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Unanimous Voice, Unanimous Symbol:  
George Washington during the Revolutionary War

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A thesis  
presented to  
the faculty of the Department of History  
East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree  
Master of Arts in History

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by  
Matthew Joseph Hitechew

May 2007

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## ABSTRACT

Unanimous Voice, Unanimous Symbol:

George Washington during the Revolutionary War

by

Matthew Joseph Hitechew

George Washington's role in the American Revolution has not been lost in the mists of time, but most modern Americans have lost touch with his actual character and style because of the immense cultural changes that have transpired since the eighteenth century. However, by examining the duties of Washington throughout the Revolutionary War from four different perspectives a more holistic interpretation of Washington during America's fight for independence may be gained. This study examines the relationships Washington had with Congress as well as with his fellow officers and troops. Particular attention is paid to the manner in which Washington led the army, in addition to how he was perceived by his contemporaries at large. The goal of this thesis is to achieve a holistic interpretation of Washington's tenure as Commander-in-Chief, which will enable a better understanding of why Washington was and continues to be perceived as a symbol for American independence.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all my friends and family who provided support, both monetarily and spiritually, along the way; there is no way I could have done it without you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the members of my thesis committee for dedicating their time and consideration for my project. In particular I would like to thank Dr. Schmitt for his time spent reading and editing my work as well as all the useful information he bestowed both inside and outside of the classroom.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

George Washington and the American Revolution do not suffer from a lack of historical coverage; however, much of the writing concerning Washington is tainted with hero worship or hero denunciation. This study is not concerned with judging the actions of Washington within a moral framework to determine right or wrong. Such an assessment is impossible given the cultural distance between the modern world and Washington's eighteenth century. Rather, this study seeks to investigate the tenure of Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army from four different perspectives. Three of the perspectives take the form of narratives, while the final chapter is essentially a narrative but with an eye on the bigger picture throughout the study. Most importantly, this study is concerned with the character and style of Washington as it pertained to executing his duties as the military leader of the American Revolution.

Although this study focuses on Washington during the Revolution, it is not a military history, at least not in the traditional sense. The chapter concerning Washington's military style is the furthest this study goes in exploring traditional military history; yet, a great amount of time was spent examining numerous military histories by authors such as W.J. Wood and Bruce Lancaster. The inspiration for this study was born from the works of authors such as T.H. Breen, David H. Fischer, and David McCullough, and of course from the writings of Washington himself. Breen's study in colonial consumerism and the Revolution helped contribute to my personal study of dual-identity in colonial America. However, to better grasp the concept of dual-identity I thought it

prudent to examine perhaps a man, or some other symbol, which brought colonial Americans together. There are many writings on the differences that existed between the colonies before, during, and after the war, but I wanted to take the opportunity to understand what united them and, more importantly, what kept them motivated throughout the entirety of the Revolutionary War.

In terms of American history, one figure stands above all the rest: George Washington. Washington's status throughout the war and the vast literature concerning the conflict allow us to examine Washington's multifaceted role in the Revolutionary War. This study explores such questions as: How did Washington lead the army? How did he cooperate with his fellow officers and Congress? And how did his contemporaries view him throughout the war? By critically examining these inquiries, a more holistic interpretation of Washington may be gained. The study is organic in that it seeks to understand the various aspects of the systematic growth of Washington as a symbol for American Independence.

The second chapter focuses on the relationship between George Washington and the Continental Congress throughout the entirety of the Revolutionary War. It is appropriate to begin the study with this relationship because it was Congress that created the Continental Army and the position of Commander-in-Chief, but it was Washington who actually developed rough militia units into a well-trained fighting force. The relationship between Washington and Congress is important because it illuminates the distribution of power between the military and governmental bodies in America. Washington's struggle to convince Congress that he needed a professional army reflected both the precarious situation in which he found himself and the army, as well as many

American's traditional fears of a standing army. Ultimately, Washington's faithful adherence to Congressional authority helped make the American Revolution unique because leadership of the war never turned tyrannical or totalitarian.

The third chapter deals with the style and manner that Washington employed to conduct the war. This chapter is concerned with identifying the major themes of Washington's leadership, including his approach to battle. One of the most interesting aspects of this chapter is that it deals with the internal struggles of Washington; between his desire to achieve a grand stroke of victory and the reality of fighting a defensive war with, at times, a skeleton force. Washington was a man of action. When his army was forced to remain intact, but inactive, he was forced to fight his natural, internal urge to act. Perhaps Washington's greatest attribute during the Revolutionary War was his ability and willingness to learn. Although Washington's military concepts and strategies changed dramatically during the course of the war, one element of his leadership remained constant throughout the entire conflict, discipline. Considerable attention is also paid to the openness of Washington's system, with particular emphasis on individuals such as Henry Knox.

The relationship between Washington and his officers is the subject of the fourth chapter. When the revolutionary movement shifted from essentially non-violent resistance to a state of war the emphasis on the army became paramount. The army was the heart and soul of the Revolution, something Washington understood all too well. Thus, it is important to understand how Washington communicated with his fellow officers. This study explores the character of Washington from the viewpoint of different American officers but essentially focuses on how Washington perceived his fellow

officers. Gen. Nathanael Greene stands out in this chapter because he eventually became Washington's "right-hand man" and most trusted officer. One important aspect of this study is that it recognizes the other side of Washington, a side that could be deemed "dark." Washington was certainly highly conscious of his public perception, but it appears that he was also at times extremely paranoid, which led him occasionally to be cold and vindictive. Washington's actions towards his fellow officers reflected not only the army's particular situation but also help identify key aspects of his character.

The final chapter is dedicated to examining how Washington was perceived by his contemporaries. The second, third, and fourth chapters are told mainly from the perspective of Washington, but this chapter deals exclusively with how others felt about him. Because Washington was so well known during his lifetime, and almost anyone who received a letter from him kept it, the sources for this chapter span a large spectrum. The colonial newspapers provided a great opportunity for individuals to celebrate or berate the character of Washington, but so did the theatre and tavern drinking hall, where many sang songs of praise for one of the two Georges. Religion played an immense role in motivating individuals to join the fight for American independence, and Washington was often referred to as the "American Moses." By exploring what Washington meant to various groups of people, including Loyalists, it is possible to understand how he became a symbol for America at large.

In his most recent work, Gordon Wood wrote: "George Washington may still be first in war and first in peace, but he no longer seems to be first in the hearts of his countrymen."<sup>1</sup> Little wonder that many modern American's have lost touch with

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*, (The Penguin Press, New York), 31.

Washington because not only has his world long since passed, but his symbol has been over-commercialized and extremely simplified. Such treatment of Washington does not do justice to the efforts of Washington and the entire Revolutionary Generation. Viewed in the proper context, the story of how Washington led the army provides an accurate glimpse into the creation of the American republic and an understanding of how Washington came to be viewed as a symbol for America: Not simply as a “great man” who never erred, but as a man who represented a common bond between many different individuals. J.T Headley wrote: “Though seemingly a contradiction, it is nevertheless true, that time only renders the character of Washington more clear, while the circumstances which developed it become more and more indistinct.”<sup>2</sup> Though Headley’s quote does contain some elements of truth, by examining the various relationships Washington had during the war, as well as understanding how he was perceived by various groups, it is possible to grasp the world in which Washington lived, operated, and made decisions, and ultimately why he became such an important symbol for the American Republic.

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<sup>2</sup> J.T. Headley, *Washington and His Generals*, (reprint: Privately Published by Westvaco Corporation, Christmas 1991), 41.

## CHAPTER 2

### WASHINGTON AND CONGRESS

The relationship between George Washington, as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, and the Continental Congress demonstrated many of the strengths and weaknesses of the united colonies. Washington's and Congress's relationship was complex to say the least. Indeed, the relationship was born out of necessity with no clear indication of what the future might bring. The tone of Washington and others at the beginning of hostilities indicated that many thought the conflict would shortly be resolved. Before Washington left to join the army in Boston he wrote to his wife that with help from providence "I shall return safe to you in the fall."<sup>3</sup> However, the conflict in Boston would soon spread throughout the colonies and into parts of Canada and cover eight years of time. Therefore, the relationship between Washington and Congress grew over time, adapting to specific situations while clinging to certain core ideas such as state's rights. By examining the relationship throughout various stages of the war, a better understanding of the importance of both Washington's and Congress's duties during the Revolutionary War may be gained.

When the Second Continental Congress convened in May 1775, the atmosphere was different than it had been at the first gathering in September 1774. The events at Lexington and Concord propelled the revolutionary movement into the arena of armed conflict with British Regulars, something the First Continental Congress did not plan. Many issues and matters were discussed within Congress, but one of the most important concerned the creation of a Continental Army and the appointment of a general to lead it.

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<sup>3</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. III, Jan. 1770-Sept. 1775, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) 294.

Perhaps no other individual in America was more suited for the job of commander-in-chief than Washington.

Because of regional disputes within Congress, most New England delegates knew that a compromise with the Southern colonies was necessary if overall unity was to be achieved. Washington was from Virginia, a colony with many appealing qualities including the largest population of all the colonies, a radical nature, and a healthy economy. However, Washington's selection did not stem simply from his place of origin. He was a successful planter and gentleman, stood well over six feet tall, and had military experience from the French and Indian War as well as experience in legislative duties. In addition, Washington came to Congress every day dressed in a striking uniform of red and blue that he had personally designed for his use as leader of the Fairfax Independent company, a militia unit in Virginia.<sup>4</sup> In a letter to his wife John Adams stated that the choice of Washington would "have a great effect in cementing and securing the union of these colonies."<sup>5</sup>

On June 15<sup>th</sup> Washington was unanimously elected general and commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. The next day Washington gave what would become a famous address to Congress. Washington not only accepted the appointment, but did so without pay, asking only to be compensated for what he spent out of his own purse. The following day, June 17, Washington received his formal commission from Congress, which stated in rather vague terms that Washington had the authority to "act as you shall think for the good and welfare of the service." Congress's definition of the Continental

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington's War: The Forging of a Revolutionary Leader and the American Presidency*, (Sourcebooks, Inc., Naperville, Illinois, 2004), 66, 68-69.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund C. Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, Vol. I: August 29, 1774 to July 4, 1776, (Carnegie Institute of Washington, Washington D.C., re. 1963), 130.

Army was equally wide-ranging, which clearly reflected the infancy of the army. Essentially, Congress granted Washington the authority to be in charge of everyone who was taking up arms against “every hostile invasion thereof.” The commission also ordered Washington to provide soldiers with stringent discipline and the proper necessities of life to the best of his abilities.<sup>6</sup>

Washington arrived in Boston on July 3 and formally took command of the collection of New England troops. Historian Fred Anderson noted that because Washington received command of the thirteen colonies through the authority of the Continental Congress, the transformation of New England regiments into a Continental Army was “the physical embodiment of a political union.”<sup>7</sup> However, the transformation of the provincial troops into a Continental Army was not complete the instant Washington appeared in camp. On paper and in the minds of Congress the “Continental Army” existed, but the reality of being in charge of synthesizing the hodgepodge collection of troops in Massachusetts must have overwhelmed Washington at first sight.

Washington formally referred to the army as the United Provinces of North America and called upon everyone to lay aside regional differences and come together as one solid force. In order to better understand the size of the force he now commanded, Washington ordered an official census of the army, including supplies. He also set into motion a plan to create and maintain discipline. Strict rules were enforced that forbade swearing and enforced subordination. Cleanliness was required as well. Soldiers were

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<sup>6</sup> Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1783*, Vol. 2, May 10 to September 20, 1775 (Washington D.C., 1903-1937), June 17, 1775. Found at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

<sup>7</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766*, (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2000), xxi.

no longer allowed to visit Mill Pond for fear of introducing smallpox to the army.<sup>8</sup> It was these regulations that lead Pastor Emerson to remark, “The strictest government is taking place.”<sup>9</sup> The transformation took time; the cultural differences between Virginia and New England were vast. However, Washington’s countenance and dignified manner seemed to impress his soldiers and instilled into the army a tone of legitimacy.<sup>10</sup>

The returns from his official census of the army and its supplies were extremely discouraging. In a letter to the President of the Continental Congress Washington expressed the opinion of himself and other generals by stating the need to recruit soldiers from areas outside of New England, specifically Massachusetts. Supplies such as tents, clothing, and ammunition were sparse, and Washington wrote “I find myself already much embarrassed for want of a military chest.” Washington also noted the absence of engineers, which were considered essential in Washington’s situation; commanding a siege. He also made several recommendations for new offices including a Quarter Master General, Commissary of Musters, and Commissary of Artillery. Appointments were also a bone of contention for some, like General Joseph Spencer, who left the army after refusing to serve under General Israel Putnam.<sup>11</sup> Many of the problems that Washington encountered early in the war would continue to plague him and the army until the end of hostilities.

Washington’s letter and its request were received differently by different members of Congress. Benjamin Harris felt sympathy for the general and assured him that Congress was doing everything in its power to alleviate his problems. Harrison

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<sup>8</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 3, 309-310.

<sup>9</sup> David McCullough, *1776*, (Simon and Schuster, New York and London, 2005), 32.

<sup>10</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 43-44.

<sup>11</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 3, 309-310.

noted quite joyfully that Congress not only approved his recommendations for new offices but left the general in charge of selecting men to fill those new roles. On the other end of the spectrum, John Adams wrote to James Warren of the new developments. Adams was annoyed that Congress had to comply with the list of provincial generals that had been appointed in the First Continental Congress. He was equally, if not more, annoyed that the decision to choose the appointments of the newly created offices was left to Washington. Adams wrote, “The Consequence has been that the appointment of these important and lucrative officers is left to the General, against every proper Rule and Principle, as these offices are Checks upon his.” The following day, July 24, Adams wrote Warren again but this letter as Adams explained was written “freely.” Adams stated that Congress should have already established control over the whole legislative body of the continent because without it they were caught between “hawk and buzzard.”<sup>12</sup>

Adams acknowledged a fundamental lack of overall authority by the Continental Congress. The comparison between Adams and Harrison’s responses also brings to light the different perceptions within Congress. However, the root of Congress’s problems stemmed from its lack of authority. Congress’s lack of institutional authority was a side-effect of an assembly that was essentially a “meeting of committees.” Adams correctly identified a problem with the Second Continental Congress when he wrote concerning that group’s adoption of the same policy as the First Continental Congress. The circumstances in which each Congress met were simply too different for the same system to be effective. Many Congressional representatives put the priority of their state above

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<sup>12</sup> Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, Vol. I, 169-170, 173-174, 176.

all else. This type of attitude and approach to business put a strain on efficiency.<sup>13</sup> The creation of the Continental Army and George Washington's Commission changed the direction of the Continental Congress. Congress was no longer overseeing a boycott or simply organizing public support, it was now in charge of supplying an army, a task that required coordination.

The first winter encampment of the newly created army would not be the worst, but the problems posed during this time would form precedents. Washington addressed the Congress in a letter dated September 21, 1775, in which he spoke of many impending disasters that were to come with the winter. Problems arose with payment for soldiers and officers, including an argument over pay by lunar or calendar month. Two of Washington's most vexing problems concerned keeping the army together and keeping the army clothed and warm for the winter. Many enlistments were due to expire in the coming weeks, and Washington was again left with an empty military chest.

Washington's Commissary General and Quarter Master General had pushed their credit to the end, and now Washington was in desperate need of clothing and blankets. The situation led him to say "they [soldiers] may be deemed in a state of nakedness."

Washington also informed Congress that he had sent Colonel Benedict Arnold to "if possible make himself Master of Quebec."<sup>14</sup>

The invasion of Canada was the brain child of Congress. Many of the delegates reasoned that French Canadians would join the thirteen colonies in rebellion and create a united North American front. On November 8, 1775 Congress wrote to General

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<sup>13</sup> Rick Wilson and Calvin Jillson, "Leadership Patterns in the Continental Congress, 1774-1789," *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 1. (Feb., 1989), 8, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 3, 505-512.

Schuyler, “Exert your utmost endeavors to induce the Canadians to accede to a union with these colonies, and that they form from their several parishes, a provincial Convention, and send Delegates to this Congress.” Congress also guaranteed religious freedom.<sup>15</sup> Congress had previously attempted to gain the support of Canada through bureaucratic endeavors but had failed to receive a positive reply. Arnold and Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga in early May 1775 but were forced to abandon it later. Based on testimony from Allen and Arnold, Congress deemed Canada an easy target. However, the Canadian invasion was a disaster, culminating in the American defeat at Quebec on December 31, 1775. Arnold and three other generals kept the siege alive outside Quebec, but it was never a serious threat. When General Burgoyne arrived in Quebec and rendezvoused with General Carleton’s existing forces the invasion of Canada ended, lasting just two months shy of an entire year.<sup>16</sup>

As fall gave way to winter the fortunes of the army seemed to be in doubt. The effort to re-enlist soldiers for another campaign had produced some results but not enough to make Washington happy, much less comfortable. Privately the Virginia gentleman commander loathed the Yankee soldier. The absence of good news from Congress coupled with the politics of a stalemate left Washington in a foul mood. However, on November 28, 1775 Captain John Manley, a privateer of the schooner *Lee*, captured the *Nancy*, a brig, just north of Boston. Washington expressed the event in terms of providence, but actually he had sent out a number of private schooners to accomplish precisely what the *Lee* had done. Historian David McCullough wrote, “The

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<sup>15</sup> Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 3, Nov. 8, 1775.

<sup>16</sup> W.J. Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War, 1775-1781* (Da Capo Press, Chapel Hill, NC, 2003) 35-37, 54.

ship was loaded with military treasure- a supply of war material such as Congress could not be expected to provide for months to come...nearly everything needed but powder.”<sup>17</sup>

The situation with the *Lee* is important because it demonstrated the type of action that was so desperately needed by Washington, and the type of action that Congress had to offer.

Thanks in large part to Washington’s willingness to approve young Henry Knox’s plan to acquire artillery from Fort Ticonderoga and transport it back to Dorchester Heights, the Continental Army was able to force the British out of Boston. The British departed in March and before long the Continental Army would as well. In April 1776 Washington arrived in New York, ready to begin preparations for a showdown in the near future.<sup>18</sup> Again, Washington was in need of supplies for his men and wrote to Congress expressing his need, but he also wrote to Colonel Joseph Reed. Reed informed Washington that he had secured the supplies but he also mentioned that Congress was divided by factions. Washington wrote back on April 23, most disturbed by the news concerning Congress, and urged Reed to hire horses in order to deliver the supplies quickly. The same day Washington also wrote to Congress informing them of Reed’s cache of supplies and requested that it pay for the supplies.<sup>19</sup> Washington never failed to inform Congress of the army’s needs, but he also learned that other avenues had to be pursued. Reed’s information concerning the state of Congress did not help instill confidence in an assembly that had already proved incapable at times.

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<sup>17</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 63-64.

<sup>18</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 82,117.

<sup>19</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 4, 505-508.

The division that Reed referred to in his letter to Washington stemmed from the overall differences that existed between the colonies and the geographic region in which each colony was situated. The split may be categorized into two factions, conservative and radical. Historian H.J. Henderson noted that the radical and conservative split did not concern commitment to war but rather perception of the war. Radicals tended to view the war in ideological terms, which meant total reform through total commitment on behalf of the citizens. New England Congressmen represented the radical element in Congress, but they also received some support from the Southern and Middle Colonies. The conservative faction in Congress feared internal divisions in areas such as the Middle Colonies and tended to back away from making the war a “people’s revolution.” Conservatives such as Robert Morris saw the creation of the military as a necessary step in order to regain control of a situation that was turbulent.<sup>20</sup>

One question that Washington continually posed to the Continental Congress early in the war regarded an official Indian policy. He wrote to Major General Philip Schuyler on April 19, 1776, “I have urged to Congress the necessity of engaging them [Indians] on our side, to prevent their taking an active part against us, which would be a most fatal stroke under our present circumstances.”<sup>21</sup> The President of Congress, John Hancock, wrote Washington on June 11 notifying him Congress had not come to a decision concerning Indian relations. Hancock told Washington that Congress would probably be in agreement with him on the issue and promised to work harder in the future to secure such business in a faster manner.<sup>22</sup> Finally, on June 20 Washington was able to

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<sup>20</sup> H. James Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress* (McGraw-Hill Book Co., New York, 1974), 102-105.

<sup>21</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 4*, 496.

<sup>22</sup> Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 1, 481-482.

send orders to General Schuyler informing him of Congress's resolves concerning the Indians. The Indian question was so vital to Washington because he needed to secure a passage into Canada.<sup>23</sup> The need for a passage way into Canada stemmed from the continued siege of Quebec, which was in its last stages.

In June 1776 Congress attempted to solve problems concerning the maintenance and management of the war. Acting upon the suggestions of a Congressional committee it created a Board of War made up of five members. John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Harrison, James Wilson, and Edward Rutledge were elected to the Board of War with Richard Peters serving as secretary and Adams as President. John Hancock thought the creation of the board to be a pivotal moment in the direction of war. Hancock assumed the board would create a working system for supplying the military. The duties of the Board of War were vast. The board was in charge of keeping an exact count of officers, soldiers, arms, artillery, and other military supplies as well as guarding money being sent from Congress, fitting and dispatching land forces, taking care of prisoners of war, and maintaining the letters and papers of the board. Because members of the Board of War were required to attend Congress regularly, their schedule was dictated by the course of Congress. Many members such as John Adams became overburdened.

Despite Hancock's optimism the Board of War was not capable of streamlining the management of the war. The board's duties were too extensive and it generally lacked the authority to solve problems. Congress granted the Board of War enough power to solve very specific problems, but overall the board was reduced to simply making suggestions to Congress. One of the tasks that consumed a great deal of the Board of War's time was determining commissions of foreign officers. The question of

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<sup>23</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 5, 162.

rank became a thorn in the Board's side. Because many individuals simply did not have documented resumes, Congress decided the Board of War should review each request and make a decision based on evidence. This was a time-consuming task that caused the work of the Board of War to slow down considerably. Many individuals, such as Samuel Chase, recognized the need to reorganize the Board of War as early as December, 1776.<sup>24</sup>

Before the British invaded New York in August, important developments occurred in Congress and throughout the colonies. The question of independence became of paramount importance. Until this time the question had only been posed by radical factions and then only sporadically. Perhaps independence was the next logical step, but it was a step Congress took very cautiously. On July 6, Hancock wrote to Washington informing him that Congress had decided upon independence from Great Britain. He enclosed a copy of the Declaration of Independence and asked Washington to "have it proclaimed at the Head of the Army in the way you shall think most proper."<sup>25</sup> The Declaration of Independence changed the dynamics of Washington's job as Commander-in-Chief of the army. He was no longer leading a fight for restoration and preservation but a fight for complete independence.

Historian David Hackett Fischer noted that the Continental Congress and its generals had several different options on how to conduct and win the war. Essentially all of the plans that were incorporated involved a strategy of avoiding open conflict with the British. However, Washington and Congress were certain that the British would choose New York City when they returned, and both decided the city had to be defended.

General Charles Lee was chosen by Congress and Washington to organize the defense of

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<sup>24</sup> Jennings B. Sanders, *Evolution of Executive Departments of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Peter Smith, Gloucester, Mass., 1971), 8-11.

<sup>25</sup> Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 2, 2.

the city. After assessing the army's situation, General Lee concluded the city was at the mercy of whoever controlled the water surrounding it. Lee's plan for defense of New York was accepted but was altered significantly by Washington. The fall of New York would prove to be one of the most troubling and desperate times for Washington and the Revolution. The Continental Army sustained heavy losses and was forced to retreat through the New Jersey countryside. Fischer wrote that the disaster of New York "was the lowest point of Washington's long career."<sup>26</sup>

In the days leading up to Christmas 1776, Washington wrote to Robert Morris, Congress, and others describing his awful position. The army was about to be disbanded come New Year because of the terms of enlistment ending. His army needed supplies and the wounded needed care, plus General Lee had been captured. On Christmas he wrote to Morris again, thanking him for sending a shipment of blankets. Washington's tone in this letter was different, he suggested that the colonies should "look forward with hopes that some lucky chance may yet turn up in our favor." Washington ended the note looking toward the future, yet firmly planted in reality: "I hope the next Christmas will prove happier than the present to you and to Dear Sir."<sup>27</sup> The duty of Commander-in-Chief was its heaviest during this period for Washington. He found himself confronted with the problem of losing his army as well as the popular support needed to keep the war effort alive. On Christmas night Washington led his army across the Delaware and successfully attacked the town of Trenton, followed up by another victory at Princeton.

The fall of New York had brought an important question to a head between Congress and the military. The various problems of managing the war that had existed

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<sup>26</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (Oxford University Press, 2004) 81-83, 114.

<sup>27</sup> Fitzgerald, *Writings of Washington*, Vol. 6, 420-421, 431-434, 436-438.

prior to the last days of 1776 were only magnified by the outcome of the New York Campaign. General Nathanael Greene wrote to Congress in late 1776 asking it to consider some other method of conducting the war. Essentially, Greene was asking permission for the army to solely conduct military affairs. The army did not want Congress making tactical decisions, such as the invasion of Quebec in 1775. Congress responded on the same day that Washington attacked Trenton, December, 26, with a resolve granting Washington full authority to conduct the war.<sup>28</sup> Congress's resolve to grant full authority to Washington certainly demonstrated a great deal of trust between the two parties, but Washington's leadership would later be called into question.

After the Battle of Princeton, the army moved into winter encampment at Morristown, New Jersey. The winter of 1777 would almost strip Washington of his army. The army was in great need of clothing and was very poorly fed, plus the harshness of the winter caused many soldiers to fall ill. Smallpox was introduced into the camp as well, causing Washington to take drastic measures. On February 13, 1777, the Medical Committee wrote to inform Washington that in order to save the army all soldiers who had not been inoculated for smallpox were to receive the treatment.<sup>29</sup> However, Washington had already acted on his own authority. When he arrived in camp on January 6, he ordered Chief Army Doctor William Shippen to begin inoculations. Bruce Chadwick noted that Washington's decision to inoculate the army was the first use of "executive order." The decision to inoculate the entire army was groundbreaking because no other army had done so before for any disease. Congress backed Washington's decision to act quickly because it was within his given powers as

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<sup>28</sup> Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 368-369.

<sup>29</sup> Burnett, ed., *Letters of Members of the Continental Congress*, Vol. 2, 249-250.

Commander-in-Chief and it was for the overall good of the army.<sup>30</sup> Inoculating the army would prove to be a resourceful move. The army was salvaged, and the revolution continued.

Despite the success of inoculating the army at Morristown, the medical administration of the Continental Army had problems. The problems began when Washington first took over the army in 1775 and ordered a reorganization of the hospital. Washington's actions angered regimental surgeons who were no longer allowed to simply take medical supplies, plus Washington demanded weekly reports. Benjamin Church was appointed the first Director General of the Hospital shortly thereafter. The clash with regimental surgeons continued, but before Church could work out a compromise he was arrested for treason. The problems between the general and regimental hospitals continued throughout the war with no stable leadership until late in the war. In 1780 John Cochran was selected Director General, and served the army well until the end of hostilities.<sup>31</sup>

During the winter-encampment at Morristown Washington spent a great deal of his time pleading to Congress for more troops. From December to March, Washington wrote Congress expressing his deep concern. At the beginning of hostilities in 1775 Congress stated that it could raise a force of more than seventy-five thousand men. At Morristown, Washington could only count about three thousand soldiers, and many of those were too sick to stand, much less fight. Washington wanted a new army that consisted of men who signed on for long enlistments because his experience in the field suggested that an army of citizen/soldiers was not capable of winning the war. Although

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<sup>30</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 92-94.

<sup>31</sup> Howard Lewis Applegate, "The Medical Administration of the American Revolutionary Army," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (Spring, 1961), 2-4, 10.

Washington was vocal about his dislike of the militia, he was forced to beg for their assistance during the winter of 1777, an act that clearly defined the precarious situation that Washington found himself and the army in. One of the biggest points of contention Washington had with his supply of troops was the ability of a state legislature to recall troops from his army.<sup>32</sup>

Historian Paul Nelson noted that most American officers preferred a regular army. In addition to Washington's complaints, during the Southern Campaign in 1780-81, Generals Nathanael Greene and Daniel Morgan both lamented the use of militia troops. Although Greene and Morgan were victorious with the use of militia, their success depended largely on a contingent of Continental troops. Nelson also noted officers who were more ideological, such as Charles Lee, preferred the use of militia. The main debate concerning the militia and regular army centered largely upon finding the correct mixture of the two types of armies. The question concerning the citizen/soldier or regular army would not be solved during or after the Revolutionary War.<sup>33</sup> Despite these differences, when Washington left Morristown in May his army had grown to about nine thousand troops. Rebuilding the army had taken the efforts of Washington, state leaders, and Congress. Many of the men who signed on to fight became Continental Regulars and agreed to terms lasting from one to three years. Washington did not have the army he wanted, but it was certainly a step in the right direction. He was still dependent to some degree on militiamen, but the importance of long enlistments was finally understood by Congress.

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<sup>32</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 153-155.

<sup>33</sup> Paul David Nelson, "Citizen Soldiers or Regulars: The Views of American General Officers on the Military Establishment, 1775-1781," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Oct., 1979), 131.

Despite the refurbished Continental Army, the British were able to take control of Philadelphia, the capital of the United Colonies and the meeting place for Congress, after the Battle of Brandywine. Washington mounted an offensive at Germantown in the following weeks but was unable to restore the capital to American control. Not long after Washington's defeat at Germantown, General Gates achieved a stunning victory over British General Burgoyne at Saratoga, New York. These events, coupled with an anti-Washington group in Congress, created problems for Washington and the leadership of the war. The anti-Washington group in Congress was led by members such as Richard Henry Lee and Thomas Mifflin. In late November of 1777 Lee and others pushed for a reorganization of the Board of War. The Board of War was steeped in problems, which the anti-Washington group used in their favor to appoint additional members to the Board of War who were sympathetic to their viewpoint.<sup>34</sup>

The revamped Board of War was to consist of three non-Congressional members, General Thomas Mifflin, Colonel Thomas Pickering, and Colonel Robert Harrison, but Harrison declined the invitation. In place of Harrison, three additional members were chosen, General Gates, Joseph Trumbull, and Richard Peters. Gates was named president of the Board of War and, along with Mifflin, represented an anti-Washington stance. Trumbull was not physically able to take his post because of an illness, and Pickering tended to view Washington in a "luke-warm" fashion. Thus, Richard Peters was the only member of the Board of War who was strongly in favor of Washington's leadership. A separate problem developed in the form of Thomas Conway. Conway was a French volunteer who found favor in Congress and was promoted to brigadier general. Rank continually posed a bone of contention among many officers and created another problem

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<sup>34</sup> Sanders, *Evolution of the Executive Departments of the Continental Congress*, 11-12.

that Washington had to contemplate. Washington accepted Conway's initial promotion but protested heavily when he heard Congress was considering making Conway a major general.

The controversies concerning the Board of War and Thomas Conway merged after a letter written from Conway to Gates was discovered. In the letter Conway berated Washington's leadership and exonerated Gates. If the letter had never been brought to attention, perhaps the so called Conway Cabal would never have occurred, but Washington found out the contents of the letter and quickly wrote Conway a short letter stating: "In a letter from Gen. Conway to Gen. Gates he says: 'Heaven has been determined to save your country; or a weak general and bad counselors would have ruined it.'"<sup>35</sup> Washington had good reason to be suspicious because Conway was also named Inspector General of the Board of War. Gates was in charge of the committee that was to supply and maintain the army, and he received popular support among his colleagues. Historian Jennings Sanders noted that "Gates' ability to cause trouble increased by his new position."<sup>36</sup>

In January of 1778 Congress passed a resolution authorizing the Board of War to undertake another invasion of Canada. The resolution did not mention Washington. Major General the Marquis de Lafayette along with Conway and General John Stark were elected by Congress to lead the assault. Lafayette was one of Washington's strongest advocates, which led him to despise Conway. When Lafayette met with Gates and others at a banquet before the planned assault on Canada, he was incensed at the disrespect shown to Washington. When Lafayette arrived in Albany to begin the journey

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<sup>35</sup> Edmund C. Burnett, *The Continental Congress* (Greenwood Press, Westport, Conn., 1975), 281-282.

<sup>36</sup> Sanders, *Evolution of Executive Departments*, 13.

into Canada, he was shocked by what he found. Lafayette wrote to Washington expressing his feelings concerning the Board of War and the deplorable state of affairs present in Albany. Lafayette, with the help of Washington and Henry Laurens, was able to convince Congress to abandon the Canadian enterprise. Conway was reassigned but disapproved of his new assignment under the command of General McDougall and eventually resigned. Conway continued to have problems until he was seriously wounded in a duel with American General John Cadwalader on July 4, 1778. Before returning to France Conway wrote Washington a letter in which he apologized for any wrong doings.<sup>37</sup>

Perhaps Washington blew the situation with Conway and Gates out of proportion, but his view of the situation stemmed from his overall fear that certain congressmen and officers were eager to replace him. Historian John Ferling noted that some individuals were not pleased with Washington's leadership, but on the whole everyone understood the circumstances and were grateful to have Washington lead the army. Furthermore, those who opposed Washington often did so over specific issues, and never considered electing a new commander-in-chief.<sup>38</sup> At the same time Washington was dealing with challenges to his position of leadership, he was also dealing with serious problems developing from the army's winter-encampment at Valley Forge. Many of the problems Washington faced were the same that he had encountered at previous winter-encampments, but Valley Forge presented problems that were distinctly unique.

On February 17, 1778, John Laurens wrote to Henry Laurens from Valley Forge: "Those who are employed to feed us, either for want of knowledge or for want of activity

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<sup>37</sup> Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 290-297.

<sup>38</sup> John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 205-206.

or both, never furnish supplies adequate to our wants.” On March 24 Washington wrote to Congress expressing the same concerns but added “since the month of August last, between two and three hundred officers have resigned their commissions, and many others were with difficulty dissuaded from it.” Four days later Washington wrote to Congress again to inform them that he had named Baron Von Stueben Inspector General of the Army.<sup>39</sup> The appointment of Von Stueben was geared towards creating a disciplined army that operated from a single unified plan of engagement. However, Washington needed to first ensure that he had an army to discipline. Washington understood the situation of his soldiers and officers and knew that many of those who deserted did so because their families desperately needed them at home. Washington recognized the need for Congress to enact a pension system.<sup>40</sup>

The pension method that Washington and others preferred was that of a half-pay system, which was prevalent throughout European armies. The question split Congress nearly in half, with only a slim majority favoring the half-pay pension system for officers or their widows. Those who opposed the measure were steadfast because they felt as though Congress did not have the authority to enact such a measure, and they feared the thought that a standing army might be produced from such a measure. Thomas Burke, a Congressman from North Carolina, acknowledged that the former was by far the most prevalent reason to oppose the half-pay system. Throughout the debates Washington stood steadfastly in support of the system. The question was then posed to the states which produced essentially the same results as the Congressional voting. The debate was finally settled via a compromise in which officers would receive half-pay, not for life, but

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<sup>39</sup> William S. Baker, *Itinerary of General Washington from June 15, 1775 to December 23, 1783* (Hunterdon House, Lambertville, New Jersey, 1970), 119, 122-123.

<sup>40</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 283.

for seven years after the end of the conflict.<sup>41</sup> In the end, those in Congress who were against half-pay did agree to step beyond their presumed authority but only in a measured way.

The winter-encampment at Valley Forge was a trying time for everyone, especially the troops. A variety of problems confronted Congress. One of the main reasons that Congress was unable to supply the troops in a satisfactory manner resulted from their own exile. The British occupation of Philadelphia forced Congress to move to York. York was a small town located in the interior of Pennsylvania that presented travel problems for many members of Congress.<sup>42</sup> The tensions created between Washington and the Board of War also hindered progress. Gates, Pickering, and Mifflin were scheduled to meet with Washington at Valley Forge to determine a plan for supplying the army. Because of the tensions Gates and Mifflin never arrived, and what could have been a useful meeting never took place. Gates was relieved from his duty on the Board of War in April 1778. Afterwards, the Board of War became a virtual non-factor, often reduced to minor tasks such as providing a table for Washington. Congress ignored the Board of War by assigning military tasks to other committees. Despite performing minor tasks, the Board of War did not ease the problems that plagued the relationship between Washington and Congress.<sup>43</sup>

Leadership posed a problem that hindered the relationship between Washington and Congress. Washington had the authority to speak on behalf on the entire Continental Army, but Congress lacked a unified response. Rick Wilson and Calvin Jillson argued

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<sup>41</sup> Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 311-316.

<sup>42</sup> Burnett, *The Continental Congress*, 321.

<sup>43</sup> Kenneth Schaffel, "The American Board of War, 1776-1781," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 50, No. 4 (Oct., 1986), 187-188.

that if effective leadership was to come from Congress it would have been through the President of Congress, the committee system, or activity on the debate floor. Wilson and Jillson's study concluded that none of the above mentioned means produced effective leadership. The President of Congress was reduced to a monitor during debate. In November 1777, President Henry Laurens wrote to Washington "tis seldom in the power of the President to answer with that dispatch which may seem necessary." Laurens felt the same level of ineffectiveness as his predecessors, Peyton Randolph and John Hancock, often referring to himself as a "silent spectator." Like Randolph and Hancock, Laurens resigned the office to regain his political voice.<sup>44</sup> Washington wrote some of his most distressing letters to the various Presidents of Congress, but instead of having the authority to take serious action, the Presidents were forced to simply turn the matter over to debate and perhaps assign a committee.

The committee system was too constrained and was never allowed the opportunity to provide effective leadership and offer Washington a system that could ease the burdens of the army. Most committees were formed in response to a specific letter or issue, which led to a large number of committees. Wilson and Jillson identified 2,327 committees between the years 1775 and 1783. Distribution of members throughout the various committees was uneven and resulted in abundant workloads for members. James Duane's complaints in 1779 about the burden of committee appointments sound remarkably similar to John Adams' complaint concerning his duties as President of the Board of War in 1776. The activity on the floor determined the relevance of specific committees, but the floor also failed to produce a unified response and provide effective leadership. If Washington was the unanimous voice of his countrymen, then

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<sup>44</sup> Wilson and Jillson, "Leadership Patterns in the Continental Congress," 13-16.

Congressional floor debate was the antithesis. Thomas Rodney, a Congressman from Delaware, reported in March 1781 that “selfish conceit and opinions...[which led] them [Congressmen] to disagree in everything...this disjointed manner of proceeding throws government into that disordered tract of adopting one expedient after another perpetually.” Instead of providing stability to counter the ineffectiveness of the committee system and the office of President, the floor produced no stable leadership.<sup>45</sup>

Turnover and attendance were serious problems that plagued Congress throughout the entirety of the war. During the Continental Army’s stay at Valley Forge Congress experienced a high rate of turnover, which meant that an increased workload was left to fall upon an inexperienced Congress. The high rate of turnover also prevented long-term cooperation and coordination among members and their various political connections. Attendance was also a problem. Although the British occupation of Philadelphia posed problems for many members, the length of Congressional service also posed effective leadership problems. On average, most delegates to Congress served about six months out of the year. Many members were constrained by rules under the Articles of Confederation, which stated that delegates could not serve more than three years out of any six year period. Turnover combined with a faulty attendance policy prohibited Congress from acting in the most efficient manner, which in turn caused great problems for Washington and the army.<sup>46</sup>

The financial backing of the war caused problems for both Washington and Congress. Throughout the war Congress routinely printed paper bills. By the end of 1775 Congress had issued six million dollars in bills, which was only a minuscule amount of

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<sup>45</sup> Wilson and Jillson, “Leadership Patterns in the Continental Congress,” 20-21, 24-27.

<sup>46</sup> Wilson and Jillson, “Leadership Patterns in the Continental Congress,” 28-31.

the total dollars in bills issued by the end of 1779.<sup>47</sup> Because of the large amount of paper bills put into circulation, prices increased heavily and the value of paper money decreased. As a result, farmers and other providers of goods were reluctant to sell their goods for paper money. Merchants were often blamed by the public for speculating in conjunction with public officials. Some Congressmen did speculate, such as Sam Adams and then Quartermaster General Nathanael Greene, who urged Commissary General Jeremiah Wadsworth to keep their dealing secret because “for however just and upright our conduct may be, the world will have suspicions to our disadvantage.”<sup>48</sup>

Contributions made by the French during the war helped to ease the troubles that existed between Washington and Congress. The government of France officially forged an alliance with Congress in February 1778, but France had been sending supplies on a limited basis beforehand. The French company of Hortalez was created in May 1776 with the sole purpose of distributing supplies to the American war effort. It has been estimated that in the two years of its existence Hortalez supplied the Continental Army with eighty percent of its gunpowder.<sup>49</sup> After February 1778 the French government sent large amounts of money, supplies, men, and a navy to aid the American war effort. French support helped Washington keep his army from disbanding. The French also lent the American cause legitimacy because they were an established nation. During the remaining years of the conflict the assistance that France gave Congress and Washington

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<sup>47</sup> Sanders, *Evolution Executive Departments of the Continental Congress*, 51.

<sup>48</sup> Henderson, *Party Politics in the Continental Congress*, 227-228.

<sup>49</sup> Bruce Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, (Mariner Books, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 1971), 125-126.

aided tremendously in the final outcome. It was the French ships at Yorktown that helped the army trap General Cornwallis and force him to surrender.<sup>50</sup>

The Battle of Yorktown would prove to be the final conflict in the Revolutionary War, but Washington would confront one final crisis within his army before the official end of the conflict. The eighteen-month lag in activity between the battle of Yorktown and the official end of the war in April 1783 caused problems for Washington. Those officers who had signed up after the half-pay agreement by Congress during Valley Forge complained about their pension because their service amounted to five, not seven years. Washington supported his officers and troops before Congress, which did little but debate about the issue for two years. Congress finally stated in December 1781 that they would not award back pay or pensions because the treasury was empty and the states could not be further taxed. The result was on December 29, 1782, a petition was presented to Congress by General McDougall, Colonel Mathias Ogden, and John Brooks signed by officers in the Continental Army.<sup>51</sup>

Despite the pleas of General McDougall and others, Congress did nothing to appease the officers. As a result, on March 10, 1783, the officers posted the Newburg Address, which was a direct threat to the stability of the United Colonies. The officers threatened to order their men to march on Philadelphia and take charge of Congress, or not disband after the war was over, leaving a leaderless, angry, standing army. Either way the officers who wrote the Newburg Address threatened to undo everything that all the previous years of effort had procured. Washington immediately called upon

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<sup>50</sup> Maurice Ross, "Teaching the Reason's for France's Participation in the American Revolution," *The French Review*, Vol. 36, No. 5. (Apr., 1963), 497.

<sup>51</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 438-440.

Congress to honor the commitments it had made to the troops and officers, but in the end it would be Washington who stopped the officers' revolt.

On March 15, just as the situation was about to become chaotic, Washington addressed the officers in a meeting. Washington's actions on this day have become legendary. After reading an ineffectual speech, Washington attempted to read a letter he had recently received from a member of Congress but stumbled over the words and had to resort to putting on his spectacles. Washington then remarked, "Gentlemen you must pardon me, I have grown gray in your service, and now I find myself going blind as well." The effect of Washington's simple gesture was monumental. Officers began to cry because they realized the symbolic importance of Washington's gesture, although Washington did not plan or intend such a reaction. Washington finished reading the letter, mounted his horse, and rode off; the officers' revolt was over.<sup>52</sup> In the end it was Washington's undying commitment to his troops and leadership qualities that saved the revolution one last time.

After the Treaty of Paris formally ended the American Revolutionary War on September 3, 1783, Washington issued his "Farewell Order to the Armies of the United States" on November 2, 1783. Washington wrote to the army that their perseverance was unparalleled "through almost every possible suffering and discouragement for the space of eight long years." Washington also urged the soldiers to "carry with them into civil society the most conciliating dispositions; and that they[soldiers] should prove themselves not less virtuous and useful as citizens, than they have been preserving and victorious as soldiers."<sup>53</sup> Washington served as the ultimate example of the soldier who

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<sup>52</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 440-446.

<sup>53</sup> Fitzgerald, ed., *Writings of Washington*, Vol. 27, 223,225.

returned to civilian life after the war was over. After he formally resigned his position of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, Washington returned to his home at Mount Vernon.

Several scholars, including Bruce Chadwick, have argued that Washington's war experience contributed heavily to the eventual formation of the office of President of the United States of America. Evidence in support of this argument comes from several of the individuals who were closest to Washington during the war who later lobbied for the office during the Constitutional Convention in 1787. Former soldiers such as Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe had observed Washington conduct the war under the most difficult circumstances all the while maintaining relationships with Congress, state leaders, and others. If Congress had been more efficient in supplying the needs of the army perhaps the office of the president would have been extremely different or non-existent. Chadwick stated, "His [Washington] experience in the war had given him many of the skills they [Hamilton and others] believed were necessary for a national leader."<sup>54</sup> Washington's presence at the Constitutional Convention also helped to ensure that the new Constitution would come to fruition.

The relationship between Washington and Congress was extremely difficult and tiresome because of a variety of reasons. The foremost reason stemmed from the infancy of the entire operation. Virtually every department, office, and committee had to be created, which naturally created problems. Throughout the war Washington never stopped corresponding with Congress. Washington, as much as anybody, helped to lend to Congress an air of legitimacy by always recognizing its authority. Washington could have easily taken charge of the army and marched on Philadelphia, instead he saved

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<sup>54</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 465-466.

Philadelphia and Congress from an angry army. The problems Washington faced were often repetitive, especially during winter-encampments, but he never abandoned Congress and never stopped searching for better methods of supplying the army. The relationship between Washington and Congress is important because it displayed the mutual cooperation and distribution of power between a government that represented the people and the leader of that people's army. Perhaps if Congress had possessed more central authority, it could have made Washington's job easier, but that lesson had yet to be learned.

## CHAPTER 3

### WASHINGTON'S MILITARY STYLE

On July 14, 1776, Lord Richard Howe sent Lieutenant Philip Brown to deliver a message across the bay in New York; the letter was addressed to George Washington, Esq. Upon arriving in New York Brown met Joseph Reed and explained he had a letter addressed to Mr. Washington from Lord Howe. Reed replied, "Sir, we have no person in our army with that address." Lord Howe tried three more times, but he could not bring himself to address Washington as an equal by recognizing his status as a general and Commander-in-Chief. Lord Howe did modify his approach by changing the address to George Washington, Esq., etc. & etc. British Captain Nisbet Balfour, who actually met with Washington face-to-face, tried to explain that the use "etc., etc." was meant to signify "everything that ought to follow." Washington was quick to point out to Balfour that indeed "etc." could be used to stand for "anything."<sup>55</sup> This minor squabble concerning rank and honor may not have been crucial to the actual fighting of the Revolutionary War, but it does reveal a glimpse into the character of General Washington during the early phases of the war. The story also helps give some depth to the manner in which British officers viewed their adversaries.

The character, conduct, and style of George Washington during the Revolutionary War have always been popular topics among historians. However, in recent histories and biographies concerning Washington the more human and fallible side has emerged. No longer concerned with upholding the mythical status of Washington, historians such as David H. Fischer and John Ferling have been able to paint a more complete picture of Washington during his time of military service. By examining Washington's military

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<sup>55</sup> David McCullough, *1776*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, 2005), 144-145.

style of leadership in the context of his emergence as a symbol for the military and the United States at large, one may gain a more complete understanding of the birth of an independent America. Perhaps the most important concept to keep in mind when considering the military style of Washington is best summed up by biographer Edward Lengel. “Britain and America fought the Revolutionary War with different understandings of tactics that originated in their diverging temperaments and material circumstances.”<sup>56</sup> This chapter aims to examine the character and style of Washington’s leadership during the war within the concept of Lengel’s quote.

The selection of Washington as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army was a decision based in the politics of unification. Many delegates, including John Adams, felt that the army needed a leader from outside the New England area in order to draw the southern colonies more closely into the conflict. Washington’s background as a soldier was not the substance of legends, but he had experience nonetheless. In 1754, Washington, serving as a lieutenant colonel in the Virginia militia, attacked a French party at Great Meadows with success. However, a few weeks later Washington was forced to surrender his force at Fort Necessity, which was hastily constructed by Washington’s men. The so-called Battle of Great Meadows proved to be the beginning of what would become a global war known as the French and Indian or Seven Years’ War. Washington also accompanied General Edward Braddock on his failed expedition to seize Fort Duquesne. After returning from the failed attempt on Fort Duquesne, Washington was named leader of the Virginia militia. Washington and his militia joined

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<sup>56</sup> Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life*, (Random House: New York, 2005), 99.

with British forces in the successful conquest of Fort Duquesne in 1758, after which Washington resigned his commission and returned home to resume his life as a planter.<sup>57</sup>

However, as many historians including Benton Patterson have noted, when Washington arrived as a delegate to the Continental Congress he did so dressed in the manner of a soldier. By simply wearing his uniform to these important assemblies he made a personal statement that could not be ignored. No other delegate attended the assembly dressed in such a manner. Washington's demeanor and air of aloofness did not publicly reinforce his desire or urge to lead the army. However, Washington never turned down the opportunity to lead or take part in a committee formed to investigate methods for designing and supplying the army. Washington was also asked to head a committee designed to calculate how much money Congress would have to raise in order to create a military. Washington's military and organizational skills impressed many of his colleagues and lead John Adams to say Washington's "great experience and abilities in military matters is of much service to us."<sup>58</sup>

Washington's unanimous election to the position of Commander-in-Chief was the mixed result of the needs of the Continental Congress in relation to conducting a unified resistance against Great Britain and Washington's experience in military matters and his character. One of the key ingredients in Washington's character that most biographers have identified was his aloofness, or air of disinterestedness. Edward Lengel noted that Washington's apparent lack of interest in the position was the polar-opposite attitude of that which was expressed by individuals such as the President of Congress John Hancock, and soon to be General Charles Lee. Perhaps Washington made the biggest impression

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<sup>57</sup> Benton Rain Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis: The Battle for America, 1775-1783*, (Taylor Trade Publishing, New York & Oxford, 2004), 1-2.

<sup>58</sup> Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 2.

upon John Adams, who, when nominating Washington for the position, noted many of Washington's fine qualities including his "independent fortune, great talents and excellent universal character."<sup>59</sup> Adams later remarked in his diary, "Dignity with ease and complacency, the gentlemen and the soldier look agreeably blended in him. Modesty marks every line and feature of his face." Adams was further moved to recite Dryden:

Mark his majestic fabric; he's a temple  
Sacred by birth, and built by hands divine;  
His soul's the deity that lodges there;  
Nor is the pile unworthy of the god.<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps the best way to interpret the character and style of Washington is to view him within the context of an eighteenth century Virginia planter, in other words, on his own terms. One of the best scholarly works that helps illuminate the world of the Virginia planter is T.H. Breen's *Tobacco Culture*. In the book Breen identifies tobacco as one of the major cultural influences in the Chesapeake area. Planters both aspired to be and were expected to be gentlemen. Breen noted, "Independent persons, it was believed, stood above the scramble after power and wealth and thus seemed ideally suited to provide leadership for the small planters." Breen also noted that more often than not planters were simply keeping up a façade of autonomy and independence because of their accumulating debts to English merchants.<sup>61</sup>

Washington's experience as a planter also honed his skills as a director and manager of great and small tasks. At Mount Vernon, Washington oversaw the planting, building, and maintenance of the plantation, a job that consumed most hours of his day.

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<sup>59</sup> Lengel, General *George Washington*, 87-88.

<sup>60</sup> Page Smith, ed., *John Adams: Volume I, 175-1784*, Page Smith, ed., (Doubleday & Company, New York, 1962), 201.

<sup>61</sup> T.H. Breen, *Tobacco Culture: The Mentality of the Great Tidewater Planters on the Eve of Revolution*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 1987), 89, 90-91.

Breen also noted in *Tobacco Culture* the sheer size of the undertaking of running a successful plantation. Tobacco was a year-round occupation that left little spare time and dictated the pace of the planter's life. In the years prior to the start of the Revolutionary War, Washington switched from cultivating tobacco to wheat. The relative ease of growing wheat shocked Washington because he now had "free time" to pursue more leisurely, relaxing, and fun activities.<sup>62</sup> The experience of maintaining a plantation no doubt gave Washington excellent managerial skills, which coupled with his, albeit brief, military experience, caused those around him in Congress to entrust him with the position of leadership for the newly created military.

One of the defining aspects of Washington's style of leadership was the openness of his system. Washington's less-restricted brand of leadership manifested itself early in the war during the Siege of Boston in the form of a round, plump bookseller named Henry Knox. Knox had no military experience before the coming of the Revolutionary War but he quickly signed up with the Boston Grenadier Corps and consumed every book he could locate concerning military and artillery tactics. Three days after arriving at Cambridge and officially assuming command of the army Washington met Knox at the defenses of Roxbury. Knox made quite an impression on Washington, enough to convince Washington to allow him to go after and retrieve artillery at Fort Ticonderoga, which had been abandoned after Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen captured it from British control on May 10, 1775. David McCullough stated:

That such a scheme hatched by a junior officer in his twenties who had no experience was transmitted so directly to the supreme commander, seriously considered, and acted upon, also marked an important difference between the civilian army of the Americans and that of the British. In an army where nearly

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<sup>62</sup> Breen, *Tobacco Culture*, 54-56.

everyone was new to the tasks of soldiering and fighting a war, almost anyone's ideas deserved a hearing.<sup>63</sup>

Whatever notions Washington had about leading an army based on traditional standards of eighteenth century warfare quickly diminished upon his arrival. What Washington had perceived to be a simple task of taking stock and collecting information concerning the army proved to be an eight-day affair that was by no means totally accurate. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee dated July 10, 1775, Washington spelled out his troubles stating "I am ashamed to look back at the time that has elapsed since my arrival here." Washington ended the letter by promising his full effort to construct an efficient military but was hesitant to guarantee any results.<sup>64</sup> Certainly, the "newness" of the entire military effort caused problems for efficient management, but the cultural divide between Washington, the Virginia planter, and the bulk of the army surrounding Boston, which was largely made of New Englanders, caused problems as well.

The notions of what constituted a gentleman were firmly implanted in the mind of Washington when he took command of the troops around Boston, and what he saw shocked him. Rather than possessing the same qualities of aloofness and distance, New England officers often shaved the faces and shined the shoes of common soldiers. Many officers and soldiers casually referred to each other by their first names. The army around Boston was composed of various militia groups that, in the past, had served more a social function than as serious military organizations.

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<sup>63</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 58-60.

<sup>64</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. III, Jan. 1770-Sept. 1775, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) 330-331.

Because militia groups tended to be more socially oriented, punishment for “war-crimes” such as desertion and falling asleep on the job were dealt with rather lightly or not at all. Washington’s authority was initially met with some resistance; John Ferling accurately noted that “these farmers and artisans who were resisting British centralization sometimes were just as loath to surrender their personal freedom and independence to an American officer.”<sup>65</sup>

As if these problems were not enough for Washington’s mind to fathom, he had one more culture shock in store; African-Americans were also part of the army around Boston. Initially Washington reacted to the situation by stating no African-Americans, or young boys for that matter, could serve in the military. But, in the weeks that followed, Washington was forced by want of soldiers to rescind his prior decision and allow African-Americans to serve in what McCullough referred to as a “landmark general order.” Washington’s decision to allow African-Americans to serve demonstrated that he was willing to let go of at least some of his inherent biases and notions of what constituted a proper eighteenth century military. Washington’s army has been described as a rabble in arms, but “it was the first American army and an army of everyone, men of every shape and size and makeup.”<sup>66</sup>

Despite Washington’s willingness to make exceptions to his standard notions of what constituted an army, he ran the army with complete control. Upon arriving at his headquarters in Cambridge on July 4, 1775, Washington issued the second “General Order” of the war, which laid down strict laws of conduct. Washington

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<sup>65</sup> John Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, (University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1988) 126.

<sup>66</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 34-37.

realized that he needed to gain some kind of control over the army and decided to start at a basic level. Officers were instructed to ensure the cleanliness of their soldiers and soldiers were expected to mind their manners and attend “divine Service.”<sup>67</sup> Washington’s time spent in politics and war had instilled in him a belief that discipline was necessary if an army was to be successful. In 1759, as leader of the Virginia Militia, Washington wrote to his officers, “Discipline is the soul of an army. It makes small numbers formidable, procures success to the weak, and esteem to all.”<sup>68</sup> Washington applied the same formula for discipline to the Continental Army that he ordered for the Virginia Militia in 1759. However, in 1775 Washington found himself aiming his guns at the British soldiers. Thus, the size of Washington’s task in bringing order to his hodgepodge of troops was great and the risk of complete disaster was even greater.

The military power that Washington faced in defending the “United Colonies of North America” was nothing short of the greatest military power in the world. Some historians have tended to overstate the advantages that the British possessed over the American forces, but, to be sure, they were a well trained force that was supplied by a wealthy, established nation. The British Regulars were in many ways completely different from Washington’s army. British Regulars served for life, and most had fought battles across the globe, which must have caused many Regulars to view America as just another battlefield. The British military also possessed various Scottish Highland Regiments that were known for their fierce tactics and dedicated soldiers. But perhaps the best example of the differences between the military

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<sup>67</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. III, Jan. 1770-Sept. 1775, 308-311.

<sup>68</sup> Scott Thorpe, *Revolutionary Strategies of the Founding Fathers: Leadership Lessons From America’s Most Successful Patriots*, (Sourcebooks, Inc, Naperville, Illinois, 2003), 198.

makeup and approach to the war was the British Government's attempts to hire mercenaries. British ministers got quotes on how much it would cost to hire Hessian soldiers from various Germanic states, but were initially reluctant to pay such a high price. After being turned down by Catherine the Great, Frederick the Great, and Moors in Morocco, British ministers opted to pay the high price and hire mercenaries from Hesse-Cassel and other principalities.<sup>69</sup>

The actual pacification of the colonies by the British military posed several problems that eventually grew worse. George Billias broke down the British military effort in America into two very general phases. Phase one may be referred to as the "colonial phase," and lasted roughly from 1775 to 1778. Billias identified two major problems during this phase, first the military aggression in the American colonies and second, the domestic feuding that was brought about over the disagreement on foreign policy and military intervention. "Phase two" refers to the remainder of the Revolutionary War and marks a clear departure from "phase one" because the problems English ministers and the British military encountered were of a global nature. America was no longer officially fighting alone after 1778 when France and Spain joined the war, causing the conflict to spread globally. Billias stated, "Between the first and second phases, the character of the war was completely changed."<sup>70</sup>

The conditions of the opening year of the war caused great uncertainty for Washington, a feeling that would remain with him throughout the remainder of the war. But, despite facing a superior force that was well trained and to a large extent

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<sup>69</sup> David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, (Oxford University Press, 2004), 39,46-49,51-52.  
<sup>70</sup> George Athan Billias, ed., *George Washington's Opponents: British Generals and Admirals in the American Revolution*, (William Morrow and Co., Inc., New York, 1969), xiv.

professional, Washington possessed some advantages that would help level the playing-field. Perhaps the best advantage that Washington had working in his favor was the geographic location and size of the North American continent. The eastern coast of North American extended for over three-thousand miles, which meant that the British military had to endure an enormous, exhaustive, and costly process if they were going to pacify America. In conjunction with the coast-line, the sheer size of the thirteen colonies caused the British military to be spread thin, a fact that only worsened as the conflict spread throughout other countries.<sup>71</sup> If Washington did not realize these advantages before entering the conflict, it did not take long before he was well aware of what the enemy had to do to achieve success, but Washington also had to manage his own personal feelings and emotions.

The style Washington employed to fight the Revolutionary War has been portrayed differently throughout popular history. Many views emphasize the use of non-traditional tactics such as soldiers hiding behind trees and in the cover of foliage in order to achieve a surprise attack. Such explanations site the geographic location and lifestyle of the colonies as reasons for the change in tactics. While such an assessment may contain certain aspects of truth, in the end, it leads one to assume that Washington happily chose a mode of combat that has been described as guerilla warfare. Such an assessment overlooks some of the central conflicts that troubled Washington internally and challenged his natural impulses and inclinations to think on a much larger scale. John Ferling summed up Washington's mindset toward war:

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<sup>71</sup> Billias, ed., *George Washington's Opponents*, xv.

“Always he [Washington] longed to execute a brilliant stroke, always he thought in terms of the grand and audacious gesture.”<sup>72</sup>

Edward Lengel went so far as to compare Washington with Ulysses S. Grant; and while such a comparison may be incompatible, both generals did not like being idle and preferred some kind of action. Lengel sites the willingness of Washington to periodically take dangerous risks and throw “caution to the winds.” Lengel suggested that if General Howe had been as aggressive as Washington the war might have ended in favor of the British and as early as 1776.<sup>73</sup> The year 1776 brought highs and lows to the leadership of the military. In April the British army was forced out of Boston. In July the Declaration of Independence was signed, which changed the nature of Washington’s fight from a war of restoration to a war for independence. However, the British returned to mount dual offensives in the summer. The first was an unsuccessful attack on Charleston, South Carolina, the second was an offensive campaign aimed at New York. The New York Campaign presented Washington with serious military choices and challenged his ability to be a successful leader.

Washington was aware well ahead of time that when the British returned New York was likely where they would launch their campaign. Thus, Washington sent General Charles Lee to examine the layout of New York and its harbors so that a general plan of defense could be created. Lee replied that whoever commanded the water commanded New York and recommended the burning of New York City. Although Washington may have privately agreed with Lee’s assessment, neither he nor Congress had the gumption to order the burning of New York. When

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<sup>72</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 261.

<sup>73</sup> Lengel, *General George Washington*, 150.

Washington arrived he found the recommendations for defense that Lee had suggested (other than burning the city) were not progressing, which was partly the result of Lee's reassignment to the defense of Charleston. Once Washington arrived in early April, the discipline of the army was restored and they spent the next four months digging- in for battle.<sup>74</sup>

In a letter to the President of the Continental Congress dated July 10, just before Howe arrived in New York, Washington informed Congress of his intentions. Washington began the letter by stating he had had the newly created Declaration of Independence read before the army but quickly moved on to military matters. Washington specifically referred to various groups of islanders around the "Jerseys" who anxiously awaited the arrival of the Howe brothers. Whatever notions Washington had about abandoning New York and fighting a guerilla war initially took a backseat to achieving some great blow to the enemy. Washington wrote:

If our Troops will behave well, which I hope will be the case, having every thing to contend for that Freeman hold dear, they [enemy] will have to wade thro' much Blood and Slaughter before they can carry any part of our Works, if they carry them at all; and at best be in possession of a Melancholy and Mournful Victory.<sup>75</sup>

The arrival of the British fleet in July brought a change of leadership for the British military. Sir William Howe, commander of the British army and his brother, Lord Richard Howe, Admiral of British Navy, issued a statement upon their arrival offering full-pardon to those "who may have departed from their allegiance and duty to his majesty." It was also during this time that Washington refused to accept the

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<sup>74</sup> Willard Sterne Randall, *George Washington: A Life*, (A John MacRae Book, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1997),

<sup>75</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. V, May 1776-Aug. 1776, 247-250.

correspondence of Lord Howe because of Howe's reluctance to address Washington "in the character he respectively sustained." Washington also survived an attempt made by several "double-agents" to assassinate him and several other officers. Washington responded by ordering the execution of two of the three conspirators.<sup>76</sup> Despite being forced to lead the army in a precarious situation, made worse by the sickness spread throughout his army, Washington kept his senses and was still thinking in terms of achieving some great success.

That success however was not to be found in New York. The New York Campaign proved to be one of the lowest points of Washington's military career, punctuated by the fall of Fort Mifflin on September 26, 1777. Washington and other officers made many decisions based on faulty information, which, along with the strength of the enemy, led to the Continental Army's defeat at the Battle of Red Bank in late September. Washington and his army were in a dilemma at Fort Mifflin while General Howe continually advanced siege lines. Perhaps the only bright spot during the entire New York Campaign for Washington was the successful night crossing of the Delaware River, a feat that many thought was impossible. Because of the intervention of the weather, the retreat was kept secret from both the British Army and Navy.<sup>77</sup> The crossing of the Delaware River became the first of many daring escapes that Washington would lead the army through.

Despite the success of the evacuation of Fort Mifflin, New York City fell into Howe's hands on September 26, and after the Battle of Red Bank in late September, Washington was forced to retreat and take refuge in the Hudson Highlands. Before

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<sup>76</sup> James Thacher, *Military Journal of the American Revolution*, (Hurlbut, Williams, and Co., American Sunscrition Publishing House, Hartford, Conn., 1862), 51, 53.

<sup>77</sup> Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 98-101.

Howe invaded New York City by way of Kip's Bay on September 15, Washington wrote a letter addressed to the President of Congress on September 8 describing his position and outlining a specific plan of action that called for restraint and consideration. Washington acknowledged that Howe's plan was to encircle him on the Island of New York and "oblige us to fight them [British] on their own terms."

Washington continued by saying:

In deliberating on this question it was impossible to forget, that History, our own experience, the advice of our ablest Friends in Europe, the fears of the Enemy, and even the Declarations of Congress demonstrate, that our Side of the War should be defensive...That we should on all Occasions avoid a general Action...unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never be drawn.<sup>78</sup>

However, after the Battle of White Plains, General Nathanael Greene convinced Washington to let him continue to occupy Fort Mifflin. Fort Mifflin was located on the east side of the Hudson River across from Fort Mifflin, located in New Jersey. Holding Fort Mifflin meant that Washington would negate his plan to execute a defensive war and only engage the enemy under favorable conditions. The Continental Army paid a heavy price for Washington's willingness to go along with Greene's plan on November 16, 1776, at Fort Mifflin. "As the full weight of the disaster fell upon him [Washington], he turned away from his lieutenants and began to weep."<sup>79</sup>

Despite the terrific losses that the Continental Army sustained in the New York Campaign the fight still continued and Washington was anxious to make something positive happen. After retreating through the Jerseys, Washington found his

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<sup>78</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. VI, Sept. 1776-Jan. 1777, 27-28.

<sup>79</sup> Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 111-114.

opportunity at Trenton. Much has been written about this now mythical event in which Washington lead his troops across the Delaware River on December 26, 1776, but one of the most interesting military facts concerning the entire operation is often overlooked. Jac Weller's study of the crossing of the Delaware pointed out that Washington's decision to make the artillery a priority in the planned assault on Trenton resulted in the subsidizing of the infantry, a tactic that was unheard of during the eighteenth century. The weight and quantity of artillery made the crossing of the Delaware even more difficult than it would have been and, combined with the cold and wet weather, caused Washington to run behind schedule. According to Weller's study, armies generally carried two or three pieces of artillery for every one thousand soldiers on foot. Washington's decision to use more artillery stemmed from his desperate situation and desperate need to attack. Artillery was considered a "wet weather" weapon, while muskets could prove troublesome or impossible to shoot in wet weather.<sup>80</sup> The gamble proved successful for Washington.

The Battle of Trenton represented an opportunity for Washington to go after that grand stroke of brilliance and deliver a crushing defeat while still technically adhering to his policy of not risking the overall security of the army. In his study, *Washington's Crossing*, Fischer compared the leadership of Washington and General Charles Cornwallis after the second Battle of Trenton and his findings revealed a marked difference between the two commanders' styles. Cornwallis represented the ideal English officer/gentleman who was born into nobility, schooled with others of the same noble birth, and accustomed to being heard by, not listening to others.

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<sup>80</sup> W.J. Wood, *Battles of the Revolutionary War, 1775-1781*, (Da Capo Press, Perseus Books Group, 1990), 62.

Fischer stated that Cornwallis “was not merely a leader but a ruler...His [Cornwallis] meeting was less a council than a court.” In a meeting on January 2, General William Erskine urged Cornwallis to attack before Washington had the chance to escape. Cornwallis would not adhere to such a plan because it ran contrary to his style, which avoided nighttime attacks especially in terrain that was unknown. Cornwallis’s reasoning was based in traditional eighteenth century notions of warfare, but his failure to listen to his fellow officers cost him the opportunity to capture Washington and possibly put an end to the American Revolution.<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, Washington’s council was the polar opposite. The meeting, like his military system, was open and had a free-flowing feel. The public was even invited to come and take part. General Arthur St. Clair, who was present at the meeting, stated that Washington began the meeting by addressing the problem and then seeking advice. Whereas Cornwallis had proposed his recommended course of action, Washington recommended none and listened to the opinion of the various officers and soldiers in attendance. St. Clair proposed a plan that called for a retreat to Princeton followed by an attack on the enemy’s rear. The plan was reinforced when locals offered their service as guides. Washington thought highly of the plan because it allowed for a fighting retreat, which was good for morale and his reputation. Fischer concluded by stating:

The Americans improvised a different system of command. It was forced upon them by the diversity of cultures in the country, by the pluralism of elites, by a more open polity, by a less stratified society, and especially by expanding ideas of liberty and freedom. The man at the center was George Washington.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 310-313.

<sup>82</sup> Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 313-315.

Despite the failure at Fort Washington that could be attributed to Washington's style of taking military advice, he did not abandon his system of leadership. Fischer's study of the two councils at Trenton demonstrated Washington's willingness to listen and learn.

After the success of the Battles of Trenton and Princeton both armies settled into winter quarters. Washington chose Morristown, New Jersey as the Continental Army's site because of its close proximity to the then capital of Philadelphia. The winter-encampment was harsh on the Continental Army; many were affected by diseases and famine. However, the winter-encampment did give Washington time to organize his total force and gather returns from troops stationed in Rhode Island, New York, and other areas. Washington also used the time to confer with officers on strategy, which helped contribute to Washington's plans for the spring campaign. Washington also faced another problem at Morristown, and his response reveals a side of Washington's leadership that is often overlooked.

One of the most vexing problems Washington was forced to deal with at Morristown was Loyalists. Despite Morristown's reputation as a patriot stronghold, the surrounding areas were home to many Loyalists. Bruce Chadwick estimated that the total number of Loyalists in New Jersey was about nineteen thousand. Some Loyalists, or Tories, plundered the homes of rebels, but all refused to send aid to the army, and, worst of all, Washington feared many of them were spies.<sup>83</sup> In a letter written to Congress on February 5, 1777, Washington proposed the institution of an oath of allegiance to the revolutionary cause. Washington opined in the letter "I

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<sup>83</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington's War: The Forging of A Revolutionary Leader and the American Presidency*, (Sourcebooks, Inc., Naperville, Illinois, 2004), 116-120.

have often thought the States have been too negligent in this particular and am more fully convinced of it from the Effect Genl Howe's excursion has produced in New Jersey." Washington was placing some of the blame for the army's lack of local support on the states and he wanted Congress to ensure every state enact a loyalty oath "without exception, and to out law those that refuse it."<sup>84</sup>

Washington's desire for an oath of allegiance was born from his desperate situation and his desire to be in complete control. However, Washington did not exercise executive authority; rather Congress passed the oath, followed by all the colonies. Opposition to the oath was based on the argument that such an oath was totalitarian in nature and violated civil rights. Abraham Clark, a New Jersey Legislator, stated that Washington had "assumed the legislative and executive powers of the government in all states." Washington often used dubious tactics to ensure harsh measures were taken and examples were made of the worst Loyalists. Committees in New Jersey and New York were formed specifically for the purpose of hunting Loyalists. Many individuals were held in jail without evidence for long periods of time. John Duyckman was one such prisoner who was held in jail for two months without ever being charged with a single crime.<sup>85</sup> The loyalty oath displayed the willingness of Washington to suspend traditional rights to individuals in the name of safety and protection for the military. The situation at Morristown clearly demonstrated that the army was the heart of the revolutionary cause and everything had to be done to ensure its survival.

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<sup>84</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. VII, Jan. 1777-April 1777, 105-106.

<sup>85</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 121-122.

The winter at Morristown was hard on both Washington and the army but they managed to come out with renewed vigor. However, the following spring campaign would press Washington's strategy of a war of posts. Despite the efforts of the military at Brandywine Creek on September 11, 1777, the American capital of Philadelphia was captured by the British. Traditionally, when an opponent captured its enemy's capital the war was over, but the Revolutionary War was not a traditional war in that sense. Washington soon realized that the loss of the capital was not that staggering, Congress was still functioning and the army was composed and waiting within striking distance of the enemy. However, a few officers began to doubt the leadership ability of Washington. Adjutant General Timothy Pickering blasted Washington for being indecisive and questioned his military merit. Washington responded by suggesting an attack on the village of Germantown, located outside of Philadelphia.<sup>86</sup>

The Continental Army did not achieve a victory at the Battle of Germantown, but the defeat did little to dampen the spirit of Washington. In a letter to Congress written the day after the battle Washington reported that he ordered the attack after receiving information that Howe had detached some of his troops to the forts on the Delaware. The reduced level of troops provided Washington with an opportunity to attack the post at Germantown with little risk. Despite early success in the battle a group of British soldiers held up in Mr. Chew's House, which caused chaos behind the Continental front lines. The soldiers at the Chew House, coupled with "extremely foggy" weather conditions, caused the chance for victory to slip away,

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<sup>86</sup> Bruce Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, (A Mariner Book, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 2001), 178-179.

and army had to retreat. Most importantly, however, Washington added that the British were “nothing the better by the event,” and that the troops “gained what all young troops gain by being in Action.” The next day, October 6, Washington thanked his officers and troops and reminded them that “the enemy are proof against a vigorous attack, and may be put to fight when boldly pushed.”<sup>87</sup>

Washington entered winter quarters at Valley Forge with newfound confidence in his army and his approach to war. The fact that Washington was willing to accept multiple defeats, in the traditional sense of the term, and still maintain morale displayed the growth of Washington’s style over the years of the war. The winter at Valley Forge proved to be one of the worst throughout the entire war and challenged Washington’s ability as a leader. Cold weather was not the problem at Valley Forge; in fact the warmer conditions may have contributed to the spreading of diseases. The problem stemmed from poor lines of transportation that led to famine throughout the camp. One estimate places the number of soldiers who died in continental hospitals during the winter at Valley Forge at three thousand. It has also been estimated that between September 1777 and March 1778 Washington lost about half of his fighting force. As if these problems were not enough for Washington to deal with, the so-called Conway Cabal also transpired during this time.<sup>88</sup> Despite these setbacks and harsh conditions, the Continental Army marched out of Valley Forge a new army, thanks to the efforts of Washington and a new officer, Baron Von Steuben.

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<sup>87</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. IX, Aug. 1777-Nov. 1777, 308-310, 312.

<sup>88</sup> Randell, *George Washington: A Life*, 350-353.

Baron Von Steuben arrived at Valley Forge in late February with some acclaim. He had fought in the armies of Frederick the Great and was highly touted by Benjamin Franklin. However, Steuben had been out of the military for a number of years and was only a half-pay captain, despite his recommendation to Congress stating he was a lieutenant general. Washington was impressed by Steuben's act of refusing a fixed command and allowed him to discipline and train the Continental Regiments. Although Washington did not speak German or Steuben English, the communication system worked rather well through Washington's French secretary Pierre Duponceau, Colonel Henry Laurens, and Lt. Colonel Alexander Hamilton. Steuben was successful in molding the military into a smooth fighting machine that operated from a common set of instructions. Steuben began on a very small scale, working with small groups and, in effect, turning them into teachers as well.<sup>89</sup> Steuben's new system created light infantry companies that were designed to engage in wilderness skirmishes. The marching and parade tactics that Steuben had the army practice regularly also helped to draw the men's attention away from the desperate conditions of camp life. Despite being faced with multiple problems throughout the winter, Washington and the Continental Army were very much alive.<sup>90</sup>

Baron Von Steuben's experience at Valley Forge signified three important aspects of Washington's style of leadership. First, the openness of the system that had always existed since the first day Washington arrived in camp, second Washington's willingness to listen to others and act upon their suggestions. Bruce

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<sup>89</sup> Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, 187.

<sup>90</sup> Randall, *George Washington: A Life*, 357.

Chadwick noted it is likely that Washington thought it would take a great deal more than one Prussian officer to get the army into shape. However, simply because he gave Steuben a chance, the army grew in maturity by leaps and bounds. Chadwick also noted that in the Continental Army many soldiers hated foreigners, but Washington's open system allowed Steuben the opportunity to gain the soldiers respect.<sup>91</sup> The third aspect of Washington's leadership style was his willingness to rely on foreign officers. Other foreign officers such as the Marquis de Lafayette became close to Washington and played a vital role in the eventual outcome.

In June 1778, while still encamped at Valley Forge, an opportunity presented itself to Washington and the army. In response to the trappings of Philadelphia and the threat of the French Navy, General Henry Clinton, who had replaced Howe as commander-in-chief, decided the British should remove themselves to New York. On June 19 the American army left Valley Forge and traveled parallel to the British. The next day Washington met with his officers and staff and informed them that he wanted to attack in force. General Charles Lee roundly rejected the plan and, with the exception of Hamilton, had the support of the rest of the officers in the room. Then Nathanael Greene suggested an attack on the enemy's flank and rear with light infantry and detachments for support. The generals ordered a smaller engagement with fifteen hundred men on the British flanks.<sup>92</sup>

Despite being overruled by the majority in the council of war, Both Greene and Washington felt as though they were letting an opportunity slip through their grasp. Greene desired an attack at a site near Monmouth Courthouse, which was

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<sup>91</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 289-290.

<sup>92</sup> Terry Golway, *Washington's Generals: Nathaniel Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution*, (A John MacRae Book, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 2005), 173-175.

located just south of the army's position. Later in the evening Lafayette urged Washington to ignore the council of war's advice and seize the opportunity to attack.<sup>93</sup> Washington ordered Lee and his men to advance on the enemy from the rear and attack after he learned the British were leaving Monmouth on June 28. However, Lee did not have a plan and when he finally departed on Sunday he assured Washington that he had created a make-shift plan. Washington immediately formed his own soldiers into columns and began the march to Monmouth in support of Lee. When Washington arrived on the battlefield at Monmouth he had already passed through soldiers retreating and upon reaching Lee demanded to know what had happened. Lee retorted that the troops were not able to meet the challenge. Washington replied, "Sir they are able and, by God, they shall do it."<sup>94</sup>

Washington's actions at Monmouth on June 28, like the crossing of the Delaware, have grown to mythic proportions. Many of the soldiers had never seen Washington that angry before. General Charles Scott remarked, "Delightful...never have I enjoyed such swearing before or since." Before leaving, Washington also ordered Greene and his men to provide support in the attack as well. When Greene arrived on the American right side of the attack he realized the magnitude of the situation: Cornwallis and seven thousand British soldiers against twelve thousand American soldiers, Washington had received his wish for a large scale attack. The fighting lasted for several hours with each side exchanging blows until the contest ended in a draw. The next day the British army resumed its march to the Hudson River and ultimately New York, but the Continental Army proved something to

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<sup>93</sup> Golway, *Washington's Generals*, 175-176.

<sup>94</sup> Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 170-174.

themselves and to their enemy at Monmouth Courthouse.<sup>95</sup> The Revolutionary War had been going on for over three years at this point and, far from withering, the Continental Army was as good as it ever was.

The Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, June 28, 1778, proved to be Washington's last major battle until the Battle of Yorktown in 1781. Washington and his army held their position and did not surrender to the temptation of providing Clinton an opportunity to defeat them in a decisive battle. The British turned their attention to the south and on May 12, 1780, forced the surrender of Charleston, South Carolina. Later, General Gates and his force received an overwhelming defeat at the Battle of Camden. In less than four months the American southern army had been destroyed, rebuilt, and then destroyed again. The third time however, would be a charm. Washington recommended and Congress approved the appointment of General Nathanael Greene to command the army, which ultimately forced Cornwallis to stretch his chain of supply and eventually withdraw to the coast of Virginia at Yorktown.<sup>96</sup>

Despite the occasional or sporadic voices that spoke out against Washington's style of leadership and military capabilities, Washington emerged from the year 1778 as the firm leader of the war effort. Both Lafayette and Henry Laurens acknowledged Washington's symbolic importance to the Revolutionary War. Despite his lack of military experience, Washington was able to establish himself as a good military leader because he accounted for his deficiencies by working hard and focusing on the things he was good at, such as understanding the

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<sup>95</sup> Golway, *Washington's Generals*, 176-177.

<sup>96</sup> Gordon Wood, *The American Revolution: A History*, (A Modern Library Chronicles Book, The Modern Library, New York, 2003), 84-86.

public temper and maintaining his character.<sup>97</sup> Gordon Wood wrote that Washington's "stoicism, dignity, and perseverance in the face of seemingly impossible odds came to symbolize the entire Revolutionary cause."<sup>98</sup>

Washington never took his eye away from New York, perhaps it was because it was the scene of his biggest failure, until the late summer of 1781. On August 1, 1781 Washington formally abandoned his effort to raise the necessary numbers to conduct a siege of New York City. Washington had hoped to recruit ten thousand soldiers but was only able to bring together six thousand, and combined with the five thousand troops under the French Count de Romambeau, stationed in Newport, was only able to muster roughly the same number of soldiers as the enemy. On August 14 Washington received a letter notifying him that Admiral De Grasse was headed to the Chesapeake with over three thousand French troops plus artillery and cavalrymen. Washington wrote to Lafayette, who was in the Chesapeake, and told him to keep Cornwallis stationary. Days later Washington's army left for Yorktown.<sup>99</sup>

Washington faced one major problem when he decided to advance his army toward Yorktown: If Clinton knew of his plans he could attack Washington from the rear and possibly defeat the entire Continental force in a decisive battle. Washington decided to "roll the dice" and risk the attack, but covered his actions by first moving his army toward Manhattan so to give the appearance of an attack. Washington assumed that Clinton thought New York was his objective. Even so, Washington did not inform the army of the destination, and many had no clue that they were

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<sup>97</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 262-263.

<sup>98</sup> Wood, *The American Revolution*, 84.

<sup>99</sup> Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 298-299.

marching to Virginia until Washington turned his army south through New Jersey. Clinton did believe Washington's goal was New York, but just in case Washington left General William Heath and 2,500 troops to cover his rear. Washington had one final problem to consider before he could finally execute the grand stroke of brilliance he had always longed for: the money to pay his soldiers. However, Admiral De Grasse assured Washington that the army would be paid with gold coins upon his arrival.<sup>100</sup> On October 19, 1781, George Washington finally realized his dream when Cornwallis was forced to surrender his entire army at Yorktown. The defeat essentially meant the end of the American Revolution, although sporadic fighting continued for nearly two years.

Perhaps Washington's greatest act as leader of the Revolutionary War came at the end when he personally put an end to an officer's revolt that threatened the progress of the revolutionary cause. His address to the officers in response to the Newburg Address unintentionally stopped the revolt because his steadfast loyalty to the army and the revolutionary movement caused the officers to question their own desires. Lieutenant Samuel Shaw, who was present at Washington's address, wrote: "There was something so natural, so unaffected, in his appeal that it rendered it superior to the most studied oratory, it forced its way to the heart."<sup>101</sup> In the end Washington's leadership was good enough to lead the "United Colonies of North America" to a victory over the British Empire.

Washington's final act as a military leader has often been heralded as his most noble. After successfully leading the Americans to victory, George

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<sup>100</sup> Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 301-303.

<sup>101</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 445.

Washington resigned his commission and went home, just as he had done after the successful capture of Fort Duquesne in 1758. Washington's actions led King George III to state that if Washington gave up the power he possessed he "would indeed be the greatest man of the eighteenth century."<sup>102</sup> Washington did give up the power and returned to Mount Vernon to resume his life as a planter and husband to Martha, yet it would not be long before Washington would be pulled back into limelight.

George Washington's military style of leadership can best be described as an evolution of technique and style that was both learned and imposed upon him. Throughout the war Washington constantly battled with his natural, internal call to action, but kept himself in check by listening to the advice of his military council. Washington's system of leadership was open from the very beginning, partly because of the infancy of the entire military operation and partly because Washington sought the best advice he could get to account for his lack of military experience. Most importantly, Washington was with his army from the beginning, through the darkest hours of the war, and at the very end.

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<sup>102</sup> Randall, *George Washington*, 402.

## CHAPTER 4

### WASHINGTON AND HIS OFFICERS

To better understand the role George Washington played in the Revolutionary War it is necessary to understand the relationships he had with his fellow officers and aides. Because of the abundance of officers and soldiers who took part in the Revolutionary War, this study seeks to investigate those relationships that ultimately factored more heavily into the final outcome of the conflict or those relationships that aid in demonstrating specific characteristics and traits of Washington. One of the central figures in this investigation, besides Washington, is General Nathanael Greene. Greene's role in the Revolution was not underestimated by his contemporaries or by historians since in eighteenth century. However, by investigating the relationship of Washington within the context of many other officers, a more holistic interpretation of Washington as well as his system of management during the war may be gained.

After officially naming Washington the Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, the Continental Congress appointed the officers who were to serve along with him. On June 17, 1775, Congress commissioned Artemus Ward, who was currently in charge of the troops in Boston, a Major-General and second in command behind Washington. Charles Lee was named third in command and given the rank of second Major-General. Horatio Gates was unanimously declared an Adjutant General, then promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. Two days later on June 19, Congress declared Philip Schuyler the third Major-General and Israel Putnam, also in Boston at the time, the fourth Major-General. Three days later Congress expanded the number of Brigadier Generals by eight, naming them in order of rank as follows: Seth Pomeroy, Richard

Montgomery, David Wooster, William Heath, Joseph Spencer, John Thomas, John Sullivan, and Nathanael Greene.<sup>103</sup> Thus, Congress successfully created the new army's first nexus of officers. However, by the end of the conflict the names that collectively constituted the American officer's corps were quite different.

Washington and his top four generals reflected the infancy of the entire military operation as well as the limited scope of the conflict. Ward was placed second in command because he was in charge of the militia at Boston and had military experience. Putnam was considered something of a folk hero. Referred to as Old Put, Putnam had lived a daring and wild life. He had fought the French and Indians, wrestled wolves, managed to survive being shipwrecked, and been one of the heroes of Bunker Hill. Putnam's character and manners were essentially the polar opposite of Washington's style.<sup>104</sup> Ward and Putnam both possessed military knowledge and determination, but the third in command was considered by most Americans to be a military genius. Charles Lee, like Horatio Gates and many others, was a former English officer who had immigrated to America seeking other opportunities. Lee's character was often at odds with everyone and his personal hygiene was notoriously bad. Historian Bruce Lancaster referred to Lee as "fantastically ugly." Despite his personal quirks, Lee was a proven soldier and generally considered by his contemporaries an asset for the Revolutionary cause.<sup>105</sup>

From the very beginning the experience of managing the American military challenged Washington to go beyond any preconceived notions of what constituted

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<sup>103</sup> Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1783*, Vol. 2, May 10 to September 20, 1775 (Washington D.C., 1903-1937), June 17, 19, 21, 22, 1775. Found at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

<sup>104</sup> David McCullough, *1776*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 2005), 34-35.

<sup>105</sup> Bruce Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, (A Mariner Book, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston & New York, 2001), 100.

proper eighteenth century behavior. His officers, like his new army, were a hodgepodge of cultures and ethnicities that collectively represented a unique brand of resistance.

Washington sought discipline and order and conducted himself in accordance with the norms of a great tidewater planter, which stressed the importance of self-autonomy and restraint. Washington's air of aloofness was strikingly different from the conduct and temperament of the New England troops. Washington stood out. After observing the arrival of Washington at Cambridge in July 1775, James Thatcher wrote:

I have been much gratified with this day with a view of General Washington. His excellency was on horseback, in company with several military gentlemen. It was not difficult to distinguish him from all others; his personal appearance is truly noble and majestic; being tall and well proportioned. His dress is a blue coat with buff- under dress, and an elegant small sword; a black cockade in his hat.<sup>106</sup>

There is no doubt that Washington stood out among his troops and officers. Almost everything about him was in contrast to the New England Yankees he now commanded. The simple fact that Washington had a uniform made him stand-out among his troops because most troops and officers did not have uniforms. One of the first measures Washington took in organizing the army was to institute a system of ribbons to be worn by officers so they could be identified.<sup>107</sup> Such a system of officer recognition was not to be found in the British ranks, where everyone was keenly aware of their position and station in the army.

Despite Washington's character and style, which was firmly planted in the proper rules of gentlemanly conduct, he found himself in charge of a rag-tag army facing down

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<sup>106</sup> James Thatcher, *Military Journal of the American Revolution*, (Hurlbut, Williams, and Co., American Subscription Publishing House, Hartford, Conn., 1862), 30.

<sup>107</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 32-33.

the world's most powerful military force. One of the problems that Washington faced early during the siege of Boston would prove to be a recurring theme: shortage of troops because of expiring enlistments. Washington was forced to pressure his officers to encourage men to re-enlist or at least stay some amount of additional time and on occasion he personally addressed the troops and requested their further service. The pressure was enough to cause Washington to opine "Such a dirty, mercenary spirit pervades the whole that I should not be at all surprised at any disaster that may happen." Washington felt sorry for himself and even wished he had never accepted the command, but he never publicly expressed these feelings to his troops.<sup>108</sup> Washington's willingness to embrace an open system of management helped the army to survive its initial problems. His willingness to accept such a system was a result of the desperate situation he faced while trying to create a functioning army.

Perhaps the two best examples of the openness of Washington and the Continental Army's system were Nathanael Greene and Henry Knox. Greene and Knox had no significant military experience prior to 1775, but both played vital roles in the outcome of the Revolutionary War. Washington first met Henry Knox at Roxbury when he was visiting the various defenses around Boston. Before the start of the war Knox was the owner of a local bookstore in Boston that was often visited by Tories and British troops and officers. However, Knox was staunchly in favor of the revolutionary movement and began reading as many books as possible concerning military warfare. Knox focused a good portion of his research on the mechanics and techniques of operating field artillery. Knox also became a member of the Boston Grenadier Corp, but just as his military career

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<sup>108</sup> Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*, (Perennial: Harper Collins Publishers, New York, 2002), 68-69.

was beginning he suffered an injury while bird hunting that could have prohibited him from ever becoming an officer. Knox's gun exploded in his hand which caused his third and fourth fingers to be ruined. Traditionally, men who suffered from physical defects were not allowed to become officers, but Washington's army was not traditional in that sense. On July 5, Washington met Knox at Roxbury and was impressed enough by this meeting to invite Knox to dinner. Knox wrote, "General Washington fills his place with vast ease and dignity, and dispenses happiness around him."<sup>109</sup>

Knox made a good impression on Washington and others as well. Samuel Adams noted the ingenuity of Knox and Joseph Waters in their defenses at Roxbury. Adams went so far to write that "We were told here [Philadelphia] that there were none on our camp who understood the business of an engineer or anything more than the manual exercises of the gun." Adams was partially correct; until Knox the Continental Army did not have any real talented leadership in the artillery corp. Colonel Richard Gridley, who commanded the artillery, was a veteran of the French and Indian War and despite being only fifty-four years old was in terrible health. Washington soon realized that he had to do something about the artillery unit and wrote to Congress recommending that Knox replace Gridley. Congress accepted the advice of Washington and named Knox head of the army's artillery. The first problem that Knox encountered was the lack of artillery, so he came up with a plan to salvage artillery that had been abandoned at Fort Ticonderoga after the campaign of Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen. Washington agreed to the plan and soon sent Knox on his way to the north end of Lake George to Fort Ticonderoga.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 58-59.

<sup>110</sup> North Callahan, *Henry Knox: George Washington's General*, (Rinehart & Co., Inc., New York & Toronto, 1958), 34-37.

The fact that Knox, who until the Revolutionary War had no experience, became the head of the Continental Army's artillery department and had his plan for retrieving artillery approved by Washington exemplified the openness of Washington's leadership system. Knox's plan for retrieving the artillery was rather far fetched, but Washington and Knox were desperate for large guns. Once Knox and his traveling party reached Fort Ticonderoga they planned to load the artillery, about 120,000 pounds worth, on boats and sail it down Lake George to the southern end of the lake where it was to be unloaded. Knox had planned on moving the artillery overland to Boston by using sleds. The plan depended on the cooperation of the weather in the form of snow. The weather did not initially cooperate and Knox encountered many difficulties, including nearly freezing to death. Knox and his crew employed ingenuity to overcome seemingly impossible difficulties that the weather and terrain imposed. The entire trip back was over 300 miles long and included crossing the Berkshire Mountains. Knox had never before moved artillery through frozen mountain terrain, but he was ultimately successful in both scaling and descending mountain tops. Knox managed to rescue one of the largest cannons that fell through ice and sank near the shore of the Hudson River. In mid-December 1775 Knox and the artillery arrived back in Boston; not a piece had been lost on the journey. Knox had proved that he was not only creative and resourceful but he was also dependable.<sup>111</sup>

Dependability was a trait that Washington held high as was demonstrated through his own actions and adherence to the revolutionary cause. Dependable men were something that Washington desperately needed, especially in the early phases of the war. Knox proved to be a wise investment for Washington because he was not only

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<sup>111</sup> McCullough, *1776*, 60, 82-85.

dependable, but also resourceful. His eagerness and willingness to learn eventually landed him an important spot in the military and secured him a close personal relationship with Washington. Another young man who would eventually become Washington's second-in-command was a friend and frequent visitor to Knox and his bookstore. Nathanael Greene was a Quaker who walked with a limp, hardly the ideal makings of a successful military officer, but Greene was not an ordinary person. Knox and Greene's friendship began prior to the outbreak of war and was based in the urge to learn the various arts of war. Their relationship was strong and lasted throughout the war until Greene's death in 1786.<sup>112</sup>

Despite the similarities between Knox and Greene, the path that Greene traveled was very different from that of Knox. Greene was raised in a Quaker household according to traditional Quaker customs. The Greene family had several successful businesses, including a forge and mill, but Nathanael yearned for intellectual knowledge. Nathanael's father did not permit him to read the kind of books he wanted to, but that only caused Nathanael to find ways around the rules. Nathanael did read and as he grew older and his father's hold on him grew weaker he read more, but it was not until events on the Rhode Island coastline occurred that his thoughts began to shift toward learning military tactics for the purpose of actually executing them. The burning of the British ships *Liberty* and *Gaspee* exemplified many of problems that led to armed conflict, but to Greene the matter meant something else as well. Although it is unlikely that Greene actually did so, he was named as one of the suspects who boarded, then set fire to the *Gaspee*. Before the burning of the *Gaspee*, Greene had levied a lawsuit against Lieutenant William Dudingston, Captain of the *Gaspee*, who had seized one of the

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<sup>112</sup> Callahan, *Henry Knox: George Washington's General*, 29-30.

Greene family's merchant vessels, the *Fortune*. Greene's case against Dudingston caused a sensation in Rhode Island and served as proof that Greene was ready to bring his intellectual ideas and notions into the public arena.<sup>113</sup>

In the summer of 1774, as relations between England and her American colonies continued to spiral out of control, Nathanael Greene joined the newly conceived Kentish Guard in East Greenwich, Rhode Island. Many of Greene's friends and neighbors joined as well. Those who knew Greene well were convinced that he would be a good officer and they pushed for his promotion, but Greene was initially denied because of his limp. Greene was born with a "stiff" knee that did not bend well, but he was quite capable of riding and dancing. However, to many of his comrades, he was a blemish on their otherwise spotless military parade. Greene's friends stood by his side and threatened to leave the guard if he was dismissed. Greene, however, agreed to serve in the guard as a private which resolved the issue. The situation caused Greene to remark that he felt "more mortification than resentment."<sup>114</sup> Despite Greene's initial setbacks in the Kentish Guard, he became an important piece of the Revolutionary War puzzle.

Despite nearly being kicked out of the Kentish Guard for having a limp, within six months of the embarrassing affair Greene was placed in charge of the newly created Rhode Island Army of Observation, formed by officials in Providence after the Battles at Lexington and Concord. Greene was no longer a private; he was a general despite never actually taking part in a battle. Nonetheless Greene and his army marched off to Boston and offered their services to the leader of the Massachusetts Army, Artemus Ward.

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<sup>113</sup> Terry Golway, *Washington's General: Nathaniel Greene and the Triumph of the American Revolution*, (A John MacCrae Book: Henry Holt & Co., New York, 2005), 28-38.

<sup>114</sup> Elswyth Thane, *The Fighting Quaker: Nathanael Greene*, (Hawthorn Books, Inc., New York, 1972), 8-10.

Before Washington arrived at camp for the first time Greene had already caused many officers in the army to notice his style and his army's discipline. Indeed, discipline was a problem in the Continental Army, but Greene's troops proved to be a model that other units could aspire to be. Pastor William Emerson remarked in a letter to his wife that the Rhode Island troops lived in "proper tents...and looked like the regular camp of the enemy" as opposed to the majority of the American army that lived in "slapdash housing made of stone and turf."<sup>115</sup>

When Washington arrived in camp on July 3, 1775, Greene sent a detachment of two hundred men with a welcome letter; Washington responded by asking to meet with Greene, this would ultimately prove to be the beginning of a long friendship between the two officers. Both Washington and Greene were men of the enlightenment, not in the intellectual sense such as Thomas Jefferson, but in the sense of self-improvement through self-determination. Perhaps Washington even saw a mirror image of himself in the young Greene. Greene certainly held Washington in high esteem: "I hope we shall be taught to copy his example and to prefer the Love of Liberty in this time of publick danger to all the soft pleasures of domestic Life." One important aspect of Greene and Washington's relationship that manifested itself early was Greene's ability to treat Washington with the respect he demanded from the army. Washington wrote to Congress that "familiarity between the officers and men" should be avoided because it was counterproductive. Greene, along with others, began addressing Washington with the title "His Excellency," which fit the Old World aristocratic style of Washington and reaffirmed his elevated position within the army.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Golway, *Washington's General*, 46-47, 51-54.

<sup>116</sup> Golway, *Washington's General*, 57-59.

Greene's respectful behavior toward Washington was not the same behavior expressed by General Charles Lee and Brigadier General Horatio Gates. Washington was pleased by their appointments and took for granted their loyalty to him. However, despite a cordial meeting with Gates at Mount Vernon before both men donned their military uniforms, Washington soon expressed feelings of reserve on the part of Gates. Historian John Ferling noted that no evidence exists in the writings of Gates or elsewhere to substantiate the claim made by Washington that he treated the commander bitterly and eventually became "openly malevolent." In the time leading up to the Battle of Saratoga the correspondence between Washington and Gates did grow cold, particularly on the part of Washington and his staff. Washington's relationship with Lee fared better than with Gates during the opening years of the war. Lee fought well at Charleston in 1776 and at White Plains later on in the year but was captured by British soldiers in December. Although it is difficult to assess Washington's feelings toward Lee after his eventual release fifteen months later, Nathanael Greene's account of his return may provide some clue: "Hope [that] he may be of use but I apprehend no great good, as the junto will endeavor to debauch and poison his mind with prejudice."<sup>117</sup>

Greene's use of the term "junto" in his description of Lee's arrival may also provide some clues to the early rift between Washington and his officers, Lee and Gates. During the beginning years of the war one of the most vexing questions the conflict posed dealt with the how the army was to be recruited. Washington and many other officers, as well as congressmen, were pushing for a national army that called for long enlistments. Two of the most vocal advocates for a militia based system were Gates and

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<sup>117</sup> John Ferling, *The First of Men: A Life of George Washington*, (University of Tennessee Press, Knoxville, 1988), 251-253.

Lee. Very early in the war Lee expressed his opinion that the war should be very democratic and championed the citizen-soldier model. It is clear that Lee wanted the revolution to have a deeper social impact on American life than Washington.

Washington's initial reluctance to accept Lee's militia system may have been the result of his cultural biases, but the militia proved inefficient in the New York campaign of 1776, causing Washington and others to criticize it relentlessly. On August 4, 1777, Gates was placed in command of the troops in New York by Congress. His eventual success at the Battle of Saratoga by using defensive techniques and citizen-soldiers caused many to question the requests of Washington for a professional army as well as his ability to successfully lead the army.<sup>118</sup> The differing views on how the army was to be composed may have caused Washington to resent Gates and Lee because they did not adhere to "His Excellency's" suggestions.

Washington wrote to Gates on October 30, 1777, after learning about the success of the army at Saratoga. Washington began the letter in a congratulatory fashion but soon shifted his position: "I cannot but regret, that a matter of such magnitude and so interesting to our General Operations, should have reached me by report only." Washington was upset because he had not received notification or a written report of the battle from Gates, a fact that seemed to cause more doubt in the mind of Washington concerning the loyalty of Gates. Washington ended the letter by explaining to Gates that one of his aides, Alexander Hamilton, was on his way to meet with Gates and relate the

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<sup>118</sup> Paul David Nelson, "Citizen Soldiers or Regulars: The Views of American Generals on the Military Establishment," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 43, No. 3. (Oct., 1979), 28-30.

situation of the army at Valley Forge.<sup>119</sup> Ferling noted: “Instead of rejoicing at the victory of Saratoga, Washington’s aides hurriedly spread the tale that Gates had feared to step on the battlefield” and that Gates “hung himself at a distance to leave an [Benedict] Arnold to win laurels for him.”<sup>120</sup>

During the same time that Washington wrote Gates concerning the Battle of Saratoga, events were unfolding that eventually led to the so-called Conway Cabal. Thomas Conway was born in Ireland but spent a good portion of his life fighting in the French military. He joined the American war effort as a brigadier general. Washington initially thought Conway might be of some good use, but his tendency to defy authority caused Washington to block his attempt to become a major general. As a consequence, Conway became close to Gates. On October 28, 1777, James Wilkinson, an aide to Gates, was at a tavern in Reading, Pennsylvania and apparently had one too many drinks and started to “talk.” According to Lord Sterling, who had made the tavern his headquarters, Wilkinson berated Washington and exonerated Gates and told of a letter written by Conway to Gates in which Conway belittled Washington’s style of leadership. During this time a rumor was also spreading that Congress had made a list of men to succeed Washington, and Gates was at the top of the list, followed by Lee, Thomas Mifflin, and Conway. Alexander Hamilton, then serving as an aide to Washington, replied to the situation by stating it was a deeply rooted, foul scheme and that Conway was nothing more than a “vermin.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. IX, Aug. 1, 1777- Nov. 3, 1777, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) October 30, 1777.

<sup>120</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 252.

<sup>121</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington’s War: The Forging of a Revolutionary Leader and the American Presidency*, (Sourcebooks, Inc., Naperville, Illinois, 2004), 257-259.

The situation only worsened when Congress decided to revamp the largely ineffective Board of War by placing military figures on the committee. Gates was chosen to be the head of the Board of War, and Conway was chosen as its inspector general. Historian Jennings Sanders noted that in the mind of Washington, “Gates’ ability to cause trouble increased by his new position.”<sup>122</sup> Many individuals within Washington’s circle were afraid that he might be losing his power, but some, such as Henry Laurens did not consider Gates and Conway threats. Laurens wrote to a distraught Marquis de Lafayette, “Be not alarmed. I think it is not in the power of any junto to lessen our friend without his own consent.” Washington’s note to his aide John Fitzpatrick on February 28, 1778 indicated that he was feeling better about the situation: “In a word, I have a good deal of reason to believe that the machinations of this junto will recoil upon their own heads.”<sup>123</sup> Washington and Laurens proved right in their assessments, but the suspicion on the behalf of Washington and the deception on the behalf of Gates revealed an oblivious split between certain members of the American war effort.

After the smoke cleared from the Conway Cabal in 1778 five, general officers emerged that Washington trusted above all others: Knox, Greene, Lafayette, Arnold, and Anthony Wayne. All of these individuals had proved themselves on the battlefield and were willing to be loyal to Washington. Ferling noted that three of these individuals, Arnold, Wayne, and Lafayette, resembled the headstrong side of Washington, who was willing to risk life and limb in battle and longed for great military success. Knox and Greene represented something altogether different. They were realistic in their approach to problem solving and showed a great willingness to learn and study the art of war. All

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<sup>122</sup> Jennings B. Sanders, *Evolution of Executive Departments of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Peter Smith, Gloucester, Mass., 1971), 13.

<sup>123</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington’s War*, 266-267.

of these men were young, talented, and willing to be a subordinate to Washington. Ferling noted: “Lafayette immediately noticed that the commander had surrounded himself with flatterers, and he fell right into step as he inched closer to Washington.”<sup>124</sup>

The rise of the Marquis de Lafayette as an important figure and friend of Washington during the Revolutionary War demonstrated both the openness of Washington’s system and his tendency to surround himself with talented young men. Washington first met Lafayette on July 31, 1777, when the young Frenchman came into camp at Germantown. Many troops and officers in the Continental Army were weary of foreign individuals, especially soldiers; Washington was particularly troubled by the French. He wrote, “I am haunted and teased to death by the importunity of some and dissatisfaction of others.” But Lafayette was different. His willingness to put aside his large aspirations of military glory in order to serve in smaller commands impressed Washington and convinced him that Lafayette was of high quality. Washington was obviously impressed with Lafayette, and Lafayette’s willingness to yield ultimate authority to Washington caused him to write:

He has said that he is young and inexperienced, but at the same time has always accompanied it with a hint, that as soon as I shall think fit for the command of a division, he shall be ready to enter upon the duties of it, and in the meantime has offered his service for a smaller command.<sup>125</sup>

Washington’s relationship with Lafayette exemplified the qualities that he looked for in officers and leaders. He was not willing to tolerate individuals bent on pursuing their own methods, nor was he totalitarian in his approach. Rather, Washington

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<sup>124</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 254-255.

<sup>125</sup> Edward Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life*, (Random House, New York, 2005), 219-220.

found it easier to work with young men who admired and respected him as opposed to individuals who doubted his abilities and questioned his judgment.

A specific confrontation between Washington and then aide Alexander Hamilton in March 1781 revealed a great deal concerning what Washington expected from those in his military “family.” Hamilton had first joined Washington’s “family” in 1777 and was put to great use, soon becoming very close to Washington. But one morning in March 1781 he was late for a meeting. When Hamilton finally arrived Washington scolded him by saying, “Colonel Hamilton, you have kept me waiting these ten minutes, I must tell you Sir you treat me with disrespect.” Hamilton responded by stating he did not consciously mean to offend or disrespect Washington, “but since you have thought it necessary to tell me so we part.” Washington tried to apologize later, but, Hamilton did not concede. Instead, Hamilton privately confided that he never liked Washington and referred to him as an egocentric with a bad temper. Although Hamilton and Washington eventually patched up their relationship, Hamilton privately pledged to “say many things” about Washington after the war was over, but he never brought that pledge to fruition. Hamilton, as well as other officers, often alluded to what could be considered the “dark side” of Washington, particularly in his dealings with Lee. Washington was described by one individual as being “better endowed by nature in habit for an Eastern monarch, than a republican general.”<sup>126</sup>

Some of Washington’s contemporaries thought that he used Lee as a scapegoat at the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse on June 28, 1778. Despite the advice of his military council, Washington decided to attack British General Henry

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<sup>126</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 256-257.

Clinton and his army as they abandoned Philadelphia and marched to the Hudson River en route to New York City. Lee was accused by Washington of having no plan of battle and failing to conduct himself properly on the battlefield. To Lee's credit, he did lead the army to Monmouth Courthouse and engage the enemy, but only in a limited fashion. When Clinton turned and attacked Lee, he retreated back to the West Ravine. Lee's decision did make military sense. By staying put, Lee could have lost his army and by retreating to the West Ravine he enticed the enemy into a trap. However, Washington perceived the situation differently when he rode into the battle and saw soldiers retreating. Whether or not he actually cursed Lee is somewhat debatable, but no doubt Washington rallied his army and re-engaged the enemy in a fierce conflict that essentially ended in a draw.<sup>127</sup>

Two days after the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse, Lee was arrested and charged with a court-martial on the grounds of insubordination and disobedience. Lee wanted a chance to justify his actions and explain himself, but his complaints prior to his arrest about the manner in which Washington addressed him on the battlefield led Washington to allow Lee no such opportunity. In December Congress suspended Lee and essentially declared him incompetent, later in 1780 Lee was formally dismissed from the army by Congress.<sup>128</sup> No doubt Lee reflected on his prior assessment of Washington's character: "A puffed up charlatan...extremely prodigal of other men's blood and a great oeconomist of his own."<sup>129</sup> Both Lee and Washington had convincing arguments and whether or not Washington simply took the opportunity to get rid of Lee may never be known for certain, but Lee was gone and Gates was soon to follow.

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<sup>127</sup> Lengel, *General George Washington*, 304-305.

<sup>128</sup> Lengel, *General George Washington*, 305-306.

<sup>129</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 260.

The Battle of Monmouth proved to be the last major military engagement Washington participated in until the Battle of Yorktown in October 1781. During the time between Monmouth and Yorktown, Washington kept his army at bay, just outside the reach of Clinton and his army in New York City. However, in 1780 Clinton decided to change the focus of the war from the northern to the southern theatre. On May 29, 1780, Major General Benjamin Lincoln was forced to surrender the southern army after the British successfully captured Charleston, South Carolina. The British soon spread out across South Carolina and Georgia and prepared to move north. The only obstacle in their way was a contingent of troops Washington had ordered to North Carolina under Baron de Kalb. The south was in need of an army and someone to lead it; Washington thought Greene should occupy the post; Congress chose Horatio Gates. Gates pushed hard for the position, but it proved to be his eventual downfall. After arriving to find de Kalb's army in desperate shape, he made a poor decision based on faulty intelligence and confronted the British at Camden. The result was a massive defeat punctuated by Gates fleeing the field of battle for some sixty miles until he and his aides reached the security of Charlotte, North Carolina. The Battle of Camden marked the end of Gates' military career.<sup>130</sup>

Within a short span of time the two military officers who some thought should replace Washington as commander-in-chief were no longer a part of the army. Washington certainly had nothing to do with Gates' situation, but the ousting of Lee reveals the aggressive, perhaps vindictive approach that Washington took towards those who he thought were a challenge to his authority. On September 15, 1780, Washington wrote a letter to Congress in which he totally rejected the notion of depending on militia

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<sup>130</sup> Ferling, *The First of Men*, 277-279.

units to defend the south. Washington wrote, “*No Militia* will ever acquire the habits necessary to resist a regular force.” The only remedy for the south as far as he was concerned was a well disciplined and trained army. Washington believed that militia units were helpful and necessary but could by no means be solely depended on to repel a force the size of Cornwallis’ army. The army in the south, which was composed of the remains of de Kalb’s contingent, was without a leader and reeling from disaster. Perhaps with that fact in mind Washington included a sentence that informed the members of Congress that he was traveling to Hartford to meet with the Count De Rochambeau and the Chevalier De Ternay, and in his absence “The command of the army...devolves on Major General Greene.”<sup>131</sup> Washington certainly wanted Greene to have command of the southern army and employed subtle gestures such as the one above to make his point clear to Congress. However, before Congress decided upon a new strategy for the defense of the southern army, both it and Washington were struck a treacherous blow.

Benedict Arnold was one of Washington’s favorite generals because he was a man of action. In May 1775 Arnold, along with Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys, captured Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold won further acclaim from Washington and many other Americans for his daring trek from Maine to Canada through the thick wilderness in the winter. When Arnold and his 600 troops reached the St. Lawrence River, Washington wrote Arnold congratulating him on his journey by stating he deserved success because of his “enterprising and persevering spirit.” If Arnold had been successful in his attack on Quebec, it is likely his fame would have been much greater. However, his actions in the Quebec Campaign of 1775 did earn him a promotion to

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<sup>131</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. XX, Sept. 6, 1780- Dec. 20, 1780, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) September 15, 1780.

brigadier general, but Arnold yearned for more. The Battle of Saratoga provided another opportunity in which Arnold seized the initiative and played a major role in the defeat of General Burgoyne. Despite Arnold's heroics on the battlefield his reputation among his fellow officers was declining because of his thirst for power and misappropriations in his expense account. Gates had relieved him of his command before the Battle of Saratoga for insubordination and afterwards Arnold was passed over in favor of five of his junior officers for promotion to major general. Washington was suspicious of Arnold's actions, but he had no clue as to how far Arnold planned to be disobedient.<sup>132</sup>

On March 5, 1779, Benedict Arnold appeared in Philadelphia before the Paca committee to defend himself against charges of misuse and mismanagement of funds while serving as the military governor of Philadelphia. The committee cleared him of all charges except two, the misuse of militia and wagons, but recommended a court martial on those two charges. Arnold was livid and considered leaving his post because he felt deserted by Washington. The following month Congress reached an agreement by allowing Washington to determine the outcome of Arnold's case; Washington wrote Arnold a letter postponing the trial. "Arnold's old mentor, the man on whom he relied when his ungrateful country and its Congress deserted him, had now left him awaiting an indefinite sentence."<sup>133</sup> Arnold felt ultimately betrayed.

During the troublesome year of 1779 Arnold also married the eighteen year old Peggy Shippen, the daughter of a wealthy Philadelphian family whose political inclinations tended to be loyalist. Through his new bride Arnold met John Andre, an aide

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<sup>132</sup> Benton Rain Peterson, *Washington and Cornwallis: The Battle for America, 1775-1783*, ( Taylor Trade Publishing, Lanham and New York, 2004), 202-203.

<sup>133</sup> Willard Sterne Randall, *George Washington: A Life*, A John MacCrae Book, Henry Holt and Co., New York, 1997), 367-368.

to General Clinton, and the means for his eventual treason.<sup>134</sup> In December 1779 Arnold was cleared of all his charges and given only a slight punishment by Washington, and later in the summer of 1780 he joined Washington's army on the Hudson. Arnold had privately been negotiating with Clinton, and on August 25, he received his reply from Clinton agreeing to meet his demands in exchange for the American fort at West Point. It is ironic that after Arnold sold out his comrades Washington offered him the command he always yearned for, command of the entire left wing of the army. Arnold adamantly declined the post on the grounds that his injured leg necessitated a "rear-area assignment." Washington eventually relented and gave Arnold command of West Point. Once Arnold was in command, he systematically weakened West Point and even arranged to have Washington captured when he visited the fort. However, on September 23, 1780, the plot was uncovered when Andre was captured by three militiamen. Arnold fled and Andre was executed. When Washington learned of the affair, it is reported that he turned to Henry Knox with a trembling hand and said "Arnold has betrayed me. Who can I trust now?"<sup>135</sup>

The betrayal of Arnold was a hard blow to Washington because it caused him to doubt the loyalty of his officers and also because it exemplified many of the problems that were plaguing the army. In Washington's eyes, the system used by Congress to promote officers obviously needed to be refurbished because it caused many squabbles concerning rank, including the Conway Cabal. Washington realized another perhaps more important problem that plagued the army, the lack of money and sufficient supplies. Many of the soldiers, like Arnold, had grown to hate civilians because in dire times of

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<sup>134</sup> Peterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 203.

<sup>135</sup> Randall, *George Washington: A Life*, 371, 373-375, 379, 381.

need civilians tended to sell their produce and goods to others or at high prices because of the depreciating continental currency. Feuds between officers and their men continued to be a problem that contributed to the growing distance between the “people” and the Continental Army. Washington wrote, “We are daily and hourly oppressing the people-souring their tempers-and alienating the affections.”<sup>136</sup> Arnold’s treason hurt Washington because he believed in Arnold, but as he reassessed the situation afterwards the hurt only deepened because Arnold’s treason was born from specific circumstances that indicated the army was disintegrating.

Despite the troublesome times Washington could always count on one man to follow him into battle and follow through on his every command and that man was Nathanael Greene. Greene served by Washington’s side or close by throughout the entirety of the war until he was called to assume command of the army in the south. Before he was reassigned to a command post, Greene had been the army’s Quartermaster General, a post that lacked the fame of a command post but often demanded twice the worry and work. Despite Greene’s wishes to achieve great battlefield glory, he accepted the post and worked hard to create an efficient system of supply for the army. In July 1780 Congress adopted a plan that changed the role of the quartermaster general. Greene made his suggestions clear to Congress and Congress clearly ignored all Greene’s suggestions, which caused him to draft his resignation from the post. Greene was so angered over the situation that he failed to keep a check on temper and stated, “It is sufficient to say that my feelings are injured.”<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington’s War*, 430-431.

<sup>137</sup> Francis Vinton Greene, *General Greene*, (Kennikat Press, Port Washington, New York & London, 1970), 144.

Following Greene's resignation from the quartermaster general post, his enemies in Congress, men such as Joseph Jones of Virginia, moved to get him expelled from the army totally. It is not likely that Congress would have dismissed Greene from service, but after Washington read a letter written by Jones denouncing Greene, he decided to write Congress concerning the manner:

I shall neither condemn nor acquit General Green's conduct for the act of resignation, because all the antecedent correspondence is necessary to form a right judgment of the matter, and possibly, if the account is ever before the public, you may find him treading on better ground than you seem to imagine; but this is by the bye.

Washington explained that he feared the consequences of Congress suspending Greene:

Each will ask himself this question: If Congress, by its mere fiat, without inquiry and without trial, will suspend an officer to-day, and an officer of such high rank, may it not be my turn to-morrow? and ought I put it in the power of any man or body of men to sport with my commission and character, and lay me under the necessity of tamely acquiescing, or, by an appeal to the public, exposing matters which may be injurious to its interest?...It is my wish to prevent the proceeding; for sure I am that it cannot be brought to a happy issue if it takes place.<sup>138</sup>

It is clear that Washington held Greene in extremely high esteem and was not about to sit idle and allow a small faction to harm his character. After the betrayal of Arnold and the existing problems between officers and Congress as well as officers and their soldiers, Washington had had enough. His letter on behalf of Greene is somewhat moving because it is apparent that Washington was willing to place his own reputation on the line and stand by his friend. Although Washington did not know it at the time, the man he wrote the letter for had yet to execute his most monumental contribution to the Revolutionary War.

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<sup>138</sup> Greene, *General Greene*, 148-150.

Washington had wanted Greene to be in charge of the army in the south ever since the British capture of Charleston, but Congress ultimately made those decisions, and it had chosen Gates. However, after Gates was defeated at Camden, the Continental Army in the south was all but extinct, and Washington again recommended Greene for the assignment. Washington had confidence in Greene as is evidenced by his letter to Greene after his resignation from the quartermaster general post:

From that period to the present time, your exertions have been equally great; have appeared to me to be the result of System, and to have been well calculated to promote the interest and honor of your Country. And in fine I cannot but add, that the States have had in you, in my opinion, an able, upright and diligent  
Servant.<sup>139</sup>

On October 5, 1780, Congress resolved to create a “court of enquiry to be held on the conduct [of] Major General Gates, as commander in chief of the southern army,” and that “the Commander in Chief be and is hereby directed to appoint an officer to command the southern army.”<sup>140</sup> Washington received what he had been wishing for, the chance to put Greene in charge and the opportunity to conduct the war with another powerful general who was loyal to his wishes. On October 22, Washington wrote Greene a letter explaining his new task in the south. The tone of Washington’s letter is at times like a father speaking to his beloved son, who, finally realizing his son is ready for the world sends him out with full confidence. Washington was also brutally honest with Greene:

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<sup>139</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. IXX, June 12, 1780- Sept. 5, 1780, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) August, 15, 1780.

<sup>140</sup> Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1783*, Vol. XVIII, Sept. 7 to Dec. 29, 1780, (Washington D.C., 1903-1937), October 5. Found at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

Uninformed as I am of the enemy's force in that quarter, of our own, or of the resources which it will be in our power to command for carrying on the war, I can give you no particular instructions but must leave you to govern yourself intirely, according to your own prudence and judgment and the circumstances in which you find yourself. I am aware, that the nature of the command will offer you embarrassments of a singular and complicated nature; but I rely upon your abilities and exertions for every thing your means will enable you to effect.<sup>141</sup>

Washington obviously trusted in Greene's ability to lead but he also trusted the character of Greene. Throughout the war Greene worked hard and shared many problems with Washington, suddenly all that experience was put to the ultimate test. Greene's rival leader in the south was Lord Charles Cornwallis, one of the most famous British generals. On December 2, 1780, Greene officially took over command from Gates at Charlotte, North Carolina and quickly started assessing the army's situation. Greene's time spent as a quartermaster taught him to be sensitive to the most important aspect of any military campaign, the supplying of the army. Greene's style had an effect on those around him immediately; Colonel William Polk remarked that after Greene arrived he had "by the following morning understood [supply problems] better than Gates had done in the whole period of his command."<sup>142</sup>

The Revolutionary War in the south had a different character from the fighting that occurred in New England and in the Middle Colonies. Many historians have justifiably referred to the fighting in the south as a civil war. Many in the south felt no attachment to the Revolutionary War on either side because the conflict, until then, had largely avoided the south. When Clinton decided to take the war to the south, the people were forced to decide which side they would provide support for, a decision

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<sup>141</sup> Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. XX, Sept. 6, 1780- Dec. 20, 1780, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) October 22, 1780.

<sup>142</sup> Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, 291-292.

that was often based in the politics of self-interest. Many southerners avoided decisions or switched sides during the campaign. Therefore, it was important for Greene to procure support for the cause and root out Tory sympathizers. Greene's advice to one of his generals was "to strike terror into our enemies and give spirit to our friends." In a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Greene explained that a raid by his troops on a group of Loyalists resulted in "a dreadful carnage of them," but it had "a very happy effect on those disaffected persons of which there were too many in this country."<sup>143</sup>

Greene displayed no reluctance to do whatever it took to win the war in the south, even if it meant hunting down Loyalist groups or defying traditional military rules of engagement. Before Greene assumed command of the army, a group of militiamen from the mountainous frontier marched down to meet Major General Patrick Ferguson at Kings Mountain on October 7, 1780. Ferguson was killed and his entire force was captured or killed. The defeat destroyed the left flank of Cornwallis' army and caused problems in the recruitment of Loyalists. Therefore, when Greene assumed command of the army in the south Cornwallis was in the midst of reforming his new strategy. Greene considered his options within the context of the south as a whole and devised his strategy accordingly. Greene was joined by Daniel Morgan and "Light-Horse" Henry Lee. Greene sent Lee, along with William Washington's cavalry, to meet with Francis Marion on the Pee Dee River. Greene also violated traditional military policy by dividing his force in the face of an enemy when he sent Morgan and 600 troops across the border to Cheraws, South Carolina.

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<sup>143</sup> Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States: 1492 to Present*, (Harper Perennial, New York, 2005), 83.

Greene's decision proved to be correct when Morgan's forces met with those commanded by Colonel Banestre Tarleton on January 17, 1781, at Cowpens, South Carolina. Cornwallis was astonished to hear the news that his revamped left-flank under Tarleton had been destroyed again. Cornwallis tried to catch Morgan and the rest of the army after Cowpens, resulting in the now famous "Race to the Dan," but he was too late to catch Greene and the army before it crossed the Dan to relative safety. In the effort to catch Greene, Cornwallis destroyed large amounts of supplies in order to move quickly and lost around 200 men but had nothing tangible to show for it. Greene was ultimately successful in the south because he was able to blend the actions of his Continental force with guerilla operations led by men such as Lee and Marion.<sup>144</sup>

Greene learned many important lessons during his tenure with Washington. He learned to violate standard military techniques if the situation demanded it and not to judge success by ordinary military standards. Greene learned that the army was the heart of the revolution, and as long as the army was alive so too was the revolution. At Guilford Courthouse on March 15, 1781, Greene displayed these qualities by removing his army from the fight despite the opportunity to execute a complete victory. Greene refused to put his whole army at risk because he realized that Cornwallis' main objective was his army. Cornwallis' army received much higher casualty rates than Greene's army, a fact that caused Greene to remark that Cornwallis' victory "was made at so great an expense that I hope it may yet affect their ruin." One of Cornwallis' aides summed up Guilford Courthouse by saying the army had procured no good from the victory and that "the Spirit of our little army has

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<sup>144</sup> Lancaster, *The American Revolution*, 291-298.

evaporated a good deal.”<sup>145</sup> The scenario of Guilford Courthouse was repeated by Greene at Hobkirk’s Hill and Eutaw Springs until Cornwallis was forced to retreat to the coast of Virginia at Yorktown.

The Battle of Yorktown proved to be the final major battle of the Revolutionary War. The Battle of Yorktown was unique because more French troops participated in it than Continental troops. Washington and his army rendezvoused with the Count de Rochambeau and his troops from Newport and advanced to Yorktown where they were met by Admiral de Grasse and his fleet of ships carrying many French troops.<sup>146</sup> Washington was overjoyed by the help he received from the French throughout the war but particularly happy at Yorktown because he recognized the important opportunity it presented. Count William Deux-Ponts, second in command of the Deux-Ponts regiment, recalled the joy exhibited at Yorktown when the French fleet arrived. Deux-Ponts wrote:

The joy which this welcomed news produced...is more easy to feel than to express. He [Washington] put aside his character as arbiter of North America and contended himself for the moment with that of a citizen, happy at the good fortune of his country. A child, whose every wish had been gratified, would not have experienced a sensation more lively, and I believe that I am doing honor to the feelings of this rare man, in endeavoring to express all their ardor.<sup>147</sup>

Washington had reason to be happy because later on October 19, 1781, Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown. Cornwallis’ surrender ended the Revolutionary War for all intents and purposes.

Almost two years after the surrender of Cornwallis the Treaty of Paris officially ended the Revolutionary War and resulted in the recognition of the United

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<sup>145</sup> Peterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 287-288.

<sup>146</sup> Patterson, *Washington and Cornwallis*, 305-306.

<sup>147</sup> Gilbert Chinard, ed., *George Washington as the French Knew Him: A Collection of Texts*, (Greenwood Press, New York, 1969), 42-43.

States of America as an independent nation. The final two years of the war were troublesome times for Washington as he struggled to keep his army together, but afterwards he shocked the world by resigning his commission and returning to private life. Before he returned to Mount Vernon though, Washington met with his “military family” to say a few final words and bring closure to his experience of leading the army. Washington read a speech to the army the day after the peace treaty was signed in which he thanked the army for their service and told them they had nothing left to do but “preserve a perfect unvarying consistency of character.” However, he met with his officers later at Fraunces Tavern, located at the bottom of Wall Street in New York City. The meeting was a heartfelt exchange between Washington and his top officers. Knox was speechless, perhaps for the first time in his life, and could do nothing but embrace Washington. Benjamin Talmadge, leader of one of Washington’s spy rings remarked, “The simple thought...that we should see his face no more in this world seemed to me utterly insupportable.” Washington left the tavern with tears running down his face and proceeded to journey back to Mount Vernon, back to private life.<sup>148</sup>

Throughout the war the various relationships that Washington had with his officers and aides defined the different aspects of Washington’s character and helped illuminate the usual and unusual situations that he confronted as leader of the Continental Army. At times Washington was cold and vindictive, other times he was warm and nurturing, a shift in attitude that reflected the internal struggle that Washington faced as leader. Although some factions did exist from time to time, Washington was successful in creating a core of officers and aides that he trusted and depended on to help him fight the war. Of those, Nathanael Greene emerged as his

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<sup>148</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington’s War*, 454-456.

most trusted. Greene displayed all the qualities that Washington could have ever asked for in his most trusted officer when he took over the southern army and eventually helped bring about the surrender of Cornwallis. Despite the distance that Washington tried to keep between himself and virtually everyone, his attachment to the cause and unyielding brand of leadership caused many of those around him to adore him and in the case of individuals like Knox, Lafayette, and Greene, he adored them back. Washington viewed the end of the war as the end of an epoch and though he was happy to see the end, saying goodbye to his “military family” was painful.

## CHAPTER 5

### WASHINGTON AS SEEN BY HIS CONTEMPORARIES

George Washington had many important duties during the Revolutionary War, but one of his most crucial tasks was to maintain popular support for the war effort. Therefore, in order to achieve a holistic interpretation of Washington's tenure as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army it is necessary to understand how various groups perceived Washington during and directly after the Revolutionary War. The previous chapters have been dedicated to the relationships Washington had with Congress and his officers, as well as the manner and style by which Washington led the army, but this chapter seeks to understand how his contemporaries felt about him and his leadership. By consulting the opinions of various colonial Americans from both sides of the conflict, an understanding of how Washington was perceived may be gained. That Washington became a mythic figure as generation after generation of Americans venerated his name and character is undeniable and in that respect this examination will help to shed light on the initial development of Washington as a symbol for the United States and its citizens.

The rise of Washington to the position of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army was unique when compared with other revolutionary movements because the initial reaction of the colonies was to form a large committee, known as the Second Continental Congress. Washington had been a member of the First Continental Congress but remained silent for the most part, allowing his reputation as a soldier and successful gentleman to make the biggest impression on his new colleagues. At the Second Continental Congress, Washington served on several committees concerning military

affairs, all the while dressed in his striking military uniform that he wore as leader of the Fairfax Militia in Virginia. Washington's military exploits were not the stuff of legends, but that did not seem to bother his colleagues in Congress. Washington's appointment as leader of the Continental Army was representative of a shift in the colony's approach to resisting British authority. Washington was very popular before he officially assumed command in Boston, a fact that supports the statement, "His appointment was in effect a decision for war, and the people who agreed with that decision expressed their support by praising its executor."<sup>149</sup>

Despite the shift to war the representatives and those who supported the war at large did not necessarily see military experience as the most important factor in choosing Washington as leader. The likes of leaders such as Oliver Cromwell were still fresh in the minds of many Americans and they looked for something else in their chosen leader: character. Americans who were pro-war were interested in choosing a leader they could trust to represent and execute the war according to their notions of shared authority. Americans during this time also feared the thought of a standing, professional army. Charles Lee was certainly more experienced in military matters, but his character and status as a recent immigrant caused him to not be chosen as leader. John Adams' quote concerning the appointment of Washington makes this point clear: "Treat the General with all that confidence and affection, that politeness and respect, which is due one of the most important characters in the world." It was the character and style of Washington

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<sup>149</sup> Barry Schwartz, *George Washington: The Making of An American Symbol*, (The Free Press, Collier Macmillan Pub., New York and London, 1987), 14-17.

that appealed to his contemporaries and aided in their decision to make him the tangible symbol of the United Colonies.<sup>150</sup>

However, Congress was also equally concerned with the attitude of the mass population. Despite the patriot's talk of liberty and freedom, the rights about which these men were speaking had limits and Congress sought to empower a leader who understood those limits. John Randolph, attorney-general of Virginia, referred to these limits when he suggested that the government was being handed over to the "ignorant vulgar" because political candidates began protesting laws that forced non-slave holders to ride patrol at night and watch for runaway slaves. Joseph Galloway warned against "companies of armed, but undisciplined men, headed by men unprincipled." Although Congress, like most colonists, feared a standing army, it realized that in order to defend America against Great Britain a well trained regular army was needed.<sup>151</sup> The attitudes between Congress and the people it theoretically represented created a need for someone who could be trusted to lead the army and serve as an inspiration to others but at the same time maintain a specific order.

George Washington, like many of his contemporaries, was highly conscious of his character and how his character was perceived by his contemporaries. Many biographers of Washington have noted his close attention to correcting, at a young age, the aspects of himself that he viewed as defects. Washington also spent a considerable amount of time crafting his public persona by copying and memorizing lines from the *Rules and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation*. Gordon Wood noted that almost all of the "Founding Fathers" adhered to these rules of civility, but none of them more devoutly

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<sup>150</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 18.

<sup>151</sup> John Ferling, *A Leap in the Dark: The Struggle to Create the American Republic*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 2003), 141-142.

than Washington. Taken in this light, it is easier to understand why the character of Washington, often described as aloof and cold, was appealing to many of his contemporaries. Unlike other contemporaries such as Thomas Jefferson and John Adams, Washington did not receive a formal education, something he was always self-conscious about, but compensated for by observing and listening to educated persons. His behavior in public was often described as shy, but many of his contemporaries, including French officers and officials, recognized Washington's "gift of silence."<sup>152</sup>

One of the most important aspects of Washington's character that was appealing to his contemporaries was the level of modesty he displayed both before and after the Revolutionary War. After he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Washington answered by promising only to do his best:

Tho' I am truly sensible of the high Honour done me, in this Appointment, yet I feel great distress, from a consciousness that my abilities and military experience may not be equal to the extensive and important Trust: However, as the Congress desire it, I will enter upon the momentous duty, and exert every power I possess in their service, and for support of the glorious cause. I beg they will accept my most cordial thanks for this distinguished testimony of their approbation.

Washington then stated:

But, lest some unlucky event should happen, unfavorable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered, by every Gentleman in the room, that I, this day, declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the Command I am honored with.<sup>153</sup>

Washington ended his acceptance speech by announcing he would not accept any money for his service, which punctuated his already modest approach of assuming command of

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<sup>152</sup> Gordon Wood, *Revolutionary Characters: What Made the Founders Different*, (The Penguin Press, New York, 2006), 35-37.

<sup>153</sup> Worthington C. Ford, ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1783*, Vol. 2, May 10 to September 20, 1775 (Washington D.C., 1903-1937), June 16, 1775. Found at [www.loc.gov](http://www.loc.gov).

the army. However, it is clear that Washington was concerned with his reputation and wanted to publicly make a statement to cover his character in case something dreadful occurred. After the war, Washington remained modest as evidenced by the writings of Jean-Pierre Brissot, who met with Washington at Mount Vernon five years after the war. Brissot wrote: “His modesty is astonishing to a Frenchman; he speaks of the American war, and of his victories, as of things in which he had no direction.”<sup>154</sup>

Before Washington assumed command of the army, his status as a symbol for the American cause had already caused a sensation throughout many of the colonies. Because the appointment of Washington reflected a shift in a large portion of colonial America’s society, many people came to see Washington as he departed Philadelphia en-route to take command of the army around Boston. The scene was repeated as he traveled through New York and again as he neared Boston. Colonial Americans were looking for a symbol to represent their cause and Washington was easily identifiable. Benjamin Rush explained that “you would distinguish him to be a General and a Soldier, from among ten thousand people.” Rush went even further by stating, “There is not a king in Europe but would look like a valet de chambre by his side.”<sup>155</sup>

Despite the assessments of men such as Rush, the reality Washington faced when he formally took charge of the army around Boston was shockingly dissimilar. Washington may have looked the part, but his army was something all together different. The militia that initially responded to the conflict was a variety of all types, and collectively represented a unique brand of resistance. At first Washington approached the situation with a high level of optimism stating that it was wrong to expect that “troops

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<sup>154</sup> Gilbert Chinard, ed., *George Washington as the French Knew Him: A Collection of Texts*, (Greenwood Press, Pub., New York, 1969), 87.

<sup>155</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 19.

formed under such circumstances should at once possess the order, regularity, and discipline of veterans.” Despite his initial positive outlook, Washington soon grew weary of the army’s situation, as well as the character of the troops he commanded.<sup>156</sup>

Washington wrote his cousin Lund Washington on August 20, 1775, and explained many of the problems he faced. He could not understand why many Americans were reluctant to join the fight after the initial flood of interest. However, Washington’s criticisms struck a much more profound chord when he wrote:

The People of this government have obtained a Character which they by no means deserved; their officers generally speaking are the most indifferent kind of People I ever saw... I dare say the Men would fight very well (if properly Officered) although they are an exceeding dirty and nasty people.

Washington went as far to say that if the troops had been properly commanded, the British would have suffered much more damage at the Battle of Bunker Hill.<sup>157</sup> After the initial hoopla concerning the creation of the Continental Army, the harsh reality of conducting the war began to set in on Washington, and often he responded with despondent prose.

One example of the opposition Washington faced when building the army of his choice came from his home state of Virginia where even before the conflict at Lexington some colonists had expressed concerns about being forced to fight. Ray Raphael noted that individuals who expressed these concerns were not “unpatriotic,” but rather possessed concerns about the terms of enlistment and the army’s chain of command. Many of these individuals rejected the notion of being treated like a subordinate as well

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<sup>156</sup> Thomas G. Frothingham, *Washington: Commander-in-Chief*, (Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston and New York, 1930), 72-73.

<sup>157</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. III, Jan. 1770-Sept. 1775, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) August, 20, 1775.

as other standard military traditions, like elaborate uniforms. The group became known as the Virginia “Shirtmen” as a result of the dress they adopted: a shirt and a belt with a tomahawk or knife. These individuals resented the notion of having to adopt formal strategies because time was not on their side. They did not have slaves to do their work while they were off fighting in the war, which caused them to put the basic need of providing for their family first. As a result, revolutionary governments were forced to rely on the services of men who had no other choices in life and tended to be vagabonds. The Virginia “Shirtmen” were not an oddity; many other colonies experienced the same reaction to a long-term war. Before the British pulled out of Boston it was apparent to Washington that he needed what he did not have, a professional army.<sup>158</sup>

Despite the problems Washington faced in creating a professional army, the first year of the war passed with relatively little conflict. The Continental Army forced the British out of Boston by outmatching their guns, thanks in large part to the efforts of Henry Knox, and support for Washington and the war was still alive. A few months into the war a song was written entitled “New Song,” which included Washington’s name in the opening line: “Since WE your brave sons, insens’d, our swords have goaded on, / Huzza, huzza, huzza, huzza for WAR and WASHINGTON.”<sup>159</sup> Other songs and poems were published in newspapers and sung in homes and taverns across the colonies, including a poem by Philip Freneau, who has been labeled by many as the poet of American Revolution. The opening lines of Franeau’s 1775 poem “American Liberty, a Poem” contributed to the already growing development of Washington as a mythic figure:

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<sup>158</sup> Ray Raphael, *A People’s History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence*, (Perennial, New York, 2002), 74-76.

<sup>159</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 21.

See Washington New Albion's freedom owns,  
And moves to war with half Virginia's sons,  
Bold in the fight, whose actions might have aw'd  
A Roman Hero, or a Grecian God.<sup>160</sup>

One of the most important facts to keep in mind when considering how Washington was perceived by the public is that he did not enjoy complete popular support. William Bryan noted that, "It must be remembered that another third favored the crown and that the remaining third were by comparison indifferent."<sup>161</sup> Although Bryan's figures have been disputed by most modern historians, his figures do help to illuminate the differing opinions of colonial Americans. Just as rebels had songs venerating their cause and their leaders, so too did those who remained loyal to the crown. One of the most popular Loyalists songs was entitled "Burrowing Yankees" in reference to the immense amount of digging done by the Continental Army outside of Boston, and displayed the resolve of those loyal to the crown:

And the time will soon come when your whole rebel race  
Will be drove from the lands, nor dare show your face:  
Here's health to great George [III], may he fully determine,  
To root from the earth all such insolent vermin.

"Burrowing Yankees" was published at least four different times and first appeared in the *Halifax Journal*, which indicates the important role that colonial newspapers played during the war.<sup>162</sup>

In his study of the development of American journalism, Eric Burns noted that "the Revolutionary War was not an easy one to cover." Many newspapers failed to survive the war for a variety of reasons. The war caused a shortage of supplies for items

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<sup>160</sup> William Alfred Bryan, *George Washington In American Literature, 1775-1865*, (Greenwood Press, Pub., Westport, Connecticut, 1970), 122.

<sup>161</sup> Bryan, *George Washington in American Literature*, 6.

<sup>162</sup> Martin Kallich and Andrew MacLeish, eds., *The American Revolution Through British Eyes*, (Row, Peterson, and Co., Illinois and New York, 1962), 85-86.

such as paper and ink that halted the production of many papers, plus many of the individuals who labored to create newspapers were actively engaged in the combat. Subscriptions to newspapers also thinned for the same reason and a lack of extra money to spend on the newspapers that were available. Providing a newspaper or journal did survive, it was very difficult to attain and disseminate information concerning the war in the midst of the British army. However, at the beginning of the conflict many papers resonated with the rally for war. The *New York Journal* remarked, “The kind intension of our good mother-our tender, indulgent mother, are at last revealed to all the world.” Other pro-Revolution papers reported the opening conflicts with patriotic zeal. Likewise, Tory publications such as the *New York Gazette* and *Weekly Mercury* reported the war with an equally obvious bias.<sup>163</sup>

Although many newspapers did fail during the Revolutionary War, there is evidence that the overall number of newspapers continued to rise. In his statistical study of colonial newspapers Thomas Tanselle discovered that in the three decades before war the number of newspapers increased. John C. Miller noted that “the American Revolution was one of the first great popular movements in which the newspapers played a vital role.” One important statistic shows that between 1763 and 1783, 530 political satires were published, of these about 70% could be seen in a newspaper. The pamphlet was also a useful tool that colonists used to disseminate information concerning the rift between themselves and Great Britain.<sup>164</sup> However, newspapers and pamphlets were most effective in rallying support before the conflict turned bloody, once the war began

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<sup>163</sup> Eric Burns, *Infamous Scribblers: The Founding Fathers and the Rowdy Beginnings of American Journalism*, (Public Affairs, New York, 2006), 190-192.

<sup>164</sup> Bernard Bailyn and John Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution*, (American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, 1980), 346-350.

colonists no longer sought to justify their reasons for resistance, a fact that was made concrete with the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

The shift in the priorities of American journalism manifested itself through more thorough analysis of events and decisions made by war leaders. Journalists who wanted to cover the war had to rely in large part on the letters sent to and from Congress by leaders such as Washington. Although it was not the norm, some journalists did travel to camp and interview various officers, including Washington, but often journalists were relegated to speaking with subordinates. Although Washington was not completely comfortable with being interviewed, he did once suggest to Congress that it assign a traveling group of journalists so that information concerning the war could be written with some authenticity. After Washington was forced to retreat from Manhattan to White Plains, where he was defeated again, some newspapers started to question his leadership. The questioning of Washington's leadership marked the beginning of the love/hate relationship that the press had with him, and likewise he had with the press. After Gates' victory at Saratoga at least one newspaper, *The New Hampshire Gazette*, found a new hero that it celebrated with a poem.<sup>165</sup>

Washington was also celebrated and berated in the theatre, though on a much smaller scale than in song or in lyrical verse. Of the plays that were written, only a few were actually performed during the Revolutionary War; most plays concerning Washington were written after the war or after his death. However, one of the first plays written concerning Washington and the war was titled *The Fall of British Tyranny*, attributed to Joseph Leacock in 1776. The play expressed the feelings of many colonists at the time by placing the blame for the crisis on members of the British Parliament.

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<sup>165</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 193-194, 214-215.

Washington's character appeared in the latter portion of the play, joined by Charles Lee and Israel Putnam. The three commanders collectively lamented the death of Richard Montgomery and then pledged their life to the cause of liberty. Another play that briefly discussed Washington was written by Mrs. Mercy Otis Warren, a farce entitled *The Motley Assembly*, which toyed with the notion of Washington as "godlike."

In response to *The Fall of British Tyranny*, New York publisher Jemmy Revington published an anonymously written farce entitled *The Battle of Brooklyn*. *The Battle of Brooklyn* is significant because the author personally attacked the character of many Revolutionary War leaders, particularly Washington. Washington was presented as a tyrant in his own right, who unjustly assumed command of an immoral rebellion. Washington's military competence is also mocked and scoffed at by the author. The play also emphasized the social position of Washington as opposed to the composition of the army he commanded. Washington was portrayed as being paranoid that the army would rise and overthrow his power because of the large social gap that existed between the wealthy Virginia planter and the majority of the poor, dirty men who comprised the army. The author also went as far to suggest that Washington was paying one of his chambermaids for sexual favors. Overall, the play was a "scurrilous attack on the private lives of the Patriots."<sup>166</sup> *The Battle of Brooklyn* is significant because some of the accusations that the author expressed were founded in reality and may have been influential in shifting the attitudes of many who were undecided to the British side.

The issue of slavery was a hot topic during the Revolutionary War for a variety of reasons. Gordon Wood accurately noted that slavery was well ingrained in the minds of eighteenth century individuals living in colonial America. Individuals such as

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<sup>166</sup> Bryan, *George Washington in American Literature*, 172-173.

Washington justified slavery because it had been in existence for thousands of years and was only the lowest rung on the great social hierarchy that was by no means equal. About one fifth of colonial Americans were slaves and Washington's home state contained almost half of the total number of slaves in colonial America. The Revolution changed the way individuals in America perceived slavery. Although many individuals continued to practice and condone slavery during and after the Revolution, they were acutely aware of the fundamental contradiction between their rhetoric of freedom and the institution of slavery. Washington condoned slavery when he took charge of the army and was shocked to find many African-Americans under his command. Initially he rejected the notion that African-Americans could be in the army, but later changed his mind when necessity demanded. Washington went as far as offering freedom to any slave who fought for the Continental Army in 1779 and allowing Rhode Island to create an African-American regiment. It is justifiable to say that Washington led a racially integrated army because around 5,000 African-Americans fought for the American Revolution.<sup>167</sup> However, to the Loyalists' eye the contradiction was evident and was used as propaganda to justify the immorality of many Patriots.

Although most individuals who remained loyal to the English Crown did not think too highly of Washington, at least one Loyalist from Boston proved to be an exception. Before the New York Campaign of 1776 was set into motion by General William Howe, the Loyalist Bostonian's letter was published in *Lloyd's Evening Post and British Chronicle*. The author stated that many Americans had been "deluded by Patriots, Fishers in troubled waters, and hot-headed Republican Preachers," and that they were "actually poor and wretched...more enslaved by their Congress than the subjects of

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<sup>167</sup> Wood, *Revolutionary Characters*, 38-39.

Morocco.” However, instead of criticizing the character of Washington the author applauded it and sought to justify Washington by explaining he had been thoughtful as a member of the First Continental Congress and capable of restraint as leader of the army. The author noted Washington’s “generous spirit was for allowing the friends of Government the liberty of thinking for themselves.”<sup>168</sup> The author represented a unique perspective during the revolutionary crisis because their viewpoint did not applaud the American Congress or the English Parliament, but it nonetheless respected the character of Washington as an able, just leader. However, after the signing of the Declaration of Independence and the New York Campaign, the character of the war changed.

Despite the losses suffered by the Continental Army in the New York Campaign of 1776, Washington still retained support from most Patriots. Many revolutionaries, including Henry Laurens, thought that Washington should be allowed some room to make mistakes: “The General very well knows we are, and will continue to make suitable allowances for all defects seeming or real.” The extent of what Laurens referred to as “suitable allowances” was pushed by the failure of the army to protect the American capital of Philadelphia from being captured by the British. It was failures such as these, coupled with the fall of New York and the success of American General Horatio Gates at Saratoga that led a small group inside the army and Congress to plot to overthrow Washington’s leadership. The conspiracy was dubbed the Conway Cabal in relation to the size of the anti-Washington clique and was overwhelmingly denied by other members

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<sup>168</sup> Margaret Wheeler Willard, ed., *Letters on the American Revolution: 1774-1776*, (Kennikat Press, Inc., Port Washington, New York, 1968), 266-267.

of Congress once the plot was revealed. Many who learned about the plot responded with the cry: “Washington or no army!”<sup>169</sup>

The Conway Cabal clearly displayed the loyalty of most of the revolutionaries in regards to Washington’s brand of leadership. However, even before the Conway Cabal and the fall of Philadelphia, John Adams expressed a growing concern about the idolization of Washington. Adams registered his complaint during a session of Congress on February 19, 1777, weeks after the success of the Continental Army at Trenton and Princeton. Congress was debating whether it or Washington should choose a number of major-generals to serve in the war; Adams was against Washington choosing, which is not surprising since Congress was the source of Washington’s authority. But Adams took his argument one step further by stating:

I have been distressed to see some of our members disposed to idolize an image which their own hands have molten. I speak here of the superstitious veneration which is paid to General Washington. Although I honor him for his good qualities, yet in this house I feel myself his superior.<sup>170</sup>

Adam’s quote clearly demonstrated the amount of hero worship associated with Washington not only throughout the colonies but inside the governing body of the newly declared America. Adams was not against the leadership of Washington, but he did have a problem with individuals losing sight of who was really in charge of the revolution, and in his mind Congress was in charge.

Adam’s insight into the singular fascination many Americans had concerning Washington is further illuminated when taken within the context of Elias Boudinot’s comments to Alexander Hamilton in July 1778. Boudinot was serving as commissary-general of prisoners when he wrote: “Every lip dwells on his praise, for even his

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<sup>169</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 26-27.

<sup>170</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 21-22.

pretended friends (for none dare to acknowledge themselves his enemies) are obliged to croak it forth.” Boudinot actually recorded an interview with Washington later in July after he wrote Hamilton. Boudinot had tried in vain to obtain “hard money” from Congress in order to clothe prisoners of war, but was met with denial. His interview with Washington is revealing because it sheds light on the multi-faceted nature of Washington’s post. Washington told Boudinot, “He was Genl. Quarter Master and Commissary. Everything fell on him and he was unequal to the task.” Boudinot informed Washington had he could borrow money from his own credit, to which Washington replied if Congress did not reimburse him he would go in on half the losses with Boudinot from his own personal account.<sup>171</sup>

Both Adams and Boudinot were justified in making the statements that they did. Adams’ concern over the growing “cult” of Washington was well founded, especially with the memory of Cromwell in his mind, but Boudinot’s statements were also founded in reality. One could justifiably say Boudinot’s statements represent a more realistic approach to the problems that Washington faced because Boudinot was actually taking part in the fighting and experienced first-hand the many difficulties Washington faced in leading the army. Historian Bruce Chadwick noted the many different positions that Washington was forced to assume when he became Commander-in-Chief. When Boudinot conducted his interview with Washington the army was experiencing hard times. The army’s encampment at Valley Forge clearly displayed the weakness of Congress in organizing and supplying its soldiers, plus the hard-times at Valley Forge caused a rift between soldiers and civilians. Chadwick explained that most civilians during this time thought the army needed no help because Congress had raised the army

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<sup>171</sup> Bryan, *George Washington In American Literature*, 26-27.

and it and the states collected taxes that were to be used for the maintenance of the army.<sup>172</sup>

Washington soon realized that he only had two options: Congress and the army. He also realized the faults inherent with the type of system used to manage the Revolutionary War. In order to properly supply the army Washington became convinced that a “separate, civilian administrative branch of government to operate all federal agencies, separate from Congress but with Congressional overseers” was needed. Washington was convinced his solution could properly remedy the situation because his solution was founded upon his own personal experience of being forced to assume unofficial leadership of the civilian state.<sup>173</sup> One of Washington’s closest contacts and friends throughout the Revolutionary War was the Governor of New Jersey, William Livingston. Livingston and Washington’s relationship is symbolic of the multi-faceted role Washington played during the war as leader of the military and civilian state. Livingston knew the troubles that Washington faced as Commander-in-Chief and responded with vengeance to criticism directed at Washington. Livingston wrote a letter to Charles Lee after the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse in which he stated that his support for Washington was not, “from a blind attachment to men of high rank, nor from any self-interested motive whatsoever, but from a full conviction of his great personal merit and public importance.”<sup>174</sup>

Despite the willingness of men such as Livingston and Laurens to publicly denounce anyone who suggested Washington’s leadership was not adequate, Washington

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<sup>172</sup> Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington’s War: The Forging of a Revolutionary Leader and the American Presidency*, (Sourcebooks, Naperville, Illinois, 2004), 214-215.

<sup>173</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington’s War*, 216-217.

<sup>174</sup> Bryan, *George Washington in American Literature*, 26.

certainly had his detractors. But one of the most vocal writers who bashed the character of Washington and the revolutionary movement in general proved, in the end, to only lend support for those who characterized Washington as brilliant. Jemmy Rivington began denouncing the revolutionary movement in its early phases and once Washington was named leader of the newly created army, Rivington summed up Washington as “underskilled and overrated.” Not long afterwards Rivington was almost killed by a mob of angry colonists in mid-1775 before escaping, but his types used for printing were melted into bullets. Rivington considered leaving America for good, but opted to ask Congress for a pardon concerning any wrong doings on his behalf, which Congress granted. However, Rivington took time before reentering America and first traveled to England where he was given, by Parliament, a new press and the title of the Crown’s printer in New York. Rivington returned and continued to blast Washington throughout the war.

Rivington was hated by patriots throughout America. William Livingston scolded Gouverneur Morris for his previous support of Rivington’s paper and stated: “If Rivington is taken, I must have one of his ears; Governor Clinton is entitled to the other, and George Washington, if he pleases, may take the head.” Although Livingston was close to Washington, he did not know the complete story. From the surface it is reasonable that Livingston would make such a statement, after all he was steadfastly loyal to Washington. But what he did not know was that Rivington had been all the while employed by Washington to gather information concerning the movements and plans of the Royal British Navy. Thanks to the efforts of Rivington many soldiers were saved because on at least one occasion his information helped the Continental Army break the

British military's code.<sup>175</sup> Washington did not reveal the true identity of Rivington until after the war was over when he stopped by his office in New York to “embrace and thank him” for willingly becoming the “most hated editor in America.”<sup>176</sup> Washington's relationship with Rivington is important not only because it provided information concerning the enemy but also because it reveals the willingness of Washington to endorse the slaughter of his character for the overall good of the army. Perhaps Washington was confident that enough people would continue to support him and the army no matter what individuals such as Rivington said. Ample evidence existed that would prove such an assessment by Washington to be reasonable.

In addition to the many poems and songs that were published during the initial phase of the Revolutionary War, more were produced as the war continued that tended to focus on Washington as a majestic leader of the people. One of the most well-known lyricists of the Revolutionary War was Mitchell Sewall who wrote the immensely popular ballad “War and Washington” in addition to an Epilogue for Joseph Addison's *Cato* that compared the Roman hero of the play to Washington. The African-American poetess Phillis Wheatley sent Washington a copy of her verse in his honor, to which Washington responded with much gratitude. Francis Hopkinson also contributed with his brand of satirical work, once proclaiming: “Had he lived in the days of idolatry he had been worshipped as a God.” But one of the most unique and ultimately meaningful tributes came via Charles H. Wharton, who was a citizen of England and a Roman Catholic:

Great without pomp, without ambition brave,  
Proud not to conquer fellow man, but save;  
Friend to the wretched, foe to none but those  
Who plan their greatness on their brethren's woes;

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<sup>175</sup> Burns, *Infamous Scribblers*, 178-181, 195-198.

<sup>176</sup> Chadwick, *George Washington's War*, 453.

Awed by no titles, faithless to no trust,  
Free without faction, obstinately just.<sup>177</sup>

Despite the amount of bad press Washington received from the Rivington and other “true” Tories, the support he received from a wide variety of individuals more than compensated for the words of his detractors.

Unlike Charles Wharton, most Americans who were in favor of the war were Protestants, but they nonetheless espoused the same enthusiasm that Wharton displayed in his tribute to Washington. From the beginning of the war many Americans viewed their struggle with Great Britain within the Biblical context of the Children of Israel and their struggle with Egypt. Therefore, Washington was compared and often referred to as Moses. From the beginning of hostilities many religious individuals drew comparisons based on the hopelessness of the situation: Moses facing the mighty Egypt, Washington against the giant empire of Great Britain. It was said after the end of the conflict: “Moses led the Israelites through the Red Sea; has not Washington conducted the Americans thro’ seas of blood?” A good deal of the literature comparing Washington to Moses was published directly after the death of Washington. They drew comparisons between the similar nature of both men’s role as civilian and military leader as well as their decision to leave positions of authority with sound farewell addresses.<sup>178</sup> The comparison of Washington as a religious figure is important to understanding his overall appeal because many citizens throughout the entirety of the war viewed the war in a religious context.

That many Americans during the Revolutionary War viewed the conflict in terms of providence is not surprising because throughout time people from all parts of the globe

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<sup>177</sup> Bryan, *George Washington in American Literature*, 144-146.

<sup>178</sup> Robert Hay, “George Washington: American Moses,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4. (Winter, 1969), 781-786.

have done so. What is remarkable is the situation that Washington ultimately found himself in, as the American Moses. In a sense, many people viewed the conflict with Great Britain as preordained, and in that respect the role Washington was to play had already been created for him. This type of thinking led individuals to one logical conclusion: the Americans would emerge from the conflict victorious. As a result, many people reported to the army with such a notion of the conflict in mind. Washington was in attendance to hear the Bostonian preacher Rev. Leonard quote from Exodus: “And He locked their chariot wheels, and caused them to drive heavily; and Egyptians said, ‘let us flee from the face of Israel, for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians.’” Thomas Jefferson, Ben Franklin, and John Adams contributed to the comparison by choosing a depiction of Pharaoh caught in the collapsing Red Sea as the emblem for the initial design of United States Seal. The motto stated: “Rebellion to Tyrants is obedience to God.” Comparisons such as Moses crossing the Red Sea indicate that the development of Washington as some “god-like” creature did not solely rest on the talents of the man. Instead, the references to Washington as Moses indicated “the new nation’s need to articulate and concretize the fervent beliefs and emotions of its citizens.”<sup>179</sup>

Washington did not have a problem with being compared to Moses because he needed all the support he could get and religion certainly aided in motivating people to fight for the cause. However, despite the Biblical comparisons Washington was not a strictly religious man. He was a child of the Enlightenment, but he did not subscribe wholeheartedly, as many of the revolutionary generation did, to Deist beliefs, nor was he an atheist. Rather, Washington realized the popular appeal of religion, but he never seriously subscribed to any religion. Years after the war in a letter to Lafayette,

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<sup>179</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 28-30.

Washington wrote: “Being no bigot myself to any mode of worship, I am disposed to indulge the professors of Christianity in the church, that road to Heaven, which to them shall seem the most direct plainest easiest and least liable to exception.”<sup>180</sup> Washington was more comfortable referring to God as the “All-powerful guide, and great disposer of human Events.”<sup>181</sup> Throughout the war Washington often spoke in terms of providence, but his rhetoric was founded in reason and hard work.

One of the most interesting and ultimately telling ways to interpret the character and style of Washington as he was perceived by others during his life is through French contacts. Many Frenchmen joined the Revolutionary War to fight for the American cause and a great deal of money was also spent by French officials as well as the government. Although foreign officers, especially the French, were often loathed by American soldiers and officers, many of them became close with Washington and joined his “military family.” One of Washington’s closest comrades during the Revolutionary War was the young Marquis de Lafayette who, after the tense situation created by the Conway Cabal, wrote Washington a letter that helps to explain what Washington came to mean to some individuals engaged in the war. Lafayette wrote:

Take away for an instant that modest diffidence of yourself (which, pardon my freedom, my dear general, is Sometimes too Great, and I wish you could know as well as myself, what difference there is Between you and any other man Upon the continent), You Shall See very plainly that if you were lost for America, there is nobody who could keep the army and the Revolution for six months.

Lafayette explained that the letter was “very useless and even very importune,” but he

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<sup>180</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. 29, Sept. 1, 1786- June 19, 1788, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931) August, 15, 1787.

<sup>181</sup> John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington From the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745-1799*, Vol. 27, June, 11, 1783- Nov. 28, 1784, (United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1931), February 20, 1784.

had to take the opportunity to explain to Washington his feelings because, “You, my dear general, who have been indulgent enough as to permit me to look on you as upon a friend, could know the confession of my sentiment in a matter which I consider as a very important one.”<sup>182</sup>

Lafayette may have thought his letter was useless, but given the character of Washington it is highly likely that the letter helped to raise the spirits of the Commander-in-Chief. Lafayette’s letter is revealing because it suggests as the Revolution grew older the dependency upon Washington grew as well. Other French sources such as Jean Baptiste Gouvion shed light on how Washington was perceived during the war. Gouvion served seven years in the Revolutionary War, and after the Treaty of Paris he wrote Washington a farewell letter. Gouvion, like many revolutionaries, referred to Washington as “your Excellency” and was thankful for his time spent fighting for American independence. Gouvion stated that it was joyful to know that the services he had provided during the war had satisfied Washington and “I shall always take pride in remembering that I was an American officer.” Gouvion ended the letter by expressing his belief that Washington should be heralded as a hero: “May your Excellency experience from his country a gratitude so well deserved, but which can never be equal to the unparalleled toils, labors, and cares you have sustained to save it.”<sup>183</sup>

Despite the loving words written by individuals such as Lafayette and Gouvion, perhaps the greatest tribute paid to Washington by the French came via “the Mother of Armand.” The Mother of Armand had a son who served under Washington and she

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<sup>182</sup> Stanley J. Idzerda, ed., *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected Letters and Papers: 1776-1790*, Vol. I, December 7, 1776- March 30, 1778, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1977), 204-206.

<sup>183</sup> Chinard, ed., *George Washington as the French Knew Him*, 22-23.

sought to thank Washington for the manner in which he treated her son. Perhaps her letter was a bit too enthusiastic in its praise of Washington, but it bears repeating:

Will the hero of our age, the man of all ages, the object of the admiration of all the nations & particularly of France, the theme of true enthusiasm, will the great Washington allow a French woman...to join with a feeble voice in that tribute of praise which every one pays to that Great Man- Some compare him to Cezar, other to trajan...they take the talents & virtues of modern characters, in order to form out of them a Great Whole, here their art fails, forgive this familiar Language, it is that which we address the Gods.<sup>184</sup>

By the time the Revolutionary War was over, despite the pleas of individuals such as John Adams, many people throughout the world perceived Washington as a supernatural being, whose talents and extraordinary character was the primary force behind the success of the American Revolution. Washington's actions after the Treaty of Paris only helped to reaffirm the already present belief among many that he was a "great man."

Unlike other historical figures such as Oliver Cromwell, after the conclusion of the Revolutionary War George Washington retired and returned to private life. His decision to retire to private life was based on his ever present ability to read the attitude of those around him. Washington knew that the American Revolutionary movement called for a leader whose "eloquence or example could make them want to do what they knew they ought to do." Hence the statement: "Washington did not create the republic. The Republic created him" is accurate. Although Washington may have not created the republic, he was present at nearly every stage of its development. "Washington's disinterested service, in war and peace...was not flawless; but it was rounded and

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<sup>184</sup> Chinard, *George Washington as the French Knew Him*, 24-25.

balanced that, for people with a less classical ideal of rule, it looks soporifically perfect.”<sup>185</sup>

Washington’s appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army was not born out of his singular passion for power, but of a collective thrust of resistance that chose him as its physical and symbolic leader and example. Some of Washington’s contemporaries compared his style of leadership with that of a circle because it was the most perfect of all forms. In other words, Washington was talented, but not too extreme. Washington’s actions were not designed for short-term glory, but long-term success; therefore, his actions often came across as dull. Barry Schwartz summarized the atmosphere that gave rise to Washington: “In the New American Republic- a society that valued character over genius, conservatism over dedication to change, diffidence over ambition...we find a different version of human greatness.”<sup>186</sup> Revolutionaries were not looking for another great military leader such as Frederick the Great but a leader who embodied their core beliefs and served as a shining example of republic virtue.

Gordon Wood labeled George Washington America’s only classical hero and noted that only Benjamin Franklin matched his international fame, but Washington was “much more of a traditional hero...admired as a classical hero in his own lifetime.” Washington was keenly aware of his newfound position and acted accordingly throughout the rest of his life. But Washington was “one of Plutarch’s men...he belonged to the predemocratic and pre-egalitarian world of the eighteenth century, to a world very different from the one that followed.” Therefore, it is understandable why his

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<sup>185</sup> Garry Wills, *Cincinnatus: George Washington and the Enlightenment*, (Doubleday & Co., Inc., Garden City, New York, 1984), 130-131.

<sup>186</sup> Barry Schwartz, “The Character of Washington: A Study in Republican Culture,” *American Quarterly*, Vol. 38, No. 2. (Summer, 1986), 202, 209.

character seems so far removed from the modern America he helped to create. In the end, Wood determined that it was Washington's character that distinguished him from other men. Washington's style and manner was just about all the revolutionary generation looked for in its leader. Washington appeared virtuous but more importantly self-taught and capable of restraint, in other words he "seemed to possess a self-cultivated nobility."<sup>187</sup>

One of the unique ways to interpret what Washington meant to his contemporaries as well as the generations of Americans who followed is by viewing Washington in terms of a "living tribal totem." Primitive peoples used objects such as animals and plants to express their belief in "the moral authority of society." These objects in their own right are not sacred, but because "they symbolize something greater than themselves" they assume a hallowed position. As human beings became more civilized, these objects changed from animals to human beings. The objects had always contained a "sacred" meaning, thus when people became symbolic leaders "the line between religion and politics blurred." Washington was a product of his "tribe," and ultimately he was chosen and venerated because "he symbolized the bond between his society's political and religious sentiments."<sup>188</sup>

Throughout the entirety of the Revolutionary War the character of Washington was subject to criticism that spanned the entire spectrum of sentiments. From the beginning there were groups of dedicated individuals who either hated or applauded him, as well as many who remained somewhat indifferent. However, as the Revolution continued the importance of Washington to the cause increased in the minds of most

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<sup>187</sup> Wood, *Revolutionary Characters*, 32-35.

<sup>188</sup> Schwartz, *George Washington*, 6-7.

dedicated Patriots, especially those closest to him such as Lafayette, until he became an indispensable part and ultimately the absolute symbol of the fight for American independence. Washington's status as a symbol for America continued to grow after the Revolution and especially after his death. His contemporaries knew that when he passed an era had come to an end, but individuals throughout the modern world still find inspiration in the character of Washington.

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