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## **Men of the meanest sort :: military leadership and war in the New England colonies, 1690-1775/**

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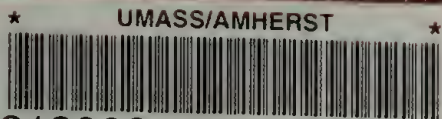
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MEN OF THE MEANEST SORT: MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND WAR IN THE  
NEW ENGLAND COLONIES, 1690-1775

A Thesis Presented

by

SEANEGAN P. SCULLEY

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

MASTER OF ARTS

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History

MEN OF THE MEANEST SORT: MILITARY LEADERSHIP AND WAR IN THE  
NORTHERN COLONIES, 1690-1775

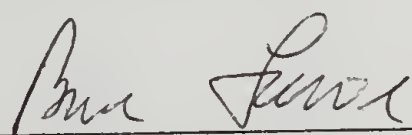
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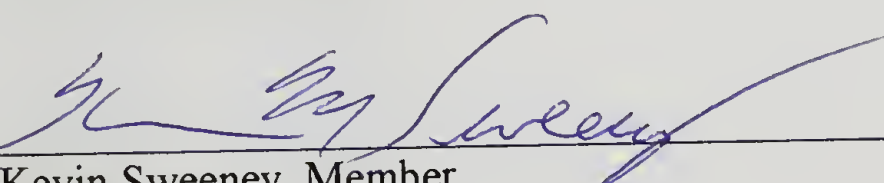
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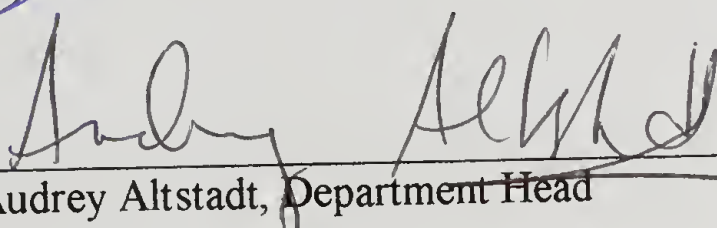
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## INTRODUCTION

On February 3, 1758, the entire company of Captain Ebenezer Learned from Massachusetts deserted their posts at a fort in Stillwater, New York. This desertion was initiated by the men of the company but was led by their commander, Captain Ebenezer Learned, who had returned from a furlough to find his men discouraged and demoralized. They had received orders from the British commander of the garrison, Captain Philip Skene, that they would have to remain on guard through the winter at Stillwater. Their enlistments, however, were due to expire on February 2, 1758. Their captain attempted to have his company released but Skene refused to bend. From the British perspective, the colonial force had been recruited to protect the colonies from the French and those enemy forces remained a threat. After discussing the commander's decision with his men, Captain Learned directed his men to make snow shoes and hide them within banks of snow until they could escape. The provincial officer led his company out of the fort, under the cover of darkness, marching his men south. During the seven days it took to reach Deerfield, Massachusetts, the company was lost for two days and many men suffered from frostbite and hunger. Finally, one of the men realized that the creek they were following was near Deerfield. Captain Learned asked his men to trust him one last time. Knowing that some of the injured would not make the remainder of the march on their own and that the rest of his company had not the strength to help, the commander built a fire and went ahead for help. When he arrived, Learned was greeted with welcoming arms by the soldiers there and a relief column was sent back for the others. The deserters were greeted with a hero's welcome, allowed to recover from their ordeal,

and sent home. The captain never left his men and the soldiers never lost faith in their commander.<sup>1</sup>

Why would a military officer agree to lead a desertion? And why would his men trust he would listen to their problems and not punish them under the British Articles of War? Was he simply a coward or did his decision reflect something different entirely? And why would the receiving garrison help them upon their arrival? I believe this is an extreme example of the new form of leadership that was developed under the provincial system of military. The provincial armies comprised voluntary enlistments of men who were family, friend and neighbor who worked together in an egalitarian society. These armies required a new form of leadership that engendered trust necessary to promote continued support within local communities. Without that trust, new enlistments could not be counted on for future campaigns.

In *A People's Army at War*, Fred Anderson goes a long way towards explaining how the colonial forces of New England in the eighteenth century were different from their British counterparts and how those differences helped precipitate a later conflict, the American War of Independence. Anderson plausibly contends that New England's cultural values, reflected in their military institution, clashed with English social norms in the interactions between soldiers during the Seven Years' War, resulting in a realization that colonials were no longer "English" but were "American". While his method of questioning the interpretation of military history from a social angle is compelling and fruitful, Anderson fails to adequately examine how the relationships between officers and

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<sup>1</sup> Rufus Putnam, *Memoirs of Rufus Putnam*, (Boston: Houton Mifflin, 1903), p. 11.  
Fred Anderson, *A People's Army*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1984). p. 162-4.



men, developed in an egalitarian society and a voluntary army, became a unique form of leadership negotiated in a singular manner.

Fred Anderson understands the relationship between officers and their men, in Massachusetts, to be a contractual arrangement that was mainly legalistic and economic in nature. This insight explains much about the differences between the Massachusetts soldiers and English soldiers. Yet contract as a concept explains little about the maintenance of unit cohesion that repeatedly survived the anguish of battle experience. New England units did not dissolve upon contact with the enemy, including direct assaults in the most violent situations. Pay and a contract cannot explain how regiments from the Bay Colony and the rest of New England could succeed time and again throughout the first half of the eighteenth century against professional soldiers, nor why New England units performed well, when given a chance, against professional armies in the French and Indian War, despite the conclusions of other recent historians.<sup>2</sup> In this regard, it is more useful to focus on the relationship between the provincial officers and their subordinates.

The voluntary soldiers of the provincial armies trusted their officers to lead them into battle with common sense and loyalty found in a unique relationship that incorporated the values of their society, sufficiently changed to meet battlefield conditions. Unlike most English commanders, the officers of Massachusetts could not rely on their honor and a draconian system of discipline to force obedience from their soldiers. Instead, they led by exemplifying courage, common sense, and religious fortitude and thereby maintaining the effective loyalty of their men. They were expected

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<sup>2</sup> See Guy Chet's *Conquering the Wilderness: The Triumph of European Warfare in the Colonial Northeast*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).



to uphold the contractual obligations of provincial enlistments while enforcing “fair” discipline against transgressors. Furthermore, it was expected that they would adhere to the tactical norms developed in the colonies, attacking when advantageous, defending when necessary, but always keeping the welfare of their soldiers foremost in their minds. This tacit code of military etiquette created a relationship between officers and men totally foreign to the professional army of England. Rather than rely on a complete separation between classes to create effectiveness on the battlefield, the colonial forces succeeded by maintaining a sense of social equality viewed as dishonorable by their British counterparts.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THE BRITISH OFFICER

Social institutions tend to reflect the cultural values of that society because they are products of that culture. The British Army of the eighteenth century was no different in this regard. Though the specific workings of the military conformed to outside influences, such as tactics and technology, the overarching professional ethos reflected British society as a whole. In war, hierarchy and discipline are necessary to accomplish victory in the face of immanent death. The British version of this took the form of exaggerated separation of classes and extreme punishment. Though as much as one-third of the junior officers came from the ranks (who, without money or patronage, overwhelmingly remained junior)<sup>3</sup>, the British aristocracy and its ethos dominated the officer corps, soldiers came from the working class and were enlisted for life, and most offenses against the British Articles of War were punishable by death, much as crimes were punishable in civil society.

The Imperial army of the eighteenth century was a product of the New Model Army, created in 1645. With the advent of a series of defeats for the Parliamentary forces early in the English Civil War, Puritans in the House of Commons perceived a need to rectify their military mission with the Will of God. Previously, members of Parliament could simultaneously serve as officers in the army and have a seat in government. A new sense of “self-denial” was necessary, they thought, to bring them God’s favor renewed and they began to call for a separation of civil and military

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<sup>3</sup> Steven Charles Eames, *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the Northern Frontier, 1689-1748*, (University of New Hampshire: UMI, 1989), p. 335-6.



authority. Parliament was the place for debate over military strategy, not on the field of battle between commanders. This new vision alarmed many in the House of Lords who feared further restrictions on aristocratic power and privilege. A compromise was reached whereby both Houses were needed to approve commissions and the bill was passed on February 17, 1645.<sup>4</sup>

Though this new institution would seem, to modern eyes, to fit well with a growing concept of democracy, in which military power was subordinate to civil authority, Oliver Cromwell's tenure as dictator did much to sour English public opinion in regards to a standing army. For five years, from 1653 to 1658, Cromwell ruled over England as a dictator, using the New Model Army to establish his control and to enforce his rule over both the Rump Parliament and English society. Upon his death, despite naming his son as successor, Cromwell's army fell into disarray largely because Parliament was unable to afford its payroll.<sup>5</sup>

After many months of instability, General George Monck marched on London in 1660 from Scotland with his unit, the Coldstream Guards to re-establish order. He encamped his soldiers outside the gates of the city demanding that the Rump Parliament be dissolved, called for free elections, and openly supported the return of Charles II. Once it was clear that those demands would be met, Monck submitted his military power to the authority of the newly elected Parliament.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Mark A. Kishlanski, *The Rise of the New Model Army*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 28-40.

<sup>5</sup> Noel T. St. John Williams, *Redcoats and Courtesans: The Birth of the British Army (1660-1690)*, (London: Brassey's Ltd., 1994), p. 3-4.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5-8.

Within a year, in February of 1661, the New Model Army was disbanded and the new British military institution was formally established, in the name of the king and under the command of General Monck. This new institution was still subject to Parliamentary control because funding had to be voted upon and given by the House of Commons, but the commissioning of the officers came directly from the king. Under the new laws, the English army was an expansion of the traditional King's Guard concept from medieval Europe. Though the king no longer had to call upon vassals to supply their own units to support his war aims, the army was still viewed as an extension of the king's authority and, until the end of King James II's reign, was paid for out of the royal allowances. By the late seventeenth century, however, the army had grown to over 34,000 soldiers and their salaries began to be paid for out of the Parliamentary funding for county militias, which were still dear to many an Englishman's heart but no longer practical to the defense of a growing empire.<sup>7</sup>

The British army was born during a period of the tensions between monarch and Parliament, aristocracy and bourgeoisie, Anglican and Puritan cultural values. Common ground was found, though, which balanced a fear of monarchical authority and abuse found in Europe's standing army tradition and the needs to grow and protect imperial power abroad. County militias were perceived by the growing British gentry as a salutary restraint to absolutism in England, if impractical for the projection of power in British colonies. This faith in militias for local defense was exported to the North American colonies during this time.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 22-5, 45, 219-20.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 22-5.



As stated above, the king was responsible for commissioning officers. This was accomplished through the purchase system. British officers purchased their commissions until 1870.<sup>9</sup> The purchase system enforced the social requirement that all officers be aristocrats of either wealthy means or noble patronage or the sons of rich merchants who could afford their commission. Officers were not paid well and promotions were not determined by experience or merit, but were purchased from a superior officer at the time of his retirement or his own promotion. To rise in rank an officer needed either inherited wealth or patronage from his supporters. The system was open to serious abuse. Prior to the reign of Queen Anne, it was not unknown for high commissions to be purchased for nobility at their birth.<sup>10</sup> This was deemed beneficial both by the monarch and the Parliament because it meant that the officer was in charge of his retirement. It was by selling his commission that an officer was able to leave the service and maintain himself as a civilian.

The British system of patronage and purchase within the officer corps not only insisted upon the nobility and wealth of its members, it also inculcated primary adherence to honor. Among officer-gentlemen, dueling was common. The smallest slight could send two officers into a field, each with his “second” to prepare weapons and possible funeral arrangements, to fight with sword or pistol for their family or regiment’s honor. Though these contests were publicly denounced by the administration of the army, they were difficult to obstruct when even generals were guilty of the infraction, as was the

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sandhurst.mod.uk/history/index.htm>

<sup>10</sup> A.J. Barker, Red Coats, (London: Gordon Cremonesi, Ltd., 1976), p. 19.

case with Generals William Howe and Thomas Gates in 1778, during the American Revolution.<sup>11</sup>

In relationship to their soldiers, British officers were charged with inculcating in them loyalty to king, country, and regiment. An officer's ability to lead his troops came from authority that had its foundations in several areas. Common soldiers in the British army came from a society highly stratified and hierarchically rigid. Lower class men were used to obedience towards the aristocracy by tradition, so an officer's social rank reinforced his authority over his soldiers. All soldiers in a regiment were placed in the position of total dependency on their regimental commanders. Parliament had enacted a pay and clothing system that placed the regimental commander in charge of the soldiers' financial and physical well-being. The commander received all allowances, clothing, food, and pay for his men. His paymaster and quartermaster were then charged with the disbursement of funds and support by which the soldiers lived. This created dependency among the soldiers, not just for their institution (ie. the regiment) but for their officers as well. Finally, military honor demanded that officers place themselves in danger, with their men, on the field of battle. Though they were encouraged to indoctrinate their men with draconian discipline to enforce order in combat, the example of the officer's courage gave him a moral authority over his men that they would be willing to follow.<sup>12</sup>

If honor and courage were the foundations of officer authority, discipline was the structure through which the officer corps attained success on the battlefield with their soldiers. Discipline was understood to mean the difference between victory and defeat in

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvia R. Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 132.



combat. Soldiers were required to stand in formation and face a brutal onslaught of artillery and musket balls while firing and reloading their muskets at the rate of once every thirty seconds. And if they managed to survive the first minutes of this terror, they could expect to face a cavalry charge on their flanks by the enemy's heavy horse. The training to make men capable of such actions in the face of certain maiming or death was similarly brutal and born from the changing tactics and technology of the day.

The tacticians of early modern warfare were attempting to keep up with the advancing technology of the eighteenth century. European tactics in the seventeenth century relied upon four main types of units. Artillery had become lighter and was no longer relegated to use solely in fortifications or at sea. Instead, artillery batteries took the field and decimated infantry formations with cannon balls and grapeshot. The infantry was composed of two different formations. Musketeers carried heavy matchlock muskets that required forks for support and were unwieldy in maneuver but deadly in firepower. To protect these musketeers against cavalry, the second type of infantry, the pikeman, was used in phalanx-like formations. Pikemen wore armor and wielded a long spear, or pike, to keep fast moving dragoons, or heavy cavalry, at bay. The fourth main combat unit, the mounted dragoon, was utilized for flanking maneuvers to overwhelm the enemy's infantry and to drive them from the field.

Eighteenth-century technological innovation fundamentally changed this paradigm. The heavy matchlocks were replaced in the 1690's by the flintlock musket, in the British army, and those were standardized in 1730 by the Long Pattern Musket, or "Brown Bess".<sup>13</sup> Musketeers did not wear armor and the flintlock, a lighter and more

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher I. Archer, John R. Ferris, Holger H. Herwig, and Timothy H.E. Travers, *World History of Warfare*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2002), p. 322.

maneuverable weapon, allowed infantrymen to be more mobile on the battlefield. Another innovation, the ball and socket bayonet, removed the need for pikemen as protection against cavalry and they were retired from service in 1704. Instead, all infantrymen became musketeers with the ability to shoot their weapon on the move and defend themselves from other units on the battlefield. Their rate of fire increased somewhat with the introduction of prepared cartridges but their ability to produce accurate fire was sacrificed for a higher rate of fire. It has been estimated that a flintlock using paper cartridges could be discharged twice a minute which doubled the rate of fire compared to a matchlock musket. Flintlocks had a misfire rate of about 1 out of 3; matchlocks 1 out of 2.<sup>14</sup> Soldiers used balls smaller than the bore of their muzzles in order to ease reloading despite the resultant tumbling of the ball down the barrel when fired which seriously compromised accuracy. British officers did not trust their men to aim and think under fire, that was the prerogative of the officer, and so the sacrifice of accuracy was not significant.<sup>15</sup> For this reason, volley fire, or firing muskets in unison and on command, was deemed necessary. Soldiers were placed in ranks and commanded to volley fire by platoon, creating a rolling fire, in order to increase the overall rate of fire of the formation. Draconian discipline was required for this drill to be performed in the face of enemy fire.<sup>16</sup>

British soldiers accepted their brutal training out of the necessities of large-scale warfare and because of cultural mores. Non-commissioned officers understood the utility of ingrained drilling for success on the European battlefield, where unlimited war had

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<sup>14</sup> David Chandler, *The Art of War in the Age of Marlborough*, (Staplehurst, England, 1990), 75-79.

<sup>15</sup> Hans Delbrück, *The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1985), p. 269-71.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 269-71.



become the military norm. And in British society, the legal use of corporal and capital punishment was well established. Still, the summary use of the cane to discipline privates, while still in use through the eighteenth century, was becoming less permissible. Personal violence by officers against their men was replaced late in the seventeenth century by the regimental and general court-martial system, codified in 1685 in the Articles of War. Regimental courts-martial heard corporal crimes and general courts-martial were convened in capital cases.<sup>17</sup> While this more rational and less arbitrary legal system lent more protection to eighteenth century soldiers, flogging was common and sentences of a thousand lashes was normal. In fact, flogging as a form of disciplinary punishment in the British army was not formally abolished until 1881.<sup>18</sup>

Fred Anderson describes the British disciplinary system as one of “justice, terror, and mercy”.<sup>19</sup> The law was an entity of its own, an impartial stricture that applied to every man, regardless of status. Punishment for an infraction was swift and terrible, often death. Once the sentence had been passed, the condemned was led to either the gallows or the flogging post, in front of the entire regiment, and his sentence was read. But his fate could be averted, at the last moment, by mercy. The commander of the regiment, as the representative of the crown, had the authority to reduce the punishment, or pardon the soldier altogether. As such, military tribunals became a sort of tragic morality play, with the accused soldier as the moral underdog, his fate indeterminate until the final minute, and hinged upon the word of his commander.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Frey, p. 80-1.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Anderson, *A People's Army*, p.121.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 121-3.

By the time of British military intervention in the American colonies in 1755, a system of social hierarchy, honor, and discipline was well established within the institution of the “Redcoats”. Though successful in the European theater, and similar to other like institutions on the Continent, the British military could not have been more dissimilar to the military institution that had evolved in the British colonies for the last century and a half, especially in New England, under the military objectives of limited warfare, the *petite guerre*. At the onset of the Seven Years’ War in the colonies, this difference would prove disastrous for the professional British establishment.

When Major General Edward Braddock arrived in the colonies in February 1755, he was unprepared for the difficulties that awaited him which arose from the differences between North American colonial society and Great Britain. Braddock arrived with the authority granted him by his patron, the Duke of Cumberland, to assume overall command of His Majesty’s forces in British America. While awaiting the arrival of his two regiments from Ireland, the 44<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Foot, Braddock demanded a meeting with the colonial governors in April to tell them of London’s plan for campaigns that year. He explained that four separate expeditions were planned in order to push the French from the Ohio Valley and off of the shores of the Great Lakes, in hopes of confining her to the northern reaches of the St. Lawrence.

General Braddock would head west with his two regiments and attack Fort Duquesne in the Ohio Valley. Simultaneously, William Shirley, who had been promoted to Major General and placed second-in-command behind Braddock, would lead an expedition to seize Fort Niagara, where he would rendezvous with Braddock’s victorious troops coming north from Fort Duquesne. William Johnson was to be placed in charge of



a third expedition to seize Fort St. Frédéric at Crown Point on Lake Chaplain, while a fourth expedition moved by sea north from Boston to attack two French forts on Nova Scotia. Governor Shirley complained that this plan was too ambitious and should be scaled down, as did the other governors, and he suggested that Duquesne be attacked after Niagara was occupied. The outpost relied upon Fort Niagara for supplies and troops and would be more easily destroyed as a secondary target.

Edward Braddock had not attained his vaunted position through battlefield experience. Instead, Cumberland had promoted Braddock for two other reasons. First, Braddock was an excellent administrator, a quality he had illustrated when placed in charge of the garrison and colony of Minorca. Second, he followed orders to the letter and demanded that his subordinates do the same. Braddock's orders were to follow the plan set in London and force the colonists to support him in that endeavor. He ignored colonial advice and dismissed the governors with demands that they raise the required provincial troops and supply the English regiments with quarters and supplies necessary for the upcoming campaigns.<sup>21</sup>

When Braddock marched west to his destiny, he made several decisions that were not unexpected, decisions which in another theater might not have proved so costly. First, according to Fred Anderson, he decided that he did not need Indian allies. In fact, after the newly appointed Indian agent for the South, George Croghan, managed to gather several hundred Shawnee, Delaware, Mingo, and other tribal warriors Braddock proceeded to assure them that once the British had managed to drive the French from the Ohio Valley they would ensure that no Indians would be allowed to use the land for

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<sup>21</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*, (London: Faber & Faber, Inc., 2000), p. 86-88.

themselves. Not surprisingly, only seven Mingo warriors were convinced to help as guides on the expedition.<sup>22</sup> Second, Braddock made it known that colonial soldiers were next to useless because of their lack of discipline. Although he had them drilled over the three weeks before they began their march, he trusted only the 44<sup>th</sup> and 48<sup>th</sup> Foot while ignoring the flexibility irregulars could have given him.<sup>23</sup> Third, the general rejected the advice of local experts who advised him to take a shorter route to Fort Duquesne. The original plan had been finalized in London by staff officers who had not been on the ground and did not understand the density of the forests or the difficulties of river travel in North America. The military experts who knew of the problems Braddock would encounter were not British officers, only colonial governors and militia leaders.<sup>24</sup>

The results of these decisions were long days of short marching because of the stultifying heat. Braddock chose to split his forces, causing a rift of some sixty miles when combat was joined. Furthermore, Braddock suffered from a complete lack of intelligence as to the composition of the enemy ahead; he also commanded force composed of units which had not trained together and who did not trust one another to fight properly. Braddock's army had made less than 25 miles from its start point at Will's Creek, after the first seven days of marching, because the path was small and choked with vegetation. To allow the artillery to pass, pioneers hacked a road out of the wilderness but the process was taking too long. Braddock had received news that the French were aware of his expedition and had sent for reinforcements. He had to hurry.

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>23</sup> Paul E. Kopperman, *Braddock at the Monongahela*, (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press, 1977), p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 88-90.



Making the decision to split his force, Braddock placed the regular infantry in a flying column in order to advance as swiftly as possible to either invest the fort or occupy it, depending on whether or not French forces were present. The baggage and the rest of Braddock's army would follow behind, improving the road and providing support upon their arrival to Duquesne.<sup>25</sup>

When Braddock's forces forded the Monongahela River on July 9, 1755, they were vulnerable to attack. They crossed the obstacle without incident because the French forces, composed largely of Canadiens and their Indian allies, had delayed leaving the fort until after the French commander had shamed them into action and a war song had been sung. They were not, therefore, in position to ambush the British at the ford site, as they had planned. Instead, the two forces met in route to their separate objectives. It was reported that the British fired first, killing the commander of the French contingent, Captain de Beaujeu. The British had had time to regroup after the crossing, forming back into an advance guard, flank security forces, the main body, and a rear guard.<sup>26</sup> Their discipline was held firm throughout the twenty-two day march and did not fail at the end. Yet some historians, Fred Anderson included, believe it was this adherence to discipline that doomed the majority of the British soldiers to death that day.<sup>27</sup>

What had not been accomplished by Braddock were any modifications to his troops' tactical abilities which would allow them to fight against an enemy that hid behind cover and fired aimed shots. Fifteen of eighteen officers in the advance guard died in the first ten minutes of the battle. That was not luck. The Indian warriors knew

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<sup>25</sup> Kopperman, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 31-49.

<sup>27</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 102-3.

to aim at the soldiers wearing the silver gorgets of the officer caste, riding horses and carrying swords.<sup>28</sup> Instead of withdrawing to better ground, upon receiving the news of the advance guard's injuries, Braddock chose to ride forward, bringing the main body of his troops into the ambush site. This caused even greater confusion when the two units collided, one attempting to retreat, the other rushing into the fray. Most eyewitness accounts have called Braddock's actions heroic, placing the blame for the utter devastation of two British regiments at the hands of only 200 Indians and Canadian militiamen on the British soldiers for failing to maintain order.<sup>29</sup> They cite incidents of fratricide that occurred when soldiers fired on other platoons that crossed into their sectors of fire and upon colonials from the rear guard who began fighting from behind trees and other cover once their colonel was killed. Actually, it was Braddock's arrogance that caused him to make a rash decision. He *knew* that French colonial irregulars and a few barbarians were no match for the King's finest. It was inconceivable he could be defeated so he rode forward with every confidence that if he stood his ground, he would carry the day. His soldiers maintained their discipline, though they often remained in only platoon sized elements, but they did not have many officers left to give them orders. And rather than attempt a flanking maneuver or an orderly withdrawal back to the river, Braddock and his remaining officers continued to attempt to form the line and fire volleys into the woods. The result was seventy percent casualties and the effective loss of two regiments.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Kopperman, p. xxii.



Edward Braddock was a courageous man. It was his courage that allowed him to fight on, even after four horses had been shot out from under him, and it was this personal attribute that made other courageous men, like George Washington, continue to support his legacy after the battle. His decisions were decidedly predictable, given his social status and upbringing in England and his training as an officer in the British Army. Yet the Battle at Monongahela highlighted a weakness within both the tactics and the institution of the British Army in the North American theater. Not every battle would simply be a siege of a fort. Not many battlefields would be in open terrain. The British Navy would not always be present to keep supply lines open or to close them against the French. Time and again from Monongahela until the Battle of Quebec, the British Army would learn that getting to the battlefield was a battle, and combat in the field was not a foregone conclusion with victory reserved to he who had the most disciplined troops. According to John Grenier and Steven Charles Eames, what had developed on the frontiers of North America was limited warfare that did not attempt the achievement of decisive victory.<sup>30</sup> Instead, raids, ambushes, and attacks of opportunity were used to wear down opponents or massacre the unwary. British concepts of honor and hierarchy on the battlefield found small purchase in this new theater.

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<sup>30</sup> Steven Charles Eames, *Rustic Warriors: Warfare and the Provincial Soldier on the Northern Frontier, 1689-1748*, (University of New Hampshire, 1989).

John Grenier, *The First Way of War: American War Making on the Frontier, 1607-1814*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE PROVINCIAL OFFICER

There is little dispute among military historians that the officers in the British and colonial armies were quite different. The ability of the two systems to conduct war, though, has usually been viewed as effective in the case of the English institution and disappointing in regards to the American. An illustration of two typical officers provides insight into this predominant framework.

Colonel Ephraim Williams Junior, who died at the age of forty in the Battle of Lake George, 1755, spent almost half of his life as a colonial officer on the western frontier of Massachusetts. After what some scholars speculate was a youth spent at sea,<sup>31</sup> the young Ephraim joined his father to help establish the town of Stockbridge, Massachusetts. The first document to pinpoint Williams' location prior to King George's War is a survey he conducted in 1742 for land bought by his father. For a while after his thirtieth birthday, he was living in Stockbridge and working as the deputy sheriff under Oliver Partridge.<sup>32</sup> It can be assumed that he was also a member of the local militia, probably as a sentinel, since there is no documentation of a commission during this period. At the outbreak of hostilities between France and England in 1744, however,

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<sup>31</sup> Wyllis E. Wright, *Colonel Ephraim Williams: A Documentary Life*, (Pittsfield: Berkshire County Historical Society, 1970), p. 5.

Kevin Sweeney, *River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790*, (Yale: UMI, 1986), p. 372.

<sup>32</sup> Sweeney, p. 373.



Ephraim's life becomes much clearer with his commission as a captain in the provincial army under the command of Colonel Stoddard.<sup>33</sup>

During the early 1740's, Massachusetts and New York were in dispute over the boundaries of the two colonies. In defiance of New York's claims, Colonel Stoddard and Governor William Shirley commissioned the construction of a line of four forts along the Bay Colony's western border. Ostensibly to guard against Indian raids, these forts served the secondary purpose of solidifying Massachusetts' land claims. Initially under the command of Captain William "Billy" Williams, Stoddard's nephew, supervision was granted to Ephraim Williams in 1745 when the previous commander joined the expedition to Louisbourg.<sup>34</sup>

For the next decade, Williams commanded first the entire fort line along the western border of Massachusetts, from 1745 to 1746 and then soldiers at Fort Massachusetts until 1752.<sup>35</sup> Both Williams' failure and success as a commander during this time are important. In the summer of 1746, John Stoddard directed all the Williams' under his command, including not only Ephraim Williams Junior but also Ephraim's father, Major Williams and his uncle, Captain Billy Williams, to join officers in Hampshire County in recruiting soldiers for Shirley's planned expedition against Canada. While Ephraim Williams Junior was traveling the county "drumming up" recruits, a process made more difficult by the strains of defending the frontier from French and Indian raiders, Fort Massachusetts was attacked and burned to the ground. Technically

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<sup>33</sup> Wright, p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Sweeney, p. 373-4.

speaking, the fort was under Williams' command and his responsibility. Its destruction spread fear throughout the frontier and called into question among the populace the methods by which their safety was being assured.<sup>36</sup>

While this mistake by Stoddard and Williams was serious, the people of the county tended not to blame Williams for it. Though he might have refused to leave his command as ordered or should have placed another competent officer in charge during his absence, the public scorn was laid primarily at the feet of John Stoddard.<sup>37</sup> Following a summer of reconstructing the fort in 1747, Ephraim commanded the soldiers at the fort and the entire fort line again for another five years. During that time, he successfully repulsed a raiding party in 1748 and gained a reputation for diligent management that Wyllis Wright attributes to Williams' return as commander of the fort in 1754,<sup>38</sup> though Kevin Sweeney does argue his return had more to do with kinship and patronage.<sup>39</sup> What seems clear is that Williams learned from the defeat and at the least regained his reputation through service to the colony. As Steven Charles Eames states in his dissertation on provincial armies of New England, "The ability to lead...marked the successful, long-serving provincial officer...incompetency...resulted in social disgrace and professional oblivion."<sup>40</sup> Ephraim Williams Junior's military career was far from over in 1747. It would not end until his death eight years later, in combat.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 374-6.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 376.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, p. 35.

<sup>39</sup> Sweeney, p. 504-5.

<sup>40</sup> Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, p. 325.



During his second stint as commander of the fort line along the western frontier, Williams had the opportunity to face the enemy that had previously shamed both him and his military establishment. In a letter dated August 2, 1748, Williams described an Indian attack on Fort Massachusetts he successfully repelled. Though King George's War had concluded, tensions were still high on the frontier. Captain Williams had received scouting reports that French and Indian war parties had been sighted between the fort and their supply center in Deerfield. Though Ephraim's lieutenants managed to return safely with new supplies, the commander suspected, due to the disquiet among his guard dogs, that enemy forces lay in ambush a short distance outside the enclosure. Their presence could threaten to isolate the fort and Williams devised a plan to force the enemy to withdraw. He told fifty men to ready their weapons while he and his lieutenants planned an attack around the flank of the suspected ambush position. The rest of his forces would man the cannon and provide cover and armed support but a chain of events on the ground thwarted his plan.<sup>41</sup>

One of the fort's guard dogs found an enemy Indian and attacked. The Indian shot the dog, revealing his position. At the same time, without the knowledge of Captain Williams, between 12 and 15 colonials had sallied forth from the gate and fired upon the enemy position, which returned fire. Williams quickly assessed the situation and led another thirty-five men out of the gate to meet the enemy and force their withdrawal. Though successful, Williams was unaware of a secondary ambush, which was initiated immediately. Williams led his men back to the fort under fire, conducting a defense from the fortification that eventually forced the retreat of the French and Indians. He was unable to assess enemy casualties because they carried their dead and wounded off the

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<sup>41</sup> Wright, p. 30-1.

field, but his unit sustained only three casualties, two of whom soon died of their wounds.<sup>42</sup>

This engagement is important for three reasons. First, the discipline of some colonials was certainly wanting. Bravado overcame good tactical sense for the 12 to 15 men that left the fort without orders and placed themselves, and their comrades, in unnecessary danger. The tactical patience of the commander, however, was evident, as was his tactical knowledge. Williams utilized simultaneous planning when he ordered his men to prepare for combat while he planned the attack, knowing that he had limited time in which to catch the enemy by surprise. His desire to drive the enemy from their suspected position illustrates his proper sense that his forces' success and survival hinged upon seizing the initiative. Furthermore, his plan to flank the enemy was sound, given the terrain. Second, the colonials were properly trained. No military plan survives first contact with the enemy and the fighting ability of Williams' unit allowed for flexibility to adapt to a rapidly changing situation. These men quickly attacked under fire, defeated the first position, stood their ground during the second attack, and withdrew to the fort without panic, eventually winning the engagement. They accomplished all this with only three casualties. Finally, Williams guessed that the enemy had sustained high casualties. While casualty rates for the enemy were often exaggerated during this period and Williams certainly had motive to inflate success in order to regain some of his reputation, his assessment was based on the fact that his men had fired five to six rounds apiece from "no greater distance than 15 rods (82 yards) – a great many shots not above 7 rods (38.5

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 30-1.



yards).”<sup>43</sup> In other words, Williams was confident in the marksmanship of his soldiers and he expected his rationale to pass muster with his superiors and the public. Taken together, the account illustrates training and preparedness at the fort that belies an understanding of the provincials as rag tag and the officers as “common and stupid”.<sup>44</sup>

Williams remained in command of the frontier forts until 1752. Two years later, in anticipation of another upcoming war and the decline of discipline at Fort Massachusetts, Williams was asked by Governor Shirley to first serve again as commander of the forts and then as a colonel in command of his own regiment. Williams was commissioned by the governor to raise a regiment in support of the Crown Point expedition, an operation planned by both the northern colonies and London authorities to drive the French off of Lake George and out of the Hudson River Valley. His enlistments came largely from western Massachusetts where he had become immensely popular as a military commander.

These successive promotions had less to do with Williams’ reputation among his superiors and more to do with his local reputation. Governor Shirley and other elites were compelled to promote men who could, through their local reputations, fill the levies and man the proposed units in the provincial armies for each campaign. Williams had gained just such a reputation over the years in which he protected western Massachusetts at the frontier forts, despite one significant setback. As an example of this over-riding prerequisite for command in the colonies, John Stoddard wrote of Williams in 1748 to Governor Shirley:

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>44</sup> George Washington in a letter to Richard Henry Lee, August 29, 1775.

Capt. Ephraim Williams must be thought the fittest man that is likely to be obtained. He is accounted a man of courage, has lived at Fort-Massachusetts, and is well knowing in that country.

It is generally talked that he maintains good government & I know no man amongst us (except Col. Williams) that men would more cheerfully list under than he...<sup>45</sup>

This suggests that a man's character and reputation that empowered him to provide voluntary enlistments in his command was paramount in New England's colonies. In opposition to Williams, men like Pasco Chubb, who surrendered Fort William Henry in 1696, were either imprisoned or became social pariahs.<sup>46</sup>

After a month of delays caused by a lack of supplies from Boston, Williams led his regiment to a rendezvous at Albany in July 1755. His unit fell under the command of Major General William Johnson of New York. The army marched north, through German Flats and on to what would soon be called Fort Edwards. General Johnson left one hundred men of the New Hampshire regiment at the fort to await resupply of both materiel and men, leading the rest of the 2500 men from Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York further north to the south shore of Lake George and the proposed site for a new fortification. It was at this site, the soon-to-be Fort William Henry, that Johnson learned he was about to have company.

Jean Erdman, the Baron Dieskau, had arrived earlier in the season with three thousand regulars from France and had made his way to Fort Carillon in response to the fears of the Governor-General of New France, Vaudreuil, that English forces might seize Crown Point. Dieskau decided that rather than defend Ticonderoga, he would seize the initiative and attack Fort Edwards which lay south of his position, a few miles below the

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<sup>45</sup> Wright, p. 26-7.

<sup>46</sup> Eames, p. 366-7.



south shore of Lake George. With a select unit of 600 Indians, 680 Canadians and 200 French regulars, Dieskau began his march south towards Fort Edwards on September 4, 1755.

When Mohawk scouts discovered the large French trail three days later, Johnson sent two separate groups of messengers, one on horseback and four on foot, to warn his small contingent at Fort Edwards of their danger. Baron Dieskau had arrived on the Johnson Road that connected the unfortified camp at Lake George with Fort Edwards at about the same time the messengers were en route to the fort. The messenger on horse, a soldier named Adams, was shot as he rode past while the four foot messengers returned to Lake George, unable to reach the fort. At the council of war that next morning, Johnson decided to assemble a group of one thousand colonials and two hundred Indians, led by Col. Williams and the Mohawk chief Hendricks, to march to the relief of what they believed would be a soon besieged fortification.

Baron Dieskau had made a different decision, however, with the new intelligence he had acquired from Johnson's dead messenger. Since the French allied Indians were reluctant to attack a fortified position, Dieskau chose instead to shift his attack north on the unfortified camp, despite the larger number of colonial troops. The French commander moved slowly, with scouts on his flanks because he did not know if Johnson had placed any picket lines in front of his position. Dieskau needed surprise to seize the initiative in the anticipated battle. Williams, on the other hand, was moving as quickly as possible to the relief of what he believed was a small contingent under siege. His group was in column and separated into three units, the Indians under the leadership of Hendrick in the van, followed by colonials under the direct command of Williams, with a

rear guard under the command of Lt. Col. Whiting from Connecticut. When he reached Rocky Brook, Williams was still many miles from Fort Edwards and less than three miles from his starting point on the lake.

At the brook, between West Mountain and French Mountain, Dieskau was waiting in an ambush. He had captured an English deserter early in the morning and decided to trap the advancing provincial force in the ravine. He arranged his forces in a hook formation, on the high ground overlooking the military road, with his Indians and Canadians along the leg of the hook and his French grenadiers forming the curve at the end of the trap. As Williams' forces marched into the ravine, someone called out to Hendrick, riding at the head of the column. It has been assumed by historians that the call was made by one of the French-allied Caughnawaga warriors unwilling to spill his Mohawk kin's blood. Regardless, immediately after, shots were fired and thirty Mohawks, including Chief Hendrick, were killed. The problem for Dieskau was that the ambush had been initiated prematurely and only a portion of Williams' force was in the ravine. Williams himself quickly led an assault up the ravine, but was killed immediately, along with some fifty of his men. Another one hundred provincials from his Massachusetts regiment and the remaining Mohawks began to lay down a suppressive fire while the rest of the one thousand colonials retreated back to the lake and General Johnson. What had become the rear guard, under the command of Lt. Col. Whiting, was met by three hundred reinforcements from General Johnson's position at Lake George and these soldiers fought a withdrawing action back to the camp, which was hastily building impromptu breastworks. This rear guard action delayed the French forces significantly and it took them over an hour and a half to reach the English camp. The



French Indian commander who had defeated Braddock earlier in the year, Legardeur de Saint-Pierre, was killed in the battle.

At the camp, Johnson built breastworks from his boats and placed four cannon to cover the road upon which the French would assault. When Dieskau arrived, his Indian forces refused to attack, unnerved by the loss of Saint-Pierre and reluctant to attack a fortified position defended by their Mohawk kinsmen. The baron, intent upon shaming his Indians and Canadians to fight, placed these irregulars in the surrounding woods and ordered the French grenadiers to assault. These were some of the finest European soldiers, resplendent in their white uniforms with bayonets fixed. Marching forward, in European fashion, six abreast, they were cut down mercilessly by grapeshot from the English cannons. Though the Indians and Canadians fired in support from the tree line, the French soldiers were eventually forced to retreat, and Baron Dieskau was wounded and captured at the end of the day.

At the same time, approximately 150 men, under the command of Capt. Folsom from New Hampshire and Capt. McGuiness from New York, dispatched from Fort Edwards, fell upon the retreating French soldiers when they returned to the site of the original ambush. It was at this battle that the majority of the French casualties occurred, as they were completely routed and the road between the fort and the lake was cleared. The burial party of four hundred men led by Lt. Col. Seth Pomeroy of Northampton and dispatched the next day, found 136 provincial dead, including the bodies of Col. Williams and Seth Pomeroy's brother, Daniel. Most of these men were found scalped and bound

to trees. Unable to take their captives with them, the retreating Indians had taken scalps as trophies during the final fight that previous afternoon.<sup>47</sup>

Much of what occurred during the Bloody Morning Scout is informative to the successful nature of colonial tactics and leadership. Though many historians have found fault with Williams' decision not to place flank security out during his march to Fort Edwards, his intelligence did not suggest a need for them so close to his starting point. Instead, Williams saw the need for speed at the outset to relieve a very small force at the fort. This is not an apology for the colonel, for commanders were, and are, often forced to balance risks in order to accomplish their assigned mission. Force protection may sometimes be sacrificed for audacity. In this instance, that aggressiveness was unsuccessful but not inappropriate to the situation as Williams understood it. The real problem was that his intelligence was not as sound as that given to Baron Dieskau, who was able to retain the initiative and initiate his ambush.

At the ambush, Williams' leadership and that of his subordinate officers saved the day for the provincials. Williams reacted immediately to secure his flank and repel the enemy on the high ground. When this failed, his subordinate commander, Lt. Col. Whiting, quickly established fire lines to cover the retreat of the main force back to their encampment and forestalled both a general route of the English and an overwhelming assault by the French on the position at the lake. Johnson was able to erect a breastwork and emplace cannons for the defense of his position. The retreating forces arrived to bolster the defense and Dieskau was forced to pause in order to regroup his men for an

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 128-39.

Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 117-21.  
Seth Pomeroy, *The Journal and Papers of Seth Pomeroy, Sometime General in the Colonial Service*, ed. by Louis Effingham de Forest, (New York: The Society of Colonial Wars in the State of New York, 1926), p. 113-6.



assault on what had become a fortified position. It was Dieskau's decision to attack with European tactics that defeated him that day. Had he withdrawn, given the unwillingness of the predominance of his forces to attack, he could have saved the cream of his troops and attacked at another location with the valuable information about the composition of his enemy forces. Instead, he opted to assault and lost his grenadiers, leaving the rest of the French soldiers without his leadership when he was captured. It was that flawed leadership, along with the good decision by the Fort Edwards' commander, Col. Blanchard, to send reinforcements that resulted in the complete route of the French that day.

This battle, along with others to be discussed like the siege at Louisbourg and Ticonderoga, will show that the common understanding of colonial forces as rabble good for little else than road building and the occupation of fortifications is really an assumption by some historians of an imperial English opinion or a lack of differentiation between regular warfare and the *petite guerre* as they were employed in this era. Col. Williams was a middle-class land speculator turned professional soldier. He served on the frontier for a decade before commanding his regiment on the Crown Point campaign. His promotions were the result of his growing reputation among constituents in Hampshire County of his military prowess and management at the frontier forts. His ability to care for his men and guard the settlements meant he could enlist a greater number of men for campaigns. He was able to lead well under fire and this ability was not special just to him. The officers and soldiers with him did the same. They were often too aggressive for their own safety and not all officers held up well under pressure, but

when confronted with trained Europeans and Indian warriors, the provincial troops did not run. They reacted to ambush well and they defeated the best Europe had to offer.



## CHAPTER THREE

### NEW ENGLAND'S EXPECTATIONS OF LEADERSHIP

The British officer of the eighteenth century had to meet rather demanding expectations from many different quarters. These requirements came from political, social, and military institutions and from his superiors, peers, and subordinates. Great Britain had structured her army from traditions which reinforced social divisions and evolved from medieval concepts of royal guards and vassal militia. The modern British Army started with the Parliamentary armies during the English Civil War which produced the Coldstream Guard, the personal force of King Charles II, and expanded under the command of the John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and Parliament in order to meet threats from abroad. The officer was an agent of the king. He must come from the aristocracy and promote the social values of the realm. In other words, the British officer was expected to embody aristocratic ideals of chivalry, status, and private wealth in his person and express courage and honor on the battlefield to invoke duty, loyalty, and discipline in his soldiers.

The expectations of the colonial officer within his society were markedly different. The colonial government of Massachusetts required its officers to have the ability to raise voluntary regiments for each campaign season, to lead volunteer garrisons at frontier forts, and to control local militia within communities which could provide basically-trained sentinels during times of war. All of these requirements led to the need for officers respected in their communities for their military skills and their social status. This respect came less from breeding, though kinship ties were important, and more from

their embodiment of other ideals. The officers of the colonial military had to be a member of the middling class or better, a man who had worked hard within the community to become a commercial success, either in land surveying and speculating, gunsmithing, farming, as a merchant, or professional elite. He had to conform to religious expectations and attend sermon on the appointed days. And he had to have proven in previous campaigns that he could bring most of his men home for the winter. He had to be trusted to lead his soldiers in battle with not only the mission in mind but the welfare of the men in his charge.

Colonial politics made a large standing army impossible. The coffers of the colonial government could not afford it and the local communities, consisting primarily of descendants of expelled English Puritans, would not tolerate it. Consistent protection, at least on the frontier, was necessary, however, and so small contingents of garrisoned soldiers within the four frontier forts had become a reality by 1745. These fortifications, and the consistent campaigns against the French, spawned a small group of professionalized officers, men who pursued civilian careers for income but who served more time as military officers than not. Ephraim Williams was one such officer. Though he worked for periods as a land speculator and surveyor, or as the deputy sheriff of Hampshire County, Williams was the commander of Fort Massachusetts for most of the ten years between King George's War and the French and Indian War; he died as a regimental commander at the Battle of Lake George in 1755. Williams' successor as regimental commander, Seth Pomeroy, was another professional colonial officer with a great deal of experience.



Pomeroy was the descendant of blacksmiths who had emigrated to Massachusetts in the mid-seventeenth century. Born in Northampton in 1706, Seth was the seventh child from his father's second marriage. He was trained as a blacksmith, earning his living as such in Northampton. He was certainly involved within the town militia because his first diary entries place him en route to Boston to participate in the 1745 siege of the fortress at Louisbourg as a major in the provincial forces. Pomeroy returned from that campaign to command one of the companies in Joseph Dwight's regiment on the frontier and then followed Ephraim Williams on the Crown Point campaign as his second-in-command. After Williams' death, Pomeroy was promoted to colonel, given command of the regiment, but forced to return home due to severe illness. Though he did not fight for the rest of the French and Indian War, Seth Pomeroy rushed from Northampton to Boston to fight at on the left flank of the redoubt on Breed's Hill at the Battle of Bunker Hill and died in command of the Massachusetts militia in Peekskill, New York on February 17, 1777.

Though he was not the product of a military academy, nor the son of nobility, Seth Pomeroy was a soldier and an officer in colonial service for at least thirty-two of his seventy-one years. Ephraim Williams was the same. These men had other occupations. Indeed, they could not have supported themselves or their families if they did not have other means of income. Seth Pomeroy, while becoming one of the wealthiest men in Northampton, was the seventh son of his father's second marriage, not the inheritor of a large estate. Unlike men from other colonies, like George Washington, Pomeroy and Williams did not inherit large estates to support them. They had risen to prominence within their communities as tradesmen and secured their military reputations in combat.

All of this was necessary for them to be successful because without their respectability they could never have done the one thing their political leaders required of them: raise a regiment to fight for a campaign.

Correspondence between Governor William Shirley and his chief military leaders throughout the colony highlight this expectation of prospective officers. Writing to Col. John Stoddard, the chief military commander in Hampshire County, Shirley says:

Sir:

I have received your letters of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21 instant. I am sensible that the contention among the officers employed for the raising soldiers for the expedition and their solicitations for drawing over those that are upon the point of agreeing with other officers is a great prejudice to the service, and I should have been glad to have an effectual remedy applied to their misconduct in this affair, and as I have opportunity I shal let 'em know my disapprobation thereof... The four officers you mention viz Lieutenant-Colonel (William) Williams, Major (Seth) Pomeroy, Captain (Ephraim) Williams (Senior) of Stockbridge, and Captain Ephraim Williams (Junior) will be very agreeable to me, provided they do their part in raising the men otherwise some inconvenience may ensue; but I would still hope for a fifth company out of your country; and it may be a few days more will give some considerable advantage to some of the recruiting officers – I would endeavor that all proper methods be used for making those officers easy who have inlisted a number of men and yet must be disappointed as to their having any command over 'em...<sup>48</sup>

In this letter to Colonel Stoddard, Governor Shirley is attempting to solicit the advice of his old military adviser on several problems. The letter was written in the summer of 1746 when Shirley was trying to gather another expedition to head north against Canada, this time to seize Montreal while the British fleet attacked Quebec. Shirley's main problem was that some officers around the colony had not raised enough troops to form companies. The soldiers enlisted to serve under specific officers and those officers were expecting to command units. The government was forced to rearrange those terms somewhat, in order to create viable units with enough men. Furthermore, some officers,

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<sup>48</sup> Wright, p. 15-6.



aggressive in their pursuit of a commission for what could be a very profitable campaign, had been stealing the enlistments of men from other officers, to the dismay of both. These soldiers would often desert or claim their enlistments void if they did not get assigned in companies with their own and under the command of their own officers. Finally, Shirley had some officers that were very qualified to lead on the frontier but had not spent the time to raise their own units. Others had done so but were needed on the frontier while the men they had enlisted would be required to march north without them, a situation objected to by both the officers and their men.

The importance of this correspondence between the colonial governor and his military officers reflects the reality that officers were expected to raise soldiers for upcoming campaigns and that their ability to do so determined, to some extent, their position within the ranks. While kinship ties played a role in who Stoddard put forward as candidates for command (the Williamses were tied by marriage and blood to John Stoddard), it was their reputations and abilities to recruit that mattered most. Equally accepted was the importance of the enlisted soldier's expectations in regard to who would command him in the field. The colonial sentinel enlisted for a campaign season with the expectation of release from service by the winter of that campaign to return home. This meant that his continued service during a longer war would require his willingness to re-enlist the next summer.

We do not have to guess how these soldiers felt about their service. Colonial soldiers of this period had a high literacy rate. They often kept diaries of their experiences and were not reticent when it came to their opinions of the officers in charge of them. Rufus Putnam, who served as a private soldier from 1758-9, was promoted to

sergeant for the 1760 campaigns when his growing status at home allowed him to enlist eight soldiers from the area. During his time at Ticonderoga in 1758, Putnam wrote:

Mr. Collins character undoubtedly Suffered...we did not complain – however when an officer is brought to Solicit his soldiers not to complain of him, he must feel Small in his own eyes, as well as Contemptable in the eyes of others.<sup>49</sup>

Mr. Collins, the lieutenant in charge of a reconnaissance Putnam participated in, had fled the field upon contact with some Indians allied to the French. This act of cowardice, coupled with his desertion of his men, was intolerable. Putnam was equally critical of generals he viewed as cowards. When General Webb refused to support the besieged Fort William Henry with his 4000 troops located down the road at Fort Edwards, Putnam wrote that he and the other colonials saw this refusal as an act of cowardice and many soldiers promptly began to desert.<sup>50</sup> By the end of this campaign, Putnam vowed never to enlist again. He had been detached from his company because the British regulars were in need of a skilled carpenter to help build roads and fortifications. Putnam was promised (and he took the assignment with the expectation of) extra pay to complete the task. The British officer in charge refused to pay at the end of the campaign and Putnam returned home embittered. Only after Colonel Ruggles promised a promotion to sergeant in return for Putnam's enlistment of other Americans in his town would Rufus agree to serve for another campaign.<sup>51</sup>

Many other soldiers saved their harshest criticisms for the British officers under whom they were forced to serve following the dismissal of William Shirley. When Lord Loudoun took charge of the war in 1756, the provincial armies of Massachusetts fell

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<sup>49</sup> Putnam, p. 12-3.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 14-5.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 27-9, 31.



under nominal command of the British regulars. Though the legislature of Massachusetts was able to convince Loudoun that soldiers would not enlist unless they were guaranteed to stay within colonial units commanded by colonial officers, they were unable to avoid taking orders from the British high command. The Reverend Daniel Shute complained bitterly about the British conduct during the assault on Fort Ticonderoga in 1758. He believed that General Abercrombie acted irresponsibly when he ordered a frontal assault on the breastworks, without artillery support, that resulted in casualties upward of 2000. He called the attack a “rash attempt” that killed so many regular officers a Council of War could not even be convened the next day!<sup>52</sup>

Stephen Cross, of Newbury, Massachusetts, a carpenter stationed at Fort Oswego, enlisted to build bateaux for the campaign against Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario in 1756. He was present for the capture of the fort and was shipped first to Quebec and then to France as a prisoner of war. Cross had marched up from Boston, arriving at the fort that summer, just months before the Marquis de Montcalm arrived with a force of 3000 men to lay siege to the fort and drive the British off the Great Lakes. Fort Oswego was originally a trading post built on the shores of Lake Ontario, next to Wood Creek. Its east and west were flanked by hills overlooking the blockhouse, leaving the fort indefensible. Rather than build a new fort and abandon Oswego, William Shirley ordered that supporting fortifications be built on both hills, Fort Ontario and the new Fort Oswego, later known to the men as Fort Rascal. These fortifications were to act as satellites to the central fort, which was protected solely by a rampart on its landward side. The old fort at Oswego was completely unprotected where it touched the lake and the river. All

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<sup>52</sup> Daniel Shute, “A Journal of the Rev. Daniel Shute, D.D., Chaplain in the Expedition to Canada”, Essex Institute, Historical Collections, XII (1874), p. 137-8.

fortifications were in disrepair because the British regulars who occupied the area for the winter of 1755, the 50<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> Regiments of Foot, had barely survived starvation. Over the winter and into the spring, the main supply route to the forts had become choked off by ice and then by French-allied Indian war parties who had burned down Fort Bull. Fort Bull was the supply center that straddled the Great Carrying Place between the headwaters of the Mohawk River and Wood Creek. Lieutenant Colonel Bradstreet was finally sent with 300 bateau men he had trained to fight, who drove off the Indians and re-supplied Fort Oswego in June.<sup>53</sup>

When Montcalm arrived, he decided to invest Fort Ontario first. He built a trench within a few hundred yards of the east wall, under the cover of a small ridge, and soon began pounding the wooden palisades to dust. The British quickly retreated to Fort Oswego and soon twelve large cannon were pointed down at the blockhouse. Lieutenant Colonel Mercer, the regular British officer in charge of the fort, ordered his cannon to fire back at Fort Ontario despite the hopelessness of his situation because his honor demanded it.<sup>54</sup>

On the Appearance of Day light our Morning Gun was fired as usual, But A Shot Put in it, and pointed to Fort Ontario, Concluding the Enemy to be there; we were immediately answered by 12 Shot... Upon which, our Guns were Bricked about,... all that Coild be Brot to Bear, and as Severe A Cannonade on Both Sides, as Perhaps Ever was, until about 10 o'clock. about this time we Discovered the Enemy, in Great Numbers, Crossing the River; and we not in force Sufficent to go up and oppose them, and being Judged not safe, any longer, to Keep the Men, in Fort Raskel, that was evacuated; and we all were Huddled together, in and about the Main Fort, the Comadent, Coll Manser, about this time was killed by a Cannon Ball; thus the man who this week had the lives of valuable men in

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<sup>53</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 136-41, 150-4.

<sup>54</sup> It was this concept of professional honor that both Mercer and Montcalm adhered to which caused Cross' long interment during the war. Montcalm did not believe that the fort fought long enough to deserve release back to England and so he had all the men taken prisoner, a decision which resulted in the deaths and enslavement of many by the Indians who, disappointed in a lack of fighting, took what spoils they could among the prisoners.



his hands, and would not extend Mercy to them, now had not time, not even to sue for his own life...<sup>55</sup>

Lieutenant Colonel Mercer was beheaded by that cannon ball and his death put Lieutenant Colonel John Littlehales in charge, who promptly surrendered. Since the British did not defend their position long enough, in the professional opinion of Montcalm, all soldiers and civilians were taken prisoner and those that survived the night marched up to Canada the next day.<sup>56</sup>

The part of Cross' narrative which is most interesting is his condemnation of Mercer. Cross was not upset with Mercer's decision to fight the French, despite the odds. Courage and honorable conduct was expected on the battlefield by both British and American soldiers. Cross hated Mercer for something he had done the previous week, before the French had been discovered. On the ninth of August, just a week before the siege, Mercer had brought two American soldiers to justice in the British tradition. Several soldiers from both Pepperell's and Shirley's regiments had been caught deserting. As was usual under the British Articles of War, one man from each regiment was selected as an example and sentenced to death. Five days after they were found guilty the men were shot in front of their regiments, despite the pleas from the colonial officers that Governor Shirley be notified and given a chance to grant a reprieve.<sup>57</sup> It was Mercer's refusal to bear challenge to his authority that earned him the righteous hatred of all the colonial troops. American soldiers expected to be punished for deserting, and flogging

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<sup>55</sup> Stephen Cross, Sarah E. Mulliken, ed., "Journal of Stephen Cross, of Newburyport, Entitled "Up to Ontario", the Activities of Newburyport Shipbuilders in Canada in 1756", Essex Institute, Historical Collections, LXXV (1939), 334-357; LXXVI (1940), 14-42, p. 14-17.

<sup>56</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 154.

<sup>57</sup> Cross, p. 356.



was not uncommon among colonial outfits (though not to the severity usual in the British Army), but the death penalty was deemed cruel. New England colonials expected their officers to lead them, not coerce them, and few colonial officers wished to tell their neighbor that he had ordered their son's death.

Further proof of this sense of community among the officers and their men can be found in their shared religious practices. The journals and memoirs that survive recounting colonial experiences in the French and Indian Wars mention which Psalm was discussed during sermon and who gave it. During these times, officers and men were expected to be treated as equal in the eyes of God and to act accordingly. Often, the Sabbath preacher would be a private and every man was expected to listen and hear the Word of God. Cross, on his way up to Fort Oswego 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..."<sup>58</sup> According to the orderly book of Fort Cumberland, Nova Scotia, kept by Sergeant Josiah Perry in 1759, "Prayers are to be attended daily at 9 o'clock, A.M. by all the men in garrison off duty... Divine service to be attended every Sunday by all the garrison off duty – 11 A.M."<sup>59</sup> This congregation of soldiers as equals was so ingrained in the Massachusetts' colonial mindset that Rufus Putnam, writing about all of his war experiences after the Revolution, was moved to complain in his memoirs, "Captain Learned prayed with his Company

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>59</sup> Josiah Perry, "The Orderly Book of Sergeant Josiah Perry", *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, LIV (1900), 70-76, p. 74.

Morning and evening, and on the Sabbath read a Sermon. (Oh! how the times have changed.)”<sup>60</sup>

This expectation of shared religious observation separated further the colonials from the British redcoats. British officers would never have shared the same religious meeting with the enlisted men, if they ever attended a sermon at all. When the British officers did deign to attend colonial services, it was usually for an expressed purpose. Following the British defeat at Ticonderoga in 1758, Lieutenant Colonel Bradstreet convinced General Abercrombie to allow an expedition of colonials, lead by Brigadier Stanwix and Bradstreet, to attack Fort Frontenac on Lake Ontario as a remedy for lost British honor. Though Bradstreet enjoyed the sympathy of his men because of his participation at Louisbourg in 1745 and his relief of Fort Oswego in 1756, the colonial troops were unhappy with Abercrombie and distrustful of Stanwix. They were beginning to desert and the colonial officers were not, in Stanwix’s mind, enforcing discipline with enough vigor. For this reason, the Brigadier decided to bring his entire compliment of regular officers to Sunday sermon, an act that was cause for noting in the journal of one of the regimental chaplains, Daniel Shute.

Sunday Mr. Spencer, New York Chaplain, preached 11 Chron 32 v. Gen Stanwix and ye Regular officers present. In his address to them acknowledged their great goodness in coming to N. America with such noble views, and the Disingenuity of ye people in failing to make them grateful returns. And after discanting awhile on their wonted Lenity in discipline, advised them to more vigorous measures to prevent deserting.<sup>61</sup>

The sarcasm of this religious man is hard to miss. Shute and the rest of the colonials were insulted that the British officers would interrupt their prayers and use the pulpit to

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<sup>60</sup> Putnam, p. 11.

<sup>61</sup> Shute, p. 140.

denounce colonial military practices. Sermons were not a forum for reinforcing military hierarchies; they were a forum for all men to humble themselves before God. Stanwix's action was inexcusable.

Such expectations of leadership, of humility and courage, did not come solely from the lower ranks. They also came from an egalitarian society that all Massachusetts' soldiers, enlisted and commissioned alike, were a part. Condemnation for failure to meet these expectations came from both below and from peers. For example, Rufus Putnam wrote the passage quoted above concerning Captain Learned and his attendance of service with his men as a memoir composed after his service during the Revolution in which he was commissioned as a general. His views, therefore, were a mixture of memories as a private soldier informed by his later experiences as an officer. Yet the most compelling example of the expectations of colonial officers among themselves comes from Seth Pomeroy following the Battle of Lake George.

Pomeroy was second-in-command of Ephraim Williams' regiment. Following Williams' death in the initial ambush between Lake George and Fort Edward, Pomeroy led the remnants of the regiment in the defense of the encampment under Phineas Lyman following General Johnson's retirement with a wound to the buttock. Once the powder smoke had cleared, however, Williams' replacement became a more political question. Though Pomeroy was second in the chain of command while Williams was alive, he was not the most senior lieutenant colonel present among the Massachusetts' provincial army. Johnson held a council of war to determine whether to promote from within each regiment that had lost officers or to promote by seniority. The decision was made to promote by seniority and Lt. Col. Thomas Gilbert, of Taunton, was promoted *pro*



*tempore* to succeed Williams until Johnson had received official orders from the governor.

This decision to place the regiment comprised mostly of Hampshire men, under the command of an outsider did not sit well with the rank and file of the regiment. According to the editor of Pomeroy's journal, Louis Effingham de Forest, the enlisted men had petitioned Johnson for the promotion of Pomeroy to command.<sup>62</sup> When an officer from another regiment, and another county, was sent instead, the men staged a small revolt of their own. Pomeroy wrote that "...one night Some Person Took it (the regimental colors) away & Set it up whare it aut to be at Colo Williams Tent Gilbert In ye morning brought It back & Said yt he had rathar they had took his head off."<sup>63</sup> This incident shows that Pomeroy's dislike of Gilbert did not stem from the fact that he was not from Hampshire County. For Pomeroy, and the other officers in the regiment, Gilbert's reaction to the prank was a telling statement of Gilbert's character. According to Pomeroy, Gilbert was "Famos Insulting", a man who craved promotion and foolishly placed his entire honor in a flag, "So much upon his Shame".<sup>64</sup>

Within two weeks of Johnson's *pro tempore* promotions, written orders arrived from Boston. The acting governor, Spencer Phips, decided to bend to local political pressures and promote the officers from within the regiments. Petitions had arrived from Northampton, complaining against the decision of Johnson's war council to promote from without the Hampshire regiment, and perhaps at the urgings of Col. Israel Williams the governor promoted Pomeroy in order to retain the continued support of the county's

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<sup>62</sup> Pomeroy, p. 117.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 121-2.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 122-3.

representatives in the General Council. Pomeroy and his soldiers were all too happy to send Gilbert packing. In fact, Gilbert was so enraged he left the campaign entirely and returned home. Pomeroy invited all the officers in the regiment to his headquarters for a celebratory drink to toast the end of “Gilbard & Tirony” much to the “univertial Sattisfaction with ye officers”.<sup>65</sup>

Instead of accepting the promotion of an officer from outside the regiment, the colonial soldiers of Massachusetts believed they had the right to decide who should succeed their previous commander. And more importantly for this instant, the officers believed it as well. Seth Pomeroy was almost certainly disappointed not to have been immediately promoted to colonel by Johnson. After all, he had served with distinction at Louisbourg in 1745 and continued to serve defending the frontier between the two wars. He had been passed over for Ephraim Williams to command the regiment initially because of Williams’ higher reputation and kinship ties in the county but he was second-in-command. Furthermore, Gilbert only outranked Pomeroy by two days! Yet neither Pomeroy’s journal entries nor any of his letters home indicate that jealousy was the cause of his concern. Rather, he and his men, officers and enlisted alike, disagreed with the decision to place an officer in command who was not selected from within and who placed himself above those in his command.

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

For two hundred years, European powers competed with one another over the rich cod fisheries off the eastern coast of Canada. Competition took various forms from the piracy of privateers to outright combat between imperial navies. To support their fishing fleets, France and England each established ports along the Canadian coast and English Harbor on Cape Breton Island, or Havre á l'Anglais, was the one harbor that did not completely freeze over in the winter. Its narrow opening to the sea had a small island in its center. This port was retained by the French in the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713, though the rest of Acadia was ceded to the English and became Nova Scotia. The French understood that its position was economically desirable and strategically important to the protection of her North American possessions because of its proximity to the mouth of the St. Lawrence River. Therefore, in 1720, the government of Louis XV began to pay for a stone fortress to be built around the town known to the French as Louisbourg.<sup>66</sup>

The fortress at Louisbourg was planned and built by two French military engineers, first Verville and then Verrier, based upon the tenets established by Vauban. Situated among the natural protections of swamps and the rocky coast, its stone walls were thick though not continuous; there was a gap on the harbor side where there was a pond. The harbor itself was large enough for French naval vessels to maneuver within while its entrance was protected by the Island Battery constructed in the mouth of the

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<sup>66</sup> Fairfax Downey, *Louisbourg: Key to a Continent*, (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1965), p. 1-10.



channel. A final artillery fortification, the Grand Battery, was built a mile to the northeast to defend the Island Battery or the fort against attack.<sup>67</sup>

While the presence of the fort was of concern to the English, their fishing vessels stationed at Canseau continued to infringe upon French interests. In retaliation, the French governor at Louisbourg in 1744 detached his soldiers to destroy the English settlement. This attack, combined with the initiation of the War of the Austrian Succession in the American colonies, was used by the Massachusetts governor, William Shirley, to begin a campaign against the French fort in the spring of 1745. Shirley enlisted the help of the other New England colonies to produce a provincial army of 4000 men under the command of William Pepperrell from Maine. Shirley convinced his patrons in London that the attack was plausible if he had the aid of the British Navy and Commodore Sir Peter Warren was dispatched from the West Indies with his squadron. Meanwhile, Shirley gathered a flotilla of colonial privateers to transport his army north to Canseau, a former British fort destroyed the year before.<sup>68</sup>

When the colonial forces arrived at the destroyed fort, they re-fortified their position and began to drill. Their scouts discovered that the French harbor was still choked with ice, forcing the provincials to wait and drill for three weeks. On April 13, 1745, the British Navy arrived and, after a council of war with Pepperrell, Commodore Warren left to blockade Cape Breton. Though the French were aware of a renewed English presence south of Louisbourg, Governor Du Chambon assumed the force only capable of rebuilding Canseau. For this reason, he directed reinforcements from Quebec,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 23-8.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 56-62.  
Grenier, *The First Way of War*, p. 68.

under the command of Lieutenant Pierre-Paul Marin de la Malgue, to march on Annapolis Royal in the belief that forces at Canseau were not a threat. In addition, Du Chambon did not send word to France requesting naval support.<sup>69</sup>

When the English forces arrived on April 23, the Grand Battery was in disrepair. Money had not been forthcoming from the Crown for needed work on the walls and a near mutiny the year before had resulted in little work conducted where it was most needed. When the British vessels began their initial bombardment, Captain Chassin de Thierry, commander of the Grand Battery, determined the position untenable and recommended the guns be spiked and the battery abandoned. Du Chambon agreed and the guns were left without ever firing a shot. With naval support, Pepperrell began an amphibious assault three miles from the fortress, landing at Fresh Water Cove and defeating a group of eighty French soldiers. The victory allowed him to disembark 2000 men near the fort over two days.<sup>70</sup>

Directly after the landing, 13 men scouted around the rear of the fortress to locate the Grand Battery and assess its disposition. The men found the fort abandoned and quickly waved their comrades inside. The French, realizing that they had not done enough to destroy their own guns, detached a force to re-take the battery. It was too little too late. Pepperrell, notified in advance, dispatched his own soldiers who repelled the French attack. Gunsmiths, led by Major Seth Pomeroy, arrived to repair the French artillery and by the next morning the bombardment of Louisbourg had begun.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 65-72.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 73-5.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 75-80.

The English forces then began to unload their own artillery and mortars on to the beach. They realized there was high ground overlooking the fortress less than a mile from the walls, a position known to the French but assumed to be swampy enough to deter any enemy from emplacing guns there. Pepperrell appreciated the necessity of an artillery emplacement there and managed, after four days of continuous hauling, to navigate the marsh with stone sledges. He placed the guns above the town and began a second artillery attack.<sup>72</sup>

For the next two weeks Louisbourg endured shelling from two positions. Though the walls sustained severe damage, they did not fall and neither position was close enough to allow English mortars to bomb the inside of the fort. Pepperrell and Warren became concerned as their stores of ammunition and powder were depleted. Warren was unable to defeat or destroy the Island Battery and still could not enter the harbor. Then the French frigate *Vigilant* arrived to re-supply the fortress. Warren managed to capture her before she could run the blockade and, for a while, English concerns over supplies were abated. The Island Battery still remained the key to capturing the French fortress, however, as an assault on Louisbourg was deemed impossible without the close support of the British naval guns.<sup>73</sup>

Spurred on by concerns that more French vessels were en route, Pepperrell planned an assault on the Island Battery. The assault was conducted under the cover of night with the soldiers landing on the small island without incident. The problem was the indiscipline and amateurism of the provincials, a factor so prominent in the writings of British contemporaries and modern historians alike. A drunken soldier let out a war cry

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 80-4.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 85-88.



just as they were about to scale the undefended walls of the battery. Alerted, the French soldiers manned their posts and repelled the attackers after a two hour fight that ended with over 180 English casualties. Another method would have to be found to destroy the Island Battery.<sup>74</sup>

Soon after the failed attack on the battery fort, under the pretense that English captives had been mistreated, Pepperrell sent an officer to Louisbourg with a letter from the French officers of the *Vigilant*, describing their good treatment. The British officer complained against French mistreatment of English captives and awaited Du Chambon's reply. Unbeknownst to the French, this English officer spoke French and he was able to ascertain that Du Chambon had not known the *Vigilant* was captured. The realization that supplies would not arrive sorely tested French morale. A subsequent capture of a French vessel from Acadia warned the English that Captain Marin, having failed to destroy Annapolis Royal, was marching on Canseau. He planned to kill the English soldiers stationed there and then relieve Du Chambon at Louisbourg by attacking the English from their rear. Pepperrell dispatched soldiers on two colonial privateers who arrived at Canseau before Marin. Gathering three other ships and the soldiers there, the English surprised Marin's force as it was crossing the channel to the English fort and destroyed them in the water.<sup>75</sup> The intelligence gained by both the capture of French ships and the subterfuge of colonial officers became pivotal to English success.

Warren and Pepperrell then decided to move some of their artillery to the Lighthouse Point, overlooking the Island Battery. Some colonials had discovered ten French artillery pieces sunk in shallow water in the bay and, combined with English

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 93-5.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 93-8.

mortars, the English built an emplacement less than a mile from the last existing French battery. Soon mortar bombs were lobbed within the walls, destroying the magazine.

This was the final straw for Du Chambon and the French were forced to surrender.

While the English commanders held a council of war to plan their assault on the fortress proper, an assault Seth Pomeroy feared "...in all human Probability Prov'd Fatal To our army & Destroy'd a grate Part of ym..."<sup>76</sup>, the French suddenly surrendered.<sup>77</sup>

It would seem that this assault was doomed from the start. The French fortress, manned by professional French soldiers and Swiss mercenaries, was the strongest on the continent. The attacking force was provincial (and so rag tag) and the officers that led it largely inexperienced. Only three weeks were given to drill and most of the artillery men learned their trade through trial and error. Although a part of the English success can be attributed to Du Chambon's oversights and underestimation of English intent, the details of the battle show that a greater part of responsibility lay with the English leaders. Despite some historians' claims that Pepperrell's plan was to immediately assault the fortress walls<sup>78</sup>, in fact the colonial leadership made many sound decisions during the siege. Reconnaissance was critical in determining when to start the attack, discovering that the Grand Battery was undefended, and realizing that Canseau had to be defended against incoming French forces. Artillery placement was key to the battle and Pepperrell and his officers were determined to establish those positions despite the difficulties involved. Soldiers had to haul the guns themselves because no draft animals had been brought. Certainly, this was an oversight in planning but the military leadership

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<sup>76</sup> Pomeroy, p. 50.

<sup>77</sup> Downey, p. 98-102.

<sup>78</sup> Chet, *Conquering the American Wilderness*, p. 102.

necessary to motivate those soldiers in the swamp was astounding. For four days, officers and privates alike pulled artillery pieces weighing several tons on stone sledges, sometimes resulting in a broken leg or arm when a soldier became stuck in the mud and was crushed by the sleds. Yet the officers maintained their determination and their soldiers did not quit. Furthermore, despite Commodore Warrens' pressures in repeated councils of war, Pepperrell resisted the urge to order a suicidal frontal attack on the walls of Louisbourg until all other pieces were in place to allow the greatest chance for success. General Abercrombie would not be as patient twelve years later.

There is no doubt mistakes were made during the campaign. Supplies were slow in coming from Boston, forcing New England soldiers to rely on captured French supplies. Clothing and shelter became a problem and disease took its toll. Most glaring of all was the failed mission to capture the Island Battery by raid at night. The campaign as a whole, however, was successful. The colonials held together as a unit for a two-month siege that required many separate successes to be accomplished. The British Navy made the siege possible through their blockade and with captured intelligence but it was the artillery positions that won the day, not naval guns. In this instance, at least, the colonies of New England, led by Massachusetts, had proven that they could be victorious on the battlefield.

Despite this victory in the realm of regular warfare by a New England provincial army, some historians do not agree that they were effective; the battle at Louisbourg was an exception to the rule. Particularly, Guy Chet has produced a well researched book, *Conquering the Wilderness*, in which he argues that there was nothing new or particularly successful militarily occurring in New England through the Seven Years' War. Instead,



the colonial armies of Massachusetts and New York deteriorated over the course of 150 years from King Philip's War to 1755 and British intervention was necessary to defeat France. Chet agrees with Stanley Pargellis, among other historians of the period, that focus must be paid to British forces in the colonies if one is to understand how colonial military institutions were formed. In other words, there was no *viable* "Americanization" of tactics or logistics (and therefore leadership) in the New England colonies, no American exceptionalism.<sup>79</sup>

Two other historians have written to refute this position by claiming that New Englanders had developed a viable military institution but that it was one designed to fight the *petite guerre* or irregular warfare. Steven Charles Eames argues that previous historians have presented a skewed portrait of northern colonial forces as incompetent because they focused on major events and tended to favor the contemporary opinions of the professionals of the era, in other words British officers. According to Eames, colonial forces were successful when they used guerrilla tactics and conducted raids and ambushes designed to surprise the enemy and destroy property. This type of limited, unconventional warfare was necessary to defeat Indian forces and the French who favored these tactics as well. Furthermore, when the results of both French and colonial major campaigns are compared from 1690 to 1748, New England fairs quite well. During this time, New England, led by the colony of Massachusetts, planned nine large-scale operations. Three of these were successful, two were failures, and four were cancelled due to weather or lack of funds. By comparison, the French attempted four, of which one never passed the planning stage, one was cancelled, and two failed. Finally, the British officer corps understood warfare through the lens of class. All enlisted

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 5-6.

soldiers, including their own, were brutes incapable of reason. Once the British Army took control of the North American theater in 1755, there was no other option but for the British officers to take control. Colonial officers were little better than their men and so were next to useless. Their actual abilities on the battlefield were irrelevant. When seen from this perspective, Braddock's decisions become obvious and British military professional opinion becomes suspect.<sup>80</sup>

John Grenier also takes the position that colonial forces had developed a distinct form of warfare through his examination of irregular warfare and ranger units on the American frontier. For Grenier, regular warfare incorporated limited war with decisive victory that was characteristic of European battles in this era. In the American colonies, however, there was not the infrastructure or the necessity to wage war in this manner. Instead, a particularly violent form of *petite guerre*, one which combined unlimited war with attrition, evolved that incorporated scalp hunting and ranging to extirpate Indian populations.<sup>81</sup> Again, previous historians were blind to American successes because they tended to focus on professional armies and regular warfare. In fact, European armies of the era had experience in irregular tactics. Among the French, such tactics were incorporated into the professional structure under Marshal Grand-Maison, who wrote a treatise on the subject. The British Army had a less favorable view of guerrilla tactics, however. While the methods of the *petite guerre* were utilized in Scotland and Ireland, such tactics were viewed as criminal, used only when necessary against criminal elements. Irregular warfare was distasteful and to be avoided when not needed. For that reason, irregular forces were not institutionalized in the British Army prior to the Seven

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<sup>80</sup> Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, p. 16-29.

<sup>81</sup> Grenier, *The First Way of War*, p. 1-15.

Years' War and colonial units designed to fight in such a manner were scorned.<sup>82</sup> During the Seven Years' War, however, American rangers were employed when the British regulars began to understand that they were required if the British were to overcome the hazards of fighting in the North American wilderness.<sup>83</sup>

Grenier focuses upon ranger units to highlight the effectiveness of colonial forces, both north and south, in their uses of irregular warfare. He contends that this "First Way of War" was eventually incorporated into the institution of the US Army by the nineteenth century. Combined with Eames' assertions that both regular and irregular colonial forces were more successful than previously depicted, Guy Chet's argument against a peculiar "American" system of combat effectiveness appears untenable. In fact, the colonial armies of New England were successful for over a century in defeating both Indian and French forces and a key element of that success was their development of a military leadership that could direct volunteer soldiers without recourse to coercion.

Military leadership, tactics, and weapons all exist in relationship to one another. Tactics evolve as technology changes the tools used on the battlefield. In many instances, this happens with a lag time and the result is slaughter. In the American Civil War, frontal assaults, like Picket's Charge at Gettysburg, doomed many more men than necessary because that tactic, made unsupportable with the advent of mass-produced rifles, quick-loading carbines, and improved artillery had not been changed to meet the realities of military technology. General James Longstreet is rumored to have predicted that only a defensive war, in trenches, could affectively utilize the awesome firepower possible by the 1860's. This came to pass, with even worse results, in Europe from 1914-

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 102-14.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 115-45.



1918. Finally, with the invention of the tank, and tactical evolutions at Sandhurst, feasible offensive tactics of support by fire and maneuver allowed Allied forces to make key breakthroughs and force Germany to surrender.

If tactics, then, are a function of weaponry, how is leadership a function of tactics? In World War II, small unit leaders in the US Army had more autonomy than ever before because tactics and technology determined that their decisions were necessary to win the fight. No longer could generals sit atop the hill and move their forces like chess pieces. Men moved in squad and platoon formations, requiring the leadership of sergeants and lieutenants to clear houses and flank machinegun positions. In the Philippines in 1945, a reinforced Ranger company was dispatched to rescue 500 prisoners of war taken by the Japanese after the defeat at Bataan. Though the battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Henry Mucci, was overall in charge of the expedition, the planning and execution was left to the company commander, Captain Robert Prince.<sup>84</sup> Every Ranger was trained in the position above him because leadership down to the fire team level was seen as essential to success.

In the British Army of the eighteenth century, leadership came in the form of draconian discipline and strict hierarchy. The inaccuracy of muskets like the “Brown Bess”, combined with the ingenious new tool of the bayonet, demanded that formations remain in close order under fire, that soldiers reload standing despite the carnage, and that when given the command to charge, soldiers followed that command unflinchingly. Yet how would that picture look if the tools were changed? Soldiers in the Massachusetts provincial regiments did not carry bayonets until around 1758. In fact, the hatchet was

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<sup>84</sup> Hampton Sides, *Ghost Soldiers: The Epic Account of World War II's Greatest Rescue Mission*, (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), p. 120-2.

the melee weapon of choice. Bayonet charges were thought not to work well against an enemy in the woods and formations were difficult to hold in close terrain. Though both these assertions were tested during the Seven Years' War, in the battles of La Belle Famille and Busy Run where bayonet charges did rout Indian forces, usually the enemy fought in a dispersed manner not conducive to such tactics. As a rule, the enemy, whether French or Indian, did not bring large forces into open fields and fight in the conventional fashion of columns and files. Tactics were different in North America and, along with a change in society in New England there came a change in military leadership.

Leadership is, however, more complicated than simply a method for maneuvering troops given a specific kit of combat technology. The most obvious, and recent, juxtaposition to illustrate this point would be the Soviet bloc forces and the US forces in the 1980's. Both nations had large land armies that utilized comparable rifles, machineguns and tanks. Yet the leadership styles among these forces were quite different, if comparably suited to the realities of modern warfare. While the US Army adjusted to an all-volunteer force, training a professionalized non-commissioned officer corps and retaining its method of teaching each soldier the job of the man above him, the Soviet model was based on political hierarchy and the tactics of mass formations. The USSR decided to produce more equipment and utilize its large population to overwhelm an opponent. Officers were selected for their *political* credentials and soldiers were conscripted. The result was a more centralized form of military leadership that resulted, often, in indecision once a platoon leader or company commander was killed. What



becomes clear is the way in which the society from within which a military institution is created reflects the methods used by that military to lead soldiers.

This was certainly the case in the provincial armies of New England and though it is more involved than simply the contractual concepts put forward by Fred Anderson, a basic issue is whether it worked on the field of battle in the eighteenth century. Chet, among other “supporters” of the British system, has argued that it did not. According to Chet, the British Army won the war through superior logistics and transportation. He tells us it was Lord Loudoun, with his attention to details and his creation of a transportation corps in the North American colonies, which laid the foundations for British success by 1760. Irregular tactics were not uncommon in Europe; they were simply not utilized by British professional establishment. Instead, partisans and local mercenaries were used to conduct raids and to gather intelligence. The problem in North America was that the provincial armies were so bad at those tasks. Their undisciplined soldiers and ineffective officers made dealing with colonials, for the British, too inefficient and frustrating. The establishment of irregular and light infantry tactics, suited to the colonial theater of war was, therefore, not an admission that British tactics should change but a necessity. The provincials could not be trusted to do it themselves.<sup>85</sup>

The weaknesses in Chet’s argument about tactics and American units are two-fold. He defines the tactics of the offensive too narrowly (and so wrongly defines the tactics of the defensive) and he incorporates strategic maneuver with tactical maneuver. For Chet, a soldier or unit is only on the offensive if they are moving forward. Under this definition, the assault and the flanking maneuvers are the only real offensive tactics of the eighteenth century. Once a unit stopped, or utilized cover, that unit was on the defensive.

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<sup>85</sup> Chet, p. 126-130, 135-7.



His definition of these terms would then place an ambush in the category of the defensive, where the elements of surprise and audacity,<sup>86</sup> are critical to success. It makes more sense to consider a military operation as offensive or defensive in its characteristics, planning, and objectives. If the defense embodies the characteristics of preparation, security, disruption, massed effects, and flexibility, its purpose is to force the enemy to *attack* under less than favorable conditions in order to *re-gain the initiative*.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, the characteristics of the offense (surprise, concentration, tempo, and audacity) combine initiative with maneuver to either destroy the enemy or seize terrain.<sup>88</sup> In either case, it is the objective that determines the type of operation and in many instances both sides can be on the attack, though not both on the defense.

The intent here is not to write a presentist history of military doctrine. Rather, this is an argument for enduring principles of war that define very concrete characteristics evident in combat throughout history. In other words, while tactics change, operations can be defined as offensive or defensive utilizing the same definitions that apply today. The variation in warfare comes from the different technologies and tactics employed to accomplish these fundamentals and the leadership utilized to motivate soldiers on the battlefield. It is these characteristics which Chet overlooks in his argument for the dominance and success of the defense in European tactics during the eighteenth century and weakens his argument against the viability of provincial troops in the theater of war during this period. Instead, the colonial tactics and leadership of New England

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<sup>86</sup> Field Manual 3-90.5 **Heavy Brigade Combat Team Combined Arms Battalion**, March 2005, Headquarters, Department of the Army, p. 5-1 to 5-4.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6-3 to 6-6.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5-38.

incorporated both the offense and the defense, combined irregular warfare within a more conventional structure, and evolved a leadership model that provided direction and motivation to a largely all-volunteer force.

The imperial forces of both France and England brought with them certain technological advances and definitely different ideas of how to wage warfare in North America. The influx of professional European armies brought with it a desire to import regular war into a theater in which irregular tactics had previously dominated. Primarily, they imported a *need* for complex fortifications in the style of Vauban and therefore the *need* for large contingents of artillery and mortars to invest those forts. What is seen throughout the Seven Years' War are a series of battles, centered on European-style fortresses, which required the building of roads and large logistics trains to support the attacker's investment. British colonial forces adapted to these changing conditions of war though the British Army decided not to use them to their capabilities for political and social reasons.

At the Battle of Ticonderoga in 1758, General Abercromby assembled the largest British force to date of 16,000 troops. His second-in-command, Lord Howe, led the advanced guard north on Lake George, in front of 1000 vessels transporting the main body of British and colonial troops. With him were the ranger companies of Major Robert Rogers and a Massachusetts regiment under the command of Colonel Jedediah Preble. They landed on the north shore of the lake, immediately attacking French pickets emplaced there. Among them was a sixteen-year-old private, David Perry from Rehoboth, Massachusetts. He described the first skirmish of the battle.

“Major Rogers, with his Rangers was the first to land. He was joined by Lord Howe...It was the first engagement I had ever seen, and the whistling of balls and



roar of musquetry terrified me not a little. At length our regiment formed among the trees behind which the men kept stepping from their ranks for shelter. Col. Preble, who, I well remember, was a harsh man, swore he would knock the first man down who should step out of his ranks which greatly surprised me, to think that I must stand still to be shot at...and when I came to see the blood run so freely, it put new life into me. Lord Howe and a number of other good men were killed.”<sup>89</sup>

This first encounter as described by Private Perry is important for three reasons. First, the rangers came on shore and successfully repelled the French pickets sent to disrupt the British landing. Second, the Massachusetts regiment stood up under fire, despite the instinct of many new recruits to hide behind cover. And third, Lord Howe, one of the very few British officers respected by the New Englanders, was killed during the first volleys of the battle.

Abercromby landed his full force soon after and, upon discovering the death of Lord Howe, decided to wait for two days before attacking the French at Fort Carillon. During that time, the Marquis de Montcalm, recently arrived from Quebec, began furiously working his officers and men to build a breastwork in front of the dilapidated fort. A trench was dug in front of a wall made of logs and sandbags. In front of this defense, for as much as 100 yards or more, all the trees were cut down and left lying in a tangle of limbs and stumps. The branches were sharpened like stakes and the entire obstacle, called an abatis, formed an engagement area to trap assaulting enemy forces.

Abercromby attacked with little intelligence and, therefore, no artillery support. He assumed that the ruinous condition of the fort would hinder French resistance and that his overwhelming force would prevail. The rangers and the provincial light infantry marched forward and took positions on the flanks and behind the cover provided by the abatis defenses as support for the frontal attack performed by the regulars. Almost

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<sup>89</sup> David Perry. “The Life of David Perry”. The Magazine of History, 1928: 137. p. 9.



immediately, the British formations were in shambles and, for the next eight hours, over 1500 soldiers lost their lives in those trees. As Archelaus Fuller, a soldier in Colonel Timothy Bagely's regiment, recounts from his position behind a log,

"But before the Reagellers came up the fier began very hot the Regalors hove down thair pak and fixed their bayarnits came up in order stod and fit very coragerly our men droed up very ner and was ordered to make a stand the fit came on very smart it held about eaght ours a sorefull Sit to behold the Ded men and wounded Lay on the ground hauing Som of them legs thir arms and other Lims broken others shot threw the body and very mortly wounded to hear thar cris and se thair bodis lay in blod..."<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, wave after wave of British regiments were flung into the kill zone created by the French without any soldier making the breastwork itself. David Perry's regiment was there as well, to support the assault though he was not able to raise his head long enough to fire. One of his comrades "raised his head a little above the log, and a ball struck him in the center of the forehead, and tore his scalp back to the crown."<sup>91</sup> Finally, with the coming of nightfall, the British regulars retired and the provincials finally left for the boats. Rumors the French and Indians were in pursuit turned retreat into a rout as thousands of British soldiers fought to be the first on the lake headed back to the burnt shell of Fort William Henry.<sup>92</sup>

The Battle of Ticonderoga was the greatest British defeat of the war, along with Monongahela. Without doubt, the defeat lay solely in the decision by Abercromby not to move his artillery to the high ground and shell the fort into submission. The importance of the battle in regards to the caliber of the provincial soldiers is that it shows us colonial

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<sup>90</sup> Archelaus Fuller, "Journal of Col. Archelaus Fuller of Middleton, Mass., in the Expedition Against Ticonderoga in 1758", Essex Institute, Historical Collections, XLVI (1910), p. 214.

<sup>91</sup> Perry, p. 10.

<sup>92</sup> Anderson, *Crucible of War*, p. 240-6.

soldiers under heavy fire for hours at a time who did not crumble or flee. Some provincials, like Rufus Putnam, volunteered to go forward rather than appear cowards in front of their friends.<sup>93</sup> These soldiers were certainly not drilled into a disciplined force in any manner that would have been recognized by their British, or French, counterparts. Yet they followed their officers and noncommissioned officers into a hellish scenario and did not withdraw until nightfall.

The doctrinal weaknesses in Chet's thesis that concern tactics and focus on conventional warfare weaken his interpretation of colonial forces, both in the regiments and in the ranger companies. To better judge the effectiveness of the rangers and regiments, a historian must analyze their purpose, what they were designed to accomplish. The rangers were organized to infiltrate, to destroy property through raids, and to bring back intelligence. They were successful at Ticonderoga when they defeated the French pickets. Furthermore, Grenier's book highlights ranger units led by Ben Church, John Gorham, Robert Rogers and others in their successful campaigns from the western frontier of Massachusetts to Nova Scotia.<sup>94</sup>

The provincial regiments were light infantry. When these units were used for their intended purposes, such as their supporting role during the final assaults at Ticonderoga, the colonials did not break, they did not falter. The bias of British officers has, however, lasted through the twentieth century. For these professionals the colonials were rabble, without honor, men who could not emulate the model of eighteenth-century warfare (ie. The British Army). Chet asserts that partisans in Europe (local fighting units

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<sup>93</sup> Putnam, p. 24.

<sup>94</sup> Grenier, p. 16-35, 66-77.

utilized by the British Army in the European theater to perform military operations deemed distasteful to professional officers) made a professional light infantry unnecessary before the Seven Years' War and colonial incompetence changed that model. Instead, what is important is that the British Army had never attempted to *incorporate* partisans into their institution before and their insistence that colonial troops act like British soldiers often placed these units in situations for which they were not designed. When the British did create a regiment for ranging, the 80<sup>th</sup> of Foot, it failed due to Thomas Gage's insistence on patronage among his officers and Rogers' was placed back in command of British ranger operations.<sup>95</sup>

Throughout the war, and the previous colonial conflicts, few men involved in the provincial armies were ever professional. Some were definitely life-long soldiers. Ephraim Williams served his colony as a military officer for most of his adult life. Seth Pomeroy was not only involved in campaigns of both King George's War and the Seven Years' War but also commanded a fort on the frontier between conflicts. Rufus Putnam rose from private to general in the Revolutionary War. Though these men, and many like them, fought for their colony and their country all of their lives, they were not professionalized in the conventional sense. They did not attend schools such as Woolwich or, later, Sandhurst. They did not earn their livings solely in uniform. Though many officers had experiences of war before attaining their higher ranks, some, like William Pepperrell, were promoted to higher command based on their social status. Yet even that example has its extenuating circumstance since there was no one with the required experience in Massachusetts at the time to lead the expedition to Louisbourg.

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<sup>95</sup> Grenier, p. 115-45.



Instead, Pepperrell's impeccable reputation was deemed the most important quality to instill public confidence in the operation and to encourage voluntary enlistments.<sup>96</sup> For the large majority of officers, their experience of war over decades gave them the knowledge to fight and to lead. They learned drill, tactics, and discipline from both the British Army and from trial and error. They had to modify what they were taught by the professionals of the age to suit their particular social situation. And they had soldiers who were not strangers to violence.

Barry Levy, in his paper "Boston Sports: Masculine Play and the Growth of a Maritime City, 1640-1790", relates how violence was sanctioned within the school systems of both Boston and Salem. In the rough and deadly world of eighteenth-century merchant marines, physical toughness and leadership was necessary to survival at sea. Boys and young men created their own hierarchy based upon the strong in which fighting and hazing was the norm. Gangs existed that fought each other for honor each Pope's Day with fists and clubs and pipes. These Massachusetts communities closed themselves to strangers and cultivated their own leaders through a system of "play" as Levy has explained it.<sup>97</sup>

The reading of journals from the soldiers in this era might appear surreal to some. Often the descriptions of battle are clinical and devoid of trauma. Of course, many were written years after the facts related, memoirs designed to prove that the soldier in question had served in war and was entitled to a pension. This is not the case with all of them and some of the information gathered came from letters written only days after,

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<sup>96</sup> Eames, *Rustic Warriors*, p. 330-1.

<sup>97</sup> Barry Levy, "Boston Sports: Masculine Play and the Growth of a Maritime City, 1640-1790", Five Colleges' Seminar, 2006.

letters meant to inform family members back home that a loved one had died. Though many of these men were quite young (David Perry was only sixteen when he first enlisted), they often bore up well under the strains of combat. Perhaps their upbringing could explain some of this. That could also help illuminate more reasons why the leadership of the provincials in Massachusetts was based less on class and more on reputation.

The life-long experiences of war in the colonies, specifically along the western frontier of New England, accustomed men to violence. The leaders of these forces were no different. They came from the same towns and communities. They sometimes served first as privates and sergeants. They learned their trade through experience, sometimes to good effect and sometimes not. Yet they had managed, prior to 1756, to maintain their borders against the French and French-allied Indians and even capture a fortress the likes of Louisbourg. The introduction of large numbers of imperial forces, both British and French, fundamentally altered the methods by which war was waged. This climate of change forced the colonials to alter their tactics somewhat, by extending enlistments, defending more forts, and enforcing stronger discipline. It also forced the British Army to change, creating a light infantry regiment that reloaded kneeling down and fired from behind trees. But neither institution changed their system of officership or their methods of leadership. In this area of military culture, among others, the two communities found their fundamental difference which Fred Anderson has identified as a source of separation for another time.

## CONCLUSION

The nature of military leadership and tactics has been debated for millennia. Sun Tzu wrote *The Art of War* to teach his student, the Emperor, how best to defeat the enemies of China. Likewise, Machiavelli attempted to teach the prince of Florence strategies that would protect his land from the encroachments of the French. Carl von Clausewitz argued that war should be viewed as an extension of politics while his contemporary, Henri de Jomini wrote his *Art of War* to expose the secrets of Napoleon's tactical successes while securing his promotion within the Russian Army. This is an ongoing dialogue that is as important for what it tells us about the tactics utilized throughout history as it is for the universal principles these writers propose as the foundations of their works.

Part of this dialogue in the present and immediate past has concerned the difficulties faced by a democracy that wages war. Niall Ferguson wrote *Colossus* recently as his answer to the American problem of Iraq. For him, democracies are inefficient and so wage war uneconomically. Furthermore, because of their republican nature wars cannot be drawn out. The electorate will eventually grow tired of the costs, in taxes and lives, and the political will to accomplish the objectives will wither away. The answer to this universal problem within the immediate context is to convince the American people that liberal empire, a system in which American hegemony is not only recognized but openly promoted to provide world stability, is necessary. If American political elites could convince the American public of this, perhaps a total war concept



could be utilized to defeat worldwide terrorism.<sup>98</sup> This would mean fighting the Global War on Terrorism as if we were fighting World War II again.

This idea that democratic societies are not well made for war is not new. There are many examples of wars whose outcomes turned more on political will than tactical ability. Though this author tends to agree with Clausewitz, that war is politics by another means, what do these debates say about how democracies function within the institutions used to wage war? Soldiers who voluntarily enlist in military service, men and women who have been raised to believe that their opinion has *national* and *international* importance through their vote, will be willing to submit to military discipline only so far. They will not enlist for life. They will not submit to draconian punishment. They will not accept orders based solely upon the class or status of their superiors. It seems that they will become very inefficient soldiers.

Such soldiers need leadership. While they learn discipline and combat skills, they will always require direction, motivation, and purpose if they are to succeed. If they come from a society in which they expect to rise economically and socially, or at least assume their right to do so, they will only volunteer to serve in a military with an authority structure based upon merit, not class. Though these factors all seem to be stumbling blocks to an effective military, they are actually the impetus for success. The demands of a democratic society necessitate innovations in military structure. Officers become more involved in all aspects of their soldiers' lives and must earn the respect of those they lead. Noncommissioned officers must become as professional as their officers and gain the same reputations for leadership and loyalty. Soldiers must be taught the

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<sup>98</sup> Niall Ferguson, *Colossus: The Price of America's Empire*, (New York: Penguin Press, 2004). See specifically the introduction and chapter 3, pp. 1-33 & 61-104.

requirements of those above them and be given the opportunity for promotion based on merit. Authority becomes decentralized which, while requiring more communication and risking a certain degree of inefficiency, also promotes initiative at the lowest levels and allows for quick replacement of those wounded or killed.

The provincial armies of Massachusetts exhibited many of these traits throughout their history as colonial forces and even into the first battles of the American Revolution. Their greatest success came in 1745 at Louisbourg. Yet even after that, their military system continued to function though it had to adapt quite quickly to changes imported by the great empires through which the conflict of the Seven Years' War was really fought. Some officers, like Ephraim Williams and Seth Pomeroy, were commissioned because their standings within their communities allowed their ability to recruit. Others, like Rufus Putnam, rose to the rank of general by the onset of the Revolution from the lowly position of private through a lifetime of service. Soldiers who volunteered for campaigns year after year rose in rank as their reputations and experience grew. The fact that rank often followed ability to recruit led to the need for officers soldiers would follow. New England was a fragmented democratic society. Within the towns, election was the rule in both government and church. Though this democratic ideal was not so strong at the county or provincial levels, the soldiers within the New England colonies enlisted often under local leaders, those they selected themselves through the act of enlistment. Outsiders, however, could not expect the same treatment. Strangers were distrusted and shunned, so the structure of the military also involved election and reputation.

The system of the citizen soldier was effective as well. It was effective enough to defeat the French at Louisbourg. Admittedly, during the Seven Years' War, fewer

opportunities were presented for this fact to be proven in a conventional fight while the British establishment continued to relegate most provincials to the tasks of road clearing and fortification repairs. By 1763, British officers still viewed colonials as good for little more than some specific, and ethically questionable, irregular fighting and certainly no match for professionals in a conventional battle. For the British officer, a system which, in the northern colonies, relied upon renewed enlistments every year and encouraged loose relationships between officers and enlisted soldiers could never compare well against professional, standing armies where cultured, educated superiors controlled disciplined, unthinking subordinates. Yet the beginnings of the American Revolution would give lie to their assumptions and prejudice.

At the Battle of Bunker Hill on in June 1775, Massachusetts forces could only loosely be termed an army. Artemus Ward, a veteran of Ticonderoga, was given command of all forces by the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts (though probably more for his political connections with the country party than for his actions in the French and Indian War) but each regiment fought quite separately. In fact, Israel Putnam, in command of his Connecticut regiment, spent most of the battle around Bunker Hill (not Breed's Hill where most of the fighting occurred) trying to coordinate both newly arrived forces and some semblance of a reserve. Despite much confusion that resulted from the ad hoc formation of troops and a lack of *political* coordination by the Provincial Congress, Col. William Prescott mounted a defense on Breed's Hill that repelled the British regulars twice and resulted in a victory so costly to the British that they were eventually forced to abandon Boston, following the arrival of artillery from Fort Ticonderoga. With him in the redoubt on the hill was Maj. Gen. Joseph Warren who



refused to take over from Prescott because he had not received his formal commission from the Congress yet. He fought as a volunteer private. To begin the assault, Maj. Gen. William Howe directed his light infantry against the American left flank while sending his regulars in a frontal assault of the redoubt on Breed's Hill. Captain Thomas Knowlton of Connecticut and Col. John Stark of New Hampshire were defending the left flank behind a fence and stone wall, effectively destroying every British attempt to overrun their position. On the third attempt, the British regulars gained the redoubt on the hill, though they were never able to flank the position, largely because the American forces ran out of ammunition. The Americans fought a rear guard action hand-to-hand with the British out of the earthen fort and, with the support of a company that had remained in the flaming Charlestown and the forces still defending the fence and wall on the American left flank, withdrew across Charlestown Neck to Cambridge.<sup>99</sup>

Though Richard Ketchum, writing in the early 1970's, characterized the American force as untested farmers,<sup>100</sup> in reality many of the leaders and soldiers had fought previously in the colonial wars. Seth Pomeroy fought as a private on the American left flank that repelled General Howe's light infantry and regular forces. Col. Ebenezer Learned, the former captain who led his company into desertion, was the first to enter Boston after the British left. Though the British finally forced the American withdrawal on their third assault, casualties were staggering for the attackers. Of the almost 2300 soldiers involved, 1054 were killed or wounded.<sup>101</sup> American casualties

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<sup>99</sup> Richard M. Ketchum, *Decisive Day: The Battle for Bunker Hill*, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1973), p. 137-84.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111-2.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 190.

were also high at around 450, but because of the successful rear action conducted by the American left flank, only 31 prisoners were taken, most mortally wounded.<sup>102</sup> Though the British took Breed's Hill that day, they lost Boston and removed their headquarters to New York. The colonial soldiers were told to hold their fire until ordered to do so and to aim for the officers. Though their muskets were inaccurate, the order to fire came at the last possible moment and the death toll among British officers was staggering. Gen. Howe lost his entire staff and some of his remaining officers begged Howe to pullback and reevaluate the situation.<sup>103</sup>

The results of the Battle of Bunker Hill were a combination of New England's abilities to field forces capable on the battlefield (though perhaps not centrally organized or properly supplied) and continued British prejudice against provincial armies. According to Bernard Bailyn, Henry Clinton's suggestion to land the British behind Breed's Hill would have been successful but was ignored by a cautious Howe. Though it is quite probable that caution was a major factor in Howe's decision to land on Morton's Point, over-confidence was the reason he continually ordered frontal assaults after he failed to gain the American flank. Furthermore, that over-confidence would have been warranted had the Americans acted in the manner assumed by the British. They did not, however, and the defense conducted by Prescott was better than adequate. The leadership at the regimental level and below resulted in prepared defensive positions, high British casualties, especially among the officers, and a protected retreat. The British

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

<sup>103</sup> Bernard Bailyn, "The Battle of Bunker Hill", <http://www.masshist.org/bh/essay.html>.

officers' assumptions of colonial ineptitude, in the end, led the British Army to a victory too costly to be repeated.

When he took over the revolutionary forces in 1775, George Washington was not impressed with the caliber of officers and soldiers he found defending Boston. Yet according to David Hackett Fischer in *Washington's Crossing*, the new commander-in-chief soon realized that there was merit in their methods and by the Battle of Trenton and Princeton he was holding councils of war that encouraged autonomy in his regiments in intelligence-gathering and led to a new "American Way of War".<sup>104</sup> Of course this statement ignores Grenier's formulation of America's "First Way of War" as an incorporation of irregular tactics and violence; it does suggest an integration of democratic military leadership found in New England with a more European ideal favored by Washington to produce the Continental Army. Though there have been many attempts in the recent historiography of the American past to discredit the idea of exceptionalism, as Fischer states, "to make the American past into a record of... folly"<sup>105</sup>, the evidence remains which illustrates the uniqueness of colonial American societies. While it is undesirable to interpret our own history into a sort of iconographic nationalism, it is equally egregious to impose our values in such a manner that we make our past devoid of all accomplishment. New England society was the same as all societies, unique. And it produced a military institution which reflected its values and so was also unique. What can be argued as its "exceptional" quality was its successes in the face of professional scorn and its influence on a national stage in its later history.

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<sup>104</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 19-22, 30, 367-75.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 379.



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