In a Massacre, the Seeds of a Civil War

Americans slaughtered their countrymen in a bloody battle in South Carolina

By Linda L. Creighton

It was an improbable encounter in sweltering heat. Hard-charging British Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton had driven his force of nearly 270 American Tories over a hundred miles on foot and horseback in 54 hours, hoping to catch rebel soldiers heading home after their failure to rescue Charleston, S.C.

But the sudden and unexpected skirmish in woodlands in the Waxhaw area in northern South Carolina became a grisly footnote of another war fought during the Revolution—an American civil war. "In the South, it became common to have Americans against Americans, with communities and even families divided just as in the later Civil War in the 1860s," says John Ferling, the author of 10 books on early American history, including *Almost a Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence.*

"IN THE SOUTH, IT BECAME COMMON TO HAVE AMERICANS AGAINST AMERICANS."

LOYALISTS' LEADER. Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton

After their defeat at the Battle of Saratoga in New York, the British turned to a "southern strategy" based on recruiting loyalists into provincial units—Americans often commanded by a British officer. Ties to England were stronger in the South because of a long-standing trade in tobacco and rice, as well as a British promise to let loyalists retain their slaves. At one point in 1780, there were more loyalists serving in the British Army than American patriots serving in the Continental Army.

The details of the Battle of Waxhaws, as recounted by an American witness, are still sickening 200 years later. By the time the British took Charleston in May of 1780, they believed they had nearly won the war, with American patriots on the run. Tarleton's loyalist forces caught up to the rear guard of roughly 340 northbound Virginia regulars about 3 p.m. on May 29, 1780, at a rural crossroads.

"Last extremity." Tarleton dispatched Capt. David Kinloch bearing a white, cease-fire flag to offer terms of surrender to Col. Abraham Buford. "Resistance being vain, to prevent the effusion of human blood, I make offers which can never be repeated," Tarleton's note told Buford. Tarleton proposed the same terms accepted by roughly 5,500 surrendering defenders of Charleston 17 days earlier.

Buford rejected the offer, vowing to "defend myself to the last extremity." Tarleton's bugler sounded the charge, unleashing a full-scale cavalry and infantry charge on the larger American force, which was struggling to form a defensive line. Buford's men withheld their musket fire until the thundering loyalist forces came within 10 yards of their flimsy line, but the rebels' close-range firing failed to stem the attack. With no time to reload their muskets, they could not effectively defend themselves as the sabers of the British cavalrymen slashed savagely into their heads, arms, and torsos.

"Tarleton's men just chopped them into pieces," says Ferling. Overwhelmed, many of the patriots laid down their arms and attempted to surrender.

Buford dispatched a flag of surrender toward the British lines, "expecting the usual treatment sanctioned by civilized warfare," an American field surgeon, Robert Brownfield, recalled. But as Tarleton prepared to receive the emissary in the confusion of battle, his horse was hit in the forehead and went down, rolling over on the British commander and giving his comrades the impression that American rebels had attacked under a flag of truce.

The Tory troops set upon the 350 Virginia soldiers with "the horrid yells of infuriated demons," carrying out "indiscriminate carnage never surpassed by the ruthless atrocities of the most barbarous savages," Brownfield wrote. Tarleton's men "went over the ground plunging their bayonets into every one that exhibited any signs of life."

In only 15 minutes, the Tories slaughtered 113 American soldiers and wounded 150. The loyalists suffered only 5 killed and 12 wounded. "The average casualty rate in Revolutionary War fighting was usually 8 or 10 percent," says Ferling. "At Waxhaws, it was 75 percent [for the Virginians], a massacre by anyone's standards."

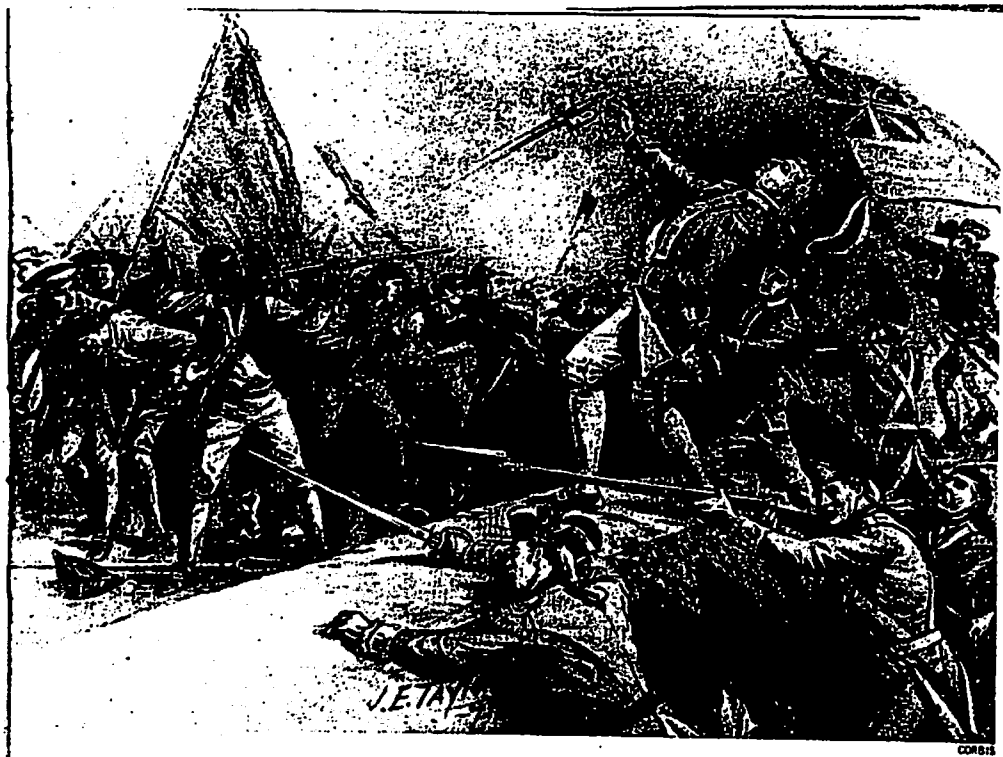
A great partisan war began in the backwoods of the South. Rebels formed guerrilla bands that came out of the swamps and attacked British patrols and supply lines, completely changing the dynamics of the war. By the end of August, Lt. Gen. Charles Cornwallis, the British commander in the South, concluded that South Carolina was in total rebellion. "In the aftermath, massacres and terror were practiced more by Americans than by the British," observes Ferling. "American patriots charged into battle against American loyalists shouting 'Tarleton's quarter!' rather like 'Remember Pearl Harbor!'"

During a 65-minute battle at Kings Mountain in South Carolina four months after Waxhaws, patriot militia annihilated a force of about 1,000 loyalists, killing or wounding over 300, many after they had surrendered. Only one British soldier, the commander, was killed; the rest of the dead, on both sides, were Americans. ●

DID YOU KNOW...

An estimated **25,000 people died** in military service during the Revolutionary War, far more from disease than from combat. Many of those who fell to illness were prisoners of war housed in filthy ships off New York.

SIR JOSHUA REYNOLDS. *COLONEL BANASTRE TARLETON.* NATIONAL GALLERY (LONDON) / BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY



CORBIS

BATTLE. A black soldier is credited with killing a British major at Bunker Hill.

For Blacks, No Clear Choice

African-Americans ended up on both sides of the war

By Elisabeth Goodridge

Early on, it looked as though the issue of African-Americans serving in the Continental Army would be resolved simply enough. Only days after taking command in 1775, Gen. George Washington decreed that no black, free or enslaved, could be recruited to fight.

As a Virginian and slave owner, Washington was reacting to southerners' fear that arming blacks would lead to slave rebellions. Additionally, many white soldiers expressed disdain at the notion of fighting alongside men they considered inferior. So a deal was struck: Those free blacks serving in northern regiments, most of which first fought in state and local militias, would be able to finish their terms of service. Then Washington would have an all-white Army.

But his plan didn't last long. Military realities soon forced him to reverse course, and blacks would fight on both sides of the Revolutionary War. Everything from a drastic shortage of soldiers to the differing colonial economies affected which side blacks ended up on, but by far the most important factor was the promise of freedom.

FOR SLAVES, THE PROMISE OF FREEDOM DREW TENS OF THOUSANDS TO THE BRITISH SIDE.

For both armies, the need for manpower trumped most other calculations. In November 1775, Lord Dunmore, the colonial governor of Virginia, issued a decree that infuriated colonists. "I do hereby further declare all indented servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels,) free, that are able and willing to bear arms, they joining His Majesty's Troops."

It would be a monumental moment in the Revolution's history, says Sylvia Frey, a Tulane University historian and author of *Water From the Rock: Black Resistance in a Revolutionary Age*. "The proclamation had more the psychological impact than the military impact. It created the image of the black warrior who was willing and capable to fight for freedom."

For the British Army, Dunmore's reasoning was twofold. Escaped slaves would bring economic hardship to their rebel masters and strengthen the ranks of the British Army. For slaves, the promise of freedom drew tens of thousands to the British side. "Whenever there is a war that the masters are involved in, the enslaved people take advantage of the situation," says Edward Rugemer, a Yale University assistant professor of history and African-American studies. "The American Revolution was no different."

Dunmore's decision, however, did not indicate an absence of bigotry. Blacks were generally barred from fighting alongside loyalist soldiers, and most of the newly freed slaves—men and women—were relegated to manual labor. They built fortifications in Savannah, Ga., foraged neighboring towns for provisions, worked as cooks and servants for British officers, and plied the rivers of the South as boat pilots.

On the rebel side, meanwhile, the Colonies' inability to fill soldier quotas forced Washington in January 1777 to retract his decision barring free blacks. Roughly a year later, enough slaves in Rhode Island—promised freedom in exchange for military service—enlisted to fill two battalions. Most northern colonies soon followed suit. In a common practice, runaway slaves passed themselves off as free to join up. Often, particularly in Virginia, slaves fought as substitutes for their masters.

Deep South. For South Carolina and Georgia, it was a different story. Even with increasing pressure from Congress for additional manpower, those colonies would not arm slaves. In fact, many South Carolina rebels pledged loyalty to King George III to keep their slaves.

In the end, an estimated 5,000 African-Americans picked up arms to fight for independence, while many, many more worked as manual laborers. "They made a difference in terms of the size of the Continental Army," says Adele Logan Alexander, an associate history professor at George Washington University. "Washington, who was a brilliant general, understood that you could not have the disruptive impact of all those people going over to the British."

Once the Treaty of Paris was signed, ending the fighting, the fate of African-Americans would vary as much as their role in the war. Many who fought for the crown fled with the British Army. Some headed to the Caribbean while others left for Nova Scotia, London, or even a new colony in Sierra Leone.

Some who remained began to petition local and state governments for equal rights. "You have a sixth of the total population that is nonwhite," Alexander says. "And these people are starting to hear all this stuff about freedom and wondering why it shouldn't apply to them."

The Revolution did help launch an emancipation movement that would outlaw slavery in the North. But slavery became further entrenched in the South, and many decades would pass before the Declaration of Independence's assertion that "all men are created equal" would be applied universally. ●

The Unlikely Role of a Patriot Pirate Navy

Privateers whipped the British, and some amassed great fortunes to boot

By Robert H. Patton

It began offhandedly in the fall of 1775. Unable to attack British-occupied Boston because of shortages of cannons and gunpowder, George Washington observed the flow of enemy supplies into Boston harbor and wondered if intercepting a British weapons ship might help replenish his meager armory and uplift his army's spirit.

Offering a percentage of the spoils as inducement to the crews, he dispatched several armed schooners to prowl Massachusetts Bay. In their hunger for loot, the schooners mistakenly snatched a number of patriot vessels before capturing a British transport carrying tons of munitions. Word spread that the seamen had made their fortunes. Yet Washington's joy at the windfall didn't change his low opinion of the colonials involved. Of the lowly shipboard "tars" and the commercial agents who outfitted the schooners, he said, "I do believe there is not on earth a more disorderly set."

The last of Washington's schooners left government service in 1777. In their place were a fledgling Continental Navy and a marauding horde of civilian privateers, essentially legalized pirates who were permitted under international law to plunder the enemy's commercial ships.

Though the Continental Navy launched only a handful of warships during the Revolution, more than 2,000 privateers sailed from colonial ports. They seized 600 ships in American waters and hundreds more in the North Atlantic, as well as in the West Indies, then a teeming marketplace for New World commodities and African slaves. In Britain, privateering caused the price of imports and maritime insurance to soar. Newspaper editorials denounced the American "pyrates," and merchants wondered, "Where is the boasted navy of our country?"

In fact, the Royal Navy captured or destroyed hundreds of American privateers in bloody mismatches of firepower and seamanship. But the payday was deemed worth the risk. One success, shrugged the Philadelphia financier Robert Morris, an avid investor, "will pay for two, three, or four losses." The crews themselves were no less bullish. One New Hampshire seaman, just 14 years old, collected a ton of sugar, 40 gallons of rum, and $100 in gold from the proceeds of one captured ship. Although a six-week privateering jaunt turned into two years of combat and harsh imprisonment for a Connecticut teenager, he astonished his family by hopping another privateer two days after staggering home. He ended the war a wealthy man.

These ambitious mariners ultimately wore down an enemy whose military superiority was strained by the commitments of building a global empire. Benjamin Franklin, America's first emissary to France and a strong supporter of privateering, had no illusions about defeating the Royal Navy, but he aimed to prolong the sea war in order to weaken British resolve. "We expect to make their merchants sick of a contest in which so much is risked and nothing gained."

Franklin devoted himself to aiding privateersmen jailed in Britain. Their plight had become dire after Parliament voted in 1777 to deny them legal rights typically granted prisoners of war. Presaging the current controversy over the rights of detainees at Guantánamo Bay, Britain allowed rebels captured at sea to be held without trial or any prospect of exchange.

Tables turned. Parliament also legalized Britain's own privateers, and French trade ships inevitably fell prey to them. In 1776, French officials had dismissed British complaints about American privateers with amusement. "Shall we say they are pirates? They do not commit any acts of piracy against us." But by the fall of 1777, the French were the ones lodging complaints about hijacked cargoes.

Privateering's casualty toll is hard to calculate. But male populations in seaports from New Hampshire to Maryland were decimated after the war, and public records cite countless men missing at sea. Certainly, thousands died under the guns of British warships, and most of the 12,000 Americans who perished on the infamous prison ships anchored off New York were civilian mariners, their bodies thrown overboard or shoveled under the sandy banks of what is now the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

None of this detracts from the courage and sacrifice of the Continental Navy. But even the navy's most ardent commander, John Paul Jones, conceded that naval service couldn't compete with privateering's loose discipline, better pay, shorter cruises, and explicit permission to avoid tangling with enemy warships.

Indeed, the privateering industry tapped the same vein of self-interest and comradeship that had led the Colonies to seek independence in the first place. It bolstered the battered wartime economy by supporting shipbuilders as well as legal officials who settled captured prizes. It sparked wild financial speculation and created fortunes that survive to this day.

Some of the investors had already been rich and simply added privateering to their wartime portfolios.

ONE SEAMAN COLLECTED A TON OF SUGAR, 40 GALLONS OF RUM, AND $100 IN GOLD FROM JUST ONE PRIZE.

PIRATES. An American privateer seizes a British ship.

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DID YOU KNOW...

As revered as he was as president and military commander, **George Washington** had to put up with detractors' unfounded rumors that he had **illegitimate sons**, one of them reported to be his treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton.

But most were lower-class hustlers who bet all on a dicey enterprise and emerged as the new nation's economic elite.

Some waterfront magnates entered the highly profitable slave trade. Many transports sent from New England to Africa to collect slaves for delivery to the American South were former privateer warships or converted prizes. Three fifths of them hailed from Rhode Island, a booming privateer center from the earliest days of the rebellion.

The key factor behind privateering's growth from a New England fad to a trans-Atlantic phenomenon, from small-time to big business, was that its lowliest seamen and richest investors pursued it for the same reason—to make money and whip the British, too. In that regard, it opens a window on Revolutionary society that is instantly recognizable to our modern sensibility, for the enterprise blended capitalism and patriotism, selfishness and public service. It was a difficult balance, whose shifts and moral accommodations constitute a basic theme of American life both in 1776 and today. ●

Patton is the author of Patriot Pirates: The Privateer War for Freedom and Fortune in the American Revolution *(Pantheon, 2008).*

British Might Meets Yankee Ingenuity

The American Revolution paved the way for modern submarine warfare

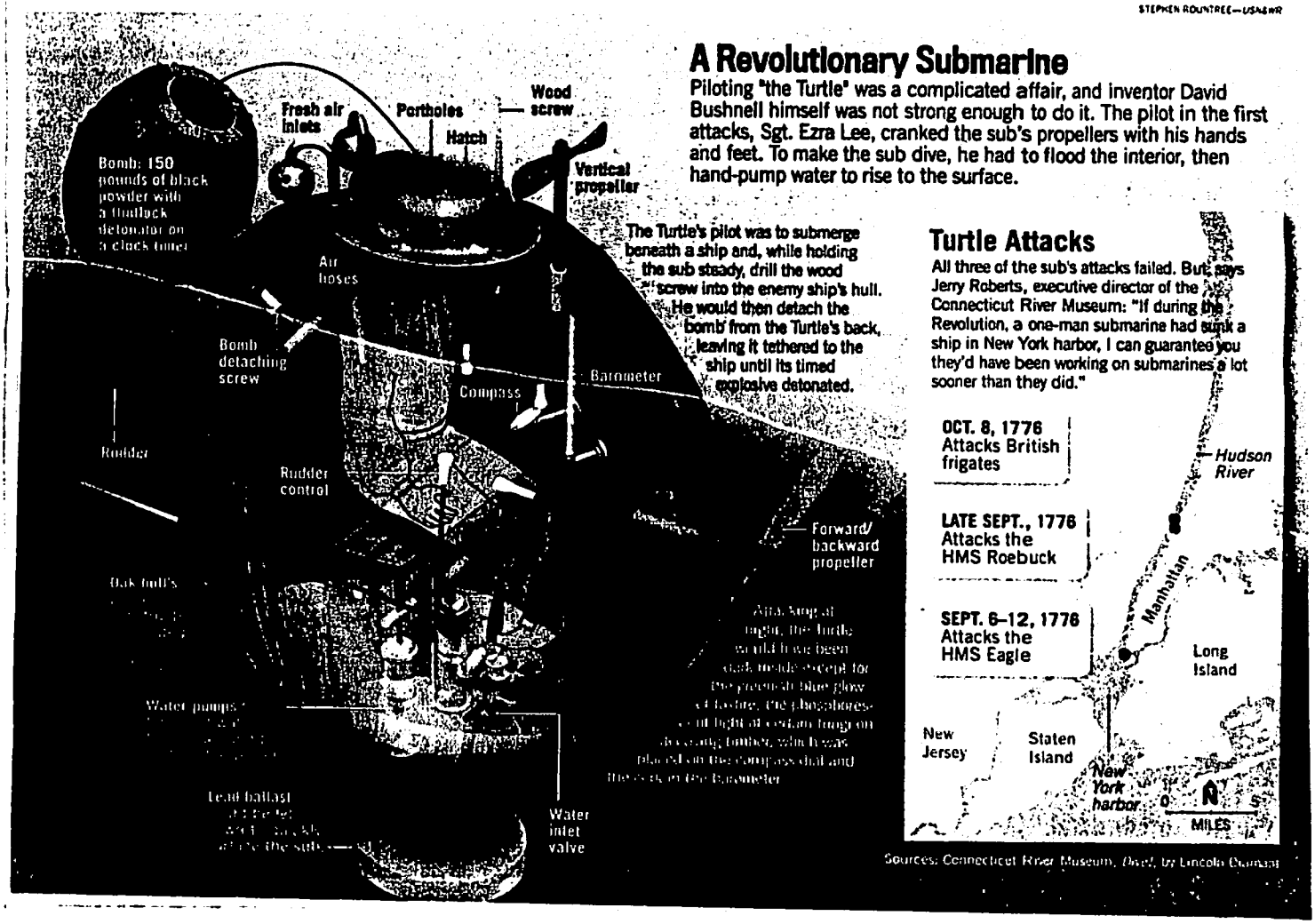
By Stephen Rountree

The Continental Army was outnumbered in its defense of New York. A British fleet of at least 200 ships lay anchored in New York harbor to support the invasions of Long Island and, later, Manhattan. So Gen. George Washington, who reportedly believed underwater attacks to be "ungentlemanly," reluctantly agreed to try something new—a "Water Machine" invented by David Bushnell of Saybrook, Conn. On the night of Sept. 6, 1776, Ezra Lee climbed into the first submarine used in battle. Pilot, crew, and propulsion system—he worked the craft's cranks and pumps with his hands and feet—Lee was "one man against Goliath," says Jerry Roberts, executive director of the Connecticut River Museum.

Lee maneuvered the tiny sub, called "the Turtle," under the keel of the 64-gun British flagship, HMS Eagle. He was to drill a screw into the Eagle's hull and attach a bomb, which was timed to detonate after the Turtle had moved safely away.

In the end, Lee failed to secure the explosive. As morning dawned, he retreated, jettisoning the bomb. It exploded in the harbor, destroying no ships but blasting open the door to submarine warfare. ●

STEPHEN ROUNTREE—USA&WR



Sources: Connecticut River Museum, *Dictionary of* by Lincoln Diamant

from his leg," Palmer writes, "but his heart remained full of rancor."

Much of his anger focused on civilian leaders in Congress who stinted on supplies for the military and failed to acknowledge the contributions made by fighting patriots. "How can Congress allow this army to starve in a land of plenty?" he penned indignantly. With popular support for the American cause waning, Arnold felt that the country was worse off than it had been before the Revolution.

Washington appointed Arnold military commander of Philadelphia in June 1778, his disability preventing another field commission. As he badgered Congress on behalf of veterans and families, Arnold's contempt for the architects of the Revolution hardened. He was infuriated by what he saw as politically motivated accusations that he had misused his military powers. "Having made every sacrifice of fortune and blood, and become a cripple in the service of my country, I little expected to meet the ungrateful returns I have received from my countrymen," he wrote to Washington.

Treason. Unfairly convicted on and reprimanded for two misdemeanor counts of dereliction of duty, Arnold was disgraced at the hands of men he blamed for corrupting the Revolution. Soon afterward, he wrote his first treasonous letter to British Maj. John André. "The only sensible course, in Arnold's mind, was to return his political loyalty to the British parent nation before everything was lost," says Martin.

Unaware of his deep unhappiness, Washington granted Arnold command of West Point, a crucial defense. In secret code letters, Arnold plotted to sell West Point to the enemy for 20,000 British pounds (as much as $3 million in today's dollars). But Major André was intercepted with plans to West Point in his boot. Tipped off, Arnold escaped.

The nation quickly turned against its hero. "Washington knew that they had to destroy this guy top, bottom, and sideways," says Martin, "and forever associate him with treason." André was hanged and Arnold erased from military records. With astonishing speed, his name was linked with Satan's, an example for anyone tempted to switch sides. "The tragedy of Benedict Arnold is that his incredible acts on behalf of the cause of liberty have been washed away and basically forgotten," says Martin.

Arnold received a commission from Britain, along with his 20,000 pounds, and he led raids on Virginia and New London, Conn., before decamping with his new wife and baby to London, where he was not embraced. "Nobody likes a traitor, even if he's your traitor," observes Palmer. He died in 1801, his war injuries dogging him to the end.

Palmer, while he was superintendent of West Point, occasionally walked to the chapel in early evening, stopping just above the choir loft where 12 black marble shield-shaped plaques gleam in the low light. Each of the memorials to generals of the American Revolution has four engraved lines: name, date of birth, rank, and date of death. The last has only two lines: "1741" and "Major General." True to George Washington's orders issued so many years ago, the name of Benedict Arnold does not appear. ●

'Town Destroyer' Versus the Iroquois

Powerful Indian villages are razed on the orders of George Washington

By Johannah Cornblatt

By 1779, George Washington had already earned the famous moniker "Father of His Country." But the Iroquois Indians of the time bestowed on Washington another, not-so-flattering epithet: *Conotocarious,* or "Town Destroyer."

This lesser-known title also had its origins in 1779, when General Washington ordered what at the time was the largest-ever campaign against the Indians in North America. After suffering for nearly two years from Iroquois raids on the Colonies' northern frontier, Washington and Congress decided to strike back. From his headquarters in Middlebrook, N.J., Washington authorized the "total destruction and devastation" of the Iroquois settlements across upstate New York so "that country may not merely be *overrun* but *destroyed.*"

The Iroquois, whose tribes had lined up on both sides of the conflict, were too distracted by their own internal divisions to see the crisis coming. By August, the expedition was moving through Iroquois country, meeting almost no resistance. In keeping with explicit orders from Washington, the Americans set ablaze every village in their path. "I am well persuaded," John Sullivan, the leader of the venture, bragged to Congress afterward, "that, except one town situated near the Allegana, about 50 miles from the Chinessee, there is not a single town left in the country of the Five nations." The campaign defeated the loyalist Iroquois army, burned 40 Iroquois villages to ashes, and left homeless many of the Indians, hundreds of whom died of exposure during the following frigid winter.

Crushed power. The Iroquois Confederacy, arguably the strongest Indian government during the colonial period, would never recover. "It was disastrous to the Iroquois," says Barbara Graymont, author of *The Iroquois in the American Revolution.* "It actually crushed their military power." While individual Iroquois tribes continued to launch raids over the next few years, the Revolutionary War broke the power of the Iroquois as a political unit.

When he met with Washington 11 years after the devastating campaign, Chief Cornplanter, who headed the Seneca tribe of the Iroquois, stressed the durability of "Town Destroyer" as the commander in chief's nickname. "And to this day when that name is heard, our women look behind them and turn pale, and our children cling close to the necks of their mothers," Cornplanter said. But the title stuck even tighter than the Seneca chief could have imagined. To this day, "Town Destroyer" is still used as an Iroquois name for the president of the United States. ●

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LOSS. A 1796 engraving of an Iroquois

Always a Traitor, but Once a Patriot

Benedict Arnold was a war hero before he chose a path of betrayal

By Linda L. Creighton

After almost losing a leg for America, Benedict Arnold expected more.

Admired by revolutionary leaders, twice wounded in courageous fighting, Arnold could easily have seen his accomplishments chiseled onto every Revolutionary War memorial in the country. Instead, his name is a historical sneer.

His unforgivable act of treason has often been attributed to a flawed character, but the real story is sadder and more complex. After so many sacrifices, he became disillusioned with the war's progress. Perhaps even more important, he grew deeply mistrustful of the cause's civilian leaders and, ultimately, Arnold himself felt betrayed. "This was a man who began in 1775 as the most ardent of patriots," says James Kirby Martin, a history professor at the University of Houston, "but he grew to feel that turning back to England would be the best course for the country."

Arnold was the second of six children born to a close-knit and prosperous family in Norwich, Conn., in 1741. His mother sought solace in religion and his father in alcohol after three of Arnold's siblings died of diphtheria. Expecting to attend Yale, the 14-year-old was instead apprenticed to an apothecary in New Haven. When his mother died and his father turned into the town drunk, Arnold had an early taste of the disgrace that would color the rest of his life.

Ambition and business acumen propelled Arnold from merchandising to international trade. He had made enough money by 22 to buy back the family homestead sold to pay his father's debts. He resold it at enough of a profit to buy a fleet of ships. In 1767, he married the daughter of a prominent Freemason.

But soon squeezed by oppressive British taxes and policies, which imperiled his livelihood, the short and intense patriot devoted himself to resisting British tyranny by joining and then leading the local chapter of the Sons of Liberty.

Hannibal. Untrained and poorly equipped troops frustrated Arnold, so he used his own money and time to train patriot forces. In May 1775, he helped launch an attack on the small British fort of Ticonderoga. A bloodless victory whetted his appetite for military maneuvering and led to Washington appointing him commander of 1,100 men for a campaign against Quebec. Three hundred fifty miles the troops trudged through rain, snow, and ice, reduced to eating candles, dogs, and shoe leather. The Americans' march through the Maine wilderness earned Arnold the undying respect of his men and the nickname "America's Hannibal." During Arnold's recovery from a musket ball to the leg, Thomas Jefferson praised him before the Continental Congress.

Yet Arnold never truly felt his nation's gratitude. Petty jealousies kept his name off lists of promotions. Inferior military officers generated rumors that pockmarked his reputation. "Virtue is a key concept in the Revolution," says Martin, author of *Benedict Arnold, Revolutionary Hero: An American Warrior Reconsidered*, "and Congress repeatedly insulted Arnold's virtue."

After the triumphant Battle of Saratoga in New York in 1777, his sense of betrayal reached an unbearable pitch, says Dave Palmer, former superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and author of *George Washington and Benedict Arnold: A Tale of Two Patriots*. The courage and stamina shown by Arnold and the Americans impressed the French enough to help convince them to join the war and provide critical support to the struggling rebels. But Arnold received a near-fatal shot to the same leg wounded at Quebec and would never walk again without a limp. While Arnold lay immobilized in an Albany hospital, his commander, Major Gen. Horatio Gates, peevishly claimed credit for the British surrender. "Bedridden and helpless, Benedict Arnold gnashed his teeth at the distressing thought of 'Granny Gates' receiving honors won by the blood and grit of better men," writes Palmer.

Reassessing his sacrifices and rewards, Arnold grew bitter. He was financially strapped, his wife had died during his absence, and his personal honor had been attacked. "Poison may have stopped oozing

Before he soured on the revolutionary cause, Benedict Arnold was a celebrated hero.

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DID YOU KNOW...

Alexander Hamilton was the target of a **blackmail scheme** by the husband of a woman with whom he had had an affair. The blackmailer encouraged the affair and demanded a government job in exchange for his silence.

Rewriting the Legend of Paul Revere

Every schoolchild knows the story, but most of it turns out to be wrong

By Justin Ewers

"Listen, my children, and you shall hear / Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere." With those words, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, in a poem published in 1861, galloped away with the legend of the Boston silversmith who helped start the Revolutionary War. Longfellow's poem, with its romantic image of a lonely rider single-handedly stirring a sleeping countryside to arms, was written more than 40 years after Revere's death for readers facing the specter of another looming conflict. But its simple, inspiring message still resonates: One man, in pursuit of a noble cause, really can make a difference.

The poem has only one flaw, historians say: It is inaccurate in almost every way. "We have heard of poetic license," wrote the town historian of Lexington, Mass., in 1868, "but have always understood that this sort of latitude was to be confined to modes of expression and to the regions of the imagination, and should not extend to historic facts." By abandoning the real story of Paul Revere from beginning to end, Longfellow may have undermined his own message. "He appealed to the evidence of history as a source of patriotic inspiration," writes David Hackett Fischer in *Paul Revere's Ride*, "but was utterly without scruple in his manipulation of historical fact."

JOHN SINGLETON COPLEY, *PAUL REVERE*, FREELANCE PHOTOGRAPHY GUILD / CORBIS

"HE WOULD BE VERY MUCH SURPRISED BY HIS MODERN IMAGE AS THE LONE RIDER OF THE REVOLUTION."

The real-life Paul Revere was not a national hero until Longfellow crafted his poem, though his mythic stature would rise with each passing stanza. In 1775, Revere was one of many Whig activists in Boston who learned that the British garrison was preparing to send troops to seize military supplies in Concord. At the time, Revere was a small but important player in a much larger colonial intelligence network, which dispatched him and one other rider to alert the local militias. The other man, William Dawes, a Boston tanner, took the main road out of town. Revere, meanwhile, arranged with the help of several other people to sneak across the Charles River.

Two if by sea. No part of Longfellow's poem has become more iconic than the image of Revere standing on the riverbank across from Boston, waiting for a signal from the Old North Church. But in fact, Revere's own testimony contradicts this version of the story. In descriptions of his ride he wrote after the battles, Revere himself said he had arranged for the lanterns to be lit while he was still in Boston—two of them, to indicate the British would be traveling by sea—in case he wasn't able to cross the river. The citizens of Charlestown, on the other side, dispatched their own rider to spread the news. Revere was rowed across, found a horse, and followed. He and Dawes arrived in Lexington about 30 minutes apart. Historians aren't sure what became of the third rider.

Later that night, Longfellow's poem describes Revere galloping into Concord to sound the alarm, but Revere said he never made it that far. He left Lexington with Dawes, then met yet another rider, Samuel Prescott, a local doctor, along the way. Before they reached town, the three men were stopped by British officers. Dawes and Prescott got away, but Revere was captured. Prescott was the only one who made it to Concord. Revere, in other words, was neither alone nor the man who completed his mission. "He would be very much surprised by his modern image as the lone rider of the Revolution," writes Fischer.

While Prescott was riding on, Revere spent some anxious moments being interrogated by the British. He defiantly informed his captors that the game was up. "I know what you are after," he told them, "and have alarmed the country all the way up." Revere had been told the British were looking for John Hancock and Samuel Adams, who were in Lexington that night, and he tried to keep the British away from the town. When his captors heard gunshots from the Lexington green—probably from a group of men clearing their muskets before entering the local tavern—Revere was released.

Historians say Longfellow probably knew most of this when he wrote his poem. He had access to Revere's written recollections, but he seems to have ignored them. "I think he told it the way he did because it's simpler and more dramatic," says Patrick Leehey, research director at the Paul Revere House in Boston. Until Longfellow made him a hero, Revere had been little more than a local folk legend, but his stature quickly began to grow. "I think it's fair to say Revere's messenger ride wasn't considered to be anywhere near as important then as it's considered to be now," says Leehey.

Even if Revere wasn't the lone savior of Longfellow's poem, there's no doubt he and his fellow riders were the critical spark that ignited the Revolution. When British troops marched into Lexington that morning, the first shots of the war were fired, leaving eight colonists dead. Thanks to the riders' efforts, militias from all over the countryside were mobilized to take their revenge, driving the British all the way back to Boston. "The Die was cast," John Adams would later write, "the Rubicon crossed." The Revolutionary War had begun. It would take a bit longer for the same to be true of the legend of Paul Revere. ●

Washington's Delaware crossing: a fanciful, but enduring, image

How Washington's Savvy Won the Day

Despite his share of tactical errors, he prevailed as a strategist and a politician

By Jay Tolson

Idolatry has done George Washington a disservice. His popular image as the stolid icon of republican virtues—given earliest form in the cherry tree and other apocryphal stories of Parson Weems—obscures not only the complexity of the man but also his genius for leadership. Ripening fully in his presidency, Washington's gifts first found expression on the battlefields of the American Revolution. As commander in chief of the Continental Army, the Virginia planter and veteran of the French and Indian War did not simply best the world's most formidable fighting machine. He set the template for a new, truly American style of command—a style rightly called leadership.

Yet, says historian Thomas Fleming, author of *Washington's Secret War: The Hidden History of Valley Forge*, "people still don't get Washington." Thanks largely to hagiography and, until recently, a neglect of military history by scholars, most Americans remain unaware of Washington's less obvious strengths, as well as those flaws that made his achievements all the more remarkable.

Political skills. "The fact that he was successful against the best combat officers of his day didn't mean that he was the best commander ever," says Mount Holyoke College historian Joseph Ellis, author of *His Excellency: George Washington*. Washington particularly struggled, Ellis says, when he couldn't see the whole battlefield, devising plans that were often too complicated for execution. Even in the successful surprise attack on Trenton in December 1776, only one of three elements of Washington's force made it across the Delaware River on Christmas Day. But many of the greatest generals in history, including Napoleon, did not in the end do what Washington did: "He won," says Ellis. "And he won because he understood the war, the big picture, including the political context."

"HE WON BECAUSE HE UNDERSTOOD THE WAR, THE BIG PICTURE, INCLUDING THE POLITICAL CONTEXT."

Realism, strategic imagination, adaptability, and political savvy are all aspects of Washington's generalship that more than made up for his tactical deficiencies, as a new batch of political and military histories of the Revolutionary era show. All of those qualities emerged forcefully after the demoralizing defeats in and around New York in the summer of 1776, when the Americans were repeatedly crushed by the forces of Adm. Lord Richard Howe and his brother Gen. William Howe. "In twelve weeks," writes Brandeis University historian David Hackett Fischer in his Pulitzer Prize-winning *Washington's Crossing*, "George Washington lost large parts of three states, and 90 percent of the army under his command."

Yet Washington took cool stock of the situation. Seeing that pitched battles against the larger, better-trained British and Hessian troops were a formula for defeat, Washington wrote to the Continental Congress in September to advocate a defensive war that "should on all occasions avoid a General Ac-

tion or put anything to the risque unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never to be drawn." In addition to formulating his doctrine of a "war of posts"—with smaller forces hitting quickly wherever the enemy set up its bases—Washington stood up to republican idealists like John Adams, who believed that a largely volunteer militia, motivated by the ideals of liberty, should form the core of the war effort. Early defeats had only added to Washington's conviction that militias were inadequate; a disciplined army that would not melt away in the face of artillery and the well-drilled ranks of red-coated soldiers was, in his view, the necessary backbone of a protracted struggle.

Washington's realism extended to his views about the need for a paid force. Passions, he argued, would motivate people for only so long. To believe "among such people as compose the bulk of an Army," Washington wrote in a separate letter to Congress, "that they are influenced by any other principles than those of Interest, is to look for what never did, & I fear never will happen."

Fighting force. Washington's vision was vindicated in the winter of 1776–77, as his Army, often working with militias, scored quick-hitting successes at Trenton, Princeton, and other parts of New Jersey. Washington even made the best of a painful setback after the British conquest of the nation's capital, Philadelphia. Settling in for a hard winter at Valley Forge, Pa., Washington built a distinctively American fighting force even while exercising political skills that allowed him to overcome insubordinate rivals in the Army and to mollify critics in the Continental Congress.

Many of Washington's virtues as a leader were on display during this crucial period, says Fleming. Respecting the civil authority that had granted him extensive powers, Washington nevertheless saw the need for a commanding general to stay in touch with political actualities, not least to correct misperceptions about military developments. And with some of his own generals criticizing and even subverting him, Washington had to maintain his own back channels with Congress in order to retain his position, press for reforms, and otherwise keep the war effort on course.

While Washington despised disloyalty, Valley Forge made it clear that he valued strong and independent-minded officers. He heeded their best ideas and gave them plenty of room to exercise initiative. With the Prussian Friedrich Wilhelm August de Steuben, Washington developed a style of military discipline suited to a democratically inclined people, above all embracing Steuben's dictum that a captain must win the love of his men (story, right).

The Army that came out of Valley Forge would quickly prove itself in the Battle of Monmouth, exhibiting even greater discipline and courage than it had shown in the earlier New Jersey battles. If ultimate victory and independence were still far from assured, Washington had forged an Army that mirrored his own blend of prudence and daring.

Just as important, he had won the lasting support of America's civilian authorities, to whom he returned all power at war's end. Hearing of that gesture, Britain's King George III said that Washington would be the greatest man in history if it was true. It would be only slightly less praise to say that Washington's surrender of power was just part of what made him the first great leader in the modern world. ●

The Rich Legacy of a Forgotten Founder

Baron de Steuben may have been a fraud, but he knew how to wage a war

By Paul Lockhart

On May 6, 1778, the soldiers of the Continental Army filed onto the open field of the Grand Parade at Valley Forge to perform for the French ambassador and a small crowd of dignitaries from Congress. In the brilliant sunshine of a spring morning, they marched in perfect columns, quickly and precisely unwound into two parallel lines, and fired three rolling volleys of musketry to salute their awe-struck guests.

The Grand Review, as it was called, was a celebration of America's new alliance with France. It was also a celebration of the return of hope to the American cause after a long, dark winter. In large measure, the army's buoyant spirit and self-confidence owed to its newfound professionalism, the product of three frantic months of retraining. The mastermind behind the army's metamorphosis was an eccentric newcomer who spoke very little English: a dumpy, middle-aged former Prussian Army officer known as Friedrich Wilhelm August, the baron de Steuben.


PRIVATE COLLECTION / AKG

DRILLMASTER. Friedrich de Steuben

Historians of the Revolution have taught us that Steuben was a talented fraud, a shameless self-promoter who falsified his titles and credentials in order to seek preferment in the Continental Army. But his military expertise was no affectation. The eldest son of a lesser noble family in the German kingdom of Prussia, Steuben had joined the army of the legendary warrior-king Frederick the Great at the age of 16. During Europe's bloody Seven Years' War (1756-63), he led troops in combat against the Austrians, the French, and the Russians. Steuben never rose above the rank of captain, but he served as a staff officer for several Prussian generals, and King Frederick himself hand-picked Steuben for training in generalship.

The advent of peace in 1763 left Steuben without a job. Dismissed from the Prussian Army, he spent the next decade as a functionary at the court of a minor German princeling. It was here that he was given the honorific title of *freiherr* (baron). But he still craved the life of a soldier. Quitting his post in 1775, he tried—without success—to find employment in nearly every army in Europe.

Steuben's big break came in 1777, when a casual acquaintance informed him that the American rebels were in dire need of military professionals. Steuben pounced on the opportunity, setting out immediately for Paris to sell himself to Ben-

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jamin Franklin and Silas Deane, then the American commissioners at the French court. Franklin and Deane were suitably impressed by Steuben's credentials, but they were not authorized to grant rank of any kind. All the commissioners could do was to suggest that the baron journey to America and look for work on his own.

Steuben took this as rejection, but his desperation drove him to accept what little the American commissioners could offer. And they, in turn, did their best to make him more marketable. Franklin and Deane knowingly falsified Steuben's service record, informing Congress and Gen. George Washington that he had been a lieutenant general and personal aide to Frederick the Great. The ruse worked. When Steuben arrived in America at the end of 1777—styled in the French manner as the baron de Steuben—he was greeted as a conquering hero.

Yet it was Steuben's personality and manifest talent that won over his adoptive countrymen almost overnight. A lifelong bachelor, the 46-year-old was a skilled raconteur and incurable flirt. Though largely self-educated, he was as well-versed in contemporary literature and political thought as he was in military science. He enjoyed parties and high living and perpetually spent beyond his means. The baron's charm and raucous sense of humor transcended the language barrier. He effortlessly befriended the leading men of the Revolution.

EDWIN AUSTIN ABBEY, *BARON VON STEUBEN DRILLING AMERICAN RECRUITS AT VALLEY FORGE IN 1778*, PENNSYLVANIA STATE CAPITOL / BRIDGEMAN ART LIBRARY

TAKING CHARGE. Baron de Steuben drills recruits at Valley Forge, Pa., in the winter of 1778.

Instant legend. Congress eagerly accepted Steuben's offer to serve Washington as a volunteer aide. Soon his blunt advice on military matters earned him the trust of the general-in-chief as well. Less than a month after Steuben's arrival at Valley Forge in February 1778, Washington assigned him the daunting task of retraining the army.

At Valley Forge, Steuben became an instant legend. Stomping through the snow, he put a single "model company" of Continentals through their paces, teaching them drill as he cursed the awkward soldiers in an incomprehensible mix of French, German, and English. The men fell in love with him, with his exaggerated fits of anger, but above all with his constant attention to their well-being. Within weeks, the entire army was marching and drilling with a grace and precision that rivaled the standing armies of the great European powers.

The reforms set in motion by Steuben imparted to the Continental Army the tactical proficiency that served it so well in the bloody battle at Monmouth, the storming of Stony Point, and the final confrontation at Yorktown. Though always lacking in manpower and matériel, the American rebels were now able to meet the British on nearly equal terms.

Steuben's fame comes from Valley Forge, but the truth is that his most enduring contributions came after 1778. As the first inspector-general of the U.S. Army, he worked tirelessly to keep the troops in fighting trim—not only through constant training but also by monitoring deficiencies in clothing, equipment, and medical care. Accountability was his byword. Officers were made responsible for the whereabouts and the physical condition of their men. Indeed, Steuben insisted that officers should put the needs of their men ahead of their own and that they should temper discipline with loving concern. This was one of the central tenets of his "Blue Book," the first official regulations of the U.S. Army.

The baron, however, was never quite satisfied with his contribution to the Revolutionary cause, and his quixotic personality often frustrated his efforts. He could be both overbearing and overly sensitive. When Congress balked at giving him the authority and compensation he felt he deserved, he would become petulant and threaten to return to Europe.

He was similarly stung when Washington repeatedly denied him a combat command. Washington, striving to keep the peace among a contentious band of proud generals, knew the uproar that would ensue if he were to promote the baron above longer-serving, American-born commanders. And when Washington did entrust Steuben with a major combat assignment—the defense of Virginia in 1781—the experience was not a pleasant one. Against overwhelming odds, Steuben managed to fend off a series of British invasions. But the military incompetence of state officials nearly drove him to distraction, and his impatience and autocratic manner alienated the proud Virginians.

Steuben served as inspector-general until the end of the war and remained in the fledgling republic until his death in 1794. Congress showed little inclination to reward him financially for his service, and the baron's improvidence kept him in poverty. Despite growing bitterness, he continued to serve the military, drafting plans for the peacetime army and composing the curriculum for the planned academy at West Point. He was an outspoken advocate for Continental Army veterans. And though he went to his lonely grave feeling that his services to the cause had never been fully acknowledged, he had made a conscious decision to accept the United States as home. Unlike most of the foreigners who joined in the fight for independence, Steuben became an American. ●

DID YOU KNOW...

The winter at **Valley Forge,** 1777–78, is known as the cruelest of the Revolution. But in *Founding Myths,* author Ray Raphael reports that the distinction rightfully belongs to the winter of **1779–80 in Morristown, N.J.**

Paul Lockhart is the author of The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army *(HarperCollins 2008).*

Allied With the Enemy of Our Enemy

America needed France to defeat the Brits, but it was Paris that lost in the end

By Alex Kingsbury

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, England and France had been waging almost uninterrupted war with each other for nearly a century. From King William's War in 1689 through the Seven Years' War that wrapped up in 1763, it was a century of bloodletting and territorial trading that played out like a colossal game of Risk. It was little surprise that the French saw the nascent American insurgency, which came to a boil in 1775, as a new front in their battle for world dominance with London.

In the end, French assistance was perhaps the single greatest factor in the colonists' victory. Not only did France provide desperately needed financing and supplies, but its naval power proved crucial as the conflict between Britain and the Colonies spread to include skirmishes in the Caribbean and off the coast of Brittany and fights for islands in the Mediterranean and around the Indian Ocean. But the alliance was tenuous and difficult to manage. The cautious French could often be counted on to fight only when it suited them, while the Americans proved to be fickle friends. Even as America was celebrating its hard-won independence, France began to realize its victory was a pyrrhic one, as the war with England plunged the country into debt and, later, its own revolution.

HIGH SEAS. The Revolutionary War reached the Indian Ocean, where French ships battled Britain's Navy.

The roots of the American Revolution lay in the Seven Years' War, when England was forced to raise taxes to pay off war debts. Raising more tax money from distant colonies was a reasonable solution, achieved by levying various duties on tea, stamps, and other staples of commerce. Most New England merchants didn't take too kindly to the idea, and they were some of the first to rebel. When the war began, the colonists found themselves with an ill-equipped army and a nearly empty treasury. Enter the French, who provided assistance to the Colonies in the form of military advisers, ammunition, and coin to keep the fledgling government afloat. Fearing a British response, however, the French funneled their aid through a front company called Rodrigue Hortalez et Cie.

Benjamin Franklin, the new nation's emissary in Paris, helped cultivate French public opinion. He became a fixture at court and often wore a rustic beaver-pelt hat to emphasize the rugged individualism of Americans, which the French so admired. Ideas of freedom and equality were an easy sell among the general population and a portion of the nobility in post-Enlightenment France, and they became a rallying cry that attracted the likes of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, later the architect of the District of Columbia, and the Marquis de Lafayette, who became one of George Washington's most trusted field commanders.

Reluctant allies. Despite Franklin's popular appeal, getting France to publicly support the American cause took some time. It wasn't until 1778 that Paris openly backed the war effort with its Navy, followed by ground troops a year later. Other allies proved tougher for the Founding Fathers to enlist, but Spain and Holland eventually aided the Revolution, taking up arms and providing substantial loans to keep the government running.

On the battlefield, France was an inconsistent ally. Their first forays into combat in Rhode Island and Georgia were decidedly unimpressive. But by the Battle of Yorktown, the allies were far better aligned. French ships and French and American soldiers combined to win a decisive contest that ended the war. "The French were at first reluctant to get in the middle of a family battle between England and her colonies only to have the family make up and leave the French out," says Joyce Appleby, professor emerita of history at UCLA. "Yet that's exactly what happened."

France had hoped that Britain would be crippled and that securing exclusive trade relations with the Colonies would help pay for the war. But the new nation double-crossed its ally, signing a separate peace treaty and resuming trade with London shortly after hostilities ended. "Without a doubt, they had accomplished something just short of miraculous by winning a war against a superior adversary, securing the support of a historic enemy, and then running roughshod over the interests of both in the treaty that ended the war," writes historian Ted Widmer in his forthcoming book, *The Ark of Liberties*. "But it was a curiously nonidealistic way to advance America's famous idealism." Moreover, France paid for the expensive naval campaign through loans rather than through increased taxation, causing a serious economic crisis when the bills came due. It was this crisis, and the monarchy's clumsy attempts to deal with it, that helped trigger the French Revolution. ●

DID YOU KNOW...

Independence was actually declared by the Continental Congress on July 2, 1776. The declaration was adopted on the 4th and celebrated for the first time on the 8th, when it was read aloud to a crowd in Philadelphia.

DOMINIC SERRES. THE FOURTH ACTION OFF TRINCOMALEE BETWEEN THE ENGLISH UNDER ADMIRAL SIR EDWARD HUGHES AND THE FRENCH UNDER M. DE SUFFREN. THE GALLERY COLLECTION / CORBIS

Franklin, here in the court of France, was hugely popular with the French.

WILLIAM DUFFEND GELLER, *BENJAMIN FRANKLIN AT THE COURT OF FRANCE*, REUNION DES MUSEES NATIONAUX / ART RESOURCE

In Paris, Taking the Salons by Storm

How the canny Ben Franklin talked the French into forming a crucial alliance

By Diane Cole

In the same bitter winter of 1776 that Gen. George Washington led his beleaguered troops across the Delaware River to safety, Benjamin Franklin sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to Paris to engage in an equally crucial campaign, this one diplomatic.

A lot depended on the bespectacled and decidedly unfashionable 70-year-old as he entered the world's fashion capital sporting a simple brown suit and a fur cap. With the Continental Congress running low on money, arms, and troops, Franklin's job was to secure aid from abroad. "Without French help, the Revolution would have collapsed, and there would have been no United States," says Jonathan Dull, former associate editor of the Benjamin Franklin Papers at Yale University and author of *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution.*

Franklin's miracle was that, armed only with his canny personal charm and assisted by his international reputation as a scientist and philosopher, he was able to cajole a wary French government into lending the fledgling American nation an enormous fortune. Not only did Franklin help seal the French alliance with a formal treaty in 1778 and keep it alive throughout the war; he was instrumental, as well, in negotiating the peace with Britain. By the time Franklin sailed back to Philadelphia in 1785, he had proved himself "the most indispensable leader of the American Revolution next to George Washington," says Dull.

LIKE THE BEATLES ARRIVING IN AMERICA, FRANKLIN AROUSED A FERVOR. HIS FACE EVEN APPEARED ON TEACUPS.

Ladies' man. And yet, Franklin's years in Paris form the least-known chapter of his life and perhaps of the Revolution, says Stacy Schiff, author of *A Great Improvisation: Franklin, France, and the Birth of America.* "The whole myth of independence is that we, the little guys, rose up against the ancient society and did it on our own," she says. "Franklin is associated with the dependence of America, the need to seek help. He went begging to a foreign power, moreover a monarchy, and we'd rather think that George Washington did it all on his own."

Instead, the enduring image of Franklin in Paris tends to be that of a flirtatious old man, too busy visiting the city's fashionable salons to pursue affairs of state as rigorously as John Adams. When Adams joined Franklin in Paris in 1779, he was scandalized by the late hours and French lifestyle his colleague had adopted, says Schiff. Adams was clueless that it was through the dropped hints and seemingly offhand remarks at these salons that so much of French diplomacy was conducted. "In France, you did work socially, and that didn't jibe with John Adams," says Schiff. Nor with his wife, Abigail, who was shocked by Franklin's familiar behavior with the French ladies in their overly revealing gowns.

As uncomfortable as he was unfamiliar with French ways, the prickly Adams, along with Arthur Lee of Virginia and Connecticut patriot Silas Deane, could prove more hindrance than help. With the exception of John Jay—ambassador to Spain before helping to negotiate the final treaty with Britain—"they were probably the most undiplomatic and dogmatic negotiators possible," says Schiff.

Unsurprisingly, the French consistently asked the Continental Congress to retain Franklin as America's chief spokesman. And what a presence he was. Like the Beatles arriving in America, he aroused a fervor, says H. W. Brands, author of *The First American: The Life and Times of Benjamin Franklin.* His face appeared on prints, teacups, and chamber pots. "The equivalent today," says Brands, "would be everyone wearing Franklin T-shirts and using Franklin screen savers."

The extraordinary popularity served Franklin's diplomatic purposes splendidly. Not even King Louis XVI could ignore the enthusiasm that had won over both the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Significantly, Franklin had found in the French minister for foreign affairs, Charles Gravier, the *comte* de Vergennes, a wily and willing listener—a pragmatic strategist eager to weaken Britain, with which France had been warring for centuries.

When, in 1785, Thomas Jefferson arrived in Paris to become America's next minister to France, Gravier said, "You replace Dr. Franklin, then." Jefferson responded: "I succeed; no one can replace him." ●