The Transformation of American Revolutionary Forces

A Monograph

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The transformation of American forces from colonial militias, through a hybrid force comprising both militias and the Continental Army, to a post-independence regular army was both unique and rapid. The American case study may assist in the conceptualization of future Security Force Assistance missions by identifying those elements that, during the period from 1775 to 1783, enabled American revolutionary forces to transform into a disciplined regular army.

A number of factors contributed to the successful transformation of American revolutionary forces, but organization, logistics, and foreign expertise, all underpinned and supported by politics, was critical.

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Abstract

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Introduction and Overview

Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the United States, along with many of its allies, effected regime change in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Part of the overall exit strategies for both countries involved Security Force Assistance (SFA) on a grand scale. In Afghanistan, NATO and its partners faced the task of building and transforming an army based on little more than the militias of the northern alliance. In Iraq, following the disbandment of the state security apparatuses, there again emerged a need to build a regular military as a prerequisite for withdrawal. Current global security challenges, such as the civil war in Syria, may ultimately result in the need to either rebuild, or form anew, a regular military that is rapidly capable of providing security and defeating threats, thereby either allowing foreign forces to withdraw, or avoiding their deployment in the first place.

Throughout the War for Independence, American revolutionary forces consisted of a mixture of irregular and regular troops, militias and regular army, with soldiers of American, British, German, and Irish origin amongst others. Quakers and Puritans fought side by side, as did whites, blacks, and American Indians, all for the cause of American independence.[1] Despite the initial lack of a central system for recruitment, logistics, training, and organization, and considering there was no core doctrine that drove tactics or operations, revolutionary forces were ultimately able to transform into an army while fighting a war. Despite often losing tactical actions, this Continental Army, paired with militia forces, was able to continue to exist, evolve, and pose a threat to British regulars. It consequently contributed to an independent United States of America, and laid the foundations for the eventual creation of the US Army. A number of factors contributed

[1] William A. Ganoe, *The History of the United States Army* (New York: D. Appleton, 1924), 3; Ricardo A. Herrera, *For Liberty and the Republic: The American Citizen as Soldier, 1775-1861* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 1.

to the successful transformation of American revolutionary forces, but it was organization, logistics, and expertise, all underpinned by politics, that was critical.

The transformation of American forces from colonial militias, through a hybrid force comprising both militias and the Continental Army, to a post-independence regular army was both unique and rapid. The American experience may assist in future SFA missions, but it is important however to view "lessons learnt" in the correct context. In analyzing the transformation of revolutionary forces into a regular, disciplined army, the result cannot be used to create a model for future transformations. As John Lewis Gaddis pointed out, "A simulation, as I'm using the term, attempts to illustrate (not replicate) some specific set of past events. A model seeks to show how a system has worked in the past but also how it will work in the future. Simulations need not forecast; models must."[2] A number of diverse, and indeed similar case studies need to be analyzed and then compared to come to any meaningful conclusions in terms of modelling. The example of the Continental Army during the American Revolution simply demonstrates what worked in a specific cultural, economic, and historical context. If nothing else, it reinforces the concept that context is paramount, and that the solution to each situation will differ based on that context.

The Prelude to Revolution

From the inception of English colonization of the North American continent with the founding of Jamestown in 1607, until the eve of the revolution in the mid 1770s, the thirteen colonies that would initially form the United States of America mostly shared a common British heritage. The colonists' religious beliefs, culture, and military thought were grounded in English

[2] John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 65.

history.[3] However, it was their desire for more political and economic freedom, set against a British need for greater revenue that set them on the path to revolt.

The Seven Years' War, known as the French and Indian War in North America, ended with the Peace of Paris in 1763. The treaty confirmed Britain's preeminence in North America, and left its colonies there without a European threat. It also however, left Britain diplomatically isolated and without allies. France and Spain had been defeated, but at tremendous cost, saddling Great Britain with a national debt of over 133 million pounds, almost double what it had been a decade before.[4] Britain needed to cut costs and increase revenue.

The British government, in an effort to avoid costly wars with Native American tribes, issued a Royal Proclamation in October 1763 restricting settlement west of the Appalachian Mountains. Although the document now appears designed to facilitate the orderly purchase of land from indigenous inhabitants rather than a halt of land transfer altogether, the proclamation angered colonists eager to expand westwards as it gave the Crown a monopoly on future land purchases from Native Americans.[5] In addition, in an effort to both police the Proclamation Line and regulate the fur trade, regular British troops garrisoned the western frontier. The declaration of the Proclamation Act and the garrisoning of British regulars infuriated colonists who were both eager to expand geographically and economically, and were culturally suspicious of a standing army.[6]

As well as cost-saving measures, Britain sought to raise revenue in North America. Trade was regulated with the renewed enforcement of the Navigation Acts. Taxation also increased with the introduction of the Sugar Act alongside the longer-standing White Pine Acts, and the Stamp Act

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[3] Allan R. Millett, Peter Maslowski, and William B. Feis, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States from 1607 to 2012*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 2012), 1.

[4] The Tax History Project, accessed 11 September 2016, http://www.taxhistory.org/www/website .nsf/Web/ THM1756? OpenDocument.

[5] Hugh Brogan, *The Longman History of the United States of America* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 122; and "The Royal Proclamation, 1763, Geo. 3," accessed 11 September 2016, http://avalon.law. yale.edu/18th_century/proc1763 .asp.

[6] Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *For the Common Defense*, 45.

among others. Many of the colonists were angered and dismayed at what they viewed as an infringement of their rights as Englishmen, believing Britain to be unjustified in directly taxing them without commensurate representation in parliament.[7]

Politically, the colonies had from the outset diverged from Great Britain. From their founding, the government expected settlements and colonies to defend themselves and face the threats of the New World alone, despite the British monarch authorizing their expeditions and granting them extensive land rights.[8] That this led to a fiercely independent minded population who, through necessity and distance, developed their own systems of local governance is not surprising. Although diverse in character, on 7 October 1765, delegates from nine of the thirteen colonies met as part of the Stamp Act Congress to discuss measures of resistance to the Stamp Act, as well as other taxation issues.[9] This was significant; it was the first time, as historian Hugh Brogan asserts, that "an inter-colonial body met whose authority was accepted, not rejected, by all the colonies."[10]

In 1774, every colony except Georgia agreed to elect delegates to a "Grand Congress" in Philadelphia. Ostensibly, this congress was in response to the Coercive Acts, designed and passed by Great Britain following the Boston Tea Party. By debating colonists' rights and economic resistance measures against Great Britain in response to acts passed after 1763, this First Continental Congress essentially instituted a parallel structure for governance. Apart from invoking non-importation, the Congress called on towns and counties to establish "Committees of Inspection," designed to enforce the trade boycott at the local level. This reinforced parallel governance by establishing local government. Crucially, the colonies agreed to come to the aid of

[7] Brogan, *The Longman History of the United States of America*, 114-22.

[8] Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *For the Common Defense*, 2.

[9] Brogan, *The Longman History of the United States of America*, 127-28.

[10] Ibid., 134.

Massachusetts Bay in the event that the British attacked it. Furthermore, they agreed to a Second Continental Congress in the spring of 1775. [11]

As the political ambitions of the maturing colonial society evolved, so too did the methods of resistance to British authority. Protests took both non-violent and violent forms. Radicals organized riots, intimidated loyalists, and conducted propaganda campaigns in an effort to undermine the British government.[12] The British, believing a show of force was necessary in order to reassert authority, responded with a march on Lexington and Concord. The resulting violence marked the beginning of the armed phase of the American Revolution.

The Militia System

The militia system in North America was rooted in the English militia system that prevailed until the English Civil War. American colonies, despite facing threats from European powers such as Spain and France, and from native tribes, could ill afford to allocate scarce resources to the maintenance of a standing army. Nor were they culturally inclined to trust a standing army, a suspicion inherited from Whig ideology in England which viewed a standing army as a direct threat to liberty.[13] To that end, the citizen-soldier became the basis for colonial defense.

Militia training was not necessarily thorough or consistent. The design was not to maintain dual farmer-soldiers, rather it sought to give colonists a basic grounding in military skills. Historian Russell Weigley asserts that the various militias performed adequately when defending their homes and settlements from Indian raids, but were for the most part ill-suited to "offensive war distant

[11] David L. Ammerman, "The Tea Crisis and its Consequences, through 1775," *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 198-204.

[12] Millett, Maslowski, and Feis, *For the Common Defense*, 46.

[13] Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Beginnings of the Military Establishment in America* (New York: Free Press, 1985), 4.

from their own firesides." [14] Richard Kohn's argument, in *Eagle and Sword*, that the militia system was not in fact a system at all, but rather a "concept of defense" goes some way in explaining the variance in quality that so marked the militias in the middle of the eighteenth century.[15] Militia training and organization did little to prepare them for campaigning, so when the French and Indian War broke out in 1754, Great Britain dispatched regular troops to the shores of America.

The performance of the militias during the French and Indian War was inconsistent at best. The character of each militia varied from colony to colony, and the consistency with which militias trained varied as well.[16] One of many issues the militia faced was that of a dearth of volunteers. Early in the war, the governor of Virginia failed to raise even half of the two thousand troops he proposed. In December 1755, George Washington, then commander of the Virginia Regiment, appealed to militia officers in Virginia to muster their companies. They informed him that their men refused to obey orders to assemble. Even once volunteers or drafted men mustered and deployed, desertions were problematic. Once again, part-time soldiers responded well when their hearths and homes were threatened but felt little inclination to campaign when not in direct support of their interests. [17] In fact, the opposite was often true. Many colonists were loath to go campaigning when doing so left their families and farms vulnerable to attack.[18]

Another area of concern was that of the character and organization of the each militia. Despite popular modern perceptions of the militias as middle class organizations, serving as "seedbeds for future democratic flowerings," the reality was that by the end of the French and Indian War, many were filled with so-called "down and outers." The prevalence of social pariahs

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[14] Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, enl. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 11-12.

[15] Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 7.

[16] John W. Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 31.

[17] Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 14-16.

[18] Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, 35.

within the ranks of many militias dissuaded many so-called respectable men from volunteering.[19] The truth was that militias were often paper organizations which were "superimposed on the local government structure to implement the concept of universal obligation."[20]

Many British officers regarded all fighting Americans as militiamen, and had a large degree of disdain for them. There was a distinction however, between the militias and the provincials. Broadly speaking, and notwithstanding those issues already raised, the militia was a compulsory institution comprised of able-bodied men between the ages of fifteen and sixty. Their role was to provide weapon familiarity, provide manpower for temporary service, and home defense. The provincial regiments were comprised of young men who volunteered to serve enlistment periods of up to a year. Despite the distinction, Anderson and Cayton still describe these provincial forces as "notoriously expensive, inefficient, undisciplined, and ill-trained."[21]

The Continental Army

Some historians have suggested that for all the organized military might of the British forces and their mercenary Hessian allies, theirs was perhaps the harder task. As David Hackett Fischer, in *Washington's Crossing*, writes, "to win the war Britain had to conquer the colonies; the Americans needed only to survive."[22] While his statement might stand, it does little justice to how difficult the task of survival was for the American forces. Don Higginbotham gives an indication of what this entailed, explaining that "the Continental army needed staying power, the ability to survive. It had to be an object of concern to British commanders, a source of intimidation for the

[19] James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights, IL: Harlan Davidson, 1982), 18-19; Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*, 38.

[20] Kohn, *Eagle and Sword*, 8.

[21] Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Penguin, 2005), 162.

[22] David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 78.

loyalists, a rallying point for the militia, and a living, day-to-day symbol of the Revolution and of emerging American nationality."[23] The use of militias to defeat the British Army was not sufficient; there existed a requirement for a larger, organized, equipped, and trained regular force to threaten them. To that end, on 14 June 1775, the Second Continental Congress adopted a resolution to raise ten companies of riflemen from Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Virginia to join troops from the New England Army in the vicinity of Boston. The words approved for soldiers' enlistment were important in that they made reference to the "American continental army."[24]

The origins of the New England Army, which formed the core of the Continental Army for the first year of the conflict, actually dated to 1774. In that year the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts Bay, anticipating armed conflict with Great Britain, created a committee of safety that wielded the power to collect military stores and call out the militia. It instructed militia officers to maintain a quarter of their men as minutemen, available for immediate use. Following the clashes at Lexington and Concord on 19 April 1775, the committee called for the enlistment of an army of eight thousand troops. By late May, following enthusiastic volunteering and an appeal to New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut for troops commensurate with their respective populations, the New England Army stood on paper at close to twenty five thousand men. [25]

A day after the Continental Congress resolved to form an army, it further resolved to appoint George Washington as a general officer to "command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty."[26] Thus the New England Army, augmented by small, formed units from across the colonies, and commanded by a Virginian, became the core of

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[23] Don Higginbotham, *George Washington and the American Military Tradition* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1985), 70.

[24] Worthington C. Ford et al., ed., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Washington, DC, 1904-37), 2:90.

[25] Weigley, *History of the United States Army*, 30-31.

[26] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:91.

the Continental Army. It was the first national institution of the United States of America, even before the country officially came into being.[27]

The Continental Army, as a concept, remained constant throughout the war, but its form, organization, political underpinnings, and–critically–its effectiveness, evolved substantially. George Washington was a proponent of a regular, disciplined force as the continental answer to the regular British Army. He was not subject to the same misgivings and cultural aversions towards a standing army as many of his countrymen were, writing in December 1776:

> The Jealousies of a standing Army, and the Evils to be Apprehended from one, are remote, and in my judgement, situated and circumstanced as we are, not at all to be dreaded; but the consequence of wanting one, according to my Ideas,…is certain, and inevitable Ruin.[28]

Michael Bonura, in *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, claims that Washington spent "the entirety of the War of Independence attempting to make his Continental Army an eighteenth-century European army, capable of the evolutions of Frederick the Great."[29] He by and large considered the militias, which he had experience of dating from the French and Indian War, to be ill-disciplined and found their predisposition for direct democracy within units to be distasteful.[30] That he had to initially tolerate the militia ethos that permeated the Continental Army was a fact of life that chafed. The military and societal culture he hailed from in Virginia was far more hierarchical, and set greater store by social standing than that of New England. For his part, Washington was forced to reason with many of his subordinates and work through councils of war, while the New Englanders had to learn to follow orders to some degree.[31]

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[27] Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History: The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation, 1775-1917*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2009), 51.

[28] George Washington, *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, vol. 6, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1932), 112.

[29] Michael Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon: French Influence on the American Way of Warfare from Independence to the Outbreak of World War II* (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 41.

[30] Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 15-30.

[31] Ibid., 20-21.

In order to transform the largely New England-based militia-style army into a regular Continental Army capable of challenging the British Army, a number of actions were required. First, the Continental Army needed to be organized, both structurally and administratively, to meet the threat it faced, to enable more effective planning, and to continue to exist. Second, the army needed to sustain itself if it was to survive. Finally, the army needed to adopt and adapt existing doctrine, and co-opt expertise where necessary in order to become tactically proficient in a relatively short period of time. All of these factors were interconnected; each one affected the others, and all of them held the survival of the Continental Army as their ultimate goal.

In all of these endeavors, political direction was ubiquitous. In a flowering republic, made up of colonies and communities whose interests, local cultures, and approach did not always intersect harmoniously, politics was required to drive and reinforce the formation of an army. In some cases the political direction issued successfully laid the foundation for eventual victory, in others it exacerbated strains already present.

To understand the importance of organization, logistics, and expertise in transforming the revolutionary forces, it is critical to analyze some of the minutia and banalities of these elements. There is a direct correlation, for instance, between the evolution of recruitment and retention, and the ability of the Continental Army to maintain a cohesive force in the field. The apparently trivial machinations of uniform issue, hospital organization, and ammunition requisitioning had a direct impact on the morale, health, and fighting ability of the troops. The apparent ordinariness of the simplification and standardization of drill at the tactical level enabled the Continental Army to engage the British and Hessians directly, and thereby increase the threat to, and pressure on, the British. Finally, understanding that many of the tactical and grassroots reforms were instituted at the strategic and political level gives an indication of their importance to transformation.

Organization

Organization, in the context of the transformation of revolutionary forces, encompasses not only the physical structure of the army, but also the administrative frameworks introduced, and the personnel policies adopted. Organization of the Continental Army, whether structural, administrative, or conceptual, all exhibited the influence of civilian government in coordination with the military leadership. At times this coordination was close, at others it was not. The results in both cases varied due to inexperience and competing demands. As the objectives of the war shifted, from autonomy to independence, so too did the roles and responsibilities of the army. The result was a series of reorganizations from the period 1775 to 1783. These reorganizations occurred at the political-military level, at the structural level, within departments that supported the army, and in terms of the way in which the force was administered and disciplined.

From its inception, the army of America was a military tool built upon a framework of political direction. Having created the army, and fearful of forming a standing army that could threaten domestic liberty, Congress directed much of its organizational structure and evolution during the war. This direction, as well as subsequent reforms, exhibited Congress' desire to decentralize power, decrease the responsibility of department heads, and maintain a careful watch on senior military commanders.[32] Critical direction often occurred in reaction to events and crises, resulting in what Wayne Carp, in *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, describes as "an ineffective, uncoordinated administrative system at odds with itself."[33] As the government matured however, so too did its administrative abilities, resulting in an evolution in the army's structure, reform efforts, and the emergence of a code of conduct, all in an effort to improve competence and efficacy.

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[32] Wayne E. Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1984), 38-41.

[33] Ibid., 32.

Structural Evolution

The Continental Army underwent significant reorganizations throughout the war, driven by a number of factors. As it matured, the requirement for specialist capabilities was an obvious and understandable reason to reorganize, but policies governing enlistment periods, and economic pressures were often also drivers of change. Enlistment periods in particular remained a contentious and problematic issue throughout the war. Finite enlistment periods, set within a culture that largely viewed standing armies as dangerous to civil liberties, created an unwelcome administrative burden on Congress, the various committees detailed to investigate the issue, and senior military commanders. In order to stave off a collapse of the army when enlistments were due to run out at the end of December 1775, Washington, in conjunction with other senior officers, and along with Congress, worked to reorganize the army structures that had been inherited from the New England forces midway through 1775.

In early November 1775, Congress, following consideration of Washington's various reports and proposals, set the manning level of the army "intended to lie before Boston" at 20,372 men. It further detailed the size of each regiment, and the internal structure in terms of companies and ranks that each regiment was to mirror. It also resolved to extend enlistments for another year, until the end of December 1776, and called on officers to submit their intentions to reenlist or retire.[34] By the end of March 1776, the Continental Army had an overall structure of twenty-seven Continental infantry regiments and one artillery regiment. Although manning shortfalls meant that it did not match its congressionally mandated strength, it was roughly back to the strength that it had been in 1775.[35]

[34] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 3:321-24.

[35] Robert K. Wright, Jr., *The Continental Army* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1986), 56.

Washington, having essentially reformed the army following the completion of enlistments at the end of 1775, and having experienced the reenlistment process that followed, implored Congress:

> If Congress have any reason to believe, there will be occasion for Troops another year, and consequently of another inlistment, they would save money, and have infinitely better Troops if they were [to enlist men] for and during the War.…The trouble and perplexity of disbanding one Army and raising another at the same Instant, and in such as critical situation as the last was, is scarcely in the power of Words to describe, and such as no man, who has experienced it once, will ever undergo again.[36]

Despite Washington's opinions on the issue, in early 1776, Congress and the colonies were not yet prepared to consider enlistment periods that spanned the war. Robert K. Wright Jr., in *The Continental Army*, describes the acceptance of duration enlistments at that point in the war as "probably not feasible."[37] By the fall of 1776 however, congressional opposition towards enlistments that were, in theory at least, to last for the duration of the war, softened, resulting in the adoption of a sweeping reorganization effort.

In September 1776, Congress adopted the Board of War's plan, devised in close cooperation with senior military commanders, for a comprehensive reorganization of the army. This plan, known as the "Eighty-Eight Battalion Resolve" when accepted by Congress, developed following the experience of the reformation of the army less than a year before, and was influenced by some of the insights gained from the 1776 campaign season against British forces. The plan saw enlistments extended to become duration enlistments, with cash bonuses and generous postwar land grants offered to entice reenlistment for the duration of the war. Despite the wording, the majority of these duration enlistments actually became three-year enlistments rather than extending until the end of hostilities.[38] The plan also physically restructured the army to consist of eighty-eight infantry

[36] Washington, *Writings*, vol. 4, 315-18.

[37] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 56.

[38] Ibid., 153.

regiments. Individual states were to provide these regiments using a quota system based on population size.[39]

The army's structure did not remain static for long. In December 1776, barely three months after the "Eighty-Eight Battalion Resolve," Congress agreed to once again increase the number of regiments to a minimum of one hundred and ten, on Washington's request. The number of artillery regiments also increased, and Congress authorized the army to raise up to three thousand light dragoons.[40] As regiments reorganized into brigades and divisions, administration and command and control became more efficient. Washington's staff increased in size, and units were better able to retain experienced officers and soldiers. Additionally, a shift in control of units was occurring from individual states to the military. The states' main responsibility, in theory, changed from the raising of new regiments to the recruitment and replacement of individuals into existing regiments. On paper, the Continental Army's manning level by the close of 1777 was over 90,000. This was an extraordinary increase in little over two years of conflict, although the army never came close to reaching that target, and continued to face significant manning issues going into 1778.[41]

As the majority of the army camped at Valley Forge over the winter of 1777 to 1778, a committee investigated options for reconciling the manpower realities of 1777 with the structures mandated by Congress in 1776. Most regiments had begun the 1776 campaign under strength in terms of enlisted men, and following sickness, injuries, and deaths, some units were regiments in name only. By contrast, most regiments had filled their quotas of commissioned officers. One of the committee's recommendations was the institution of a nine-month draft in states that were unable to

[39] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 4:762-63.

[40] Ibid., 6:1043-46.

[41] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 119.

fill their quotas through volunteering, which effectively reintroduced a dual system of manning.[42] This evolved further into one year drafted enlistments by 1780.[43]

Congress, in May 1778, resolved to amend the structure of the army once again. It reduced the overall number of regiments, and altered the internal structure of some regiments while reducing the number of officers therein.[44] This was the result of a number of factors. First, the manning reality was such that a consolidation of regiments with better manning made sense. Second, the ideological suspicion of a large standing army combined with the apparent successes of smaller tactical units that relied on militia support influenced some delegates in Congress into believing that a large regular army was not necessary. Third, a rapidly deteriorating economic situation forced Congress to search for ways to economize, with structural reform an obvious target.[45]

In September and October 1780, following a number of tactical and operational defeats, set against the context of an economy facing total collapse, Congress once again issued direction on the reorganization of the army. Washington had argued for the introduction of three-year drafts to make up states' shortfalls in manning, but Congress was not convinced. The result was a compromise; Congress retained the one-year drafts, but added an innovative stipulation that the draftees could be relieved earlier if replaced by their state.[46] Congress further resolved that the army consist of fifty infantry regiments and eleven others, including artillery, by 1 January 1781. Some units, such as the Corps of Engineers and a handful of others, were left untouched but the remainder were directed to disband and transfer manpower to enduring regiments in order to consolidate manning. The realignment was conducted using realistic estimates of eligible men in each state rather than simply

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[42] Ibid., 125-26.

[43] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 16:81-82.

[44] Ibid., 11:538-43.

[45] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 126-128; Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 42.

[46] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 18:844.

using their total population as a guide to instruct quotas.[47] States were given a free hand in how they effected the consolidation of troops and regiments, and apart from in Pennsylvania, where the reorganization precipitated a mutiny, the process was remarkably smooth.[48]

The structure of the Continental Army evolved significantly from 1775 through to the end of the war. Changes occurred in response to a number of factors including the requirement for more combat and specialized forces, manning levels, recruitment policy, and the economy. The results, after much trial and error, were evident. Realistic force levels and specialties were achieved and integrated when the threat, economy, and policy where considered together. The young nation began to understand and define the defense roles of the federal and state governments, and Congress' emerging obsession with economizing drove it to introduce bureaucratic procedures to ensure financial accountability for staff officers, resulting in the institutionalization and "systemizing of army administration."[49]

The final structural reorganization of the revolutionary forces came in 1784, after the revolution had proved successful. An armistice with Great Britain, in force from 19 April 1783, signaled the beginning of the Continental Army's drawdown. Some delegates in Congress supported a swift disbandment of the army in an effort to cut costs. Others, recognizing that Britain posed a threat as long as its troops remained, demanded a more measured process. On 3 June 1784, a full nine months after the Treaty of Paris ended the war between the United States and Great Britain, Congress approved a small regular force. The remainder of the plan called for a uniformly trained and organized militia, a system of arsenals, and a military academy.[50]

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[47] Ibid., 18:893-96; and Wright, *The Continental Army*, 157.

[48] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 161-63.

[49] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 42.

[50] Ibid., 179-82; Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 27:529-31.

Throughout the Revolutionary War, while Congress ordered organizational changes, it was often George Washington who drove that change by listening to his subordinates and pressing his superiors for action. Some historians have accused him of stubbornness, impatience, and unpredictability. However, his organizational ability, along with his influence as a "linchpin" between the military and its civilian masters, did much to shape the structure of the Continental army.[51]

Reform Efforts

As the war progressed, the requirement for efficient and cost-effective sustainment in large part drove initial administrative reform. For reasons of cost, Congress yearned for greater supervisory oversight of the various supply agencies. Additionally, it wanted an organization that could act as the administrative body of the armed forces and also effectively action supply requests. This desire led to the establishment and evolution of what became the War Department.

During the early campaigns, if a serious supply issue arose, Congress responded by establishing temporary special committees using its own delegates. These committees would deploy to consult with commanders, boards of officers, and supply chiefs in order to draft reports. Congress would then consider the reports and decide on whether to action specific supply requests. Some of the temporary committees soon transformed into standing committees; the Committee of Secret Correspondence and the Commerce Committee being prime examples. These two committees, although distinct, both had a role in obtaining supplies from abroad and garnering foreign aid. However, there was very little interaction between the committees and the supply chiefs they supported. In an effort to improve the process, Congress created the Board of War and Ordnance on 12 June 1776.[52]

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[51] Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), x-xi.

[52] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 5:434.

Congress charged the new board with five broad tasks. First, it was to establish the function that would today be the remit of a personnel branch. It was to create and maintain a register of officers, and also to track the state and disposition of troops. Second, the board needed to monitor ordnance and other "warlike" stores, and then store said equipment and ammunition when not required by the field force. Third, it was to act as an administrative intermediary between Congress, the armies, and the colonies, transmitting money and dispatches in a secure fashion. Fourth, it was to raise, equip, and dispatch all land forces ordered for service. Finally, the board was responsible for prisoners of war, in accordance with "orders and regulations of Congress." At the same time that it was formed and tasked, the board was given a set of vague regulations and authorizations.[53]

The Board of War and Ordnance did not always fulfil the functions envisioned at its inception, in part due to the competing commitments of its members. It was not until 17 October 1777 that Congress decided to appoint members to the Board of War that were not simultaneously members of Congress themselves. The board's remit continued to expand until it was dissolved in 1781 and replaced with the War Office, headed by a Secretary of War.[54]

Congress was active in reforming other departments as well. Nowhere was its involvement more evident than in the structures, or lack thereof, of the various supply departments that supported the army. While Congress resolved to create departments, usually through the appointment of a department head, the initial responsibility for determining each department's structure, organization, and regulatory measures, apart from some early direction issued to the Hospital Department, fell to the supply chiefs themselves.[55] The absence of clear guidance, coupled with a general lack of experience of the individual supply chiefs, resulted in departments that had

[53] Ibid., 5:434-35.

[54] Erna Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army* (Washington, DC: US Army Center of Military History, 1981), 11-13.

[55] Ibid., 9-10; Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:209-10.

overlapping responsibilities, or in other cases created gaps whereby tasks were not accounted for by any department or individual.[56]

Congress, having created these departments in haste without issuing adequate direction on organization or authorities, then sought to action structural and authoritative reforms as the war progressed. Carp describes Congress' reform efforts as exhibiting two trends. The first was that it increasingly relied on staff departments to bear responsibility for servicing the field army by progressively concentrating authority within the departments. The second trend was that Congress sought to reform and reorganize its own administrative bodies as well as the staff departments themselves, to better allow them to take advantage of their new authority.[57]

Initial reforms did not necessarily achieve their intended outcomes, at least not initially. The reduction of reliance on committees, commanders, and states to provide logistic support coupled with the progressive investment and concentration of authority within departments ran counter to the fledgling government's ideology of decentralization. Congress often rejected early departmental suggestions for reform if the envisioned end state was a consolidation of power within a department head. This aversion to centralized authority often resulted in departments that experienced periods of confusion and paralysis as they evolved, with the experience of the Commissariat and the Quartermaster's Department preceding Valley Forge being prime examples.

Congress' reforms in 1777, intended to improve efficiency in the departments, had the opposite effect. By restricting both the authority and commission-earning ability of department heads and deputies, Congress essentially initiated a string of resignations. Although pay was raised, the cost of living increased as the currency devalued. These businessmen turned public officials refused to work on anything other than a commission basis. Their resignations, coupled with the resulting appointment of individuals who lacked experience, commitment, and drive, had a

[56] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 35-36.

[57] Ibid., 35.

disastrous effect on the Commissariat in particular, returning it, as Carp describes, to "the inexperienced and inefficient days of 1775."[58]

At the same time, in another example of Congressional restrictions interfering with military efficiency, the transportation of supplies to the troops at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778 was almost completely halted because of the limits Congress had placed on the price to be payed to teamsters. Because of the economic twins of inflation, and currency devaluation, the amount the military was authorized to pay was nowhere near the market price charged. Some historians have suggested that supplies in the country as a whole at the time were actually rather abundant; even soldiers in a procurement squad based little over a dozen miles from Valley Forge at the time recalled having plentiful stores and provisions.[59]

In October 1778, the Quartermaster himself resigned, in protest at the job and because of a difference of opinion with the commander-in-chief. Despite Washington's urgings, Congress took nearly five months to select a replacement. This political indifference resulted in further hardship and hunger for those camped at Valley Forge. Out of the suffering of the troops, which highlighted the disorganized state of the supply departments, came a report that ultimately convinced Congress to relent in its pursuit of decentralization. It directed that power and authority be concentrated in the Quartermaster and his two assistants, and at the same time appointed individuals into those positions. Concurrently, Congress revised the manner in which these individuals were paid, essentially granting them commission rights.[60] Similar reforms were applied to the Commissariat, providing at least temporary relief to the army.

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[58] Ibid., 44.

[59] Joseph Plumb Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle: Being a Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers, and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 111; John B. B. Trussell Jr., *Birthplace of an Army: A Study of the Valley Forge Encampment* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1976), 33.

[60] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 10:210; and Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 44.

Congress faced the dual difficulties of attempting to improve the efficiency of military departments while at the same time trying to improve its own proficiency and ability to govern. The immediate results of this tension were structurally ill-defined departments and chains-of-command that were unclear. This forced Congress to continually revisit departmental issues, distracting it from other governmental tasks. The institution of the nascent War Department provided Congress with an ability to detach itself somewhat from the administration of the military, while creating an organization that was designed to coordinate efforts across "defense." Congress also had to wrestle with its ideology of decentralization versus the obvious benefits to the army of centralized power at various levels, finally adopting a pragmatic approach that combined centrally invested power with careful Congressional oversight.

Discipline

Despite its militia roots and traditions, the Continental Army was not an enlarged militia or provincial force, a view adopted by some Americans in the early years of its existence.[61] Its role was as an offensive tool, notwithstanding the concept of defense of the revolution, and it therefore needed organization and discipline. The militias, while effective in certain areas, were not subject to the same discipline as the army. Joseph Plumb Martin, in his personal account of service in the revolution as a regular soldier, *Private Yankee Doodle*, insisted that the militias would not have endured that which the army did,

> When the hardships of fatigue, starvation, cold and nakedness…begun to seize upon them…they would have instantly quitted the service. The regulars were there and there obliged to be; we could not go away when we pleased without exposing ourselves to military punishment.[62]

[61] Holly A. Mayer, "The Continental Army," *A Companion to the American Revolution*, ed. Jack P. Green and J. R. Pole (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000), 308.

[62] Martin, *Private Yankee Doodle*, 290.

The bedrock of the Continental Army's system of discipline, sufficiently different from the British Army system, influenced as it was by the colonial culture, were the congressionally mandated "Articles of War." The name was a misnomer. In reality, the sixty-nine articles resolved by Congress on 30 June 1775 were a set of disciplinary rules and regulations for conduct in war and peace. They not only listed a number of punishable infractions, such as desertion, insubordination, fraud, and the falsification of records, they went into some detail describing exactly what constituted an infraction. The articles also went into significant detail on the court-martial process, proscribing their varying compositions and detailing their judicial powers. The articles also defined the powers that Congress vested in commissioned officers in order to maintain discipline and enforce the various regulations.[63] The resolution creating a set of regulations for the army was a momentous event in the transformation of the revolutionary forces. In doing so, Congress codified conduct within the military, and although violations of the regulations continued to occur, as they do in every armed force to this day, the simple act of introducing a disciplinary system was a step towards professionalism, and a movement away from the militia system that had prevailed until that point.

In September 1776, Congress amended the articles following the submission of a rewritten draft produced by a congressional committee.[64] The articles expanded to include some of the British Articles that had been omitted the previous year, and in an ironic twist, the rules and regulations governing the Continental Army began to mirror more closely those that governed the British Army. These updated articles remained in force for the remainder of the war.[65]

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[63] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:111-22.

[64] Ibid., 5:788-807.

[65] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 92.

Logistics

> Instead of having Magazines filled with provisions, we have a scanty pittance scattered here and there…Instead of having our Arsenals well supplied with Military Stores, they are all poorly provided…Instead of having a regular System of Transportation established upon credit – or funds in the [Quartermaster's] hands to defray the contingent expense of it we have neither the one nor the other and all that business, or a great part of it being done by Military Impress, we are daily and hourly oppressing the people–souring their tempers–and alienating their affections.
>
> —George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington*

The militia system that dominated prior to the formation of the Continental Army had within it a rudimentary sustainment method that did not translate well into a system for a large army. Militiamen provided their own weapons and provisions. If an expedition ran longer than a few days, the local authorities appointed agents to purchase provisions, the vast majority of which were readily available in requisite quantities. At its formation, the Continental Army was essentially an amalgam of various militia groups that brought with it the militia tradition of sustainment. Following the French and Indian War, some colonial leaders did become interested in the more technical aspects of military literature. Texts such as Humphrey Bland's *A Treatise of Military Discipline*, *The Memoirs of Marshal Saxe*, and *The Military Guide for Young Officers*, by Thomas Simes, did not provide experience, but they did give colonial leaders an appreciation of the importance of supply services and logistics overall, and no doubt influenced future planning.[66]

Few leaders at the outbreak of war envisioned a protracted confrontation for complete independence from Great Britain. As a result, the accumulation of military stores prior to the start of hostilities was in no way sufficient in scope to what would be required of an army. Through the eight years of war, a system of sustainment developed that, while never truly efficient, ultimately allowed the Continental Army to survive. The government established five services that gave logistic support to the army: the Quartermaster's Department, the Commissariat, the Clothing

[66] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 8.

Department, the Ordnance Department, and the Hospital Department. These departments were not all established at the outset, as the requirements that some of them addressed did not manifest themselves initially. Neither did each department function as initially intended, or remain organized as originally envisioned, if indeed any organizational planning occurred. They evolved throughout the war to meet the needs of the army they supported, to match the economy in which they operated, and to reflect the politics that created them.

The Quartermaster's Department

On 16 June 1775, two days after the formation of the Continental Army, Congress authorized the appointment of a Quartermaster General.[67] The Quartermaster General in an eighteenth-century army was probably the most important of the essential staff officers. The role brought with it a range of responsibilities that covered supply, movement orders, route reconnaissance, and camp placement. In terms of sustainment, he was responsible for the procurement of marching supplies, camp equipment, and lumber. He was a transport officer who had to move troops by land or water, he had to provide wagons and pack animals, and was responsible for the resulting forage requirements.[68]

The initial organization of the Quartermaster's Department reflected the simple structure of Washington's army in 1775. During the siege of Boston, the requirements of the army revolved around camp goods, provisions, and lumber. It soon became clear however that the needs of a small stationary army were different to those of a growing army on the move. The department both expanded and evolved almost immediately in reaction to the army's move to, and defense of, New York City. Not only did men and materiel require transport, troops needed accommodation and food.

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[67] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789,* 2:94.

[68] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 29.

Following the supply experiences of 1775 and 1776, the Quartermaster General, Thomas Mifflin, submitted a plan through George Washington in which he proposed to restructure his department. Congress accepted the plan and issued more detailed regulations in May 1777. These authorized the creation of separate sub-departments for forage and wagons within the Quartermaster's Department, and also imposed a uniformity of bureaucracy in the form of a system of returns, which the Quartermaster General had to consolidate the each month.[69]

The department continued to develop through the war. Manning ebbed and flowed in response to campaigns, and in reaction to congressional inquiries regarding fraud and cost cutting measures. Special committees were appointed to conduct inquiries until the formation of the Board of War in January 1776, although specific committees stood up from time to time throughout the war in an effort to reform all of the supply departments.[70] Despite the office of the Quartermaster General being abolished in July 1785, almost two years after the Treaty of Paris, it had performed a vital function for the Continental Army during the war. It evolved as the needs of the army did, and was characterized by governmental oversight, which itself became more refined as the government of the fledgling state increased in confidence and maturity.

The Commissariat

On the same day that Congress appointed a Quartermaster General, it also appointed a Commissary General of Stores and Provisions.[71] Like its counterpart, the Commissariat was created without due attention given to structure and organization. Even after it had been instituted, Congress continued to rely on a multitude of sustainment methods, in a largely ad hoc fashion, rather than channeling supply through the official, centralized department. It often contracted the

[69] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 7:355-59.

[70] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 47.

[71] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:94.

services of civilian suppliers when a crisis arose, and it stood up temporary committees when supply issues manifested themselves. It even expected some commanding generals to supply their own units with provisions. It was not until 1779 that both the Quartermaster's Department and Commissariat became the major source of congressional expenditure, indicating common usage by the government.[72]

One reason for Congress' hesitation in focusing all the supply of provisions through the Commissariat was the initial structure and authority of the department itself. This was of course a problem of Congress' own making. In a display of an understandable inexperience of military matters, and potentially of a wider naiveté regarding the direction of their conflict with Great Britain, Congress was reluctant to issue explicit instructions that had longer term implications. In doing so, they created departments that were unable to properly fulfil their intended purposes, making them less attractive to their own government. It was not until the first structural reforms of 1777 were actioned that the Commissariat began to effectively supply elements of the army.[73]

The Ordnance Department

On 19 July 1775, Congress granted General Washington permission to appoint a Commissary of Artillery to the Continental Army. This role later became known as the Commissary of Military Stores.[74] Distinct in function to the Commissary General of Stores and Provisions, the role was primarily responsible for the receipt and subsequent issue of ordnance in the field. In addition to the field role, Congress established a civilian Commissary General of Military Stores whose responsibilities included the manufacture, storage, and distribution of arms and ammunition to the field army.

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[72] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 23-24.

[73] Ibid., 24-25.

[74] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 2:191.

Congress, confusing titles, roles, and responsibilities, but thinking themselves acting on the advice of the Commissary of Artillery, provided regulation of the department in 1778 which mixed the responsibilities and activities of the field and civilian branches. The resulting subordination of the field organization to the civilian branch created inefficiency and tension. The Commissary of Artillery found himself unable to effectively influence basic details such as dimensions of cannon as he lacked the legislative authority to do so. More alarmingly, he found himself unsure of where to send for stores in an emergency as commissaries within the Department of the Commissary General of Military Stores were under no obligation to furnish him with returns, and many resisted even when he requested that they do so.[75]

It was not until February 1779, following Washington's intercession and the review of a plan drawn up by the Chief of Artillery, that Congress revised the field organization of the Ordnance Department. It improved efficiency through a revision of the lines of authority and organizational restructuring, and consolidated field authority in the Chief of Artillery. Furthermore, the commissaries within the civilian branch were henceforth required to forward returns to him to aid the distribution of stores.

Despite its responsibilities, in reality the supply of ordnance and ordnance stores was never truly centralized in the Commissary General of Military Stores. Most gunpowder, many of the raw materials required to produce powder, and a large number of various arms and stores were procured and imported by the Secret Committee. Initially the department was simply limited to the purchase of supplies rather than their manufacture, although its remit gradually increased commensurate with the increase in domestic industrial capability.[76]

[75] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 318-320.

[76] Ibid., 334-36.

The Clothing Department

On 27 December 1776, Congress empowered Washington to appoint a Clothier General of the army. Until that point, and indeed beyond it, the procurement and subsequent distribution to the army of clothing, blankets, and shoes proved problematic. Many of the supplies needed had to be imported, and this task initially fell to the Secret Committee and the Committee of Secret Correspondence. The Marine Committee also played a role in that it distributed a portion of the British merchantmen cargoes captured by the American Navy. Again, Congress relied on a number of methods to achieve the same end which resulted in inefficiency and waste at best, and corruption at worst.[77]

To add to the problems faced by the Clothier General, extreme decentralization created tensions between the states themselves, and between the states and the Continental Congress in terms of supply. For example, each competed for the same materials from Europe and the West Indies. Despite the appointment of deputy clothiers for each state, many of the state governments preferred to use the services of agents, or commissaries, with which the centrally appointed deputy clothiers had to compete. The system was profit-driven, resulting in agents refusing to sell clothing at prices that Congress deemed suitable, and corruption at various levels of procurement, distribution, and delivery.[78]

Congress, following advice from Washington and the Board of War, finally took action on 23 March 1779. It directed that authority to receive all relevant supplies, both imported into the United States and procured domestically, be centralized in the Clothier General, and that he be the distributor to the state clothiers. The system remained imperfect, and underwent further legislative

[77] Ibid., 260-61.

[78] Ibid., 267-71.

reform through to June 1781 in order to centralize procurement and improve coordination with other departments to effect distribution.[79]

The Hospital Department

Congress established the Hospital Department just over a month after the formation of the Continental Army, in July 1775. That it started on a sounder basis than the other logistic departments was down to two major reasons. First, Congress sought expert advice before creating the department; Massachusetts sent Dr. Benjamin Church to confer with the Medical Committee prior to its formation. Second, as a result of the advice given, Congress gave clear guidance on the initial structure of the Hospital Department, the definition of duties, the division of labor, and the lines of authority. As Carp points out, "On paper, at least, the Hospital Department was ready to meet the needs of the army."[80]

Despite having been established on a better footing, the Hospital Department suffered relative inefficiency from its inception due in large part to organizational failings. The lines of authority outlined in Congress' creation of the department, although far clearer than those issued for the Quartermaster's Department and the Commissariat, were not detailed enough to resolve unanticipated friction between regimental surgeons and the Director-General. The surgeons were fiercely independent, viewing themselves as free from the director-general's authority but entitled to his medical stores. This initial lack of control from the department resulted in the waste of scarce medical supplies. As a result, General Washington convened a special court of inquiry but, despite it ruling in favor of the Director-General, friction continued. In July 1776, Congress attempted to intervene by issuing a number of resolutions designed to clarify lines of authority and improve the

[79] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789,* 13:353-59.

[80] Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure,* 25; and Ibid., 2:209-10.

efficiency of the department with regards to the issuance of medical supplies.[81] This did not have the intended effect and it was only at the end of September that year, following Washington's further involvement, that Congress gave clear, unequivocal direction on the subordination of regimental surgeons. It resolved that "all regimental surgeons and mates, as well as those of the hospitals, be subject to the direction and controul [sic] of the directors in the several departments."[82]

Summary

Erna Risch, in *Supplying Washington's Army*, describes logistical support during the war as falling into two broad phases. The first, lasting from roughly 1775 through 1778, was characterized by administrative failings resulting from Congress' action and inaction. When deficiencies were noted, it attempted to reform supply departments. The timing of reforms however, often coinciding with crises, frequently resulted in shortages and sometimes the exacerbation of existing shortfalls. The second phase, lasting from 1779 until the end of the war, was marked by the deteriorating economic situation faced by the Continental Congress. The effects of this were twofold. First, initial costs of provisions, stores, and supplies increased, adding financial pressure on the government. Second, and linked to the first, Congress often approached reform with economizing as the driving force rather than efficiency. It was in this second phase that French aid became more important than ever. Not only was French military confrontation with Great Britain vital in relieving the pressure on the United States, French stores, ammunition, and clothing proved to be a significant supply boost.[83]

Despite the war evolving into a struggle for independence, bringing with it an element of ideological enthusiasm from the people at large, leaders such as Washington acknowledged that the

[81] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 5:568-70.

[82] Ibid., 5:837.

[83] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 419-20.

support and goodwill of the population could not be sustained indefinitely if the burden of supplying the army was to fall on them. In fact, he recognized the danger that a lack of organized sustainment represented for his army in terms of popular support.[84] To that end, the government and military made concerted efforts to create a system, and at times multiple systems, of logistic support. The unintended results were both overlaps and gaps in sustainment, spiraling costs, and a lack of consistent supply.

Doctrine: Adoption, Adaptation, and the Role Played by Foreigners

At the outbreak of the War of Independence, the only doctrine available for the Americans to study was European, specifically British, texts and manuals. Despite not generating any homegrown manuals for regular units prior to the war, once the war broke out there appeared an attempt by some colonies to impose a modicum of commonality in the training of militias. One such example was the adoption, on 1 May 1776, of the *Plan of Military Discipline* by the Province of Massachusetts Bay. The House of Representatives recognized that previous manuals, such as the British *Manual of Arms, 1764*, were not well-suited to a militia and desiring something less complicated, resolved:

> That the aforesaid plan of Exercise published by *Timothy Pickering*, Esq, shall for the future be used and practised by the Militia of this Colony; and all Officers thereof are hereby directed and enjoined to learn the same, and to instruct and exercise the Soldiers under their command respectively agreeable to the said plan in all their publick Trainings and Musters accordingly.[85]

The author, Lieut. Thomas Pickering from the Essex County (Massachusetts) Volunteers, wrote the manual in July of 1775. In a later letter to Washington, he acknowledged that he had designed it for the use of militias, but stated "duty and inclination lead me to present the ensuing

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[84] George Washington, *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748-1799*, vol. 2, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), 207.

[85] *Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of the Massachusetts Bay*, vol. 19, Chapter 946 (Boston: Wright and Potter, 1918), 368, accessed October 25, 2016, https://archive.org/stream/actsresolvespubl19mass#page/n9/mode/2up.

plan of discipline for a militia and submit to your decision the expediency of recommending or permitting its use among the officers and soldiers under your command."[86]

There was clearly a desire by some for a set of regulations that would provide a uniform system and a set of standards that the militias and the Continental Army could train to. That said, there remained a lack of a standardized training material to guide colonial soldiers who were, in theory, required to fight as part of a formed unit in a style more akin to the European armies of the day. This requirement became all the more urgent following the disappointing Philadelphia campaign of 1777. In it, the Continental Army had performed well as individuals, but lacked the training to maneuver and change formation at speed. They were in desperate need of training that would enable them to fight in a more conventional European fashion.[87] Washington believed that drilling the troops was of paramount importance. While encamped at Valley Forge in the autumn of 1777, he ordered:

> Every day, when the weather will permit, the Corps are to be turn'd out and practic'd in the most essential exercise: Particularly, primeing and loading–advancing–forming–Retreating–breaking–and Rallying. No pains are to be Spar'd to improve the Troops at this point.[88] The officers commanding Brigades and Corps, are to draw out their men (excepting those on duty) every day…to practice the most necessary Manoeuvres–particularly to advance in line–from thence to form Columns to go thro' passes and openings in Fences and reduce them again–to retire in line and Columns and form again. In a word, to perform all those movements which in Action a woody and inclos'd Country shall make necessary.[89]

The solution to the desire for a home-grown set of regulations that would allow for European-style warfare came in the form of Baron Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, a Prussian.

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[86] Quoted in, Joseph R. Riling and Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, *Baron von Steuben and His Regulations* (Philadelphia: Ray Riling Arms Books, 1966), 2.

[87] Paul D. Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 57.

[88] George Weedon, *Valley Forge Orderly Book of General George Weedon* (New York: Arno Press, 1971), 84.

[89] Ibid., 96.

Baron von Steuben

Baron von Steuben served in the Prussian army from the age of sixteen, first as an enlisted soldier, as was the Prussian custom, and then as a commissioned officer. He served through the Seven Years' War as a company commander, an adjutant, and as an aide. He had trained recruits and served on staffs up to the army level, and was a disciple of Frederick the Great. However, by a quirk of power politics that was common among the European nobility at the time, in addition to a downsizing of the army, he fell out of favor and was at first demoted and then, in 1763, dismissed from the army entirely.[90]

Von Steuben arrived in America on 1 December 1777, claiming a desire to serve in the Continental Army as a volunteer, having come to an agreement with Benjamin Franklin in Europe. After a favorable meeting with Congress, where he was issued the temporary rank of captain, he arrived at Valley Forge on 23 February 1778 to witness for himself what was described by congressional delegate Gouverneur Morris, as "the skeleton of an army…in a naked starving condition, out of health, out of spirits."[91] Like many foreign officers, he was initially viewed with reserve and sometimes suspicion.

Despite a cool reception from Washington on arrival, von Steuben was quickly given full access to the encampment. He soon provided blunt assessments and recommendations on everything from the drilling of troops to camp sanitation and defense. Gen. George Weedon's *Valley Forge Orderly Book* gives some insight into the effects Steuben's commentary had. A few weeks after his arrival, orders began to appear regarding the removal of horse carcasses and the correct disposal of offal, along with strict instructions regarding the toiletry habits of the camp's inhabitants. Washington became so concerned with sanitation and the health of his army that he

[90] Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge*, 9-21.

[91] Quoted in Thomas Flemming, *Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 174.

issued an order on 13 March 1778 for sentinels to fire on individuals found to be "easing themselves elsewhere than in the Valts."[92] Commanders issued direction on the cleaning of springs, the sinking of wells, and the storage of clean water. In terms of defense, troops were forbidden from removing and burning stumps and brush that acted as obstacles to an approaching enemy, and brigade commanders were ordered to inspect sections of a new defensive line of fortifications that was being built to report deficiencies. Everywhere there appeared a flurry of new direction.

To modern military professionals, these orders and considerations may seem like common sense, but the Continental Army had, at that point, little experience of the administration and camp discipline required for a large, static, defensive encampment. Baron Steuben brought with him years of experience of campaigning and living in the field. His keen military eye also freed Washington to concentrate on issues other than the minutia of day to day camp life.

On 28 March 1778, Washington ordered that the army consider Baron Steuben to be the *de facto* Inspector-General of the Continental Army "till the pleasure of Congress shall be known."[93] The inspector-general in an eighteenth-century army held many responsibilities. He was charged with the maintenance of training and drill, and was to ensure that the army maintained its discipline on the march and in camp. He was to identify deficiencies in supply that required remedying by the quartermasters, and was also responsible for keeping an accurate record of regimental strength, having the authority to hold commanders accountable for the whereabouts of their men.[94] On 5 May, following advice from the Commander-in-Chief, Congress ratified von Steuben's appointment in the rank of major general, "his pay to commence from the time he joined the army and entered into the service of the United States."[95]

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[92] Weedon, *Valley Forge Orderly Book*, 254-55.

[93] Ibid., 273-74.

[94] Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge*, 81.

[95] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-17*, 11:465.

Von Steuben's first task was take over training. Due to the size of the army at Valley Forge, he instigated a "Train the Trainer" program whereby a company of veterans, drawn from across the force, and representative of the states, was consolidated and taught the basics of drill and maneuver under his direct instruction. This group was then dispersed back into the force to become instructors.[96] Washington supported this move by first communicating to subordinate commanders his intention to introduce a uniform system of maneuvers, and then ordering the cessation of the instruction of previous techniques until the new regulations were disseminated.[97] Washington further exhorted subordinate commanders to embrace the system:

> The Importance of establishing an uniform system of Manoeuvres, and regularity of Discipline, must be obvious. The deficiency in our Army in these respects, must be equally so…Without the most active exertions therefore of Officers of every class, it will be impossible to derive the advantages propos'd from this institution, which are of the greatest moment to the success of the ensuing Campaign.[98]

Apart from drilling the soldiers at Valley Forge in preparation for the next campaign, von Steuben also wrote out his drill system lesson by lesson and, once translated by his staff, had them sent to the brigade inspectors for entry into their "Orderly Books" in an effort to disperse the knowledge more widely.[99] Later, he began work to prepare a system of discipline and military exercise that would become the first and only official American regulations of the eighteenth century, *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, known as the *Blue Book*.[100]

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[96] Weedon, *Valley Forge Orderly Book*, 263; Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge*, 97.

[97] Weedon, *Valley Forge Orderly Book*, 266.

[98] Ibid., 274.

[99] Riling and Steuben, *Baron von Steuben and His Regulations*, 8.

[100] Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 43.

Despite its brevity, the *Blue Book* contained a significant amount of information. In it, von Steuben issued direction on customs, courtesies, and accoutrements, the formation and movement of companies and regiments, the training of recruits, a manual of arms, and a system for deploying in a line. He also included direction on the correct order of march for baggage, the correct method of laying out an encampment, cleanliness and sanitation of said encampments, and instructions to all ranks within an infantry battalion.[101] The tactics described were based on the British regulations of 1764, with which at least some of the Americans were familiar. The utility of the *Blue Book*, however, was its simplicity. Instructions were brief and to the point, and there were plenty of diagrams to aid the reader. Bonura describes the regulations as perfect "for a nation of militia companies and volunteers" in light of "American predilection for simple systems of tactics."[102]

Baron von Steuben did not simply modify existing practices. While his methods initially drew heavily from the British Army manual, he looked to Prussian, French, and American methods as well. He simplified European drill maneuvers and incorporated the excellent musketry skills of the Americans to create an American system that remained largely unchanged until 1835.

Von Steuben rose to become, as the Inspector General, Washington's de facto chief of staff. His staff inspected units with the full authority of the commander in chief, and reported, through commanders, to the Board of War. He and his staff developed and refined many organizational functions and tasks within the army, and did much to professionalize the administration and training of the Continental Army.[103]

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[101] Riling and Steuben, *Baron von Steuben and His Regulations.*

[102] Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 42-43.

[103] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 142-46.

Other Foreign Expertise

Washington's consistent aim of creating a Continental Army capable of meeting the British regulars in the open field influenced him into allowing foreign officers to hold key positions of responsibility in the Continental Army.[104] Notwithstanding the contribution that Baron von Steuben made, the role played by other foreign advisors in the Continental Army was significant. Some, such as the Marquis de Lafayette and Johannes de Kalb, served as commanders in the infantry, initially as unpaid volunteers. However, it was technical expertise in particular that was scarce, so the qualifications that some foreigners brought with them, whether they were government-sponsored personnel or simply adventuring volunteers, was vital.

Military engineering was the first specialist area to feel the effects of the injection of technical expertise. Following the arrival of individuals with European qualifications, Washington requested Congress to organize a 'corps of engineers,' which it did on 27 December 1776.[105] The results of this organization, headed by the Frenchman Louis le Begue de Presle Duportail from mid-1777 onwards, were felt immediately in bridge-building operations and fortifications. The addition of companies of combat engineers came more slowly, finally being manned in 1780. The introduction of a topographical staff, headed by a Scottish immigrant, Robert Erskine, was based on a French precedent. Washington, a former surveyor, saw the value in accurate mapping and was instrumental in adopting the practice of the French.[106]

Congress also sought European leadership for the transformation of mounted troops into cavalry. Casmir Pulaski, from Poland, was appointed Commander of the Horse in September 1777.[107] He resigned the following year following disagreements with his American officers, and

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[104] Bonura, *Under the Shadow of Napoleon*, 42.

[105] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 6:1045.

[106] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 132.

[107] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 8:745.

the strategic situation at the time lead the Continental Army to retain reconnaissance forces instead of developing offensive cavalry. Pulaski went on to command a "partisan corps" which was modelled after its European namesake and was designed to conduct raids on enemy rear areas. Another two partisan corps units existed, one commanded initially by a Prussian, succeeded by a Frenchman, and the third by an American. [108]

Congress authorized the Marechaussee Corps, a mounted police unit, in 1778. Based on a European concept rather than a British tradition, it was responsible for assisting in the maintenance of order and discipline in camp and on the march. Additionally, it was designed to secure the rear and prevent desertion in combat. The first commander was a Prussian, Bartholomew von Heer, who recruited from the German-American communities of Pennsylvania [109]

Finally, the British use of men unfit for field duty to garrison fortifications in Britain inspired the creation of the 'Corps of Invalids.' Congress authorized the creation of the corps in mid-1777. Its duties included the defense of depots not under immediate threat, and the recruitment and training of replacements for the field army, thus freeing up combat units for campaigns.[110]

Foreign expertise and influences were significant in shaping the Continental Army. Foreign officers held key positions, while foreign ideas inspired home-grown American capabilities. The result was a pragmatic approach from a Continental Army that was not hide-bound by tradition and was open to novel ideas.

Conclusion: Context is Everything

The transformation of revolutionary forces in the period 1775 to 1783 was significant. From a militia system that espoused the virtues of the civilian-soldier, came an organization that

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[108] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 133-34.

[109] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 11:541; and Wright, *The Continental Army*, 134.

[110] Ford et al., *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, 8:485; and Wright, *The Continental Army*, 136.

embraced structure, discipline, and order. From a system of self-sufficiency came a complicated method of sustainment that required, and indeed fostered, coordination at the unit, departmental, and political level. From a tactical approach that relied on small unit action and individual skill came the synchronization of thousands of combatants, the thunder of artillery, and the intricacies of engineering, with operational actions eventually being conducted in conjunction with a foreign ally.

The Continental Army, forming as it did from the New England Army, which itself was really a collection of militias, had to form in the midst of a war. It needed to fight, and therefore required an effective structure to do so. That the initial configuration of the force left something to be desired is not surprising, given two fundamental issues. The first is that the politicians and senior officers devising the structure were understandably inexperienced. The second is that the strategic objective of the leaders of the revolution changed relatively early on, from autonomy to independence, thus changing the purpose of the force. These two issues combined resulted in a requirement for extensive restructuring. Exacerbating the situation were the issues surrounding enlistment lengths and recruitment shortfalls. As the enlistments of the army ran out, based as they were on an assumption that the war would not be a drawn-out affair, almost the entire force needed to be reenlisted, and in some case recruited. This experience drove the senior leadership of the army, General Washington in particular, to press Congress for more expansive enlistment terms. The outcome was a compromise that saw differing terms of enlistment exist side by side.

Citizens serving in the army also had to learn to be part of a disciplined and organized force. As Holly Mayer points out, "Americans had to create and serve in an authoritarian institution while engaging in the profoundly anti-authoritarian process of rebellion and while implementing a more democratic political system."[111] This process was driven from the top down initially. Congress and senior army leaders created a military justice system by which "officers,

[111] Mayer, "The Continental Army," 310.

soldiers, and associated civilian personnel were controlled not only by civil laws, but by the more stringent rules of war."[112] The "Articles of War" represented very detailed direction, issued at the political level, empowering members of the military to enforce the discipline necessary for the existence of an efficient fighting force.

Congress, in close cooperation with the military, restructured and reformed both the army and its supporting departments throughout the war. It often acted with urgency when faced with crises, but sometimes neglected important matters when overmatched by a plethora of issues. The creation of the Board of War, and then the War Office, is testament to Congress' recognition of its limitations. That these departments were not always properly structured and authorized to effectively administrate the military is a symptom of the "growing pains" that resulted from institutional inexperience at all levels.

Congress and the army exhibited a striking flexibility throughout the conflict. When defections in the system were recognized, remedial action was often formulated by the army, considered jointly by the army and the civilian leadership, and then actioned by Congress. While tensions clearly existed, civil-military relationships were for the most part positive, and the subordination of the military to the civilian authority was sacrosanct, emanating as it did from the democratic roots of the revolution itself.

In terms of logistics, the efforts made to sustain the Continental Army were critical in allowing it to survive. At the outset of the war, little logistical effort and coordination existed except for some local stockpiling of ammunition and other provisions. By the war's end, a number of departments existed whose role it was to support the army, in the provision of everything from food, to ammunition, transport, and uniforms. That said, at no time during the war was sustainment efficient, well-coordinated, or cost-effective. The system, or collection of systems, was open to abuse. Departments sometimes had overlapping responsibilities and

[112] Ibid.

complicated lines of authority. When considered in the context of a remuneration system for agents that included commission payments for some, and salaries that often went unpaid for others, it is understandable that the system suffered significant fraud and corruption. As the American economy deteriorated, the bureaucracy that governed military expenditure sometimes proved inflexible. In fact, organizational, authoritative, and prioritization failures in logistics may well have posed the greatest threat to the Continental Army during the war.

But American efforts at sustainment cannot be labeled a complete failure. Historians have posited divergent opinions on the viability of an American victory without French aid. Risch argues that "without that aid, the Americans could not have defeated Cornwallis or won the war."[113] In *The War for Independence*, Howard Peckham dismisses such fatalistic views, arguing that it is an "imponderable of history." He acknowledges that French aid was of immense value, going so far as to call it decisive, but also recognizes that a prerequisite for that aid was the existence of "a fighting American army."[114] The army did survive, and managed to achieve some impressive tactical victories, thus meeting the precondition for an alliance with France. This opened a second front against the British and further strained its military, economic, and political resources to the point that it could not emerge victorious.

Creating an operational army involved more than the creation of effective structures and sustaining troops efficiently. When the militias came together to initially fight as a coordinated force, their skills were optimized for small unit tactics. While useful, this was not sufficient to demonstrate an ability to defeat the British Army. Washington therefore needed to create a European-style force. Robert Wright Jr. describes the Continental Army's adoption and subsequent adaptation of European precedents, saying that "Americans borrowed where

[113] Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army*, 420.

[114] Howard H. Peckham, *The War for Independence: A Military History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 202.

appropriate, but they were not afraid to be innovative."[115] While he was describing the employment of senior staff officers, his assertion remains valid when analyzing the American approach to doctrine, training, and the use of foreign expertise.

In the absence of indigenous doctrine, the Continental Army adopted existing doctrine and adapted it to reflect the threat it faced, to suit the terrain in which it operated, and to appeal to the character of the troops destined to use it. By compelling the whole force to adopt von Steuben's *Blue Book*, Washington ensured a tactical uniformity that proved invaluable. That uniformity was not simply cosmetic. Through the institution of a common system, commanders at all levels were provided more flexibility in the utilization of their troops. Additionally, its simplicity supported rapid dissemination. Furthermore, while designed as a short term solution, its focused nature gave it longevity.

Foreigners had an important impact on the inexperienced army. Although many were viewed with suspicion due to a number of imposters claiming inflated ranks from where they came, those that had value to offer were valued. Baron von Steuben is perhaps the most famous, and had the greatest institutional influence, but there were others that played important parts. Foreigners served as commanders in the infantry, were instrumental in the creation of an engineering branch, and influenced the creation and evolution the Continental Army's mounted forces and partisan corps. Americans essentially cherry-picked concepts from both individuals and armies, creating a way of warfare that was as indigenous to the revolution as anything else.

Many militaries around the world are obsessed with the concept of "lessons learnt." History does not provide guidelines for the future. It does however offer clues to those willing to study it. The notion that applying what worked in the American Revolution will work in building of an effective fighting force in places like Syria or Iraq is trite, and misses the point of historical analysis.

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[115] Wright, *The Continental Army*, 146.

In analyzing the revolutionary army from the period 1775 to 1783, it is clear that numerous factors contributed to its transformation. Ideology played a clear role, as did culture, religion, and tradition. Foreign alliances and aid were extremely important, as was support for the army by the general population. However, the revolution depended on the existence of a fielded army that could at least threaten the British Army, if not consistently defeat it in the field. In order to embody a credible threat, it needed to survive in good order. It was organization, logistics, and expertise that at the same time posed the greatest threat to, and the greatest potential for, that survival. Shaping, supporting, and at times threatening the Continental Army's efforts in these areas was politics.

Politics at the state and national, or union, level was critical in both the successes and failures experienced in transforming the force. Congress worked to balance the demands of military advice, the political union that existed at the time, and the economy. At times that balance was not achieved, but the political system, and–critically–the army itself, remained flexible enough to respond. At the top of the army was the military-political figure of George Washington. He was instrumental in driving change both up and down the chain of command. He was by no means a perfect tactician, and some historians have derided him as bland, dull and even incompetent in the field. His strength, however, appears to have been his organizational ability, his drive and commitment, and his positive micromanagement.[116] The key is not that organizational leadership be vested in one person. The key is that it exists and is able to have an effect.

In the future, Western forces are likely to conduct Security Force Assistance missions. In some, there may be a requirement to create, or at least assist in the development of, an army. In that scenario, it would be unhelpful to assert that the imposition of a tried and tested structure, the implementation of an apparently efficient system for logistics, and the provision of expertise

[116] Lengel, *General George Washington*, 365-71.

will result in a proficient and professional force. What would be helpful would be recognizing that in the American Revolution, the army developed as a result of imported, adapted, and indigenous practices. These occurred in the midst of conflict within a unique cultural, economic, and political context that will never be replicated. Perhaps the most important knowledge to be garnered from historical case studies is that lessons cannot be drawn in specificity. Generally speaking, organization is important, logistics are important, expertise is important, and politics is critical. Context, however, is everything.

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