The Early American Way of War: Reconnaissance and Appraisal

Don Higginbotham

A survey of writings on early American military history, which appeared just over twenty years ago in the American Historical Review, concluded on a positive note. Academic historians in increasing numbers were entering a field that had been almost exclusively the preserve of professional soldiers, journalists, and popularizers. They were embarking upon a campaign to integrate military subjects into the mainstream of historical studies.

Military themes have not only been attractive during the last two decades but have been influenced by "the new social history" and by cultural and intellectual studies. While efforts to integrate military topics have been made for all of American history, the "new military history" that has emerged from such conjunctions has been most fruitful for the early American and Progressive-era fields. This essay addresses the results in the former field through a series of interrelated questions. What did Americans think of war as a means of protecting and advancing the interests of their society? How did they view civil-military relations and formal military institutions, particularly militia and other locally organized and controlled forces as distinguished from regular or standing armies? How effectively did those institutions serve the needs of Americans in peace and war? Finally, would it be accurate to say that there was discernible, in the years before 1815, an "American way of war"?

Mr. Higginbotham is a member of the Department of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He wishes to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance of E. Wayne Carp, Harold E. Selesky, Thomas L. Purvis, James W. Titus, James Kirby Martin, and his own seminar students in History 330.


One can scarcely undertake a broad-gauged examination of American attitudes and practices concerning security and warfare without calling to mind John Shy’s provocative essay of 1971, “The American Military Experience: History and Learning.” Shy maintained that the period before 1815 constituted the first distinctive unit in American military history and that no other nation has had its origins “so clearly linked to warfare,” with violence so “bound up with . . . national identity.” Shy noted that wars, though often of short duration, make a profound impact upon the lives of those who undergo them and ultimately upon the collective memory of a nation; and so it was for the American people by the end of the War of 1812. To state the matter somewhat differently, the influence of wars on attitudes and opinions, in Shy’s words, “should be reckoned not by proximity, but by priority in historical time.” What the experience was is more important than when the experience occurred.4

By the middle of the seventeenth century, according to Shy, American and European warfare moved in different directions. After the bloody, ideological Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), Europeans gradually progressed to a more restrained or rational kind of conflict, which historians have termed limited warfare. But the colonists, for two reasons, continued to fight with a zeal for destroying their enemies that had always typified their martial behavior. First, their very survival seemed to be at stake—and continued to be so in a political sense until after the War of 1812. Second, their enemies—until the Revolution—were either heathen “savages” or hated French and Spanish “papists.” Shy wrote of Americans seeking “a definitive military solution” to the problem of their security, involving the total elimination of their adversaries as effective military entities. A farfetched dream in 1700, it was an accomplished fact by 1815. The experience of two hundred years made forceful solutions to problems with outsiders—Indian or European—an American tradition because, in the long run at least, they brought enormously successful results.5

While Shy in 1971 found in his conclusions disturbing implications for a nation that has averaged one war for every generation, it remained for Russell F. Weigley, in a substantial volume published two years later, to relate in detail the substance of Shy’s interpretation to subsequent

---


5 Ibid., 233-240, quotation on p. 238.
American history. Weigley’s *The American Way of War* is largely an interpretive account of how post-1815 American wars were fought, emphasizing the American pursuit of a “strategy of annihilation.” According to Weigley, if American military writers before the mid-nineteenth century did not always advocate the absolute destruction of their foes, it was partly because the republic was too weak militarily to do so. Shy, for his part, indicated that military weakness in the earlier years may itself have contributed to desire for a “complete solution” in dealing with enemies. Because wars were terribly costly and disruptive to a society in which “military institutions hardly existed” distinct from society itself, absolute victory seemed the only way to guarantee the safety of a people who could not or would not maintain considerable standing forces.7

Weigley did not deny that the strategy of annihilation (evident in the campaigns of U. S. Grant, in the destruction of native Americans in the Great Plains, in World War II bombing policy, in Douglas MacArthur’s approach to the Korean War, and, in its ultimate form, in a Cold War obsession with nuclear weapons) had deep roots, extending back into Shy’s first chronological unit of our military history. Although the thrust of Weigley’s reasoning relied heavily upon ideas of combat derived from Napoleon and Napoleon’s later interpreters, as well as from America’s growing strength in human and industrial resources, he nevertheless saw American warfare “diverging from the European pattern of limited war almost from the beginning of the American settlements.” He likewise acknowledged that there were clear manifestations of the strategy of annihilation in American demands for the complete elimination of France from the North American continent during the Seven Years’ War and in efforts to obtain not only Independence but the trans-Appalachian West as well during the Revolutionary War.8

The complementary views of Shy and Weigley, enormously stimulating and insightful, call for deeper tracking of early American thinking about the nature and objectives of war. John E. Ferling’s *A Wilderness of Miseries: War and Warriors in Early America*, dealing with a century and a half of English colonization and with the War of Independence, makes a stab at addressing that need. Proposing to show “how early Americans, collectively and individually, experienced war, what they thought of war, and what impact war had on the world in which they lived,” Ferling discovers an “American Way of War” that was more pervasive and devastating than anything described by Shy or Weigley. Influenced by Francis Jennings’s *The Invasion of America*, a morally charged account of white-Indian

---


relations in the seventeenth century focusing on southern New England, Ferling writes sweepingly that “the English migration took the form of an armed invasion of the New World, a tactical approach that persisted until near the end of the colonial era.” The founders of Virginia, for example, accepted war as a likely result of their territorial ambitions, and they anticipated violence from the beginning. When Capt. Christopher Newport’s exploring party first set foot on the Chesapeake coast, his men wore the armor of European combat and carried muskets and swords. They soon were attacked by Indians firing arrows and wielding tomahawks. Already “in England’s first permanent colony, warfare had begun.”

Ferling observes that as harsh as war was in Europe at the dawn of the seventeenth century, it became even more devastating in the New World. English colonists initiated an age of total war American style, which they fashioned so as to respond most effectively to their environment, their resources, and their adversaries. Without large armies, which could scarcely have performed effectively in the wilderness in any case, they turned from formal combat and professional officers to small-unit operations and unorthodox tactics under local leaders who gained expertise in irregular warfare. Unlike Europeans after 1648 or so, they did not curtail cruelty and carnage but rather sought to maximize them. They wantonly razed fields and towns, butchered the weak and the helpless, tortured, maimed, and enslaved, and gave bounties for scalps.

Unfortunately, Ferling’s study often sacrifices the complexities of Indian-white warfare in favor of provocative but unsubstantiated generalizations, ignoring Wilcomb E. Washburn’s warning against a simplistic interpretation that equates the first “European contact with the Indians of the East Coast . . . with the establishment of a military beachhead.” Washburn, writing in 1978, held that there “was in fact a slower, less abrupt process of cautious feeling out of each party by the other, mutual accommodation according to what each had to offer the other, and eventual military confrontation over issues that are often obscure in their origin.”

Neglecting this process, Ferling devotes little space to deepening feelings of hostility toward the Indians—to how and when whites arrived at a desire to remove or exterminate the aboriginal tribes. It can


11 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, like several other historians mentioned in this essay, discerns a colonial desire for an absolute solution to the Indian menace (Settling with the Indians: The Meeting of English and Indian Cultures in America, 1580-1640 [Totowa, N.J., 1980], esp. chap. 9). That Virginians arrived at such a view by the second decade of settlement is the theme of Alden T. Vaughan, “Expulsion of the Salvages: English Policy and the Virginia Massacre of 1622,”
be argued that neither Europeans nor Indians had an original commitment to total war and that whites, with such tactics as burning crops and villages, better understood initially some of the psychological dimensions of warfare than did their opponents, who, as Ferling and Jennings indicate, were accustomed to an intertribal form of violence that usually took few lives and was seasonal and sporadic. But the Indians became more formidable adversaries after the early years of settlement, and James Axtell has stressed that they concentrated on “the guerrilla tactics for which they are justly famous” in response to European firepower.\textsuperscript{12}

We might consider the proposition that in respect to fighting methods there were American \textit{ways} of war—that English settlers were most unorthodox and barbaric in their conflicts with Indians throughout the colonial era, that they were more restrained in their confrontations with the French and Spanish, and that they were most civilized (if war can be that) in their struggle for Independence against their British motherland. The proposition is not necessarily meant to imply the absence, among the colonists, of a common ideology about the object of war, regardless of the identity of their opponents. The point is rather that different foes meant different military methods and ethics.

Ferling asserted that a century and a half of éclat in New World warfare offers a powerful explanation for the Americans’ response to Britain’s new imperial policy after 1763. Reacting against Whitehall’s measures to regiment and confine them, they “articulated a world view that can be characterized only as aggressive and expansionist. Its fulfillment hinged on the use of force, for which the colonists had been prepared by the long years of colonial warfare and the ideology, culture, and hubris that accompanied conflict.”\textsuperscript{13} Moving with broad strides across the decades from 1607 to 1783 and occasionally beyond, Ferling’s \textit{A Wilderness of Miseries} raises more questions than it answers. The biggest problem with this ambitious and thought-provoking monograph is that it implies that


\textsuperscript{13} Ferling, \textit{Wilderness of Miseries}, 155.
American thinking about warfare was “locked in” or frozen for nearly two centuries: it was seventeenth-century-style Indian conflict and little else—unremitting, ubiquitous, unorthodox, and cruel.\textsuperscript{14}

Ferling’s interpretation differs from those of the two most senior scholars in the field of colonial military history, Howard H. Peckham and Douglas Edward Leach, whose synthetic histories stress the development of orthodox military practices and the turn to formal campaigns during the imperial struggles for North America.\textsuperscript{15} Their emphases, like those of Lawrence H. Gipson, serve as a useful reminder of the continued impact of European military thought and practice on the colonials.\textsuperscript{16} The provincials, either alone or with British support, assembled expeditions for operations against Port Royal, Louisbourg, Quebec, and Montreal at one time or another between 1690 and 1745. Several thousand colonials were taken into the British army for the Cartagena campaign of 1741. Thomas L. Purvis has estimated conservatively that 11,000 Americans served in the British regular forces in the Seven Years’ War, alongside 20,000 redcoats.\textsuperscript{17}

Without doubt, George Washington’s career in arms during that final Anglo-French contest for empire lends support for the Peckham-Leach-


\textsuperscript{17} See Purvis’s preliminary statement in “Colonial American Participation in the Seven Years’ War, 1755-1763” (paper presented at the General Brown Conference at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, 1983). I am indebted to Professor Purvis for providing a breakdown on British and colonial manpower in the king’s regular army.
Gipson approach. While Washington and dozens of other provincials failed in their designs to obtain British officers’ commissions, their ambitions attest to the lure of professional soldiering in America. As I endeavored to demonstrate in George Washington and the American Military Tradition, Washington thought and acted like a military professional, and during the Braddock and Forbes campaigns, he took advantage of his opportunity to study closely the procedures of a regular army. Consequently, in his own Virginia Regiment he stressed strict discipline and formal training instructed by European military literature, which was required reading for his officers. Since his command elicited high praise from British senior officers while campaigning in South Carolina and Pennsylvania, Washington may not have exaggerated when he claimed that “nothing but Commissions from his Majesty” were required to make his Virginia Regiment “as regular a Corps as any [British unit] upon the Continent.”¹⁸

The evidence thus far presented appears preparatory to the book that, by integrating military history into the general framework of early American studies, will indicate how British America made war. Authors contemplating such a volume face a formidable task because, among other reasons, they must discover what war meant to the colonists in different times and places. Only then can they weave those variations into the larger fabric of war and society over more than a century and a half.

We know a great deal more about the Seven Years’ War than we do about any other imperial conflict, but most of that knowledge is about New England. That region has probably been at the center of the scholarly action because of its heavy involvement in the Anglo-American military effort between 1755 and 1760. Purvis’s ongoing work on the Seven Years’ War bears out the last observation on New England’s role. During this struggle, which ranked fourth among all American wars (behind the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II) in the percentage of free white males engaged in military service, northerners—principally New Englanders—shouldered a disproportionate share of the burden: in the southern colonies only one of eight free white males bore arms, in contrast to two of five of their counterparts in provinces north of Maryland.¹⁹ The marked disparity shown by these figures came as no surprise to observers in both regions and is partly explained by the fact that the northern colonies felt more immediately threatened. In 1754 the


¹⁹Purvis, “Colonial American Participation in the Seven Years’ War, 1755-1763,” 9-10, as well as more recent information from the author.
Massachusetts General Court asserted that the provinces south of the Hudson would fail to fulfill their obligations were Franklin's Plan of Union adopted, since they were "but little disposed to and less acquainted with affairs of war."20 A few years later Washington echoed the Bay Colony's judgment. "Virginia is a Country young in War," he conceded, and before Maj. Gen. Edward Braddock's campaign had enjoyed "Tranquil Peace; never studying War or Warfare."21 Similar opinions were probably even more widely held at the time of Lexington and Concord, and, as is well known, they partly explain the appointment of Washington as commander in chief of the Continental army, a selection designed to rouse southern support for the clash with Britain.22

Was there more than a statistical basis—numbers of men in service—to distinguish between northern and southern military experiences and attitudes? Can we move behind the broad American generalizations of historians such as Shy and Ferling? Will any such generalizations hold up under close, comparative inspection? We have begun to receive answers for Massachusetts and Connecticut from studies that, collectively, view war-making in its political, religious, and social dimensions. Two recent complementary monographs concentrate on Massachusetts: William Pencak's *War, Politics, and Revolution in Provincial Massachusetts* and Fred Anderson's *A People's Army: Massachusetts Soldiers and Society in the Seven Years' War.*23

Pencak employs the telescope to bring into view nearly a century of conflict, from the Glorious Revolution to the American Revolution. Though not without its problems, particularly in generalizing about whig and tory leadership in the Revolution, his volume offers a meaty diet for students of war and political development. One's sense of the uniqueness of each colony's encounters with war is reinforced by Pencak's stress on the Bay Colony's strategic location, which made it more familiar with war than any other British mainland dependency. As a result of the American versions of the first two imperial conflicts, King William's War and Queen Anne's War, the colony drew closer to the mother country, reversing the pattern of their seventeenth-century relationship, because Massachusetts was weak and needed royal sustenance. Later, the pattern reversed again. As the colony grew stronger and as its contributions mounted during King George's War and the French and Indian War, tensions between Whitehall

and Massachusetts increased, as did political divisions within the province between its “court” and “country” political factions.

Not all specialists will agree with Pencak’s treatment of these prerogative and popular factional groupings over such a long span, and even he notes that they were “shifting, unorganized coalitions,” but we must grant that political alignments in the General Court were shaped in considerable part by the crown’s repeated calls for soldiers and supplies and by the economic consequences of the imperial frays, including problems of retiring wartime debts and creating a stable currency. Nor can one gainsay Pencak’s judgment that “for over half of the period between 1689 and 1765 Massachusetts mustered and taxed its inhabitants to a degree unduplicated in any other British colony,” though further proof is required for his arresting proposition that the last two Anglo-French confrontations produced an institutional transformation in Massachusetts quite similar to the state-building process occurring in Europe. In any case, the colony’s wartime contributions came from a people who “had not been directly attacked since the early days of the eighteenth century.” British claims after 1763 that America had not contributed its fair share to the last imperial struggle were received in Massachusetts as a slap in the face, as were the “severe, undeserved burdens” imposed by Britain’s unilateral and abrupt alteration in the relationship that left Massachusetts’s citizens “more aggrieved” than those of “any other colony.”

While Pencak illuminates the four imperial clashes from the vantage point of Boston, focusing on politics, Anderson applies the microscope to Massachusetts provincial soldiers of the Seven Years’ War, focusing on their social characteristics and, to a lesser degree, on their religious principles. The result is a strikingly original monograph that has no parallel in the library of military studies to 1815.

It has been a commonplace in recent years to depict early American military units, in both the colonial wars and the struggle for Independence, as drawn from the marginal elements of their communities and therefore as having minimal commitment to the values of their society and its war-making objectives. Because these soldiers do not figure importantly in such public records as tax lists and deed books, they have been categorized as permanently poor and socially surplus. It follows that only coercion or economic desperation can explain their presence under the colors. Thus they resembled European armies, most notably the British establishment, with its redcoats sucked from the underside of society—the flotsam of humanity.

Anderson’s evidence challenges the prevailing notion of “a Malthusian crisis of overpopulation . . . afflicting the seacoast” of Massachusetts in the first half of the eighteenth century. Relying heavily but not exclusively on quantifiable data from muster rolls in the Massachusetts Archives (show-

24 Pencak, War, Politics, and Revolution, 5, xi, xii, 6.
25 The literature on the socioeconomic makeup of the Continental army is discussed below.
ing age, birthplace, residence, civilian occupation, and condition of
service), he finds that a high percentage of soldiers in the province’s
regiments were not “proletarians” but offspring “of a society and economy
that constantly generated males who were temporarily available for military
service.” Many young men, awaiting their inheritance in land or other
forms, lived through a time of “prolonged dependence”—from mid-teens
to mid-twenties—when they might hire themselves out or, alternatively,
accept reasonably good pay in the provincial forces.26

Moving the argument another step, Anderson attributes large numbers
of enlistments to factors that were not necessarily or essentially economic.
Family and community pressures figured prominently: men joined rela-
tives who were recruiting companies or were themselves signing up, or
they answered appeals from local dignitaries who might be friends and
neighbors. There was thus a close linkage between officers and men that
was nonsensical to British commanders, whose pride of rank set them far
above the common soldiers. “[A] provincial army,” observes Anderson,
“was in fact a confederation of tiny war bands, bound together less by the
formal relationships of command than by an organic network of kinship
and personal loyalties.”27

An army of upstanding citizens, however youthful and modest in
economic terms, was objectionable to British professionals not only
because of its democratic internal behavior but also because of its
adherence to New England contractual principles, upon which the Mas-
sachusetts regiments were formed and by which they acted. In 1756 Lord
Loudoun, British commander in chief in North America, sparked a storm
when he endeavored to assume control over provincials raised only for
that year to attack the French at Crown Point and Ticonderoga. The
Massachusetts men felt that Loudoun, in trying to alter their terms of
service, violated a contract to which he had never been a party. “Theirs
was an argument especially resonant in New England,” explains Anderson,
“a society fairly steeped in covenants: marriage covenants binding hus-
bands and wives, church covenants among members of congregations, the
great covenant of salvation between God and his chosen people.”28

The meaning of the war itself, in Anderson’s view, was culturally
grounded in Massachusetts’s past, specifically in its religious tradition.
This is not to deny the importance of community pressures or of personal
desires for pay and booty, but to suggest, more deeply, that religion
provided a powerful motivating drive, as did long-standing fears and
hatred of France and “poverty.” Indeed, the two were connected, as

26 Anderson, People’s Army, chap. 2, quotations on pp. 28, 33, and “A People’s
Army: Provincial Military Service in Massachusetts during the Seven Years’ War,”
27 Anderson, People’s Army, 48.
28 Ibid., chap. 6, and “Why Did Colonial New Englanders Make Bad Soldiers?
Contractual Principles and Military Conduct during the Seven Years’ War,” WMQ,
ministers made plain when they “placed the struggle firmly in [New England’s] providentialist tradition,” even to the point of apocalyptically “identify[ing] the French king with Antichrist and the events of the conflict with the fulfillment of the last prophecies.” New Englanders tended strongly to see the war in terms of religious symbols and rhetoric: victory would surely bring the commencement of the millennium, to say nothing of the acquisition of tracts of virgin acreage for God’s chosen flock.29

Since Anderson’s account does not advance beyond 1763, it is not possible to perceive distinctly the influence of military service on the subsequent lives of Massachusetts soldiers. But Anderson surely has sound footing in underscoring their rare opportunity to participate in a common cause that united males from every part of a rural, insular society where one’s town was one’s country. Massachusetts veterans could pride themselves on their role in the victories of the empire and their own province. They could also reflect back, with satisfaction, on a collective undertaking that had brought them together as a people and had revealed their sharing of traits and ideals that were so different from those of the king’s professional army. Accordingly, Anderson concludes, they gained a “sense of themselves as a distinct people.”30

A People’s Army, like any book that launches so broad an assault on well-entrenched interpretations, will undoubtedly prompt counterattacks on some fronts as well as charges that the author has put down his weapons too quickly, leaving pockets of resistance—unanswered questions—to be dealt with. Members of what may be designated the Lockridge school, which formulated for colonial New England the “Malthusian” thesis of economic stagnation accompanied by stratification of wealth and mounting social anxieties not unrelated to the American Revolution,31 may fire back that Anderson’s quantitative data for the socioeconomic composition of the Massachusetts army are drawn too exclusively from 1756 military records, that a more persuasive case might have been made had such material existed for 1758, when a larger number of men bore arms, and that the overall terrain of American military history shows that the more protracted the conflict, the more likely the need to scrape the bottom of the barrel of human resources. Pencak, whose work reflects these society-in-crisis explanations, agrees with Anderson about the great

29 Anderson, People’s Army, 22, 155-157, chap. 7, quotations on p. 156.
enthusiasm for war against France and speaks of the "missionary zeal" over the decades "to attack Canada repeatedly." But Pencak speculates that much of the Bay Colony's "militant enthusiasm" can be ascribed to a desire for release from economic and social woes as described by the Lockridge school.\textsuperscript{32} As for religious motivations, it remains to be seen whether this emphasis on providentialist and millennialist thinking has been overstated, especially in view of Melvin B. Endy, Jr.'s downplaying of the importance of such thought during the War of Independence.\textsuperscript{33}

Those who take the field in subsequent scholarly forays should also test Anderson's conclusion that the Bay Colony army, "a confederation of tiny war bands," did in actuality develop a concept of oneness, for the evidence for the transformation is not as fully spelled out as one would like. We also would profit from knowing whether the Massachusetts soldiers' awareness of their cultural separation from their redcoat counterparts weakens the theory of an eighteenth-century anglicization of America, a notion that was first expressed with regard to the colony of Massachusetts,\textsuperscript{34} or whether, to posit an alternative hypothesis, it was a factor in halting this Europeanization of the king's mainland dependencies.

A recently completed doctoral dissertation by Harold E. Selesky casts valuable new light on the complexity and diversity of military experiences from one New England colony to another. Selesky's "Military Leadership in an American Colonial Society: Connecticut, 1635-1785," intersects at a number of points with the monographs of both Pencak and Anderson. Political divisions over military matters were never as intense and sustained in Connecticut as in Massachusetts. The colony's governor was not a royal appointee intent on creating a court party, and there was general agreement among executives and legislators that cooperation with imperial authorities in wartime was probably vital to the retention of the colony's charter. Having no exposed frontier, Connecticut faced few threats to its survival; its people "never had to fight a guerrilla war against any tribe" and were consequently unaccustomed "to fight Indian-style."\textsuperscript{35} Perhaps for the same reason, the militia declined during the eighteenth century.\textsuperscript{36} Connecticut's forces mingled features of militia and regular

\textsuperscript{32} Pencak, \textit{War, Politics, and Revolution}, 9, 122.
\textsuperscript{35} Selesky, "Military Leadership" (Yale University, 1984), xv, xvi.
\textsuperscript{36} Various factors, sometimes differing from colony to colony, contributed to the decline of the militia, which was well underway in some provinces by the end of the 17th century, if not earlier. The best overall statement on the matter is John
service: men were recruited by promises of bounties, organized into expeditionary regiments, and commanded by officers who, for colonials, exhibited a good deal of military professionalism.

Selesky pays particular attention to the Seven Years’ War, and some of his conclusions converge with Anderson’s for Massachusetts, while others vary to some extent. Though he discovers little evidence of promotional activity by ministers, couched in the flaming rhetoric of their brethren to the north, he suggests that Connecticut’s military exertions, relative to its economic and human resources, may have surpassed the Bay Colony’s. He has, at any rate, no quarrel with Gipson’s assertion that Connecticut compiled “the most highly creditable” record of any of the colonies.\(^{37}\) This record helped give its folk the confidence, a decade later, to engage in war against Britain itself.\(^{38}\)

Though Selesky does not address the question of Malthusian crisis in Connecticut, and though his colony lacks the demographic documentation available to Anderson in the Massachusetts military records, he believes the preponderance of Connecticut soldiers in the 1750s to have been young and poor. Still, they were hardly the social pariahs that redcoats allegedly were, but were marking time, with reasonably good prospects of upward mobility. Selesky, like Anderson, finds that family and community incentives often account for initial enlistments. He looks much more closely than Anderson at the identity of officers and their relationship with the rank and file. Many officers had themselves been former enlisted men, and they were chosen to be officers not because of their social status but because of their ability to secure recruits. The high quality of Connecticut’s military leadership, combined with the good pay that came from William Pitt’s program of subsidizing the provincial war machine, explains why men continued in service for a succession of one-year enlistments. “By 1762,” writes Selesky, “British subsidies had twisted Connecticut’s

---


military system into a colonial version of a mercenary professional army, an aberration which Connecticut society was neither sufficiently wealthy nor stratified to have developed on its own.\textsuperscript{39}

That American military methods and attitudes were also regionally variable appears when one compares the picture presented for New England by Pencak, Anderson, and Selesky with the portrait of Virginia offered by James Titus in "Soldiers When They Chose to Be So: Virginians at War, 1754-1763."\textsuperscript{40} This doctoral dissertation builds an arresting case for an unflattering verdict on war-making in the Old Dominion, where the Seven Years' War was highly unpopular. Early in the conflict, states Titus, "the members of the House of Burgesses quickly sensed that most Virginians saw no issues worth fighting for." The reason was, of course, that they hardly felt threatened by events in the remote interior of the continent but regarded the reputed French menace as no more than a ploy to further the transmontane ambitions of Gov. Robert Dinwiddie and the Ohio Company. Accordingly, Virginians found few reasons to volunteer, family and community pressures were slight, and divines scarcely wasted their breath on appeals laced with references to patriotism or popery. Confronting such resistance and unwilling to risk disorder among the gentry and yeomanry, the government dipped deep for fighting men, drawing especially upon the overpopulated tidewater region. When recruitment lagged, as it soon did, authorities resorted to conscription, which invariably excluded the freeholders.\textsuperscript{41}

Titus's data for the rank and file resemble Anderson's in scope and particularity but yield different conclusions. Virginia's conscripts were somewhat older than Massachusetts's recruits and were likely to have been born outside the Old Dominion and often outside the colonies altogether. The demographic and occupational data indicate that Virginia's troops were not cut from the same social and economic cloth as the Massachusetts soldiers described by Anderson. High-ranking Virginians said as much at the time. Thus the county lieutenant of Fairfax referred to his draftees as "almost naked and in poor condition," and Dinwiddie described the pool of available manpower as "the Lowest Class of our People."\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Selesky, "Military Leadership," chap. 4, parts 3-5, quotation on p. 217. Selesky turned up only one company muster roll containing information on occupations and places of birth (ibid., 309, n. 25).

\textsuperscript{40} James Russell Wade Titus, "Soldiers When They Chose to Be So" (Rutgers University, 1983).

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., particularly chap. 1, quotation on p. 270. Titus's account owes something to the convincing explanation of Virginia's role in precipitating the Anglo-French crisis in Patrice Louis-René Higonnet, "The Origins of the Seven Years' War," Journal of Modern History, XL (1968), 57-90, notably 60-65.

\textsuperscript{42} Titus made use of 22 company "size" rolls in the Washington Papers in the Library of Congress, all from 1756-1757, a period when "provincial authorities relied on a manpower policy of compulsion" ("Soldiers When They Chose to Be So," 154). For Titus's detailed evaluation see ibid., 154-165, quotations on p. 154. Ferling endeavors to modify somewhat Titus's unflattering portrait of the Virginia
If Virginia refused to require or even strongly encourage productive citizens to take the field, it also failed in efforts to compel marginal folk to do so in numbers adequate to fight a war. The latter evaded conscription and, when caught, deserted in droves. The government ultimately got the message. "In the final analysis," declares Titus, "the gentry abandoned conscription—the cornerstone of their original military policy—because they did not possess the means to impose it." Such general resistance, particularly when successful, contributed to the decline of social deference. During wartime, at any rate, the "lower class" refused to kowtow—to risk themselves in compulsory military service imposed by the planter elite, service the elite itself was reluctant to perform. Only after the assembly turned to liberal enlistment bounties in 1758 were Virginia's "expendables" willing to provide the province with substantial military manpower.43

Despite the insights and originality of the scholarship reviewed in this section, it goes only so far in illuminating the queries initiated by Shy and Ferling. These new accounts, of course, are trained largely on the Seven Years' War. Purvis's investigation of mobilization during that struggle is still in progress; and the impact of Selesky's and Titus's dissertations cannot be gauged until they appear in print. There are, to be sure, older works that bear on individual colonies at war, including a shelf of doctoral tomes; but they are narrow in compass. Given the quality of the contributions of Pencak, Anderson, and Selesky, there is less need for further monographs on New England in the final Anglo-French confrontation before the American Revolution than for fresh studies of the middle and southern colonies. The unfortunate neglect of Virginia and Maryland in time of conflict—save for Titus's offering—seems particularly surprising since the societal dimensions of wars and military organizations should

---

have been rewarding topics for the growing company of social historians who, for nearly two decades, have delved into so many areas of Chesapeake life before Independence.

Turning to the burgeoning literature on colonial attitudes toward British military administrators and regular forces, we find that the evidence is more than a little contradictory. It indicates that the colonists had greater contact with metropolitan military authority than we once realized and that, as we shall see, much of that contact was acrimonious. It also, however, raises doubts whether the provincials were as "ideological" about standing armies as they have been described by historians of Anglo-American commonwealth or radical whig thought. Indeed, as the following discussion will suggest, some recent studies strongly indicate that the colonists were often pragmatic about standing armies, both British and, later, American regular establishments, particularly when those forces conducted themselves with sensitivity to civilian concerns.

The extent of American interaction with royal military power long before the Seven Years' War figures crucially in Stephen Saunders Webb's effort at a landmark reinterpretation of the relationship between the colonies and the mother country. Webb argues for the preeminent importance of military considerations, as opposed to the conventional emphasis on the Navigation Acts and other commercial factors, in giving shape to the empire. A system of imperial control, gradually implanted in the colonies, reached its full form, first in Jamaica and then in Virginia, by the early 1680s. More political than economic, the system was maintained by what Webb describes as "garrison government," a kind of military rule over civilian populations employed initially in Ireland, then in Scotland, and during the Restoration in parts of England itself. Webb demonstrates that between 1660 and 1727 almost 87.5 percent of governors of royal colonies were military officers, 65 percent of whom had seen service as garrison commanders. The title of governor-general accurately stated their dual political and military roles.

Undoubtedly, as Webb says, earlier investigators such as Charles M. Andrews and other members of the so-called Imperial school slighted the part of military executives in extending and solidifying the empire, just as in a broader sense they did not devote adequate attention to governmental involvement in imperial development. The commercial and military concepts of empire, in Webb's estimation, continued in tension with each other until the War of Independence. The Walpole regime of the 1720s and 1730s subordinated garrison government to ascendant commercial interests, but the international conflicts of 1739-1748 and 1754-1763...


45 Webb, Governors-General, Appendix, 467-513.
restored the military vision of empire to dominance. When in 1775 Lord Dunmore's marines seized the public magazine in Williamsburg and General Gage's redcoats sought to confiscate provincial military stores at Concord, they acted within an age-old pattern of garrison government.

Since Webb has published only the first of three projected volumes, which brings his detailed account to 1681, it is difficult to pass judgment on his thesis of garrison government. He has framed his larger subject, however, in this initial installment and in a provocative article. While he adduces some evidence for the reality of garrison government in Jamaica and Virginia in the seventeenth century, and while he indicates that he will subsequently document the same claim for the Dominion of New England, he has not yet convincingly demonstrated a conscious and persistent effort to that same end on the part of the metropolitan government from the Restoration to the American Revolution. Perhaps Webb needs to look more closely at the possibility that governors may have been chosen less for their military ability per se and more for their administrative talent, their mobility, and their claim to royal reward. Surely, patronage had much to do with the selection of garrison governors, whose posts might be no more than sinecures, as with Lord Orkney, who never set foot in Virginia during his long tenure (1705-1737) as chief executive. And how did London officialdom provide these soldier-governors with muscle? Had Whitehall consistently spent even modest sums for provincial military establishments or stationed substantial numbers of troops in the colonies in peacetime, one would be inclined, at this preliminary juncture, to give considerable weight to Webb's thesis. In time, of course, his argument may come to rest on firmer foundations, especially if he can provide impressive evidence that the colonists themselves perceived royal government in the terms he portrays it. Otherwise, one can hardly accept the contention that the American Revolution "was a reaction to a century and a quarter's experience of a militarized executive." 47

In any case, Webb and other students of the imperial relationship will need to address Douglas Edward Leach's Roots of Conflict: British Armed

46 Quite recently, however, Webb has sought to strengthen his claim that Virginia and New England were drawn more closely into Whitehall's orbit following Bacon's Rebellion and King Philip's War. Because of these and other events of "1676, the American colonies lost—and lost for a century to come—their political independence" (1676: The End of American Independence [New York, 1984], xv).

47 Webb, Governors-General, 4. My evaluation of the "garrison-government" thesis was written before the appearance of Richard R. Johnson's penetrating analysis of Webb's overall ouvre, which is followed by Webb's rejoinder (Johnson, "The Imperial Webb: The Thesis of Garrison Government in Early America Considered," WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIII [1986], 408-430; Webb, "The Data and Theory of Restoration Empire," ibid., 431-459; see also "Communications" by Johnson and by Wilcomb E. Washburn, ibid., XLIV [1987], 158-161).
 Forces and Colonial Americans, 1677-1763, a product of vast research in unpublished British sources by a historian who always displays the ability to make complex matters understandable without oversimplifying them. If Leach has not followed a wholly untrodden path, he has made all of the stops along the way, analyzing episodes of discord between British regular forces and colonials in seventeenth-century Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York, and going on to dissect Anglo-American antagonisms during the eighteenth-century imperial wars. His most original chapter chronicles a century of controversy between the Royal Navy and colonials over coastal defense, enforcement of the Navigation Acts, wartime trade with the enemy, amenities owed to British vessels and their crews, and impressment.

Leach’s book shows that not all British-American tensions resulted from any single kind of military confrontation. His portrayal of seventeenth-century altercations may appear to reinforce Webb’s conception of garrison government, for provincial executives in Virginia, Massachusetts, and New York could at times call upon royal troops to back them up. Though those forces were scarcely tyrannical or even very heavy-handed, Leach believes that they were seen by civilians as instruments of oppression. In one form or another, the problems in the following century stemmed from British endeavors to secure colonial cooperation in wars against the French and Spanish; in those wars the governors appear more often than not to have been caught in the middle between their New World constituents and British military and naval commanders. In the Louisbourg campaign of 1745, however, Leach reminds us that the embroilments were not at the highest civil and military levels but rather between inferior officers and enlisted men of the New England army and the inferior officers and seamen of the Royal Navy. Two of Leach’s seven chapters deal with the Seven Years’ War, showing how colonists from various stations of life complained of British behavior—assemblymen who felt royal demands for aid were usually unreasonable, farmers and shopkeepers who reacted against the impressment of wagons and the enlistment of indentured servants, homeowners and tavernkeepers who resisted the quartering of redcoats in their midst, and jack tars who battled naval impressment gangs.

Equally significant in eroding Anglo-American good will, in Leach’s judgment, was the fact that provincial soldiers resented their treatment at the hands of imperious Britons who failed to recognize their wartime contributions and treated them as militarily inferior and more or less incompetent. This is not a previously untold story, but Leach garnishes it with fresh detail. His findings are consistent with Anderson’s conclusions on that topic regarding the Massachusetts forces and harmonize with Alan Rogers’s Empire and Liberty: American Resistance to British Authority,

48 Leach, Roots of Conflict (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986).
1755-1763, which traces rather briefly both political and military controversies between the colonists and imperial authorities.49

What did this century-long pattern of friction and antagonism mean? To Leach, it contained for the Americans the seeds of alienation from the empire. No doubt there is much to be said for such an interpretation. Since the colonists had been far from happy with the British army that had been in America partly at least to defend them as well as to expand the frontiers of the empire in the 1750s, it would seem to follow logically that to retain thousands of redcoats there in peacetime would cause those seeds to germinate in the 1760s and early 1770s.

This conclusion, however, does not dovetail with John Shy's disclosures for the latter period. Admittedly, Shy, in Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution, was mainly interested in pursuing a single question: "What was the army doing in America?" Only secondarily did he touch on "American attitudes and behavior toward the army."50 But the evidence presented plainly implies that few colonials were originally suspicious of the British military presence after the Treaty of Paris. And, in fact, though the thought of using the regiments to make Americans toe the line was not entirely absent from some English minds, their major mission was to prevent controversy, not to provoke it, by securing the new imperial possessions and by serving as a frontier police force to keep whites off Indian lands and regulate the fur trade.51 Though there were initially some disputes over quartering in the Middle Colonies, British authorities were hardly dictatorial or oppressive in military matters—a striking exception was the New York Restraining Act of 1767—and even when substantial numbers of units were moved from the frontier to the seaboard settlements beginning in 1768, the redcoats got along reasonably well with the populace. Relations between the colonial governments, including New York, improved to the point that Parliament amended the American Quartering Act to allow the colonies to enact any billeting statutes that adequately met the army's needs. Boston, needless to say, was an exception to these generalizations since it suffered punishment in the form of crimson regiments in the city from 1768 to 1770 and again in 1774 and 1775. But, as Shy demonstrates, even the events surrounding the Boston Massacre itself did not brew a tempest against redcoats stationed elsewhere, save briefly in New York, nor did they trigger demands that the king's regiments be withdrawn from the colonies. "The American response ...
can only be described as ambivalent." Such evidence led Shy to assume a
cautious position: "The safest conclusion about the American attitude
toward British troops is that, though hardening noticeably after 1768 [his
evidence for this comes almost exclusively from Massachusetts and New
York], it contained almost as much sympathy as hostility until late in the
prewar struggle."52

One has the hunch that Shy was surprised by his own reading of the
evidence, as was at least one of his reviewers, Merrill Jensen, who, while
generally commending Toward Lexington as finely tuned institutional
history, could not accept Shy's verdict, however qualified, on civil-military
relations. Instead, Jensen held to the notion "that the presence of the
British army in America produced far more widespread reactions in
America than this book indicates."53

But that was not the case in New Jersey, according to Larry R. Gerlach,
whose look at civil-military interactions there put him in Shy's corner.
New Jersey "during the pre-Revolutionary decade supported proportion-
ally (and at times actually) a larger contingent of royal troops" than any
other North American dependency. When the 26th Regiment left the
province in 1770, it received commendation for its behavior from all
quarters, and its officers attended a farewell dinner in their honor. Its
replacement was the 29th Regiment, but neither news of that regiment's
involvement in the recent Boston Massacre nor its subsequent arrival in
the province prompted public ill will; in time, it too was complimented for
"exemplary Conduct." Gerlach uncovers slight evidence of animus toward
the army, mainly in areas where troops were not stationed; it cropped up
in the legislature, but usually in the context of partisan politics; and it was
not infrequently voiced by Quakers, who, however, sometimes voted for
army appropriations. Gerlach concludes that "the army had ceased to be
an issue in New Jersey on the eve of the Revolution," as late as the
summer of 1774.54

How do the revelations of Shy and Gerlach mesh with venerable
concepts of deep-seated ideological fears of centrally controlled armed
forces, apprehensions that are normally depicted as endemic in colonial
America? Though neither of these authors was mainly concerned with the
history of ideas, one discerns in their narratives implications that Ameri-
cans' attitudes were not rigid and doctrinaire. Just as we need to plumb the
military experiences of individual colonies over time before venturing to
generalize about American views of war, so, too, we need monographs
that delve into colonial thinking about armies to determine whether or
how attitudes mutated from one century to the next. One might assume,

52 Shy, Toward Lexington, 385, 391.
54 Gerlach, "Soldiers and Citizens: The British Army in New Jersey on the Eve
of the Revolution," New Jersey History, XCIII (1975), 5-36, quotations on pp. 5-6,
33, 35, and Prologue to Independence: New Jersey in the Coming of the American
given the increasing contact with regulars in the eighteenth century, that colonial concerns over their presence would have mounted.

That they should have done so is strongly suggested by Bernard Bailyn and J.G.A. Pocock in well-known studies of the acclimatization of radical whig or commonwealth ideology in the colonies. This ideology stressed the evils of consolidated political power—ever rapacious and encroaching—that invariably brought with it a standing army paid for and permanently maintained by the central government. Whether stationed among the people to act directly against them or merely to intimidate them by its existence, a standing army was associated with conspiracies, corruption, loss of public virtue, and eventually the death of liberty. Such fears, according to Bailyn, played an important role in triggering revolutionary impulses among Americans who saw in “the MONSTER of a standing ARMY” a “PLAN . . . systematically laid . . . by the British ministry . . . for enslaving America.”

Neither Pocock nor Bailyn, however, digs much below the level of published political discourse to explore popular attitudes, nor has any scholar followed, for America, the lead given by Lois G. Schwoerer’s study of anti-army sentiment in seventeenth-century England. A useful essay by T. H. Breen shows that the principle of civil control over the military was firmly implanted by 1650 in Massachusetts, where the militia was shaped in reaction to the military schemes of Charles I and where the magistrates of Boston warned, in 1638, against “a standing authority of military men, which might easily, in time, overthrow the civil power.”

Still, attitudes toward armies remain largely unexamined for the seventeenth century. The scholar who explores them will surely consider the ramifications in the popular mind of numerous dangerous encounters with British troops—in 1651-1652, when imperial muscle brought Virginia and Barbados into line; in 1655, when regiments landed in Jamaica as part of Cromwell’s “Western Design”; in 1664-1673, when New York was under military control; in 1676, when an army contingent was dispatched to Virginia during Bacon’s Rebellion; in 1686, when Sir Edmund Andros, governor of the Dominion of New England, arrived with a contingent of soldiers; and in 1689-1690, when redcoats descended on New York to aid in suppressing Leisler’s Rebellion.

If the picture for the seventeenth century is fragmentary and obscure,


what then of the eighteenth? We may accept, in large part, Leach's account of frictions generated by the imperial wars and still maintain that Americans were not unduly exercised by the British military presence, provided that one or more "ifs" fall into place: if the army was seen as necessary for provincial defense (as it was during periods of Anglo-French conflict), if it succeeded against the enemy, if it provided an economic windfall for the provinces in general and for towns and cities in particular, if its officers were diplomatic rather than imperious and condescending in dealing with civilians (as some like Loudoun were and others like Forbes were not), and if the rank and file were kept under tight control. That these provisos are not mere "ifs," but contain more than a semblance of factual reality, is suggested by the near-absence of sharp public protests against the stationing of British troops, though the troops' deportment was commonly criticized. Redcoats were not an unmixed curse. Even in confrontations over quartering or the recruiting of servants for the army, the citizens' plea was not so much that the soldiers leave as that they be made to behave.

Recent scholarship, which illuminates colonial thought regarding the role of military forces, provides more ammunition for the views of Gerlach and Shy than for those of Pocock and Bailyn. John Phillip Reid, a legal scholar who claims that the subject of radical whig thought in America has received excessive attention, articulates an approach that emphasizes the crucial role of law in explaining American attitudes toward standing armies and other issues associated with the coming of the Revolution.58 Zeroing in on Massachusetts in the late 1760s and early 1770s, Reid detects only minimal complaints about the British army in America before regiments descended on Boston in 1768, and for some years after that, so far as his evidence shows, opposition was limited to the Bay Colony. The paucity of anti-redcoat fulminations may well be explained by what Reid calls the condition of law, which was still considered as much custom and community consensus as sovereign authority, and which was enforced by very effective legal institutions in Massachusetts and other colonies. British soldiers, in peacetime and in some instances in wartime as well, were as much subject to local law as the colonists themselves. Moreover, magistrates had to give permission for troops to be used against civilians, and royal councils had to assent before governors could declare martial law. If the British army at times appeared to be constitutionally impotent, even after it reached Boston, the explanation owes much to the condition of law in Massachusetts.

It was law, in the form of both institutions and ideas, that governed the colonists' reactions to the British army, according to Reid. From using local law, which was fairly effective in preventing abuses by the redcoats, Americans turned to legal arguments, rather than the radical whig thought

58 Reid, *In a Defiant Stance: The Conditions of Law in Massachusetts Bay, the Irish Comparison, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (University Park, Pa., 1977), and *In Defiance of the Law: The Standing-Army Controversy, the Two Constitutions, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1981).
described by Bailyn and Pocock, when they sought complete removal of
the king’s regiments, especially during and after 1774 in Massachusetts
following the arrival there of several thousand troops and the uniting of
civil and military authority in the province under Gen. Thomas Gage as
governor. In doing so, they drew upon a legal tradition that stemmed
primarily from seventeenth-century English concepts of customary con-
straints on arbitrary power, including the dictum that troops could not be
constitutionally imposed on civilian communities without the latter’s
consent. Americans, says Reid, adhered to the widely held view of the
previous century that there were certain things that Parliament could not
do. It was this “intellectual legacy of seventeenth-century English constitu-
tionalism from which the defenders of American opposition to military
intervention in government inherited not only the substance of their
arguments, but also much of their vocabulary.”

Reid’s revisionism invites comparison with Lawrence Delbert Cress’s
Citizens in Arms: The Army and the Militia in American Society to the War
of 1812, which also mines the ideological content of the standing-army
controversies. Cress’s most impressive chapters treat the decade and a half
before Independence and resonate with Reid’s views in concluding that
anti-redcoat sentiment in the colonies has been exaggerated and that
Americans thought and acted as moderate whigs during most of the
eighteenth century. Cress finds that “antiprofessionalism, probably the
most far-reaching aspect of radical Whig opposition to the standing army,
remained largely undeveloped [even] in New England during the late
1760s.”

His evidence, as Thomas P. Slaughter stresses in a review, thus
“constitutes an important challenge to Bailyn’s understanding of American
ideology.” But though Cress takes implicit exception on the matter of
attitudes toward standing armies before 1774, he draws back from an
explicit challenge to Bailyn’s model. Furthermore, he contends that the
radical whiggery of American thought broke through, with a vengeance,
after Parliament’s passage of the Coercive Acts, an argument already made
of War: Republican Theory and Military Practice during the American
Revolution.” Both authors show that Americans leaped to the attack on
two fronts. They declared that standing armies, in principle and in fact, had

59 Reid, In Defiance of the Law, 4. Jack P. Greene, who has advocated an older,
legalistic grammar of politics as opposed to a radical whig or commonwealth
ideology, has also penned a generally favorable evaluation of Reid’s scholarship.
See “Political Mimesis: A Consideration of the Historical and Cultural Roots of
Legislative Behavior in the British Colonies in the Eighteenth Century,” with a
response by Bernard Bailyn and Greene’s rejoinder, AHR, LXXV (1969),
337-367, and “From the Perspective of Law: Context and Legitimacy in the
Origins of the American Revolution,” South Atlantic Quarterly, LXXXV (1986),
56-77.

40.

61 WMQ, 3d Ser., XL (1983), 651.
always been all that radical whig pamphleteers said they were, and that militias, as the radical whigs had always claimed, were the only acceptable military force, being composed (in theory) of property-owning citizens who fought because they had a stake in society and who posed no threat to liberty, morality, or civil virtue.62

Whether Americans had become as ideological as Cress and White believe, or whether they were in part at least merely employing the only conventional anti-army rhetoric known to them, they moved to accommodate theory with reality after war broke out in 1775 and became "official" in 1776. They moved slowly, according to White, who states that initially Americans did not view Washington's Continentals as a standing army but, rather, as a republican army and therefore intellectually acceptable. This army offered no bounties, enlisted men only for twelve months or less, required recruits to provide their own weapons, and was commanded by a general who personified the citizen-soldier ideal by leaving his native acres to serve his country and by refusing to accept pay for performing his duties. Only in 1776, when a new army was formed—one that paid bounties and turned to long-term enlistments—were Washington's regiments likened to European armies and considered a potential threat to American liberties.63

There is yet another possible reason why so many colonists accepted an army of their own in 1775—whatever they thought of it later. Implicitly or explicitly, they recognized that there had been changing patterns in the way Americans made war. They had advanced from seventeenth-century militia to the eighteenth-century semiprofessional forces illuminated by Anderson, Seleskey, and Titus, and from there took a logical next step: a Continental army that initially bore a strong resemblance to the semiprofessional forces of the last war and that became increasingly professional—and increasingly of concern to a growing component of the civilian population—as the longest war in the nation's history before Vietnam dragged on. Accordingly, pragmatic and evolutionary explanations may be as significant as ideological predilections in accounting for the establishment of the Continental army in 1775.

The professionalism and performance record of the Continental army bulk large in the writings of Robert K. Wright, E. Wayne Carp, Paul David Nelson, Charles Royster, Richard H. Kohn, and others.64 These


64 Wright, The Continental Army (Washington, D.C., 1983), and "'Nor Is Their Standing Army to Be Despised': The Emergence of the Continental Army as a Military Institution," in Hoffman and Albert, eds., Arms and Independence, 50-74; Carp, To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783 (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1984); Nelson, Anthony Wayne:
historians picture the Continental army as more than an assortment of "ragtag and bobtail" that prevailed almost in spite of itself, owing to Washington's fortitude, an occasional battlefield miracle, French intervention, British mistakes, and geographical circumstances. That we need to consider the army as an institution in order to comprehend its staying power and performance is the theme of Wright's *The Continental Army*. In such matters as tactical and administrative organization, staff structure, and discipline, Washington and his lieutenants, with support and occasional guidance from Congress, fashioned a military system that lasted throughout the war. They did so, declares Wright, by blending colonial experience with viable British precedents and later with European continental military thinking as well. Never a static instrument, the army became increasingly "Europeanized," according to Wright, who correctly stresses the contributions of European professionals. These included Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who standardized drill procedures and served effectively as inspector general and as Washington's de facto chief of staff, as well as French officers who formed a first-rate corps of engineers, influenced the work of the topographical staff (which turned out better maps than those available to British commanders), and introduced into the army a scientific and technical tradition that would lead to the creation of the United States Military Academy and to the army's nineteenth-century role in the development of the West.  

While Wright does not train his sights on the supply services for long—they are brought into range elsewhere in the Office of Military History's special studies on the War of Independence, of which his monograph is a part—both he and Carp conclude that those services functioned reason-


Wright's *Continental Army* provides outline histories of the more than 170 regiments of the Continental army, along with maps and bibliographies essential to the investigation of the units of each state and Canada, a reminder that for the most part the army was structured along state rather than national boundaries. The book also offers what is probably the most useful general bibliography available on military aspects of the Revolution.

ably well, considering shortages of matériel and other impediments. One of Carp's objectives is "to describe and analyze the difficulties of supplying the Continental army with food, clothing, camp equipage, and medical aid." By showing how these problems cut across the logistical departments, Carp provides an integrated administrative history. He makes two specially noteworthy contributions. First, he illuminates the nationalist movement of the early 1780s by demonstrating that it originated as much or more with certain state-level leaders (frustrated over their failure to provide for the army) as with Congress, which has usually been credited with the first steps in behalf of centralized governmental authority. Second, Carp brings to the fore the 130 or so supply service officers, who, except for Nathanael Greene, Thomas Mifflin, and a few other department heads, have been generally ignored. Most of these officers were not unscrupulous and corrupt, as was charged then and later, but were honest, dedicated public servants with as much esprit de corps as the line officers. Dismally as the logistical agencies performed now and then, their failings would have been infinitely greater without the perseverance of unsung and overworked men such as Ephraim Blaine, who labored seven consecutive years in the commissary department, where he battled political inaptitude, inflation, and matériel shortages.67

Professionalism, as Carp reveals it among the supply officers, meant a desire to learn from the technical literature of military craft, to master the skills required in the performance of duties, and to develop an esprit de corps and a corporate identity. Accordingly, officers who aspired to professionalism tended to be harshly critical of the militia and to ignore the very solid contributions of part-time soldiers as constabulary units behind the lines, as partisan forces in upstate New York and the South, and as temporary replacements for depleted Continental divisions.68


Throughout American history the militia or national guard has been involved in local and colony-state politics, but military studies have scarcely touched that
Military professionalism, as it came to be defined by Karl von Clausewitz and other uniformed intellectuals in the following century, had other dimensions too, notably layers of formal education and a body of theoretical writings from which modern strategic studies emerged. But by any yardstick of their own generation, Washington and his officers made strenuous efforts to become professional, and their degree of success is only now becoming fully appreciated, although, as Lee Kennett reminds us, the officers of Rochambeau's expeditionary force were on the whole pleasantly surprised by the high quality of Washington's subordinates.

We still need a big book that will give us a collective portrait of the Continental officer corps. It should not ignore the officers' socioeconomic status, about which we know too little, nor should it avoid exploring


71 A valuable exception is the work of Mark Edward Lender, who reports that over 80% of New Jersey's officers came from the most affluent third of the state's population ("The Enlisted Line: The Continental Soldiers of New Jersey" [Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1975], 127-134, and "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade: The Continental Line as an American Standing Army," in Peter Karsten, ed., The Military in America: From the Colonial Era to the Present [New
their mentalité, into which Royster and Kohn have made promising probes, each demonstrating—from somewhat different perspectives—how the officers came to equate their personal interests with the cause of the Revolution generally.72 Finally, such a volume should examine officer continuity. Because of the heavy turnover in the Continental enlisted ranks, much of the army's stability over eight and a half years must have depended on a good deal of continuity within the officer complement, particularly at the company and field-grade levels, for only with such experienced leadership could thousands of new men be assimilated into the army every year or so without fatal consequences. How stable and effective was the officer component below the general officer level? Did those subordinates have opportunities to move up in rank? Did promotion prove to be a compelling incentive for remaining under arms? What percentage of regimental officers served for one, three, five years, or for the duration of the conflict?73

If we know too little about officers, we also need more information about the Continental rank and file, including their conduct in battle. We know whether they held firm or were swept away by an enemy charge, whether they won or lost, but not much else. Robert Middlekauff, who addresses the issue of soldiers' behavior in a thoughtful exploratory essay, emphasizes the intimacy of the eighteenth-century battlefield: American soldiers saw in close proximity both the enemy and their fellow Continentals, with whom they could communicate and "give one another moral or psychological support." Thus "the loneliness, the sense of isolation," described by combatants in recent wars probably had no parallel on Revolutionary War fronts, where men may well have experienced "a singular intensity of feeling uncommon in modern battles." Consequently, as Middlekauff suggests, the keys to the Continentals' performance are probably to be found in the quality of their officers and in the strength of their bonds with those who fought beside them. The presence of able, respected commanders and ties of affection might make men fight

---

York, 1980], 30, 31, 35-36). A useful comparative perspective showing the societal composition of the officer categories in the Georgian army before the American Revolution is available in Alan J. Guy, Oeconomy and Discipline: Officership and Administration in the British Army, 1714-63 (Manchester, 1985).


tenaciously, while their absence—in the face of a glistening line of advancing British steel—might explain those occasions when they broke and fled.\textsuperscript{74} No doubt, too, as Kohn remarks, one more likely found sinews of togetherness in older, more stable units unaffected by sharp fluctuations in enlistments. Unquestionably, Kohn has a valid admonition for academic campaigners when he decries our failure to distinguish a hard core of enlisted men left over from each annual requisition from such men in Washington’s camp as raw recruits, draftees, and paid substitutes. Kohn also compels us to broaden our earlier plea concerning American officers; we will have to dig more deeply to divine the truth about continuity (or lack thereof) for both enlisted and officer echelons of the Continental army.\textsuperscript{75}

Battlefield behavior has generated less scholarly interest than questions about the common soldiers’ immediate backgrounds, motives for enlisting, and willingness to stay on in the face of adversity. These subjects became a timely concern in the 1970s, when all our recent studies originated; the nation was painfully aware that the Vietnam War had been fought by Americans who came disproportionately from the minorities and the economically disadvantaged. Though these new accounts are not numerous—and only Mark E. Lender’s dissertation on the New Jersey Continental Line appears to be based on massive research—they all contain similar propositions about the low socioeconomic status of the rank and file, particularly after 1776, when manpower resources seemed to hit bottom.\textsuperscript{76} But, as Anderson and Selesky have cautioned us about


colonial troops in the Seven Years' War, we should not necessarily conclude—until we know more than we do at present—that the poor, who must have made up a majority of the Continental army, remained permanently in economic deprivation in the post-1783 decades. Their absence from the tax and property lists may only mean that many of them, as Anderson sought to demonstrate for Massachusetts provincials in the 1750s, awaited opportunities to move up in the world. Or, to take another example of the danger of overreliance on local records, we cannot assume perpetual poverty for veterans who died thirty or forty years after the war with a modest probate record because wills and property inventories may not mirror a former soldier's status one, two, or three decades earlier. The same caveat applies to veterans' pension statements, those marvelously rich sources for what happened to Washington's fighters both during and after their military service, sources which only in the last decade and a half have begun to be tapped. Like wills, the ex-soldiers' pension testimonials were penned late in life. They were often impeccable at that time, or they thought it necessary to present themselves as hard-pressed financially in order to qualify for federal assistance.\footnote{\textsuperscript{77}}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{77} Some 80,000 Revolutionary War pension claims were filed in the 19th century, composing 808 microfilm reels that may be purchased from the National Archives. A convenient finding aid is \textit{Index of Revolutionary War Pension Applications in the National Archives} (Washington, D.C., 1976). A recent issue of \textit{Prologue}, XV (1984), is devoted primarily to articles pertinent to the use of these pension records for historians. John C. Dann has edited 79 of the longest and most historically significant of veterans' reminiscences. Since many of them were dictated, they are one of the earliest examples of the gathering of oral history in America (\textit{The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence} [Chicago, 1980]). Dann's volume is in the Clements Library Bicentennial Studies series, a magnificent compilation of materials that illuminate the record of the Continental army in all its dimensions. The other publications in the series are J. Todd White and Charles H. Lesser, eds., \textit{Fighters for Independence: A Guide to Sources of Biographical Information on Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution} (Chicago, 1977); Howard H. Peckham, ed., \textit{Sources of American Independence: Selected Manuscripts from the Collections of the William L. Clements Library}, 2 vols.}
Nor should we automatically conclude, writes Royster, that the young and poor, who by their numbers kept the Continental army in the field, were motivated mainly by "economic need or ambition" rather than by "revolutionary ideas." To Royster, the dichotomy is "misleading," and he takes a squad of historians to task for creating it. Why, he asks, did most of the soldiers' counterparts in civilian life not succumb to the lure of bounties if the army was recognized as offering meaningful economic advantage to have-nots?\textsuperscript{78} Royster's salvo has drawn a counterblast from what might be labeled the Rutgers school, comprising Kohn, Lender, and James Kirby Martin, all of whom have practiced the new social history in the study of the common soldiers and have stressed—particularly Martin and Lender—tensions between officers and enlisted men in Washington's army. Kohn, for instance, insists that no historian has yet offered convincing documentation that enlistees were "largely motivated by love, ideals, patriotism, loyalty, dedication, conviction." While Martin and Lender agree with Kohn, they do argue that once the poor enlisted for their bounties, many of them eventually found an added motive for enduring hardships, eschewing desertion, and fighting impressively: they came to believe that the military success of the Revolution would provide them "a better life" in a "freer republican environment." Implicitly, at least, the Continental veterans proved to be the most thoroughgoing republicans of the Revolution, for by their collective conduct they had passed the demanding republican test of virtuous behavior.\textsuperscript{79}

An essay by Martin builds on this thesis of a republican soldiery, speculating that the troops' occasional mutinous behavior late in the war owing to shortages and broken promises can be described as a kind of political radicalism. The rebellious soldiers, as one veteran explained, did not wish to engage in indiscriminate violence, for they had become "truly patriotic" and "loved their country." But as republican citizens they had rights, and they insisted on expressing their concerns, even in disobedient ways, whenever they lacked meaningful alternatives.\textsuperscript{80} Martin does not


\textsuperscript{78} Royster, \textit{Revolutionary People}, Appendix: "A Note on Statistics and Continental Soldiers' Motivation," 373-378, quotations on pp. 373, 374.


\textsuperscript{80} Martin, "A 'Most Undisciplined, Profligate Crew': Protest and Defiance in the
claim that these radicalized soldiers tried to shape the course of the Revolution. They were unlike the sergeants of Cromwell's New Model, nor did they necessarily resemble the radicalized "lower class" elements who, according to the Progressive school of historians, sought to democratize American society. In any case, Martin's and Lender's formulations are intriguing, but we still need to examine the rank and file more comprehensively before we can be sure to what extent their "crowd behavior," going beyond a normal human desire for basic needs and fairness, projected democratic implications for the very nature of the Revolution itself.

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

If, as was hypothesized above, Americans may have accepted an army for realistic reasons, we ought not conclude that their anti-army thought—whatever its texture and vitality before 1775—simply disappeared. Yet its persistence does not necessarily mean that it stemmed entirely from radical whig or commonwealth sources. It also appears to have been shaped by Protestant cultural values, by local reactions against military intrusions, and by other wartime events and conditions. Moreover, since there is reason to believe that some scholars have exaggerated the ideological opposition to the Continental army in Congress and in the states, it may be time to reevaluate in a more positive light civilian cooperation at both the federal and state levels with Washington's forces in securing American Independence.

Reservations about standing armies bulk large in Royster's A Revolutionary People at War, which, as Edmund S. Morgan has written, makes "a quantum leap" in our understanding of the Revolution by demonstrating that for many Americans the struggle became as troubling as it was glorious. Royster's strategy is to spotlight the Continental army in relation to the ideals of the Revolution. He proves that the high tide of wartime patriotism, the rage militaire, occurred in 1775. Its manifestations were an outpouring of enlistments and material and moral support from a people who expected no less of themselves because the bedrock of their character was virtue. That translated into such qualities as devotion, sacrifice, and bravery. But with each passing year the army lost public appeal because of its ever-growing professional trappings, its officers' obsession with honor and recognition, and its social composition at the enlisted level. Since Congress had no alternative in a protracted war but to recruit long-term soldiers, upstanding citizens—the major source of the


81 Morgan's review of Revolutionary People in New Republic, CLXXXIII (July 26, 1980), 32.
rage militaire—refused to sign on for such unattractive service, which reminded them of European mercenary legions. They preferred to leave the fighting and dying to the sorts of lesser folk discussed in the immediately preceding section of this essay.

The American mindset concerning things military is a complex one in Royster’s pages. He does not point to an obsession with republican ideology behind every sentiment or action, and that itself is refreshing. Yet because of the power of Americans’ ideas (which come through as owing as much or more to their Protestant heritage as to English radical whig thought), Americans deemed it vital for their generals to conform to Revolutionary principles in their conduct of the war. (From the army’s standpoint, however, civilians’ idealistic rhetoric was rarely accompanied by meaningful contributions to the military effort.)

At this juncture Carp’s _To Starve the Army at Pleasure_ dovetails with Royster’s treatment of ideas since Carp seeks “to analyze the relationship between the administration of the Continental army and eighteenth-century American political culture.” While Royster trains his sights on (among other things) civilian perceptions of the military and vice versa, Carp brings into focus the attitudes of civilian governments at all levels toward the army’s supply departments. Sensing a military threat to their autonomy, civilians preferred to direct aid to their local militias or state lines and more often than not responded to urgent Continental requests only after Washington’s officers followed proper channels of civil authority. In Carp’s hands it is a tale of how the Revolutionary aim of preserving the rights of private property clashed with the military goal of winning the war.82

An unflattering picture of civilians in and out of political office is painted by Carp and Royster, whose sympathies lie mostly with the army. “There is more than a grain of truth,” observes Carp, “in the statement that Americans won the War of Independence in spite of, rather than because of, their political ideals.”83 Neither historian depicts the army as a danger to the Revolution, whether as a potentially coercive weapon of Congress or as a force that might demand to rule in its own right or to elevate Washington to monarchical heights. But both the army and the public blamed the other for not being more virtuous and making greater sacrifices to achieve Independence. Given this division and distrust, one comes away from Royster’s and Carp’s volumes wondering how the Americans ultimately prevailed, and in fact neither book provides the answer. Royster does, however, offer an intriguing comment that serves as a partial explanation. Despite all their shortcomings, soldiers and civilians continued to articulate their ideals. Had they not done so, they would doubtless have fallen even farther from their lofty objectives. For their notions about American character, however unrealistic, were a help as well as a hindrance: had the patriots “not widely shared this ability to see

82 Carp, _To Starve the Army at Pleasure_, chaps. 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, quotation on p. xi.
83 _Ibid._, 221.
beyond material facts and to reinterpret events in order to make an ideal seem true, they probably would not have sought independence and surely would not have won it when they did."84

The scholarly harvests of Carp and Royster leave room for additional work on thought concerning the military in the Revolution. Were American fears directed at the possibility of army rule or at what army needs might do to the civilian sector, both in undermining civil authority and in seeking more material goods than society could provide—or was it the mere existence of the army that seemed incompatible with Revolutionary ideology? Surely, all these concerns were present and intermingled, but did their relative weights shift as the war lengthened? And is it possible that Royster and Carp have exaggerated the ideological responses to the Continental army? Their mentor, Robert Middlekauff, certainly would not fault their emphasis on anti-army ideals, as one discerns from his The Glorious Cause, the most recent comprehensive narrative of the Revolutionary era. Middlekauff and his former students would doubtless close ranks behind his contention that "Radical Whig perceptions . . . attracted widespread support in America because they revived the traditional concerns of a Protestant culture that had always verged on Puritanism."85

Without discounting the achievements of these historians, we must remain cognizant that it is difficult to measure anti-army ideas. Is it possible that as the conflict progressed Congress became more flexible and nonideological, their radical whig vocabulary notwithstanding? Such indeed is the argument of John Todd White, although it is not clear that White is correct in dating the shift in attitude to 1777. In fact, the evidence that Congress adhered to realpolitik from an earlier date is compelling. Here was a legislative body that broadly defined Washington's authority, that granted him dictatorial power for three brief periods, that turned to lengthy enlistments after a year or so, that eventually acceded to a sensible compromise on the subject of postwar compensation for the officer corps, and that, among other things, usually turned a sympathetic ear to Washington's insistent solicitations. Congress's errors, numerous in the eyes of some army elements, resulted more from ignorance and inexperience than from fear of an American Caesar. White's leitmotiv of union rather than division in the legislative halls squares with the more extensive study of Congress by Jack N. Rakove, who discerns consensus rather than conflict throughout the life of that tribunal.86

84 Royster, Revolutionary People, 367.
85 Middlekauff, Glorious Cause, 48.
We are simultaneously turning our gaze to the influence of other essentially nonideological explanations for civilian thought and behavior, principally to what may be categorized (for want of a better label) as localism: not only to fathom how Americans reacted to armies but also to throw light on why men elected to be whigs or Tories or to be indifferent to the Revolution in 1775 and later. Although we have only scratched this surface, there is now sufficient literature to outline certain contours of inquiry.\(^{87}\) Eighteenth-century Americans, as Jack P. Greene has said, were a private people who wished to be left alone by government at all levels.\(^{88}\) Political authority was constricted and fragile, and Americans liked it that way. They had rarely needed armed force to maintain order in their communities, and they were mainly unaccustomed to being coerced into contributing for military purposes before 1775. The appearance of British forces during the Seven Years' War had generated tensions in some areas, authority, and an invaluable reference source, is James Gregory Bradsher, “Preserving the Revolution: Civil-Military Relations during the War for Independence, 1775-1783,” 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 1984). Bradsher concludes that both the army and the civilian leadership were capable of a good measure of tolerance and understanding of each other during those critical times when internal discord threatened to derail the war effort. The explanation rests substantially upon the fact that the army officers themselves came from civilian backgrounds and shared the political ideals of congressional and state officials.


but the redcoats had normally paid in cash for what they bought or impressed; and, to return to a point made by John P. Reid, there were legal restraints upon what the king's soldiers could do. On the other hand, when the Continental army showed up, it paid in doubtful promissory notes, and, as a revolutionary military force, it did not function under well-defined constitutional limits. Furthermore, Washington's army asked far more of the citizenry than the British army had ever done; nor, for that matter, did British forces demand as much from the population in the Revolution as did the Continental army, which depended on civilians for everything—men, weapons, clothing, food, forage, and other necessities.

Small wonder, then, that so many Americans wanted to be left alone by both of the opposing forces. Their preoccupation with privacy comes through with particular clarity in recent studies of the southern backcountry and in articles by Joseph Tiedemann on Queens County, New York. In Queens the great majority of the inhabitants remained uncommitted. Those who sided actively did so because of internal differences involving religion, ethnicity, and community issues since even in the midst of revolution and war "they still interpreted the larger world in terms of their own local disputes." Consequently, "ideology was not the primary factor leading individuals to join either the Whig or Tory cause." But mistreatment or excessive demands for aid by British or American forces could drive neutrals to take sides and convert whigs into tories and vice versa. That was the story in Queens County, where "seven hard years of [British] military misrule" prepared neutralist and tory alike for American Independence.

Countering the eloquent complaints of American officers, as reported by Royster and Carp, about civilian lust for profits and soft living and about civilian obsessions with theoretical rights and localized concerns, Richard Buel, Jr., presents a defense of the home front and a reminder of the dearth of modern studies of the individual states at war. In _Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War_ and in two provocative articles he not only provides our most full-blown coverage of

---


91 Tiedemann, "Patriots by Default," _WMQ_, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 63. Two articles by Stephen Conway reinforce Tiedemann's conclusions and place them in broader perspective by showing that, as the war dragged on, a growing number of British officers favored a harsher policy in dealing with Americans ("British Army Officers and the American War for Independence," _ibid._, XLI [1984], 265-276, and "To Subdue America: British Army Officers and the Conduct of the Revolutionary War," _ibid._, XLIII [1986], 381-407).
one society in conflict but also tentatively projects some of his findings onto a wider horizon. According to Buel, we have not comprehended how profoundly the war disturbed the domestic economy. The disruption of external commerce, the linchpin of the colonial economy, shut down patterns of exchange and eroded incentives normally motivating farmers and others to generate the surpluses so desperately needed by the Continental army. To Buel, “the oversupply of money,” often depicted as the root of Revolutionary economic hardships, was “only a symptom of a larger problem that originated in the disruption of the old colonial patterns of exchange whereby Americans had traded their surpluses for European and West Indian goods.” Buel is less critical of state-level leaders than some historians have been. For as Congress was heavily dependent on the states, the states in turn often depended on local political agencies to initiate the process of raising men and matériel sought by Congress. Neither the Congress nor the states could use sustained coercion at the community level for reasons that were ideological, legal, and political. This inability, explains Buel, “when examined in the light of other modern revolutions,” was a “distinguishing feature” of the American Revolutionary experience.

Even so, Connecticut’s gifts to the Revolution were not inconsequential and came at a heavy cost for a state that bordered the early combat zones and for seven years felt the impact of Britain’s occupation of New York City. Forced repeatedly to call out its local defense units, the state suffered from coastal raids and the ever-present threat of major attacks. Though Commissary General Jeremiah Wadsworth, a native son, turned to Connecticut for a disproportionate share of the army’s supplies, and though the state sought to respond to French needs as well when Admiral d’Estaing and General Rochambeau reached New England, the state reaped no economic bonanza. Price inflation, currency devaluation, hoarding, and illicit commerce with the enemy in nearby New York all extracted their toll on public morale, patriot loyalties, and governmental machinery. The state’s political and military leaders valiantly struggled to keep the Revolution going, but the citizenry regarded stringent taxation, price-fixing, and impressment as draconian infringements on privacy and individual rights.

Buel’s most intriguing and debatable proposition is that had the struggle continued much longer, internal travail rather than British armies might have brought down the Revolution, for the economic problems of state and nation defied solution under the political constraints of the time. Buel

---


94 Buel, Dear Liberty.
is convinced that the Revolution verged on collapse in Connecticut by 1781 and that while conditions in Connecticut were worse than in some other states, a more drawn-out struggle would have been to Britain’s advantage. Assuredly, he offers a serious rejoinder to those who, overextending the analogies between the Revolution and the Vietnam War, claim that Britain could not possibly have won this war 3,000 miles from home against an opponent whose territory was vast and whose sizable population was armed. Buel’s time-factor thesis meshes nicely with the other essays also published in 1978 as Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War, which demonstrate that the War of Independence was a war of attrition. Americans had no alternative, given the lack of muscular central government, the obstacles to creating a large standing army, and logistic and economic hardships.

Even if, as Buel speculates, home-front conditions would have gone from bad to worse, would Britain therefore have outlasted the Revolutionists? We must agree with Piers Mackesy that it would be unwise to look on events in Asia since World War II as containing lessons “valid for the whole of human history” and to capitulate “to the conviction that the counterinsurgent can never win.” All the same, Britain did not step up her efforts to prevail in America, and there is serious doubt that she would have traumatized the domestic sector with heavy taxes and military drafts to win a distant conflict, uncharacteristic behavior on the part of European powers in the age of limited warfare.

What was the legacy of early America for civil-military relations, for military institutions, and for attitudes toward war? Cress and White believe that there was an upsurge of anti-army sentiment as peace came in sight. Cress attributes to ideological concerns the failure of Congress to adopt any of the postwar plans for a military establishment put forward by Washington, Hamilton, and others: “no peace establishment was acceptable that failed the test of classical republican theory.” It is at least conjectural, however, that these plans failed for some of the same reasons that Congress and the executive departments of the Confederation...
tion withered in the 1780s, including the reassertion of localism and parochialism following the war, together with a feeling that America had proved in the Revolution—and could do so again if necessary—that it could form an army on short notice.

Certainly Washington’s army had demonstrated its loyalty to the principles of the Revolution, notwithstanding its complaints. White himself concedes that the alleged Newburgh Conspiracy, “occurring as it did at the end of the war,” failed to generate “an ideological response” from the public. That failure was “especially surprising” since whig ideologues had always predicted that armies would be “the most dangerous” at the cessation of hostilities because they faced disbandment or neglect. Surely anti-army ideology surfaced in debates over the Federal Constitution, but, more significantly, the framers and ratifiers were able to bring off a sizable increase in the central government’s military powers. As for the Antifederalists, their principal examples of the dangers of standing armies came not from the character and deportment of Washington’s army, which had persevered under the most stressful conditions imaginable, but rather from every timeworn European “angle that had occurred to their seventeenth-century predecessors.”

The Constitution preserved the practices of the Revolution: the possibility of employing either a regular army or the militia, or both, as instruments of national security. But with few exceptions, such as during the Whiskey Rebellion, effective federal oversight or use of the state-level contingents was more myth than reality. Regular forces, save for the French crisis of 1798, were minuscule.

An inconsiderable military establishment meant that few of the Continental army officers had later opportunities for rewarding service in arms. None missed the glories and rigors of battle more than Henry Lee, who never came to terms with the civilian world and who judged both his country and its people by the virtues he attributed to the soldierly life in general and the American Revolution in particular. In Royster’s *Light-Horse Harry Lee and the Legacy of the American Revolution*, the only monograph of its kind for the War of Independence, we have a sophisticated, nuanced exploration of this “connection between character and war.” Although most officers did not turn the joys of war into the burdens of peace as did Lee, other veterans might be pursued in much the same fashion as Royster has gone at Lee. Daniel Morgan, Anthony Wayne, and George Rogers Clark were perhaps equally restless spirits who, however, did not equate their personal fortunes so directly with the results


99 John K. Mahon, *The American Militia: Decade of Decision, 1789-1800* (Gainesville, Fla., 1960), and *History of the Militia and the National Guard*.

of the Revolution, and only Clark's pathetic demise parallels Lee's oblivion and self-imposed exile.

While Wayne alone among the Revolution's greater military lights was to grasp fresh laurels as a warrior, in the Northwest Territory in 1794, the years 1789-1815 constitute part of the formative period in the history of American military institutions and ideas, years that remain cloudy compared to the Revolutionary War. The most reliable and comprehensive guide to the Federalist era is Kohn's *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America*. The future Federalist party leaders, as Kohn proves, had refined their formulations on American security requirements as early as 1783, but they could not implement their program until the 1790s, when a series of war threats enabled them to adopt most of it in piecemeal fashion. If Federalists' internal divisions and overreaction to the crisis of 1798 paved the way for the party's eventual death, Kohn convinces us that they nevertheless left the country with sound, well-developed military institutions: frontier and coastal fortifications, a small army, a navy and marine corps, and centralized agencies of control. By the end of the decade—and for some of its members much earlier—the opposition Republican party could agree that some regular forces were necessary. The wars of the French Revolution demonstrated to leaders of both parties that the nature of warfare was changing and that professional soldiers were needed at all levels.

Jefferson, as Reginald C. Stuart has shown, was no pacifist, and, as Theodore J. Crackel averns in *Mr. Jefferson's Army: Political and Social Reform of the Military Establishment, 1801-1805*, certain other notions about the third president rest solely on myth. Crackel reveals that Jefferson's love affair with the militia has been overblown, and that while the chief executive originally sought a smaller force of regulars, he wished it to be even more efficient. In the face of a crisis with Britain in 1808 he drastically increased the army, a step not dissimilar to the Federalist preparedness campaign of 1798. His about-face on formal military education for officers and his establishment of the United States Military Academy were actually consistent with his desire to "republicanize" the army—to draw into the service student officers from all levels of society rather than simply from the elites, which he claimed to have been the practice of the Federalists. The army also came to look more republican as it adopted rules for short hair, the elimination of wigs, and modest military dress.

---

According to Cress, the more realistic Republicans were heirs to the English moderate whig tradition, although radical whiggery continued to carry sufficient weight with enough of the party faithful in Congress to block President James Madison’s appeals for new military measures after 1808, thereby leaving the country unprepared for war in 1812. While theoretical preferences were perhaps at the root of much of the intraparty squabbling over defense, J.C.A. Stagg, reconnoitering the same subject in *Mr. Madison’s War*, arrives at more mundane explanations—Madison’s lack of political skill and congressional worries about declining federal revenues—and Cress closes his volume with the assertion that by the conclusion of the War of 1812 radical whiggery had shot its bolt. Madison’s fellow citizens embraced “the moderate Whig view that only professional military institutions could meet the demands of national security during war and peace in the modern world.” Thus a “basic change had taken place in the American understanding of the military’s place in a free society.” No doubt by that time such was the case. But to what extent had it come about earlier? And precisely what was the impact of the War of 1812 itself on military attitudes? In any event, Cress’s *Citizens in Arms*, advancing over more than a century of Anglo-American thought, provides an invaluable point of departure for further labor in the field.

Finally, what did the Revolution do to thinking about war as a solution to the country’s problems or as a means of fulfilling American ambitions? The somber conclusions that, in Royster’s judgment, Americans drew first from their Revolutionary military undertaking might well have made them reject collective violence as a desirable method of resolving future national concerns. What might be inferred from Royster is made explicit

---


by Buel, who finds Connecticut so demoralized and weakened by events of 1775-1783 that it took the state until the 1790s to recover fully. During the Jay Treaty crisis, the state's fear of another war with Britain owed a great deal to unpleasant recollections of the War of Independence.105

The South, of course, suffered more than New England. Partially occupied by British armies between 1779 and 1782, it reeled from a backcountry civil war unlike anything encountered by Connecticut and its New England neighbors. One might wonder, therefore, whether negative war reflections prompted the southern-led Republican party in 1812 to shrink from the prospect of another confrontation with the former mother country. But as Stagg has demonstrated in Mr. Madison's War, our best account of the political components of that struggle, Republican leaders scarcely hung back from a contest that they hoped would unify their divided party and in time unify the country behind that party. From 1783 onward, says Stagg, Madison perceived that seizure of Canada by the United States would bring vast benefits, either as a bargaining chip for favorable commercial terms with Britain or as a permanent part of an enlarged American empire. For Madison, the War of 1812 was really the Canadian war.106

That war, like the Revolutionary conflict, might have held the potential to discourage future American war-making, for, as Stagg shows, it was replete with almost all the miseries that had marked the Revolution: mismanagement, apathy, disloyalty, and federal-state friction. While all this is hardly novel, Stagg fashions it into something of an original proposition: these failures were inherent in the very character of American society and institutions. Accordingly, "the War of 1812 might be best understood as the sum total of the difficulties experienced by Americans after 1783 as they labored to establish their experiment in republican government on secure foundations."107 Though this thesis is cogently argued, it hardly makes clear what had been the lasting gains of the Revolution and the new constitutional forms adopted in 1788, nor do we discern what the War of 1812 itself did for the institutional and mental health of the United States.

What Royster has to say in a stimulating essay on these so-called First and Second Wars of American Independence offers some clues, at least, to the impact of both experiences on the American mind. As the years passed, memories of both wars became more positive, until battles, deaths, and sufferings were recalled mainly in romantic and heroic terms. Furthermore, since military confrontation had originally forged and later

105 Buel, Dear Liberty, Epilogue.
106 Stagg, Mr. Madison's War, chaps. 2-3. The Madison administration's foreign and military policies are also reviewed in Harry L. Coles, "From Peaceable Coercion to Balanced Forces," in Hagan and Roberts, eds., Against All Enemies, 71-89. See also Stagg, "Enlisted Men in the United States Army, 1812-1815: A Preliminary Survey," WMQ, 3d Ser., XLIII (1986), 615-645.
107 Stagg, Mr. Madison's War, Epilogue, quotation on p. xi.
sustained a nation lacking the “usual bonds of a people” such as monarchy and antiquity, war itself became “an ultimate recourse” for definers of “Americanness” and “a fundamental component of American nationality.”

(Royster’s theme blends with the conclusions of Thomas C. Leonard, who, in canvassing American reflections on their bloodlettings from 1861 to 1918, unveils a major effort, whether conscious or not, to erase the images of pain and suffering and to remember only the heroism and glories of combat.

Assuredly, Americans did not shrink from the prospect of war in the century after Independence. According to recent studies of the Mexican War and the Spanish-American War by Robert W. Johannsen and Gerald Linderman respectively, countless Americans appear to have displayed attitudes similar to those of the Puritan leaders whose jeremiads rang out the redemptive results of battle or of Royster’s Revolutionists who believed during the rage militaire that a test of arms would reinforce existing virtues. In these two nineteenth-century conflicts men marched off to war not only to secure the nation’s objectives but also to provide a moral uplift to the country and to themselves through acts of sacrifice and dedication.

If these accounts reinforce propositions of Shy, Weigley, and Ferling on American war-making, they clash with the opinions of Reginald Stuart in The Half-Way Pacifist: Thomas Jefferson’s View of War and in War and American Thought: From the Revolution to the Monroe Doctrine. Stuart properly states that “remarkably few historians have grappled with the American approach to war, except for the Cold War.” Though acknowledging that Shy and Weigley are notable exceptions, Stuart observes that they, as well as other military interpreters, have customarily “asserted that Americans have not waged wars for policy, but approached their martial conflicts as crusades.” Stuart visualizes American war-making, from the Revolution through the early national period, as a reflection of a “limited-war mentality” that owed much to Judeo-Christian definitions of a just war, to the Age of Reason, and to the age of limited warfare. His emphasis on the just war doctrine receives explicit backing in Endy’s earlier-cited article, which, in more detail than Stuart, rejects the conclusions derived

---


111 Stuart, War and American Thought (Kent, Ohio, 1982).

112 Stuart, Half-Way Pacifist, 64.
from Alan Heimert and others that "religious leaders were . . . urging their people to regard the Revolution as . . . between the forces of Christ and Antichrist to bring about the millennium."113 Stuart's evidence is sufficiently convincing when he informs us that most of the Federalist and Republican chieftains considered war a rational way of achieving specific objectives that conformed to national needs and policies.

But to say that Stuart is on solid ground for the Founding Fathers, who fought two wars against our white Protestant British relatives, is not to discount the possibility of crusades both before and after the struggles he surveys. Endy himself, though denying the former, readily concedes the latter concerning religious leaders: "Crusading zeal would come to the fore on many occasions . . . in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially in time of war." Whatever the relationship between war and religious enthusiasm before the nineteenth century, it is Endy's contention that it increased thereafter as Americans drew closer to a once-inscrutable God.114 More comfortable in his presence in an age that toned down or rejected Calvinism and extolled evangelical democracy with its belief in free will and good works, Americans could march into battle shoulder-to-shoulder with him.

What then is the mental linkage between the wars before and after 1815? Did "victories" in 1783 and 1815 reinforce an already-building perception that Americans had a winning military tradition? Is it worth stressing that the colonial wars were against Indian and Catholic nations, and that the nineteenth-century conflicts after 1815 were also against Indians and Catholic states (the Civil War excepted)? And did the views of elites and nonelites always agree? Stuart and Endy are mostly convincing in their handling of statesmen and religious leaders, but neither assesses attitudes of the public at large toward violence and bloodshed.

Given these many fruitful investigations of civil-military relations, military institutions, and attitudes toward war, a final challenge must be met before we can comprehensively interpret the early American way of war. With all of our interest in republicanism during the last two decades, we have yet to develop fully the relationship between republicanism and war, be it war as policy or war as crusade, or a combination thereof. It was a commonplace of the eighteenth-century mind—shared by such diverse persons as Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Paine, and Count Vergennes—that the citizens of republics were peace-loving and that republics consequently favored pacific relations with the outside world. Given the martial record of the United States in the past two hundred years, one must inquire, "What happened?"

114 Ibid., 24-25.