"We Began the Contest for Liberty Ill Provided': Military Leadership in the Continental Army, 1775-1783"

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“‘We Began the Contest for Liberty Ill Provided’: Military Leadership in the Continental Army, 1775-1783”

A Dissertation Presented

by

SEANEGAN P. SCULLEY

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2015

History
“’We Began the Contest for Liberty Ill Provided’: Military Leadership in the Continental Army, 1775-1783”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is with much gratitude that I acknowledge the support and guidance given by many people over these past four years. To Barry Levy and Kevin Sweeney, you guided me through both a thesis and dissertation. Thank you for encouraging me to take my investigation from the Seven Years’ War into the Revolution and for your mentorship and friendship. Guy Chet and Steve Pendery, you took a chance on an eager student you had not yet met and provided the guidance and discussions necessary to help me learn what I did not know. I could not have done this without your support.

To my commanders over the past few years, Colonel Gail Yoshitani, Colonel H. Clint Kirk, and Lieutenant Colonel J. Keith Purvis, thank you for your understanding and support. You gave me the time and mentorship to accomplish both our missions and my goal. Thank you.

To my parents, Mary and Pat, I owe my love of history. You encouraged me from the very start to respect the past and learn from it. And over the past four years, you have read what I read, read what I wrote, and volunteered to come on this journey with me. The gratitude I have for your support and love, both for this project and for me, cannot be expressed in words.

Finally, to my best friend and partner in life, Jenny, I owe everything. For the past twenty years we have experienced the challenges that come with a military life together. Your efforts to complete this project were equal to or greater than mine. This belongs to both of us. I love you.
ABSTRACT

“‘WE BEGAN THE CONTEST FOR LIBERTY ILL PROVIDED’: MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN THE CONTINENTAL ARMY, 1775-1783”

MAY 2015

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In 1775, a Virginia gentleman-planter was given command of a New England army outside of Boston and the Continental Army was born. Over the course of eight years, a cultural negotiation concerning the use of and limits to military authority was worked out between the officers and soldiers of the Continental Army that we call leadership today. How this army was led, and how the interactions between officers and soldiers from the various states of the new nation changed their understandings of the proper exercise of military authority, was codified in The Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States. The result was a form of military leadership that recognized the autonomy of the individual soldiers, a changing concept of honor, and a new American tradition of military service.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Washington wrote his first general order as commander of the Continental Army on July 3, 1775. To accurately determine how many men were fit for duty, he told the regiments surrounding Boston to conduct a muster and report their numbers to his headquarters.¹ The next day he notified the troops that they were now placed under the command of the Continental Congress rather than their specific colonial governments. Distinctions (of what was not specified) by individual colony were to be ignored.² A few days later a court-martial found Captain John Callender guilty of cowardice for his actions at Breed’s Hill and sentenced him to be cashiered from the service. Washington began mentoring his officers, exhorting them to show courage at all times.³ In less than a week, the first and only Commander-in-Chief was taking command, in a very assertive manner, of the Continental Army.

Yet the army Washington took command of that week was not truly a continental army. It was largely an army from New England that had just accepted a Virginian planter as its leader. When Washington was finally able to get strength reports into his headquarters from the regiments, he learned approximately 19,500 soldiers were present.


and fit for duty. Five colonies were represented and while Pennsylvania had a contingent of 925 soldiers, the rest of the troops were from New England and 60% of those soldiers were from one colony, Massachusetts.\(^4\)

The new commander-in-chief was not pleased with the soldiers and officers he met in Cambridge that summer. The officers lacked courage and the soldiers were “a dirty and nasty people.” But he did judge them willing to fight well. Writing his brother on August 20, 1775, Washington claimed these soldiers could have defeated the British regulars at Bunker Hill two months before if they had been led by good, courageous officers ready to provide the leadership needed to win.\(^5\)

Why did these soldiers from New England make such a poor initial impression on their new commander? Perhaps his expectations were too high before he arrived. From the distant colonies of Virginia and Pennsylvania, the battles at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts on April 19, 1775 must have appeared a validation of republican ideals. As Washington described that day to his friend, George William Fairfax, American citizens under arms successfully defended their liberties and stopped “Ministerial Troops” from destroying private property. The British retreat was a rout, despite reinforcements from Lord Percy’s Brigade and Washington hoped this would convince Lord Sandwich that Americans would fight to protect what was rightfully theirs and they would do so successfully.\(^6\)

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Of course this account, based on reports received in Philadelphia just prior to Congress assuming control of these armed men surrounding Boston, did not include an understanding of the difficulties faced by the officers in charge at Cambridge. Artemus Ward, commanding from Cambridge, spent the months from April to July trying to organize a camp of almost 20,000 soldiers who possessed little experience living in such a large community. Boston was the largest town in the region and its population was no more than 16,000 at the time. Ward gave orders regulating latrine duty and other tasks required to prevent the spread of disease among the soldiery while he prohibited prostitution, profanity, and excessive drinking. The men were to attend sermon daily and maintain the protection and sanctity of God.\(^7\)

Convincing the soldiers to follow these rules was not an easy task. Though some of the officers, including Ward, had served during the French and Indian War twelve years prior, most of the enlisted soldiers and many of the younger officers had little military experience. Their conception of military service came from militia drills in their towns and stories told by their elders. David How, a seventeen-year-old boy from Methuen, Massachusetts, was one of these soldiers encamped around Boston. He and his five brothers all served in the Revolution and David was both a minuteman at Lexington and a soldier in Colonel Paul Dudley Sargent’s regiment at Breed’s Hill.\(^8\) Private How


spoke often of the sermons he attended that were given by his regimental chaplain. He described parading in front of the regiment’s major to have his musket appraised.\(^9\) While these portions of How’s diary suggest elements of discipline were being enforced, other portions of his account illustrate Private How did not believe his officers were entitled to his unqualified obedience. Instead, there appeared to be little social distance between privates and the officers in charge of them at the company level.

For the next few months after the weapon inspection, Private How sold his original musket to a colonel, purchased a new musket and then sold it to another soldier, always at a profit to himself.\(^10\) In February 1776, How’s lieutenant, David Chandler, died of smallpox. When Lieutenant Chandler died he owed Private How thirteen shillings. A week later Chandler’s brother paid How the debt.\(^11\) It is hard to imagine Lieutenant Chandler lowering himself to borrow money from someone he viewed as significantly socially inferior. Instead, these soldiers looked more like young acquaintances traveling together on a military adventure.

While this business of borrowing money and buying and selling muskets testifies to How’s personal (and possibly cultural) views on the merits of the entrepreneurial spirit, it also underscores the difficulties faced by more senior officers. Soldiers experienced months of boredom as they waited for the British to make another attempt to


\(^9\) Ibid., 1, 4-5.

\(^10\) Ibid., 4, 6, 10.

\(^11\) Ibid., 7.
attack outside of the confines of Boston. Men paid prostitutes for entertainment, drank liquor excessively, and gambled their money away. Two soldiers combined the sins of drunkenness and gambling, wagering over who could drink the most in the shortest amount of time. Within two hours, one of the two gamblers was dead, apparently from alcohol poisoning. The leadership challenges faced by senior officers were exacerbated by the fact that soon after the first few months of the Army’s existence, 3500 soldiers were reported too sick to accomplish their duties and hundreds more were on furlough. These men not fit for duty comprised about 15% of the overall troop strength of the organization.

While the reality of disciplinary problems probably clashed with his ideal of a virtuous republican army, it also certainly ran contrary to Washington’s desire to command a more professional army capable of defeating British forces in a conventional war. Washington’s ideas regarding the necessary qualities of a successful army had been developed during the French and Indian War. He spent time serving as a volunteer officer under the tutelage of several British commanders and was the first commander of the Virginia Regiment in 1756 and 1757. During that time, especially while training his regiment, Washington attempted to mold himself into a professional officer and disciplined his men to meet the same professional standards.

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12 Ibid., 5.

13 Lesser, 4-5.

Central to his conception of military professionalism was the belief that officers exercised the right to command through social recognition of their personal honor. While honor in some societies can be conferred on an individual through birthrights, for Washington personal honor was gained and retained through personal actions and social status. In his earliest writings as a military leader, Washington did exhibit a belief that a sense of honor could be inculcated in an individual officer if honorable action was found wanting, a task he worked hard to complete with his colonial officers in the Virginia Regiment.\footnote{Washington, “Letter to Robert Dinwiddie, Winchester, April 18, 1756,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-02-03-02-0010}.} If an officer exemplified his personal honor to his soldiers, they would, in return, confer the right to command them on the officer. Personal honor was, then, the prerequisite to leadership because it governed proper behavior for the leader that would be recognized by his followers.

Bertram Wyatt Brown explained this understanding of honor in his book \textit{Southern Honor}. According to Brown, the concept of honor combined three necessary elements: a sense of self-worth in the individual, a show of that worth to the public, and an acceptance of that worth by the public. A man of honor had first to believe himself worthy of esteem among others in his society and then exemplify that worthiness to his community. Yet that was not enough. The most important component to this formulation was the acceptance of the community that this man’s actions adequately proved his worth. If the community agreed, honor was conferred.\footnote{Bertram Wyatt Brown, \textit{Southern Honor: Ethics and Behavior in the Old South} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 14-5.} It was this concept of personal honor that Washington found lacking in the officers and soldiers of the new Continental
Army. From his perspective, New England officers did not appear concerned if their actions failed to reflect the necessary sense of self-worth nor did the soldiers convey the proper attitude of acceptance that the officers were worthy of commanding obedience to orders.

Was Washington correct, then? Were the soldiers outside Boston ineffectively led before Washington arrived? Was the New England officer corps devoid of the proper conception of personal honor necessary to legitimate their authority to command? Or were cultural beliefs regarding military service and military leadership simply different? And how would this perception by Washington effect how the Continental Army was led throughout the American Revolution?

To understand these questions and answer them, it will first be helpful to define military leadership in a general sense, removing cultural connotations from the term. Since leadership requires communication and agreement between individuals within an organization or society, the term is laden with cultural values and beliefs. The word is, therefore, a cultural concept and the goal is to strip it of those cultural connotations in order to better define what it meant in the Continental Army rather than bring outside cultural understandings into the investigation. To accomplish this task it will be necessary to briefly describe what an army is in its most basic (and universalist) form. An army is, of course, a type of human organization. To address many large problems, societies create teams of individuals to work together and solve specific problems for the good of the society. Some problems involve food production while others center on spiritual protection and winning the approval of a god or gods. Problems of a more immediate and dangerous nature are related to self-defense and territorial expansion. In each case, the
organization formed to tackle challenges requires a system of decision-making that is culturally acceptable to those individuals involved. The system devised to make those decisions can be generally termed leadership.

To make these decisions and then act upon them in an efficient and effective manner often requires the majority of individuals belonging to an organization to accept the decisions made by a minority. Those individuals are, in reality, granting some or all of their individual power to those in a leadership role. People may do this consciously and voluntarily or they may believe they have no choice, depending on their cultural conceptions of power and authority. In the case of armies, this cultural understanding of the appropriate level of submission may differ from most other organizations in their society due to the immediacy of the danger to life and limb and the recognition by the group and society that the security of all hinges upon the success of the organization preparing for battle. Furthermore, efficient and effective decision-making can more easily be understood as paramount in a military organization and so the leadership structure is often more hierarchical than perhaps is acceptable in the society from which the military was created.

The relationships between members of an organization often imply some exercise of power and authority. Max Weber famously defined power as “the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action.”17 For Weber, power was coercive in nature, a force used to compel some men to follow the direction of others.

And as such, power was a universal force, defined once and applicable to all societies. Almost a century later, historian Edmund Morgan defined power as a socially constructed myth with far-reaching consequences for a society when that conception changed.¹⁸ For Morgan, the transformation of English political structure from the English Civil War to the American Revolution served as an example of power becoming re-conceptualized. A monarchy based on the ideas of the divine right of kings gave way to the sovereignty of the people. In other words, the basis of power shifted from it origination with God to its foundation within the individual, a belief pivotal to the natural philosophers of the eighteenth century. The result was revolution, both at home and in the colonies.

Both Weber and Morgan explored not only the nature of power but also the relationship between those with power and those without. For Weber, economic means and social status allowed the few to exercise power over the many while Morgan claimed the transformation of Anglo understanding created the unintended consequence of decoupling status from power. Both discussions give important insight into both the nature of power and the authority to use it, and are useful to a discussion on leadership. Understanding power as both an exercise of will and a “myth” leads to questions concerning the cultural nature of authority (ie., the legitimate use of power) and how members of a society work through the differences between an idealized understanding of power and the reality of its use by leaders.

Taking into account the discussion above regarding organizations, their generalized purpose in societies, and the characterization of power, leadership can be defined generally as the cultural construct within which decisions for an organization are

made and actions are taken to effect that decision. More important, leadership is
conducted through a negotiation of authority between the leaders and the led to determine
how both the decisions and their method of execution are reached. Negotiation is crucial
to maintaining the legitimacy of the system in question. This negotiation is cultural in
nature because the understanding of power, its origin and the acceptable use of it, are not
universal. Both those in charge and those following have agency. They can accept,
acquiesce, resist, revolt, and come to an evolving understanding of the acceptable
eexercise of authority, influenced by cultural norms.

Over time, these organizations can form their own institutional sub-cultures as the
organization seeks to provide continuity between succeeding “generations” of members.
The sub-culture of an organization will usually tend not to diverge too far from that of the
greater society from which it was formed because it is constantly assimilating new
members that were raised in, and presumably accept, the larger cultural beliefs of their
society. But as historian John Lynn pointed out several years ago, military sub-cultures
tend to be more divergent (and accepted as necessarily so by society) due to the extreme
nature of their purpose. Still, he noted, that divergence must fall within certain acceptable
parameters. If it does not, cultural values will change to meet reality or the society will
force reality to come back in line with cultural ideals.¹⁹ This greater degree of divergence
can include both a higher elevation of some values (for example courage, loyalty, honor)
and the compromise of other beliefs (for example freedom of speech or individualism),
often in the name of collective security.

The longer an organization remains, the deeper entrenched its sub-culture can become. As older members of the institution increasingly accept new values and beliefs shaped by their experiences and possible isolation from the larger society, they could encourage and enforce assimilation of those divergent beliefs on new members. Inversely, a new organization will exercise its objectives first with values more closely aligned to those of the larger society and, over time, begin to elevate and compromise certain cultural norms to meet the challenges of their environment. This can be a turbulent time for the members of an organization as they negotiate among themselves and with their society over changes perceived as necessary. The Continental Army would certainly fall within this category of a new organization.

While the Continental Army was a newly formed organization, it will not be asserted here that it was formed in a vacuum, a social experiment to wage war in a purely republican manner. As has already been successfully proven over at least the last 30 years, there was a multitude of military cultures developed in the American colonies prior to 1775. Instead, it will be argued that those various military solutions competed with one another for supremacy in the Continental Army as officers and soldiers from across the colonies came together to accomplish the overarching goal of establishing independence from the British Empire. Central to that competition, or negotiation, was how the Army would be led.

In terms of military organization, the British model was accepted by all colonies, and then states, concerned. At its heart was the infantry regiment, comprised of ten companies, with between 60 and 100 men per company. A captain led his company with the help of a lieutenant, an ensign, and several non-commissioned officers, including a
first sergeant, sergeants, and corporals. A colonel and his staff of one lieutenant colonel, one major, and an adjutant commanded the regiment. While this basic organization of leadership structure could lead some to assume more similarities between the British and American armies than actually existed, a cultural understanding of leadership as a negotiation of authority will lead to other conclusions. A closer look at American colonial military events supports this line of investigation.

The history of colonial Virginia provides an example of a society that only sporadically invented military solutions to its political problems. While the early history of the colony was marked with violence, first on the eastern seaboard and then on the frontier, the need for military solutions to political problems declined in the eighteenth century. Following the end of Bacon’s Rebellion in 1676, the colony rarely saw a need to create a military organization to defend its borders or increase its territory. Instead, the political leadership relied on alliances with native powers and its relative isolation from both French and Spanish colonies to avoid the expense of war. While the colony maintained a militia system, these local defensive measures were focused on prevention of domestic violence, particularly from its enslaved and indentured sections of society.

The ability to remain aloof from the internecine imperial competition prevalent in the north evaporated in 1754 when George Washington and other investors in the Ohio Company ventured west into the Ohio River Valley. Following a disastrous expedition to the forks of the Ohio River in that year, the governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie,

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established the Virginia Regiment, a provincial army led by Washington as its colonel.\textsuperscript{21} Washington requested to organize the regiment along the British professional model, with two battalions totaling 2000 men. He suggested each battalion would contain ten companies and that three of those companies would be commanded by the field-grade officers of the battalion, again in the fashion of the British professional establishment.\textsuperscript{22} Over the next year, Washington and the House of Burgesses would struggle to enlist even a fraction of the required soldiers as social and political realities emplaced obstacles insurmountable to the colonial establishment. Not until 1758, when William Pitt convinced the Parliament in London to approve funding from London, would the Regiment be fully manned.\textsuperscript{23}

During his tenure as commander, Washington attempted to lead based on the conception of personal honor described above. He also enforced a code of military justice and punishment similar to that of the British Army. Following accusations of misconduct from civilians living in and around his headquarters at Winchester, Washington issued an order stating any officer witnessing “irregularities” and not correcting the problem would be arrested. Non-commissioned officers who did not enforce discipline would be reduced to the ranks and suffer corporal punishment. Soldiers who fought one another would receive 500 lashes without the benefit of a court-martial while those found drunk would


\textsuperscript{23} Titus, 109-25.
receive 100 lashes. The Regiment soon adhered to the Parliamentary act passed in 1754, placing all colonial troops under the British Mutiny Act and while the officers were initially shocked by the severity of these military laws, the Regiment was governed by this system for the remainder of the Seven Years’ War.

From 1758 to 1762, the Regiment did well in the field, even gaining the respect of the British professional officer corps for gallantry under fire. Historian James Titus argues this success was due to a corps of officers and soldiers who served throughout the war, developing unit cohesion and a degree of professionalism. He also points out, correctly, that with the infusion of funds from London, the Regiment was comprised of voluntary, well-paid soldiers who learned to fight on the offensive against their French and Cherokee enemies on the frontier. It is possible he missed one other reason for their acceptance by the British professional establishment. The Virginia Regiment looked very similar to the British Army, led by social elites whose personal honor was accepted by their social subordinates as a legitimate source of authority. Arguably, this was possible because the structure for military leadership did not diverge too far from accepted social and political norms of leadership within the greater colony.

If colonial Virginia’s military history could be characterized as sporadic during the eighteenth century, the history of Massachusetts paints a picture of consistent military tensions from 1636 to 1763. Massachusetts’ provincial military system was not created, it

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25 Titus, 46-72.

26 Ibid., 126-41.
evolved over a period of 120 years as the colony took the lead combating incursions from Canada by both the French and their Indian allies. Several times, the colony was even capable of projecting power deep into French holdings. In 1745 a provincial army from Massachusetts even successfully besieged and captured the French fortress of Louisbourg on Cape Breton with the help of a small squadron from the British Navy.27

While the basic concept of the militia in Massachusetts was not unique, the colony’s ability to raise voluntary regiments to serve for a year or less was exceptional. Following the end of King Philip’s War, the General Court effectively stopped the practice of local impressment by militia committees and instead promoted the enlistment of volunteers for provincial service.28 The local militias served to protect the towns from raids by the French-allied Indians while the General Court possessed the ability to commission officers from the counties to recruit volunteers and create regiments of infantry for campaigns. The rank given to an officer reflected in many cases an assumption by the governor that the officer could raise a certain number of men. In 1748, John Stoddard wrote a letter to Governor William Shirley that illustrates this point. He suggested Ephraim William as a good candidate for the rank of captain in the provincial regiment raised in Berkshire County. Stoddard reported that Williams was “…thought to be the fittest man…I know no man amongst us (except Col. Williams) that men would more cheerfully list under than he…”29 When a person was commissioned a colonel, it

27 For a narrative of Massachusetts’ successful assault on the fortress at Louisbourg, see Fairfax Downey, Louisbourg: A Key to a Continent (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965), 73-102.

was because the governor believed he could raise a regiment of volunteers in his county. Captains were chosen to raise companies, sergeants to recruit a few men for the company. This system worked for over a century with interesting consequences.

As Fred Anderson proved thirty years ago, men who enlisted in the Massachusetts provincial regiments understood their service as contractual in nature. Young men working to gain some form of economic independence, or competence, willingly enlisted for a short term to earn much needed cash and, in many cases, because other members of their families were enlisting as well. Units were formed locally and regionally and those in leadership positions were not socially distant from their soldiers. For all these reasons, discipline was not harsh by the standards of the day, with a Biblical limitation of lashes emplaced on corporal infractions. Capital crimes were referred to the governor. The result was a rather democratic form of military structure, limited by the religious context of the culture in the New England colonies, and re-created every year of the conflict.

Leading soldiers in this system required much more overt negotiations of authority than in the Virginia system. Soldiers enlisted with a certain officer because they trusted that individual. They would not serve in another regiment or company and if they were moved to another unit, or if their leader died and was replaced by another officer

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31 Ibid., 26-50.

32 Ibid., 111-41.
not to their liking, they would resist in various ways. In 1755, following the death of Colonel Ephraim Williams near Lake George, the men of his regiment expressed their displeasure at the temporary appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Gilbert as regimental commander. The field commander, General William Johnson, selected him for his seniority of rank but he was not from Hampshire County. Due to their unrest and a petition sent by the citizens of Northampton, Gilbert was soon replaced with the local favorite, Lieutenant Colonel Seth Pomeroy.\textsuperscript{33} Pomeroy, as an experienced military leader from Hampshire County, had the reputation among both the soldiers and their town members to effectively take the position.

In other instances, entire companies were known to desert their post, despite the tactical or strategic consequences, if their enlistments were complete. In February 1758, Captain Ebenezer Learned faced a difficult dilemma. The enlistments for his company had just expired. The British commander at their posting outside Stillwater, New York demanded the company of Massachusetts provincials remain until he received reinforcements. Learned’s men told him they were planning to desert if he could not convince the British command to release them. Captain Learned agreed with his soldiers and when the British officer, Captain Philip Skene, refused to acquiesce to the provincials’ demands, Learned left with his company.\textsuperscript{34}

In response to the relative power of soldiers to resist those actions by their leadership viewed as unacceptable, and because officers were forced to re-enlist soldiers


\textsuperscript{34} Rufus Putnam, \textit{Memoirs of Rufus Putnam} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903), 11.
at the beginning of each campaign season, officers were not able to lead through a recognition of personal honor based solely upon social status or with the aid of draconian military laws to enforce discipline. Instead, they led by exemplifying courage, common sense, and religious fortitude to maintain the loyalties of their soldiers and communities. Of course, this system of decision-making appeared inefficient and unprofessional to their British counterparts. While Captain Ebenezer Learned certainly believed his decision to lead his company to desert was justified, the British commander could only see this action as both a betrayal and a cowardly act. While different perspectives give separate meaning to these actions, two points can be reasonably asserted. First, the military system developed in Massachusetts was consistent with cultural expectations from the colony. Second, the style of leadership utilized was one that was both acceptable to the soldiers who served and to the communities from which they came.

These examples drawn from Virginia and Massachusetts serve as useful bookends between which other military systems developed in the various colonies. Though a neighbor of Virginia, the colony of Pennsylvania could not strictly follow Virginia’s example during the French and Indian War. Prior to the war, Pennsylvania was one of the most peaceful British colonies in North America. Its Quaker-dominated Assembly refused to institute any formal military structure and the ethnic minorities on the frontier were left to fend for themselves. Once French forces moved south into the Ohio Valley, colonial elites were forced to change their position and attempted to create a Pennsylvania Regiment. Initially, men were enlisted for a year, soldiers often elected

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their officers, and discipline was very lax. Following a crisis at Fort Augusta in 1757, when the Regiment refused to remain longer than enlistments allowed, the governor convinced the Assembly to authorize a more professional model, with three-year enlistments, officers commissioned by the governor, and discipline determined by the British Mutiny Act.³⁶

These “Old Levies” were augmented one year later with 23 companies of “New Levies,” forces generated with the help of William Pitt’s policies in London. The “New Levies” followed a third structure, similar to those instituted in Massachusetts, with soldiers enlisted for one year but officer ranks determined by the number of men enlisted by that officer. This structure was made possible with the promise of British money to pay for American provincial troops. The result was companies drawn from specific regions that were ethnically homogenous. According to R.S. Stephenson, fifty percent of the companies were Scots-Irish, twenty-five percent were English, and the remainder was drawn from the Welsh and German communities in the colony.³⁷

If experimentation and turbulence characterized Pennsylvania’s evolution, studies suggest quite a different story unfolded in the closest neighbor to Massachusetts, the colony of Connecticut. During King Philip’s War, the colony drafted large numbers of its men in a war for survival. Following the conclusion of the conflict, however, Connecticut became more secure and found less need for a defensive force. In the early years of the eighteenth century, the military reputation of the colony waned as the colonial government struggled to raise provincial regiments to aid in the projection of British

³⁶ Ibid., 200-4.

³⁷ Ibid., 204-9.
imperial power against their French neighbors. Over a period of seventy years, the colony came to an accommodation. Arguably for fear of losing their political autonomy if they failed to properly support British imperial ambitions, Connecticut created a semi-professional provincial force structure that drew soldiers from the lower classes of society with officers commissioned by the governor. Still, Selesky’s study proved these officers and soldiers remained socially quite close, especially at the level of the companies within the regiments, due to a reluctance of social elites to serve in uniform.

Though these two examples of Pennsylvania and Connecticut do not include a more in-depth examination of the relationship between officers and their soldiers, or utilize anecdotal evidence to highlight the negotiation of authority between them, they do illustrate the variation of military structures and cultures developing in the colonies prior to the American Revolution. It can also be argued, then, that both the soldiers who served and their various colonial societies created different expectations concerning leadership in the military. It was within this environment of competing visions and perspectives that George Washington took command of the Continental Army in 1775.

When Washington expressed his displeasure with the officers of New England, he was both expressing a cultural bias and noting concrete examples of poor leadership. In no culture easily identifiable is it considered a virtue for military officers to show cowardice in the face of the enemy, as was the case in the conviction of Captain John Callender. Yet Washington began “mentoring” his officers on the virtues of courage four

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39 Ibid., 168-200.
days after arriving in Cambridge and following one completed court-martial of a captain for cowardice. It can be argued four days was a short time to determine there was a problem of cowardice among an officer corps numbering over 1300 officers.\footnote{Lesser, 4-5.}

Furthermore, Washington quickly complained to John Hancock, then President of the Congress, that his delinquency in reporting troop numbers was due to a lack of discipline among the officers.\footnote{Washington, “Letter to John Hancock, Cambridge, July 10-11, 1775,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-01-02-0047-0003}.}

Still, these officers, without the benefit of Washington’s guidance, managed to ride a rapidly rising tide of popular force that drove the British regulars from Lexington and Concord back to Boston and then exacted a costly victory on the enemy at Breed’s Hill, leaving the British where they started, bottled up in Boston. Certainly, the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts gave command of the forces to Artemus Ward largely because of his experiences in the previous war but also for his political connections to the country party. Yet each regiment fought separately at the Battle of Bunker Hill, and for commanders the soldiers chose to serve under. While the officers and soldiers constructing the redoubt on Breed’s Hill accepted the leadership of Colonel William Prescott, no general officer or field officer exercised overall command on the battlefield. With Colonel Prescott in the redoubt on Breed’s Hill was Major General Joseph Warren who refused to take charge because he had not yet received his formal commission from the Congress and lacked the military experience of Prescott. He fought as a volunteer private. And there was confusion at Bunker Hill but this was due to an inconsistency of
experience and training among the various regiments and an unwillingness to obey Israel Putnam as he attempted to move units from Bunker’s Hill to Breed’s Hill. In other words, failures during the battle were due in large part to a lack of political coordination between the four New England governments and their forces in the field.

Still, the forces occupying the redoubt on Breed’s Hill and defending the flanks of that position fought with discipline and courage. Colonel Prescott mounted a defense on Breed’s Hill that repelled the British regulars twice and resulted in a victory so costly to the British (1054 British soldiers killed or wounded from a total force of 2300)\(^{42}\) that they were eventually forced to abandon Boston, following the arrival of artillery from Fort Ticonderoga. Captain Thomas Knowlton of Connecticut and Colonel John Stark of New Hampshire, defending the left flank behind both a fence and stone wall, effectively defeated every British attempt to overrun their position. But these officers essentially fought their own battles. On their third attempt, the British regulars gained the redoubt on the hill, despite never flanking the position, largely because the American forces ran out of ammunition. The Americans in the earthen fort fought a rear guard action hand-to-hand against the British with the support of a company that remained in the flaming Charlestown, while Stark’s forces still defending the fence and wall on the American left flank withdrew on their own across Charlestown Neck to Cambridge.\(^{43}\) While American


\(^{43}\) Ibid., 137-84.
casualties were high at 450 soldiers killed or wounded, the British managed to capture only 31 soldiers, most of who were mortally wounded.\textsuperscript{44}

For over a century, Massachusetts and the other New England colonies fielded forces capable on the battlefield. While these provincial forces often lacked training in conventional warfare, they often performed quite well when used as light infantry for skirmishing and ranging. Their most glaring military weakness was in the arena of logistics and transportation, an issue Lord Loudon focused on when he took command of British forces in North America in 1756.\textsuperscript{45} Yet Washington initially did not focus on logistics or training (though he was aware of a lack of muskets, ball, and powder). Instead, he complained about a lack of leadership among New England’s forces. Arguably his was a culturally biased perspective that would not recognize that not only was New England leadership devised at the time to lead a soldiery used to the democracy of New England’s town meeting governance, it was actually effective, if only for the short-terms necessitated by one-year enlistments.

In fact, Washington faced a serious leadership challenge of his own from the moment he took command of the Continental Army. Due to a conflict of cultural expectations, a \textit{new} negotiation of authority was required between the leadership of the Army and those who were led. While the Virginia gentleman was initially taking charge of New England regiments, he would shortly be confronted with the requirement to assimilate forces from almost all of the former colonies into a single army. To do so, he

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 181.

and the rest of the officer corps would need to create a new form of military leadership that could be identified as distinctly American.

Historian Don Higginbotham suggested a similar understanding of the process in his essay “Military Leadership in the American Revolution.” Examining several of the generals in the Continental Army, Higginbotham argued the amateurish nature of their service led to a leadership style more civilian than military in character. While Washington was attempting to create a professional officer corps based on the British model, there was little continuity between the Seven Years’ War and the Revolution so the generals were commissioned based on their civilian merits. Amateur generals combined with a civil-military relationship dictated by republican ideals to shape this new and uniquely American leadership style.46

Higginbotham could not fully examine the topic in a short essay and his argument missed the continuity between the two wars provided by senior officers to include not only Washington but also New England officers like Seth Pomeroy, Israel and Rufus Putnam, John Stark, and several others. This current examination will go further, considering not only the top leaders of the Army, but investigating the perspectives and remembrances of soldiers and mid-grade officers as well. These narratives will show that culturally there was more continuity between the Seven Years’ War and the Revolution in the realm of military activities than Higginbotham admitted. The formulation of leadership as a negotiation of authority requires an analysis of the evidence from both the top down and the bottom up, continuing a tradition of historical study decades old that

enriches our understanding of the agency exercised by people not completely in control of their own destiny.

Finally, the evidence presented here will argue against the conception that a pan-European military culture infused the Continental Army. Instead, there was a tension in the Army between a republican ideal of the citizen-soldier and the real need for a professional army, a tension that was not as overtly visible in other European armies of the eighteenth century. Among the various groups that organized within the Continental Army there were competing understandings of what proper military service looked like, tensions between professional and popular military cultures that already existed in the colonies before 1775. A cultural discourse concerning the nature of authority and the legitimate use of power was necessary to resolve those stresses or the Army would cease to exist. For these reasons, the Continental Army was led in a manner foreign to their European enemies and possibly set the foundation for how the US Army would be led in the future.

For the majority of the War for Independence, the Continental Army conducted its major operations within three distinct departments, North, South, and Middle. The command of the Northern Department fell initially to Philip Schuyler, headquartered in Albany, and his soldiers came from regiments recruited in New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. From Albany, campaigns were launched into Canada and against the forts built along the Lake Champlain-Lake George corridor leading into Canada. Later, Major General Horatio Gates fought the battles at Saratoga as commander of this department and operations finally ended with Sullivan’s campaign against the Iroquois in western New York in 1779. The Southern Department was commanded by at
least four generals from the Continental Army. Charles Lee first successfully defended Charleston in 1776. The region then suffered a period of civil strife between Loyalist and Patriot partisans until the British attacked Savannah and Charleston in 1779 and 1780. Benjamin Lincoln was in command until Sir Henry Clinton captured Charleston, when Horatio Gates moved south to reassert American control of the region. Following Gates’ defeat at Camden in August 1780, Washington chose Major General Nathanael Greene to take command in the South, where he remained until Cornwallis’ defeat at Yorktown in October 1781. During this entire period, Continental forces in the Southern Department came from the southern states, and were significantly augmented by state militia forces after the almost complete destruction of the Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, and North Carolina state lines at Charleston and Camden.

The core of the Continental Army occupied the Middle Department, a region spanning between Newburgh, New York in the north and Yorktown, Virginia in the south. Called the Grand Army, this main force was continuously commanded by George Washington from 1775 to 1783 and included regiments from New England, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia. This portion of the Continental Army contained the largest number of troops representing the widest cross-section of the states. Furthermore, during the periods of winter encampment, many of the other elements of the Continental Army converged on the Grand Army until the following campaign season. While some attention will be given to the other departments of the Army, this study will focus largely on the Grand Army, the general orders given to those soldiers, and their responses to these orders as representative of the whole army.
In an attempt to understand the negotiations of authority at play in the Grand Army, five important areas of army life will be examined to highlight how officers sought to transform the force into an organization capable of defeating the British and driving them from the states. It seems apparent the first area of focus should be on the developing concept of officership. The term officership will be defined as the qualities and traits of leadership necessary for one man to command another within the confines of the Continental Army during a time of war. Both top leaders of the Army and those being led maintained rights to determine those qualities and traits, as general officers mentored company officers who then faced commitment, compliance, or resistance from their men in the rank and file. Cultural understandings, ideology, and the exercise of authority in camp and in the field all played with and against one another to forge a common understanding of the “good officer.”

Recruiting was a topic of much debate during the period. While the war began with states willing to enlist men for only one year, Washington always maintained the view that enlistments for the duration of the war were critical to the success of the Continental Army. The reasons for this will become clear but they do not all hinge on the creation of a core of professionals. States resisted this change for a period of time for several reasons but Congress eventually acceded to Washington’s request, creating enlistments for three years or the duration of the war. Still, those enlisting maintained, in most cases, the voluntary nature of enlistment and the Army always contained men enlisted under various terms, including bounties, pay, and time of service.

Tied to recruiting was the issue of discipline and punishment. This was another topic affecting the governance of the Army that Washington again had little authority to
change himself. At the onset of war, soldiers were governed by the Massachusetts Militia Act of 1775, a set of military laws viewed as much too lenient by Washington and many of his fellow generals. While this form of discipline superficially followed British forms, with regimental and general courts-martial and both corporal and capital punishments, lashings were still limited to 39 lashes per offense and death was an extremely rare punishment. Within a few years, however, new military justice laws were passed, allowing up to 100 lashes and allowing capital punishment for several infractions, including treason and desertion to the enemy. Still, these laws were much more lenient than those of the British Army and soldiers continued to exert their perceived rights to resist in the face of what they regarded as draconian or illegal uses of discipline by their officers.

In order to fight effectively on the battlefield, soldiers and officers needed training. Operating the smooth-bore musket of the late eighteenth century required discipline and courage in the face of a determined enemy. To win on the field of battle, soldiers were required to maintain unit cohesion while maneuvering across the ground in a rapid and precise manner to flank the enemy and force their withdrawal. Initially, training was left to the regimental commanders, while brigade commanders issued orders during the battle to their regiments assuming the regiments could execute those orders in a timely and effective manner. Due to the lack of regulated and centralized training, the soldiers of the early Continental Army rarely experienced tactical success offensively. Despite notable exceptions at Trenton, Princeton, Bennington, and Saratoga, the leadership and soldiers of the Continental Army were much more confident and successful on the defensive. A change would come in the spring of 1778 when Major
General Frederick Wilhelm August Heinrich Ferdinand von Steuben introduced the “Blue Book.” The effects of this new emphasis on regular training will be explored to determine the repercussions on officer-soldier interactions and negotiations.

Harder to assess but even more important was troop morale, a subjective measure of the spirit of an army. This difficult subject is the final area of study for this investigation. Morale is defined here as the measure of soldier acceptance to their environment and to the leadership of their officers. Included in their environment was their treatment by civilian society and the legislation passed by Congress. Over the course of the war, it can be safely asserted that the support of neither their political leadership nor their civilian brethren met soldiers’ expectations, even superficially. Yet the Grand Army remained in the field and fought until the end. The reasons for this rather amazing fact was the ability of the Army leadership to convince their soldiers the cause was worthy and the officers would take care of the men when the time came for their support. Some historians would argue the core of the Army, those who enlisted for the duration of the war and served for longer than six years, became professionalized and institutionalized in the values of the organization. The historians taking this position might also argue those values that compelled these soldiers to remain were handed down to the Army by the British establishment (even the pan-European military culture of the West) and were enforced by the economic limitations of those who served. Yet events throughout the war, particularly in 1781 and 1783, contradict this view. Those events will be examined toward the end of the chapter.

The Continental Army was formed initially as an amalgam of regiments from a multitude of military traditions that were either created or evolved during the final
colonial war. Above the regimental level there existed few areas of agreement over issues of recruiting, discipline, or training. In order for the Continental Army to become an American army, these disagreements would have to be settled. The treatment of soldiers, and their willingness to serve under that treatment, would have to become standardized throughout the army. Failure to successfully negotiate the terms of authority necessary to determine both how decisions were made and how those decisions were executed would have spelled the end of the army in the face of the enemy. How the Continental Army managed to arrive at a consensus led to a new agreement on leadership that, while imperfect, was distinctly American.
CHAPTER 2

OFFICERSHIP

It is well known that General Washington was less than pleased with the caliber of officers he encountered when he arrived at Cambridge in 1775. In various letters to his friends in Congress and Virginia, he said that these leaders from New England were cowardly, vain, and only willing to serve for money and promotion. In short, these men were completely devoid of the republican virtues Washington had come to expect given New England was the heart of the Revolution. Furthermore, Washington’s despair did not solely derive from disappointed ideological attachments. He also described important cultural differences between himself and these northern men, to the effect that he rarely recognized a gentleman among them. Instead, these officers were much too close to their men and unable or unwilling to order their men to do the tasks required for soldiers to win in battle.

Washington was looking for the right kind of men to lead the Continental Army, men with the proper background to command respect and compel obedience. His experiences in the French and Indian War led him to the conclusion that one factor, personal honor, was the key to effective leadership. Personal honor could be recognized by the social status of an officer, his personal actions, and by his treatment of those placed under his command. Honor, in Washington’s opinion, could be taught, instilled in younger officers through mentorship. Of course, these young officers had to understand the necessity for honor first. This understanding often required an officer to have a background that recognized social obligation and gentlemanly honor as marks of social leadership.
This conception of who deserved to lead the army and its soldiers was not readily agreed upon by the majority of those officers in service at the time of Washington’s appointment as Commander in Chief or by the soldiers enlisted at that time. Over the course of the war, Washington and his officer corps worked hard to come to a new agreement on the meaning of their offices. In the first two years of the war, Washington sought to direct officers to follow his orders while many of his officers resisted complying in various ways. Though Congress decided on the general officers based upon their social status and the political need to keep the states happy with their quota of generals, commissions for the majority of the field and company officers came directly from their states and were based more on their willingness to serve in the Army. These men were often not yet affluent, though their families might have had some modicum of wealth, and they invariably spent more time with their soldiers than they did the commander-in-chief. As the war continued, officers came to understand the need to follow many of Washington’s examples while His Excellency was forced to admit certain compromises both to the meet the expectations of his soldiers and to standardize conduct throughout the Army.

How this negotiation played out over the Revolution is the topic of a minor debate. One of the more persuasive arguments is presented in a dissertation by Scott N. Hendrix, “The Spirit of the Corps: The British Army and the Pre-National Pan-European Military World and the Origins of American Military Culture, 1754-1783.” As its rather lengthy title suggests, Hendrix argues in this work that before the development of a strong nationalist ideology, honor was the justification for military culture in the pan-European world, including the North American colonies of Great Britain. Gentlemen
served as officers to “display their courage and honor” and others served in the rank and file to participate in an occupation viewed as “acceptable and honorable.”\textsuperscript{47} While Hendrix admits the democratic revolutions of the late eighteenth century served to undercut this culture over time, he asserts that the American military inherited this view of military service and that it remained into the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{48}

Yet Hendrix focused almost solely on the British Army to make his point. Only brief attention was paid to the Continental Army, and American military history in general, in his final chapter.\textsuperscript{49} Caroline Cox, writing a year earlier, did address the Continental Army and its officers and she did so in much the same vein. She depicted the Army as one with a distinct social divide between gentlemen officers and lower-sort soldiers that worked well with the hierarchy necessary in a standing army. Concepts of personal honor were important to her formulation, as well, but where Hendrix viewed personal honor as the purview of gentlemen, Cox argued personal honor existed for the enlisted soldiers too.\textsuperscript{50} Discipline was less harsh in the American Army than in the British establishment because all men serving maintained a certain amount of personal honor, a commodity the Army could take as punishment for a misdeed. While corporal and capital


\textsuperscript{48} Ibid., 22-3.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 299-328.

\textsuperscript{50} Caroline Cox, \textit{A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington’s Army} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 38.
punishment existed in the American military justice system of the era, public shaming was also important for both officers and soldiers to strip them of their honor.\(^{51}\)

These two works are the most persuasive studies in an area that has not received much focus. As stated earlier, Don Higginbotham did write an essay recognizing Washington’s cultural bias towards his New England officers and suggesting that the amateur nature of the officer corps led to a civilian-like leadership model within the Continental Army. Still, in the realm of military leadership, he focused much more of his attention on Washington’s contribution to the American military tradition’s adherence to the proper civil-military relationship of subordination to civil control.\(^{52}\) Other historians, like E. Wayne Carp, focused on the administration of the Continental Army to show how officers in support roles (hospitals, quartermaster corps, and Commissary Department) exercised republican virtue to keep the Army alive despite a consistent lack of support from both politicians and civilians during the war.\(^{53}\) What these works and others investigating the Continental Army ignore, assume, or only imply is the relationship between the officers and their soldiers that we call leadership today.

In every army organized within a construct that recognizes a distinct officer corps to lead soldiers there is an understanding of what constitutes a “good” officer. Of course, the term “good” is difficult to define due to the cultural nature of its definition. In general terms, “good” officers derive their authority to lead from a legitimate source and then

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\(^{51}\) Ibid., 100-1.


exercise authority over their followers in a legitimate fashion to achieve success on the battlefield. Legitimate sources of authority and legitimate uses of authority are areas for negotiation between the leaders and the led, whether or not they are recognized as such in an overt way.

To understand how the Continental Army was led by its officers and how or why both officers and soldiers agreed (or disagreed) over the concept of the “good” officer, it must first be acknowledged that there did exist differing perspectives on the topic. Several distinct cultural visions of officers existed in the colonies up through 1775. While there were variations, three basic conceptions of leadership guided most colonial military institutions in their exercise of authority. In many of the southern colonies up through Maryland and, at times, in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, the gentleman-officer was viewed as a legitimate leader in the military. His authority to lead was derived from his social status. His sense of personal honor maintained that authority over those he led by exhibiting courage and a sense of patronage for his soldiers. In the northern colonies, particularly those that comprised New England, local loyalties and a cultural understanding of a communal contract governed who could lead and how they should conduct themselves. The authority to lead came from local recognitions in towns and counties while the conduct of the officers was regulated by a communal sense of the proper use of authority. An improper exercise of authority was seen as a violation of contract (both communal and enlistment), potentially releasing soldiers from their obligation of enlistment and justifying resistance. The third distinct construct of proper leadership developed in an organization known as the Pennsylvania Associators, a model that was also employed on occasion in Delaware. Here was the most democratic
expression of the exercise of authority, where the authority to lead was determined by the consensus of the group and that authority was only exercised legitimately through the same group consensus. An important difference between this model and the other two discussed was that the Associators were privately funded units, often with members derived from similar social strata.

These three solutions for who should lead and in what manner interacted with ideology, reality, and human action during the American Revolution as regiments from the various state lines came together to fight the British. Most of the officers and soldiers serving during the war agreed with republican ideology that championed citizen-soldiers serving in a temporary capacity as a safeguard against the evils of a standing army. Yet many of them came to agree with the need to professionalize the service to some degree in order to increase their capabilities to defeat the British Army on the battlefield. This tension between ideology and necessity was further complicated by officer jealousies over rank, states’ political competition for officer appointments, and the real economic consequences of service for both officers and soldiers. Finally, the expectations of treatment expressed by those soldiers in the rank and file limited attempts to increase the authority of the officer corps and tempered movements towards a professionalized standing army. The acceptance of revolutionary ideology that championed a challenge to traditional authority lent legitimacy to soldier resistance against increased officer authority in the army.

Almost four years after Washington arrived at Cambridge, in 1779, Congress published the drill manual for the American Army. Known as the “Blue Book,” this manual sought to standardize drill and make it easier for commanders in the field to
control units from the various states. The manual was reprinted in 1794 and remained the manual of arms for the United States Army until the 1850’s. In the back of the book, every rank was described and their corresponding duties were prescribed. The highest rank before general (for which there were no descriptions) was the regimental commander. His first responsibility was the health of his men and he was instructed to always encamp and march with his soldiers, as it was his example, and the example of his officers, that the soldiers would follow.\textsuperscript{54} Sergeants and corporals, the most junior of leaders in the Army, were told the discipline of the regiment rested on their shoulders but they were to treat those in the rank and file with respect and kindness. When teaching the privates to drill, non-commissioned officers should do so mildly, understanding no one would get the movements correct the first time.\textsuperscript{55}

There is a leniency in tone, a recognition of the humanity and value of the private soldier, that does not contradict Washington’s earlier effort to instill personal honor in the officers of the Virginia Regiment. The duties prescribed in the manual set down many of the ideals that the Commander-in-Chief sought to instill throughout the Revolutionary War. Still, the manual’s approach does not fit easily into a framework that recognizes a gentleman as having a class-based right to lead through personal honor. The private soldier is granted a degree of autonomy. Non-commissioned officers are directed to recognize this autonomy in their methods of instruction and discipline while officers at the junior ranks are taught to protect that autonomy from abuses. Furthermore, the need to publish and reassert these expectations suggests a recognition that the officers in the

\textsuperscript{54} Von Steuben, \textit{Regulations}, 67-9.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., 77-8.
Continental Army were not bringing with them certain skills, knowledge that a gentleman would conceivably gain through practice in his civilian surroundings.

In the end, the interaction of these competing understandings of military leadership produced a new American concept of the “good” officer. He was not necessarily a prominent person socially, though he often was more affluent than his soldiers. He did maintain more control over his subordinates than was allowed outside of the military but he could not compel his soldiers’ obedience to the degree that his European counterparts could. Furthermore, he was constantly aware of the need to treat his soldiers in a manner that did not risk rebellion, endangering the very existence of the force. The result was a new standard formulated in the drill manual of 1779 that codified proper behavior for officers and non-commissioned officers within the regimental structure of the Army.

At the onset of the American Revolution, there were several concepts of the “good” officer incorporated into the military traditions practiced within the American colonies. In the north, the legitimacy of an officer was based on local reputation for leadership (to include military leadership) and was confirmed by the willingness of local men to enlist under his command. In certain regions of the middle colonies, a mixed practice of local reputation and popular election determined who would lead on military ventures. The tradition most prevalent in the South, and accepted by George Washington, agreed with the concept of the gentleman-officer and found validity within the British professional establishment.
In February 1777, three Royal Artillery officers were stationed in Quebec for the winter. One night these three young men drank too much and traveled to the home of a local inhabitant who had three daughters. During that evening, while these three men took “liberties” with the young women, their father returned home and ran the officers off his property. In the morning, the father complained to the British commander, Major General William Philips. The general addressed all the officers in his formation, claiming he did not know who these men were and that he did not want to know. Instead, he chastised the group, insisting that gentlemen did not conduct themselves in this manner, nor should they need to do so to gain the affections of a woman. For this reason, those officers responsible should go to the aggrieved father and apologize; soldiers should at all times conduct themselves gallantly. Thus shamed, the three officers went to the accusing father and apologized.56

British Lieutenant Thomas Anburey recounted these events in his diary and then followed with an anecdote about Colonel Carelton who was assaulted one day while riding in his sleigh. Anburey blamed the senior commander, General Guy Carelton, for this incident, arguing the general’s generous behavior with the local Canadiens led to insolence on the part of the lower class in Quebec. While he agreed with General Philips that gentlemen should always conduct themselves honorably, the plebeians of Canada needed to be taught to respect the authority of their betters if order was to be maintained

during the winter’s quarters. And the only way to teach the lower sort was through the exercise of authority and compulsion.

Two years earlier, in Boston, General Thomas Gage had experienced disciplinary problems of his own among his officers. In March of 1775, the British soldiers sent to occupy Boston were disgruntled over poor living quarters (many of them were encamped on Boston Commons) and inadequate food. On March 20, 1775, two ensigns were tried in a general court-martial for dueling over an accusation of ungentlemanly behavior. Three days later, a lieutenant colonel and an ensign attempted to duel with swords after the lieutenant colonel struck the ensign but they were stopped. Attempting to finish the matter, the two officers re-engaged with pistols on the Commons and were arrested by the Officer of the Guard. These gentlemen, with little to do, were beginning to pick at each other’s honor and dueling to protect the same.

These accounts of British officers’ behavior and their superiors’ responses highlight a culture of leadership that historians often see as being shared by American officers during the period. For the gentleman-officer, personal honor was paramount. Honor lent the officer his authority to command and guided his actions towards his soldiers, his fellow officers, the enemy, and those civilians with whom he interacted. To maintain his authority, that personal honor required guarding against accusation and demanded examples of courage under fire. For those above him, an assumption of his honor allowed for shaming as the highest form of punishment while the gentleman jealously protected his prerogative from unjust accusations. To attain personal honor,

\[\text{Ibid., 85-6.}\]

these men had to possess a certain position, given to them either by virtue of their birth or through patronage.

This was the model of officership George Washington initially sought to create when he took command of the Continental Army in 1775. His experiences during the Seven Years’ War had taught him the British model described above was the professional solution to his current Revolutionary problem. Washington served as a volunteer officer aide to British Major General Edward Braddock in 1755 and again as a colonial colonel under the command of British Brigadier General John Forbes and Colonel Henry Bouquet. In 1756 while serving as commander of the Virginia Regiment, his letters to members of the House of Burgesses illustrated his adherence to this model of the gentleman-officer. Following accusations by a few politicians that he and his officers were conducting themselves in a dishonorable fashion, Washington defended his actions and insisted he always strove to be the model of a gentleman-officer. If he could no longer command the unanimous support of the colonial government, he would gladly resign his commission.\(^{59}\) In response, he received several letters aimed at soothing his honor, including one from Landon Carter claiming the accusations made against him came from a few men of little esteem in the assembly and that “A whole crowd of Females” sent their regards and were holding a service in his honor.\(^{60}\)


Washington wanted gentlemen of honor to serve, men with merit and republican virtue, and men with the means and status necessary to understand and maintain personal honor. He notified his officers early on that their commissions would soon be determined not by how many soldiers they could re-enlist but by their social standing. Commissions would be reserved “for such Gentlemen as are most likely to deserve them.”

Commanders should be easy and condescending with their subordinate officers but not too familiar, as this would breed contempt. With their soldiers, they should strictly enforce discipline, but not in an unreasonable fashion, and they should reward or punish their men by the merit of their actions. Above all, these senior officers must discourage vice and remind their soldiers of the justice of their cause. To state it differently, Washington was going to determine who was fit to lead and his determination would be based on a man’s personal honor and right actions.

Other gentlemen from the southern colonies agreed with Washington’s vision. For a week in October 1775, a committee from Congress visited the Army’s encampment at Cambridge. Their mission was to confer with Washington and representatives from the four New England governments over the issue of raising a new army in 1776. One of the members of the committee, Thomas Lynch from South Carolina, wrote to Washington the next month to inform him of Congress’ response to the committee’s

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recommendations. While Congress did agree to pay a bonus to those officers who elected to remain in the service, he hoped Washington was in a position to turn down those New England officers who changed their minds and decided to stay only for the money. Lynch now believed, after visiting Cambridge, that the soldiers of New England could be convinced to follow gentlemen from other states, relieving Washington from the necessity of relying on “bad Offices of that Country in order to raise Men there.”

Washington should also be pleased to know that Congress approved all the amendments to the Articles of War Washington suggested, so officers would now be required to act and dress like gentlemen. 64 Though not an ideal solution, especially as it acknowledged the necessity to induce officers to serve through payment, the Congressional decision to begin following Washington’s suggestions regarding officer conduct was encouraging.

Yet despite what appeared to be an early success to restructure the officer corps more to the liking of the commanding general, Washington faced daunting resistance from both his fellow officers and his soldiers in the rank and file. The vast majority of his army understood their service in terms of local loyalties and communal contract and they agreed to serve under a leadership structure that fit with those terms of service. The strongest obstacle to Washington’s designs was the demand for regionally aligned regiments. Writing to John Hancock on November 8, 1775, Washington complained that his efforts to create a new corps of officers were stymied by the refusal of soldiers to serve under officers not from their home colonies. He was seriously contemplating

dismissing all those unwilling to serve in an integrated regiment. But within only a few weeks, when faced with the urgent need to re-enlist his entire army, Washington admitted defeat on this plan and formed his force with regiments determined by region.

In fact, both New England officers and soldiers were unwilling to let go of their cultural understandings concerning who should lead and how they should be selected. Despite Washington’s orders that officers would be selected among the gentlemen with the best merit, junior officers continued through the fall of 1775 and winter of 1776 to compete with one another for enlistments. First lieutenants in the regiments competed with their captains for recruits under the belief that they would be promoted if they enlisted more men. Soldiers petitioned Washington for solutions to who should lead but not for reasons Washington would have agreed with. One group of soldiers from Rowley, Massachusetts asked Washington to replace their company commander with Lieutenant Cresy, followed by Second Lieutenant Pike, and then Sergeant Bailey. This line of succession in the company would settle the issue of officers properly representing the men of the town who were aligned with two different parishes.


And while Washington viewed these competitions and demands as unpatriotic and provincial, the men serving from New England believed this was the only way for officers to maintain the trust of their communities and for soldiers to be led by men they trusted. During the colonial wars, New England towns enforced their own influence over officer behavior during campaigns. While the local reputation of a prospective officer was important to his ability to recruit, his actions on campaign were equally important to his ability to continue to serve. Officers who failed to perform well on campaign could even face imprisonment upon their return home. Additionally, officers like Colonel Seth Pomeroy from Northampton could enjoy local political support for promotion in the field should that promotion become necessary.\(^69\) This requirement for the officers to continue to serve in the trust of their communities did not change over the 12 years between the end of the Seven Years’ War in 1763 and the start of the American Revolution in 1775.

Rufus Putnam, recounting his experiences during the Seven Years’ War, gave a full account of how reputation, town attachments, and the expectations of those serving all worked together to determine who would lead in a New England provincial regiment. Putnam first enlisted as a private in Captain Ebenezer Learned’s company recruited out of Brookfield, a few miles north of Sturbridge, Massachusetts in 1757.\(^70\) At the end of that campaign, his company deserted their post because they were being held past their enlistments.\(^71\) Putnam enlisted the next year in Joseph Whitcomb’s company (Captain Learned having lost his commission for leading the desertion) in Colonel Timothy

\(^69\) Pomeroy, 124.

\(^70\) Putnam, The Memoirs of Rufus Putnam, 11.

\(^71\) Ibid., 16-21.
Ruggles’ regiment, again out of Brookfield.\textsuperscript{72} The following year, Putnam again enlisted, this time as a sergeant, in William Page’s company from Hardwick again in Colonel Ruggles’ regiment (Hardwick is a town just north of Brookfield). But Putnam ended this campaign very disillusioned with his service, having been forced to conduct extra service as a carpenter but not receiving the extra pay he was promised for this service.\textsuperscript{73}

While he vowed not to enlist again, he found himself in an interesting situation the following spring in 1760. Putnam had moved to the neighboring town of New Braintree and enrolled in the town’s militia. When mustered to meet with Captain Page who was again recruiting, Putnam was handed recruiting orders direct from Timothy Ruggles who had been promoted to brigadier general in the provincial service. Notwithstanding his promise never to serve as a soldier again, Putnam also faced the displeasure of his new town if he agreed to follow these orders. Apparently, several other men from New Braintree had applied for the job, as these orders promised the rank of lieutenant should Putnam enlist enough men. Ruggles had refused these older members of the town and they were now angry at his selection of Putnam for the position, claiming it was an insult to the town. Page attempted to recruit in New Braintree with no success but when several former soldiers acquainted with Putnam claimed they would enlist under his leadership, Putnam accepted his orders and enlisted eight or nine soldiers immediately. Ironically, Putnam made the mistake of enlisting these men not for himself but for Captain Page and when Page failed to make his quota for a company, he took

\begin{footnotes}
\item[72] Ibid., 22.
\item[73] Ibid., 25-32.
\end{footnotes}
Putnam’s recruits, forcing him to go looking for more men late in the season with disappointing results.74

Several traits of the New England tradition concerning military leadership and the “good” officer become apparent through this account. Men known locally recruited companies for the provincial service and their success was determined by their reputation, often as military leaders. Yet the commissions came from the General Court, handed down by the senior military leadership, so local support for applications of commissions did not guarantee rank. A reputation among those senior officers continuing to serve over several campaigns could also provide increasing promotions in the service, as long as a man could maintain the support of the towns. William Page was not able to maintain that loyalty between Hardwick and New Braintree but clearly Rufus Putnam could. Still, Putnam had to thread his way carefully or he risked alienating himself from his newly adopted town. Finally, the men he recruited were men who had served with him before, at similar ranks, and who worked with him in the towns of the region. While he lost these initial recruits, he was given a commission as an ensign in Colonel Abijah Willard’s regiment based on Brigadier General Ruggles’ recommendation.

A sense of commonality between officers and men was further strengthened through a shared sense of religious community. The journals and diaries from the French and Indian War cite which Psalm was preached each Sunday while on campaign. Chaplains were usually designated within the regiments of Massachusetts and Connecticut but it was not unique for a soldier or officer recognized as most able to preach. If the Sabbath preacher was a private, all soldiers, officers and privates alike,

74 Ibid., 32-3.
were expected to listen. Stephen Cross (a New England carpenter contracted to build ships for the British on Lake Ontario) wrote “…attended Worship where a Common Soldier by the name of Williamson Preached I believe a Good Man made many Good observations and good admonitions and counsells…” In an orderly book kept by Sergeant Josiah Perry in Nova Scotia, “Prayers are to be attended daily at 9 o’clock, A.M. by all the men of the garrison off duty… Divine service to be attended every Sunday by all the garrison off duty – 11 A.M.” This congregation of soldiers as equals was so ingrained in the mindset of colonial soldiers from Massachusetts that Rufus Putnam (writing after the American Revolution) remarked “Captain Learned prayed with his Company Morning and evening, and on the Sabbath read a Sermon (Oh! How the times have changed).”

Washington experienced this military culture when many of his men celebrated Pope’s Day (or Guy Fawke’s Day) that commemorated the anniversary of the foiled Catholic plot to blow up Parliament in 1605. Officers and soldiers alike paraded through Cambridge on November 5, 1775, burning an effigy of the Pope. Washington scolded his officers, calling their actions “monstrous” and demanding the celebrations to stop while

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there was an American attempt to elicit the aid of Canadian colonists.\textsuperscript{78} Still, he recognized the necessity of providing for the religious requirements of his troops when, in February 1776, he formally established a Chaplain Corps, ordering one chaplain be designated for every two regiments.\textsuperscript{79}

Certainly not all units present around Boston were from the New England colonies. Companies from the Pennsylvania Associators were among the first forces from outside the northern region to join in active revolt. As many as 924 men were present in the summer of 1775 and grew to several thousands by the summer of 1776.\textsuperscript{80} Initially, the Pennsylvania Associators raised these soldiers. The Associators were first formed, with the support of Benjamin Franklin, in 1747 to rectify the perceived lack of military protection for the colony during Queen Anne’s War. In the Articles of Association drawn along the lines of John Locke’s natural philosophy, membership was voluntary, the soldiers elected their company officers (approved by the governor), and funds were furnished voluntarily.\textsuperscript{81}

During the Seven Years’ War, two separate military institutions existed in the colony. While the Pennsylvania Associators remained as a voluntary and privately

\textsuperscript{78} Washington, “General Orders, Cambridge, November 5, 1775,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-02-02-0279}.


\textsuperscript{80} Lesser, 4, 27.

funded defense force to stabilize the frontier, the Pennsylvania Regiment was formed through the Supply Act of 1756 as a regular force to bring the war to the enemy and paid for with public funds. The Pennsylvania Regiment combined characteristics of both the Virginia and Massachusetts establishments, with officers selected based on their ability to recruit, companies formed regionally and along ethnic lines, but with a greater social and economic disparity between officers and soldiers.

While this provincial force was less democratic than the units of Associations, the Regiment ceased to exist at the end of the Seven Years’ War. It was the Philadelphia Association that defended the city from the Paxton Boys in 1764. In the early summer of 1775, following the news of Lexington and Concord, Pennsylvania Associations raised numerous battalions, including light infantry and rifle battalions, training for months, electing officers, and marching to Boston and in support of Washington’s Flying Camp in 1776. On July 4, 1776, the officers and privates of the Associations convened and elected their two brigade commanders, Daniel Roberdeau and James Ewing.

At the outset of the Revolution, several military cultures and their various views concerning the legitimate source of authority for officers to lead combined in the formation of a new establishment of the Continental Army on January 1, 1776. Known as

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82 Ibid., 76-7.


84 Seymour, 113-4.

85 Ibid., 126-44.

86 Ibid., 150.
the First Establishment, the Continental Army consisted of soldiers enlisted for one year, regiments remained organized by state but were designated as numbered Continental regiments, and the Massachusetts Articles of War governed disciplinary actions. For many, republican ideology was all that linked these different understandings of military service in common cause to eject British forces from the colonies. Perhaps intuiting this reality, Washington encouraged his soldiers from the very beginning of his time as their commander in chief through the use of republican rhetoric in his general orders.87

Washington’s republican rhetoric was mirrored by the state legislatures. The Massachusetts General Court congratulated the general for his successes at Boston. In their speech on March 28, 1776, the political leaders of Massachusetts painted Washington as the perfect republican gentleman, one who gained the trust of the people by his reputation from the previous war, for his refusal to accept pay while in military service, and because he always placed himself under the authority of civilian leadership.88

Just five days after its signing, Washington ordered the Declaration of Independence to be read to every soldier in the Army as a fresh reminder that every soldier now acted to preserve and protect his State, a State imbued with the power to reward his endeavors to preserve the liberty of a free country.89


Despite his own adherence to republican virtue and that of Massachusetts’ politicians, Washington believed he needed to inculcate that vision of republican virtue among his New England officers. From his perspective, they lacked the necessary public spirit required to lead soldiers in the Revolution. In fact, he complained vociferously to his friends and political leadership that the patriotism he was taught was characteristic among the people of New England was completely absent.\textsuperscript{90} Instead, they wanted to go home frequently on furlough, they refused to enlist for longer than one year at a time, and they refused to continue service unless they were paid. The result in the first months of the war was a much lower enlistment than previously expected.\textsuperscript{91} These men were proving their service was based more on local loyalties than true patriotism and the reasons clearly related to the lack of social status among the officers. How could a man truly understand patriotism if he did not own land or give the proper level of dedication to Congress if his commission was not determined by that august political body?

In reality, when Washington took command of the army in Massachusetts the officer corps was filled with men chosen either through election by their soldiers or for their ability to recruit. In other words, the officer’s position was in large part determined from below. Washington quickly came to the conclusion that this system had two major flaws: the officers were just like their men and they were unable to effectively make their soldiers complete necessary tasks. Washington knew gentlemen of sufficient social


standing and experience who would make proper officers. Their position would be
determined in the proper way, from above. Yet their ability to be promoted in the service
was hampered by their lack of influence within the New England governments and
among New England soldiers. 92

What Washington needed was a Continental Army beholden to Congress, not the
state governments, led by officers committed to republican virtue and personal honor. He
needed field officers appointed directly by Congress and company officers commissioned
by Congress but appointed by Washington based on his determination of legitimacy. The
authority to lead would come from the Continental Congress down, not generated up
from the soldiers being led. Still, he initially was at a loss on how to break the model of
various provincial regiments led by different types of officers. He decided to canvass his
general officers for methods of promoting those he considered the best among the junior
officers.

In October 1775, with enlistments just three months away from expiration,
Washington saw an opportunity to re-mold the force more to his liking. He had to re-
enlist every soldier and either appoint or gain the appointment for every officer. The
Army of January 1776 would be smaller than the force currently surrounding Boston, so
some officers would have to be let go. Washington knew, however, that the soldiers

PGWD, http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-
01-02-0270.
would be reluctant to re-enlist until they knew which officers would be kept, which
would be promoted, and which would be released. 93

To settle these important questions, Washington canvassed his general officers.
Three days later, the other generals met at a council of war. The decision of all these
senior leaders was that they could not make a decision on the promotion of officers
because it was too delicate a question. 94 No political decision had yet been made to allow
Washington or any other general to commission or promote officers within the Army.
States still held that power and made their determinations separate from Washington’s
concerns. The officers themselves were not fully committed to staying in the new army
structure, waiting to see what might serve them best, a commission in the Continental
Army or service with their local militia. The most glaring problem, however, lay with the
need to re-enlist all the soldiers for the Continental Army. These men were going to wait
to see who was promoted before they decided if they would continue to fight within the
new organization.

So Washington decided to encourage adherence to his understanding of service
among his fellow officers, recognizing those who acted in a similar fashion. In his
general orders for November 16, 1775, Washington recognized one of his regimental
commanders. Colonel Asa Whitcomb was notified his position would no longer exist in
the new establishment on January 1, 1776. His response was first to exhort his men to
remain in the service and re-enlist under a new commander. He told them he would

93 Washington, “Circular Letter to the General Officers, Cambridge, October 5,
1775,” PGWD, http://0-
rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-02-02-0096.

94 “Council of War, Cambridge, October 8, 1775,” PGWD, http://0-
rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-02-02-0115.
remain, as well, and would re-enlist as a private in the Army due to the righteousness of the cause. Colonel Jonathan Brewer, the newly designated commander for the regiment, offered to resign his commission in favor of Whitcomb remaining in command. Washington agreed to this solution as a good example for the Army, agreeing to keep Colonel Whitcomb in command and placing Colonel Brewer in the position of Barracks Master until a new regimental command became available. These men, through their actions, proved to Washington that they possessed the personal honor and republican virtues necessary to lead in the new Continental Army.  

Interestingly, Washington may have only gotten half of this estimation correct. Whitcomb certainly possessed the republican virtue necessary to step down when asked and then decided to serve as a private soldier. Would this be the action of a gentleman, however, a man who prized his personal honor? In fact, Whitcomb remained in service as a regimental commander at Ticonderoga in 1777. At that time, his two sons served as his waiters, doing menial tasks and making shoes for their fellow soldiers. The decision by the regimental commander to allow his sons both to serve as privates and wait on him doing laborious tasks caused the officers of Pennsylvania to deride him over time. On Christmas Day 1777 one of these Pennsylvanian officers, after a night of drinking, destroyed the cobbler’s bench in Colonel Whitcomb’s office, assaulted Colonel Whitcomb, and caused his soldiers to fire on the Massachusetts regiment as they came out of their barracks. Colonel Whitcomb’s response was to accept the insolent officer’s

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apology in the form of a dinner and let the issue disappear.  

Whitcomb and Washington may have agreed on service as a republican virtue but their conceptions of proper action based on social status were worlds apart.

Throughout the war, Washington increasingly worked to inculcate a republican ideology in his officers and soldiers, believing his men would follow leaders who lived the ethics of the Revolution. Men like Joseph Bloomfield fit Washington’s ideal well. Born to a middling family in New Jersey, Bloomfield was trained in the law and practiced in West Jersey until the start of the war. He joined the Third New Jersey Regiment under Colonel Elias Drayton early in 1776 and served until shortly after the Battle of Monmouth in 1778. He was initially commissioned as a captain and commanded a company first in the Mohawk Valley and then at Fort Ticonderoga.  

Soon after he joined the regiment, Bloomfield was granted a short leave. He returned home, was engaged to his future wife, Mary McIlvaine, and wrote that despite the income loss of £250 per year, he would serve as long as necessary based upon his patriotic principles.  

When Captain Bloomfield took command (and listed the roll of his men in his journal) he vowed that these soldiers were now his family and that he would endeavor to treat them all with kindness and humanity to gain their love and esteem, all to fulfill the

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96 James Thacher, *A Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War, from 1775 to 1783* (Boston: Richardson and Lord, 1823), 82-3.


98 Ibid., 38.
trust given to him by his country. Yet this young captain did not agree with some of the actions of his fellow officers, actions they might ascribe to their personal honor. In July of 1776 two volunteer officers challenged one another to a duel. The regular officers allowed the contest but turned it into a charade for their own amusement. They loaded the pistols with powder and wadding only, no ball. After the first round, when no one was hurt, one officer said honor was satisfied but the other would not yield. The regiment’s lieutenant colonel, also in on the prank, told the two officers honor now required a duel to the death. Again their seconds loaded just powder and wadding. Again no one was injured. The first officer again allowed that honor was satisfied but the second officer was livid. He demanded they fire a third time but at only five paces. The spectators were now openly laughing. The regimental commander and Captain Bloomfield finally stopped the entertainment and ordered the two officers to make up and drink as friends. Bloomfield stated this “Frolick” convinced him more than ever of the absurdity of this kind of behavior. He called it “a ridiculous custom (that) serves only to shew the Passionate Temper and absurd Folly of those who expose themselves to satisfy their brutish thirst for what? Why for nothing else but to keep the world from thinking they are Cowards…”

Men like Captain Bloomfield fit Washington’s vision of an officer with legitimate authority to lead. He was of the right class, for a junior officer, he volunteered for the right reasons, and he wanted to lead his soldiers in a patronizing manner, though his views on dueling hint at a very different understanding on personal honor. With an army so young, Washington needed to take men like this and promote them as their merit

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99 Ibid., 41-2.

100 Ibid., 68-70.
allowed. From the very beginning, he told his officers their ability to rise in the ranks would be determined mostly by merit and not solely through recruiting or time in service. When groups of officers wrote him to complain about promotions, Washington often took the opportunity to mentor them on a new vision for the Army. The officers of Brigadier General Joseph Spencer’s brigade complained in September 1775 over the promotion of Ebenezer Huntington to Lieutenant in the 2nd Connecticut Regiment because he was junior to other officers. Washington wrote a letter back to the Spencer, admonishing his officers for preferring time in service over merit. Instead, this was a young army that needed to promote those best suited for the job over those longest in the line. Seniority may play a part but it would not be the determining factor.¹⁰¹

Of course, at this early stage, “merit” probably meant different things to different people. For those from New England, merit was determined by how many men would willingly enlist under a given officer. For the rest of 1775, Washington struggled against this, as lieutenants attempted to enlist soldiers in competition with their company commanders, thinking they would be given the commission of captain as a company commander in the new establishment if they enlisted more. Washington ordered this practiced stopped immediately and assured the lieutenants this was not the way to gain promotion in his army.¹⁰²


Tensions over company-level promotions remained throughout 1776 because Washington and his New England officers did not agree on the issue of merit. One particular case highlighted the problem. While in New York, preparing to defend the city against the Howe brothers, Washington convened a general court-martial for Lieutenant Thomas Glover. Glover was from New Hampshire and the first lieutenant in Captain James Wilkinson’s company in Colonel James Reed’s Second Continental Regiment (New Hampshire). Glover had verbally attacked his new company commander and refused to obey his orders, believing himself to be the company commander. The reason for this confusion was that Glover had enlisted the most men in the company and Brigadier General Sullivan promised him he would serve under his former company commander, Captain Ogden, and no other.103

To break the institutional link between recruiting and promotion endemic among his New England soldiers, Washington needed Hancock to convince Congress to take the power to promote all the officers in the Army away from the states. And, on May 10, 1776, Congress did so.104 Still, the issue was not fully resolved for the rest of the year. In this specific case, among others, the soldiers supported the view of Lieutenant Glover. Washington was forced to parade the Second Continental Regiment with two other regiments looking on under arms, to dissuade a mutinous spirit from infecting even more soldiers. He sent that regiment up to Albany to remove them from the immediate situation. He allowed Lieutenant Glover to join the unit, as a lieutenant and under the

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104 Ibid.
command of Captain Wilkinson, once Glover had formally apologized and agreed to
follow the orders of his new commander and influence the men to do likewise. While
Washington believed this decision was too lenient when it came to dealing with Glover,
he admitted to Hancock that he was not in a position to completely change the culture of
these regiments. As he eloquently stated, “Time can only eradicate and overcome
customs and prejudices of long standing – they must be got the better of by slow and
gradual advances.”\(^{105}\)

As a part of those gradual changes, Washington asked Congress to give him the
ability to promote officers at the company level, under the authority of Congress.\(^{106}\) This
power would allow Washington to promote the right type of officers, exhibiting the right
kind of merit, men Washington understood as legitimate and worthy of emulation. In this
attempt, however, Washington failed. Congress never did relinquish this power, forcing
Washington to go to them for every promotion for the duration of the war. The states
were unwilling to cede the power to determine who led their soldiers and many of the
state representatives in Congress were worried of centralizing too much power in the
Army and its commander; Washington’s desired changes would be more gradual than he
wished.

Eighteenth-century republicans feared nothing more than a professional, standing
army. A standing army was the instrument of coercion for the power-grabbing members
of the governing body. Yet eighteenth-century linear warfare was not an activity for


\(^{106}\) Ibid.
amateurs. It required discipline under fire and extensive training for the soldiers of the rank and file to perform intricate maneuvers and the evolutions of firing the flintlock musket. This very real need for professionalism in the Continental Army clashed with a majority adherence to republican ideology and remained a source of Washington’s frustrations throughout the war, both in regards to his officers and his soldiers.

Washington’s initial confidence in the capabilities of his officers and men was not great. Though the Continental Army was successful forcing the British into an untenable position in Boston in March 1776, it was not until August of that year that the American and British armies would meet on the battlefield while Washington was in command. The American general was clear before the Battle of Long Island, those soldiers who displayed courage under fire would be rewarded but those found retreating without the express orders of their commanding officers would be shot for cowardice. Soon after their defeat at Long Island, officers on Haarlem Heights attempted to enforce this order, with almost disastrous results. Sergeant Leffingwell from a Connecticut regiment passed through the lines to retrieve more ammunition, at the order of his regimental commander. Washington’s adjutant general, Colonel Joseph Reed, saw the man “retreating” and told him to return to the line. When the sergeant explained his mission, Col. Reed refused to believe him, ordering the sergeant again back to the front. The sergeant would not budge and Colonel Reed drew his sword on the man. Sergeant Leffingwell leveled his musket at the colonel and cocked it. He was arrested, tried under court-martial, and sentenced to execution. On the day of the execution, the regiments from Connecticut were paraded to

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watch but Sergeant Leffingwell was pardoned. Private Joseph Plumb Martin claimed this was a good choice by the officers. If Sergeant Leffingwell’s blood had been spilt, more blood would have followed.  

Over the course of the war, training and discipline among the officers increased, though challenges remained. As late as 1779, senior commanders were still admonishing their junior officers for breaches of discipline. That summer, while conducting operations in upstate New York, Brigadier General Enoch Poor admonished the officers of his regiments after an embarrassing ambush executed by enemy Native Americans in the area. One regiment was marching through country known to contain hostiles, yet no officers were present with their soldiers. When other officers attempted to regain control of men firing in a less than disciplined fashion, some of those officers were almost shot themselves. General Poor wondered “how Exceedingly pleasing it must be to four or five Lurking Savages to See one fire from them produce a wanton Discharge of All the musquets in A number of Regiments without any kind of aim meaning or Order and Leveled at no Object.”  

While this incident documented continued challenges for the officer corps, the composition of Poor’s brigade shows growing integration in the Army. Enoch Poor was from New Hampshire (though he was born in Andover, Massachusetts) and fought as a private for Massachusetts in the Seven Years’ War. His brigade not only

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contained three regiments from New Hampshire but two regiments from New York, as well.

Still, the individual regiments remained organized, manned, and officered by their particular states. At the lower levels, officers usually came from the same state as the soldiers they led and when soldiers were forced to complete duty in specialized integrated units, some commented on the strangeness of the officers and soldiers from other states. This was particularly true for the soldiers from the New England states, where regiments remained homogenous. After the Battle of Monmouth in June 1778, Private Martin was placed in an integrated light infantry battalion. The regiment was comprised half of soldiers from Pennsylvania and half from New England. While he did agree that the officers were gentlemen, the experience made him extremely “homesick.” During this short period of service, all he wanted was to return to a Yankee regiment, under the leadership of Yankee officers.\(^\text{110}\)

The demand made by soldiers to remain in regiments affiliated by state was not unique to New England. While at Valley Forge in the winter and spring of 1778, Washington and his officers faced a serious problem with new recruits from Virginia. Initially these men were to fill vacancies in Virginia regiments without regard to their preference. Due to their reluctance to comply with this order, a compromise was reached. The soldiers would initially be placed in the brigade of the officer bringing them into camp. After a period of 24 hours, time for the soldiers to determine which regiments contained family and friends, the soldiers would determine which regiment they wished to join. If that regiment was full, they would be given their second choice. Interestingly,

\(^{110}\) Martin, 82.
this accommodation was reached despite the fact that many of these incoming soldiers were draftees.  

Despite Washington’s frequent attempts to develop an officer corps throughout the Army that derived its legitimate authority to lead through class and adherence to ideology, pressures from state representatives in Congress and from the soldiers serving required a more localized view on legitimacy that remained throughout the war. The closest Washington got to creating a sense of affinity to a larger entity was to design uniforms that reflected a regional alignment of states. In 1779 he issued a general order from his headquarters at Moore’s House in New York describing what soldiers would wear, when their states had the funds available to provide the uniforms. Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire regiments would wear blue coats faced with white. New York and New Jersey regiments would face their blue coats with buff. The regiments from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia would have red facings while those from the remaining southern states would face their uniforms in blue with a white stripe.

If Washington could not insist that officer commissions be reserved for gentlemen of the proper caliber, he could at least train those officers he had to act like gentlemen once they arrived in camp. Yet his ideal would continue to be challenged, both by his junior officers and by the soldiers that they led. At issue were the expectations of these officers, some with prior military experience and some without, and the expectations of the soldiers and what they viewed as acceptable and legitimate uses of authority.

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The fall of 1776 was a very difficult time for the Continental Army. The American forces lost at their first conventional battle under Washington’s command in August of that year at the Battle of Long Island. The generals were still attempting to defend New York, an untenable position given America’s inability to oppose amphibious landings. The soldiers were demoralized and suffered from a non-existent logistic system, lacking food and ammunition. To compound the challenges faced by the leadership, the Continental Army was actually only a portion of the forces on the ground. Much of the American opposition to the British invasion was comprised of local militia and state levies. These men had agreed to serve for only a short time and while Washington hoped those in the state levies might decide to enlist in the Continental Army, without success on the battlefield most would not.

The regimental commander for the Second Connecticut State Levy at that time was Colonel Fisher Gay. His regiment was a portion of a large Connecticut contingency of 25 state levy regiments and 14 militia regiments sent to support Washington’s efforts to defend New York. The defeat on Long Island seriously compromised the abilities of the officers in these “New Levies” to control their men and, at times, themselves. Private Martin, serving in one of these regiments, described a lieutenant crying before the battle and his field officers removing any signs of their rank. After the battle, he could not find an officer to tell him and his friend where to go. The only officer he admitted to seeing was an artillery officer attempting to stop him returning to his regiment. The reality was the officers lost control of their forces in the aftermath of a British victory and

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112 Martin, 17.

113 Ibid., 26.
regimental commanders such as Colonel Gay did not know how to retreat in an orderly fashion.

Washington was both disappointed at the defeat and dismayed by the actions of his officers. Prior to the battle he told the battlefield commander, Israel Putnam, to stop the soldiers under his command from firing at the British in a scattered and undisciplined fashion.\(^{114}\) The soldiers and their officers were getting nervous, wasting precious ammunition in fruitless attempts to harm their enemy while they were out of range. Directly after the defeat, he told the Army that the actions during the battle were intentional. The generals ordered the retreat not due to a lack of faith in the Army’s ability to stand firm against the British but to shorten the internal lines of communication.\(^{115}\) This was not an attempt to falsely raise morale; soldiers had routed at points in the battle when brigade commanders attempted to reposition regiments to avoiding becoming flanked. This initial fight, mostly on open ground, showed Washington some important weaknesses in the Army.

Washington explicitly addressed one of these weaknesses with Colonel Gay directly after the battle. The men of the Second Connecticut Regiment were accused of plundering and stealing. Men were deserting and Gay was not conforming to Washington’s requests for information and disciplined action. He stated he could not decide if Colonel Gay was not receiving the General’s orders or simply ignoring them.


and he did not want to know. The ill-disciplined actions of both the colonel and his regiment would end. Gay would send the strength returns Washington demanded immediately and would continue to do so every Saturday from now on. At this point, the method used by Washington to enforce compliance from Gay and his other officers was shame. Appealing to what Washington assumed was Gay’s personal sense of honor and attachment to country, he demanded Gay act like a gentleman and an officer and obey orders.\textsuperscript{116}

Over time Washington relied increasingly on disciplinary actions to enforce gentlemanly behavior and act as a negative example for right action. During the encampment at Valley Forge, court-martials were held for numerous officers and many resulted in a dismissal from service. Ensign Carson of the 4\textsuperscript{th} Virginia Regiment was dismissed for falsely accusing another officer of cowardice, becoming drunk, and acting unbecoming a gentleman.\textsuperscript{117} Major General Adam Stephen was found guilty of being drunk during the Battle of Germantown and ordered dismissed.\textsuperscript{118} Washington continued to purge his officer corps of those found acting unbecoming a gentleman, cashiering at least 10 more officers for being drunk, taking shoes from their soldiers, sleeping and messing (preparing meals) with the men, and other infractions deemed to lessen the social divide between officers and soldiers.\textsuperscript{119} Still, Washington either re-instated or pardoned


\textsuperscript{117} Weedon, 83-4.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 135-6.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 162-3, 223-4, 225-9, 231-2, 235-6, 236-7.
those officers who violated some of the Articles of War, specifically Section Seven which prohibited dueling, possibly because these actions were not considered ungentlemanly.\textsuperscript{120}

The Commander in Chief also insisted that his officers lead by example and take care of their soldiers. A serious concern during the periods of winter quarters was keeping the men from going home on furlough and then not returning once that furlough ended. Obviously, not all the soldiers could go home at the same time but the fewer soldiers present placed less pressure on a fragile logistic system. Officers were required to set the example, planning officer furloughs at the regimental level to ensure there was always one field grade officer present and that each company always had one company officer present.\textsuperscript{121} Officers failing to return from furlough in a timely manner could be court-martialed, as was the case for Colonel William Cook, commander of the Twelfth Pennsylvania Regiment, who absented himself from Valley Forge for three months.\textsuperscript{122}

Encouraging obedience to orders was also a necessary focus. On June 8, 1777, Colonel Henry Beekman Livingston from the Fourth New York Regiment stood accused of speaking against his brigade commander, Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, for ordering a retreat of Continental troops on March 3, 1777. He was also accused of not bringing his regiment to the battle in a timely manner and, when the regiment did arrive, for not equipping his soldiers with enough ammunition. General Putnam reprimanded the colonel for speaking in an abusive manner to McDougall, in front of other officers,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., 209-11.
\item\textsuperscript{121} Lauber, 193.
\item\textsuperscript{122} Weedon, 256-7.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
because such behavior gave a poor example to the soldiers and encouraged ill-discipline.\textsuperscript{123}

Perhaps the most important example the officers were required to set for their soldiers was courage under fire. As stated earlier, Washington thought this particular trait was seriously lacking among his officers at the beginning of the war. He was so concerned that a good example would not be set that he ordered any man caught retreating in the face of the enemy shot. As the war progressed, however, this particular order was not repeated. Instead, Washington and other general officers exhorted the officers and soldiers to fight as freemen struggling against tyranny, praised them (often by name) for their individual acts of bravery, and court-martialed those accused of cowardice. Washington personally recognized Captain Harry Lee for his actions in January 1777, when the cavalry officer held off reportedly 200 British dragoons at a house with only a corporal and four other men.\textsuperscript{124} Following Washington’s example, Major General Nathanael Greene made similar comments after the American defeats at Brandywine and Germantown, though he was sure to thank the soldiers, as well, for their bravery in the face of defeat.\textsuperscript{125}

There was also an expectation that the officers would share the hardships of the men, from caring for the sick to marching alongside them during movements. To encourage these examples, Washington made sure it was known he would follow his own


\textsuperscript{124} Weedon, 200-1.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 45-6, 70-1.
rules. During the campaign of 1777 in Pennsylvania, Washington disposed of his baggage, except his blanket, and made his staff do the same to encourage his fellow officers to comply with his order that baggage trains were to be limited to necessary supplies. His actions led Brigadier General George Weedon to do the same, telling his officers that despite the fact that the brigade’s wagons were available, all officers under his command would follow Washington’s example.\textsuperscript{126}

Encouraging the company-level officers to visit the sick was another issue entirely. Smallpox was a constant worry for American forces during the war. Inoculations were dangerous and caused entire units to be unavailable for fighting for long periods of time. Washington was often forced to forbid regiments from attaining inoculations due to campaign requirements, though these orders were sometimes ignored, with serious consequences. The fear of becoming sick when taking care of soldiers who fell ill was, therefore, a very real emotion for officers. In February 1778, Colonel Walter Stewart of the Thirteenth Pennsylvania Regiment was forced to reprimand his officers for their failure to take care of their sick men. He decided after visiting the hospital at Valley Forge to order his captains to visit the hospital themselves on a daily basis and, to ensure they complied, to report the findings of their inspections and their actions to support the sick to him after each visit.\textsuperscript{127}

While Washington and his senior officers maintained expectations for the rest of the officers, these more junior leaders had expectations of their own. These men volunteered to serve in the Army for various reasons. Some did so from patriotic zeal.

\textsuperscript{126} Weedon, 46-7.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 243.
Many others sought commissions for money, land, or from a desire to become gentlemen after the war. For all these reasons, most officers expected to have some say in their promotions and were not too shy to complain or resist when they felt their higher commanders did not recognize their proper rankings. This led directly to another common expectation, that senior officers would publicly recognize their good behavior. Junior and senior officers alike could be very delicate when it came to their reputation, leading to public complaints, active resistance, and, in some cases, open fighting among officers if someone thought his reputation was in danger. Naturally these men expected they would be adequately compensated for their service but they also wanted to serve with other officers they deemed legitimate.

As discussed earlier, on the outset of the war, junior officers, particularly from New England, believed they had the right to tell Washington if they felt they should be promoted ahead of their peers. Isaac Bangs, from Harwich, Massachusetts decided to take the matter of his appointment to lieutenant in his own hands in April 1776 when he volunteered to join the Continental Army. Although he was a lieutenant in Colonel Cary’s militia regiment, he told Colonel Bailey he would fill a vacancy in his new Continental regiment left by Lieutenant Shaw if Colonel Bailey agreed. He then walked to Washington’s headquarters to get his commission. Since the Commander in Chief was too busy to speak with him, Bangs spoke with Major General Gates who suggested he fill the vacancy, get a recommendation from Colonel Bailey, and wait until the commission arrived.\footnote{Isaac Bangs, *Journal of Lieutenant Isaac Bangs, April 1 to July 29, 1776* (New York: Arno Press, 1968), 20-1.} Gates, a former British officer, was mentoring this young man to follow the
tradition of young gentlemen in Britain and the southern colonies, volunteering their
service until a commission came open and Bangs followed his guidance.

But his decision was not appreciated by the other company officers of his new
regiment. Over the next few months, relations between Bangs and the other junior
officers of his new regiment were tense. When Bangs attended the third meeting of a new
association begun by the company officers of the regiment, he learned that many of the
officers were upset with him for presuming to fill a vacancy from outside the regiment
ahead of other officers from inside the regiment. While his fellow officers placed much
of the blame on the field grade officers, Lieutenant Bangs was guilty of not discussing the
issue with his new company commander first. Bangs told his side of the story at the
meeting and believed he had convinced most of the audience that he had not intended to
offend anyone. The next day a lieutenant colonel in the regiment thanked him for
successfully diminishing tensions within the unit.129 Bangs was guilty of ignoring the
regimental line of succession and of failing to follow more traditional methods for
attaining his rank, i.e. recruiting soldiers.

Throughout the war, and not solely in regiments from New England, officers
publicly complained if they thought an officer was promoted in an irregular way. In
February 1778 a captain in the Pennsylvania Line made a complaint against the
promotion of Michael Ryan to the majority as irregular. This complaint forced
Washington to suspend the appointment until a Board of Generals investigated the
matter. Eight days later, after hearing the evidence presented, the board recommended to

\[129\] Ibid., 38-9.
Washington that the promotion was in fact irregular and Washington removed the appointment.¹³⁰

This belief among the junior officers that they had a right to be included in the promotion system could get them in trouble. John Barr was an ensign in the New York Line late in the war. When he returned to his regiment after a furlough in 1780, he refused to comply with an order from Lieutenant Colonel John Conway of the First New York Regiment to be officer of the guard. Barr demanded Ensign Bartholomew Vanderburgh of the Second New York be assigned instead, due to his junior appointment. When Lieutenant Colonel Conway suggested they draw lots, Barr again refused and both ensigns were arrested. At his general court-martial four days later, Barr claimed he chose to force the issue of guard detail to settle a larger problem, that of the date of his appointment to ensign. He produced paperwork from the New York State Council of Appointment placing his date of rank as January 1, 1779. When his appointment date was published in the brigade orders, other ensigns complained to their regimental commander, Colonel Peter Gansevoort, who agreed to push the appointment date to May 15, 1779. Ensign Barr did not believe Colonel Gansevoort had the authority to do this and so ignored his decision. Barr believed he should, therefore, be acquitted from the charge of failing to obey a superior officer as his actions stemmed from the need to settle this more important matter and not from a lack of respect for Lieutenant Colonel Conway. A few months later, after Barr had left his regiment to serve in the Quarter Master Department,

¹³⁰ Weedon, 231-2, 238-9.
he received a letter notifying him that he was found guilty of disobeying a lawful order and would receive a reprimand.  

Decisions to settle disputes among officers publicly troubled Washington for the duration of the war. It is well known that many of the generals in the army were publicly jealous of their reputations. Major General Philip Schuyler threatened to resign after his retreat from Crown Point in 1776 because he felt his reputation was being damaged by an inquiry into his decision. Colonel John Stark left the Continental service when other junior colonels were promoted to brigadier general ahead of him. Other senior officers, like Colonel Varnum, threatened to resign when they were not promoted because they did not want to follow the orders of men formerly their subordinates. Most famously, Benedict Arnold’s act of treason can be traced in part to his anger over slower promotions than he thought was fair.

And this sensitivity over rank, promotion, and reputation was not limited to senior officers. Ensigns, lieutenants, and captains also felt a tension between patriotic service and their desires to leave the army with the highest rank possible. The issue became bad enough by the spring of 1778 that Washington felt compelled to make a statement in his

131 Lauber, 837-40, 845.


133 Caleb Stark, Memoir and Official Correspondence of Gen. John Stark (Concord: G. Parker, Lyon, 1860), 42.

general orders. Following the acquittal of one lieutenant accused for striking another, Washington scolded his officers for resorting to violence to settle their personal disputes. He saw a pattern of this behavior among his junior officers that was coming to light in public trials. He wished, instead, that his officers could view one another as brothers, able to settle their problems amicably and thus avoid the necessity of public courts producing public documents that would leave an embarrassing public record.\textsuperscript{135}

While some historians believe these disputes to be proof of a sense of personal honor among these men, it is also probable that tensions arose due to the convoluted nature of promotion and a desire among many officers at the more junior level that this system follow some logical line of legality. While Congress and the state legislatures wrangled over who would maintain the right to promote within the army, these men served, often for years, without pay or adequate food and shelter. The situation led to stress and tension within and among those serving due to the uncertainty of their future after the war. Some of these officers abandoned burgeoning professions while others entered the service too young to have begun a civilian career. As the war continued, many officers decided they could no longer serve at the cost of supporting their families while others continued to serve and faced beginning life anew once the war was concluded.

Despite the uncertainty, these men did serve, many for the duration of the war, and they wished to do so with others they deemed fit to be their peers. Captain Bloomfield was placed in an exceptional position to affect who served in his company in 1776. While the rest of his regiment went to Fort Stanwix, Bloomfield was placed in

\textsuperscript{135} Weedon, 280-1.
command of his company and a company of militia to guard the rear and await the arrival of General Schuyler at German Flatts. As he was in command of two companies, he placed two of his volunteers (those without commissions but serving as very junior officers) in the positions of adjutant and quartermaster. As soon as the regimental commander left the camp, one of the lieutenants from the militia tested Captain Bloomfield’s authority and left the camp for several days against orders. With the support of General Schuyler, who visited for a day while on his way to Fort Stanwix, Captain Bloomfield arrested this lieutenant when he returned and forced his resignation, along with that of a second lieutenant who claimed to be too sick to continue in the service. These resignations allowed Bloomfield to move several officers up to fill the vacancies and secure for his two volunteer officers regular commissions as ensigns. Bloomfield was naturally glad to rid his command of a troublemaker, an officer he claimed was lazy and who only really cared about his appearance.  

For the entire war the junior and senior officers to varying degrees negotiated who held the legitimate authority to serve as an officer and what would be a legitimate exercise in authority regarding their relationships to one another. The enlisted soldiers made sure they had a place at the negotiating table as well. What these men expected from their officers with regards to performance and treatment would sound reasonable and, perhaps, obvious. Still the ability of the enlisted soldiers to affect change in the army was greater than in other, more mature military institutions. As mentioned before, these soldiers expected to be led by officers from their region, or at the least from their state. They wanted officers to share their hardships with them and officers they deemed unfit to

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136 Bloomfield, 70-1, 78.
be removed from the service. They wanted the opportunity for promotion, either to the non-commissioned or to the commissioned officer corps. Most importantly, they expected to be treated with the recognition that as an individual, they had equal rights. The ideals of the Revolution, and the revolutionary rhetoric they heard, encouraged them to challenge traditional authority. If these expectations were not met, these men, many of them volunteers, felt they had the right to resist, with either their feet or their fists.

In 1775 and 1776, soldiers who had not served in a military before would act like civilians until properly trained and accustomed to military hierarchy. While young men in the colonies were used to the hierarchy of family and work, military service could be seen as an avenue towards greater autonomy and the aim of the Army was to overthrow a traditional form of authority. And resistance by enlisted soldiers when subjected to treatment they perceived as unfair, overbearing, or in violation of contract persisted throughout the war. Late in the war, Joseph Plumb Martin, by then a sergeant, stopped a prank that his soldiers were planning against their company commander, a man often spoken of as overbearing and unwilling to share in the hardships of his men. While working on Constitution Island blasting rock in 1782, these men planned to fill a wooden canteen with gunpowder and explode it under the captain’s bed. The canteen was filled with three pounds of gunpowder! Though the men claimed they just wanted to frighten the officer and so make him more “complaisant,” Martin was sure this would kill him. While the sergeant did not like his commander any more than his soldiers did, he did not believe the captain deserved to die.\footnote{Martin, 154-5.}
Soldier demands to serve in regiments from their own state, with fellow soldiers they knew or at least had something in common with, and to be led by officers they recognized as legitimate also remained throughout the war. Washington recognized this fact in 1776 when he told John Hancock Congress should implicitly recognize a regimental line of promotion instead of a continental line. He warned the president that only in extreme cases of merit or failure should Congress ignore this advice as the men in many regiments would mutiny if the regimental line of succession was not followed.¹³⁸ When Private Martin broke his ankle in 1777, he was placed on guard of the baggage train. He said it was bad enough being placed under the command of officers he knew but it was intolerable to be placed under the command of strangers. He left for his company soon after.¹³⁹ While Washington was specifically speaking of his New England troops and Martin did come from Connecticut, the attachment of men to their local leaders was found throughout the army. Incoming Virginia soldiers to Valley Forge wanted to determine which regiment of the Virginia Line they would serve in and, in South Carolina, recruiters found men in the militias would not serve unless their militia commanders were serving, as well.¹⁴⁰

Of course, this demand had implications for officers’ exercise of authority. To be perceived as legitimately exercising authority once in that position the officer was first expected to share hardship with his men. General Washington recognized this when he


¹³⁹ Martin, 44-5.

took only his blanket with him into Valley Forge, Captain Bloomfield recognized it when he took his pack off the wagon and placed it on his back for the march to Fort Stanwix, and the soldiers expected it in most cases. John Henry from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, enlisted in a rifle company in 1775 and traveled with Benedict Arnold and Daniel Morgan to Quebec. Henry described how they divided rations along the march through Maine as the vanguard of the force. The principal officer would divide the food evenly and in front of the men. He would then turn his back to the men, pick a portion, and ask the group, “Which one is this for?” Henry said in this way every man knew his portion was given fairly and without prejudice.  

When officers acted in ways the soldiers believed did not recognize a sense of individual equality, soldiers often complained in imaginative ways. Corporal Lemuel Roberts felt it unfair one night that he had to stand guard outside while General Alexander McDougall slept comfortably inside. The corporal spent the cold evening stomping his feet on the loose boards of the outside porch both to keep his feet warm and to keep the general awake. The general told his aide to make the guards be quiet but the lieutenant knew better. He came outside, gave the men a bottle of whiskey to stay warm, and asked them to be as quiet as possible. This line of reasoning apparently worked and the general got his rest.  

Additionally, soldiers expected to be treated in accordance with their conditions of enlistment. The soldiers of Colonel John Stark’s regiment in February 1776 assaulted

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the paymaster for New Hampshire, Colonel Samuel Hobart, because they feared he would not pay them. Their commander was forced to apologize to the assaulted colonel because he did not do enough to stop them. On December 31, 1776, Corporal Roberts’ regiment almost refused to fight because it was the last day of their enlistments. They made a stand before the march, claiming they should be dismissed and allowed to go home. They would, however, be true to their enlistments. They would march one more day and not a day after that.

While there was a recognized separation between officers and soldiers in the rank and file, there was also an expectation that merit, wherever it came from, could get a soldier promoted up the ranks. Men like Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert entered the service in 1775 as a private, was promoted to sergeant in 1778, and ended the war as a junior officer. Of course he managed to survive the entire war, which helped. Still Lieutenant Gilbert was not a unique example, nor even an exceptional one, as men serving in the Continental Army died or rotated back to civilian life. This ability of those from the ranks to become non-commissioned and commissioned officers existed because the legitimate basis for authority was changing, allowing a more fluid flow between ranks. Furthermore, this fluidity was based less and less on a person’s ability to recruit, and more and more on recognized abilities to lead.


144 Roberts, 40.

The Continental Army was a temporary creation that only lasted for eight years. It took much of its structure from the European model of regiments and companies, captains and sergeants. Still, its institutional culture did not come from Great Britain. It came originally from New England, because the vast majority of its soldiers and officers came from New England. While the only Commander in Chief to ever command this army wished for more integration, the army never achieved it. Regiments remained regionally aligned and the officers who led them did so, as well. Only at the most senior levels did this not hold true, specifically among the major generals commanding divisions. The result was an officer corps from the regiment down to the company with differing understandings of legitimate sources for authority but growing agreement in how their power should be exercised. These issues were always in negotiation with their soldiers and as accommodations were reached, institutional culture grew.

In 1779, in an attempt to promote more uniformity among the various regiments, Washington ordered the “Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops” be published and distributed among the officers and soldiers of the army. Drill manuals were not uncommon in the eighteenth-century, but this manual had something different at the very end. The last 14 pages were dedicated to a description of the responsibilities and duties for every rank from colonel to private. While the language is paternalistic, speaking of gaining the “love” of soldiers, the overall tone is one that recognized the autonomy of soldiers who would not follow harsh or tyrannical leaders. Regimental commanders had to ensure their officers watched for the health of the soldiers, while promoting non-commissioned officers for merit and their willingness to teach. The
company commanders were instructed to listen to their men and address their legitimate complaints. Ensigns were told to protect the men from harsh treatment by their non-commissioned officers if that treatment was not warranted. At the same time, the non-commissioned officer was directed to discipline the soldiers while treating them always with respect and kindness.\textsuperscript{146}

The authority to lead these soldiers came not from social rank or status but from Congress and the individual states. Of course, each state had its various reasons for commissioning officers and certainly some of those decisions were made with social status in mind. Still, without a large source of “gentlemen” to draw from, and with many of the wealthier citizens choosing to serve in political positions or to pursue private endeavors rather than risk life or limb in the Army, many of the officers could not claim “Esquire” as a moniker. The best they could do was earn some cash, hope for a land grant, and perhaps learn some of the characteristics of a gentleman along the way.

The amalgamation of various cultural understandings of who should serve as an officer and how he should conduct himself while in uniform led to two significant changes in the concept of officership. The authority from which the officer derived his ability to lead soldiers, the basis for his legitimacy as a leader, trended away from civilian social status towards a political foundation based largely, at the ranks below regimental commander, on merit. An officer’s (or non-commissioned officer’s) ability to lead soldiers could often determine his promotion into the company grade officer ranks. With regards to the legitimate use of authority while leading, officers navigated between the demands of their commander-in-chief, peer pressure from other officers, and the

\textsuperscript{146} Von Steuben, 67-9, 72-3, 74, 75-8.
willingness to follow (or lack thereof) from soldiers who viewed themselves as 
volunteers fighting for liberty. The result was a code of conduct, written in the 
Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops that recognized command 
authority had many limitations in the Continental Army. Soldiers would not be coerced to 
serve, except in extreme cases, and the success of the Revolution lay with their 
willingness to follow.
CHAPTER 3
RECRUITING

On June 24, 1775, Captain Bernard Elliott left Charleston, South Carolina for nearby Savannah, Georgia. His mission was to recruit soldiers for the 2nd Regiment of South Carolina Troops to support a revolt against British control of the colony. As he rode towards the Savannah River, Elliott experienced limited success, enlisting 20 men of grenadier size initially, followed by another group of young men before reaching the river. He traveled with a retinue of thirteen people, including musicians. As he stopped at each settlement, Elliott treated the inhabitants with wine and grog, hosted barbeques, and held Virginia dances. When this method was unsuccessful, he gathered the local militia leaders and produced documents describing the abuses of Parliament against the colonies, believing this political avenue of persuasion might convince the local leadership to encourage participation in the revolt. Over the next few weeks, Captain Elliott met another captain on a recruiting mission (agreeing to target only men large enough to serve as grenadiers so as not to compete with his comrade from the First Regiment) and convinced a colonel of a county militia to resign his commission and serve on the American side.\textsuperscript{147}

Elliott viewed the objective of his mission as more political than military. South Carolina experienced serious divisions between Loyalists and Patriots throughout the Revolution and at the very beginning, the Patriot side recognized the need to convince the populace to chose the policies of the Revolutionaries over their loyalties to the Crown, committing themselves to armed resistance. The manner with which Elliott decided to

\textsuperscript{147} Elliott, “Recruiting Journal,” 95-8.
accomplish this goal was familiar to all in the region. He canvassed the “voters” by
treating them. This method of convincing voters to choose a candidate for the colonial
assembly was common throughout the South, from Virginia to Georgia. When local elites
found it necessary to lead through consent, they treated their neighbors to convince them
to follow.

By the end of the war, several states were conducting drafts to meet the quotas
agreed to in the Continental Congress. Despite significant resistance, many states found a
need to compel service among their less fortunate inhabitants because political elites
lacked the time and resources to cajole them into uniform. One Massachusetts officer,
Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert, at first believed New England should follow this largely
southern practice, as it gave the states the power to compel service for longer periods and
would keep trained men in the regiments until the end of the war. After service in
Virginia, however, he changed his mind, deciding the soldiers from Virginia were
cowardly and difficult to train. His final assessment, in the spring of 1781, was that for
the Americans to win, New England would have to save the day.\textsuperscript{148}

The methods used to recruit an army establish much of the foundation for how an
army must be led. If leadership is conducted through a negotiation of authority between
the leaders and the led to determine how both the decisions and their methods of
execution are reached, methods of recruitment initiate that negotiation by setting initial
limitations on both the legitimate exercise of authority by leaders and soldier agency to
legitimately resist. Yet the Continental Army was not recruited the same throughout the
state regiments and lines. Instead, Congress set state quotas and the states determined the

\textsuperscript{148} Gilbert, \textit{Winding Down}, 25-6, 42-3.
methods used to meet those quotas. These policies were then modified by the willingness of the state’s citizens to either support or resist those measures. Some states continued to vote large bounties and allow for short-term enlistments in an attempt to meet their quotas. Other states moved over the course of a few years towards compelling service through classing and drafts.

Recruiting during the Revolution has received some attention from historians, though the subject is usually presented as an overview that misses the difference between the states. More detailed studies tend to focus on a single state and fail to take into account the larger meaning of regional differences. In A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789, James K. Martin and Mark E. Lender characterized the pattern of recruiting over the duration of the war as moving from voluntary to involuntary service due to the waning willingness of the middling classes in America to join the Continental Army. As the states increasingly resorted to drafts and other coercive means to secure recruits, the Army took on the characteristics of other European armies, with poor, landless soldiers disconnected from their civilian counterparts. Yet their investigation missed some of the nuances affecting recruiting. While many states did directly authorize drafts, culturally this was not acceptable in every case and in many instances the drafts were ignored or actively resisted. In other circumstances, states avoided directing drafts but decided to fine towns if they failed to meet quotas. If these variations led to similar outcomes, the motivations of the soldiers were necessarily different depending on their faith in the legitimacy of their recruitment.

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Historian Charles Royster famously coined the phrase *rage militaire* to describe the outpouring of voluntary enlistment in the first year of the war and then described the failed attempts by the states to meet their quotas throughout the remainder of the Revolution despite higher bounties and drafts.\(^{150}\) Royster sought to assess the impact of ideology on popular will by examining examples of support for and against Continental service. Still, these anecdotes were presented as being part of a single story, without specifically noting either the different experiences of the states or the impact of varying traditions on each state’s solution to the problem. In actuality, each state government approached the problem separately and came to their own solutions founded in their abilities to influence their own societies.

Writing in 2007, historian Michael McDonnell did explore a specific state, Virginia, to show how one Revolutionary society fought its separate battle to fulfill its military obligations in the face of determined resistance by citizens. Following a year of unsuccessfully attempting to mobilize forces voluntarily, the Fifth Convention of Virginia decided to avoid the political problems inherent in coercing the voting middle class into military service and instituted a draft of the landless poor to enlist its 15 battalions in the Army. Having disenfranchised men owning less than 50 acres, the state could enforce such a law with little initial risk of political backlash but the promise of 100 acres for those enlisting for the duration of the war by Congress did create a new problem; men forced to serve due to their lack of political power could eventually return

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with the ability to politically express their discontent once the Revolution was complete.\textsuperscript{151}

The reasons for these differing methods of recruitment were a combination of cultural acceptance, economic realities, and the willingness (or lack thereof) of citizens in each of the states to comply with the acts passed by their governments. In New England, recruiting was relegated to the towns and facilitated by large bounties and the acceptance of shorter enlistments when men refused to enlist for three years or the duration of the war. In Connecticut, while recruiting was still a responsibility of the selectmen from the towns, a system of classing was instituted in the militia companies to place social pressure on those eligible to enlist in the state regiments. Virginia chose to tackle the problem of enlistment by structuring the state into 15 districts and initiating a draft of landless men. These examples highlight differing cultural views of military service that influenced solutions found to supply the Continental Army with soldiers.

Yet these solutions, while rooted in cultural mores and tradition, rarely succeeded in filling the state quotas. This was due, in part, to the inability of Congress and the state assemblies to meet the monetary terms of enlistment. The rapid inflation of the Continental dollar undercut soldiers’ pay while the states found it extremely difficult to supply their regiments with the necessary clothing, equipment, or food. The privations and suffering experienced by Continental soldiers already in service made it harder for the states to enlist more men as the war dragged on. The result in most states was a

\textsuperscript{151} Michael A. McDonnell, \textit{The Politics of War: Race, Class, and Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia} (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 253-60.
repetition of similar acts demanding men enlist in the Army with little response from the citizens.

The Continental Army never reached close to a third of the size Congress wished. As was the case in every other labor market of the period in North America, manpower was a constant problem and each state dealt with the situation in ways similar to those chosen to work through their labor issues. In Virginia, the political elites attempted to alleviate their need through coercion of the disenfranchised and, as happened in the past, resistance followed. In Massachusetts, the towns controlled much of the recruiting, just as they controlled the labor pool. While a few outsiders were brought in, the majority of men recruited came largely from the young laborers waiting for the ability to purchase land and become freeholders themselves. Yet overall, the fact that demand greatly outmatched supply allowed the negotiation of the terms of service to continue throughout the war, forcing the officers of the Continental Army to work hard to balance their abilities to legitimately exercise authority against the perceptions of their soldiers regarding their right to resist.

George Washington faced a serious problem on January 1, 1776. His army was disbanding in the face of the enemy while he was enlisting a new army. The regulations governing how this new army (known as the First Establishment) would operate were intended to be significantly different from those of the previous force. The General was under no illusions about how difficult this task would be nor did he believe, as others might, that this would be the only time he would face this challenge. Instead, unless the terms of enlistment changed in the next year, Washington would have to convince his
soldiers to remain each and every year while their enemy remained to their front. For the commander-in-chief, this situation was untenable.

The issue began in October while Washington struggled to understand how to motivate his New England soldiers to follow orders, remain in the camp, and continue to support the Revolution through the harvest. He had canvassed his generals at the beginning of the month in an attempt to determine who were the best among his officers. Even if all the privates currently enlisted remained, there would be a need for fewer officers than already retained commissions.\textsuperscript{152} A few days later, those generals advised Washington that the question of officer promotions was too delicate to answer at the time.\textsuperscript{153} The men might be offended if the wrong officers were promoted in front of others and without some say from the surrounding communities.

Colonel William Henshaw sent a proposal of his own to Washington on the same day. Hensaw had been the adjutant-general for Artemus Ward. When Horatio Gates was named adjutant-general by the Continental Congress, Henshaw offered to resign and go back to Leicester but was asked to act as Gates’ second. Colonel Henshaw recommended that Washington gather his major generals and brigadier generals to decide who were the best field officers and retain those needed. Those field officers should then be allowed to pick their company officers for the regiments. Once these decisions were made, the list of officers would be posted for all to see. If this was done, Henshaw argued, the men would then feel comfortable enlisting in the army. If the names of the officers to remain were


\textsuperscript{153} “Council of War, Cambridge, October 8, 1776,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-02-02-0115}. 

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not determined before December, the men would not enlist and Washington would lose his army.\textsuperscript{154}

Washington was unable to follow Colonel Henshaw’s suggestion of what would appear to have been an orderly and intelligent solution to the problem because the council of his generals had already determined they could not make those decisions without risking the popular support for the war at that point. What ensued was a rather chaotic few months with junior officers competing with one another for enlistments under the belief that their rank would be determined in the new establishment by how many soldiers they enlisted. Despite Washington’s every attempt to convince his younger leaders that this was not the case, recruiting competitions continued into 1776 and led to soldiers enlisting in more than one regiment, officers refusing to obey their company commanders because they believed they were the commander, and generals being forced to adjudicate between officers when one claimed another had “stolen” his soldier.

Washington became personally involved in one enlistment issue shortly after moving the Army down to New York. In May 1776, Colonel James Varnum, commander of the Ninth Continental Regiment (Rhodes Island), complained to Washington that fifteen men enlisted for his regiment by Captain John Lane (one of his company commanders) had instead been enlisted into Colonel Edmund Phinney’s Eighteenth Continental Regiment (Massachusetts). Varnum was in New York at this time while Phinney was still headquartered in Boston. Captain Lane claimed one of Colonel Phinney’s officers, Lieutenant Daniel Merrill, had stolen his soldiers but when he

petitioned Artemus Ward for redress he was unable to produce the required enlistment papers. Ward refused to release the soldiers for service in the Rhode Island regiment and Varnum wanted Washington to force the issue.\textsuperscript{155} Despite Washington’s request that these men, who had been enlisted from towns located in present-day Maine, be returned to Colonel Varnum, Ward insisted there was no proof of Captain Lane’s story and so he refused to do so.\textsuperscript{156}

On the heels of his difficulties re-enlisting men, Washington expressed his frustrations to John Hancock. He needed longer enlistment for three important reasons. The most obvious was that yearly enlistments forced him to disband his army in the face of the enemy while enlisting a new army at the same time. Washington thought it a miracle that over the winter of 1775-1776 General Howe had not marched out of Boston and attacked the American army when it was in this state of confusion. Another important problem with short enlistments related to discipline. Distinctions between officers and soldiers could not be properly maintained because the officers were always aware of the necessity to retain the loyalty of their soldiers in order to re-enlist the same men the following year. If soldiers already serving did not re-enlist, the officers were forced once again to train and instill proper discipline to raw recruits. Short enlistments had a final shortcoming. When a man’s enlistment was about to end, he began to think of


home and perhaps how lucky he was to survive the last year. He became careless of his equipment, careless of the camp, and more difficult to lead.\textsuperscript{157}

Eventually Congress listened to Washington’s argument for longer enlistments and, in the fall of 1776, authorized terms for three years or the duration of the war. The General continued to struggle through 1776, again enlisting a new army (known as the Second Establishment) in the face of the enemy in the winter of 1776-1777. The year had begun well when morale reached a highpoint in March 1776 following the British withdrawal from Boston. Washington was glad to receive a report from Lord Stirling that soldiers were enlisting from both the east and the west on the heels of the American victory.\textsuperscript{158} But by the winter of that year the British had successfully seized New York and the Continental Army was forced to retreat across the Delaware River, leaving New Jersey’s harvest vulnerable to the foraging of the British. Washington’s decision to attack that Christmas at Trenton and then at Princeton came with great risk but had been absolutely necessary to raise morale and give impetus to his recruiting campaign.

Given the circumstances, Washington could not continue to fight the war building a new army every year, allowing the terms of enlistment to drive his strategic and tactical decisions. He needed stability and he needed trained soldiers. Another consequence of the policy of shorter terms was it forced Washington to rely on militia. On November 6, 1776, Washington told Hancock he was forced to call in the militia of the eastern states to


shore up his forces because he did not believe he could re-enlist his army following their defeats in New York.\textsuperscript{159} Throughout the war this was a problem for Washington and several historians have convincingly argued that the issue with the militia was its unreliability against British regulars. While this was certainly the case in many instances, there were some important battles in which the militias and state levies from New England and the Middle States fought quite well (Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill, Bennington, and Cowpens, to name a few). Perhaps a more serious problem for Washington with these state forces was who controlled them.

During the summer of 1778, the Continental Lines of South Carolina and Georgia attempted to partner with the militia of Georgia to attack British forces in Florida. Their goal was to forestall further British attacks on Charleston and other ports in the South. The expedition was a spectacular failure. Brigadier General Robert Howe led the Continental forces while the governor of Georgia, John Houstoun, led the militia. Over the course of the campaign, Houstoun refused to comply with Congressional mandates to place all militia forces under the command of the Continental leadership while operating with the Continental Army. Instead, his militia took the best of all local supplies, attempted to charge the Army for their own wagons, and stole horses and food from the Army. The result was an aborted campaign.\textsuperscript{160} The American forces never reached the


\textsuperscript{160} John F. Grimke, “Journal of the Campaign to the Southward, May 9\textsuperscript{th} to July 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1778,” \textit{South Carolina Historical and Genealogical Magazine} 12, no. 4 (October 1911): 194-206.
British fort and the next year British forces were free to march north and support the seizure of Savannah.

Washington’s arguments did not fall on deaf ears at the Continental Congress. The delegates did pass resolutions to demand more men for the Army and to allow enlistments of three years or the duration of the war in exchange for large bounties, to include 100 acres of land for every man who stayed in the Army until the conclusion of the war. Still, Congress did not have the authority to enlist soldiers directly. As John Hancock wrote to the Massachusetts’ General Court on October 9, 1776, all Congress could do was help the states induce enlistment with increases of pay, issuances of clothing, and grants of land. It was still the responsibility of the states to garner recruits through their own resolutions.  

The result was a haphazard system of enlistment, determined by state, which often placed soldiers at odds with one another over the different terms of service. Once Congress set the initial numbers of regiments required from each state and the base bounties for enlistment, the states then set out their individual terms of service. Massachusetts initially voted to supplement the salaries of their soldiers with an extra 20 shillings per month and a new blanket annually. It also mandated that officers failing to meet their enlistment quotas would be forced to forfeit their commissions and send their soldiers to other companies. Connecticut also voted to supplement their soldiers’ pay with 20 shillings.

\[161\] The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay: To Which are Prefixed the Charters of the Province, V (1769-1780) (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Company, 1886), 680.

\[162\] Ibid., 681-2.
This attempt to encourage enlistment was not repeated in the other states further south. The result was disgruntlement among the other soldiers, particularly those from New York serving with New England regiments in the Northern Department. Congress passed a resolve in November 1776 (at the urging of Washington\textsuperscript{163}) requesting Massachusetts revoke its previous promise.\textsuperscript{164} In the same month, both Massachusetts and Connecticut complied, revoking the supplemental pay, though Massachusetts did add an additional £20 bounty, absolving its soldiers who enlisted the previous month of their commitment and encouraging them to re-enlist under the new terms.\textsuperscript{165} But while the governments of New England were convinced to lessen their enlistment inducements to help the southern states, Congress was forced to raise soldier pay to bring the rest of the Army in line with New England standards. While soldiers from New York, Pennsylvania, and the rest of the southern states were initially recruited at a monthly salary of $5, the soldiers of New England received $6.67 per month. Due to the refusal of soldiers from New York and Pennsylvania to march north to Canada unless properly compensated,

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\textsuperscript{163} Washington, “Letter to John Hancock, Peekskill, NY, November 11, 1776,” PGWD, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-07-02-0102}.

\textsuperscript{164} The Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts Bay, 683-4.

\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 684; Charles J. Hoadly, ed., The Public Records of the State of Connecticut, from October 1776 to February 1778, inclusive, with the Journal of the Council of Safety from October 11, 1776 to May 6, 1778, inclusive, and an Appendix (Hartford: Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1894), 65-6, 70.
Washington was forced to request that Congress standardize soldier pay and raise it to meet New England’s rate.\(^\text{166}\) Shortly thereafter, Congress did so.

By the fall of 1777, Massachusetts began approaching the issue of enlistments from another angle. As inflation continued to accelerate, soldiers’ families suffered from an inability to support themselves on soldier pay. In September 1777, the General Court passed a resolve ordering the towns to give families half their soldier’s pay to buy goods at a reasonable rate. If a soldier was enlisted to fill the quota from another town, the hometown could petition the Court for recompense from the enlisting town.\(^\text{167}\) While the state did work to increase soldier and officer pay through state lotteries,\(^\text{168}\) throughout the remainder of the war Massachusetts recognized a need to support the families of soldiers currently serving if they were to have any chance to continue enlisting new soldiers.

By September 1779, enlistment negotiations between those serving for Massachusetts and the General Court began anew as most of the soldiers had enlisted for three years and their enlistments were about to end. Major General William Heath from Roxbury, Massachusetts wrote to the Court at the beginning of the month, warning the politicians that there would be serious challenges re-enlisting those soldiers already serving. A committee of three was appointed to visit their soldiers at West Point, New York and offering both an addition $300 enlistment bonus (additional to those bounties offered by Congress) and a promise to address those entitlements in arrears by January 1,


\(^{167}\) *The Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts Bay*, 812.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 983.
The committee met with the officers and soldiers and then submitted their report to the Court on November 12, 1779.

In their report, the committee disclosed the grievances of those serving in the Massachusetts Line. Both officers and soldiers were no longer willing to remain in the service. Their families were destitute and support from the towns was insufficient. Officers were broke, paying for their own clothes and feeding their soldiers without recompense from the government. Soldiers claimed their weapons were paid for from their enlistment bounties. Furthermore, soldiers who deserted were not actively pursued. Instead, they were readily hired as laborers by the towns at lower wages and protected by the towns from prosecution. Despite the promise of $300 for both those enlisted for the duration and those willing to re-enlist, the committee did not believe enlistments would be adequate unless the Court could provide their soldiers with good clothing and good food quickly.\(^\text{170}\)

While the Court did agree to forward $500,000 to General Heath and to fund a visit to Boston by a committee from the Army to continue the discussion of grievances, the state of Massachusetts was saved from being forced to address all the complaints from their soldiers by the ending of the war. Still, their inability to honor their promises continued to remain an issue, stirring discontent that fed into Shay’s Rebellion in 1786.

Throughout the Revolution, Massachusetts approached the challenge of enlistment from a perspective similar to its approach in the past and in line with its perspective on labor as a whole. Towns were responsible for labor management and they


\(^{170}\) \textit{The Acts and Resolves of Massachusetts Bay}, 1284-6.
remained responsible for soldier quotas and for the maintenance of their soldiers’ families. While participation in the militia was compulsory, enlistment in the Continental Army remained largely voluntary, forcing the Court to negotiate terms throughout the war. These negotiations were expensive, over-extending both the state and the towns well past their abilities to honor their own terms. Still, Massachusetts consistently maintained the largest number of soldiers in the field throughout the war.

The result of these methods of recruiting was a representation of the full spectrum of Massachusetts’ society. According to an investigation of both the enlistment and tax records of 4071 soldiers from four regions of Massachusetts conducted by historian Walter Sargent, 30% of all men who enlisted for any form of service (Continental, state, and militia) enlisted in the Continental Army. And the highest number of those enlisted in 1777 under the new longer terms of service. Refusing to enlist for the duration of the war, most of these men enlisted for three years, though others agreed to enlist once eight- and nine-month enlistments were allowed. The median age of enlistees was 23 years of age and overall their ages were representative of the state’s population. While it is difficult to determine the economic status of men that young in New England, Sargent traced the family backgrounds of those soldiers who enlisted in 1777 and determined that these soldiers fell within the median economic status of both the soldiers who had served

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172 Ibid., 54.

173 Ibid., 57-8.
in 1775 and 1776 and within the median of the rest of the state’s population.\textsuperscript{174} Finally, very few enlistees were black, Native American, or foreign-born, accounting for only 37 of 1536 soldiers whose records specifically annotated origin (2% of the population).\textsuperscript{175}

One of the few states to support the war with its own soldiers as effectively was Connecticut. Initially, Connecticut recruited in a fashion similar to its neighbor, Massachusetts. Connecticut also started by granting a twenty-shilling supplement to soldier salaries and then rescinded the offer at the request of Congress. For the first 18 months of the war, Connecticut strived to meet its required manning voluntarily, through higher bounties and caring for families. In December 1776 the Assembly voted to add £10 to the Congressional enlistment bounty.\textsuperscript{176} In the same month, the Assembly sent a committee to its soldiers, asking those unwilling to re-enlist to stay for a period past their enlistment, with additional allowances.\textsuperscript{177} On March 18, 1777, at a meeting of the governor and the Council of Safety, it was recommended that the towns establish committees to care for soldiers’ families as an inducement for more voluntary enlistments.\textsuperscript{178} Despite these attempts, the state quotas could not be filled, necessitating a new approach to the problem.

On April 22, 1777, the governor again met with the Council of Safety. They decided to solve their problems with enlistment in a new manner. The commissioned

\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 61.

\textsuperscript{175} Ibid., 60.

\textsuperscript{176} The Public Records of Connecticut, 106.

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid., 126-8.

\textsuperscript{178} Ibid., 193-4.
officer from every militia company in every town would meet to determine how many soldiers they were short to meet their town quotas. The field officers would then evenly divide the militiamen into classes, one for each man needed to fill the quota. These officers were instructed to divide the men as fairly as possible and then gather all the militiamen together, separate them into their classes, and instruct them to produce a man for enlistment within three days. If a recruit was not forthcoming, one man from that class would be drafted into service for the remainder of the year.\textsuperscript{179}

The system of “classing” was enforced in May, but not without a few caveats. First, men from the towns were encouraged to find recruits on their own. Any two men who produced a recruit by May 26, 1777 would themselves be exempt from service for the term of their recruit’s enlistment. The recruit would count against the quota of his town, unless that quota was complete, in which case he would count against the town of those two men presenting him. After May 26, the militia companies of the towns still requiring men would meet, class their militiamen, and produce the required enlistee. If a man refused to enlist despite being drafted, another man would be forced to enlist and the first man would be penalized under the same laws governing those enlisting and refusing to march. All those men enlisting for three years or the duration would receive all bounties allowed and those agreeing to enlist for the rest of the year would receive £3.\textsuperscript{180}

By the end of 1777, the towns were still being given quotas to fill but the overall responsibility for recruiting was given to the six militia brigades in the state. Officers from the Continental Line were not required to leave the service to recruit. Instead, the

\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 207-9.

\textsuperscript{180} Ibid., 240-2.
field officers from the six brigades canvassed the towns, enforcing the quotas, classing, and the drafts. In October 1777, still attempting to meet its obligation, the Assembly agreed to draft 300 men from the First Militia Brigade and 300 men from the Second Militia Brigade for two months, with service in Peekskill, New York, under the command of General Israel Putnam.\textsuperscript{181} Additionally, in an effort to induce soldiers to voluntarily enlist, rather than continue to force a draft, the state made it legal for towns to impress food and clothing from those who could afford to give it (but were unwilling to sell at reasonable prices) and give those goods to families of soldiers serving in the Continental Army.\textsuperscript{182}

By 1778, Connecticut was again allowing one-year enlistments to encourage voluntary service and modified classing by directing the officers involved to draft men taking into account those who had already served in some capacity. According to the spirit of the law, if a man had already served for a period of time, another man should be selected based on his lack of service. If a draftee felt his selection was not in concurrence with these guidelines, he could argue his case with the officer in charge of the draft and the officer had the authority to pick another man from the militia. Draftees would receive a bonus of over £5 and had 10 days to either voluntarily enlist or produce a substitute.\textsuperscript{183}

The decision to move quickly from an all-volunteer force to a compromise between volunteerism and compulsory service is interesting, given Connecticut’s military tradition. As a colony, it mobilized forces in much the same way as Massachusetts,

\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 405-6.

\textsuperscript{182} Ibid., 419.

\textsuperscript{183} Ibid., 474-5.
abandoning universal service for financial inducements to encourage enlistments, though it did not stop impressments completely until 1760. Harold E. Selesky’s work on the topic, *War and Society in Colonial Connecticut*, agreed with much of what Fred Anderson had to say about the Bay colony, though Selesky did highlight a growing concern in Connecticut for its autonomy. Massachusetts always shared a long border with French Canada. Threats to its frontier were constant and so popular support for military ventures remained high throughout the colonial period. Connecticut did not share this motivation as it moved into the eighteenth century. It did have a close relationship with Massachusetts and, along with the financial support enjoyed by all the colonies from London in the second-half of the Seven Years’ War, it was able to consistently provide a large number of voluntary soldiers during each campaign of that war. Still, the colony’s political elites feared that Connecticut’s political autonomy would be reduced if it failed to provide forces to support Britain’s imperial wars.

While Connecticut did institute a more coercive form of recruiting during the War for Independence than Massachusetts, it exercised that plan in a similar fashion. Though legislation was utilized to give authority to military officers to force enlistments, the Assembly attempted to avoid resistance to their use of political power by encouraging the use of social pressure instead. Private Joseph Plumb Martin enlisted for the duration of the war in 1777 under this model. In the spring of 1777, Martin’s town instituted classing by separating their militia company into squads, classed by ratable property. Each squad had to enlist a man for three years or the duration. If no one volunteered, the squad could

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184 Selesky, 144, 155.

185 Ibid., 166.
collectively hire a man to fill its requirement. If the squad failed to hire a man, one of their members would be drafted. In Martin’s case, he was included in his grandfather’s squad and was pressured by the older men to volunteer, thus saving his grandfather and others from serving.\textsuperscript{186} Social pressure (centered on town culture) allowed Connecticut to raise more men than any other state except Massachusetts and Virginia.

When the war first began, Virginia also was able to raise regiments voluntarily. In July 1775, the Virginia Convention raised two regiments totaling 1000 men to fight against Governor Dunmore and the Redcoats stationed in the colony. Initially, the new state was divided into 16 districts with a very rational system for recruiting that allowed the deputy of the district to appoint the company officers and then direct those officers to enlist a total of 68 men for each of their companies. No officer was allowed to recruit outside his district until the company from another district was complete. These 16 companies formed two regiments. Seniority among the officers would be determined by who brought their company to the appointed rendezvous first.\textsuperscript{187}

Following Dunmore’s Proclamation, in December 1775 the Convention attempted to raise another six regiments. In an attempt to voluntarily enlist these 3000 soldiers, the state abandoned the concept of districting, allowing officers to recruit wherever they could find the men willing to join for two years. Along with a 20-shilling bonus, soldiers

\textsuperscript{186} Martin, 37-9.

\textsuperscript{187} William Waller Hening, \textit{Hening’s Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the first session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, IX} (1775-1778) (Richmond: W.W. Gray, 1819), 10-7.
would be exempt from taxes and their families would be cared for at the public’s expense if they were maimed or killed.\textsuperscript{188}

During this early period of revolutionary fervor and public spirit, Virginia was successful raising the required men. Within less than a year, however, the state that provided many of the most ardent Patriots in the public arena began a struggle to raise even a third of the soldiers those Patriots promised in the Congress. Over the course of the next five years, Virginia state legislators leaned on their county structure and moved quickly towards solutions to solve their manpower problem that mirrored the colony’s previous solutions to labor shortages. In October 1776, the initial act was passed establishing Virginia’s requirement to provide 15 regiments to the Continental Army. Since the state already had nine battalions in the field, those soldiers in service would be re-enlisted under the new establishment and another six battalions were needed. Officers would be selected by the county militia officers and commissioned by Congress provided they enlisted their quota of soldiers. The state offered no additional inducements for enlistment but the act did enumerate the bounty and benefits offered by Congress.\textsuperscript{189}

While the surviving muster rolls are incomplete, it is clear by May 1777 Virginia managed to place less than 4000 soldiers in the Continental service.\textsuperscript{190} In response to the shortfall of volunteers, the Convention began a draft of militiamen by county. Any two militiamen who convinced a man to enlist in the original nine battalions would be exempt from further drafts from the militia. The county magistrates would draft the remainder of

\textsuperscript{188} Ibid., 75-81, 91.

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 179-84.

\textsuperscript{190} Lesser, 46.
the soldiers from among the men most readily available and fit for service.\textsuperscript{191} Later in the year, the rules for the draft were refined, defining eligible men as those without children and providing bonuses for those who volunteered, allowing enlistments as short as six months.\textsuperscript{192}

Throughout the remainder of the war Virginia passed a series of laws that attempted to combine social pressure and political coercion it but never succeeded in creating the regiments Washington needed. By October 1780, the enlistment bonus went as high as including one free slave between the ages of ten and thirty years of age, 60 pounds of gold or silver, and 300 acres of land for those successfully completing their service of three years or the duration (the land grant was only offered to officers).\textsuperscript{193} Despite this attempt to give an enlistment bonus less vulnerable to inflation (in the same act soldiers were offered $12,000 for simply enlisting), the draft continued until May 1781 when Lord Cornwallis’ invasion of the state apparently forced the issue and made the draft no longer necessary.\textsuperscript{194}

The political elites of Virginia, in similar fashion to their northern counterparts, approached the problem of enlistment in ways that embodied their cultural norms for organizing labor. Poor whites were necessarily targeted as it was viewed as too dangerous to arm enslaved blacks. The result was that one-sixth of all recruits were substitutes, paid

\textsuperscript{191}Hening, 275-80.

\textsuperscript{192}Ibid., 337-49.

\textsuperscript{193}William Waller Hening, 	extit{Hening’s Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of all the Laws of Virginia from the first session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619, X} (1779-1781) (Richmond: W.W. Gray, 1819), 326-37.

\textsuperscript{194}Ibid., 433-4.
to serve in the stead of the gentry and richer yeomanry not interested in attaining a commission as an officer. One-third of those who enlisted were adolescents and fully 80% of the soldiers were younger than 25 years of age. And 20% of all recruits were foreign-born, most of these men coming from the Scots-Irish immigration of the early 1770s. In other words, the men recruited or drafted to serve were the young and poor of Virginia society. In particular, draftees were akin to indentured servants, landless young men who were given money at the beginning of their indenture and promised a bounty to begin their life anew when their time of service came to an end. Of course, this form of military indenture competed with other forms of labor servitude that placed wealthy landowners at odds with the needs of the Revolution. Military service outside of the county militia, when compelled by a draft, was viewed as forced servitude by those freemen drafted, explaining the extreme difficulty experienced by the state to either execute the draft or meet its Congressional requirements. While Virginia did manage to field the second-largest state line in the Continental Army (through a combination of financial inducements, social pressure, and drafting), its attempts to negotiate the initial terms of authority for service to the Continental Army left the leaders of the Army with significant leadership challenges and created a large social gap between the enlisted soldiers and their officers.

In Pennsylvania, the state first relied heavily on the Associations to supply soldiers in 1775 and 1776. From June to November 1775, the state assembly first moved to gain control of these private organizations, paying for their services and equipment with public money and encouraging all white males between the ages of sixteen and fifty

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to join. On November 25, 1775, the assembly approved the Rules and Regulations for the Better Government of the Military Association, determining the rank structure of the Association officers and adopting the Articles of Association that enumerated military laws and punishment. Furthermore, a fine of two pounds ten shillings was legislated against those men unwilling to join the Associations. By 1777, the state had moved away from the Association model of militia service to an encouragement of regular service in the Continental Army. Officers found that while men on the frontier were willing to serve, inhabitants from the southeast of the state were not, particularly within the urban areas of Philadelphia. The result was that many of the soldiers serving in the Pennsylvania Line were immigrants of German or Scots-Irish origin while their officers were more affluent gentlemen from the east who had originally begun their service in the Pennsylvania Associations. Still, many of these men in the rank and file initially enlisted under the assumption that they would fight to protect their homes in the west. Though these men enlisted under a three-year term of service, they soon began to believe their use in other theaters was a violation of the terms under which they had agreed to serve.

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197 Ibid., 499-516.


199 Ibid., 70-1.
Recruiting for the Army set the initial terms of service within the force. Men entering the service either agreed that their enlistment came from a legitimate exercise of authority from their state government and recruiting officers (and were more willing to follow their regimental officers) or they did not (and resisted that exercise of authority over them). During the earliest stages of the war, the vast majority of soldiers from every state were enlisted voluntarily but for short terms and high bounties. The result was a motivated force that was undisciplined, untrained, and often unwilling to remain in the field once the terms of enlistment had ended. Over time, some states maintained the voluntary nature of enlistments (though at a continued cost that grew increasingly unsupportable) while others attempted to coerce enlistments that were met with resistance both before and during service. The result was an overarching inability of the states to meet their obligations, either to Congress or to their soldiers.

Towards the end of the war, Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert observed first hand the problems that both Virginia and Massachusetts had recruiting for the Army. As an officer in the Massachusetts Line, by October 1780 he was quite disillusioned with the insistence by his state to maintain voluntary enlistments and the state’s inability to honor enlistment obligations. In a letter to his father, Gilbert explained that morale was low among the officers because they had not been paid in months and they were forced to constantly train new recruits. Many officers were resigning their commissions, his company commander Daniel Shay among them. Gilbert claimed his days were filled drilling raw recruits that were coming in daily, men unaccustomed to army life and most likely to break under fire. These new soldiers slept while on guard duty and were not trustworthy. Gilbert felt relegated to the position of a drill sergeant, training men whose enlistments
were so short, they would likely leave the service just as Gilbert finished training them. In his estimation, Massachusetts would be better served drafting enlistees, like Virginia, if the war was ever to be concluded successfully.  

Less than a year later, Lieutenant Gilbert experienced a campaign that changed his perspective considerably. By May of 1781, Gilbert’s unit, the Fifth Massachusetts Regiment, was fighting in Virginia. He witnessed the difficulty that Virginia had mobilizing a regular force through drafting. Washington’s Grand Army, of which the Massachusetts Line was the largest component, was forced to standby as the British plundered the countryside because, according to Gilbert, Virginia was incapable of fielding regular regiments capable of fighting. Virginia could not enlistment men for three years or the duration. Their soldiers were not well trained, as a result. Furthermore, this inability to recruit was mirrored in the other three southern states. Gilbert blamed the lack of voluntary enlistments in the south for the fall of Georgia and the Carolinas. The key to Revolutionary success was New England and its soldiers.  

The sentiments expressed by Gilbert over that last year of fighting highlighted the importance of enlistment methods for leadership in the Continental Army. For eight years the officers in the Army negotiated terms of authority with their soldiers, developing norms in the exercise of power through discipline, training, and experience that ended with a distinctly American way of leading soldiers. Negotiations began with the terms of enlistment and continued to be shaped by those terms over the course of a soldier’s service. Washington understood the impact of enlistment terms on discipline and training,

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200 Gilbert, 25-6.  
201 Ibid., 41-3.
though he did not show in his correspondence that he recognized the importance of local requirements on the methods of recruiting. Expectations were established based on promises made when a soldier first entered the Army though those contractual agreements were rarely met. Still, most of the soldiers who enlisted for three years or the duration remained in the Army despite their disappointments. This was because while leadership as a negotiation of authority began with enlistment terms, it continued through the actual experience of service, as soldiers and officers built cohesion in discipline, training, and hardship.
CHAPTER 4
DISCIPLINE

On the morning of June 28, 1776 Thomas Hickey was marched to the gallows erected in a field near Bowery Lane in New York and hanged for the crimes of sedition and mutiny. Hickey’s execution was completed in front of a crowd of 20,000 spectators, including much of the Continental Army then occupying the city. He was formerly a member of Washington’s personal guard, implicated in a plot to sabotage American fortifications, to possibly kidnap or kill the General, and to desert to the British Army once imperial forces landed in the state. He was the only soldier implicated in the plot and he was the first soldier executed in the Continental Army.202

The execution of Thomas Hickey is historically interesting for many reasons. Thomas Hickey was not originally from the American colonies; he was an Irishman. While he was the only person executed, several civilians were also implicated (including the mayor of New York) but never prosecuted.203 And the crimes Hickey was convicted of were not capital crimes.204 In fact, the two crimes of which the defendant was expressly convicted did not become capital crimes until new Articles of War were approved by the Continental Congress three months later.205 Regardless, Hickey’s

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204 “Court Martial for the trial of Thomas Hickey and others,” American Archives: Documents of the American Revolution, 1774-1776, http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?/var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/.17512#.
accomplice, Michael Lynch, was never brought to trial, the mayor of New York, David Mathews, was imprisoned in Connecticut but he escaped, and no other persons were punished.

Washington and his council of generals used the occasion to parade their troops to the field to observe the administration of justice. The next day Washington admonished his soldiers to avoid “Lewd women,” Thomas Hickey’s excuse for traveling down a bad path. Newspapers such as the Constitutional Gazette applauded the execution of an enemy to Liberty. Finally, almost as many people reportedly attended the event as lived in New York at the time. This very public event was an occasion to enforce discipline in the new army at its most extreme against a person who probably did not have many relatives in the country, for a crime most Patriots could agree was unforgivable, and during a time of extreme duress when the enemy was quickly approaching.

Over the course of the War for Independence, officers in the Continental Army evolved their views on military discipline and how to achieve success within their formations. Initially, senior leaders perceived a requirement for more authority (codified

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205 It is possible the recorder of the court-martial documents annotated the second offense incorrectly, meaning instead to record a violation of the thirty-first article, prohibiting anyone in the Army from compelling their commanders to surrender or abandon fortifications to the enemy. This was a capital crime at the time and would remain so.


in stricter military regulations) as the way to discipline soldiers who lacked training or experience. But there was a more complex relationship between regulations, training, experience, and morale that became clear to many officers over time. Indeed, the initial focus on more stringent regulations proved insufficient to the development of discipline. Instead, a requirement to provide leadership, develop unit cohesion, and inspire motivation soon became apparent and altered the focus of Continental Army leaders.

The term discipline as it was used in relation to military leadership in the Continental Army was the measure of commitment by both the leaders and the led to the negotiated agreement of standards and exercise of authority. Well-disciplined troops were identified as those who maintained their appearance, obeyed the orders of their officers quickly and efficiently, withstood attacks by their enemies, and performed their duties according to established standards. Ill-disciplined soldiers failed to maintain their cleanliness, were unwilling to follow orders or stand against the enemy in combat, and could not be counted on to maintain their duties in camp. For some leaders in the Continental Army, the key to maintaining good discipline was a strong set of military regulations that allowed officers to enforce standards, both as a method to reform those who violated regulations and as a deterrence to others thinking of doing the same.

These definitions of disciplined and undisciplined troops illustrate the connections between training and morale to discipline and highlight the levels of commitment or compliance to the standards negotiated between those serving in the Army. Soldiers who were trained to perform well on campaign and during encampments were confident in the abilities of themselves, their fellows, and their leaders. These were the men who would stand against the British in an open field and follow directions under fire. Still, their
morale (often determined by how well they were provisioned and paid) could detract from their willingness to obey the orders of their officers. This led in some cases to regiments exhibiting the worst breakdowns in discipline despite their relatively high levels of training. Soldiers who were well trained with high morale were committed to the standards expected by their leadership and acted with little need for officers to resort to harsh treatment. Soldiers experiencing low morale or who had not received training were much less likely to show any traits of good discipline and would only comply with Army standards when faced with the stringent enforcement of disciplinary actions.

From the beginning of the war, Washington understood this relation between training, morale, and punishment. He believed his army’s initial inability to face the British on the offensive was rooted in his lack of stronger authority over his soldiers necessary due to their lack of training and experience. He knew the first Articles of War, passed by Congress in June 1775, lacked the power to compel his soldiers, unused to military life, to obey regulations with which they did not agree. He wanted the authority to enforce his standards to a degree that perpetrators would be reformed and their fellows would be deterred. His perspective on this issue was formed from his experiences as a plantation owner in Virginia and as a colonial officer in the Seven Years’ War. Washington’s view on the need for strict military regulations was not shared by some of his other officers and soldiers. And while Congress would strengthen American military regulations by the end of 1776, the increase in punishments would be tempered in important ways and not always result in an increase in unit discipline.

In 1774, the British Army adopted newly revised Articles of War. In 1775, the Massachusetts provisional government created their own Articles to govern their militia
forces that were substantially weaker. The Continental Congress initially chose to adopt the Massachusetts Articles of War for their army. For the next 17 months, Washington petitioned Congress to strengthen those laws, arguing he needed regulations more in line with British practices if he was to form an army capable of defeating his enemy. By the fall of 1776, Congress complied, re-writing their Articles of War to be almost identical with the British model. Still, despite an increase both in the number of regulations categorized as capital and in the severity of corporal punishments, limitations remained that would restrict the administration of punishment in ways nonexistent in the British system. Certainly, as the war progressed, the Continental Army became more disciplined and more capable. While some of the credit for this improvement could be given to stronger military regulations, a reliance on the use of coercion would be insufficient to effect the changes required for the Continental Army.

Thomas Simes, a captain in the British Army, published a book on military leadership in 1776 titled *The Military Guide for Young Officers, in Two Volumes*. While his work included excerpts from other famous British officers and illustrated in detail the duties of senior officers, junior officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers, he began his piece discussing discipline. According to Simes, discipline was the soul of an army. He argued it was a false assertion that complete subordination of a soldier to his superiors was a debasement of courage. To the contrary, the armies with the strictest discipline had made the greatest achievements. General officers did more than give orders; they needed to instill the severest discipline by upholding justice with impartiality. If he could do this, a commander would engender both the love and fear in
his subordinates necessary to succeed in war. From the beginning of his tenure as Commander of the Continental Army, Washington adhered to these very same beliefs, stating in his first general order to the newly established army that “Subordination & Discipline (the Life and Soul of an Army) [will] make us formidable to our enemies, honorable to ourselves, and respected in the world…”

Some historians have emphasized Washington’s outlook on discipline and they have given some credit to the increasing severity of disciplinary actions in the Continental Army for its success as the war dragged on (or at least for its ability to remain in the field year round). Combined with longer enlistments and an increasing number of the lower sorts serving in the ranks, this growing authority over soldiers could be viewed as indicative of the Army’s growing professionalism based on a European model. It could also help us understand why those serving in the army submitted to the harsh realities of a war in which little support was given to soldiers in food, clothing, or pay. The Continental Army remained largely intact because the soldiers serving had nowhere to go, they were legally bound to remain, and the consequences of resistance were quite high.

James K. Martin and Mark E. Lender offered such an interpretation in *A Respectable Army*. Following the defeats experienced in New York and New Jersey during the summer and fall of 1776, Congress abandoned their support of a purely republican force and granted Washington the means to create a European-style army. It

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demanded the states supply men enlisted for three years or the duration and increased the severity of the military laws to allow Washington to compel compliance. As the war progressed, the rank and file increasingly filled with men of little or no property. At Valley Forge, von Steuben introduced his drill regimen to increase the army’s military discipline while Washington’s decision to execute the ringleaders of the New Jersey Line Mutiny maintained discipline through the end of the war. The increasing gap in experience and composition between the army and American society introduced a potential to destroy civil-military relations that was mitigated only by the inability of the officers and soldiers to come together with their grievances.\(^{210}\)

Other historians have investigated Continental Army discipline primarily from the perspective of punishment and coercion. In *A Proper Sense of Honor*, Caroline Cox explores the differences in forms of punishment between officers and soldiers and their connections to honor. Corporal punishment was reserved for private soldiers because they had little besides their bodies to offer in reparations for their crimes. Officers and those serving in militias often owned property, allowing for the imposition of fines instead of physical pain. Central to her thesis, however, is the idea that all men maintained personal honor. Every punishment, whether financial or corporal, held the essential element of shame. The true punishment lay in the damage to one’s honor. For this reason, all of those found guilty of violating military regulations were subject to the public release of notification of a court-martial’s verdict. This publication could be found in general orders and local newspapers. Furthermore, the rank and file were notified in the more visceral manner of reprimands and whippings conducted in front of the regiments. The purpose of

\(^{210}\) Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 75-7, 114, 127.
this study in punishment was to highlight cultural differences in the toleration for violence (Cox illustrated the vast disparity between South Carolina and Massachusetts in the severity of punishment at the beginning of the war) and the central theme of honor that flows throughout her book.211

While military regulations and punishment were certainly important, discipline was instilled through a combination of leadership, training, esprit de corps, and disciplinary actions. Still, a comparison of the differing ideas of how the Continental Army should regulate itself when discipline broke down is useful to understanding how leaders sought to enforce discipline and to what degree the rank and file would tolerate disciplinary enforcement. When the Revolutionary War began, officers and soldiers from the various states entered the service with widely different views on this subject. Regiments from the state lines approached the issue of coercion separately but over time, consensus was reached that standardized the administration of justice, acculturated the members of the Army to its deployment, but still left room for negotiation up to the end of the war.

During the last colonial war, Virginia instituted military laws very similar to their British counterparts. Starting in the summer of 1755, the Virginia assembly passed new military laws for their provincial force that authorized corporal punishment against those soldiers found guilty of mutiny, desertion, or sedition. The death penalty was mandated for those convicted of treason. While this new act of the colonial legislature imposed much stricter regulations on men conscripted for the Virginia Regiment compared to their colonial militia, these laws were not enough for the regimental commander, George

211 Cox, A Proper Sense of Honor, 77-117.
Washington. By October 1755, Washington threatened to resign if the assembly did not impose harsher penalties more in line with British military regulations, claiming the current regulations failed to impose proper subordination of the soldiers to their officers and of the officers to Washington. Governor Dinwiddie agreed, directing the House of Burgesses to pass a new Mutiny Act that increased the number of capital crimes and allowed for harsher corporal punishments. The result was a new set of regulations passed in October 1755 that mirrored British punishments, making treason, mutiny, insubordination, and striking an officer all capital crimes. Additionally, the use of the lash was increased, allowing punishments as large as 1000 lashes and giving officers the latitude to summarily administer corporal punishment in certain cases.\textsuperscript{212}

South Carolina began the Revolutionary War with similarly harsh forms of punishment allowed within their regiments. When the colony raised regiments in 1775, the South Carolina Assembly passed regulations based on the British military laws of 1774. For the next year, courts-martial held in South Carolinian regiments passed down sentences as high as 800 lashes. While these harsher sentences were often pardoned or lowered, actual punishments still exceeded the current Continental restrictions of 39 lashes, resulting in punishments of 50 to 100 lashes. Furthermore, soldiers were not allowed to leave their camps without written passes and white civilians were asked to stop soldiers and demand their passes. If a soldier was caught without a pass, the civilian was entitled to a reward when he returned the soldier to his commander. Severe punishments remained the norm in South Carolina until November 1776, when General Robert Howe arrived with the new Continental Articles of War. He insisted the new laws

\textsuperscript{212} Titus, \textit{The Old Dominion at War}, 91-2.
be read aloud to all soldiers in the South Carolina line, lowering the levels of punishment and bringing South Carolina in line with the rest of the Continental Army.\textsuperscript{213}

Pennsylvania initially did not allow severe corporal punishment within their Associator regiments. In November 1775, the Pennsylvania Assembly adopted new Articles of Association, incorporating 32 articles that worked as their articles of war. Article 15 stipulated two privates or non-commissioned officers would participate as voting members during courts-martial, a practice in use in the Prussian Army at the time but certainly not the British Army, nor would it be adopted for the Continental Army.\textsuperscript{214} Furthermore, punishments would be limited to fines, dignals, and reductions in rank.\textsuperscript{215} It is important to note, however, that the Associators were initially comprised of men with relatively equal social and economic statuses given the requirement for enlistees to provide their own equipment.\textsuperscript{216}

In the Seven Years’ War, Pennsylvania had initiated more severe forms of punishment within the regiments of their provincial army. Following the failure of Pennsylvania soldiers to remain in service at Fort Augusta in 1757, Governor Denny used the crisis to institute a more professionalized force. He formed companies known as the “Old Levies” with men enlisted for three years who were regulated under the British articles of war and officers commissioned by the governor. This foray into a nascent

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{213} Cox, 96-8.
\item \textsuperscript{214} Seymour, \textit{The Pennsylvania Associators}, 139; \textit{Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania} VIII (1766-1776): 509.
\item \textsuperscript{215} \textit{Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania} VIII (1766-1776): 510.
\item \textsuperscript{216} Samuel J. Newland, \textit{The Pennsylvania Militia: The Early Years, 1669-1792}, (Annville, PA: Department of Military and Veterans Affairs, 1997), 130.
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standing army ended fairly quickly, however, once William Pitt began flowing British resources into the colony. At his suggestion, the “New Levies” were instituted in Pennsylvania, with one-year enlistments and officers selected based on their ability to recruit. Still, these forces within the Pennsylvania provincial structure remained under the regulations of the British Articles of War.217

Officers and soldiers entering the Continental Army from the New England states were used to a relatively lax form of military justice that evolved as a result of short-term enlistments under locally known and supported officers from their communities. In Massachusetts during the Seven Years’ War, the governing military law was initially the 1754 Mutiny Act. Riding the wooden horse, running the gauntlet, or other like forms of punishment, could punish all infractions not designated as capital offenses. This was understood to mean that the use of the whip was not to exceed a Biblical limitation of 39 lashes.218 This set of laws did declare the crimes of mutiny, desertion, and sedition as capital crimes. While a court-martial of eleven officers could adjudicate these crimes, the sentence had to be approved by the governor of the colony before it could be carried out. Though the British Articles of War officially regulated all provincial regiments serving with British regular forces after 1755, New England officers attempted to protect their men from British justice (particularly in cases of capital offenses). In one instance when a British officer did issue such a sentence on a New England soldier, the provincial officers begged him to stay the sentence until the governor could be informed. The refusal of the British commander to wait led to a significant increase in desertions at Fort Oswego and,


218 Anderson, A People’s Army, 123-5.
when the British officer was killed a few weeks later, the fort surrendered to the French immediately thereafter. His epitaph from a New England carpenter working at the fort, Stephen Cross, read “thus the man who this week had the lives of valuable men in his hands, and would not extend Mercy to them, now had not time, not even to sue for his own life…” For New England colonial soldiers, the death penalty seemed cruel for all but the most heinous crimes and no officer wished to return home and explain to his neighbor he had executed his son. The result of this lighter form of coercion was that the discipline of New England provincial troops during this period relied on the solidarity of the soldiers with their officers, training in proper military conduct, the entreaties of officers to their soldiers to maintain their duty, and the enforcement of community expectations when they returned home.

Similar to the issues of recruiting and enlistments, the various traditions of colonial military regulations initially worked against the establishment of an immediate standard in the Continental Army. The vast majority of the officers and soldiers that comprised the early force were from New England, unused to the harsher realities of eighteenth-century military punishments and unwilling to subject themselves to a system they viewed as contrary to liberty. General Washington, as their new commander-in-chief, believed soldiers necessarily subordinated themselves to a more stringent standard of punishment compared to those allowed in civil law or militia regulations. Officers needed more authority to administer harsher punishments as a method to instill discipline

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220 Anderson, 125.
in soldiers who would soon come under the fire of British muskets and artillery. The resultant tension between these differing views would lead to a negotiated middle ground where military discipline rested not only on the fear of punishment but also on other means to convince soldiers to adhere to military standards.

As Washington worked to pull together the various groups within his army, he focused on two primary issues he believed were at the heart of a disciplined force. As discussed in the previous chapter, recruitment and enlistment terms had led to his desire for enlistments for the duration of the war. His second concern, spoken of almost in the same breath, was his desire for a more stringent set of military laws. This perceived need for regulations that reflected those of the British Army came from Washington’s experiences, his cultural acceptance of a more violent civil law regime, and his understanding that he was taking command of an army that was not consistently well trained or always reliable under fire. Yet the representatives in the Continental Congress decided initially to take the Articles of War developed by the Massachusetts provincial assembly. These laws authorized only three offenses as capital crimes, limited lashes to 39 for any one person convicted of a lesser crime (and a court-martial could not circumvent this restriction by giving 39 lashes per offense if multiple infractions were annotated), and retained mutiny, desertion, and sedition as corporal crimes. Finally, in recognition of the limited powers of the Congress, Article I stated that while all soldiers were to be regulated by this new system, regiments unwilling to submit themselves to this
standard could, with the concurrence of the Commander, remain under their particular state regulations.\textsuperscript{221}

Clearly, these initial Articles of War were far less draconian than the British regulations issued in 1774. Furthermore, they provided much less authority to Washington than he wanted. After being informed that Congress had decided to adopt the Massachusetts Articles of War for the entire Continental Army, Washington immediately began complaining of the lack of discipline among his New England soldiers and officers.\textsuperscript{222} While he worked to convince a visiting Committee of Conference to strengthen the laws, in October 1775 that committee from Congress upheld the decision to restrict punishment to 39 lashes.\textsuperscript{223} At this point, Washington took a different tack. He issued demands in his general orders for soldiers to behave in a disciplined and orderly manner, appealing to their sense of duty and their adherence to the tenets of the Revolution.\textsuperscript{224} He implored his officers to follow his general orders and to train with their

\textsuperscript{221} “Journals of the Continental Congress – Articles of War, June 30, 1775,” \textit{The Avalon Project}, Yale Law School, \url{http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_06-30-75.asp}.


\textsuperscript{223} “Proceedings of the Committee of Conference, Cambridge, October 18-24, 1775,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.uppress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-02-02-0175-0003}.

When his orders were not followed, he threatened the arrest of his officers and cancelled his soldiers’ furloughs. Furthermore, he issued an order on the eve of his seizure of Dorchester Heights that notified his army that soldiers retreating on the battlefield would be summarily shot for cowardice. Finally, the General worked through general courts-martial to make an example of those refusing to comply with regulations (both officers and soldiers), cashiering, fining, and whipping (within the legal limits) those found guilty of desertion, cowardice, and failure to stay awake on guard.

With Congress, Washington focused on arguments to increase the terms of service for his incoming soldiers, realizing that training and experience would be needed to inculcate discipline in the face of relatively lax military laws. Writing to Joseph Reed on February 1, 1776, Washington claimed the reason he could not attack the British in

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Boston was due to his inability to enforce the harsh discipline necessary do so. Without the threat of severe punishment, only longer enlistments would give him the leverage to train his soldiers properly.\textsuperscript{228} Washington informed John Hancock that training his soldiers the proper subordination necessary to win battles could not be achieved while constantly worrying about recruiting and introducing new recruits each year.\textsuperscript{229} Washington was attempting to achieve the greater authority denied him in the Articles of War through other means.

His difficulties in discipline only increased when he moved his army to New York. By that time, the number of regiments from states outside of New England increased dramatically, as did the need to convene general courts-martial on a more frequent basis. Over the course of six months, from April to September 1776, Washington reported in his general orders the results of no less than 108 general courts-martial that tried 20 officers, 13 non-commissioned officers, and 130 soldiers for desertion, mutiny, cowardice, theft, striking an officer, and attempted murder. These men put on trial came from Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. In many of the cases, the officers were acquitted but when they were not, all were cashiered. For the soldiers, punishments ranged from a week’s imprisonment on bread and water to fines to repay bounties to lashes from between 10 and 39 lashes. The


increase in disciplinary punishments culminated just prior to the British landings on Long Island with the execution of Thomas Hickey for activities that were in reality treasonous.

Despite Washington’s use of coercion to instill military discipline, significant portions of his army continued to act in ways contrary to military order. Soldiers and officers regularly visited a part of New York known as the “Holy Grounds,” a district near Trinity Church where prostitutes plied their trade. On April 26, 1776, the soldiers rioted in this neighborhood after two soldiers were found murdered and one soldier was castrated. The number of soldiers involved during the riot limited Washington to issuing a general order admonishing his army to rely on legitimate redress for wrongs committed by civilians.230 Following the reading of the Declaration of Independence to the various regiments, soldiers again rioted, tearing down a statue of King George III. Again, Washington beseeched his men to maintain discipline and order.231

The result of these breakdowns in military discipline during the Army’s occupation of New York was a continued distrust between Washington (and his closest advisors) and his soldiers. Facing the impending British invasion, Washington increasingly relied on threats of summary punishment for acts of cowardice or failure to comply with orders. He attempted to appeal to republican ideology to convince hungry soldiers not to loot from nearby farms and houses, and he promised rewards to those who acted as good soldiers. At least one of his officers failed to listen when it came to the


statue of King George. Lieutenant Isaac Bangs in the Second Massachusetts Regiment either did not hear Washington’s admonishment or did not agree. From his perspective, the result of the riot was 4000 pounds of lead that could be used to make musket balls. And this would be a fitting use, making ammunition to poison British and Tory soldiers whose minds and souls had been poisoned by the lies of the king. Still, while Washington continued to struggle with how to instill discipline in this new organization, Congress was about to grant both his requests for longer enlistments and more stringent military laws.

Though Washington appeared at a loss to enforce discipline in the majority of his army during the First Establishment, some officers did manage to produce well-disciplined units at the lower levels. Captain Joseph Bloomfield was one officer who apparently discovered how to instill order despite lacking the authority to enact harsh punishments. Leading a company in the Third New Jersey Regiment, Bloomfield marched his men from New York to Albany on May 3, 1776. Benefitting from the leadership of his regimental commander, Colonel Elias Dayton who served in the Jersey Blues during the Seven Years’ War, Bloomfield was proud to report his regiment was recognized as the best disciplined unit in Albany by General Philip Schuyler. In July 1776, Bloomfield was given a separate mission from the rest of his regiment, to command his company and one militia company guarding the rear of the regiment at

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233 Bloomfield, Citizen-Soldier, 40-4.
German Flatts.\textsuperscript{234} A few days later, two more provincial companies joined him, making Bloomfield a \textit{de facto} battalion commander.\textsuperscript{235}

For the next two months, Bloomfield worked hard to maintain order within the four companies. He issued daily orders, conducted roll calls and exercises, appointed volunteer officers as adjutant and quartermaster, and held courts-martial when necessary. He even paraded his companies on Monday, July 15, to read the Declaration of Independence.\textsuperscript{236} During this period, several disciplinary problems confronted Bloomfield, requiring him to make hard decisions given his relatively junior rank and experience. Many of those problems resulted from drunkenness, with officers and soldiers sleeping outside of camp and absenting themselves from exercises and roll calls. In every case involving an officer, Bloomfield managed to force their resignation. In the case of his soldiers, Bloomfield sentenced his men to lashes, imprisonment, and reduction in rank. Yet not a single form of physical punishment was actually carried out. The two corporals reduced in rank were restored shortly thereafter. And imprisonments were limited to the time spent waiting for trial. The only exception to this last point involved Private Michael Reynolds. After his corporal punishment was rescinded, Reynolds claimed he was being punished out of spite and Bloomfield had him immediately imprisoned again. Still, after only three days, Reynolds publicly apologized for his comments, stating his remarks were aimed at his fellow soldiers, not his commander.\textsuperscript{237}

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid., 70-1.

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid., 76.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid., 73, 75.

\textsuperscript{237} Ibid., 89-90, 93.
Captain Bloomfield resorted to group cohesion and identity rather than coercion to maintain discipline over those two months. He repeatedly brought men to the whipping post, admonished them in front of the companies, and then forgave them. He kept the men busy building a fort at their encampment and celebrated the completion of the work with a parade and a toast. Furthermore, he continuously required his officers to share in the exercises and duties of the day. His biggest crisis occurred the day after four months of pay arrived at camp. The following day, five soldiers crossed the river from camp and began drinking. Bloomfield immediately sent a guard detail to return the wayward soldiers. When Bloomfield rode to meet them, one soldier did attempt to flee but Bloomfield subdued him with the flat of his sword. Threatening a general court-martial, Bloomfield again convinced his soldiers to apologize and fall back in line with the rest of their fellows.\(^{238}\)

Officers like Captain Bloomfield were able to more directly connect with their soldiers, negotiating the use of coercion (or threat of its use) with the known levels of training and morale within their units. Bloomfield and many of his soldiers came from the same region in West Jersey, so their relationships were easier to establish. His mentor was an experienced colonial officer who apparently taught Bloomfield the necessity of daily orders and exercises. While Bloomfield’s “regiment” did not encounter an enemy during the period discussed, there was ample opportunity for this small command to degenerate into a disorderly crowd. Yet, despite Bloomfield’s obvious distaste for inflicting physical punishment, only two soldiers deserted and Bloomfield was

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\(^{238}\) Ibid., 103-4.
recognized for his success when he was promoted to deputy judge advocate for the Northern Department by General Horatio Gates in November 1776.\textsuperscript{239}

By 1777, the Continental Army began operating as the Second Establishment. Two resolves from the Continental Congress worked together to provide Washington and his generals more authority over their soldiers. The first, discussed previously, was the enlistment of soldiers for three years or the duration. Of course, many soldiers continued to enlist for much shorter terms but a core of enlistees was created that would remain in service for the most difficult period (both while on campaign and in winter quarters) of the war. The second piece of Congressional legislation transformed the American military legal system to mirror their British counterparts.

The Continental Congress approved a revised Articles of War on September 20, 1776. While the original Articles of War drew directly from the laws set by Massachusetts, the new regulations reflected a dramatic shift to a more professionalized organization. More specifically, the new Articles of War were based directly from the British Articles of War passed by Parliament in 1774.\textsuperscript{240} Many more crimes were specifically noted, both regimental and general courts-martial were strengthened in their abilities to punish, and the list of capital crimes were increased from only three offenses to fully seventeen enumerated offenses. The effect was to give more authority to officers

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\textsuperscript{239} Ibid., 115-6.
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over their soldiers and more autonomy to those officers from the Continental and state
governments.

Martial law in the Continental Army, as in other European armies, was exercised
in regimental and general courts-martial. Due to the nature of colonial provincial armies,
disciplinary actions usually resulted from regimental courts-martial, with few general
courts-martial being held outside of British authority. Provincial generals were few and
their colonial assemblies largely held their authority in check, requiring governor
approval for capital sentences. After over a year of war waged by a Continental Army,
Congress recognized the necessity for the generals in the Army to administer justice in a
more efficient manner and acquiesced to Washington’s call for stricter punishments. Still,
the delegates from the new states required all records and sentences from general courts-
martial be sent to Philadelphia as a method of retaining supervision over sentencing.

The most striking change in the military regulations enacted in September of 1776
was an enormous increase in crimes that could result in the execution of a soldier. Eleven
crimes previously categorized as corporal were moved into the capital crime list and one
of those offenses (Doing violence to those supplying the Army) moved from a crime
initially adjudicated in regimental courts-martial. While this serious increase in Army
authority is important, the new laws also increased the abilities of Army leadership to
punish offenders in every other way. If generals, operating through their courts, could
condemn men to execution for many more crimes, regimental commanders also gained
more power to punish their soldiers. Originally, regimental courts-martial were the venue
to punish those who left their platoons without leave, failed to appear at the parade
ground on time, and were found drunk on duty. By 1777, regimental leadership could
also punish soldiers for speaking traitorously against the Congress, hiring others to do their duty, and destroying private property.²⁴¹

The authority of senior officers over junior officers was also strengthened by 1777. Initially, officers could be cashiered for a total of eight enumerated offenses, while they could be fined for an additional four violations and imprisoned for one crime (Behaving badly in a place of worship (second offense)). The new regulations reduced the use of fines or imprisonment for officers to one offense and removed any violations that could reduce an officer in rank. Instead, officers now faced one of two punishments in the Continental Army; they could be cashiered for fifteen separate offenses (and face publication of their crimes in their home state) or be executed.²⁴² Washington may not have ever achieved the authority to choose his officers but he certainly had gained the power to remove those commissioned officers he found inadequate to the job.

While the regulations that helped usher in the Second Establishment of 1777 did initiate a new era of authority for commanders, they also continued to place restrictions that recognized a compromise between the various military traditions found in the former colonies. Gone was the stricture of 39 lashes for corporal punishments. Instead, a maximum of 100 lashes were permitted. This increased authority for the use of the whip was important but when compared to British practices of 1000 and 2000 lashes for corporal crimes, the Continental limitation becomes more apparent. Furthermore, while a


²⁴² Ibid.
two-thirds majority in the court-martial could sentence a soldier for execution, no sentences passed by a general court-martial could be enacted before the presiding general informed Congress.\textsuperscript{243}

Washington received the news that Congress had approved his requests for longer enlistments and stricter military regulations in a letter written by John Hancock on September 24, 1776. Hancock wrote “that without a well disciplined Army we cannot rationally expect Success against veteran Troops” and that “Congress…(is)…fully convinced…our Militia is inadequate to the Duty”.\textsuperscript{244} Washington received the letter on September 28, 1776 and ordered the “new Rules and Regulations” disseminated to the regimental commanders and read to all the officers and soldiers that very day.\textsuperscript{245} A week later, due to either the lack of efficiency in the Army’s orders process or some reluctance on the part of his officers to relay the new Articles to their soldiers, Washington was forced to again order the reading of the new regulations to the soldiers.\textsuperscript{246} The new Articles of War went into effect on Monday, October 7, 1776.

Yet to what degree did officers actually exercise their powers of coercion (or reformation and deterrence as it was thought of at the time) to force compliance of the

\textsuperscript{243} Ibid.


contractual obligations soldiers entered into when they enlisted? Many officers certainly wielded more legal authority than they had ever practiced in their civilian lives. For officers from the Southern and Chesapeake states, corporal punishment was largely a private affair, practiced by masters over indentured servants and slaves. As the labor system in these regions moved increasingly from a majority of white indentured servants to black slaves, whipping moved further into the realm of the owners, with laws allowing masters to act as judge, jury, and executor on their plantations. Still, most Continental Army company officers from these states were not slave-owners. Furthermore, their soldiers were often lower-class freemen, laborers used to a racial legal system that consciously separated them from the slave class by limiting their vulnerability to suffer private corporal punishment.\(^{247}\)

In the New England states, particularly Massachusetts, corporal punishment was reserved for the state, practiced in public and administered by the county courts of quarter sessions. Guided by John Winthrop in the seventeenth-century, the free labor force was subjected to a rational, legalized form of public punishment aimed at reforming behavior to produce better workers. Families delegated their coercive authority over their children to the town, arguably creating a culture that, by the late eighteenth-century, relied less on whippings and more on an acculturated, self-disciplined workforce.\(^{248}\) In other words, many of the officers and soldiers serving in the Continental Army from New England were not accustomed to administer, suffer, or witness frequent events of corporal


punishment. They were, however, accepting of the concept that such punishments were necessary (if only in a limited fashion) when they were the result of a deliberative justice system and executed in public for the edification of everyone.

Still, there were two groups within the Army more accustomed to a frequent use of the lash to both reform and deter bad behavior. The senior leaders, regimental commanders and general officers, often had experience with either military justice as it was practiced in the Seven Years’ War or with administering justice in a civilian capacity. George Washington was both a plantation owner and a former regimental commander. Colonel Rufus Putnam and most of his fellow regimental commanders from Massachusetts previously served under the British in provincial battalions. Some of these men came up from the ranks while others gained their positions due to their political and social status; these senior officers were no strangers to administering justice.

Additionally, many of the men drafted into the Continental regiments from Middle Atlantic and southern states, particularly in Pennsylvania and Virginia, were immigrants from Europe and some were former soldiers in European armies. These men, particularly those who were veterans, may have been used to a more draconian form of military justice. Jeremiah Greenman, from Danbury, Massachusetts, observed that men from the “Old Country” often had to be flogged 100 lashes apiece else “Sum will git drunk stab the genl horses wen on Sentry at the door.” While his observation is rife with the xenophobia common among New England soldiers, observations of the tougher

attitude towards corporal punishment exhibited by veterans from other armies was common.

As recorded in many of the general and brigade orders that survive today, justice was rarely carried out at even close to the letter of the law, particularly in the case of capital punishment. In fact, offenses like desertion or enlisting in two regiments simultaneously rarely resulted in executions unless attended by the additional crime of doing so in order to change sides and join the British effort. Capital punishment could only be adjudicated in a general court-martial and the decision of the court had to be published in the general orders, making it easier to determine how many soldiers were actually killed for a crime. The general impression left from reading many general orders from 1777 to 1783 is that while many crimes were committed that were classified as capital, very few resulted in a sentencing of death. As British lieutenant Stephen Adye warned in his famous *A Treatise on Courts Martial* in 1769, making too many crimes capital offenses would only encourage humane officers to hide infractions and protect their soldiers.\(^\text{250}\)

During the difficult winter at Valley Forge, not a single instance of the execution of a soldier is recorded in Washington’s general orders. During the winter and spring, over thirty general courts-martial were held, trying at least 63 officers, soldiers, and civilians. Four of those indicted were sentenced to die for their crimes. The first was a civilian, Joseph Worrell, accused and convicted of acting as a spy for the British. His conviction was confirmed by over the two-thirds majority required and he was sentenced

to be hanged. On March 2, 1778 Washington stated in his general orders that the execution was postponed but, as historian Theodore J. Crackel annotated in his digital edition of Washington’s papers, Captain Samuel Kearsley reported to Lt. Col. Aaron Burr the next day “Joseph Worrell is no more but hangs as a spectacle for Buckscounty torys.” Given Washington’s order, Worrell was probably a victim of vigilante justice camouflaged with the veneer of military sanction.

The other three capital sentences were passed late in the spring over three soldiers convicted of desertion. On May 5, 1778 John Morrell and Thomas Hartnet were sentenced to die, while William McMath was presumably sentenced during a general court-martial in the Artillery. The next day, following the announcement of France’s decision to openly support the American states, Washington publicly pardoned Morrell and McMath. While no record exists to definitively show what happened to Hartnet, the lack of a general order establishing the execution site or requiring the soldiers to attend the execution indicates the killing was not carried out. When executions were conducted, general orders invariably told all soldiers and regiments not conducting some form of special duty to attend. Such a momentous event was important as a lesson to be seen and experienced in order to reform (if the convict was pardoned) and/or deter (for the rest of the audience).

251 Weedon, 245-7.


253 Weedon, 309-10.
Soldiers, both enlisted and commissioned, were executed most frequently for spying or encouraging others to desert to the enemy. Still, executions were rare. Furthermore, threats to shoot soldiers retreating in the face of the enemy were not carried out. It was common for Washington to publish such threats in general orders prior to battle, as observed before the battles of Long Island, Brandywine, and Germantown, yet the case between Colonel Joseph Reed and Sergeant Ebenezer Leffingwell during the Battle of Harlem Heights stands out due both to its singularity and the fact that the soldier was not, in fact, shot. Furthermore, following the renewed training regimen established at Valley Forge and practiced throughout the Army from 1778 until the end of the war, such threats ceased to be published in general orders, at least from Washington and from Nathanael Greene.

Some soldiers accused of other capital crimes were forced to sit on the gallows for periods of time or were pardoned at the last moment. The most common form of punishment for capital offenses was, however, corporal punishment. Desertion was the most common offense and, as the war dragged on, it drew an almost automatic punishment of 100 lashes. Officers were very reluctant to actually execute their soldiers. As an example, in the summer of 1777, General Putnam’s command along the Hudson River had many opportunities to exercise its ultimate coercive power but only four individuals were sentenced to death. Of those four soldiers, one man was executed and he, Edmund Palmer, was actually a British officer caught as a spy.254 The other three men, American soldiers, certainly broke the law in rather spectacular ways. Amos Rose

attempted to shoot his lieutenant, Elisha Brewster.\textsuperscript{255} Lemuel Ackerly admitted he was a robber and a spy.\textsuperscript{256} Finally, James Duggan fired on a fatigue party as it returned to camp and then re-loaded his musket and fired again.\textsuperscript{257}

While the charges against the soldiers involved either attempting to kill a fellow soldier or turning to the enemy, none of these men were executed. Duggan admitted he was trying to kill a fellow private. His excuse was that Private Barns had threatened to kill Duggan’s wife; Duggan was acting in a form of self-defense. The result was that the court had pity on Duggan, ordering him to sit on the gallows for thirty minutes with a halter around his neck and then receive 50 lashes.\textsuperscript{258} The other two soldiers suffered a more protracted fate. Over the course of seven weeks, these two men had their execution date postponed three times and when their day actually arrived, on September 9, 1777, they were placed in front of their graves, pardoned, and sent to a prison ship.\textsuperscript{259}

The fact is officers did relate to their soldiers, suffered with their soldiers, and were not raised to see their soldiers as completely separate members of their society. Brigadier General John Stark, after taking command of the Northern Department, spent months attempting to alleviate the suffering of his soldiers and officers. Writing to Major General William Heath, Stark notified his commander that he had just stopped a mutiny

\textsuperscript{255} Ibid, 33-5.
\textsuperscript{256} Ibid, 43-4.
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid, 69-71.
\textsuperscript{258} Ibid.

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and captured the ringleader. While he knew he would have to punish this one man for the deeds of many, he was loath to do so because it was unfair. Besides, Stark agreed with the men; they were being treated in a disgraceful manner and felt abandoned by their government and fellow Americans.\textsuperscript{260} It was true that the social distances between southern officers and their soldiers was greater than the distance between New England officers and their men, yet recruiting practices maintained a certain agency for many soldiers to mitigate abuses and excesses, petitioning their officers and governments for redress of enlistment contract violations, participating in mutinies for legitimate grievances, or simply insisting to go home at the end of their term of service and refusing to re-enlist.

Additionally, the elites of American society (Washington and a select few others excepted) did not serve in the Army, as officers or soldiers. The majority of officers, especially ensigns, lieutenants, captains, and majors, were drawn from the middle-class or came from the ranks. This was particularly true in the regiments from New England, where over 50% of those who agreed to serve for Massachusetts after 1777 were veterans of the first two years of the war and whose median wealth (measured in real estate, livestock, and acreage) fell within the median wealth for their fellow civilians in the state.\textsuperscript{261} And Washington’s attempts to facilitate further separation by paying officers more and soldiers less failed. While there was a significant difference between the salaries of an officer and a private, it really did not matter. No one in the Continental


Army received pay on anything close to a regular basis, leaving almost everyone (officers and soldiers) in debt, ill-clothed, and ill-fed.

Still, time would separate officers from soldiers socially to some degree due to the privileges afforded them. Possibly the most visible sign of this was housing during winter encampments. Throughout the war, regiments arrived at their encampment sites late in the season and the soldiers always built cabins for the officers first. Additionally, a more powerful cause for separation occurred as recruiting practices moved more towards the states enlisting soldiers in quotas and away from individual commanders recruiting for rank. Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert, serving in the Fifth Massachusetts Regiment at West Point in 1780, was very unhappy with the new recruits arriving in his company. They were inexperienced and enlisted for terms so short they would head home before he had them properly trained. More to the point, he could not trust them, for they slept while on duty and he was sure they would run at the first sight of the enemy. Gilbert wanted soldiers he could trust, soldiers with whom he could courageously rush into battle.\(^{262}\) He wanted men with experience. Some of the New England traditions were breaking down at the regimental level by this late date in the war. Under the pressure to continue recruiting in a war that had lasted almost six years and during which time the government had failed to meet its obligations, men were unwilling to either remain in the service or enter on longer terms. And officers from the regiment were no longer enlisting men directly for their regiments; recruiting officers were responsible to meet the needs of the state and while they were most often from the region within which they recruited, they were not necessarily serving in the regiments within which their recruits would serve. The result

\(^{262}\) Gilbert, 25-6.
was a growing separation, not necessarily between officers and men, but between the regiments of the Army and their communities back home.

There was always the possibility that the power to punish would be abused. At Valley Forge, several sentences were overturned or revised because they went beyond the 100-lash limit. During a failed expedition to Florida in 1778, six men were shot and one man hanged for attempting to desert. Their sentences were determined by a hasty court-martial and Major John Grimké defended the harshness of the sentencing as necessary to avoid a mass desertion. Perhaps most egregious, news quickly spread throughout the New York Highlands in August 1780 when a man from the Tenth Pennsylvania Regiment was hanged without the benefit of a trial. While some of these abuses could be explained by a lack of experience on the part of the presiding officers or due to a sense of desperation when operations began to unravel out on campaign, probably a more comprehensive explanation was that over the eight years American soldiers and officers served, rationalized and legalized public violence exercised by leaders over the led became normalized for the core of the Army. Excesses were more likely to occur as punishments became more acceptable. Yet, for the vast majority of cases, those excesses were curbed or stopped by senior leaders.

Nor would soldiers and junior officers willingly submit to arbitrary or extreme forms of coercion. While Washington and others saw the military regulations as a tool to

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263 Weedon, 212-5, 252-3.


reform offenders and deter their fellows, most American soldiers viewed their service as contractual and certain offenses as legitimate forms of protest against a failure by their government and Army leadership to meet contractual obligations. The two most common forms of protest were desertion and mutiny. While desertion was usually an individual form of resistance, mutiny (or truly a labor strike) was the group manifestation of discontent. Attempts by senior Army leadership to reform and deter such actions through coercion were fraught with peril, for the organization and the individuals involved.

Throughout his eight years of service, Joseph Plumb Martin annotated many instances of both soldier resistance and reactions to what they viewed as the unwarranted exercise of coercion from above. He claimed his regiment would have revolted had Ebenezer Leffingwell been executed for leveling his musket at Joseph Reed. 266 In the late fall of 1779, he described the hanging of a cavalry trooper for desertion during which the soldiers in attendance pelted the executioner and presiding officer for their attempt to take the trooper’s boots before they had even lowered the body. 267 Perhaps more distressing for Army leadership, during the Connecticut Line Mutiny of 1780, Martin claimed attempts to stop the protest with the Pennsylvania Line failed when officers realized it was more likely the soldiers from the two states would join together against their officers. 268

Still, there did exist a core of soldiers who had enlisted for three years or the duration despite the fact that the Continental Army always relied on soldiers with shorter

266 Martin, 29.

267 Ibid., 99-100.

268 Ibid., 109-12.
terms to fill out their ranks. These soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and junior officers became increasingly acculturated to Army standards and willing to enforce compliance within their ranks. Lieutenant Gilbert served as a private and then sergeant from 1775 to 1780. He re-entered the service as an ensign after a six-month furlough. He wrote letters to his hometown friends shortly after arriving back in camp that it was hard adjusting again to military life and discipline, though it was much easier now that he had several years’ experience. A few months later, in the winter of 1781, he supported his soldiers’ arguments against the government for lack of food, clothing, and pay to his father, stating that while all were suffering, at least they had moved out of their tents to the barracks. Joseph Plumb Martin, a sergeant in the Sapper and Miners Corps by the winter of 1781, was sent home by his colonel to recover two soldiers who had not returned from furlough. Martin’s leave was left open-ended but, not wishing to take advantage of his commander’s generosity, Martin refused to stay away too long. He returned to his encampment to find the regiment gone, marching south with the Marquis de Lafayette in support of Washington’s siege at Yorktown. Martin was pulled between his nostalgia for home and his desire to be with his unit. He chose the unit, walking south to meet them at Annapolis.

While advertisements were placed in local papers to encourage civilians to return deserters, many regions failed to do so. Non-commissioned officers and junior commissioned officers were sent on furloughs to collect deserters. Sergeant Martin was

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269 Gilbert, 23-4.

270 Ibid., 31-2.

271 Martin, 123-5.
sent to Connecticut to collect a few of his fellow soldiers because he knew the area.\textsuperscript{272} Ensign John Barr of the 4\textsuperscript{th} New York Regiment searched Duchess County looking for several deserters after his furlough ended in the summer of 1780, finding two in Fishkill and returning them to camp.\textsuperscript{273} Additionally, the use of one part of the Army to force other regiments to continue to serve was sometimes necessary. The Massachusetts Line was used to surround the New Jersey Line during its Line Mutiny of 1781, forcing the surrender of the New Jersey soldiers and resulting in the execution of two of its ringleaders.\textsuperscript{274} At times portions of the Army could be counted on to enforce order in another part of the Army when the time or the reason was viewed as compelling, though these forces were never from the same state lines.

Throughout the Revolution, even following the rules and regulations that created the Second Establishment of 1777, soldiers’ ability to resist through desertion, mutiny, and refusals to enlist for longer terms meant they could effectively limit the actual practice of coercion within the Continental Army. Officers found, even at the level of the Commander-in-Chief, that the soldiers in the Continental Army had to be convinced they were being led and not driven to success. Compliance through force would not work; soldiers’ commitment to the Army, its cause, and their fellow soldiers was key. While the

\textsuperscript{272} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{274} Gilbert, 35; Heath, Memoirs, 251-2.
number of courts-martial increased dramatically from the middle of 1776 on, sentencing remained lighter than perhaps senior officers may have wished. The leadership of the Army was always cognizant of the fact that they never had enough soldiers in the line, enlistments were an ongoing challenge, and soldiers could resist if and when they believed their leaders were violating contractual obligations or exercising their coercive powers too harshly.

The exercise of coercion and its relation to discipline within the Army was important. Yet while its authorization was increased within the Second Establishment, its use was uneven, usually practiced less than was authorized, fraught with resentment and resistance from the soldiers, and not truly connected to an increase in discipline within the Army. Instead, commitment would have to be gained through leadership rather than compliance through coercion (with notable caveats when officers failed to join with their men in the face of obvious failures to hold to contractual obligations by the state).

Training and unit cohesion gained over time would become more instrumental to achieving this goal. A new form of leadership evolved and soldiers’ agency reinforced its requirement. Senior leaders in the Army, to include Washington, began to see that the Army would become more disciplined through training rather than through harsh disciplinary actions. Despite what others may have concluded when investigating Washington’s desires, he never received a gentleman-class officer corps. Instead, he was relegated a lower middle-class and middle-class officer corps, particularly at the ranks of major and below, that never fully separated itself from the rank and file. A strict exercise of coercive authority never became acceptable to either the officers or the soldiers of the Continental Army.
Still, officers and soldiers did grow more distant from one another, due to enlistments coming from the state and due to officers remaining in service while many of the men rotated out with shorter enlistments. By 1780, many of the company officers were men who had risen to their rank as a result of their longer service. Additionally, those men who agreed to enlist for longer periods of time were from the lower economic and social strata, either agreeing to serve for wages or forced to do so through state drafts. Yet this widening of the social gap was more apparent outside the New England state lines. In the Massachusetts and Connecticut Lines, the men and the officers remained rather close. As will be illustrated later, this may explain why the Connecticut Line did not successfully mutiny in 1780 and the Massachusetts Line remained loyal to the Army during the New Jersey Line Mutiny of 1781.

Furthermore, the Continental Army, for the reasons stated above, was distancing itself from the rest of American society. As Wayne E. Carp (among many other historians) has expertly shown, the Continental Army was never publicly supported during the war. He argues a culture of deferential politics that favored localism, a fear of standing armies, and a belief that property equaled liberty remained at odds with the political requirements to win the war (ie. political centralization, a standing army, and property confiscation). The result was often public animosity towards the Army and a refusal to support that army with food, clothing, or money that soon isolated members of the army from their fellow citizens. Officers and soldiers in the Continental Army soon came to believe that if they were to succeed in the Revolution (and in the face of almost

persistent destitution), they would have to agree to a standard of disciplined action that would rely more on commitment than compliance. Leadership, not coercion, would gain this commitment through training and shared experience.
CHAPTER 5
TRAINING

Early in September 1775, a tension growing between regiments of New England and a regiment of Pennsylvania and Virginia riflemen nearly exploded into violence. This sole regiment from outside New England was encamped away from the rest of the army on Prospect Hill and excused from conducting fatigue detail due to the special nature of their mission as sharpshooters. Since their arrival, several soldiers from their ranks had been arrested for misbehavior but were either broken out of their confinement by their companions or pardoned by their regimental commander. Finally, the senior officers decided to end the undisciplined actions of their soldiers. After a sergeant was again released from his confinement by a group of his fellows, the regimental commander, Colonel William Thompson, and several of his officers seized the sergeant and ordered a guard detail to march him to the main guard at Cambridge. Less than half an hour later, 32 soldiers from one of the rifle companies loaded their rifles and ran off after the prisoner, vowing to release him or lose their lives trying. While the officers stayed with the remainder of the regiment to restore order, the Second Rhode Island Regiment located nearby was ordered under arms in case force was necessary and General Washington reinforced the Main Guard with 500 more soldiers. Washington, Nathanael Greene, and Charles Lee moved to meet the mutineers with a portion of Greene’s brigade about half a mile from Cambridge, ordering the riflemen to drop their weapons and
submit to the authority of their officers. Surrounded by a company from their own regiment, these 32 mutineers did drop their weapons and all were placed under arrest.\footnote{276}{Jesse Lukens, “Letter to Mr. John Shaw, Prospect Hill, September 13, 1775,” in \textit{The Spirit of ‘Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants}, ed. Henry Steele Commanger and Robert B. Morris (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 156-7.}

Writing of the event, Jesse Lukens declared, “You cannot conceive what disgrace we are all in and how much the General is chagrined that only one regiment should come from the South and that set so infamous an example.”\footnote{277}{Ibid.} The genesis of this dangerous occurrence was the lack of trust among the regiments from the separate colonies and the feeling among them that Washington favored those soldiers from his region above the rest of the army. Particularly among the soldiers from Massachusetts, many believed Washington favored the soldiers and officers from Virginia and was taking pleasure in court-martiauling the officers from New England.\footnote{278}{Benjamin Thompson, “The American Soldiers are Dirty, Nasty, Insubordinate, and Quarrelsome,” in \textit{The Spirit of ‘Seventy-Six: The Story of the American Revolution as Told by Participants}, ed. Henry Steele Commanger and Robert B. Morris (New York: Da Capo Press, 1995), 155.} To make the situation worse, the majority of the army soon came to believe the reputation of the riflemen was greatly exaggerated. Instead of being the greatest marksmen in America, the regiments of New England realized they could produce better shooters from their own ranks.\footnote{279}{Ibid., 156.} While the Continental Army succeeded in forcing the British from Boston the following spring, trust and cohesion within the army were clearly lacking.
In the early summer of 1776 Washington and the Continental Army prepared to defend New York City against an approaching combined military force of both the British Navy and Army. The Continental Army was composed of 16 regular regiments, mostly from New England, four state regiments, and some New York militia, totaling over 10,000 soldiers present and fit for duty.280 Congress directed Washington to send the remainder of his forces, an army of an additional six regular and nine state regiments, to Canada under the command of Major General Horatio Gates.281 In preparation for his first battlefield encounter with British general William Howe, Washington began training his men in a variety of martial tasks, including drill, marksmanship, guard duty, and maneuvers. He ordered officers to assign the same defensive positions to the same soldiers, to practice moving to their posts in the dark, and to ensure every soldier maintained his ammunition and pack in readiness for the impending attack.282 On July 1, 1776, the General allowed each regiment to fire two rounds per soldier from their muskets both for target practice and to ensure their muskets were in good working order, despite the severe lack in both powder and ball.283


One of the soldiers in the Continental Army at that time was the ambitious Lieutenant Isaac Bangs. After Lieutenant Bangs smoothed relations with his fellow officers in the Twenty-Third Continental Regiment (Massachusetts), he spent the early summer supervising fatigue details on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River and getting into trouble in a seedy part of New York City known as the Holy Ground.\(^{284}\) He also supervised the marksmanship training Washington authorized. His brigade was allowed to fire two shots per man on July 4, 1776. Apparently some of the men were not familiar with firearms, as one man killed himself with his own musket during the practice.\(^{285}\) A week later, when the British armada attacked the Grand Battery, Bangs saved one man from a bouncing cannon ball while witnessing another six artillerymen who accidentally killed themselves when their cannon exploded; they were all drunk.\(^{286}\)

The dangerous requirements of eighteenth-century linear warfare necessitated training. Firearms were unpredictable and needed constant maintenance from fouling and damp. Disease, the biggest killer during campaigns, could run rampant in a camp not properly managed. The realities of communication technology made effective administrative processes necessary for generals to know the state of their armies and for soldiers to know the orders of their generals. Finally, for those infrequent occasions when regiments and brigades actually faced one another on the battlefield, the tactics developed to take advantage of technology required men to move in unison and in close order, at the


\(^{285}\) Ibid., 55.

\(^{286}\) Ibid., 58-60.
commands of an individual, quickly and efficiently in the midst of fire and death to outflank the enemy and force his withdrawal.

Training in the Continental Army was the most important step in acculturating its soldiers to military leadership. While the recruiting process initiated the negotiation between the leaders and the led over the proper exercise of authority and the use of punishment could enforce compliance with regulations, officers used training to establish an agreement between them and their soldiers concerning standards of discipline that engendered trust in their authority and confidence among the soldiers in their capabilities on the battlefield. Training accustomed new soldiers to a power structure that was certainly foreign to most of them. They learned to listen to the orders given and to obey them in the face of imminent danger. In general, soldiers and officers learned to accept more authority over their actions than they were used to in their civilian lives. And training engendered trust among the regiments within the army as they operated together.

After his initial experience during recruiting, a Continental soldier then began his training, whether he understood it as such or not. This experience was not the same for every soldier as, again, regiments from different states had disparate methods for initially introducing new soldiers to the Army. Prior to 1778, the regiments of the Continental Army followed the drill manuals of their colonial predecessors and these manuals were not standardized. As soldiers came into camp, some may have received basic training at a rendezvous for a few weeks prior to their arrival while others marched straight from their place of enlistment into a winter encampment and then on to a campaign. While many of the soldiers coming from New England may have received training as members of the
militia, often there was not time for the companies and regiments to train together as a unit.

While the British Army struggled with long lines of communication and could not always train their soldiers properly before they arrived in America, for the first half of the war they did take advantage of relatively safe winter encampments, properly supplied by the British Navy, to train for upcoming campaigns. In the late winter and early spring of 1777, General Burgoyne’s army trained daily, despite the cold and snow. Instead of working on the parade ground, regiments drilled on the ice; it was rough enough in texture to allow men to maneuver without slipping.\(^{287}\) Additionally, while on the marches out of Canada, regiments were instructed to conduct training in wooded terrain, learning to adapt their tactics to the new environment.\(^{288}\) Additionally, the British Army benefitted from the maturity of its institution. Administrative functions were well established and every regiment trained under the same drill manual, allowing regiments to work well together.

The Continental Army spent its first two winters conducting a siege or on the march, without adequate supplies or shelter. While the British Army began adapting its tactics to the realities of war in America, the American Army struggled to balance the establishment of its organizational structure with a competing requirement to train its soldiers to fight together in a regular fashion. After a rough start in 1775, the British Army was able to quickly transition its tactical focus from engagement to maneuver, to

\(^{287}\) Anburey, *With Burgoyne from Quebec*, 88-90, 95.

\(^{288}\) Thomas Hughes, *A Journal by Thomas Hughes: For his Amusement, and Designed only for his Perusal by the Time he Attains the Age of 50 if he Lives so Long* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), 6.
train for light infantry maneuvers and bayonet charges that took advantage of the close terrain and mitigated American strengths on the defense. The Continental Army eventually developed its own standard drill manual that simultaneously accounted for the leadership peculiarities of their soldiers and allowed the regiments to perform better in a regular fashion.

Training in the Continental Army evolved over the war despite the challenges of constant recruiting and uncertain logistic support. Initially, Washington and his generals focused on establishing camp discipline, administrative efficiencies, and standards for officer conduct. Washington assumed regiments arrived with a modicum of tactical training, particularly with regards to individual soldier skills in marksmanship and maneuver. His orders focused on regimental rolls, guard details, dissemination of general orders, officer and non-commissioned officer duties, and equipment maintenance.

Certainly, shortages of muskets and gunpowder precluded even rudimentary target practice but his concern over this skill did not surface until after the Battle of Long Island in the summer of 1776. Once recruiting laws produced soldiers who enlisted for three years and administrative practices began to settle into a semblance of routine, Washington and others began to focus on standardizing drill and maneuver to avoid defeats like Germantown in 1777, where two brigades converged in a fog and then fired on each other. With the publication of Baron von Steuben’s “Revolutionary War Drill Manual,” the Army began a more intense focus on combat training with some notable success.

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289 For a discussion on the British Army’s evolution from firearms engagement to a reliance on the bayonet charge, see Matthew H. Springer, With Zeal and with Bayonets Only: The British Army on Campaign in North America, 1775-1783 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 138-68.
Of equal importance to the increased capabilities of the Continental Army was the increased confidence of the soldiers in their abilities to survive the war and their trust in those officers who led them. Over the years of the war, soldiers grew to believe that they were capable of defeating the Redcoats in a regular manner. They became angry when they believed their officers did not make the correct tactical decisions to succeed on the battlefield and they willingly endured extraordinary hardships for those leaders they trusted to comply with the agreements reached through their training. The officers, too, committed to those agreements, often taking time to explain to their men why they made the decisions they did and recognizing the laudable actions of their soldiers regularly to reinforce their growing trust in one another.

The myth of the humble farmer dropping his plow to fight for liberty during the Revolution was dispelled years ago through the work of historians such as James Kirby Martin and Mark E. Lender in their study *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789*. In their formulation, American colonial society was becoming increasingly Anglicized, including a preference for recruiting the poor and indigent into regular Army formations while allowing the propertied middle class to stay near their homes and defend their private property through service in militias. Lender and Kirby argue the British were surprised in 1775 when the New England militias were able to exact such devastating damage on their regular forces, both in the spring at Lexington and Concord and in the summer at Breed’s Hill. The effectiveness of New England forces contradicted Thomas Gage’s expectations that were based on his observations during the Seven Years’ War. During that conflict British officers interacted with provincial troops,
largely from New England, and viewed them as militarily incompetent, useful only for
digging ditches and building roads. For Lender and Martin, the key difference between
the incompetence of the earlier provincial regiments and the effectiveness of the New
England militiamen in 1775 was in the caliber of person recruited. During the Seven
Years’ War, those provincial troops were the landless poor and indigents unfortunate
enough to run afoul of new colonial legislation that allowed the drafting of men without
property into what were essentially colonial regular forces. At the battles fought in the
spring and summer of 1775, the British fought middle-class militiamen, defending hearth
and home and willing to fight to the death. Still, by late 1776, the generals of the
Continental Army and their Congressional leadership actively sought again to promote
the recruiting of the lower sorts into the ranks of the regular Army, leaving the middling
classes to remain in their militias or at home.290

While this picture was painted through the use of a variety of secondary sources,
other historians have challenged this perspective with investigations focused on specific
colonies and their military traditions. More nuanced studies suggest separate solutions to
the same military problem arose among the various colonies and states over these periods
of military conflict, both during the Seven Years’ War and the American Revolution. In
the colony of Virginia, a colonial regiment was established under the leadership of
George Washington initially made up of draftees. In the first years of the war the Virginia
Regiment struggled to meet its quota of required men and failed to adequately defend the
frontier from French and Indian incursions. By the second half of that war, two regiments
were fully formed, with the help of funding from London, which eventually operated

quite well with British regular forces during Forbes’ march to Fort Duquesne in 1758 and beyond. According to historian James Titus, the difference of performance lay in both the fact that the later members of the regiments were largely volunteers (motivated by better pay to enlist) and the training and experience accumulated by a core of officers and soldiers who served throughout the war.  

In New England, particularly in Massachusetts, provincial forces were voluntarily recruited annually from the younger men of the various towns, organized in regiments based largely on the counties from within which those towns were located, and led by officers the recruits were willing to follow into combat. These provincial forces were disbanded each year and re-formed again the next spring, which made it hard to develop a body of trained soldiers used to working together. As it was, there was little or no training involved within the regiments before they marched north to support British incursions towards Canada and, as Fred Anderson illustrated, there was little time to train during the campaigns. Because of their lack of training, British commanders decided these forces were good only when used for fatigue details. Orderly books of the period show the provincial regiments were largely ignorant of regular infantry maneuvers and while the British officers gave lip service to training requirements, Massachusetts soldiers were rarely allowed more than one or two days to drill on any given campaign. Instead, training focused on the duties of soldiers and leaders in camp, ranging from the proper relationships between privates, non-commissioned officers, and officers to guard duty and camp sanitation.

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291 Titus, *The Old Dominion at War*, 133-8.

Still, some officers and men who served regularly throughout the colonial wars on the northern frontier did gain both training and experience, which they brought with them when tensions broke into conflict in 1775. Their history and the findings of historians like Fred Anderson and James Titus contradict others like Martin and Lender who have attempted to combine the variety of colonial military experiences into a single portrait of American military experiences marching towards a Europeanized consensus for fighting wars. When viewed in more detail, a better explanation for why the British encountered a stronger military resistance than they expected initially is that the New England forces combined a popular uprising with trained and experience leadership to offer a force capable of withstanding a British attack, at least for a short period of time. Particularly among the militias of eastern Massachusetts, training in marksmanship and loose-order tactics increased following the passage of the Coercive Acts as New England towns prepared for the invasion of British regulars to seize stores of weapons and gunpowder. The fundamental difficulty faced by the American forces after 1775 resulted from the British abilities to adapt tactically to fighting in America and a lack of institutional cohesion within the Continental Army itself. Long and difficult training would be required to overcome both administrative and tactical challenges, particularly once the initial popular support for military enlistments evaporated with the Second Establishment of 1777.

The issue of cohesion in terms of training was further complicated by the militia traditions of the other colonies. Of particular note, as mentioned previously, was the Associator tradition in Pennsylvania and Delaware. While these were ostensibly private

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organizations raised to meet particular defensive needs of these colonies, some of these associations probably remained in existence after 1747 and were revived during the first year of the Revolution. These units maintained a continuity of organization and possibly training that allowed Pennsylvania to provide specialized troops, in the form of artillery and rifle battalions, from the onset of hostilities. Pennsylvania was the first state outside New England to send fully formed regiments to Boston in the summer of 1775.

The Philadelphia Artillery Association remained in continuous service following its inception in 1747 due to the need to defend the harbor of Philadelphia from potential attacks of both the French and the Spanish during the colonial wars. Furthermore, artillery use required extensive training to allow crews to operate the cannon with any semblance of expertise. Regular practice of specialized skills and some knowledge of mathematics were needed to operate the guns and hit targets at range. Sheds, equipment, and ammunition were maintained in the city and practice was regularly attended during the interwar years between the Seven Years’ War and the Revolution. Throughout the state, following the adjournment of the First Continental Congress, various associations began forming cadre companies to train soldiers. The Philadelphia Greens, the Quaker Blues, and the York Blues associated, founded rendezvous (training sites), and began drilling twice a day under the direction of veterans from the previous war. For the York Blues, Dytch, a veteran of the Royal American Regiment, was chosen as the fugleman (the model soldier used to illustrate drill movements). For the next few months, in the summer of 1775, the number of training companies increased to drill recruits for the

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Pennsylvania Line, giving soldiers as many as three months of training before heading north.\textsuperscript{296}

While this state system enacted to provide trained units to fight the British could be viewed as initially beneficial to the Continental Army, these men trained to a particular standard. In 1775, the Associators of Philadelphia funded the publication of the \textit{Prussian Evolutions}, a two-volume work that included infantry and artillery drills, along with military law and regulations enacted by the Prussian Army in 1756.\textsuperscript{297} While the use of this particular drill manual standardized training in much of the Pennsylvania Line, its use exacerbated a problem of various state lines using different training manuals throughout the Continental Army.

There were at least three other drill manuals in use throughout the American forces in 1776. Some state regiments, particularly in the South, used \textit{A Plan of Discipline Composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk}, otherwise known as the \textit{Norfolk Discipline}. Printed in London in 1760, this drill manual was an attempt by gentlemen in the English county of Norfolk to simplify training for militias formed in England and Wales during the Seven Years’ War. During the Jacobite Uprising of 1745, few militias responded to Parliament’s call to defend England from a Highlander invasion that supported the young Charles Stuart. To encourage a better popular response for homeland defense should the French invade during the Seven Years’ War, William Pitt and his Whig allies in Parliament passed the Militia Act of 1757. English and Welsh counties were instructed to create local militias through a ballot system that compelled

\textsuperscript{296} Ibid., 133.

\textsuperscript{297} Ibid., 138-9.
individuals to serve in the militia for a period of three years.\textsuperscript{298} In the county of Norfolk, William Windham developed and published a simplified drill manual that would allow part-time soldiers to master the Prussian drills with less time to train.\textsuperscript{299}

At the end of the Seven Years’ War, the British Army revised its drill manual. Originally published in 1764, \textit{The Manual Exercise, as ordered by His Majesty} was published throughout the colonies in 1774 and 1775 to facilitate training for militia units that were increasingly preparing for conflict.\textsuperscript{300} The manual was considerably shorter than the \textit{Norfolk Discipline}, modernized by British experiences in the Seven Years’ War, and contained a shorter series within the manual exercise than the militia drill manual.\textsuperscript{301} While this would appear to be helpful to those attempting to quickly form military regiments from inexperienced civilians, \textit{The Manual Exercise} took certain matters for granted and so ignored portions of the \textit{Norfolk Discipline} necessary for leaders who were also not professional soldiers. Of particular note was the omission of any instructions to officers with regard to their training or their responsibilities to train their soldiers. Still, given its publication in Philadelphia, New York, and Boston between 1774 and 1775, it was easily accessible to state regiments within New England and the Middle states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and New York.\textsuperscript{302}


\textsuperscript{299} William Windham, \textit{A Plan of Discipline Composed for the Use of the Militia of the County of Norfolk} (London: The Sun, 1760), xx-xxvi.

\textsuperscript{300} Houlding, 214-5.

\textsuperscript{301} Ibid., 208-9.

\textsuperscript{302} Ibid., 214-5.
In 1775, Thomas Pickering of Massachusetts published his own version of drill, entitled *An Easy Plan of Discipline for a Militia* for the New England militia and minutemen. Pickering acknowledged his study of both the *Norfolk Discipline* and *The Manual Exercise* to develop his drill manual but he claimed these preceding works missed the mark in their attempts to simplify Prussian drill for ease of training. He claimed both manuals continued to favor appearance on the parade ground over utility on the battlefield, leading to overly complicated exercises that wasted time and confused soldiers. “But to anyone who considers the principles and foundation of exercise, it will be obvious that the Norfolk exercise and that of the army, are neither of them so short and easy as they might be. In the latter it must be acknowledged that divers motions are retained *merely for show* : and in the former some motions are not only *useless*, but *inconvenient*, and directly repugnant to one of the main principles on which exercise is grounded (simplicity and use in battle)…”  

303 Pickering’s manual was in use by many of the New England regiments.

These various manuals contained similar instructions but none of them were the same. Every manual contained a manual exercise. The manual exercise was a routine of movements designed to acculturate soldiers in close formation to unified motions at the command of their officers. In the *Norfolk Discipline*, the manual exercise consisted of 50 separate commands, each comprising between one and ten motions.  

304 *The Manual Exercise* contained 35 commands with between one and four motions each while

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304 Windham, 3.
Pickering’s manual comprised 42 commands of between one and ten motions each.\textsuperscript{305} They all contained similar commands (Fix your Bayonets! Present! Fire!), yet these commands contained a variety of motions dissimilar from one another. In *The Manual Exercise*, priming and loading the musket was conducted through separate commands totaling 12 motions. In the two manuals focused on militia training, Prime and Load! was a single command comprised of nine motions.

The dissimilarities in the manual exercises created at least three problems for the Continental Army. Soldiers from one regiment could not transfer to another regiment with any assurance they would follow the same motions for the same command as the rest or understand a command that was not present in their previous training. Furthermore, regiments from various state lines would be easily confused by orders given by different officers on the field should consolidation be necessary. And these differences prevented the creation of elite units such as battalions of light infantry that drew men from many different regiments.\textsuperscript{306} Rather than increasing cohesion, these separate forms of training manuals only highlighted the regional differences of the state lines and complicated training for an army struggling to coalesce in the face of the enemy.

Other problems arose from further disparities. The British manual omitted any mention of officer exercises with the fusil. While both Windham and Pickering recognized a necessity for officers to practice with their firearms, the British army discouraged this because they believed officers should focus on commanding their units.

\textsuperscript{305} Pickering, 32-3.

\textsuperscript{306} It is no coincidence that the first units of Continental light infantry appeared in 1778 after the adoption of Von Steuben’s reforms, and a brigade under Major General Anthony Wayne was created in 1779.
and not firing as individuals in combat. Before commencing his march on Albany in 1777, General John Burgoyne reinforced this guidance in his general orders. Officers were responsible for leading and directing their men, not firing their fusil. Only in extreme cases of self-defense should an officer fire his weapon. Windham included descriptions of the responsibilities for privates, corporals, and sergeants while on guard duty but failed to discuss officer responsibilities within the regiment. Recommendations were made for officers with regards to training their soldiers in the manual exercise. Any instructions for the responsibilities of various ranks outside their positioning within the formation were omitted from both The Manual Exercise and An Easy Plan of Discipline.

Linear combat during this period consisted of more than simply standing still and firing volleys. Maneuver was essential to attaining the advantage and forcing an enemy from the field. All the manuals of this time included detailed descriptions of wheeling, turning, and transforming columns to files and files to columns. Again, within the various drill manuals, disparities existed on how these movements should be carried out. These differences would create problems for the Continental Army when various regiments joined together on the field under a brigade structure. As will be discussed shortly, the defeats at Germantown and Brandywine finally convinced Washington a new drill


Hadden, Hadden’s Journal and Orderly Books, 70-7.

Windham, 37-54, 177-86.
manual was necessary to standardize training throughout the Continental Army and promote that training to increase American chances for victory while on offensive.310

Before the winter of 1777-1778, the Continental Army relied on defensive tactics and petite-guerre to achieve success. These were the tactics many of the leaders were accustomed to from previous experience. In New England regiments, particularly, these skills fit well with their colonial military tradition. British forces retreating from Lexington and Concord were beset with a running ambuscade executed by militiamen along the road to Boston. At the Battle of Bunker Hill, New England soldiers positioned by their officers behind fences, walls, and within redoubts, exacted a terrible toll on British forces before retreating back along the Charlestown Neck. New England officers prepared a good defensive position on Breed’s Hill, maintained discipline among their men, and gave orders to aim for British officers, firing at the last possible moment. The result was that General William Howe lost his entire staff in the battle, along with 1054 soldiers killed or wounded.311

What few American regiments understood was how to soldier through a winter, how to act in an encampment composed of thousands of soldiers, how to manage such large forces, or how to operate as a cohesive army on the offensive during a regular, linear battle. For the first two years of the war, Washington and his generals were forced to rely on regional differences in tactical training while they focused on institutional training. Their first goal was to form an American Army capable of withstanding defeats,

310 Weedon, 273-4.

retreats, and harsh winters without experiencing large-scale desertions and mutinies that would sink the Revolution. The result of their exertions was a uniquely American solution, one that trained leadership to the officers and non-commissioned officers, recognized the demands from below of the soldiers in the rank and file, and led to the development of a training manual that incorporated more than the manual exercise. Encapsulated within this work was the final agreement between the leaders and the led on how the American Army would operate for another 40 years following the end of the war.

The First Establishment of the Continental Army began on January 1, 1776 and lasted one year. Impeded by the immediate requirement to re-enlist the Army by January 1, 1776, Washington waited until January 2, 1776 to begin a new plan for training these men to act like soldiers in a unified army. He ordered the officers to provide an accurate account of their men and told them to limit the number of soldiers allowed to go home for furlough. At the same time, he initiated a re-organization of the regimental structure to standardize it across the Army. Regiments would contain a colonel, lieutenant colonel, a major, an adjutant, a surgeon, surgeon’s mate, and a quartermaster. Within each of the eight companies, there would be a captain, a first and second lieutenant, an ensign, four sergeants, four corporals, and 76 privates. Furthermore, the regiments lost their distinctive names. No longer would a regiment be known by the name of its commander; now every regiment would be a numbered Continental Regiment. The next day he issued

the new Continental Rules and Articles of War, ordering copies be made for each of the regiments and companies and that these new regulations be read aloud to the men once a week. Additionally, the regimental commanders were directed to attend to the training and exercise of their men. The soldiers were to be drilled on “the Evolutions and Maneuvers” with the admonishment that “many practices in Regular Service” were worthy of emulation.\textsuperscript{313} On January 5, 1776, Washington insisted his regimental commanders enforce uniformity and discipline through their non-commissioned officers by dividing their companies in fourths, with one sergeant, one corporal, and 19 privates.\textsuperscript{314}

Yet this effort to standardize training in the Army continued to bog down due to a lack of compliance from officers within the regiments and a dearth of resources (time and equipment) available. Comments of drilling or listening to orders are conspicuously absent from diaries of soldiers until much later. Private David How first mentioned being read general orders in October 1776 and he did not note any training until November 18, 1776.\textsuperscript{315} Elisha Bostwick, who served as a sergeant and then lieutenant in 1776 for Connecticut, never mentioned drilling or orders, though he did recall Colonel Scott always exhorting the men to aim for the enemy’s legs to avoid shooting over their heads.


\textsuperscript{315} How, 30, 36.
According to the commander, one wounded soldier was worth three soldiers as it would take two others to remove him from the line.\textsuperscript{316}

Washington noted a consistent lack of compliance from his officers on various occasions. Another problem was a severe lack of muskets among those willing to re-enlist. Soldiers feared they would have their personal arms seized by the Army if they enlisted with them. Washington was forced to offer one dollar to every soldier for the use of their personal muskets, permitting them to take their weapons home when their enlistments expired, and reimbursing them for muskets lost through no fault of the soldier.\textsuperscript{317} Still, despite a lack of weapons and sporadic compliance with following orders, training did appear to occur, at least with the manual exercise. By February, Washington ordered his regimental commanders to focus more on maneuvers and less on the manual exercise in preparation for the seizure of Dorchester Heights.\textsuperscript{318}

Of equal or greater concern was the lack of administrative skills among the officers. Repeatedly during the siege of Boston, Washington attempted to gain an understanding of his muster rolls and to disseminate his orders throughout the Army. He ordered books be kept at the regimental level to track the number of soldiers enlisted and


\textsuperscript{318} Washington, “General Orders, Head Quarters, Cambridge, February 20, 1776,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-03-02-0247}.
their disposition (on furlough, sick, deserted, etc.). He then instituted a new system for guard details. All guard posts would be assigned to the same soldiers in shifts that began at 8:00 every morning. Each morning, the new guard detail would parade before the field officers of the regiment, then parade in front of the brigade field officers. These officers would inspect the uniforms and weapons of the detail, before permitting them to parade in front of the Brigadier of the Day. The Brigadier of the Day would instruct the field officers of the day on their guard inspection duties and then report to Washington personally.

These initial attempts to train the Army in military procedure and protocol necessary to maintain security and discipline in camp highlight several challenges that would continue to plague the Continental Army for the rest of the year. The required focus on institutional knowledge took much of the attention away from tactical training and centralized decision-making at the highest levels. Washington was consumed with devising and disseminating plans and orders to organize the Army and oversee compliance with those orders. Frustration with his officer corps was the result as they resisted attempts to centralize authority and erase regional distinctions. Furthermore, the army encamped around Boston was only the largest portion of the Continental Army. In March Congress divided the states into three departments, with a major general in charge of the Southern and Northern Departments, leaving Washington in control of both the


Middle Department and the Army at large. His attempts to standardize activities within the Army through general orders meant his plans only affected the regiments directly under his control. Finally, while the soldiers in his army admired Washington, his orders were not automatically followed. As highlighted by several historians, the American lack of institutional knowledge or of a civilian culture of subordination meant, unlike in the British Army, senior officers lacked a non-commissioned officer corps acculturated to discipline or able to pass down their experience and training to privates and junior officers.

The Continental Army struggled to establish regularity in training when Washington moved his army down to New York in the spring of 1776. His challenges increased as new regiments joined him to defend the city. His orders for regular returns of soldiers fit for duty were often ignored or given late. Despite his demands that orders be read daily to the soldiers in the regiments, many claimed ignorance when confronted for disobeying regulations. Fatigue and guard details were consistently late reporting

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for duty, with soldiers falling asleep on guard and officers failing to supervise the work.
Lieutenant Bangs finally went on a fatigue detail with his soldiers in May. He did so because the men were complaining of abuse at the hands of the assistant engineers.\textsuperscript{325} When he next was assigned a fatigue detail, in June, Bangs mentions little to nothing of the work or the soldiers. Instead, he spent his time wandering the Jersey banks of the Hudson, and visiting a gentleman named Arent Schuyler who owned a copper mine north of New York City.\textsuperscript{326}

The challenges faced by Washington and the Continental Army in general was that training standards were being negotiated within the leadership and between leaders and soldiers during this early period. Those negotiations began at the top, between Washington and his generals and between the generals and their regimental commanders. Due to the various military traditions within the Army, standardization did not exist above the regimental level. Some regiments were viewed as well trained, with a reputation for success while on campaign. Other regiments did not perform well initially and were not trusted by their adjacent units. Additionally, regiments from different regions were distrustful of one another, making it difficult for them to operate together within the same brigade.


\textsuperscript{325} Bangs, 37.

\textsuperscript{326} Ibid., 46-54.
Brigadier General Nathanael Greene confronted problems on Long Island that underscored these disparities. When Washington reorganized his regiments into brigades, he placed a New Jersey state regiment under Greene’s command. The regiment, under the command of Colonel David Foreman, originally belonged to Brigadier General Nathaniel Heard. Heard had been giving permission to soldiers in Foreman’s regiment to take furloughs, despite the threat of British attacks on Long Island and without consulting Greene or Foreman. Greene wrote to Washington in August 1776 asking Washington to control Heard. His actions were causing morale to fall within Foreman’s regiment. While the men were expecting to go home, Foreman and Greene were forced to deny the furloughs, looking like “tyrants” to their soldiers.\(^\text{327}\) The next week, Greene wrote to Washington again, asking the Commander to rescind an order to move Colonel Daniel Hitchcock’s Eleventh Continental Regiment (Rhodes Island) to Fort Washington. Greene claimed Hitchcock’s regiment was well trained and disciplined. Furthermore, they knew the terrain and were attached to the rest of the soldiers in Greene’s brigade, having been on Long Island for the last month. Greene feared the replacement regiment would not be well trained and, without an attachment to the rest of the brigade, would not fight well when the time came.\(^\text{328}\) Additionally, Hitchcock and his men were from Greene’s home state, something Greene failed to mention in his dispatch.


These issues with training and discipline caused Washington to increasingly centralize decision-making authority to the highest levels. Starting on August 11, 1776, regimental commanders were ordered to submit furlough requests through their brigade commanders to Washington.\(^{329}\) Additionally, throughout this period, Washington continued to experience other administrative problems. Regiments habitually failed to submit their muster rolls. For this reason, Washington decided to muster every regiment on their parade grounds at one time, on the evening of August 30, 1776, to force regimental commanders to follow his order and gain an accurate account of their men.\(^{330}\)

To put an end to undisciplined firing in camp (and the frequent incidents of fratricide), Washington demanded every regiment discharge loaded weapons at the same time during retreat. Writing specifically to Major General Israel Putnam, the Commanding General ordered his division commander to put a stop to undisciplined firing by gathering the colonels together, telling them to control their soldiers and disseminate their orders to the other officers.\(^{331}\)

During this period of the First Establishment, Washington was trying to gain control of his various forces and to train them to act as a unified army by centralizing authority. While he mentioned non-commissioned officers at various times, his focus was...
on the responsibilities of commissioned officers to disseminate and enforce orders, to
obey the orders of their higher command, and to train and lead their soldiers by their
presence and their example. Still, affecting a change of culture took time, especially in
the face of imminent attack by the enemy. By September, Washington continued to face a
lack of compliance to his desires, eventually threatening to arrest junior officers and
publicly shame regimental commanders should brigades continue to fail to report on time
to receive orders, submit musters, and appear for guard and fatigue details.332

The Second Establishment of the Continental Army began on January 1, 1777
with the initiation of three-year enlistments, the revised Articles of War, and the
reorganization of regiments into state lines (with enumerations that again recognized the
states from which the regiments were formed). By the summer of 1777, some of
Washington’s initiatives appear to have taken root, even in forces outside of his direct
control. Israel Putnam was placed in command of the New York Highlands, guarding
against a British incursion from New York in support of Burgoyne’s invasion from
Canada. Putnam’s forces operated under specific circumstances, some familiar and some
new. Due to the decision made by Congress to enlist soldiers for three years or the
duration, some soldiers were veterans of the year before (mostly from Massachusetts) but
many were new to the army. Still, this portion of the Continental Army was under less
pressure than at any time previous. British forces were maintaining some presence north

332 Washington, “General Orders, Head Quarters, New York, September 6, 1776,”
PGWD, http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-
06-02-0185.
of New York City but the predominance of their forces were preparing to operate further south in a bid to occupy Philadelphia. Putnam had time to focus on training.

Drummers and fifes were ordered to practice twice a day, in the morning and afternoon. Following Washington’s mandate, only one wagon and four horses were allowed for the baggage for every 100 men, officers included. Furthermore, Putnam was confident long general orders would no longer be necessary; what was necessary was for officers and soldiers to follow standards already set, to “do their Duty.” Officers were appointed to inspect the camp every day and report their findings to their brigade commanders. Furthermore, soldiers were ordered to keep themselves clean and neat in appearance, trimming their hair to a decent length, eating well-cooked food, and sleeping off of the cold ground.

As important, the forces encamped in Peekskill would have time to drill and train as companies and regiments. Putnam ordered all soldiers not on fatigue detail to train regularly. Companies were to drill the manual exercise and their maneuvers three times a day. Brigades were ordered to maneuver their regiments twice a week. One brigade commander explicitly stated in his general orders that the King’s Manual Exercise of 1764 would be used for training and that officers needed to practice the manual exercise, as well. All officers of the regiments were required to drill with their soldiers and train their sergeants. By July 1777, regiments under Putnam’s command were ordering their

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334 Ibid., 20-1, 27.

335 Ibid., 28.

336 Ibid., 29-31.
sergeants major to arrest sergeants failing to obey orders or discipline their soldiers. If soldiers were slow to muster on the parade ground for drill, sergeants would be punished and soldiers failing to follow the orders of their sergeants would likewise face consequences. These orders appeared to have had some success, as regiments began regularly training together in brigades, firing field pieces and in platoon volleys to practice skirmishing and regular maneuvers.  

At the same time, Washington continued to experience difficulties with his field officers while on campaign in Pennsylvania. In August one major was tried in a general court martial for neglecting his duties while acting as a brigade major. He repeatedly refused to present himself to the Commander’s headquarters for the daily issuance of general orders and was sentenced to a public reprimand in the general orders. In the reprimand, Washington stated it pained him to so frequently be forced to censure his officers for failing to follow orders. Officers must, through their actions, illustrate diligence and discipline to the rank and file. If another brigade major failed to perform his duties, Washington would suspend his commission and ask Congress to give that commission to another officer.  

During this campaign to protect Philadelphia from General William Howe, Washington was forced to keep his army on the march, constantly alert for the landing of British forces from New York. He was aware of the invasion by Burgoyne to the north but uncertain of Howe’s plans for the Middle Department. Following Howe’s landing in Maryland, Washington marched his army south, fighting the British at Brandywine,
Paoli’s Tavern, and Germantown over the course of a month. While on the move, the Commander of the “Grand Army” focused on administrative training and marching rather than tactical training. He was faced with regulating baggage allotments on wagons, disciplining wagon masters who impersonated officers, provisioning the army, and reducing the number of camp followers (particularly women). His was an army on the march, struggling to feed itself and maintain order and discipline. By September Washington realized part of the problem: only a very few companies actually maintained orderly books. Following this discovery, Washington warned his officers if one of their soldiers could prove that they had disobeyed orders due to ignorance, the officer would be punished instead.\textsuperscript{339}

Early in October, following defeats at Brandywine and Paoli, Washington decided to attack the British in one last bid to force Howe’s withdrawal from Philadelphia. On October 3, 1777, Washington issued his orders for an attack on British forces encamped at Germantown. His plan split his forces into four columns with Continental divisions in the center two columns and the militia on the flanks. White paper was ordered displayed on soldiers’ hats to prevent fratricide, with light cavalry used for communications.\textsuperscript{340}

While this final battle of the season ended in failure, as well, the Grand Army did well at the beginning of the battle but several factors worked against success. The morning began with a very thick fog, obscuring the view of the battlefield and making a concerted effort by all four columns very difficult. At one point, the two Continental brigades converged and began firing at one another. Furthermore, Washington made a mistake following the

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid., 58-9.

\textsuperscript{340} Ibid., 72-4.
initial attack, committing his reserve to attack an enemy force barricaded in a stone mansion, which produced severe losses to his reserve. Yet the key problem for the Continental Army was the complexity of the plan itself.

At no point prior to this battle did Washington’s orders focus on tactical training. There was not time or leader focus on drill, evolutions, or maneuvers, even at the company level. While Nathanael Greene congratulated his division for their courage during the fight, he did address a particular lesson his forces needed to learn from that day. Sometimes it was necessary for officers to order a retreat during a battle but those orders were meant to reposition the regiments for another attack. These commands did not mean the army was in general retreat. It was important for soldiers to listen to all the commands given, to obey quietly and quickly in order to allow the army to take advantage of their new positions. Greene’s comments point to an important fact. Washington’s plan, while audacious and important to improving the morale of the Grand Army, was far too complicated for an army with some experience but with inadequate training together as a united force.

Almost immediately, Washington recognized the need to focus on tactical training and his orders reflected this change in priorities. On October 10, 1777, he admonished his army for not following orders immediately. A soldier’s job was to obey orders promptly, not to question why an order was given or require an explanation before an order was followed. An army, he said, was like a clock. If the pieces of a clock worked as directed, the clock operated in a rational and efficient manner. When the parts did not work well,

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341 Ibid., 70-1.
the clock failed.\footnote{Ibid., 77-9.} Two days later, Washington told his officers this was the time to instill discipline. Every day, weather permitting, the troops would be turned out to exercise priming and loading, advancing, forming, retreating, breaking, and rallying.\footnote{Ibid., 83-4.} A week later, the brigades were ordered to exercise their formations everyday, focusing on actions in wooded terrain: advancing in a line, forming into columns to march through defiles and openings in fences, and back into lines. The brigade commanders were to do the same while in a retreat.\footnote{Ibid., 95-6.}

This renewed focus on training both the manual exercise and maneuvers at the company, regimental, and brigade levels continued into the winter encampment of the Grand Army at Valley Forge. Washington consolidated forces from the New York Highlands with his immediate forces within the Middle Department. With the arrival of a former member of the Prussian Army, Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, Washington established a new standard for training in the army, set forth in the *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, known as the “Blue Book.” On March 17, 1778, 100 soldiers from each of the state lines present, (Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland) were ordered to the General’s Guard for training. The Virginia Line was exempted because they provided 100 soldiers for the Guard already.\footnote{Ibid., 263.} For the
remainder of the war, this would become the standard for training throughout the Continental Army.

The new manual contained a systematic approach for training new soldiers as they arrived into the Army. Soldiers would first learn the facing movements and marching without arms. The manual exercise consisted of 27 separate commands and while priming and loading were broken down into separate commands, there was a section for priming and loading under fire that was trained separately in 15 steps. The state lines were standardized to form in two lines when fighting, and to use the bayonet in combat. Not only were officers directed to take part during training, they were trained to empower their non-commissioned officers to enforce discipline and take charge in training. Maneuvers were explained at the company, regiment, brigade, and army levels. Furthermore, standards for baggage trains and camp cleanliness were established. The new manual acted as a contract between the commanders and their soldiers for the conduct of the Continental Army in every situation. The key to every article was the full participation by every element in the army, from the privates to the generals.

For the next few months, Washington continued to enforce regular and frequent exercises by the brigades, reiterating other parts of the manual and discouraging deviations. Commanders were told to stop training until the new manual could be disseminated to their regiments. All majors, captains, and one subaltern officer per company were ordered to report to Major Samuel Cabell to observe the model companies

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347 Ibid., 16, 31.

348 Weedon, 266.
drilling in the new manual.  

On March 24, 1778, all the brigades were ordered to begin training in the new manual exercises that next morning at 9:00 and again that afternoon, at 4:00. The brigade commanders were notified the new Inspector General, the Baron von Steuben, would be present to observe. Field officers were appointed as brigade inspectors to ensure compliance with the new standard and every officer was told his leadership was required to ensure the success of the new standard.

Washington did not reserve his commands solely for the officer corps. Recognizing the need for their commitment, the Commanding General demanded adherence to the new regulations from the non-commissioned officers, as well. In April 1778, Washington focused for a time on the cleanliness of both the encampment at Valley Forge and individual soldiers. As stated in the Blue Book, soldiers were required to keep their uniforms and their bodies clean at all times, washing their faces and hands daily and grooming their hair and beards. The key to the soldiers’ health was the enforcement of standards by their non-commissioned officers. It was the responsibility of the non-commissioned officers to ensure the cleanliness of their men. These corporals and sergeants held their rank by virtue of being better soldiers than the privates. Their example was key to compliance with the new standards by the rest of the army. If a non-commissioned officer was unable to enforce those standards among his soldiers, he

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349 Ibid., 268.

350 Ibid.

351 Ibid., 273-5.
would be reduced in the ranks and another soldier capable of leading his fellows would be promoted.\textsuperscript{352}

For the next two months, in April and May 1778, the Grand Army directly under Washington’s command practiced the “Prussian drill” as many diarists of that period called it, and exercised maneuvers. On Sunday May 3, 1778, Washington ordered his brigades to conduct an exercise together, for two hours in the morning and an hour in the evening on that Monday. Their instructions were to conduct those exercises exactly according to the new regulation, for any deviation would create havoc on the field of battle. The brigades and their regiments would compete, in front of the inspectors, each striving to become the first to master the new system.\textsuperscript{353} The first true test of the increasing skill among the regiments began the very next day, May 5, 1778. The cause was not conflict but a celebration. The French had decided to openly support the rebellion. In recognition of this important news, the Grand Army was instructed to conduct a feu de joie, marching together, in battalions, loading and firing their muskets in a running fire from the left to the right, first line and then second line, all coordinated by the firing of artillery.\textsuperscript{354}

Shortly thereafter, Washington’s forces removed from their winter encampment and followed the retreating British Army from Philadelphia back to New York. At the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, the Continental Army succeeded in fighting the British in a regular fashion, on the offensive, and proving they could succeed. While the battle

\textsuperscript{352} Ibid., 283-4.

\textsuperscript{353} Ibid., 305.

\textsuperscript{354} Ibid., 307-9.
ended in an operational success for General Charles Cornwallis (his objective as the rear guard was to protect the British main forces, and he did), this was a tactical draw and the American forces rallied, maneuvered, and fought with discipline. After a winter spent on a foraging squad, Private Martin complained of his return to the life of a regular soldier, drilling continuously under the supervision of the Baron von Steuben. Yet when it came time to fight that summer, Martin claims the soldiers of his regiment were excited to meet the British. Placed in a light infantry regiment, Martin wrote that his platoon commander from Rhode Island gave an inspirational speech and the soldiers of the invalid unit refused to give up their weapons, wanting desperately to join the battle.\textsuperscript{355}

This engagement directly after the intensive training of Valley Forge was crucial to the acceptance and commitment of the Army to the new regulations. While a council of war, meeting on June 24, 1778 decided against a general engagement with the retreating British Army, Major General Greene wrote a separate letter to Washington as a caveat to his position. He understood the risk but felt a failure of the Continental Army to engage the enemy after all the work completed during the spring would both demoralize the Army and damage its reputation with the American people.\textsuperscript{356} Brigadier General Anthony Wayne concurred with this assessment in a separate letter.\textsuperscript{357} Washington took their advice into account, deciding to attack the rear guard of the British Army at

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{355} Martin, 71, 76.}


Monmouth Courthouse. Despite Major General Charles Lee’s initial rout, Washington rallied the troops who fought well until Cornwallis followed Henry Clinton in his continued retreat to New York.

In his general orders the following day, the General congratulated his Army for their success, highlighting the coolness under fire of the infantry regiments and the effectiveness of Henry Knox’s artillery.358 This first successful use of the new training under fire acted as a final agreement for the Army that the new regulations would remain. Throughout the final five years of the war, the “Blue Book” was the standard. While military operations in the Northern and Middle Departments settled into a state of observation, training continued in the American encampments under the watchful eyes of generals and their inspectors. Nathanael Greene, acting as the commander-in-chief while Washington was away in Hartford, congratulated the Army on their proficiency in the evolutions and maneuvers in September 1780. In the same order, he acknowledged the treason of Benedict Arnold but claimed this only reinforced the reality of the Army’s strengths. The British, unable to succeed on the battlefield, was now forced to gain through sabotage what they had failed to achieve in battle.359

Certainly, this last comment on treason was partly an attempt to raise morale following the devastating news concerning the betrayal by one of America’s most popular generals but it does point to a significant change in the Army’s level of training and discipline. Training continued while portions of the Army remained encamped


359 Lauber, 142-3.
throughout New England and New York, and while on campaigns in the South. The commander of the Second Rhode Island Regiment, Colonel Israel Angell, described the parade of his regiment in front of the Baron von Steuben on August 10, 1780. He commanded his regiment in maneuvers the next day. Ten days later he repeated this training, exercising his regiment on the parade field.360 While serving as part of the Army of Observation in Rhode Island following the Battle of Monmouth, Sergeant Jeremiah Greenman repeatedly noted drills and maneuvers, including “…a Genl. Revew and a Sham fight / fir’d a Nom of Cannon.”361 First Lieutenant Francis Brooke reported drilling and exercising his troops in the Virginia Line throughout 1781.362

Following the surrender of Cornwallis in October 1781, Washington remained focused on training as a method for retaining soldier morale and confidence while keeping the remaining British forces in New York City. In May 1782, Washington planned a grand tour of his forces encamped throughout the New York Highlands. He directed von Steuben to visit the regiments and determine which sequence of maneuvers they would all follow for the inspections. Over the course of a month, the Commander visited each of his encampments, with favorable results. On June 18, 1782, he expressed his appreciation for the quality of training apparent throughout the Army. He stated the soldiers all looked disciplined, in good spirits, and maintaining a high degree of esprit de corps. While some regiments performed their maneuvers better than others, those regiments located in especially rugged terrain encountered difficulties exercising on such

360 Angell, Diary of Colonel Israel Angell, 103-4, 106-7.

361 Greenman, Diary of a Common Soldier, 122.

close terrain. The brigade commanders were ordered to continue their training regimen throughout the year. While they were permitted to change the maneuvers they exercised from those specified during the inspection, they were reminded to stay within the “established principles” and always focus on priming and loading, leveling, and taking aim. These were the most important fundamentals.363

The Continental Army, as an institution, only lasted eight years, all in a state of war. Prior to June 1775, there were military traditions that existed in reality and in memory for many colonists preparing to revolt but these traditions were different one from another. As part of those traditions, the standards for training were not the same and the leadership within the forming regiments of the Continental Army understood those training standards to varying degrees. Over the course of the first three years, the leadership and the led of this new American institution struggled to come to an understanding of how the army should operate, how leaders and led should interact, and how to learn to fight on the battlefield and trust one another under fire. Finally, after several years of trial, a standard was reached, tested under fire, and accepted by all.

The importance of this may not be fully understood, either by those involved or those historians looking back. Over the course of the remaining five years, officers, non-commissioned officers, and soldiers struggled with lack of food, clothing, and pay, either constantly on the move or stultified with boredom in encampments. One of the biggest binding agents between these men was their shared experiences, their shared exercises

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and drilling, and their formation into a cohesive team. The Blue Book standards established a written contract for how each member of the army was supposed to act, how they were supposed to form in battle, and how they were supposed to interact with one another. With so little experience prior to the war, these codes of conduct and methods for preparing for combat created trust, gave soldiers expectations of their leadership, and taught junior leaders techniques for gaining the respect of their men.

Washington knew in 1782 that the war was winding down. The surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown was the final blow he had been trying to strike since Germantown. While he certainly needed his army to remain trained, ready to meet the British should they attempt to break out of New York City, his summer tour of the regiments and brigades in 1782 was more than a simple inspection of training. Washington knew the power of training in creating cohesion within a unit. He understood there were going to be many boring days ahead, possibly with little pay or food. As will be discussed shortly, he had already experienced the Line Mutinies of 1781 and the complaints of groups of officers and soldiers against Congress and the state governments. He needed the Army to remain an institution with esprit de corps and loyalty to each other and the leadership. Training and exhibiting excellence was a tried and true method to keep soldiers focused on their duty and off their hardships. As will be explored next, these attempts to keep the Army together worked but with some interesting consequences in both discipline and morale.
CHAPTER 6
MORALE

Despite better training and increased effectiveness on the battlefield, by 1780 the Continental Army was showing serious fissures in discipline. On May 25, 1780 half of the Connecticut Line mutinied at Morristown, New Jersey. Following the morning muster, men from the Eighth Connecticut Regiment refused to leave the parade ground with their officers. The regimental adjutant remained as well to give the orders of the day to the orderly sergeants. An altercation ensued between the adjutant and one of the sergeants, leading the officer to loudly declare the non-commissioned officer a “mutinous rascal” and storm off. When the sergeant hit the butt of his musket on the ground and yelled “Who will parade with me?” the entire rank and file of the regiment fell into formation.\(^{364}\)

The Eighth Connecticut Regiment was soon joined by the Fourth Connecticut and they marched together to convince their brothers in the Third and Sixth Connecticut to join them in protest against perceived maltreatment at the hands of their officers, their countrymen, and their government. Warned of the impending disaster, Colonel Samuel Wyllys and Colonel Return J. Meigs attempted to place guards between their soldiers and their weapons and a fight broke out. Colonel Meigs was wounded, stabbed in the side with a bayonet. While the unplanned violence tempered the men from the other two regiments, the Fourth and Eighth Connecticut refused to put down their weapons and officers from the Pennsylvania Line attempted to gather their regiments to surround the mutineers. The result was less than effective. Elements of the Pennsylvania regiments

\(^{364}\) Martin, 109-10.
appeared more willing to join the mutiny than quell it and the officers were forced to march their men back to their huts. In the end, the Connecticut soldiers were only calmed when an officer they respected (Colonel Walter Stewart from the Pennsylvania Line) came to hear their grievances. His concern for their demands and assurance that their issues were both shared by their officers and would be addressed immediately eventually led the soldiers to disperse.365

This would not be the final mutiny of a regiment or regiments in the Continental Army during the Revolution. A much larger crisis involving both the Pennsylvania and New Jersey Lines was in the making, along with other protests from Massachusetts and Connecticut soldiers. Certainly, by 1780, Continental soldiers and officers had much to complain about, against both their government and their fellow countrymen. Throughout the Army soldiers were rarely paid and when they were, the currency that constituted their pay depreciated faster than they could spend it. Food, clothing and supplies were always scarce, due to a rather ineffective administrative apparatus in both the Army and in Congress, the refusal of state governments to allow military impressment of civilian property, and the unwillingness of local civilians to sell their goods for Continental dollars. The result was poverty and misery for both officers and soldiers throughout the war.

Yet the Continental Army remained in the field throughout the eight years it took to expel the British from the eastern seaboard of North America. No American army during the colonial wars had been required to remain in the field for such a long period, relying instead on annual recruiting drives to re-establish provincial regiments for each

365 Ibid., 110-2.
campaign season. Why did Continental soldiers remain in the face of defeat, privation, and poverty? It is possible they gave some deference to those in leadership who demanded they remain to fight. Certainly state and martial laws sought to compel soldiers to stay. These men had agreed to (or been forced into) long-term enlistment contracts that made it illegal for them to leave, no matter the cost. Additionally, by 1780, these were hardened, trained veterans used to the rigors of war. Many soldiers may not have had many prospects outside the Army and so remained despite the conditions. And most states passed laws protecting debtors as long as they served in the army. Taken together, these were strong incentives for a soldier to remain in the service but they do not fully explain why the army continued to fight. Tales of men leaving trails of blood in the snow as they staggered into Valley Forge and descriptions of soldiers marching to battle in rags barely illustrates the difficulties faced or the methods needed to keep these men from evaporating in front of General Washington’s eyes.

A stronger explanation for the reason soldiers remained in the Army despite the lack of general support was that Army leaders often managed to maintain morale at a level high enough to convince the majority of soldiers to stay and fight. Generally, morale is defined as “the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regards to the function or tasks at hand.”366 For soldiers in the Continental Army, their levels of enthusiasm, confidence, and loyalty were most often determined by their belief that their leadership, their governments, and their fellow citizens were meeting their expectations. Military leadership as a cultural negotiation of authority created many of those expectations, especially regarding right

conduct and treatment from their officers. The ability of a leader in the army to maintain morale was determined by his ability and willingness to meet those expectations set through cultural negotiation and deemed legitimate by his followers. In particular, this meant officers honoring contracts, maintaining discipline, conducting themselves in accordance with standards, achieving success on the battlefield, and representing their men’s grievances to state governments and Congress. When combined with the unit cohesion formed between the soldiers of all ranks within their companies and regiments, the ability of officers to meet soldiers’ expectations could be powerful indeed. Despite the extreme difficulties faced by officers to meet these expectations, many were able to do so and those that were not often paid a heavy price.

Studies of the Continental Army usually investigate the challenges faced by these soldiers and their responses; they often do not focus specifically on morale to determine why some regiments experienced lower morale than others. Allen Bowman did conduct an instructive investigation of morale within the Continental Army in 1943 as an attempt to aid the Committee for National Morale in understanding how morale is gained and maintained. He examined the physical and psychological impediments to morale and then explored the effects of absenteeism and desertion to better understand how morale was maintained. He identified the quality of soldiers, lack of supplies, prevalence of disease, and depreciation of wages as the physical causes for lower morale.\textsuperscript{367} Within his examination of psychological factors, Bowman highlighted the provincialism of the regiments and the individualism of the soldiers.\textsuperscript{368} In the end, when he summed up all of

the challenges, all of the deprivation experienced by officers and soldiers alike, Bowman came to one conclusion: the Continental Army remained intact due to the soldiers’ devotion to the Revolutionary Cause, a “crusade divinely blessed against a cruel oppressor.”369

Other historians have come to similar conclusions to explain the activities of the soldiers. Historians like Charles Royster, Walter Sargent, and John Resch, found that the Army was bound together in common cause despite the disagreements between officers and soldiers over the ramifications of republican ideology. Investigating the motivation for service among the men of Massachusetts, Sargent found that while a broad spectrum of society joined in the fight for liberty, they often did so for political and ideological reasons that become clear when viewed through the lens of town meetings.370 Royster argues that as requirements of the war changed how the Continental Army was organized, officers and soldiers agreed that though necessary these changes were a violation of their republican ideology. For Royster, the important fact was that they agreed.371 The implication of their research points to a general agreement of all in the Continental Army that they were working together to achieve a common goal. This sense of commonality was sufficient to overcome differences between the ranks and maintained morale despite a general lack of support.

368 Ibid., 26-9, 30.
369 Ibid., 61, 102.
370 Sargent, “The Massachusetts Rank and File,” 44.
371 Royster, A Revolutionary People at War, 25-54.
James K. Martin and Mark E. Lender found another reason for soldiers to remain in the Army despite low morale and lacking supplies. They found no linkage between officers and soldiers, no common cause that would bind them. Instead, while officers and soldiers suffered alike, social differences and the deference common to late colonial America precluded anything more than a desire by Washington and his officers to exercise as much coercive authority as possible to deter desertions and mutinies. If this perception of an insurmountable social gulf existed between officers and the rank and file, only one explanation can be reached: unit cohesion, the devotion of the men to each other, would explain why soldiers continued to fight and also why they increasingly protested their plight through mutinies.\textsuperscript{372}

Other historians, including Steven Rosswurm and Gregory T. Knouff, found the experience of military service during the Revolution pitted lower-class soldiers against the leading elites in a fight over the meaning of revolutionary ideology. For Rosswurm, patriotism lost out to egalitarianism among the privates of Pennsylvania though they were ultimately disappointed in a final demonstration during the Fort Wilson Riot of 1779.\textsuperscript{373} Knouff also examined the experiences of common soldiers from Pennsylvania and found that localism was the motivating factor for these men. Patriotism and ideology were elitist conceptions; common men fought for localized reasons that colored their perception of the war.\textsuperscript{374} From this perspective of class separation, motivation and morale in the

\textsuperscript{372} Martin and Lender, \textit{A Respectable Army}, 127-34.


\textsuperscript{374} Knouff, \textit{The Soldiers’ Revolution}, 36-7.
Continental Army necessarily rested on a foundation of cohesion among like groups of soldiers serving together.

Yet these two perspectives on the experiences of those serving in the Army during the Revolution fail to adequately discuss the relationship between the leaders of the Army and those who followed them. In either overview, the maintenance of morale was left to unconscious or extraneous forces at work to explain why the Army failed to fall apart in the face of extraordinary challenges. The first argument assumes ideology was strong enough to overcome years of privation and neglect experienced by officers and soldiers at the hands of their government and countrymen. The other position implies soldiers’ commitment to the war effort during periods of low morale occurred in spite of the officers who led them. Neither thesis acknowledges that a strong relationship developed between the leaders and the led in the Army over eight years of war. Belief in a common cause was certainly necessary for all to agree that their actions had meaning and worth. Unit cohesion and esprit de corps did exist among soldiers serving through hard times together. Yet these forces could have been mobilized to steer the Army (or separate state lines) in very different directions. There were several examples when morale dropped, discipline suffered, and entire units of soldiers decided to go home or revolt. Still, those instances were relatively few and they were almost always re-directed back to the issue at hand: defeating the British Army.

The idea that the officer corps actively led their soldiers has not been adequately explored to explain why the Army continued in generally the same direction. The decisions made by officers to care for their soldiers and motivate them to continue in the face of hardships and defeat added more to the success of Washington’s Fabian strategy.
than any other contributing factor. Washington personally set many examples to maintain the loyalty of his soldiers. Self-sacrificing and stalwart, the Commander-in-Chief only left the Army when he deemed it necessary to visit Congress in person. He was otherwise constantly in the field and at camp with his men. And he demanded much the same from his subordinate officers. In most cases, they followed his example.

When viewed over the entire eight years of the war, it is certain the Continental Army disbanded demoralized compared to the heady days of its establishment. And it would be easy to assume that the morale of the army could be determined by its performance on the battlefield. Certainly the First Establishment experienced a true low point following its defeat at New York in the fall of 1776. It was in this milieu that Washington was forced to recruit for the Second Establishment, with longer enlistments and stronger coercive authority. Additionally, the Second Establishment experienced a series of highs and lows as separate departments experienced varying degrees of success. The Northern Department became the example of victory Washington was forced to rely upon during his less than successful campaign in Pennsylvania in 1777. The relative success at Monmouth in 1778 increased morale in the entire Army following the difficulties of Valley Forge while the flight of Horatio Gates from Camden in 1780 was certainly a new low.

Yet perhaps the most difficult time followed the last major battlefield victory at Yorktown. While Lord Cornwallis was defeated, for the next two years the Army camped in New York, forced to remain while Henry Clinton and what remained of the British Army continued to occupy New York City. As historian John Nagy found in Rebellion in Weedon, Valley Forge Orderly Book, 89-90.
soldiers’ protests increased as the war progressed and the large majority of their group protests (executed in the form of mutinies) resulted from the lack of food, clothing, and pay and not from battlefield defeats.\textsuperscript{376} Morale ebbed and flowed throughout the war, presenting Army leadership with continuous challenges. Only by convincing the soldiers that they cared, that despite the apparent apathy of the government and society, officers appreciated the sacrifice made by their soldiers, did the Continental Army manage to persevere.

If morale can be defined as the feelings generated among a group when expectations are met or not, Washington certainly benefitted from his reputation and the strong support for the Revolutionary Cause when he first took command. His lack of understanding concerning the expectations of men from New England could have led to disaster early on. To be sure, he pushed very hard to change how the army was managed and he did so from the outset. The result was consternation on the part of many in the army. According to a Loyalist from Boston, Benjamin Thompson, “Notwithstanding the indefatigable indeavours of Mr. Washington and the other generals, and particularly of Adjutant General Gates, to arrange and discipline the army, yet any tolerable degree of order and subordination is what they are totally unacquainted with in the rebel camp. And the doctrines of independence and levellism have been so effectually sown throughout the country, and so universally imbibed by all ranks of men, that I apprehend it will be with the greatest difficulty that the inferior officers and soldiers will be ever brought to any

tolerable degree of subjection to the commands of their superiors.” Only the advice of Washington’s senior officers from New England, and his willingness to follow that advice, averted the probable alienation of the commander Congress had appointed to take control.

Officers and men alike refused to accept many of Washington’s initial reforms. His generals, when asked to determine how to promote the best among the officers (outside the number of soldiers recruited), refused to give him an answer. They understood such a move was premature and would create uproar among the men. The committee sent from Congress to confer with Washington, his generals, and the representatives from the various state governments supplying soldiers refused to accept an adoption of the British Articles of War. New England men were used to New England military justice and Washington was forced to accept the Massachusetts Articles instead. The men refused to enlist under officers they did not know. Officers continued to fight with one another over recruits in the belief this would determine their


By May 1776, Washington realized to maintain morale he would have to meet current expectations and, over time, change those expectations to meet his standards.

During the year that the First Establishment existed, Washington and other leaders faced issues with morale that stemmed from more than a lack of success on the fields of battle. While the British withdrawal from Boston was a cause for celebration, defeats in Canada and at New York sobered those who believed there would be a quick end to the war and impacted the willingness of men to enlist in the regular army. Yet soldiers already serving in the army reacted more strongly to events that occurred outside of combat. In the Northern Department, Major General Philip Schuyler faced a mass desertion by his bateaux men after regimental officers blamed them for not transporting the regiments north in a timely manner. Schuyler was forced to arrest a regimental commander, Colonel William Irvine, for abusing his waggoners who also threatened to leave. A general fear of smallpox led many soldiers in the north to disobey orders and convince local physicians to inoculate them, resulting in further defeats in Canada. Furthermore, soldiers from regiments of the different states were fighting amongst

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themselves.\textsuperscript{385} Philip Schuyler himself threatened to resign following his withdrawal from Crown Point, claiming many officers were attempting to damage his reputation and he demanded Congress hold a court of inquiry to clear his good name.\textsuperscript{386}

The forces under Washington’s direct control in New York suffered similar problems with morale. Before the British landed on Long Island, soldiers in regiments from different states fought with one another.\textsuperscript{387} Officers convinced Doctor Azor Betts to inoculate them for smallpox against Washington’s direct orders.\textsuperscript{388} Soldiers complained consistently of overtaxing fatigue details in preparation for New York’s defense.\textsuperscript{389} Once British forces did land in New York, and particularly after the initial defeat at Long Island, soldiers lost confidence in many of their officers to care for their needs and senior officers lost confidence in their soldiers to stand and fight.\textsuperscript{390}


\textsuperscript{387} Washington, “General Orders, Head Quarters, New York, August 1, 1776,” \textit{PGWD}, \url{http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-05-02-0396}.


\textsuperscript{389} Bangs, \textit{Journal of Lieutenant Isaac Bangs}, 37.

It was in this environment of severely damaged morale that Washington was forced to contemplate the reorganization of the Army for the Second Establishment of 1777. He had received many of the reforms he had asked for. Enlistments would now be for three years or the duration of the war. Pay was standardized among the soldiers at $6 and 2/3. The Articles of War were changed to match more closely those of the British Army. Initial estimates from recruiting officers were that soldier enlistments would drop precipitously. Understanding that the future of the Continental Army (and the Revolution) were at stake, Washington decided to surprise British forces in New Jersey on Christmas and New Years 1776-1777. Despite his success at forcing the withdrawal of British forces from New Jersey, the impact of that victory on recruiting and morale were mixed. Washington was forced to ask those in service but refusing to re-enlist to remain six weeks past their contracted service. Some, like David How from Methuen, Massachusetts, refused to stay despite experiencing success at Trenton. At least one regiment refused to march into battle on December 31, 1776 until their officers agreed that the soldiers had done enough and would be released the following day when their enlistments expired. Still, many did agree to stay the extended time, including the Nineteenth Continental Regiment (Connecticut), though they did so after they were offered an addition $10 bounty. And, at least in Massachusetts, the continued threat of

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392 Roberts, 40.

British invasion provided the impetus to enlist more men in 1777 than had been enlisted during the previous two years.\textsuperscript{394}

While morale in the Continental Army never again reached the high point of 1775, it certainly did recover from the dark times of the following year. In particular, the victory at Saratoga and the success at Monmouth late in 1777 and in the spring of 1778 led to increased confidence by both the officers and the soldiers that the overall success of the Revolution was attainable. The new training regimen established at Valley Forge convinced soldiers to such a degree that men left invalid by that harsh winter had to be forcibly restrained from joining the fight in New Jersey.\textsuperscript{395} Yet these sporadic victories were not enough to overcome the debilitating realities of insufficient support from the government and local inhabitants. The most frequently cited reasons for low morale were the absence of pay, clothing, and food. Defeats on the battlefield, while certainly demoralizing, rarely warranted mention in soldiers’ diaries or memoirs when recounting their reasons for protesting their conditions. While it can be justifiably surmised that victory at some point was an expectation for soldiers in the army, their strongest expectations centered on the promises made to them when they enlisted. The inability or unwillingness of their fellow countrymen to make good on those promises were always the greatest cause for discontent among those serving in uniform. Though new victories in 1781 again raised morale, the final two years of the war would bring about further demoralization as soldiers waited for the word that the war was at an end and their time in the army was likewise concluded.

\textsuperscript{394} Sargent, 54.

\textsuperscript{395} Martin, 76.
From the very beginning of the Revolution, soldiers’ pay was a serious issue with regards to morale. While the Army consisted almost exclusively of regiments from New England, soldiers were paid on a fairly consistent basis or received back pay at the conclusion of their service. Troubles over pay began when regiments from the middle states joined forces with the rest of the Continental Army. Though men from different states often did not like one another, they certainly shared information across the regiments. Both in New York City and in Albany, soldiers from New York and Pennsylvania began to complain that their salary of $5 per month was lower than that of New England soldiers paid $6 and 2/3 per month. Washington was forced to promise soldiers from Pennsylvania they would be paid the higher amount months before Congress officially decided to do so before they would march north to Albany.\textsuperscript{396} From that point until the end of the war (and for decades after) pay and money would be the chief source of discontent among soldiers and officers.

Once Army pay was standardized, the real problems surfaced. Initially, the challenge was paying soldiers in a regular fashion. Pay in the Continental Army was given in Continental dollars until 1781, a currency printed or authorized by the Congress and supported by little more than the promise of a Revolutionary victory. In some cases, as with Captain Bloomfield’s command on the frontier in 1776, pay was often months late though this could be explained by the remote location of the command.\textsuperscript{397} A lump


\textsuperscript{397} Bloomfield, 102.
sum payment of four months’ pay still created a challenge for the commander, as soldiers experienced long bouts of dearth and then suddenly became flush with cash. Sutlers provided alcohol and other foodstuffs to supplement a bland Army diet of beef and flour, forwarding credit to soldiers until they were paid. For Bloomfield, the result was an outburst of ill-disciplined behavior. A group of five soldiers left camp, became inebriated across the river, and refused to return until they were forced back under a guard led by Captain Bloomfield.398

As early as July 1777, soldiers were contemplating protests over the failure to receive their pay in a regular fashion.399 By 1778, protests did occur in several regiments as an attempt to secure months (and soon years) of back pay. Yet the situation became worse by 1780 when depreciation of the Continental dollar created an inflationary crisis that threatened to beggar all soldiers and ruin even the wealthiest of officers. When a young lieutenant, Francis Brooke of Virginia, joined his regiment late in 1780, he claimed he was paid $33,000 and 2/3 in paper in lieu of the $33 and 2/3 he was due because prices made the latter amount worthless. His uniform coat cost him $2000 and the buttons $1500.400 Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert expressed empathy for his soldiers in January 1781, claiming many of them had not been paid since December 1779.401 In New York, Lieutenant John Barr answered accusations that he was working as a teacher while at home recovering from an injury by stating he would be a fool to stay outside of camp

398 Ibid., 103.
399 Greenman, 76.
400 Brooke, 21.
401 Gilbert, 31-2.
for longer than necessary. The cost of living at home far outstripped his wages in Continental dollars.\textsuperscript{402}

To make matters worse, the Commissary department of the Army was completely inefficient, often incapable of supplying the necessary food and goods to units spread across the three departments. To supplement the needs of the soldiers, officers allowed sutlers to accompany their forces but these men were certainly not above taking advantage of a captured market. Not only did these merchants artificially raise prices, they were a constant source of aggravation when they supplied soldiers with large amounts of alcohol. Additionally, food remained scarce despite the relative abundance of food production throughout the regions the Army occupied. Many civilians were simply unwilling to sell their produce to the Army for currency they had little faith in.\textsuperscript{403} Finally, Congress failed to honor their enlistment promises for clothing and blankets. Soldiers were promised an annual re-supply of two linen hunting shirts, two overalls, a waistcoat, hat, breeches, two pair of hose, and two pair of shoes. If the soldier supplied these clothes, he would be given $20 instead.\textsuperscript{404} Congress lacked the ability to produce these articles or the infrastructure to supply them. By December 1779, Congress shifted responsibility to the states, requiring the state governments to supply their regiments with clothing and food.\textsuperscript{405}


\textsuperscript{403} Carp, \textit{To Starve the Army at Pleasure}, 172.

\textsuperscript{404} \textit{The Acts and Resolves of the Massachusetts Bay}, 680-1.

\textsuperscript{405} Carp, 179.
Given the deplorable state of supplying the Army, it was not surprising soldiers responded at times with desertion, plundering, and mutiny. Desertion rates have been difficult to determine, due to the inaccurate and inconsistent manner with which muster rolls were collected. A study of Charles Lesser’s research does allow for some analysis. During the terrible winter of 1779-1780, when the Continental Army was encamped at Morristown, New Jersey, the Massachusetts Line reported 79 soldiers deserted and 132 soldiers were sick and absent of a total 4738 soldiers. This constituted about 4% of its total force on the rolls at that time. The rolls of Connecticut (17 deserted, 180 sick and absent of a 2526 total), Pennsylvania (50 deserted, 71 sick and absent of a 2593 total), New York (13 deserted, 62 sick and absent of a 1407 total), Virginia (7 deserted, 35 sick and absent of a 2237 total), Maryland (72 deserted, 85 sick and absent of a 2112 total), and New Jersey (16 deserted, 66 sick and absent of a 1187 total) range between 5-7% reported absent from the winter encampment that might never return. While these numbers increase dramatically when the numbers of soldiers on furlough are included, the official numbers of soldiers reported as absent without leave were actually quite low.

It is certain these numbers were inaccurate. Washington continuously berated his officers for failing to report their numbers in a timely fashion. Still, by the winter of 1779-1780, regimental officers were becoming more reliable and it was much easier to maintain accountability in winter camp than while on campaign. If the muster rolls are to be taken as even somewhat accurate, desertion rates within the Continental Army were

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not the problem some historians have come to believe and might explain the leniency often exhibited when deserters were captured and returned to the Army.

Much more prevalent, at least within the general orders of the day, was the habit soldiers had of plundering local inhabitants for food and supplies. Washington’s orders addressed this problem consistently from 1776 through the end of the war. Soldiers, frustrated by the sight of civilians spending their winters in relative comfort while the Army faced harsh condition with little clothing and food, decided to take matters into their own hands and relieve their condition through theft. Soon after establishing winter quarters at Valley Forge, Washington was forced to address civilian complaints against soldiers stealing food. \(^{407}\) Farmers continued to complain that officers and soldiers took more food despite being shown certificates that food had already been given. \(^{408}\) Late in the spring, Washington was still receiving reports of unauthorized foraging; farmers claimed soldiers were using Washington’s name to demand gifts of food and clothing. \(^{409}\)

The problem was even worse when regiments from Pennsylvania and New York came back into friendly territory following a season on campaign in the West. Major General John Sullivan led an expedition into Iroquois territory in the summer of 1779. His objective was to attempt the capture of Fort Niagara but lacking the logistical means necessary to take his 4000 soldiers that far west, he instead defeated a force of Loyalists and Iroquois at Newtown and conducted a scorched-earth strategy for the season, burning crops and villages, utterly destroying the ability of the Six Nations to remain. When he

\(^{407}\) Weedon, 167-9.

\(^{408}\) Ibid., 205-7.

\(^{409}\) Ibid., 297-8.
returned to Easton, Pennsylvania, his soldiers appeared to have difficulty shedding habits developed over the previous summer. Sullivan initially gave orders that soldiers were to refrain from burning property and railings as they moved south.\textsuperscript{410} Within two days of arriving back in Pennsylvania, locals began complaining of looting and violence. Sullivan threatened to place a guard around the camp even if that meant half the camp would remain on duty at any given time.\textsuperscript{411} These orders were clearly not heeded as, a few weeks later, a soldier was wounded while attempting to rob a civilian, soldiers were reported firing at civilians while conducting their looting, and officers were failing to uphold order in the camp at Pompton, New Jersey. At this point, Sullivan ordered no one was to leave camp at night.\textsuperscript{412} When these orders failed to have effect, guards were placed in a circle around the encampment, field officers were placed in charge of the guards, and brigades were assigned patrols throughout the night.\textsuperscript{413} One of the regiments involved, the Fourth New York Regiment, soon thereafter experienced the mass resignation of 64 officers as a petition against ill treatment from their “State and Assembly.”\textsuperscript{414}

While desertion was concerning (given the low number of enlistments) and plundering was alarming (with its potential to turn the citizenry against its army), Washington’s most dangerous problem connected to low morale came in the form of

\textsuperscript{410} Lauber, 94.
\textsuperscript{411} Ibid., 98.
\textsuperscript{412} Ibid., 114-5.
\textsuperscript{413} Ibid., 115-6.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., 818.
mutinies, whether from a single regiment or entire state lines. Mutiny for the Continental Army almost always meant a form of group protest against perceived failures by those in leadership to meet soldiers’ expectations concerning pay, food, and clothing. At the risk of anachronism, these were a form of labor strike. During none of the various mutinies studied did soldiers seriously attempt to replace their officers with new leadership from among the non-commissioned officers or privates. Instead, for a period of time, the officers and some of the non-commissioned officers lost the ability to command the majority of their regiments while those in charge of the mutiny illustrated the temporary authority to direct a protest and demand fairer treatment.

The first mutiny occurred in September 1775 when a company of Virginian riflemen attempted to break out one of their fellows from the Main Guard at Cambridge. More alarmingly, in December 1775, Connecticut soldiers marched home against orders from Washington and in violation of their enlistment contracts. Washington viewed this protest as a mass desertion from Israel Putnam’s division. The soldiers from these regiments claimed their enlistments were at an end and they ran for home taking their weapons and ammunition with them. Jonathan Trumbull, the governor of Connecticut, responded that these men were accustomed to liberty, making them disagreeable to discipline and subordination. Still, they had violated their contract

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and would be dealt with accordingly.\textsuperscript{417} While the soldiers claimed they had the right to leave, all these men knew when their enlistments expired (January 1, 1776). It is clear they left for other reasons, though whether it was in protest to Washington’s reforms or due to homesickness is not known.

In 1776, regiments refused to follow orders on several occasions. As stated previously, some regiments refused to march north until they were promised pay equal to that of New England troops. Others refused to continue fighting on the last day of their enlistments until promised release on the next day. In the winter of 1777-1778, at Valley Forge, soldiers and camp followers from two Virginia regiments (the Second and Tenth Virginia Regiments) attempted a mutiny in protest of their deplorable conditions. Mary Johnson was found guilty in a division court-martial of mutiny and attempting to desert to the enemy. She was sentenced to 100 lashes and was drummed out of the Army. Eight of her co-conspirators (all male) were also found guilty, though only Jeremiah Bride was given 100 lashes as punishment. The other seven soldiers were sentenced to 100 lashes but their punishments were reprieved. Three other people (two soldiers and one female camp follower) were acquitted of all charges.\textsuperscript{418}

Still, protests of this kind did not seriously threaten the integrity of the Army until the Connecticut Line Mutiny of 1780. As stated earlier, the protest embroiled two regiments, almost included another two, and had the potential to include regiments from Pennsylvania, as well. The end result of the exhibition was that soldiers received


\textsuperscript{418} Weedon, 215-6.
immediate support in the form of clothing and food. Less than seven months later, the most serious of mutinies occurred. In early January 1781, first the Pennsylvania Line and then the New Jersey Line mutinied in mass over issues of pay, food, and enlistment terms. For soldiers from the Pennsylvania Line, many of whom were German and Irish immigrants, there was a dispute over whether their terms of enlistment were for three years or the duration of the war. The state government insisted these soldiers had enlisted for the longer of the two terms. Since most of these soldiers initially enlisted in 1777, those who believed they had enlisted for only three years insisted their time was over. Furthermore, Pennsylvania was still working through the legislation required to pay these soldiers in Pennsylvania currency, the new requirement once Congress admitted the Continental dollar was no longer a viable form of payment. The end result was a complete breakdown in discipline, the death of at least two officers, the wounding of many others, and an accommodation by the Pennsylvania government to release those no longer willing to serve and a new enlistment bounty to those who would.

The New Jersey Line Mutiny that followed a few days later would end much differently (as would two other smaller mutinies at Yorktown and in New York over the next year). When a portion of the soldiers of New Jersey’s First and Second Regiments encamped at Pompton saw what they believed to be the success of the Pennsylvanian protest, they too decided to march towards Philadelphia. First they agreed to head to

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419 Martin, 112.

420 Nagy, 77.


422 Nagy, 79, 158.
Chatham to enlist more soldiers in the Third New Jersey Regiment. Their leader, Sergeant Major George Grant, was only days before a member of the Third Regiment but had been moved in a reorganization of the line. The leadership within the New Jersey Line was somewhat confused in these first weeks of 1781. The line was consolidating three regiments into two. The commander of the Third Regiment, Colonel Elias Dayton, was considered a very capable officer and was taking command of the Second Regiment. He was located with many of his soldiers originally from the Third Regiment at Chatham. The former commander of the Second Regiment, Colonel Israel Shreve, was retiring but still in the field at Pompton. He followed behind his soldiers as they marched to Chatham. When Sergeant Major Grant and his fellow mutineers arrived at Chatham, they met with Colonel Dayton and some commissioners from the New Jersey Assembly who listened to their complaints. Colonel Dayton told the mutineers of pay advances that were soon to be given, refused to allow the men to leave the service upon a sworn oath that their enlistments had expired, and convinced them to

\[\textit{Ibid.}, 172.\]

\[\textit{Francis B. Heitman, Historical Register of the Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the American Revolution, April 1775 to December 1781 (Washington, DC: The Rare Book Shop Printing Company, 1914), 42-3. Colonel Elias Dayton was Captain Joseph Bloomfield’ regimental commander in 1776. He served in the Jersey Blues as both an enlisted soldier and junior officer. He remained in the service of the Continental Army from 1776 to the end of the war when, in recognition for his service, Washington convinced Congress to promote him to Brigadier General.}\]

\[\textit{Nagy, 172.}\]

\[\textit{Heitman, 495.}\]
return to their duty and await a redress for their grievances. The mutineers agreed and marched back to Pompton under the command of Colonel Shreve.\textsuperscript{427}

While Colonel Dayton was working to avert disaster, Washington put in motion a plan to make an example of the New Jersey Line. The quick succession of events was too much for Washington, who marched regiments from the Massachusetts Line south under the command of Major General Robert Howe, surrounded the protesters, executed two members of the mutiny (sparing the life of Sergeant Major Grant), and squashed further resistance.\textsuperscript{428} In that same year, in the Southern Department, troops from Virginia also mutinied when told to join General Nathanael Greene’s forces. They too had not been paid in close to a year. Again the mutiny was forcefully put down, Sergeant Hagarltoy run through with Captain Shelton’s sword and the Second Virginia Regiment commander, Colonel Christian Febiger, ordering the barracks burned to the ground.\textsuperscript{429}

The effectiveness of soldier protests varied over the eight years of war. Desertion was truly an individual form of protest or, at most, a method for a few soldiers to decide conditions were no longer acceptable. Yet the records suggest that many deserters were not actually protesting their failed expectations; they were looking to take advantage of a rudimentary administrative process in the Army to earn several bounties at once and then, perhaps, runaway with the cash. Plundering was viewed as often necessary by the soldiery due to the failed supply system of the Congress and the Army though it rarely relieved more than the direst of needs. Group protests, mutinies and the threat of them,

\textsuperscript{427} Nagy, 172-3.

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., 179-80; Gilbert, 33-4.

\textsuperscript{429} Brooke, 21.
appeared to be much more effective, at least until 1781. Before the incident with the
troops of New Jersey, these events almost always ended with an accommodation to the
demands of the soldiers in revolt. The change in strategy for handling this challenge to
authority by higher-ranking officers would mark a new and final point in the negotiations
over the meaning of military leadership in the Continental Army.

Washington always wished for more control over the administration of the Army.
He wanted the ability to commission company officers. He asked for more authority to
punish soldiers as he thought necessary. He wanted states to initiate more drafts to lower
his reliance on militia support. In the end, he never received the authority he thought he
needed. Yet he also never wanted certain powers he always believed should remain
within the purview of his political leadership. The republican and Whig ideological
beliefs that separated military authority from civil authority, and placed the former under
the latter, was central to Washington’s own political values. That these separations
remained throughout the war also meant that officers in the Continental Army were both
limited in their abilities to meet the expectations of their soldiers and protected in some
regards from the ire of their troops when those expectations were not met.

Furthermore, officers suffered from many of the same failed expectations as their
soldiers. When soldiers were not paid, officers were also not paid. When the Continental
dollar lost all value, officers too were left begging family and local civilians for support.
Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert expressed his sympathy for the soldiers who were not
receiving pay, claiming in a letter to his father that this was also true for the officers. For
this reason, he asked his parents to send him white yarn and thread to fix his socks and
clothing. In Philadelphia a soldier and officer were charged with begging from locals for necessary supplies for the sick. In February 1778, one officer, Lieutenant Alexander Guy in Colonel John Lamb’s Second Continental Artillery Regiment, was found guilty of conducting robbery with one of his privates. He was sentenced to having his sword broken over his head and dismissed from the Army with infamy. Still, officers received certain privileges soldiers did not and it was when they abused those privileges to avoid the travails of their soldiers that they lost the respect of their soldiers and morale in their units plummeted.

Joseph Plumb Martin’s memoirs contain several examples of this fact. Shortly after arriving at their winter quarters near Redding, Connecticut in 1779, Israel Putnam led soldiers on a failed patrol to find the enemy. Unable to return to their encampment before dark, the officers took up quarters in some nearby lodgings and left the soldiers to camp in the woods. When it began to rain hard after midnight, soldiers began firing their weapons in an attempt to force the officers from their cozy lodgings. When this failed to work, Martin concluded it was because the officers did not care for their men. A short time later, while still encamped within Connecticut, this same regiment began a mutiny over pay, clothing, and food. The soldiers (perhaps not surprisingly) believed their officers were not doing enough to address this problem with the state. They mustered several times over the course of a month, threatening to march to Hartford and deal with

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430 Gilbert, 33-4.
431 Greenman, 243.
432 Weedon, 225-6.
433 Martin, 88-9.
the government on their own terms. When the regimental commander failed to quiet the men by berating them, he did promise to go to Hartford and represent the soldiers. Still, one night the troops loaded a gun barrel with powder, placed it in one of the barracks, and set it off with a slow match. The resultant explosion sent the officers scrambling from their huts. When none of the men would admit to the prank, the officers returned to their quarters and the soldiers repeated the joke. This continued several times until the officers simply ignored them.\textsuperscript{434} These were the same men who mutinied again in May 1780.

While examples of this kind could suggest the very separation highlighted by other historians between officers and soldiers in the Continental Army, other examples exist that counter this argument. Included in this same account of the Revolutionary War, Martin described his platoon commander giving a short inspirational speech prior to the Battle of Monmouth. The soldiers viewed this leader as a brave officer, afraid of nothing, a man these soldiers would gladly follow into any battle.\textsuperscript{435} Furthermore, during the mutiny in 1780, two of the Connecticut regiments were dissuaded from joining the protest after they wounded Colonel Meigs. Martin described Meigs as a well-respected officer and believed the wounding to be accidental. Finally, the uprising was finished when Colonel Walter Stewart from Pennsylvania agreed to discuss the grievances with the soldiers. Colonel Stewart was apparently very well liked by soldiers in both the Pennsylvania and Connecticut lines and his assurances that both the officers and men

\textsuperscript{434} Ibid., 91-3.

\textsuperscript{435} Ibid., 76.
were suffering alike and that he would bring the matter up to the Connecticut officers was enough to calm the soldiers down and return them to their duty.436

It is curious an officer from another state line would maintain enough trust with these Connecticut men to diffuse such a dangerous situation. This fact points to a situation in the Eighth Connecticut, the regiment that began the protest, which has not been covered in other histories of mutinies during the war. The first commander, Colonel John Chandler, fell ill after less than a year in command and was forced to resign. His second-in-command also fell ill at the same time and was absent for the entire winter of 1777-1778, resigning a month after Chandler. The vacancies in leadership positions forced the promotion of the regimental major, Joseph Hait, to lieutenant colonel and Giles Russell (the lieutenant colonel of the Fourth Connecticut) was promoted as the new regimental commander. But stability in leadership continued to elude the Eighth Connecticut. Colonel Russell died on October 28, 1779, reportedly due to complications arising from wounds sustained during the French and Indian War. Joseph Hait was transferred to the Second Connecticut and Lieutenant Colonel Isaac Sherman was moved in from the Second Connecticut to command the regiment just months before the mutiny in May 1780.437 The turbulence in senior leadership within the Connecticut Line meant that officers they did not know and who did not know them led these soldiers and this situation was a contributing factor to their low morale.438

436 Ibid., 109-12.

437 Heitman, 16-9.

438 This was similarly the case during the New Jersey Line Mutiny, where the relationships built between the officers and the men were altered as the regiments reorganized.
What becomes apparent from many of the accounts throughout the war was that officers who illustrated for soldiers they were willing to both share the difficulties of war with their men and represent them to the higher authorities when expectations were not met became the leaders capable of maintaining morale even in the worst of conditions. Colonel Stewart appeared several times to help his soldiers and calm their protests. At Valley Forge, Washington ordered his company commanders to visit their sick at the hospitals, with a captain appointed each day to visit the sick, inspect the hospitals, and ensure their men were receiving the care they needed.⁴³⁹ After several weeks of visiting the hospital, Colonel Stewart realized these orders were being ignored. He decided to ensure his men were taken care of personally. From that point forward, the captains appointed for hospital duty would report directly to Colonel Stewart daily and report their findings and actions to care for the soldiers to him.⁴⁴⁰ In addition to his role during the Connecticut Line Mutiny, it was Stewart who was called forward to Anthony Wayne’s temporary headquarters during the Pennsylvania Line Mutiny because it was known the soldiers trusted him and would listen to him.⁴⁴¹

Washington understood the need to share his soldiers’ travails and show them support clearly. He never took a furlough in the entire eight years of war. He issued orders to his officers to not abuse furloughs as a method for avoiding the difficulties of winter encampments.⁴⁴² Furthermore, to protect his soldiers from unscrupulous sutlers,  

⁴³⁹ Weedon, 216-7.  
⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 243.  
⁴⁴¹ Nagy, 82.  
⁴⁴² Lauber, 193.
Washington and his generals established public markets where the officers fixed prices to allow soldiers to buy tobacco, liquor, sugar, and other necessaries at reasonable prices.\textsuperscript{443} 
And, as stated earlier, officers were ordered to visit their sick in the hospitals, attend to their needs when possible, and certainly keep an account of hospital shortages.\textsuperscript{444}

Actions like those above and others, to include setting the example of marching with the soldiers on campaign, legitimized officer authority and granted them the ability to command the respect necessary to maintain morale. To be sure, officers from some state lines succeeded in this endeavor better than others. Looking at the instances of mutinies conducted and other examples of group protests, most state lines experienced troubles. Besides the cases of Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and New Jersey previously discussed, Massachusetts, Maryland, Rhode Island, New York, and South Carolina also experienced varying degrees of protests that resulted in mass officer resignations, refusals to march, or mass desertions. For Massachusetts, approximately 100 men marched home from West Point, New York on January 1, 1780. Yet it was the Massachusetts Line Washington chose a year later to suppress the New Jersey Line during their mutiny. The reasons the mutiny was little more than a company strong and why Washington felt he could trust these men a year later can be explained by examining the response of Massachusetts’ officers to their soldiers’ grievances and their government’s response to their appeals.

On January 19, 1779 the four brigades from Massachusetts sent a petition to the General Court. That petition laid before the assembly the complaints of officers and


\textsuperscript{444} Weedon, 243.
soldiers regarding the depreciation of their pay and the impact on their ability to feed and clothe themselves and their families. In response, the General Court ordered towns to support their soldiers with credit, to be repaid once the soldiers were paid. A few months later, Colonel Rufus Putnam sent a petition requesting those soldiers serving in the regiments but not citizens of the state also be included in all resolves to provide support. The Court agreed. Still, in September 1779, Major General William Heath sent a letter to the Court that spurred them to appoint a three-man committee to meet with the officers and soldiers at West Point to hear their grievances. Political leaders were facing a serious problem at this juncture; the majority of their soldiers had enlisted for three years in 1777 and those enlistments would soon be completed. The committee was authorized to offer a re-enlistment bonus of $300 to those willing to re-enlist for the duration of the war and to promise all soldiers and officers that as much of their back pay as the state could provide would be paid to them by January 1, 1780. The remainder would be given when available.

The committee traveled to New York, met with all the officers and the men at West Point, and returned to submit their report on November 12, 1779. The report was not encouraging. Both the officers and the enlisted soldiers were unhappy with their treatment by their government and unwilling to remain in the service. Officers were broke, spending their own money to feed their soldiers. The families of both officers and

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446 Ibid., 1278-9.

447 Ibid., 1280.

448 Ibid., 1282-3.
soldiers were now destitute, reliant on the generosity of their towns for support. Deserters were not pursued; to the contrary, they were hired by the towns as laborers and protected from being forcibly returned to the army. While the committee did its best to promise restitution was coming and that there was a sizeable bonus for those who re-enlisted, they did not feel enlistments would be substantial unless the state rectified the immediate need for food and clothing. Finally, the committee reported the officers were very concerned that the men who served and counted in the state’s quota but were citizens from other states be included in any and all benefits agreed upon.\textsuperscript{449}

While these discussions, in reality, never amounted to much (officers and soldiers remained unpaid for long periods of time and, as will be shown later, both officers and men left the Army in 1783 greatly disillusioned by the treatment from both government and their countrymen), the combined knowledge that their officers suffered with them and that those same officers supported them went far to ameliorate the damage done to morale. Contrasted to the case of the Pennsylvania Line Mutiny of 1781, it is apparent that the appearance of the committee in November 1779 quite possibly averted a similar event occurring a year earlier in what were arguably the most radical units in the Army with a reputation from the French and Indian War of marching home when contractual expectations were not met.

In the case of the Pennsylvania Line, its government was also working to solve the riddle of paying for its soldiers once the Continental dollar collapse. Where Massachusetts decided to fund its soldiers through a lottery,\textsuperscript{450} Pennsylvania chose to use

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{449} Ibid., 1284-6.}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{450} Ibid., 983.}
the promised sale of seized Loyalist real estate as collateral for the issuance of state notes. Yet while the Pennsylvania Assembly worked to pass a law that would fund a state currency, backed by the promise of land sales, and authorized a team of auditors to determine the back pay due to its soldiers, to include accounting for depreciation, the soldiers of the regiments decided to take matters into their own hands. There is no record of petitions sent to the Pennsylvania Assembly by officers in support of their soldiers prior to the mutiny. There are no records to show the soldiers knew of the new resolutions passed to attempt their relief. Instead, Joseph Reed rode up to Princeton from Philadelphia to meet with Major General Anthony Wayne and the leaders of the revolt with this information after the protest began. He arrived with the power to promise those who believed they had enlisted for three years the ability to leave the service or re-enlist for an additional bounty. Once this information was given to the soldiers, to include the promise of new clothing and more food, the mutiny ended and the soldiers either marched back to Morristown or were marched home to await a rendezvous in Carlisle the following spring. The mutiny that winter was as much a failure of leadership on the part of both senior officers and politicians as it was a necessary protest to resolve legitimate grievances.

Still, if leadership is a cultural negotiation of authority and the officers were products of the same colonial cultures and military traditions as their men, why would the soldiers from these different state lines appear to act in similar ways to similarly failed

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452 Nagy, 158-9.
expectations? The reason for this was that by 1780 much of the Continental Army had come together to form its own military tradition, a new set of standards and expectations, built over the shared experiences of the previous five years, that required officers to answer the needs of their soldiers in similar fashion, despite their own understanding of their place in society. Key to this joining, as discussed earlier, was training. Training set the standard of conduct for officers, noncommissioned officers, and soldiers alike. Another force bringing these men together was simply the experience of serving together in the same region and on the same battlefields. Soldiers were often placed on special duties that forced them to work with other officers and other soldiers from the various regiments and states. A melding of culture and expectation was not, therefore, surprising. Still, while this meeting of traditions was important, perhaps the strongest force that drew soldiers from across the Army into a common military culture was the revolutionary rhetoric of Washington and his officers.

Starting with the reading of the Declaration of Independence a few days after its signing, soldiers were inundated with revolutionary ideology as a way to motivate them before a battle, to entreat them towards better behavior in camp, and to lift their morale following a defeat. Washington’s general orders are replete with calls to defend liberty, to uphold the right to private property, and to guard against tyranny. Prior to the Battle of Long Island, Washington told his Army that they fought not for their specific states but for the single cause of Liberty. “Let all distinctions of Nations, Countries, and Provinces,

453 And in most cases, particularly in the regiments of New England, the company officers were really not that different in economic or social status from the start. As the war dragged on (due to their military service) the lack of pay and time spent fighting the war rather than attending to a private career had a leveling effect between soldiers and officers rather than increasing their disparity of condition.
therefore be lost in the generous contest, who shall behave with the most Courage against
the enemy, and the most kindness and good humor to each other." Now was the time
for every soldier to do his duty, to fight for liberty, property, life, and honor, for his wife,
his children, and his country (America). Prior to the beginning of the campaign in
1778, Washington assured his soldiers of their imminent victory, for they were free
citizens in arms fighting against mercenaries and forces of a king intent on ravaging their
lands and their rights.

Washington was certainly not the sole provider of revolutionary fervor. Leaders
down to the company level were inspired by this revolutionary rhetoric and acted in
concert with those ideals. Following the death of one of his soldiers, Captain Bloomfield
held a military funeral with all officers in attendance. Five soldiers fired three shots in
salute. The soldiers from Bloomfield’s regiment were impressed at the respect shown a
private soldier. Over the summer of 1776, Bloomfield and his soldiers built Fort
Dayton, at German Flatts, and following the successful conclusion of its construction, the
entire unit raised a sixty-foot pole, flew a flag atop it with “Liberty” on one side and
“Property” on the other. They then gathered around a barrel of grog, the officers toasted
the success of the fort, the soldiers gave nine cheers, they all fired shots through the

454 Washington, “General Orders, Head Quarters, New York, August 1, 1776,”
PGWD, http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-
05-02-0396.

455 Washington, “General Orders, Head Quarters, New York, August 13, 1776,”
PGWD, http://0-rotunda.upress.virginia.edu.usmalibrary.usma.edu/founders/GEWN-03-
06-02-0001.

456 Weedon, 245-6.

457 Bloomfield, 46.
portholes, marched around the fort, gathered back around the grog, gave more Patriotic toasts, and then dispersed.\textsuperscript{458} It is impossible to know how many of the soldiers there that day were present almost five years later when Washington ordered members of the New Jersey Line to shoot to death two of their own for leading the Mutiny of 1781 but the ideology of Life, Liberty, and Property surely survived those first heady days in the summer of 1776.

The experience of serving in the Continental Army was radicalizing, especially for soldiers serving from states where those ideals were not even close to being practiced in reality. It should be no wonder, then, that the failures of the Congress, the state governments, the local populace, and, at times, the leaders of the Army caused soldiers to come together to protest violations of the ideals for which they fought. The wonder is that it happened so infrequently and usually was diffused before their protests exploded into mob violence or mass desertions and defections. The best explanation for why that was so is the leadership of many of the officers to care for their men, address their needs when possible, and represent those men to higher authorities when needed.

Yet by 1781 Washington and other generals found that accommodation had its limits, especially in the face of the enemy. While the Pennsylvania Line refused British attempts to turn the protest to their advantage, the quick succession of first the Pennsylvania mutiny and then the New Jersey mutiny convinced Washington he had to respond more forcefully with the second protest. Despite the success of Colonel Dayton to diffuse the situation, Washington marched 500 soldiers of the Massachusetts Line

\textsuperscript{458} Bloomfield, 101.
down from West Point to Pompton, surrounded the offenders, and forced the execution of two ringleaders by twelve fellow mutineers.\(^{459}\)

For the rest of the war, these forms of protest no longer brought accommodation; they brought executions. The two times when mutiny again threatened the Army, it occurred in the same regiments where it had occurred before. Regiments of the Pennsylvania Line attempted mutiny at Yorktown, claiming correctly that the promises made them earlier had not been kept. Anthony Wayne violently suppressed this revolt in front of the enemy by executing several members of the mutiny while in commission of instigating the revolt.\(^{460}\) In May 1782, the Connecticut Line again planned a mutiny but a soldier revealed the plot to seize artillery and march to Hartford, resulting in the execution of one plot leader.\(^{461}\) While caring for soldiers, leading them by the example of perseverance, and representing them remained the cornerstone to maintaining morale, accommodation to mutiny was no longer tolerated in the Continental Army.

As the war drew to a close, Washington and the other officers of the Army faced their final challenge to morale: a waning sense of purpose. Following the victory at Yorktown, the Army was forced to remain encamped in the New York Highlands to maintain a careful watch over British forces still occupying New York City. For the officers and soldiers remaining in the Army, this was a tense time, one of small

\(^{459}\) Gilbert, 35.


\(^{461}\) Gilbert, 57-8.
skirmishes, foraging parties, no pay, little food, and an uncertain future. In order to
maintain morale, Washington was forced to get creative.

His first order of business was to keep the soldiers spread across the Highlands
busy. He organized a tour of his forces and he ordered them to perform a specific set of
exercises, given to them by Von Steuben. Washington would inspect every unit and
critique them on their tactical abilities. Following the inspection, Washington issued
general orders congratulating the officers and soldiers on their performance. All units
looked professional (except a few regiments that had yet to receive hats) and all
performed their exercises well (except a few that had difficulty conducting their training
on such rugged terrain). Washington thanked Von Steuben for all his hard work,
encouraged regimental commanders to continue training and to change the routine of
maneuvers but also stay true to the established principles of the Blue Book.\textsuperscript{462}

Washington then created two new forms of recognition for his soldiers. The first
was a thin white stripe of cloth, cut in an angular fashion, and worn on the left sleeve of
the uniform coat. It would symbolize three years of brave and faithful service. Those
soldiers who served for six years wore two stripes sewed parallel to one another. The
second award was for any soldier or non-commissioned officer who served gallantly in a
singular meritorious action. These men would be awarded a purple heart, cut from cloth,
and sewed on the facings of his left breast. To be awarded such an honor, the soldier’s
commander was required to certify the action with General Washington personally. The
wearer of the Purple Heart would receive the privilege of passing the guards as officers

\textsuperscript{462} Boynton, \textit{General Orders of George Washington}, 30-1.
These two distinctions are still in use in the modern US Army, though the Purple Heart now signifies that a soldier was wounded in combat. His or her service stripes still represent three years of dedicated service each.

Washington had one final project to keep the men busy as they waited for the signing of the final peace treaty to end the war. On Christmas Day in 1782, Washington approved the suggestion of Reverend Dr. Israel Evans, the chaplain for the New Hampshire Brigade, who proposed the building of a great public building for the common use of worship. For the next few months, officers and soldiers from across the Army came together to collect the materials and expertise necessary. Colonel Tupper of the Massachusetts Line was placed in charge and the building was complete in early March 1783. It is perhaps ironic that the first meeting ever held there would later be called the Newburgh Conspiracy.

In the first week of March 1783 a letter circulated among the officers remaining in the Army, announcing a meeting to be held at the new public building to discuss the future of the officers and their soldiers. A few months earlier, in December, Major General Alexander McDougall, Colonel Matthias Ogden, and Colonel John Brooks traveled to Philadelphia as a committee representing the grievances of the Army to Congress. Their desire to secure the pay owed everyone in the Army and commute a promised pension to a lump sum payment for the officers was debated but not decided over the winter. Back at Newburgh, tensions were running high as all men in uniform

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463 Ibid., 34-5.
464 Ibid., 62.
465 Ibid., 63-4.
contemplated the upcoming peace, the definite dissolution of the Army, and the threat that they would all be forced to return home without a settlement of their accounts. Some officers decided more pressure was necessary to force Congress to honor its promises.

The letter sent to the officers, known as the Newburgh Address, was an emotional appeal, listing the wrongs done to the officers by Congress and declaring that only two options remained if Congress refused to resolve these issues regarding pay. If peace was declared, the officers could lead the Army to Philadelphia and refuse to lay down their arms and disperse until their accounts were settled and commutation given. If the war did not end, the officers could lead the Army west, leaving Congress vulnerable to British attacks.\textsuperscript{466} Washington immediately took control of the situation, issued a general order stopping the proposed meeting and announcing a meeting the next Saturday to discuss a report from McDougall’s committee. He assumed no officers would have attended the earlier meeting due to its “irregular” announcement but he requested that all officers attend his meeting with the senior officer in attendance to act as president. The president was to report the results of the meeting to Washington upon its conclusion.\textsuperscript{467}

The general order implied Washington would not attend the meeting personally. Major General Gates chaired the meeting as president but before the discussions could begin, Washington walked into the building and began to attack the anonymous letter as emotional and dangerous. The two options presented in the letter were preposterous. If the Army marched on Philadelphia, every objective of the Revolution would be compromised. If the officers marched the Army west, they would not only leave


\footnote{467 Boynton, 69-70.}
Congress vulnerable, they would also place their families at risk. The only rational
decision was to remain patient, trust that Congress would honor its responsibilities, and
continue to lead the Army to a victorious conclusion of the war. Following this appeal
to his officers’ sense of commitment to the Revolution and their new country,
Washington read the report from McDougall stating Congressional support to address the
Army’s grievances. The officers unanimously agreed to support the Congress and a
potential crisis was averted.

Several scholars have debated the importance of this sole example of a mutiny by
the officers of the Continental Army. Richard H. Kohn asserts this event was the result of
a conspiracy between young nationalist in Congress and young “Turks” in the Army (led
by Horatio Gates) who attempted to use the Army to further their aims at centralizing
national power in Congress. While these politicians and officers never wished for a
military coup d’etat, they were willing to risk revolt in order to force the issue of pay and
commutation paid for by a national tax to fund a national debt. Historian Paul D.
Nelson, a biographer of Horatio Gates, argues Gates and his protégés never intended a
coup. Instead, while perhaps politically naïve, their intentions were solely to place
pressure on Congress and were never of a treasonous nature. Historian C. Edward

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469 Nagy, 209.


Skeen took Nelson’s argument one step further, depicting the Newburgh Address as misunderstood by Washington. The entire affair was fomented by politicians in Philadelphia who were attempting to excite the Army to their own nationalist agenda while the officers involved only ever wished for a stronger remonstrance to Congressional failures. Washington, receiving letters from Alexander Hamilton and a Virginian congressman, Joseph Jones, became convinced the Address was originally written in Philadelphia and delivered to Newburgh by Colonel Walter Stewart. He then overreacted during his meeting on March 13, 1783, crushing any attempts to pressure Congress for legitimate redress and ending what was actually a non-event.472

Regardless, the events of early March 1783 highlighted the extreme distress of all in the Army during those final days over the issues of failed expectations. While Washington’s reaction illustrated the limits to which he would go, the Newburgh Conspiracy showed that the officers in the Army suffered the same plight as their men and were willing to continue their support to care for their soldiers. Whatever the intentions of the Address, everyone knew of the continued attempts to speak with Congress and receive due compensation while the petitions included demands for both soldiers and officers. And despite the failure of Congress to come to a resolution, the Army at Newburgh did not revolt.

All of these actions at Newburgh over the final months of the war point to another important fact. Washington had changed his view of his Army as they had conveyed their trust and loyalty to him. By March 1783, the vast majority of his Army came from New

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England. Of the nineteen regiments remaining, fourteen regiments were from the four New England states, and eight came from Massachusetts alone. His decisions to create the Army’s first official recognitions for soldiers’ service and actions were not cynical attempts to ameliorate failures from governments to meet their obligations. These were recognitions that his soldiers were men worthy of his respect and appreciation. Furthermore, his most trusted officers were Nathanael Greene, Henry Knox, William Heath, Rufus Putnam, and John Brooks (commander of the Seventh Massachusetts), all officers from New England. And these were the men he relied upon to support him when he decided to end the Newburgh Conspiracy in no uncertain terms.\footnote{Ibid., 287; Kohn, 211.}

The last days of the Continental Army were not ones of high morale. Washington thanked all who served with him over the duration of the war in one of his last general orders. He asked all to remember their time in the Army with pride, knowing they helped erect a “fabric of freedom and empire on the broad basis of independency.”\footnote{Boynton, 78-9.} Yet despite his best efforts to the contrary, most officers and soldiers left the Army with little more than their weapons, their uniforms, and promissory notes. Many of them were forced to sell those notes immediately, at a depreciated value, to be able to afford their transport home. Lieutenant Gilbert, forced to remain in camp until he received some payment, described the plight of many soldiers and officers as they were discharged in the summer of 1783. Disillusioned by the ingratitude he witnessed from American citizens toward the soldiers, he described for his brother-in-law the scenes of soldiers who served for four to eight years leaving the Army without a penny in their pocket. These men were forced to
beg for money from the very people they had fought for and died to protect. For Gilbert the scene was impossible to bear.\footnote{Gilbert, 107-8.}

Conditions for the soldiers of the Continental Army were terrible. Without the logistical or administrative infrastructure to support the Army, pay, food, clothing, and other necessaries were never adequately provided. The military traditions of colonial America never demanded the ability to support an army year round and certainly not to do so for almost a decade constantly in the field. Yet stirred by the revolutionary rhetoric that convinced them they were fighting for liberty against slavery and tyranny, the final decision made by those last soldiers in the Continental Army not to take the Revolution to the doorsteps of their state assemblies and the Continental Congress for redress is hard to explain without acknowledging the leadership of their officers in service with them. And while that leadership failed to adequately protect soldiers from the apathy of government and country, the result of eight years of war was a new American military tradition that would define the relationship between leaders and led in the army for centuries to come.
CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The War of Independence ended in June 1783 and the Continental Army was largely dissolved. Only a single regiment, known as the First American Regiment, remained to guard the frontier against Indian attacks as the American population continued its move westward into Ohio, Kentucky, and territories further west. This small force was not equal to the task.\textsuperscript{476} The political weaknesses of the Congress under the Articles of Confederation and the republican politics that were strengthened by the success of the Revolution required the new nation to rely more heavily on state militias for defense. Though Washington suggested a method for regulating the militia that would centralize control at the national level, it was rejected.\textsuperscript{477} The idea of a peacetime establishment was debated during the Constitutional Convention and while it was eventually declared constitutional, still the country relied heavily on state militias for defense. In effect, according to historian Don Higginbotham, the new Constitution created a dual military system of state militias (the old colonial tradition) and a standing army (maintaining the lessons learned from the Continental Army).\textsuperscript{478}

The United States Militia Act of 1792 maintained states’ control of their militia forces but also mandated the use of \textit{The Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States} from 1779 for organization and training. Some officers from


\textsuperscript{478} Ibid., 457.
the Revolution remained in the small standing force. Many of them blamed their experiences of insufficient support during the Revolution on a weak central government and became ardent Federalists. In 1792, the Army recruited approximately 4000 soldiers to fight under the command of Major General Anthony Wayne to protect settlers in the Northwest Territory. At the Battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794, Wayne decisively defeated his Native American opponents and ended the war for the Northwest Territory.

During President Washington’s administration, he and Alexander Hamilton advocated for a military academy to educate and train officers, especially in the military art and in engineering. While Congress declined to debate this and several similar proposals over the course of the 1790s, President Thomas Jefferson did approve the establishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1802, though historians debate his reasons. Some historians argue Jefferson sought to establish a three-tiered educational system that included desperately needed professional schools to teach mathematics, science, and engineering. The United States Military Academy was part of his educational vision. But as historian Theodore Crackel has skillfully shown, Jefferson’s strongest reason lay in his desire to “Republicanize” the Army. Following the Military Peace Establishment Act of 1802, Jefferson and his Secretary of War, Henry Dearborn (who served for New Hampshire as a captain, major, and lieutenant colonel in

479 Ibid., 438.

480 Weigley, 41.

481 Jennings L. Wagoner and Christine Coalwell McDonald, “Mr. Jefferson’s Academy: An Educational Interpretation,” in Thomas Jefferson’s Academy: Founding West Point, edited by Robert M.S. McDonald (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 120.
the Continental Army), worked through a reorganization of the Army to rid the senior ranks of Federalists, promote the lieutenant colonels to colonel (thus winning over many who were moderates), and re-institute the rank of ensign in the infantry regiments to create many new offices for the Republican Party to fill. As a part of this reorganization, the United States Military Academy at West Point provided the means to educate future officers in proper, republican leadership, while the free education and political appointments ensured young men of merit were appointed who also maintained the proper political leanings.482

The debates and decisions concerning the American Army that came to light in the Early Republic show a continued negotiation over the issues of military service and authority that began with the adoption of the Continental Army in the summer of 1775. Over the course of the War of Independence, the officers and soldiers of the Continental Army wrestled with what it meant to lead and follow during the most active parts of the Revolution. As the commander-in-chief of this army, Washington had great influence over these debates but so too did his soldiers and junior officers. He took command of a New England army at the heart of the revolt and he left command again in charge of a largely New England army. The final garrison for the Continental Army became the future sight of the United States Military Academy.

The United States Army continued, from the Revolution until the creation of the All-Volunteer Force in 1972, to work in this dual system of a small standing army and a larger state militia system whereby a small core of professionals stood by ready to

incorporate citizen-soldiers in times of need. This system maintained a requirement to negotiate the use of military authority as large numbers of citizens entered the regular service to support their nation in times of war. Even during the American Civil War, regiments remained delineated by the states from which they were formed. Still, many of the officers continued to be educated and trained at one school, West Point. And the agreements reached in the Continental Army persevered. In particular, the idea that American soldiers were autonomous individuals, unwilling to follow leaders simply because they had been granted the authority to lead by their government remained.

In 1879, following a hazing scandal at the Academy, a former Superintendent of the Academy and then commander of the US Army, Major General John M. Schofield, gave an address to the Corps of Cadets. A portion of his speech, known as Schofield’s Definition of Discipline, is still required to be memorized by every cadet as he or she begins four years of training and education. “The discipline which makes the soldiers of a free country reliable in battle is not to be gained by harsh or tyrannical treatment. On the contrary, such treatment is far more likely to destroy than to make an army. It is possible to impart instruction and to give commands in such a manner and such a tone of voice to inspire in the soldier no feelings but an intense desire to obey, while the opposite manner and tone of voice cannot fail to excite strong resentment and a desire to disobey. The one mode or the other of dealing with subordinates springs from a corresponding spirit in the breast of the commander. He who feels the respect which is due to others cannot fail to
inspire in them regard for himself, while he who feels, and hence manifests, disrespect toward others, especially his inferiors, cannot fail to inspire hatred against himself."483

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