

**Sustaining the Revolution: Civil-Military Relations, Republicanism, and the
Continental Army's 1780 Morristown Encampment**

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Abstract

This paper investigates how the nascent American republic prosecuted the War for Independence. Specifically, it looks at the problem of waging war under a Republican government distrustful of standing armies and incapable of implementing the sophisticated fiscal and bureaucratic structures used by other western military powers during the eighteenth century. Here, I argue that it was the Continental Army itself that functioned as an arm of wartime national governance by intervening in the civilian sphere. Its authority manifested in various forms, from the intrusive confiscation of civilian property to more benign exhibitions of authority such as parades and social gathering. As a case study, this paper uses the Continental Army's 1779-1780 winter encampment at Morristown, New Jersey. Winter encampments are useful subjects of study since they most vividly and directly exhibit the interaction between military authority and civilian life, and highlight the important role armies played beyond the battlefield. The Morristown encampment provides a particularly useful study as it took place at a time when the stresses of waging a long war were beginning to have serious consequences for both military and civilian leaders. Indeed, this study will show that the Continental Army's maintenance of positive civilian relations often came at the price of harming relations with the Army's own rank-and-file. Overall, this paper seeks to better our understanding of the intersection between military institutions and governance during the War of Independence, with a particular emphasis on how these relationships impacted the course of the war in New Jersey.

Quartermaster Nathaniel Greene of the Continental Army once wrote,

A Country, once overflowing with plenty, are now suffering an Army employed for the defense of everything that is dear and valuable, to perish for want of food. A people too, whose political existence depends upon this Army, and the future enjoyment of what they now possess. O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you! Legislatures are guarding against little trespasses, while they suffer the great Barriers of political security to be thrown down, and the Country overrun.¹

Quartermaster Greene wrote this as the Continental Army endured a period of frightful cold, hunger, and fatigue during its encampment at Morristown, New Jersey, during the winter of 1779-1780. Greene's lament, echoed by many others in the Army who also suffered through that winter, represents more than just the complaint of an exasperated officer; instead, it highlights the deep flaws in the American system of politics and society as the fledgling colonies muddled through the War of Independence. By 1780, declining morale, military stalemate, and a collapsing financial structure combined to greatly undermine the Americans' ability to further prosecute the war. The civilian apathy and military indiscipline Greene observed were the most salient examples of the overall malaise that had engulfed the nation after five years of war.

Yet, less than six months later, the Continental Army, in close cooperation with the New Jersey militia and with broad support from the state's civilian population, repelled a large incursion by royalist forces, culminating in the Battle of Springfield on June 23, 1780. Despite ongoing financial problems and the political and social friction caused by the Army's presence in northern New Jersey, enthusiasm and unity characterized the conduct of civilians, soldiers, and officers during the Springfield Campaign, in stark contrast to the discord and infighting that plagued them during the winter encampment at Morristown.

¹ Greene to Furman, January 4, 1780. Morristown National Historical Park Collection. Box 5. Folder 353. (Park Collection hereafter referred to as PC)

This paper explores the winter and spring of 1780 in New Jersey, to better understand the social and political factors that shaped how revolutionary America made war. I argue that the strains of conflict exacerbated the social fissures and political tensions within the American state's republican structure. The paradoxical nature of republicanism's ideological and social foundations profoundly affected the colonies' conduct during the war. The republic's government and people distrusted professional standing armies and the strong central governments required for their maintenance, yet the realities of eighteenth century warfare made a professional army necessary to safeguard the republic. Thus, this paper uses the Morristown encampment and Springfield campaign to trace how Americans coped with these difficulties and the ultimate legacies of this process.

Here I study three agents of change: civilians, common soldiers, and officers. In the absence of a centralized national authority to provide adequate food and equipment, common soldiers responded to the poor logistics and pay by disobeying their officers and plundering supplies from the surrounding population. Civilians suffered from this plunder as well as from royalist raids and confiscations sanctioned by Army officers. Civilians responded in a variety of ways: voicing their concerns through civilian political leaders, non-compliance with military orders, and illicit trade with the British garrison in New York. Officers sought to maintain the Army's strength despite the absence of support from the national government, while also attempting to secure New Jersey and its civilians and keeping its rank-and-files in line.

I argue that the Continental Army utilized several strategies, dependent upon exploiting conceptions of Republican society and ideology, to foster a fragile cooperation in New Jersey during 1780. Most importantly, in the absence of a strong national authority, I contend the Continental Army itself behaved as a sovereign body. At its Morristown headquarters, the

Army's leaders received foreign ambassadors, held formal parades and social gatherings, and dispensed military discipline. Politically, this display of pageantry served to demonstrate to New Jersey civilians a facet of the national government that was strong and stable; ideologically, these acts exhibited the officers' statuses as virtuous gentlemen, a key element of the republican order. Conversely, the common soldiers were confined to camp and severely punished for any disciplinary transgressions, particularly violations of civilian property. This contrast between officers' and soldiers' experiences illustrates the wider divides in American society, even as Americans struggled to forge and safeguard a new nation founded upon republican principals. Thus, my examination of the Continental Army reflects, like any other institution, the society from which it was produced.

Like any institution, the Continental Army's behavior was determined by its environments. Just as the mountains and forests of its ecological environment determined where the Army marched and how it fought its battles, so too did the colonies' political, legal, and social environments determine how the Army received its funding, quartered its officers, and recruited its soldiers. From the military historian's perspective, understanding these contexts is crucially important to comprehending the American war-effort, as well as placing the Continental Army in comparative context. Republicanism is the key to understanding why the colonies could never craft a central government with the fiscal power of Great Britain, why its independent-minded and politically aware population would not acquiesce to conscription as in Prussia, and why and its leaders, suspicious of radicalization, could not entertain the dangers of wholesale popular mobilization in the way of revolutionary France a decade later. America, in sum, did produce the minutemen and the Continentals, but it did not yield grenadier guards or a *levee en masse*.

This paper's focus on civil-military interactions during the War of American Independence derives from a small yet cogent body of scholarship. E. Wayne Carp's *To Starve the Army at Pleasure* is of paramount importance to the understanding of the Continental Army's logistical system and the often contentious relationship the professional Army had with national civilian authorities. Carp's work has shown not only the institutional origins of the Continental Army's logistical plight, but also the manifestation of Continental Army officers' attitudes within the national political culture during the 1780s. This paper draws upon Carp's conclusion that Republican governance was ill-suited to the maintenance of a standing army, but differs from his scholarship in two key aspects. First, whereas Carp looks primarily at the overall logistical failure during the war, I use a specific, localized study to show how alternative strategies brought the Army, if not success, then at least survival. Second, while Carp emphasizes the Army's role in driving national politics during the late-war and post-war years, I focus instead on how the Army's presence had an immediate impact on the local authoritative, ideological, and social landscape.²

Also of key importance is Holly Mayer's *Belonging to the Army*. Mayer emphasizes the importance of the Continental Army as a community, inclusive of not only officers and soldiers, but servants, sutlers, soldiers' families, and various camp followers and other hangers on as well. The presence of these non-combatants, according to Mayer, served to sustain the Continental Army in the midst of a revolutionary conflict. Furthermore, the forging of a Continental community in the republican image served as an example to the nation at large. Mayer's thesis

² E. Wayne Carp. *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783*. (UNC, 1984).

serves as a powerful argument in favor of the important role the Continental Army fulfilled off of the battlefield.³

Here, I share Mayer's focus on the Continental community, though rather than recapitulating her study of intra-community relations I instead look to the interactions between the Army and the local civilian population and their leaders, as well as amongst the Army itself (between officers and soldiers). Furthermore, rather than illustrating the community's progress towards unity and cooperation, I focus instead on its differences, its conflicts, and how the strains of wartime mobilization further exacerbated these fissures. In this vein, my scholarship aligns with the military histories of Martin, Lender, and Neimeyer, which all emphasize the social divide between officers and soldiers during the war. More broadly, this scholarship further highlights the ongoing debate over the social dimension of the American Revolution and the character of American radicalism. This paper aims to show the waging of the War of Independence and the faults of Republican governance exacerbated American social problems, while the presence of the Continental Army served to ease these tensions through a combination of forceful coercion and persuasive inducement. Thus, between Carp's faltering national government and Mayer's Continental Community, this paper argues in favor of a Continental Army that, through both force and example, victualled itself, defended American territory, and sustained the revolution.⁴

³ Holly A. Mayer. *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution*. (Columbia, SC, University of South Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴ Mark Lender and E. Kirby Martin. *A Respectable Army: the Military Origins of the Republic. 1763-1789*. (Arlington, Harlan Davidson, 1982) ; Don Higginbotham. *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice 1763-1789*. (New York, Macmillan, 1971); John Shy, *Towards Lexington; the British army and the Coming of the American Revolution*. (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1965); Charles Niemeyer. *America Goes to War: A Social History of the Continental Army*. (New York, NYU Press, 1996); Charles Royster. *A Revolutionary People at War: the Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783*. (Williamsburg, the UNC Press, 1979); Caroline Cox. *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army*. (UNC, 2007).

This is not merely a question of logistics, of interest only to the most parochial of military historians. Instead, it is the story of the strains wartime places on society, of fissures expanded and fractures mended. Previously, historians have studied the financial failure of the Continental Congress, the contentious relationship between Continental officers and the national government, interactions between the army and civilian populations, and soldier indiscipline and mutiny as largely separate phenomena. Here, instead, I draw these disparate strands together to into a unified narrative, situating these various actors beneath the umbrella of the emerging American “state.” In the absence of a strong national state in the traditional state, I instead look at how the Continental Army acted as an institutional stand-in for national governance. Thus, the story of the Morristown encampment becomes here a narrative of the Continental Army’s authority to regulate interactions amongst the various actors crucial to maintaining the war-effort. Underpinning this drama throughout was republican ideology. When American radicals overturned British rule in the colonies, they could not have known the arduousness of the coming military struggle; certainly the government they crafted at the outset of the conflict was ill-equipped to fight the war. Instead, it was the Continental Army, out of its own logistical necessity, that cultivated and maintained civilian support for the struggle. Historians have largely missed the power military authority had during the conflict; they have fail to realize that just because there was no military *government* does not preclude the existence of military *governance*. Thus, military authority becomes a useful lens onto understanding American republicanism, as officers strove to maintain the Army and the war-effort without violating republican principals. As the following pages reveal, this was not an easy task, as republican ideals fell to wartime exigencies. That republicanism did of course survive the war and flourish

does not mean that it was not tested during the conflict, and it is the nature, and ultimate effect of this trial that historians have yet to truly uncover.

The arrival of some 13,000 Continental soldiers in Morris County in late 1779 presented serious difficulties for officers, soldiers, and civilians. As one of the largest and most concentrated encampments of the war, the cantonment at Morristown was to severely tax both the Army and governmental logistical apparatuses as well as the civilian economy. Coupled with the national fiscal crisis, deteriorating morale in the ranks, and declining popular enthusiasm for the war, the winter at Morristown was to exhibit the perils and strains of making war as much as any battle or campaign. During the Army's seven-month stay in Morris County, civilians became increasingly disenchanted with the Army, rank-and-file soldiers lost confidence in their leaders, and officers were left to manage the conflicting interests of these disparate groups. Thus, even away from the battlefield, a drama unfolded that exhibited all of the fragilities and insecurities of the American wartime republic.⁵

The Continental Army's leaders planned the 1780 winter encampment with civilian relations in mind. During a previous stay at Morristown in early 1777, the Army had had numerous negative interactions with the community, highlighted by a smallpox outbreak that the inhabitants blamed on the presence of the Army. In 1777, the small Continental Army (3000 men at most) billeted in private homes, but the subsequent growth of the Army as well as civilian outrage meant that by 1779 this option was no longer available. Thus, when the Continental Army once again arrived in Morris County in December 1779, its leaders chose to encamp the soldiers in a sparsely populated wood known as Jockey Hollow, five miles south of the town.⁶

While Jockey Hollow did offer secure ground and ample lumber, Army leadership also

⁵ This summary relies upon the only published overview of the Morristown encampments: Samuel Stelle Smith. *Winter at Morristown 1779-1780: the Darkest Hour*, (Freneau, 1979).

⁶ Stelle Smith, 3-11.

chose this location because of its distance from the civilian population center at Morristown. In contrast to the 1777 encampment, concentrating at Jockey Hollow would inconvenience only the half-dozen farmers who inhabited the area. The five miles between Morristown and Jockey Hollow were in a way a social quarantine, segregating the potentially unruly, rapacious soldiery from the genteel Whig community to the north. Yet, events that winter were to prove that soldiers and civilians could not be kept separate so easily.

Historians have downplayed the extent unfamiliarity played in shaping relations between civilians and soldiers, as well as between soldiers themselves. In some ways, the Continental Army resembled an occupying foreign Army more than a force with New Jersey's interests at heart. First and foremost, the Army was composed predominantly of soldiers from other states. Nearby Pennsylvania and Connecticut each contributed two brigades, while New York contributed one. Farther off Maryland also contributed two brigades, and another two brigades of Virginians briefly occupied Jockey Hollow as well. The final two brigades present, those of Stark and Hand, were composed of troops from several New England states, as well as other regiments, including refugees of the 1775 Canadian invasion. Only one brigade, under Brigadier General William Maxwell, was composed of New Jersey men. Thus, not only were soldiers seen as ill-disciplined plunderers, they overwhelmingly originated from far-off, unfamiliar places.⁷

Not only were the soldiers from unfamiliar geographical origins, but they were from different socioeconomic backgrounds as well. In contrast to the well-to-do farmers, craftsmen, and merchants of the Morristown area, most of the soldiers in the Continental Army by 1780 were overwhelmingly of the lowest class of laborers and recent immigrants. European professional armies were generally seen as both separate from and below the social order, and, as

⁷ For the composition of Continental Army, see Charles H. Lesser. *The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army*, (Chicago, 1976); and, more generally, Robert K. Wright Jr., *The Continental Army*, (Michigan 1983).

the Continental Army came to increasingly resemble its European counterparts, it too was ostracized.⁸

As supplies began to dwindle shortly after the Army's arrival, hunger became a primary concern. The local magazine was apparently depleted rapidly after the Army's December 3 arrival, as by the middle of the month accounts already noted the lack of provisions.⁹ This deficiency reached its height in early January, when the entire Army was placed on starvation rations.¹⁰ Men were told their two pound ration of meat was to last ten days, though even this meager supply was rarely available to every man.¹¹ Improving weather conditions later in the month allowed supplies to be transferred from other magazines, temporarily improving the food situation.¹² It might appear then, that the near-catastrophic absence of victuals from the Morristown encampment was more a byproduct of inadequate transportation further hindered by snowy weather conditions, rather than any failure of government, finance, or civilian political will. Indeed, Historian John Shy has attributed the Americans' supply difficulties to issues of transportation and distribution.¹³

Yet, in the case of the Morristown encampment, supply deficiencies transcended transportation problems. Morristown itself was selected in part because it stood astride the lateral lines of communication stretching from Philadelphia northwards towards West Point, while also dominating local routes connecting Newark, Elizabeth, and Bergen County with the communities

⁸ For the perception of soldiers as a separate class during the eighteenth century, see Duffy. Duffy. *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason*. (Routledge, 1987). For the American variations of this theme, see Cox, Neimeyer, Lender and Martin.

⁹ Jeremiah Greenman, December 18, 1779, PC 2, 1, 23. Nathan Beers Diary, December 20, 1779 PC. 5, 343.

¹⁰ Parkman's Diary, January 2; PC 5, 353. Harmar, January 7, 1780. LWS, 157. Beers, January 7, 1780. PC 5, 343

¹¹ Diary of James Thatcher, January 1780. Morristown National Historical Park, Loyd W. Smith Collection. Box 168. (Hereafter referred to as LWS).

¹² Thatcher, January 27, 1780; LWS Box, 67, 168. General Orders, January 30, 1780, LWS 266; Divisional Orders, Pennsylvania Line, March 19, 1780, LWS Box. 67, 266

¹³ See Shy. "Logistical Crisis and the American Revolution: A Hypothesis." In Lynn *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present*. (Westview, 1994).

of the state's interior.¹⁴ Therefore, a lack of roads themselves cannot be blamed for the Army's supply difficulties.

The weather may appear to have played a decisive role in hindering supply, given the amount of snow that accumulated in New Jersey that winter; however, this supposition is also problematic. By 1780 the Continental Army had the manpower to delegate parties specifically tasked with clearing snow from roads to maintain lines of communication, and on several occasions during the winter supply convoys arrived despite the poor weather.¹⁵ Yet, even with roads cleared and the overall improvement in the climate after February, near-famine periodically returned to the Morristown encampment.¹⁶ For example, in late March, soldiers endured a four day period without bread.¹⁷ This second period of hunger lasted into the next month, with meat rations completely absent in early April.¹⁸ This distress appears to have been alleviated as April progressed, only to return the following month, when soldiers were reduced to half rations on May 22nd.¹⁹ Writing during this third period of hunger, James Thatcher summed up the Army's exasperation, writing, "we are again visited with the calamity of which we have so often complained, a great scarcity of provisions of every kind."²⁰

Overall, the Morristown encampment experienced three periods of "great scarcity," the first occurring during the first week of January, the second between March 20th and April 3rd, and the last during the final week in May. Furthermore, deficiency, though not outright starvation, prevailed through much of December, April, and May. Notably, the two month period from mid-January to mid-March was one of relative plenty, even though the "hard winter" was

¹⁴ Wacker, 15-21.

¹⁵ General Orders, January 13, 1780. LWS Box 67, 266

¹⁶ Harmar, April 6, 1780, LWS, 157.

¹⁷ Harmar, March 20, 1780, LWS, 157; Division Orders, Connecticut Line, April 14, 1780. LWS Box. 67, 266.

¹⁸ Parkman, March 31 1780; April 3, 1780, PC 5, 353.

¹⁹ Greenman, May 22, 1780, PC 1, 23.

²⁰ Thatcher, May 29, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.

still at its height during these months. Conversely, from late-March onwards the Army drifted between hunger and starvation, despite the generally fine weather. Shy's hypothesis, that transportation and distribution were the primary determinants of logistical problems, is at odds with the realities of the Morristown encampment. The Army enjoyed only two months of consistently available food, and this came at a time when snowfalls were heavy and travel difficult. Two of the three periods of "great scarcity" occurred after the worst of the winter was over and transportation should not have been a problem, particularly in such a well-situated location as Morristown. That the Continental Army spent 70% of its time at Morristown short of food indicates a much greater logistical problem than simply inadequate transportation.

Contemporaries, too, did not see transportation as a significant logistical issue, and aside from orders detailing fatigue parties to clear roads, there are few accounts from the winter encampment concerning roads.²¹ Instead, American officers were far more concerned with their inability to procure supplies locally. Washington recognized that in the absence of an advanced logistical infrastructure based on magazines and civilian purchasing agents, the Army was reliant upon what the local inhabitants were willing to part with. The American commander-in-chief wrote to Congress shortly after the beginning of the encampment to express his concerns, stating, "I confess I am greatly alarmed at the prospect of our supplies of provision which so much depend on that of forage."²² It quickly became apparent that the root cause of the Army's forage problems was the depreciated currency. For instance, as the first famine period began in late December, James Thatcher wrote that "the people in the country are unwilling to sell the produce of their farms for this depreciated currency."²³ General James Clinton echoed Thatcher the following month, when he wrote "our money is so reduced that I fear it will not purchase a

²¹ Harmar, January 3, 1780, LWS, 157; Washington, January 6, 1780, PC 9, 695.

²² Washington to Congress, December 10, 1779, PC 9, 695.

²³ Thatcher, December 20, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.

further supply.”²⁴ Indeed, the inflated currency did greatly inhibit the Army’s ability to purchase supplies from the local inhabitants, who often times outright refused to accept the Continental Dollar as legal tender.²⁵ That the Army’s financial difficulties, and therefore its logistical problems, were a product of the inability of the Continental Congress to craft an effective wartime national state was not lost on observers in the Army. Alexander Scammel contrasted the Army’s perseverance in the face of hardship with Congress’s perceived ineffectiveness, noting, “if Congress can contrive a method to appreciate currency as quickly as we can build huts, our affairs would soon assume a promising aspect.”²⁶ Yet Scammel's desire never came to fruition, leaving the Continental Army to search for other methods to rectify its supply deficiency.

Early in the encampment, the rank-and-file at Jockey Hollow crafted their own solution to the Army’s supply problem by stealing from civilians. Certainly, even the limited physical activity of the winter encampment could not be sustained on a diet of bread, or even less.²⁷ Even in their isolated location at Jockey Hollow, the soldiers could not have remained ignorant of the fact that even as they starved, New Jersey civilians continued to eat well. Thatcher indeed described the encampment to be “in the midst of a country abounding in every kind of provisions.”²⁸ As an armed, organized body of men, the Army’s rank-and-file were well-positioned to appropriate this abundance from the surrounding communities, despite their officers’ proscriptions, leading Washington to write “the property of the inhabitants in the vicinity of camp is prey to the plundering spirit of the soldiery.”²⁹ This indicates by the end of the first month of the encampment, soldiers’ marauding was becoming endemic.

²⁴ James Clinton to George Clinton, January 7, 1780, PC 10, 705.

²⁵ Huntington, January 8, 1780, PC 5, 25; Hand to Yeats, June 5, 1780, PC 5, 24

²⁶ Alexander Scammel, December 13, 1779. PC, 5, 452.

²⁷ James Fairlie to Van Courtlandt, January 12, 1780, PC, 5, 18.

²⁸ Thatcher, December, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.

²⁹ General Orders, December 29, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.

Civilian property of various kinds was threatened in this atmosphere of increasing desperation and deteriorating discipline. The constant transit of undisciplined soldiers through the countryside could also harm civilian property even when nothing was being stolen, as complaints about trampled wheat fields indicate.³⁰ Certainly, food was the soldiers' primary concern, and poultry, sheep, pigs, and cattle were among the most commonly stolen items.³¹ Alcohol, a necessity in the eyes of many soldiers, was another commonly stolen good.³² Other items were also prey to soldiers, especially rail fences, which were often stripped by rank-and-file for firewood.³³

The claims of damages made by Morris County civilians provide the best details of the nature of the plunder taking place in the Jockey Hollow area. Resident Josiah Guerin, for example, filed claims for "one calf, some sheep, two bushels of rye, six bushels of potatoes, two narrow axes, one greatcoat, blanketing, a new linen petticoat, and two half-worn shifts."³⁴ Other civilian claims list a similar litany of items.³⁵ While livestock and foodstuffs were the most prevalent items stolen, the frequent mentions of clothing, tools, and utensils indicate that plunder was about more than supplementing meager rations, but a breakdown in discipline.

Crimes were not limited to the sparsely populated Jockey Hollow area. Detachments of soldiers in Morristown itself also had negative interactions with the local population, just as in 1777.³⁶ While soldiers' depredations were generally limited to theft, on occasion more confrontational transgressions also took place. In one instance, a soldier had a violent altercation

³⁰ Regimental Orders, Jackson's Regiment, Starks Brigade, April 10 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.

³¹ Thatcher, January 20, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168; General Orders, December 29, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.

³² General Orders, January 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 266.

³³ Angels Regiment, January 29, 1780; Connecticut Line 1st Brigade, Brigade Orders, April 17, 1780; Brigade Orders, New Jersey Brigade, February 17, 1780; Brigade Orders, Starks Brigade, December 31, 1779: LWS Box 67, 266.

³⁴ Guerin, Claims of Damages. PC, 5, 348.

³⁵ Dickenson, Claims, PC, 5, 348.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

with a Morristown woman, which ended with a threat by him to burn down her house.³⁷ Regular operations also brought soldiers into contact with other civilian communities like nearby Vealtown and Pluckemin, increasing the opportunities for further negative interactions.³⁸

Moreover, the threat of marauding becoming a habit among soldiers was a very real fear to Army commanders. For example, for a group of recently discharged Connecticut soldiers returning home from New Jersey headquarters ordered “the officers are to pay particular attention to the conduct of the men on their march that no destruction of private property or any other disorders are committed by them on their march.”³⁹ With the contagion of disorder already extending from Jockey Hollow to the surrounding area, officers faced the specter of its continued spread wherever bodies of armed and increasingly unruly men traveled. Certainly, the Army’s inability to control its soldiery would drive the country’s civilians to reconsider their support for the regime. Overall, the predatory nature of the rank-and file’s activities points to a disruption of faith in the republican cause. The civilians refusal to sell their food and the Army leadership’s inability to devise a suitable system of supply represented a betrayal of the common soldier upon whom military success relied, thus plunder of civilians and defiance of orders was a form of retaliation.

To mitigate civilian agitation in the face of the soldiers’ depredations, Continental Army leadership resorted to several different tactics. First, by issuing general orders prohibiting plundering, officers not only sought to restrict soldiers’ actions but also to make clear to the civilian community that whenever plundering did take place, it was not sanctioned by the Army. The Army’s first response was to seek to tighten discipline through corporal punishment. Washington directed his officers to use “every method in their powers to convince depredations

³⁷ Brigade Orders, Stark's Brigade, May 26, 1780 LWS Box 67, 277.

³⁸ Brigade Orders, 4th New York Brigade, December 28, 1779. LWS Box 67, 277.

³⁹ Divisional Orders, Connecticut Line, January 6, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

of so pernicious a nature will not except the most exemplary punishment.”⁴⁰ Thus, as injuries to civilian property continued, the Continental Army resorted to harsher disciplinary measures. For example, John de Armor, after an infraction against Morristown resident Katherine Slover, was sentenced to receive “one hundred stripes on his naked back.”⁴¹ Three soldiers who broke into a Morristown storehouse were similarly sentenced.⁴² As the winter progressed and plundering continued, the Continental Army changed tactics. Although trials and sentences were usually carried out at the Jockey Hollow encampment, during the spring proceedings were moved to Morristown itself.⁴³ Here, at a venue more readily visible to the public, Army leadership could demonstrate to the public that whatever depredations the soldiery might commit, the officers remained a disciplinary force.

To more vividly demonstrate to the public the Army’s commitment to punishing crimes against civilians, leadership took more extreme measures later in the encampment. During February 1780, three members of a Pennsylvania regiment were found guilty of plundering and were sentenced to hanging.⁴⁴ Although accounts vary, it appears that at least one of those soldiers convicted were in fact executed while the others were pardoned.⁴⁵ On another occasion the following month, four soldiers from Pennsylvania regiments were found guilty of “plundering Mr. Bogart, an inhabitant near Paramus.”⁴⁶ Some empathy did exist between soldiers and civilians, as these men were also sentenced to death, but their reputations as generally disciplined soldiers and the intervention of the aggrieved Mr. Bogart led to pardon, indicating that republican sentiments did, on occasion, cross status boundaries.

⁴⁰ General Orders, December 3, 1779, LWS 67, 277.

⁴¹ Brigade Orders, Angel’s regiment, Stark’s brigade. May 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

⁴² General Orders, January 20, 1780, LWS 67, 277.

⁴³ General Orders, March 13, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ General Orders February 18, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277; Jeremiah Greenman, February 19, 1780, , PC 1, 23; Ebenezer Parkman, Feb 19, 1780, PC 5, 353.

⁴⁶ General Orders, March 13, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

Yet, even as the Army tried and sentenced soldiers for plundering, it also could not ignore that, when faced with dwindling finances, sometimes outright confiscation was the only means of keeping soldiers supplied. Headquarters initially directed quartermasters to purchase supplies from the region's inhabitants, since during bad weather the Army was forced to rely on local sources for logistics. New York's General James Clinton reported that with the magazines exhausted by early January, "the commissaries can have the wheat that has been collected from the farmers in consequence of our laws."⁴⁷ With the advent of the financial crisis in 1780, headquarters commanded quartermasters to "borrow of them (civilians) giving them assurances to return the same quantity, when the situation of our supplies will permit, and if this shall prove ineffectual, they will take from those who will be least injured thereby, giving vouchers for the quantities they receive."⁴⁸ Josiah Harmar of the Pennsylvania Line lamented being "obliged to be under the disagreeable necessity of ordering our parties to take provisions from the inhabitants and give them certificates therefore."⁴⁹ Directives such as this indicate that while the Continental Army's leadership did frequently proscribe and punish soldiers for taking civilian items, they nevertheless recognized that there was often little alternative.⁵⁰

The key difference here is that the confiscation of goods was part of an authorized strategy sanctioned by headquarters, as opposed to the wonton acts of plunder perpetrated by the soldiers themselves. More importantly, these orders at least maintained a pretense that the government would provide compensation at a later date. While what general orders termed "borrowing," may have been essentially the same as theft, they at least gave the promise of

⁴⁷ James Clinton to George Clinton, Jan 7, 1780, PC 10, 705.

⁴⁸ General Orders, 4th New York Brigade, January 30, 1780; and Angels regiment, May 21, 1780, LWS 67, 277.

⁴⁹ Josiah Harmar, January 7, 1780, LWS, 157.

⁵⁰ See E. James Furgeson. *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill 1961) for the broader story of the financial crisis. See also Robin Einhorn *American Taxation American Slavery*. (Chicago, 2006), 110-156.

vouchers. As long as men acted under the authority of officers operating under the pretense of orders, the confiscation of civilian property was justifiable as a wartime necessity. Both the state government and the Continental Army's commanders could rationalize plunder as a sacrifice for the republican cause, while vouchers offered the promise of payment to assuage at least some of the civilians' anger. Official authority differentiated appropriation of property by the Army from acts of plunder perpetrated by the rank-and-file. This was of paramount importance in shaping how New Jersey civilians viewed the Continental Army's actions. Whereas European armies disciplined marauding soldiers to maintain cohesion, resorting to the whip in the American Army had the added benefit of demonstrating to civilians the Army's concern for republican attitudes towards individual rights and private property.

The Continental Army's strategy rested on this differentiation between the organized acts of plunder directed from headquarters from the plundering committed by individuals. While property taken by the quartermaster's office could be written off as requisitions, individual soldiers who took from civilians were charged with theft. Publicly visible trials and punishments demonstrated to the population that indiscipline was not to be tolerated. Headquarters own rhetoric exhibited the contrast between authorized requisition and unauthorized plunder. Washington characterized the behavior of his soldiers as "better becoming a band of robbers than disciplined troops called forth in defense of the rights of the community."⁵¹ This statement vividly illustrates the social ills both officers and civilians perceived in the common soldiers, while also incorporating the language of republican ideology. The general attitude of Army leadership was similar. Actions authorized and organized by officers were sanctioned as an integral part of the revolutionary struggle, while the depredations of the rank-and-file were prohibited and punished severely.

⁵¹ General Orders, December 29, 1779, LWS 67, 277.

It is apparent that, by 1780, both armies were cognizant of inextricable linkages between finance, supply, and civilian sentiments. For the British, this meant an undermining of the civilian economy through armed attacks on private property and public stores. In the southern theatre, Royal officers looked to achieve similar ends through different means.⁵² For the Continental Army, finance and supply presented a difficult dilemma as officers were left to balance the needs of their starving soldiers with the attitudes of the civilian population. Carp has shown how a failed financial system threatened to delegitimize the national government in the eyes of American civilians.⁵³ Here I argue that an ill-disciplined rank-and-file presented an equally dangerous threat to national legitimacy. The task for Continental officers then, was to keep their soldiers as best supplied as possible while causing a minimal amount of civilian consternation.

A key to this strategy was to court a positive public image. Thus, when officers took from civilians, they benefited from perceptions of them as virtuous gentlemen, a valuable source of credibility soldiers lacked.⁵⁴ The Continental Army actively courted a positive public perception for its officers among the civilian population throughout the winter encampment with numerous public events held in Morristown. Dancing assemblies provide a particularly illustrative example. A letter to the Connecticut Line's Colonel Webb mentions an assembly of "130 subscribers (officers) and 165 ladies," from the surrounding area.⁵⁵ Captain Samuel Shaw noted that these assemblies brought civilians from a number of communities, including Basking Ridge, Elizabeth, and Raritan, while Erkuries Beatty's social endeavors brought him in contact with

⁵²See Urwin. "When Freedom Wore a Red Coat: How Cornwallis' 1781 Virginia Campaign Threatened the Revolution in Virginia," U.S. Army Center of Military History.

⁵³ Carp, 205-215.

⁵⁴See Joanne Freeman. *Affairs of Honor: National Politics in the New Republic*. 2002.

⁵⁵ Huntington to Webb, Feb 16, 1780, PC 6, 426.

residents of Bottle Hill (present-day Madison).⁵⁶ Beyond dances, other social gatherings brought together officers and local elites. Of particular interest is an assembly on February 23 that brought General Knox and his staff together with civilian John Jacob Faesch, a wealthy iron mine owner and prominent figure among Morris County's elites.⁵⁷ Walter Stewart of the 2nd Pennsylvania anticipated the social possibilities of an Army storehouse, "newly built in Morristown, the dancing room 70 feet long by 50 feet broad."⁵⁸ According to Royal Flint, assemblies were "almost a daily, or rather nightly diversion."⁵⁹ The frequency of these social gatherings, and the importance ascribed to them by officers in their writings is certainly reflective of the value colonial society placed on gentlemanly conduct. More importantly, by bringing officers and prominent civilians together in a social atmosphere, the Continental Army could foster a positive image and maintain friendly relationships. This effectively contrasted them with the heavy-handed conduct of British officers, both during the brief occupation of New Jersey in 1776, and during subsequent British incursions into the state. Conversely, that officers enjoyed a generally pleasant life of socializing could not have escaped the notice of the rank-and-files suffering in camp. Thus, even as officers and civilians came closer together, the social cleavage with the common-soldier increased.

The Continental Army also used other means to maintain positive civilian relations and further its hold on claims to legitimacy and authority in New Jersey. Headquarters buildings acted as sites symbolic of republican power. American general officers actively contrasted their actions with pre-war British quartering policy, by deferring to state laws and requesting civilian permission before entering private homes. The homes they did choose were often those of

⁵⁶ Samuel Shaw, PC 6, 453. Feb 29, 1780; Erkuries Beatty, March 13, 1780, PC 6, 406.

⁵⁷ Samuel Shaw, February 19, 1780, PC 6, 453.

⁵⁸ Walter Stewart, February 1, 1780, PC 6, 454.

⁵⁹ Flint to Wadsworth, February 17, 1780, PC 6, 419.

prominent Whigs. For example, Nathaniel Greene spent the winter at the tavern of militia officer Jacob Arnold, a prominent pre-war meeting spot for Morristown's revolutionaries.⁶⁰ Washington stayed at the home of deceased militia colonel Jacob Ford Jr. Ford, a prominent iron forge owner and lawyer, had been among the wealthiest men in the region prior to his death in early 1777 and his house on Morristown's eastern edge had been the town's largest.⁶¹ While little of Ford's personal papers remain, he appears to have been a well-respected figure in a fervently patriotic community and Washington's use of his home for his headquarters symbolically demonstrated the fusion of the local and national republican sentiments.⁶²

Washington's headquarters itself also functioned to impress the local population. Here camped Washington's Lifeguard, a unit of 300 men selected for their physical appearance and native-born ancestry. Their fine uniforms and discipline was on constant display to New Jersey residents who passed by the headquarters along the main road from Newark to Morristown. Maintaining a martial image was a particular concern throughout the Army, as the preponderance of orders emphasizing proper uniform and equipment indicates. In Hazen's regiment, for example, orders directed soldiers "great care must be taken to preserve the regimental clothing which must at all times be kept neat and clean."⁶³ Issues of clothing supply permeate general orders throughout the encampment.⁶⁴

The headquarters itself exhibited the pageantry of a sovereign capital, with an estimated 50 or more guards, servants, and staff present inside the home. The headquarters more than just gave the appearance of a sovereign; it also functioned as one by receiving foreign dignitaries and state delegations. Civilians were made intimately aware of the growing internationalization of

⁶⁰ Thayer, 205-207.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Regimental Orders, Hazen's regiment, March 14, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

⁶⁴ General Orders, December 26 1779, January 22, February 29. March 12, March 24, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

the war with the visit of the Spanish envoy, Don Juan de Mirrales, in April 1780.⁶⁵ Mirrales' death from illness at the encampment was followed by an apparent display of military pageantry, for Ebenezer Parkman recorded "the Spaniard {was} buried with great pomp."⁶⁶ Parkman was similarly impressed by the pageantry accompanying a visit from the French ambassador Luzerne, writing "troops assembled to salute the French Ambassador his excellency, with the grandee and they ladies waited on him in the field...thirteen cannon were fired. A very grand appearance."⁶⁷ A concurrent military parade directed by von Steuben served to impress both the foreign visitor and the local inhabitants.⁶⁸ Social gatherings reminiscent of Europe's military aristocracy followed the celebrations. Thatcher records, "Washington and the French minister attended a ball, provided by our principal officers, at which were present a numerous collection of ladies and gentlemen of distinguished character. Fireworks were also exhibited by officers of the artillery."⁶⁹ Similar parades were held in Morristown the following month, with much emphasis given to an ordered, disciplined appearance; this time both a visiting delegation from Congress and Lafayette were present.⁷⁰

Overall, these activities at the winter headquarters reveal another facet to the Army's winter encampments beyond the common narrative of skirmishing and foraging. The officers' cultivation of relationships with local Whig elites highlights the importance of synthesizing national and local interests. While Carp has recognized the connections between local elites and officers in *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, I contend that their relationship was fundamental to

⁶⁵ Ebenezer Parkman, April 28, 1780, PC 5, 353; Nathan Beers, April 29, 1780, PC 5, 344.

⁶⁶ Ebenezer Parkman, April 29, 1780, PC 5, 353.

⁶⁷ Ebenezer Parkman, April 24, 1780, PC 5, 353.

⁶⁸ General Orders, April 25, 26, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277.

⁶⁹ Thatcher, April 24, 1780, LWS Box, 67, 168.

⁷⁰ General Orders, May 28, 1780, LWS Box 67, 277; von Steuben, May 29; 1780, PC 10, 508. Thatcher, May 29, 1780, LWS 67, 168; Parkman, May 29, 1780, PC 5, 353.

the republican cause.⁷¹ Amidst a population distrustful of standing armies and exhausted from a long and expensive war, the cooperation of familiar, local leaders with the regular Army must have had a powerful psychological sway over the inhabitants. Thus, the seemingly quaint wintertime social activities of the officer class, when interpreted through the lens of public perceptions of gentlemanly republic virtue, become more central to the wartime narrative.

Furthermore, the pomp and pageantry of the winter encampment, and Washington's headquarters in particular, further complicates the narrative of sovereignty and legitimacy during the War of Independence. Military parades, demonstrations, and visits from foreign dignitaries transformed the headquarters into a symbolic center of power. With the ineffectual governance of the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, the apparent authority emanating from the winter encampment provided a substitute source of national sovereignty. The *de facto* military capital thus played as important a role as the national financial system in legitimizing the republican regime. Indeed, by conducting foreign affairs, intervening in the civilian economy, enforcing law, as well as continuing its traditional defense and security role, the Continental Army acted as a source of national authority driving the republican struggle as much as the nominal national government in Philadelphia.

One June 3, 1780, a powerful force of British, Loyalist, and German troops crossed into New Jersey from Staten Island intent on capturing the American base at Morristown. For the next three weeks fighting raged along the corridor running from Elizabethtown westward to the Hobart Gap, culminating in the Battle of Springfield on the 23rd. Participants on both sides were struck by the enthusiasm of the American forces, which successfully repelled two British thrusts. American victory in the Springfield campaign rested upon the participation of the various groups crucial to the war-effort: the New Jersey militia turned out in large numbers to harass the British

⁷¹ Carp, 153.

advance, local civilian leaders rallied popular support and decried loyalist agitations, Continental soldiers discharged their duty effectively despite their ongoing logistical plight, and Continental officers effectively managed these disparate factions in a successful campaign to resist the British attack.⁷²

American success was so surprising because the harmony between officers, soldiers, militia, and civilians during June 1780 contrasted so greatly with the discord that had characterized relations during the previous six months. After a winter of financial and logistical collapse, plunder, mutiny, and faltering morale among civilians and soldiers alike, British leaders did not expect to encounter such staunch resistance during the June invasion. The enthusiastic American reaction to the British invasion highlights both the overall resiliency of republican values in the face of hardship and, more importantly, the importance of the Continental Army in fostering continued support for the war-effort among soldiers and civilians alike.

Here, I have argued that the Continental Army's strategy for maintaining positive public relations hinged on the exploitation of class difference, as the military command sharply distinguished meritorious officers from the dangerous rank-and-file. The Army's leaders strove to keep the mass of rank-and-file separated from the civilian inhabitants to prevent "the rabble" from depredating private property. Public trial and punishment of soldiers for plundering private property reinforced this distinction and preserved the honor and legitimacy of the Continental Army. Conversely, when the Army took from civilians under the auspices of the Quartermaster's Department, they termed it requisitioning and cast it as a temporary sacrifice for the sake of the republican cause. To mitigate negative reaction, officers actively increased their standing among civilians by fostering a sense of shared cultural values in the republican virtue of the well-off. By lodging in the homes of prominent local Whigs, hosting social gatherings with civilians, and

⁷²See Flemming, *The Forgotten Victory: The Battle for New Jersey-1780*. (Reader's Digest Press, 1973).

exhibiting a martial image, the Continental Army's officers promoted faith in the cause through symbolic gestures of power, even as an actual manifestation of national sovereignty, a sound currency, evaporated. Thus, transforming Morristown into "the military capital of the revolution," as a stand-in for an ineffective national government, provided New Jersey's civilians with a symbol of national authority to believe in even as that nation's Army took their crops in exchange for worthless vouchers.

Overall, the Army strove to exhibit discipline and subordination of officers over soldiers to New Jersey's inhabitants, characterizing the soldiers' plundering as acts of theft committed by brigands and robbers to be punished by whippings and hangings, meanwhile highlighting the officers' perceived qualities of virtue and status to court civilian loyalty even as the Army confiscated private goods for its own survival. Ultimately, though, the Americans' republican values proved resilient. Despite soldiers' plundering and officers' confiscations, New Jersey's inhabitants did not turn wholesale against the republican government, nor did they instigate a loyalist insurgency. While the Continental Army leadership did take civilian possessions without paying for them and did indeed place a substantial burden on the population, they never threatened to supplant civilian political leadership with a military government. Ultimately it was the soldiers that suffered most. Poorly supplied, when they took matters into their own hands they were severely punished by their military leaders and ostracized from the surrounding civilian community, and indeed the final years of the war did see several large mutinies, beginning with the Connecticut Line at Morristown in 1780.⁷³ Yet, these mutinies never spread to the whole Army, and no radicalized soldiery ever threatened the country's social or political status quo. Nor did the rank-and-file completely descend into wholesale undisciplined brigandry.

⁷³ For mutiny in the Continental Army, see Niemeyer (1996), 130-159. For a more detailed treatment of the subject, see Carl Van Doren. *Mutiny in January: The story of a Crisis in the Continental Army*, (Viking 1943). For a more recent study, see John A. Nagy. *Rebellion in the Ranks: Mutinies in the American Revolution* (Westholme, 2007).

The primacy of republican ideals in the conduct of the officers, soldiers, and civilians in New Jersey during 1780 in preserving the revolution's social and political goals indicates that, while republican ideology may have caused the logistical problems of the later war years by precluding the creation of a strong centralized government, it also mitigated against any collapse or radicalization of the American war effort by providing some modicum of commonality through shared values between the social groups intrinsic to the waging of the war.

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