THE BOARD OF WAR IN THE YEAH OF THE CARPENTER, 1776: THE BUILDING OF THE GALLOWS

by

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ABSTRACT

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The moment the Second Continental Congress adopted the rebel force besieging Boston on June 15, 1775, it assumed responsibility for its supply and administration. Prior to the creation of the Board of War and Ordnance on June 12, 1776, Congress relied on ad hoc committees for the administration of the Continental Army. Congress was afraid to put the administration of the army under the control of a single executive for fear of the rise of a new Cromwell. The American defeat at Quebec on January I, 1776, altered the thinking of the delegates on this subject. Reports received from eyewitnesses to the American defeat at Quebec indicated that Congress' poor administration over that army had contributed to its demise. The Congressional delegates realized the need for a permanent body to oversee the administration of the Continental Army. On June 12, 1776, the Board of War and Ordnance was created. The members of this standing committee were chosen deliberately for sectional, political, and economic reasons, and its initial duties were organizational in nature. However, as

the summer and autumn campaigns progressed, the Board of War assumed an active role in the actual prosecution of the war. The committee created more organization and stability in the army. The War Office provided the army with qualified, experienced leadership, and saw to it that the troops were paid. The Board of War supplied the Continental Army with arms, supplies, and provisions. It also sent reinforcements to threatened areas, and drew up a plan for a permanent professional army. However, a variety of factors, beyond the control of the committee, Congress, and the states, coupled with the Board of War's lack of military expertise, combined to make the year 1776 one of disappointment and frustration for the rebelling colonists. The events of 1776 helped set up the golden opportunities which were presented to the British high command for suppressing the rebellion in 1777, commonly referred to by historians as the Year of the Hangman.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been written regarding the Continental Congress and the American Revolution. Among the best of these works are The Reluctant Rebels, The Story of the Continental Congress by Lynn Montrose (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), The Winning of Independence by Marshall Smelser (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 by Don Higginbotham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), The Continental Congress by Edmund Cody Burnett (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), and "The Continental Congress: A Study in the Origin of American Public Administration, 1774-1781" by Frederick S. Rolater (University of Southern California, Ph.D., 1970). However, only one study has been conducted relative to the role played by the Continental Congress in the military conduct of any portion of the Revolutionary War. Donald J. Proctor's work, "From Insurrection to Independence: The Continental Congress and the Military Launching of the Launching of the American Revolution" (University of Southern California, Ph.D., 1965), studied the Second Continental Congress' attempt to prosecute the war from April of 1775 to June of 1776. Proctor ended his dissertation with Congress' creation of its first military administrative body, the Board of War and Ordnance. This thesis begins where Professor Proctor's dissertation terminated, and is

a study of the Board of War and Ordnance's formation and activities from June to December of 1776.

December of 1776 marked a low point in America's struggle for independence for it was in that month when the Continental Congress was forced to abandon Philadelphia and flee to Baltimore by the approach of General Sir William Howe's British army. Indeed, the evacuation of Philadelphia by Congress ushered in the year 1777, commonly referred to by American historians as the Year of the Hangman, because it was in that year when the greatest opportunities for crushing the insurrection presented themselves to the British high command. If the rebellion had failed, many of the leaders in the Continental Congress would have visited the London gallows. However, events which occurred in 1776 were instrumental in setting up the golden opportunities for the British the following year. In order to understand the events which transpired in 1777, perhaps the most crucial year of the American Revolution, one must first understand the events of 1776 which led up to this watershed in American history. Thus, if 1777 can be termed the Year of the Hangman, then 1776 can be termed the Year of the Carpenter: The Building of the Gallows.

As Donald Proctor points out in his study, historians such as George Bancroft in his History of The United States from the Discovery of the American Continent (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1845-1893), have asserted that George Washington was, on the whole, solely responsible

for the successful outcome of the American Revolution. The Continental Congress has been portrayed as an impotent, factionalized, and corrupt body which hindered, rather than aided, the war effort. On June 12, 1776, Congress created a standing committee, the Board of War and Ordnance, to be the military administrator of the Continental Army. This committee has received only passing remarks from historians in the standard works of the American Revolution. These remarks have been, in the main, of a disparaging nature, and the authors have downplayed the role and significance of the War Office in the actual prosecution of the war. Marshall Smelser in The Winning of Independence, writes that the Board of War and Ordnance was established merely to "undertake most of those things civilian authorities do to maintain an army in being." Professor Smelser concludes that after the battle on Long Island, in which General Washington was trounced, the "board of war and ordnance was more of a game than a reality, that Washington held the Army together by sheer nerve." Frederick S. Rolater, in "The Continental Congress: A Study in the Origin of American Public Administration, 1774-1781," concludes that, "Basically the board was a recruiting, accounting and clerical office as the list of duties indicated." By utilizing the Papers of the Continental Congress, Journals of the Continental Congress, Peter Forces's American Archives, and Paul H. Smith's Letters of Delegates to the Continental Congress, 1774-1789, this thesis attempts to prove whether these interpretations of the

Continental Congress and the Board of War and Ordnance are accurate by studying the committee's activities during the crucial six months preceding the year 1777, the Year of the Hangman.

CHAPTER I

A STATE OF NATURE

> Government is dissolved. Fleets and armies and the present state of things show that government is dissolved. Where are your landmarks, your boundaries of Colonies? We are in a state of nature, sir.
>
> – Patrick Henry, 1774.

1775 - The Beginning

On the damp, overcast morning of April 22, 1775, John Adams swung his stout form onto the saddle of his brown mare, turned it in the direction of Cambridge, Massachusetts, and started off down the road at a trot. Through the early morning hours Adams encountered many militia regiments and straggling columns of volunteers stirring in their camps or scurrying along the road in the direction of the American army located across the bay from the beleaguered city of Boston, occupied by the British regulars under General Thomas Gage. Just three days earlier these professional troops had suffered a stinging setback during their foray to Lexington and Concord and were now subjected to a humiliating siege by colonial militia. Most of the militia units which Adams passed on the road to Cambridge were from Massachusetts, but Adams hoped others would soon be coming from Connecticut and New Hampshire to succour their neighbors.[1]

Reaching the American camp at Cambridge around mid-morning, Adams stopped to survey the scene on the Cambridge common. Through the early morning haze Adams spied men of every description milling around blazing campfires and steaming kettles. There were men from every part of

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[1]John Adams' Diary, 1755-1796, The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States, ed. by Charles Francis Adams, 10 vols. (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1850-1856), 2:405, 406.

the colony. Some were dressed in their hunting shirts, some in bucksin, some in osnaburg, others in ruffled shirts, waistcoats, and breeches. Some had slept in tents, some in crude lean-tos, while others had only the open sky over their heads and the ground for a pillow. As Adams sat on his mount, an occasional spring breeze would pull back the shroud of the morning fog and campfire smoke to reveal more of the camp. Here and there were militia units drilling, practicing their march or manual at arms. The air was filled with the din of clanging pots and pans, crackling campfires, the shouts of officers, laughter, profanity, and the incessant sound of the wasteful discharging of rifle and musket in the camp (followed by an occasional howl and curse as another patriot was felled by an errant ball not fired by the enemy).

Adams was familiar with military discipline, organization, and routine from his days in Boston when he lived across the street from the Boston common where the British troops camped after their arrival in 1770. He used to spend his idle hours watching the redcoats march and drill and was constantly impressed with the precision of the British Army. Now, friend had turned to foe, and Adams was struck by the difference in discipline, organization, and appearance of the two opposing forces. Accustomed to the precision and order of the British Army, the lawyer from Braintree was appalled and dismayed by the "New

England Army ('s) . . . great confusion" and "distress."[2] Adams spent the remainder of the morning in the company of Generals Artemus Ward, William Heath, and Joseph Warren, conferring with them on the state of the army and the military situation. They all agreed that the army lacked basic necessities such as artillery, arms, powder, clothing, organization, discipline, and provisions.[3]

John Adams then took his leave of the generals to make a personal tour of the battlefield that had been the scene of the colonial triumph three days earlier. Riding through Menotomy and beyond on the muddy road to Lexington and Concord (eleven and sixteen miles distant), he surveyed the familiar rocky Massachusetts landscape dotted with stone and rail fences, thick woods and underbrush, houses and barns, unturned fields, and wooden bridges that crossed small streams. The sight of an occasional shattered British musket, bloodied clothing, or discarded cartouche box gave the Massachusetts patriot a feeling of exhilaration. Stopping at almost every house "along the scene of action," Adams "inquired of the inhabitants the circumstances" of the running skirmish, while quietly smoking his pipe or chewing a piece of plug tobacco.[4] As he

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[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.; Page Smith, John Adams, 1735-1784, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962), 1:28.

listened to the various accounts, Adams became convinced "that the die was cast, the Rubicon passed, and, as Lord Mansfield expressed it in Parliament, if we did not defend ourselves, they would kill us."[5]

It was with these thoughts that John Adams set out for Philadelphia a few days later as a Massachusetts delegate to the Second Continental Congress. Armed with the belief that the New England militia could never stand up to the veterans of the British Army in a conventional battle, he was determined to initiate reforms for the army in Congress. His ultimate goal was to have the army "adopted." by the Continental Congress. This measure was foremost in Adams' plan because it would insure that Massachusetts would not stand alone. Once the New England army at Cambridge was adopted by Congress, all of the thirteen colonies would be committed to the defense of Massachusetts, and in Adams' mind, to the Cause. As far as John Adams was concerned, once blood had been spilled at Lexington and Concord, the only course the colonies could steer toward was independence. Adams wrote, "It appeared to me that all petitions, remonstrances, and negotiations, for the future," between the colonies and Great Britain, "would be fruitless, and only occasion a loss of time, and give opportunity to the enemy to sow divisions among the states and the

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[5]Diary, 1775, The Works of John Adams, 1:405, 406.

people."[6] Thus, upon reaching Philadelphia by the end of April, Adams immediately began to advocate and lobby both in Congress and "out of doors" for Congress "to adopt the army in Cambridge as a continental army, to appoint a General and all other officers, take upon ourselves the pay, subsistence, clothing, armor, and munitions of the troops."[7] John Adams' involvement in the military administration of the war effort, which led eventually to his appointment as President of the Board of War and Ordnance in 1776, had begun. However, his determination and initiative had to overcome the disorganization and disparity of interests within the Continental Congress.

In April of 1775 the New England army and the Continental Congress were virtually in an organizational "state of nature." Since royal prerogative and parliamentary control in the colonies were in question, the government of each colony fell to either a provincial committee of safety or an abrogated general assembly. As more militia units and volunteers gathered around Boston, including those from Connecticut and New Hampshire, the question of command and organizational responsibilities took on new importance. The army and the Continental Congress relied heavily on English tradition and their own colonial experience to deal with many of the qovernmental and

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[6] Ibid., p. 406.

[7] Ibid., p. 407.

organizational problems. Even though the Continental Army eventually assumed the same basic organizational structure as the British Army, this organization was nonexistent in the spring of 1775. The colonial militia had no experienced staff officers to deal with logistics, supply, ordnance, transportation, or strategic planning. As Erna Risch has written, "no colonist ever filled a staff position in the British Ordnance or Quartermaster's Departments." For the more protracted expeditions against the French or the various Indian groups in previous wars, the British Army provided the staff officers for the colonial militia.[8] Most militia expeditions were of such short duration that the men brought their own arms, clothes, food, and accoutrements, thereby negating any need for a permanent administrative organization by the colonies.

As the army at Cambridge swelled to over 20,000 men by the middle of May, the overburdened Massachusetts Committee of Safety wrote to Congress on May 15, requesting that the Congress adopt the army besieging Boston, as the Committee was unable to deal with the diverse and substantial logistical supply problems inherent in an army of that size.[9]

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[8] Erna Risch, Supplying Washington's Army (Washington: Government Printing Press, 1981), p. 8.

[9] Donald J. Proctor, 'From Insurrection to Independence: The Continental Congress and the Military Launching of the American Revolution" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1965), p. 1.

But Congress itself was virtually in an organizational "state of nature." Theoretically there were no restrictions on the type of state and national government that could or would be formed. Eventually the Continental Congress and the states drew from their English tradition and their own governmental experience, but in 1775 this course of action was far from certain in the eyes of many delegates. Delegates, such as John Dickinson, Joseph Galloway, and James Wilson of Pennsylvania, John Alsop of New York, and John and Edward Rutledge of South Carolina, questioned whether any new governments were necessary for they believed reconciliation was still possible. The radical faction in Congress led by Samuel Adams and John Adams, and Roger Sherman from Connecticut, was already looking beyond government at the state level and was debating among themselves what type of national government should be formed. John Adams was concerned because there were some southern delegates who wanted an "'omnipotent Continental congress to replace the King, having power to appoint a House of Lords, a House of Commons, governors, judges, and to set up admiralty courts and other agencies of government.'"[10]

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[10]John Adams to James Warren, October, 1775, Warren-Adams Letters: Being Chiefly a Correspondence among John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Warren, vol. 1, pages 167, 168, cited by Jennings B. Sanders, Evolution of Executive Departments of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1971), p. 3.

Congress was so split by provincialism that John Adams feared the danger of a southern and northern party. Adams was anxious that the southern aristocrats who did not admire the New Englanders' "levelling" tendencies, would form limited monarchies for their state governments, which would make cooperation and eventual union between all thirteen (possibly fourteen including Canada) colonies almost impossible in the future.[11] Even the radical faction was divided over the question of the distribution of administrative power. Samuel Adams advocated a broadly based administrative system with power dispersed among a variety of delegates (i.e. the committee system). John Adams, in contrast, believed in a concentration of administrative power and advocated single executives heading up various departments within Congress.[12] Therefore, due to factionalism, disorganization, and lack of a common purpose, the Continental Congress was practically in a "state of nature." The army was in a similar situation in Cambridge. Important decisions had to be made before the colonies would be ready to oppose the British Army on equal terms and force a military conclusion to the issue.

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[11] Smith, John Adams, 1:200; Peter Shaw, The Character of John Adams (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 1976), p. 92.

[12] Frederick S. Rolater, "The Continental Congress: A Study in the Origin of American Public Administration, 1774-1781" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1970), p. 7.

The first major decisions made by the Second Continental Congress in June of 1775--the adoption of the New England army at Cambridge and the appointment of a commander-in-chief--were engineered by John Adams, who was under the direction of the Massachusetts Committee of Safety. In the few days before he set out for Philadelphia after his tour of the Lexington and Concord battlefields, Adams spent many hours discussing the needs of the army and military strategy, as well as the future structure of the Massachusetts government, with James Otis and three members of the Committee of Safety--Major Joseph Hawley, and James and Joseph Warren.[13] Because Adams had contracted a cold during his visit to Cambridge and his subsequent ride into the countryside on that damp April day, these meetings took place in Adams' house in Braintree. In the small room of that brown, two-story structure, many mugs of hot tea were hoisted, many pipe bowls emptied, much tallow burned low, and the survival of Massachusetts--the great issue of the day--was discussed and plans were laid. By the time he was able to convince Abigail that he was well enough to travel to Philadelphia, Adams and the members of the Committee of Safety agreed to work in unison for the preservation of their beloved colony (not to say their own necks). The survival of the Bay colony depended upon the adoption of the New England Army by the Continental Congress.

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[13] Smith, John Adams, 1:198.

The request by the Committee of Safety for the adoption of the Cambridge army by Congress was part of the plan agreed to by Adams, Hawley, Otis, and the Warrens to draw the rest of the colonies irrevocably into the conflict. Included in the request was a plan of government for the colony that the Committee of Safety wished Congress to approve. Claiming that Massachusetts was without a civil government, the rebels stated that "we tremble at having an Army (although consisting of our own countrymen) established here without a civil power to provide for and control them."[14] Thus, the Yankees from Massachusetts reasoned that once Congress gave its tacit approval to a formal revolutionary government for Massachusetts, other colonies would soon follow and form their own revolutionary governments. This would widen the breech between the mother country and the colonies and make reconciliation more difficult. Although the Committee's claim that no civil government existed in the colony was untrue because the colonial committees of safety were given full executive authority by the general assemblies during periods of adjournment, Congress, despite opposition by the conservative delegates like Galloway and Dickinson, authorized Massachusetts to organize an assembly and to exercise the powers of

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[14] Proctor, 'From Insurrection to Independence," pages 1, 2.

government until Great Britain agreed to govern the colony according to its original charter.[15]

While the protracted debate over the Massachusetts government issue took place, John Adams continued his lobbying efforts for the adoption of the New England army. Much of this skillful politician's work was done out of doors, as he argued with and cajoled his compatriots into accepting his point of view. Adams, using his courtroom manners, impressed his colleagues with the logic and soundness of his arguments, and his cool, self-assured style. He adhered to the principle that human nature was more easily persuaded and governed by "promises, encouragement and praise than by threatening, punishment, and blame."[16] But he was careful not to present the issue of a continental army in Congress because he found that there was a strong suspicion towards New Englanders especially by the Pennsylvania conservatives. Instead, the Braintree native sought out delegates from other colonies who had similar ideas and he used them as surrogates to present his views in Congress. Kichard Henry Lee from Virginia and Thomas Lynch from South Carolina were two such colleagues whom Adams trusted.[17] On May 16, Lee opened the Congressional

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[15] Smith, John Adams, 1:199.

[16] Shaw, The Character of John Adams, p. 21.

[17] Ibid., p. 100.

debate by reading proposals for the raising of an army, and this motion was quickly seconded by Lynch.[18] By May 21 Adams was able to write to his fellow Massachusetts planner, James Warren, "I can guess . . . that an Army will be posted in New York, and another in Massachusetts, at the Continental expense."[19]

There were those delegates in Congress, like Galloway and Dickinson and the two Rutledges, who still favored reconciliation over an expansion of the military conflict. Adams decided to direct his persuasive powers toward a few of the Southern delegates in the hope that they would have a change of heart and vote with the New England faction. Adams was not above a little chicanery either. He wrote to James Warren on May 26, advising him that he had sent two young Maryland gentlemen to Cambridge and he wanted positions in the army found for them, adding that "it will be of great importance that these gentlemen should be treated with the utmost delicacy and politeness: their letters to their friends will have a great influence on the Southern colonies."[20] One June 10, he expressed his frustration for the lack of action by Congress regarding the

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[18]Silas Deane's Diary, 16 May 1775, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789, ed. by Paul H. Smith, 8 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1976), 1:351.

[19]John Adams to James Warren, 16 May 1775, Ibid., p. 364.

[20]John Adams to James Warren, 26 May 1775, Ibid., p. 408.

army when he wrote to the chairman of the committee of supplies of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Moses Gill, that "we have found by experience, that petitions, negotiations, every thing which holds out to the people hopes of a reconciliation without bloodshed, is greedily grasped at and relied on; and they cannot be persuaded to think that it is so necessary to prepare for war as it really is."[21]

Between June 10 and June 14 Adams spent a great deal of time persuading the other delegates that the New England army would soon disperse if it was not adopted immediately by Congress. It is possible that he met several times with George Washington and perhaps struck a deal of sorts. On June 14 a Virginia delegate wrote that "Col. Washington has been pressed[italics mine] to take the supreme command of the American troops at Roxbury, and I believe will accept the appointment. . . ." That Washington was pressured into accepting the appointment there is no doubt because on June 19 he wrote that although he had "a thorough conviction of my own incapacity & want of experience in the conduct of so momentous a concern . . . the partiality of the Congress added to some political motives left me without a choice." The political motives of John Adams were to "keep up the Union & more strongly cement the Southern with the Northern colonies, & serve

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[21]John Adams to Moses Gill, 10 June 1775, Ibid., p. 466.

to the removing all jealousies (an) Army composed principally of New Englanders (if happily they prove successful) of being formidable to the Southern colonies." The possible deal struck by Adams and Washington involved the latter's subordinates, Charles Lee and Horatio Gates, for Adams wrote "considering the earnest desire of General Washington to have the assistance of these officers . . . I could not withhold my vote from either."[22]

Adams' involvement in the political maneuvering is borne out by the fact that it was he who rose at 10:00 a.m. in Congress on June 14 and nominated George Washington as commander-in-chief of the New England army, provided that the army was adopted by Congress. Adams' nomination of the Virginia tobacco planter was all part of the plan devised by himself, Joseph Hawley, James Otis, and the Warrens to draw the rest of the colonies irrevocably into the conflict. As early as May 7, James Warren wrote to the Massachusetts delegate that "the army seems to want a more experienced direction. I could for myself wish to see your friends Washington and Lee at the head of it, and yet dare not propose it, tho' I have it in contemplation."[23] Adams, a

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[22]Virginia Delegate to Unknown, 14 June 1775, Ibid., p. 486; George Washington to Burwell Bassett, 19 June 1775, Ibid., p. 515; Eliphalet Dyer to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., 16 June 1775, Ibid., p. 496; John Adams to Elbridge Gerry, 18 June 1775, Ibid., pages 503, 504.

[23]James Warren to John Adams, 7 May 1775, Warren-Adams Letters, vol. 1, p. 47, cited by Proctor, "From Insurrection to Independence," p. 17.

clever and pragmatic man, knew the nomination of a Southerner for the commander-in-chief of the New England army would insure the Southern delegates' votes in favor of the adoption of the army. Be liked Washington from their initial meeting in the fall of 1774, and now the Puritan politician from the Bay Colony nominated the wealthy tobacco plantation owner from the South to the most important position in the North American colonies. Politics do indeed make strange bedfellows.

Shortly after Adams' nomination of George Washington for the position of commander-in-chief of the army around Cambridge, Congress resolved to adopt that army as its own. On June 15, 1775, George Washington accepted the appointment as Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army. Congress and the colonies had an army, the most complex social organization, and providing for its administration was now a major problem confronting Congress.

The adoption of the New England army by Congress, although committing the other twelve colonies to the defense of Massachusetts, was not a total victory for the New Englanders. In a compromise maneuver, John and Samuel Adams did not oppose the determination of the conservatives in Congress to pursue reconciliation with Great Britain. Thus, the official policy of Congress was to build up the colonies' defenses while extending the olive branch of peace to the mother country. Congress made it clear that

it was prepared to defend the colonies in the event that reconciliation failed.

In order to fortify the colonies' defenses, Congress had to provide supplies, munitions, ordnance, artillery, transportation, and administrative positions for the army gathered around Cambridge. Supplying the army in Massachusetts proved to be a minor problem because the surrounding colonies donated money and provisions. The New England army also had the advantage of besieging the largest city in Massachusetts. All roads led to Boston; consequently, there was an excellent transportation system utilized by the American Army. Therefore, the army around Cambridge was, for the most part, well-fed.

Within the army itself Congress created a Quartermaster Department and a Commissary General of Stores and Provisions in June of 1775, and a Hospital Department and a Commissary of Military Stores in July of 1775. These positions and departments were based on the tradition of the British Army.[24] However, Congress created no central administrative board or executive within Congress to coordinate all of the various departments and activities. As Louis C. Hatch wrote in retrospect, "a War Department with extensive powers should have been promptly established. Instead, Congress retained the military administration in its own hands, merely appointing committees

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[24]Risch, Supplying Washington's Army, p. 9.

for special purposes, and frequently giving them authority only to report, not to act."[25] At first the delegates acted on the day-to-day needs of the army using Congress as a committee of the whole. Everyone in Congress had the opportunity to participate in the daily discussions concerning the army. Such a system made it impossible to avoid delay and confusion. In an attempt to remedy some of the delays due to the distance between Philadelphia and Cambridge, it was proposed by some of the delegates "out of doors to adjourn to Hartford or New Haven in Connecticut in order that we might be near the seat of action," but that "some of the Southern gentlemen have not given their consent, nor do I think they ever will."[26] The conservative delegates feared that the moderates might become infected with the New England radicalism and "levelling spirit" if Congress moved into that area. Moreover, for the delegates from South Carolina, Philadelphia was closer than Hartford and New Haven.

As Congress became entangled with more and more minutiae of daily affairs, the administration of the army on a day-to-day basis became an impossibility for Congress as a committee of the whole. Therefore, following the plan of Samuel Adams, who advocated dispersive executive

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[25]Louis Clinton Hatch, The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904), p. 18.

[26]Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, 5 June 1775, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 1:446.

power, Congress adopted the standing committee and ad hoc committee system of administration. Since the time of the Stuarts, Englishmen had been wary of executive power under singular control. The delegates to Congress followed this English tradition, regarding executive authority as an enemy of liberty. Even though the Cambridge army was basically a New England army, Southern delegates and conservatives were loathe to part with any power and insisted on representation on any committees created to deal with specific military problems.[27]

The Southerners especially feared the possibility of an experienced New England army marching southward, after the British had been driven out of Boston, and dictating to the Southern colonies. Consequently, when a committee of five was appointed to draft a declaration to be published by General Washington upon his arrival at Cambridge, Thomas Johnson from Maryland and John Rutledge from South Carolina were members. When a committee was appointed to form an estimate of the cannon needed, and to devise ways and means of procuring that ordnance, Samuel Chase and John Rogers of Maryland were members. And when another committee was appointed to contract for making muskets and to consider the proper methods of promoting the manufacture of firearms in the colonies, Samuel Huntington from South Carolina and Richard Henry Lee from

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[27]Hatch, The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army, p. 2.

Virginia were members. In addition, there was a beef committee, a committee to prepare instructions for recruiting officers, and a saltpetre committee. There was a medical committee, a committee on cavalry, and a committee responsible for putting the militia in a proper state of defense. Other committees included one to consider applications from military officers, a hospital committee, a clothing committee, a committee 'to consider the health and discipline of the army, and one to make all provisions for furnishing the battalions destined for Canada.[28] On all of these ad hoc committees at least one Southerner or known conservative was appointed.

By far the three most important committees appointed before the creation of a more permanent war department, the Board of War and Ordnance in June of 1776, were: the one sent to Cambridge, Massachusetts, in October of 1775 to confer with General Washington; the one sent to Albany and Fort Tyconderoga in November of 1775 to confer with Generals Schuyder and Arnold; and the one sent to Canada in February of 1776 to assess the condition and military situation of the Northern Army.[29] The first committee sent to Cambridge was to confer also with the governor of Connecticut (Jonathan Trumbull), the lieutenant governor of Rhode Island,

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[28]Sanders, Evolution of the Executive Departments of the Continental Congress, pages 6, 7.

[29]Proctor, "From Insurrection to Independence," pages 141, 235, 236, 282.

the Council of Massachusetts, the president of the convention of New Hampshire, and other people considered important when regarding the most "effectual method of continuing, supporting, and regulating a Continental Army."[30]

By the end of September it was apparent to Washington that the British troops intended to winter in Boston. The Commander-in-Chief informed Congress that the Connecticut and Rhode Island militia were enlisted only to December 1, 1775, and the remainder of the army was not obligated beyond January 1, 1776, with very few showing any inclination to reinlist. Some provision, the Congress was told, had to be made for the enlistment of an army beyond January 1.[31] Because there had been no attempt to reinforce the redcoats in Boston since the fighting on April 19 at Lexington and Concord, militia enthusiasm had waned. Since penetration into the countryside by Gage seemed remote, the colonial militia soon grew weary of camp life. The citizen-soldier was unaccustomed to sleeping on the hard ground,

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[30]Journals of the Continental Congress, September 29, 1775, ed. by Worthington Chauncey Ford, 34 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 3:265.

[31]George Washington to the President of Congress, 21 September 1775, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799, ed. by John C. Fitzpatrick, 39 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931-1944), 3:505-513.

standing watch, and discipline.[32] In short, Washington informed Congress, after January 1, 1776, he would no longer have an army to command and Congress would be naked before the executioner. The situation, in the Virginian's estimation, was critical.

In spite of the gravity of the problem, the factions in Congress continued the tug of war for the sinews of power. The New England delegates, including John Adams and Samuel Ward, opposed the dispatching of the October committee, insisting instead that a committee would entail delay, and that a "letter to General Washington," regarding solutions to the situation, "would have superceded the necessity of any committee."[33] The Southern delegates were adamant on the committee's creation because George Wythe from Virginia, John Rutledge and Edmund Pendleton saw it as a way to increase their influence over the army. Always suspicious of an experienced New England army dictating to the Southern colonies, the Southerners wished to exert a moderating effect on it. Piqued by the New Englanders' preoccupation with democratic principles and egalitarian philosophy, "the Southern gentlemen wish to reduce the wages of the privates and raise those of the officers."[34]

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[32] Proctor, 'From Insurrection to Independence," pages 134, 135.

[33] Samuel Ward to Henry Ward, 30 September 1775, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 2:84, 85.

[34] Ibid.

John Adams recognized that another objective of the Southern delegates was the "introduction of some gentlemen from other colonies, into the service as officers." Adams considered this "unreasonable," and believed it "absurd to suppose, that the Council of Massachusetts should appoint gentlemen from the Southern colonies, when Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire do not." In addition, he contended that Massachusetts had men who were "better qualified, with knowledge both of theory and practice," because "they have been more in war, and longer in the study of it." Furthermore, the stocky lawyer from Braintree doubted whether the hardy embattled farmers of the Bay colony would "be easy to be commanded by strangers to the exclusion of gentlemen, whom they know being their neighbors."[35]

After the first ballot, Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Lynch were chosen but a tie existed between Benjamin Harrison from Virginia and Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut. On the second ballot another Southern delegate took his seat in the hall and cast the deciding ballot in favor of Harrison. However, according to one New England representative, "the gentlemen fond of the motion wished a very different committee from that actually appointed."[36]

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[35]John Adams to John Winthrop, 2 October 1775, Ibid., 2:96.

[36]Samuel Ward to Henry Ward, 30 September 1775, Ibid., 2:84, 85.

After the selections, John Adams was less concerned stating that the "committee . . . are determined Americans." Although "Messrs. L and H may have received some unfavorable impressions from misrepresentations concerning our province . . . these will easily be removed, by what they will see and hear, I hope."[37]

In November of 1775, Robert Treat Paine from Massachusetts, Robert R. Livingston from New York, and John Langdon from New Hampshire were sent as a committee into the north country of New York where Generals Philip Schuyler and Benedict Arnold were building an invasion force for use in Canada. These delegates' responsibilities included determining how many troops were necessary to win and hold Canada, how best to sustain that army, how to fortify Crown Point and Tyconderoga, inventory munitions, evaluate the Hudson River defenses, and most important, what methods would be effective in getting the Canadians to join the Continental Association. Although there were no Southerners appointed to this particular committee, two were selected to serve on the committee to draw up the instructions for it (Thomas Lynch and Richard Henry Lee). The omnipresent John Adams was also a member of the instructions committee.[38]

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[37]John Adams to James Warren, 1 October 1775, Ibid., 2:91.

[38]Proctor, 'From Insurrection to Independence," pages 235-238.

The committee selected to travel to Canada was chosen on February 15, 1776, after Congress learned of the Quebec disaster. On January 19, 1776, word reached the startled delegates in Philadelphia that General Richard Montgomery was dead with a bullet in his brain, and the Northern Army was shattered and on the verge of collapse. The committee was sent to assess the immediate condition and military situation of the Northern Army.[39] The committee would not return with its report until June 11, 1776, and it was not a coincidence that on the next day the Board of War and Ordnance was created. On January 19, 1776, when the news of the Quebec catastrophe ashened the face of many an ardent patriot in Philadelphia, the war began to take on the appearance of a long one.

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[39] Ibid., p. 282.

CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL STATE OF AFFAIRS

This conversation [with General Washington] would make a figure in history. It turned upon the general state of affairs in the military departments, and the characters of the principal officers in the army. I don't think it prudent to commit to writing the particulars.

-John Adams to Abigail Adams
June 3, 1776.

Historians of the American Revolution often refer to the year 1777 as the Year of the Hangman because it was in that year when the greatest opportunities for destroying the Continental Army presented themselves to the British high command. Had the Continental Army been destroyed in that year, the executioner in London would have had plenty of work in disposing of the leaders of the colonial rebellion. If the Year of the Hangman is a fair and accurate description of the year 1777, then certainly the year 1776 can be characterized as the Year of the Carpenter: The Building of the Gallows. By the end of that year the rebellion was in such a state of collapse and disarray, that the opportunities for complete victory by the British forces in 1777 were able to present themselves.

By the end of 1775 the tide of the war was changing. After experiencing initial "successes" at Concord, Breed's Hill, Tyconderoga, St. John's, and Montreal, the rebels began to taste the bitter fruit of defeat. Following the first clashes in which the colonials gave out better than they received, Congress was filled with euphoria and an ardent military fervor. The leaders failed to realize that these "successes" had not been won by the skill and military prowess of the colonial militia or commanders. At Lexington and Concord, the British troops had been chased back into Boston by swarms of citizen-soldiers

sniping at the exposed redcoats from the cover of stone and rail fences, houses, barns, woods and thickets. Similarly, the British attack on Breed's Hill, aside from being a colossal tactical gaffe by Sir William Howe, was made against a large force of provincials hidden behind a series of strong fortifications and redoubts. Only the scarcity of colonial powder kept the bloodied nose of John Bull from being broken. In addition, the small garrison of "lobster backs" had been surprised at Tyconderoga in the dead of the night by Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys, and St. John's, on the Richelieu River, had been reduced by a siege lasting fifty-five days. Finally, Montreal had been captured without a fight.[1]

Congress and the patriots throughout the colonies basked in the glow of America's seeming invincibility. Historians have not yet been able to verify the rumor that the colonial merchants were unable to meet the demand for larger shirts to fit puffed out American chests. It is a wonder that Congress did not order the immediate construction of a fleet for the invasion of England. There are few surviving letters that suggest that any member of Congress realized that the Americans had not yet been

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[1]For more detailed accounts of these actions, see Don Higginbotham, The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1971), pages 58-65, 70-77, 66, 67, 109-112.

subjected to the acid test--to meet the British Army in the open field on equal terms.

The illusion of an endless stream of victories by the Americans came to a sudden and shattering halt on a snow blown, bitterly cold night in Quebec, Canda, on December 31, 1775. Before dawn arrived on January 1, 1776, General Richard Montgomery lay dead in the Canadian snow and the shattered remnants of the American Northern Army had recrossed the St. Lawrence River to await Sir Guy Carleton's coup de grace. Deprived of supplies, arms, clothing, money and reinforcements by the impotent and defective administration of both subordinates and Congress, the outnumbered Montgomery had been forced to attack a strong defensive position before his men's enlistments ran out the following morning. Although Carleton did not immediately pursue the Americans with vigor, this battle was singularly important for the impact it had on the opposing armies. This one action reversed the momentum and gave the initiative to the side of the British. For the next eleven and one-half months, until Trenton and Princeton, the Americans would fight a defensive war with rapidly shifting fronts. The year 1776 had been ushered in on an ominous note for the Americans and in many ways Quebec set the tone for the entire year.

But Quebec was only the beginning. On March 17, 1776, Sir William Howe evacuated Boston and set sail for parts unknown. Instead of expressing euphoria at the

sight of the British transports sailing away, Washington was concerned because he realized that in lieu of having Howe bottled up where the Virginian could keep an eye on him, Sir William was now running loose and liable to appear anywhere off the coast of the colonies bringing havoc and destruction with him. Congress became alarmed at the prospect of having the British fleet sail up the Delaware River to the doorstep of Carpenters Hall in Philadelphia. Of all the places Howe and the British Army were likely to go, General Washington gambled that New York was the target. If Sir William obtained possession of New York, he would isolate New England from the other colonies and it would, thus, be open for attack and conquest. Convinced that Howe would not return to the Bay colony, Washington began to march his army and baggage westward less than one week after the British departure from Boston. If he was correct, the former colonel of the Virginia militia hoped to give the redcoats a warm reception at the gates of New York.

Thus, in 1776 the Continental Congress and the Continental Army were faced with a different kind of war than the one they had fought in 1775. The "new" war required speed and mobility. The mobile war presented Congress with a plethora of new and challenging supply problems. A stationary army, like the American army that had besieged Boston, was much easier to communicate with and supply. Permanent sources of supply could be

established and magazines could be constructed. An army constantly on the move, however, must be able to travel light because speed and mobility are crucial tactical and strategic advantages. The geography of the colonies provided natural obstacles and handicaps for the foot soldier as well as wagons heavily laden with provisions, supplies, and munitions. The relatively undeveloped countryside of eighteenth century America was crisscrossed with unfordable rivers and streams, rugged mountains and steep hills, deep valleys, swamps, and unpenetrable woods and thickets. While Massachusetts had a comparatively good road system, many colonies did not. The roads found in New England and the Middle colonies became rivers of mud during the spring thaw and snow choked during the winter, making them impassable for man and beast. Spring rains produced swollen streams and rivers which washed away both stone and wooden bridges. Quality roads were few and far between and made the supply line for Washington's Continental Army extremely vulnerable. A few well placed felled trees by an enemy patrol could effectively close a road for days and, thus, disrupt transportation to and from the army. Therefore, getting supplies to the army was often a serious problem for Congress and the Quartermaster.

Adding to the magnitude of the supply problem encountered by Congress was the dearth of wagons, carts, teamsters, horses, and oxen in the colonies in 1776. The wagons that were constructed for the army barely filled

the gaps left by those worn out by the rough usage they received over rocky and rutted roads. Broken axles and wagon wheels were common mechanical breakdowns. Artisans were in constant demand to repair disabled vehicles. Horses and oxen were driven until they collapsed from exhaustion or starvation because forage, too, was in short supply. In addition, farmers in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New York were reluctant to part with such vital instruments in their livelihood as wagons and beasts of burden. The farmers realized that the chances of having their equipment returned to them in reasonable working order, if at all, were remote. When they did rent their wagons and animals to the army, they were known to charge exorbitant rates. Thus, Congress found it necessary to give the Quartermaster General, Thomas Mifflin, authorization to impress the wagons, horses, and oxen he needed to keep the Continental Army adequately supplied.[2] Impressment meant seizure by armed force. Mifflin resorted to this method in moving Washington's army to New York in the spring of 1776.

There was also an acute shortage of experienced teamsters to man the wagons. The handling of teams consisting of four to six horses or oxen required experienced hands and was a highly valued skill in eighteenth century America. The teamsters that were available were reluctant to leave more lucrative employment offered by merchants,

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[2]Risch, Supplying Washington's Army, p. 21.

who also needed goods transported, for the low wages offered by the Continental Congress. Therefore, the Congress was in competition with private interests for the teamsters[1] service, and in most instances, Congress was unable to match the top dollar inducements offered the drivers by merchants.[3] Perhaps the greatest problem Congress faced during the war was that of financing it.

As an "extralegal" body with undefined powers, Congress was faced with the problem of financing a mobile war that kept increasing in "size and intensity" and expense.[4] Supplies had to be paid for and the soldiers had to be paid. The moment Congress adopted the New England army on June 14, 1775, it assumed these responsibilities. But Congress had no money and it lacked the power to tax the colonies to raise funds for the war effort. Congress was not given the power of taxation because as Don Higginbotham has written, "Having broken the grip of one Parliament, the colonies were not about to put themselves in the grasp of another."[5] Therefore, in order to finance the war, Congress had to borrow on its own credit and issue paper money, and it had to rely on contributions

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[3]For further reading on this subject, see Risch, Supplying Washington's Army, pages 64-70.

[4]Higginbotham, The War of American Independence, p. 81; Rolater, "The Continental Congress," p. 176.

[5]Higginbotham, The War of American Independence, p. 93.

from the individual states. Congress found that the "new" mobile war in 1776 was far more expensive than the stationary one of 1775. Supply lines lengthened thus increasing transportation costs. The cost of supplies and provisions soared as clothing and food became scarce and the military supply agents had to compete with civilians in the purchase of such commodities.[6] To keep pace with the rising costs of the "new" war, Congress resorted to printing more paper currency so that by the end of 1776 a total of twenty-five million dollars in paper money was in circulation.[7] As more paper currency was put into circulation, each paper dollar depreciated in value. By the fall of 1776, depreciated Continental currency was a major problem that confronted Congress. Thus, the difficulty of procuring supplies and paying the soldiers increased. Congress was well aware that an unsupplied and unpaid army soon ceases to exist. Another plank had been nailed into place on the gallows.

Finally, Congress was handicapped by the lack of any real military experience among its members. The members of the various committees selected to oversee specific military problems were merchants, farmers, and lawyers, not professional soldiers. These committees lacked real firsthand military knowledge which is essential in the understanding of problems related to the administration of

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[6]Risch, Supplying Washington's Army, p. 18.

[7]Ibid., p. 17.

an army. The ad hoc committees consisted of gentlemen who were merchants and lawyers, who understood constitutional law, finance, and the mechanics of trade.[8] However, they lacked the essential military experience needed to forecast future munitions, clothing, arms, and provision requirements needed by an army on the move. Only an experienced military administrator could forecast the amount of ammunition likely to be expended in a future encounter, the quantity and kind of provisions needed by soldiers constantly on the march, the rapidity with which clothing could be expected to wear out by soldiers on the move, and when, where, and in what quantity supplies and provisions would be needed. The ad hoc committees lacked the experience and intuition necessary to keep the army adequately supplied and administered. As Erna Risch stated, "Neither in 1775 nor in later campaigns did Congress or the states show any appreciation of the fact that supplies could not be obtained on the spur of the moment."[9]

Five days after the news of the American disaster at Quebec reached Philadelphia, and the aura of American invincibility had been shattered, Edward Rutledge from South Carolina rose in Congress and made a motion that Congress establish a War Office and outline its powers.[10]

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[8]Ibid., p. 14.

[9]Ibid., p. 28.

[10]Richard Smith's Diary, 24 January 1776, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 3:148.

After several hours of debate on the subject, a committee of seven (Thomas Lynch, Benjamin Franklin, Edward Rutledge, Benjamin Harrison, Samuel Ward, Samuel Adams, and Robert Morris) was selected to consider the motion. The effect of the defeat at Quebec was so strong that it changed the military attitude of Congress. Instead of thinking of a quick offensive victory, negating any need for a permanent war administration, the delegates now girded themselves for a long defensive war. Because the legislative and administrative business of Congress was increasing daily, the delegates realized that Congress, as a committee of the whole, could no longer deliberate on the daily needs of the army. They also realized that they needed a more permanent body to coordinate the defensive military efforts of all thirteen colonies, and to have essential knowledge such as troop strengths, troop locations, a list of the officer corps, the condition and military situation of all the continental armies andcolonial militias, the quantity of ordnance, munitions, and clothing in continental possession, and where such essential items were stored. Thus, Congress attempted to lift the burden of daily military minutiae from its shoulders and to place this burden in the hands of a committee which would be familiar with the military situation in each of the colonies. Thus, by appointing the committee of seven to consider the propriety of a War Office, Congress moved a step closer to the establishment of an executive department for the administration of the Continental Army.

By selecting Samuel Adams as a member of the committee of seven, Congress was assured that the executive administration of the army would be invested in the hands of a standing committee instead of one man. Samuel Adams was the leading advocate of the dispersive executive power faction in Congress. The committee, no doubt, studied the English tradition and British system of civilian control over the army. The committee's deliberations continued for over five months. In the meantime, Sir William Howe had evacuated Boston on March 17 and George Washington, anxious that Howe might appear anywhere off the coast of the colonies, implored Congress to establish a war department to coordinate and oversee all of the colonies' defenses.[11] The General was able to make a personal appeal to the delegates for the establishment of a war department during his visit to Philadelphia from May 23 to June 5, 1776. The visit was made ostensibly to discuss the upcoming summer campaign, which Congress envisioned as being decisive. Besides being appointed on a committee to confer with the Commander-in-Chief on this important subject, John Adams also met privately with Washington.[12] An

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[11]George Washington to the President of Congress, 13 June 1776, American Archives, Fourth Series, ed. by Peter Force (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1837-1853), 6:837.

[12]John Adams to Abigail Adams, 22 May 1776, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 3:60, 61.

insight into what was discussed is revealed in a letter John Adams wrote to his wife after an evening meeting with the Virginian at the Philadelphia residence of John Hancock. Adams wrote, "This conversation would make a figure in history. It turned upon the general state of affairs in the military departments, and the characters of the principal officers in the army. I don't think it prudent to commit to writing the particulars."[13] Without a doubt, Washington and Adams were of the same mind concerning the establishment of a permanent war department and the energetic lawyer from Massachusetts, called the "Atlas" of the Second Continental Congress by some of his peers and the most influential member of that body by others, because of his omnipresence and his ability to ignite action in Congress, used his substantial powers of persuasion in out of doors meetings with other delegates on this matter.[14]

However, when the committee sent on February 15 to assess the condition and military situation of the Northern Army finally returned from New York and Canada on June 11 and delivered its report, Congress needed no further persuasion. Congress was stunned to learn that the Northern Army was riddled by disease, dissension, and dissertion and was no longer an effective fighting force. The committee

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[13]John Adams to Abigail Adams, 3 June 1776, Ibid., p. 121.

[14]Shaw, The Character of John Adams, pages 98, 95.

reported that the condition of the Northern Army was due in part to the neglect by Congress. The implications of the report became all too clear for even these men of limited military knowledge. New York was wide open for invasion and the consequent isolation of New England became a real possibility. Adding to the fears of Congress was the revelation that the British force that had decisively defeated the Northern Army at Trois Rivieres, which drove the Americans from Canadian soil, consisted of fresh troops under the command of "Gentleman" John Burgoyne. If Burgoyne pushed down through New York, and Sir William Howe appeared off New York City, General Washington would be caught in a pincers movement and the rebellion would be at an end. This report spurred the committee of seven, selected to deliberate the propriety of a war department, to swift action. On June 12 the committee made its report to Congress and on the same day the Board of War and Ordnance was created.[15] It was to consist of five members who were to become the military information center for the Second Continental Congress. The members appointed were John Adams, who was nominated President of the Board (perhaps for his continual interest in military affairs since 1775), Benjamin Harrison, Edward Rutledge, James Wilson, and Roger Sherman. The Board of War was also provided

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[15] Journals of the Continental Congress, 12 June 1776, 4:434.

with a Secretary, Richard Peters, and a number of clerks.[16]

Thus, the English tradition of civilian control over the military, which began with the reign of William III in 1683, was continued in America.[17] Combining the British system of a Secretary at War and the Board of Ordnance into one body, Congress was determined to keep the administration of the army in its own hands rather than delegate such potential power to a group of professional soldiers.[18] It may have been mere coincidence that in the British system, the Board of Ordnance also consisted of five civilian members which included a lieutenant-general, a surveyor-general, a clerk of ordnance, a keeper of the stores, and a clerk of deliveries, because there is no evidence that any of the members of the American Board of War and Ordnance were given any such titles.[19]

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[16] Ibid., p. 438.

[17] Correlli Barnett, Britain and Her Army, 1509-1970: A Military, Political, and Social Survey (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1970), p. 132.

[18] J. W. Fortescue, A History of the British Army, 13 vols. (London: Macmillan and Co., 1899-1930), 1:412, 586.

[19] Major R. E. Scouller, The Armies of Queen Ann (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 37; The duties and responsibilities of the Board of War and Ordnance will be discussed in the next chapter.

Thus, the Board of War and Ordnance was thrust into a hornet's nest of crisis. Congress, beset by a multitude of legislative and administrative problems, could no longer deliberate as a committee of the whole on the daily military needs and problems of the Continental Army. The Board of War and Ordnance was created to deal with problems of recruitment, enlistments, promotions, pay, and supply of the army. At the time of the Board's creation, the Revolution appeared to be unravelling. The grandiose visions of a quick military solution to the problems with Great Britain of 1775 were gone. Congress was finally shaken into action by the stark reality that the American citizen-soldiers had failed the acid test--meeting and defeating the British Army in the open field on equal terms. Already a committee had been appointed on June 7 to consider the matter of independence. Thus, when the Board of War was created, the point of no return had already been passed. With Howe expected to try to wrest control of New York from General Washington, Burgoyne expected to march down through New York in a pincers movement, the Southern colonies' frontiers in flames as news of Indian attacks reached Philadelphia, and total independence the goal of Congress, the Board of War and Ordnance was thrust into the breech to try to stem the military tide and to reorganize America's military effort. With the creation of the Board of War came Congress' first attempt at the establishment of an

executive department for the administration of the Continental Army. How the Board of War and Ordnance reacted to the crises and how its power expanded is the subject of this study.

CHAPTER III

ONLY A FOUNDATION

The establishing of a War Office is a new and great event in the History of America, and will doubtless be attended with essential advantages when properly conducted and inspected. I hope the Committee will be ready, in a few days, to enter upon the execution of their duty. You will see the outlines of this office in the enclosed Resolves. Some farther regulations, it is more than probable, will be necessary in the course of time. The Congress have only laid a foundation at present. It still remains, in a great measure, to erect a system of rules and laws, that will enable us to carry on our military operations with more knowledge, certainty, and dispatch.

–John Hancock to General George Washington
June 14, 1776.

The creation of the Board of War and Ordnance on June 12, 1776, was the first attempt by Congress to place the administration of the war effort on a permanent and stable foundation. The priorities of Congress were to establish some semblance of order in the Continental Army and to organize and delineate administrative functions and responsibilities before attempting to deal with the more complex issues of supplying and planning military campaigns. Thus, the initial duties and responsibilities assigned to the Board of War and Ordnance were of the organizational variety and reflected the immediate concerns of Congress. The Board of War was given the responsibility of keeping a record of all Continental officers, including the date of their commission (to simplify promotions), and to record the location and state of preparedness of all the Continental troops and colonial militia. The generals and regimental commanders were instructed by Congress to make monthly returns to the Board of War regarding these particulars so that Congress could keep abreast of troop strengths and materiale wants. The War Office was given the duty of keeping an accurate account of all artillery, arms, and ammunition in the colonies and where such ordnance were located. In addition, the Board of War was instructed to build proper magazines for the munitions at strategic locations.[1]

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[1] Journals of the Continental Congress, 12 June 1776, 5:435, 436.

The Board of War also had the tasks of forwarding all messages from Congress to the military commanders in the field and providing escorts for the delivery of money to the Continental Army. More important, the committee had the vital responsibility of raising, equipping, and forwarding all land forces needed by the Continental Congress for the prosecution of the war.[2] The nature of these initial duties and responsibilities has led some historians to conclude that the Board of War was merely a clerical and accounting committee and not a deliberative, decision-making body. Marshall Smelser states that the "work of the Board of War was usually the kind of paperwork the Congress had previously done."[3] Frederick S. Rolater believes that "basically the board was a recruiting, accounting and clerical office as the original list of duties indicated."[4] Was the Board of War in 1776 only a clerical and accounting committee? The remainder of this study will offer a more comprehensive analysis of the Board's activities and contributions to the war effort.

On June 13, 1776, Congress elected five delegates to the Board of War. Roger Sherman from Connecticut,

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Marshall Smelser, The Winning of Independence (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1972), p. 207.

[4]Rolater, "The Continental Congress," p. 345.

Edward Rutledge from South Carolina, James Wilson from Pennsylvania, Benjamin Harrison from Virginia, and John Adams from Massachusetts were chosen.[5] Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Hooper, Samuel Huntington, and Francis Lightfoot Lee were added as members later in the year. A person outside of Congress, Richard Peters from Philadelphia, was appointed to the full-time position of Secretary to the Board of War. The War Office also was allowed an unspecified number of clerks to help the Board perform its duties.[6]

The membership of the Board of War presents an interesting assortment of personalities and backgrounds. The War Office was initially composed of three lawyers, a merchant, and a planter.[7] Two of the members were among the leading land speculators in the colonies.[8] The members of the Board of War represented a cross section of young and old thought, tradition, and ideology in the colonies, and each had an economic or personal motive for joining the rebellion.

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[5] Journals of the Continental Congress, 13 June 1776, 5:438.

[6] Ibid., pages 434, 438.

[7] Adams, Wilson, and Rutledge were lawyers, Sherman was a New Haven merchant, and Harrison was a Virginia tobacco planter.

[8] Sherman had ties to the Susquehannah Land Company and Wilson was one of the leaders of the Illinois and Wabash Land Company.

Fifty-five-year-old Roger Sherman represented the old Puritan way of life in New England. Raised in a strict Puritan environment and a member of the New Light religious faction, Sherman was known to berate his enemies in Congress with biblical admonitions.[9] A leading advocate for fiscal conservatism in the Continental Congress, he once proposed that the Continental soldiers be provided with clothing by their families and the troops buy their own provisions from camp sutlers. When his proposal was ignored and a commissary department was created, Sherman insisted on a constant audit of the accounts and that committees be appointed to check for any fraud.[10] The old Puritan appears to have been the Second Continental Congress' version of Charles Dickins' Ebenezer Scrooge. However, since Sherman was a member of the New England radical faction, John Adams described him as a "solid, sensible man" with "a clear head and sound judgment."[11] Sherman's only military experience was as a commissary for the Connecticut troops at Albany during the Seven Years War.[12]

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[9]Christopher Collier, Roger Sherman's Connecticut: Yankee Politics and the American Revolution (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1971), p. 3.

[10]Ibid., p. 181.

[11]Diary, 17 August 1774, The Works of John Adams, 2: 343; Diary, 15 September 1775, Ibid., 2:423.

[12]Mark M. Boatner III, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution (New York: David McKay Co., 1974), p. 1004.

Edward Rutledge, age twenty-seven, and Benjamin Harrison, age fifty, represented the Carolina and Chesapeake societies, respectively. Rutledge was the epitome of what Carl Bridenbaugh has described as the Carolina Society in colonial America--brash, hungry, pompous, foreign-educated, and extremely wealthy.[13] Harrison was a product of the more conservative and established Chesapeake Society. Harrison had been a member of the Virginia House of Burgess for nearly two decades, while Rutledge had only recently returned to South Carolina after studying law at the Temple in London. Through his social and economic position, and also through his marriage to the eldest daughter of one of the richest and most powerful men in South Carolina, Henry Middleton, Rutledge found it easy to pursue his political ambitions.[14] John Adams found the South Carolinian dull and childish and described Rutledge as a "perfect Bob-o-Lincoln--a swallow, a sparrow, a peacock; excessively vain, excessively weak, and excessively variable."[15] The rebellion provided Rutledge with an

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[13]Carl Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South (New York: Atheneum, 1974), pages 59, 101, 116, 117.

[14]Henry Muller Brabham, "Edward Rutledge of the American Revolution" (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1935), pages 3, 5.

[15]Diary, 24 October 1774, The Works of John Adams, 2:401.

opportunity to make a name for himself. He had no military experience, and compared to the other members of the Board of War, he was politically inexperienced.

While Rutledge joined the rebellion to gain political power and prestige, Harrison joined it to retain his. In Bridenbaugh's Chesapeake Society, there was little class or economic mobility, and politics laid within the sphere of the aristocracy.[16] It was within this aristocratic sphere that Harrison made his home. He joined the resistance movement when Parliament began to assume powers, such as taxation, that had long been a function of the provincial general assemblies. Because power of the purse strings was the means that the general assemblies had for manipulating the governors, men like Harrison were reluctant to part with what they regarded as the general assemblies' prerogative.[17]

Although a colonel in the Charles City County militia, Harrison brought virtually no military expertise with him to the Board of War. However, he served on the committee sent to confer with General Washington at Cambridge in October of 1775, and the committee which studied both the propriety and duties of a War Office. There was

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[16] Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, p. 51.

[17] Elma Josephine Hege, "Benjamin Harrison and the American Revolution" (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1939), pages 3, 4, 7, 10.

no affection between Harrison and the two New Englanders on the Board of War. The Virginia Anglican had little stomach for their self-righteous airs and domineering style. Harrison once proposed that Congress send three million dollars annually to the New England states to enable the Yankees to fight the war (with Southern officers). Thus, John Adams described the Virginian as an "indolent, luxurious, heavy gentleman, of no use in Congress or on committee, but a great embarrassment to both."[18] Harrison also served on the Marine and Secret Committees, so it is likely that he was unable to attend a few War Office meetings.

The fourth member of the Board of War was Scottish-born thirty-five-year-old James Wilson. He joined the resistance movement when Britain's Quebec Act threatened his landholdings west of Fort Pitt.[19] He initially opposed independence but reluctantly cast his lot with the radical Whigs when Chase and Carroll made their report on the condition of the Northern Army on June 11, perhaps because he recognized there was no other way to recover his landholdings. Devoid of any military experience, Wilson found himself appointed to the Board of War with two of his

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[18] Ibid., pages 9, 45, 56: Diary and Autobiography, 29 February 1776, The Works of John Adams, 3:31.

[19] Charles Page Smith, James Wilson: Founding Father, 1742-1798 (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), pages 3, 51.

staunchest enemies, John Adams and Roger Sherman.[20] Because of this mutual antagonism, Wilson seldom attended War Office meetings and only when the discussion pertained to frontier problems affecting his land company's interests. Wilson was more active on the Committee for Indian Affairs. As one biographer states, "There is little doubt that [he] used his official position to further his own interests and those of his associates."[21]

Due to absenteeism and special needs, Congress was obliged to elect four other members to the Board of War during the summer and fall of 1776. The most important of these additions was Charles Carroll of Carrollton who was chosen on July 18.[22] Carroll, a Roman Catholic, was educated in France and was acquainted with many families of the French court. His knowledge of the French language and his affiliation with the Catholic Church already had proven an asset to Congress, and his selection to the Canadian committee in February of 1776 was for those very reasons. His election to the Board of War was useful to Congress for several more reasons. The delegates were anxious to

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[20] Adams disliked Wilson's preoccupation with his own self-interest, a quality Adams recognized in himself, and Sherman quarrelled with Wilson over the Susquehannah Land Company claims.

[21] Geoffrey Seed, James Wilson: Scottish Intellectual and American Statesman (New York: KTO Press, 1978), pages 10, 11, 14, 15, 28.

[22] Journals of the Continental Congress, 18 July 1776, 5:575.

show the French government that Congress harbored no prejudice against a man for his religious convictions, and that Catholics were holding important positions in Congress. More important, as a member of such an influential committee as the Board of War, Carroll's already well-known name in France would carry even more prestige within French governmental circles. Because the military tide had turned in favor of the British, Congress was desperate for help and thus sought French assistance. Carroll, in his capacity as a member of the Board of War, was expected to use his influence and prestige to gain French support.[23]

Carroll also was useful in dealing with French officers who petitioned the Board of War for commissions in the Continental Army. Congress was anxious to acquire the services of experienced soldiers, and because many of the French officers had friends and patrons in the French government, these officers were eagerly accepted by Congress.[24] More than a few of these French officers turned out to be nothing more than buffoons and dandies, lacking both ability and character. In addition, they proved to be useless in command of Continental troops because most spoke little or no English. Thus, Carroll's presence on the

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[23]Ellen Hart Smith, Charles Carroll of Carrollton (New York: Russell & Russell, 1942), p. 156.

[24]Hatch, The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army, p. 50.

Board of War allowed for better scrutiny of the French officers' credentials, background, and motivation.

William Hooper from North Carolina and Samuel Huntington from Connecticut were added to the Board of War on September 3 because of the temporary absence of Benjamin Harrison and Charles Carroll.[25] A week earlier General Washington was soundly thrashed at Long Island and was in headlong retreat. The revolution was in dire peril and Congress was anxious to give the Board of War all of the help it needed to stem the military tide. When Huntington indicated his desire to return to his home in Connecticut in early October, Congress appointed Francis Lightfoot Lee from Virginia to fill Harrison's vacant seat in the War Office on September 11.[26]

The least known but perhaps the most indispensable man associated with the actual operation of the War Office was Richard Peters, who was appointed Secretary on June 13. The title of "Secretary" as used by the British and the colonists had more than a clerical or accounting connotation. The Secretary was the head of an executive department, ranking just below the president and members of a board or committee, and above the individual department

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[25] Journals of the Continental Congress, 3 September 1776, 5:732. Harrison and Carroll had gone home to attend their provincial conventions.

[26] Journals of the Continental Congress, 11 September 1776, 5:751.

heads. Thus, Peters was under the direction of the Board of War members, but had control over such department heads as the Quartermaster General, Commissary of Stores, and Foragemaster General.[27] Prior to June 12, 1776, this position never had been created by Congress for any committee. Thus, the Board of War and Ordnance was the first conscious attempt by Congress to create an executive department.

Peters gained recognition as a Philadelphia lawyer and as the register of the admiralty from 1771 to 1775.[28] Distinguished by his sharply pointed nose, chin, and wit, Peters was well-known for his "punctuality, painstaking care and patience," qualities which were needed for the position of Secretary to the Board of War.[29] Congress appointed a non-member of Congress to the position of Secretary because the multitude of business that Congress intended the War Office to handle required a full-time attendant, someone who would be familiar with the latest military developments. Since the members of Congress were

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[27] Kenneth R. Bowling, "Good-bye 'Charlie': The Lee-Adams Interest and the Political Demise of Charles Thornson, Secretary of Congress, 1774-1789," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 100 (July 1976): 316.

[28] Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 14, ed. by Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934), p. 509.

[29] Samuel Breck, "A Collection of Puns and Witticisms of Judge Richard Peters," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Bioqraphy, 25 (1901):367; Dictionary of American Biography, 14:509.

in session during the greater part of the day, the position required a trustworthy person outside of Congress. Richard Peters was such a man. Although the majority of his time was spent in Philadelphia, Peters was in constant communication with the commanders in the field, and with state and local governmental officials. Occasionally, he travelled outside of Philadelphia to ensure that supply requests were met, or to view the military front firsthand in order to better inform the members of the Board of War of the true situation.[30] Peters' position on the Board of War was vital because he was the link between the commanders in the field and the Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

The driving force behind the Board of War was John Adams. This pepperer's devotion to the welfare of the army prior to and after the army's adoption in 1775, and his energetic personality, qualified him for the position of President of the Board of War. It was Adams who urged the Board of War to meet twice daily and to act boldly when others preferred to hold back. Adams wanted to be a soldier but his physical limitations and constant poor health prevented him from pursuing his dream.[31] At the outbreak of the rebellion, Adams was determined to get involved in the military aspects of the revolution in one capacity or another. Appointment as President of the

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[30] Richard Peters to the Board of War, 10 November 1777, letter reprinted in Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography, 40 (1916):373.

[31] Smith, John Adams, 1:202.

Board of War was as close to the actual fighting as Adams could hope to get. Although he had no practical military experience, Adams prepared himself by reading all the military books he could acquire.[32] Prior to his appointment to the War Office he lamented the fact that he would never be a military officer and, thus, he would have to "leave others to wear the laurels which I planted."[33] However, after June 12, 1776, he contented himself by stating that fighting "is not the greatest branch of the science of war." He realized his role would be to ensure that the army was supplied, paid, clothed, raised, and quartered.[34]

Adams was driven by ambition and a desire for fame. Although he had the largest law practice in Massachusetts prior to the rebellion, his success had not given him the recognition he felt he deserved. The revolution provided him with the opportunity to become one of the leading men in the country. Adams recognized his desire for fame and this caused much inner conflict within him due to his Puritan heritage. To Adams, purity of motive meant the abandonment of self-interest or personal gain in the interest of the common weal. Thus, what Adams saw lacking in

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[32] Ibid., 1:197.

[33] John Adams to Abigail Adams, 23 June 1775, Familiar Letters of John Adams and His Wife Abigail During the Revolution with a Memoir of Mrs. Adams, ed. by Charles Francis Adams (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876), p. 70.

[34] John Adams to Nathanael Green, 22 June 1776, Letters of the Delegates to Congress, 4:288.

himself--purity of motive--he demanded of others.[35] He disliked James Wilson for the Pennsylvanian's blatant preoccupation with his own economic self-interest. Although Adams liked George Washington, the Braintree dynamo felt no guilt or shame when he sent his own personal spy, William Tudor, into the Virginian's camp to keep the War Office informed of the General's activities.[36] To Adams, the stakes of the revolution were too high to place anyone above suspicion.

When the Board of War was created on June 12, 1776, the revolution appeared to be falling apart. The disasters at Quebec and Trois Rivieres exposed New York to the ravages of the army of General John Burgoyne and his Indian allies. There was the very real possibility that Burgoyne and Sir William Howe would trap Washington's Continental Army in a pincers movement which would effectively terminate the rebellion. If the Board of War could not reorganize the Continental Army, raise and forward new troops, and establish secure lines of supply, the members of Congress would surely visit the London gallows as a reward for their treason. Before Washington could expect to have a chance against the better trained and equipped British troops in the field, the Board of War would first have to provide him with the men and materiale to do so. Thus, the Board

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[35] Shaw, The Character of John Adams, pages 22, 40, 41.

[36] Smith, John Adams, 1:202.

of War and General Washington, in essence, jointly held the fate of the revolution in their hands. Therefore, the selection of the members of the War Office was a most serious affair.

Upon close examination, the Board of War appears to have been carefully constructed in order to satisfy all of the sectional and political factions in Congress. The different factions in Congress (i.e. the radicals, conservatives, New Englanders, and Southerners) insisted upon representation on the committee lest one section or faction become too powerful. Benjamin Harrison, William Hooper, Eaward Rutledge, George Wythe, and Joseph Hewes distrusted the New Englanders and feared that, if the radicals dominated the War Office and gained too much control over the army, they would turn the army southward and dictate their "levelling" political ideology to the Southern colonies if the British threat was removed. The result was a distinctly multi-partisan standing committee. The appointments involved more than just the personalities of the delegates chosen by also encompassing sectional, economic, political and social factors.

An examination of the Board of War reveals its multi-partisan nature. All three sections of the rebelling colonies were represented. New England was represented by John Adams and Roger Sherman. The Middle colonies were represented by James Wilson, and the Southern colonies were represented by Benjamin Harrison and Edward Rutledge.

By such representation on the Board of War, the Congressional delegates ensured that no one section would be put upon to contribute more than its share in the war effort.

Further examination reveals that the three most populous colonies, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts, were represented on the Board of War. The delegates from these colonies undoubtedly argued that the colonies which were going to supply most of the manpower for the army should be represented on the committee drawing up the colonial troop quotas. The delegates from the three most populated colonies wanted to guarantee that the other colonies contributed their share of the manpower needs. Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Massachusetts did not want to do all of the fighting for the other ten colonies.

Politically, the Board of War was bipartisan. The two staunch conservatives, Rutledge and Harrison, struck a balance with the two New Englanders, Adams and Sherman. James Wilson was also a conservative and the War Office was brought into political equilibrium on July 18 by the addition of the wealthy raaical from Maryland, Charles Carroll of Carrollton. Harrison's and Rutledge's aristocratic natures, proaucts of the Chesapeake and Carolina societies, were balanced by the egalitarianism of Adams and Sherman. Thus, sectionally, politically, and socially, the Board of War was truly multi-partisan.

Because the duties and responsibilities of the Board of War concerned the acquisition, stockpiling, and

forwarding of military supplies and ordnance for the army, economic geography was also important in the selection of members to the War Office. Colonies producing or raising vital supplies for the army were represented on the Board of War. Congress was still an extralegal body with no defined powers or authority over the individual colonies. Because of this, it had to rely on the good will of the colonies to support its resolutions and recommendations. Just as the delegates came to hot and muggy Philadelphia to act as ambassadors to the Continental Congress for their colonies, this role was reversed for the members of the Board of War. Each member of the War Office had to act as an ambassador to their respective colony on behalf of Congress to acquire supplies and ordnance for the Continental Army. The advantages of having delegates from vitally important supply colonies in the War Office were twofold. The delegates were familiar with their own colony's commercial and governmental organization, and had more influence in a time of need with the governmental leaders and merchants than an outsider. Since Congress possessed no power to force the individual colonies to comply with its requests (although the Board of War found one method of persuasion that will be discussed in Chapter V), it had to rely on the ability of the individual Congressional delegates to persuade or cajole their colony into cooperating. The necessity of having delegates from colonies vital to the prosecution

of the war on the Board of War was paramount because of the communication factor.

The colonies producing or raising vital war materiale were represented on the Board of War and perhaps explains why the conservatives William Hooper or Joseph Hewes from North Carolina were overlooked initially in favor of the inexperienced South Carolinian, Edward Rutledge. South Carolina was important not only for its rice and indigo production, but because it contained the fourth largest North American city, Charles Town (12,000 inhabitants).[37] As the cultural and economic center of the deep South, Charles Town was the anchor of the Continental Southern Military Department, as well as the largest Southern seaport. South Carolina also produced more pitch and tar--essential shipbuilding materials--than all of the other colonies combined. Finally, the colony was the wealthiest in North America and was needed to help finance the war.[38]

Benjamin Harrison was chosen as a member of the Board of War over his fellow Virginians because he was one of the leading conservatives in Congress. He was chosen over the North Carolinians not only because of Virginia's

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[37] Stuart Bruchey, The Roots of American Economic Growth, 1607-1861 (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p. 20.

[38] Marcus Wilson Jernegan, The American Colonies, 1492-1750: A Study of their Political, Economic, and Social Development (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1929; reprint ed., New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1965), p. 365; Bridenbaugh, Myths and Realities, p. 67.

manpower advantage, but also perhaps because Virginia was more economically important and vital to the war effort. Virginia's cash crop, tobacco, was used to purchase foreign arms and munitions because Congress had no hard money and the products of its printing press were worth little overseas. In addition, the western section of the Old Dominion contained a few large iron mines, and its tobacco plantations produced quantities of saltpetre (a by-product of the curing process), used in the manufacture of gunpowder.[39]

James Wilson was chosen over the Maryland, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York delegates perhaps because Pennsylvania's grain production was necessary for feeding the Continental Army. By 1776, the flour mills in Pennsylvania were among the most advanced in the world.[40] The weavers in the colony produced quantities of stockings that were previously used for export but were now earmarked for the army. The large Lancaster, Warwick, and Sarum ironworks, producers of cannon, were located within the confines of Pennsylvania. Although the colony's representative on

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[39]Bruchey, The Roots of American Economic Growth, p. 21; Herbert Eugene Bolton and Thomas Maitland Marshall, The Colonization of North America, 1482-1783 (New York: Macmillan, 1922), p. 330.

[40]Marc Egnal, "Economic Development of the Thirteen Continental Colonies," in Interpreting Colonial America, ed. by James Kirby Martin (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 272.

the Board of War lacked public spirit, Pennsylvania's help was sorely needed for the war effort.[41]

Massachusetts was represented on the Board of War primarily for its manpower resources, the important harbor at Boston, shipbuilding, and the manufacture of shoes. The colony's agriculture was mainly subsistence farming and could not be relied upon as a major food supplier for the army.[42] Roger Sherman was probably elected over delegates from New Hampshire and Rhode Island because Connecticut was the main supplier of beef for the Continental Army, and since the war had been fought mainly in the northern part of the continent, the colony already had supplied many troops for the war effort. Because of these reasons, Connecticut could hardly be unrepresented on the Board of War.

The care taken in the selection of members of the War Office suggests that the committee was intended as something more than just a clerical or accounting body. It also suggests that the Board of War was more than just a one man committee (John Adams), as Peter Shaw has suggested.[43] The members of the Board of War were elected by

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[41] Ibid., p. 282; Jernegan, The American Colonies, pages 369, 370.

[42] Bruchey, The Roots of American Economic Growth, p. 30; Egnal, Interpreting Colonial America, p. 282.

[43] Shaw, The Character of John Adams, p. 95.

Congress, acting as a committee of the whole. Using simple quantification regarding the committee's activities from June 16 or 17, when the committee held its first meeting, to December 11, 1776, it becomes evident that the Board was the busiest standing committee in Congress. Perhaps other scholars have underestimated the role of the Board of War in the prosecution of the war. As John Hancock stated in his letter to General Washington on June 14, 1776, the initial duties and responsibilities assigned to the Board of War were "only a foundation" and were not a description of the limits of control the committee was designed to have.[44] Because of the plethora of business before Congress, the War Office was expected to assume an increasing number of duties to lift the burden of daily management of the war effort from Congress' shoulders.

The Board of War's very method of operation indicates that it was a deliberative body, and not, as Marshall Smelser states, "more of a game than a reality."[45] As of June 12, 1776, the correspondence Congress received from its military commanders in the field, or from state and local governments regarding military problems were read

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[44] John Hancock to Georqe Washington, 14 June 1776, Letters of Members of the continental Congress, 1774-1789, ed. by Edmund Cody Burnett, 8 vols. (Washington: The Carnegie Institution, 1921-1936; reprinted., Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1963), 1:488.

[45] Smelser, The Winning of Independence, p. 205.

on the floor of Congress and then referred to the Board of War for "deliberation."[46] The Board of War met early in the morning before the general Congressional session was called to order, and again in the evening after Congress had adjourned for the day.[47] The very fact that the Board of War "deliberated" on issues suggests that these issues were discussed by the members of the War Office until a mutually acceptable solution for all sections and factions was arrived at. The Board of War's recommendation was then read on the floor of Congress by the committee's President, John Adams. Adams answered the delegates' questions or defended the Board of War's recommendation.[48] Because the members of the War Office were the most informed members of Congress regarding the general military situation as well as the location of troops, ordnance, and supplies, their recommendations must have carried great weight in Congress. John Adams' courtroom manner, logical reasoning, and persuasive powers no doubt changed the minds of a few recalcitrants. In only a few instances was the report by the Eoard of War ordered tabled by Congress

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[46] For example see Journals of the Continental Congress, 5:445.

[47] John Adams to Abigail Adams, 26 June 1776, Letters of Members of the continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 1:512.

[48] Autobiography, 1776, The Works of John Adams, 3:6.

following the lengthy debate, obviously because of disagreement among the delegates.[49]

Simple quantification reveals how busy the Board of War was. During the period between June 12 and December 11, 1776, Congress referred 292 letters, petitions, and appeals to the Board of War. One hundred and ninety-six of these letters originated from military commanders in the field concerning the general military situation or supply, ordnance, and reinforcement requests. Therefore, the War Office received, on the average, one letter per day from the military commanders. The correspondence came from all three military departments (i.e. Northern, Middle, and Southern). Taking into consideration the delay caused by colonial transportation and roads, the Board of War was kept well-informed about the military situation in all quarters.

The Board of War, in turn, presented sixty-nine reports to Congress during the same six-month period which contained a total of 255 recommendations. To better clarify the role played by the Board of War regarding military operations in 1776, these recommendations have been classified into those concerning logistics (i.e. the moving, supplying, and quartering of troops), which indicate the Board's active role in the prosecution of the war, and those which were strictly clerical in nature

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[49]For example see Journals of the Continental Congress, 5:811.

(i.e. recommendations regarding pay, promotions, commissions, appointments, prisoners of war, commendations, and discharges). The figures reveal that forty-four percent of all of the recommendations concerned the vital issues of raising, supplying, and forwarding troops. These issues undoubtedly required much deliberation in the War Office because care had to be taken not to strip colonies closest to the field of battle defenseless, while still satisfying all Congressional factions and colonial sections. The numbers also reveal that if the recommendations regarding the voluminous requests for commissions in the army and appointments to departmental positions, strictly clerical in nature, were removed from the general total of letters referred to the Board of War, the percentage of those recommendations regarding logistical support for the army increases to sixty-four percent. Thus, it becomes clear that the Board of War was a busy committee and that much of their work had a direct bearing on the actual prosecution of the war.

Because the Board of War was responsible for the logistical support of the Continental Army, and George Washington was responsible for the direction of that army, the committee and the General jointly held the fate of the revolution in their hands. Congress had "only laid a foundation" in assigning the Board of War and Ordnance its initial duties and responsibilities on June 12. The War Office had to assume more responsibility on its own as the

summer season progressed in 1776. With Sir William Howe expected to arrive with an invasion fleet off the coast of New York, and General John Burgoyne expected to join him in a pincers movement to trap Washington and the Continental Army by driving south from Canada through New York, the situation appeared to be critical. The construction of the gallows was continuing in earnest.

CHAPTER IV

THE BEST ORDER

> The dispute is, as you justly observe, in all human probability, but in its infancy. We ought, therefore, to study to bring everything in the military department into the best order.
>
> —John Adams to Nathanael Greene
> June 22, 1776

The "army" entrusted to the care of the Board of War in June of 1776 was, in reality, five armies located in three different geographical areas of the thirteen rebelling colonies. There were separate armies in Massachusetts (Boston), northern New York and Canada (Tyconderoga, Crown Point, Albany, Montreal, and Sorel), eastern New York (Long Island and the Highlands along the Hudson), New Jersey (the flying camp scattered between Perth-Amboy, Elizabethtown, and Newark), and South Carolina (Charles Town). The forces under the command of Washington, Philip Schuyler, and John Sullivan at Long Island, Albany, and Sorel, respectively, were composed of "regular" Continental troops and state line militias. The army at Boston, commanded by the venerable Artemus Ward, and the army at Charles Town, commanded by Charles Lee, were strictly Continental troops. The flying camp in New Jersey, under the direction of Hugh Mercer, was a mixture of Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland militia, and Philadelphia Associators.[1] All five armies had their own specific needs and organizational problems, but common characteristics shared by the majority of the troops were that they were ill-equipped, ill-supplied, unpaid, disease ridden, dispirited, disorganized (with the exception of Washington's command), and, in many cases, poorly led at the regimental level. In short, the American troops were

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[1]The New Jersey militia were in New York assisting General Washington.

not of the cut that put the fear of God in the veterans of the British Army. Instead of an army, the Board of War inherited not much more than a loosely organized rabble. Congress left the task of turning this "army" into an effective fighting machine to the War Office.

It is a military maxim that an army is only as formidable as its leadership. In military terms, the size of an army bears little, if any, relationship on its effectiveness as a fighting force. John Adams realized, as did others in Congress, that regardless of the number of troops the Board of War was able to raise and forward to the areas of combat, these men would only be cannon fodder unless properly led.[2] Thus, the first task that confronted the War Office was the reorganization and reformation of the Continental Army. This endeavor, along with supplying and reinforcing the armies, occupied the members of the Board of War from June to December of 1776.

Because Congress and General Washington fully expected the major British blow to fall on the provinces of New York and New Jersey, the Board of War's attention was initially focused on the Continental armies stationed there. Of the five major Continental armies in the states, the weakest was the Northern Army which was scattered over

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[2]John Adams to Samuel Holden Parons, 19 August 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:57; John Adams to Henry Knox, 25 August 1776, Ibid., 2:61.

hundreds of miles of frontier. Congress was fully aware that the Northern Army was on the verge of total collapse. In addition to the information gathered by Charles Carroll of Carrollton and Samuel Chase, reported to Congress on June 11, Congress regularly received reports from Continental officers in the field regarding the critical situation. Brigadier General Benedict Arnold wrote that "the small pox has broke and divided the army in such a manner, that it is almost ruined." Arnold added that "the repeated misfortunes and losses has greatly dispirited the troops, our enemies are daily increasing and our friends deserting us."[3] A return of the army in Canada, filed on June 25 with the War Office, revealed that out of a total of 6,241 officers and enlisted men, only 3,591 were present and fit for duty. An additional 3,000 men were unaccounted for and presumed to have gone home. One member of Congress reported that the Northern Army "has melted away in as little time as if the destroying angel had been sent on purpose to demolish them, as he did the children of Israel."[4] The weak Northern Army was the only obstacle between General Burgoyne, whose troop strength was

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[3]Benedict Arnold to Philip Schuyler, 6 June 1776, The Papers of the Continental Congress (Washington: National Archives and Record Service, Microcopy 247), reel 166, item 152, 2:41.

[4]For a return of the Northern Army see Force's American Archives, Fourth Series, 6:915, 916; Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, 8 July 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:117.

estimated at 10,000, and a linkup with the Howe brothers at New York City. If New York was to be saved, Burgoyne had to be stopped during the summer and autumn campaigns at the headwaters of Lake Champlain. To accomplish this, the Board of War had to reinforce the Northern Army and rebuild its devastated command structure.

The defeats suffered by the Americans at Quebec, the Cedars, and Trois Rivieres, in addition to the fever and smallpox, had cost the Continental Army many experienced officers.' A soldier in the Northern Army declared in a letter to his brother that "no less than thirty captains died with [smallpox], and not more than one in three lived through it that took it the natural way."[6] Congress and the Board of War knew that the Canadian campaign had cost the lives of Generals Montgomery and John Thomas, and that General William Thompson had been captured. They also knew that many experienced regimental and company officers suffered the same fate and, thus, were aware that the commana structure of the Northern Army was in shambles. Therefore, the Board of War's priority was to rebuild the Northern Army's chain of command. Toward this aim, the War Office desperately sought experienced, qualified

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[5]Benedict Arnold to Philip Schuyler, 13 June 1776, The Papers of the Continental Congress, reel 186, item 169, 1:374-376.

[6]Charles Cushing to his brother, 8 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:128-132; many more died via innoculation.

officers to fill the vacancies existent in the Northern Army. however, in its zeal to provide qualified leadership in that military department, the newly created administrative department became entangled over the issue of continental (national) versus state prerogative.

The first action initiated by the War Office to provide support for the Northern Army was executed without rancor. On June 17 the Board of War authorized Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut to appoint the field officers to the Continental regiments raising in that state that Congress had requested for the reinforcement of the New York frontier.[7] Ordinarily, since these troops were being raised under the Continental establishment, the Governor had no authority to appoint the field officers to those regiments.[8] However, since the members of the newly created Board of War were relatively uninformed about the availability of unattached officers in the Connecticut area, to save the valuable time it would have taken to inquire into this matter, they probably heeded the advice of Roger Sherman (a good friend of Governor Trumbull), and decided to let Trumbull make the appointments. The War Office was careful to guard its prerogative by adding to its instructions to Trumbull that only "the present exigency requires

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[7] Journals of the Continental Congress, 17 June 1776, 5:447.

[8] The rank of colonel, lieutenant colonel, and major were field grade, and captain and lieutenant were subordinate officers.

this measure," and it should "not be drawn into precedent."[9]

In addition to those troops being raised in Connecticut for the relief of the Northern Army, the Board of War was informed that help was available from another direction. In a letter from General John Sullivan, read on the floor of Congress, the delegates learned that French Canadians were "flocking by hundreds" to join Sullivan's command at Sorel. Although the letter was in a great measure contradictory to what had been reported by Arnold, Congress and the War Office were anxious to accept any succour the Canadians were willing to give. In order to show his affection for the French volunteers, and to secure their friendship, Sullivan wrote apologetically that he had gone beyond wnat he knew to be the limits of his authority and had given commissions in the army to the experienced Canadians.[10] Instead of chastising Sullivan for this infringement on Congressional prerogative, the Board of War assessed the critical situation in that department and recommended that the Canadian commissions be approved.[11]

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[9]Journals of the Continental Congress, 17 June 1776, 5:447.

[10]John Sullivan to General Washington, 6 June 1776, The Papers of the Continental Congress, reel 166, item 152, 2:47.

[11]Journals of the Continental Congress, 19 June 1776, 5:465.

Thus, the Board of War demonstrated in its first two actions as an administrative body, that in situations affecting the common weal, the members were not about to stand on ceremony. The War Office soon discovered that the majority of the states were not so generous and public spirited wnen it came to parting with provincial prerogative. The individual states were unable to rise above their own provincial interests for the cause of national unity. Such parochialism created many roadblocks for the Board of War in its efforts to carry out its duties and responsibilities not only in 1776, but throughout the entire war. At the same time, the militarily inexperienced War Office was taught a lesson in military protocol.

Responding to a petition that was read in Congress from officers who had served in Canada during the previous winter, and who had lost their commands via enlistment expirations or attrition, the Board of War authorized the New York Convention to raise a regiment of Continental troops and to commission these officers in that regiment.[12] The petition by the unattached officers fit perfectly into the plans of the War Office to provide experienced leadership for its troops. However, the committee's attempt to provide positions in the army for those officers drew the ire of the Yorkers, who insisted that appointments of

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[12] Ibid., 21 June 1776, 5:471; the principal officers were Colonels Lewis Dubois and Seth Warner, Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Stafford, and Major Elisha Painter.

subordinate officers, below the rank of field grade, fell within the prerogative of the individual states. The New York Convention, in a letter to Congress, wrote that such a procedure was "so contrary to the common usage hitherto observed and practiced upon in all similar cases," as to "raise a discrimination highly invidious to this State." The convention added that although they did not doubt that Congress possessed sufficient knowledge about the officers to make the appointments, the assembly questioned "whether the ability [Congress] may thence derive to perform an act can constitute a right of doing it."[13] This response made it very clear that the state was very jealous of its own prerogative and would not relinquish it quietly.

The Board of War also had trampled unknowingly on military protocol which left many officers in the Continental Army disgruntled. Officers with more seniority in the Continental service than those promoted to a higher rank in the forthcoming New York regiment were so sufficiently rankled by being "ungenerously superceded," that they resigned their commissions. According to the insulted officers, even "sergeants and corporals . . . have superceded officers who bore commissions in the [Canadian] campaign."[14]

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[13]New York Convention to the President of Congress, 11 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:201, 202.

[14]New York Convention to the President of Congress, 12 July 1776, Ibid., 1:228; the offended officers were Lieutenants Aaron Aerson, Jonathan Pease, Richard Platt, Daniel Gano, and Garret H. Van Wagener.

Thus, the Board of War had its first brush with the issue of national versus state prerogative. Through ignorance and haste the War Office had blundered into the confrontation, but to back down in the face of this provincial challenge would have caused irreparable damage to the Board of Mar's prestige and authority. The War Office deliberated on the matter for eight days before it delivered its recommendation to Congress. John Adams reported that the Board of War would not withdraw its original instructions to New York because "no good purpose would be answered by making any alteration therein." However, the War Office so much as admitted its mistake by declaring that "although many worthy officers who served in Canada are yet unemployed, the Board can only lament that they are not in service, but hope something will, (in the future), turn up to enable Congress to place them in situations equal to their merit."[15]

Though the War Office stood firm in the face of this initial provincial challenge, it became remarkably timid in similar circumstances throughout the remainder of 1776. Perhaps the Board of War was afraid that to press the matter would cost the support of several of the states. In the only other related instances involving the staffing of regiments, the War Office clearly deferred to the judgment of the states. For example, on July 9, the Board of

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[15] Journals of the Continental Congress, 23 July 1776, 5:602.

War approved the commissions requested by Virginia for the staffing of the new Virginia rifle company under Hugh Stephenson, instead of appointing their own. No doubt Benjamin Harrison's presence on the Board of War greatly aided the state's recommendation. The War Office even graciously asked the Virginia delegates in Congress to write to the several Virginia counties requesting that they reconunend persons for filling up the remaining positions in the regiment.[16] In another instance, the Board of War requested Massachusetts to appoint one of the general officers of that state's militia to command the troops which were raised there to fill the void created when the Continental troops around Boston were ordered to march to New York by General Washington.[17] Since the last appointment clearly fell within the prerogative of the War Office, it demonstrates how careful the Board of War had become in dealing with the individual states. The last thing the War Office wanted to do was alienate any of the states.

The War Office also had learned a lesson in military protocol. For the remainder of the year, when vacancies occurred in regiments, officers were promoted on a strictly regimental line. Unfortunately, with this method, seniority counted for more than merit and undoubtedly the service suffered in some cases as a result. But this

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[16] Ibid., 9 July 1776, 5:529.

[17] Ibid., 14 August 1776, 5:657.

method of promotion calmed the storm created in the army by the Board's previous action.[18]

In their report of June 11, Chase and Carroll indicated that a neglect by Congress had contributed to the demise of the Northern Army, with nonpayment of the troops a causal factor. The Board of War attempted to correct this oversight throughout the summer of 1776. On June 25 the War Office recommended that all of the states that were requested to send reinforcements to the New York frontier appoint paymasters for each regiment so that accurate accounts could be kept of what was owed to the soldiers by Congress.[19] This did not guarantee that the troops would be paid because Congress still lacked hard currency, but perhaps Congress believed the measure would at least give the troops the impression that Congress meant to pay them. To help the men pray for their pay, on July 5, the Board of War, acting on a request from General Washington of the 28 of June, recommended that chaplains be appointed to each regiment of the Continental Army. Experienced soldiers, then as now, recognized the value of good morale among the troops, and how low morale could ruin the best of armies. This measure by the War Office obviously was

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[18] See the Board of War's promotions for Colonel Samuel Elmore's Connecticut regiment, and for filling vacancies in Washington's army, Journals of the continental Congress, 30 July and 10 August 1776, 5:644, 614, 615.

[19] Ibid., 25 June 1776, 5:479.

intended to lift the sagging spirits of the troops and satisfy their religious needs as well.[20]

The War Office also spent time straightening out the Commissary Department in the Northern Army in an attempt to supply that force more effectively. In previous wars, ana in the first year and a half of the revolution, each army had been provided with its own commissary, whose function was to provide the army with provisions. In 1776, this system ultimately led to competition for wagons, horses, teamsters, and supplies among the commissaries of the different armies--a very unsatisfactory arrangement. Joseph Trumbull had been appointed Commissary General for the entire Continental Army in July of 1775, but when he attempted to assert his authority over the Northern Army's acting commissary, Walter Livingston, in the spring and early summer of 1776, he was rebuffed by both Livingston and General Schuyler.[21] After receiving General Washington's opinion on the festering situation in the Northern Department, the Board of War (undeniably pro-Trumbull because of his New England background and friendship with John Adams and Roger Sherman), stated that Trumbull had

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[20]General Washington to the President of Congress, 28 June 1776, Force's American Archives, Fourth Series, 6:1117, 1118; Journals of the Continental Congress, 5 July 1776, 5:522.

[21]Livingston was Schuyler's favorite, and Trumbull was a friend. of General Horatio Gates, who had replaced General Sullivan at Tyconderoga after the Army's retreat to that place.

full authority over all of the New York, Middle, and Eastern armies. The decision was really only academic due to Trumbull's appointment as head of the department a year earlier, and no great initiative can be credited to the Board of War in this instance either. Livingston subsequently resigned and the Commissary Department was finally united under a single department head, Joseph Trumbull.[22]

Other portions of the Chase-Carroll report also demanded the Board of War's attention. In an effort to tighten Congress' control over the armies and to help eliminate corruption therein, on July 16, the War Office recommended that commissioners be appointed to audit the accounts of the two New York armies, and the Northern Army in particular. The audits were aimed at the Commissary, Quartermaster, Hospital, and Paymaster departments. Surely the money conscious Roger Sherman had a hand in the instigation ana formation of this recommendation. The Board of War also ordered that the departments submit weekly and monthly returns of all transactions so that the accounts would be closely monitored.[23]

The War Office also informed General Schuyler that officers holding more than one office in the army would no

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[22] Journals of the Continental Congress, 8 July 1776, 5:527; for Livingston's resignation see Walter Livingston to the President of Congress, 7 September 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 2:220, 221.

[23] Journals of the Continental Congress, 16 July 1776, 5:564, 565.

longer be tolerated. A few officers, principally in the Northern Army, had been acting as the commissary for their regiments in addition to their regular duties. These few officers had been known to turn a quick profit at the expense of their men by charging the troops exorbitant prices for provisions. Under the Board's recommendation, this practice was eliminated and undoubtedly created better harmony between officers and enlisted men.[24]

Finally, to demonstrate to the troops in the Northern Army that Congress was serious about its new commitment to that military department, the War Office reconunended two hundred thousand dollars be sent to Jonathan Trumbull (the son of the Connecticut Governor), Deputy Paymaster General in the Northern Department, to pay the men. In addition, the Board of War authorized James Livingston and a French Canadian, Preudhome la Jeunesse, to raise a regiment of Canadians to fight alongside the Americans at Tyconderoga. Congress approved the Board's recommendation to pay the troops, but tabled the suggestion for raising the Canadian regiment.[25] The War Office inexplicably allowed the issue to die and made no attempt to reintroduce a similar measure. Perhaps Congress had conceded that any new Canadian campaign would prove to be fruitless.

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[24] Ibid., 19 July 1776, 5:591.

[25] Ibid., 2 August 1776, 5:627, 628; Ibid., 15 August 1776, 5:657; Ibid., 21 August 1776, 5:692.

However, given the critical situation in that department, it is a cause for wonderment that more of an effort was not exerted in this direction. In any event, the record reveals that in the two-and-one-half months before the battle on Long Island, the high watermark of the 1776 summer campaign, the Board of War had taken many steps to rectify the disorganization, dispiritedness, and corruption in the Northern Department. Yet, this military department was not the only responsibility of the Board of War.

On July 1 Congress was informed by General Washington that forty-five ships of the Howe brothers' armada had arrived off Staten Island, and in his dispatch a day later, the Commander-in-Chief declared that upwards of one hundred and ten sail stood in the harbor disembarking troops.[26] Shortly thereafter, Congress was also shocked to learn of "a hellish plot . . . to murder General Washington and some other officers of the first rank, blow up the magazine, and spike up the cannon."[27] The subsequent hanging of one of the conspirators did nothing to alleviate the anxiety felt by Congress and the War Office regarding the army around New York City.[28] Washington's command was the best organized

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[26]General Washington to the President of Congress, 29 June 1776, Force's American Archives, Fourth Series, 6:1134; General Washington to the President of Congress, 30 June 1776, Ibid., Fourth Series, 6:1142, 1143.

[27]Joseph Hewes to Samuel Johnston, 8 July 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:117.

[28]The condemned man was Thomas Hickey, a private in Washington's own Life Guard.

of all the Continental armies, and the loss of the General ana several of his staff would have been a devastating blow and would have thrown the army into complete chaos. New York would have been surely lost and victory would have been in the grasp of the British. Congress itself received a message that loyalists intended to plant kegs of gunpowder right under the delegates' feet at Carpenters Hall. Although both plots failed, they serve to illustrate the tension and chaotic atmosphere Congress and the Board of War were forced to labor under during the hectic summer of 1776.

Despite trying conditions, Congress and the War Office continued to carry on with the business of rebellion. With General Washington's command intact, the Eoard of War played only a supporting role in this theatre from June until the end of the summer campaign which climaxed with the battle of Long Island on August 27. The logistical support providea by the War Office will be discussed later, but the Board attempted to help Washington prepare his reception for the British in other ways as well. On June 26 and July 23 the War Office sent to the General two experienced French engineers, Antoine Felix Weibert and Monsieur St. Martins, to help construct the Continental defenses.[29] In addition, following Washington's recommendation, Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Putnam was appointed

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[29] Weibert was employed at King's Bridge.

as an engineer to aid these gentlemen.[30] Engineers were invaluable to an army because, although they were often combined with the artillery in a common arm of the service, they were also responsible for the siting and construction of redoubts, cheveau de frise, ditches, palisades, abatis, and flèches.[31] Thus, even though the Board of War was content to play a supporting role in this theatre, it provided Washington with defensive expertise the General sorely needed. The engineering experience lent to Washington was intended to give untried Continental troops a fighting chance against experienced veterans under Sir William Kowe.

The Board of War also heeded Washington's request to take the Connecticut and New York lighthorse, which had come to the General's aid, into Continental pay. Although these dragoons were state line militia and volunteers (Congress had not yet made any provision for lighthorse troops in the army), Washington had requested that, as added inducement for their assistance, Congress should pay them.[32]

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[30] Journals of the Continental Congress, 26 June 1776, 5:480; Ibid., 23 July 1776, 5:602; Ibid., 5 August 1776, 5:630; for Washington's recommendation of Putnam, see Washington to the Board of War, 29 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:641, 642.

[31] Boatner, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution, p. 346.

[32] General Washington to the President of Congress, 21 June 1776, The Papers of the Continental Congress, reel 186, item 169, 1:368, 369; General Washington to the President of Congress, 10 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:173, 174; Journals of the Continental Congress, 16 July 1776, 5:563-565; Ibid., 24 July 1776, 5:607.

Lighthorse troops were particularly useful in reconnoitering and harassing enemy positions and troop movements. However, the Connecticut dragoons proved to be too much for even the Commander-in-Chief to handle and he was forced to dismiss them.[33] Historians can only speculate on what the outcome of the battle of Long Island might have been had Washington had the five hundred extra dragoons covering his flanks on August 27. The fact remains, however, that the War Office again had demonstrated its resolve in aiding the Continental commanders in any manner it could.

Congress also left to the Board of War the task of straightening out a misunderstanding that the War Office had no hand in promoting. Washington had been piqued when he learned that Congress, superseding the Board of War, had granted General Gates the authority to commission officers while the Northern Army was still on Canadian soil. Congress had given Gates almost dictatorial powers over the Northern Army in Canada in an effort to save that campaign.[34]

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[33] Upholding the tradition of good cavalry, the Connecticut lighthorse refused to do duty without their horses, and since forage was scarce, Washington was forced to send them home; for a comic exchange, see Colonel Seymour (Connecticut lighthorse) to General Washington, 16 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:371.

[34] Gates had relieved General Sullivan because the latter had almost sacrificed the remainder of the Northern Army by remaining too long at Sorel in a vain show of bravado, even though the situation was totally hopeless. However, by the time Gates arrived, the army had already retreated to Crown Point and, thus, Gates' extraordinary powers were void.

Washington complained to Congress that, as Commander-in-Chief, even he had not been granted such extensive powers.

Thus, it fell to the War Office to smooth the ruffled feathers of the Continent's Commander-in-Chief. In a letter drafted by the Board, but signed by John Hancock, the President of Congress, the War Office reassured the General that Congress had "in no instance, except in the late appointment of General Gates to the command in Canada, parted with the power of filling up vacancies" in the army, and it had only acquiesced in that instance because of the "great confusion and many disorders prevalent in that Army, and its distance" from Philadelphia, and "only during his continuance in Canada."[35] This letter appears to have satisfied Washington for he again turned his attention to the problems at hand. In fact, relations between the General and the Board of War had improved enough by August 17 that the committee suggested to him that he should attempt to arrange a prisoner of war exchange with the Howe brothers.[36] Unfortunately, within a fortnight, Washington would be bargaining for the release of more Americans than he would have cared to imagine.

Nor were the other Continental armies scattered throughout the other twelve states ignored by the War Office during the summer of 1776. On July 16 the Board of

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[35] Journals of the Continental Congress, 1 August 1776, 5:625, 626.

[36] Ibid., 17 August 1776, 5:665.

War authorized John Doyle to raise an independent company of riflemen in Pennsylvania for the defense of that state. The committee also sent an experienced French engineer, Le Chevalier ae Kirmovan, to the Pennsylvania Convention to aid that state in the construction of fortifications at the strategic post of Billingsport on the Delaware River. Billingsport was an important post because the British had to pass that place if they decided to attack Philadelphia from the Chesapeake Bay area.[37] In an action of lesser importance, the War Office appointed William Lawrence as paymaster of the Third Pennsylvania regiment which was being raised by Colonel John Shee.[38] This appointment further illustrates the total involvement by the War Office in all matters regarding the Continental Army.

The flying camp at Perth-Amboy and other locations in New Jersey created special problems for the departmental heads in the Continental Army and subsequently for the Board of War. The troops that streamed into the camp were entirely state and local militias and Philadelphia Associators. Because these troops had only enlisted for a short time during the harvest season, their numbers fluctuated daily. As new units arrived, others went home. This situation presented extraordinary logistical problems

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[37] Ibid., 16 July 1776, 5:564; Ibid., 28 June 1776, 5:490.

[38] Ibid., 13 August 1776, 5:651.

for the quartermaster and commissary because it was impossible to determine just what, when, and where supplies and ordnance were needed. In an effort to relieve some of the burden from the camp quartermaster and commissary, all of the troops destined for the flying camp were ordered by Congress to pass through Philadelphia. There they were supplied with arms, equipment, and some provisions. But, as the Deputy Quartermaster of the flying camp, Clement Biddle, noted, an assistant quartermaster was needed in Philadelphia to keep accurate accounts of the ordnance and supplies issued there. Thus, on August 17, the War Office approved Biddle's recommendation and appointed Biddle's friend, Gustavus Risberg, a Philadelphia merchant, to that position.[39] Thereafter the supply system operated more efficiently and troops were not arriving in the flying camp empty-handed as often.

The impending crisis at New York also had an effect on the defense of Massachusetts and presented the Board of War with another problem. When General Washington ordered the Continental troops at Boston to New York, the Massachusetts Assembly was thrown into a panic over the prospect of being left defenseless,[40] However, the Board of War

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[39]Clement Biddle to Richard Peters, 14 August 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:948, 949; Journals of the Continental Congress, 17 August 1776, 5:665.

[40]Benjamin Greenleaf to the President of Congress, 19 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:459, 460.

allayed the Bay state's fears by recommending to Congress that any militia troops the state saw fit to raise to replace the departed Continental troops be taken into Continental pay until the crisis ended. In addition, the War Office, at the urging of John Adams, recommended that the aging Artemus Ward be continued as the commander of the Eastern forces.[41]

During the busy summer of 1776, the Board of War was not only able to tighten Congress' control over the Northern Army but extended Congressional control over the Southern frontier as well. Previously, only Charles Town, South Carolina, had drawn a military commitment from Congress. But after Congress learned of the British attack on Charles Town and the Cherokee attacks on the district of Ninety-Six, it became apparent that the British were capable of striking anywhere. Thus, on July 24, the War Office recommended that the South Carolina and Georgia independent rangers be brought under Continental control and pay. Because General Charles Lee had boasted that he could control the Southern frontier with one thousand dragoons, the Board of War set the number of troops to be

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[41] Journals of the Continental Congress, 31 July 1776, 5:623; Ibid., 21 August 1776, 5:693, 694; for Adams' handiwork in the retention of Ward as commander of the Eastern forces, see John Adams to James Warren, 21 August 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:59.

raised, the pay scale, and the command structure.[42] The War Office also aided Colonel Hugh Stephenson, who was raising and equipping a regiment of riflemen in Virginia. The Board sent the Colonel twelve thousand dollars for that purpose, and the regiment was quickly completed thereafter.[43]

One of the most important recommendations made by the Board of War in the summer of 1776 pertained to the establishment of a permanent artillery corps in the Continental Army. Prompted by a letter from Colonel Henry Knox, who pointed out that the Americans had been continually outgunned in this ordnance by the British, the War Office immediately set itself to the task of rectifying this oversight.[44] Although the Americans would continue to be inferior to the British in this ordnance, because it took time to cast cannon and train matrosses, the War Office at least initiated a positive response to the imbalance.

The Board of War also found time to take control over the prisoners of war. Up until July 10, each state had British prisoners of war scattered throughout the

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[42]For General Lee's account of the British attack on Charles Town, see Lee to the President of Congress, 2 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:435, 436; Journals of the Continental Congress, 24 July 1776, 5:606, 607.

[43]Ibid., 9 July 1776, 5:529.

[44]Ibid., 24 July 1776, 5:607; For Knox's letter to Congress, see Henry Knox to General Washington, 9 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:502.

countryside and there was no central authority providing for their care. But on July 10, the War Office officially established a central prisoner of war camp in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and all of the states were supposed to send their prisoners to that location. However, individual states continued to hold prisoners so the Board of War notified each state that monthly returns were required from each assembly detailing the number of prisoners held in that state.[45] By this action, the Board of War at least was able to keep an accurate count of the prisoners held by the Americans which was imperative to know in arranging prisoner exchanges with the British.

Thus, the summer of 1776 proved to be an extremely busy one for the Board of War. However, after the Continental defeat on Long Island on August 27, the responsibilities thrust upon the Board by Congress increased dramatically, far beyond anything that had been initially set down in the original list of duties and responsibilities. The most important of the new responsibilities proved to be beyond the capability and competence of the members of the Board of War to perform.

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[45] Journals of the Continental Congress, 10 July 1776, 5:531.

CHAPTER V

A GENTLEMAN OF THE MILITARY

The business of the Congress must be placed in different hands. A gentleman of the military must be of the Board of War.

–Samuel Chase to John Sullivan, December 24, 1776.

On August 29, 1776, Congress learned of the disastrous defeat of the Continental Army on Long Island. General Washington had been outflanked and the green Americans had been drawn into a trap. The result was over one thousand Continental troops killed or wounded, and Generals Sullivan and William Alexander (Lord Sterling) had been captured. The British and Hessian forces had suffered barely one-third that number in casualties. Furthermore, Congress learned that Washington had been forced to abandon Long Island, and the city of New York proved to be untenable.[1] Thereafter, General Washington was forced to play a desperate game of trying to keep the Continental Army between Sir William Howe and the Continental Congress at Pniladelphia. Though Howe would not enter Philadelphia in 1776, Congress nevertheless fled to Baltimore on December 2.

Long Island was not the only blow struck by the British during the autumn campaign. On October 21, Congress learned of the crushing defeat suffered by Benedict Arnold's fleet at Valcour Island on Lake Champlain on October 11 to 13. Arnold had hoped to stop the British fleet on the lake to forestall an autumn invasion of northern New York. Arnold's failure to stop Burgoyne left the American post at Tyconderoga vulnerable to attack. Because of the lateness of the season, Burgoyne decided to

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[1]For an account of the battle of Long Island, see Robert H. Harrison to the President of Congress, 27 August 1776, The Writings of Washington, 5:494, 495.

postpone the invasion, but this decision was not anticipated by the delegates in Philadelphia. Congress fully expected the British to attack Tyconderoga during the fall of 1776. Nonetheless, Burgoyne had set the stage for the opening move of the spring campaign of 1777.[2]

Perhaps the crushing blow to the Americans occurred when Fort Washington fell before the British guns on November 16. The defeat cost the Americans not only over twenty-eight hundred men in killed, wounded, and captured, but more importantly, yielded large stores of American gunpowder, arms, cannon, and ammunition, and many wagons and horses to the British. Because of the dearth of such war materiale in the colonies, the fall of Fort Washington was particularly crippling to the Continental Army. The defeat had one more consequence as well--the evacuation of Fort Lee which left New Jersey wide open to invasion, an opportunity Sir William Howe took advantage of. Thus, during the autumn campaign American arms met with defeat after defeat. The Continental Army and American morale were sent reeling, and it was not until December that the Americans were able to check the British advance at Trenton and Princeton. As one can surmise, the Board of War was a very busy committee during this period.

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[2]For Arnold's account of the action off Valcour Island, see Arnold to General Washington, 12 October 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 2:1038.

The Continental defeat on Long Island directly affected the development of the Board of War as an administrative body. As the Continental Army fell back toward Philadelphia, Congress panicked and turned to the Board of War to stem the military tide. On September 2, Congress ordered the War Office to prepare military plans for the next campaign. During the summer campaign, the Board of War had proven itself capable of creating more organization within the Continental Army and the various departments therein. The War Office had straightened out the Commissary Department, provided pay for the troops, and established a system of promotion that satisfied both the officers in the Continental Army and the delegates in Congress. In short, the Board of War had proven that it was effective in dealing with daily military minutiae and organizational problems which required no military knowledge or experience. However, the responsibility of planning a military campaign required more than common sense and good intentions--it required military expertise, a quality the members of the Board of War did not possess. For all of his vain ambition, John Adams had recognized that he was unfit to be a member of the War Office. In a letter to his wife, he wrote that "very little business will be done here, but what will be either military or commercial--branches of knowledge and business for which

hundreds of others in our province are much better qualified than I am."[3]

The lack of military expertise among its members was, of course, not the fault of the Board of War. Congress had deliberately excluded professional soldiers from the War Office in an effort to keep the army under civilian control. Thus, since the Board of War did not possess the military competence the order required, the result was that the committee never did present a plan for military operations even though the members had gone as far as purchasing two maps of the thirteen rebelling states.[4] Nor is there a shred of evidence that the committee consulted officers experienced in this type of military planning. Only near the end of 1776 did some members of Congress begin to see the absolute necessity of having an experienced soldier on the Board of War. Samuel Chase came to such a conclusion on December 24, after Congress fled to Baltimore, when he wrote that the "business of the Congress must be placed in different hands. A gentleman of the military must be of the Board of War."[5] Thus, the defeat on Long Island, and

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[3]John Adams to Abigail Adams, 11 July 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:184, 185; for Congress' order to the Board of War, see Journals of the Continental Congress, 2 September 1776, 5:729.

[4]Ibid., 7 September 1776, 5:743.

[5]Samuel Chase to John Sullivan, 24 December 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:186.

the subsequent inability of the Board of War to carry out its increased responsibilities served to convince some members of Congress of the need of having at least one professional soldier on the Board of War. When such a man was appointed, the Board of War was able to exercise more authority over the actual prosecution of the war. However, the idea of civilian control over the army died hard, and it was not until October of 1777 that General Horatio Gates became a member of the War Office.

Though the Board of War was unable to draw up plans for a military campaign, it nevertheless continued to aid the war effort by utilizing its organizational skills. On September 10, a member of the Board of War, other than John Adams or Edward Rutledge, presented a report to Congress regarding the establishment of a regular Continental Army.[6] The new army would be enlisted for five years or for the duration of the war, and would consist of eighty-eight regiments.[7] Although John Adams was not present to deliver the recommendation, he long had argued the need for a standing army and undoubtedly he played a major role in formulating the War Office's recommendation. General Washington, too, had often voiced his complaints regarding

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[6] Rutledge and Adams had gone to New York to meet with Sir William Howe ostensibly to hear Britain's reconciliation proposals. In reality, the Congressmen were only buying time to allow General Washington's shattered command to regroup.

[7] Journals of the Continental Congress, 10 September 1776, 5:749.

the unreliability of militia troops.[8] Prior to August 27, Adams had been unable to persuade his colleagues in Congress of the need for a professional army. He proved to be a seer of sorts when he wrote that only "two or three horrid defeats" would "bring a more melancholy conviction, which I expect and believe will one day or other be the case."[9]

Long Island proved to be the horrid defeat which shocked the other delegates into action. After deliberating on the War Office's plan for six days, Congress, with some amendments, approved the committee's plan for establishing a regular army. The Board of War had drawn up quotas for each state according to population. Thus, Virginia and Massachusetts were required to raise fifteen regiments each, Pennsylvania twelve, North Carolina nine, Connecticut and Maryland eight, South Carolina six, New York and New Jersey four, New Hampshire three, Rhode Island two, and Delaware and Georgia one. The amendments to the committee's original plan pertained to the number of regiments each state was required to furnish and the bounty system. Josiah Bartlett, a delegate from New Hampshire, wrote that "by producing the return of our number

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[8] John Adams to General Heath, 3 August 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:739, 740; General Washington to the New York Convention, 30 August 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:1230.

[9] John Adams to Henry Knox, 25 August 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:61.

of inhabitants, I have got the proportion to be fixed at three instead of four regiments for our State." Undoubtedly, the idea of using land grants as part of the bounty to be given each volunteer had much opposition in Congress as well. John Adams had known early on that the land grants would be a major stumbling block when he wrote that, although he was in favor of using land as an incentive for prospective volunteers, "the majority [in Congress] are not of my mind for promising it now."[10] However, after six days of debate over the issues, Adams was able to write to his wife that the plans for the army had been approved and "we have offered twenty dollars and a hundred acres of land to every man who will enlist during the war."[11]

Congress, however, was still an extralegal body with no defined powers. Thus, the Board of War had little power to force the states to comply with the assigned quotas. Instead, the War Office had to rely on the goodwill of the states in forming the new army. In reality, less than half of the eighty-eight regiments were ever raised.[12] When Congress learned that volunteers were only

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[10] Journals of the Continental Congress, 16 September 1776, 5:762, 763; Josiah Bartlett to William Whipple, 14 September 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:89; John Adams to Samuel Holden Parsons, 19 August 1776, Ibid., 2:57.

[11] John Adams to Abigail Adams, 22 September 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 2:443.

[12] Boatner, Encyclopedia of the American Revolution, page 263.

trickling in, the delegates were forced to make adjustments in the approved plan. Officers' pay was increased in the new regiments, bounties were allowed for men already in the army who chose to reinlist, a suit of clothing was promised for each volunteer, and the term of service was shortened to three years.[13] But even these further inducements failed to produce a torrent of volunteers.

The limited power possessed by the Board of War for forcing compliance with its quota system consisted of direct arm-twisting. But the War Office resorted to this tactic only once in 1776, probably because the members were afraid of losing the support of several states. This power consisted of ordering Continental troops out of an uncooperative state, thus, forcing the state to defend itself or be an inviting target for the British. Edward Rutledge explained that "in order to compel the Jerseys to afford a further assistance we have directed General Washington to call into your city (New York) from the flying camp 2000 men, judging, I should suppose truly that the people of that colony would not suffer to be overrun, but when convinced that they must contribute to the common cause, they would do so at once. . . ."[14] But the Board of War did not

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[13] Journals of the Continental Congress, 7 October 1776, 5:853; Ibid., 8 October 1776, 5:854, 855.

[14] Edward Rutledge to Robert R. Livingston, 20 July 1776, Letters of Members of the Continental Congress, ed. by E. C. Burnett, 2:17.

resort to this tactic in order to establish the new army, nor did they possess any other coercive power. Thus, because Congress and the Board of War were virtually powerless to force compliance with the quota system, the Continental Army already in the field continued to face greater than two-to-one odds against the superior troops of Sir William Howe. In 1776, the Year of the Carpenter, the steps leading up to the gallows had been completed.

Despite these major shortcomings of the Board of War, the conunittee did make positive, though less important, contributions to the war effort during the autumn campaign. The War Office continued to reorganize the army and improve the army's leadership by providing positions for experienced commanders. The committee also continued to provide stability in the army by promoting officers in a regimental line and by providing pay for the troops.[15]

The War Office continued to initiate reforms in the army as well. The committee recommended that militia troops be put on the same pay and provision footing as the regular Continental troops. This action helped to ease the friction and tension between the two forces. The Board also directed that, in situations where militia officers outranked the regular Continental officers, the highest

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[15]For positions for experienced officers and promotions in the army, see Journals of the Continental Congress, 6 September 1776, 5:740; Ibid., 12 September 1776, 5:754; Ibid., 19 September 1776, 5:783; Ibid., 25 September 1776, 5:823; for providing pay for the troops, see Ibid., 7 November 1776, 6:932, 933; Ibid., 13 November 1776, 6:949.

ranking militia officer would command. Prior to this decree, regular Continental officers had often refused to obey commands issued by higher ranking militia officers. After this action by the Board of War, there would be no question as to who had the authority to direct operations in the field.[16]

In addition, on September 19 the Board of War presented to Congress a plan for enforcing and perfecting discipline in the Continental Army. This plan ordered the Continental commanders in the field to drill the troops daily in the manual of arms exercise and tactical maneuvering in the field.[17] Thus, the War Office had taken the initial steps in transforming the loosely organized rabble they had inherited on June 12, 1776, into a professional army long before the arrival of Baron von Steuben in December of 1777. The evidence reveals that even in its clerical duties, the Board was far more than just a paper-shuffling committee. Through the summer and fall campaigns of 1776, the War Office had developed into a bona fide administrative body. Although the Board lacked the military expertise necessary for it to take more direct involvement in the actual prosecution of the war, it nevertheless made a considerable contribution to the war effort

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[16] Ibid., 14 September 1776, 5:757.

[17] Ibid., 19 September 1776, 5:784.

through its organizational abilities. But, perhaps, an even more important part of the Board of War's story has yet to be discussed--that of logistical support of the Continental Army in 1776.

CHAPTER VI

A MORE RESPECTABLE FOOTING

A list of the army is making out, wherein at one view every thing relating to each regiment will be seen. But the fluctuating state of the army has prevented that accuracy which, it is hoped, will be shown in the military affairs of the continent, when they shall, by the new establishment, be put upon a more permanent, and of course, a more respectable footing.

–The Board of War to General Washington, October 15, 1776.

During the summer and autumn campaigns of 1776, the Board of War had done its best to provide the Continental Army with qualified, experienced leadership. The War Office had initiated reforms, reorganized, and created a greater stability within the army and the various military departments. The result was that the departments operated more efficiently because the competition for supplies among the various commissaries was eliminated. More harmony was also achieved in the army because the Board of War had provided it with an acceptable system of promotion. But even the best commanders can not win unless they are given sufficient manpower and war materiale with which to fight. Thus, an investigation regarding the role played by the War Office in the actual logistical support of the Continental Army is in order.

In the original list of duties and responsibilities which were written down on June 12, 1776, the Board of War initially had little to do with the daily logistical support of the Continental Army. The only logistical duty assigned to the War Office was that of raising, equipping, and forwarding troops to the Continental commanders in the field. The responsibility of supplying the Continental troops with arms, ammunition, powder, clothing, and provisions rested with the two main logistical departments of the army--the Commissary of Stores and Subsistence and the Quartermaster. However, due to circumstances which will be explained later, the Commissary and Quartermaster were unable to

keep the Continental Army adequately armed and supplied. As the months passed during the summer and fall of 1776, and the supply and ordnance shortages mounted, Continental commanders and the logistical departments were forced to turn to Congress and the Board of War for relief. Thus, the War Office not only played a clerical role in the administration of the war effort but also was summoned to take an active logistical role as well.

Part I: Reinforcing the Continental Army

On May 25, 1776, the Continental Congress appointed a committee to confer with General Washington, Major General Gates, and Brigadier General Thomas Mifflin in order to draw up a plan of military operations for the summer and autumn campaigns. On June 2, the Conference Committee made its first report to Congress. Included in the report was a recommendation for the reinforcement of the badly weakened Northern Army. The committee recommended that six thousand militiamen be employed to reinforce the Northern Army. To complete this number, quotas were established for the individual states according to population. Massachusetts was requested to furnish 3,000 men (four regiments), Connecticut 1,500, New Hampshire 750, and New York 750. This recommendation was remarkably similar to one presented to Congress four days earlier by another committee which was appointed on May 23 for the purpose of consulting with the three generals about a related

matter. The members of the May 23 committee were Richard Lee, John Adams, Benjamin Harrison, Edward Rutledge, and James Wilson. The May 25 committee was composed of the same delegates with the exception of Edward Rutledge who was replaced by Roger Sherman. In addition, there were nine other delegates appointed to the May 25 committee. Although the original recommendation by the May 23 committee was ordered tabled by Congress, the similarity between it and the recommendation delivered by the May 25 committee undoubtedly was no coincidence. Adams, Rutledge, Sherman, Harrison, and Wilson probably had great influence on the recommendation which was approved by Congress for the reinforcement of the Northern Army.[1]

Furthermore, the Conference Committee brought in another report on June 3. Parts of this report pertained to the reinforcement of Washington's army on Long Island, the flying camp at Perth-Amboy, and the Eastern Army in Massachusetts. The committee recommended that 13,800 militiamen be employed to reinforce the army on Long Island. To complete this number, quotas were again assigned to the individual states. Massachusetts was required to furnish 2,000 men, Connecticut 5,500, New

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[1] Journals of the Continental Congress, 25 May 1776, 4:391; for the initial report by the Conference Committee, see Ibid., 2 June 1776, 4:410, 411; for the appointment of the May 23 committee, see Ibid., 23 May 1776, 4:383, 384; for the May 23 committee's recommendation for reinforcing the Northern Army, see Ibid., 29 May 1776, 4:399, 400.

York 3,000, and New Jersey 3,300. The committee stated that the eleven regiments raised and ordered to be raised for the reinforcement of the Eastern Army were sufficient. For the flying camp, the Conference Committee recommended that ten thousand men be raised and that Pennsylvania furnish six thousand militia troops for this purpose, Maryland 3,400 and Delaware 600. Thus, with Adams, Rutledge, Sherman, Harrison, and Wilson being prominent members of the Conference Committee, it can be said that the Board of War actually began its work three weeks prior to its official creation. By the time the War Office was created, the members of the Board had already figured greatly in Congress' attempt to reinforce the Continental armies and, in fact, by June 12, troops were already on the march. Therefore, on June 12, the Board of War had only to augment the plan already put in motion by its members for reinforcing the Continental armies. The logistical role of the War Office had begun.[2]

Of the five Continental armies inherited by the Board of War, the Northern Army was the weakest. Not only was the Northern Army's command structure in shambles, but it also suffered a serious manpower deficiency through battle losses, disease, and desertion. In addition to providing immediate leadership assistance to that army, the Board of War simultaneously attempted to augment the size

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[2]Ibid., 3 June 1776, 4:412, 413.

of the relief force, as drawn up on June 2, destined for that quarter. On June 17, the War Office ordered Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut to send the two Continental regiments (1,500 men) raising in that state to Canada. In addition, the committee recommended to the New York Convention that they raise a regiment of Continental troops and these be dispatched to Tyconderoga as soon as possible. The War Office also recommended that, in addition to the six thousand militia troops being sent to the Northern Department, four thousand Continental troops be raised and sent with them. The committee believed that the relief force, when added to the troops already at Tyconderoga, would enable the Americans to reach their stated goal of May 29 of a two-to-one manpower superiority over General Burgoyne. But many factors made this goal beyond reach. The majority of the relief force destined for Tyconderoga was to be state and local militia, over which both Congress and the Board of War had little or no control. There was little the War Office could do except send urgent appeals to the states to hasten the raising and marching of the militia. The Continental commanders also appealed airectly to the states for succour. Generals Schuyier and Washington often operated in this fashion, and then informed Congress that they had requested militia

aid. The War Office often gave its approval to such calls for assistance from the field commanders.[3]

Although the Board of War could not order a state to send its militia to the Northern Department, it often "recommended" that individual states do so. On June 25, the committee recommended that New Hampshire send its quota of the relief force, one regiment, immediately to the Northern Army. The War Office also urged the other states that were to supply troops for the relief force to expedite the raising, equipping, and forwarding of those troops. Because the militia were state controlled, these recommendations and appeals were as far as the Board of War and Congress could go.[4] But even the states had trouble raising their own militia for a reason which was beyond their control. The main obstacle was the fact that the citizen-soldiers were being asked to leave their homes at the height of the growing season. As most of the reinforcements destined for the Northern Army were being raised in the New England states, this factor was critical. Most of these men were subsistence farmers by occupation, and their livelihood depended on what they raised. Even a few weeks away from their farms could prove to be economically

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[3] Ibid., 29 May 1776, 4:399; Ibid., 17 June 1776, 5: 447, 448; Ibid., 25 June 1776, 5:479; Ibid., 26 June 1776, 5:481; for an example of the Board of War's approval of a field commander's request for militia aid, see Ibid., 22 October 1776, 6:895.

[4] Ibid., 25 June 1776, 5:479.

disastrous to many of them. Thus, the critical military situation, and the subsequent call for militia assistance could not have come at a more inopportune time. From Connecticut, Governor Trumbull reported to a delegate in Congress that "the extreme busy season retards the filling [of] our regiment[s] going to New York."[5]

But perhaps an equally important factor which hindered the raising of the militia was the awareness of the New Englanders that the Northern Army was riddled by disease, especially smallpox, an extremely lethal disease in the eighteenth century. The majority of the New Englanders had not been exposed to this disease, and they did not relish the idea of succumbing to the sickness in the wilderness of the New York frontier, especially when the close quarters of a military camp was known to foster epidemics. Governor Trumbull wrote that, in addition to the seasonal hinderance, there was also "the dread of the smallpox to those inlisting to go into the service in the Northern Army." General Schuyler echoed Trumbull's report when he stated in a letter to Washington, dated July 12, that, "None of the militia from the eastern colonies are yet arrived; they are extremely apprehensive of being infected with the smallpox, and not without reason, as it

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[5]Governor Trumbull to William Williams, 26 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:606-608.

proves fatal to many of them."[6] Thus, throughout the New England states there was the general feeling that enlisting for duty in the Northern Department was tantamount to signing one's death certificate. But even for those troops which responded with alacrity, the march to Tyconderoga was at times agonizingly slow for yet another reason over which the Board of War and the states had no control.

Northern New York during the American Revolution was largely uninhabited and undeveloped, and the subsequent lack of roads through the virgin woods was a major obstacle to troop movement. The supply routes from Albany to Tyconderoga and Crown Point were no more than footpaths which quickly yielded to the undergrowth. Consequently, the reinforcements converging on Tyconderoga from different directions often had to hack out their own roads as they marched. The weather during the summer and autumn of 1776 also proved to be as much of a hindrance to travel as the terrain. The conditions encountered on the march by at least one regiment were described by a militia officer, Colonel Jonathan G. Fraser, in a letter to General Gates. Fraser stated that, "The roads, or rather woods, that we marched through were so exceeding[ly] bad, occasioned by the vast quantity of rain that we have had lately, retarded our march much. We had rafts to build to cross the rivers with our baggage, etc., and swam across several creeks.

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[6] Ibid., General Schuyler to General Washington, 12 July 1776, Ibid., Fourth Series, 6:232, 233.

This, with the worst ground I ever travelled over, detained us a little." A snort time later, General Schuyler informed Gates that he had been forced to use some of the Continental troops, destined for Tyconderoga, to work on the roads. He added that, "If they are taken from that, all supplies must stop. Even now the roads are extremely bad." Nor had the road conditions improved measurably by the end of October when troops were hurriedly being sent up to counter the blow struck by Burgoyne off Valcour Island. With the season's first snows expected, Schuyler requested that the Board of War send supplies to the Northern Department in light wagons because in a short time "the roads will be almost impassable for heavy carriages."[7]

Although the Northern Army received no immediate support for the reasons described, the Board of War acted with initiative ana responsibility. The members brought forth a plan for reinforcing that army which would have given the Americans a two-to-one manpower advantage over the British. However, due to circumstances beyond the War Office's control, this goal was never reached during the year 1776. Only the lateness of the season and the same climatic and transportation conditions encountered by the forces under General Burgoyne prevented the invasion of

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[7]Colonel Jonathan G. Fraser to General Gates, 30 August 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:1238; General Schuyler to General Gates, 11 September 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 2:293; General Schuyler to the Board of War, 30 October 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 2:1298.

northern New York. Burgoyne was forced to postone his invasion until 1777, the Year of the Hangman.

By early July, the focus of the Board of War's attention turned from the northern frontier of New York to Long Island and Perth-Amboy, where Generals Washington and Mercer were constructing defenses to meet the expected invasion fleet of the Howe brothers. The members of the War Office had been instrumental in drawing up the plan for reinforcing these defenses. According to the plan, Washington was to receive 13,800 militia troops to augment his force of over 10,000 men on Long Island, and General Mercer was to receive ten thousand militiamen for the flying camp.[8] Great faith was placed in the Commander-in-Chief's judgment and military abilities by Congress and the War Office throughout the summer of 1776. The Virginian had been the hero at Boston earlier in the year by making Sir William Howe take to his heels and had yet to be defeated on the field of combat. Thus, because of the great trust Congress placed in Washington, the Board of War was not reluctant to defer to the General's judgment on all matters. In response to several letters from Washington, the committee, on July 8 and August 12, approved his requests to be allowed to call to his assistance such Continental regiments in Massachusetts that had not already received orders to

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[8] A General Return of the Army of the United Colonies, Commanded by His Excellency George Washington, 28 June 1776, Ibid., Fourth Series, 6:1119, 1120.

march to Tyconderoga, and to employ as many of the St. John's, Nova Scotia, Penobscot, and Stockbridge Indians as he thought necessary.[9]

The Board of War expressed Congress' trust in Washington when the members informed him "that Congress have such an entire confidence in his judgment, that they will give him no particular directions about the disposition of the troops, but desire that he will dispose of those at New York, the flying camp, and Tyconderoga, as to him shall seem most conducive to the public good."[10] In essence, the War Office had given Washington carte blanche in ordering troops to their destinations. But the General was a prudent man and was aware of the critical situation in the Northern Department. Thus, he was always hesitant about re-directing troops destined for that front. The Board of War, therefore, found it necessary occasionally to remind Washington that all of the Continental troops raising in the New England states were at his disposal. On July 29, the committee, concerned over the growing strength of the British on Staten Island, specifically empowered the Commander-in-Chief to order the Twenty-first Massachusetts regiment and Colonel Samuel Elmore's Connecticut regiment to his defenses on Long Island.[11]

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[9] Journals of the Continental Congress, 8 July 1776, 5:527; Ibid., 12 August 1776, 5:627, 628.

[10] Ibid., 23 July 1776, 5:602.

[11] Ibid., 29 July 1776, 5:614, 615.

In addition to those troops directly under Washington's command on Long Island, and the 13,800 militiamen which were supposed to aid him, the flying camp at Perth-Amboy was not only designed to act as a deterrent to a British invasion of New Jersey, but was also a reserve force for Washington. Thus, theoretically Washington was supposed to have 33,000 troops from which to draw from to repel the British invasion. However, some of the same conditions which hinderea the raising and forwarding of the militia troops for the Northern Department also hindered the reinforcement of Washington. The main factor was that the New England farmers were just as reluctant to march to New York during the growing season as Tyconderoga. And as the militia troops were state controlled, the Board of War was powerless to order them anywhere. Thus, the only possible recourse the War Office had was to try to raise more Continental regiments. But again, the New England farmers were even more reluctant to commit themselves to the army for three years. Furthermore, such an attempt to recruit more Continental troops in New England would have been fruitless because Massachusetts had already contributed sixteen regiments to the Continental Army (12,000 men), Connecticut five regiments (3,750), New Hampshire three regiments (2,250 men), and Rhode Island two regiments (1,500 men). Pennsylvania was supplying most of the manpower for the flying camp, and Maryland and Virginia were busy quelling loyalist

uprisings.[12] Although Washington did receive four to five thousand militia troops before August 27, he was still badly outnumbered when Sir William Howe launched his attack. This situation was clearly not the fault of Congress or the Board of War, but was due mainly to uncontrollable circumstances. After the defeat on Long Island, the members of the War Office again exerted their initiative by drawing up the plans for a regular army to consist of eighty-eight regiments. Obviously, one of the objectives of the plan was to eliminate the powerless situations in which the Board of War had twice found itself regarding the militia. The committee could order regular troops to the areas of combat, something which it could not do with militia. Thus, the members of the War Office had played a prominent role in providing reinforcements for the Continental Army throughout the summer and fall campaigns of 1776. But providing reinforcements is only one form of logistical support required by an army.

Part II: Supplying and Arming the Continental Army

Once reinforcements sent by the Board of War and the individual states arrived in the field, the task of supplying and arming the troops fell to the Commissary and Quartermaster corps. As the size of the Northern Army and

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12Fred Anderson Berg, Encyclopedia of Continental Army Units (Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1972), pages 32-36.

the army on Long Island grew, the strain on the Commissary and Quartermaster increased as well, as these administrative departments desperately attempted to keep the armies adequately supplied and armed. However, the economic realities which existed in the New England and Middle states hindered the departments in this attempt. The small number of manufacturing facilities within the various states meant that supplies and ordnance could not be speedily procured in times of need and this hindered the Commissary, Quartermaster, and the Board of War in their logistical support of the armies. The problem of procurement became acute as the summer and autumn campaigns dragged on and the arms and equipment initially issued to the soldiers wore out or were lost, as the Americans suffered consecutive defeats. Thus, the Continental commanders in the field were forced to turn to the Board of War for aid.

The Board of War first became involved in this type of logistical support in July of 1776. On July 4, Congress empowered the Board of War to employ persons in the manufacture of flints. The War Office was instructed to inquire of all the states for names and places of residence of persons skilled in this manufacture, and where, in each state, the best flint stores were located. The committee was also instructed to examine the quality of the flints, and to make contracts for the best flint available. Flint was a valuable military item in the eighteenth century when the principal weapons were muskets and flintlock

rifles. In addition to contracting for the manufacture of flints, the War Office found that Pennsylvania already possessed a quantity of that item, and, thus, requested the Pennsylvania Council of Safety to immediately forward them to General Washington at New York. The Council of Safety quickly complied with the request. On July 5, the Council ordered the Pennsylvania Commissary, Robert Towers, to deliver thirty thousand flints to the Commander-in-Chief.[13]

The army also needed lead, which was in short supply in the rebelling states, for shot and shell. In response to a letter from General Washington, read in Congress on July 15, the War Office instructed the Pennsylvania Council of Safety and the New Jersey Convention, to procure as much lead within their respective states as possible for the use of the flying camp. Both states responded to this request with alacrity. On July 16, the New Jersey Convention ordered the several township committees to exert themselves in procuring the much needed lead. Toward this end, the Convention ordered the township committees to collect "all the leaden weights from windows and clocks, and all the leaden weights of shops, stores, and mills, of one pound and upwards," and, "all other lead in and about houses and other places." The Pennsylvania Council of

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[13] Journals of the Continental Congress, 4 July 1776, 5:517; Order of the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 5 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1: 1287.

Safety likewise appointed persons to collect all available lead in the state, and was able to order Robert Towers to deliver to Colonel Clement Biddle, Deputy Quartermaster General, two tons of lead and two tons of powder, made into cartridges, for the use of the army under General Mercer at the flying camp. Thus, while the rebels in Philadelphia and the thirteen rebelling states were celebrating the intent of the Declaration of Independence throughout the month of July, the Board of War, in conjunction with the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments, was doing its best to procure and send to the soldiers of the Continental Army and militia the flints and lead necessary to make the proclamation a reality.[14]

Heavier ordnance needed by the Continental Army and Navy, such as cannon, were beyond the procurement capabilities of the Quartermaster and Commissary because of the scarcity of these articles in the rebelling states. The field commanders were forced to appeal to Congress for aid in acquiring such vital materiale. During the summer and autumn campaigns, the Board of War acted thrice to procure cannon for the Continental Army. On July 30, the committee

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[14]General Washington to Congress, 12 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:223, 224; Journals of the Continental Congress, 16 July 1776, 5:563-565; Resolution of the New Jersey Provincial Congress, 16 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:369; Resolution of the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 27 July 1776, Ibid., Fifth Series, 1:1301.

ordered that a number of four and six pound cannon, not to exceed ten of each, be immediately sent by the Pennsylvania Council of Safety to General Mercer at the flying camp. The committee's request was again quickly complied with. On July 31, the Pennsylvania Council ordered Captain Joseph Blewer of the Pennsylvania militia to procure and forward the guns to Perth-Amboy. Later that summer, in response to a letter from General Gates, the Board of War instructed the Cannon Committee in Congress to contract for the immediate casting of six 6-pound cannon, six 12-pounders, four 8-inch howitzers, four 6-inch howitzers, and six cohorn mortars. The Cannon Committee was ordered to deliver these cannon to General Gates at Tyconderoga as soon as possible.[15]

Furthermore, as the autumn campaign of 1776 neared a conclusion, the War Office began planning for the army's cannon needs for the opening campaign of 1777. On November 19, the Board of War ordered the Secret Committee to procure from foreign nations one hundred 3-pound cannon, fifty 6-pounders, fifty 12-pounders, thirteen 18-pounders, and thirteen 24-pounders, all of brass. Thus, the Board of War was already looking forward to 1777 even as Sir William Howe's forces approached Philadelphia.[16]

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[15] Journals of the Continental Congress, 30 July 1776, 5:620, 621; Resolution of the Pennsylvania Council of Safety, 31 July 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 1:1303; Journals of the Continental Congress, 21 August 1776, 5:693, 694.

[16] Ibid., 19 November 1776, 6:963.

But the Board of War's logistical support of the Continental Army was not limited only to scarce or exotic ordnance. Throughout the summer and autumn campaigns of 1776, the War Office procured and forwarded substantial quantities of gunpowder, munitions, cartridge paper, flints, clothing, tents and other camp equipment. Not even medical supplies were overlooked by the committee. On September 18, the Board of War ordered the Medical Committee in Congress to send an assortment of medicines to the Northern Army. Evidence that the medicines were sent is contained in a letter sent by two Congressional commissioners, Richard Stockton and George Clymer, read in Congress on November 4. The commissioners reported that the Fort George hospital had "lately received a large supply of the most capital medicines."[17]

However, the scarcity of war materiale possessed by the thirteen rebelling states was eventually felt by the Board of War and hindered it in its logistical support of the army. On October 15, the War Office informed General Gates that it could not comply with his request for

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[17] Ibid., 18 September 1776, 5: 781; Richard Stockton and George Clymer to Congress, 26 October 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 2:1256, 1257; for the procurement and forwarding of gunpowder, munitions, cartridge paper, clothing, flints, tents, and other camp equipment, see Journals of the Continental Congress, 5 July 1776, 5: 522, 523; Ibid., 31 July 1776, 5:623; Ibid., 14 September 1776, 5:758; Ibid., 21 October 1776, 6:890; Ibid., 27 August 1776, 5:706; Ibid., 25 September 1776, 5:823.

more cannon because the committee simply did not have any to send. And the ordnance situation had not changed a month later. On November 12, the War Office reluctantly informed the Virginia legislature that it could not allow that state to purchase any of the recently cast cannon because of the great need for it by General Washington. Too, the War Office was often ignorant of the needs of the army through no fault of its own. In a complaint lodged with General Washington on October 15, the committee charged that the various field commanders were neglecting to file ordnance returns with the War Office. Thus, the committee indicated that it was most difficult to know what was needed by the Continental Army. Therefore, the Continental commanders were as much at fault for the condition of the Continental Army at the end of 1776 as was the Continental Congress.[18]

Congress recognized the increasing importance of the Board of War as the chief administrative body of the Continental Army. On September 27, Congress oraered the Secret Committee to deliver to the War Office all of the arms, ammunition, and other ordnance imported by that committee. And, on September 30, Congress empowered the Board of War to send supplies and ordnance to the commanders in the field upon request, without first having

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[18] Journals of the Continental Congress, 15 October 1776, 6:876; Ibid., 12 November 1776, 6:943; The Board of War to General Washington, 15 October 1776, Force's American Archives, Fifth Series, 2:1062.

to gain the approval of Congress as a whole. Thus, in late September, the War Office was officially put in charge of the stockpiling and distribution of all of the Continental arms and ordnance. Therefore, it is clear that the Board of War had become active in all phases of support for the Continental Army by the end of 1776. The committee assumed duties and responsibilities far beyond those which were written down on June 12 and was not hesitant in exercising its additional powers. However, during the latter stages of the autumn campaign, the War Office assumed an even greater responsibility which turned the committee's attention from the logistical support of the Continental Army.[19]

On November 14, as Sir William Howe and the British Army approached Philadelphia, Congress put the defense of the city in the hands of the members of the Board of War. Undoubtedly, this new responsibility occupied the attention of the War Office and, thus, with the exception of ordering the Secret Committee to purchase the foreign cannon previously mentioned and the ordering of several regiments of Continental troops to Philadelphia, the committee made no other efforts toward the logistical support of the Continental Army. But even had the Board of War possessed some military expertise, it is doubtful that Sir

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[19] Journals of the Continental Congress, 27 September 1776, 5:831; Ibid., 30 September 1776, 5:835.

William Howe could have been kept out of the city had he desired to occupy it. Realizing this fact, Congress ordered the evacuation of Philadelphia on December 12. The Board of War was put in charge of the evacuation, and was ordered by Congress to secure all of the Continental arms ana ordnance in the city and transport them to other magazines. Congress then fled to Baltimore, and only Washington's desperate counterattacks at Trenton and Princeton prevented the British Army from wintering in the former residence of the Continental Congress.[20]

The logistical support provided to the Continental Army by the Board of War during the summer and autumn campaigns clearly illustrate that the committee was far from only a clerical, paper-shuffling body. The War Office had done its best to provide reinforcements, arms, munitions, clothing, and camp equipment for the Continental Army. The committee had even drawn up plans for providing logistical support for the campaigns of 1777. However, with Congress having fled to Baltimore, and the Continental armies undermanned, under-equipped, and dispirited, the autumn campaign of 1776 came to a close, and the stage was set for the opening campaign of 1777.

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[20] Ibid., 14 November 1776, 6:951; Ibid., 23 November 1776, 6:976; Ibid., November 1776, 6:980; Ibid., 12 December 1776, 6:1027; Ibid., 9 December 1776, 6:1016.

CHAPTER VII

DEFECTS AND EXPERIENCE

The instituting [of] a War Office is certainly an event of great importance and in all probability will be recorded as such in the historic page. The benefits derived from it will be considerable, tho the plan upon which it is first formed may not be entirely perfect. This, like other great works, in its first edition may not be free from error. Time will discover its defects and experience suggest the remedy and such further improvements as may be necessary. Eut it was right to give it a beginning in my opinion.

—George Washington to John Hancock, June 20, 1776.

Great changes had occurred in America in the seventeen months from the time John Adams mounted his brown mare and started down the road towards Cambridge, Massachusetts, in April of 1775. The thirteen rebelling states found themselves in a full-scale war with a powerful European country. Historians still debate the causes of the war and will continue to do so in the future. However, to the Continental and militia soldiers fighting the British, the causes undoubtedly faded in significance when compared to the daily struggle for survival against disease and musket balls. In the year and a half since the first shots rang out at Lexington ana Concord, the Americans had experienced the euphoria of victory and tasted the bitter fruit of defeat. Sir William Howe had been driven out of Boston, only to return to drive the rebels out of New York City. The Americans haa invaded Canada and captured Montreal. But the winter season, poor administration, short enlistments, and British guns had defeated the Americans at the gates of Quebec. General John Burgoyne had expelled the Americans from Canada and given them a thrashing off Valcour Island. The defeat at Quebec on January 1, 1776, had ushered in a year tnat proved to be a frustrating and demoralizing one to the rebels. Indeed, if 1777 can be called the Year of the Hangman because of the military opportunities which presented themselves to the British high command for ending the rebellion, 1776 can certainly be termed the Year of the Carpenter: The Building of the Gallows. The

administrative and military mistakes made by the Continental Congress and the Continental commanders in the field in 1776 set the stage for the opening military operations of 1777 and made the Year of the Hangman a real possibility.

Important progress had been made in organizing the rebelling army since that April day when John Adams surveyed military prospects at Cambridge. The army had evolved from a virtual rabble in front of Boston to a complex, though inefficient, military machine. From the day the army was adopted by Congress on June 15, 1775, the delegates assumed responsibility for its supply and organization. To meet the initial needs of the army, Congress established logistical departments within the army, such as the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments. However, until June 12, 1776, the overall administration of the army was left purposely under the control of Congress as a whole. Congress was reluctant to place the administration of the army into the hands of a single executive, due to England's experience with the Stuart monarchies. To deal with immediate, specific military problems, Congress was content to appoint ad hoc committees from among its members.

However, when news of the Quebec disaster reached Philadelphia in the spring of 1776, the direction of the war took a new and more complicated turn. Instead of a stationary war, Congress was faced with one in which speed and mobility were key elements. This new mobile war presented a plethora of problems for Congress in its

attempt to keep the Continental Army supplied and armed. Because Congress also had to address many other problems and decisions which were non-military in nature, it could no longer deal with the daily military wants of the army. Delegates, such as John Adams, Richard Henry Lee, and Samuel Adams, realized the need for a more permanent body to coordinate the defensive military efforts of the thirteen rebelling colonies. A committee was needed to possess essential military knowledge such as troop strengths, troop locations, a list of the officer corps, the condition and military situation of all of the Continental armies and state militias, the quantity of ordnance, munitions, and clothing in Continental possession, and the location of such ordnance and supplies. Thus, when Samuel Chase and Charles Carroll of Carrollton presented their alarming report on the state of the collapsing Northern Army on June 11, 1776, and indicated that a neglect by Congress contributed to that army's deterioration, Congress was ready to create such an administrative body. On June 12, 1776, the Board of War and Ordnance was established to become the military information center for the Continental Congress and to lift the burden of the day-to-day operations of the Continental Army from its shoulders.

The Board of War and Ordnance was not an innovative administrative body created by Congress. Rather, it was an adaptation from the British system which utilized a Secretary at War and a Board of Ordnance. Congress merely

combined the two offices into one committee. The members of the Board of War were selected very carefully by Congress as a whole. Each geographical section and political faction insisted on having a representative in the War Office to prevent rivals from becoming too powerful and dictating to the rest of the states. The Southern delegates were especially suspicious of the New England states. Thus, politically and geographically, the War Office was distinctly multipartisan. Roger Sherman and John Adams were representatives from New England. James Wilson represented the sectional interests of the Middle states, and Edward Rutledge and Benjamin Harrison represented the Southern states. Adams and Sherman were members of the radical faction in Congress, and Wilson, Harrison, and Rutledge were conservatives. The radical from Maryland, Charles Carroll of Carrollton, was later added to the committee to bring the War Office into political equilibrium. The most populated states had representatives on the committee because these states were to supply most of the manpower for the Continental Army. The states which were important producers or manufacturers of vital war materiale and provisions also were represented on the Board of War. Thus, it is clear that the members of the War Office were not randomly selected by Congress but were chosen deliberately and carefully.

The initial duties and responsibilities assigned to the Board of War were of the organizational variety.

This has led some historians, such as Marshall Smelser and Frederick S. Rolater, to conclude that the War Office was merely a clerical, paper-shuffling committee. However, the evidence clearly illustrates that as the summer and autumn campaigns progressed, the Board of War assumed a direct role in the actual prosecution of the war. For the sake of discussion, the duties and responsibilities of the War Office have been categorized as clerical and logistical in previous chapters. However, in the realities of 1776, the members of the committee could hardly distinguish one function from the other because, in many cases, they often went hand in hand. This can be illustrated when the War Office provided the Northern Army with experienced, qualified leadership (a clerical function). This action would have been meaningless if the committee also did not send them troops to command (a logistical function). Thus, both responsibilities were equally important.

During the summer and autumn campaigns, the Board of War performed many important clerical and logistical functions in connection with the prosecution of the war. Not one of the five major Continental armies in the thirteen rebelling states was overlooked by the War Office. The Northern Army's chain of command was reorganized and experienced commanders were dispatched by the committee to Crown Point and Tyconderoga. Even before the War Office was officially created, the members played a prominent role in implementing a plan for reinforcing that army as well as

the other four Continental armies. Once the Board of War was created, the members made provision for payment of the Northern Army and straightened out the supply system by intervening in the dispute between the commissaries. The committee sent General Washington experienced engineers to help prepare defenses for the invasion by the Howe brothers and otherwise aided him in various ways. In the Southern Military Department, the Eoard of War took the South Carolina rangers into Continental pay in an effort to stabilize the Southern frontiers. In addition, the War Office created a permanent artillery corps and drew up a plan for a professional regular army to consist of eighty-eight regiments. Quotas were established for each state, according to population, to supply troops for the new army.

The War Office provided the armies with arms and munitions. Flints, gunpowder, muskets, and cannon were acquired by the committee and sent to the areas of combat with alacrity. The Board of War did all in its power to supply the troops with clothing and camp equipment. In short, the War Office became involved in all aspects of supplying the Continental Army with the articles of war. Indeed, in the six months since its inception, from June to December of 1776, the Board of War did much to put the Continental Army on a "more respectable footing." Why, then, was 1776 such a frustrating and disappointing year for the rebels, one which saw Congress flee Philadelphia

for the safety of Baltimore, and one which set the stage for the opening campaigns of 1777, the Year of the Hangman?

The major internal weakness of the Board of War was the lack of military experience and expertise among its members. The delegates elected to the War Office consisted of a planter, a merchant, lawyers, and land speculators. These men were knowledgeable in constitutional law and finance, but not in military affairs. The exclusion of a professional soldier among the members of the committees was intentional on the part of Congress because the delegates feared the possible rise of a Cromwell.

The lack of military expertise on the committee undoubtedly hindered the War Office in some of its activities. The War Office was unable to forecast the future arms, munitions, and supply wants of the army. Thus, stockpiles of ordnance often lagged behind the demands of the army. Congress and the War Office often assumed that such war materiale could be obtained on the spur of the moment. The economic realities of the thirteen rebelling states made such acquisition difficult, if not impossible. The states simply did not have the manufacturing facilities to supply the army quickly. Whether the presence of a professional soldier on the Board of War could have alleviated some of the forecasting difficulties is a question that must await further study especially after Horatio Gates was appointed to the committee in October of 1777. Nevertheless, the evidence reveals that in 1776, the civilians on the Eoard

of War and Ordnance did their best to comply with requests from the field commanders for reinforcements, supplies, and ordnance. The committee responded to such requests with responsibility and alacrity.

But there were other factors which contributed to the reverses suffered by the Americans in 1776. The Board of War discoverea reluctance on the part of the individual states to sacrifice state prerogative in the interest of the common weal. The rebelling states feared the Continental Congress would only become a substitute for Great Britain's strong parliamentary control. Thus, the War Office often found that the individual states were as great a hindrance to the committee's efforts to prosecute the war as were other factors. The dependence on state and local militias to do the majority of the fighting also impeded the American war effort. Since these troops were state controlled, Congress and the Board of War had little or no control over them. The War Office could only urge the states to send their militia troops to the areas of combat. But even the states found it difficult to raise their militia due to uncontrollable factors. The citizen-soldiers were reluctant to march to the areas of combat at the height of the growing season, and the fear of disease further dampened the militia's aruor. And, once on the march, the lack of quality roads through the wooded, hilly terrain hindered troop and supply movement so that reinforcements and war materiale were often slow in arriving. Once

the militia arrived at the areas of combat, their short enlistments often expired just on the eve of battle and few of these troops were persuaded to stay.

Finally, the outcome on the field of battle ultimately depends upon the ability of the field commanders. The Continental Army lacked experienced, professionally trained soldiers. The Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army, George Washington, was only a colonel in the Virginia militia prior to 1775. Charles Lee, a soldier of fortune, achieved the rank of Major-General in the Polish Army but never commanded a large body of troops. And Horatio Gates, although a major in the British Army, was noted more for his organizational abilities than for his prowess as a field commander. Thus, against the seasoned commanders and professional soldiers of the British Army, the Continental commanders and green Continental troops and state militias often found themselves outmaneuvered and overmatched on the field of combat. All of these factors contributed to the reverses suffered by the Americans in 1776.

Nevertheless, the evidence clearly reveals that the Board of War and Ordnance in 1776 was more than just a clerical, paper-shuffling committee. The War Office was not, as Marshall Smelser suggested, "more of a game than a reality." The stakes of the rebellion were far too great for the committee to have been a game. The delegates to the Continental Congress realized that if the rebellion failed, many, if not all of them, would hang on the

London gallows. But, due to the circumstances described, by the end of 1776, the Continental Army was in headlong retreat and Congress had fled to Baltimore. The Year of the Carpenter came to an end, and the stage was set for the opening campaigns of 1777. The Year of the Hangman appeared to be a real possibility.

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