

CITIZEN WARRIORS: FRENCH PERCEPTION OF THE AMERICAN MILITARY,
1775-1777

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ABSTRACT

JULIA OSMAN: *Citizen Warriors: French Perception of the American Military, 1777-1779*
(Under the direction of Jay M. Smith)

From examining reports of the American Revolution in French newspapers, this thesis evaluates the French perception of the American military from the beginning of the war until the French-American alliance in 1778. During the 1770s, French officers and savants were referring to ancient sources to reform the military's practical problems and flagging patriotism. One officer, the Comte de Guibert, proposed the French adopt a "citizen army" as the ultimate solution. In this context of reform, the American military appeared to epitomize the patriotism and success of the ancient militaries. The hearty support of the American military that appeared in a government propaganda paper reveals the significance of the American image to the French government and European elite. During these early years of the American Revolution, the press coverage constructed an archetypal image of the American army and militia that informed French officers and enlightenment writers' understanding of military operations and patriotism.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In 1777, a small French ship appropriately christened “La Victoire” sailed across the Atlantic Ocean, transporting Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette, who impatiently waited for the ship to reach the American colonies. The nineteen-year-old French nobleman had willingly left his expectant wife, young daughter, and pampered lifestyle in order to volunteer under General Washington and offer his military services to the Americans in their quest for liberty. Louis XV had forbidden French soldiers or officers from involving themselves directly in the British-American war, but Lafayette had surreptitiously arranged for a ship and crew and had slipped out of France unnoticed. As he sailed across the Atlantic, he penned these words to his wife, describing his tender emotions towards the American people and his motivations to fight for the American cause.

As a defender of that liberty which I adore, free myself beyond all others, coming as a friend to offer my services to this most interesting republic, I bring with me nothing but my own free heart and my own good will, no ambition to fulfill and no selfish interest to serve . . . The happiness of America is intimately connected with the happiness of all mankind; she is destined to become the safe and venerable asylum of virtue, of honesty, of tolerance, of equality, and of peaceful liberty.¹

¹ Marquis de Lafayette, letter to Madame Lafayette May 30, 1777 (La Victoire, 1777) in *The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution*, ed. and trans. by Charlemagne Tower, Jr. (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 58.

Lafayette was one of many French officers who fought in America during the Revolutionary War, though few of these officers expressed such enthusiasm for the American cause or achieved Lafayette's level of success.² After the war broke out in 1775, several French officers, some with, some without, the permission of their King, sailed to America and volunteered to fight under General Washington. In 1778, after clandestinely aiding the American army with supplies and monetary support, the French government agreed to send official military support.³ In 1780, the Comte de Rochambeau arrived in America with 5,500 troops and a small officer corps. These French troops camped in Newport, Rhode Island for a year, then marched south to victory

² The only other volunteer who announced his purposes for going to America in the same manner was Louis-Philippe de Ségur. See Gilbert Bodinier, *Les Officiers de L'Armée Royale : combattants de la guerre d'Indépendance des Etats-Unis de Yorktown à l'an II* (Chateau Vincennes : Service Historique de L'armée de Terre, 1983), 263. Ségur details in his memoirs how he wished to join Lafayette in America as a volunteer, but his father would not allow it. Ségur eventually sailed to America in 1783, after the combat had concluded. Louis Philippe, Comte de Ségur, *Memoirs and Recollections*, ed. Harmon Tupper and Harry W. Nerhood (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1970), 104-110.

Under the Command of General Washington, Lafayette, who volunteered as a private, rose to the rank of Major General and received accolades for his military performance at the Battle of Brandywine. He developed a strong filial relationship with George Washington that continued until Washington's death in 1799. Because of his popularity in America, Lafayette became instrumental in orchestrating the French-American military alliance, though his loyalty to the American army did not sit well with some of the French officers in Rochambeau's army. For a classic treatment of Lafayette in America, see Charlemagne Tower, *The Marquis de Lafayette in the American Revolution with some account of the Attitude of France Toward the War of Independence* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970). For an excellent examination of Lafayette's relationship with America during the Revolution, see Lloyd Kramer, "America's Lafayette and Lafayette's America: A European and the American Revolution," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 38 (Apr., 1981): 228-241. The largest and most well known account of Lafayette would be Louis Gottschalk's six-volume series on Lafayette's life from his arrival in America through the French Revolution. Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette Comes to America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935); Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette joins the American Army* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937); Louis Gottschalk, *Lafayette and the Close of the American Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942).

³ Congress initially sent Thomas Mason, a skilled merchant marine, to l'Orient (today known as Lorient) in 1775 to purchase arms from the French. His providers were reluctant to supply them, fearing the British would discover the exchange. See Henry Pleasants, Jr. "Contraband from Lorient," in *Military Analysis of the Revolutionary War*, ed. by the Editors of Military Affairs (New York: KTO press, 1977). Congress had greater success in 1776, when French merchants used a secret French trading company called Roderique Hortalez and Co. to send aid to the colonies without the Britain's knowledge. This company was created and directed by Pierre Augustin Caron de Beaumarchais, who negotiated with Silas Dean, the American representative to France for the appropriation of supplies, to use the company to supply the American military during the early years of the war. For a thorough and fascinating account of Beaumarchais and his covert trading operations, see Brian M. Morton and Donald C. Spinelli, *Beaumarchais in the American Revolution* (New York: Lexington Books, 2003).

at Yorktown in 1781, where they fought alongside the American forces for the first and last time. Following the battle, the French army remained in America for two years until the Treaty of Paris formally ended the war in 1783.

Considering the extensive wars that devoured French resources throughout the eighteenth century, the American Revolution, which involved only five years of official French participation and a few thousand troops, hardly counts as one of the most notable chapters in French military history. Yet because the French Revolution followed closely on the heels of the American Revolution, scholars believe that there is an evident connection between the two. Colin Jones, for example, suggests that patriotism and liberty were somehow “transplanted” from America to France. He even assumes the “career soldiers” who served in the American Revolution were “transformed by their involvement in the struggle for American freedom.”⁴ However, despite what appears to be an evident connection, scholars cannot seem to find a direct link between the two Revolutions. Samuel Scott set out to demonstrate that the French military had transported Revolutionary ideas from America to France, but his work revealed that with the exception of Lafayette, most of the French officers who participated in the American war opposed the French Revolution. The opinions of the French soldiers who participated in the American Revolution are currently unknown, as their documents are maddeningly few.⁵ Of the American Revolutionary veterans, Lafayette was one of the

⁴ Colin Jones, *The Great Nation: France from Louis XV to Napoleon* (New York: Penguin Press, 2002), 301-310.

⁵ The one known study of the French foot soldiers in the American Revolution is Forrest McDonald, “The Relation of the French Peasant Veterans of the American Revolution to the Fall of Feudalism in France 1789-1792,” in *Agricultural History Magazine* 25 (Oct., 1951): 145-161. This article found a correlation between the provinces of France that were the most violent in 1789 and the provinces where most of the American Revolutionary veterans resided. He concluded that the American Revolution

few inspired by his experience in America to put his new revolutionary ideas into practice upon his return to France.

This difficulty in establishing a connection between the two Revolutions seems to go hand in hand with scholars' criticism of the French volunteers and officers who fought under Rochambeau. Gilbert Bodinier and Scott have argued convincingly that the French officers had no motivation other than self-interest or duty in following orders.⁶ Even Lafayette came under attack from scholars who portrayed him not as the valiant, self-sacrificing hero of the American and French Revolutions, but as politically clumsy and militarily inept. The soldiers and officers of Rochambeau's army were not informed until after their ship departed the coasts of France that they would be fighting in America.⁷ French volunteers were mostly professional soldiers with little overt ideological interest in the American war who wished to distinguish themselves in battle or escape debts incurred in France.⁸ The Chevalier de Pontgibaud, for example, was in prison shortly before leaving for America, because his aunt had accused him of trying to poison his father. After escaping prison, Pontgibaud reconciled with his father, who instructed his

inspired French peasants to end economic feudalism. However, such a correlation can have numerous explanations, and few scholars consider MacDonald's conclusion convincing.

⁶ Gilbert Bodinier has conducted the most thorough research to date on the French volunteers and officers under Rochambeau who fought in America. In his exhaustive studies of the French officers, Bodinier determined that the majority of volunteers were professional soldiers looking for work in a rare period of European peacetime.

⁷ Samuel Scott, *From Yorktown to Valmy* (Colorado: University Press of Colorado, 1998), 7.

⁸ For a complete reference of French volunteers and their motives, see Bodinier, *Les Officiers de L'Armée Royale*, 263, 281, 297. For a compilation of all the volunteers and their backgrounds, see André Lasseray, *Les Français sous les Treize Etoiles, 1775-83* (Imprimerie Protat frères; à Paris, 1935) and Gilbert Bodinier, *Dictionnaire des officiers de l'armée qui ont combattu aux Etats-Unis pendant la Guerre d'Indépendance, 1776-1783* (Vincennes : Service historique de l'Armée de Terre, 1983).

son to volunteer with the colonial army in America and regain his honor.⁹ The American Revolution, therefore, served as a means for French volunteers to gain glory and honor for their personal benefit; very little about America itself seems to have interested them.

Does this apparent lack of interest in the American cause necessarily indicate that the American Revolution held no ideological significance for the French military? And does the absence of an obvious ‘smoking gun’ indicate there is no military connection between the American and French Revolutions? The environment of the educated elite in France during the outbreak of the American Revolution indicates that French officers did have an ideological interest in the American war, albeit not a socio-political one of freedom and equality. After all, volunteers who came to America desiring to distinguish themselves on the battlefield expressed military ideals. Lloyd Kramer recently argued against the cynicism one encounters in present-day scholarship and restored some of Lafayette’s heroic characteristics.¹⁰ Perhaps it is time to reconsider the motives of other French officers who fought in America, as well. While these officers’ motives might appear selfish or foolhardy when viewed in isolation, in the context of the French military and moral crisis of the eighteenth century, they are recast in a more ideological light. As Durand Echeverria so aptly stated, in France “the [American] image was a reflection not of reality but of domestic preoccupations,” and in the 1770s, France was preoccupied with military and moral reform.¹¹

⁹ Hugh Rankin, *Narratives of the American Revolution* (Chicago: Donnelly Sons and Co., 1976), 213-214.

¹⁰ Lloyd Kramer applied one of Hayden White’s observations to the historians of Lafayette, specifically that the nineteenth century was a Romantic era in which history was full of heroes. The twentieth century consequently adopted a cynical view of history. Lloyd Kramer, *Lafayette in Two Worlds* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 1-6.

¹¹ Durand Echeverria, *Mirage of the West: A History of the French Image of American Society to 1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 78. Echeverria provided the foundational work on the

During the eighteenth century, and particularly during the 1770s, the French army engaged in a reform movement to address the various moral and practical problems that afflicted their military and cost them severe losses in the Seven Years' War. Among other weaknesses, the French military suffered from incompetent officers, poorly trained troops, and flagging patriotism. Reformers studied the successful military accomplishments and patriotic fervor of the ancient Greeks and Romans in search of a suitable model for the French military to emulate. As depicted in French literature, ancient militaries utilized successful tactics, employed talented and skillful commanders, and were most of all motivated by a deep sense of patriotism. One representative figure, Jacques-Antoine Hippolyte, the Comte de Guibert, a French army officer whose ideas were popular in both military and wider educated circles, promoted a new military structure based on the success of the ancients. In his *Essai Général de Tactique*, Guibert used the examples of Rome and Sparta to conclude that the French military needed to become a citizen army—an army consisting of every individual able to carry arms, ready and willing to fight for France—in order to overcome its difficulties. In particular, Guibert argued that patriotism, as exemplified by the ancients, would naturally ameliorate military problems by motivating troops and officers alike to defend their country. Guibert's proposal for a citizen army was received with wild enthusiasm from military thinkers and *philosophes* alike as a potential anecdote to cure the French military of its tactical and motivational failings.

Within this widespread atmosphere of military reform, the two most popular newspapers in France, the *Gazette de Leyde* and *Gazette de France*, printed articles

French perspective of the American Revolution and Early Republic, and focuses on philosophical, political, and social perceptions, but does not look directly at either the French or American military.

portraying the American military as the ideal citizen army that naturally avoided the practical and moral challenges plaguing its French counterpart. The American Revolution piqued military reformers' interest, as the Americans employed various tactical, organizational, and inspirational methods reminiscent of the ancients.¹² In particular, the American military appeared to exemplify citizen warfare as described by Guibert. French officers, attuned to ideas of reform and seeking evidence to support the possibility of citizen warfare, filtered the reports of America through this frame of reference.

In addition to these two popular newspapers, examining *Les Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*, a third newspaper published by the French government, reveals the extensive influence and the broad appeal of the American military as a citizen army. French interest in the American military was not just a temporary trend, but had powerful implications for the future of the French military and government. When read from the perspective of military reform, these three newspapers can convey French perceptions of the American army and militia and illustrate how this image epitomized the French army's military ideals.

In exploring the specifics of how this interest in military reform crafted the American image, I will look at the *Gazette de France* and the *Gazette de Leyde* from the beginning of the American War in 1775—and the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*, from its first publication in 1776—until the official military alliance in February of 1778 that bound France and America in a common destiny. During these

¹² For excellent descriptions of how the American militia demonstrated the French ideal of a “natural army” and preceded the *Levée en Masse* which occurred during the French Revolution, see Orville T. Murphy, “The Concept of the *Levée en Masse*,” and “French Soldier’s Opinion of the American Militia,” in *Military Analysis of the Revolutionary War*, ed. by the Editors of Military Affairs (New York: KTO press, 1977).

early years of the American Revolution, the press coverage constructed an archetypal image of the American army and militia that informed French officers and enlightenment writers' understanding of military operations and patriotism.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL AND MILITARY REFORM

Military Crisis and Transition

When the American War began in 1775, the French military was already engaged in a two-front conflict with itself, attempting to reform both the practical aspects of the French military that accounted for failure on the battlefield, as well as moral failings of the French nobility, which resulted in a flagging sense of morale and patriotism.¹³

Though these conditions had been slowly building since the early eighteenth century, the French army's embarrassing defeats during the Seven Years' War exposed the lack of competence among the officer corps and lack of aptitude among the troops. Officers did not merit their ranks, soldiers did not receive sufficient training, and the military lacked a central system that explicitly defined uniform military policies. Reformers busily concocted plans that would improve military performance without disrupting the military's place in the French social structure, but by 1775 these reformers had not succeeded in implementing all the necessary changes.

According to recent scholarship, the principal factors behind the inefficiency of the officer corps were overcrowded ranks and lack of experience. Since the Middle Ages, the leadership of the military had rested with the nobility, an elite group of warriors whose families had defended France for generations. By the eighteenth century, there was a widespread perception that the nobility should no longer have exclusive control

¹³ In discussing the French nobility, it is important to remember that not all nobles lacked military competence and values. Members of the noble class varied in wealth, status, experience, education, and world-view. Indeed, the nobility's greatest critics of these moral and military failings were nobles themselves. Therefore, when I mention problems within "the nobility," or among "nobles," I am referring only to the perception of widescale problems among the nobility.

over the officer corps, as many nobles lacked the necessary experience, expertise, and military interest to merit their ranks. As the disparity in wealth increased within the nobility, many feared that the deciding factor in military promotion had shifted from talent and experience to the financial ability of the officer to adequately outfit his soldiers and fund the campaign. Because high military rank indicated high social rank, and because Louis XV used the military as a means of rewarding court favorites, the officer corps became bloated with inept nobles vying with each other for military positions and the corresponding status. The competition among the noble officers for key positions bred personal animosities that interfered with decisions on the battlefield.¹⁴ Junior officers who managed to obtain a regiment were generally more concerned about their own popularity and the deference of their troops than about training and discipline.¹⁵ Accustomed to extravagant living, the young officers overwhelmed their regiments with excessive baggage trains in an attempt to maintain a court lifestyle on the campaign.¹⁶ Because of the misplaced priorities in the court culture of Louis XV, wealth and status trumped training and discipline.

As a result of such unprofessional behavior among the officers, the troops were undisciplined, ill-trained, and given to desertion. While scholars are currently taking a fresh look at the social constitution of the French infantry, the most recent academic

¹⁴ See Emile G. Léonard, *L'Armée et ses Problèmes au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1958), 174-175.

¹⁵ See Rafe Blaufarb, "Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building: French Military Administration after the Seven Years' War," *French Historical Studies* 24 (Spring 2001): 223-246, 236.

¹⁶ Excessive baggage on the campaign not only slowed the army and created logistical problems, it signified the officers' misplaced priorities and their inadequacy as military leaders. French writers condemned the dependence on "le luxe," luxury, as one of the greatest problems of the nobility. For example, Mably, a leading writer of the eighteenth century, argued that "luxury softens the leaders." Gabriel Bonnot, abbé de Mably, "Entretiens de Phocion, sur le rapport de la morale avec la politique," *Oeuvres complètes de l'abbé de Mably*, vol. 10 (Londres, 1789), 289.

consensus accepts the view of the army's eighteenth-century critics, who depicted the typical soldier as either an indifferent mercenary or an apathetic conscript. The majority of the French troops had little interest in cause and country, and had similarly little motivation to stay in the army if their pay arrived too late or the training seemed too rigorous. As non-nobles, foot soldiers received insufficient pay and had little hope for advancement. In an effort to keep the soldiers from deserting, young officers hesitated to enforce discipline or train the troops too rigorously. This approach only weakened the troops on the battlefield, who were unable to perform basic maneuvers and continued to desert.¹⁷ With little incentive for the troops to stay, desertion was, as Corvisier describes it, the "true curse" of the military.¹⁸

Lee Kennett and Rafe Blaufarb point to the lack of a central system within the military as the root of these problems. Since no official set of policies and procedures existed to instruct the officers about army operations, coordinating the various regiments for a battle proved nearly impossible. Power constantly shifted among the top ranks of the military, leaving the operation of the army to the numerous lower-ranking officers.¹⁹ According to Blaufarb, regiments relied on a system of "private administration," in which the officers, usually captains, had complete control over their own companies, without necessarily communicating with their fellow officers about training techniques and maneuvers.²⁰ The government did not provide a central base or barracks for the troops,

¹⁷ Blaufarb, "Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building," 235.

¹⁸ André Corvisier, *L'Armée Française de la fin du XVIIe siècle au ministère de Choiseul*, 2 vols. (Paris : Presses Universitaires de France, 1964), 693.

¹⁹ Kennett, *The French Army during the Seven Years' War*, 10.

²⁰ In eighteenth-century France, captains literally "owned" their companies, because they had to purchase all the supplies for their company and provide salaries for all the soldiers. French companies

and when not campaigning during winter months and interwar periods, captains often dispersed their troops throughout the countryside in search of provisions. When the troops scattered, regular training and discipline disintegrated, causing high rates of desertion.²¹ Without an official policy that united all aspects of the military under a uniform command, the misguided regiments could not function on the battlefield as a single military machine.²²

As these embarrassing qualities of the French military came to light during the Seven Years' War, the nobility questioned the nature of its role in society and the values that the noble class theoretically represented. Because the nobility traditionally served the state by conducting warfare, their estate corresponded to the values of patriotism, honor, and virtue. Simultaneous with military failings, French men of letters pointed out discrepancies between supposed values and the actual behavior of many members of the nobility. Rather than serve the state selflessly, for the good of fellow citizens, contemporary French writers argued that the monarchy had trained the nobility to serve the state for the promise of personal glory and gain. Hoping to rekindle lost values, scholars looked to the ancient Greeks and Romans as models of military virtue. The ancient model of patriotism, based on an overpowering love of the *patrie*, threw into sharp contrast the French nobility's self-serving reputation, and it seemed unlikely that

were therefore usually comparatively small, averaging about 40 men per company, whereas a Prussian company consisted of as many as 115 men. See Blaufarb, "Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building," 234.

²¹ Ibid., 235.

²² For more details about the mechanics of eighteenth-century warfare, see John Lynn, "States in Conflict" in *Warfare: the Triumph of the West*, ed. Geoffrey Parker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 164-178, and Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (New York: Atheneum, 1988).

the French nobility as a whole could ever conform to Roman or Spartan ideals.²³

Through constant references to ancient military ethics, eighteenth-century French authors and noblemen sought to reinstate the noble values of patriotism, honor, and virtue into a nobility that had too long operated without them.

In an effort to combat the more practical problems that beset the French military, several government officials and high-ranking military officers initiated immediate reforms following the Seven Years' War. Jean-Baptiste Donatien de Vimeur, Marquis de Rochambeau, a high-ranking noble and future military commander of the French forces in America, proposed reforms that were not based on a behavioral or moral change with the officer corps. Rather, he suggested a complicated method of awarding rank, one in which the lower ranks within the officer corps were the exclusive privilege of the nobility. Though his proposal did not require any sacrifices or changes from the officers, it was not considered a viable reform and existed only on paper.²⁴

Etienne-François, duc de Choiseul, the Minister of War, managed to pass several effective reforms that did require some officers to make sacrifices. In 1762, Choiseul removed the military from the realm of private administration, by making the army's financial requirements the burden of the state, rather than that of the individual officer. He hoped that by financing the regiments, rank would depend less on individual wealth and more on the individual's military abilities.²⁵ Choiseul also decreased the size of the officer corps, a necessary, if unpopular move. In order to give the soldiers a greater sense

²³ Jay Smith, *Nobility Reimagined: the Patriotic Nation in Eighteenth Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 95.

²⁴ Jay Smith, *The Culture of Merit* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1996), 246-248.

²⁵ Blaufarb, "Noble Privilege and Absolutist State Building," 237.

of purpose, he required them to swear an oath of loyalty to the king, effectively making them the “king’s soldiers,” rather than the property of their captain. Finally, he required all non-commissioned officers to be literate, thus providing more educated and capable enlisted leaders.²⁶ Unfortunately for Choiseul, the factionalism and intrigue of Louis XV’s court eventually resulted in his dismissal in 1770. Once Choiseul lost his position as Minister of War, his reforms, essential for the improvement of the French military, were reversed. The French military needed practical and moral reforms alike, but by the late 1760’s, many observers agreed that practical military reform could not take place without first initiating reforms that addressed the poor state of military values.²⁷

Guibert and Citizen Warfare

Jacques-Antoine Hippolyte, the Comte de Guibert, inspired new methods of reform among the nobility and the military when he penned his *Essai Général de Tactique*, a work addressing both the practical measures of military reform as well as the moral crisis of French society. Building on an established literature of patriotic reform, the *Essai* spoke to a wide audience, from *philosophes* to military commanders, and gauging from his instant popularity upon the circulation of his text in 1771, Guibert managed to appeal to both groups simultaneously.²⁸ Guibert’s extensive military

²⁶ Léonard, *L’Armée et ses Problèmes au XVIIIe Siècle*, 241.

²⁷ For more examples on the types of reforms attempted in the 1770s, see David D. Bien, “The Army in the French Enlightenment: Reform, Reaction, and Revolution,” *Past and Present*, 85 (Nov., 1979): 68-98.

²⁸ In writing his *Essai*, Guibert added to an established literature that discussed French patriotism, values, and honor, using the Ancient Greeks and Romans as models for moral reform. Some of the more prominent authors that Guibert borrowed from and dialogued with include Nicolò Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Mably, Rousseau, and Fénelon. Unlike his predecessors, Guibert utilized the classical revival and search for patriotism in order to garner the interest of Enlightenment thinkers in the contemporary French military. He successfully wedded the philosophic sphere with the military sphere, demonstrating how the improvement of one depended on the other.

observations and interactions gave him the credibility necessary for his proposal. Guibert was a member of the nobility, and his father was able to secure for him the rank of lieutenant at the age of thirteen. During the Seven Years' War, Guibert accompanied the renowned general, duc de Broglie, on campaign and witnessed first-hand the French army's disastrous defeat at the battle of Rossbach in 1757. With respect to organizational and ethical issues, Guibert helped his father implement some of Choiseul's reforms during the early 1760's. By the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, Guibert was well qualified to address the problems facing the French army, and he argued for a complete transformation of the military.²⁹ Breaking away from the European system of dynastic warfare, Guibert argued that the military should become a citizen army, which he believed would solve France's military and moral crisis.

Instead of employing professional soldiers or recruiting conscripts, a citizen army called for the mobilization of the entire population in times of war. During times of peace, these citizens laid aside their arms and returned to their daily occupations. This idea resonated for those who had learned of Cincinnatus, the Roman general who returned to his farm after fighting for the Empire. Guibert's vision of a citizen army included a "vigorous militia . . . consisting of contented citizens who are interested in defending their prosperous state." He argued that neighboring nations would not wish to disturb its tranquility, but,

²⁹ For works discussing Guibert and his *Essai Général de Tactique*, see François Emmanuel Vicomte de Toulangeon, preface to *Journal d'un voyage en Allemagne, fait en 1773*, by Jacques-Antoine Hyppolyte de Guibert (Paris : Treuttel et Würtz, 1803), 1-85. A work that places Guibert in the context of seventeenth and eighteenth-century French military history is R.R. Palmer, "Frederick, Guibert, Bülow," in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Peter Paret, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1986), 105-113. For a brief biography of Guibert, see Henri Ménard, preface to *Ecrits Militaires* by Jaques Antoine Hippolyte de Guibert (Paris: Copernic Press, 1977), 15-52.

if finally, despite [the citizen-soldier's] moderation, he is in some way violated, in his affairs, his land, or his honor, he will make war. But when he makes war, it will be with the full exertion of his power; it will be with the firm resolution not to lay down his weapons until he has been paid reparation in proportion to the offense. His method of war will not be like the method that most states have adopted today. He will not want to conquer, but only preserve what is rightfully his. . . . Terrible in his anger, he will bring to his enemy fire and sword. With his vengeance, he will frighten all the people who are tempted to disturb his peaceful state. This will not be barbaric, his violation of the superficial laws of war, for these reprisals are founded on the laws of nature. [Once offended], he rises, he leaves his hearth. He will perish, until the last man if necessary. But he will obtain satisfaction, he will avenge himself, he will assure, by the lightening of his vengeance, his future peace . . . ³⁰

In proposing this new approach to warfare, Guibert presented a solution to the military and moral crisis plaguing France. By placing the duty of warfare in the hands of French citizens, Guibert suggested distancing the military from the nobility; the army would no longer serve as a gauge for social celebrity but instead exist purely for defense. Guibert's citizen army would therefore avoid the cumbersome baggage trains that court nobles "needed" on the campaign. Nor could the monarch use positions in the military as a means to reward his court favorites, placing unqualified individuals in positions of high rank. Rather than fighting amongst themselves for royal favors, officers and soldiers alike would work toward a common cause, not for their personal glory, but for the defense of their *patrie*. Because a citizen army would not rely on mercenaries or conscripts, but on citizens motivated by love for their country, the army would not suffer from desertion, nor require a great deal of financial assistance from individuals or the

³⁰ Jacques-Antoine Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert, "Essai Général de Tactique," in *Ecrits militaires*, ed. Henri Ménard (Paris : Copernic, 1976), 67.

state. Patriotism, a deep and sincere love of the *patrie*, was the essential ingredient if this type of military were to succeed.³¹

Promoting French patriotism would lay the foundation for moral and military reform by making service to the *patrie* its own reward. Guibert's citizen army operated only in defense of the nation for the promise of "future tranquility." Because Guibert restricted warfare to the borders of France, monarchs would not have to invent incentives for his nobles to fight on foreign lands. Instead, the threat of being conquered would be the primary motivation for people to fight in defense of their country. Patriotic warfare would be more personal, as the citizens would be fighting directly to defend their families and property. The disciplined training required of foot soldiers to effectively execute line warfare would not be necessary in a citizen army, because citizens would fight in a more "natural" style akin to guerilla warfare. If the citizens fought so heartily for their own defense, then merit, not social rank, would determine which individuals organized and commanded the military. By fighting only defensive wars, and calling on all citizens to take an equal part in the protection of their country, France would eliminate its moral and military problems.

Guibert recognized the implausibility of this ideal state, and admitted that European states had little interest in citizen warfare. Having a citizen army required arming the citizenry, and monarchical European governments of the eighteenth century feared revolts.³² Guibert further recognized that European governments would probably continue their attempts to gain additional power and expand their territories. Despite the

³¹ Guibert, *Essai*, 213.

³² *Ibid.*, 64.

reality of Europe's current situation, Guibert indicated in his *Essai* that Europe could change, and that France would provide the example. Addressing his *patrie*, Guibert encouraged his nation to adopt a patriotic system, reasoning that "[t]his vision will perhaps not always be a fantastic dream. It could be realized in you."³³

To the modern reader, Guibert's ideas may seem too idealistic to have been taken seriously, but his *Essai* found a strong following in France. As the ultimate mark of approval in philosophic society, Voltaire praised the text as "a work of genius."³⁴ Guibert's *Essai* made him an instant celebrity among the upper nobility and educated elite, and he quickly embraced the life of a French *philosophe*. Guibert succeeded in popularizing the military reforms among the educated classes, and he united the objectives of military and moral reform, pointing to patriotism as the key to improving the incompetent, corrupted and unmotivated French army.

³³ Ibid., 68-9.

³⁴ Palmer, "Frederick, Guibert, Bülow," 106. See also Léonard, *L'Armée et ses Problèmes*, 260. Léonard quotes Voltaire, saying, "La Tactique n'est pas un ouvrage de belles-lettres; mais elle m'a paru un ouvrage de génie."

CHAPTER III

THE PRESS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Reporting on the American War

While the educated elite in France contemplated and criticized society's moral shortcomings and military failings, a revolution erupted across the Atlantic, and the French elite followed the events with great interest. The majority of educated French society probably learned of the American war (as well as the events leading up to it) by reading the *Gazette de Leyde* or *Gazette de France*, the two leading newspapers in France. The *Gazette de France* was a court paper printed under the supervision of the French government. It primarily described court activities, new regulations that warranted public attention, and international events, but reported very little on domestic affairs. Despite some discrepancies in the factual information of the paper, which would discredit it as a reliable source according to modern standards, the *Gazette* was generally recognized as an authoritative source for political news. It was often the first source to print international information and thus provided its readers with their initial impressions. In addition to its reliability (by eighteenth-century standards), the *Gazette de France* was cheaper than other papers and enjoyed a reputation for prompt reporting.³⁵

The other major newspaper in eighteenth-century France was a French-language paper printed in the Netherlands called the *Gazette de Leyde*. This *Gazette* served an

³⁵ Jeremy Popkin, *News and Politics in the Age of the Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989), 47, 48.

international audience and was not written under the gaze of a government, making its news on French domestic affairs comparatively more reliable. Thanks to its timely reporting and international correspondents, by 1750 the *Gazette de Leyde* was the top-selling newspaper in Europe.³⁶ Jean Luzac, the editor of the paper during the 1770s, sympathized with the American cause, often giving news from Britain and America precedence over reports from other regions. In reporting American events, he relied heavily on American correspondents in Europe. One of his contacts, Charles Dumas, who represented the American cause in the Netherlands at the Hague, communicated regularly with Luzac and encouraged other American representatives in Europe, such as Silias Dean and Benjamin Franklin, to send their correspondence to Luzac for publication.³⁷ Indeed, Luzac's friendship with John Adams and George Washington sealed his legacy, as "during the War of [American] Independence, a war that impassioned the general *esprit*, he was receiving from America the first and most accurate news."³⁸ Although the *Gazette de France* was the more popular newspaper in France, the *Gazette de Leyde* printed more detailed information and had greater freedom in choosing what to print.

It is difficult to assess the exact number of readers, since one newspaper would pass through an indeterminate number of hands at a café, salon, club, or private residence, but the *Gazette de France* and *Gazette de Leyde* together sold nearly 15,000 copies twice a week, a sufficient number to ensure widespread readership among the

³⁶ Ibid., 9.

³⁷ Ibid., 87, 76.

³⁸ Eugène Hatin, *Bibliographie Historique et Critique de la Presse Périodique Française* (Paris, 1866), 85.

elite.³⁹ Only the wealthy could afford a yearly subscription to the *Gazette de Leyde*, limiting its readership to the higher levels of society.⁴⁰ Because both papers were costly and catered to those with an interest in politics, it is safe to assume that wealthy court nobles and high-ranking military officials would have been regular readers of the two *gazettes*.

In reporting news on foreign affairs, both newspapers often relied on articles in other periodicals, letters, and official documents, which they either summarized or reprinted in full, usually over the course of several weeks. In some instances, reporters did not provide the sources for particular information, although at other times the reporters went to great lengths to present all available sources in an article. When they received conflicting information, both newspapers carefully chose which version to report and alerted the readers to these discrepancies or presented both conflicting sources. The *Gazette de France* admitted that “[o]ur published papers always contain facts which are difficult to reconcile.” Similarly, the *Gazette de Leyde* wrote that “the public will read avidly” any articles on the American war, even if the contradicting reports made “the news from America . . . unsuitable for publication.”⁴¹ Regardless of the accuracy of some of their sources, both *gazettes* felt pressure from the readership to print more news on the American Revolution and demonstrated similar tendencies in their treatment of it.

The image the newspapers sculpted of the American military was partially shaped by the literary styles and Republican rhetoric of the eighteenth century. The journalists

³⁹ Number of subscriptions of *Gazette de France* in 1781: 12,000; number of subscriptions of *Gazette de Leyde* in 1778: 2,560. See Popkin, *News and Politics in the Age of the Revolution*, 48, 121.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126. The price for a subscription to the *Gazette de Leyde* was 36 livres per year.

⁴¹ *Gazette de France*, November 22, 1776, and *Gazette de Leyde*, July 28, 1775.

reporting and propagating the favorable American image were as steeped in the rhetoric of Greek and Roman patriotism as the officers who read their reports; even outside the military, eighteenth-century French literature abounded in references to the ancients. Rousseau's *First Discourse*, for example, examined the conflicting roles of art and military science in Greek and Roman society and concluded that the French should learn from those examples and focus on military training before the arts.⁴² In his *Considerations on the Government of Poland*, Rousseau encouraged his countrymen to "build strong citadels in the hearts of the citizens" like Sparta, and emulate the Romans' public displays of patriotic fervor.⁴³ Gabriel Bonnot, abbé de Mably likewise linked the rampant luxury in the French military to the death of patriotism.⁴⁴ In representing the American Revolution, these newspapers were also employing prevalent literary styles. The language they used closely resembled the language of Guibert, which signified that these reporters were well-versed in the literary conventions of the time period. This literary frame of reference does not completely explain the individual journalists' intentions when they penned the articles, but it does suggest that the reporters already had a model in mind when they received the scattered information from America. When piecing the information into a report, or translating letters or Congressional resolutions, they used the classical republican lens already popular in French literature and philosophy.

⁴² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Discours sur les sciences et les arts," in *Oeuvres Complètes de J.J. Rousseau*, vol. 10 (Paris : Chez P. Dupont, 1823), 20.

⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, "Considerations on the Government of Poland," from *Political Writings*, ed. and trans. by Frederick Watkins (London: Thomas Nelson and sons ltd., 1953), 243, 173-4.

⁴⁴ Gabriel Bonnot, abbé de Mably, "Entretiens de Phocion, sur le rapport de la morale avec la politique," in *Oeuvres complètes de l'abbé de Mably*, vol. 10 (Londres, 1789).

While the extent of the American military's influence on the newspapers cannot be known, in examining Washington's correspondence, it is apparent that the Americans knew of and protected their image abroad. According to Bernard Bailyn's study of American Revolutionary pamphlets, Americans identified themselves with the Greeks and Romans of antiquity and saw the ancients as "illustrative" of their thoughts and actions.⁴⁵ Concerning the specific perceptions of the American military abroad, the Americans did not so much construct this image as safeguard it. In a letter dated shortly before the British attack on Philadelphia, Lafayette counseled Washington to combat the British without the aid of the militia in order to preserve the powerful image of America's citizen army. Lafayette understood that if his countrymen discovered that the American militia was not nearly as successful as the newspapers reported, the Americans could lose all hope of foreign aid and recognition. He informed Washington,

Europe has a great idea of our ability to raise when we please an immense army of militia, and it is looked upon as our last but certain resource. If we fall this phantom will also fall and you know that the American interest has always been that since the beginning of this war to let the world believe that we are stronger than we ever expect to be.⁴⁶

The Americans, as far as we know, had little control over the information that the newspapers chose to print, but they were aware of their image in Europe and understood the need to safeguard it as much as possible.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 26.

⁴⁶ Lafayette, *The Letters of Lafayette to Washington: 1777-1779*, ed. Louis Gottschalk (New York, 1944), 12.

⁴⁷ The Americans did indeed propagate their image in Europe in many ways outside the press' depiction of the military. American representatives in the French court, especially Benjamin Franklin, consciously cultivated a rustic but noble image of the Americans that the French elite found particularly appealing, and various types of literature followed to enrich and solidify that impression. See Gerald Stourzh, *Benjamin Franklin and American Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954). The most recent

Given that these newspapers provided the reading public with the most detailed, consistent, and up-to-date reports from abroad, analysis of their contents can help to establish the general impression that most educated Frenchmen would have formed of the American military. Although the papers are replete with inaccuracies, their accounts of the American war—reports of battles, descriptions of the military, pertinent Congressional resolutions—allow us to reconstruct French perceptions of the American army and militia and the ways in which that perception conditioned and was conditioned by the context of the French moral and military crisis. What we see is that French readers would have formed an impression of the American military that matched Guibert’s portrayal of citizen warfare.

Press Representations of the American Army and Militia

When one views the two *gazettes*’ reports of America from a perspective firmly rooted in the moral and military reforms of the 1770s, the American army and militia appear to fit the mold of Guibert’s model citizen army to a startling degree. A citizen army, as Guibert presented it to the French nobility and as the American military appeared to embody it, involved a sense of mutual support, patriotism, and self-sacrifice. According to Guibert, love of country and family sufficiently motivated citizens to defend their country and refrain from wars of conquest. When repulsing the enemy, citizen soldiers used all available resources in a type of warfare that corresponded to the “laws of nature,” involving unconventional tactics. Guibert concluded, as did the papers reporting on the American Revolution, that a nation equipped with such a powerful and

publication on Franklin’s time in France is Stacy Schiff, *Franklin, France, and the birth of America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2005).

passionate army could not be defeated.⁴⁸ Generally speaking, the American officers and soldiers as presented in the newspapers seemed to avoid the problems plaguing French military personnel. Additionally, reports of congressional resolutions illustrated some of the American government's approaches to organizing and administering an effective citizen army. Towards the end of 1777, the American image became associated with the ancients that French writers encouraged their own people to emulate.

When one considers the French impression of the American army and militia, it is important to note that in the early years of the American Revolution (until news arrived of the Declaration of Independence), French newspapers represented the Americans as actively seeking reconciliation with England. In these accounts, the colonists fought purely for the rights and liberties that they merited as Englishmen, not for independence from a monarchy. According to the papers, only citizens in Boston demonstrated any revolutionary or anti-monarchical sentiment, whereas the remainder of the colonists made a point of proclaiming their allegiance to the Crown. The *Gazette de France* quoted one of Washington's letters to Congress announcing that,

While the faithful subjects of the King, by respect for the laws, and the same for the constitution, in virtue of which His Majesty is seated on the Throne of England, we take upon ourselves the sad necessity of taking up arms for the defense of our rights and our privileges, and that at the same time we deplore the calamities of this divided Empire . . . according to the voices of all good Americans, this great quarrel concludes in our reconciliation with the Mother Country.⁴⁹

The *Gazette de Leyde* further printed parts of Congressional correspondence in which John Hancock, the President of Congress, continually referred to the American citizens as

⁴⁸ Guibert, *Essai*, 67.

⁴⁹ *Gazette de France*, August 21, 1775.

“faithful subjects of His Majesty.”⁵⁰ Therefore, at the outset of the American war, the perceived reasons behind the conflict had little to do with challenging the monarchy, and more with re-establishing certain rights and privileges that the British colonists merited by right of being Englishmen. Reports that describe the American military are not concerned with the politically ideological implications of the Revolution, but rather focus on military performance and the success of a citizen army.

According to Guibert, citizen armies could only fight defensive wars, and beginning with the Battles of Concord and Lexington, both newspapers cast the British army in the role of the aggressor and the colonial army and militias as the defenders, fighting valiantly for their rights. While neither paper described either side in such explicit terms, one can infer these respective roles from the accounts of battles, wartime atrocities, and congressional resolutions that the newspapers chose to print. In reporting on the Battle of Lexington, the *Gazette de France* printed sections of a letter that the Provincial Congress of New England addressed to the inhabitants of Great Britain, explaining the cause for the conflict and placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of the British army. The letter recounted several inhabitants of Massachusetts, strolling peacefully from Boston on the road to Lexington, when British soldiers from General Gage’s army attacked them. The Lexington militia came to these citizens’ defense, and sent a hundred men to fight against at least 900 British soldiers.⁵¹ The *Gazette de Leyde* presented a different translation of the same letter and included a graphic description of

⁵⁰ *Gazette de Leyde*, August 15, 1775.

⁵¹ *Gazette de France*, June 9, 1775.

the atrocities that the British supposedly committed against American citizens following the battle:

It would be very difficult, if not impossible, to give a detailed account of the ravages that the [British] troops committed during their retreat from Concord to Charlestown. Suffice to say, that a great number of houses on the way were pillaged and destroyed, some of them were burned, women who were in their beds were chased naked down the road by the [British] soldiers, who killed old men in cold blood in their homes; in a word, the [British] troops gave to this occasion scenes of horror so dark, that they would dishonor the annals of even the most barbaric nations.⁵²

Having reported this dramatic event, the *Gazette de Leyde* added that London awaited news from General Gage for his account of the matter, which it duly printed in the next issue of the journal four days later. Gage's account placed responsibility for the battle on the "rebels," whom he claimed fired at the British troops from behind houses and brick walls. Gage reported that he and his men simply carried out orders, destroying colonial stores of weapons and supplies. He emphasized the number of British casualties that resulted from the Battles of Concord and Lexington, but did not describe the colonists' actions in great detail, beyond their various geographic positions throughout the skirmish. Gage did not make any mention of the supposed atrocities that the British soldiers committed against civilians, but stated that, "the detachment marched towards Concord, without arriving at any other incident."⁵³ For some readers, Gage's account might have seemed the more plausible of the two, but in printing the American account first, with its dramatic language and graphic imagery, both the *Gazette de Leyde* and the

⁵² *Gazette de Leyde*, June 13, 1775.

⁵³ *Gazette de Leyde*, June 20, 1775.

Gazette de France introduced the American war as a colonial response to British aggression.

The theme of British aggression continued throughout both papers' accounts of the American Revolution, each making several references to British brutality. While the newspapers published a few British accounts that recounted American brutality against the British army, in most cases the British troops were described as the aggressors, committing acts of atrocity against civilians. French readers saw "the [American] inhabitants . . . only suffer. The murders, the thievery, the rapes, the insults of which these [British] troops are guilty, are terrible."⁵⁴ In casting the British troops as the aggressors and continually reminding readers of their atrocities, the newspapers established that the British troops had, in Guibert's words, "violated" the Americans' affairs, land, and honor, giving them every reason to "make war."⁵⁵

As if consciously following Guibert's definition of a citizen army, the Americans, as represented in the two *gazettes*, responded to this attack on their *patrie* by repelling the British armies with "full exertion of [their] power." Immediately after reporting the outbreak of war with the Battles of Concord and Lexington, both *gazettes* printed abridged versions of the "Declaration of the Causes and the Necessity of Taking up Arms," Congress's explanation of the violence between British and Provincial troops as well as an outline of the conditions necessary for peace. Like Guibert's citizen soldier who, "with firm resolution [does] not lay down his weapons until he has been paid

⁵⁴ *Gazette de Leyde*, October 14, 1777.

⁵⁵ The quoted text is in reference to Guibert's description of citizen warfare in his *Essai*, 67.

reparation in proportion to the offense,”⁵⁶ Congress declared the American people “unanimously resolved to die as free men rather than to live in slavery . . . We do not fight for vain glory nor for conquest. We will cease hostilities when hostilities have ceased on the part of the aggressors . . . but not before.”⁵⁷ The American conflict fit Guibert’s parameters for citizen warfare perfectly; citizens, not mercenaries or conscripts, were taking up arms against an invading army to protect their cherished homeland.

In protecting their homeland, the Americans appeared to use all of their resources to repel their enemy, including manpower, finances, and supplies. The *Gazette de France* reported that out of a population of 2,400,000 people, 600,000 men, or one colonist of every four, participated in either the American army or local militia.⁵⁸ Even Quakers, a community of pacifists, reportedly constituted their own company of soldiers.⁵⁹ The remaining members of society contributed to the war effort by making saltpeter for gunpowder or clothing for the soldiers.⁶⁰ In Maryland, any person who “refused to contribute arms or ammunition was regarded as an enemy of America and would have his name printed in the [local] gazette,” demonstrating that the Americans expected their fellow citizens to contribute to the war effort.⁶¹ On an illustrative note, the *Gazette de France* published a letter from American General Lee to British General Burgoyne, informing him that “it would not be an exaggeration to say that all the boats in

⁵⁶ Guibert, *Essai*, 67.

⁵⁷ *Gazette de Leyde*, August 22, 1775; *Gazette de France*, August 21, 1775.

⁵⁸ *Gazette de France*, December 13, 1776.

⁵⁹ *Gazette de Leyde*, July 18, 1775.

⁶⁰ *Gazette de Leyde*, January 9, 1776.

⁶¹ *Gazette de France*, April 17, 1775.

the world would not suffice to transport the forces . . . of three million men, unanimously resolved to sacrifice all for liberty.”⁶² From reading these reports, educated Frenchmen saw that all men able to carry arms were actively fighting against the British, that the remaining citizens who did not carry arms were busily working to support and supply the colonial troops, and that all citizens were willing to sacrifice their lives and their fortunes for the cause of liberty. Indeed, according to the reports of the papers, the entire “nation” of America was at war.

The newspapers further indicated that, even before the colonies united in a movement of independence against the mother country, they provided military support for each other and treated attacks on specific colonies as attacks on the colonies as a whole. Shortly after the battles of Lexington and Concord, the *Gazette de Leyde* reported that Connecticut “offered 10,000 men to New York” in preparation for the ensuing British attack.⁶³ In 1777, once the war was well under way, American soldiers busily attempting to replace lost supplies from their magazines in Danburg and Ridgefield, “received much help from the other colonies.”⁶⁴ In reporting the American war, both newspapers emphasized a feeling of unity and mutual support among the colonies. Unlike France, in which Paris was the center of the nation and all other provinces were literally and figuratively on the periphery, these examples demonstrated a strong level of communication throughout the colonies, as well as a sincere concern for fellow citizens and a willingness to help. To borrow from Guibert’s depiction of citizen-soldiers, these

⁶² *Gazette de France*, March 1, 1776.

⁶³ *Gazette de Leyde*, June 23, 1775.

⁶⁴ *Gazette de France*, July 7, 1777.

reports of mutual aid and support presented a view of the Americans as “contented citizens interested in defending their prosperous state.”⁶⁵ The colonists were cooperative rather than competitive, willing to selflessly defend different provinces in order to aid and protect fellow citizens.

Accounts of the American soldiers in combat, which the *gazettes* gathered from some of General Gage’s letters to Britain, portrayed distinct differences in strategy and tactics when compared to the European method of warfare. Rather than meet the British army on the battlefield and fight along traditional limits of line warfare, Washington was “content to harass [British] troops and refuse[d] to engage.”⁶⁶ As both *gazettes* reported, Washington further bent the rules of European warfare during the Battle of Trenton, in which he crossed the Delaware River on Christmas Eve with about 4,000 troops pulled from the army and various militias, and surprised a group of Hessians encamped at Trenton on Christmas morning. According to both *gazettes*, the engagement resulted in the death or capture of hundreds of Hessians at no cost to the American army.⁶⁷ In this thoroughly reported battle, Washington broke with European tradition by fighting in winter, when combat usually stopped for the entire season. As Guibert had suggested to French officers in the *Essai*, Washington’s officers, well-versed in the shape and scope of the landscape, used the geography of the battle grounds to their advantage.⁶⁸ Certainly a

⁶⁵ Guibert, *Essai*, 67.

⁶⁶ *Gazette de France*, April 14, 1777.

⁶⁷ *Gazette de France*, February 21, 1777; *Gazette de Leyde*, February 18, 1777. I have reproduced the Battle of Trenton as reported by the *gazettes*. Please note that Washington did not cross the Delaware on Christmas Eve, but Christmas night, and attacked the Hessians on the morning of December 26. See Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), 166-170.

⁶⁸ See Guibert, *Essai*, 220-224.

citizen army could employ this non-European tactic, because citizens of the country understood how to use the land formations to maximize the effectiveness of guerilla warfare. The major battles of the American Revolution did conform more closely to European style fighting, yet the *gazettes* reported more frequently on Washington's unconventional strategy of attrition and guerilla warfare, which they presented as largely successful.⁶⁹ "The Provincial [army] continually harass [British] troops on their march with sudden attacks . . . unanticipated in the woods, the gorges, which America is full of, and against which this army cannot present an extended front."⁷⁰ Again, as though keeping with Guibert's description of citizen armies, the American military practiced a more "natural" style of warfare.⁷¹

Aside from non-traditional military practices, the *gazettes* reported that Americans defeated British troops, because as citizens, they were personally invested in the war and its outcome. They fought for their homes, their families, and their personal liberties. Beyond the cause of liberty and their rights, which appeared most often in the newspapers as the principal motives for the American war, the Americans fought for their "dear wives, and children, these tender objects of [their] solicitude, but also the millions of [their] descendants not yet born . . ."⁷² At the same time, the newspapers portrayed the Americans as willing to sacrifice all of their worldly goods and security for the American

⁶⁹ Wars of attrition often connote wars that involve massive casualties, which was not the case in the American Revolution. However, one can correctly classify Washington's strategy as one of attrition, due to his use of protracted guerilla warfare that may not have resulted in numerous British casualties, but did overwhelm the morale of British officers and troops.

⁷⁰ *Gazette de France*, July 11, 1777.

⁷¹ See Guibert, *Essai*, 67.

⁷² *Gazette de Leyde*, May 24, 1776.

cause. *The Gazette de France* reported that in Charleston, citizens resolved to burn their town rather than leave it to supply and house the British soldiers.⁷³ *The Gazette de Leyde* described the Americans as “more resolved than ever to defend their liberty at the price of their lives and all that is dear to them.”⁷⁴ Guibert noted in his *Essai* that the penalties in the ancient world for losing a war—enslavement or death—were frightening enough in themselves to motivate ancient Greek and Roman soldiers to fight. Reports of America displayed the same consequences for the Americans—slaves under the British, destruction of their homes, death of their families—if they failed to win this war.⁷⁵

Because of the geographic and chronological distance between American events and the corresponding reports in the newspapers, and because the newspapers relied on resolutions, letters, and secondary reports as the basis of their news, often a relatively bleak American event could, by the time the report reached the newspapers, appear to the French readers as a great success or triumph over adversity. *The Gazette de Leyde*, for example, printed a series of letters and resolutions from Congress pleading with citizens to join either the American army or militia. These resolutions appealed to the personal and cultural aspects of the war, discussing the safety of wives and children, the protection of property, the inevitable destruction of a British invasion in a particular town or colony, as well as the desire to live in liberty and enjoy the rights “accorded to [them] by heaven.”⁷⁶ A critical reader might see these resolutions as a failure on the citizens’ part to rise and meet the enemy. Yet shortly after the *gazette* printed these calls for help, it

⁷³ *Gazette de France*, September 27, 1776.

⁷⁴ *Gazette de Leyde*, May 24, 1776.

⁷⁵ Guibert, *Essai*, 79.

⁷⁶ *Gazette de Leyde*, April 4, 1777.

reported huge rises in the number of troops in Washington's army. After recounting the overwhelming response to this appeal for more soldiers, the paper reported 99,000 troops in the army, with an additional 47,600 available for "occasional needs."⁷⁷ In responding to their government's call to arms, the Americans exhibited the solidarity between government and people, which according to Guibert was necessary for a successful citizen army. This series of articles illustrates the optimistic interpretation the gazettes spun when reporting American news. A war that historically had many unsuccessful moments was actually represented in a continual positive light in these newspapers.

In short, as portrayed by the *gazettes*, the American war matched Guibert's definition of a citizen army in nearly every aspect: the citizens were invested in the outcome of the war, fought for a just government, were united in a common cause, and motivated by patriotism. As a result, they were waging a successful war against one of the most powerful armies in Europe that had defeated the French army just thirteen years before during the Seven Years' War. As a perfect illustration of this citizen warfare, the *Gazette de Leyde* printed a story of the Connecticut militia, which was desperate for more troops. When the governor appealed to men who had extensive families, and thus were exempted from military service, they responded *en masse*. According to the newspaper, most of these men were elderly members of the gentry class. As instructed, they formed units, elected their own officers, trained, and prepared to enter battle. The reporter for the *Gazette* extolled these men: "The example of these respectable citizens proves to what degree patriotism raises their hearts, and how difficult it will be to subjugate a people, in which the vast majority know how to sacrifice their familial ties and their most

⁷⁷ *Gazette de Leyde*, May 23, 1777; *Gazette de Leyde*, August 1, 1777.

valued personal interests, to save the *patrie* in danger.”⁷⁸ As if they were enacting Guibert’s text, the Americans proved that having patriotism driving military action resulted in *esprit*, morality, and military success.

The gazettes were further attuned to the Americans’ domestic political culture, which consisted of festivals celebrating their independence and commemorating their fallen comrades. Perhaps the most extravagant reports of patriotism, which the French reformers must have read with jealous eyes, appeared in September of 1777, when the papers recounted how the Americans celebrated the first anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In Boston, the Fourth of July was “celebrated . . . with all the enthusiasm that can inspire a *fête* that recognizes the liberty of Republican souls.”⁷⁹ The *Gazette de Leyde* reported that all thirteen colonies, “broke publicly and gloriously the sword which Britain had forged for them; and generously took back the rights that God and Nature had accorded to mankind.”⁸⁰ Both newspapers reported the memorials that the army dedicated to their fallen soldiers and officers.⁸¹ Anytime the Americans answered the needs of their fellow citizens, from sewing shirts to fighting in the battle of Trenton, they actively demonstrated patriotism as their primary motivation in fighting the war. As the newspapers recounted, the soldiers and officers of the army and militias had occupations other than soldiering—most were farmers or artisans. The pay for soldiering was minimal; Congress did not even raise taxes in these early years to fund the military, and some of the wealthier officers provided, of their own volition, money for supplies.

⁷⁸ *Gazette de Leyde*, May 13, 1777.

⁷⁹ *Gazette de France*, September 22, 1777.

⁸⁰ *Gazette de Leyde*, September 23, 1777.

⁸¹ *Gazette de France*, July 14, 1777; *Gazette de Leyde*, March 22, 1776.

Unlike European soldiers, it was not these citizens' profession to fight, yet the Americans demonstrated a great "ardor for battle."⁸² As General Howe penned in one of his letters printed in the *Gazette de France*, "we offered peace to the Americans, who immediately prepared for battle and offered us combat."⁸³ In reading about the Revolutionary War, French officers would have perceived the extent to which the Americans' self-conscious patriotism realistically supplied both a moral officer corps and military efficiency.

In reporting on the character and success of American warfare, the *Gazette de Leyde* reprinted several resolutions from Congress, demonstrating how a nation formed and organized an army of volunteers and militias. In these resolutions, the American Congress detailed all the specifics involved in a citizen army, including the appropriate ages of the volunteers (between 16 and 50), the number and ranks of the officers, and the necessary equipment. According to these resolutions, soldiers in the militia elected their officers who then received their commissions from provincial assemblies. These resolutions enumerated the equipment, training schedules, uniforms, and compensation for the soldiers necessary for maintaining a citizen army. An elite group of the militia would serve as minutemen, and additional resolutions provided details for the training of these soldiers.⁸⁴ The *Gazette de Leyde* further published the army regulations, enumerating how the army was organized, who nominated the officers, how soldiers were compensated for their service, and many other such practical details.⁸⁵ Though the fledgling United States improvised many of their military guidelines, they provided a

⁸² *Gazette de France*, July 5, 1776.

⁸³ *Gazette de France*, December 15, 1777.

⁸⁴ *Gazette de Leyde*, February 14, 1775.

⁸⁵ *Gazette de Leyde*, February 21, 1777.

concrete example of a centralized system that oversaw all military policies, modeling for France the kind of “central system” necessary for an effective citizen army.

In contrast to the French army, the two *gazettes* presented the American officers as homegrown patriots, whose concern for their country informed their leadership. Because America did not have a traditional nobility, social rank did not necessarily influence military rank. The *gazettes* printed a few brief biographies of some of the officers, enough to give the impression that high-ranking officers of the American military had a great deal of experience or expertise, earned the respect of their soldiers and fellow citizens, and merited their rank. Few of these officers considered themselves military men for life, but French readers would have associated them with Cincinnatus; the officers of the American army were not professional soldiers, but qualified citizens. Generals Sullivan, Putnam, and Gates received accolades from the newspapers, while General Washington embodied every virtue of the perfect officer. Because these officers could not expect a rise in social rank or a promotion at court to result from their time as officers, the *gazettes* inferred that they served out of patriotism.

Though these homegrown, high-ranking American officers seemed a far cry from the upper nobility of the French military, the newspapers also presented more genteel aspects of the Americans that must have seemed comforting and familiar to the noble Frenchmen. The *Gazette de France* reported an instance in which American General Gates hosted a formal dinner party for British General Burgoyne. Although a board sitting on two barrels served as a dining table, and the meal consisted of watered down rum and very plain fare from the officers’ mess, both gentlemen enjoyed each other’s

company and ended the meal toasting their countries and leaders.⁸⁶ This instance would have resonated with French officers, for whom ceremony and protocol often overcame national differences. General Howe recounted in a letter how British General Gage and his family (who accompanied him to America) did not have sufficient food until American General Putnam learned of their condition and “sent Mrs. Gage a quarter of freshly killed veal.”⁸⁷ These actions demonstrated that the Americans were more than mere backwoods fighters who believed in their country’s cause—they had goodwill, good manners, and good taste, and they recognized the class distinctions in the British army by demonstrating a level of deference and politeness to high-ranking British officers. The Americans might practice an entirely different form of warfare from the French, but these glimpses of American gentility demonstrated that the Americans were not wholly divorced from European manners.

Contrasting these glimpses of European delicacy, American soldiers appeared, according to the newspaper accounts, prepared and eager for combat. The newspapers attributed the soldiers’ abilities to the citizens’ natural, even Spartan inclination to fight. Whereas most of the French soldiers were poorly trained and exercised, the Americans appeared naturally hardy, accustomed to “the excessive heat” or cold of their environment, as well as to local diseases.⁸⁸ One paper described the army as a group “of men, who, from their childhood, are accustomed to work, [and] firing a rifle in good manner.”⁸⁹ So ingrained was the importance of warfare in American culture that they

⁸⁶ *Gazette de France*, January 2, 1778.

⁸⁷ *Gazette de Leyde*, August 1, 1775.

⁸⁸ *Gazette de France*, April 22, 1776.

⁸⁹ *Gazette de France*, July 1, 1776.

prepared for their duty as citizen soldiers from infancy, being educated in weaponry and acculturated to constant hard work. Patriotism provided the greatest motivation for these troops, for it was patriotism that inspired the citizens to mobilize these skills in the defense of their country. These traits were highlighted on the battlefield, as the majority of the battle accounts depicted the troops' "love of combat."⁹⁰ British letters stated that "the Americans equal our soldiers in courage," they triumphed despite "inconceivable exhaustion," and even Washington reported that the militia "assembled in the most courageous manner, firmly resolved to . . . give us as much aid as possible."⁹¹ So prevalent were examples of Sparta in French reform literature, that readers would have filtered these accounts through that frame of reference, evoking images of the ancient Greek warriors fighting on American soil.⁹²

The newspapers began explicitly referring to the Americans as ancients by the end of 1777, as America and France drew closer and closer to a military alliance. General Washington in particular received praise, being compared to the "great men of antiquity" for his willingness to defend and make sacrifices for his country.⁹³ Concerning the American army as a whole, the *Gazette de Leyde* reported the military men as possessing "the most noble motives . . . their common goal is liberty, the same principle directed the

⁹⁰ *Gazette de France*, July 5, 1776.

⁹¹ *Gazette de France*, August 11, 1775; *Gazette de France*, March 29, 1777; *Gazette de Leyde*, September 9, 1777.

⁹² Jean-Jacques Rousseau was one of the leading *philosophes* of the eighteenth century who encouraged the French military to follow the example of the Spartans. In particular, his work *Considerations for the Republic of Poland* (1772), encouraged governments to emulate Sparta, with its discipline and attention to warfare, rather than Athens, which focused too keenly on the arts. See Jean-Jacques Rousseau *Considérations sur le gouvernement de Pologne*, Londres (i.e. Paris : printed by Valade for Cazin), 1782.

⁹³ *Gazette de Leyde*, September 30, 1777.

armies of Rome in the days of their glory . . .”⁹⁴ The French had already associated the ancients with military excellence, and in his *Essai*, Guibert had extolled the ancients for their virtues in warfare, both in combat and in their military structure. Such a perception of the Americans proved that it was still possible to achieve the military superiority of the Romans, and that citizen warfare was the key for doing so.

⁹⁴ *Gazette de Leyde*, October 3, 1777.

CHAPTER IV

A MONARCHICAL *AFFAIRE* WITH THE REPUBLICAN ARMY

Les Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique

The extent to which the image of Americans as citizen warriors saturated educated society is evident in the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*, a newspaper used by the French government to garner support for the American war against Britain.⁹⁵ Though the paper was primarily a propaganda tool, the editors disguised it as an impartial *gazette* by portraying it as a French-language periodical printed in Antwerp, much like the *Gazette de Leyde*. The Comte de Vergennes, France's minister of foreign affairs, heavily subsidized the paper and oversaw its publication in Paris. Edmé-Jaques Genêt, a zealous advocate of the American cause, edited the paper and received several written contributions from Benjamin Franklin and John Adams, who were in France negotiating for military aid.⁹⁶ They supplied the periodical with copies of the Declaration of Independence, state constitutions, and letters and reports from American newspapers that

⁹⁵ Little is written on this short-lived periodical, which only lasted from 1776-1779. As the purpose of the paper was to win French support for the Americans, it was no longer needed once the French government had committed military support to America. Eugène Hatin's *Bibliographie Historique et Critique de la Presse Périodique Française* does not even mention it. An analysis of some of the major themes of the *Affaires* can be found in August W. Eberle, "The American Revolution in the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*, 1776-1779" Kansas State, July 1939, Doctoral dissertation; and George B. Watts, *Les Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique and John Adams* (Charlotte: Heritage Printers Inc., 1965), 1-10. Briefer mentions of the periodical can be found in: Elise Marienstras and Naomi Wulf, "French Translations and Reception of the Declaration of Independence," in *Journal of American History*, 85 (Mar., 1999), 1299-1324; Bernard Faÿ, *L'esprit révolutionnaire en France et aux États-Unis à la fin du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: E.Champion, 1925).

⁹⁶ George B. Watts, *Les Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique and John Adams* (Charlotte: Heritage Printers Inc., 1965), 1-10.

were often reprinted in full. Franklin not only supplied materials from America, but he wrote some of the ‘articles’ himself.⁹⁷ In addition to these contributions, the paper included transcripts of several debates in the British parliament, articles from the British newspaper *The Remembrancer*, and the letters from “a London banker to M. *** in Antwerp,” which usually described recent events from the war that heavily favored the Americans. The paper dealt primarily with issues of commerce, but the few articles that reported news of the actual war extolled the American army for its virtue and military prowess to a greater degree than the other two *gazettes*. That the monarchy would so heavily emphasize the success of a perceived Republican army and disparage the British army, fighting for a monarch, revealed the broader effects of the American image on the French government and European elite.

As portrayed by the *Affaires*, the British army suffered from some of the same shortcomings as the French, especially difficulties in recruiting soldiers and the problematic necessity of hiring mercenaries. One article reported that Lord Shelburne, in recognizing the difficulty of recruiting soldiers in Britain, suggested that Parliament “give the troops certain pleasures (douceurs)” that were still compatible with military discipline as an incentive for more people to join the army. He suggested, “engaging troops for a limited number of years as they do in France,” instead of for life.⁹⁸ While this passage might have assured the French officers of the weakness of their archenemies, it also revealed that the British army suffered from the familiar problem of insufficient patriotism.

⁹⁷ Echeverria, 56.

⁹⁸ *Affaires*, I, 2, 4.

Further projecting French military anxieties on the British army, the *Affaires* reported heavily on the British army's reliance on mercenaries, which placed them in the same camp as the French military, debating the moral and practical costs and benefits of paying foreign professional soldiers. When the Revolutionary War began, the British government contracted several thousand German mercenaries to supplement their forces in America. In what appears to be a transcript of a debate in Parliament concerning the use of Hessians in the American war, the *Affaires* reported Lord Shelburne's critique of employing mercenaries and the "machine fighting" that resulted.⁹⁹ Other members of Parliament were concerned over the cost of the Hessians, their likely fraternization with German-speaking colonists in Pennsylvania, and the image of Britain abroad if she could not supply her own troops.¹⁰⁰ In arguing against mercenaries, Shelburne himself alluded to Guibert's *Essai*:

Doubtless, few of you know a French book on the *Tactique*, the one that appeared in Paris. It is there that you would see the pitiful mechanism of foreign military discipline. There, you would learn to judge the inadequacy of a similar aid, by the difference in bravery between the soldiers who fight for their liberty and their possessions, and the machines for whom merit consists solely of maneuvers and who fight without the least interest in the quarrel of the Prince who pays them.¹⁰¹

Regardless of whether or not Lord Shelburne actually spoke these words to his fellow members of Parliament, in printing this speech, the *Affaires* offered a stunning portrayal of the British Parliament criticizing its own military according to the terms of a French tactical essay. During the eighteenth century, most of the written works on warfare were

⁹⁹ *Affaires*, I, 2, 4.

¹⁰⁰ A concise and accurate summary of parliament's debates on mercenaries as reported in the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique* can be found in August W. Eberle, "The American Revolution in the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique*," 6-19.

¹⁰¹ *Affaires*, I, 2, 5.

in French; Britain had very few military manuals, but works by Marshal de Saxe and Marquis de Feuquières comprised the reading list of high-ranking officers in most of Europe's militaries.¹⁰² Lord Shelburne's ideas about mercenaries revealed how widespread and accepted Guibert's essay had become in Europe, and further supported the French papers' portrayal of the American military as a citizen army. The British Parliament appeared to recognize the difference in the level of fighting when soldiers fought for personal reasons or beliefs rather than for the whim of a monarch. The Americans, a people fighting for their own interests, would fight more effectively than the Hessian mercenaries interested only in being paid. The idea of a citizen army, which the French described in writing and which the Americans enacted on the battlefield, was not a mere French fancy but an idea that shook traditional military thinking.

Shelburne's concerns about the Hessians were confirmed in one of the accounts of the battle of Trenton (the *Affaires* contains several brief accounts of this battle from different letters and articles). According to an article that first appeared in England,

We must agree that the Rebels comported themselves in a manner that gives us a very different opinion of them than the one we had until now; and unfortunately, the Hessians and some other foreign troops acted in a way that gives us grounds to think differently of them. It is certain that Congress did not neglect any method for debauching them; that they put down their arms at the first attack and only seven men killed; that they were received in Philadelphia more like friends than enemies; that they marched down the main streets of Philadelphia, drums beating and flags flying.¹⁰³

Lord Shelburne's fears about mercenaries were prophetic. If Britain's hired troops fraternized with the Americans instead of fighting them, then the Americans should be

¹⁰² Ira Gruber, "British Strategy: the Theory and Practice of Eighteenth-Century Warfare," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), 20.

¹⁰³ *Affaires*, IV, 18, clxv-clxvj.

able to win their battles against the mercenaries with relative ease. This incidence also drew a contrast between the mercenaries' motivation (or lack thereof) and the colonists' motivation to defend their homes and families. Congress' role in "debauching" the mercenaries suggested here that the Americans knew full well that mercenaries were eminently corruptible. This view of mercenaries complemented French military reform literature of the period. The British army, which used the same military texts and used similar methods of employment on the battlefield as the French, appeared inadequate because of lack of patriotism and military motivation. This military might have been a match for the French army, suffering from the same problems and fighting in a similar manner during the Seven Years' War, but could not succeed when pitched against a citizen army.

Just as the *gazettes* cast the British troops in the role of villainous conquerors of the virtuous Americans, the *Affaires* portrayed the British army, which closely resembled the French military, as even more brutal. According to the *Affaires*, the British troops came to America for two purposes: to destroy American freedoms and to terrorize and torture the populace. One letter reprinted from Philadelphia declared the British were "deaf to the voice of reason and humanity, and inflexibly set on devastation and war."¹⁰⁴ The *Affaires* later published a letter from the Chamber of Representatives of Boston to George Washington, describing the British as "violent and oppressive" who "attacked . . . the liberty of America." From these reports, one would gather that the British troops specifically targeted the American way of life and attempted to destroy American virtue.

¹⁰⁴ *Affaires*, II, 8, 28-29.

One report even speculated that the entire reason behind the war was “the animosity of certain English against the Americans.”¹⁰⁵

Such animosity played out in the British army’s violence against civilians, and the *Affaires* was replete with reports of “the enormous excesses committed by the King’s troops on the inhabitants of America.”¹⁰⁶ One letter detailed that “our virtuous children are massacred and our houses destroyed by the British troops.”¹⁰⁷ The most frequently reported act of British atrocity, usually accompanying pillaging and burning villages, was the rape of American women and young girls. According to a letter written by a “distinguished officer in the America army,” one American civilian saw the “rape of his wife, as well as his ten-year-old daughter.” The British soldiers then chased several other young women through the woods, and the letter reported a rather graphic sexual assault of a thirteen-year-old girl. Yet another story followed a father who was shot while trying to save his daughter from becoming another victim of British lust.¹⁰⁸ Even the American loyalists appeared to “conspire barbarous and infernal plots” against American patriots.¹⁰⁹ While the other *gazettes* reported British atrocities as well, their focus seemed to be destruction of property and death of innocent civilians, and the language of their reports was much less precise. The *Affaires* continually described specific instances of British brutality in vivid, inflated language, which may have intended to elicit a much more

¹⁰⁵ *Affaires*, VI, 26, liv.

¹⁰⁶ *Affaires*, VI, 25, 128.

¹⁰⁷ *Affaires*, II, 10, 48.

¹⁰⁸ *Affaires*, VI, 20, ccxv-ccvj.

¹⁰⁹ *Affaires*, IX, 35, 69.

emotional response from its readers and even inspire righteous outrage against the British.

In describing the role of the British troops and hired mercenaries, the editors of the *Affaires* left readers with a distinct impression of the British forces as weak and barbaric. While England and France were notorious rivals, this unmerciful description of them levied a harsh critique of European military practices. Against a citizen army, the British military, designed to practice limited warfare in an enlightened manner, proved ineffective in combat and committed horrible atrocities more reminiscent of the seventeenth-century religious wars. Because they shared many of the same military characteristics, in condemning the British military, the French government was implicitly criticizing their own. The reform literature of the eighteenth century had penetrated the French government to such a degree that it did not recognize the implications of criticizing a monarch-supported military.

In stark contrast to the British military, the *Affaires* also presented the American military, the citizen army, as the epitome of virtue. As with the British army, the language describing the American military was much more melodramatic than in the other *gazettes*, appealing to the French concept of Americans as the virtuous harbingers of liberty and righteousness. In promoting the American military organization, the *Affaires* also promoted the Republican values that were incompatible with a monarchy.

When describing the American military in action, the *Affaires* only reported on the larger, more significant battles of the American Revolution, such as Quebec, Trenton, and Saratoga, rather than the smaller skirmishes. Unlike the other *gazettes*, which provided detailed accounts of the troop movements during the battles, these reports

highlighted the daring conduct of the military men involved. The *Affaires*' account of Quebec featured the tragic death of General Montgomery, who "received the fatal blow while marching with a battery of cannon," and the heroic conduct of General Arnold who commanded in his stead. The *Affaires* described General Arnold as a "brave man, mourning the loss of General Montgomery." During the battle, Arnold became "overwhelmed by the British army's superior numbers," and "after three hours of the most vigorous resistance," in which he received "a dangerous blow to his leg," Arnold withdrew with his troops a few miles from Quebec. Following the battle, Arnold wrote a letter to Congress, saying, "Providence, who brought me here through so many dangers and saw to my protection, is my sole support. I am in my place, performing my duty: I feel no fear." The reporter writing this story then assessed Arnold's retreat (and defeat), not as a loss, but as "a wise defensive."¹¹⁰

Arnold's case study created the impression that the American generals were in the thick of the battle, fighting with their men, enduring hardships and injury with courageous fortitude. Arnold's reliance on Providence gave the American cause a righteous tone, and the reporters' assessment of the battle promoted the Americans' military competence. Most importantly, Arnold retreated, not because of the British army's superior skills or tactics, but because of their superior numbers. According to this battle account, the American army was a competent and capable military that lacked only a sufficient number of men to defeat the British.

Although the *Affaires* noted an insufficient number of men at the Battle of Quebec, other articles indicated that this was not due to a lack of participation among the

¹¹⁰ *Affaires*, I, 1, 100.

colonists. The *Affaires*, like the other *gazettes*, reported inflated numbers of colonists who participated in the army or militia with zeal and skill. One account refuted the notion that American soldiers were “without discipline,” and described them as a group of “fifty thousand powerful men, who reduced, during their first campaign, an army just as formidable.”¹¹¹ The *Affaires* dispelled rumors of desertion from the American army by describing the deserters’ “most sincere repentance,” and celebrating General Washington’s “new recruits . . . a great number [of whom] enlisted for the duration of the war.”¹¹² According to the *Affaires*, the fact that these soldiers were citizens fighting in defense of their own country only increased their participation. The British army’s “hostile invasion . . . inspire[d] an ardent love for [the colonists’] Patrie.”¹¹³ One of the letters from the mysterious London banker concluded that the colonies “will not be conquered” by Britain, because “the activity of the officer and the bravery of the soldier will render [Americans] invincible.” The citizens’ “war-like virtue must shine.”¹¹⁴ As the war progressed, the troops “redouble[d] their zeal and ardor” for their cause, undeterred by losses.¹¹⁵

The officers of the American army were as equally zealous and skilled as the citizen soldiers. The *Affaires* presented detailed accounts of the most prominent American army officers, illustrating their virtues and abilities. General Warren, according to a speech by Benjamin Franklin, had “all the talents and virtues of a great

¹¹¹ *Affaires*, I, 1, 42.

¹¹² *Affaires*, V, 21, xlvij.

¹¹³ *Affaires*, II, 8, 28-29.

¹¹⁴ *Affaires*, III, 15, cxcxiv.

¹¹⁵ *Affaires*, VII, 33, lxxv, xcj.

man, of a patriot, of a [Roman] senator, and a hero.” Such values seemed to inspire others to join the army to defend these virtues, as the speech ended with Franklin calling on all “brave defenders of liberty and glory.”¹¹⁶ George Washington received similar treatment from the *Affaires*, which printed a letter that addressed him as a “man of great capacity in the art of war.” Washington’s response to this letter, as printed in the periodical, was a humble recognition of his attempts to “contribute to the establishment of liberty and peace,” for which he “applauds . . . all virtuous citizens.” More so than the other *gazettes*, the *Affaires* presented patriotism, competent officers, and motivated soldiers as inextricably linked. Very little of the information from the *Affaires* differed in content from the information found in the other two *gazettes*, but accounts of American patriotism and skill are more embellished in the *Affaires* than in the other papers. According to the *Affaires*, Americans were synonymous with the virtue, honor, and patriotism that the French army considered to be their own values but that they did not fulfill.

The *Affaires*’ presentation of the Americans as “invincible,” replete with “war-like virtue,” provided a stark contrast against the more traditional British military that shared so many traits with the French. While it is unlikely that the French government purposely used the British and American militaries as a means of self-criticism, by disparaging the traits in the British military that the French shared and contrasting the brutality of the British against the virtue of the Americans, the *Affaires* had dangerous implications for the monarchy. Furthermore, the support that the monarchy gave to a citizen army, which would be harmful to its power and structure, indicated the level to which reform rhetoric and excitement about the America’s citizen-army penetrated even

¹¹⁶ *Affaires*, 2, 6, 26-28.

the highest levels of French society. In France and other parts of Europe, the American citizen army was not a fad, but a reality.

Saratoga

In September and October of 1777, after reporting on small skirmishes or unsuccessful large-scale battles between the American and British armies, the *Gazette de France*, *Gazette de Leyde*, and the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique* printed extensive coverage on the Battle of Saratoga, a large, two-part engagement in which the American troops emerged victorious. The articles describing this engagement emphasized the tenacity and discipline of the troops and the bold leadership style of the officers, proving to the French that the Americans' citizen army could defeat the British army in a more traditional European battle. As presented in the newspapers, this battle was the culmination of a long period of trial and error for the American forces. All papers ran extremely thorough accounts of the fighting, detailing specifically which troops moved where at what time, allowing the educated French reader to fully appreciate American tactics and execution. This engagement finally proved to the French government that the Americans were indeed winning the war against the British, and in February of 1778, the French agreed to send military aid to the United States.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

When the American Revolution broke out in 1775, it immediately attracted the attention of French military officers who kept abreast of the latest developments by reading the *Gazette de France*, the *Gazette de Leyde*, or both. Some, like Lafayette, responded enthusiastically to the American cause of liberty and equality, and sailed to America, ready to defend her against the oppressors. Other officers responded by volunteering as well, but were not nearly as interested in the causes behind the American Revolution as the opportunities the American war presented. Most of the officers who read these reports stayed in France, but undoubtedly they watched the American army with a close eye, interested to see how this new form of citizen warfare interacted and compared with traditional European warfare. The French might not have been so intrigued by the American war had their own military been more efficient and their officers more virtuous. Because the French officers and men of letters were concerned with severe problems in the French military, the American Revolution took on a special meaning, appearing to employ citizen warfare, a type of warfare in which the French were particularly interested. In reading about the formation, nature, and performance of the American military, the French officers watched a new Rome rise across the Atlantic, buoyed by patriotism.

Gilbert Bodinier argues that with the exception of Lafayette, officers who showed any interest in the American Revolution were acting on their own selfish desire for glory

and distinction, not for any greater cause. Examining newspaper representations of the American army suggests, however, that these volunteers may have sailed to America with military ideals, desiring to fight with an army that had managed to circumvent the problems that beset their own.

Reading the two *gazettes* suggests that the American image appealed to the French officers for two reasons. The first reason involves the context of the military problems in France during the 1770s in which officers who did not have personal connections at court or in the higher ranks of the military remained trapped in lower ranks with little opportunity for advancement. For these frustrated officers, the American Revolution, a war in a rare moment of European peace, presented an opportunity for them to have greater leadership roles and distinguish themselves in combat. Especially since France had not been involved in a European conflict since the Seven Years' War, many of the younger officers expressed an eagerness to prove themselves on the battlefield.

Yet for the majority of the French officers, who remained in France throughout the entire course of the American Revolution, the American war was intriguing because at a time when military officials and men of letters questioned the army's effectiveness in battle and looked to renew the military's values, America provided a laboratory setting in which to test an emergent military theory, citizen warfare. From the perspective of these French officers, the organization of the American military, its system of command, citizen-soldiers, and methods of maintaining an army and militia appeared as solutions to French military problems of unqualified officers, poorly trained troops, and overall lack of organization.

On an even deeper level, the American military enacted the values of virtue, patriotism, and honor, which many believed that the French nobility had lost and needed to regain. Just as Guibert insisted that patriotism was the root of military success, the American military appeared to draw its support chiefly from the patriotism of the citizens and managed to form an effective fighting force that successfully combated the British army, one of the most celebrated armies in Europe. With little formal military experience, the Americans reportedly reinvigorated warfare with the values that formed the base of successful fighting: virtue, honor, and patriotism.

Studies of military relations between the American and French militaries typically focus on the experience of Rochambeau and his small band of officers and troops, who spent three years in America and fought in only one engagement. The larger impact of the American military can be found in these newspapers, which reached the vast majority of French officers and educated elites who were already highly sensitized to the factors that made for a successful military. In focusing on the American image as depicted in the *gazettes* and *Affaires*, and framed in the context of French military reform, perhaps we can better understand the connection between the American and French Revolutions. American Revolutionary principles did not sail back to France with Rochambeau, his army, and a few hundred volunteers, but perhaps the newspaper reports, which represented the American military as a model for citizen warfare, seduced a society already aware of its own military shortcomings and eager for reform.

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