At some time during the period 1659-1663, Etherege apparently gave up serious study of the law in favor of his future role as man-about-town, playwright, and courtier. The factual and circumstantial evidence here presented may help to account for so radical a change in the life and lifestyle of an obscure clerk articled to a country lawyer.

Why Men Fought in the American Revolution

By Robert Middlekauff

In the Battle of Eutaw Springs, South Carolina, the last major action of the Revolutionary War before Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, over 500 Americans were killed and wounded. Nathanael Greene had led some 2200 men into the Springs; his casualties thus equaled almost one fourth of his army. More men would die in battles in the next two years, and others would suffer terrible wounds. Although the statistics are notoriously unreliable, they show that the Revolution killed a higher percentage of those who served on the American side than any war in our history, always excepting the Civil War.¹

Why did these men—those who survived and those who died—fight? Why did they hold their ground, endure the strain of battle, with men dying about them and danger to themselves so obvious? Undoubtedly the reasons varied from battle to battle, but just as undoubtedly there was some experience common to all these battles—and fairly uniform reasons for the actions of the men who fought despite their deepest impulses, which must have been to run from the field in order to escape the danger.

Some men did run, throwing down their muskets and packs in order to speed their flight. American units broke in large actions and small, at Brooklyn, Kip’s Bay, White Plains, Brandywine, Germantown, Camden, and Hobkirk’s Hill, to cite the most important instances. Yet many men did not break and run even in the disasters to American arms. They held their ground until they were killed, and they fought tenaciously while pulling back.

In most actions the Continentals, the regulars, fought more bravely than the militia. We need to know why these men fought and why the American regulars performed better than the militia. The answers surely will help us to understand the Revolution, especially if we can discover whether what made men fight reflected what they believed—and felt—about the Revolution.

Several explanations of the willingness to fight and die, if necessary, may be dismissed at once. One is that soldiers on both sides fought out of fear of their officers, fearing them more than they did battle. Frederick the Great had described this condition as ideal, but it did not exist in ideal or

practice in either the American or British army. The British soldier usually possessed a more professional spirit than the American, an attitude compounded from confidence in his skill and pride in belonging to an old established institution. British regiments carried proud names—the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, the Black Watch, the King's Own—whose officers usually behaved extraordinarily bravely in battle and expected their men to follow their examples. British officers disciplined their men more harshly than American officers did and generally trained them more effectively in the movements of battle. But neither they nor American officers instilled the fear that Frederick found so desirable. Spirit, bravery, a reliance on the bayonet were all expected of professional soldiers, but professionals acted out of pride—not fear of their officers.

Still, coercion and force were never absent from the life of either army. There were, however, limits on their use and their effectiveness. The fear of flogging might prevent a soldier from deserting from camp, but it could not guarantee that he would remain steady under fire. Fear of ridicule may have aided in keeping some troops in place, however. Eighteenth-century infantry went into combat in fairly close lines and officers could keep an eye on many of their men. If the formation was tight enough officers might strike laggards and even order "skulkers," Washington's term for those who turned tail, shot down. Just before the move to Dorchester Heights in March 1776, the word went out that any American who ran from the action would be "fired down upon the spot." The troops themselves approved of this threat, according to one of the chaplains.

Washington repeated the threat just before the Battle of Brooklyn later that year, though he seems not to have posted men behind the lines to carry it out. Daniel Morgan urged Nathanael Greene to place sharpshooters behind the militia, and Greene may have done so at Guilford Court House. No one thought that an entire army could be held in place against its will, and these threats to shoot soldiers who retired without orders were never widely issued.

A tactic that surely would have appealed to many soldiers would have been to send them into battle drunk. Undoubtedly some—on both sides—did enter combat with their senses deadened by rum. Both armies commonly issued an additional ration of rum on the eve of some extraordinary action—a long, difficult march, for example, or a battle, were two of the usual reasons. A common order on such occasions ran: "The troops should have an extraordinary allowance of rum," usually a gill, four ounces of unknown alcoholic content, which if taken down at the propitious moment might dull fears and summon courage. At Camden no supply of rum existed; Gates or his staff substituted molasses to no good effect, according to Otho Williams. The British fought brilliantly at Guilford Court House unaided by anything stronger than their own large spirits. In most actions soldiers went into battle with very little more than themselves and their comrades to lean upon.

Belief in the Holy Spirit surely sustained some in the American army, perhaps more than in the enemy's. There are a good many references to the divine or to Providence in the letters and diaries of ordinary soldiers. Often, however, these expressions are in the form of thanks to the Lord for permitting these soldiers to survive. There is little that suggests soldiers believed that faith rendered them invulnerable to the enemy's bullets. Many did consider the glorious cause to be sacred; their war, as the ministers who sent them off to kill never tired of reminding them, was just and providential.

Others clearly saw more immediate advantages in the fight: the plunder of the enemy's dead. At Monmouth Court House, where Clinton withdrew after dark leaving the field strewn with British corpses, the plundering carried American soldiers into the houses of civilians who had fled to save themselves. The soldiers’ actions were so blatant and so unrestrained that Washington ordered their packs searched. And at Eutaw Springs, the Americans virtually gave up victory to the opportunity of ransacking British tents. Some died in their greed, shot down by an enemy given time to regroup while his camp was torn apart by men looking for something to carry off. But even these men probably fought for something besides plunder. When it beckoned they collapsed, but it had not drawn them to the field; nor had it kept them there in a savage struggle.

Inspired leadership helped soldiers face death, but they sometimes fought bravely even when their leaders let them down. Yet officers' courage and the example of officers throwing off wounds to remain in the fight undoubtedly helped their men stick. Charles Stedman remarked on Captain Maitland, who at Guilford Court House was hit, dropped behind

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2 The Writings of George Washington, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, D.C., 1931-44), V, 480
7 Orderly Book, June 12-July 13, 1778, Benjamin Fishbourne et al., Huntington Library MS BR46.
for a few minutes to get his wound dressed, then returned to the battle. Cornwallis obviously filled Sergeant Lamb with pride, struggling forward to press into the struggle after his horse was killed. Washington’s presence meant much at Princeton, though his exposure to enemy fire may also have made his troops uneasy. His quiet exhortation as he passed among the men who were about to assault Trenton—“Soldiers, keep by your officers”—remained in the mind of a Connecticut soldier until he died fifty years later. There was only one Washington, one Cornwallis, and their influence on men in battle, few of whom could have seen them, was of course slight. Junior and noncommissioned officers carried the burden of tactical direction; they had to show their troops what must be done and somehow persuade, cajole, or force them to do it. The praise ordinary soldiers lavished on sergeants and junior officers suggests that these leaders played important parts in their troops’ willingness to fight. Still, important as it was, their part does not really explain why men fought.

In suggesting this conclusion about military leadership, I do not wish to be understood as agreeing with Tolstoy’s scornful verdict on generals—that despite all their plans and orders they do not affect the results of battles at all. Tolstoy did not reserve all his scorn for generals—historians are also derided in War and Peace for finding a rational order in battles where only chaos existed. “The activity of a commander in chief does not at all resemble the activity we imagine to ourselves when we sit at ease in our studies examining some campaign on the map, with a certain number of troops on this and that side in a certain known locality, and begin our plans from some given moment. A commander in chief is never dealing with the beginning of any event—the position from which we always contemplate it. The commander in chief is always in the midst of a series of shifting events and so he never can at any moment consider the whole import of an event that is occurring.”

The full import of battle will as surely escape historians as participants. But we have to begin somewhere in trying to explain why men fought rather than ran from revolutionary battlefields. The battlefield may indeed be the place to begin, since we have dismissed leadership, fear of officers, religious belief, the power of drink, and other possible explanations of why men fought and died.

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8 Charles Stedman, The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War (Dublin, 1794), II, 36.
11 War and Peace, Bk. XI, Ch. ii.
The eighteenth-century battlefield was, compared to that of the twentieth, an intimate theater, especially intimate in the engagements of the Revolution, which were usually small even by the standards of the day. The killing range of the musket—eighty to one hundred yards—enforced intimacy, as did the reliance on the bayonet and the general ineffectiveness of artillery. Soldiers had to come to close quarters to kill; this fact reduced the mystery of battle, though perhaps not its terrors. But at least the battlefield lost some of its impersonality. In fact, in contrast to twentieth-century combat, in which the enemy usually remains unseen and the source of incoming fire unknown, in eighteenth-century battles the foe could be seen and sometimes even touched. Seeing one's enemy may have aroused a singular intensity of feeling uncommon in modern battles. The assault with the bayonet—the most desired objective of infantry tactics—seems indeed to have evoked an emotional climax. Before it occurred tension and anxiety built up as the troops marched from their column into a line of attack. The purpose of their movements was well understood by themselves and their enemies, who must have watched with feelings of dread and fascination. When the order sending them forward, rage, even madness, replaced the attacker's anxiety, while terror and desperation sometimes filled those receiving the charge. Surely it is revealing that the Americans who ran from battle did so most often at the moment they were convinced their enemy had started forward with the bayonet. This happened to several units at Brandywine and to the militia at Camden and Guilford Court House. The loneliness, the sense of isolation reported by modern soldiers, was probably missing at such moments. All was clear—especially that glittering line of advancing steel.

Whether this awful clarity was harder to bear than losing sight of the enemy is problematical. American troops ran at Germantown after grappling with the British and then finding the field of battle covered by fog. At that time groping blindly, they and their enemy struggled over ground resembling a scene of modern combat. The enemy was hidden at a critical moment, and American fears were generated by not knowing what was happening—or about to happen. They could not see the enemy, and they could not see one another, an especially important fact. For, as S. L. A. Marshall, the twentieth-century military historian, has suggested in his book *Men against Fire*, what sustains men in the extraordinary circumstances of battle may be their relationships with their comrades.

These men found that sustaining such relationships was possible in the intimacy of the American battlefield—and not just because the limited

arena robbed battle of some of its mystery. More importantly it permitted the troops to give one another moral or psychological support. The enemy could be seen, but so could one's comrades; they could be seen and communicated with.

Eighteenth-century infantry tactics called for men to move and fire from tight formations which permitted them to talk and to give one another information—and reassurance and comfort. If properly done, marching and firing found infantrymen compressed into files in which their shoulders touched. In battle physical contact with one's comrades on either side must have helped men control their fears. Firing the musket from three compact lines, the English practice, also involved physical contact. The men of the front rank crouched on their right knees; the men of the center rank placed their left feet inside the right feet of the front; the rear rank did the same thing behind the center. This stance was called—in a revealing term—"locking." The very density of this formation sometimes aroused criticism from officers who complained that it led to inaccurate fire. The front rank, conscious of the closeness of the center, might fire too low; the rear rank tended to "throw" its shots into the air, as firing too high was called; only the center rank took careful aim, according to the critics. Whatever the truth of these charges about accuracy of fire, men in these dense formations compiled a fine record of holding their ground. And it is worth noting that the inaccuracy of men in the rear rank bespoke their concern for their fellows in front of them.

British and American soldiers in the Revolution often spoke of fighting with "spirit" and "behaving well" under fire. Sometimes these phrases referred to daring exploits under great danger, but more often they seem to have meant holding together, giving one another support, reforming the lines when they were broken or fell into disorder, disorder such as overtook the Americans at Greenspring, Virginia, early in July 1781 when Cornwallis lured Anthony Wayne into crossing the James with a heavily outnumbered force. Wayne saw his mistake and decided to make the best of it, not by a hasty retreat from the ambush, but by attacking. The odds against the Americans were formidable, but as an ordinary soldier who was there saw it, the inspired conduct of the infantry saved them—"our troops behaved well, fighting with great spirit and bravery. The infantry were oft broke; but just as oft rallied and formed at a word."
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These troops had been spread out when the British surprised them, but they formed as quickly as possible. Here was a test of men’s spirits, a test they passed in part because of their disciplined formation. In contrast at Camden, where the militia collapsed as soon as the battle began, an open alignment may have contributed to their fear. Gates placed the Virginians on the far left apparently expecting them to cover more ground than their numbers allowed. At any rate they went into the battle in a single line with at least five feet between each man and the next, a distance which intensified a feeling of isolation in the heat and noise of the firing. And to make such feelings worse, these men were especially exposed, stretched out at one end of the line with no supporters behind them.16

Troops in tight lines consciously reassured one another in several ways. British troops usually talked and cheered—“huzzaing”—whether standing their ground, running forward, or firing. The Americans may have done less talking and cheering, though there is evidence that they learned to imitate the enemy. Giving a cheer at the end of a successful engagement was standard practice. The British cheered at Lexington and then marched off to be shot down on the road running from Concord. The Americans shouted their joy at Harlem Heights, an understandable action and one which for most of 1776 they rarely had opportunity to perform.17

The most deplorable failures to stand and fight usually occurred among the American militia. Yet there were militia companies that performed with great success, remaining whole units under the most deadly volleys. The New England companies at Bunker Hill held out under a fire that veteran British officers compared to the worst they had experienced in Europe. Lord Rawdon remarked on how unusual it was for defenders to stick to their posts even after the assaulting troops had entered the ditch around a redoubt.18 The New Englanders did it. They also held steady at Princeton—“They were the first who regularly formed” and stood up under the balls “which whistled their thousand different notes around our heads,” according to Charles Willson Peale, whose Philadelphia militia also proved their steadiness.19

What was different about these companies? Why did they fight when others around them ran? The answer may lie in the relationships among

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their men. Men in the New England companies, in the Philadelphia militia, and in the other units that held together, were neighbors. They knew one another; they had something to prove to one another; they had their “honor” to protect. Their active service in the Revolution may have been short, but they had been together in one way or another for a fairly long time—for several years, in most cases. Their companies, after all, had been formed from towns and villages. Some clearly had known one another all their lives.20

Elsewhere, especially in the thinly settled southern colonies, companies were usually composed of men—farmers, farmers’ sons, farm laborers, artisans, and new immigrants—who did not know one another. They were, to use a term much used in a later war, companies of “stragglers” without common attachments, with almost no knowledge of their fellows. For them, even bunched tightly in line, the battlefield was an empty, lonely place. Absence of personal bonds and their own parochialism, coupled to inadequate training and imperfect discipline, often led to disintegration under fire.21

According to conventional wisdom, the nearer the American militia were to home the better they fought, fighting for their homes and no one else’s. Proximity to home, however, may have been a distraction which weakened resolve; for the irony of going into battle and perhaps to their deaths when home and safety lay close down the road could not have escaped many. Almost every senior American general commented on the propensity of the militia to desert—and if they were not deserting they seemed perpetually in transit between home and camp, usually without authorization.

Paradoxically, of all the Americans who fought, the militiamen best exemplified in themselves and in their behavior the ideals and purposes of the Revolution. They had enjoyed independence, or at least personal liberty, long before it was proclaimed in the Declaration. They instinctively felt their equality with others and in many places insisted upon demonstrating it by choosing their own officers. Their sense of their liberty permitted, even compelled, them to serve only for short enlistments, to leave camp when they liked, to scorn the orders of others—and especially those orders to fight when they preferred to flee. Their integration into their society drove them to resist military discipline; and their

16 The Virginia Gazette, Sept. 6, 1780, contains an account of the extended disposition on the left Ward, II, 722-730. Provides a fine study of the battle, as does Wickwire, pp. 149-165.
17 Tench Tilghman to his father, Sept. 19, 1776, in Memoir of Genl. Tench Tilghman (Albany, 1876). p. 139.
18 Francis Rawdon to the earl of Huntington, June 20, 1775, Hastings Papers, Huntington Library.
19 Charles Willson Peale Diary, Jan. 3, 1777, Huntington Library.

21 The conclusions in this paragraph were suggested by Edward G. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Newton, “General Smallwood’s Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private,” WMQ, 3rd Ser., 30 (1973), 117-132. The Nathanael Greene Papers in the Huntington Library contain materials which tend to confirm these impressions.
ethos of personal freedom stimulated hatred of the machine that served as the model for the army. They were not pieces of machine, and they would serve it only reluctantly and skeptically. At their best—at Cowpens, for example—they fought well; at their worst, at Camden, they fought not at all. There they were, as Greene said, “ungovernable.” What was lacking in the militia was a set of professional standards, requirements and rules which might regulate their conduct in battle. What was lacking was professional pride. Coming and going to camp as they liked, shooting their guns for the pleasure of the sound, the militia annoyed the Continentals, who soon learned that most of them could not be trusted.

The British regulars were at the opposite pole. They had been pulled out of society, carefully segregated from it, tightly disciplined, and highly-trained. Their values were the values of the army, for the most part, no more and no less. The officers, to be sure, were in certain respects very different from the men. They embodied the style and standards of gentlemen who believed in service to their king and who fought for honor and glory.

With these ideals and a mission of service to the king defined their calling, British officers held themselves as aloof as possible from the peculiar horrors of war. Not that they did not fight; they sought combat and danger, but by the conventions which shaped their understanding of battle they insulated themselves as much as possible from the ghastly business of killing and dying. Thus the results of battle might be long lists of dead and wounded, but the results were also “honourable and glorious,” as Charles Stedman described Guilford Court House, or reflected “dishonour upon British arms,” as he described Cowpens. Actions and gunfire were “smart” and “brisk” and sometimes “hot,” and occasionally a “difficult piece of work.” They might also be described lightly—Harlem Heights was “this silly business” to Lord Rawdon. To their men, British officers spoke a clean, no-nonsense language. Howe’s terse “look to your bayonets” summed up a tough professional’s expectations.

For all the distance between British officers and men, they gave remarkable support to one another in battle. They usually deployed carefully, keeping up their spirits with drum and fife. They talked and shouted and cheered, and coming on with their bayonets at the ready, “huzzaing,” or coming on “firing and huzzaing” they must have sustained a sense of shared experience. Their ranks might be thinned by an American volley, but on they came, exhorting one another to “push on!” as at Bunker Hill and the battles that followed. Although terrible losses naturally dispirited them, they almost always maintained the integrity of their regiments as fighting units, and when they were defeated, or nearly so as at Guilford Court House, they recovered their pride and fought well thereafter. And there was no hint at Yorktown that the ranks wanted to surrender, even though they had suffered dreadfully.

The Continentals, the American regulars, lacked the polish of their British counterparts but, at least from Monmouth on, they showed a steadiness under fire almost as impressive as their enemy’s. And they demonstrated a brave endurance: defeated, they retired, pulled themselves together, and came back to try again.

These qualities—patience and endurance—endured them to many. For example, John Laurens, on Washington’s staff in 1778, wanted desperately to command them. In what amounted to a plea for command, Laurens wrote: “I would cherish those dear, ragged Continentals, whose patience will be the admiration of future ages, and glory in bleeding with them.” This statement was all the more extraordinary coming from Laurens, a South Carolinian aristocrat. The soldiers he admired were anything but aristocratic. As the war dragged on, they came more and more from the poor and the propertyless. Most probably entered the army as substitutes for men who had rather pay than serve, or as the recipients of bounties and the promise of land. In time some, perhaps many, assimilated the ideals of the Revolution. As Baron Steuben observed in training them, they differed from European troops in at least one regard: they wanted to know why they were told to do certain things. Unlike European soldiers who did what they were told, the Continentals asked why.

Continental officers aped the style of their British counterparts. They aspired to gentility and often, failing to achieve it, betrayed their anxiety by an excessive concern for their honor. Not surprisingly, like their British peers, they also used the vocabularies of gentlemen in describing battle.

Their troops, innocent of such polish, spoke with words from their immediate experience of physical combat. They found few euphemisms for the horrors of battle. Thus Private David How, September 1776, in New York noted in his diary: “Isaac Poulus had his head shot off with a cannon ball this morning.” And Sergeant Thomas McCarty reported an engagement between a British foraging party and American infantry near New Brunswick in February 1777: “We attacked the body, and bullets

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23Greene to Gov. Reed, Mar. 18, 1781, Nathanael Greene Papers, Huntington Library. Feb. 9, 1781, Greene wrote Gov. Nash that 20,000 militia would not provide 500 effective troops. He way they “come and go.”

24Stedman, II, 382, 360; Rawdon to the earl of Huntington, Aug. 3, 1775, Sept. 23, 1776.

25Rawdon to the earl of Huntington, June 20, 1775.

26To his father, Mar. 9, 1778, in The Army Correspondence of Colonel John Laurens (New York, 1897), p. 236.

flew like hail. We stayed about 15 minutes and then retreated with loss." After the battle inspection of the field revealed that the British had killed the American wounded—"The men that was wounded in the thigh or leg, they dashed out their brains with their muskets and run them through with their bayonets, made them like sieves. This was barbarity to the utmost." The pain of seeing his comrades mutilated by shot and shell at White Plains remained with Elisha Bostwick, a Connecticut soldier, all his life: A cannon ball "cut down Lt. Youngs Platoon which was next to that of mine[,] the ball first took off the head of Smith, a Stout heavy man and dashed it open, then took Taylor across the Bowels, it then Struck Sergeant Garret of our Company on the hip [and] took off the point of the hip bone[,] Smith and Taylor were left on the spot. Sergeant Garret was carried but died the same day now to think, oh! what a sight that was to see within a distance of six rods those men with their legs and arms and guns and packs all in a heap.[]"

The Continentals occupied the psychological and moral ground somewhere between the militia and the British professionals. From 1777 on their enlistments were for three years or the duration of the war. This long service allowed them to learn more of their craft and to become seasoned. That does not mean that on the battlefield they lost their fear. Experience in combat almost never leaves one indifferent to danger. Unless after prolonged and extreme fatigue one comes to consider oneself already dead. Seasoned troops simply learn to deal with their fear more effectively than raw troops do, in part because they have come to realize that everyone feels it and that they can rely on their fellows.

By winter 1779-1780, the Continentals were beginning to believe that they had no one save themselves to lean on. Their soldierly qualifications so widely admired in America—their "habit of subordination," their patience under fatigue, their ability to stand sufferings and privations of every kind may in fact have led to a bitter resignation that saw them through a good deal of fighting. At Morristown during this winter, they felt abandoned in their cold and hunger. They knew that food and clothing existed in America to keep them healthy and comfortable, and yet little of either came to the army. Understandably their dissatisfaction increased as they realized that once again suffering had been left to them. Dissatisfaction in these months slowly turned into a feeling of martyrdom. They felt themselves to be martyrs to the "glorious cause." They would fulfill the ideals of the Revolution and see things through to independence because the civilian population would not.29

Thus the Continentals in the last four years of the active war, though less articulate and less independent than the militia, assimilated one part of the "cause" more fully. They had advanced further in making American purposes in the Revolution their own. They had in their sense of isolation and neglect probably come to be more nationalistic than the militia—though surely no more American.

Although these sources of the Continentals' feeling seem curious, they served to reinforce the tough professional ethic these men also came to absorb. Set apart from the militia by the length of their service, by their officers' esteem for them, and by their own contempt for part-time soldiers, the Continentals slowly developed resilience and pride. Their country might ignore them in camp, might allow their bellies to shrivel and their backs to freeze, might allow them to wear rags, but in battle they would not be ignored. And in battle they would support one another in the knowledge that their own moral and professional resources remained sure.

The meaning of these complex attitudes is not what it seems to be. At first sight the performance of militia and Continentals seems to suggest that the great principles of the Revolution made little difference on the battlefield. Or if principles did make a difference, say especially to the militia saturated with natural rights and a deep and persistent distrust of standing armies, they served not to strengthen the will to combat but to disable it. And the Continentals, recruited increasingly from the poor and dispossessed, apparently fought better as they came to resemble their professional and apolitical enemy, the British infantry.

These conclusions are in part askew. To be sure, there is truth—and paradox—in the fact that some Americans' commitments to revolutionary principles made them unreliable on the battlefield. Still, their devotion to their principles helped bring them there. George Washington, their commander-in-chief, never tired of reminding them that their cause arrayed free men against mercenaries. They were fighting for the "blessings of liberty," he told them in 1776, and should they not acquit themselves like men, slavery would replace their freedom.30 The challenge to behave like men was not an empty one. Courage, honor, gallantry in the service of liberty, all those words calculated to bring a blush of embarrassment to jaded twentieth-century men, defined manhood for the

28Laurens to his father, Jan. 14, 1779, Army Correspondence, p. 108
30"Writings of Washington, V, 479.
eighteenth century. In battle those words gained an extraordinary
resonance as they were embodied in the actions of brave men. Indeed it is
likely that many Americans who developed a narrow professional spirit
found battle broadly educative, forcing them to consider the purposes of
their professional skill.

On one level those purposes had to be understood as having a remark-
able importance if men were to fight—and die. For battle forced Ameri-
can soldiers into a situation which nothing in their usual experience had
prepared them for. They were to kill other men in the expectation that
even if they did they might be killed themselves. However defined,
especially by a Revolution in the name of life, liberty, and the pursuit of
happiness, this situation was unnatural.

On another level, one which, perhaps, made the strain of battle
endurable, the situation of American soldiers, though unusual, was not
really foreign to them. For what battle presented in stark form was one of
the classic problems free men face: choosing between the rival claims of
public responsibility and private wishes, or in eighteenth-century terms
choosing between virtue—devotion to the public trust—and personal
liberty. In battle, virtue demanded that men give up their liberties and
perhaps even their lives for others. Each time they fought they had in
effect to weigh the claims of society and liberty. Should they fight or run?
They knew that the choice might mean life or death. For those American
soldiers who were servants, apprentices, poor men substituting for men
with money to hire them, the choice might not have seemed to involve
moral decision. After all they had never enjoyed much personal liberty.
But not even in that contrivance of eighteenth-century authoritarianism
in which they now found themselves, the professional army, could they
avoid a moral decision. Compressed into dense formations, they were
reminded by their nearness to their comrades that they too had an oppor-
tunity to uphold virtue. By standing firm they served their fellows and
honors, by running, they served only themselves.

Thus battle tested the inner qualities of men, tried their souls, as
Thomas Paine said. Many men died in the test that battle made of their
spirits. Some soldiers called this trial cruel; others called it “glorious.”
Perhaps this difference in perception suggests how difficult it was in the
Revolution to be both a soldier and an American. Nor has it ever been
easy since.

Intramuralia
Books and People
Compiled by Carey S. Bliss*

It isn’t often that we add to the fine incunabula collection in the
Huntington Library. Therefore it is with extreme pleasure that we
announce the acquisition of an important medical incunabulum pur-
chased from a New York dealer. It is a copy of Alexander Benedictus’
Collectiones Medicinae (Venice, ca. 1493), the first and only separate
edition of this general treatise on medicine, written by a great anatomist who was
professor of anatomy at Padua and is said to have founded the anatomical
theater in that city. His insistence on autopsy and anatomical observation
gave a new impulse to the study of anatomy. The Gesamtkatalog records
eighteen copies in Europe, and Goff adds seven other copies in American
libraries.

Here Begynneth a Newe Boke of Medecynes Intytuted the Treasure of Pore Men
was a very popular English medical work designed to make every man his
own physician. The first edition appeared in 1526, and the Library has
one of the two known copies. According to the new STC, fifteen editions
appeared between 1526 and 1575. The Library can now add one more
edition with the acquisition of a copy printed in London in 1601. This
1601 edition is apparently unrecorded anywhere. It is bound in
contemporary vellum and shows signs of considerable usage.

Of the production of English political pamphlets printed between 1641
and 1649 there was seemingly no end. The Library already has a fine
collection of those pamphlets, roughly 6,500 to 6,800 titles. One very
interesting and somewhat gory title was added recently with the purchase
of Canterburys Amazement; or, The Ghost of the Yong Fellow Thomas Bensted
Who Was Drowne, Hanged, and Quartered (London, 1641), Wing C456. One
of the two crude woodcuts shows Thomas Bensted as a ghost, the other
depicts the unfortunate young man being quartered.
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