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“An Exceedingly Dirty and Nasty People”: Exploring the Patriot Forces of 1775

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**“An Exceedingly Dirty and Nasty People”:
Exploring the Patriot Forces of 1775**

An Honors Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of American Cultural Studies
Bates College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts

By
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Lewiston, Maine
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Introduction

Any visitor to the Old North Bridge in Concord, Massachusetts, encounters Daniel Chester French's statue entitled "Minute Man." This Minuteman stands as the epitome of a citizen soldier with concrete allegiances both to home and community. He stands holding a musket in one hand and a plow in the other affirming the romanticized view of a noble Revolutionary soldier who marched straight from the fields to serve in Washington's Continental Army.

Growing up in Massachusetts, I was taught that the militias selflessly put the needs of the nation before their own. They protected liberty and freedom for all. They were the backbone of the Revolution. But then how could these men, the more than 20,000 who gathered in Cambridge following Lexington and Concord, not reenlist for the subsequent year? Why did Washington report that as of November 28, 1775 only 2,530 men had reenlisted to fight for the Continental Army in 1776?¹ This thesis explores the fleeting enthusiasm of 1775, how it developed, why it was so ephemeral, and how Washington was left with only 2,530 men reenlisted come November.²

Traditionally, historians have analyzed the development of the colonial forces in 1775 from two main perspectives: from the perspective of the Revolution's leaders and alternatively, from the perspective of the forces themselves. An important element in both schools is the different understandings of the militia structure prevalent in the colonies during this time. This thesis explores the history of the militia system to understand how colonists developed both

¹ Eric I. Manders, "Evidence for Numbering Systems in the Cambridge Army, 1775- 1776," in *Military Collector & Historian* 55.1 (Spring 2003) 2; George Washington, "To John Hancock: November 28, 1775," *The Papers of George Washington*, Philander D. Chase, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia) 2: 446. [Hereby cited as WP]

² Manders, 2; Washington to Hancock, WP, 2:446.

formal and informal military organizations. This thesis includes the perspectives of both the Founding Fathers and the patriots, to develop an understanding of how the decisions of leaders and the actions of everyday men intersected to create the colonial forces in 1775. Drawing upon a wide body of work, this thesis examines the fleeting enthusiasm of 1775, and tries to uncover why men who rushed to arms at the beginning of that year retreated almost as quickly.

To explore this question, this thesis questions the romanticized revolutionary image of the “citizen soldier” as depicted in French’s statue. “Citizen soldiers” were colonists who “in ordinary times... did their own work- usually farming- without military office or public expense.... [But] they would mobilize to face a threat and become the first defenders.”³ The role of the “citizen soldier” in the Revolution and specifically 1775 is highly debated. Not only do historians argue about citizens’ motivations for enlisting (and leaving) the army, but they also argue about the impact of Washington's reforms had on converting the citizen soldiers to long term soldiers. Given this, there are multiple answers to the question, why were men propelled to fight?

Most explicitly, Robert Middlekauff in his essay “Why Men Fought in the American Revolution” tries to address what motivated men to join the Revolutionary cause in early 1775.⁴ Middlekauff’s essay not only explores why men gathered, but he takes his analysis further and examines the units that stayed unified under intense pressure, to determine what kept them together under increased stress and demand. Studying these distinct units, Middlekauff concludes that men who remained in camp fought out of responsibility to both their community and to their fellow soldiers. Middlekauff argues that men were not driven by religion, citing many of these

³ Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2011), 36.

⁴ Robert Middlekauff, “Why Men Fought in the American Revolution,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 43.2 (Spring 1980): 135-148.

highly religious units disintegrated under fire. Middlekauff's article is essential to understanding the importance of the personal bonds between members and the weak influence of religion in 1775. Although Middlekauff's argument addresses the men at Cambridge, many of the men who arrived in Cambridge in the weeks following Lexington and Concord were products of a larger military tradition that did not begin with the events of April 19, 1775.

Although the citizen soldier is sometimes seen as a development of the Revolutionary War, it had deep roots in the New World. Louis Morton in his article, "The Origins of American Military Policy" argues that from the establishment of colonial settlements, the Crown tasked colonists with developing their own systems of defense.⁵ Rather than an established country with an army, the colonies were small independent settlements that had to rely on their inhabitants for protection. Settlements were thus defended by their inhabitants, therefore fostering both a tradition of military service and developing a deep sense of loyalty to local communities.

Pauline Maier argues that along with militias, colonies also developed a tradition of informal crowd action as a way to preserve order in communities. She argues in her article "Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth Century America" that "leading eighteenth century Americans had known many occasions on which mobs [or crowds] took on the defense of the public welfare.... [and became] an integral and even respected element of the political order."⁶ As Maier would have predicted, with the growing frustrations of colonists in the 1770s, the militia became an essential vehicle for colonists to express their growing frustrations and protect their economic interests.

⁵ Louis Morton, "The Origins of American Military Policy" *Military Affairs* 22.2 (Summer 1958): 75-82.

⁶ Pauline Maier, "Popular Uprising and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 27.1 (January 1970): 4.

The second major field of historiography focuses on the impact of George Washington on the Continental Army. Historians such as Justin Florence and Fred Anderson see Washington's appointment as a concrete example of the shifting ideologies of 1775.

Justin Florence suggests in his article, "Minutemen for Months: The Making of the American Revolution Army before Washington," that between Lexington and Concord and Washington's appointment, colonists began to organize themselves, developing hierarchical systems of command, and standardizing the actions and day-to-day life of soldiers.⁷ Regardless of these attempts to organize the forces, Florence ultimately concludes that there was a "sharp dichotomy.... Between the militia that fought at Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill, and the Continental Army that Washington subsequently organized."⁸ The appointment of Washington not only legitimized the organization of forces in the spring, but he brought the necessary order and structure to develop the Continental Army.

Similarly, Fred W. Anderson argues in his article "The Hinge of the Revolution" that Washington's appointment shifted the base of the revolution from the informal organization of the spring to the formal national organization of the summer.⁹ Anderson argues that the "popular forces" of 1775, known as the militias, existed in the purist form only prior to the appointment of George Washington on July 3, 1775.¹⁰ Although Anderson recognizes that his argument focuses on "July, 3, a day on which nothing much happened," he argues that Washington's

⁷ Justin Florence, "Minutemen for Months: The Making of an American Revolutionary Army before Washington, April 20- July 2, 1775" In *History, Memory and a House Museum: Artemas Ward of Shrewsbury, Massachusetts*, ed. American Antiquarian Society, (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 2005) 59- 99.

⁸ Florence, 60.

⁹ Fred Anderson, "The Hinge of the Revolution: George Washington Confronts a People's Army, July 3, 1775," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 1 (1999): 20-48.

¹⁰ Anderson, "The Hinge of the Revolution," 45.

organizational changes drastically altered the trajectory of colonial military thought.¹¹

Washington arrived to reform “a whole set of pernicious Yankee attitudes towards military service, and indeed a complex beliefs about the nature of war itself.”¹² Additionally, Washington arrived to provide order to men who prior to his arrival were “under very little discipline, order, or Government... [and who were] not natural soldiers.”¹³ Washington’s introduction of formal European-style training, and his deconstruction of the previous laissez faire warfare suggests that the force of 1775 were untrained, but prior to 1775 the colonies had an established military tradition.

Many mainstream Revolutionary histories focus on the various acts and taxes imposed by the Crown following the French and Indian War, rather than the military history of the colonies. While these acts did have a significant impact on the colonial situation, they were not the main call to arms. Rather the American Revolution was a result of the colonies formal and informal political and military organization that towards the end of the 18th century designed to protect colonists’ own interests. The convergence of formal militias and informal crowds resulted in both the enthusiastic rush to arms in the spring of 1775 and the subsequent desertion from and apathy for the Continental’s military efforts.

Therefore, the contemporary historiography is generally focused on two main themes: uncovering men’s motivations for marching to Cambridge, and examining the arrival of Washington, his observations, and his subsequent changes. But unfortunately primary sources make it difficult to tell this story.

¹¹ Anderson, “The Hinge of the Revolution,” 24.

¹² Anderson, “The Hinge of the Revolution,” 24-25.

¹³ Anderson, “The Hinge of the Revolution,” 28.

While the historiography does capture the changing military structure in 1775, there is a significant lack of primary sources. While there are full accounts of the Revolution from men such as Joseph Plumb Martin who enlisted after 1775, there are few published records of men who served just in 1775. Although a few records do exist, many are not published and thus not accessible for this thesis.¹⁴ Thus, I have worked to incorporate primary sources when I have found them in secondary sources. Additionally, I have relied heavily on Washington's papers in the second half of the thesis. Not only do Washington's letters illuminate the time frame of this thesis from July 1775 to January 1776, but his letters describe the situation in Cambridge, detail his frustrations with the forces, and capture his strong rhetoric. Washington's frustrations with the militias and the forces of 1775 are no secret; he strongly articulated their weaknesses and his disappointments with them through his letters. I have also incorporated statistics when possible, but because there are few records from 1775, there are few statistics. Additionally, the statistics that are published are sometimes questionable. For example in Howard Peckham's *The Toll of Independence: Engagements & Battle Casualties of the American Revolution*, he only records seven desertions during 1775. While it is unclear exactly how many men deserted from Cambridge, Washington wrote numerous times in the fall about the high rate of desertion, which were not caused by only seven men.¹⁵ With a force of nearly 20,000 in April, seven would make little impact, therefore highlighting the difference between the primary source accounts of the situation and military records. Regardless of these limitations, this thesis combines both the available primary sources with the contemporary historiography to understand the declining motivations of New England forces in 1775.

¹⁴ See Appendix in Justin Florence's "Minutemen for Months" for list of 1775 records.

¹⁵ Middlekauff, 144; Washington, "General Orders," WP, 1:346

Because New England was at the center of protest and rebellion prior, and during the first year of the Revolution, this thesis analyzes the actions of New Englanders. This is not to say that other colonies were not frustrated with the British, but the people of Boston publicly expressed their frustrations to a degree unseen in the other colonies. Additionally, from a research perspective, there is an abundance of literature on both the development of New England during the colonial period, and growing tensions between patriots and the Crown during the early months of 1775.

A discussion on terms is in order. While historiography has many names for colonists including insurgents and rebels, this thesis refers to these protesting colonists as patriots. While insurgents and rebels may have been appropriate at the time, this nomenclature carries moral implications in the 21st century. While the term patriot carries its own implications, it does not as directly imply the morality of men, or the legitimacy of their actions.

To explore the changing relationships between patriots and society, the thesis deconstructs the historical foundation for military service and protest, and its role in 1775. Chapter 1 explores the foundation of both formal and informal colonial military forces, and the convergence of the militia and crowd traditions. Chapter 2 illustrates how men were willing to fight to protect their own communities, but had little interest in fighting to protect strangers. Chapter 3 investigates Washington's challenges as he tried to convert the men in Cambridge from a political to a military force. Finally, Chapter 4 addresses the challenges that Washington faced maintaining the Continental Army through the fall and winter, as men saw little need for them to remain or even extend their service. The unification of both formal militias and informal crowds during the first few months of 1775 created an enthusiasm that was not driven by the

excitement of battle, but rather it was driven by the desire to protect the political rights of local communities.

Chapter 1: Development of Formal and Informal Colonial Protection

1775 is often remembered in contemporary history for patriots' quick rush to arms, both at Lexington and Concord, and in Cambridge. Historians agree "the assembling of the army before Boston was a miracle of quickness, the amazing gathering of a formidable force," a force that was "crucial to New England's success."¹⁶ This force was so surprising that Alan French argues that "[n]ever had there been anything like it."¹⁷ But there had been. Both militias and crowds developed prior to the revolution to respond to invasions and preserve order, but they functioned independently. While militias initially formed in the 17th century to protect fledgling settlements against attack, crowds grew in the 18th century, to provide social, political, and economy order to the expanding colonies. Although these two systems functioned independently prior to the Revolution, following the Articles of Association, enacted on December 1, 1774, these two forces converged. This unified regulatory force in the colonies. 1775 was defined by the combination of traditional militias and modern crowds to create an unprecedented force that combined both the formal and informal military structures of New England.

Arriving in the New World, settlers were tasked by the British Crown to protect themselves. Settlements received orders from the Crown to use arms in any way that they deemed necessary for their protection. The Massachusetts Bay Charter in 1628 goes so far to assert that men were "to take whatever measures were required 'to incounter, expulse, repell and resist by force of arms' ... any effort to destroy or invade the settlement."¹⁸ In addition to the Crown, the businessmen who financed the colonies protected their investments by ensuring that

¹⁶ Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1934), 25; John W. Shy, "A New Look at Colonial Militia", *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 20 No. 2 (April 1963): 179.

¹⁷ French, 25.

¹⁸ Louis Morton, "The Origins of American Military Policy," *Military Affairs* Vol 22. No. 2 (Summer, 1958): 75.

“weapons and military stores were therefore included in the cargo of ships.”¹⁹ Provided supplies and the freedom to organize, colonists developed the militia system.

Militias were developed to provide a robust system of protection against spontaneous local raids and attacks. With so few settlers, a standing army was not an option. Instead, many settlements required “the entire adult male population ... to maintain arms.”²⁰ Therefore men collectively shared the responsibility to protect and preserve their settlement, but only when it was necessary. As such, they were primarily concerned with matters that involved themselves and their immediate community. Additionally, militias could not intervene in colonial matters outside their borders.

These geographic limitations were developed by the Crown to avoid unnecessary conflicts in the New World. The Crown was clear that militias were for protection not aggression: “English law...restricted the use of the militia to inhibit the Crown from employing it outside the kingdom.”²¹ In other words, militias could only fight on their own territory. The clear geo-political limitations of militias not only determined their defensive position but also fostered little connection between neighboring militias.

Local militias generally did not protect each other; instead, militias only fought when it was in the best interest of their community. This extreme localism was not only fueled by the political and geographical barriers between colonies, but also by the militias themselves. As one North Carolinian argued: “Let the New Yorkers defend themselves... Why should I fight the Indians for them?”²² While this may seem overly geocentric, during the early 17th century

¹⁹ Morton, 75.

²⁰ Robert K. Wright Jr., “Nor is their Standing Army to be Despised,” in *Arms and Independence*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 52.

²¹ Morton, 76.

²² Morton, 76.

survival was not guaranteed and thus this approach was necessary. With the unknowns of the New World, colonists looked first to protecting their own interests before they even considered supporting each other. With little potential of outside assistance, communities developed standard training to enforce and resolve military participation.

The Crown placed male colonists under some form of obligatory training.²³ In 1631 The Massachusetts Bay Colony passed their first military law that required “all males between 16 and 60, whether freeman or servants...to provide themselves with weapons and to form into units for training.”²⁴ When these training units, known as militias, were first established they “called for weekly training periods, held every Saturday.”²⁵ Massachusetts Bay records suggest that the frequency of these trainings was directly reflective of the perceived threat that colonists faced.²⁶ In 1637 as the Massachusetts Bay Colony “had become more settled, the number of trainings per year [decreased and now] was fixed to eight.”²⁷ These trainings, viewed as necessary to protect the colonies, were unfortunately based on British models that proved generally ineffective in the New World.

Following the British military tradition, militia commanders adopted traditional British drills. These drills, according to Morton, were “a remarkably complicated series of motions for forming troops, marching, fixing the pike, and firing the musket.”²⁸ While this sort of training was “standard in European armies, where the perfection of mechanical motions governed warfare... [they] bore no relation to Indian fighting in the forests of the New World.”²⁹

²³ Wright Jr., 52.

²⁴ Morton, 78.

²⁵ Morton, 79.

²⁶ Morton, 79.

²⁷ Morton, 79.

²⁸ Morton, 79.

²⁹ Morton, 79.

Regardless of their effectiveness, settlers and colonists continued to follow British training manuals through the 17th century. In the 18th century, as the colonies were more established, there was little need for militias.

In the early 18th century militia drills brought together communities for a day of celebration. Training days turned into “festive local holidays.”³⁰ Men would gather for a series of drills where colonists “lined up with their muskets and powder horns, executed some awkward drills, listened to the pastor preach a sermon, and spent the rest of the day in eating and drinking.”³¹ While these trainings proved to be part of 18th century culture, they did not hold the same power that they did in the 17th century. While in the public order in the 17th century, public order was maintained by the communal identity of settlers who put the needs of the community before their own, the 18th century saw the rise of liberalism and the development of colonists’ individuality.

In the 18th century, colonists began to develop a need for a local government body to look out for the local concerns and affairs of colonists. Colonists, citing the liberal belief that “nature had endowed human beings with the capacity to think for themselves and act in their own behalf,” became increasingly independent.³² Liberalism gave power to individuals to express their opinions, gave colonists agency, and accordingly strengthened the growing calls for local systems of governance in the colonies. Citing this need, colonists developed both formal and informal systems of governance at the local level to govern daily life.

³⁰ Morton, 79: Arthur Bernon Tourtellot, *Lexington and Concord; The Beginning of the War of the American Revolution* (New York: New York, W.W. Norton, 1963), 47.

³¹ Tourtellot, pg. 47.

³² Joyce Oldham Appleby, *Liberalism and Republicanism in the Historical Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 1.

Male landowners, who were increasingly concerned about land allocations, formed formal town meetings to settle these disputes.³³ These town meetings were comprised of “artisans and tavern owners, small merchants, and retailers.”³⁴ According to Richard Bourne these men and their “liberalizing tongues” sought to develop a formal system of local governance.³⁵ While these town meetings had little impact on the development of military forces, they do illustrate the growing desire for colonists to develop as individuals, and to make their own decisions. Since town meetings were primarily concerned with land allocation, there was an increasing need for additional systems of governance to address the political, economic, and social developments of 18th century society.

In the 1700’s crowds proved this governance to be necessary to preserve the colonies’ growing society and economy. Paul Gilje argues that during the early 18th century, crowds were focused upon three primary issues, “issues of customary rights concerning both the market and natural resources, the morality of the people in the neighborhoods, and expressions of loyalty.”³⁶ As Gilje’s observations suggest, while crowds did not protect colonies from attacks, they functioned to preserve colonial order. Pauline Maier argues in her article entitled “Popular Uprisings and Civil Authority in Eighteenth-Century America” that this concern with public order turned crowds into “extralegal arm of the community’s interest.”³⁷ Assuming many of the responsibilities of a local government, crowds managed the social, political, and economic

³³ Russell Bourne, *Cradle of Violence: How Boston's Waterfront Mobs Ignited the American Revolution* (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2006), 22.

³⁴ Bourne, 22.

³⁵ Bourne, 22.

³⁶ Paul A. Gilje, *Rioting in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 28.

³⁷ Maier, “Popular Uprising”4-5.

order.³⁸ As Maier continues to argue, crowds were concerned with “the public welfare, which was, after all, the stated purpose of government.”³⁹ The importance of crowds may be seen in its treatment of the rapid population growth in the early 18th century.

Between 1700 and 1740 the population of New England expanded from 99,000 to 282,000.⁴⁰ This increasing population put significant strain on the resources of the region. Dating back to 1640 “with a population of 1,200... [Boston] had outgrown its food resources.”⁴¹ From 1640 on, Boston relied on importing food for both its residents and for the nearly 500 ships departed Boston bound for England each year.⁴² This created a natural tension between Boston residents and the near British-bound ships, as they had to compete for wheat.

This tension culminated in the Wheat Riot of April 30, 1710. On April 30, a crowd attacked the grain ship of Andrew Belcher, cutting the ship’s rudder and seizing the wheat on board.⁴³ Judge Samuel Sewall, a Massachusetts judge, observed that the crowd attacked because “Capt. Belchar’s ... [ship was] laden with Wheat in this time when Wheat is so dear.”⁴⁴ Although technically the British Crown was responsible for governing the colonies, as the Wheat Riot of April 30 suggests, there was a need for local governance and allocation of resources that the

³⁸ While Maier uses the term “mob” to avoid negative assumptions, this thesis uses the term “crowd” to describe the organization and mobilization of colonists.

³⁹ Maier, “Popular Uprising,” 4.

⁴⁰ Population an average of Sutherland and Rossiter’s estimates of New England’s population in 1700 and 1740 from Daniel Scott Smith, “The Demographic History of Colonial New England” *The Journal of Economic History* 32.1 (March 1972) 175.

⁴¹ Jack Tager, *Boston Riots: Three Centuries of Social Violence* (Boston: Northeastern Press, 2001), 27.

⁴² Tager 27; Bourne 47.

⁴³ Tager, 27.

⁴⁴ Tager, 27.

Crown simply did not address on the local scale. Because the local governance was so essential, crowds became “an integral and even respected element of the political order.”⁴⁵

Therefore, because crowds were seen as so essential to preserving communities, it was often the town leaders, who held leadership positions in the town meeting or militia, who led crowds. In the case of Exeter, New Hampshire, during a contentious visit from “a King’s surveyor of the woods,” a member of the Gillman family, who was a militia officer and a mill owner, organized a crowd against the Surveyor.⁴⁶ The ability of this member of the Gillman family to assemble a crowd, given his position, suggests that crowds were in fact seen as a legitimate vehicle in the 18th century for landowning colonists to voice their concerns over their governance. Further as the situation in Exeter suggests, as colonists were establishing these formal and informal systems of governance, they were also starting to articulate their own voice.

Therefore emerging from the first half of the 18th century, colonies established both formal (town meetings) and informal (crowds) structures to voice their opinions and provide local governance for New England settlers. Colonies were finding additional independent ways to provide local governance, monitoring their own economic, political, and social wellbeing until the Imperial Crisis threatened this budding independent governance.

Faced with 90 million pounds of debt from the French and Indian War (1754-1763), the British turned to the colonies to recuperate their losses.⁴⁷ Beginning in 1765 with the Stamp Act, continuing with the Townsend Acts from 1767 to 1770, the Tea Act in 1773, and the Coercive Acts of 1774, the British sought to make colonists pay for the costly war and assert their control

⁴⁵ Maier, “Popular Uprising,” 4-5.

⁴⁶ Gilje, 32; Maier, 13.

⁴⁷ Adam Smith *An Inquiry into the Nature and Wealth of Nations* as Published by *Project Gutenberg*, February 28, 2009, last updated June 5, 2011. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/3300/3300-h/3300-h.htm>

over the colonies. While each of these acts sparked a different response, together they fostered discontent in the colonies and created an environment rich for rebellion, especially in Boston.

Bostonians' frustrations with the Tea Act of 1773 were notably visible and are highly celebrated in Revolutionary folklore. The Tea Act was designed to relieve the East India Company of its huge oversupply of tea and crack down on the smuggling of tea.⁴⁸ Colonists paid a tax on imported tea to the British Crown. Patriots argued that this act established the "principle of collecting taxes in America."⁴⁹ While other colonies simply sent the tea back to Britain, Massachusetts Governor Thomas Hutchinson insisted that the tea stay. In an act known as the Boston Tea Party, and described by John Adams as a "most magnificent Movement of all," Bostonians made sure that Hutchinson's orders would not be followed- there would be no tea in Boston.⁵⁰ On the night of December 16, 1773, a group of Bostonians disguised as Native Americans boarded an East India Company ship and dumped its whole supply of tea into the Boston Harbor. The Boston Tea Party, not only brought to life colonist's frustrations, but how colonists used informal crowds and protest to redefine their relationship to the Crown.

In response to the Tea Party, Parliament instated the Intolerable Acts. The Intolerable Acts were a series of acts in 1774 designed to assert control of the Crown and punish Boston. In particular, the Boston Port Act that came into effect June 1, 1774, targeted the Boston Port, a central hub for both international and colonial trade. This act brought the Boston shipyards to a standstill, leaving many men out of work and causing a serious shortage of food.

⁴⁸ Richard D. Brown, *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution*, (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), pg. 130.

⁴⁹ Brown, 130.

⁵⁰ Adams, John, Margaret A. Hogan, and C. James Taylor, *My Dearest Friend: Letters of Abigail and John Adams*, (Cambridge: Belknap, 2007) 36.

In response, Governor Thomas Gage, appointed by the Crown to handle the affairs of Massachusetts, sent colonists out of Boston to the country where the demands for supplies were not as high.⁵¹ But Gage, a perennial optimist, failed to accept the growing unrest in the country. By enabling Patriots to leave Boston, Gage was polarizing the geography of greater Boston (with loyalists in Boston, and Patriots in the country). In addition, he potentially was strengthening the Patriot cause. While there is no concrete evidence of the interaction between Boston crowds and the militias of Greater Boston, given their common cause and now close proximity, they may have collaborated in the months leading up to the Revolution. Therefore, this exodus potentially provided the perfect foundation for the Revolution. With the Patriot cause growing, The Continental Congress saw a need to develop systems to organize men.

In light of the increasing threat of British control, Patriots began to reconsider their organization. Although the colonies had informal crowds and formal militias, they had no way to unite the two against the Crown in early 1774. For “Militia officers, even where they were elected, held royal commissions” and as such were prohibited from acting against the Crown.⁵² John Shy observes that militias “did not simply slide smoothly into the Revolution, but rather had to redefine the organizational structure of units.”⁵³ So colonists restructured their militias to enable these units to protect colonial settlements from any threat, including the British.

On October 20, 1774, the First Continental Congress published the Articles of Association, which repurposed militias. The Articles converted the historic militia that many saw as “draft board and a reserve training unit...[into] a police force and an instrument of political

⁵¹ Jacqueline Barbara Carr, *After the Siege: A Social History of Boston 1775-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University press, 2005), 25.

⁵² John W. Shy, “Hearts and Minds: The Case of ‘Long Bill’ Scott” in *Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution 1760- 1791*, ed. Richard D. Brown (Lexington: D.C. Heath and Company, 1992), 213.

⁵³ Shy, “Hearts and Minds,” 213.

surveillance.”⁵⁴ The Articles called for the formation of “a committee...in every county, city, and town, by those who are qualified to vote for representatives in the legislature.... [who are responsible for monitoring] foes to the rights of British-America [so that any violations] may be publicly known, and [be] universally condemned as the enemies of American liberty.”⁵⁵ In other words, men now had ability to rise against the Crown when necessary. To create this organization, communities had to begin “purging and restructuring the militia.”⁵⁶ While this process has received relatively little attention in revolutionary historiography, it was an essential step in restructuring militias, for it enabled crowds and militias to fuse together to create the passionate armed forces of 1775.

⁵⁴ Shy, “Hearts and Minds” 214.

⁵⁵ “Avalon Project: The Journals of the Continental Congress: The Articles of Association; October 20, 1774,” Yale Law School, The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History, and Diplomacy, last modified 2008. <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/contcong_10-20-74.asp> (Accessed December 6, 2011).

⁵⁶ Shy, “Hearts and Minds” 213.

Chapter 2: From Association to Washington's Arrival

In the months following Association, unrest captured New England. The unity between crowds and militia created an environment rich for revolution. Events leading up to Washington's appointment suggest that while men were willing to fight locally to protect their community, they had little interest in fighting for strangers. Following the winter of 1774, Patriots demonstrated that while they were willing to go to extremes to protect their own resources and communities, they were not that interested in protecting their neighbors.

In 1774, with the growing tensions between colonial patriots and the British army, both sides monitored each other's arms and supplies. During 1774, it was common and within their rights of the British to collect Patriots' supplies, as the colonies were under British control. Though legally acceptable, many colonists found that this threatened their growing independence; they wanted to have control over their community's military supplies. For colonists in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, the "unremarkable building" known as Fort William and Mary held their colony's entire supply of powder.⁵⁷ Therefore, when it was rumored that General Gage ordered two regiments from Boston to Fort William and Mary in December 1774 to presumably collect supplies, colonists reacted.⁵⁸

On December 13, 1774, Paul Revere rushed to Portsmouth to warn colonists that "British Ships were on their way to take the arms, ammunition, and powder stored at the fort back to Boston."⁵⁹ Receiving word of these plans, New Hampshire colonists quickly organized on December 14, 1774, to reclaim their gunpowder before the British arrived. Assembling "a

⁵⁷ T.H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots: The Revolution of the People* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), 295.

⁵⁸ Breen. 295.

⁵⁹ Ray Raphael, *The First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord* (New York: The New Press, 2002), 181.

curious band- local militiamen, armed strangers, committeemen from neighboring towns” by drumbeat, patriots marched to the fort.⁶⁰ Initially, 200 men departed for the fort, but they gathered support as they walked.⁶¹ The spreading support for this march suggests that it was a true New England crowd comprised of men who were connected through both their desire for independence and their location. The force of 350 who arrived at the fort in a “festive air.”⁶²

Confronting the six British soldiers stationed at the fort, the colonists easily gained control of the building. Taking the British soldiers captive, they “seized almost a hundred barrels of powder, several small cannons, and an impressive supply of small arms.”⁶³ Glowing with their success, the colonists reportedly “gave three huzzas and hauled down the King’s colors.”⁶⁴ While this march may be seen as an act of rebellion against the British, it was foremost a march to establish autonomy. The men in New Hampshire marched to assert their independence and control over their own supplies.

The following day, men from all over New Hampshire rushed to Portsmouth, many having heard that the British regiments were trying to dismantle the fort. In the morning on December 15, nearly 2,000 colonists gathered in Yarmouth.⁶⁵ Historian T.H. Breen argues that these 2,000 men represented “one out of every six adult males in New Hampshire... [who halted] normal farm work, travel scores of miles over icy roads, and assault the king’s property.”⁶⁶ By seeking to control their own colony’s supplies, New Hampshire residents asserted their military independence from the British.

⁶⁰ Breen, 295.

⁶¹ Breen, 295.

⁶² Breen, 295.

⁶³ Breen, 295.

⁶⁴ Breen, 295.

⁶⁵ Breen, 296.

⁶⁶ Breen, 296.

From a British perspective the events at Fort William and Mary demonstrated the changing face of unrest in the colonies. Following Association, militias and crowds were able to unite and march together, for militias no longer served the Crown. Governor Wentworth of New Hampshire observed this change as he complained that “the many magistrates and militia officers who ought to have given their aid and assistance in restraining and suppressing this uproar were active to promote and encourage it.”⁶⁷ While this conflict was relatively calm compared to later confrontations between the British and colonists, the organization and enthusiasm of 1775 was not simply random. Rather, it was built upon the convergence of crowds and militias and fueled by the drive to create a new colonial identity, independent from the Crown.

These rumbles of independence were threatening to the British, and General Gage was under increased pressure “to come up with some sort of victory in the field.”⁶⁸ But, “with travel and transport difficult in winter, he made no... moves during December and January”; instead, Gage spent the time gathering reports of the rebels’ organization and their supplies.⁶⁹ For if Gage could gather all of the patriot supplies, they would not pose a threat. Citing the growing rebellion in some of the centers of rebellion, such as Worcester, Gage decided instead to march to Salem. Salem was not only vulnerable, being accessible by both land and sea, but it also had significant military stores. Additionally, Gage finally acted when during February he heard reports that the town was planning to transport “eight field pieces.”⁷⁰ Gage saw this as an opportunity to “greatly

⁶⁷ Breen, 297.

⁶⁸ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 182.

⁶⁹ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 182.

⁷⁰ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 183.

disconcert their schemes” and on February 26 he sent 240 troops by boat to Salem to seize these pieces before they were transported.⁷¹

The British regiment, led by Colonel Alexander Leslie, was ill prepared to enter Salem. Leslie’s ad-hoc offensive highlighted clear shortcomings of Gage’s planning. Not only did Leslie’s men approach Salem on a Sunday morning, when Salem residents were already centrally gathered at church, in the town center, but he chose a route that had a potentially impassable final obstacle: a drawbridge.⁷² Leslie had not scouted the route and did not know about the drawbridge, which blocked his men from reaching Salem. While Leslie argued that “he was upon the Kings Highway and would not be prevented passing over the bridge,” his plea meant little to Salem residents.⁷³ Salem townsman James Barr responded to Leslie’s request, in true liberal rhetoric, that “it is not the King’s Highway; it is a road built by the owners of the lots on the other side, and no king, country or town has anything to do with it.”⁷⁴ In Salem, the Crown no longer controlled the land; rather, colonists owned it. In the case of both Yarmouth and Salem, patriots’ actions indicate that communities were willing to take up arms to protect their own military supplies.

Following Leslie’s embarrassing attempt to gather supplies from Salem, Gage dispatched Captain John Brown and Ensign Henry De Berniere to gather information on the state of the countryside, specifically the roads and bridges.⁷⁵ Brown and De Berniere moved quickly through the countryside, yet patriots were often aware of their arrival. In some cases, Brown and De

⁷¹ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 183.

⁷² Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 184.

⁷³ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 184.

⁷⁴ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 184.

⁷⁵ Breen, 276.

Berniere were forced to flee towns just as a crowd formed to protest their presence.⁷⁶ Although they were forced to move quickly through the countryside, they did observe the regularity of militia training. On the road to Worcester, they stopped at a local tavern, where they found “a company of insurgents exercising near the house.”⁷⁷ Breen describes their observations of the company, “the local commander... assured them that they would emerge victorious over Gage’s forces if they just remembered to have patience and courage... at the conclusion of his talk... the whole company came into the house and drank until nine o’clock.”⁷⁸ Brown and De Berniere not only observed how men were training, but also how intertwined militia training was in patriot’s lives. At this time, there was very little separation between military service and society; they were analogous in 1775 Massachusetts.

Now knowing more about how well prepared militia units were to respond to any British march, Gage continued to search for his next step. Under increasing pressure from the Crown to rein in the colonies, Gage “pressed ahead with his plan to seize military supplies.”⁷⁹ In January, Gage ordered a scouting trip to Concord to record the Patriot supplies, and discovered that in Concord there was a “Magazine of Powder consisting of between Ninety and an Hundred Barrels.”⁸⁰ With this intelligence, Gage must have determined that a successful attack on Concord make a significant dent in the patriot supplies. As soon as Brown and De Berniere reported that the road was clear, Gage planned a march to Lexington and Concord.

Gage’s planning suggests that he did not expect or plan to exchange fire in the process. If Gage had wanted to provoke a fight, he would have instead chosen to attack Worcester.

⁷⁶ Breen, 276-277.

⁷⁷ Breen, 277.

⁷⁸ Breen, 277.

⁷⁹ Breen, 278.

⁸⁰ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 182.

Worcester not only had a majority of the rebel's arms and powder, but it also had a large population of militias ready and prepared to fight.⁸¹ A march on Worcester "would undoubtedly trigger another mass mobilization of patriot forces."⁸² Instead Gage's "plans suggest that he counted on avoiding hostilities."⁸³

Marching to Concord, he "tripled the number of troops, they departed in the dead of night, and they chose a route that did not have a drawbridge."⁸⁴ Further, these troops traveled light, a sign that Gage did not expect a major fight. The troops only "carried one day's ration but no knapsack... [And] No artillery or baggage accompanies the column."⁸⁵ Gage not only did not expect a fight, but he thought that his men would be able to return in the morning unscathed. John Shy suggests that "Gage hoped to make up in speed of movement what such a force lacked in weight."⁸⁶ But Gage was in for a surprise. As the bells of Lexington's church rang on the morning of April 19, Patriots rushed to arms.

Hearing of the British regulars' march, Paul Revere and William Dawes rushed to Concord in the early morning of April 19, 1775, to warn colonists. Upon alarm, the bells of Lexington meeting house rang, calling men like Sylvanus Wood of Woburn out of bed before dawn.⁸⁷ Wood "immediately arouse... [f]earing that there was difficulty there" grabbed his gun, and "went in haste to Lexington."⁸⁸ There he discovered that the British troops were within half a

⁸¹ Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 182.

⁸² Raphael, *The First American Revolution*, 183.

⁸³ John Shy, "The Empire Militant: Thomas Gage and the Coming of War" in *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflection on the Military Struggle for American Independence*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), 109.

⁸⁴ Ray Raphael, *A People's History of the American Revolution: How Common People Shaped the Fight for Independence* (New York: The New Press, 2001), 48.

⁸⁵ Shy, "The Empire Militant," 109.

⁸⁶ Shy, "The Empire Militant," 109.

⁸⁷ Raphael, *A People's History*, 49.

⁸⁸ Raphael, *A People's History*, 49.

mile. Joined by other men who had heard Williams Diman's "beat to arms," Wood paraded to the north edge of Lexington Common and prepared to meet the British.⁸⁹ By the time the British entered Lexington Common, thirty-eight men stood prepared to deter the British.

Just as Gage's planning suggests that he did not expect a fight, neither did the Patriots. In the preceding confrontations between British and the rebels, no shots had been fired between the forces. While there had always been a significant threat of bloodshed, previously the Patriots and British only sparred with words. But in Lexington, with the first draw of blood, the Revolutionary effort gained support.

Suffering casualties at Lexington, the British continued to Concord, where they encountered a surprisingly organized group of patriots. While Brown and De Bernier had accurately scouted the route to Concord, they had not reported on the responsiveness of Concord men.

Defeating the British in Concord, the militia successfully protected their supplies, and continued escorting the British troops back to Boston. Surrounding Boston, the Patriots laid Boston under siege. Citing this, many Boston residents relocated to the countryside in the weeks following the commencement of the siege.⁹⁰ Following the Patriots' march of the British back to Boston, the patriot forces organized in Cambridge.

Following the Battle of Lexington and Concord on April 19, there was no longer any doubt that the patriot forces were prepared to fight. Lord Hugh Percy, a British officer at Lexington and Concord, wrote that while the colonists were "very scattered" and fought in an "irregular manner," they were prepared for battle, and their strength should not be ignored.⁹¹ As

⁸⁹ Raphael, *A People's History*, 49.

⁹⁰ See Carr, 13- 43 for additional explanation.

⁹¹ David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 294.

he wrote, “whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob, will find himself very much mistaken. They have men amongst them who know very well what they are about.”⁹²

Percy was right to caution the British against disregarding the colonial forces, for during the spring, New Englanders had fused the enthusiasm of the crowd with the organization of the militia to create a new force that posed a significant threat to the British. Although this temporary arrangement of militias and crowds proved to be effective in the shouting matches of early 1775, the Patriots understood that to fight the British they would need to establish a formal force. In other words, they needed an army.

On April 8, just prior to the Battle of Lexington and Concord, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress issued a resolve to Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire to prepare an army. The resolve noted that “the present dangerous and alarming situation of our public affairs, renders it necessary for this colony to make preparations for their security and defense, by raising and establishing an army.”⁹³ This resolution continued to ask the states of New England to report on the “number of men, in their opinion, [that] will be necessary to be raised by the four New England governments for their general defense and report.”⁹⁴ While it is unclear if the states responded specifically to this claim, or to reports of Lexington and Concord, they did send men in droves to Boston following reports of April 19 to assist the Patriot forces.

In the week following Lexington and Concord, New Englanders rushed to Cambridge. Historians generally note that around 20,000 men gathered in Cambridge.⁹⁵ But by the time that Washington assumed control of the forces, “there were 16,000, of which fewer than 14,000 were

⁹² Fischer, 294.

⁹³ Manders, “Evidence for Numbering Systems,” 2.

⁹⁴ Manders, “Evidence for Numbering Systems,” 2.

⁹⁵ Carr, 20.

fit for duty.”⁹⁶ However, regardless of how many men actually gathered, the apparent growing size of the patriot force at Cambridge was a source of concern for the British; for “never before had there been anything like it.”⁹⁷ While the British were rightly concerned about the quick mobilization of New Englanders, they should have been also comforted by the high rates of desertion among the soldiers at Cambridge.

Because colonial militias had developed with an intense localism, many soldiers who found themselves at Cambridge left almost as soon as they got there. Of the 16,000 who gathered in Cambridge, “more than 1,500 were sick, another 1,500 absent.”⁹⁸ Given the general unrest and disorganization of the first few days at Cambridge, it is not surprising that there is no statistical data on the desertion rate of men who gathered there. Though records do indicate that the men who arrived were inadequately prepared. Many men “from the nearer towns... had [neither] brought a change of clothing; nor had anyone, arriving in the first few days.”⁹⁹ Men’s lightweight arrival suggests that few Patriots intended on remaining in Cambridge; rather they were there to protect against the immediate threat of a strike men there were not interested in remaining in Cambridge, and “desperately sought to return home.”¹⁰⁰

The high rates of desertion became an ongoing problem amongst Patriot forces. General Artemas Ward was appointed by the Massachusetts Committee of Safety on April 20 to command the Patriot forces spoke against the desertion. Four days after arriving in camp, Ward had observed such high rates of desertion that he pleaded for regular enlistments. As he wrote on April 24: “My situation is such, that if I have no enlisting ordered immediately, I shall be left all

⁹⁶ David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), 25.

⁹⁷ French, 25.

⁹⁸ McCullough, 25.

⁹⁹ French, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Florence, “Minutemen for Months,” 83.

alone.”¹⁰¹ Although Ward’s plea to Congress is quite dramatic, so was the situation in Cambridge, men simply came and went as they pleased. Joseph Warren wrote to John Adams that “as to the army, it is such a shifting, fluctuating state as to not be capable of a perfect regulation. They are continually going and coming.”¹⁰² While it is unclear exactly why men left, the desertion of Captain Winthrop Rowe’s New Hampshire Company suggests that men were only interested in protecting their own communities.

In June 1775, eighteen men deserted from Rowe’s New Hampshire Company stationed in Cambridge. These men argued that they “‘didn’t intend when they enlisted to join the army, but to be station’d at Hampton’ on the New England Coast.”¹⁰³ In other words, these men enlisted to protect their own coast, not the state of Massachusetts.

This was a common frustration of soldiers: they primarily wanted to be connected to their communities. Some militia contracts in 1775 went so far as to stipulate that soldiers could only fight within a 150-mile radius from home.¹⁰⁴ The limited reach of the men’s service ensured that they were serving their local communities. This localism, founded in the militia traditions of the 17th century, continued to affect the men that assembled in Boston. The earliest colonial settlements had survived by the quick actions of local men. This ability to quickly mobilize served the colonists well in the first few months of 1775. But as the fighting shifted from the countryside to the city, Patriots showed little interest in following the removed fight.

¹⁰¹ American Archives: Documents on the American Revolution, “General Ward to Massachusetts Congress,” *Northern Illinois University Libraries*, 2011, <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/amarch/getdoc.pl?/var/lib/philologic/databases/amarch/.2436>.

¹⁰² James Nelson, *With Fire and Sword: The Battle of Bunker Hill and the Beginning of the American Revolution*, (New York: St. Martins, 2011), 153.

¹⁰³ Royster, 60-61.

¹⁰⁴ Christopher Smith, “American Rebels: Soldier Protest in the Early American Military, 1754-1815” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Houston, 2007): 117.

Following the initial siege of Boston, colonists searched for additional ways to squeeze the British out of Boston. The thousands of forces in Cambridge had little to do aside from maintaining the siege. And so they kept on putting pressure on Gage in Boston. In June, Patriots turned their attention to Charlestown. The plan to fortify Bunker Hill was not a new plan; it had been suggested as early as May 12 “as part of the recommended fortifications between Cambridge and Charlestown.”¹⁰⁵ Because it was located “within long cannon range of Boston” it was seen as potentially a great asset to the Patriots.¹⁰⁶ But there was no formal plan to dig until the Patriots received reports that the British were planning to fortify Bunker Hill. Hearing intelligence that the British might be planning to make a move on Bunker Hill on June 14, the Patriots mobilized.¹⁰⁷

Colonists organized a march to Bunker Hill in two short days. There were no written orders, just a report from the Committee of Safety on the sixteenth that requested “a detachment of one thousand men.... [to] march to Charlestown, and entrench upon that hill.”¹⁰⁸ The plan was for men to dig under the guise of night, and return back to Cambridge in the morning. But the events of the seventeenth would prove to be more complicated.

The Battle of Bunker Hill was the first such battle, but it was not a small conflict. It was an immense bloodbath. Of the 1,500 patriots who participated at Bunker Hill, 140 were killed, 271 were wounded, and 31 captured.¹⁰⁹ Bourne observes that the British had a “grim” casualty rate of 52%, with 226 men killed, 928 wounded.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵ Nelson, 211.

¹⁰⁶ Nelson, 211.

¹⁰⁷ Bourne, 224.

¹⁰⁸ Nelson, 220.

¹⁰⁹ Bourne, 224.

¹¹⁰ Bourne, 224.

On the morning of the seventeenth General Putnam and General Prescott could not have envisioned what was in store for them, for as the sun rose over Boston they continued to encourage their men on. On the other side of the harbor, Gage had received reports on the colonists' efforts during the night. True to his personality, he still hoped to avoid conflict. When Major General Henry Clinton reported back to Gage on the colonists' entrenchment, Gage "seemed to doubt their intentions' and decided to do nothing until daylight revealed the extent of the American preparations."¹¹¹ Though, as the sun rose, and the scale of the Patriots' entrenchment became clearer, there was no longer any question of the Continentals' intentions. Gage ordered his forces to Charlestown, and the battle began.

It is generally thought that there was a high rate of desertion amongst the patriot forces at Bunker Hill. While historians often cite this high rate as an example of wavering support for battle, it is unclear how many patriot men actually deserted. Charles Royster comments that men generally "left the fighting as soon as they could get away.... in squads of twenty, carrying one wounded man."¹¹² James Nelson observes that William Prescott, who commanded the men in a redoubt, reported that while he had started the day with 1,200 men in the morning, by the time the British reached the redoubt, he had "perhaps one hundred and fifty men in the fort."¹¹³ Both the lack of desertion statistics and the general acceptance of desertions suggest that it was common amongst Patriot forces at Bunker Hill.

The first few months of 1775 frame the Revolution as a revolution comprised of independent colonists. There was an intense localism in both the militia system, and in the activation of forces. As such, when it was in soldiers' personal interest to fight the British, they

¹¹¹ Richard M. Ketchum, *Decisive Day: The Battle for Bunker Hill* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999), 115.

¹¹² Royster, 45.

¹¹³ Nelson, 272.

did with more fervor and skill than the British had predicted. But when it was not in the interest of their own community, men deserted. Colonists' rush to arms at Fort William and Mary, Salem, and at Lexington and Concord proved to the British that patriots were ready to take on the British. But this colonial enthusiasm faded as the relationship between the war and the community evolved. Colonists were increasingly separated from their main motivation: protection of their communities. This tension was aggravated by Washington's appointment as general of the colonial forces, for he was a man who adhered to the "mid eighteenth century concept of warfare- an era in which war and society were carefully separated."¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ John Shy, "American Strategy: Charles Lee and the Radical Alternative," in *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflection on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1990), 147.

Chapter 3: Washington's Election and Arrival

Following Lexington and Concord, the tension between the British and the patriots developed into a militarized conflict.¹¹⁵ The Second Continental Congress met in early May to discuss the future of colonial affairs, and specifically the increasing need to develop their own military force. The Continental Congress established the Continental Army on June 15, 1775, and appointed George Washington as Commander in Chief. Washington was chosen for his ability to provide structure for the forces in Cambridge and unite all the colonies, northern and southern.

In Cambridge, Washington met a force that was “both politically healthy and militarily inefficient.”¹¹⁶ Politically, the forces in Cambridge were democratic, independent and unorganized. While there may have been little cohesion in Cambridge, men did have significant power in deciding both their own fates and the fate of their units. With the establishment of the Continental Army, men no longer had a say in their leadership or service. But when Washington arrived, he brought his affinity for the European style military systems to Cambridge and sought to not only convert a “popular force into a respectable army” but also to convert “a New England revolution.... [into] an American Revolution.”¹¹⁷ Although the appointment of Washington was necessary to preserve the revolutionary cause, he brought with him a new hierarchical structure that undermined the informal connections that had tied men together, and ultimately aggravated the already fragile commitment of the patriot men in Cambridge.

When the Second Continental Congress convened in Philadelphia in early May, following the events at Lexington and Concord, Washington's appointment was anything but a

¹¹⁵ Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*, (New York: Knopf, 2004), 68.

¹¹⁶ Shy, “A New Look at Colonial Militia,” 175.

¹¹⁷ Anderson, “The Hinge of the Revolution,” 45; Florence, 96.

foregone conclusion. The principle concern of the Congress was how the colonies were going to address the increasingly strained relationship with the British. While Congress debated the path of the colonies, during a “confused and highly improvisational moment within the Congress,” Washington was appointed to Commander in Chief.¹¹⁸ Although Washington was elected unanimously, Congress was not unanimous in the decision to prepare an army. As Joseph Ellis observes, “more delegates could agree that Washington should lead the American army than that there should be an American army at all.”¹¹⁹ Regardless, it was decided that if there was going to be an army, it would be lead by Washington. The election of Washington, in the words of Ellis, seemed “obvious” both given Washington’s affinity for structure and his being a southerner.¹²⁰ However, the appointment of Washington may not have been as “obvious” as Ellis suggests.¹²¹ Both Washington’s military background and his interest in the position are questionable.

After the French and Indian War, Washington’s military efforts were magnified and celebrated even as “his military experience was not great, [and] his services not outstanding.”¹²² He emerged from the French and Indian war as an ambitious, competent, “well-known and highly respected figure in colonial America and Britain,” but this was surprising given his

¹¹⁸ Ellis, *His Excellency*, 68.

¹¹⁹ Ellis, *His Excellency*, 68.

¹²⁰ Ellis, *His Excellency*, 68.

¹²¹ There are reasons that historians cite for Washington’s appointment that range from his physical presence, his arrival at the Congress in a full military uniform, the wealth of Virginia, and his leadership qualities. For more explanation of these arguments consult Joseph J. Ellis’ *His Excellency: George Washington*, (New York: Knopf, 2004), 67-70; John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 124- 127.

¹²² French, 284.

service.¹²³ Barry Schwartz argues that Washington's appointment reflected more the colonies' need for leadership than Washington's achievements. As Schwartz argues:

Washington was virtually deified by his generation, but there is no apparent reason why he should have been. Although Washington was... intelligent and accomplished, he was neither a brilliant nor a self-confident man, nor was his experience precisely suited to the needs of this time.¹²⁴

But Washington did have a reputation for bringing British-style order and organization to his troops, something the Congress needed in their fledgling army.

Washington had a great affinity for the British military structure. As a leader in the French and Indian War, he had "seemed determined to become more British than the British."¹²⁵ Interviewing senior British officers during the French and Indian War, Washington became convinced of "the importance of self-control, consistency, distance from subordinates, and strictness in dealing with enlisted men."¹²⁶ Fred Anderson explains Washington forcefully implemented these values during the Revolution because "he longed to meet... [the British] army he respected, and for years had sought to emulate, on equal terms."¹²⁷ Therefore, the organizational reforms that Washington made to the army were of no surprise. Washington clearly was appointed to both bring order to the army and to unite the army, two goals that he achieved.

Washington was a Southerner, and his appointment reflected, in part, interest in tying the colonies together. In a time when colonial unity was not guaranteed, Congress sought to unify

¹²³ Don Higginbotham, "George Washington: Ambition, Accomplishment and Acclaim," in *George Washington Remembers: Reflections on the French and Indian War*, ed. Fred Anderson (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 68.

¹²⁴ Barry Schwartz, "George Washington and the Whig Concept of Heroic Leadership," *American Sociological Review* 48.1 (1983): 20.

¹²⁵ Anderson, "The Hinge of the Revolution," 42.

¹²⁶ Anderson, "The Hinge of the Revolution," 43.

¹²⁷ Anderson, "The Hinge of the Revolution," 43.

the colonies in the fight against the British. With the main nexus of fighting in Boston, Congress sought a way to extend the cause outside of Boston and activate the rest of the colonies.

Appointing Washington did just that. As a highly respected Southerner, he “would broaden support for the war, pulling the Chesapeake provinces and perhaps the more southerly ones into the fray.”¹²⁸ This was essential, for if Congress was going to sanction the creation of an army, it was important that that army represented and protected all of the colonies. If John Hancock, a delegate from Massachusetts and the president of the Second Continental Congress had been elected to Commander in Chief, as he hoped to be, the conflict would have been centered in Boston with questionable support outside of New England. But the Congress was clear not to elect Hancock; they chose Washington instead for he would bring order to, and broaden support for, the Continental Army.

Arriving in Cambridge, Washington sought to unite and organize the forces, but faced the unique resolution of New Englanders. In 1789, looking back at the war, George Washington wrote in a draft of his inaugural address, that pointed that during the first few months of 1775, the colonists had a “secret resource.... unknown to our enemy... the unconquerable resolution of our Citizens.”¹²⁹ But this unconquerable resolution that Washington speaks about was one of the main challenges he faced during 1775. He, too, at times could not figure out how to conquer the resolution of his men, which was deeply embedded in Cambridge as evidenced in the ineffective communication, the loose hierarchical leadership, and the constant disorderly conduct.

¹²⁸ John Ferling, *John Adams: A Life* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 127.

¹²⁹ “Papers of George Washington,” [gwpapers.Virginia.edu](http://gwpapers.virginia.edu), last modified 2011, <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/inaugural/fragments.html>.

In Washington's first nine days in Cambridge, he learned quickly that there was a need for new systems of communication and records, and more broadly, a new organizational structure. Arriving in camp on July 3, 1775, he issued a single general order the same day that asked colonels and commanding officers "to make two returns of the number of men in their respective regiments; distinguishing such as are sick, wounded or absent on forlough: And also the quality of ammunition each Regiment now has."¹³⁰ This order which, with "a regular army would have been done in an hour," took eight days.¹³¹ He did not conceal his frustrations in this process. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee eight days later, Washington wrote about the results of his initial order, noting that "I do not doubt but the Congress will think me very remiss in not writing to them sooner but you may rely on it yourself, and I beg you to assure them, that it has never been in my power till this day."¹³² Washington's frustration was understandable, given the loose relationships between military leaders and men in Cambridge; order and communication could not be established.

Upon arrival in Cambridge, Washington was struck at the informal hierarchy between men and officers. He observed that men had little respect for their commanders and came and went as they pleased; they shot their guns for the "pleasure of the sound," and bathed freely in the Charles, often in front of women.¹³³ Mirroring Washington's observations, Joseph Warren, an active Massachusetts patriot, observed that the Continental Army was comprised of the "the most

¹³⁰ Washington, George. General Orders, July 3, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington. Revolution Series*, Philander D. Chase, ed. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1985), 1:49. [Referenced from here on as WP].

¹³¹ Washington, to Richard Lee, July 10, 1775, WP, 1: 98

¹³² Washington, to Lee, WP, 1:98.

¹³³ Middlekauff, 144; Washington, General Orders, August 22, 1775, WP, 1:346.

undisciplined, profligate crew that were ever collected to fight a war.”¹³⁴ And the close relationship between officers and their men made fighting units inefficient. This close relationship, according to John Shy fostered “military inefficiency.”¹³⁵ Colonists often abandoned their units, failed to follow orders, and lacked respect for military leadership. Irrespective of how one defines military inefficiency, it was clearly an issue in Cambridge.

Patriots were drawn independently to the cause by choice, and so they were accordingly vocal in the decisions and actions of the army. As Baron von Stuben, the German-born major general in the Revolutionary War observed, the Continentals “differed from European troops in at least one regard: they wanted to know why they were told to do certain things. Unlike European soldiers who did what they were told, the Continentals asked why.”¹³⁶ Because colonists believed strongly that they were fighting for their own liberty, they were compelled to have a say in their actions, and required justification for their orders. They did not respect the close adherence to order that Washington prescribed. Instead, they made decisions for themselves, irrespective of the collective efforts.

James Kirby Martin argues that during the first phase of the war the forces “had an individual character.”¹³⁷ Men were often found to be “swearing, excessive drinking, assaulting officers, deserting, or bounty jumping.”¹³⁸ While these acts were harmful to the patriot cause, they were at the time more a bother, with little major effect on strategy, than anything else. In contrast, during later stages of the war (post 1776), such acts of defiance “took on more and

¹³⁴ James Kirby Martin, “A ‘Most Undisciplined, Profligate Crew’: Protest and Defiance in the Continental Ranks, 1776- 1783,” in *Arms and Independence*, ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 128.

¹³⁵ John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 37.

¹³⁶ Middlekauff, 145.

¹³⁷ Martin, “A ‘Most Undisciplined Profligate Crew,’” 128.

¹³⁸ Martin, “A ‘Most Undisciplined Profligate Crew,’” 128.

more of a collective (and menacing) character.”¹³⁹ This indiscipline shows, that while soldiers still identified as individuals during 1775; they had the choice to fight or to protest. When Washington arrived in Cambridge, he focused his efforts on reorganizing the force from a loose collection of individuals to a unified fighting force, an army.

In Cambridge, Washington encountered a force that was still grounded in the local militia and crowd traditions. Men organized and fought to protect their community, rather than the collective interests of the colonies. Washington found “not so much a deficient army as an army that worked exactly as the governments that organized it, the officers who led it, and the men who filled its ranks expected it to work.”¹⁴⁰ When Washington encountered the forces at Cambridge, they functioned as they were designed.

Militia units were designed to respond to immediate threats that required quick action rather than organized planned service. To defeat the British, Washington had to fight against that militia tradition. As Fred Anderson phrases it best, Washington needed to “reform a whole set of pernicious Yankee attitudes towards military service, and indeed complex beliefs about the nature of war itself.”¹⁴¹ In changing the structure of the forces, Washington was changing not just the structure of the army; he was also formalizing soldiers’ service, expecting them to abide by formal military hierarchical relationships and standards of conduct.

On his second day in Cambridge, Washington issued a lengthy General Order designed to communicate his vision for the army, which was centered on bringing discipline and order to what was at the time anything but disciplined and orderly. As he wrote, “[i]t is required and expected that exact discipline be observed, and due Subordination prevail thro’ the whole Army,

¹³⁹ Martin, “A ‘Most Undisciplined Profligate Crew,’” 128.128.

¹⁴⁰ Anderson, “The Hinge of Revolution,” 40.

¹⁴¹ Anderson, “The Hinge of Revolution,” 24-25.

as a Failure in these most essential points must necessarily produce extreme Hazard, Disorder, and Confusion; and end in shameful disappointment and disgrace.”¹⁴² To ensure that order “prevailed,” Washington worked from the top down to restructure the forces.

Prior to Washington’s appointment, the units formed in Cambridge functioned very much like political units with democratically elected leaders. As Anderson observes, the leadership in Cambridge was far more concerned with politics than with arms. He writes, “an officer who raised volunteers for his rank had no choice but... ‘to make interest’ with his men, just as a politician standing for election ‘made interest’ with his electors.”¹⁴³ This phenomenon occurred in most units, including a militia unit from Worcester, which found itself without a commanding officer. Reflecting the historical democratic practices of militias, it was decided that appointments would be determined by vote: “the town [Worcester] should elect the officers, and these should elect the field officers.”¹⁴⁴ Because colonists had an active role in appointing officers, there was a close connection between officers and their men. And this close connection often diminished the formal responsibilities of officers, as there was little separation between soldiers and their officers.

This close connection, Washington argued, made it practically impossible to organize an army. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee on August 29, Washington complains that officers were often too busy “curry[ing] favour[s] with the men (by whom they were chosen, & on whose Smiles possibly they may think they may again rely) seems to be one of the principal objectives

¹⁴² Washington, General Orders, Cambridge, July 4th, 1775. WP, 54.

¹⁴³ Anderson, 31.

¹⁴⁴ French, 39.

of their attention.”¹⁴⁵ This was no way to lead an army. So on his second day in camp, he started to redefine the role of military leadership in Cambridge.

On July 4th, in his General Orders, Washington noticed that Proper Notice will be taken of such Officers and Men, as distinguish themselves...[additionally] [a]ll Officers are required and expected to pay diligent Attention, to keep their Men neat and clean... they are also to take care the Necessarys be provided in the Camps and frequently filled up to prevent their being offensive and unhealthy.¹⁴⁶

By highlighting the responsibilities of “Officers and Men” Washington was illuminating the need for leaders to respect the military hierarchy of the army. He was also constructing a new role for military leadership, one based on his generalship and officers’ leadership. But his reforms did not end there. Although he viewed it as a risky move, Washington sought to end the democratic election of men to positions of leadership in the army. In a letter to John Hancock on July 10, 1775, Washington recognized that this was a risky proposition, “but the experiment is dangerous, as the Massachusetts Men under the Priviledge of chusing their own Officers, do not conceive themselves bound if those Officers are disbanded.”¹⁴⁷ Although Washington questioned the commitment of soldiers without their elected leaders, he determined that it was a necessary risk in organizing and uniting the forces in Cambridge.

Just as he was tasked with uniting the colonies, Washington was also responsible for uniting the colonial forces. In his July 4 General Order, Washington clearly connects the men in Cambridge with the troops all along the Atlantic coast. As he writes, “the Troops of several Colonies, which have been raised.... Into their Pay and Service: They are now the Troops of the United Provinces of North America; and it is hoped that all Distinctions of Colonies will be laid aside; so that one and the same spirit may animate the whole.... [in] the most essential service to

¹⁴⁵ Washington, to Richard Henry Lee, August 29th, 1775, WP, 1: 372.

¹⁴⁶ Washington, General Orders, July 4th, 1775, WP, 1:54-55.

¹⁴⁷ Washington, to John Hancock, August 4, 1775, WP 1: 224.

the great and common case in which we are all engaged.”¹⁴⁸ This proclamation of unity may seem only natural given the creation of a national army. However, given the historic independence of the militia units, his proclamation redefined the nature of military service in Boston. Washington effectively displaced the local motives that led many men to Cambridge and replaced those with the abstract “great and common cause in which we are all engaged.”¹⁴⁹ It is unclear, however, if this rhetoric had any significant effect on the men in Cambridge. In spite of his attempts to restructure the force, Washington remained disappointed with the patriots in Cambridge.

After two months of trying ineffectively to institute order in Cambridge. Washington expressed disappointment with the Patriots’ service. On August 20, Washington wrote that the men in Cambridge were an “exceedingly dirty and nasty people” who failed to keep “to their duty and ma[ke] them watchful and vigilant.”¹⁵⁰ Not only did Washington observe that militiamen had little respect for their service, he wrote to Richard Henry Lee on August 29, 1775, that working with these militiamen was one of the largest challenges he had encountered: “It is among the most difficult tasks I ever undertook in my life to induce these people to believe that there is, or can be, danger till the Bayonet is pushed at their breasts... [this is a product of] an unaccountable kind of stupidity in the lower class of these people.”¹⁵¹ Finally, Washington concluded at the close of the summer that he would choose a “respectable army” over the “popular force[s]” of 1775 any day.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ Washington, General Orders, July 4th, 1775, WP, 1:54.

¹⁴⁹ Washington, General Orders, July 4th, 1775, WP, 1:54.

¹⁵⁰ Washington, Letter to Lund Washington, August 20, 1775, WP, 1: 336; Washington, to Richard Henry Lee, August 29, 1775, WP, 1: 372.

¹⁵¹ Washington, to Lee, August 29, 1775. WP, 1: 372.

¹⁵² Anderson, 45.

Washington was increasingly convinced that the men in Cambridge could not and would not fight in a revolution against the British. In an Open Letter to Congress on September 25, 1776, Washington finally concluded that the men in Cambridge, tied to their home, without military skill, and accustomed to acting independently, were not capable of fighting the Revolution. As he wrote:

To place any dependence upon militia, is, assuredly, resting upon a broken staff. Men just dragged from the tender scenes of domestic life - unaccustomed to the din of arms - totally unacquainted with every kind of military skill...makes them timid and ready to fly from their own shadows... Men accustomed to unbounded freedom, and no controul...without which, licentiousness, and every kind of disorder triumphantly reign. To bring Men to a proper degree of Subordination, is not the work of a day, a Month or even a year; and unhappily for us, and the cause we are Engaged in, the little discipline I have been labouring to establish in the Army under my immediate Command, is in a manner done away by having such a mixture of Troops as have been called together within these few Months.¹⁵³

In 1776, Washington had little hope organizing the militia into an effective military force. As this letter indicated, not only were the forces of 1775 unaccustomed to arms, but they were unacquainted with military skills, knew unbound freedom, and showed little self-control.¹⁵⁴

Given this lack of character, Washington, in his letter to Congress, suggested the formation of a standing army. Washington understood the colonists' fears of such a force. Addressing and attempting to calm such fears, Washington wrote: "The Jealousies of a standing Army, and the Evils to be apprehended from one, are remote; and in my judgment, situated and circumstanced as we are, not at all to be dreaded."¹⁵⁵ Washington's request for a standing army suggests that his significant efforts to implement strict military standards in Cambridge had failed. He was unable to establish the professional army he desired.

¹⁵³ Washington, Letter to John Hancock, September 25, 1776, WP, 6:396.

¹⁵⁴ Washington, to Hancock, September 25, 1776, WP, 6:396.

¹⁵⁵ Washington, to Hancock, September 25, 1776, WP, 6:396.

While Washington was appointed to lead the Continental Army, his first task was to establish such an army. Ideally, while the forces assembled in Cambridge, already in arms, would comprise the army, Washington faced numerous, and ultimately overwhelming challenges trying to convert what had been a politically motivated force into a military force. As the fall of 1775 demonstrates, Washington faced an almost impossible task as he tried to construct an army from local men.

Chapter 4: After July

When Washington arrived in Cambridge in July, he had six months to establish an army before the expiration of the first military contracts in December 1775. He worked vigorously through his first two months in camp to define a hierarchical structure between men and officers and to regulate behavior. Washington hoped that this army would be prepared to swiftly defeat the British. For if the Continental Army was not able to defeat the British during the first military contracts, which expired in December, Washington would have to reenlist men and literally reform the army. Although Washington understood the dangers of the December deadline, he initially hoped that victory over the British would be swift, and he would be home by December.

However, the conflict with the British entered a relatively calm period following his arrival in Cambridge, effectively prolonging the conflict and postponing major conflict to 1776. This calm period not only left Washington restless, but his men as well. With little visible need to be removed from their hearth and home, both Washington and his soldiers longed to return home. And so, while Washington had instituted new hierarchical organization, and stricter behavior standards which he saw as necessary to establish an effective fighting force, the newly formed Continental Army remained for the rest of the year in a calm state. Washington learned that as the army remained inactive for the rest of the year, soldiers saw little need to re-enlist or even stay at camp.

When Washington first arrived at Cambridge, the camp was still breathing with the excitement of Bunker Hill, and he quickly turned his attention to preparing the newly formed Continental Army for their next battle, citing reports that “it was highly probably Gage’s Troops

would very Shortly attack our Army”.¹⁵⁶ Noting the dangerous lack of supplies, he stressed that “it (is) of such infinite Importance” that they receive additional supplies immediately.¹⁵⁷

Washington was determined to be prepared for any fight that the British waged. Washington had arrived in Cambridge ready to fight, but the events of 1775 were out of his control.

During the summer of 1775, there was no rumored attack, and Washington grew increasingly frustrated as “soldiers on both sides settled into the monotonous routine of siege warfare,” and seemed to have little interest in combat.¹⁵⁸ On September 21, Washington wrote to John Hancock, president of the Continental Congress that the “State of Inactivity in which this Army has lain for some Time, by no Means corresponds with my Wishes.”¹⁵⁹ This passive state of the army surrounding Boston, led Washington to grow restless. He had little desire to sit around and enjoy the “dull, sometimes sordid routine of camp life.”¹⁶⁰ When Washington first arrived in Cambridge, he wrote his wife Martha that he hoped to be home by the fall.¹⁶¹ But as 1775 continued, Washington realized that the siege was not progressing rapidly and that the Continental Army would be stationed around Boston for far longer than he had initially imagined. As Washington grew restless, so did his men.

Joseph Hodginks, initially from Ipswich, Massachusetts, lamented their passive state. Writing to his wife Sarah on September 8, Joseph described the inactivity at Cambridge: “I have

¹⁵⁶ John Ferling, *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory In the War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 75.

¹⁵⁷ Washington, Letter to Jonathan Trumbull Sr, August 14, 1775, WP, 1:308.

¹⁵⁸ Edward G. Lengel, *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), 113.

¹⁵⁹ Washington, Letter to John Hancock, September 21, 1775, WP, 2:27.

¹⁶⁰ Lengel, 114.

¹⁶¹ Washington, Letter to Martha Washington, June 23, 1775, WP, 1:27.

know news to rite to you only that the Enemy have not yet fired a gun or sent a Bum at our People since I have Ben here Expect a few small arms.”¹⁶²

The dormant state of the army fueled the gradual decline of enthusiasm for the war. As Raphael observes, during the summer and fall of 1775 “little by little, the collective spirit of the people, their furious patriotism, began to dissipate, eclipsed by private lives and personal needs.”¹⁶³ On October 6, Hodginks followed up his previous letter, observing that the men in Cambridge were “Bewicht about getting home.”¹⁶⁴ Hodginks’ letters illustrate the deep pull to return home that the men felt, fueled both by their inactivity in Cambridge and as well for personal and financial reasons. As harvest season arrived in Cambridge men must have felt a particular need to be home. Washington was aware that with little visible need for troops, men saw little tangible reason for their encampment in Cambridge.

So Washington turned his attention to occupying his soldiers’ time. On September 8 he even asked his General Officers, “how then shall we be able to keep Soldiers to their duty... impatient to get home?”¹⁶⁵ This impatient behavior aggravated his frustrations with the forces and on September 21, he went so far as to say that he was surrounded by “mutinous behavior.”¹⁶⁶ The growing disorder in Cambridge fueled Washington’s search for any expedition, battle, or conflict. And thus in an ironic way, the boredom of early 1775 led Washington to seek out conflict; the defensive patriots now turned to the offensive.

Washington now “in a situation which requires us to run all risques,” turned his attention to British colonial holdings, for while the Continental Army could not sail to Britain, they could

¹⁶² Raphael. *A People’s History*, 54.

¹⁶³ Raphael. *A People’s History*, 54.

¹⁶⁴ Raphael. *A People’s History*, 54.

¹⁶⁵ Washington, Circular to the General Officers, September 8, 1775, WP, 1:433.

¹⁶⁶ Washington, Letter to John Langdon, September 21, 1775, WP, 2:31.

attack British territory in the New World.¹⁶⁷ In the last five months of 1775, he sent a ship to Bermuda to gather supplies, he thought of attacking Nova Scotia, he tried to persuade the West Indies to join the colonial efforts, he formed an army of shipping vessels and finally sent men to Canada.¹⁶⁸ Washington staged a major excursion to Canada, the “fourteenth colony” to activate his men, and assert the strength of the Continental Army.¹⁶⁹

Why Quebec?

Canada had become the “fourteenth colony” following the French and Indian war. The Treaty of Paris in 1763, which concluded the war, ceded French control of land east of the Mississippi River (including Canada) to the British. Quebec’s geographic importance, weak military, negligible local support, and substantial supplies must have been factors Washington considered in his decision to send troops to Canada.

Geographically, Quebec was of extreme strategic importance. As the gateway to the St. Lawrence River, if the colonists could seize control of Quebec, they could close off one of the major routes into America for British troops, and protect the Hudson Valley from attack from the north. Additionally, not only was Quebec geographically important, it was also relatively weakly protected.

A meager “small British garrison” protected Quebec.¹⁷⁰ The relatively weak military presence made Washington believe that Quebec simply “awaited conquering.”¹⁷¹ As he wrote to John Hancock, “Quebeck in its present defenseless State must fall into his Hands an easy Prey.” He continues, noting that after making “all possible inquiry... [I] Found nothing... to deter me

¹⁶⁷ Washington, Letter to Nicholas Cooke, August 4, 1775, WP, 1:221.

¹⁶⁸ Dave Richard Palmer, *The Way of the Fox: American Strategy in the War for America 1775-1783* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975), 98-99.

¹⁶⁹ Palmer, 99.

¹⁷⁰ Palmer, 99.

¹⁷¹ Palmer, 99.

from proceeding.”¹⁷² While Washington does not expand upon his specific research, he must have gambled that the local French were not likely to support the British troops.

Following the Quebec Act of October 7, 1774, the British established political control over Canada, with the creation of a royal governor and council institutionalizing their governance.¹⁷³ But since the Crown did now actively govern the territory, it remained relatively weakly defended and supported.¹⁷⁴ Further, due to the changing political control of Canada, from French to British, there were weak allegiances between the French Canadians and the British Crown. And while there was a “huge French population there... [that was] not necessarily pro-American, [it] was believed to be deeply anti-British.”¹⁷⁵ Washington hoped that this relative neutrality would enable his men to enter Canada.

Therefore, when Benedict Arnold, who had gained fame in his previous capture of Fort Ticonderoga and its guns, volunteered to lead a march to Quebec to attain additional supplies, Washington supported him. Arnold argued that a siege of Quebec would be “advantageous” for the colonists, a great military asset, but the colonists would be able to gather there and with “provisions of every kind [which were] plenty” which could supply the colonists.¹⁷⁶

Together, these factors convinced Washington to send a force to Quebec in an effort to both secure the St. Lawrence River, and gather supplies. Washington decided prior to his arrival in Cambridge to “order preparations.... ‘To facilitate any future operation’” into Canada.¹⁷⁷ With

¹⁷² Washington, Letter to John Hancock, September 21, 1775, 2:27.

¹⁷³ “Quebec Act” <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/related/cqa.htm>

¹⁷⁴ Palmer, 99.

¹⁷⁵ Robert Harvey, *“A Few Bloody Noses” : The Realities and Mythologies of the American Revolution* (Woodstock: Overlook, 2002), 179.

¹⁷⁶ Desjardin, Thomas. *Through a Howling Wilderness: Benedict Arnold’s March to Quebec, 1775*. (New York: St. Martin Press, 2006), 11.

¹⁷⁷ Palmer, 99.

Congress's support, Washington began to work with Benedict Arnold in August 1775 to plan an expedition to Quebec.

During the third week in August, Washington worked with Benedict Arnold to gather the supplies and men for an expedition to Quebec. In a letter to Phillip Schyler on August 20, Washington estimated that he could spare "a Detachment of 1,000 to 1,200 men."¹⁷⁸ Two weeks later, on September 5, Washington's General Orders called for a regiment comprised of "active woodsmen, well acquainted with bateaus."¹⁷⁹ Following this General Order, the men in Cambridge surprised both Washington and defied recruitment expectations, and rushed to volunteer for this expedition. It is unclear why specifically men felt so compelled to enlist, though it is plausible that, given the growing inactivity of forces in Cambridge, men were simply bored and itching for action.

Arnold left Cambridge on September 11 with 1,050 men from Massachusetts and New York.¹⁸⁰ While he had consulted with Maine residents such as Reuben Colburn and Samuel Goodwin to gather information about the Kennebec River, he was unprepared for the journey.¹⁸¹ The trials of Arnold's expedition to Quebec are numerous. During the arduous path to Quebec, the expedition suffered from the daily physical challenges, food shortages, and desertions. On September 30, the nineteenth day of the journey, Arnold had 950 men, but this number quickly decreased thereafter.¹⁸² Most dramatically, on October 25, Colonel Roger Enos and his battalion of 450 men defected, turning back to Boston, leaving Arnold with 500 men, less than half the

¹⁷⁸ Washington, Letter to Philip Schuyler, August 20, 1775, WP, 1: 332.

¹⁷⁹ Washington, General Orders, September 5th, 1775, WP, 1:415.

¹⁸⁰ Ferling, 88; Lengel, 113.

¹⁸¹ Desjardin, 13.

¹⁸² Ferling, 92.

force he had leaving Cambridge.¹⁸³ Additionally, by the time that Arnold finally reached Quebec, and even with the addition of General Montgomery's expedition (which had traveled up along the Hudson River to join Arnold to seize Quebec), the forces that gathered on December 31 were comprised of around 300 men, nearly a third of the forces that had set out for Quebec months earlier.¹⁸⁴

The Quebec campaign was unsuccessful for a number of reasons. The forces were a fraction of what Washington initially planned and envisioned. But more importantly, due to the expiring contracts of the soldiers on December 31, Arnold and Montgomery were forced to attack before their men deserted their positions (remember that the military contracts expired at the end of December). Montgomery tried to persuade men to reenlist; but he was unsuccessful. Rather, while Montgomery pleaded "with them to sign on only until April 15 or until reinforcements arrived, which might be as early as late January.... there were few takers,"¹⁸⁵ On December 31, when Arnold and Montgomery tried to besiege Quebec, everything went wrong. "Montgomery was shot dead; Arnold was seriously wounded in the leg; dozens of other men became casualties or prisoners."¹⁸⁶ Historian James Kirby Martin goes so far as to argue that this attack on Quebec was a "hopeless" endeavor that neither Arnold nor the patriot forces ever recovered from.¹⁸⁷

When news reached Cambridge of the defeat at Quebec and the death of Montgomery, Washington blamed the weak commitment of men for the failure. On February 1, 1776, Washington wrote to Joseph Reed, a Pennsylvania delegate in Congress and the Continental

¹⁸³ Ferling, 93.

¹⁸⁴ Ferling, 95.

¹⁸⁵ Ferling, 96.

¹⁸⁶ James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763- 1789* (Arlington Heights: Harlan Davidson, 1982), 72.

¹⁸⁷ Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*, 73.

military secretary, that “the evils arising from the short, or even any limited enlistments of the troops, are greater, and more extensively hurtful than any person... can form any idea of.”¹⁸⁸ The short enlistment of soldiers had led to the premature and unsuccessful assault of Quebec. If Montgomery had been able to extend soldiers service into 1776, his forces could have waited till reinforcements arrived. But instead, his men voted to return home at the end of their service. By choosing to return home on January 1, men effectively placed the importance of their personal need over the collective needs of the Continental Army. If the men who arrived in Quebec had been committed to the Siege of Quebec, men would have voted to stay, extended their enlistment, and waited to plan a more successful attack, as opposed to a forced premature attack. With the expiration of the army’s first contracts at the end of December 1775, the entire Continental Army had to reenlist men.

Washington was painfully aware of the impact of soldiers’ contracts expiring at the end of 1775. Through the fall of 1775 Washington wrote numerous letters to express his growing frustrations with the men in Cambridge, their weak commitment to the Continental Army, and their failure to reenlist for 1776. On November 28, he wrote that the “dirty, mercenary spirit [which] pervades the whole.... [combined with the] dearth of publick spirit and want of virtue... will prove the destruction of the army.”¹⁸⁹ Washington was sure that the expiring contracts of 1775 would destroy the Continental forces. And he was right. While Washington was ultimately able to rebuild the army, it was not easy.

1776 brought new developments to the Revolution. As contracts expired on December 31st, many men returned home. Additionally, when the British officially abandoned Boston on

¹⁸⁸ William B. Reed, *Life and correspondence of Joseph Reed, military secretary of Washington, at Cambridge; Adjutant-General of the Continental Army* (Charlestown: Nabu, 2010), 149.

¹⁸⁹ Washington. Letter to Colonel Joseph Reed, November 28, 1775, 2: 449.

March 17, the siege of Boston concluded, and many colonists who had been displaced in the spring of 1775 simply left. As colonists returned home, the nature of enlistment changed. For in 1776, soldiers fought to protect the budding nation, rather than their community.

1775 had proved that when men were both in close proximity to their home and to the enemy, they would fight ferociously. But absent this local connection and threat to their community, men had little interest in fighting. This was evidenced by both the high rate of desertion in the army, and as well, the weak rate of reenlistment between 1775 and 1776.

Conclusion

This thesis has explored the foundation, formation, and subsequent disintegration of the enthusiasm and widespread support for the Revolutionary cause in 1775. While much has been written about the first few months of 1775, historiography has largely focused on either the role of Founding Fathers or popular forces independently of each other. But the events of 1775 prove that these two groups were intimately connected. For while the popular forces sparked the revolutionary movement, the formal leadership struggled as they were tasked to convert a local informal political uprising into a formal national military force. Eventually, as 1775 closed in Quebec, it became clear to General Washington and others that their attempts to leverage the Cambridge encampment into a fighting Continental Army had been largely unsuccessful.

With the expiration of the army's first military contracts on January 1, and the conclusion of the Siege of Boston on March 17, 1776, men who had fought in 1775, or who had been displaced, returned home. When they were asked to reenlist in the army, they declined, for they had no motivation to, they had returned home. Soldiers had mobilized in the first instance to protect and defend their communities, but as the conflict became more national in scope their interest waned.

This is not to say that men did not continue to enlist in the army. There are a plethora of journals and diaries such as Joseph Plumb Martin's which document the lives of soldiers who enlisted in 1776 for the duration war. But the men who enlisted in 1776 were committed to an army for the protection of the colonies, in contrast to the collective forces of 1775 that were bound to, and motivated by, their separate local allegiances.

The fleeting enthusiasm and brief service of New Englanders in 1775 highlights the importance of integrating formal and informal systems of protection. During the first few months

of 1775 New England society grew with unrest as Patriots from all classes united to protect their communities. But with Washington's appointment, the local threats that had originally compelled patriots to fight no longer existed; it had been displaced by the formal Continental Army focused on protecting all the colonies. The widespread deification of the "citizen soldier" must be reconsidered. For it was not Patriots' identity as a "citizen soldier" that created the amazing rush to arms in early 1775, it was, rather, the convergence of crowds and militias. Next to the Minute Man statue in Concord, there should be another statue of his unit comprised of family, neighbors, and friends, walking back home from Cambridge as they returned home, still with a plow in one hand and a musket in the other.

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