made it impossible for the British to supply themselves successfully from the countryside or to provide reinforcements and replacements for their casualties and losses.
- **C.** It thus became Nathanael Greene's business to keep his army away from any match with Cornwallis, while allowing Francis Marion and the partisans to undermine British control of the countryside.
- **D.** Greene brought with him a detachment of cavalry under "Light-horse Harry" Lee to supplement William Washington's dragoons, so that Greene would always have greater mounted scouting resources than Cornwallis.
- **E.** Greene convinced Francis Marion to provide intelligence-gathering and to identify supply sources.
- **F.** Above all, Greene wanted caches of boats to allow his troops to cross safely and easily the ladder of parallel rivers, all the way up into Virginia to the James River.

III. Greene would not sit idle.

- **A.** He detached Daniel Morgan and the Maryland and Delaware Continentals, who defeated Banastre Tarleton at Cowpens, a small but costly battle for the British on January 17, 1781.
- **B.** In January and February 1781, Greene lured Cornwallis across the Carolina Piedmont, where Greene's caches of boats came to his troops rescue, first at the Yadkin River and then at the Dan River, just over the line in Virginia.

IV. From the perspective of Lord George Germain in London, little stood between Cornwallis and a triumphant link with the British occupation forces in Portsmouth and Norfolk.

- **A.** Germain did not know that Cornwallis was 150 miles from the nearest usable supply station at Wilmington, North Carolina, nor that there was no British garrison in Portsmouth or Norfolk.
- **B.** And any hope that North Carolina Loyalists would turn out to help Cornwallis vanished on February 25, when "Light-Horse Harry"

Lee fooled 400 Loyalists into thinking that the Americans were Tarleton's dragoons, and then cut them to pieces.

C. Cornwallis had no choice but to stop his pursuit of Greene.

V. Now it was Greene's turn to chase Cornwallis.

A. Reinforced by two brigades of North Carolina militia, Greene slipped eastward to Guildford Courthouse, near modern Greensboro, North Carolina, on March 14. There the Earl decided to turn and grapple with his tormentor.

B. For once, Greene would risk an open fight, but he would do it on the defensive, imitating Morgan's tactical plan at Cowpens.

C. It was not quite the climactic event that either man had been waiting for.

1. A series of volleys, advances, and pullbacks on both sides resulted at one point in such a logjam that Cornwallis ordered his artillery to fire into the struggling mass of men, killing friend and enemy alike.

2. On March 15, 1781, Greene called for a general retreat, not wanting to lose more of his Continentals.

3. Cornwallis wanted to pursue but his men were too winded, and too many had been killed or were wounded. Rain fell that night, adding to the misery for the British.

D. Cornwallis issued a proclamation, claiming victory, but he later admitted that the Americans had fought admirably.

Suggested Reading:

Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, chaps. 23–24.

Pancake, *This Destructive War*, chaps. 6–8, 11.

Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, chap. 21.

Questions to Consider:

1. How did Nathanael Greene's experience in providing for supply and logistics for the Continental army help him in planning strategy in the Carolinas?

2. Why were the British unable to sustain their initial successes in the Carolinas?

Lecture Twenty-One—Transcript
“The Americans Fought Like Demons”

On December 2, 1780, a new commander for the disaster-wracked Southern Department of the Continental army clattered into Charlotte, North Carolina, to behold what was left of the regular American forces after the surrender at Charleston and the debacle at Camden. There wasn’t much: The “condition of this army, if it deserves the name of one,” wrote the new general in charge in his first report to George Washington, is “wretched and distressing.” The handful of Continentals still in camp “are literally naked, and a great part totally unfit for any kind of duty.” When the rolls were checked, the Southern army amounted to a meager 2,300 men, and of those, only 1,500 were actually in the camp and fit for duty. But for once, this was a challenge which was to be met squarely by the right man, who in this case was a member of George Washington’s inner circle and his most successful quartermaster general: Nathanael Greene.[232]

Nathanael Greene had never wanted to be a quartermaster. For that matter, he was not a particularly obvious candidate for a soldier. He was born in 1742 in Rhode Island, born into a family of Quakers who had multiple interests in non-violence and milling, iron-forging, and coastal shipping. No interest at all, though, in learning or in soldiering. But young Nathanael had an aggressive spirit, which bent him toward books and which led to his suspension from the family’s Quaker meeting in 1773. He never looked back; but at the same time, he also never forgave, and his resentment at having been held back from the opportunities he deserved planted a permanent touchiness in his spirit. “I lament the want of a liberal education,” Greene complained. “I was educated a Quaker, and amongst the most Supersticious sort, and that of its self is a sufficient Obstacle to cramp the best of geniuses.”

Greene’s experience of Quakerism had nothing in common with the genial smiling face on the Quaker Oats box. Instead, he found his family’s Quaker meeting smug, small-minded, and hateful. He was dragged into the colonies’ quarrel with Great Britain in 1773, when the new British sanctions on New England trade laid a heavy hand on the family’s shipping business.

---

[232] Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 288; Terry Golway, *Washington’s General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution* (New York, 2005), 239.

As commander of the Rhode Island militia, he met George Washington for the first time on July 4, 1775, in the Continental army's first encampment outside Boston.

Greene made the same impression on Washington that another self-taught soldier—Henry Knox—had made, and Washington prevailed on the Continental Congress to commission Nathanael Greene as a brigadier general in the Continental army. But Greene's development as an officer required more patience on Washington's part than Knox's had. In the campaigns of 1776 around New York City, Greene argued in favor of holding Fort Washington on the northern tip of Manhattan, only to see its entire garrison surrounded and captured by the British. At Brandywine and Germantown in 1777, Greene's principal responsibilities had been to cover the Continental army's humiliating retreats; and, as he was quick to resent anything which looked like a slight, he had gotten into an unseemly *contretemps* with the Continental Congress over promotions and seniority. But, on the other side of the ledger, Greene had commanded one of Washington's attack columns at Trenton, and he'd helped Washington rally Mercer's Continentals after the first shock of the British attack at Princeton. Then, in February 1778, in the middle of the Valley Forge winter, Washington proposed making Nathanael Greene quartermaster general of the "main army." Partly, this was because Washington needed someone with some business sense to oversee procurement for the army's supplies. But partly, this was to forestall the scheme of Horatio Gates and his Congressional admirers to acquire effective control over the main army, which is something that we looked at in detail in Lecture Seventeen.

Greene wanted very badly to refuse. He had signed on to fight the British, not to fight with contractors and farmers, and—as Greene snorted—history never remembers who the quartermasters were. "I hate the place," Greene complained, but "His Excellency … presses it upon me exceedingly," and so Greene gave in. He took temporary field command, once at Monmouth and the other in the failed joint expedition with the French against Newport, in 1778, but he did even better as quartermaster general. Greene reorganized purchasing, created an army script known as "quartermaster's certificates" to function in the place of the depreciated Continental currency, and set up "magazines"—storage depots—at points along the army's most likely routes of campaign so that supplies for the army weren't always having to play catch up with the movements of the army. Still, Greene did not suffer fools gladly. When Congress tried meddling in quartermaster's affairs in 1780, Greene responded with a

resignation letter so sarcastic that voices in Congress demanded that Greene be suspended from his office.[233]

Then came the disaster at Camden, which not only put Horatio Gates permanently on the shelf, but gave George Washington the opportunity to move Nathaniel Greene into Gates's place. It was one of the best personnel decisions Washington made in the war, for Greene's spell as quartermaster general—as well as his prewar life in business—had given him a clear and practical eye for what armies could and could *not* do, entirely apart from the pursuit of military glory. There were two things which it was immediately apparent that the Southern army could and could not do: First of all, there was no possibility that the Southern army could rebuild itself far or fast enough to confront Earl Cornwallis's army in an open fight. If it was foolish enough to do so, and sustained a third serious defeat, that would be the end of the Continental army in the South and everything south of the Chesapeake would revert to British control.

On the other hand, Cornwallis's army was at the end of a very long logistical tether, and nobody was in a better position to appreciate the consequences of that than Nathanael Green. The vicious partisan warfare being waged throughout the backcountry by Loyalist and rebel militias, and especially by the elusive partisan captain—Francis Marion, the "Swamp Fox"—horrified Greene. He wrote privately that rebels and Loyalists preyed on each other "with as much relentless fury as beasts of prey. People … are frequently murdered as they ride along the road."[234] But one thing which the backcountry cutthroat warfare did was make it impossible for the British to forage successfully—to supply themselves successfully—from the countryside, with the result that Cornwallis's troops always remained leashed like a weather balloon to safe coastal towns where supplies could be received from New York. The same thing was also true concerning reinforcements and replacements for casualties and losses. Lord George Germain had little enough to spare in the way of new recruits for North America, and most of that little had to be detailed to secure New York and the Southern coastal points that Cornwallis relied upon for supplies. No matter whether Cornwallis's army lost or won, if it was going to sustain casualties it lost, because those casualties could not be replaced. It thus became Nathanael Greene's business to keep his army dancing away from

[233] Golway, *Washington's General*, 20, 46, 165, 226; Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 264.

[234] Golway, *Washington's General*, 240.

any slugging match with Cornwallis, while allowing Marion and the partisans to undermine British control of the countryside. In other words, to keep the British limited to those coastal supply points. But yet, at the same time, to keep luring Cornwallis into fruitless chases that ate up British supplies and wore down British soldiers. Greene had learned this one great lesson which Washington had learned since 1777: dance like a butterfly, sting like a bee.

Greene brought with him to North Carolina a detachment of cavalry under one of Washington's most promising horsemen, Lt. Col. Henry—or as he was known, "Light-horse Harry"—Lee to supplement William Washington's dragoons, so that Greene would always have greater mounted scouting resources than Cornwallis. Greene wooed Francis Marion, a prickly man whom Horatio Gates had foolishly neglected, to provide intelligence-gathering and identify local sources of supply.[235] Above all, Greene wanted boats, which was an unusual request for the commander of a land army. But Greene had taken in the basic geographical fact that the Carolina coastal plain is segmented by a ladder of parallel rivers: the Savannah River, the Edisto, the Santee, the Peedee, the Catawba, the Yadkin, and the Dan, all the way up into Virginia to the James River. If Greene was to dance like a butterfly, he would need to dance over these rivers, and caches of boats would be needed to allow him to cross his troops safely and easily.

One thing which Nathanael Greene would definitely not do was sit idle. On December 16, he broke camp in Charlotte and swung southeast around the head of Cornwallis's army into South Carolina. At the same time, Greene detached Daniel Morgan and the Maryland and Delaware Continentals and sent them around the other side of Cornwallis's army, headed toward the British upcountry outpost of Ninety-Six, where he expected Morgan to keep Cornwallis sufficiently off-balance that the British would decide to abandon any move into North Carolina and fall back toward Charleston. Daniel Morgan—as we saw in Lecture Twenty—succeeded beyond Greene's wildest hopes by drawing off Banastre Tarleton, and then turning and administering a bloody nose to "Bloody Ban" at Cowpens on January 17, 1781. Cowpens was not a large-scale battle, but it proved very costly to the British all the same: The outsize number of British and Loyalist dead and missing represented people that Cornwallis had no practical hope of replacing.

---

[235] Hugh F. Rankin, *Francis Marion: The Swamp Fox* (New York, 1973), 142.

Still, Greene had no intention of underestimating Cornwallis. The Earl might have been a Cambridge-educated aristocrat, but he was no military fool. Cornwallis's later career as British commander in chief in India would be one of the most distinguished in British military history. The problem for Cornwallis was catching Greene, for with the arrival of the news of Cowpens Greene, accompanied only by a headquarters party, doubled back across the dangerous South Carolina hill country, rejoined Daniel Morgan on January 30, 1781, and then deliberately drifted back up to a rendezvous with the rest of his Continentals into North Carolina, hoping to lure Cornwallis after him across the bleak winter landscape of the Carolina Piedmont. Cornwallis, eager to get his hands on Greene and Morgan after the Cowpens embarrassment, was only too happy to oblige them. Cornwallis lunged after Greene with 1,500 men in an effort to trap the wily Americans against the Yadkin River. Unhappily for Cornwallis, Nathanael Greene's caches of boats came to his rescue at the Yadkin River, and an enraged and boatless Cornwallis had to settle for heaving a fusillade of futile artillery rounds across the river at the departing Americans. Cornwallis had not paused for long: He improvised his own crossing of the Yadkin in pursuit, chasing after Nathanael Greene over as much as 20 miles a day of hard marching in hope of trapping Greene again, this time against the Dan River, just over the line in Virginia. But on February 14, Greene's troops arrived at the Dan River and merely opened up another cache of boats, crossed the river, and left Cornwallis stewing on the south bank.[236]

Cornwallis wanted to call this little campaign a victory. He had, after all, planted his colors up through North Carolina and into a toehold in southern Virginia. From the perspective of Lord George Germain in London, nothing but Nathanael Greene's little army seemed to stand between Cornwallis and a triumphant link-up with the British occupation forces in Portsmouth and Norfolk. The problem was that Germain did not know that Cornwallis was now over 200 miles from Camden, and 150 miles from the nearest usable supply station on the coast at Wilmington, North Carolina. Above all, Germain did not know that there was no British garrison in Portsmouth or Norfolk for Cornwallis to link up with, for the simple reason that Cornwallis had earlier evacuated the British troops there and shipped them to Charleston to become reinforcements for his own army. Any hope that North Carolina Loyalists would turn out to Cornwallis's succor disappeared on February 25, when "Light-horse Harry" Lee surprised 400 Loyalist militia under Col. John Pyle, fooled the Loyalists into thinking that the

---

[236] Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 159.

Americans were Tarleton's dragoons—because both Tarleton's dragoons and Lee's cavalry wore green jackets—and then they turned on the Loyalists and cut them pieces, killing 90 of the Loyalists while shouting, "Remember Buford!" (That's Abraham Buford, whose Continentals—as we saw back in Lecture Twenty—had been massacred by Tarleton the year before at the Waxhaws.) Cornwallis had no choice but to call a halt to his pursuit and to fall back into central North Carolina, hoping, ultimately, to reach safety at the coast at Wilmington.[237]

Now it was Nathanael Greene's turn to take up the chase. Greene recrossed the Dan River on February 22, and reinforced by two brigades of North Carolina militia, he shadowed Cornwallis from the west and then turned southeastwards to close the distance. Cornwallis reached Hillsborough, North Carolina at the end of February, and then cut westward to ford the Haw River, thus bringing the two armies on a converging course. Greene slipped eastward to Guildford Courthouse—five miles northwest of the modern Greensboro, North Carolina—on March 14, because that was where he expected Cornwallis to make his turn towards Wilmington, along the line of the Cape Fear River. Cornwallis's army at that point was down to just under 2,000 men, having lost upwards of 400 in skirmishes or to desertion and disease. The Earl now decided to turn and grapple with his tormentor, Nathanael Greene, hoping that he could redeem his resultless chase through the Carolinas and administer another Horatio Gates-style pummeling to the Americans. Greene had been, all along, avoiding a shooting match with Cornwallis, but now he sat on his haunches and waited. For once, Greene would risk an open fight, but he would do it on the defensive: He would allow the British to attack him and bleed themselves further while he could always retreat and fight another day. With the militia reinforcing him, Greene had as many as 4,400 men at his call, and though he had no better opinion of the militia than Washington had, nevertheless Daniel Morgan's victory at Cowpens had taught Greene how the militia could be best used to serve as adjuncts to the regular Continental infantry.[238]

Greene imitated Morgan's tactical plan at Cowpens: He drew his army up in three lines to receive the British; the first line composed of 1,000 North Carolina militiamen. Green assured the North Carolina militia that they had only to fire two or three reasonably good volleys, and then they could

---

[237] Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 364; Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 173; Moses Hall, in Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 202.

[238] Mackesy, *War for America*, 406.

scamper to the rear; they would not have to stand up to the British bayonet charge. Three to four hundred yards behind the North Carolina militia, the Virginia militia were drawn up in a screen of trees with the same orders, and then there was a third line 700 yards back of the Virginians and drawn up at the crest of a slight rise where the Guildford Courthouse was perched. There Greene put five battalions of Continentals: the 1st and 5th Maryland, the 4th and 5th Virginia, and two companies of the Delaware line. On the flanks, William Washington's dragoons and "Light-horse Harry" Lee's light cavalry were ready to ride down on whatever British infantry survived their attack through these three lines. The heavy gullies and pockets of underbrush would further upset the solidity of the fearsome British bayonet charge, and so, as "Light-horse Harry" wrote, "General Greene … prepared for battle; not doubting that the long avoided, now wished-for hour was at hand."[239]

It turned out not to be quite the climactic hour that Lee, Greene, or even Cornwallis had been waiting for. Cornwallis had his little army on the road toward Guildford Courthouse—12 miles away—at four o'clock on the morning of March 17, 1781, with Banastre Tarleton and a single troop of Tarleton's much-depleted dragoons clearing the way. Tarleton brushed up against Greene's advanced pickets at seven o'clock that morning, but the bulk of the British infantry—which in this case was the 23rd and 33rd regiments plus the 2nd battalion of the 71st, the Fraser Highlanders, whose 1st battalion had been wrecked at Cowpens; in addition, there was also the light infantry and grenadier companies of the Guards regiments, these being the companies drawn from the Grenadiers, Coldstreams, and Scots Guards; and then there was also the von Bose regiment of Hesse-Cassel—did not come in sight of Greene's lines in front of the Guildford Courthouse until noon. Cornwallis deployed his regiments from their column of march on the Salisbury Road and shook out the Guards battalion: the 23rd and the 33rd regiments in the line of battle to the left, and the 71st and von Bose regiments on the right, with Tarleton's cavalry "ready to act as circumstances might require." The British started forward to the attack at approximately one o'clock with precisely the same tactical directions which had won the day at Camden, and nearly lost it at Bunker Hill. As they advanced at 140 yards, the North Carolina militia in Greene's first line gave them one volley, and then at 40 yards a second volley, wickedly balanced for accuracy on top of a fence rail which ran across the North Carolinians' front; and then the North Carolina militia sprinted for the rear. Stumbling

---

[239] Golway, *Washington's General*, 255–6; Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 371.

and falling, whether from militia bullets or from the uneven terrain, the panoramic British line began to come unhinged and uneven. The 23rd Regiment was faltering noticeably, and their lieutenant colonel, James Webster, had to rally them with more than even his usual commanding voice—"Come on, my Brave Fuzileers"—and they came on just in time to come under fire from the Virginians in Greene's second line.[240]

As the by-now panting and tired British came on, one of the Virginia militia brigades dutifully fired and pulled back into the screen of trees behind them. The other stood, trading fire and holding back the Highlanders and the Germans so that the two halves of the British assault were now completely out of alignment with each other. This meant that once the Virginians had been driven from the woods, the Guards battalion and the 33rd Regiment were the first to come in sight of Green's Continentals, up the hillside toward the courthouse. Lt. Col. Webster of the 23rd Regiment led them pell-mell up towards the Continentals, who waited until Webster and his redcoats were 30 yards away, and then staggered them with a volley. Up behind them came the Guards battalion, glowing with impatience to signalize themselves. They slammed a volley into the 1st and 2nd Maryland regiments; the 2nd Maryland collapsed and gave way, but the 1st Maryland stood its ground, trading volleys and bayonets with the Guards Battalion, and even witnessing British Col. James Stuart crossing swords in single combat with Col. John Smith of the 1st Maryland. Smith dodged a thrust from the Britisher, and brought his own sword down on the back of Lt. Col. Stuart's neck and killed him. One North Carolina militiaman, Nathaniel Slade, watched the ferocious combat from his perspective at the courthouse, and wrote that "This conflict between the brigade of guards and the first regiment of Marylanders was most terrific, for they fired at the same instant, and they appeared so near that the blazes from the muzzles of their guns seemed to meet." Cornwallis was so desperate to break the logjam that he ordered his artillery to fire into the struggling mass of men, killing friend and foe alike. The 23rd and 71st regiments, now emerging from their entanglement in the trees with the Virginia militia, launched a second general attack. But this, too, was stopped in its tracks by the fire of the Continentals.

---

[240] Golway, *Washington's General*, 257; Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 375–9; Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 179; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 336; Cornwallis to Lord George Germain (March 17, 1781), in *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, Charles Ross, ed. (London, 1859), 1:521–2.

Then Nathanael Greene, deciding that he had punished the British enough for one afternoon and not wanting to lose more of his own precious Continentals, called for a general retreat. The Continentals, bloodied but unbowed, regrouped and marched off past Guildford Courthouse as though they had been to nothing more than a field day. Cornwallis wanted to start a pursuit with the 23rd and 71st regiments, but his men were too winded, and, as he quickly learned, he had lost so many of them breaking over Greene's lines that Greene might conceivably turn and rend him instead. Cornwallis had lost 93 killed, with 413 wounded; 50 of whom would die that night from their wounds. That was almost a quarter of his army. His second-in-command, Charles O'Hara, was hit in the chest and the thigh. The headlong James Webster was hit in the foot, lost the foot to amputation, and died two weeks later. Rain fell that night, adding misery to misery for the British. "I never did and I hope I never shall experience two such days and nights as those immediately after the battle," wrote O'Hara.

> We remained on the very ground on which it had been fought, covered with dead, with dying, and with hundreds of wounded, rebels as well as our own. A violent and constant rain that lasted above forty hours made it equally impracticable to remove or administer the smallest comfort to our wounded.

Cornwallis issued a proclamation, claiming complete victory. But privately, even Cornwallis had to admit, "I never saw such fighting since God made me. The Americans fought like demons." Nathanael Greene, far from wailing in anguish over a defeat, wrote George Washington to say that "now I am perfectly easy, persuaded that it is out of the enemy's power to do us any great injury."[241]

Indeed it was. On March 19, Cornwallis got his army back on the road, heading southeast to Wilmington, which he reached on April 7. For three weeks, Cornwallis rested and refitted his troops, mulling over his next move. One option was to pull back to Charleston; and in fact the commandant of the Charleston garrison had prepared a flotilla to transport Cornwallis's battered troops there. But this was the same as conceding defeat to the Americans. It made more sense to Cornwallis to ask where Greene was drawing his remarkable strength and resiliency from, and the answer at once became clear: Virginia. If Cornwallis could strike into Virginia, then he could cut off

---

[241] Reid, *British Redcoat, 1740–1793*, 59; Stephenson, *Patriot Battles*, 340; Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 380, 382; Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 186.

Greene from his avenues of supply and reinforcement, and force Greene to abandon North Carolina in order to save Virginia.[242]

That was not a bad plan. Not a bad plan; except that Cornwallis had simply failed to reckon with George Washington.

---

[242] Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 189.

Lecture Twenty-Two
The Reward of Loyalty

Scope: Those who remained loyal to Britain did not have an easy time during the revolution. Some families had been torn apart by contrary allegiances. Some became the subject of rebel rampage and suffered loss of property and even loss of life. The biggest losers however, were the Indians, many of whom had established centuries-long ties with the British. The Iroquois, Cherokee, and Shawnee all fought bitter battles with militia and suffered destruction and loss of their native land. Washington saw rebellion closer to home in the form of the Pennsylvania Continentals, who mutinied in January 1781. Far more painful for Washington, however, was the shocking mutiny of Benedict Arnold.

Outline

I. In January 1781, Washington feared that American society might be incapable of sustaining the war effort.

  A. Sometimes contrary allegiances tore families in half.

  B. Loyalists became the targets of rebel rage and even legislation.

    1. The New York legislature made it a felony to promote Loyalism and the estates of prominent Loyalists were confiscated and broken up.

    2. In North Carolina, Loyalists were given 60 days to sell their property and leave, or else face confiscation.

    3. In Georgia, the rebel legislature declared 117 persons guilty of treason and confiscated their possessions.

II. The biggest losers for Loyalism, however, were the 200,000 Indians who had been driven into a narrowing band of territory between the Appalachian foothills and the Mississippi River.

  A. The Iroquois Nations of upstate New York were reluctant to commit themselves to one or the other side

    1. In 1777 Joseph Brant, a Mohawk himself, was successful in bringing four of the six Iroquois tribes over to the British side.

    2. Starting in the summer of 1778, a combined force of Loyalists and British Iroquois swept down the Susquehanna River, destroying a militia outpost and massacring hundreds.

3. This massacre brought on a series of retaliation on both sides, which finally led Washington to order an entire division of Continentals led by John Sullivan to eliminate the Iroquois threat on the northern frontier.
4. The clash of the Sullivan expedition with the Loyalist-Iroquois allies at present-day Elmira was just the start of a series of mutual retaliations resulting in the ravage of the entire region of the old Iroquois confederacy in upstate New York and upper Pennsylvania.

B. Much the same pattern repeated itself further to the south, where the Shawnee and the Cherokee had long stood in the path of colonial expansion.

1. In March 1775, to the dismay of a number of Cherokee, a land development company persuaded the Cherokee leadership to sell 27,000 square miles (the equivalent of the modern state of Kentucky) to the Transylvania Company for approximately £10,000 in trade goods.
2. In July 1776, a Cherokee leader, Dragging Canoe, forced settlers to withdraw into three fortified towns, but the Cherokee were, in turn, attacked by South Carolina and North Carolina militia.

C. The next year, the Shawnee attacked Harrodsburg in March and besieged Boonesborough from April to May 1777, and capturing Daniel Boone himself in February 1778.

1. In reply, Virginia governor Patrick Henry authorized Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark and the Virginia militia to conduct a counteroffensive, not against the Shawnee or the Cherokee, but across the Ohio River, at the real source of the Indian troubles, the British outposts at Kaskaskia and Vincennes (in modern-day Illinois and Indiana).
2. Clark surprised and overran the tiny garrison at Kaskaskia on July 4, 1778, without firing a single shot.
3. On February 5, 1779, Clark marched out of Kaskaskia with 200 men and on February 24, delivered a summons to Lt. Gov. Hamilton to surrender, to which Hamilton eventually agreed.

D. In later years, the Indians, both Shawnee and Cherokee, suffered greatly.

1. Most of the Cherokee sued for peace in 1777 and signed the first United States Indian treaty in 1785; by 1800, the

Cherokee had withdrawn into northern Georgia and were then deported in 1834, along the tragic "Trail of Tears," to modern-day Oklahoma.

2. The Shawnee fought on until 1794, when "Mad Anthony" Wayne defeated them at Fallen Timbers. A new generation of Shawnee was defeated by an American army at Tippecanoe in 1811 and the Battle of the Thames in 1813.

III. Washington was also plagued by mutiny and disloyalty within the army.

A. The army went unpaid, unfed, and unclothed.

1. On New Year's Day, 1781, the Pennsylvania Continentals seized the brigade artillery and formed up to march away to Philadelphia.
2. A compromise was hammered out guaranteeing new clothing and pay warrants.

B. But for Washington, the most painful incident of mutiny concerned the unhappy Benedict Arnold.

1. Washington had tried to mollify Arnold by securing him a promotion to major general and assigning him as commandant of a reoccupied Philadelphia in 1778.
2. Through his young Loyalist wife Peggy, Arnold began furtively corresponding with Sir Henry Clinton's adjutant-general, Maj. John André.
3. In the summer of 1780, Washington appointed Arnold commandant of West Point.
4. In July, Arnold got an offer of £20,000 and a general's commission in the British army for the betrayal of West Point and, if possible, George Washington.
5. In September 1780, André was stopped as he tried to make his way through American lines in disguise; the plans and schedule Arnold had given him for capturing West Point were found.
6. Arnold soon learned he had been discovered and made his way safely to New York. André was hanged.
7. Washington arrived at West Point on September 25 and was stunned to discover Arnold missing and the envelope of incriminating papers.

Suggested Reading:

Hammon & Taylor, *Virginia's Western War*, chap. 4.

Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution*, chap. 7.

Randall, *Benedict Arnold*, chaps. 17–19.

Walsh, *The Execution of Major André*, chaps. 5–7.

Questions to Consider:

1. Why didn't the British take advantage of the mutiny of the Pennsylvania Continentals?

2. Should Sir Henry Clinton have agreed to exchange Arnold for André?

Lecture Twenty-Two—Transcript
The Reward of Loyalty

It was the middle of January 1781, in the middle of another dreary winter spent hovering outside the British lines that guarded New York City. There George Washington sat down to unburden himself in a long letter to one of his admiring young staffers, John Laurens. Unburdened, because Washington had a lot to say to Laurens about all the ways in which this war had wrecked the expectations of nearly everybody who had gone into it. "The efforts we have been compelled to make for carrying on the war, have exceeded the natural abilities of this country and by degrees brought it to a crisis," Washington wrote. "The want of a sufficient stock of wealth" had plunged the rebel government into an abyss of debt and made its currency worthless; foraging on the countryside to support the army had only alienated the people and "excited serious discontents … the patience of the army from an almost uninterrupted series of complicated distresses is now nearly exhausted." Above all, Washington was depressed by the flaccid response of the American people themselves: Americans, he wrote, were "a commercial and free people," not a nation of beaten-down and submissive peasants, and they "were little accustomed to heavy burthens." The longer the war dragged on and the heavier its costs became, the more Washington feared that Americans had developed a "speculative apprehension of future sufferings from the loss of their liberties." In other words, the more that the army was forced to confiscate crops and livestock, the more the militia was called out to make up shortfalls in the Continental Line, and the more that Congress and the state governments struggled to keep a lid on Loyalist resistance, then the more the people would reach for the nearest target rather than the real cause of their woes, and announce that it was Washington and Congress—and not the British—who were the real threat to their liberties. "Dissatisfied with the mode of supporting the war," Washington wrote to Laurens, and "pressed by impositions of a new and odious kind," Washington feared that Americans "may not make a proper allowance for the necessity" of sustaining the war's length, "and may imagine, they have only exchanged one tyranny for another."[243]

---

[243] Washington to John Laurens (January 15, 1781), in *George Washington: A Collection*, ed. W.B. Allen (Indianapolis, 1988), 182–3; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 270, 275.

Washington was far from the only one that winter to wonder whether the American Revolution had taken people down paths they had never expected to take, and no one felt that more keenly than the Loyalists he despised. Sometimes the cruelties that they suffered were personal ones: Contrary allegiances ripped some families in half, making the Revolution as much a "brothers' war" as the American Civil War would be 80 years later. Elizabeth and Ann Phillips—two sisters who married career British army officers in the 1750s—saw their lives split when one husband, Robert Fenwick, stayed loyal to the Union Jack, while the other, Horatio Gates, became a general in the Continental army. Isaac Low was determined to "live and die a British subject," but his brother Nicholas was a rebel who sat in New York's rebel legislature. Jared Ingersoll the elder, a New Haven merchant, was trapped in Philadelphia when the British evacuated the city in 1778. But his rebel-sympathizing son, Jared Ingersoll the Younger, was at the same moment stranded in London, trying to persuade Lord North's government to indemnify his Loyalist father for two years' lost salary as a Crown official. Hannah Griffits, a Pennsylvania Quaker, prayed that God would, "Oh! Speak contending brethren into Peace / Bid the sweet Cherub bless our weeping Shores / And friends again in her soft Bands unite." But the reality was, as Griffits realized, that "mean Distinctions times have made," and those times were likely to "break each sacred Tye, each social Band / and in affliction plunge the parent Land."[244]

The strain on personal and family affection was only part of the Loyalists' disenchantment. As we've seen in both Lecture Twelve and Lecture Twenty, Loyalists who applauded the march-through of the king's soldiers quickly became the targets of rebel rage when those soldiers departed. The New York legislature made it a felony to promote Loyalism by "preaching, teaching, speaking, writing, [or] printing," and the estates of prominent New York Loyalists were confiscated by the rebel legislature and broken up. Oliver de Lancey's 2,300-acre estate was broken up and auctioned away; James de Lancey's New York manor was sold off among some 275

[244] Judith L. van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York* (Philadelphia, 2002), 42, 48; Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790* (Baltimore, 1981), 285; Lawrence Henry Gipson, *Jared Ingersoll: A Study of American Loyalism in Relation to British Colonial Government* (New Haven, 1920), 357–8; Karin Wulf, "'Despise the mean Distinctions [these] Times Have Made': The Complexity of Patriotism and Quaker Loyalism in One Pennsylvania Family."

bidders; and the 25,000 acres owned by Roger Morris disappeared into the hands of another 250 rebels. At the same time, tenants on the great manors of *rebel* landlords—hoping that a king's victory might allow them to carve up the grandees' estates for themselves—staged Loyalist uprisings up and down the Hudson River Valley, all of which were ruthlessly suppressed. In North Carolina, Loyalists—and there Loyalists meant anyone who refused to take a loyalty oath to the new rebel regime—were given 60 days to sell their property and leave, and if they didn't sell within 60 days their property would be confiscated. In Georgia, the rebel legislature there declared 117 persons guilty of treason and confiscated their "possessions both real and personal." Whatever the unreliability of the militia in open battle, the militia was invaluable for policing and suppressing Loyalist sympathy, and for squeezing fines and levies from unenthusiastic farmers.[245]

The biggest losers for Loyalism, however, were the 200,000 Indians who had gradually been driven—over the course of the preceding century—into a narrowing band of territory between the Appalachian foothills and the Mississippi River. The Iroquois nations of upstate New York, despite their long ties to the British and the vigorous recruiting efforts of Joseph Brant—the Mohawk Chieftain, protégé and brother-in-law of the royal Indian Superintendent, Sir William Johnson—nevertheless, despite those pleas the Iroquois were reluctant to commit themselves to one or the other side of the white men's quarrel. Not until a great parley at Oswego in 1777 was Brant successful in bringing four of the six Iroquois tribes over to the British side. In the summer of 1778, a combined force of Loyalists and British-sympathizing Iroquois swept down the Susquehanna River Valley, destroying a militia outpost at Forty Fort, massacring most of its 360-man garrison—who had unwisely allowed themselves to be lured outside Forty Fort into an ambush—and then went rampaging through the now-unprotected frontier settlements of Pennsylvania's Wyoming Valley. Massacre promptly begat more massacre. Pennsylvania and New York militia retaliated in September by burning Iroquois towns in upstate New York, while Brant and the Loyalist ranger John Butler led a retaliation raid into the settlements in New York's Cherry Valley

[245] Countryman, *A People in Revolution***,** 174, Alden, *History of the American Revolution*, 362; Gary B. Nash, *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* (New York, 2002), 246–7; Alexander C. Flick, *Loyalism in New York During the American Revolution* (New York, 1901), 152, 160; Robert S. Lambert, "The Confiscation of Loyalist Property in Georgia, 1782–1786," *William & Mary Quarterly* 20 (January 1963), 80; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 269, 277, 285.

in November; which finally led George Washington to order John Sullivan and an entire division of Continentals: the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th New Jersey; 1st, 2nd and 3rd New Hampshire; 4th and 11th Pennsylvania; and an eight-gun battery of artillery. With Sullivan, they were to eliminate the Iroquois threat on the northern frontier.

The Sullivan expedition marched out from Easton, Pennsylvania on June 18, moving ponderously up the Susquehanna River toward Tioga, New York, and meticulously burning Indian towns and fields as they went. At Tioga, Sullivan rendezvoused with a second column—composed of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th New York Continentals—on August 19th. Joseph Brant and Col. Butler tried to make a stand at the Iroquois town of Newtown—which is near present-day Elmira, New York—but this was playing to Sullivan's strength. Sullivan planted one brigade on the Loyalist-Iroquois flank, and then hit them with both artillery and the bayonet. Brant and Butler fought their way out of Sullivan's clutches, and the overall casualty figures were not particularly staggering: three 3 dead and perhaps 50 wounded among the Continentals; not more than 30 Indian or Loyalist dead. But once on the run, Brant's Iroquois stayed on the run. Sullivan went on to scorch the earth of the Iroquois nations so effectively that Sullivan could boast afterwards that "that there is not a single town left unburnt in the Iroquois confederacy."[246] This did nothing to dampen Joseph Brant's determination to wage war, and for the next two years Brant, his Iroquois, and their Loyalist allies swept back over upstate New York and upper Pennsylvania, only to be met and swept back by the militia; and the ultimate result was that the entire region of the old Iroquois confederacy was mutually ravaged.

Much the same pattern repeated itself further to the south, where the Shawnee and the Cherokee had long stood right in the path of restless colonial expansion. "When we enter … into treaties with our brothers, the whites, their whole cry is *more land*!" complained Onitositah—or Cornstalk—a Shawnee elder. In 1776, the Cherokee were approached by delegates from the Iroquois nations at the Cherokee town of Chota, hoping that they could persuade the Cherokee to join a united front against white colonial encroachment over the Appalachians. Like the Iroquois at first, the Cherokee had also hoped to find some way of avoiding taking sides in the

---

[246] Thomas Coffin Amory, *The Military Services and Public Life of Major-General John Sullivan, of the American Revolutionary Army* (Albany, 1868), 117, 121–124; Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 346–7; Ronald Wright, *Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes since 1492* (Boston, 1992), 138–9.

Revolution, but the record of white colonial dealings with the Cherokee was not particularly encouraging. In March 1775, a land development company—the Transylvania Company, headed by Richard Henderson, a former judge from North Carolina—met with the Cherokee leadership at Sycamore Shoals on the Watauga River, in what's now modern east Tennessee, and persuaded them to sell 27,000 square miles between the Cumberland and Ohio Rivers—in other words the equivalent of the modern state of Kentucky—to the Transylvania Company for approximately £10,000 in trade goods. The deal did not sit well with a number of Cherokee, especially Tsiyu Gansi-ni—or "Dragging Canoe"—who walked out of the sale, angrily predicting that "the same encroaching spirit will lead them upon other land of the Cherokees … Such treaties may be all right for men who are too old to hunt or fight. As for me, I have my young warriors about me. We will have our lands."[247]

When the Transylvania Company hired Daniel Boone to lead a surveying party into the Company's new acquisitions and lay out a string of settlements there, Dragging Canoe was as good as his threat. In July 1776, Dragging Canoe descended on the Kentucky settlements and forced the settlers to withdraw into three fortified towns: McClelland's, Harrodsburg, and Boonesborough. But Dragging Canoe's Cherokee were, in their own turn, attacked by South Carolina and North Carolina militia coming over the mountains to the aid of the frontier posts, and they gave up the campaign. The next year, the Shawnee tried their hand, attacking Harrodsburg in March and besieging Boonesborough from April–May 1777. They even captured Daniel Boone himself in February 1778. The Shawnee tried to use Boone as a negotiator to convince Boonesborough to surrender; but Boone, instead, rallied the 75 militiamen defending that post and withstood a brief siege by the Shawnee in September. In reply, Virginia governor Patrick Henry authorized Lt. Col. George Rogers Clark and seven companies of Virginia militia to conduct a counteroffensive. Except that this time, it would be a counteroffensive not directly against the Shawnee or the Cherokee, but across the Ohio River, at what Governor Henry and Col. Clark regarded as the real source of these Indian troubles: the British outposts at Kaskaskia and Vincennes, in modern-day Illinois and Indiana.

---

[247] Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 112–3; Nash, *Unknown American Revolution*, 257; Neal O. Hammon and Richard Taylor, *Virginia's Western War, 1775–1786* (Mechanicsburg, 2002), 2–3; James Wilson, *The Earth Shall Weep: A History of Native America* (New York, 2000), 150.

The conviction on the part of Patrick Henry and George Rogers Clark that the real instigators of this trouble were not really the Shawnee and the Cherokee, but the British behind them, was not entirely an exaggeration. This had a great deal to do with the ambitions of Henry Hamilton, one of the five lieutenant governors appointed to assist Sir Guy Carleton in administering Canada. Headquartered in Detroit, Hamilton had only about 300 provincial militia to hold down British control over the entire western Great Lakes, but he was happy to encourage the Shawnee to do his work for him by raiding the Kentucky settlements of the Americans by whatever means lay at hand. Setting up a base at the falls of the Ohio River—near modern Louisville—George Rogers Clark shot the Ohio River rapids, then marched overland with his little army and surprised and overran the tiny British garrison at Kaskaskia on July 4, 1778, without firing a single shot. He was able to do this as easily as he did mostly because the bulk of the scattered population in the region was French. These French settlers were holdover *habitants* from the old French colonial regime back before the French and Indian War, and these French settlers cheerfully welcomed George Rogers Clark as a sort of liberator from the British. Taken aback by Clark's daring in the attack of Kaskaskia, Lieutenant Governor Hamilton mobilized a force of 60 Regulars and 115 Loyalist provincial militia, struggled down the Maumee and Wabash Rivers, and paused at Vincennes on December 17 to wait out the balance of the winter. George Rogers Clark had no intention of waiting for Hamilton to make his own war on his schedule, in his own time table. On February 5, 1779, Clark marched out of Kaskaskia with 200 men—half of them French volunteers—sloshed over bottomlands awash in an early spring thaw, and on February 24, delivered a summons to a very surprised Lieutenant Governor Hamilton at Vincennes to surrender. At first, Hamilton looked out over his stockade and refused. George Rogers Clark then cold-bloodedly brought out five captured Shawnee who had blundered into Clark's hands, and in full view of Hamilton's little post tomahawked them to death and threw their bodies into the Wabash River. Half of Lieutenant Governor Hamilton's militia was actually French, and they had no desire to go the same way as the five Shawnee for the sake of Henry Hamilton. The next day, Hamilton agreed to the surrender. Clark dismissed the French militiamen, and he sent Hamilton off as a prisoner to Williamsburg, where the new governor of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, put Hamilton in shackles.[248]

---

[248] Hammon and Taylor, *Virginia's Western War*, 41, 46, 84–90, 97, 99.

None of this insured any permanent victory for the rebels in the west. George Rogers Clark always wanted, but never had the resources sufficient, to attack Detroit; and so Clark had to settle for destroying the great Shawnee center at Chillicothe in Ohio in November 1782. Daniel Boone and the Kentucky militia suffered a humiliating defeat at the Battle of Blue Licks in August 1782; a defeat which cost the lives of 77 militiamen, including their commander, John Todd. But the real losers in these campaigns were the Indians tribes, both Shawnee and Cherokee. Dragging Canoe died in 1792, still raiding white settlements. But the bulk of the Cherokee sued for peace in 1777 and signed the first United States Indian treaty in 1785. The 1785 treaty demanded no land concessions, but the white frontiersmen did. By 1800, the Cherokee had withdrawn into northern Georgia, from whence—as Dragging Canoe predicted—they were deported in 1834 along the hideous "Trail of Tears" to modern-day Oklahoma. The Shawnee fought on, bitterly unrepentant, until 1794, when "Mad Anthony" Wayne defeated them at Fallen Timbers. Cornstalk was already gone by then, killed in 1788 under a flag of truce. A new generation of Shawnee—led by the canny chieftain Tecumseh and his brother Tenskwatawa—tried again to ignite a pan-tribal resistance movement all across the Great Lakes, only to have it crushed for good by an American army at Tippecanoe in 1811 and the Battle of the Thames in 1813.[249]

George Washington's lament to John Laurens, however, was not intended for the benefit of the Loyalists or the Indians. He had discontented soldiers and mutineers much closer to home to deal with, and the cause of the mutinies among the soldiers was the old instinct of the Continental Congress for penny pinching. Once the touchy Nathanael Greene set off for the Southern Department to win the military glory he craved, the budgetary paring knives came out, and Congress returned to its old policy of asking the states to contribute clothing and food to the "main army," rather than arranging for purchasing them itself.[250]

The result was that in the winter of 1780 to 1781 the "main army" went unpaid, unfed, and unclothed. They were, however, informed that the three-year enlistments, which were up at the end of 1780, were really supposed to extend for the duration of the war. On New Year's Day, 1781, Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania Continentals, housed in huts near Morristown, New Jersey, seized

---

[249] Hamman and Taylor, *Virginia's Western War*, 160–64; Wright, *Stolen Continents*, 203–05.

[250] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 175–7.

the brigade artillery and formed up to march away. Wayne and his officers tried to stop them, and failed. But it was not Washington or Wayne they had their quarrel with: They intended to march on Philadelphia and teach the Congress a direct lesson. The Continentals reached Princeton on January 3, where Wayne proposed that they create a committee of sergeants who would spell out the soldiers' grievances and present them to Congress. The president of the Pennsylvania Executive Council agreed to meet with the sergeants in Trenton, and a compromise was hammered out guaranteeing new clothing and pay warrants. By January 24, most of the mutineers were either back in camp or else peacefully discharged. It was not treason they were plotting; in fact, when two British agents in the pay of Sir Henry Clinton tried to persuade these Continental mutineers to desert to the British, the committee of sergeants promptly arrested the two of them, tried them, and shot them as spies.[251]

But it gave Washington pain all the same that his own troops would mutiny, even to the point of threatening the Continental Congress. Nevertheless, for Washington the closest and most painful incident of mutiny and betrayal struck so close that it might have struck him personally; and that concerned the unhappy Benedict Arnold. From the first weeks of the Revolution, no one had been more courageous in its service or more heedless of his own personal safety and welfare than Benedict Arnold. Likewise, no one had gotten less thanks for it. Arnold had come within an ace of snapping up Quebec, and with it all of Canada, in 1775. He had prevented an invasion down the Lake Champlain corridor at Valcour Island in 1776. He had carried the Continentals to victory at Saratoga and acquired a permanent limp from the wounds he got there. Yet he got no promotion for valorous service; he saw all the laurels for Saratoga go to Horatio Gates. Arnold now faced the balance of the war as a cripple for whom Congress seemed to show not the slightest shred of gratitude. Washington understood all too clearly how badly treated Arnold had been, and Washington tried to mollify Congressional neglect by wangling a promotion for Arnold to major general and assigning to Arnold the soft and profitable post as commandant of a reoccupied Philadelphia in 1778. But the Philadelphia appointment was Arnold's undoing: First because Arnold managed to antagonize the restored rebel city government by resisting their demands for vengeance against the hapless Philadelphia Loyalists; and second, on April 8, 1779, he married a Philadelphian, the charming 19-year-old Margaret Shippen. This was a problem because Margaret Shippen was from a Loyalist family, and it was through Peggy Shippen that Arnold began furtively corresponding with Sir

[251] Nelson, *Anthony Wayne*, 119–124.

Henry Clinton's adjutant-general, Maj. John André. In the summer of 1780, Washington, as a gesture of confidence in Arnold, appointed Benedict Arnold commandant of West Point. West Point was the keystone of the American encirclement of New York City. It was a formidable post overlooking the Hudson River, and what this gave Arnold was first of all prestige, and a pat on the back from Washington. But what Washington did not realize was that, secondly, this gave Arnold something to bargain to the British. In July of that year, Arnold asked and got an offer of £20,000 from Sir Henry Clinton, along with a general's commission in the British army, for the betrayal of West Point. Not only West Point, but if Arnold could time it right, the capture of George Washington. On the night of September 22, HMS *Vulture* slipped up the Hudson River and deposited Maj. André at a meeting point on the shore with Benedict Arnold, where Arnold delivered into André's safekeeping the plans of West Point and the schedule for Washington's visit there, because Washington was scheduled to make an inspection of West Point. If Clinton moved quickly, he could bag not only West Point, but Washington on site. However, HMS *Vulture* could not stay upriver against the tide, and Maj. André was persuaded by Benedict Arnold to spend the night and to make the return trip to New York City by land, in disguise through the American and then the British lines.[252]

It was the worst decision he could have made: As André tried to make his way through the American lines in civilian dress, three militiamen—Isaac van Wart, David Williams, and John Paulding—stopped André near Tarrytown, New York. They searched him; and when they did, they found Benedict Arnold's maps, papers, and diagrams. André tried to bargain with them: He promised them "five thousand" guineas, the equivalent of $300,000 today, if they would release him. They snorted in contempt. They tied him up and passed the papers to the Continental dragoon officer in charge of their picket line. Unable to believe that Benedict Arnold had sold these papers to a British officer in disguise, the officer innocently sent word back to Arnold about the capture of the papers, while dispatching the incriminating papers toward Washington, who was then at Danbury, Connecticut, on route to West Point. Once the word arrived at West Point, Arnold saw in a trice that he had been discovered. He hurriedly commandeered the longboat that André had left behind and took off downriver to overtake the *Vulture*. Washington arrived at West Point on September 25 to discover Arnold missing and the envelope of incriminating papers. He sat down, thunderstruck, to realize what Benedict

[252] Willard Sterne Randall, *Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor* (New York, 1990), 448, 462; 67–75.

Arnold had done, or nearly done. Arnold made it safely to New York City, where Sir Henry Clinton refused all of Washington's angry demands to exchange Arnold for Maj. André, and the unhappy Maj. André was tried as a spy and hanged at Tarrytown on October 2.[253]

Officially, Washington refused to believe that Arnold could have stooped so low as to betray, not only his country, not only West Point, but Washington's own good will. But sitting at Arnold's table at West Point, with the meal they were supposed to have eaten together growing cold on the table, Washington could only whisper, "Arnold has betrayed me. Who can I trust now?" Who indeed? For was not Benedict Arnold a symptom of exactly the weaknesses that Washington had complained of in his letter to John Laurens? Was not Benedict Arnold a man marked by the greatest energy *and* the basest motives; a man typical of the people Washington described as "commercial and free," but also "little accustomed to" the "heavy burthens" of war? One of Washington's colonels found his fellow officers "peeping at his next neighbor to see if any treason was hanging about him: nay we even descended to a critical examination of ourselves." Benedict Arnold taught Americans what one British newspaper called a "distrust of themselves," and unless the war could somehow be brought to some kind of speedy conclusion, that distrust might destroy them more effectively than the British.[254]

[253] Randall, *Benedict Arnold*, 557; John Evangelist Walsh, *The Execution of Major Andre* (New York, 2001), 110, 147.

[254] Randall, *Washington: A Life*, 381; Randall, *Benedict Arnold*, 562, 564; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 290–91.

Lecture Twenty-Three

A Sword for General Washington

Scope: Cornwallis's tactical plans had worked for almost two years, but eventually, he determined to move into Virginia to cut off wily Nathanael Greene's supply and recruiting sources and to establish a naval station. Washington's army meanwhile had thought the war would end in New York City, but the general's desire to capture Benedict Arnold and the arrival of French troops and ships caused him to rethink his tactics and move his army southward. After Cornwallis had managed to establish Yorktown as a supply and naval station, the British commander's grand plans began to fall apart. He underestimated American and French strength, and help from the British navy and Clinton's promise for troop reinforcements proved too little too late. On October 17, 1781, he ordered a flag of truce be presented. The official surrender documents were signed on October 19.

Outline

I. Charles Cornwallis's plan for keeping British hopes in North America alive involved four parts:

- **A.** Hold New York City.
- **B.** Stage raids along the vulnerable American coastline.
- **C.** Pacify the Georgia and South Carolina interior with a network of small fortified Loyalist garrisons.
- **D.** Reserve Cornwallis's small British field army for mopping up the feeble Continental resistance left in the South.

II. For almost two years, this plan had worked, but Nathanael Greene proved an elusive and clever opponent.

- **A.** By April of 1781, Cornwallis determined to strike northward into Virginia, where Greene's supply and recruiting grounds lay.
- **B.** Cornwallis was encouraged to move into Virginia by two other events.
  - **1.** Lord Francis Rawdon had beaten off Greene's Continentals at Hobkirk's Hill on April 25, so the South Carolina garrisons

looked capable of keeping the peace there if Cornwallis wanted to move northward.

2. A British raiding expedition commanded by Benedict Arnold had descended on Virginia almost without opposition, up the James River.

3. He marched out of Wilmington with Banastre Tarleton, a few dragoons, and about 1,435 men.

III. For two years, George Washington's main army was convinced that the war would be ended only when Sir Henry Clinton either left New York and gave battle or else ran too low on hope or supplies.

A. Even when the French finally began shipping troops to North America in April 1780 under the command of the Viscomte de Rochambeau, they showed no eagerness to join in any assault on New York.

B. However, more than New York City, Washington wanted Benedict Arnold. A three-battalion force led by the Marquis de Lafayette tried unsuccessfully to chase down Arnold.

C. Cornwallis's main aim was Portsmouth, but when he saw the difficult terrain around Portsmouth, he chose Yorktown.

IV. At this point Cornwallis's plans began to unravel.

A. Important British commanders, including Arnold, took ill. Greene and his Continental troops continued to foil British plans.

B. By the summer 1781, all that was left of the British conquests of 1780 was the coastal strip between Charleston and Savannah.

C. The bloody Battle at Eutaw Springs, on September 8, proved to be the British army's last fight in South Carolina.

V. The ultimate blow to Cornwallis's strategy was the one he dealt himself.

A. Washington could not let Lafayette stay within reach of Cornwallis's army in Virginia and so determined to turn his views southward.

1. News came that Admiral François-Joseph-Paul, the Comte de Grasse, and a French fleet would make a pass at the North American mainland in the fall.

2. Washington faced southward with the bulk of the Continentals on August 21, followed shortly by Rochambeau and the French.

B. Cornwallis had little reason to worry about warnings of Washington's movements.

1. He continued to launch search-and-destroy missions into Virginia and began constructing entrenchments to protect Yorktown.

2. However, Admiral Sir George Rodney, commander of the British West Indies squadron, made a series of tactical mistakes that enabled the French fleet to enter the Chesapeake without incident.

C. When the French ships arrived, Cornwallis realized he could leave Yorktown and elude both Lafayette to the south and Washington and Rochambeau to the north.

1. Thanks to Admiral Hood's appearance off the Virginia capes and a message from Sir Henry Clinton promising reinforcements, Cornwallis chose to stay.
2. The truth was that Clinton could send no reinforcements before mid-October, and by September 26, Washington had pinned Cornwallis against the York River.

VI. Cornwallis's army was greatly outnumbered, outarmed, and outmaneuvered.

A. He had only one other general officer to assist him, Charles O'Hara, while Washington had Knox, Lafayette, Baron von Steuben, and Benjamin Lincoln.

B. On October 9, American and French artillery began raining shot down on the heads of the British garrison, on the buildings in Yorktown, on the waterfront, and on the British ships.

C. Meanwhile, American and French troops dug trenches toward the British lines and on October 14 stormed the redoubts.

D. On October 16, Cornwallis decided to abandon Yorktown but a violent storm dashed his plans. The next day, he ordered a flag of truce to be presented.

E. The official surrender documents were signed on October 19.

Suggested Reading:

Johnston, *The Yorktown Campaign*, chaps. 6–7.

Ketchum, *Victory at Yorktown*, chaps. 8–9.

Selby, *The Revolution in Virginia*, chaps. 14–15.

Questions to Consider:

1. What role did the French play in the American victory at Yorktown?
2. Who was most at fault for the loss of Yorktown within the British leadership?

Lecture Twenty-Three—Transcript
A Sword for General Washington

Charles Cornwallis's plan—which incidentally was also Sir Henry Clinton's plan—for keeping the fires of British hopes in North America alive involved four parts: First, hold New York City; second, stage raids along the vulnerable American coastline; third, pacify the Georgia and South Carolina interior with a network of small fortified Loyalist garrisons; then fourth, reserve Cornwallis's small British field army for mopping up the feeble Continental resistance left in the South after the disasters at Charleston and Camden.

For almost two years, this plan had looked like it was working. Then, starting at King's Mountain and then continuing through the wreckage of the Loyalist cause in the South, the wheels had started coming off. Cornwallis thrashed wildly around North Carolina, trying vainly to swat the Continental "Southern army" out of existence. But Nathanael Greene proved an elusive and clever opponent, and when Cornwallis finally dragged his weary soldiers into Wilmington, North Carolina, in April 1781, it seemed to him that the only way to eliminate Greene was to strike northwards into Virginia—where Greene's supply and recruiting grounds lay—and tear Greene and his maddening "Southern army" up by its roots. "I was finally persuaded," Cornwallis said, "that, until Virginia was reduced, we could not hold the more southern provinces, and that after its reduction they would fall without much difficulty." This ran the risk of leaving South Carolina's Loyalist outposts open to an attack by Greene, something which Sir Henry Clinton in New York City was very helpful and very quick to point out. But Cornwallis was certain that a threat to Greene's Virginia pantry would bring the "Southern army" pelting desperately after the British into Virginia in an attempt to save it, and that would allow Cornwallis the luxury of choosing his own ground for a fight and standing on the defensive. "And," he added, "a successful battle may give us America."[255] What a temptation.

Cornwallis was further encouraged to move into Virginia by two other events: First, while Cornwallis was immobilized in Wilmington, Nathanael Greene tried to preempt precisely the strategy Cornwallis had in mind by descending on the British garrison at Camden, which was then under

---

[255] Henry P. Johnston, *The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis* (New York, 1881), 27–8; Buchanan, *Road to Guildford Courthouse*, 383.

Cornwallis's second-in-command, Lord Francis Rawdon. Rather than wait to be attacked by Greene, Rawdon attacked on his own, and beat off Greene's Continentals in a sharp little fight at Hobkirk's Hill on April 25. By that evidence, the South Carolina garrisons looked quite capable of keeping the peace there if Cornwallis wanted to move northward. Cornwallis was also impressed by the ease with which a British raiding expedition had descended on Virginia in January and burned and plundered its way, almost without opposition, up the James River. This was actually the third time the British had staged raids on Virginia's Chesapeake Bay shoreline: The first was in 1776; the second was in the winter of 1779–1780. The hope which governed these raids was the idea of setting up an operating naval station at Portsmouth, which would give the Royal Navy an added point on the Virginia coastline for supplying its operations to the West Indies. But what made this last raid particularly notorious was that it was composed largely of Loyalist volunteers commanded by Benedict Arnold in his debut as a turncoat British general, and the swath of destruction Arnold cut from Portsmouth all the way up to Richmond was his own personal guarantee to the British of the depth of his newfound loyalties. If Virginia was so helpless that it could mount so little effective resistance that even the arch-traitor Arnold could operate there, *and* if a usable naval base could be set up at the mouth of the James River, then a move into Virginia seemed like the solution to all of Cornwallis's woes. After less than three weeks refitting, Cornwallis marched out of Wilmington, Banastre Tarleton and a handful of dragoons at the head. Cornwallis could muster only about 1,435 men, but if he could add Arnold's Loyalists to his force that would instantly make up all the losses Cornwallis had suffered over the preceding six months.[256]

For two years, ever since the British had escaped his grasp at Monmouth Court House on their retreat to New York, George Washington's "main army" sat hovering in a great semi-circle around New York, convinced that the war would be ended only when Sir Henry Clinton either came out from the city's fortifications and gave battle, or else ran too low on hope or supplies to make New York City worth holding and abandoned it. This was not an unreasonable premise. The British quickly denuded the island of Manhattan of the thick forest which had covered it, all for firewood. The vast neutral ground between the American and British lines had become a

[256] Franklin & Mary Wickwire, *Cornwallis: The American Adventure* (Boston, 1970), 321; Barry K. Wilson, *Benedict Arnold: A Traitor in Our Midst* (Kingston, 2001), 161.

deserted no man's land where no supplies could be obtained by the British. The problem was that Washington lacked sufficient strength to launch the kind of attack that his own troops could use to overwhelm the British by main force. Even when the French finally began shipping troops to North America in April 1780—some 5,000 French soldiers in all, under the command of Viscomte de Rochambeau—when these soldiers of Rochambeau's finally arrived in North America to act in conjunction with the Continental army, they went to Newport, Rhode Island, and showed no sign of eagerness to join Washington in any assault on New York City. His orders, Rochambeau explained, required him to await a second contingent of French troops due to arrive in the spring of 1781 before going on campaign. To his staff, however, Rochambeau confided his horror at the feeble numbers and ragged condition of Washington's Continentals, and Rochambeau did not intend to risk the king of France's troops in battle until he was sure he had enough of the French troops to win any fight with the British on their own. One French officer, the Comte de Clermont-Crèvecoeur, could scarcely credit his first view of the Americans. He said, "The men were without uniforms and covered with rags; most of them were barefoot. They were of all sizes, down to children who could not have been over fourteen. There were many negroes, mulattoes, etc." The good Comte noticed that three-quarters of one of the Rhode Island regiment "consists of negroes," although, he added, "that regiment is the most neatly dressed, the best under arms, and the most precise in its maneuvers." So far as Rochambeau understood his orders, "It will therefore be good policy to keep out of sight the disappointments we met with in the number of men" etc. "and to … profess our wants and weaknesses very fully." In other words, not to do anything that would be particularly useful to George Washington. Besides, the war the French were really interested in fighting was in the West Indies, and by keeping an eye on Clinton from Newport, they were doing all they needed to do just by doing nothing—and doing it very safely, thank you.[257]

If there was one thing, however, which Washington wanted more even than New York City, it was Benedict Arnold. At the end of February, Washington assembled a three battalion force, made up from the light infantry companies of his Continentals, and gave command of them to the

---

[257] Herman O. Benninghoff, *The Brilliance of Yorktown: A March of History, 1781 Command and Control, Allied Style* (Gettysburg, 2006), 27, 124; Richard M. Ketchum, *Victory at Yorktown: The Campaign that Won the Revolution* (New York, 2004), 45, 146–7.

Marquis de Lafayette. This was deliberate because Lafayette was, after all, an example of a foreigner fighting *for* America while Arnold the American fought *against* it on behalf of foreigners, the British. Lafayette was to take this battalion and chase down Arnold and, if they could catch him, Washington authorized them to hang him on the spot. As it turned out, it was Lafayette who was nearly trussed up by the British. By the time Lafayette reached Richmond, Virginia, on April 29, Cornwallis was already moving north. When Cornwallis finally joined forces with Benedict Arnold's men just below Richmond, at Petersburg, on May 20, 1781, the Earl determined to "dislodge Lafayette from Richmond," and to get on with his mission of destroying "any magazines or stores in the neighborhood, which might have been collected either for his use or for General Greene's army." Lafayette hesitated, then abandoned Richmond and withdrew northwards to Fredericksburg. Cornwallis followed, but only as far as the North Anna River. But even in doing that, Cornwallis turned Banastre Tarleton loose for another of the hated "Green Dragoon's" raids. Tarleton, with 180 dragoons, promptly chased Virginia's legislature and its rebel governor, Thomas Jefferson, from Richmond to Charlottesville; and then on June 4, from Charlottesville to Staunton. Jefferson, in fact, was at his mountain retreat, Monticello, when Tarleton galloped up the winding road to the house. Jefferson beat it out the back door and away by only 10 minutes. Cornwallis, however, had not come into Virginia to chase either Lafayette or Thomas Jefferson. Cornwallis wanted Portsmouth, with its access to the Chesapeake Bay, as a supply and a naval station. When Cornwallis concluded that the terrain around Portsmouth made it difficult to build fortifications, he opted for second best: a protected anchorage up the York River, at a place called Yorktown.[258]

It was from this moment that Cornwallis's plans began to unravel. First, Benedict Arnold took ill and had to be invalided back to New York City in June. Second, Lord Rawdon's little victory at Hobkirk's Hill turned out to be a false dawn for British hopes and security in South Carolina. Refusing to take Cornwallis's bait and jump up into Virginia, Greene instead circled around Camden, cut off the British post there, and forced Lord Rawdon to abandon it on May 10. The British garrisons at Orangeburg and Augusta fell next; and in June, Greene besieged the upcountry British fort at Ninety-Six. Rawdon marched to their relief, but having broken through to rescue the garrison at Ninety-Six, Rawdon saw that there was no way of keeping up a

[258] Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1942), 189–90, 228, 232, 238–9, 242; Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 333.

post which was now just an island in a sea of rebellion, and so Rawdon abandoned Ninety-Six as well. By the summer of 1781, all that was left of the British conquests of 1780 was the narrow coastal strip between Charleston and Savannah. Then the unhappy Rawdon fell sick himself and had to be replaced by Lt. Col. Alexander Stewart of the 3rd Regiment. Greene, with four battalions of Carolina militia and "three small Brigades of Continental troops," caught up with Stewart at Eutaw Springs, 60 miles from Charleston, on September 8, and a sharp battle broke out, "by far the most bloody and obstinate I ever saw," Greene wrote. The Continentals, making "free use of the bayonet," swept to the attack; to the attack this time, not waiting on the defense. They mounted their own regular bayonet attack, stampeding Stewart's troops. The only thing which kept Stewart's force from falling apart completely—and Stewart's force was composed of the 3rd, the 63rd, and the 64th regiments plus a number of Loyalist contingents—and prevented them all from breaking down and running away in confusion was "a party," a small group, barricading themselves "into a large three-story brick House" and a "picquetted garden." and they held off enough of the Continentals to save "the remains of the British army from being all made prisoners." Stewart managed to pull his little force back into Charleston. It had done its last fighting in South Carolina.[259]

But the ultimate blow to Cornwallis's strategy was the one that he dealt himself, and he did it, oddly enough, by turning the tables so neatly on the Marquis de Lafayette. Much as Washington wanted to get his hands on Benedict Arnold, Lafayette was not the price that Washington was prepared to pay for that. At the beginning of August 1781, Washington concluded that he could not let Lafayette dangle within reach of Cornwallis's army in Virginia. "[A]nd therefore," Washington said, "I turned my views more seriously than I had before done to the operations to the southward." Neither, for that matter, could Rochambeau ignore what was going on, even though as late as June of 1781, Washington had still been trying to convince him that "no measure … will be so likely to afford relief to the Southern States, in so short a time, as a serious menace against New York." Rochambeau never did share Washington's enthusiasm for an attack on New York City. However, Washington's decision to turn southward was

[259] Greene, "To Thomas McKean, President of the Continental Congress" (September 11, 1781) and "To Governor Thomas Burke of North Carolina" (September 17, 1781), in *The Papers of Nathanael Greene*, eds. Dennis M. Conrad, Roger N. Parks & Martha J King (Chapel Hill, 1997), 9:331–2, 355; Pancake, *This Destructive War*, 216–7.

another matter, chiefly because that decision was seconded by the news that Admiral François-Joseph Paul, the Comte de Grasse—who had replaced the unsuccessful French Admiral d'Estaing—and a French fleet "of between twenty-five and twenty-nine sail of the line" intended to make a pass at the North American mainland in the fall on their return voyage from yet another naval campaign in the West Indies. If de Grasse and his ships could be persuaded to make their landfall in North America at the Chesapeake capes, they could effectively blockade the Chesapeake Bay and isolate Cornwallis from reinforcement and supply from Sir Henry Clinton, while Washington and Rochambeau marched south to join hands with Lafayette and box Cornwallis into another Saratoga.

On August 19, Washington turned over command of the lines around New York City to Maj. Gen. William Heath. He then crossed the Hudson with the bulk of the Continental main army on August 21, 1781, and faced southward, followed by Rochambeau and the French four days later. On September 3, the French troops, in their white coats, paraded triumphantly through Philadelphia. By September 10, Washington had reached the Potomac, and gave himself the indulgence of a quick visit to Mount Vernon, which he had not seen since the war began.[260]

The wild card in this gambit was de Grasse and the French fleet. So long as Cornwallis was confident that Britannia ruled the waves, or at least the waves in North America, he had little reason to feel panicky over the shifting situation in Virginia. Warnings about Washington's movements that Cornwallis received from Sir Henry Clinton were accompanied with nothing more urgent than the recommendation that Cornwallis hurry up his fortification plans on the York River. Even assuming that the French navy might put in an unexpected visit in conjunction with these ominous army maneuvers, the French admirals had not exactly distinguished themselves in their previous operations in American waters. Besides, Cornwallis's move into Virginia was based on the notion of stepping on Nathanael Greene's supply hose to the Carolinas, and Cornwallis saw little point in abandoning that objective by abandoning Virginia until it was absolutely necessary. Even then, at the worst pinch, the Royal Navy could always evacuate his troops back to Charleston. Cornwallis continued to launch search-and-

[260] Washington, "To Count de Rochambeau" (June 4, 1781), "To the Marquis de Lafayette" (August 15, 1781), "To Major-General Heath" (August 19, 1781) and "To the Marquis de Lafayette" (August 21, 1781), in *Writings*, 8:66, 127, 136, 140; Johnston, *Yorktown Campaign*, 83.

destroy missions into the Virginia countryside, and he began throwing up entrenchments to protect his new base at Yorktown. He was so confident that in July 1781, he even shipped some of his own troops back to New York as reinforcements for Sir Henry Clinton.[261]

But this time, the wild-card calculation was wrong. Admiral Sir George Rodney had succeeded to command of the British West Indies Squadron in March 1780. Rodney embarked on a series of tactical miscues which cost him an opportunity to engage the French off Martinque in April, which kept his squadron in the Caribbean in the path of a century's-worst hurricane—the hurricane that reduced his operational ships from 23 to 9—and he then turned away from another chance to fight de Grasse and the French fleet off Tobago in June 1781. But above all other mistakes, Rodney ruined a major tactical success by capturing St. Eustatius in February 1781, and then wasting three months thereafter disposing of the rich haul of prizes he had captured there. Too late, Rodney realized that while he profitably dithered over prizes, the French fleet under de Grasse had given him the slip out of the West Indies. Rodney sent off Admiral Sir Samuel Hood and 19 ships-of-the-line in pursuit of de Grasse. But when Hood finally found the French on September 5, 1781, the French ships were already inside the Chesapeake Bay, and Hood botched an attempt to lure them out to battle off the Virginia capes. The British ships broke contact with the French on September 9, convinced—wrongly—that the bulk of de Grasse's fleet was somewhere out at sea, and they headed to New York City. Hood did not learn until September 23 that de Grasse and his entire fleet were, in fact, safely moored in the Chesapeake, which meant that Cornwallis was now sitting inside what one of Washington's generals called "a pudding bag."[262]

The sight of "between 30 & 40 sail within the capes"—all of them French—concentrated Cornwallis's mind wonderfully. He had only had time to fortify Yorktown, on the south side of the York River, and begin building fortifications across the river at Gloucester Point; and so there were no outposts at the mouth of the York River to prevent the French from sailing merrily up the York River and systematically blasting his position to bits at close range. There was still a chance that, if he acted quickly, Cornwallis could bolt out of Yorktown and elude both Lafayette to the south and

[261] Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 349, 353.

[262] Daniel A. Baugh, "Sir Samuel Hood," and Christopher Lloyd, "Sir George Rodney: Lucky Admiral," in Billias, ed., George *Washington's Generals and Opponents*, 307–8, 336; Ketcham, *Victory at Yorktown*, 185.

Washington and Rochambeau to the north. But Admiral Hood's brief appearance off the Virginia capes on September 5 reassured Cornwallis that he was not cut off after all, and a message promising reinforcements arrived from Sir Henry Clinton on the sixth, and Cornwallis chose to stay put. He was, of course, mistaken. Sir Henry Clinton had no practical hope of mounting a relief expedition before mid-October, and by September 26, Washington—using French transports and French warships to command the Chesapeake Bay—had landed his combined army on the York Peninsula. Four days later, the army had extended a long siege line around the semicircle of Cornwallis's entrenchments at Yorktown, pinning him against the York River.[263]

Cornwallis's "pudding bag" at Yorktown consisted of a chain of ten redoubts, the largest of them known as the "Horn Work," and a small outpost across the York River at Gloucester Point. But he had only 65 cannon to deploy along these entrenchments, and a total of just 7,500 soldiers and several hundred Marines. This included the 500 forlorn survivors of the Guards battalion, plus the 17th, 23rd, 33rd, 43rd, 71st, 77th, and 80th Regiments of Foot plus four regiments of Hessians, assorted light infantry, and a scattering of Loyalist units. By contrast, Washington's forces, when totaled up, weighed in at 16,000 French and American troops. Cornwallis had only one other general officer to assist him, Charles O'Hara; while Washington had his faithful, lumbering Brigadier General Henry Knox in charge of his artillery, and three division commanders in Lafayette, who was commanding the brigades of Peter Muhlenberg and Moses Hazen; Baron von Steuben, with the brigades of Anthony Wayne and Mordecai Gist; and the unhappy Benjamin Lincoln, the man who had been compelled to surrender Charleston back in May of 1780. (We saw that in Lecture Twenty.) Lincoln had been exchanged in October 1780 and restored to command by Washington as Washington's vote of confidence in Benjamin Lincoln. It took no great vision to see that Cornwallis was hemmed in. At first, Washington made no attempt at a headlong assault on the British lines at Yorktown. Instead, on October 9, American and French artillery began raining shot down on the heads of the British defenders, the buildings in Yorktown, the waterfront, and even on the British ships tied up in the river. The next day, Lafayette offered the new governor of Virginia, Thomas Nelson, the opportunity to witness the beginning of the day's artillery bombardment. Lafayette asked Nelson if he had a particular target to recommend. Yes, Nelson replied. He had a target to recommend. His own

---

[263] Benninghoff, *Brilliance of Yorktown*, 154; Wickwire, *Cornwallis*, 358–364.

house was over there in the town of Yorktown, and it would probably be used by Cornwallis as a headquarters. "Fire upon it, my dear marquis, and never spare a particle of my property so long as it affords a comfort or a shelter to the enemies of my country." A British explosive shell landed near where von Steuben and "Mad Anthony" Wayne were standing. The explosion knocked down von Steuben and piled Anthony Wayne on top of the Prussian. "Ah ha, Wayne," joked von Steuben, brushing himself off, "you cover your general's retreat in the best manner possible."[264]

Meanwhile, the American and French fatigue parties began digging protective zigzag trenches toward the British lines. On the night of October 14, they had approached close enough to British Redoubts number 9 and number 10, that the French and Americans stormed the redoubts at the point of the bayonet, Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton leading the 320-man American storming-party at Redoubt 10. This pressed Cornwallis's troops to the wall. On October 16, Cornwallis decided to abandon Yorktown, cross his collapsing regiments across the York River, and attempt a breakout from Gloucester Point, all under cover of darkness. He actually managed to get the Guards battalion and the 23rd Regiment over the river, but before a second crossing could be made, "a most violent storm of wind and rain … drove all the boats, some of which had troops on board, down river." The tomb of Cornwallis's army was now sealed. The next morning, as the American artillery once again opened fire on the shrunken British lines, Cornwallis went up into the Horn Work, looked over at the American trenches, went back to his headquarters, and ordered a flag of truce to be presented. One Pennsylvania officer saw a "drummer mount the enemy's parapet and beat a parley," followed immediately by "an officer, holding up a white handkerchief." The cannonade stopped, and the officer was blindfolded and walked through the American lines. He had a message from Cornwallis for Washington: "Sir, I propose a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours, and that two officers may be appointed by each side, to meet at Mr. Moore's house, to settle terms for the surrender of the post at York and Gloucester. I have the honour to be …" Cornwallis. It was four years to the day since the surrender at Saratoga.

The negotiating did not take long. Cornwallis hoped to get his men paroled at once, but Washington refused. His answer was: "The same honors will be granted to the Surrendering Army as were granted to the Garrison of Charleston." Of course, when Charleston surrendered in 1780, Sir Henry

---

[264] Johnston, *Yorktown Campaign*, 140; Nelson, *Anthony Wayne*, 144.

Clinton, with Cornwallis as his second-in-command, had—if you'll remember from Lecture Twenty—refused to grant any "honors" to Benjamin Lincoln and the Charleston garrison, and now the shoe was on the other foot. Cornwallis had no choice: The official surrender documents were signed on October 19, and that afternoon—glorious, clear autumn afternoon—Cornwallis's army limped down a mile-long avenue composed of French and Continental soldiers, stacked their arms and colors, and marched off as prisoners of war. Cornwallis, pleading illness, sent his second-in-command, Charles O'Hara, to hand over his sword. In a final attempt at defiance, O'Hara tried to deliver Cornwallis's sword to Rochambeau. But the French general's adjutant stopped O'Hara: "*Vous vous trompez, le général en chef de notre armée est à la droite*."—You have made a mistake, the general and chief of our army is on the right—and pointed him toward Washington. His Lordship the Earl Cornwallis, O'Hara began to explain, was indisposed, and therefore held out the sword to Washington.[265] Washington declined it and pointed instead for O'Hara to give it to Benjamin Lincoln.

[265] "Capitulation at Yorktown," in *Writings of George Washington*, 8:530–1; Ketchum, *Victory at Yorktown*, 243; Freeman, *Washington*, 491.

Lecture Twenty-Four
"It Is All Over"

Scope: After Cornwallis's defeat at Yorktown, it seemed that only King George III believed the war was worth continuing. A motion to end the war was finally passed in Parliament in February 1782, and shortly thereafter, Lord North's entire cabinet resigned. To the dismay of the French, an American team consisting of John Jay, Samuel Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Henry Laurens negotiated a unilateral treaty with Britain. At war's end, many on the "losing side," including John Peebles, Johann Ewald, and even Benedict Arnold, went on to distinguished and successful careers. The bigger losers were the Loyalists and the black slaves who joined the British in pursuit of freedom. Both the winning and losing sides were astonished when the indispensable George Washington returned to civilian life, as did many of the soldiers who served under him, including Horatio Gates, Nathanael Greene, and Daniel Morgan. For most Americans, though, the significance of this war was that it had established among them a consciousness that this is "my country."

Outline

I. In Britain, the news of a second loss to the Americans made the war look hopeless.

- **A.** Perhaps the only man who still believed that the war was worth continuing was King George III.
  - **1.** The king remained confident that his army would carry on after the shock of the bad news wore off.
  - **2.** The government, however, had been losing ground to Charles James Fox and the Whig opposition.
  - **3.** Spain entered the war on the side of France and the Americans and was later joined by the Dutch, who had been annoying the British government all through the war.
- **B.** On December 4, 1781, Edmund Burke started the opposition landslide in Parliament.
  - **1.** On February 28, 1782, a renewed motion to end the war passed by 19 votes.

2. Germain resigned and Lord North announced the resignation of the entire cabinet, including himself.
3. North was replaced by a Whig the king detested, the elderly Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham and the new Secretaries of State would be Shelburne and Fox.

II. The suspension of the fighting in America was not, however, the end of the war.

A. The French recaptured St. Eustatia in November 1781.

B. In April of 1782, de Grasse's expedition to conquer Jamaica failed.

C. In India, the French tried unsuccessfully to rouse a coalition of Indian princes against the British East India Company.

III. The new Rockingham administration did not rush toward a final peace.

A. Shelburne hoped for some arrangement short of outright independence.

B. Benjamin Franklin proposed that the Americans might be willing to make a separate peace if Britain ceded Canada to American control.

C. Franklin, Henry Laurens, John Jay, and John Adams formed the American negotiating team.

D. Jay pushed for a unilateral peace treaty with Britain, warning Franklin that it was not in the best interest of France to have a strong and independent United States.

E. In mid-October 1782, a preliminary agreement was reached in talks between the Americans and Shelburne, who become prime minister when Rockingham died.

1. It conceded American Independence.
2. It fixed the western boundary of the United States at the Mississippi River.
3. It set a boundary between British Canada and the United States along the Great Lakes and below the St. Lawrence River.

F. On December 5, King George III opened yet another Parliament and from the throne declared America "… free and independent States. …" The final treaty was signed on September 3, 1783.

IV. There were losers in the American Revolution, although some of the losers did not do badly.

- **A.** Capt. John Peebles of the 42nd Regiment (the Black Watch) sold out his commission in the 42nd and went home in 1782.
- **B.** Capt. Johann Ewald was paroled back to the British garrison in New York and soon after signed up for service under the king of Denmark, under whom he made major general.
- **C.** Sir William Howe lost his seat in Parliament in 1780, but the king appointed him lieutenant general of ordnance in 1782.
- **D.** Banastre Tarleton went up the ladder of army promotion and found a second career representing Liverpool in Parliament.
- **E.** Charles, Earl Cornwallis, was appointed governor-general of India in 1786 and remains one of the key figures in the creation of British India.
- **F.** Lord George Germain retired to his estates in Sussex.
- **G.** Benedict Arnold set himself up in the West India trade.

V. The big losers were the Loyalists.

- **A.** Fifteen thousand Loyalist refugees flooded into Nova Scotia, becoming the new governing elite of Canada.
- **B.** The black slaves who had joined the British in pursuit of their freedom were far bigger losers.
  - **1.** Over the course of the war, upward of 80,000 American slaves ran away, joined the British, or found some way to freedom. After the Paris Treaty was signed, the British denied any responsibility for them.
  - **2.** Some were shipped to Nova Scotia; some formed the core of a black colony on the west coast of Africa, Sierra Leone. Others were sold back into slavery.

VI. After the preliminary treaty in November 1782, the Continental Congress began planning the demobilization of its army, irrespective of whether its soldiers had been paid the money Congress owed them or its officers granted the pensions George Washington had demanded for them.

- **A.** Washington had to be vigilant for both the British who still sullenly occupied New York and for the whiffs of mutiny from his own ranks.

B. In March 1783, Washington addressed some of his officers to quash a rumored conspiracy to march on Philadelphia and install him as king.

VII. By 1783, everyone on both sides of the war knew that George Washington had been America's indispensable man.

A. He had lost more battles than he had won, but time and again he had saved his army to fight again.

B. He had proven resourceful and flexible, dignified without arrogance.

C. With the peace terms settled, he led the army back into New York City as the British pulled out. He later announced his intention to resign and return to civilian life.

VIII. The soldiers Washington had led also faded back into private lives once Congress officially disbanded the army in June 1784.

A. Horatio Gates left the army in 1784 and moved to New York City. He even served a term in the New York legislature.

B. Henry Knox succeeded Washington in command of the army and then followed Washington in politics as secretary of war when Washington was elected president of the United States.

C. Nathanael Greene used the bounties and lands voted him by Congress for his service to pay the outstanding bills of his Southern army.

D. Charles Lee did not live to see the peace treaty signed, dying in Philadelphia in 1782.

E. Daniel Morgan amassed a fortune in real estate in the Shenandoah Valley.

F. "Mad Anthony" Wayne was elected to a seat in the Pennsylvania state legislature; he then moved to Georgia, where he was elected to Congress, and then took command of the American army.

IX. American soldiers had fought in 1,200 battles, skirmishes, and sieges, and lost over 10,000 killed and wounded.

A. These soldiers not only secured American Independence, they developed a sense of common nationality.

B. It would take another 80 years of political strife to finish the beginnings of this work, but it would be the foundation of "an empire for liberty."

Suggested Reading:

Morris, *The Peacemakers*, chaps. 15–16.

Norton, *The British Americans*, chaps. 7–8.

Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, chap. 14–15.

Questions to Consider:

1. Was the king's hope of continuing the war a delusion?

2. Why was Washington's resignation as commander of the army so remarkable?

Lecture Twenty-Four—Transcript
"It Is All Over"

The news of the Yorktown surrender took off for Europe with the remarkable speed which bad news usually musters. The first rumors reached England on November 23 on board speedy packet-boats, but it took only two more days for the official report to come knocking on Lord George Germain's door in Pall Mall. King George III was relaxing at Kew, outside London. After sending a messenger to Kew, Germain and his undersecretary, Thomas de Grey, called out a coach and set off to deliver the bad news to Lord North. North nearly collapsed. Germain recalled that North reacted "as he would have taken a [musket ball] in his breast. For he opened his arms, exclaiming wildly, as he paced up and down the apartment during a few minutes, 'Oh God! It is all over!'" It had been bad enough when the Americans swallowed an entire British army at Saratoga, and the government's prestige had been sinking ever since. But now to lose a second and even larger army than Burgoyne's made the American war look like the most hopeless of futilities. Johann Ewald, who surrendered his Hessian jägers along with Cornwallis at Yorktown, estimated with cool impartiality that "This disaster … will give the Opposition Party in England enough impetus to carry through its plan to give up the dominions in North America. Now every sensible man will readily realize that these thirteen provinces have to be given up."[266]

Perhaps the only man who still seemed to believe otherwise was the king. George III read Germain's announcement of the Yorktown surrender, and promptly replied with a note which expressed his "deepest concern," but which also insisted that "neither Lord George Germain nor any member of the Cabinet" should "suppose that it makes the smallest alteration in those principles of my conduct which have directed me in past time." To the distraught Lord North, who was going to need even more bucking up, the king announced that he was asking Germain "to put on paper the mode which seems most feasible for conducting the war," and "with the assistance of Parliament I do not doubt, if measures are well connected, a good end may yet be made of the war." The next week, at the state opening of Parliament, the king still remained superbly confident that "when men

[266] Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 345–6; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, 302–4.

are a little recovered of the shock felt by the bad news … they will then find the necessity of carrying on the war, though the mode of it may require alterations." This was a manifest illusion. The government had been losing ground to Charles James Fox and the Whig opposition with every new vote in the House of Commons. First the French had thrust a long stick into the wheels of the American war; then Spain, whose royal family was relatives of the French king, saw their opportunity and entered the war on the side of France and the Americans. The king made another enemy in the form of the Dutch, who had been annoying the British government all through the war by turning a blind eye to the trade in weapons and war materials being run through the Dutch West Indies colony of St. Eustatia. Lord North's government retaliated with a preemptive strike against St. Eustatia in February 1781 by Admiral Sir George Rodney. But the Dutch naturally responded by joining the Franco-Spanish alliance, although without formally recognizing the United States for another year. Now the king had four enemies to contend with instead of just one.[267]

George III resolutely ignored it all. His speech from the throne at the opening of Parliament on November 27 conceded "that the war was still unhappily prolonged, and that, to his great concern, the events of it had been very unfortunate to his army in Virginia, having ended in the total loss of his forces in that province." But the king remained convinced that to abandon America was to begin the work of dissolving the British Empire: "He could not consent to sacrifice, either to his own desire of peace or to the temporary ease and relief of his subjects, those essential rights and permanent interests upon which the strength and security of this country must ever principally depend." Yorktown notwithstanding, "he retained a firm confidence in the protection of Divine Providence, and A PERFECT CONVICTION of the JUSTICE of his CAUSE." The Whig opposition in Parliament was not impressed.[268] On December 4, Edmund Burke—whom we met for the first time back in Lecture Fourteen—started the opposition landslide by demanding a parliamentary inquiry into the legitimacy of Rodney's strike on St. Eustatia, followed by a motion in the House of Commons on December 12 that "all further attempts to reduce the

---

[267] J. C. Long, *George III: The Story of a Complex Man* (Boston, 1960), 264, 267, 280; Christopher Hibbert, *George III: A Personal History* (New York, 1998), 216.

[268] William Belsham, *Memoirs of the Reign of George III to the Session of Parliament Ending A.D. 1793* (London, 1801), 3:256; Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution*, 149.

Americans to obedience by force, would be ineffectual and injurious to the true interests of this country." The motion was defeated, but only by 41 votes. Parliament then broke for Christmas and when it reassembled on January 21, 1782, Charles James Fox asked for an even larger inquiry into the failures of the war, a motion which also failed, but only by a margin of 205 to 183. Another motion calling for a vote on the American war was made on February 22, and that failed by only one vote, 194 to 193. Finally, at two in the morning on February 28, 1782, a renewed motion to end the war in America passed by 19 votes. By this point, the North administration was crumbling fast. Understanding that his great project for subduing America was now bankrupt, Lord George Germain resigned as secretary for the American colonies. But the Whig opposition wanted more blood than just Germain's. Once the motion to suspend the war had been passed, another motion went forward in Parliament on March 8, indicting the entire cabinet for "incapacity and misconduct of administration." Twelve days later, the unhappy Lord North headed off the assault by announcing the resignations of the entire Cabinet, including himself. His place as first lord of the treasury and prime minister would go to a Whig whom the king detested, the elderly Charles Watson-Wentworth, the 2nd Marquess of Rockingham. Even more to the king's dislike, the new Secretaries of State would be William Petty, the 2nd Earl of Shelburne, for the colonies, and Charles James Fox.[269]

The suspension of the fighting in America was not, however, the same thing as the end of the war, even in America. In many respects, the war Britain was fighting against America's allies—France, Spain, and then the Dutch—sustained an amazing turnaround in 1780 and 1781. When we last looked at the war being fought in the West Indies between the French and the British navies—that was in Lecture Nineteen—the French intervention had been paying off handsomely in terms of the success of the French in occupying a string of key British colonies in the Caribbean. Even Sir George Rodney's coup at St. Eustatia in February 1780 was undone by the French, who recaptured St. Eustatia in November 1781. But in April 1782, a combined French and Spanish expedition under the Comte de Grasse, carrying 10,000 French troops and aimed at the conquest of the western anchor of the British West Indies, Jamaica, came to smash at the hands of Rodney and Sir Samuel Hood at the Battle of the Ile des Saintes, between Dominica and Guadaloupe.

[269] *Jeremy Black,* George III: America's Last King *(New Haven, 2006), 247; Robert Bisset,* The History of the Reign of George III *(Philadelphia, 1828),* 1:602–3, 605.

De Grasse and his flagship, the *Ville de Paris*, surrendered, along with four other French ships and all the siege artillery bound for the attack on Jamaica. Sir Samuel Hood begged Rodney to pursue the French and annihilate their West Indian fleet; but having saved Jamaica was honor enough for Rodney. Something of the same story prevailed in India, where the French tried to rouse a coalition of Indian princes against the British East India Company, only to be fought to a standstill by the company's Bengal army and the ships of the Royal Navy. [270]

With at least an informal truce prevailing in America, and fresh successes attending British efforts elsewhere, no one in the new Rockingham administration seemed inclined to rush matters toward a final peace. Shelburne clung to the hope that some arrangement short of outright independence might be arrived at through negotiations, and not without the added hope that the pacified Americans might then turn and rejoin their mother, Britain, in fighting their ancient enemy, the French. Benjamin Franklin was not above making a secret proposal which suggested that the Americans might be willing to make a separate peace if Britain was willing to cede Canada to American control. Then, to confuse matters further, Rockingham suddenly took ill and died. The king, preferring Shelburne to Charles James Fox as the lesser of two evils, allowed Shelburne to become his new principal minister. The enraged Charles James Fox resigned. When the Continental Congress named a negotiating team to conduct formal peace talks, it threw together Henry Laurens with the New Yorker John Jay, the stiff-necked Massachusetts lawyer John Adams, and the ebullient Dr. Franklin. Surprisingly, it would be John Jay who would push the hardest for a unilateral peace treaty with Britain. Jay wrote, "We can depend upon the French only to see that we are separated from England, but it is not in their interest that we should become a great and formidable people, and therefore they will not help us to become so."[271] Jay reasoned: Forget acting in tandem with the French or the Spanish or the Dutch. Make a separate peace with the British. The others, our allies, we can allow them to take care of their own mess with Great Britain.

---

[270] Conway, *War of American Independence*,140, 154–6; Mahan, *Major Operations of the Navies*, 163–77; Mackesy, *War for America*, 482–3, 497–8; Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774–1787* (Princeton, 1975), 283–4.

[271] Richard B. Morris, *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence* (New York, 1965), 257, 262, 306, 310.

It soon became clear that it was in the interests not just of the Americans, but the British, too, to be the parties deciding what would happen to America. Between September 1782, when talks between Shelburne and the American delegation began and mid-October, a preliminary agreement was hammered out which first conceded American Independence; second, fixed the United States' western boundary at the Mississippi River; and third, set a boundary between British Canada and the United States along the Great Lakes and below the St. Lawrence River. There were a multitude of other, secondary matters to arrange. There were issues involving American pre-war debts to British lenders, the return of confiscated properties, fishing rights, and the fate of the Loyalists. But by November 30, 1782, a preliminary treaty between Britain and America was ready to be signed. The French were not happy about this: The Comte de Vergennes objected "to the abrupt signing of the articles" which "had little in it which could be agreeable to the [French] King." But the French were also not in a very useful position to object, because any movement by France to punish its erstwhile American ally might very well drive the Americans back into the arms of the British.[272]

On December 5, King George III opened yet another Parliament with a speech from the throne, but one very different from the speech of a year before. The king said that he had always desired "an entire and cordial reconciliation" with America, but now, finding it "indispensable to the attainment of this object, I did not hesitate to go to the full length of the powers vested in me, and offer to declare them"—and here, he nearly choked—"and offer to declare them free and independent States." The final treaty would not actually be signed until September 3, 1783, in Paris, but past this point it could at last be said that the war of American Independence—the American Revolution—really was "all over."[273]

There were losers in the American Revolution, as in all wars; although in this case, some of the losers did not lose all that badly. Capt. John Peebles of the 42nd Regiment—the Black Watch—sold out his commission in the 42nd even before the peace was signed and went home in 1782. Capt. Johann Ewald was paroled back to the British garrison in New York City, where he stayed until after the peace treaty was signed. He amused himself with sightseeing and admiring the American countryside, especially the Hudson River valley, but he had no desire to stay in America. On October

[272] Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 346; McCullough, *John Adams*, 283–5.
[273] Morris, *The Peacemakers*, 412.

25, 1783, Ewald and the 7th, 22nd, 23rd, and 40th Regiments of Foot were embarked at New York for final evacuation under the terms of the peace treaty. "On all corners," Ewald wrote, "one saw the flag of thirteen stripes flying, cannon salutes were fired, and all the bells rang." Ewald and all the rest of the once great British expeditionary force "set sail with a favorable wind," passed Sandy Hook in the twilight, and by the next morning had lost all sight of land. Ewald soon signed up for service under the king of Denmark, who promoted him to the rank of lieutenant colonel, rewarded him with a title in 1790, and made him a major general in 1802. Ewald retired in 1813, and died two months later at his home in Kiel. In 1944, Allied saturation bombing in World War II leveled Kiel and obliterated the cemetery where Johann Ewald was buried. Of the 29,000 Germans hired out to serve the king of England between 1776–83, only 58 percent ever returned to Germany. The rest—over 12,000 of them—were killed, died of wounds, or simply deserted and faded effortlessly into the American landscape they had been sent to conquer.[274] Instead, it conquered them.

Sir William Howe lost his seat in Parliament in 1780, but the king made up for this by appointing him lieutenant general of ordinance in 1782. Howe did not actually retire from active service until 1803, having by that time inherited the family title as Viscount Howe after the death of his brother, "Black Dick" Howe, in 1799. Banastre Tarleton surrendered with Cornwallis at Yorktown and was, very pointedly, *not* invited along with Cornwallis's other officers to dine with their American counterparts after the surrender parade. Nevertheless, Tarleton went up the ladder of army promotion in England—major general in 1794, a baronet in 1820—and he found a second career for himself representing Liverpool in Parliament, where he made himself notorious for his opposition to William Wilberforce and the campaign to end the slave trade in the British Empire. Charles, Earl Cornwallis, returned from America to find himself lionized by the public as a heroic victim of Lord George Germain's policies. Appointed governor-general of India in 1786, Cornwallis remains one of the key figures in the creation of British India. Lord George Germain retired to his estates in Sussex and died there, peacefully, in 1785. Even Benedict Arnold did not fare too badly. Certain that any peace settlement which found him in America would probably make him a target for American revenge, Arnold

[274] *John Peebles' American War*, 18; Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 345, 359, 360, 361; Edward J. Lowell, *The Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* (1884; Williamstown, MA, 1975), 291.

begged Sir Henry Clinton for permission to go to England in December 1781, only to find himself snubbed by British society, the society for whom he had turned his coat. He set himself up in the West India Trade, and died in London in 1801, aged 61. The remains of his British handler, Maj. John André, were exhumed from his grave at Tarrytown, New York in 1821 and reburied with honors in Westminster Abbey.[275]

The losers who *did* lose big in the Revolution were unquestionably the Loyalists. Fifteen thousand Loyalist refugees flooded into Nova Scotia, many of them arriving with little more than the clothes they were wearing. The son of one wealthy New York Loyalist family suddenly found himself homesteading a farm in Nova Scotia, just as though his family's New York estates had never existed—which for all practical purposes, they no longer did—"He is now settling a new farm in Nova Scotia by beginning to cut down the first tree and erect a loghouse for the shelter of his wife and two small children, and to accomplish that is obliged to labour with his own hands." Still, even in time the Loyalists rebounded, and eventually they became the new governing elite of Canada. John Wentworth of New Hampshire, whose ancestors had settled in New Hampshire as early as the 1630s, became lieutenant governor of Nova Scotia; Jonathan Odell, the New Jersey Loyalist refugee whom we met back in Lecture Twelve, became provincial secretary of New Brunswick; and over the next century, the Loyalists, their families, and their descendants shaped the development of Canada toward Confederation in 1867 and eventual independence within the British Commonwealth. The Loyalist losers who gained nothing *but* loss from their Loyalism were the black slaves who had joined the British in pursuit of the freedom that they would never have enjoyed at the hands of the Sons of Liberty. As many as 5,000 fugitive slaves had followed Cornwallis's army to Yorktown—including 30 of the slaves of Thomas Jefferson—and over the course of the war, upwards of 80,000 American slaves—a fifth of the entire American slave population—ran away, joined the British, or found some way of beating a path to freedom. But once the Paris treaty was signed in 1783, the British shrugged off all responsibility for them. Several thousand of the runaways were shipped to Nova Scotia, where they received only the most meager compensation from their erstwhile Loyalist friends. Another 1,200 or so immigrated all the way to London, where in May 1787 the abolitionist Granville Sharp employed them as the core for a black colonization experiment on the west coast of Africa, Sierra Leone. Other refugee blacks

[275] Jared Sparks, *The Life and Treason of Benedict Arnold* (Boston, 1835), 334–5; Walsh, *The Execution of Major Andre*, 147–8.

were simply sold back into slavery in the Bahamas and the West Indies or, as when the British evacuated Charleston, kept back by bayonet from boarding the evacuation ships.[276]

Many of the winners among the Americans did not, at first, seem to have done as well as some of the losers. The preliminary treaty in November 1782 was the signal to the Continental Congress to begin planning the demobilization of the Continental army, irrespective of whether its soldiers had been paid the money Congress owed them or its officers granted the pensions George Washington had demanded for them during the Valley Forge winter. Washington had to be vigilant for both the British, who still sullenly occupied New York, and for the whiffs of mutiny from his own ranks. In March 1783, Washington had to call a meeting of his officers at Newburgh, New York, to quash a rumored conspiracy to march the Continental "main army" on Philadelphia, overthrow the Congress and install *him* as king. He gave them the sternest lecture of his life against "this dreadful alternative, of either deserting our country in the extremest hour of distress, or turning your arms against it … has something so shocking in it, that humanity revolts at the idea." Having lectured them, Washington then proceeded to read a letter from a sympathetic member of Congress to assure them of Congress's good intentions. The letter was written in a spidery handwriting, so small that Washington could not read unaided, and he fumbled for a moment in his coat for a pair of eyeglasses. "Gentlemen," he apologized, "you must pardon me. I have grown gray in your service and now find myself growing blind." With that one miraculous sentence, the wind went out of any Continental army officers' conspiracy. By 1783, everyone on both sides of the war knew that George Washington had been America's indispensable man. He had lost more battles than he had won, it was true; but time and again he had saved his army to fight again. He had proven resourceful and flexible; he'd proven dignified without being arrogant. His army, and especially the cadre of young officers whom he had built up around him, would rather have pulled the rope at their own hangings than given this man one more pang of grief. In October 1783, with the peace terms finalized, Washington led the army back into New York City as the British pulled out, and then, to the astonishment of his army, Washington announced his intention to resign and return to civilian life. He had no ambitions to be a king, and he had had soldiering enough to satisfy

[276] Wallace Brown, "'Victorious in Defeat': The American Loyalists in Canada," *History Today* 27 (February 1977), 92–100; David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (New York, 2006), 150–1.

any man. He left New York after an emotional farewell dinner with his officers at Fraunces Tavern in New York City. He rode south to Annapolis where the Congress was then in session to surrender his commission, and then, on Christmas Eve, he was home again at Mount Vernon, "where" as Lafayette put it, "he enjoys those titles every heart gives him, as the Savior of his Country, the Benefactor of Mankind, the Protecting Angel of Liberty, the pride of America, and the admiration of two hemispheres." Not even George III could withhold a measure of admiration for Washington. Upon hearing that Washington had voluntarily laid down his commission and returned to private life, the king—who had no reason to believe that anyone would ever willingly relinquish that kind of power—marveled, "Then he must be the greatest man of the age."[277]

That would also make the soldiers Washington had led the greatest army of the age, because they, too, faded back into private lives once Congress officially disbanded the army in June 1784, leaving only a caretaker force at Fort Pitt and West Point. Horatio Gates left the army in 1784 despite his vindication by Congress for the defeat at Camden. He sold his Virginia property, moved to New York City, and he even served a term in the New York legislature before his death in 1806. Henry Knox, Washington's capable artillery chief, succeeded Washington in command of the army, and then followed Washington into politics as secretary of war when Washington was elected President of the United States. He died in 1806, only six months after Horatio Gates. Nathanael Greene used the bounties and the lands voted him by Congress as a reward for his service to pay the outstanding bills of his Southern army. He died of a stroke in 1786. The perennially unhappy Charles Lee did not live to see the peace treaty signed, dying in Philadelphia in 1782. But Daniel Morgan, whom everyone called "The Old Wagoner," lived on until 1802, having amassed a fortune in real estate in the Shenandoah Valley. Morgan is buried in Winchester, Virginia, only a few yards from the burial plots of the Confederates who died defending Winchester in the Civil War. "Mad Anthony" Wayne returned to Pennsylvania, where he was elected to a seat in the state legislature. He then

[277] Washington, "Address to the Officers Assembled," in *Writings*, 8:561; Randall, *Washington: A Life*, 396; Freeman, *Washington*, 501; Higginbotham, *War of American Independence*, 408; Lafayette to Washington (January 10, 1784), *Letters of Lafayette to Washington*, 275; Weintraub, *Iron Tears*, xv; Troy O. Bickham, "Sympathizing With Sedition? George Washington, the British Press, and British Attitudes during the American War of Independence," *William & Mary Quarterly* 59 (January 2002), 101–22.

moved to Georgia, and from Georgia he was elected to Congress. He then took command of the American army which finally suppressed the Shawnee at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794. He died two years later and is buried at St. David's Church in Radnor, Pennsylvania, only a short distance from where he was born and where his troops were overrun in the Paoli Massacre. John Paulding, Isaac van Wart, and David Williams—the three militiamen who turned down Maj. André's bribe—were rewarded with offers of officers' commissions; they turned them down. Paulding died in 1818, with an honor guard of West Point cadets at his funeral. His son, Hiram, rose to become a rear admiral in the U.S. Navy in the Civil War. Van Wart died 10 years later, with another West Point honor guard at graveside. David Williams lived until 1831, old enough to make a cameo appearance in New York City in a play about the capture of John André.

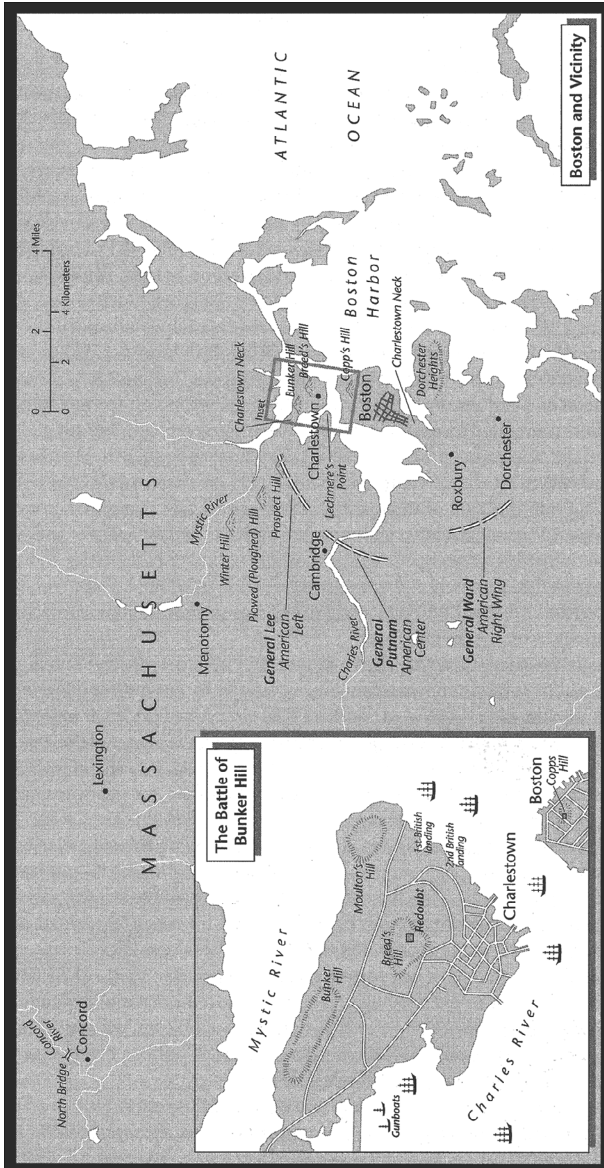
Taken together, these soldiers had fought in 1,200 battles, skirmishes, and sieges, and lost over 10,000 killed and wounded. But they had come out of it, as a young Virginia volunteer and future chief justice of the U.S. Supreme Court named John Marshall wrote, with the experience of seeing "brave men from different States who were risking life fighting in a common cause believed by them to be most precious," and from that, Marshall said, they developed "the habit of considering America as my country"—not the individual states—"but America as my country and Congress as my government." The war not only secured legal title to American Independence; it was itself "a political education, conducted by military means," and it was an education in the construction of a new form of republican democracy. It would take another 80 years of political strife, and a major civil war, to ratify that consciousness. But in the end, that consciousness—America was my country; Congress, my government—would prove to be the foundation of what Thomas Jefferson rightly predicted would become, "an Empire of Liberty."[278]

[278] Wright, *Continental Army*, 182; Albert J. Beveridge, *The Life of John Marshall* (New York, 1916), 1:244; John Shy, "The American Revolution: The Military Conflict as a Revolutionary War," in *Essays on the American Revolution*, ed. Stephen Kurtz and James Hutson (New York, 1973), 147.

Maps and Battle Plans

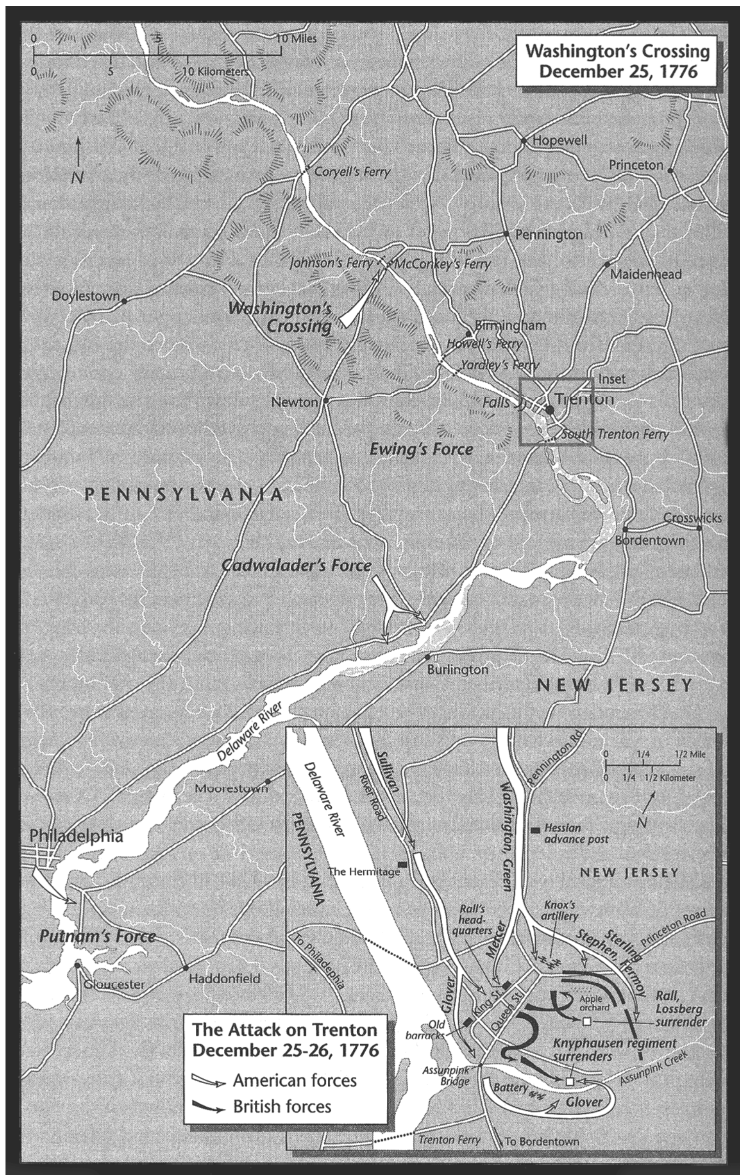
The Thirteen Colonies

Philadelphia and Surrounding Region
PA
Valley Forge
Paoli Tavern
Philadelphia
NJ
Ft. Mifflin
Ft. Mercer
MD
DE

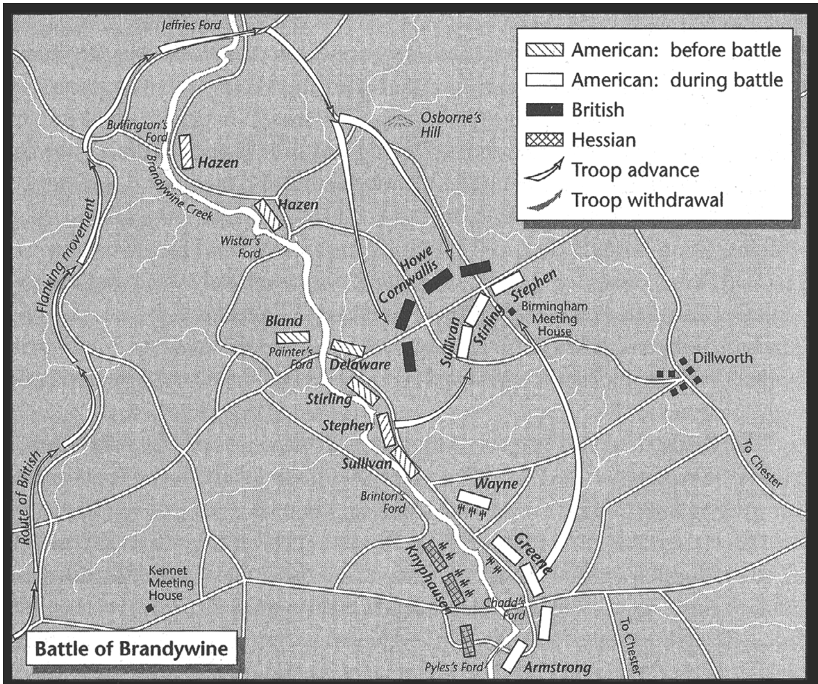


Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**

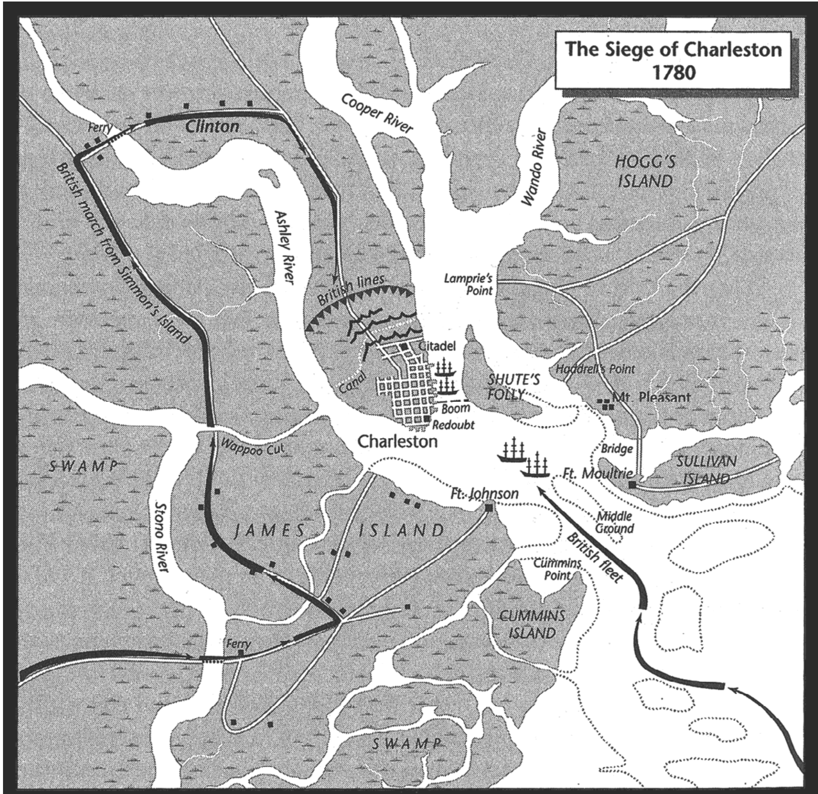
Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**



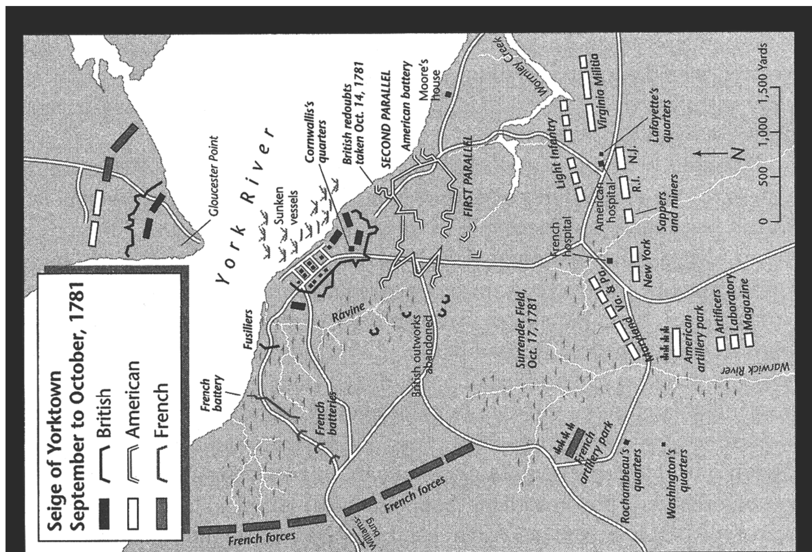
Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**

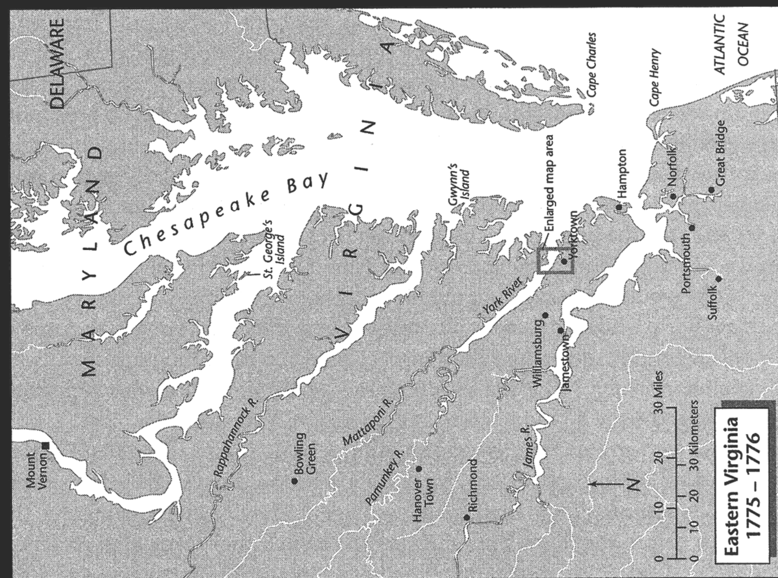


Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**



Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**





Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence (2007) by John Ferling. By **permission of Oxford University Press, Inc.**

Timeline

February 10, 1763	Peace of Paris ends Great War for Empire (also called Seven Years' War and French and Indian War).
March 22, 1765	Parliament passes Stamp Act.
October 19, 1765	Stamp Act Congress ratifies John Dickinson's "Declaration of Rights and Grievances."
March 18, 1766	Parliament repeals Stamp Act.
March 5, 1770	Boston Massacre.
April 12, 1770	Parliament repeals Townshend Duties, except for tax on tea.
December 16, 1773	Boston Tea Party.
March 31–June 22, 1774	Parliament retaliates with Intolerable Acts.
September 5, 1774–October 26, 1774	First Continental Congress meets in Philadelphia.
April 18–19, 1775	Clashes between British troops and militia at Lexington and Concord.
May 10, 1775	Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys seize Ticonderoga.
June 14–15, 1775	Congress creates Continental army and commissions Washington as its commander.
June 17, 1775	Battle of Bunker Hill.
August 23, 1775	George III declares colonies in a state of rebellion.
September–December 1775	Montgomery and Arnold's campaign into Canada.

October 10, 1775 .... Howe succeeds Gage as British commander in chief in America.

November 10, 1775 .... Formation of U.S. Marine Corps.

November 28, 1775 .... Formation of U.S. Navy.

January 10, 1776 .... Publication of Tom Paine's *Common Sense.*

March 17, 1776 .... British evacuate Boston.

June 7, 1776 .... Richard Henry Lee moves for independence in Continental Congress.

June 28, 1776 .... British fail to take Charleston.

July 4, 1776 .... Congress endorses Jefferson's Declaration of Independence.

July 12, 1776 .... Congress begins debate on Articles of Confederation.

August 27, 1776 .... Washington defeated at Long Island.

August 30, 1777 .... Washington evacuates Long Island under cover of darkness.

September 15, 1776 .... Howe lands at Kip's Bay and seizes control of lower Manhattan.

September 22, 1776 .... Nathan Hale hung by the British as a spy.

October 11, 1776 .... Carleton defeats Arnold at Valcour Island.

October 28, 1776 .... Battle of White Plains.

November 15–16, 1776 .... Fall of Fort Lee.

November 19–20, 1776 .... Fall of Fort Washington.

December 26, 1776 .... Washington defeats British and Hessians at Trenton.

January 3, 1777 .... Washington defeats British at Princeton.

June 14, 1777 .... Adoption of the Stars and Stripes.

July 6, 1777 .... Burgoyne captures Ticonderoga.

September 11, 1777 .... Washington defeated at Brandywine.

October 4, 1777 .... Washington defeated at Germantown.

October 17, 1777 .... Burgoyne surrenders to Gates at Saratoga.

October 22, 1777 .... Hessian attack on Fort Mercer fails to open Delaware River.

December 18, 1777 .... Washington marches into encampment at Valley Forge.

February 6, 1778 .... Treaty of Amity and Commerce signed with France.

May 8, 1778 .... Howe replaced by Clinton.

June 18, 1778 .... Clinton evacuates Philadelphia.

June 28, 1778 .... Battle of Monmouth Courthouse.

July 3, 1778 .... Wyoming Valley Massacre.

July 4, 1778 .... George Rogers Clark seizes Kaskaskia.

July 27, 1778 .... Battle of Ushant.

November 11, 1778 .... Cherry Valley Massacre.

December 29, 1778 .... British capture Savannah.

February 25, 1779 .... George Rogers Clark captures Vincennes.

April 12, 1779 .... Spain joins war.

June 16, 1779 .... French fleet captures St. Vincent.

June 21, 1779 .... Spanish begin siege of Gibraltar.

July 15, 1779 .... Americans capture Stony Point.

August 19, 1779 .... Americans capture Paulus Hook.

August 29, 1779 .... Sullivan defeats combined Loyalist-Iroquois force at Newtown.

September 23, 1779 .... John Paul Jones defeats *Serapis.*

October 11, 1779 .... Clinton evacuates Rhode Island.

January 16–17, 1780 .... Battle of Cape St. Vincent.

May 12, 1780 .... Charleston falls to Clinton.

July 11, 1780 .... Rochambeau's army arrives at Newport.

August 15–16, 1780 .... Gates defeated at battle of Camden.

September 25, 1780 .... Benedict Arnold flees to safety with British, abandoning John André to be hung as a spy on October 2.

October 7, 1780 .... Rebel militia victorious over Patrick Ferguson at King's Mountain.

January 1, 1781 .... Mutiny of the Pennsylvania Continentals.

January 17, 1781 .... Daniel Morgan defeats Tarleton at battle of Cowpens.

March 15, 1781 .... Cornwallis wins Pyrrhic victory at Guildford Courthouse.

September 8, 1781 .... Greene defeated at Eutaw Springs.

September 30–
October 19, 1781 .... Cornwallis forced into siege at Yorktown and surrenders.

February 28, 1782 .... Parliament votes to discontinue military operations in America.

July 1, 1782 .... Death of the Earl of Rockingham; succeeded by Lord Shelburne.

April 4, 1782 .... Clinton replaced by Sir Guy Carleton as commander in chief in America.

April 12, 1782 .... Battle of the Saintes.

November 30, 1782 .... Preliminary peace treaty between Britain and U.S. signed.

January 20, 1783 .... Preliminary treaty among Britain and Spain and France signed.

March 15, 1783 .... Washington faces down potential officers' mutiny at Newburgh.

September 3, 1783 .... Final peace treaty for all nations involved in the war signed in Paris.

November 25, 1783.......................... British troops evacuate New York City.

December 23, 1783 .... Washington resigns commission.

Glossary

American Prohibitory Act (1775): Parliamentary legislation that outlawed trade with America and effectively declared war on the American colonies.

Articles of Confederation: The preliminary constitution for the United States devised by the Continental Congress in 1776 but not ratified until 1781.

artillery: Refers to large-bore weaponry requiring service by a crew of gunners, and including field artillery (light direct-aim artillery for use in combat with infantry, mounted on wheeled carriages, and firing solid shot and grape or canister), siege artillery (heavy direct-aim artillery used in semi-permanent emplacements to bombard enemy fortifications), mortars (heavy high-trajectory artillery for siege use), howitzers (light high-trajectory artillery for field use), and naval artillery (direct-aim artillery mounted on roller-carriages for use on board warships), referred to commonly simply as "guns."

bayonet: Eighteen-inch, triangular-bladed edged weapon, attached to the muzzle of a musket with a socket, effectively converting the musket into a pike; the decisive weapon in battlefield combat in the 18th century.

blockade: Imposed by a navy on an enemy's ports, with warships preventing the entrance or departure of vessels.

brigade: An association of three or more regiments, commanded by a brigadier general.

cavalry: Soldiers mounted on horses for combat or scouting purposes; sometimes used as the force employed on fleeing or routed infantry to complete their disintegration; organized as heavy cavalry (for combat), light cavalry (scouting and pursuit), or dragoons.

column: The deployment of a unit with a narrow front and long files stretching behind; used for road movement or quick attack movement on a battlefield.

commissary general: Staff officer responsible for feeding and provisioning an army.

company: The smallest organizational unit of an army, numbering between 30 and 50 men.

Continental Congress: The joint directors of the colonial war of independence, composed of delegates from all the rebel colonies.

division: An association of two of more brigades, under the command of a major general.

dragoons: Heavy cavalry, armed with both sabers and carbines, able to fight as mounted shock troops or as dismounted skirmishers.

flank: The exposed right and left edges of a line or column of soldiers.

flotilla: A small collection of ships.

forage master: Staff officer responsible for feeding and provisioning the horses and livestock of an army.

frigate: A mid-sized warship, usually ship-rigged (three masts) and carrying between 36 and 50 naval guns.

garrison: Soldiers detailed to hold and occupy an outpost.

governor general: Officers representing British civil and military authority over Canada; delegated responsibilities to three lieutenants general.

grenadier: Originally referred to soldiers detailed to carry and use hand grenades in combat, but by the 18th century, the name for one company of each British regiment specializing in shock assault; normally distinguished by tall bearskin or half-crown hats.

habitants: French-speaking settlers within Britain's Canadian domains.

Hessians: Mercenaries hired by the British from the German principalities of Hesse-Cassel and Hesse-Hanau, but used generically to refer to any German units in British pay.

Highlanders: Describes the six regiments of Scottish soldiers recruited for British service from the Scottish Highlands.

inspector general: Staff officer responsible for the training of an army.

jäger: (German) Light infantry.

light infantry: Term applied to one company of each British regiment detailed and trained to act as skirmishers in front of a line of battle or as flankers to protect a column on the march; distinguished by short brimless caps.

line of battle: Deployment of a unit lengthwise into two or three lines, facing the enemy, in order to maximize delivery of firepower.

Loyalists: Term applied to Americans who remained loyal to the king or who served in militia companies supporting the British army; sometimes called “Tories” in derision.

magazine: Storage facility or depot for weapons, gunpowder, or supplies.

main army: The principal field force of the Continental army, serving in the mid-Atlantic region and commanded directly by Washington.

marines: Light infantry trained and detached to serve on board warships and responsible for the enforcement of ships’ discipline, delivery of harassing fire by musket during ship-to-ship combat, and armed landings.

militia: Volunteer soldiers from the civil population, available for temporary call-up in the event of an emergency; frequently lacking in training and discipline necessary to undergo combat.

musket: Long-barreled personal firearm of the infantry, with a smooth (unrifled) bore, loaded from the muzzle, and discharged by means of a flintlock trigger system.

Northern army: The field force of the Continental army serving in upstate New York and Canada.

Olive Branch Petition (1775): The last gesture of conciliation offered by the Continental Congress to King George III.

Parliament: The governing legislature of the British Empire, composed of an elected House of Commons and a House of Lords; composed of the hereditary lords of the realm.

partisan: A guerilla fighter.

patronage: The system of discretionary appointments to government positions, or awards of government contracts, in the power of the king.

privateers: Privately owned ships commissioned by the Continental Congress under “letters of marque and reprisal” to harass or capture British commercial shipping.

purchase system: The principal mechanism by which British officers obtained commissions in the British army; literally, by paying a fixed amount of money.

quartermaster general: Staff officer responsible for supplying an army with equipment and clothing.

redoubt: A fort constructed by throwing up walls of earth and reinforcing them with wood or other materials.

regiment: The basic organizational unit of the British and Continental armies, consisting of 300–500 officers and men, subdivided into 8 to 10 companies.

regulars: Long-service (or “standing”) professional soldiers; the British and Continental armies were “regulars,” as opposed to militia, which were only called out in times of emergency; also referred to as “line” regiments.

republic: Any form of government that rests on popular consent or participation (hence, its derivation from the Latin, *res publica*), and that is not ruled by a monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, or dictatorship.

rifle: Long-barreled personal firearm featuring spiral grooves cut into the inside wall of the barrel to improve accuracy; because they were difficult to load, rifles were used by special units.

Seven Years’ War: War between France and its allies and Britain and its allies from 1755–1762; also known as the “Great War for Empire” and, in America, as the “French and Indian War.”

ship of the line: A full-sized warship, usually ship-rigged (three masts) and carrying between 64 and 104 naval guns; so-called from the standard naval deployment of these ships in combat in a line of battle.

skirmishers: Light infantry deployed as an open-order screen ahead of a regiment’s battle line to harass enemy positions and clear enemy skirmishers out of the way of a regiment’s attack.

sloop: A small, two-masted warship carrying between 4 and 20 naval guns.

Southern army: The field force of the Continental army serving in Georgia, Virginia, and the Carolinas.

staff: Officers detailed by the commander of the army to assist in carrying out support and executive responsibilities.

Whig: From the derisive term, *whiggamore* (a country yokel), applied to the British opposition party that was suspicious of a powerful monarchy and viewed itself as representing the virtue and independence of the “country,” as opposed to the “court”; they tended to sympathize with the American rebels and eventually mounted sufficient opposition to force an end to the American war in 1782; opposed to Tories.

Biographical Notes

John Adams (1735–1826): Massachusetts lawyer, member of the Continental Congress, and diplomat. Took part in the Staten Island Peace Conference, represented the United States in France, and was a member of the team of negotiators that crafted the Treaty of Paris.

Samuel Adams (1722–1803): Massachusetts brewer and public official. Led Massachusetts opposition to Lt. Gov. Thomas Hutchinson and the Stamp Act, created the Massachusetts Committee of Correspondence, and was an early advocate for full American Independence from Britain in the Continental Congress.

William Alexander, Lord Stirling (1726–1783): American general. Prominent New York lawyer and merchant. He laid claim to the vacant earldom of Stirling, as the eldest male descendant of the first earl; although the House of Lords never recognized his claim, he continued to use the title throughout his life and was recognized as such in both Scotland and America. Appointed surveyor general of New Jersey, he was one of the founders of King's College (Columbia University). Appointed brigadier general by Congress in 1776, he distinguished himself in command of the Maryland Line at Long Island. Stirling was captured but exchanged and promoted to major general, and served under Washington at Trenton, Brandywine, Germantown, Monmouth, and Paulus Hook. Commanded the observation forces Washington left to secure New York during the Yorktown campaign.

Ethan Allen (1738–1789): American officer. Commanded a militia unit known as the "Green Mountain Boys" in the prewar land disputes between New York and New Hampshire over the "New Hampshire Grants" (Vermont). Allen led the Green Mountain Boys in a daring seizure of Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775. Participated in Montgomery's expedition to Canada. Captured and then imprisoned in England, and not exchanged until 1778. He returned to border politics in Vermont and was even approached by the British to negotiate a separate peace that would make Vermont a British province.

Benedict Arnold (1741–1801): American general. Joined with Ethan Allen to capture Fort Ticonderoga, led the overland march on Canada, distinguished himself in the Saratoga campaign, and took command of the reoccupation of Philadelphia after the departure of the British in 1778. Convinced that he deserved better rewards for his service, he attempted to

betray West Point to the British in 1780, and commanded British forces in Virginia in 1781.

John Barry (1745–1803): American naval officer. Commanded the brig *Lexington* in the first naval victory of the American navy over a British ship in 1776. His is the first name on the list of captains of the United States Navy.

John Burgoyne (1722–1792): British general and parliamentarian. Commissioned in the 13th Light Dragoons, then captain in 11th Dragoons, and finally lieutenant colonel, Coldstream Guards. Commissioned major general in 1772, sent to Boston in 1775, and commanded invasion of New York in 1777 that resulted in his surrender at Saratoga.

Sir Guy Carleton (1724–1808): British general and governor-general of Canada. Served under Wolfe at Quebec and appointed lieutenant governor of Canada in 1766. Appointed commander in chief in America in 1782 to succeed Sir Henry Clinton and supervised the British evacuation of New York in 1783.

Sir Henry Clinton (1738–1795): British general and third commander in chief in America during the Revolution. Commissioned major general in 1772 and sent to Boston, where he commanded part of an assault force at Bunker Hill. Served under Howe at Long Island and succeeded Howe as commander in chief in 1778. Supervised "Southern Strategy" of 1778–1781 but failed to support Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781.

Charles Cornwallis, 1st Marquis and 2nd Earl Cornwallis (1738–1805): British general. Served under Clinton in first assault on Charleston; under Howe at Long Island, Brandywine, and Germantown; and again under Clinton as part of the "Southern Strategy." Victorious at Camden and Guildford Courthouse, he was forced to surrender his army at Yorktown in 1781.

John Dickinson (1732–1808): Pennsylvania and Delaware lawyer, political writer, member of the Continental Congress, and principal author of the Articles of Confederation.

Patrick Ferguson (1744–1780): British officer and pioneer of rifle tactics. Served in the West Indies and patented a breech-loading rifle, with which he equipped a battalion of riflemen for Howe's Philadelphia campaign. Wounded at Brandywine and assigned to Southern expedition in 1780, where he was killed at King's Mountain while attempting to cover Cornwallis's left flank with Tory militia.

Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790): American printer, publisher, scientist, and diplomat. Arrived penniless in Philadelphia from Boston in 1723 but built a publishing empire that allowed him to retire at age 48 to pursue scientific interests. Served as colonial agent in London until 1775 and served in the Second Continental Congress. Sent by Congress to represent the United States in France in 1776, he successfully negotiated both the French alliance and the Treaty of Paris.

Thomas Gage (1719/20–1787): British general and first commander in chief in America during the Revolution. Served in 44th Regiment under Braddock and commanded the 80th Regiment at Ticonderoga in French and Indian War. Served as military governor of Canada from 1760–1763, promoted to major general in 1761, and succeeded Amherst as commander in chief in America in 1763. Failed to deal effectively with American unrest leading up to Lexington and Concord, and was relieved of command in 1775 and returned to England.

Horatio Gates (1727–1806): American general. Served in 44th Regiment under Braddock in the French and Indian War and in the West Indies. Retired to a farm in Virginia in 1765. Selected by Washington to serve as adjutant general of the Continental army in 1775, and as commander of the Northern Department he forced the surrender of Burgoyne at Saratoga. He schemed to succeed Washington as American commander in chief, but his reputation was ruined by his disastrous defeat at Camden in 1780.

Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette (1757–1834): French nobleman and volunteer. He arrived in South Carolina, June 13, 1777, and was commissioned major general by Congress, July 31. He served under Washington at Brandywine; designated to command the second Canada expedition, commanded Continental troops at Barren Hill, Monmouth, and Newport; and played a prominent role in Virginia in the campaigns leading to Yorktown. He participated in the French Revolution and revisited the United States on a triumphal tour in 1824–1826.

François-Joseph-Paul de Grasse-Rouville, Comte de Grasse (1722–1788): French admiral. He served in the French navy in the Seven Years’ War, was promoted to commodore in 1778 and rear admiral in 1781, and commanded the French fleet cutting off Yorktown from the sea. Captured at the Battle of the Saintes, 1782, and became intermediary of Lord Shelburne in opening peace negotiations.

Nathanael Greene (1742–1786): American general. Originally brigadier general of Rhode Island militia, he was made brigadier general of Continental troops in 1775 and was held responsible for defeat at Fort Washington (1776). He had the confidence of Washington, however, and fought at Brandywine and Germantown, then served as Washington's quartermaster general at Valley Forge. Given command of the Southern Department in 1780, he conducted a wearing campaign against Cornwallis that eventually led to Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown.

Alexander Hamilton (1757–1804): American officer. Born illegitimate in the West Indies, he entered King's College as a scholarship student in 1773 and organized a student militia company in 1775. He attracted attention for his handling of artillery at Long Island and White Plains and was attached to Washington's staff as secretary and aide-de-camp in 1777. He returned to field command in Hazen's Brigade in time to distinguish himself in leading the attacks on Redoubts 9 and 10 at Yorktown. He later served as Washington's secretary of the treasury from 1789–1795.

John Hancock (1737–1793): American merchant and politician. Graduated from Harvard in 1754 and together with Samuel Adams became principal figure of resistance to British authority in Massachusetts. He was the President of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress from 1774–1775 and president of the Second Continental Congress from 1775–1777.

Patrick Henry (1736–1799): Virginia legislator. The child of Scot immigrants to western Virginia, he began practicing law in 1760 and scored a notable success in his handling of the "Parson's Cause" in 1763. Elected to the House of Burgesses in 1765, where he opposed the Stamp Act and, in 1775, urged resistance to Lord Dunmore with the famous words "… give me liberty or give me death." Served briefly in the Second Continental Congress and commanded the Virginia state militia. Elected governor in 1776, and then again in 1784. Was a major force in the adoption of the Bill of Rights as the first 10 amendments to the U.S. Constitution.

Samuel Hood, 1st Viscount Hood (1724–1816): British admiral. Commanded HMS *Jamaica* in the French and Indian War and promoted to rear admiral in 1780 to serve under Rodney in the West Indies. Defeated and captured de Grasse at the Battle of the Saintes in 1782.

Richard Howe, 4th Viscount Howe (1726–1799): British admiral and naval commander in chief in America, brother of Sir William Howe. Entered the navy at age 14 and rose to vice admiral by 1775. Given overall naval command in America in 1776 and served as peace commissioner. Declined

to serve further under Germain or Lord Sandwich and returned home. He reassumed command in the navy in 1782 and relieved the British garrison of Gibraltar.

Sir William Howe (1729–1814): British general and second commander in chief in America during the Revolution, younger brother of Admiral Richard Howe. Served under Wolfe in the storming of Quebec (1759) and as adjutant general in the capture of Havana (1760). He was promoted to major general in 1772 and sent, despite his political sympathies with the Americans, to serve under Thomas Gage in 1775. He was in tactical command at Bunker Hill (1775) and succeeded to commander in chief in 1776. Although repeatedly victorious at Long Island, Brandywine, and Germantown, he was unable to destroy the Continental army and was relieved at his own request in 1778.

Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826): Author of the American Declaration of Independence and third president of the U.S. Elected to represent Virginia in the Second Continental Congress. His reputation as the author of the *Summary View of the Rights of British America* (1774) led to appointment to the committee responsible for drafting the Declaration of Independence. The subsequent document was almost entirely from Jefferson's own pen. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates and was chosen governor to succeed Patrick Henry in 1779. But his term was clouded by charges that he had fled in the face of British raiding parties in Virginia in 1781. Jefferson was elected to the Confederation Congress in 1783 and wrote legislation creating an American currency and a Northwest Ordinance, banning slavery in the Northwest Territories.

John Paul Jones (1747–1792): American naval officer. Born in Scotland as John Paul, he was apprenticed to a shipowner at age 12 and rose to become a merchant captain until he was charged with the flogging death of a seaman and the killing of a mutineer. He immigrated to America and took the surname Jones. In 1775 he was commissioned as first lieutenant on the Continental navy's first ship, the *Alfred*. Jones was promoted to captain and given command of the *Ranger*, with which he raided the English coast, and then took command of the ex-French vessel *Bonhomme Richard*, with which he won a lopsided victory over HMS *Serapis* on September 23, 1779. After the Revolution, he served in the navy of Catherine the Great and died penniless in Paris. His remains were reburied at the U.S. Naval Academy in 1913.

Johann de Kalb, Baron de Kalb (1721–1780): French and American general. Served in the French army during the Seven Years' War and acted as a French spy in North America. Volunteered to serve with Continental army with Lafayette in 1777 and was commissioned major general. Mortally wounded at the Battle of Camden (1780).

Henry Knox (1750–1806): American general and chief of artillery. Originally the owner of a Boston bookstore, Knox read widely in military matters, and after serving at Bunker Hill, Washington appointed him chief of the Continental artillery. He successfully manhandled the artillery captured at Fort Ticonderoga through the winter snow to Boston, where the threat of Knox's guns forced the British to evacuate Boston. He was appointed brigadier general in 1776 and served as one of Washington's most faithful and stalwart staffers. He was then appointed major general in 1782 and succeeded Washington as commander of the Continental army in 1783. Later he served as secretary of war during Washington's presidency (1789–1794).

Tadeusz (Thaddeus) Andrzej Bonawentura Kosciuszko (1746–1817): Minor Polish nobleman and American general. He arrived as a volunteer in America in 1776 and designed the Delaware River fortification. Commissioned colonel of engineers by Congress, he fought at Saratoga and constructed the defense of West Point. He fought under Greene in the Southern campaign and after promotion to brigadier general in 1784, he left to lead a defense of Poland against Russian invasion. He supported the French Revolution, led an abortive uprising in Poland, and returned to America in 1797.

Henry Laurens (1724–1792): President of the Continental Congress. Successful Charleston merchant and agent for transatlantic slave trading, he was elected to the South Carolina Provincial Congress in 1775 and participated in the defense of Charleston in 1776. Elected to the Continental Congress, he succeeded John Hancock as president in 1777, in which he rebuffed attempts to undercut Washington. Sent as Congressional agent in 1779 to negotiate with the Netherlands, and on this mission, he was intercepted at sea by a British vessel and imprisoned for treason in the Tower of London. He was exchanged in 1781 for Earl Cornwallis and joined the team of peace negotiators in London. His son, John Laurens, was one of Washington's aides and his son-in-law, David Ramsay, was an early historian of the Revolution.

Charles Lee (1731–1782): American general. Originally an ensign in the 44th Foot, he served as part of Braddock's expedition in the French and Indian War, fought at Ticonderoga, and was part of the expedition that captured Montreal. Appointed major of the 103rd Foot in 1761, he was retired when the regiment disbanded in 1763, and served in the Polish army until moving to America in 1773. He was commissioned as major general by the Continental Congress in 1775 and led a successful defense of Charleston in 1776. He was suspected of scheming to supplant Washington, and when he was captured in a daring British raid at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, on December 13, 1776, he freely gave advice to the Howe brothers on how to end the war. Exchanged in April 1778, he rejoined the Continental army, only to arouse Washington's ire for mishandling his troops at Monmouth, and was court-martialed for his conduct toward Washington afterward.

Francis Marion (c. 1732–1795): American partisan leader. A delegate to the South Carolina Provincial Congress in 1775, he participated in the defense of Charleston as a captain in the 2nd South Carolina, which he eventually rose to command. He participated in an unsuccessful assault on Savannah in 1779, and after the fall of Charleston in 1780, he conducted wide-ranging partisan raids against the British and acquired the reputation of "The Swamp Fox." He also commanded the combined Carolina militia forces under Greene at Eutaw Springs in 1781.

Daniel Morgan (1735–1802): American general. Born in Pennsylvania, he moved to Virginia in 1753 and served as a teamster in Braddock's expedition in the French and Indian War and as a militia captain in Pontiac's Rebellion and Lord Dunmore's War. He was commissioned captain of a Virginia rifle company in 1775 and served with distinction in Montgomery's assault on Quebec, where he was captured. After an exchange, he took command of the 11th Virginia and was authorized by Washington to recruit a battalion of rifle-armed Continental "rangers." He fought at Saratoga, served in Woodford's Brigade at Valley Forge, and fought at Monmouth. He briefly resigned his commission in a dispute over rank, but rejoined the army after the disaster at Camden in 1780, and distinguished himself at Cowpens (1781).

William Moultrie (1730–1805): American general. Son of an English physician, he grew up in South Carolina and rose to become a captain in the provincial militia. He was commissioned colonel of the 2nd South Carolina and distinguished himself during the British attack on Charleston in 1776 in command of the palmetto-log fort that was given his name. The second

British expedition against Charleston (1780) resulted in the surrender of the city and Moultrie's capture. He was exchanged in 1782, and was the last officer promoted to major general in the Continental army.

John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg (1746–1807): Lutheran and Episcopalian clergyman and American general. He served congregations in Virginia from 1772–1775, but was invited by Washington to take up a colonelcy in the Continental army, and recruited 300 of his congregation as the 8th Virginia. Served in the defense of Charleston (1776), Brandywine, and Germantown, where he rose to brigadier general and commanded 1st, 5th, 6th, 9th, and 13th Virginia. He served under Wayne at Stony Point, under von Steuben in the Southern campaign, and under Lafayette at Yorktown.

Sir Frederick North, Lord North and 2nd Earl of Guilford (1732–1792): He won election to parliament in 1754 and was chancellor of the exchequer (1767–1782) and opposed concessions to the Americans. A favorite of George III, he bears principal political responsibility for triggering the American Revolution and for prolonging the war. By 1778, he had given up hope of victory in America but yielded to the demands of the king to remain in office until 1782.

Enoch Poor (1736–1780): American general. A shipbuilder and cabinetmaker, he was elected to the New Hampshire provincial congress and named colonel of the 2nd New Hampshire in 1775. He served under Washington at Trenton and Princeton, and then, as a brigadier general, commanded a brigade at Saratoga. He was part of the encampment at Valley Forge and saw action at Monmouth and in Sullivan's Iroquois expedition in 1779.

Paul Revere (1735–1818): American artisan and political organizer. Beginning with the Stamp Act protests in Boston, Revere took a leading role in rallying fellow artisans and "mechanics" to resistance of British imperial policies, and served as a courier between colonial committees of correspondence. His most famous ride was on the evening of April 18–19, 1775, when he slipped out of Boston ahead of a British expedition to warn the county militias and secure the escape of John Hancock and Samuel Adams. He served in various capacities in the militia during the Revolution, none of them happy, and in 1782 he was court-martialed (but acquitted) for his conduct in the Penobscot River expedition (1779). After the Revolution, he went on to great commercial success, especially as the inventor of a process for rolling sheet copper.

Sir George Rodney, Baron Rodney (1719–1792): British admiral. Participated in the capture of Louisbourg during the French and Indian War and conducted a successful naval campaign in the West Indies (1761–1762). Promoted to admiral in 1778, he was appointed naval commander in chief in the West Indies and defeated the French at Cape St. Vincent (1780) and participated in the defeat of the French at the Saintes (1782).

George Sackville, Lord Germain and Viscount Sackville (1716–1785): British soldier and secretary of state for America. Court-martialed for disobedience of orders at Minden (1759), he inherited the property and title from Lady Elizabeth Germain and rebuilt his reputation as a politician through firm resistance to the demands of the colonies. When he succeeded Lord Dartmouth as secretary of state for America, he attempted to overmanage the course of the war in America and was noted for his truculence in refusing any form of compromise. He resigned in February 1782 when the surrender at Yorktown made it clear that no hope remained of military victory in America.

Philip John Schuyler (1733–1804): Prominent New York landholder and American general. As a leading member of the old Dutch ascendancy, he was elected to the state legislature in 1768 and in 1775. The Continental Congress appointed Schuyler as a major general and he served as the principal supply officer for Montgomery’s Quebec campaign. Given command of the Northern Department, he ordered the evacuation of Fort Ticonderoga in the face of Burgoyne’s invasion in 1777 and was relieved of command (although he stayed in the field to serve under his replacement, Horatio Gates, and join with Benedict Arnold as one of the principal architects of the Saratoga victory). He was acquitted of charges of incompetence by court-martial in 1778. He was elected to represent New York in the Continental Congress in 1779. His daughter, Elizabeth, married Alexander Hamilton.

John Sullivan (1740–1795): American general. Commissioned as brigadier general by the Continental Congress in 1775, he briefly commanded the Northern Department and was captured at Long Island (1776), then exchanged. He served under Washington at Trenton, Princeton, Brandywine, and Germantown. He failed in the attempt to retake Newport in 1778 and conducted a campaign against the Iroquois in 1779. He was also governor of New Hampshire from 1785–1790.

Thomas Sumter, “The Carolina Gamecock” (1734–1832): American partisan officer. Served under Braddock in the French and Indian War and

settled in South Carolina in 1765. Appointed captain of mounted rangers at the beginning of the Revolution, he became best known for his command of partisans during the Southern campaign. He was the last surviving American general of the Revolution.

Banastre Tarleton (1754–1833): British officer. Commissioned in the 1st Dragoon Guards in 1775, he volunteered for service in America and led the 16th Light Dragoons in capture of Charles Lee (1776). Appointed to command the British Legion in 1778, he served under Cornwallis in the Southern campaign and acquired an unsavory reputation for taking no prisoners. Defeated at Cowpens (1781), he surrendered with Cornwallis at Yorktown. He entered Parliament in 1790 and was knighted in 1820.

James Mitchell Varnum (1748–1789): American general. Graduate of Brown and successful lawyer, he responded to the call of Paul Revere and joined the militia besieging Boston in 1775. He was commissioned colonel of the 1st Rhode Island and then promoted to brigadier general. Led defense of Forts Mercer and Mifflin in 1777. Resigned commission in 1779 and became major general of Rhode Island militia. He served in the Confederation Congress from 1780–1782 and 1786–1787.

Jean Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Comte de Rochambeau (1725–1807): French general and commander of French expeditionary force in North America. Arrived at Newport on July 10, 1780, and cooperated with Washington in the siege of New York City and the Yorktown campaign. Retiring in 1791 as a Marshal of France, he narrowly avoided the guillotine in the French Revolution.

Wilhelm von Knyphausen, Baron Knyphausen (1716–1800): Prussian general and senior commanding officer of German troops in British service in America. He commanded a division of German mercenaries under Sir William Howe at Long Island, Fort Washington, and Brandywine, and under Sir Henry Clinton at Monmouth.

Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, Baron von Steuben (1730–1794): Prussian officer and inspector general of the Continental army. A minor staff officer in the Prussian army and court chamberlain of Hohenzollern-Hechingen, he parlayed his meager military credentials into a mythic reputation as a Prussian lieutenant general and was accepted by Congress as a volunteer for the Continental army. He turned out to be an enormously effective drillmaster and rewrote the Continental army's basic tactics during the Valley Forge encampment. Designated

inspector general in 1778, he served as a staff officer at Monmouth, and commanded one of Washington's divisions at Yorktown.

Charles Watson-Wentworth, 2nd Marquis of Rockingham (1730–1782): A leading critic of George III in Parliament, he had served as prime minister for the repeal of the Stamp Act (1765–1766) and was a vocal opponent of the use of military force to subdue the colonies. With the fall of Lord North as prime minister in 1782, Rockingham once again became prime minister, but only for four months before his death.

Anthony Wayne, "Mad Anthony" (1745–1796): American general. A tanner and surveyor, he participated in the first Canadian expedition (1775–1776) and was appointed brigadier general under Washington in 1777. Fought at Brandywine, Paoli, Germantown, Monmouth, and Stony Point, and served under Steuben in Virginia in 1781. Named senior general of the U.S. Army in 1792 and successfully cleared pro-British Indians from the Northwest Territory at the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794.

Bibliography

General Histories of the American Revolution

Alden, John R. *A History of the American Revolution.* New York: Knopf, 1969. The best overall survey of the Revolution, particularly in its military aspects.

Conway, Thomas. The *War of American Independence, 1775–1783.* New York: Edward Arnold, 1995. Written from a British perspective, Conway includes much valuable material on the extended frontiers of the American war in Europe and the West Indies.

Higginbotham, Don. *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763–1789.* New York: Macmillan, 1971. A detailed, although somewhat chaotic, interpretation of the command dynamics of the Continental army.

Mackesy, Piers. *The War for America, 1775–1783.* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1993. A difficult and diffuse book, written brilliantly but haphazardly, from the British perspective, but containing priceless coverage of British command decision making.

Wood, Gordon. *The American Revolution: A History.* New York: Knopf, 2002. The finest short survey of the Revolution, although more oriented toward social and political issues than military ones.

Collections of Primary Documents

Boyd, Julian P., ed. *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950–2006, 21 vols. The definitive edition of Jefferson's papers.

Conrad, Dennis M., Roger N. Parks, and Martha J. King, eds. *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1976–2005. An ambitious edition of all of Greene's letters and documents; volumes 7–9 cover his service in the Southern campaign.

Dann, John C., ed. *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. An anthology of reminiscences of American soldiers who fought in the various campaigns and battles of the Revolution, many of them drawn from pension application records.

Davies, K. G., ed. *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770–1783. (Colonial Office Series*). Dublin: Irish University Press, 1975–1981), 21 vols. A vast but indispensable collection of the pertinent British military

and political documents on the conduct of the war, including Germain's correspondence and his generals' campaign and battle reports.

Ewald, Johann. *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal.* Edited by Joseph P. Tustin. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. The journal of Capt. Johann Ewald of the Hessian jägers, a humane, literate, sometimes bemused description of his service in every campaign from Trenton to Yorktown.

Foner, Philip, ed. *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine.* Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1948; reprint, 1974. A single-volume compilation of Paine's most controversial publications.

Ford, W. C., ed. *Journals of the Continental Congress*. Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1904–1937. 34 vols. The minutes of the proceedings of the First and Second Continental Congresses, up till the Congress's supersession by the new federal Congress under the 1787 Constitution. Also available online at http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwjc.html.

Gruber, Ira D., ed. *John Peebles' American War: The Diary of a Scottish Grenadier, 1776–1782*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 1998. Unlike Capt. Ewald's journal, which was rewritten years after the events he describes, Capt. Peebles's diary is hurried, informative, observant, and contemporary, and allows a view of the Revolution through the eyes of a British junior officer.

Hutchinson, Peter O., ed. *The Diary and Letters of His Excellency, Thomas Hutchinson*. 1884; New York: Ames reprint, 1973, 2 vols. A chronicle of frustration from the ultimate Loyalist.

Jensen, Merrill, ed. *Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763–1776.* Indianapolis: Hackett, 1967. A volume in the classic Bobbs-Merrill "American Heritage Series," this volume collects 17 principal political arguments made by American writers for (and against) independence (including Paine's *Common Sense*).

Macdonald, William, ed. *Select Charters and Other Documents Illustrative of American History, 1606–1775*. New York: Macmillan, 1899. Although this collection of 80 charters, bills, and decrees includes the major documents of all the colonies, from their founding, the last 25 form the principal documents leading up to the Revolution, concluding with the Prohibitory Bill.

Ross, Charles, ed. *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis.* London: J. Murray, 1859, 3 vols. A venerable but extremely handy

collection of Cornwallis's correspondence, including his service in America (volume two), which undermines the stereotype of Cornwallis as a brutal incompetent.

Scheer, George F. and Hugh Rankin. *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolution Through the Eyes of Those Who Fought and Lived It*. Cleveland: World Publishing, 1957. Like the Dann collection, this brings together the personal accounts of British soldiers on campaign in the Revolution.

Sparks, Jared, ed. *Writings of George Washington*. Boston: John M. Russell, 1834–1837, 12 vols. There are numerous anthologies and collections of the writings of George Washington; I have chosen to list the Sparks edition because it is neither too brief, nor so exhaustingly endless as the University of Virginia *Papers of George Washington* edition; volumes 3–8 cover the Revolutionary years.

Syrett, Harold C., ed. *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, 27 vols. A thorough assemblage of Hamilton's letters, reports, and papers; volumes 1–2 cover his service in the Revolution.

Willcox, W. B., ed. *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775–1782*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954. Clinton's self-justifying account of his conduct of the war as British commander in chief in North America.

Campaign and Battle Histories—Biographies—Social and Political Histories

Alden, John R. *General Gage in America*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948. Sympathetically underscores the dilemma of a British officer charged with subduing a people whom he had lived with, almost as one of them.

Arnold, Isaac Newton. *The Life of Benedict Arnold*. Chicago: Jansen, McClurg, 1880. A comprehensive 19th century biography, by a veteran politician and descendant of Arnold.

Babits, Lawrence E. *A Devil of a Whipping: The Battle of Cowpens*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998. A phenomenally detailed account of Morgan's defeat of Tarleton, along with debunking of several myths about the battle.

Bailyn, Bernard. *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967. A landmark study of the political ideas that moved Americans to their Revolution, concentrating on

the broad heritage of Whig, Puritan, and practical sources of opposition to Parliamentary centralization of power.

Benninghoff, Herman O. *The Brilliance of Yorktown: A March of History, 1781 Command and Control, Allied Style*. Gettysburg: Thomas Publications, 2006. A careful analysis of the planning and organization of Washington and Rochambeau's march to Virginia.

Billias, George Athan, ed. *George Washington's Generals and Opponents: Their Exploits and Leadership*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1969. An outstanding collection of biographical essays on the principal British and American commanders of the war.

Bodle, Wayne. *The Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers at War*. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2002. A thorough description of the 1777–1778 Continental army encampment at Valley Forge, with particular emphasis on the failure of Continental logistics and the explosion of several popular stereotypes.

Borick, Carl P. *A Gallant Defense: The Siege of Charleston, 1780*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003. A meticulous description of Charleston's siege, with a preliminary account of the failed 1776 British attack and a particularly well-paced retelling of Sir Henry Clinton's 1780 rematch.

Bowler, R. Arthur. *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775–1783*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. Logistics is a dry subject, and this is a dry book, but it is the most thorough examination of the weak link in British plans to conquer America.

Brumwell, Stephen. *Redcoats: The British Soldier and the War in the Americas, 1755–1763*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. A study of the life and experiences of British soldiers in America through the French and Indian Wars; a useful preliminary to understanding British garrison life in America in the pre-Revolution decade.

Buchanan, John. *The Road to Guilford Courthouse: The American Revolution in the Carolinas*. New York: Wiley, 1997. A rollicking and sprawling account of the Revolution in the Carolina colonies, with forceful and controversial evaluations of a number of the major American players.

———, *The Road to Valley Forge: How Washington Built the Army that Won the Revolution.* New York: Wiley, 2004. A fine account of how Washington constructed the Continental army in the years 1776 and 1777.

Buckley, Roger Norman. *The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in the Revolutionary War*. Gainesville, FL: University of

Florida Press, 1998. A useful comparison study of a British garrison society, this time in the West Indies.

Carp, E. Wayne. *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775–1783*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1984. A sharply focused study on the failures and frustrations of the Continental army's leadership with the civilian politicians who were supposed to supply them.

Chartrand, René. *The French Army in the American War of Independence*. Oxford, UK: Osprey, 1991. A "Men-at-Arms" short book on the reforms and reorganization of the French army after the Seven Years' War, with illustrations of the uniforms and weapons used by Rochambeau's regiments in America.

Clark, J. C. D. *The Language of Liberty, 1660–1832*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994. An ambitious and complex study of the key terms and ideas used by the American Revolutionaries, connecting them particularly to nonconformist religion in England in the 18th century.

Countryman, Edward. *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760–1790*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981. A detailed study of the social tensions generated by the Revolution, especially among the landed gentry of the Hudson Valley and their restless tenants who often sought to ally themselves with the British in order to throw off gentry rule.

Davis, David Brion. *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Davis's survey is a comprehensive account of the whole history of slavery in the Americas, with two chapters that concentrate on the experience of slave refugees during the Revolution.

Dell, Jonathan R. *The French Navy and American Independence: A Study of Arms and Diplomacy, 1774–1787*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975. Examines the contribution of the French navy to the American victory in the Revolution, along with valuable material on the reconstruction of the French navy after the Seven Years' War and the challenge it offered to the Royal Navy in home waters.

Desjardins, Thomas A. *Through A Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold's March to Quebec, 1775*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006. A popular account of Benedict Arnold's overland expedition from the coast of Maine to Quebec, climaxing with the ill-fated attack on Quebec.

Dickinson, H. T., ed. *Britain and the American Revolution*. London: Longman, 1988. A collection of essays on the impact of the American Revolution in the British Isles, with a particularly good chapter on Parliamentary opposition to the American war.

Ellis, Joseph J. *His Excellency George Washington*. New York: Vintage, 2004. A popular one-volume overview of the life of Washington, concentrating mostly on his post-Revolutionary career.

Ferling, John E. *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007. A thick, readable, and clear-as-crystal survey of the Revolution, with the primary emphasis on the campaigns, and an unusually helpful conclusion on the post-Revolution dissolution of the Continental army.

Fischer, David Hackett. *Paul Revere's Ride*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. A marvelous and detailed narrative of the most famous ride in American history, stressing how much of the American response was more organized and "regular" than popular perceptions of the minutemen usually convey.

———. *Washington's Crossing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. Like *Paul Revere's Ride*, a thorough and well-written account of the Battle of Trenton, in which Washington is the unquestioned master of the hour and the embodiment of the Revolution's cause.

Fleming, Thomas J. *Now We Are Enemies: The Story of Bunker Hill*. New York: St. Martins, 1960. Still the best retelling of the Battle of Bunker Hill, well narrated, with good maps and a firm command of the primary sources from both British and American participants.

———.*Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge*. New York: Harper Collins/First Smithsonian, 2005. A popular account of the Valley Forge encampment, with the focus on Washington's political skill in outmaneuvering his critics in Congress and his rivals in uniform.

Flexner, James Thomas. *George Washington in the American Revolution, 1775–1783*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1968. The second volume in Flexner's multi-volume classic biography of Washington, masterfully well written.

Fowler, William M. *Rebels Under Sail: The American Navy during the American Revolution*. New York: Scribner, 1976. A fine popular narrative of the creation and combats of the Continental navy, particularly strong on the Continental navy's first expeditions to the Bahamas.

Freeman, Douglas Southall. *Washington*. Abbreviated by Richard Harwell. New York: Scribner, 1995. Freeman's seven volumes are still the go-to biography of Washington, but for our purposes are wisely distilled here down to a single useful volume.

Furneaux, Rupert. *Saratoga: The Decisive Battle*. London: Allen and Unwin, 1971. A fine account from the British viewpoint, using British source materials.

Gipson, Lawrence Henry. *The Triumphant Empire: The Rumbling of the Coming Storm, 1766–1770*. New York: Knopf, 1967. Volume 12 in Gipson's series on the British Empire before the Revolution; covers the events leading up to the Boston Massacre.

———. *The Triumphant Empire: Thunder-Clouds Gather in the West, 1763–1766.* New York: Knopf, 1967. Volume 11 in Gipson's magisterial survey of politics in Britain and in each of the 13 mainland colonies in the decade before the Revolution; covers the Stamp Act and its repeal.

Golway, Terry. *Washington's General: Nathanael Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution*. New York: Henry Holt, 2005. A splendid biography of Greene, emphasizing both his considerable organizational skills but also the unhappy, thin-skinned temperament that cost him many of the advances he would otherwise have gained.

Greene, Jack P. *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1988. Greene's thesis is that the American colonies were founded as decisive breaks with British culture in the 17th century but were gradually moving toward more and more assimilation to British cultural values until the Revolution intervened.

Greene, J. P. and J. R. Pole, eds. *Colonial British America: Essays in the New History of the Early Modern Era*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984. A state-of-the-art survey of the major topics of historical interest in the history of the British North American colonies, with essays by major historians on each topic.

Gross, Robert A. *The Minutemen and Their World*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1976. A delightfully minute social history of Concord, Massachusetts, and the British raid that brought a revolution to its doorsteps.

Hammon, Neal O. and Richard Taylor. *Virginia's Western War, 1775–1786*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2002. A diffuse and not entirely well-

organized narrative of the British-inspired warfare on Virginia's Kentucky frontier, but teeming with detail.

Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982. A mold-breaking analysis of the culture of colonial Virginia, and why its leadership was moved to gamble on the movement to independence.

Jensen, Merrill. *The Articles of Confederation: An Interpretation of the Social-Constitutional History of the American Revolution, 1774–1781*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1959. The most thorough analysis of the creation and content of the first American "constitution," with vast attention to the quarrels that delayed its ratification and with a surprising amount of sympathy for the distrust of elite government that it seemed to embody.

———. *The Founding of a Nation: A History of the American Revolution, 1763–1776*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1968. An early "social history" of American motives for resistance to British imperial authority in the decade leading up to independence.

Johnston, Henry P. *The Yorktown Campaign and the Surrender of Cornwallis*. New York: Harper, 1881. A classic account of the campaign and siege of Yorktown; despite its age, its account of the armies and the progress of the siege is more detailed and useful than many modern versions.

Ketchum, Richard M. *Saratoga: Turning Point of America's Revolutionary War*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997. A popular history of the Saratoga campaign, covering the pre-invasion American preparations, the capture of Ticonderoga, and the British debacles at Bennington and Bemis Heights.

———. *Victory at Yorktown: The Campaign that Won the Revolution*. New York: Henry Holt, 2004. Another popular battle history by the Ketchum, although only the second half of the book really concentrates on Yorktown.

Kurtz, Stephen and James Hutson, eds. *Essays on the American Revolution*. New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1973. An important collection of essays, reinterpreting many of the customary understandings of the Revolution, including an essay by John Shy on the military experience.

Mahan, Alfred Thayer. *The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence*. 1913; reprint: Gloucestershire, UK: Nonsuch Publishing, 2006. Written by one of the great naval strategists of the "dreadnought" era, it remains a fabulously detailed and authoritative

account of the major actions of the American, French, and British navies in the Revolution.

Maier, Pauline. *American Scripture: Making the Declaration of Independence*. New York: Vintage, 1997. A detailed analysis of the sources Jefferson drew upon in composing the Declaration of Independence, and the document's subsequent reputation as a touchstone definition of American democracy.

Main, Jackson Turner. *The Sovereign States, 1775–1783*. New York: New Viewpoints, 1973. A skillful political history of the American colonies under the rule of Congress and the state governments.

May, Robin. *The British Army in North America, 1775–1783*. Oxford: Osprey, 1974. An early volume in the "Men-at-Arms" series of short illustrated books, concentrating on the arms, uniforms, and equipment of the British troops in the Revolutionary War.

———. *Wolfe's Army*. Oxford: Osprey, 1974. Another volume in the "Men-at-Arms" series, this time focused on the British army in North America during the Seven Years' War.

McConnell, Michael N. *Army and Empire: British Soldiers on the American Frontier, 1758–1775*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. A fine analysis of the composition and personal lives of British soldiers stationed in America up to the brink of the Revolution.

McCusker, John J. and Russell R. Menard. *The Economy of British America*, *1607–1789*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991. A hefty but absolutely authoritative volume on the colonial economy, teeming with data and insights on the struggle of Americans to stabilize their place in the overall imperial economy.

McGuire, Thomas J. *Battle of Paoli*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2000. A vigorous narrative of the daring night-time attack on Anthony Wayne's Pennsylvania Continentals; benefits from a detailed knowledge of the geography of the battlefield.

———. *The Philadelphia Campaign: Brandywine and the Fall of Philadelphia*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole, 2006. The first volume in a large-scale account of the British campaign to capture Philadelphia, focusing in this case on the defeat at Brandywine. Probably the most exhaustive account of the Brandywine battle ever written.

Miller, Nathan. *Sea of Glory: The Continental Navy Fights for Independence, 1775–1783*. New York: Donald McKay, 1974. A popular history of the formation and personalities of the Continental navy.

Milsop, John. *Continental Infantryman of the American Revolution*. Oxford: Osprey, 2004. Another in the illustrated series of “Men-at-Arms” books, concentrating on the uniforms and equipment of the Continental army.

Morris, Richard B. *The Peacemakers: The Great Powers and American Independence*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965. A venerable but still vital account of the complexities of the peace-making process, from the establishment of American representatives in Europe to the Treaty of Paris.

Nash, Gary B. *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America*. New York: Viking, 2005. A somewhat garrulous survey of the “losers” of the Revolution, with the conclusion that the Revolution represented a struggle for genuine democracy that was quashed by American elites.

———. *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979. Surveys the breakdown of social and economic life in three major colonial port cities and draws attention to the role these disruptions played in preparing Americans for revolution.

Nelson, Paul David. *Anthony Wayne: Soldier of the Early Republic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985. Outstanding biographical survey of “mad Anthony,” whose post-Revolutionary career was almost as legendary as his Revolutionary one.

Norton, Mary Beth. *The British Americans: The Loyalist Exiles in England, 1774–1789*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1972. A sprightly and sympathetic account of the agony of the American Loyalists, first to influence British policy toward vigorous suppression of the Revolution, and then to wring restitution from the hands of an unsympathetic imperial government.

O’Shaughnessy, Andrew Jackson. *An Empire Divided: The American Revolution and the British Caribbean.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000. Examines how the British West Indies sympathized with American resistance to British imperial policies and aided the Revolutionaries at the outset, but without finally committing themselves to the Revolutionary struggle.

Pancake, John S. *1777: The Year of the Hangman*. University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1977. Chronicles the fighting of the year 1777, with especially good material on the Saratoga campaign.

———. *This Destructive War: The British Campaign in the Carolinas, 1780–82*. University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985. A plainer, but better organized history than Buchanan’s of the Revolution in the

Carolinas, concentrating on the fall of Charleston, the debacle at Camden, and the recovery of the rebel fortunes under Greene.

Rakove, Jack. *The Beginnings of National Politics: An Interpretive History of the Continental Congress*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979. The classic account of the struggles of the Continental Congress to give political shape to the Revolutionary impulse.

Randall, Willard Sterne. *Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor*. New York: William Morrow and Co., 1990. If it is possible to write a biography of Arnold that makes him believable without also trying to apologize for him, this is it. A full-length treatment.

———. *George Washington: A Life*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997. The best single-volume life of Washington, with ample coverage of Washington's pre-Revolutionary years.

Reich, Jerome R. *British Friends of the American Revolution.*, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1998. A short collection of essays on the principal American sympathizers in Britain and in Parliament.

Reid, Stuart. *British Redcoat, 1740–1793*. London: Osprey, 1996. A volume in the "Men-at-Arms" advanced "Warrior" series, with a highly illuminating discussion of the recruitment, training, and drill of British soldiers in the Revolutionary era.

Royster, Charles. *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979. A controversial interpretation of the tension between the republican ideals of Revolutionary politics and the professional practice of war as embodied in the Continental soldier.

Schecter, Barnet. *The Battle for New York: The City at the Heart of the American Revolution*. New York: Walker Publishing Company, 2002. A popular history of the role played by New York City in the Revolution, with especially good material on the Battle of Long Island and the struggle for Manhattan.

Selby, John E. *The Revolution in Virginia, 1775–1783*. Williamsburg: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, 1988. A rapid but very useful survey of Virginia's role in the Revolution, both for the battles fought on its soil and for the political struggle within.

Shy, John. *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976. A collection of Shy's "accidental" essays on the military history of the Revolution.

———. *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965. A shrewd analysis of the command and logistical difficulties faced by the British army in its attempt to police the British North American colonies in the decade before the Revolution.

Silverman, Kenneth. A *Cultural History of the American Revolution*. New York: Crowell, 1976. A vast survey of how the arts—literature, drama, painting, music—were enlisted in the service of the Revolutionary cause, which in turn affected the development of a uniquely American culture.

Smith, Samuel S. *The Battle of Brandywine*. Monmouth Beach, NJ: Philip Freneau Press, 1976. This tall, slim book is the best source on the Battle of Brandywine, with a full record of units involved and maps of the battlefield.

Stephenson, Michael. *Patriot Battles: How the War of Independence Was Fought*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. A popular history of the soldiers and their battles; the first half of the book is devoted to the weapons and tactics of the British and American armies, while the second half turns to capsule histories of the major battles.

Taafe, Stephen R. *The Philadelphia Campaign, 1777–1778*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2003. The best single campaign history of the American Revolution, taking in the “big picture” of the battles for Philadelphia from the summer of 1777 until the British evacuation of the rebel capital and the Battle at Monmouth Courthouse.

Taylor, Alan. *American Colonies*. New York: Viking, 2001. A huge survey of the European colonization of North America, with particularly helpful attention to the social and political world of French-speaking, but British-ruled, Canada on the eve of the Revolution.

Thomas, Evan. *John Paul Jones: Sailor, Hero, Father of the American Navy*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003. A fine popular history of the first major American naval hero, without attempting to wish away his crude origins or violent, almost psychotic, behavior.

Tower, Charlemagne. *The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1895. A vast but still worthwhile compendium of Lafayette’s letters and activities in the Revolution.

Trussell, John B. B. *Epic on the Schuylkill: The Valley Forge Encampment, 1777–1778*. Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1974. By a veteran Pennsylvania historian, this thick booklet offers maps,

descriptions of units, and the ebb-and-flow of Continental morale during the Valley Forge winter.

van Buskirk, Judith L. *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002. An unusual interpretation of the divide between rebels and Loyalists in New York that argues that both quietly cooperated across that divide much more than they used it to punish each other.

Volo, James M. *Blue Water Patriots: The American Revolution Afloat*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007. A scholarly treatment of the Continental navy, with particularly helpful material on its logistics and command structure.

Walsh, John Evangelist. *The Execution of Major André*. New York: St. Martin's, 2001. A brief popular account of Maj. John André's mission to Benedict Arnold, along with a full retelling of André's capture, trial, and execution; questions the "nobility" of André and defends the integrity of the three militiamen who captured him.

Weintraub, Stanley. *Iron Tears: America's Battle for Freedom, Britain's Quagmire, 1775–1783*. New York: Free Press, 2005. Despite an often-confusing cast of characters and an uncertain narrative line, still the best popular account of British home politics during the Revolution; emphasizes the unpopularity of the American war from the start and the steady decay of support for it in Parliament.

Wolf, Stephanie Grauman. *As Various as Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans*. New York: HarperCollins, 1993. A wonderful survey of American social life in the era of the Revolution, examining family life, the creation of domestic space, gender, childhood, the economy, and social networks.

Wood, Gordon. *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776–1787.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969. One of the great books on the ideas that ruled the minds of Revolutionary Americans, this time (unlike Bailyn) focusing on the domestic sources of the Revolution's ideology.

Wright, Robert K. *The Continental Army*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986. A highly useful analysis of the creation and structure of the Continental army, with particular attention to how Washington developed it out of the New England militia and guided it through two successive reorganizations; the appendices include capsule histories of all Continental regiments.

Wright, Ronald. *Stolen Continents: The Americas through Indian Eyes since 1492*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992. A passionate brief on behalf of the Indian nations of the American continents, with particularly useful material on the struggle of the Cherokee nation during the Revolution.

Internet Resources

http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/jefferson/. Thomas Jefferson's papers are available electronically through the e-text collection of the University of Virginia.

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/continental/ and http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwjc.html. These two sites assemble digital images and electronic transcriptions of the Journals of the Continental Congresses and their major publications.

http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html and http://www.rotunda.upress.virginia.edu. These two sites present electronic access to the letters and papers of George Washington. The first is located at the Library of Congress; the second is the digital-access edition of the University of Virginia Press's Papers of George Washington project.

http://www.americanrevolution.com. This is a general-information site on the Revolution, with popular discussions of Revolutionary history, links to other Revolution websites, and a message board.

http://www.britishbattles.com. Although this is a general site devoted to British military history, its web pages offer excellent coverage of the major battles of the Revolution, along with particularly useful maps and uniform illustrations.

http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/aea/. This site gives digital access to the Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive, which includes John Adams's diary, autobiography, and letters.

http://www.nps.gov/revwar/index.html. This site collects into one place access to all the Revolutionary War battlefield sites managed by the National Park Service, with information on the battles, current schedules of events, and directions.

http://www.npg.si.edu/col/age/. This collection offers digitized portraits of the major figures of the Revolution from the collections of the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, DC.