Spring 2021

Praying Soldiers: Experiencing Religion as a Revolutionary War Soldier Fighting for Independence

Roberto Oscar Flores de Apodaca

PRAYING SOLDIERS: EXPERIENCING RELIGION AS A REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIER FIGHTING FOR INDEPENDENCE

by

Roberto Oscar Flores de Apodaca

Bachelor of Arts
Concordia University of Irvine, 2016

Master of Arts
University of South Carolina, 2019

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in

History

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2021

Accepted by:

Woody Holton, Major Professor

Douglas L. Winiarski, Committee Member

Mark Smith, Committee Member

Tom Brown, Committee Member

Tracey L. Weldon, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the people at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia. Without your love and support, I would never have completed this project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dissertations are generally a collaborative process and this one was no exception. I am grateful for the tremendous support and encouragement that I received throughout the research and writing process. The institutional support from the University of South Carolina was indispensable. They helped fund numerous research trips and provided opportunities to share my work and receive feedback. The research funding related to this dissertation was also essential to make it what it is. The Massachusetts Historical Society, the Society of the Cincinnati, the William Clements Library, the SPARC Grant, and especially the Bilinski Fellowship all provided funding to make this dissertation possible. I am extremely grateful for all of it. Beyond institutional and financial support, this work has benefitted from countless readers who took time to give me feedback. I would like to thank all the anonymous readers from journals to which I submitted portions of this work who provided me with critical and constructive comments on how to improve it. Similarly, many of my fellow graduate students have read and given feedback on this project. Thank you. Most especially, I would like to thank Doug and Woody for the tremendous amount of time they have invested in reading drafts and discussing this work. These times created great memories and essential feedback. Of course, I want to thank Makayla for the many sacrifices she has made alongside me every step of the way.

ABSTRACT

While enduring the hardships of battle, many Revolutionary War soldiers recorded more about their personal religious lives than perhaps any other single topic. They especially enjoyed cataloging events they ascribed to divine intervention, listing their daily religious routines, and commenting on first time encounters with religious others. New and extreme circumstances tested the religious preconceptions of those who enlisted in ways that they had rarely encountered in civilian life. Their religion took on new importance for them as soldiers relied on it both as an interpretive lens and as a source of stability amid a chaotic war. My dissertation examines how the exigencies of the Revolutionary War affected the religious lives of Whig soldiers across denominations and colonies. It will argue that ordinary soldiers' religious worldview caused them to interpret the war in ways distinct from that of their ministers and commanding officers, who have often overshadowed them in analyses of the Revolutionary movement. Moreover, it demonstrates how race influenced a soldiers' religious thought and even identifies a distinct strand of abolitionist sentiment among religious troops. This dissertation also reveals how soldiers were forced to travel beyond their hometowns where they encountered other religious beliefs and practices for the first time in a positive way. Such interactions laid the experiential groundwork for the religious pluralism that was to come in the new nation. Neither wholly political nor militaristic, the war, for many soldiers, was a formative religious experience.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MHS.....Massachusetts Historical Society

NYHS.....New-York Historical Society

RWPA.....Revolutionary War Pension Applications

SCAR..... Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution

SCL.....South Caroliniana Library

INTRODUCTION

On September 1, 1774 General Thomas Gage executed a flawless tactical mission that seized the largest store of colonial gunpowder near Boston. Imperial leaders were thrilled with the result because they believed that if they removed the military tools of resistance, the colonists would submit. The result of what became known as the Powder Alarm, however, was precisely the opposite. Colonists from New England responded with rage and violence to what was previously a cold war. They used the incident to stir up the passions of the people against the British even more. Church bells tolled across New England to signal that they were under attack and thousands of men turned out armed with whatever they could find. What Gage and his colleagues had missed was that the brewing conflict would not be won or lost based on physical military resources or tactics. Rather, this was a battle that would be fought in the hearts and minds of the colonists. Colonists, who in fact, were a deeply religious people. Although the imperialists were aware of the seditious religiosity of these New Englanders, they underestimated its power to draw colonists into war and sustain them in the cause of resistance. Without this martial endurance, inspired in no small part by colonial religious conviction, there would have been no war and no republic.[1]

"Praying Soldiers" is an analysis of how soldiers' religious experiences and beliefs functioned during the war. The Revolutionary War lasted much longer than any of

[1] On the Powder Alarm, see David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 45-52.

the colonists could have anticipated. Indeed, they and their British enemies expected the war to come to a screeching halt after a single monumental battle in one of the major colonial cities. When this did not occur, the war dragged on and turned into something of a war of posts, a war of endurance. Lasting eight years, this war required significant ideological and practical framing to maintain the support of those involved in it. This study elucidates how many of the soldiers achieved that feat, namely through their religion. Early in the war, many of the soldiers zealously took to the field in the northern colonies and recruitment did not pose much of a challenge to mounting the war effort. However, this enthusiasm gave way during the long year of 1777 and particularly through that horrible winter at Valley Forge. Conscription then began to fill the void. Under both recruitment situations, religion played a vital role in helping men understand their place in the army by providing them with tools that sustained them during their service. Whether they voluntarily enlisted or were conscripted, many soldiers turned to religion to find endurance for the long war. In Washington's war of posts, troop morale was essential and, as he well knew, religion was among the greatest factors in keeping it alive.

While republican and political ideals motivated many elite politicians to pursue the Revolution, itcah was religion that was a primary force in marshalling soldiers into battle. For the ordinary eighteenth-century mind, religion was the most powerful and well-disseminated ideology around. More than any other single consideration, soldiers' writings were filled with ideals about fulfilling a religious duty in fighting the war. Indeed, many flashy quotations about soldiers being zealous for political liberties existed and could be found, especially in colonial newspapers. But the average soldiers' diary discussed their service in far more mundane and often religion terms. They spoke of

fighting in the army as something of a religious duty. Sometimes, soldiers acknowledged that this was the only reason they fought at all, feeling rather out of place in the army apart from religious convictions that they ought to be there. Once there, soldiers' writings showed how they used religious beliefs and practices to cope with the most gruesome and harrowing parts of the war. While the rhetoric of Thomas Paine soared through colonial streets and meeting houses, worn Bibles and scratchy quills were employed for religious ends by suffering soldiers.[2]

The historiography on the relationship between religion and the Revolution is fraught with complexity. Many studies have sought to examine whether this relationship existed at all, or, if it did, what exactly religions contribution was. On one end of the historiographical spectrum, religion was simply a handmaiden of politics. Colonists' political interests set the agenda and religion provided rhetorical and theological justification for what were political ends. There are some obvious instances where this was the case that are easy enough to point out. After all, was not France a historic religious enemy and a Catholic country? Yet, Americans embraced Louis XVI as an ally simply because it was politically and militarily expedient to do so. On the other end of the spectrum are those historians who see the Revolution as in large part motivated by religious interpretations of events. Interestingly, the heterodox John Adams, often portrayed as a secular puritan, pointed to the conflict over the establishment of the

[2] I make this contrast between the soldiers and elites views not to resurrect the idea that there was a great disparity in the formal theology of lay people and their ministers, in most cases there was not. Rather, to push back on the common move of historians to show political leaders who sublimate religion to their political purposes and assume that doing so characterized the Revolutionary movement. While religion certainly intersected with politics, many religious soldiers' religion did not neatly fit with the Whig ideology behind the Revolution.

Episcopacy in the colonies as the prime reason for rebellion brewing in the hearts of the people. Adams argued that it was the "apprehension of Episcopacy" that contributed "as much as any other cause" to rouse Americans to "close thinking on the Constitutional Authority of Parliament over the Colonies." Adams here was claiming the exact opposite. It was in fact the religious prejudices against an Anglican establishment that set the political agenda to reject Parliamentary authority. Both streams of historiography have some validity and, of course, their contemporary defenders. "Praying Soldiers" complicates this historiographic binary by showing how religion was indeed active and relevant to the Revolution, but in ways that differed from the politically charged rhetoric of chaplains and advocates.[3]

While emphasizing different sources and elements of the Revolution to make their case, scholars on both sides of this debate have largely overlooked the faith-driven soldiers. Most studies on religion and the Revolution leave out the most active and consequential revolutionaries of the entire war, the soldiers themselves. In many instances, troops were intensely religious and relied on their spirituality to motivate themselves to fight in the first place and then to sustain them emotionally once they were in battle. Without the soldiers there would be no victory on the battlefield, which would

[3] John Adams to Jedidiah Morse, 2 December 1815, John Adams to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1774, *Founders Online*, National Archives, (archives.gov) (sources from this website are cited hereafter as *Founders Online).* For foundational books on religion and the Revolutionary Era, see Marjoleine Kars, *Breaking Loose Together: The Regulator Rebellion in Pre-Revolutionary North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989); Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

have meant no lasting Revolution at all. Thus, understanding the hearts and minds of the soldiers who fought provides insight into how religion functioned for those most active in the Revolution.

This study also builds on the excellent work of military historians who have covered this period. This research contributes to the important works of the various historians who have highlighted connections between the military character of a nation and its civic life. While focusing primarily on soldiers' motives, social characteristics, and ability to live up to the national ideals of virtue, these scholars have neglected to offer a systematic treatment of the Continental soldiers' religious worldview and culture. Studying the religious lives of the soldiers provides new insight into their military experience and raises fresh questions about the religious character of the society from whence they came.[4]

My intent with this work is not to weigh in on the ongoing debate about whether America was founded as a "Christian Nation." While interesting, I find the debate to largely be about differences in definitions and approaches to the question. While this work may have implications for that discussion, it is not the question I am trying to

[4] For works on the relationship between the character of the Continental Army in relation to civic values, see Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1979); James Kirby Martin and Mark Edward Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights: H. Davidson, 1982); Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996); Caroline Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor: Service and Sacrifice in George Washington's Army* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Caroline Cox, 'The Continental Army', in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, ed. Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 161-176. John A. Ruddiman. *Becoming Men of Some Consequence: Youth and Military Service in the Revolutionary War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014).

answer. Rather, I seek broadly to understand the role of religion during the nation's founding. I find persuasive the arguments about the role that a Christian anthropology had on the political philosophy of the country, particularly in the assumptions behind the ideas of Federalist papers ten and fifty-one. Yet, I do not see how such connections made the founding Christian given the explicit rejection of any national church. Instead of pursuing those ideas, I wish to know what the role of religion was among the ordinary people, among the soldiers without whom this country never would have won its independence. For them, the role of religion was clearly that of a sustaining force amid a trying war. Thus, religion had a central role in the lives of the soldiers fighting the war against the British. Whether or not that makes this a Christian nation is unclear to me, but religion clearly played a central part in the war that birthed this country, a role that is little acknowledged, let alone critically analyzed.[5]

The best way to access soldiers' religious beliefs is by analyzing the diaries that they produced. Revolutionary War soldiers were quite remarkable in the documentary record that they left behind. While the majority were not able to write, a substantial portion of those who could kept diaries of their wartime experience and many of them survive to this day. In addition to these diaries, I draw on all available sources that speak

[5] For two introductory books that represent the two sides of this extensive historiography, see John Fea, *Was America Founded a Christian Nation?: A Historical Introduction* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 2011) and Steven K. Green, *Inventing a Christian America: The Myth of the Religious Founding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). The sides of the debate are usually predictable based on the religious affiliations of the authors. The neat camps in the debate have been constructively dismantled by the work of Joseph S. Moore who has shown that one of the more religiously conservative groups of the era, the Covenantors, denounced the idea of America as a Christian Nation because it left Jesus Christ out of the Constitution altogether and condoned slavery, see *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ into the Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2016).

to soldiers' religious beliefs and experiences during the war. These include letters, broadsides, pensions applications, and even prayer bills. Religion appears in all these sources. Like the political elites that shaped the macro decisions of the Revolution, ordinary soldiers seemed to be aware that they were making history. Some knew that this war would be looked at by posterity and so kept elaborate documentation of their experiences while fighting. They wrote accordingly. Many soldiers wrote in detail not simply where they traveled and what they saw, but why they did what they did and how they interpreted the events that they went through. Some even recorded poetry and songs that reflected the turbulations of their inner life. In short, these diaries are a window into the religious soul of the Continental Army.

This study is based primarily around a collection of over one hundred soldiers' diaries. These diaries have been collected from wherever I could access them; some printed, many not. These diaries are lumpy in their geographical and temporal distribution. Undoubtedly and unsurprisingly, most of the diaries came from the Northern colonies, particularly New England. This is a consequence of many historical factors and not of any preference for New England over other colonies. These areas were certainly the most literate at the time and thus were most likely to produce diaries. Additionally, most of the soldiers who fought in the war came from these areas. Finally, this area had the most vibrant culture of nineteenth century antiquarians who actively sought out vestiges of soldiers' diaries and preserved them for future generations. Although these realities do produce a uneven source base, there are ways to level out the field and access soldiers from the middle and southern colonies. Effort was made in this study to look

beyond New England for a religious profile of the soldiers. There are indeed some diaries kept from these areas and they are given great attention.

The diaries cover the war disproportionately as well. As might be expected, the bulk of the diaries exist from the early years of the war, 1775-1777. These years produced the greatest levels of enthusiasm about the war and thus the most writing about it from the soldiers. By consequence, some events loom larger in this study than others. For example, the march to Quebec under Benedict Arnold in September of 1775 produced more diaries than any other single event in the war. Over thirty have been discovered and they continue to be found to this day. By contrast, the Battle at Stono in 1775 has but one diary extant about the soldiers' experiences there and it is merely a few pages long. Such distortions in the historical record cannot be eliminated, but only acknowledged and efforts be employed to work around and fill in the gaps as much as possible.

Of course, not all diaries written by soldiers contained religious comments or musings. I took pains not to give that impression in this study. Of the diaries that I have analyzed for this research, about forty percent of them contained some form of religious content. Some sense of proportion is given in the bibliography, in which I cite all the diaries that I read, not simply the ones that touch on religion. Yet, when a diary contains nothing on religious topics it cannot be forced into one category or another when it comes to judging the religiosity of its author. We simply cannot know. For example, Captain Rufus Lincoln shows that it is difficult to assess the religious character of a soldier based solely on his journal. In his day-to-day recordings Lincoln writes no religious content whatsoever, but in the very back of his diary he recorded several Christian hymns. Had

someone simply read his diary, they would have assumed he had no religious interests. Unpredictable and irregular journal-writing philosophies prevailed among the soldiers. Some felt it appropriate to be more reflective and philosophical when drafting a diary entry, while others preferred to merely document what they did that day without any added commentary. Soldiers' religious musings were neither private nor sparse. They entered them in just about every extant source that we have from the war. These primary sources are supplemented by various other eyewitness documents, including diaries of chaplains and civilians.

I derive my methodology for studying these sources from modern formulations of lived religion. Studies of lived religion eschew discussions of formal theology in favor of the daily thinking and practices of lay men and women. This methodology acknowledges the space between formal theologians and religious prescription and outright irreligion. In this margin exists the average religious person who is given a measure of autonomy to believe and practice their faith in their everyday lives and unique contexts. This relatively free practice of religion leads to unique emphases and adaptions of formal religion that cumulatively make up one's unique religious experiences. These experiences are bound to context and differ over time. In this study, the lived religion of soldiers revealed unique emphases and beliefs that were not those of the elite culture. In this way, how lived religion functioned during the Revolution complicates modern formulations of the relationship between religion and the Revolution. The methodology of lived religion ultimately allows for analysis of the soldiers' religious experiences on their own terms rather than as projections of their chaplains and religious leaders.

Since this study is an attempt to understand the significance and function of religion for individual soldiers, it also utilizes some recent sociological and psychological literature on religion. Many studies have been done about the utility of religion in dealing with stressful life circumstances and even on soldiers during a war. I utilize these insights to help frame how the soldiers during the Revolution were writing about and experiencing their religion during similar experiences. In particular, I draw on studies that examine how religion proves to be helpful to individuals enduring trauma and stress and also how it can foster social connections and practices that likewise fortify persons to endure hardship. Although this is applying modern findings to historical actors, many of the putative mechanisms that account for the salutary effects of religious belief and practice in the present were clearly active in the soldiers' experience.

In an effort to understand soldiers' religion on its own terms and not necessarily in reference to decades of historiographical debate, this study does not examine, at least directly, the relationship between the revivalism under George Whitefield and the American Revolution. However, given the broad interest in that topic, I will briefly tease out what I believe to be the implications of the present study of the soldiers' religion for that discussion. Most of the soldiers' religious experiences do not align with those associated with the more radical elements of the awakenings. For instance, emphasis on a New Birth, biblical impulses, and bodily animations were hallmarks of "New Light" religious experience but were sparsely represented among soldiers' spirituality during the Revolution. Few discussed those topics in their writings and even fewer claimed to have experienced them. Moreover, many of the descendants of the most radical of the revivalist preachers, those who followed the logical train of their new religious

experiences birthed during the awakenings, wound up in pacifist sects during the 1770s and not in local militias or the Continental Army. For example, the descendants of Seth Youngs (a disciple of the revivalist preacher James Davenport) joined the early ranks of the Shaker movement. The soldiers who wound up fighting in militias and the Continental Army experienced religion in much more traditional ways. They sought assurance from God not through direct revelations or biblical impulses, but by reading daily events in a providential way and engaging in prescribed religious routines. Thus, while it is possible to connect broad themes that were similar between the revivals and the Revolution (defiance of authority, lay control, anti-English sentiment, etc.…), there was little indication that there was a direct connection between the religious logic and practices of the awakenings and the coming of the Revolution.[6]

[6] For this argument about Seth Youngs, I rely on Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 432-4. The connection between revivalist religion of the 1740s and the American Revolution was famously asserted by Alan Heimert in *Religion and the American Mind, from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966). In this book, Heimert challenged a generation of American historians who presumed that the religiosity of the colonies had given way to liberalism and enlightenment thinking that birthed the Revolution and its leaders. His thesis linked the emotionalist religious revivalism of the early 18th century colonial America with the revolutionary spirit of 1776. Heimert's thesis was received skeptically by most historians and vigorously criticized by no less than Edmund S. Morgan, see "Review of Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 24, no. 3 (1967): 454–59. After lying dormant for some time, Heimert's thesis was revived, revised, and defended (for different reasons) by both Harry S. Stout in his: *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) and Mark Noll in *Christians in the American Revolution* (Grand Rapids: Regent College Publishing, 1977). Although this connection gained much traction, the importance of Christianity was questioned by Bernard Bailyn in his *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) and explicitly denounced by Jon Butler in *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). For an excellent

In the past couple of decades, historians of the Revolutionary War have undertaken a radical reconceptualization of the American victory in that war. Proponents of the founding mythology surrounding the war (and centuries of scholarship after it) were convinced that the American victory of a rag-tag bunch against the British who were the best equipped and most trained army in the world strained credulity to the point where it was not inappropriate to invoke the miraculous. This idea of a British Goliath slain by an American David has been reframed largely based on the experiences of modern wars against insurgent populations. These modern wars saw superior militaries utterly incapable of rooting out resistance of a militant population, so long as that population had the will to fight. Each time a battle was won, the opposing ranks were simply refilled. When this lens is used to view the Revolutionary War, it flips the picture on its head. Not only were the Americans likely to have won such a war, but it was also

---

historiographical essay covering these debates up until the turn of the century, see: Goff, Philip and Alan Heimert "Revivals and Revolution: Historiographic Turns since Alan Heimert's 'Religion and the American Mind,'" *Church History* 67, no. 4 (1998): 695–721. Also see: Gordon S. Wood, "Religion and the American Revolution," in Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart, eds., *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 173-205. More recently, Butler has reasserted and strengthened his position in *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000). Moreover, historical interest in the connection between Christianity and the American Revolution has witnessed something of a revival of its own, see recent works such as: Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

near impossible that they would lose. This logic is sound only as long as the will to fight continued to grip the hearts and minds of the colonists fighting the British.[7]

This shift in perspective on the war calls for analysis of the factors that contributed to the enduring will to fight among the colonists, which was indeed profound. A lethal and well-trained military was not enough to win a war of posts. Such a war demanded for powerful sentiments among the people (and especially among the soldiers) that sustained their support for the cause. For many of these soldiers that force was in large part their religious convictions. The religious framing and practices of many of the colonists not only condoned the war but sustained the soldiers. This is not a purely idealistic argument. I am under no illusions that religious beliefs were solely responsible for drawing soldiers into the war and sustaining them once they got there. Indeed, through my research I have come to agree with Washington's own balanced assessment about the relationship between personal interest and ideals when it comes to keeping soldiers enlisted. Washington wrote that he did not totally discount the powerful motivations of idealism and patriotism. These may indeed "push men to action—to bear much—to encounter difficulties," and yet "it will not endure unassisted by interest." If Washington's assessment of his own troops was sound (and I believe it was), then a unidimensional analysis of the soldiers leaves something to be desired. Thus, this study seeks to round out our understanding of these fighting soldiers. They were not purely

[7] For a recent study that embodies this trend in military history, see John Dederer, *Making Bricks Without Straw: Nathanael Greene's Southern Campaign and Mao Tse-Tung's Mobile War* (Lawrence: Sunflower University Press, 1983); Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liverwright, 2013). Boot documents the difficulty that colonial powers had had throughout history in winning wars of insurgency. The historic rarity of it occurring makes the American victory far less surprising.

moved by interest, but had that interest framed, bolstered, and sustained by their religion. This suggests a methodology for historians of insurgent wars going forward. What were the ideas and practices that sustained the insurgent population in their fight? Why were they so compelling and effective? This study seeks to answer that question, in part, by a thorough analysis of the soldiers' religion as a key component.[8]

Historians have moved away from such analysis of the religious life of soldiers, in part for good reason. A national and impenetrable mythology surrounded this topic for centuries. Fabricated images of George Washington receiving an epiphany during the winter at Valley Forge were put forward as incidents that characterized the whole movement in ways that were clearly false. These ideas lent themselves to simplistic ideas and miraculous explanations for much of the war that left many historians unsatisfied. However, the change in viewing the importance of the war from one of winning or losing battles to sustaining morale amid the war of posts, opens the door for fresh and critical analysis of how religion filled that need for many soldiers. The larger significance of these findings is also spelled out in each chapter, but the religious experiences of the soldiers themselves is always front and center. Collectively, these chapters argue that religion was a necessary sustaining force for many soldiers during the Revolutionary War.

The first chapter examines the providential worldview of the common soldier. This chapter shows how soldiers largely operated with a pre-Enlightenment providential understanding of the world in which every event could (and should) be interpreted according to the divine intention behind it. A northeasterly breeze that prevented the

[8] "From George Washington to John Banister, 21 April 1778," *Founders Online*.

British from trapping the Continental on Long Island at the end of August 1776 was not merely wind, but rather a divine act that showed God protecting soldiers from the British and smiling on their cause. This enchanted worldview linked soldiers more closely to their colonial past than to developing Revolutionary philosophies about the Rights of Man originating in Europe. Using their providentialism amid warfare, soldiers reframed tragedy and justified their own martial behaviors. As chapter one shows, their notions of an active providence were instrumental in many joining the war in the first place and became vital for many more once they were in the army to understand what was going on around them. Race also affected a soldiers' use of providentialism, leading to some African American soldiers applying it in novel ways. This interpretative lens was a key factor in how various soldiers endured the war and saw their role in it. Soldiers' providentialism was not only powerful and robust, but quite adaptive. Their context dictated the terms of their providentialism, complicating our often-simplistic understanding of a uniform providentialism during the Revolution.

Soldiers' religion was not strictly a cerebral process but was acted out by consistent religious routines. The second chapter examines these rituals and their meaning to various soldiers. A typical soldier's day was regimented around prescribed religious practices that provided him with a much-needed sense of stability and security amid the chaos of war. Although it varied according to time and location, soldiers enjoyed common religious routines with their fellow troops like worship, prayer, singing, and even poetry writing. Soldiers often commented on partaking in these religious routines and wrote about what they meant to them. The soldiers' diaries were often structured around weekly Sabbath days in which the soldier would worship and reflect on

the religious significance of their time in the army. Many soldiers showed increased attachment to these rituals as they underwent severe hardship or injury, further indicating the importance of routines as a source of stability. These embodied religious practices were used alongside soldiers' providentialism to give their lives shape, meaning, and steadiness that worked for many through the hard times of the war. While officers promoted these routines often because they kept rowdy soldiers disciplined, soldiers attached to them sentimentality and significance beyond martial utility. They became another coping mechanism provided by religion.

The third chapter examines how soldiers used religion to help them cope with the biggest challenge they faced while in the army: death. From the soldiers' perspective, the Revolutionary War was anything but gentlemanly. It was in fact a bloody and brutal war in which soldiers encountered death far more than they ever had previously. War brought men to their graves in a variety of ways, some more unsettling than others. There were, of course, the battlefield deaths which are remembered as glorious but experienced as anything but. Most deaths on the battlefield came because of a bayonet wound from a Redcoat that caused death hours or days after the fact. Yet, more than battlefield deaths were deaths by disease. Several diseases ran rampant through the army, but the most lethal was undoubtedly smallpox. Smallpox took even more lives than British bayonets. A far less numerous, but far more dramatic form of death that soldiers encountered was death by execution. Usually done by hanging or firing squad, executions were a staple of martial discipline in the Continental Army, and their ubiquity forced soldiers to confront them the same as the other forms of death. All these traumatic encounters with death demanded much from soldiers who witnessed them. Soldiers often turned to religion

when encountering deaths from these various avenues. It was during these encounters that soldiers were unusually explicit about the value and utility they placed on their religion beliefs and practices. Death was the king of terrors, and to endure underneath its tyrannical rule many turned to religion.

All this religious coping did not take place in social vacuum. In many ways, religion was an intensely communal process; soldiers often relied on their comrades and the support of their religious communities back home. Chapter four examines how troops were part of spiritual networks and how they leveraged these networks to provide them with much needed religious and moral support during their time at war. Men exchanged letters with the home front filled with religious tropes and ideas to comfort their loved ones and to receive comfort from them in return. Additionally, soldiers submitted prayer bills to their churches back home. These unique sources were small slips of paper with prayers requests written on them to be delivered to local churches. These prayer bills reveal the importance soldiers placed on their spiritual communities and the content of the religious prayers that they desired and gave. Women played a significant leadership role in this effort to sustain spiritual communities. They often took over religious leadership in the home and community in the absence of the men and were active spiritual counselors via letters and prayers to the soldiers. At times, they even ventured to battlefields to set up prayer meetings in a show of political and religious solidarity. Religion did not merely aid soldiers in itself but provided them with tools to sustain an important network of social relationships that supported them during the war effort.

The final chapter examines the complex process by which soldiers adopted practices of religious tolerance as means of coping and martial utility. The Continental

Army was the first genuinely diverse army that brought soldiers from different regions and colonies and forced them to cooperate in the context of a war. This war acted as a unifying force amid significant denominational prejudices and tensions. Soldiers now had to interact with men of other religious denominations. Moreover, the war forced mass migration of troops through new areas. This traveling meant that many soldiers attending the worship services of religious peoples whom they had never encountered. The cumulative weight of these individual instances of practiced religious toleration demonstrates a significant cultural move among the soldiers toward an attitude of religious tolerance. This tolerance was vital in their political transition to a religiously pluralistic republic and, in fact, directly resulted in the disestablishment of some established colonial churches. Practicing religious tolerance not only aided soldiers joining the army, but also smoothed the nation's transition into a posture of formal religious tolerance.

Gage and his imperialist colleagues overestimated the importance of military tactics and material and underestimated the role of culture and religion. It was a mistake that caused him to misread much of the colonists' behavior and rhetoric. Understanding the role of religion in the Continental Army and local militias illuminates how colonists sustained their support for the war and underwent the hardships it brought about. The soldiers' hearts and minds turned to religion to support this morale and they did so in ways that were not always simple but were effective. In their extended war of posts, religious morale proved more indispensable than pewter.

CHAPTER 1

"INTO THE ARMS OF A KIND PROVIDENCE": A SOLDIER'S WORDLVIEW

[If] it is my fate to survive this action, I shall; if otherwise, the Lord's will must be done. Every soldier and soldier's wife should religiously believe in predestination.

-Major John Jones to Polly Jones, 4 October 1779

We with one accord lifted up our hands and eyes to heaven and blessed the gracious God for this deliverance.

-George Morrison, Pennsylvania Rifleman, 1775

In the summer of 1776, members of the Continental Congress gathered to draft and ratify the Declaration of Independence, arguably one of the most rationalistic documents of that era. Distant from dangers of the battlefield, these political leaders invoked an abstract God of Nature upon whom they grounded Enlightenment ideals of political rights. They experienced the Revolution as a war of words, and the outcome was a triumphal move toward self-government. Less than a month after the Declaration's signing, private Ezra Tilden of Stoughton, Massachusetts described the effect of this same Revolution on his fellow troops, who looked to him like "death almost, like walking ghosts, or skelitons." Their march to Quebec had been taxing and many of these soldiers were pushed to the limits of their endurance. In the face of these hardships, Tilden

invoked his intervening and preserving God. "But Bless ye Ld," exclaimed Tilden, "[th]at he has carry'd me thro so many difficulties." He resolved further that he would "trust & pray yt he will still appear for me & keep me from all danger, & evil of ev'ry kind…or Recieve me to a Better World." Soldiers like Tilden did not have the luxury of debating abstract constitutional principles that August of 1776. Instead, their experience of the Revolution often brought them through extreme suffering and even to death, soliciting from them a profound religious response. Their religious experiences in the war not only would show the difference in their religious culture from that of their elites, but it also proved to have the power to sustain them amid severe hardship.[1]

Along with their muskets, knapsacks, and canteens, continental soldiers brought into battle with them a religious worldview that was thoroughly enchanted by divine intervention and Providence. For the adherent of a providential outlook, the discernible hand of God was in or behind everything that happened, whether it be for good or for ill. Of the 136 soldiers' writings that I consulted for this work, fifty-one of them (thirty eight percent) explicitly utilized providential rhetoric at some point. Though supernatural in this way, troops' religion was not overtly political or cosmic. Troops rarely wrote of an "American Israel" or mused on the millennial significance of the war. Providence for most men did not operate on geopolitical destinies of this sort, but rather was active in personal and immediate ways. In the writings of soldiers, God was working to hear

[1] My characterization of the Declaration of Independence is informed by Jill Lepore, *These Truths: A History of the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), xiv-xx; Matthew Stewart, *Nature's God: The Heretical Origins of the American Republic* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014); Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 196-7; Ezra Tilden Diary, 1776-1777, Stewart Mitchell Collection, Massachusetts Historical Society (MHS), 29-33.

personal prayers and protect them in battle. He was not grooming the United States to usher in a political utopia. Soldiers' providentialism was not stagnant during the war either but was shaped through both the harsh and mundane experiences of war. Many troops turned to providentialism as a mean of coping with the war psychologically and emotionally and, for many, it proved useful. Soldiers were culturally indoctrinated into a belief in meticulous Providence and what they faced during the war only strengthened this conviction and confirmed their prior commitment to it. This chapter will argue that soldiers' providentialism helped them cope with the circumstances of war and that in doing so distinguished them from their political and clerical leaders.[2]

People from across the colonies were fed a steady diet of this religious providentialism prior to the Revolution. Since the founding of the Jamestown and the New England colonies, Providence was listed as a primary cause of colonial success. John Winthrop invoked this idea of providential protection when he wrote his famous characterization of Massachusetts as a "city on a hill." All society and its hierarchies were structured by "GOD ALMIGHTY in his most holy and wise providence." It was this providential view that saturated the thinking of New Englanders from the start. Similarly, Robert Johnson articulated a similar providential mission for the Virginia colony in 1612 to evangelize the Native Americans and spread English culture. These colonies were founded with and continued to sustain a national narrative of being an agent of God's intervention in the world. While the precise meaning and application of American providentialism changed over time, it was a sustained element in the national

[2] These calculations regarding the percentage of soldier who used providential rhetoric included only materials written during the war. They consisted mostly of diaries, but also included some letters. No memoirs, orderly books, or prayer bills were included.

narrative through the time of the Revolution. Through Providence, colonists were told, these young colonies were being preserved and groomed for a great future as evidenced by their great past. Young men in the Battle of Bunker Hill had consistently heard claims about God's providential mission for their country and culture in sermons growing up. Providentialism was without doubt the most widespread means of interpreting the world during the colonial period.[3]

Colonists insisted that major events in colonial history were divinely orchestrated. Influential Boston pastor Increase Mather wrote and entire history of King Phillip's War of 1675-6 aimed at demonstrating God's providential hand behind that war. It was filled with seeming marvelous events that proved, to Mather's satisfaction, that Providence worked out the destiny of the colonies. A few decades after that, the colonists were again told that God had been doing miraculous work in the colonies during the time of the Whitfeldarian revivals. Lay persons throughout the colonies began to feel empowered to challenge religious authority and start their own churches because they believed that had a direct providential mandate from God to do so. Then again during the Seven Years War

[3] John Winthrop, *Christian Charitie: A Modell Hereof* (Boston: Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1838), 33; Robert Johnson, *The New Life of Virginea: Declaring the Former Successe and Present Estate of that Plantation, being the Second Part of Nova Britianna* (London: Felix Kyngston for William Welby, 1612). The idea of a unique American providentialism in which God played a special role in preserving and promoting the nation has been advocated by historians of this country long after Winthrop. Most influentially, George Bancroft (1800-1891) openly advocated understanding American history as a series of providential interpositions. Although it has long been abandoned by historians, providentialism continues to play a prominent role in popular culture and modern political rhetoric. Based on its historic uses and prevalence, historian Nicholas Guyatt has argued that providentialism "played a leading role in the invention of an American national identity before 1865." See Nicholas Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 3.

Americans began to craft a national narrative about the colony's sole reliance on Providence over and against Britain as a means of downplaying loyalty to their mother country. This pattern was clear and enduring. Providence was discernable behind events in these burgeoning colonies and it was up to the colonists to interpret how and why.[4]

By the late eighteenth century, however, it became fashionable among many of the American intellectual elite to reject what they saw as tired notions of providentialism. Instead, these vanguard intellectuals felt that Deists viewed the world more consistently with reason. Deism began as part of the Enlightenment's project in Europe to make religion more rational and palatable for a scientific age. It began with Baconian induction and the desire to explain events by strictly natural causes. God, for the Deist, created the world, but does not intervene in it. This view of deity has helpfully been described as the Divine Watchmaker. The watchmaker creates the watch and sets it in motion to act according to its established laws but does not intervene in its operations. This view left no room for miracles or the everyday supernatural that so dominated premodern thinking. As the Revolutionary War General Ethan Allen argued, the purpose of his Deism was to end "delusion, superstition, and false religion." Perhaps the most poignant performance of

[4] Increase Mather, *A Brief History of the War with the Indians in New England*, reprinted in *So Dreadfull a Judgement: Puritan Responses to King Philip's War, 1676-1677*, ed. Richard Slotkin and James K. Folsom (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1978). Although Mather's history of the war was the most explicitly providential, nearly all of the dozens of accounts written about that war in the seventeenth century used providentialism to understand it; William Hubbard, *A Narrative of The Indian Wars in New-England...To The Year 1677* (London: Forgotten Books 2015). Ministers and lay people alike viewed the events of the Whitfeldarian revivals as something of a providential intervention. For the definitive account of these revivals, see in Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light*. For in-depth analyses of providentialism as it related to the imperial crisis of the 1760s, see John F. Berens, *Providence & Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815* (Richmond: University Press of Virginia, 1978); Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States*, 53-90.

Deism of the era was when Thomas Jefferson cut all the supernatural elements out of his Bible to make it a book he could respect. While growing adherence to enlightenment ideals may have been the impetus for many in the political class to declare independence, it was not the animating worldview of the typical soldier. This divide revealed itself clearly during the war by troops' enduring reliance on providentialism to understand the war. Soldiers' rejection of the ascendent Deism disrupts the connection that scholars are fond of making between "revolutionary politics and revolutionary philosophy." Here were many of the most active revolutionaries, the soldiers themselves, exercising a thorough rejection of the radical philosophy of Deism in favor of supernatural providentialism.[5]

Many clerical elites also attacked Deism and insisted on preaching and defending the old notions of providentialism. Ministers were active in interpreting the imperial crisis in religious terms. They did this in two basic ways. The first was by claiming that the united colonies would usher in the Millennium and the second was by claiming that the united colonies constituted the New Israel. Millennialism was the popular religious idea that God would providentially use the United States to bring about a political utopia on earth through the spread of liberty and republicanism. In his excellent study of preaching during the Revolution, historian James Byrd noted a prominent theme in

[5] Although he would reject my characterization of Deism as a watchmaker religion, Stewart provides an excellent study of the nuance and importance of Deism to the founding in *Nature's God*: 33. Ethan Allen, *Reason, The Only Oracle of Man; Or a Compendious System of Natural Religion* (Boston: J.P. Mendum, 1854), preface. Thomas Jefferson, *Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth: Extracted Textually from the Gospels, Together with a Comparison of his Doctrines with Those of Others* (New York: N.D. Thompson Publishing Co., 1902). Thomas Paine similarly decried the supernatural and providentialism in his *The Age of Reason: Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology* (New York: Liberal and Scientific Publishing House, 1877).

patriotic preaching that saw the conflict between the colonies and Britain as "a symbolic description of the end of the world, climaxing in the final victory of Christ over the powers of Antichrist." Examples of this thinking abounded. William Emerson, the famous preacher of Concord likewise encapsulated preachers' cosmic hopes for the Revolution when he claimed that political salvation of America will bring "Complete Accomplishment" of millennial prophecies. For these preachers, not only was God involved providentially in the war, but He was going to use American victory for cosmic redemption.[6]

These common millennial interpretations of the war, however, were a far cry from the soldiers' religious interpretation of the conflict. While millennial concepts were peppered throughout much of the sermonic literature of the time, I failed to uncover more than a few vague references to the end times in the men's writings. It simply was not a primary religious category for them; it was not how they saw providence functioning.

---

[6] Although the literature is quite large, the leading proponents of the influence of millennialism leading up to and during the Revolutionary War have been Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1977; Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For Millennialism during the war, but not before 1776, see Harry Stout, *The New England Soul,* 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012). More recently, the predominance of Millennialism in Revolutionary preaching has been challenged by James P. Byrd in *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). For the case that soldiers and patriots generally were motivated by millennial conceptions see: Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 152–70; Berens, *Providence & Patriotism,* 95; Kidd, *God of Liberty,* 126-128. Susan Juster gives a helpful overview of the topic in "The Evangelical Ascendancy in Revolutionary America." in *The Oxford Handbook of The American Revolution*, ed. Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 420-21. Emerson's rhetoric and ardent millennialism may seem outlandish, but were in fact representative of the zealously millennial clergy of the day. William Emerson, *Diaries and Letters of William Emerson, 1743-1776* (Boston: Thomas Todd Company, 1972), 96-7.

This difference in religious emphasis shaded how both clergy and soldiers interpreted events during the war. Take as a practical example, a comparison between how the two groups responded to the surrender of John Burgoyne in 1777. Immediately after the surrender, Washington called on chaplains to "prepare short discourses, suited to the joyful occasion." Many chaplains responded in the manner of Reverend Noah Smith, who was quick to tie this surrender to a political millennialism: "By yielding themselves a sacrifice to the flagitious exertions of tyranny, they discovered a stability of sentiments in the cause of freedom, and sealed it with their blood…" Political salvation will follow as told by the prophet Isaiah: "all avenues of commerce will be laid open, and the inestimable blessings of government established." Millennial ministers like Smith saw the surrender of Burgoyne as part of the divine plan to bring political salvation and republicanism to the globe.[7]

Soldiers' religious instincts on this occasion were quite different, focusing rather on thanksgiving and highlighting God's meticulous protection of them personally. In response to the surrender, one soldier penned the then popular poem: *A Song Made on the Taking of General Burgoyne*. This soldier avoided millennial language and instead assured his fellow troops practically that "Our Cause is just, in God we trust, therefore my boys ne'er fear." Even the religiously zealous private Ezra Tilden responded to Burgoyne's surrender in his private journal with themes of thanksgiving and rejoicing rather than cosmically significant claims: "Exalt, oh, americans; & Rejoice at ye praise ye

[7] "General orders, 18 October 1777," *Founders Online,* National Archives, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-11-02-0549; Smith's sermons were reprinted in *The Dedication of the Bennington Battle Monument, and Celebration of the Hundredth Anniversary of the Admission of Vermont as a State* (Bennington: Banner Book and Job Printing House, 1892), 15-6.

L'd who hath done wonderful things for you: Exalt, Praise & Bless his holy name, forever & Ever." It was not an occasion for speculations about the political millennium, but a time, as soldier Oliver Boardman put it, for "every heart" to be suitably affected by the "wonderful goodness of God" in delivering them the victory and sparing their lives. This disparity in religious response to Burgoyne's surrender was indicative of a larger disconnect, at least on the issue of politics and millennialism, between the religious worldview of the clergy and that of the troops.[8]

A second pillar of ministers' religious understanding of the conflict was to view America as an "American Israel" or an "American Zion." These ministers maintained that as Israel was a specially chosen and protected nation of God, so too was the United States. According to historian James Byrd, among the sermons of that era "No biblical narrative was more influential or more diverse in its application than the story of Exodus." Drawing direct parallels between the Israelites and the American army provided "divine sanction of American resistance." These themes showed up repeatedly in ministers' preaching and led to a melding of religious and political significance in the minds of many ministers. Despite the litany of sermons that comrades heard on these parallels, the impact that it had on their religious worldview was surprisingly small. Soldiers' writings contained only scattered references to Israel and the Exodus, and even when they were brought up it was almost never to draw implications of the "chosenness" of the colonies. In fact, some men noticed clear differences between how God treated ancient Israel and how he dealt with patriots. Private Abner Stocking lamented this

[8] "A Song made on the taking of General Burgoyne," Isaiah Thomas Broadside Ballads Project, https://www.americanantiquarian.org/thomasballads/items/show/225; Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS, 97; Oliver Board's journal is reprinted in *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society* VII (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1899), 236.

discrepancy during his march to Quebec: "In our long and tedious march through the wilderness, it was not with us as with the children of Israel, that our cloathes waxed not old." More common than Stocking's rejection of such parallels was most men who did not reflect on them at all. Even when broken down into the details, I struggled to find many parallels drawn by soldiers between the Exodus story and their own. They never compared Washington to Moses, hardly ever themselves to Israelites, and only once did I find a reference comparing King George III to Pharaoh. The Exodus narrative seemed to play no bigger role in the religious worldview of the troops than other Old Testament stories such as Noah's Ark or Ahab and Jezebel. The New Israel motif was not one that many soldiers dwelt upon.[9]

Soldiers' religious views, then, were different in emphasis from those of their political and clerical elites. The tendency among scholars has been to characterize the entire religious landscape of the Revolution based on the views and statements of the elite. However, doing so misses significant nuance of the religious thought at that time. Neither millennial nor deistic, soldiers had unique religious views that were adapted to their situation and status. The importance of these differences should caution against drawing conclusions about religious population based largely on sermons. Though the soldiers heard repeatedly from their ministers about themes of millennialism and

[9] Berens, *Providence & Patriotism,* 81; Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War,* 45-50; Abner Stocking, *An Interesting Journal of Abner Stocking of Chatham, Connecticut, Detailing the Distressing Events of the Expedition Against Quebec, Under the Command of Col. Arnold in the Year 1775* (Tarrytown: Reprinted, W. Abbatt, 1921), 15. For examples of soldiers use of Old Testament stories, see Amos Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," ed. Samuel A. Green, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 12, (1897-99), 88; Arthur Fairies' Journal of 1776 Indian Campaign was printed in "Heathens, Fairies, and Ferries," in *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 2, no. 10.1 (October 2005), 24; James P. Collins, *Autobiography of A Revolutionary Soldier* (Clinton: Peliciana Democrat, 1859), 39.

"American Israel," these ideas did not always sink in. They did not significantly influence soldiers' religious self-understanding or their views of how God was working in the war. It is important, therefore, to examine soldiers' religious beliefs and experiences from their own writings and with a sensitivity to their unique context. Soldiers saw Providence working in extreme life and death situations, it is little wonder that their providentialism was not focused on abstract futures while they were starving to death or being shot at. Instead of fitting soldiers into those prominent religious camps of the Revolution, their religious thought needs to be taken on its own terms. Doing so reveals their unique use for religion during the war and how it sustained them through hardship.

Rather than on geopolitical destinies, soldiers' religious interpretation of the war focused on divine interventions that were more immediate and personal. Men's understanding of Providence was more likely the product of their education and popular religious culture than the politicized sermons that they imbibed from ministers during the Revolution. The troops' beliefs about Providence were firmly indoctrinated into them through being catechized at home, long before they entered the war. The most popular catechism of that era (at least in the northern colonies), the Westminster Shorter Catechism, one which many of the soldiers memorized, stated that providence was God's "most holy, wise, and powerful preserving and governing all his creatures, and all their actions." This was an intensely personal understanding of Providence, in which God directed his people's actions and protected them from harm. Many soldiers could relate to South Carolina Militiaman James P. Collins, who recalled that his father demanded that every "Sunday evening a certain portion [of the Bible] must be committed to memory and

rehearsed under his inspection, together with the Lord's Prayer, and what is called the Larger and Shorter catechism." For Collins and his comrades, this perspective meant that they must look beyond the surface of events they witnessed or experienced to discovery how God was working through those phenomena. In this framework, there was no such thing as luck; everything had a meaning and a purpose that could be traced back to the intentions of Providence.[10]

This providentialism helped soldiers make sense of the chaotic times they lived in. Both going to war against Mother country and declaring independence were unsettling developments. Many colonists were unclear about which path they should take and were often unsure of the one they did. Here, troops' providentialism provided guidance and reassurance. Once men came to believe that God had ordained independent colonies and would bless them in wartime, they found resolve in their choice to fight for the glorious cause. Writing from the camp at Long Island, just a few days after independence was declared, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Colman wrote a letter to his wife that detailed much of the unsettling fighting that he had experienced thus far. He seemed shocked that the mayor of New York City had "inlisted" a good many "tories who had combined together to fight for the King." The war had truly become civil and had divided colonists whom he did not expect to be at odds with one another. In the face of this uncertainty, he used religious ideas to reassure himself and his wife that independence was the proper path. "Independence was declared," he wrote proudly, "Blessed be God for it." Not only did

[10] The Westminster Shorter Catechism was published dozens of times in the decades prior to the Revolutionary War. A published version that was likely used by many of the soldiers' families was *The Shorter Catechism Agreed Upon by the Reverend Assembly of Divines at Westminster* (Boston, 1762). Collins, *Autobiography of A Revolutionary Soldier*, 16.

this divine sanction reaffirm his support for independence, but, for Dudley, the future of the war depended on such divine approval. “I hope that God in whose hand we all are - & who giveth victory will grant us his Blessing in supporting it.” With this he was satisfied and closed the letter more assured of the cause he had committed to. Providence helped provide clarity in the gray area of the early days of independence.[11]

This providential conviction in favor of independence was especially important for soldiers to maintain in the face of British accusations that the colonists were rebelling against God’s anointed king. The religious idea that God raised up, established, and protected British kings was an idea nearly as old as English providentialism itself. A popular British cartoon in 1776 mocked the colonists and captured traces of the important theological battle between the two sides. The cartoon depicted General Putnam alongside many soldiers all of whom had “Death or Liberty” written on their caps. Putnam (on the far right of the image) appeared to have doubts about the religious purity of the cause. His thought bubble read: “The sperit moves us in sun-dry places & yet I fear the Lord is not With us.” The seriousness of these religious doubts is even more exaggerated by the fact that Putnam appeared to be resting a bottle on the Bible. The implication of the cartoon was made explicit in the caption below which claimed that Putnam and Congress were liable for “fighting against the Lord’s Annointed.” The British argument was clear and powerful. Providence anoints kings and to rebel against them is to rebel against God. This was an argument that had buttressed monarchies for centuries and its power in the eighteenth century should not be underestimated. Were most troops to become convinced of this religious argument it was doubtful that they could have remained so determined in

[11] Dudley Colman, “MHS Collections Online: Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849, letter 6 July 1776,” MHS.

the cause of independence. Thus, soldiers' reliance on and constant reinforcement of providential interpretations of the events around them allowed them to blunt these pointed theological assaults by proving to themselves that God was indeed on their side.[12]

Surprisingly, in order to glean this sense of divine blessing on their war effort soldiers relied more on interpreting events providentially than on witnessing signs and portents. Popular religious culture, particularly in the New England colonies, sought out unusual occurrences to see God working in the world. For instance, in the early eighteenth century, Cotton Mather would often read into peculiar cloud formations or abnormally shaped heads of cabbage as providing insight into the divine will. Soldiers rarely saw or sought out such signs. Or if they did, they did not write about the experience. One exception to this pattern was Issachar Bates, a fifteen-year-old fifer who served several tours in the colonial militia and later went on to become a prominent leader in the Shaker movement. Bates claimed in his memoir that he had seen two portents that indicated to him the upcoming battle with the British. He witnessed two very black clouds that "stood like two armies and fired at each other as regular as in any pitched battle." They thundered and lightninged to such an extent that it foretold a hot battle coming with the British. A second sign indicated with more precision what was to take place. Bates witnessed a mysterious flock of birds that none could recognize that flew "in as good order as any band of soldiers" straight for Lexington. Lo and behold, the next day, Bates and his regiment were informed that the alarm of battle came from Lexington. Such signs were deeply meaningful to Bates. Indeed, he remembered them

[12] The image can be found among the online collections of the British Museum: "The yankie doodles intenchments near Boston 1776."
https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_J-1-122

decades later. These signs of divine activity were not merely indications of the future, but evidence of a God who "in his condescending goodness" warned his people of coming disaster and built them up with a promise of future blessing. Most soldiers did not have such clear and palpable signs of the divine plan that Bates experienced. Instead, they perceived divine action behind more ordinary actions to convince themselves of its blessing. As troops read such actions, it proved no less potent in providing them with an assurance of divine favor than Bates' signs and portents.[13]

Soldiers saw Providence acting right at the beginning of the war with their personal decisions to enlist. Divine interposition was a common way that men described their involvement in such a weighty cause. In a letter to his mother shortly after Bunker Hill, private Peter Brown credited Providence with his being in the army at all. Although it was not Brown's original intention to join the fight, the "Allwise in his providence hath very differently plann'd my summer work, which I hope may turn to his Glory and my good." Enlisting was often a difficult decision; soldiers were aware of the dangers that awaited them in battle. In the face of these challenges, men relied on the assurance that their decisions were under the hand of Providence. Joseph Plumb Martin confronted the dangers of warfare with the resolution to do his duty and "leave the event with providence." For New Jersey Lieutenant James Giles, God's providence, and his courage to enlist were integral to one another. He assured his mother that he did not cower before the daunting task of service, but "With a firm relyance on his gracious Protection, I stept

[13] Michael P. Winship, *Seers of God: Puritan Providentialism in the Restoration and Early Enlightenment* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 24, 93; Issachar Bates' autobiography about his time in the Revolutionary War was reproduced in full in Carol Medlicott's *Issachar Bates: A Shaker's Journey* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2013), 24.

forward, to discharge the duties of my Station." Some soldiers even used the language of a religious "calling" to describe their joining the army, as when Dominicus Hovey knew he may be "Caled to battel." There was this widespread acknowledgement of a religious element to a soldier's decision to enlist. Even if it was as basic as performing one's religious duty before God, men found solace in following such a divine task. While some religious soldiers did not enlist, but rather were drafted, they still often invoked Providence as an important element in answering that summons and fulfilling their duty in the army.[14]

Religious convictions could even pull soldiers back into the fight after they had left. Captain Lemuel Roberts wrote about having precisely this experience. After some trying war experiences, Roberts and his crew gathered at Stillwater, Connecticut, where they were informed that their terms of service had expired and that they "were dismissed." Roberts marched eagerly through meadows to get home and was often mistaken for a spy. Nevertheless, after he had been home for only two days, word came

[14] Peter Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS; Joseph Plumb Martin, *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin,* 4th ed. James Kirby Martin (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 16; James Giles to His Mother, 20 March 1779, ed. Dennis P. Ryan, *A Salute to Courage: The American Revolution as Seen through Wartime Writings of Officers of the Continental Army and Navy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 144; Dominicus Hovey to Rev. Ivory Hovey, 7 October 1776, Ivory Hovey Papers, Congregational Library & Archives, Digital Materials (CLA). The most balanced study of the fraught debates about soldiers' motivations remains Robert Middlekauff, "Why Men Fought in the American Revolution," in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (Spring 1980). There is also a helpful discussion of motivations in Cox, *Boy Soldiers,* 52-75. Yet both studies overlook the importance of providentialism to soldiers. Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 16-20 and Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 9-10, go too far in asserting that religious salvation took on a political concern for American Liberty. Rather, themes of providentialism and personal protection were closer to how religion interacted with soldiers' motivations.

to him of a British attack on the nearby town of Bennington. He could not ignore it and returned to fight again. When explaining this decision, Roberts pointed to his "sense of religious acquiescence in the divine disposal." "Determined to do my duty" he returned to the fight. While he did not couch his decision to rejoin the military in a cosmic religious view about God using the colonies to redeem the world, he did see his decision as part of his duty to serve that was brought to him by an act of Providence. Lieutenant John Fassett of Vermont similarly leaned on providentialism as he reenlisted in the army, hoping that "God in his infinite mercy [would] preserve me." These men's descriptions of their enlistments show how their religious motivations were compelling, if not grandiose, in joining the war.[15]

Religion was also an important factor in southern soldiers' decisions to enlist. South Carolina backcountry militia often interpreted the war in religious terms as fighting against the Anglican establishment of that colony. Scots-Irish immigrants that populated the backcountry drew on their Covenantor history and equated the present conflict with English oppression of their political and religious rights back in Scotland and Ireland. After hearing a stirring sermon from his preacher about the need to fight, William Anderson confided in his wife that "The way is now clear; the word of God approves." Similarly, backcountry Virginians joined the fight only after understanding its religious significance. Private John Parker recalled that while in Louisa County, "after a sermon from his uncle, of a patriotic character, that he enlisted, together with many others of the

[15] Lemuel Roberts, *Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts* (Bennington: Printed by Anthony Haswell, 1809), 51. The diary of Lt. John Fassett was reproduced in: Harry Parker Ward, *The Follett-Dewey Fassett-Safford Ancestry of Captain Martin Dewey Follett (1765-1831) and His Wife Persis Fassett (1769-1849)* (Columbus: Chaplin printing Company, 1896), 243.

congregation." Even some of the church elders enlisted. God's sanction (or providential approval) was determinative for these soldiers' willingness to join the ranks. Only after believing that such fighting was consistent with God's will and that He had brought them to such a moment by His providence, did troops step forward. Although shaped by their denominational distinctives and history, this religious worldview component for enlisting was common to soldiers north and south. It not only gave them divine sanction, but courage to join the ranks.[16]

Scholars have attempted to tease out soldiers' motivations to fight in the Revolution for decades. They usually point to either ideological or economic reasons as the primary factors that compelled men to pick up muskets. While the debate is far from settled, it has become clear that it was often a complex mixture of motivations that moved in the breast of the average soldier. Some enlisted out of pure zeal for the cause while others were simply looking for a path to manhood and property ownership. Others were simply compelled. While all these factors are important to analyze, it is also worth noting that, for many, religion played a decisive role in this complex of motivations. When analyzing the writings of troops themselves, it is religion that often emerges as a primary motive. Many men simply would not fight without being assured that God approved of their cause, and that Providence would aid them in it. Soldiers' ability to reconcile the war with their religious convictions was an essential part of their decision to enlist or accept their being drafted. In fact, more soldiers invoked religion when writing about

[16] Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution* III (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1850), 128; John Parker, *Pension Application of John Parker,* trans. C. Leon Harris, Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution Pension Statements & Rosters (pension applications cited from these transcriptions cited hereafter as SCAR) http://revwarapps.org/s14081.pdf.

their decision to enlist than write about economics or ideology. This is part of the reason ministers were so essential to the cause of filling the ranks. Providence called men to battle and to submit to drafts. One poetic soldier captured what seems to be the proper order when trying to understand soldiers' motivations: "for god and our Rights we ar fighting this day."[17]

The obscure case of Private Robert Rogerson illustrates of this confluence of religion and other motivations to fight in the war. Rogerson was a devout young man who was not eager to join the army but did so and worked hard at it out of a sense of duty to

[17] For the important role that clergy played in the southern colonies to galvanize support for the war effort, see Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution,* 124; Durward T. Stokes, "The Presbyterian Clergy in South Carolina and the American Revolution," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 71, no. 4 (October 1970), 270; William Tennent and Newton B. Jones, "Writings of the Reverand William Tennent, 1740-1777 (Continued)," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 61, no. 4 (October 1960), 194; Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1901), 209-11. For the classic statement and defense of soldiers' political or ideological motivations to fight in the war, see Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*. Royster's able defense of the traditional understanding of soldiers' motivations was challenged by a series of studies in the 1970s that examined muster rolls and tax records to provide an economic portrait of the soldiers as being young and destitute. Thus, the cumulative weight of these studies suggested the importance of economic motivations for soldiers' enlisting over ideological concerns, see especially Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," *William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (January 1973): 117-32; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1976); Charles Patrick Neimeyer, *America Goes to War* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). More recently, studies have pointed out elements of politics, coercion, and even coming of age as important motivators for these soldiers. Michael A. McDonnell, *The Politics of War: Race, Class, & Conflict in Revolutionary Virginia* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture Williamsburg, Virginia, by The University of North Carolina Press, 2007); John A. Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence: Youth and Military Service in the Revolutionary War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2014). Indeed, often these studies focus on demographic analysis and social trends to the neglect of soldiers' own statements about why they fought. Private George Mason's songbook was submitted with his pension application: George Mason, Pension Application Record R7003, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (RWPA).

Providence and a divine calling. He wrote in a letter to his parents shortly after his enlistment lamenting military and urban life. “O My Dear Parents I long to be at Home & to partake with you in your uninterrupted & Calm Retreat of a Rural Life, free from the Noise & hurry of a Town, where is often Riots & Mobbs, where you Ears are often filled with Nise & Clamours of a Promiscuous Multitude and frequently accompanied with what is the worst & most disagreeable of all the rest Viz. cursing Swearing & Blasphemies, which must be extremely disagreeable to a Religious Ear.” This was not the life he preferred. But he explained how he drew motivation to continue to fight for the cause. It was only because he believed sincerely that “we ought to be Contented and Resignable to the Decrees of Providence let it be in whatever Profession Station or Situation in life Providence has plotted out for us; to fulfill it with the greatest Integrity & faithfulness that we are capable of.” This notion of where his calling to be in the army came from led him to resolve “by the Graces of God so to do in my Professions & Situation that providence has assigned to me.” He concluded that Providence had placed him in the military and that it was his religious duty to stay. And so, he did. Rogerson was clearly motivated to fight by religious convictions, but not in a way that subverted religion to political millennialism.[18]

Once they had enlisted, soldiers continued to look to divine aid for personal preservation. Such religious understandings were a source of strength for many men.

[18] Two Robert Rogerson letters to his parents are preserved at MHS, see Photostats Box 37: 1775-76, Letters 3 October 1775 & 6 October 1775, MHS. Rogerson’s letters contain nothing of Thomas Paine, little revolutionary rhetoric, and even less of economic opportunities afforded him by joining the army. In fact, his economic situation at home, by all indications, was far preferable to what he faced in the army. His primarily religious justification for being and staying in the army does not fit into the contemporary scholarship on soldiers’ motivations to fight.

Insights into how soldiers understood this providential intervention and how it functioned for them during the war, can be gleaned, first, from the names that they ascribed to God. Men used a myriad of names and epithets for their God, but they nearly all revealed common themes related to personal protection and preservation. Private Abner Stocking, upon his return from Quebec, referred to God as his "Divine Protector" or "preserver," implying that he saw God as active in keeping him from suffering and death. It also showed an understanding of a God who works even in obscure circumstances; he was thought to be the "Divine Protector" of ordinary troops on the expedition into Canada. Related, were the names of God that focused on God as "creator" or as North Carolina soldier Daniel Teachey put it "Our maker," which seemed to imply that he who created them would sustain them amid all their suffering. Troops also took solace in a conviction of an all-powerful God, referring to him with descriptions like "Lord most high" or "God Almighty." He was, to these men, a God who could overcome their precarious circumstances and would do so even for obscure soldiers like themselves. More theologically sophisticated soldiers even referred to God as "my Covenant God." The *my* being the operative word here. This was an understanding of a God who made personal covenants with lowly troops; a God who was anything but distant or abstract.[19]

[19]Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 35-6; Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS, 81; Diary of Daniel Teachey was submitted with his Pension Application: Teachey, W4082, RWPA; Amos Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," ed. Samuel A. Green, in *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 12, (1897-99), 90. For a sampling of other soldiers who demonstrated a providential worldview, see Isaac Bangs, "MHS Collections Online: Isaac Bangs journal, 1776," MHS, 8,17; Arthur Fairies Journal of 1776 Indian Campaign was printed in "Heathens, Fairies, and Ferries," in *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 2, no. 10.1 (October 2005), 24-5. The classic works on the nature of providentialism through the Revolution are Berens, *Providence and Patriotism in Early America*; Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States.*

Soldiers viewed Providence as working for the fulfillment of their practical needs. Having daily needs met in extreme circumstances, even if it was done so infrequently and haphazardly, reinforced the men's conviction that an immediate hand of Providence provided for them. Food was perhaps the most basic and frequent of these necessities. Often going hungry, soldiers journaled many prayers and petitions to God that he would bring them food. Ezra Tilden hoped that, "a good providence will provide for us Poor soldiers." Others were more desperate in their pleas. Private Nahum Parker of Massachusetts cried out, "Hungry life this, o Dear god save the Army God have mercy on me." It seems comrades usually turned to Providence when the Continental Congress or the states failed to provide. Joseph Plumb Martin was horrified by the "poor emaciated carcasses" of his fellow troops and noted that a "kind and holy Providence took more notice and better care of us than did the country in whose service we were." At a later point in the diary, Martin referred to the food received by soldiers as "the bounty of Providence." Similar difficulties in getting food to soldiers existed in the southern theatre. South Carolina militiaman James Williams credited providence for being well fed when he wrote to his wife: "God be blest for His mercy to us" in that he had kept him and his fellow troops "all hearty" in their 1780 Carolina Campaign.[20]

[20] Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS, 35; Entry for 5 September 1780, Nahum Parker's Diary was submitted in his Pension Application, S11200, RWPA; Martin, *Ordinary Courage,* 68, 88; William T. Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary: James Williams (1740-1780) with sources documents* (Lugoff, SC: Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution, 2012), 196. Other soldiers who credited providence for basic provisions and comforts: Elijah Fisher, *Elijah Fisher's Journal While in the War for Independence and Two Years after he came to Maine, 1775-1784* (Augusta: Press of Badger and Manley, 1880), 24; George Ewing, *George Ewing, Gentleman, a Soldier of Valley Forge* (New York: Privately Printed by Thomas Ewing, 1928), 2.

In the soldiers' minds, food could be (and often was) brought by Providence in unconventional ways. Providential provision seemed to get more unusual the more desperate the troops were. Abner Stocking, during the extreme hunger that overtook troops on their journey to Quebec, claimed that his "company had the good fortune to kill a large black dog, that providentially came to them at that time." So hungry were Stocking and his fellow troops that such a meal caused him to thank God's providence: "Little thought I, do we know of the value of the common blessings of Providence, until we are deprived of them." Soldiers were aware and indeed often experienced Providence providing for them in less than ideal and yet natural ways such as these. It was this awareness that caused private John Henry, another member of the expedition, to exhort: "Remember to receive the dispensations of Providence, of every kind, if not with thankfulness, at least with submission."[21]

Soldiers also invoked providence when they received clothing, another item that the Continental Congress often failed to supply. Continentals were notoriously under-dressed; they often had no standard uniforms and many simply wore their hunting shirts and no shoes. At times, the lack of clothing was far worse than others. In December of 1776, Washington despaired that many men were "entirely naked and more so thinly clad as to be unfit for service." This problem reached its peak during the winter at Valley Forge, after which 2,898 Troops were deemed "unfit for duty, many with no shoes and some without shirts." Men on the march to Quebec also made that grueling journey with little clothing. Instead, their clothes were "torn in pieces by the bushes and hung by

[21] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal,* 20; John Joseph Henry, *An Accurate and Interesting Account of the Hardships and Sufferings of that Band of Heroes who Traversed the Wilderness in the Campaign Against Quebec in 1775* (Lancaster: William Greer, 1812), 23.

strings." Without shoes or shirts, these soldiers "much resembled the animals which inhabit New-Spain, called the Ourang-Outang." With clothing being such a rare yet important commodity, it was not surprising that soldiers ascribed their getting any to Providence. When private Henry Sewall was presented with clothing by superior officers, he cried out: "The propitious care of heaven!- 'naked and ye clothed me.'" [22]

In order to conceptualize how God guided them and provided for these practical needs, men drew on a creative array of biblical stories and symbols. Deeply biblically literate, South Carolina private Arthur Fairies compared his situation to that of Noah and the Ark. As his company was fleeing engagement from the Cherokee, they made it safely to the top of a hill. Fairies drew a parallel to Noah finding refuge on Mount Ararat: "through mercy we got safe to the top, allowing it little inferior to the mountain of Ararat. If here Noah's Ark rested on the top of this." Even ordinary symbols that the soldiers saw during their campaigns reminded them of biblical themes and a providing God. North Carolina private Daniel Teachey, while marching to the Battle of Stono in 1775, "beheld the Rain Bo rise with Colers Read and Green" sighting this religious symbol was sure to "Wake [to him] the coviment Our maker maketh man." Teachey took these natural symbols as personal signs of divine provision. These biblical stories of God's provision and protection came alive for these soldiers during the exigencies of their war experience.

[22] Quoted in Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (Port Washington: Kennikat Press, Reprinted 1964), 99-100. Bolton provides excellent analysis of the material needs of the soldiers during the war. Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 23-4; Entry for 1 March 1780, Henry Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, microfilm, MHS.

This tactic of interpreting their situations using well-known religious stories seemed to serve as a reminder to them of the watchful eye of Providence over them.[23]

While perhaps mundane concerns, these consistent appeals to Providence for the daily needs of soldiers reveals an important element of their wartime survival strategy. Religion functioned as a last resort for men when they had nowhere else to look. Many sincerely believed providentialism to be a source of stability and thus consistently invoked it to explain what they were experiencing. They wrote down these interpretations of the war in their diaries, which not only recorded the event but reinforced the validity of the interpretation in their own minds. The consistency with which religious soldiers recorded acts of Providence indicates their emotional and psychological reliance on providentialism as a means of coping with the scarcity that the faced. Thus, soldiers' providentialism was neither wholly political nor millennial, but tailored to their psychological needs.

As troops relied on Providence to bring them their daily physical necessities, they also looked to Providence to govern their internal emotions. Performing masculinity and emotional toughness during battle was an important element for these men to gain true honor and the respect of their peers. Some comrades mocked religion to highlight their own courage, by daring the deity to strike them or even mocking death and hell. Other men, however, relied on Providence to infuse into them emotional courage for the day of battle. Prayers for courage were peppered throughout soldiers' diaries and revealed their

[23] Fairies, Journal of 1776, 24; Daniel Teachey Diary, W4082, RWPA. For additional examples of soldiers using biblical stories to interpret the war, see Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS, 51; Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 23-4; James P. Collins, *Autobiography of A Revolutionary Soldier* (Clinton: Peliciana Democrat, 1859), 39; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 91.

assumptions that Providence governed even their emotional lives. Private Dominicus Hovey wrote to his father from New York assuring him that he trusted God to "give me Courag & Conduct that I may file manfull[y] for our people & country." Such requests were essential elements of a soldier's sense that they were divinely aided in their masculine mandate. Amos Farnsworth prayed for the emotional courage to "Endure Hardness as a good soldier of jesus Christ." Farnsworth sent up similar pleas for Providence to induce in him all sorts of emotional responses during the war, whether it was to be "filed with Anchous Desires After Holiness" or for he and his fellow troops to have "Courage in Speritual warfare as thay have in the Temporal one." In his typical artistic fashion, Private James McMichael of Pennsylvania wrote a poem about the providential origins of his courage before stepping into battle: "Whilst I my sword must guirt upon my thigh / And fight Courageous when the Enemy's nigh / Leaving to Providence to Consummate / What is recorded in the book of fate." Providence was not thought to only produce emotional courage but was even credited for simply lifting the spirits of downcast soldiers. John Henry remarked on his relief from depression that "One principal cause of change (under the fostering hand of Providence) in my sentiments, was the jovial hilarity of my friend Simpson."[24]

---

[24] For the importance of masculinity during war and the example of a soldier mocking death and hell, see Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence,* 66. Dominicus Hovey to Rev. Ivory Hovey, 7 October 1776, CLA; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnworth's Diary," 78, 80, 87; entry for 17 September 1777 in "The James McMichael Journal September 12, 1777-December 23, 1777," *Journal of The American Revolution* (March 2018), https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/02/james-mcmichael-journal-may-27-1776-october-29-1776/; Henry, *An Accurate and Interesting Account,* 71. Providential control of internal emotions was often reinforced by statements from chaplains, see William Emerson, *Diaries and Letters of William Emerson, 1743-1776: Minister of the Church in Concord, Chaplain in the Revolutionary Army,* ed. Amelia Fobes Emerson (Privately published, 1972), 78.

Providentialism during the Revolution was a double-edged sword. It not only had the power to build soldiers up about themselves and their cause, but could also cut down the legitimacy of one's enemies, and thus justify violence against them. Patriots highlighted the cruelty and immorality, as they saw it, of their British and Indian opponents to assure themselves that Providence was not working for their enemy. When documenting the British troops' behavior in Massachusetts in April of 1775, Simon Willard wrote that the "British troops commenced…hostilities in the most cruel & Barbarous maner slaying either old or young mother or child." Similarly, during successful events of the Northern Campaign, Amos Farnsworth was sure to underscore that it was through the "Barbarity and wanton Cruelty of that infernal villian Thomas Gage" that the British captured Charlestown. Such cruelty would not be committed by the power of God against the righteous American cause, so the logic ran. Although it was rare, soldiers even suggested that British victory was demonic. Lieutenant John Bell Tilden of Pennsylvania exclaimed that it was that "Develish rascal Arnold" who had destroyed three homes that he found decimated in Virginia. British victories of this kind were not providential, but "Unnatteral" and seen to be contrary to right order and the will of Providence.[25]

In southern campaigns against the Cherokee, troops likewise used providentialism to undermine the military actions of their opponents. Soldiers emphasized the non-Christian or "heathen" status of their Indian enemies to assure themselves that God was not on their side. This was particularly evident in Arthur Fairies' journaling of the

[25] Simon Willard, A Journal from Day to Day, 1775, Photostats April 19, MHS; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Dairy," 84; John Bell Tilden, "Extracts From the Journal of Lieutenant John Bell Tilden, Second Pennsylvania Line, 1781-1782," in *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 19 (1895), 52.

expedition against the Cherokees in 1776. Fairies was sure to detail in a precise way how the Cherokee killed his fellow troops in war. He described that, "John Guyton,42 who became a prey to the Heathen, & was killed with a spear, & likewise noble Samuel Thomson,43 shot with two bullets in the breast & dead." The intent here was to exacerbate the cruelty of his own enemies. He summarized these incidents with the lament that "our fellow creatures [were] massacred by the heathens" In aiding this lesser view of one's enemies, soldiers' providential worldview helped them reconcile their souls to the violent acts they had to commit during warfare, a task that was not easy for many of them.[26]

Whereas most soldiers' religious worldview justified violence against their enemies, other comrades had religious views that made them loath to fire a weapon. Historians of both the Revolutionary and Civil Wars have noted that it could often be more difficult to get troops to kill for their country than to die for it. This seemed to be the case for some religious soldiers. Though a distinct minority, some men's religion caused them to recoil from violence and be resentful of their having to serve at all. Private Josiah Atkins of Waterbury often worried about how his time in war would affect

[26] Fairies, Journal of 1776, 23; Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 116, 128-9. The disproportionate amount of time that ministers preached to try to convince soldiers that it was ok to be violent indicated that it was a problem for many soldiers. Employing the providential worldview seemed to be one religious strategy to sanction such violence. For analysis on preaching toward encouraging violence, see James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, chapter 3. For examples of northern troops using language of "heathen," see James Morris, *Memoirs of James Morris of South Farms in Litchfield* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933), 36-7; Jeremiah Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783,* ed. Robert C. Bray & Paul E. Bushnell (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press), 210; Apparently, some soldiers even toasted to "Civilization or Death to all American Savages," see Lieutenant Thomas Blake's Journal in *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779,* ed. Frederick Cook (Auburn: Knapp Peck & Thomson, 1887), 39; George Reid journal, Photostats 1780 June 28, MHS.

his spirituality and his soul. He realized that instead of engaging in spiritual practices, he spent much of his time "hastening to the field of blood & slaughter." Instead of being home carrying his Bible and hymnbook, he was daily wielding "the cruel & unwelcome instruments of war." It was not only some pious New Englanders that worried about inflicting violence. One South Carolina militiaman, reflecting on his time in the war, thanked God that he "escaped the temptation of killing a man." For he doubted whether his conscience would ever leave him alone about it if he had. While such men existed, they were a minority. Most soldiers' providentialism worked to aid their violence against the enemy, not critique it. Although grim, willingness to harm the enemy was essential for the soldier and their providentialism helped them perform the task.[27]

As soldiers saw God working internally in the hearts of both themselves and their enemies, they also saw the hand of Providence operating externally to fight. Winning unexpected battles or battles against great odds was one of the surest events to provoke providential language and eulogies. The surprisingly good performance of New England militia against the veteran Redcoats at Bunker Hill was one such occasion. Private Peter Brown could not explain the lethality of himself and his comrades except for the fact that "God in mercy to us fought our battle." When outnumbered militia and standing Continentals beat back the fearsome Colonel Tarleton at Cowpens, troops saw no explanation other than Providence. "This victory," explained Pennsylvania Sergeant William Seymour, "on our side cannot be attributed to nothing else but Divine Providence, they having thirteen hundred in the field of their best troops, and we not

[27] Josiah Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins*, ed. Steven E. Kagle (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1975), 24-5; Collins, *Autobiography of A Revolutionary Soldier*, 56.

eight hundred of standing troops and militia." Soldiers even saw Providence fighting in the smaller battles for them. The skirmish of Noddle's Island triggered quite the pious response from Private Amos Farnsworth: "Blesed be God for the interposition of his Provedence on our Side...Surely God fote the Battle and not we." Again, divine intervention was an explanation for military victories both great and small; it was not confined to New England. Arthur Fairies of South Carolina, in the Campaign against the Cherokees of 1776, noted that it was only "through mercy, [that we] defeated our enemies."[28]

Soldiers' understanding of *how* God intervened in such battles was rather sophisticated. They typically expected divine actions to be done through natural means and not against them. For instance, they did not expect God to intervene in their battles by hurling thunderbolts at British officers from a clear sky, though undoubtedly that would have been welcome. Rather, they saw God working through ordinary processes to give them the victory. As Lieutenant Paul Lunt phrased it, "by the help of God and the dexterity of the people" God gave the victory. In other words, God gave and then used extraordinary dexterity during that battle to determine its outcome. This was a common trope among the ministers that did gain traction among the men as well. As Reverand Timothy Dwight exhorted, "*Let us, in every enterprize, look to him* who teacheth the

[28] Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS; The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography VII (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1883), 294; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 81; Fairies, Journal of 1776, 23.

hands to war, and the fingers to fight." Soldiers drew on their providential worldview to understand from whence came their military skill and unexpected victories.[29]

Perhaps the most frequent means by which men saw God intervening in their battles was through control of the weather. The most famous example of this was perhaps when the famous "Nor'easter" prevented British Ships from sailing up the Hudson to cut off Washington's retreat. A weather event that not only saved Washington's Army, but perhaps the entire Revolution. But soldiers saw the hand of Providence behind the weather even on lesser occasions when it was advantageous to them in battle. Whether it was in drowning enemy ships through a storm or more general phrases like, "Had we not been favored with the smiles of Providence, in the continuation of good weather" we would have lost, troops consistently looked at weather patterns as divinely orchestrated. Again, this was not a parochial practice, but was evident in soldiers from across the various colonies. On several occasions during Nathaniel Greene's Southern Campaign of the early 1780's, sudden changes in the weather were "universally understood by the troops, and universally ascribed to a protecting Providence."[30]

While enduring the winter on the Cambridge common, soldiers took news of sunken British ships as signs that Providence used the weather against the British. Amos Farnsworth recorded joyfully that "God has of late fround on our enemies." He went on to list times where he believed Providence had done this. In Newfoundland 4,000 of the

---

[29] Paul Lunt, *Paul Lunt's Diary,* ed. Samuel A. Green (Boston: For Private Distribution, 1872), 10; Quoted in Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 94.

[30] *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779 with Records of Centennial Celebrations,* ed. Frederick Cook (Auburn: Knapp Peck & Thomson, 1887), 167; Henry Lee, *Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States* (New York: University Publishing Company, 1869), 235.

King's men were lost "in a mighty storm." And shortly after that, he noted how "two vessels was struck with lightning belonging to our enemies." Providence had worked through the weather, even when the provincials were not warring, to attack British ships and supplies. It was clearly some comfort to Farnsworth and the religious troops that Providence was fighting their battles even while they were resting on the commons.[31]

A more nuanced explanation is required to understand how soldiers' providentialism interpreted losses in battle. How would men interpret a providence that brought them victory *and* defeat? Did it mean that at times Providence favored the British? Continentals never really considered such an option, at least not directly. If Providence seemed to favor the British in a particular battle, it was not because Providence ultimately favored the British, but only because He needed to chastise the American troops for their sins. Sometimes soldiers stated their understanding of their own sinfulness and need for divine correction abstractly, as when Private James McMichael poetically expressed, "I then concluded that the humane heart Is surely Vile / not excepting any part Of all mankind / who by Nature now are in / A State of Darkness, Ignorance and Sin." This notion of one's own sinfulness also came up more concretely at times during the war, as when Private Obadiah Brown was severely injured in battle, but was convinced he got what he "Deserve[d] to bare for my sins, which are many." So too, when soldiers lost a battle it was not because Providence was not active, on the contrary, that active Providence was working to correct their sins.[32]

---

[31] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 87.

[32] Entry for 17 September 1777 in "The James McMichael Journal September 12, 1777-December 23, 1777," *Journal of The American Revolution* (March 2018), *JAR;* Entry for 1 October 1776 in Obadiah Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777," MHS.

More prominent than winning or losing battles, were soldiers' perceptions of Providence saving them personally. Men were especially grateful when they saw Providence worked to mitigate deaths during battle. Minuteman Samuel Haws of Massachusetts demonstrated this gratitude while surviving the British Bombardment from Boston during September of 1775. The British "fired a number of guns and threw several bombs" at the assembled troops, "but see the Providence of god in it when 6 or 7 hundred men were before the mouths of their cannon there was but too men killed." Later that month, a similar set of circumstances caused Haws to break again into eulogy: "the Enemy begn to fire at us...above one hundred balls," recounted Haws, and yet "through the good hand of Devine providence in all their firing they did not kill one man nor wound any except one or too slitely." Many troops were given to religious language when in battle comrades "fell on my right hand, and on my left" and yet their own life was spared. In these most dramatic of scenarios, soldiers believed they saw Providence working to preserve their lives, which no doubt strengthened their providential worldview and showed its continued use as a coping mechanism.[33]

Many anecdotes of soldiers surviving dangerous battles showed how providentialism functioned to bolster feelings of personal protection. During a battle at the Longuiel River in October 1775, Captain John Fassett of Vermont made an escape that he could only describe as providential. One "pleasent morning" he and his men had noticed suddenly that more than thirty enemy boats had come down from Montreal. He and the roughly two-hundred troops with him went to arms. They began to aim their

[33] Lemuel Lyon and Samuel Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers, 1758-1775* (Poughkeepsie: Abraham Tomlinson), 69, 73; Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS.

cannons along the river to fire at the enemy ships. The ships landed at an island across the way and the British troops began to wade toward Fasset. The battle quickly grew hot with British cannonballs and musket balls flying "in great plenty." During the fire, Fassett seemed to lament that this "was the very first time that I ever shot at a man." This battle continued well into the night and yet Fassett concluded that although "the Balls flew around on all sides of us close to our heads and feet...God suffered them not to hurt us." This reflection made Fassett exclaim that he would "never forget his goodness to me" in sparing him harm in battle. Many soldiers like Fassett saw the hand of providence in their personal survival from harm during battle. It was a conviction that seemed to be bolstered each time they survived such experiences and certainly gave them confidence for their fights in the future. Providentialism was a key component in enduring situations such as this.[34]

Similarly, when troops survived British cannonballs for extended periods of time, rather than ascribe this to chance or inaccurate British fire, soldiers saw Providence at work. Early in the war, on 23 September 1775, Private Levi Stedman documented what in his mind had been a day of providential preservation worthy of remembrance. That morning, the British began what he described as "a very Heavy firing of cannon [toward] Roxbury," which continued until eleven o'clock. During those morning hours, Stedman counted that they had fired one hundred and ten cannonballs into the city in addition to the cannonballs and bombs that were fired at Bunker Hill. The day was so memorable for Stedman because, despite the heavy firing, it had no "effect over our men" who were "providentially preserved." Not one soldier was wounded or let alone killed from the

[34] Fassett, *The Follett-Dewey Fassett-Safford Ancestry,* 226-8.

British bombardment that morning. Stedman did not see that firing simply as a cold act of war, but as a religious infraction. The British bombardments were "works of iniquity' for the "art of Violence is in their hands." For Stedman this day of inaccurate British fire revealed two important religious truths that he felt he needed to document. First, divine providence would preserve him and his fellow troops during this war as it had done that morning. This was a conviction that Stedman surely sought to remind himself of by writing this down. Second, Providence did not favor the British in the same way as their acts of war were "inquity" and not divinely sanctioned. Stedman used these providential conclusions from the war that morning to sustain confidence in the war effort going forward.[35]

When reflecting back on their wartime experiences, some of the most intense religious language came when veterans recounted their having survived gruesome injuries in battle. On 22 May 1780 Private Joseph Kerr was encamped near Murray's Ferry in South Carolina. That state had experience some of the most gruesome backcountry fighting that the war produced. While encamped, Kerr and his fellow troops were ambushed by "twenty Dragoons" who hacked at him and "shockingly cut and mangled" him so badly that "Life was totally despaired of." Despite the injury, Kerr was convinced that it was only "by the Blessing of Providence his Life has been preserved." Many men similarly resorted to religious gratitude to understand how they survived gruesome injuries during the war. Private John Fabian similarly "received a very dangerous wound, under which he suffered extreme anguish," and yet, "by the Mercy of propitious Heaven & the skill of able Physicians his life was given him." Such reflections

[35] Levi Stedman's diary was submitted with his pension application: Levi Stedman, W19108, RWPA.

show that many soldiers from all over the colonies relied on their providentialism to cope with the injuries they survived.[36]

In addition to preservation during battles, troops saw Providence working in saving them from accidental yet life-threatening scenarios. When Joseph Plumb Martin's boat tipped over, he was sure he and his fellow troops would die, "but by the assistance of a kind Providence we escaped without any further injury." Private Nathaniel Ober invoked providence when his Captain was cleaning his own gun and "Snaping the Same gun went of[f] to his suprise...But throw the Goodness of god their was no Damige Dun to any." Instances like these, accidental yet dangerous, abounded in camp life. Guns often misfired and soldiers did in fact die from stray bullets. But the times where men saw themselves or their fellow troops spared from death during these accidental scenarios was a time they were likely to invoke providential explanations.[37]

Deborah Sampson, one of the few women to fight in the war, credited Providence with her survival from several life-threatening scenarios as well. On 20 May 1782 Sampson illegally enlisted into the 4th Massachusetts Regiment as Robert Shurtleff. She saw action when she was joined with a small party sent to flush Loyalists out of East Chester that summer. During the battle, she was severely wounded and was carried off to the hospital. Upon realizing where she was being taken, she recalled that her "heart again failed me." She was so worried that her sex would be discovered that she "drew a pistol

---

[36] Joseph Kerr, Accounts Audited of Claims Growing Out of the Revolution, File No. 4252A, Online Images at South Carolina Department of Archives and History, http://www.archivesindex.sc.gov/. (From here on, online Audited Accounts will be cited with just the file number and SCDAH); John Fabian, File No. 2281, SCDAH.

[37] Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 62; Entry for 11 August 1775 in Nathaniel Ober, "MHS Collections Online: Nathaniel Ober Diary, 15 May – 3 September 1775, with accounts and notes, 1776-1781," MHS.

from the holster," intending to "put an end to my life." The only reason she did not "proceed to the fatal act…[was] the interposition of Divine Mercy." Sampson feared the social cost of being caught as a woman in the army far more than the ravages of battle. Not long after this episode, she saw Providence again working for her. She had taken a ball to the thigh and opted to remove it herself, lest the surgeon discover her. After locating the ball that "had penetrated my thigh about two inches" she proceeded to take wine and to trust in her "God, [who] by his kind care, watched over me." Three attempts later, she extracted the ball. At many steps of her wartime experience, Sampson saw Providence intervening to save her both from detection and from life-threatening scenarios. [38]

When an intensely providential soldier sought to describe what had happened to them, they could not use language of chance. Things could not occur randomly but had to be part of a larger plan. This had a significant effect on soldiers' ability to cope with serious scenarios of war. For example, one soldier's providentialism clearly functioned to help him avoid feelings of survivor's guilt. While retreating from Saratoga one evening, Captain Lemuel Roberts was called on to be on guard. However, after the grueling encounters and retreat, Roberts was "so fatigued, that our captain would not consent to my going on guard in my turn." Instead, a better rested Daniel Jones filled in for him. A few hours later, this replacement soldier was killed by the enemy. He and the whole guard were "literally cut to pieces." Roberts admitted that he often had hard feelings about what had transpired and wished he had stood in his place rather than someone for

[38] For an excellent summary and reproduction of many of the writings of Deborah Sampson, see Elizabeth Evans, *Weathering the Storm: Women of the American Revolution* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 308-9.

him. Yet, instead of those feelings, he was convinced it was not chance that made that swap but a "kind over-ruling Providence [that] ordered otherwise." Roberts initially described feelings of survivor's guilt; he was lucky enough to survive when his fellow soldiers died. And yet his providentialism did not allow him to have such feelings because it was no chance survival, but part of a divine plan. Roberts' providentialism helped him cope with survivor's guilt, an experience no doubt shared by his comrades.[39]

Providence did not always spare soldiers from harm. In instances where men were not kept by Providence from temporal harm, they relied on Providence instead to turn the agony they underwent toward their spiritual good. Soldiers referred to this process as God "sanctifying" trials so that they might be useful to them. It was often extremely difficult circumstances that caused troops to cry out that the tragedy that befell them would be sanctified to them. While he was stationed at Cambridge in 1775, Private Amos Farnsworth was informed that his father and brother were out on a canoe and "God in his holy and Riteous Provedence Suffered them both to [be] Drowned." Farnsworth was clearly distressed by the news, but was quick to pray that God would enable him to "make a wise and Religious improvement of every Dispensacion of they Providences." Soldiers even prayed for one another that after tragedies of this kind: "Oh, will god Sanctify it to your bereaved Relatives." Remarkably consistent in their providentialism, soldiers did not see tragedy as meaningless or outside the purview of the Providence they spoke so much of, but instead asked and prayed that the evil would be made to work for good. This notion of Providence working through negative experiences often had

[39] Roberts, *Memoirs of Captain Lemuel Roberts,* 50; For an excellent explanation and account of survivor's guilt among soldiers, see Adam Lineham, "I watched Friends Die in Afghanistan. The Guilt Has Nearly Killed Me," *New York Times Magazine* (November 2019), https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/11/magazine/survivor-guilt-veteran.html.

practical implications for how men interpreted developments on the battlefield. Major Jeremiah Fogg was exuberant when he realized that "The very evils that at first predicted a defeat, were a chain of causes in our favor." This notion of Providence's ability to use both personal tragedy and military blunders for the ultimate good of the soldier raised their estimation of what providence could do. When taken seriously, this idea of Providence clearly bolstered the optimism of soldiers, for whatever happened to them, it could be turned toward good by an "overruling" providence.[40]

The deeply religious African American soldier, Lemuel Haynes, uniquely applied this doctrine of a sanctifying providence to the experience of his enslaved people in North America. During the Revolution, popular theologians like Samuel Hopkins had argued that Providence used African slavery to bring Christianization to Africa. Haynes countered this popular presumption by pointing out that there was no indication that Africa was being Christianized at all. Instead, Haynes argued that Providence used the evil of slavery to instead teach the value of true liberty, education, and communal harmony between the races. For Haynes, Providence showed in America that the races could coexist with one another. This was especially true in the Continental Army where in some units black and white men fought side by side and formed many connections. Thus, Lemuel Haynes took the popular notion among the soldiers of a sanctifying providence and applied it to understanding the situation of his people and to further racial harmony through the tragedy of war and slavery.[41]

---

[40] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 87; Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS, 33; Jeremiah Fogg's Journal, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major John Sullivan,* 101.

[41] For an excellent treatment of the relationship between providentialism and understanding African slavery, see John Saillant, "Slavery and Divine Providence in New England Calvinism: The New Divinity and a Black Protest, 1775-1805," *New England*

Haynes' providentialism and wartime experience combined to produce perhaps the most powerful critique of slavery during the Revolution. In 1776, after serving in the militia to fight in Boston and later joining the Continental Army to take Fort Ticonderoga, Haynes was inspired by his wartime fight for liberty to use his literary genius to fight African slavery in the colonies. He penned the now famous *Liberty Further Extended,* an essay that explicitly condemned slavery using the second paragraph of the Declaration of Independence. While the essay began with a quote from the Declaration, it quickly moved to Haynes primary grounds for opposing slavery: his religious worldview and the Bible. Haynes' main contention in the essay was that "*the practise of Slave-keeping, which so much abounds in this Land is illicit."* He immediately supported the contention with his religious worldview. All rights are from God, Haynes asserted, and therefore any acts "passed in any Earthly Court, which are Derogatory to those Edicts that are passed in the Court of Heaven…[are] *void."* He continued to employ various passages of the Bible in his case against enslavement. God made from *"one Blood all nations of men...Acts 17,26"* and all are thus entitled to the same laws. Did not even "the Blessed Saviour of the World" condemn slavery when he taught that "*As you would that men should do unto you, do you Even so to them* [Matthew 7:12]", Haynes asked. He continued for pages in a similar vein, using primarily the Bible to critique racism and slavery wholesale. Haynes used his providentialism to not only cope with, but

---

Quarterly 68, no. 4 (December 1995), 584-608; John Saillant, *Black Puritan, Black Republican: The Life and Thought of Lemuel Haynes, 1753-1833* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 601-3. In these studies, Saillant ably shows how many ministers of the New Divinity argued for the net positive effect of African slavery because providence used it to bring the gospel to Africa and Africans. Haynes, I would argue based on his wartime experience, instead argued that providence was teaching the true value of liberty, education, and racial harmony.

also critique what he found the most troubling part of it all: fighting for liberty in colonies that enslaved his people.[42]

While Haynes was the most prominent and effective Continental soldier to critique slavery, he was by no means the only one to do it. Indeed, many soldiers used their religious worldview to critique slavery. The deeply religious Josiah Atkins was disturbed when he encountered the abuses of slavery. While marching through Virginia in June 1781, Atkins was struck by General Washington's estate, which had "two or 300 to work on it as slaves." The contradiction embodied by the commander of the army was immediately apparent to Atkins. "Alas! That persons who pretend to stand for the *rights of mankind*...can delight in oppression, & that even of the worst kind!" Atkins continued to use his religious worldview and the Bible to critique the morality of slavery" "What pray is this," asked Atkins, "but the strikingly inconsistent character pointed out by the apostle, *While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption!* [2 Peter 2:19]" Atkins' hatred of slavery came up again when he "marched by 18 or 20 Negroes that lay dead by the way-side, putrifying with the *small-pox*." He blamed their lack of care on "Cornwallisean Cruelty," since the British general had made promises of freedom to African Americans, but then neglected to care for them when sick. Again, Atkins drew on his religious worldview to critique this racism and slavery. He took solace in knowing that there was "a King superior to the British King, & a Lord far above their lords" who would not be so cruel. Atkins courageously used his religious worldview

[42] For context and a transcription of Haynes' now famous text, see Ruth Bogin, "Liberty Further Extended" A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript by Lemuel Haynes," *William and Mary Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (January 1983), 95.

to critique both his own commander and the British for their abuses and contradictions when it came to race and slavery.[43]

Similarly, Captain Rufus Lincoln of Massachusetts was clearly influenced by the anti-slavery poetry of Phillis Wheatley. Although Lincoln did not record much about his own personal musings on religion, he did copy much religious poetry into his journal. Almost randomly near the end of his diary in 1780, Lincoln recorded a portion of Wheatley's poem "*on her being brought from Africk to Americk."* Famously, Wheatley discussed in the poem her reflections on her Christianity and the relationship that has to the institution of slavery. She ended the poem with a strong statement against racism: "Remember Christians Negros black as Cain / May be refind and joine the angelic train." Clearly the war and the Revolution had gotten this soldier to muse on issues of race and slavery and perhaps to challenge them.[44]

The pattern of particularly zealous religious soldiers critiquing slavery wherever they saw it appeared outside of New England as well. Covenanters from Scotland were religious radicals not only known for being Whigs, but also for opposing racism and slavery. Many who fought in the Revolution later critiqued the United States' Constitution for not mentioning Jesus Christ in its preamble and for not opposing racial slavery. Often overlooked, this religious sect was equal to the Quakers in their zealous opposition to slavery and their involvement in the Revolutionary War provides yet another example of how religious soldiers came to critique slavery during the war. For

[43] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins*, 24-5, 32-3.

[44] Rufus Lincoln, *The Papers of Captain Rufus Lincoln of Wareham, Mass.,* reprint, ed. James Minor Lincoln (New York: New York Times & Arno, 1971), 94.

them as well, religion and providentialism were means of coping with the gravest social ill that they witnessed during the Revolution.[45]

The cumulative weight of these examples suggests that there was at least some connection during the Revolution between providentialism and anti-slavery. The pattern during the revolutionary era is discernable beyond the men already mentioned. Anti-slavery luminaries like Olaudah Equiano, Wheatley, and Haynes were all deeply religious. Moreover, this was before explicitly religious arguments for slavery were prominent. These individuals' providentialism demanded consistency and that all of life fall into a divine plan. Such a conviction, for many religious soldiers, caused them to critique African slavery in the colonies. Providentialism allowed soldiers like Lemuel Haynes to cope with and critique the most glaring social ill that they encountered during the Revolution.[46]

While Haynes was unique in applying his doctrine of a sanctifying providence to slavery, he was not the only soldier who saw that the doctrine had implications for each soldier's spiritual warfare against sin. God as righteous Judge was a consistent theme, regulating soldiers' behavior. Religious troops were thoroughly convinced that God actively raised up righteous armies and cast down corrupted ones. As one soldier put it: "The shield and protector of the good, as well as thou art the scourge of the base and wicked nation." Practically, this idea of a divine judge meant that many soldiers were

---

[45] Joseph S. Moore, *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ into the Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 88-118.

[46] Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, The African* (London 1794). Equiano was deeply religious and interpreted his life providentially. In the opening paragraph of his memoir, he wrote" "I regard myself as a *particular favourite of Heaven,* and acknowledge the mercies of Providence in every occurrence of my life."

deeply interested in the behavior of their fellow troops when camped against the enemy. This concern often manifested itself in seemingly obsessive sin catalogues in many diaries. For example, Private Nathaniel Ober frequently wrote cryptic entries like: "a woman Decked for her wanton Behaviour a man Drumed out of the Camp for Steling money." Such entries seem most explicable in the religious context of anxiety about what such behaviors will bring both in the camp and the prospects of the war. Men almost unanimously declared their anxieties that communal sins were "Prevocking...to God." Samuel Haws even commented about the scale of the reaction that stealing got in his camp: "if the infernal regions had ben opened and cain and Judas and Sam Haws had been present their could not have ben a biger uproar."[47]

Private Josiah Atkins was perhaps the most explicit on this point when he believed a terrible thunderstorm was about to destroy his whole camp. He and the army were camped along the James River about twenty miles from Williamsburg, Virginia. Then, during the night, a "very heavy & tremendous thunder storm" came upon the army, many of whom did not have tents. Atkins immediately interpreted this storm and the vengeance of his "God of war" who had appeared to "take vengeance on his adversaries." Atkins was not referring to the British, but to his fellow troops who had lived in sin and thereby "insult[ed] the insens'd Jehovah!" Atkins was shocked to find so many of his fellow troops unmoved by this display of divine "displeasure," and instead of fearing, they stood "stupid & secure, & even mock[ing] the direful voice!" Atkins' concerns were representative of religious troops. They constantly expected judgement to fall on their

[47] Henry, *An Accurate and Interesting Account,*104; Entry for 8 June 1775 in Nathaniel Ober, "MHS Collections Online: Nathaniel Ober Diary."; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 82; Lemuel Lyon and Samuel Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers,* 76.

army, to the point of consistently cataloging and critiquing the behaviors of their comrades.[48]

Likely unbeknownst to the soldiers who saw Providence acting as a harsh judge, it was quite a useful belief for them to have while in the military. Men who believed God was looking over their shoulder and that Providence would meet out justice were more likely to behave in the ranks. The soldiers' officers certainly knew this. Washington was keen on ensuring a steady supply of respectable chaplains in his ranks to instill discipline in the troops. Of course, this was no silver bullet, and men who had a providential worldview or not often behaved like soldiers anyway. Yet, after reading diaries by soldiers who were utterly convinced that Providence was actively punishing the ill behavior in themselves and all around them, it is hard to conceive that it had no restraining effect on their behavior at all.[49]

Some soldiers held so strongly to the outlines of this providential view that they rebuked those who did not interpret the war in the same way. After recounting his fraught journey to Quebec and all the dangers he faced, Lieutenant Jeremiah Fogg stated emphatically that the special workings of "Providence" were "so apparently manifested, that he who views this scene, with indifference, is worse than an infidel." On that same expedition, the sixteen-year-old private John Henry of Lancaster, Pennslyvania, ascribed the saving of his life after his canoe began to take on water to that "interference of Providence," and rebuked those who "atheistically" called such interpretations mere "presence of mind." Henry seemed to have rebuked the vocal deists of his day by this

[48] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins*, 36-7.

[49] For the promotion of Chaplains among the troops by military leaders for pragmatic reasons, see McBride, *Pulpit and Nation,* 40-53.

statement. Soldiers were aware of alternate ways of interpreting the war but still became more convinced of their own providential interpretation in large part because of its ability to help them cope with the exigencies of the war.[50]

While this enchanted providentialism was the predominant worldview among the soldiers, there were exceptions to it. Most exceptions were in diaries that simply made no use of the providential worldview or even providential rhetoric. This was the case with around half the diaries examined here. Admittedly, this does not mean that these men did not have any semblance of providentialism in their thinking, but simply that they did not write about it. Some soldiers, however, did implicitly repudiate it. For example, Dr. Zuriel Waterman of Rhode Island and his two compatriots demonstrated their dissatisfaction with reliance on a strict providentialism when they frequented the shop of a fortune teller to glean what they could about the future of their social and military life. Fortune-telling would have been outside the mainstream of colonial providentialism at the time. It was thought to be so because a reliance on Providence was to be how one coped with the future and events unknown. Going to seek revelation about the future outside prescribed religious channels undermined a providential reliance on the Bible and other normative interpretive tools. Such counter examples to the providential view of the soldiers could be multiplied, indeed many authors have done so. Yet, providentialism reigned in a substantial portion of the soldiers' thinking and it had implications for their time in war. These counterexamples highlight that soldiers' providentialism was not strictly perfunctory or their default setting. It was a means of looking at the world that

[50] Fogg, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major John Sullivan,* 101; Henry, *An Accurate and Interesting Account,* 41.

they actively clung to and one that happened to help them cope with being a soldier in war.[51]

For many soldiers, the war was a formative religious experience. While some historians have suggested that the war acted as a "wet blanket" for religious zeal, the experience of many men was precisely the opposite. The exigencies of wartime not only strengthened their commitment to their providentialism, but even caused them to renew their religious commitments in a dramatic way. After barely surviving the Battle of Bunker Hill, Peter Brown resolved to "never forget Gods distinguishing Mercy to me, in sparing my life...When the Arrows of death flew thick around me." Moreover, he committed himself to "devote my future Life to his divine service." Similarly, Abner Stocking, after his brutal march to Quebec, predicated a more zealous religious life in the future on his wartime experiences. As he recalled: "When wandering through the wilderness, hungry, faint and weary, God was my support and did not suffer me like others to fall by the way- when sick and in prison he visited me- when a captive he set me free!" These phrases were not mere poetics on Stocking's part. Indeed, he experienced each of those maladies and, as he saw it, providence delivered him out of them all. In response, Stocking prayed that his "future life [be] devoted to his service!"[52]

That soldiers' providentialism produced these positive results for soldiers indicates its power as a coping mechanism. For them, providentialism was not a political tool meant to baptize the colonial mission of republicanism and spread it throughout the globe. Nor was it a means to cast the colonies' history in the same mold as that of ancient

---

[51] Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence*, 1.

[52] Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS; Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 35-6.

Israel. Rather, it was a means of reassuring themselves of protection and provision during trying wartime experiences. Soldiers' providentialism had to be experientially relevant for them and thus they had to adapt it to their wartime situation. Doing this created a distinct religious providentialism from both their ministerial and political elite. They rejected the politicized providentialism of their ministers and the abstract providentialism of the vocal Deists. Instead, theirs was a personal providentialism that aided them in their wartime experience. The unique emphases of soldiers' providentialism pushes back against attempts to characterize the religiosity of the entire Revolution (or lack thereof) by using only ministers or only political elites as our guide.

The power of this belief in an overruling providence could be profound for the soldier. As one soldier powerfully put it "I begrudge no Pains that i take for that End; and when the Day of Care & Labour ends, a most merciful God has always enabled me through the last summer as well as this [one], when i lay my head on my Pillow to cast all the Cares & Anxiety of the Day, into the Arms of a kind Providence, so that I think I can truly say that I dont think that the most dangerous Situation that I ever been in has deprived me of One Quarter of an hours Rest in any One Night." It was on such providentialism that many soldiers relied to endure the war.[53]

While the signers of the Declaration of Independence enshrined a commitment to the abstract God of Nature and reason, soldiers like Ezra Tilden were filling their diaries with prayers to a personal God who intervened in battles and provided for a soldier's daily needs. The effect of the war on Tilden's religious life was profound. He, like many men, relied on their providentialism to sustain them in a multitude of ways throughout

[53] Quoted in Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr., *The Way of Duty: A Woman and her Family in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 135.

their wartime experience and were glad that they did. Indeed, Tilden vowed as much when toward the end of the war he begged for God's "grace to enable me for ye future if I liv'd to Live more to his glory yn I had hitherto done."[54].

[54] Ezra Tilden Diary, 142, MHS.

CHAPTER 2

"BEING SUNDAY": SOLDIERS' RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

The drums & fifes beat down the street, from the Col. quarters as far as his right, every morning at sunrise, & at one hour before sunset to call the troops to Prayers.

-Samuel Bixby, Private, Massachusetts

Died in Lunenburg July 15, [1775] Mr. Peter Brounon Aged 76. He was a brave defender of the liberties of his country...an honest man and a humble follower of Jesus Christ.

-Anonymous, Photostats Box 36 June 1775, MHS

On 5 June 1775, Colonel Experience Storrs of Connecticut was beginning to work his way back into military life. He was part of Connecticut's desperate attempt to organize a militia capable of fighting off another encounter with the British. The Battles of Lexington and Concord had just taken place, but no formal war had yet been declared. That summer Storrs was busily working to organize supplies and the movements of troops. Amid carrying out his military duties, Storrs seamlessly integrated religious routines into his regiment's day. In his journal, these routines were foundational to the military life of the troops and how he saw them operating. On one Monday he wrote that early in the day he had "Attended Prayers with the Compy." Later, he spent time "Aprising the Arms" that had just come in and ordering "the Compy to Disapliing 15 men" to clear out areas in the camp. This day of military matters ended with "Prayers at

Night at Head Quarters." Storrs' military preparation included partaking in religious routines. He recorded them side by side with his other responsibilities, highlighting, in his mind, the mutual relationship between the two. A good officer managed his military matters to keep order in the ranks and engaged in religious rituals to keep order in his soul. Storrs did not know that he was less than two weeks out from the bloody Bunker Hill, but he did know that part of his preparation for war involved prescribed and regular participation in religious practices.[1]

Religious practices are embodied actions that reinforce one's religious beliefs about the world or help redirect one's thinking in a spiritual direction. These are the everyday actions that people of faith do to express and live out their beliefs. They are not static but adapted to the various contexts in which they find themselves. Soldiers in the Revolutionary War would have been very familiar with many of the religious practices that they partook in during the war. Many had been practicing them since childhood. Yet, in the context of war, soldiers used these rituals in particular ways to aid them in the challenges that they faced. By studying not just what soldiers *thought* about religion, but also what they *did* with it adds to our picture of how soldiers used religion to cope with their wartime situation. Using theoretical studies of lived religion can expand our understanding of the importance of religion to soldiers and help us see the religion of the laity that could not be captured in sermons and treatises.[2]

---

[1] Experience Storrs, "Connecticut Farmers at Bunker Hill: The Diary of Colonel Experience Storrs," ed. Wladimir Hagelin and Ralph A. Brown, *New England Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1955): 91.

[2] Theoretical contributions to this study of religious practices include Robert A. Orsi, "Everyday Miracles: The Study of Lived Religion," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward a History of Practice*, ed. David D. Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press,

The Revolutionary leadership was overt about its promotion of religious routines among the troops in the Continental Army. Many commanders, including General Washington, viewed the religious engagement of soldiers as largely instrumental, that is, it made better soldiers. Washington saw how religion aided soldiers as they endured suffering and helped them to maintain discipline; he wanted to encourage both. He regularly advocated for more chaplains in the ranks, preferring those with a political bent and revolutionary fervor. Moreover, he often disseminated general orders that encouraged religious observance among the soldiers. While his personal religious convictions may have been hazy to the modern observer, his support of religious rituals in his army was not. Likewise, the Continental Congress frequently issued declarations that set aside days for prayer and fasting and published statements of resolve for the promotion of "True Religion and Good Morals" in the army. Such measures would encourage the troops to participate in these pious acts which, they declared, were the "only solid foundations of public liberty and happiness." There is no question then that the military and political leadership during the Revolution wanted to give at least the appearance of a pious standing army. However, concern for religious duties among these same officers quickly gave way to martial utility. Washington issued a general order as early as 26 August 1776 declaring that the previous edict "against working on Sunday is revoked the time not

---

1997), 3-21; Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 87-125; Courtney Bender, "Practicing religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*, ed. Robert A. Orsi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 273-95. For a model study of religious experience, see Douglas L. Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, Virginia, by the University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

admitting of any delay." Although happy to decree policies that promoted the religiosity of the troops in the abstract, when doing so sacrificed and did not enhance martial capacities, Washington ensured that they were revoked.[3]

While Washington and congress may have been correct that religious devotion made better combatants, many soldiers attached value to religious practices beyond martial utility. For the religious men, these rituals were not about increasing the lethality or discipline of the army. Neither were they politically intended to project a pious public image to assuage a skeptical peoples' concerns about a new standing army. Instead, soldiers sought to create a sense of stability and subjective peace through cultivating routine devotional lives. Across region and denomination, soldiers used these embodied religious practices to try and impose order on the chaotic war around them. Far from losing interest in such practices as the war went on, many soldiers showed increasing attachment to them as their time in the service was prolonged or they experience personal suffering. Religious routines, perhaps inconsistently performed in civilian life, became firmly entrenched for many soldiers during their time of service. While merely instrumental for many commanders and politicians, these rituals served as a bedrock of constancy for soldiers amid the unpredictability and dangers of war. Religion as a coping mechanism was not limited to the cerebral process of providential interpretations but extended to tangible acts of religious devotion that many soldiers relied on.

---

[3] For brief analysis of Washington's advocacy for chaplains in the army, see Kidd, *God of Liberty,* 116-30. The book that offers the most balanced assessment of Washington's personal religion is Mary V. Thompson, *"In the Hands of a Good Providence": Religion in the Life of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 3. Thompson ecumenically concludes that Washington's religion was somewhere between "the extremes, pietism and deism, often claimed for him." For a resolution from congress regarding religion and the war, see 'General Orders, 9 July 1776," *Founders Online.*

In many ways, military life was conducive to an ordered religious practice. New recruits quickly found that their lives were now strictly regimented. When they had to wake up, march, sit on guard, and even eat or wash was often commanded from above and imposed on them. The strict military life of a regular army was not easy to adapt to for many. Most colonial men were used to fighting in ad hoc militia regiments that consisted of neighbors and were led by someone they knew. An egalitarian ethos pervaded even military life in much of the colonies, particularly in New England. When General George Washington first encountered this lot of new troops, he did not like what he saw and determined that they could only be made fit for combat "if properly officered." Washington was determined to break these new recruits and impose on them strict martial discipline and a regimented lifestyle. One observer described the whole process as "a great overturning in the camp," in which "great distinction is made between officers and soldiers. Every one is made to know his place and keep it." Part of this new regimented life included strict religious routines that soldiers had to keep.[4]

The most consistent and foundational of the soldiers' religious routines was meeting in camp for worship each Sunday. Roughly fifty two out of the 136 soldiers (about 38%), documented attending church services at some point during the war. Officers were diligent about carving out time for weekly worship services. Many were believers themselves in the importance that this weekly routine had for the troops. Sergeant Lemuel Storrs of Massachusetts was careful to ensure that soldiers had ample "opportunity for public worship," without which, he believed, they could "have little

[4] Both quotes are taken from John Ferling, *Almost A Miracle: The American Victory in the War of Independence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 77.

hopes of the of the Bless[ing] of Heaven." Even among the typically rowdy men and general chaos of an army encampment, religious worship was quite robust and regular. Soldiers in New England regiments heard two sermons each Sunday, one in the morning and another in the evening. Soldiers were fond of recording their church attendance. Private Henry Sewall of Massachusetts, for example, documented a typical Sunday for himself when he wrote on 21 July 1776 that he "Went to meeting A.M. at the Trinity P.M. at Mr. Shiling's." People attending and journaling about weekly church attendance was something of a colonial tradition. The tradition endured through the war among devout soldiers.[5]

Such worship services were common across the regiments from the various colonies, with minor variations. One difference seemed to be in the number of services held each week. New England soldiers, for example, were the only ones who regularly documented two services on Sundays, while troops from other colonies were nearly as consistent in documenting at least one service each week. Soldiers in middle colonies also reported participating in weekly worship services. Private George Ewing noted that he and his fellow troops "attended Divine Service at the Jersey Camp." Southern regiments also customarily blocked off time on Sundays for worship services. Francis Marion noted in his orderly book that "Divine service will be performed by the chaplain tomorrow afternoon." He further demanded that the men attend while sober, and they were "to take care that they appear Clean & Decent with their hir Comb[ed]." Troops who traveled to different areas in the army seemed to abide by the local customs of

[5] Lemuel Storrs' Orderly Book was submitted in his Pension Application: Lemuel Storrs, W25136, RWPA; Entry for 21 July 1776, Henry Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, microfilm, MHS.

church attendance, whether that was once a day in the South or twice a day in New England. How soldiers adopted the religious practices of their regional context is covered more in-depth in chapter five.[6]

The number of soldiers who documented their church attendance showed how important worship was to them. Literary analysis of the diaries reveals remarkable consistency in soldiers' cataloging worship on Sundays. While they were often compelled to attend such services, they were not compelled to so frequently write about them. Writing in a diary during a war in the eighteenth century was no easy task. Historian Charles Bolton ably painted the picture of these troops and the difficulties they faced in even writing as much as they did. "Keeping a diary in all kinds of weather," he wrote, "with no table to write upon, poor quills and thick ink, and hands numb with cold, or stiff from guard duty, was an achievement which must command respect." This was no easy task. Men had to write with scratchy pens and fragile paper. For soldiers to write so much about their religious routines indicated their importance to them. Moreover, the consistent documentation of religious services on Sundays stands out among the soldiers' entries in their diaries as the only steady pattern in their otherwise unpredictable lives. Other day's activities were near impossible to predict. Soldiers could be drilling, marching, or

[6] George Ewing, *George Ewing, gentleman, a Soldier of Valley Forge* (New York: Privately Printed by Thomas Ewing, 1928), 47; Indications of one service per week in southern regiments come from entries for 28 August 1775 and 3 May 1777 in Francis Marion, "Huntington Digital Library: Orderly book of Francis Marion, 1775, June 20-1779, May 6," Huntington Library Archives (HLA); Entry for 7 January 1781 in Oliver Hart Diary, Oliver Hart Family Papers (1723-1795), South Caroliniana Library (SCL). Northern Orderly Books likewise document creating time for these services, see Lemuel Storrs, W25136, RWPA. William McDowell, "Journal of Lieut. William McDowell of the First Penn'A Regiment, in the Southern Campaign. 1781-1782," in *Journals and Diaries of The War of the Revolution,* ed. William Henry Egle (Harrisburg: E.K. Meyers: State Printer, 1893), 305.

fighting on any given day. But on Sundays they could count on reflecting at the end of the day on their worship service and documenting that experience in their diary. The remarkable consistency of these entries each week demonstrates the value that soldiers placed on this routine that helped give structure to their military lives. Such structure is immediately visible by simply looking at their diaries.[7]

Soldiers had unique ways of marking out this day each week in their journals many of which indicated how they viewed this day as set apart from others. Private Samuel Haws almost always began his Sunday diary entries with the phrase "Being Sunday." Other days were not named at all in his diary, but each week was structured around it "Being Sunday" or not. The next most common way to mark the day was to refer to it as the "Sabbath." The Sabbath was a clear religious reference to the day that indicated it as a day of rest, worship, and reflection. This was certainly common in the broader religious culture of the time and soldiers used it in their military life as well. Other soldiers referred to Sundays as the "Lord's Day" in their diaries, indicating similar religious import. Some soldiers even had idiosyncratic ways that they marked out this day. Private John Jenks of Connecticut began entries for Sundays with "DD" to demarcate it. Each of these different ways of marking out the same day shows the widespread practice of using this routine to structure one's week and to provide a sense of order for these soldiers.[8]

---

[7] Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902), 222-3.

[8] Lemuel Lyon and Samuel Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers, 1758-1775* (Poughkeepsie: Abraham Tomlinson), 55. For an additional sampling of how soldiers note the "Sabbath," see Kenneth Roberts, *March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition* (New York: Doubleday, Doran & Company, 1938),

The setting of this Sunday worship often varied, depending upon the context that the soldiers were in. It was most consistent during times of encampment, which constituted the majority of a soldier's time in the army. While stationed at Cambridge, one private remarked, "I frequently attended public worship on the Sabbath." These services would take place at any workable venue. Soldiers recorded attending worship on the commons, or under a tree, or even "at a barn." As might be expected, difficult campaigns quelled the frequency of formal services. For example, the diaries written on the March to Quebec demonstrate far less consistency in worship attendance than was usual for encamped soldiers. However, just preceding that trek, soldiers participated in an elaborate worship service at First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport to bless the attack and even left that service with pieces of George Whitefield's garment, which they cut up and distributed. Soldiers often became itinerant listeners as they went town to town to find a suitable worship service. Private Samuel Haws traveled "up to the connecticut forces to hear a sermon in the morning and evening." Another soldier recorded that after hearing a sermon in the morning, "in the afternune I went abut a mile & a half back tords

---

581; Danske Dandridge, *American Prisoners of the Revolution* (Charlottesville: Michie Company, 1911), 495; Bayze Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington: May, 1775- February, 1777, At the Northward and in Canada," Providence College Digital Commons (1879), 247; "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections*, Vol. 3 (Salem: Essex Institute, 1861), 56. Soldiers who noted Sundays as "Lord's Day" were equally many. For examples of these diaries, see entries 23 & 30 April 1775 in Simon Willard, A Journal from Day to Day, 1775, Photostats, MHS*;* Storrs, "Connecticut Farmers at Bunker Hill," 84; Ewing, *George Ewing, gentleman, a Soldier of Valley Forge,* 28. Entry for 4 June 1775 in John Jenks Diary, 1775-1776, Pre-Revolutionary Diaries, MHS.

home & herd a sermon." Many soldiers seemed more determined to ensure their attendance at public worship than their commanding officers were to bring it to them.[9]

The content of wartime worship services was similar to what soldiers had experienced in civilian life. Each service consisted of a sermon, prayers, singing, and occasionally the sacraments. The sermon was without question the most significant element for soldiers. The number of diary entries that relate to the content and quality of sermons abounded. Soldiers' entries about sermons usually commented on the texts that were expounded and the quality of the delivery. This "Day we had two Sermon preachd," recalled Obadiah Brown, "One text was Jeremiah 4-14 the other was Exidus 3-4-fine sermons in Deed." Other soldiers, like Amos Farnsworth, recorded the primary message of a sermon in summary statements like: "He Shew[ed] what Puting on the hole Armer of God was in its Several Peaces," or "he Treated upon the Power and goodness of God." By writing these statements soldiers revealed how they reflected upon and remembered the content of various sermons for at least some portion of time. Indeed, most diary entries were not written until the end of the day, meaning they had to recall this material to document it.[10]

---

[9] Roberts, *March to Quebec,* 580; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 79; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War,* 23-4; Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers,* 74; Stevens, "The Revolutionary Journal of James Stevens of Andover, Mass.," 43.

[10] Entry for 8 August 1776 in Obadiah Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777," MHS; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 86; Entry for 20 April 1778, Nahum Parker's Diary was submitted in his Pension Application, S11200, RWPA; Caleb Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary May 5, 1775- May 30, 1776,* ed. Lothrop Withington (Newburyport: William H. Huse & Company, 1881), 5.

Recent studies have helpfully analyzed the content of revolutionary sermons. But what kinds of preaching was most well-received by the troops? Soldiers responded particularly well to sermons that reassured them that God approved of their taking up arms. While few were pacifist, many soldiers had qualms about taking up arms and "hastening to the field of blood & slaughter," as one private put it. In the face of this hesitation, soldiers appreciated reminders that God was on their side and that the battle they fought in was a righteous one. Thus, one hesitant soldier was encouraged by a sermon that assured troops that God would be with them in battle and that they needed to take courage. It was, this private reflected, "the most exellen[t] sermon I ever heard on that subject." Amos Farnsworth was particularly eager to hear religious appeals that sanctioned military service. One Sunday he heard "An Exelent Sermon" which encouraged him to "fite for our Land and Country: Saying we did not do our Duty if we did not stand up now." Soldiers were glad to have any loyalist tendencies stamped out of them by their preachers. Samuel Bixby noted in particular a sermon on the text of: "Shall I yet again go out to battle against the children of Benjamin, my brother." Religious soldiers needed to be convinced and then reminded that the war they were fighting was acceptable under their religious ethic. To that end, they often reflected on sermons that helped them do so. Only then could they reconcile their religious conscience to the war and give themselves to it fully.[11]

[11] Josiah Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* ed. Steven E. Kagle (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1975), 19-20, 24; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 79; Samuel Bixby, *The Diary of Samuel Bixby: A Soldier in Boston During the Siege,* MHS: Life During the Siege of Boston Document Packet, 2012, 53.

Another prominent theme in sermons that soldiers were moved by was thanksgiving. This was particularly true of soldiers who had endured many battles and were simply happy to be alive. In 1779 New York Private Moses Sproule remembered such an occasion: "The whole army was mustered in & thanksgiving & a discourse adapted to the occasion." During the Siege of Boston, one soldier was glad to have a special "day of public Thanksgiving" and noted that they had Rev. Mr. Bowman of Oxford to come to preach to them on that topic. Such sermons on thanksgiving related very well experientially to soldiers, at least to those who had survived. They interpreted their survival in battle not in naturalistic ways but, as was previously shown, in providential ones. It was only fitting then to give thanks. These martial and thanksgiving sermons seemed to be far more experientially relevant to soldiers than more abstract or theologically precise sermons, which hardly appear in the soldiers' diaries. Chaplains seemed to have difficulty in picking up on this. Although many did realize these experientially relevant themes that soldiers picked up on, others seemed fixed on debating interpretations of Paul's meaning in Romans 13 as it relates to civil disobedience. This was a topic and text that did not preoccupy the soldiers much at all.[12]

Sunday was not only to be spent listening to sermons, but also acted as a time for reflection on how soldiers viewed God working through their military experiences in the

[12] Entry for 17 October 1779 in Moses Sproule Diary, "New York Historical Society Digital Collections: Moses Sproule Diary, 1779," New York Historical Society (NYHS); Bixby, *The Diary of Samuel Bixby*, 62; Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War,* 170. Byrd's excellent analysis of the topics of sermons preached during the war indicates that the most preached on topic, by a substantial margin, was on how to interpret Romans 13. While the legitimacy of war and thanksgiving (topics that soldiers most often wrote about from sermons) do appear in the top ten of topics, it does show something of a disconnect between what the ministers thought was necessary and what the soldiers responded to.

preceding week. It was a weekly benchmark to recall what had preceded and reflect on the religious implications of that week's experiences. Soldiers seemed to do this with some regularity. Private Josiah Atkins took Sunday to encourage his own heart with "a grateful sense of thy goodness in preserving me, my health & life, while so many of my acquaintances have, since the last Sabbath, been numbered with the vast congregation of the dead!" The routine of weekly reflection on the works of God preserving him in battle encouraged to be able to keep marching even in the midst of difficulty. Religious soldiers like Atkins experienced the war one week at a time and used reflection on the past to embolden their actions in the future.[13]

Beyond the mechanics of the worship service, soldiers sometimes commented on the social implications of this practice. A worship service was one of the few times officers and enlisted men fraternized. Chaplain Ammi Robbins was struck to see that officers and soldiers were often seen worshipping together. This was a significant element of Sundays given the strict hierarchy and separation that ordinarily marked relations between soldiers and their officers. It seems there was no strict separation of rank when it came to worship services. This is at odds with the idea advanced by some historians that "social standing seemed to inhibit religious participation." Perhaps true in some instances, it was certainly not ubiquitous. Even soldiers commented upon this level ground in the sanctuary. Massachusetts Private Samuel Bixby recorded that "on Sundays Mr. Pope, of Spencer, preached to our regiment. General Thomas attended worship." Henry Sewall also noticed that one Sunday "Mr. Mason preach'd in one of the Barracks- attended with the officers & soldiers of the regiment." Moreover, the event led to him

[13] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 39.

discussing spiritual matters with his Colonel. It seemed spiritual practices brought soldier and commander closer together, at least in terms of social status.[14]

Not all soldiers responded approvingly to weekly worship services as part of their military life. Some resented attending while others even sought out ways to abscond. Benjamin Gilbert, who preferred frequenting the Masonic lodge to regular church attendance, noted that one Sunday he "had a Tooth Ach [all] Day" and so stayed at home while the "Regt. went to church." Another soldier was disappointed that he could "not go to meeting without breeches, and it was so hot that I could not bear to wear them." Some soldiers who could not escape attendance resorted to disrupting the whole enterprise. This was the case of an anonymous soldier "from Coll Hixons rigmt" who had received twenty lashes for "making Disturbence in the time of Publect worship." Such disturbances sometimes came from an entire crowd of soldiers. Once a preacher at Valley Forge who, out of embarrassment, left out the part of his text that read "be content with your wages" was reminded of those words as it was quickly "shouted from a hundred tongues" of unpaid soldiers. This sort of neglect and disregard for the weekly ritual was common and it often grated on more religious soldiers. Private James McMichael of Pennsylvania would sometimes spend "the Day recluse not choosing to associate with any person their conduct being disagreeable."[15]

---

[14] Robbins, *Journal of the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins*, 6–7; Caroline Cox "The Continental Army," In *The Oxford Handbook of The American Revolution*, edited by Edward G. Gray and Jane Kamensky, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 166-168; Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 211; Bixby, *The Diary of Samuel Bixby*, 61. Entry for 26 March 1780, Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS.

[15] Many soldiers frequented Mason Lodges, but few with the frequency of Benjamin Gilbert. For an example of a soldier far more interested in the masons that church services, see Benjamin Gilbert, *A Citizen-Soldier in the American Revolution: The Diary*

Many soldiers, however, reflected on their weekly worship services with gratitude and enthusiasm. Most wrote perfunctory comments that nonetheless expressed appreciation for the weekly routine. Lieutenant Isaac Bangs often noted that he was "disirous to attend Pulick Worship" while in the army. Others gave far more enthusiastic and theologically rich accolades on Sundays. Recalling the preaching that he had heard one Sunday, one private exclaimed that he was "filed with wonder at the goodness of God...And I was filed with Anchous Desires After Holiness And I Resolved Afresh to live and Devote my self more strictly to Gods service." This soldiers response at once expressed his joy in the weekly routine and showed how it could encourage and sustain him in his military post. This acted as a ritual rededication to his "duty," as he called it. Even short of such a dramatic recommitment to the cause, the weekly routine provided many sustaining and practical benefits for various troops. For example, once soldier wrote of how he benefitted from this consistent day more practically, as when he was relieved to hear a sermon "from hebrews 4.9" that assured him that "the[re] remaineth a rest for the People of god." The subjective importance that men placed on this day benefitted many of them differently. Some it gave a sense of peace, and others a fresh sense of zeal for their cause. Still others were simply glad to be reassured of divine

---

of Benjamin Gilbert in Massachusetts and New York, ed. Rebecca D. Symmes (Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1980), 31. Gilbert's wartime letters were also published as Benjamin Gilbert, *Winding Down: The Revolutionary War Letters of Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert of Massachusetts, 1780-1783* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). Simeon Lyman, "Journal of Simeon Lyman of Sharon Aug. 10 to Dec. 28, 1775," Providence College Digital Commons (1879), 114; Entry for 15 August 1775 in Nathaniel Ober, "MHS Collections Online: Nathaniel Ober Diary, 15 May – 3 September 1775, with accounts and notes, 1776-1781," MHS; Martin, *Ordinary Courage,* 67; Entry for 2 June 1776 in "The James McMichael Journal."

protection each week. Whatever the subjective source of the benefit was, many soldiers clung to this comfort throughout their tenure in the war.[16]

Some soldiers were more committed to observing this religious day in the army even more than they had been in civilian life. Private Nahum Parker of Massachusetts kept a detailed diary of his three years in the army from 1777 through 1780. During the first year of his enlistment, he recorded attending church meetings inconsistently, but by April of 1778 he was fixed in the religious routine. Parker filled a majority of his Sunday diary entries with a simple: "I went to meting." Occasionally he opined on the text or preacher that he heard. The consistency with which Parker kept these routines seemed to be greater while in the service than when he spent time at home. Many times, in the diary, while he was away from camp, he noted on Sunday that "I staid at home." Parker's experience was not unusual. The religious discipline that was part of the military life seemed to be more consistent than many of these soldiers had in civilian life. This elevated importance of religious routines was especially noticeable in soldiers who endured hardships. Amos Farnsworth began his diary recording going to service each. However, after receiving a "bawl going through a little below my Elbow breaking the little shel Bone" and being out of service for two months, he began to record each Sunday as the "Lords Day." The change in language in his diary was a small indication of the heightened sense of importance that day took on for him.[17]

---

[16] Bangs, "Isaac Bangs Journal,"44; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 79-80; Entry for 30 April 1775 in Willard, A journal from Day to Day, MHS.

[17] Nahum Parker's Diary, S11200, RWPA; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 84. For other examples of soldiers whose diaries indicate an increased participation in weekly church meetings, see Caleb Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary May 5, 1775- May 30, 1776,*

The importance that soldiers attached to this weekly routine was also evident when they were precluded from observing it. Bitter that he could not worship one Sunday because of guard duty, Nahum Parker lamented that while others were "worshipping God here I am doing my Duty...God forgive [me]." Similarly, when combat or campaigning prevented worship, many soldiers took note of their felt loss. Samuel Haws, who had consistently attended worship on Sundays, even if that meant traveling miles by foot to do so, quipped that the famous British assault on Bunker Hill on a Sunday, 17 June 1775 made it feel "more Like the Kings birth day [typically celebrated with cannonades] than Sunday." Many southern soldiers felt the same way. Militiaman Lewis Field of South Carolina recalled how his fellow soldier "Mr. Butts" was "a religious man and anxious to observe the Sabbath" during their time of imprisonment. Even inadequate reverence of the Sabbath irritated private Thomas Foster who was finally relieved that "this is the first Saboth that hath had any [appearance] of Saboth for som time with us in the army." Examples of soldiers being upset at missing a worship service indicate that they attached a value to this routine beyond martial utility. It was a routine they expected and one that was helpful to them.[18]

---

ed. Lothrop Withington (Newburyport: William H. Huse & Company, 1881), 5-18; Ezra Tilden Diary, MHS; Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier,* 203-21.

[18] Nahum Parker's Diary, S11200, RWPA; Lyon and Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers, 1758-1775*, 67; Lewis Fields, S30413, RWPA. There is much evidence, even in the southern department, that soldiers worked to gather weekly for worship even while in captivity. The success of doing so was limited, however, especially among the rank and file. Often soldiers were forced to go to British Anglican services instead, see Richard H. Tomczak, "A Number of the Most Respectable Gentlemen": Civilian Prisoners of War and Social Status in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1780-1782," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 116, no. 3 (July 2015): 209. Entry for 16 March 1783 in Thomas Foster, "Huntington Digital Library: Thos. Foster his Book, 1779-1785," HLA.

The reality that soldiers were in the middle of a war also sometimes precluded them from worshipping, a fact that many soldiers did not take lightly. Frequently soldiers were attacked or attacking on a Sunday when they would otherwise be in church. Many famous battles occurred on a Sunday, including Washington's attack on Monmouth and the beginning of General Howe's assault on Manhattan Island at Kips Bay. According to Private Joseph Plumb Martin, the many assaults on a Sunday were not coincidental but purposeful. He claimed that the British were "always employed about their deviltry" on a Sunday because it was then that "they had the prayers of the church." Another soldier made the same critique of General Gage, when he claimed that such assaults were "like the rest of your Sabbath day enterprises," in other words, not what they should be. These frequent Sunday missions bothered Private Caleb Haskell when he had to stand guard to fight at Chelsea, "which detained us from public worship." Soldiers could not avoid the exigencies of warfare. Despite their desire for their Sunday routine, they were often precluded from keeping it by British assaults or orders from their own officers to be on duty at that time. It seemed to be a continuing point of contention between the soldiers and the British.[19]

Private John Jenks in June of 1775 recorded a vivid military experience that he had that caused him to miss worship. Jenks had spent two days both preparing for and then fighting in the Battle of Bunker Hill. On 16th of June, he spent the evening digging an "entrench" on Bunker Hill." The very next day he witnessed how the British "set Charleston on fire" and landed their boats on shore to "attack our people." This was a

[19] Martin, *Ordinary Courage,* 23-4; Craft, "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," 56; Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 6.

shocking and "bloody battle" that Jenks had to go through. The very next day was a Sunday, piously marked in Jenks' diary as "DD." Rather than peaceful worship as Jenks had hoped for, there was an "alarm of fire at Marblehead just as [the] meeting began" which "broke up" the service and forced the troops go attend to the fire. Jenks' clearly disappointed entry about the exigencies of the war causing him to miss the Sunday service he was so accustomed to was finally alleviated when at the end of the day he and his fellow troops "return'd by the ferry at mr. hopkins meeting." While the toll of Bunker Hill is well known in terms of its casualties and damage to the city of Charleston, for at least Private John Jenks, the cost also included an unwelcome blow to his cherished spiritual routines.[20]

Even when fighting did not directly disrupt the nature of the church, it did shade its character to some degree. Because battle was always a possibility, even on a Sunday, soldiers had to be ready to fight at a moment's notice. Thus, soldiers worshipped armed and ready to march, a sight that some found unsettling. Private Daniel McCurtin described this feeling after he marched to the Dorchester meeting house where he heard a "fine sermon." However, he thought it "strange...when i could see nothing else but men loaded with the ministers of death, going to hear God's word; every company had their whifers and drums, and marched into the House of God under arms." Although carrying guns to church would have been somewhat commonplace in colonial society, seeing all the worshippers carrying arms and ready to march out to battle would have been a new

[20] Entry for 16-8 June 1776 in Jenks, John Jenks Diary, MHS.

experience. The routine of religious worship on a Sunday certainly aided many soldiers during the war, but it was also greatly influenced by the war itself.[21]

It was not only battling that precluded troops from worshipping, but also captivity. Many soldiers were taken for months at a time into British captivity and were left to their own devices as far as spiritual routines went. Although it varied in different times and contexts, many simply went without. Connecticut Private William Slade was one of the first American prisoners to be kept in a British prison ship called the *Grosvenor* and one of the deprivations he mentioned in his diary was this lack of a Sabbath day. He was kept in dire circumstances, dealing with deadly lack of hygiene and food. It is amazing to note that in this extreme context Slade even noticed what day it was let alone how people were behaving on it. The first Sunday he spent in this confinement he admitted that "Such a Sabbath I never saw. We spent it in sorrow and hunger, having no mercy showed." Here again, Slade's comment seems to both express concern about the Sabbath, but also a critique of the British for not honoring it as he felt they should. His diary was filled with examples of such cruel treatment, but Slade seemed particularly dismayed at the fact that even on a Sunday the prisoners had no worship and were showed no mercy by their British captors. The Sunday routine was deeply ingrained into him to the point that he longed for it as a means of coping with his imprisonment.[22]

---

[21] Thomas Balch, ed., *Papers Relating Chiefly to the Maryland Line During the Revolution* (Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins Printers, 1857), 16.

[22] Danske Dandridge, *American Prisoners of the Revolution* (Charlottesville: Michie Company Printers, 1911), 495. Much has been written about captive of war and the treatment of prisoners during the Revolution. At the time there was an intense debate, brought about by Enlightenment ideals, regarding the treatment of prisoners of war. Despite the intensity of that debate, the right of prisoners to worship was seemingly not discussed or acknowledged. For a recent study on the treat of prisoners of war during the

The importance of this routine day in soldiers' minds endured long after the war. Even decades later, soldiers organized their wartime memories around different Sabbath days. Many soldiers' pension applications used Sunday as a marker for battles that they fought in. The routine was so grounded into them that they naturally remembered various battles in relation to this day. When trying to convince a provincial justice that he had in fact fought in the war, South Carolina veteran James Gillham swore that he saw Colonel Neel die in a battle that was "fought on the Sabbath Day" and that "the next Sabbath Day this applicant was in the Battle of the Hanging Rock." Similarly, veteran Roberto Knox did not know the precise date of the skirmish that he engaged in, but filled in the details that "we marched to a place called Rocky Mount in Camden district and on a Sabbath morning had a skirmish with a British party and then marched across Catawba River and on the next Sabbath morning we had another battle at the Hanging Rock." Their weekly Sabbath was a vital element in soldiers structuring their wartime experience and even in keeping the memories straight of when and how they were involved in the war.[23]

This Sunday routine, then, was an essential part of sustaining soldiers during the war. Although revolutionary leaders moved away from the importance of the Sabbath ritual during the war, the subjective importance of it to many soldiers endured. The frequency and consistency of such positive reflections on worship services by soldiers

---

Revolution, see T. Cole Jones, *Captives of Liberty: Prisoners of War and the Politics of Vengeance in the American Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020).

[23] Jacob Gillham, S3397, RWPA; Robert Knox, W26190, RWPA. Many soldiers used the Sabbath as a memory marker in this way. See also Edward Doyle, S32216, RWPA; John Gaston, W30007, RWPA.

indicates that this Sunday worship service was a formative part of their military experience and an aid to their enduring it. Indeed, the war for many of the soldiers acted as a catalyst toward more consistency and devotion in their religious practices. The weekly Sabbath observance was the only observable pattern and consistency amid the chaotic days of a soldiers' diary; this was a literary indication of how this day provided stability for these soldiers. More than that, to these soldiers, a weekly Sabbath was how they organized their week, provided themselves with a sense of stability, and reassured themselves of divine protection.

The Sabbath was not the only religious routine that was pushed from the top down in the army. Officers and civilian leaders also mandated fast days throughout the war. Here again, however, soldiers' responses to the fast days were different from the intention of those pushing them. Religious fast days meant a great deal for the political agendas of the revolutionary leaders but had little sustaining power for the average soldier. Fast days were periodically proclaimed by the Continental Congress, ostensibly to implore Providence to further their revolutionary cause. While these fast days had been staples of colonial life going back centuries, their significance during the imperial crisis and the war took on novel nuances and political overtones. Historians have interpreted the motives behind these fast days along the spectrum between sincere religious concern for Providence and the people to a political move calculated to unify the otherwise divided colonies. These declarations seemed to achieve two goals simultaneously for the Congress. First, they declared to themselves and others that their cause was just before God. As discussed earlier, such theological sanction meant a lot in the eighteenth century. Second, they certainly had the political purpose of unifying the colonies against a

common enemy. Fast days were perfect for this because they were denominationally neutral and practiced by nearly all the religious sects present in the colonies at the time.[24]

Despite these intended benefits of fast days, however, soldiers did not draw much spiritual motivation and fortitude from them. Indeed, fast days made a remarkably small impression on soldiers during the war. They were declared at strategic times, but, to many soldiers, fast day declarations could appear random. Unlike sermons which were always on the same day each week, fast days were announced to soldiers haphazardly on any given day. This randomness and soldiers' lack of enthusiasm about them comes through in their diaries. Soldiers like private Ammi White, simply wrote "fast," without any accompanying information about its importance or why they were doing it. These isolated entries stand out especially in a soldier's diary who wrote descriptively about a good sermon he had heard just five days prior. Similarly, Private Obadiah Brown noted a fast day in his wartime diary but neglected to write any description of it in favor of writing about his positive response to the "fine Sermons" he had heard that day.[25]

---

[24] The literature on fast days in the colonies is extensive. For works that emphasize a genuine religious concern on the part of Congress in declaring these fast days, see Derek H. Davis, *Religion and the Continental Congress, 1774-1789: Contributions to Original Intent* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); James H. Hutson, *Religion and the Founding of the American Republic* (Washington: Library of Congress, 1998). For an excellent treatment of the political intentions behind fast days see, McBride, *Pulpit and Nation,* 19-37; Guyatt, *Providence and the Invention of the United States,* 116-21. The conclusion that I have reached after analysis of the soldiers' writings is quite close to McBride's. The Congress had clear political intentions (although sincere religious intentions are not necessarily excluded from all members) and the fast days had little religious importance for soldiers. Fast days themselves had little spiritual power for soldiers, although they did pick up on their clear political intentions of unifying the colonies.

[25] Ammi White's diary was submitted with his pension application, entries 12 & 17 May 1776 in White, N18402, RWPA; Entry for 8 August 1776 in Brown, "Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777," MHS. For more examples of soldiers who simply noted fast days

Often soldiers simply wrote about how they heard a sermon on a fast day without anything specifically about the fast. It seems that they clung onto the spiritual routine that they knew and appreciated, the sermon, and were left unimpressed by the ritual of fasting altogether. A typical entry about a fast day was that of private Elijah Fisher who wrote on 6 May 1779 that "There was a farst ordered by Congress" and that a "Sermon [was] Preached." Here was nothing about why congress had ordered the fast day and also nothing about the spiritual benefit to him of fasting. Indeed, there was never even an acknowledgment that he participated in the fasting at all. Private Nahum Parker, typically quite expressive of his religious sentiments, had little to say about a fast day he experienced other than it was "a day of fasting and prayers." One is hard pressed to find any statements about the importance or relevance of religious fasts made by the soldiers. For religious soldiers, the fast days provided little, if any, fortitude to aid their duty as a soldier and they found little in them.[26]

It is important to note, however, that soldiers did seem to imbibe the intended political purpose of the fasts, namely, that they united the colonies. Fast days had the necessary political purpose of uniting the different colonies into a single movement. It gave them religious language that they could cloak their common cause in that gave it broad appeal. Soldiers did seem to indicate that they imbibed this purpose of the fast days, at least to some extent. It seemed to make an impression on many of the soldiers

---

without a significant comment, see entry for 16 July 1775 in Ober, "Nathaniel Ober Diary," MHS; Storrs, "Connecticut Farmers at Bunker Hill," 78; Entry for 1 May 1777 in Nahum Parker's Diary, S11200, RWPA; Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 8.

[26] Fisher, Journal while in the War, 12; Entry for 1 May 1777 in Nahum Parker's Diary, S11200, RWPA.

that the fast days were observed by all the colonies simultaneously. Private Henry Sewall was struck that the "Fast [was] through the provinces." These were not merely provincial fasts, as had been common previously in the colonies. It seems these fast days did have this broadening effect on soldiers as they started to think of these fast days as continent-wide events. Private John Jenks, a provincial from Connecticut, knew that what had been announced to him was not parochial, but a "Continental fast." Another private likewise recognized a fast that was decreed not from his provincial assembly, but "appointed by the Continental congress." Soldiers may not have imbibed much religiously from these fasts, but they did get the politically intended emphasis of fasts as unifying otherwise divided colonies.[27]

Perhaps the simplest explanation as to why fast days were such a small part of soldiers' experiential piety was that they were already underfed. Eating even less to spend the day in prayer was unlikely to breed anything but resentment. Soldiers were glad when Providence provided them with food but were less eager when that same Providence asked them to forgo the little that they had. The religious elements of the fast days did not provide the soldiers with much comfort amid their wartime struggles. The experiential relevance of this religious routine was lacking and therefore it took up little of the soldiers' thoughts and energy. Their generally lackluster reaction to fast days furthers our understanding of the role of religion for soldiers during the war as one of survival and coping. When particular religious routines did not aid them toward those ends, they did not cling to them.

---

[27] Entry for 5 May 1776 in Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS; Entry for 20 July 1776 in Jenks, John Jenks Diary, MHS; Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary*, 8.

Far more important to religious soldiers than fast days were their daily prayer meetings. About one-third of men wrote about their experiences with prayer and prayer meetings. These prayer meetings happened in ordinary camp circumstances each morning and evening at six. Soldiers were awakened by drums and called to prayer, after which they would hear general orders for the day read. Assuming the evening was peaceful, soldiers were called again together for a time of prayer in the evening. The setting for these prayer meetings varied. While encamped at Cambridge, Amos Farnsworth noted that they gathered for prayers at the "meeting hous" and the "Common" at different times. Samuel Bixby wrote that often he and his fellow troops would "march to Col's quarters and attended prayers." Regardless of where the gathering took place, soldiers did seem to assume similar bodily positions for prayer. One day upon arrival to prayers, Bixby noted that the ground was wet, and thus the soldiers "stood with our hats on," which implied that typically they knelt with their hats off. These were not always small meetings. Entire regiments often prayed together; Reverend William Emerson claimed he had a prayer meeting with near seven hundred soldiers in it. Prayer meetings were consistent across the colonies. One Pennsylvania lieutenant documented that his troops "had Prayers now every evening." Arthur Fairies of South Carolina noted that a "Presbyterian Minister belong[ing] to the North Army" had come to lead them in prayer. Even Virginia orderly books included statements like "The Troops in Camp to attend prayers every morning that a Minister or Chaplain Attend." Across the colonies, prayer meetings were a regular part of military life.[28]

[28] Bixby, *The Diary of Samuel Bixby*, 54; Beatty, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General Sullivan*, 20; Brent Tarter, ed., "The Orderly Book of the Second Virginia

These prayer meetings were neatly integrated into their other military duties. When times were peaceful, soldiers wrote about attending these prayer meetings as a routine part of their military life. Private Ebenezer Wild wrote how one morning he and all his "Brigade Went to prayers." Immediately after they were dismissed from prayers, he mounted up and went to his "Redoubt Guard" duty. As they were side by side in soldiers life and minds so they mutually reinforced one another. They were a routine part of military life that soldiers had become used to and indeed to expect as a pattern of their life.[29]

Soldiers described a myriad of benefits from these meetings. Many were strictly religious, as one soldier wrote: "in the morning I Etended prayers And at night: i hope that I Git good in this Day of grace." Most however, demonstrated the importance of these meetings to their wartime experience without explicit comment. Soldiers often went to these prayer meetings as the "usual" pattern of life that they experienced. One anonymous diarist from 1775 recorded that he "attended prayers" nearly every day of April and May that year. As soldiers ordered their weeks around the Sabbath, so they seemed to structure their days around these constant prayer meetings. These meetings no doubt helped to aid martial discipline and to keep bored troops from causing the trouble to which they were all too prone. Yet, soldiers invested this prayer ritual with more

---

Regiment: September 27, 1775-April 15, 1776," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 85, no. 2 (April 1977): 161.

[29] Entry for 20 September 1776 in Ebenezer Wild, Ebenezer Wild Diaries, MHS.

meaning, and it held an important place in their wartime experience. This routinized prayer life gave many soldiers "Considerabel calm."[30]

Gathering for prayer was commonplace before major battles or undertakings. Before troops were sent to occupy Breeds Hill in June of 1775, they gathered on the Cambridge commons for prayers and benedictions from their chaplain. Such prayer gatherings reassured soldiers of divine sanction on their actions and gave them a modicum sense of control over the events they were about to undertake. One chaplain from North Carolina, recalled how before attacking the Cherokee in the Carolina Backcountry, he gathered the troops "around a large tree and had prayers before they attacked an Indian town." This had some effect in assuring the troops that the "Lord is with us." Soldiers took note when one of their commanding officers prayed for them and for their well-being. While encamped at St. John's during the March to Quebec, Private Simon Fobes was struck that in the absence of their chaplain Colonel Arnold took it upon himself to gather the troops and lead them in prayer. The scene was quite memorable for Fobes, as it was "the only time I ever heard him attempt to pray." Before storming the British fortress in Quebec, one soldier emphatically summarized the prayer of the troops by exclaiming "The blessings of Heaven attend the enterprise." A Rhode Island Captain

[30] Emerson, *Diaries,* 75; Fairies, Journal of 1776, 25; Bixby, *The Diary of Samuel Bixby*, 64; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 80-1. For a sampling of other soldiers who commented on routine prayer meetings, see Beatty, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General Sullivan,* 6; Entry for 13 April 1775 in Willard, MHS; "Revolutionary War Journal Kept by Phineas Ingalls of Andover, Mass., April 19, 1775- December 8, 1776," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections,* Vol. 53 (Salem: Essex Insitute, 1917), 82-3; Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 5,7; Simeon Lyman, "Journal of Simeon Lyman of Sharon Aug. 10 to Dec. 28, 1775," Providence College Digital Commons (1879), 121; Entry for 16 June 1775 in Thomas Boynton, "MHS Collections Online: Thomas Boynton Journal, 19 April- 26 August 1775," MHS.

once took the occasion while praying before battle to reassure his men that he himself was under a higher power. He claimed he answered to "his merciful Creator, for the lives of his fellow soldiers, in rashly exposing them to ye merciless rage of their common enemy." Praying before battles, then, was a vital part of soldiers' wartime experience. It, first and foremost, affirmed to the soldiers' divine sanction on the actions they were about to take and worked to convince them that God would offer his aid and protection, no small part of mental preparation for the religious soldier.[31]

At times, troops even gathered to weaponize prayer. Partway through the deadly journey to Quebec, Lieutenant-Colonel Roger Enos defected in the face of the grueling winter. He turned back from the march, taking nearly half of the army's supplies and one-third of its troops with him. For the abandoned soldiers, this was treachery beyond forgiveness. Upon hearing the news, troops gathered to make "a General Prayer" that these men and their commander "might die by the way, or meet with some disaster." Troops were convinced of the rectitude of their prayer to condemn the deserters in a manner "Equal to the Cowardly dastardly and unfriendly Spirit they discover'd in returning Back without orders." Indeed, they wondered how those "professing christianity, should prove so ill-disposed toward their fellow-brethren and soldiers." God judged the cowardly and those who took his name in vain, these soldiers were sure of it.

---

[31] Rick Atkinson, *The British are Coming: The War for America, Lexington to Princeton, 1775-1777* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2019), 93; Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 51; David Davis, W6962, RWPA; Kenneth Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 588; Henry Dearborn's diary was reproduced in Stephen Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals and Men of Benedict Arnold's Expedition to Quebec in 1775* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011), 114; Simeon Thayer, *The Invasion of Canada in 1775: Including the Journal of Simeon Thayer* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony & Co., Printers, 1867), 27.

On this occasion they were eager to be instrumental in executing that justice through structured prayer. Episodes like this demonstrate the soldiers' confidence in the efficacy of such prayer meetings. There was no order to hold such meetings and soldiers clearly felt that doing so was a significant means of punishing those whom they felt had betrayed them.[32]

To the routinized prayers of the whole regiment, soldiers added personal prayers of their own at strategic times. Soldiers' diaries are filled with private and personal prayers that they made quietly by themselves or simply just wrote in their diary. "Retired alone in the morning" Amos Farnsworth penned, "for Secret Prayer." Many soldiers proved to be quite zealous and committed to the practice. One day Farnsworth rejoiced that "God enabled me to wat on him three or fore times today in Secret Blesed be God for Such A Ceson." Even while marching great distances from home, Private Josiah Atkins was sure to pray "7 times a day...before thee, for greater mercies, even spiritual ones, which relate to my superior part, my immortal soul!" Most of these personal prayers were not disconnected or abstracted from the soldiers' context of war but were occasioned by it. Just before marching into battle, Private Ezra Tilden "beg'd of god ye pardon of all my sins for Christ's sake & beg'd also for his grace to enable me for ye future if I liv'd to Live more to his glory yn I had hitherto done...I put up many a petition to ye almighty & short ejaculatory prayers for myself & family." Soldiers like Tilden spontaneously prayed as events in the war called for. They often knew that they faced great danger in upcoming battles and fell back on their religious routines to attempt to control their fate or at least

[32] Darley, *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition,* 137; Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 93; Thayer, *The Invasion of Canada in 1775,* 257.

resign themselves to it. The demands of piety for these soldiers were not limited to corporate and required settings but obliged each individual soldier to cultivate these practices on their own.[33]

The public image of the soldiers' private prayers became highly politicized at the time of the Revolution. Political leaders certainly wanted the perception of a pious army trotting through the colonies; it was good to gain public trust for the standing army about which so many republicans were weary. And yet, they wanted a religious army in a particular way. They wanted pious soldiers whose religion sanctified the patriot cause and encouraged sacrifice for it. They were not interested in advertising mundane prayers for blessing and protection as they were publishing prayers for liberty and republicanism. One fiery army chaplain Abiel Leonard demonstrated this national ideal of the properly religious soldier when he drafted and published *A Prayer Composed for The Benefit of The Soldiery.* This prescription for prayer was replete with political orthodoxies like praying that "the inhabitants of Great-Britain my arise and vindicate their liberties." Leonard further wished for soldiers to pray that "the liberties of America be established upon a firmer foundation than ever; and she become the excellency of the whole earth, and the joy of many generations!" Statements like this surely appealed to newspapers and leaders of the army but had little experiential relevance for the religious soldier.[34]

---

[33] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 79, 81; Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 54; Ezra Tilden's Diary, 142, MHS.

[34] Abiel Leonard, *A Prayer Composed for the Benefit of the Soldiery* (Cambridge, 1775), 1.

When troops wrote their personal prayers, they largely ignored political and millennial ideas and instead emphasized themes of preservation and blessing, much like how they experienced their notions of Providence. Petitions of "oh yt I might be preserved from sickness" or "oh God do not Leve and forsake me" are far more representative of the content of a typical soldier's prayers than what was prescribed for their prayer life by ministers. While their personal prayers may have been extended in length or times, the notes they made about them in their diaries were often short. When dreading guard duty and being short on food, Private Nahum Parker sent up a desperate "God save me" before moving on. Soldiers' personal prayers were almost always about self-preservation or relief from the stresses of military life. At least in soldiers' minds, they were an aid in dealing with both.[35]

Religious soldiers also adhered to consistent devotional reading. Army life provided significant amounts of leisure time, some of which soldiers attempted to fill with constructive habits like reading. The Bible was the most frequently referenced and quoted reading material in all the soldiers' letters and diaries. Since the imperial crisis precluded the importation of Bibles from Britain, Congress in September of 1777 ordered the importation of 20,000 Bibles for the benefit of the troops. Soldiers' interactions with the Bible were quite varied. Some seemed to cryptically record references of their reading to track their consistency. Private Phineas Ingalls recorded simple references to what he

[35] Abiel Leonard, *A Prayer Composed for the Benefit of the Soldiery in the American Army* (Cambridge, 1775); Ezra Tilden Diary, 60, MHS; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 82; Entry for 30 September 1780 in Nahum Parker's Diary, S11200, RWPA. For analysis of Leonard's prayer as representing the piety of soldiers and that of the army generally, see Kidd, *God of Liberty,* 119-20 and Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War,* 170-4.

read, like "5 chap. James." Far more frequent were men quoting Bible verses at length that they had heard in a sermon in their diaries. Noting that he had just heard someone preach on Psalm 106, Elijah Fisher quoted the salient verse, "they that sow in teers shall reap in joy." Soldiers' references to Bible verses were almost always written after the fact, meaning that they likely had a Bible in hand when they later cited and quoted the relevant verses.[36]

Private Henry Sewall frequently documented his devotional reading and its importance to him. Sewall spent what was apparently a very cold month of March in 1780 reading devotional literature while stationed at the Fishkill barracks near Valley Forge. While undergoing the difficulties of a winter in the army, Sewall had the opportunity to visit a Mr. Loudon and get some "reading from his library." To show his thanks, he gave the library owner "40 dollars." The contents of the books that Sewall obtained can be inferred from comments about what he was reading that surrounded this event. Alongside books of satire and history, Sewall purchased devotional literature. He mentioned multiple times reading "Hervey's meditations on a flower garden." In it, Rev. James Hervey encouraged meditations based on the everyday experiences, like walking through a garden. It exhorted the reader to "heighten the melody of tuneful tribes, by adding the rational strains of devotion. Let him improve the fragrant observations of

[36] Bolton, *The Private Soldier,* 159; Ingalls, Revolutionary War Journal, 84; Fisher, Journal while in the War, 12. Some more soldiers who quote Bible verses and texts include: James Stevens, "The Revolutionary Journal of James Stevens of Andover, Mass.," in *Essex Institute Historical Collections,* Vol. 48 (Salem: Essex Institute, 1912); How, Diary of David How, 5, 13, 29; Greenman, *Diary of a Common Soldier,* 216, 221; Beatty, *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General Sullivan,* 20; Entries for 19 May 1776- 25 December 1779 in Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary"; Entry for 8 August 1776 in Brown, "Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777," MHS.

nature by mingling with the rising odours the more refined breath of praise." Sewall frequently resorted to such devotional and hagiographic reading as a means of comfort during his camp life in the military.[37]

The efficacy of consistent devotional reading to sustain soldiers was evident in their attempts to maintain it even amid trial. Being stripped of all his other religious routines, Lieutenant Jabez Fitch clung to reading the Bible during his time in British captivity. Fitch surrendered himself to the British in August of 1776 at the Battle of Long Island. He was surrounded by a party of Regulars and "gave up my Arms" and was glad to find the British "Treated me with Humanity." He was taken aboard the prison ship, the *Mentor*, to begin his year and a half long captivity. While captive, Fitch had no access to the ordinary religious routines that accompanied Continental troops and thus endeavored whenever he could to assure himself that he was at least reading devotional works. He took into captivity only, "two Leves of an old Bible' which he "Read Successively several Days." On three separate occasions Fitch asked others to lend him their Bibles so that he could read, and he diligently recorded the portions of the Bible that he did. His clinging to his last available religious routine clearly sustained him in a difficult time of captivity in which he often lamented that "I have not forgot the Melancholy Consideration, that I am yet a Prisoner, & that the time of my Release Altogether unknown." When strangers and even enemies afforded him the opportunity to maintain his routine devotional reading, he did "Esteem [it] a very Acceptable favour."[38]

---

[37] Entry for 12 March 1780 in Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS; James Hervey, *The Whole Works of the Rev. James Hervey* (London: R. Griffin & Co., 1825), 94-5.

[38] Jabez Fitch, *The New-York Diary of Lieutenant Jabez Fitch*, reprint, ed. W. H. W. Sabine (New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1971), 31-7, 54, 62. Not all

Soldiers seemed to prefer devotional reading to political pamphlets. One is hard pressed to find references to *Common Sense* or other popular political texts. On the contrary, soldiers preferred reading literature that reinforced their religious experience during the war, rather than books that gave them abstract political ideals to fight for. Most common were references to renowned English theologians like George Whitefield or John Flavel. One soldier noted that he spent an entire morning "in reading Mr. Whitfields Journal, with sontring hours in my bunk." Other soldiers referenced reading more obscure religious texts like Flavius Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian. Works discovered in the library of James Williams, a South Carolina militiaman, were similar in content. In addition to literature written by English and Scottish Calvinists, Williams' library contained many sermons and commentaries on the Bible. These works, though written by different religious sects, share common themes of God working directly in history and blessing his people through hardship, themes at the heart of the soldiers' experiential and routine piety.[39]

British allowed their prisoners the ability to maintain their religious reading, many felt it radicalized them, see Royster, *A Revolutionary People*, 19. For similar strategies to recreate religious routines while in captivity among southern soldiers, see Richard H. Tomczak, "'A Number of the Most Respectable Gentlemen': Civilian Prisoners of War an Social Status in Revolutionary South Carolina, 1780-1782," *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 116, no. 3 (July 2015), 209-10.

[39] Greenman, *Diary of A Common Soldier*, 186; Fitch, *The New-York Diary*, 62; Gilbert, *A Citizen-Soldiers*, 40; Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary*, 199-209; Henry Sewall went through several volumes of sermons during his service, see Entries for 12-27 March 1780 in Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS. Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). These reading patterns of soldiers cast doubts on arguments predicated on revolutionaries being motivated by an intellectual framework created by reading political pamphlets coming out of the English Civil Wars.

Soldiers also reinforced their religious experience by transcribing and sometimes writing poetry, often religious. Rufus Lincoln of Massachusetts copied poems that related to various topics ranging from thanksgiving to heaven and hell. He even copied Phyllis Wheatley's poem on being brought to "Americk." Private Elisha Stevens likewise transcribed a poem entitled "Wiggelsworth Dream" into his diary. This pietistic poem, supposedly written by puritan minister Michael Wiggelsworth in the seventeenth century, focused on themes of sin, judgement, and redemption. Stevens ended his copying of this poem with a reminder to himself: "I fell Down on my knees as Other sinners may/ [hoping?] to fit my self against Judgment Day."[40]

Other soldiers were more creative and wrote their own poems. When Ezra Tilden contracted smallpox and was so sick that he could not keep up his breeches, he wrote an elegant, rhythmic poem to express his religious sentiments: "The Lord forever praised be, That he has done such things for me: That he's appeared for me wn sick, and granted me salvation quick." His poem reinforced fundamental themes of the soldiers' worldview and especially exalted his God as a healer and physician. Tilden went on to express his religious response as one of thanksgiving: "Long may I Live to shew his praise And bless & praise him all my days." The most prolific poet among the soldiers was perhaps James McMichael of Pennsylvania. Like Tilden, McMichael's religious poetry rehearsed themes of salvation and preservation during hardships in battle. He took several occasions during his time of service to poetically express these themes. "Kind providence

[40] Rufus Lincoln, *The Papers of Captain Rufus Lincoln of Wareham, Mass.*, reprint, ed. James Minor Lincoln (New York: New York Times & Arno, 1971), 60, 80, 87, 94; Elisha Stevens, *Fragments of Memoranda Written by him in the War of the Revolution* (Meriden: Privately published, 1893).

was lately to me good / By preserving me in Battle near the Wood," reflected McMichaels.[41]

One notable theme in the poetry written or recorded by soldiers was its other worldliness. Scholars of soldiers in modern wars have concluded that emphasis on an otherworldly faith was a key part of allowing religious soldiers to cope with war. This strategy was also found in these Revolutionary War soldiers. Through song and poem soldiers seemed to attempt to escape the dangers and deprivations of their immediate circumstances by meditating on a future, heavenly reality. After receiving orders to prepare and expect "an attack [the] next Day," McMichael sought escape via poetry: "Here I began to meditate / And think upon a future state." In a similar instance, Ezra Tilden waxed poetically about how he had dreamed himself out of the hardships of war and into "Conversing wth ye angelic hosts" and hoped to never "Leave yt delightful Place & ye delightful Compy." By writing religious poetry, soldiers accessed the benefits of escape from the gloom around them.[42]

Singing religious songs also seemed to have been a common religious routine among the troops. Many soldiers' diaries contained lyrics and music to various religious songs. While scholars are fond of citing the incident at the Battle of Springfield, New Jersey, where troops were given a hymnal of Isaac Watts's music and told to use it to

---

[41] Ezra Tilden's Diary, 58, MHS; Entry of 13 September 1777 in "The James McMichael Journal September 12, 1777-December 23, 1777," *Journal of The American Revolution* (March 2018).

[42] For an excellent analysis of the function of an "otherworldly" faith in modern wars, see Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers,* 114-5. Entry of 2 September 1777 in "The James McMichael Journal June 11, 1777-September 11, 1777." Ezra Tilden's Diary, 143, MHS.

load their guns, it's often overlooked that soldiers wrote hymns into their diaries to sing as well. Captain Rufus Lincoln of Massachusetts kept a diary that now reads like it was written by someone wholly uninterested in religion. His day-to-day entries contain no religious musings at all. However, toward the end of his diary he recorded many songs about religious themes, one beginning with the line "My God thy Service well Demand." This was not uncommon in soldiers' diaries. The very first page of Private Ammi White's diary is a copy of the hymn "Aw the Lord arise." These soldiers would have been used to singing religious songs acapella and would have had no trouble doing so while in the service. One soldier copied the entire poem entitled "a dream of a sinner' and toward the end of that part of his diary wrote "Come all soldiers in choris joine." Such singing tended to lift the spirits of downtrodden soldiers during the war.[43]

Alongside all these more conventional religious routines, some soldiers engaged in practices that would not have been sanctioned by their chaplains. During his campaign in the southern theater, Lieutenant William McDowell was shocked to witness "something extraordinary for this army." On May 1, 1782 officers and soldiers drew some rum and "May poles were erected." Maypoles were an English folk celebration that had been severely punished in parts of the colonies for its supposed pagan origins. Undeterred by such pressures, at least some soldiers continued to celebrate May Day with a Maypole. Other soldiers also went beyond the bounds of sanctioned religious routine when they visited fortune tellers during the war. Zuriel Waterman and two fellow soldiers sought out a fortune-telling woman in order to glean some information about the

[43] Rufus Lincoln, *The Papers of Captain Rufus Lincoln* (Wareham: Privately Printed, 1904), 60-1, 80-1; White, N18402, RWPA; Stevens, *Fragments of Memoranda,* 36.

prospects of their future in the war. Like Maypoles, fortune-telling was not only outside the norm, but often explicitly prohibited by law. Apparently, the war provided occasion not just for the entrenchment of conventional religious routines, but even for the practice of transgressive ones.[44]

Soldiers sought through these religious routines a means of maintaining a certain pace of life. So much in the war was unpredictable and outside of their control. There was no consistency in nearly any aspect of their military lives. At a moment's notice they could be told that they had to march out of town or even out of their home colony, something many had never done before. They could go from an entirely peaceful atmosphere to one in which they were being fired at. During this chaos, soldiers clung to consistent religious routines. Soldiers fought the war one week at a time by structuring their thoughts and meditations around weekly worship meetings. They took courage from the sermons that reassured them that God approved of their taking up arms and helped them give thanks for surviving. They adapted their weekly worship to their changing context, often adopting the practices of the local region in which they were stationed. Moreover, they showed remarkable diligence in attending prayer meetings with their fellow troops, usually at the same time each morning and evening, at least while they were camped at Cambridge. Fast days, however, meant little to the already under fed men. To these communal elements of religious routines, soldiers employed their own.

---

[44] William McDowell, "Journal of Lieut. William McDowell of the First Penn'A Regiment, in the Southern Campaign. 1781-1782," in Pennsylvania Archives 2, Vol. 15, 321; Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence*, 3-4. For background on Maypoles in the history of New England, see Michael Zuckerman, "Pilgrims in the Wilderness: Community, Modernity, and the Maypole at Merry Mount," in *New England Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (June 1977), 255-277.

They said and wrote down many prayers for their own preservation and they creatively wrote poetry as a means of comfort and escape from the horrors of war around them. Religious routines intertwined seamlessly with being a soldier for these religious troops and was to them a means of coping with its difficulties.

CHAPTER 3

"KING OF TERRORS": SOLDIERS AND SUFFERING, SICKNESS, AND DEATH

The Engagement was very warm whereby a great many are killed & wounded...A melancholy Scene of Fire & Slaughter.

-William Cheever, Private, Massachusetts

Oh the Groans of the Sick What they undergo I Cant Expres.

-Bayze Wells, Private, Massachusetts

The Revolutionary War was anything but neat and gentlemanly. It was a bloody and chaotic war that brought out a level of brutality from both sides that seemed to shock the colonists. During the engagement at Concord, militiaman Ammi White unhesitatingly rushed a wounded and retreating British regular and drove a hatchet into his skull, sending bone shards into the air and leaving his brains to ooze out of his head. The town chaplain, William Emerson, was a firm supporter of independence, but was quite disgusted and shocked by what he saw. White simply replied that he thought that was what was expected of men in battle. Not far from this incident, two exhausted and dehydrated soldiers fled the hottest part of the battle to relieve themselves with a drink of water from a nearby well. Startled by each other's presence they both fired. The militiaman hit the regular in the stomach and killed him. Before the British soldier died,

he returned fire and shattered the militiaman's wooden flask into hundreds of pieces that lodged themselves into the militiaman's stomach. As onlookers stood helpless at the scene, the young man bled out and died very slowly. Colonists present learned from this first conflict that this would be no mere war of words. It was violent on a level that most of these novice fighters had never experienced. In the face of it, soldiers had to find ways to cope with the experience and to fortify themselves in the face of the myriad forms of suffering, sickness, and death that they were about to endure.[1]

Troops were forced to confront these realities of warfare and deal with them in their own ways. Many turned to drinking both before and after battles as a means of medicating themselves and dulling their natural fears regarding the very real horrors of war. Others simply learned to harden themselves through repeated exposure to battles and killings. This was true of many of the officer class and those who served long enlistments. Still others truly demonized the British and what they were doing to such an extent that, like Ammi Robbins, they thought any violence against them was justified. Based on their diaries, most soldiers used a combination of all these tried-and-true tactics to cope with the most gruesome elements of war. Beyond these, however, it was clear that a significant number of the troops used religion and religious practices to endure the most difficult element of war, namely the prospect of dying. Religion repeatedly popped up in soldiers' diaries when they witnessed something particularly grisly. Whether it was a prayer that the same thing did not happen to them or a cry for fortitude when it did, religion (even in men who were otherwise not particularly religious) seemed to arise

[1] The story of Ammi White drawing blood during the start of the war is recounted in Nathaniel Philbrick, *Bunker Hill: A City, A Siege, A Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 143-5.

when troops faced death. The popular phrase, "no atheists in a foxhole" was not coined until World War II. And to be fair, many soldiers enlisted and died in foxholes who were in fact atheists. However, the phrase caught on among scholars and chaplains of WWII because it did touch on a potent reality. Although less explored, it was the case during the Revolutionary War as well. Many Revolutionary soldiers turn to their religious resources to cope with the horrific experiences they had as troops and to steel themselves in the face of future suffering.[2]

Soldiers encountered death in a variety of ways during the war. The mass death that they witnessed was caused by diverse means. This chapter will examine three ways of seeing death that loomed most prominent in men's writings and examine how they used religious resources to cope with this death. When it came to battlefield deaths, men drew on fatalistic ideas of comrades dying because it was their time. They also drew religious comfort from ideas of an afterlife and hope that witnessing death helped them prepare for their own. Outnumbering battlefield deaths, however, were soldiers who died of sickness. While Continentals raged against the British, smallpox raged against both. Here too, soldiers drew on religious strategies to understand the outbreak of sickness and to cope with the death that it wrought. Importantly, troops used these religious tools alongside the prevailing scientific means of the day to fight the virus. While fewest in number, soldiers also saw choreographed deaths in the form of wartime executions.

---

[2] There are many excellent studies on religion among the soldiers in modern wars. Many of them conclude that soldiers turned to such supernatural ideas and practices as a necessary coping mechanism in the face of the brutality of warfare. See Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, & Vietnam* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 113-7; Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam: Religion and America's Armed Forces in World War II* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), 317-95; S.P. Mackenzie, *Flying Against Fate: Superstition and Allied Aircrews in World War II* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2017).

These were comparatively rare but were perhaps the most dramatic. These deaths were staged to have a religious and moral effect on the troops and often did. Religious men more readily accepted the justness of wartime executions and found them more palatable because they were staged in a way that accorded with their own notions of divine justice. Across all three of these ways of encountering death, soldiers leaned on their religious views to interpret and endure what was going on. Religious troops found their religion to be a major sustaining force in the face of these most gruesome aspects of war.

Of all the hardships that soldiers had to undergo, having to witness their comrades being slaughtered *en masse* on the battlefield was the most challenging. Most of the men who fought were quite young and were wholly unaccustomed to seeing death on such a grand scale. It was an experience like no other to see one's friend dead and bleeding on the ground of a battlefield amid myriads of other dead bodies scattered chaotically. The psychological demands of the military in the face of such traumas were taxing. Troops often surveyed and had to count the number of dead on a battlefield, many of those who died were standing right by their side moments before. Understanding and dealing with this kind of trauma was profoundly challenging. Men wrestled with questions of why them and not me or found the fear and shock of thinking about the next battle to be overwhelming. One prominent means of coping with the deaths around them on the battlefield was to turn to religion. Religion gave many Revolutionary War soldiers a framework for interpreting the death they witnessed and means of fortitude in the face of their own likely death.

Even by modern standards the Revolutionary War was a bloody one. The war dragged more than 100,000 men into the Continental army and tens of thousands more

into various militia regiments that popped up throughout the country. This was a substantial proportion of the working age men in colonies at that time who were forced to deal with the traumas of war. The total death toll of the war was difficult to calculate with precision, but it was over 25,000 dead and more than 9,000 missing or wounded. That amounts to one in sixteen men of military age dead, while that figure for the Civil War was one in ten and one in seventy-five for WWII. Proportionally, this makes the Revolutionary War the second bloodiest war in American history. For a young nation and the young population that endured this event, it was a bloody and trying ordeal.[3]

Death on the battlefield during the Revolutionary War was particularly grueling and traumatic because of the weapons utilized. The weapons by today's standards were not particularly accurate or powerful, resulting in a cruel and slow death. Muskets were the primary weapon. They launched a heavy lead ball of roughly 0.7-inch diameter that caused great devastation upon impact. If a soldier took one of these to the stomach, they were almost sure to bleed out slowly and die. When these balls hit any part of you, they were sure to inflict pain and often lifelong injury. Veterans of the war recalled horrible injuries from musket balls that kept them infirm for decades. Veteran of South Carolina David Burkhalter lamented decades after the war that he "received a Desperate wound by a Ball through my own arm in the Joint of my Elbow Which has Greatly Disabled me for Labor." Perhaps even more traumatic deaths occurred from cannon fire. Cannons hurled solid lead balls into a formation of marching troops that weighed somewhere between six and twenty-four pounds. The physical and psychological toll of marching into cannonball fire was overwhelming. Numerous soldiers in formation were often killed by the same

[3] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 558-9.

cannonball. After the cannonball hit the ground it skidded along at devastating speed for hundreds of meters, often leading to men losing their legs.[4]

It was not long into the eight-year war that soldiers were graphically exposed to the effect of British cannonballs. On 16 June 1775, a number of young and optimistic New England recruits joined their commander Colonel William Prescott in a mission to fortify Bunker Hill in an attempt to hem the British in at Boston. After a prayer together on the Cambridge Commons, these troops set out to begin their laborious task of fortifying that hill. It was not long into the process when the British discovered them and began to bombard their position with cannon fire from nearby ships that surrounded Charlestown. The young men were taken aback by the noise of the cannons and were visibly shaken to the point that it held back their work. The officers, seeing their troops this way, attempted to persuade them that despite their great noise, the cannonballs were inaccurate and thus were not to be feared. Not long after this reassurance, a fortuitous cannonball came blasting into the ranks of working soldiers and took off the head of Private Asa Pollard. This shook the onlookers to their core. They froze up to the point where they could not work anymore. Colonel Prescott, hoping to remedy the situation of his petrified troops, jumped up onto the parapet and commanded them to get back to digging. After some time, these theatrics seemed to work, and the soldiers resumed their previous tasks. Pollard's head was neither the first nor would it be the last casualty of a British cannonball, and the soldiers knew it.[5]

---

[4] David Burckhalter, Accounts Audited of Claims Growing Out of the Revolution, File No. SC1007, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, transcription by Will Graves accessed through http://revwarapps.org/sc1007.pdf (hereafter these transcriptions will be cited as SCAR).

[5] Philbrick, *Bunker Hill*, 201.

Despite the destruction wrought by the musket or the cannonball, troops especially feared British bayonets. Bayonets were a terrifying instrument of death. They were ubiquitous in the British line, to the point where some historians have wondered if more soldiers died from bayonet wounds than musket balls. To die by bayonet was often slow and always painful. Seventeen inches in length and triangular, the British used a bayonet to gore their target and leave a three-sided wound in the victim that caused them to simply bleed out and die. No descriptions of wartime injuries were more terrifying than those caused by the dreaded bayonet. Virginia veteran Ezra Roberts was "cut over the eye boyneted in the shoulder and lay on it or in his blood…[he] struggled out of his blood and also [was] bayoneted in the body." These wounds eventually led to his death months later. Men sometimes took months to recover from bayonet wounds. Ambrose Lewis recalled how he received four bayonet wounds. He took two jabs in the left arm and two in the left chest area, which thankfully missed his heart but apparently damaged his lung as he experienced "difficulty Breathing at times & violent pain on any brisk exertion." Such wounds certainly justified the Continentals' fear when seeing a line of redcoats charging after them crying out "skiwer them skiwer them."[6]

In addition to seeing their comrades die in these ways, soldiers witnessed immense suffering in the form of amputations and surgeries performed on their comrades. Private Obadiah Brown, for example, watched with horror as a man "had his Lage Cut of[f]." Not long after this he noted that "ye man Died which had his Leg cut of." Awful sights like this were common enough in the army. It was not long after

[6] The litany of soldiers describing the horrors of their bayonet wounds and experiences is nearly endless in the pension records. Ezra (Isrey) Roberts, R8874, SCAR; Ambrose Lewis, S36041, SCAR; William Bassett, W9739, SCAR.

witnessing an amputation that Brown had his own arm operated on as he lay awake and watching. He writhed in agony as the doctor put "his finger through my arm puld out two pieces of bone such pain I never under went before in my Life." In more extreme scenarios, men were even obligated to try and operate on themselves or their comrades on the battlefield to save their lives. After the Battle of Germantown, Private Jonathan Todd followed his regiment to a part of the field where the wounded lay. There he quickly "dresed" the men who were "wounded in different Parts." Some had been shot and still had the musket balls lodged in them, so he "Extracted ye balls by cutting in the oposite side from where the wound is." These were levels of trauma and suffering that these men had never experienced, and many felt ill-equipped to deal with them emotionally or psychologically.[7]

The effect on people from witnessing such tragedies is now well-studied and relevant to understanding Revolutionary War soldiers' experiences. The trauma of war is a topic that has been experienced by nearly every generation and yet remains relatively understudied. Social Scientists who have studied the topic, however, have reached some important conclusions. Experiencing life-threatening situations often caused soldiers to suffer psychologically and socially. The effects of enduring such trauma were not confined to the moment it occurred, but could linger throughout one's life. Even witnessing death or injuries of others is sufficiently stressful to induce serious life harm. What is particularly relevant for the Revolutionary War soldiers was that the younger one was when they enlisted, the more at risk they are for serious psychological and physical

[7] Entries for 17-8 April 1776 and 26 October 1776 in Brown, "Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777," MHS; Jonathan Todd Submitted his wartime letters in his pension application, see letter 6 October 1777 Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA.

harm from their wartime experiences. Simply witnessing such horrors of war, even when the soldier was not harmed themselves, induced significant emotional and psychological distress.[8]

Military historians have likewise studied soldiers' emotions and fears and concluded that the most powerful of them all was the fear of death. The sheer number and graphic way many of their comrades died put tremendous strain on a soldier's psyche and caused them much worry for their own safety. In perhaps the most comprehensive study of the experience of battle, historian John Keegan concluded that fear was the primary emotion experienced by soldiers. He wrote that the acknowledgement among historians of war "of the dominance of fear over the events on the battlefield was welcomed as much for its frankness as for its apparent truth." In Keegan's view, understanding the war experience meant to understand the troops' fears. And to truly write of war, one would have to grapple with "how the American soldier overcame his fears to do his duty." Historians have differed about how soldiers indeed conquered their fear. In a traditional setting, it was the officers and leaders that inspired and encouraged in the troops. While true to an extent, in the strongly egalitarian culture of the eighteenth-century colonies this duty fell on each individual to find their own resources to grant them courage and durability amid the war.[9]

---

[8] For a recent study on the effects of war trauma on the physical and mental health of soldiers, see Judith Pizarro, Roxane Cohen Silver, and JoAnn Prause, "Physical and Mental Health Costs of Traumatic War Experiences Among Civil War Veterans," *Arch Gen Psychiatry* (February 2006): 193-200.

[9] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle: A Study of Agincourt, Waterloo and Somme* (New York: Penguin, 1976), 70-2.

Revolutionary War soldiers were no exception to having to overcome the obstacles of trauma and fear. Men's documentation of bloody battles and deaths that they witnessed revealed the toll that it had on them. War was not all idealism, certainly not from the ground view of the foot soldier. Many soldiers gave the gory details in their diaries to such an extent that they were palpable. During the Battle at Saratoga, Private Ezra Tilden witnessed a traumatic scene on the battlefield. He wrote how he "saw a sight yt was shocking indeed...a good many both of our men & ye enemy Lye dead at Gen. Gate's head Quarters." Even though Tilden and the Americans had won, it was not a triumphant and glorious experience for him. Alongside the dead bodies, he noticed "others very badly Wounded, just at dying, & ev'ry thing look'd sadly wth regard to ye poor Wounded Creature: some shot almost thro' ye Body & crying to god, to jesus, &c. To take away their lives." He could not describe these suffering comrades as anything other than "Poor miserable Creature[s]." He, like those suffering on the ground, had few resources to deal with this situation other than a religious plea of "Lord save us all I pray." Vivid descriptions of battlefield carnage often filled up the pages of men's diaries who saw combat, testifying to the impression that those experiences made on their soul.[10]

Other soldiers clearly mourned the bloodletting that they witnessed on a battlefield by cataloging the deaths and injuries that they saw. Private Peter Brown was in the bloody Battle of Bunker Hill and came away from it with as vivid an understanding of the carnage it wrought as of the euphoric victory it was for the colonists. "Out of our regiment there were but 37 kill'd 4 or 5 taken captive, about forty seven Wounded." Brown was keenly aware that it could have been him who was dead or injured: "they fell

[10] Ezra Tilden's Diary, 132, MHS.

on my right hand, and on my left, and close by me." Perhaps even more morbidly, some men simply documented in actuarial fashion the deaths and injuries in each battle they were in. Private Jonathan Todd filled up pages of his letters with such lists. After one battle, he went on to list the injuries in his regiment: "one shot thro the shoulder & one thro the arm...1 shot thro the thigh...1 in the arm...one slightly wounded in the neck." But he noted that other regiments "fair'd much wors than we did." Private Asa Hamilton similarly filled up the pages of his diary with lists of the injured and dead. After the retreat from New York, Hamilton devoted a few pages to a "true account of the men lost in our regiment." He listed the deaths and injuries of his fellow troops. From the soldiers' writings alone, it was clear that this was not a sanitary or polite war. It brought with it all the trauma associated with warfare, trauma that these young men were forced to deal with.[11]

Decades after the war, men attested to the disturbance of witnessing so much brutality and death as part of their pension applications. Indeed, many men foregrounded their gruesome experiences in wartime as a means of garnering sympathy and improving their chances of getting a pension. Veterans were careful to give gruesome details of their injuries; the more detailed the better and these applicants knew it. At the Battle of Lindley's Mill on 13 September 1781, John Brownlow claimed to have receive "four wounds," which he proceeded to describe. Three of these wounds were on his head "all of which broke the skull." After the battle, he had "thirteen pieces of the Skull bone larger & smaller" taken out of his head. The fourth wound was to his wrist on his left

[11] Brown, "Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS; Letter on 6 October 1777 Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA. Asa Hamilton's diary was submitted in the pension Application of William Hamilton, see entry for 28 October 1776 William Hamilton, W14868, RWPA.

arm. He was "thought past recovery by my friends." Remarkably, Brownlow survived into old age and grounded his pension application in those torturous experiences. While dramatic injuries like Brownlow's were somewhat rare, soldiers did not neglect to mention smaller ones. James Bone related that he had "received a slight wound by a buckshot," which apparently still bothered him. Similarly, Joseph McJunkin had his "Right arm Brokin by a ball" at the Battle of Fletcher's Mill.[12]

Some soldiers even experienced what could only be described as torture. This was neither common nor sanctioned behavior for either army to partake in, and yet some troops were subjected to it. Clement Clements of the Darlington District of South Carolina had one such story. While young and fighting at the Battle of Eutaw Springs in 1781 he had received a severe wound by the sword to his "head & hand." The injuries allowed the British easily to capture him. While in captivity, Clements described being "abused" by his captors. They apparently made little wounds on him just to give him pain. He recalled they "slightly wounded by their goading or Jabbing their Sword in his legs & other parts of his body." Tiny penetration wounds all over the body from his laughing captor's sword finally induced injured Clements to dare and effect an escape. James Beard also described being tortured, but this time at the hands of the Cherokees. This same young militiaman who had his clothes removed during captivity, also had his leg "Lanced in Nine different places." All these descriptions were traumatic memories from the war that soldiers had been dealing with for decades and indicate how difficult the experience of war were to process.[13]

---

[12] John Brownlow, R1358, SCAR; Joseph McJunkin, S18118, SCAR.

[13] Clement Clements, S8217, SCAR.

The sheer number and gruesomeness of the deaths in the war caused some religious soldiers to renounce violence completely. Issachar Bates, a profoundly religious man, later became a prominent leader in the Shaker community. He wholeheartedly endorsed and propagated an ideal of pacifism, a conviction he believes sprang from his horrifying wartime experiences. While recounting what he witnessed at the Battle of Bunker Hill, Bates wrote that "to view these wicked inventions of men to shed blood & bring destruction upon their fellow creatures" at such a young age, was part of the divine plan to teach him "how to hate them." Similarly repulsed by the violence of war, Private James Collins of South Carolina thanked God that he "escaped the temptation…" of killing a man while in the war. A Massachusetts soldier witnessed eight men injured and one man killed by cannon fire and lamented "O the sad Efect of war: when will the time Com when we need larn war No more." Religious pacifism was certainly one means by which soldiers dealt with the violence of war and it speaks to the reality that war was so traumatic that those who experienced it needed tools to cope.[14]

Alongside the reality of battlefield violence in soldiers' diaries, were the very clear anxieties that these men had about death. Soldiers' anxieties about death were present in nearly all their writings, although these anxieties manifested themselves in different ways. Private Obadiah Brown, at times, seemed almost obsessed with death. In the span of a little over one week, from 3 April 1776 through 11 April 1776, Brown wrote the phrase "one man Died here" five separate times. In addition, he noted that "we lost 800 men" in Quebec. All this death was written on a single page in his diary. Often

[14] Medlicott, *Issachar Bates*, 27; James Collins, *Autobiography of a Revolutionary Soldier* (Clinton: Peliciana Democrat, 1859), 56; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 86.

men wrote their journals as if they were monotonous obituaries. Some soldiers filled entire pages covering weeks with nothing but the names and deaths of comrades around them. After his retreat from New York, Private Asa Hamilton recorded massive amounts of death around him. For example, he wrote: "Capt Benj'm gates one killed Elisha Grigra...Capt flint company one killed James Crester...wounded too Caleb Perry & now he is dead." Ordinary soldiers had no reason for recording fatalities in such detail. They simply did it because the deaths had loomed so large in their mind each time they went to write. Moreover, the mere act of writing down and recalling such graphic and depressing experiences would have catalyzed the emotional trauma of the events in the first place.[15]

In the face of this death and suffering, many troops used religion to cope psychologically. Consistently in their journals, when men wrote about death, they wrote a corresponding religious sentiment as well. It seemed that the darkest parts of the war, namely death in battle, gave rise to religious instincts that helped soldiers endure the fear and trauma of death and continue in their military duty. Just before entering or ending battles seemed to be a time of intense religious reflection. Soldiers used the moments before battles to prepare for their own death.

A few religious elements seemed to comfort soldiers as they stared into the face of battle. Perhaps the most obvious and ubiquitous example was that men prayed just before entering battle. These prayers were often quite morbid and certainly overestimated the statistical likelihood of the soldiers' death, an understandable element of anxiety. Men took opportunities before battle to pray for their preservation and for loved ones, knowing

[15] Entry for 28 October 1776 in Hamilton, W14868, RWPA. For the relevant study on emotion, see William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

that death was very possible. Just before marching into battle, Private Ezra Tilden "put up [swift?] & fervent prayers, tho' short to god to preserve me & also my family: for I did not know but I might loose my Life if I went into action wch I yn ev'ry moment expected." Tilden seemed in this prayer to find relief and some grounds for confidence in his own well-being. It was this that gave him strength to march forward, knowing he could lose his life.[16]

Other soldiers likewise used religion in the time before battle to prepare for their own death. These young men knew that death was a reality, even for praying soldiers, and so they marshalled religious ideas and hopes to help their soul prepare for its coming. While this got close to fatalism at times, it did usually have an optimistic tenor to it. Men like Private Jonathan Todd used the possibility of their upcoming death as a time of spiritual preparation: "the Lord prepare us all for what we have to go thro' in this Life & Prepare us for an Eternal World of Rest." Death was not something that these soldiers looked forward to, but it was something they had to deal with. More specifically, the fear of death was something that they had to overcome to do their duty and for many the best way they knew how to do this was through religious means. Or as Todd put it: he "hope[d] the Many Deaths that Happen around us may serve to Prepare us all for a dying hour." One man even counseled a grieving relative of a fallen comrade back home to do the same: "Repent of all your sins: be preparing to follow your deceased husband." Even

[16] Ezra Tilden's Diary, 144, MHS.

couching death in terms of something that one could be "prepared" for was a deeply religious idea in the culture and one that soldiers seemed to lean on when facing battle.[17]

In addition to preparing to die, troops had to learn to conquer their own fears. Here too soldiers relied on religion. At times, this was communally orchestrated, as when chaplains and commanders gathered the troops together to pray and sing religious songs before battle, sending a message of the soldiers' spiritual uprightness that indicated they need not fear death. Soldiers also took the initiative themselves and sought the expiation of their sins before charging into battle. "I look'd upon myself," wrote Ezra Tilden, "as going into Battle immediately & perhaps I should be slain: & yn beg'd of god ye pardon of all my sins for Christs sake." Such confessions relieved the soldier of any guilt they may have been carrying about former acts and certainly made the prospect of dying in battle and then facing judgement more palatable. With a conviction that his soul had been forgiven, Tilden marched into battle.[18]

Another way men used religion to face death in battle was by reminding themselves of the religious accountability of their commanders. Troops were keenly aware that when they were put into battle it was largely because of an officer's decision to put them there. They knew a rash decision could, and sometimes did, lead to their and their comrades' deaths. This required a tremendous amount of trust in their commanders. To summon this trust, soldiers again used religion and reminded themselves that their commanders were ultimately accountable to God and would have to answer to divine

[17] Letters on 21 March 1777 and 3 January 1778 in Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA; Ezra Tilden's letter to his comrade's sister was preserved in his pension application, see Ezra Tilden, W14020, RWPA.

[18] Ezra Tilden's Diary, 143, MHS.

justice if they exposed the troops to death without cause. Lieutenant-Colonel Simeon Thayer reminded his troops just before battle that he answered to "his merciful Creator, for the lives of his fellow soldiers, in rashly exposing them to ye merciless rage of their common enemy." Troops found a sense of peace in this divine accountability and thus often appreciated displays of religiosity among their commanders. One private expressed this during the March to Quebec. When the troops lacked a chaplain, "Arnold took it upon himself to perform his duty. It was the only time I ever heard him attempt to pray." Religious troops found courage and comfort in having religiously accountable commanders.[19]

As it was important for men to use religious tools to stare down death before battle, so too was it necessary for some men, after a battle, to use religion to process the death they had just witnessed. Immediately after combat, soldiers tended to have religious reflections on how the deaths were timely and ordained. Religious soldiers rationalized deaths as all part of God's plan. They comforted themselves that their comrades did not die randomly but when it was their due time. Writing to a comrade's wife about the death of her husband, Ezra Tilden comforted her with the thoughts that "his time was come & he must have dy'd had he stay'd at home." In this framing, the deaths were not inflicted on soldiers by the enemy, but as part of the divine plan. A man only died when "God in his providence Saw to take him to himself." Such religious reflections allowed soldiers to keep the reality of death from plunging them into the idea that all is chaos and

[19] Thayer, *The Invasion of Canada in 1775,* 27; Roberts, *March to Quebec*, 558.

purposeless. Even the worst that can occur, death, was somehow part of a plan greater than themselves and in this they found solace.[20]

One element that particularly troubled soldiers about wartime death was its suddenness. People in the military did not only die on the battlefield, but often simply around the camp or while traveling. Death frequently came out of nowhere and proved hard to predict. This bothered soldiers. One unremarkable Saturday in September of 1775, Amos Farnsworth was taken aback by a Cambridge militiaman who was "taken Poorly of a Sudden and Died Amediately." Farnsworth realized and lamented his plight and that of his comrades when he cried out in response, "Alas upon what a Slender thread do our lives hang." With recurrent accidental deaths throughout the army, soldiers could not help but realize with Ezra Tilden that they could be "well & [then] dead in five minutes." Surprise deaths were particularly dreaded by troops when they came from the enemy. In the South Carolina campaign against the Cherokees, death was equally sudden and shocking. One militiaman was out "gathering potatoes" and was shot by a Cherokee warrior. Arthur Fairies denounced this ambush as characteristic of the Cherokees who "destroy by lurking by creeks & thickets, and shooting when no one thinks of it." Avoiding death by ambush could only be described religiously, it was always a "merciful escape." Whether it was witnessing ambush, illness, or accident, soldiers confronted their own mortality and often used that occasion for religious reflection.[21]

---

[20] Tilden, W14020, RWPA; Bangs, "Isaac Bangs Journal," 17.

[21] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 86; Ezra Tilden Diary, 60, MHS; Fairies, Journal of 1776, 25; Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 61, 170.

A letter written by Private Jonathan Todd about the Battle of Germantown was especially revealing about how men used religion to deal with the carnage of battle. In a letter he wrote to his father about his experiences of war, Todd naturally intermingled his descriptions of death with his religious means of coping with them. After briefly describing some of the battle, he wrote his father that "I hope that I may have a right sense of the distinguishing goodness of God in sparing my life & hints[?] when so many fell in the action---god grant I may always be Preserved when in the like danger or any other." It was a deadly battle in which "the Loss was considerable on both sides." Indeed, Todd felt as if "a hotter fire was never known both of small arms & field pieces." The casualties weighed keenly on his conscience and, like other soldiers, he morbidly documented the great cost in human life to his regiment. After the battle was over, he went to the field, where the "smoke was so thick that i could not see a man 3 rods" and saw his fallen comrades and attempted to aid the wounded. By the end of the experience his clothes were "all i[n] Blood" and he had nothing else to "put on as our Baggage is gone up to Bethel." He lamented to his father all these "hardships of a soldiers life" and the "shock its gives to Human nature to hear such an Insusant[incessant] fire & see much larger columns of smoke & fire & see garments Roll'd in Blood-I hope I may be suffer'd to return & recount the many favors the almighty has shown me." The only response he had to all this death was a religious one. He viewed it in the context of gratitude that he survived and lived with a purpose afterward to recount and return the favor to God. Todd used religious categories to understand the hardship he experienced, and religion gave him a sense of purpose after it was over.[22]

[22] Letter on 6 October 1777 in Todd, W2197, RWPA.

Soldiers rehearsed a few religious themes consistently when they reflected on or encountered death. The most prominent was the hope of an afterlife. Scholars say some soldiers lose their religious convictions in the face of death and suffering, while others seem to have it strengthened. The historian Jesse Glenn Gray has argued that troops who enter combat with a "firm otherworldly faith" have little difficulty in interpreting death as they always have and integrating those experiences into their preconceived religious worldview. On the other hand, soldiers "whose religious faith is chiefly this-worldly, that is, social and ethical in content" find the violence of war can undermine their religious convictions. This dichotomy seemed to be true during the Revolutionary period as well, many men increased in their faith in God and the afterlife, but lost faith in humanity. Private James McMichael often waxed poetically about such themes in his wartime diary. One poem he wrote succinctly stated this dual idea of corruption below on earth, but happiness above: "*Of all mankind, who by Nature now are in, A State of Darkness, Ignorance and Sin…[yet] From such position, and seeks a better place Even Heaven itself that Holiness above."* Surely such beliefs received confirmation in the men's minds when they witnessed violence around them and mused on the hoped-for perfections above, a world away from what they were experiencing.[23]

The thought of heaven provided many soldiers with a way to escape the bleak world of war around them. After describing some of the difficulties of building and living in a "logg Hutt" through the winter at Valley Forge, Jonathan Todd closed his letter home with a plea: "God grant that we may all endure with Patience whatever is assigned us here & at last be Rec'd to a world of bliss." It seemed clear that he longed for escape

[23] Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers,* 114; entry for 15 March 1778 in "The James McMichael Journal," *JAR.*

from the hut that was "assigned" for him here. On another occasion, Todd similarly wrote from camp about a difficult time he had with the news that "a Number of troops landed on this side. Expect a battle with them soon." Once again, in the face of hardship, Todd sought relief in a better world to come. The "Lord prepare us all," Todd wrote, "for what we have to go thro' in this Life & Prepare us for an Eternal World of Rest --- is the prayer of your Dutiful son." Troops most meditated on heaven in such difficult situations.[24]

One of the more dramatic examples of using faith to escape from the trying world of war was when Private Ezra Tilden dreamed himself away from war and into the presence of heaven. He wrote in his diary about his consuming fear of being killed by the British army. He wrote how he would have "many very bad dreams" about how the Regulars had taken and killed him. He often thought of being "Engag'd in battle withe ym...Wch worry'd, frightened, & troubled" him much. However, his escape from this fear of battle and death was a profound dream about the reality of heaven: "But ye Dream on ye other side seemed to make amends for all." It was a dream of heaven so "Exceeding please[nt] & Delightful" that it, for a time, assuaged his fears of death and indeed made it so he did not want to leave that world and return to his, the one filled with war. Whatever all the nuances of what Tilden believed this place to be and how one got there, it was clear that he used this idea and profound hope of a pleasant afterlife to escape the presently bleak circumstances of the war and to strengthen his martial resolve. Religion had a powerful role in assuaging men's fear of death, something that seemed to be a unique power that religion provided them.[25]

---

[24] Letters 21 March 1777 and 25 December 1777 in Todd, W2197, RWPA.

[25] Ezra Tilden Diary, 143, MHS.

What were men's ideas about heaven? Their writings about it varied from the very specific to the extremely vague. It seems no two soldiers wrote about heaven in the same way; different elements about heaven had unique appeal to many soldiers. Very rarely did a soldier give heaven a physical description, but when they did it was quite vivid. Ezra Tilden described heaven as a "a spacious & very Beautiful plain Conversing wth ye angelic hosts & tho't I I [sic] never wou'd Leave yt delightful Place & ye delightful Compy for nothing if I cou'd help it." For Tilden, heaven was a physical field in which he could converse with angels and sing. Fitting for someone who so delighted in poetry. However, this level of specificity was rare. Most men described heaven not according to its physical or auditory characteristics, but by the relief that they would get from war when they arrived there. These descriptions of heaven as a place of relief further indicated the way that men used religion as a corrective to the difficult parts of war. War was a place of fatigue, sadness, and constant moving. Thus, when soldiers thought of heaven, they looked forward to it being "an Eternal World of Rest...where there is Joy forever." The poetically inclined James McMichael captured this idea nicely: "May I live so, that when I die, My Soul may be at rest." A place of rest to an exhausted soldier, indeed, sounded like heaven.[26]

As comforting as this belief in a blissful afterlife could be for those dying, their belief in the reality of hell was at least equally terrifying. Although hell was less well-defined and less often mentioned than heaven in soldiers' diaries, it was clear enough in some men's minds to give them great fears of it. One awful incident recounted by Private Abner Stocking put the power of fearing hell into sharp relief. While traveling to Quebec,

[26] Ezra Tilden Diary, 143, MHS; Letter from 3 January 1778 in Todd, W2197, RWPA; Entry for 8 February 1778 in "The James McMichael Journal," *JAR.*

Stocking saw a comrade who had been shot. He did not die quickly but was dying for some "twelve hours." During that time, he was in "great horror and agony of mind at the thought of going into eternity and appearing before his God and judge." That man's belief in the afterlife in no way made his death easier. Yet, it is clear in their writings that most religious soldiers believed themselves to be going to heaven after they died. Thus, while real for some of them, fears of hell were less written about than hopes of heaven.[27]

Given these prevailing religious ideas about death and afterlife, how one behaved in the hour of their death meant a lot to those witnessing. One's deathbed performance went a long way to undermining or confirming the validity of their beliefs. Such deathbed performances were a staple of English religious culture and the practice certainly was carried by troops into battle. The popular religious culture had so much to say about death and the afterlife that one's real beliefs about them were thought to be on vivid display as one died. Thus, as we saw before, the man who feared hell after death was thought to have neglected due religious preparation for his coming appearance before God. On the other hand, some soldiers died in peace and thus validated for themselves and for their viewers that they had rightly ordered souls that had properly prepared for their deaths. For instance, Obadiah Brown witnessed a death he thought to be a triumph of character when he saw a comrade die after having his "Leg cut of[f]," and yet he died "much Resind to the will of god." Brown seemed to internalize this stalwart example of a religious death because he went on to endure his own battle wounds as "nothing

[27] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 11.

[compared] to what I Desarve for my sins which are many." Deathbed performances put on display the men's religious convictions and often inspired them in the face of death.[28]

After battles had ceased for the day, troops attended funeral services for the fallen. Soldiers attended funerals with remarkable frequency. At times, it seemed that they attended at least one every day. Here the attendants had all their religious inclinations and thoughts about death reaffirmed and intensified in a ritual way. Soldiers were reminded of the afterlife each time they attended the funeral of a comrade. Often soldiers themselves were responsible for carrying their fallen comrades' body off the field and burying them. This act, no doubt, exacerbated men's religious inclinations and fears of death. Men reported that funerals were especially affective when they were "a man of our own company." A military funeral was a highly stratified event and was always orchestrated according to the rank of the deceased, with common soldiers receiving the least pomp and circumstance. Private Henry Sewall recalled the funeral of a "Gen'l Warren" in April of 1776. He mentioned how the body was carried and the procession led by "a company of men from our Regim't." They walked into a "Stone Chappel" where a preacher proceeded to offer a "Prayer & Oration" to a "crowded audience." Soldiers often looked forward to funeral sermons because they affirmed all the religious convictions they had about death and when they faced it so often. New Jersey Lieutenant William Barton wrote with what seemed like disappointment during John

[28] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal,* 11; Entries for 3 October 1776 and 26 October 1776, Obadiah Brown Diary, MHS. The idea of the deathbed as a kind of religious performance had deep roots in English Protestantism, see Ralph Houlbrooke, "The Puritan Death-bed, c. 1560-c. 1660," in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1506-1700,* ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (London: Macmillan Press, 1996), 122-44. For details on funeral services and the importance of rank to burial rituals, see Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor,* 163-98.

Sullivan's expedition against the Six Nations that a "funeral sermon was preached by Dr. Rogers, prepared for the occasion...but was postponed on account of the rain coming." Many men, like Private Jeremiah Mcintosh, wrote with sadness a short note in their journal each day that they "attended the funeral of a soldar." Death, funerals, and religious sentiment all mutually reinforced one another and worked to assuage soldiers' fears of death by religious framing.[29]

As men used a clear religious strategy to deal with wartime deaths, they also used religion to cope with disease. More than from bullets or starvation, death came to soldiers through sickness. Their encounters with disease added significantly to their anxieties about wartime death. While in the army, troops knew when they were and were not in combat with the enemy. In this way, men felt that death from battle was somewhat predictable and seemed relatively under control. However, during the Revolutionary War troops were also in constant battle with an invisible enemy, deadly viruses. This enemy could attack and kill at any time and the soldier had no control or even awareness when they were exposed to it. For this battle too, men needed emotional and psychological aid. How soldiers' religion aided them in dealing with death by disease instead of death by combat was different in one noticeable way. Death by disease, by the eighteenth century, had some scientific solutions while death on the battlefield really had none. Because of this, men's religious beliefs had to intermingle with new methods of vaccination and scientific efforts to fight disease. Soldiers during the war developed a mixed religious and scientific approach to combating disease in the ranks, which together proved quite helpful

[29] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 81; Cox, *A Proper Sense of Honor,* 160-4; entry for 8 April 1776 in Sewall, Henry Sewall Diary, MHS; Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 6; entry for 13 October 1776 in Jeremiah Mcintosh, "Huntington Digital Library: Jeremiah Mcintosh His Book of Accounts 1776-1777," HLA.

in fighting back both the physical and emotional difficulties associated with the outbreaks.

Unfortunately for the troops, the Revolutionary War coincided with a severe smallpox epidemic in North America. From 1775 through 1782, smallpox ravaged the American continent and spread to everywhere in the Western Hemisphere that traded with it. By the end of its rampage, smallpox killed more than one hundred thousand people and crippled many more. In the latter eighteenth century, North American colonists were far more vulnerable to the virus than their European counterparts because of lack of exposure in childhood and lack of natural immunity. European peoples had been exposed to and were familiar with smallpox for centuries, which gave British soldiers higher levels of immunity. Colonial soldiers were incredibly vulnerable to smallpox outbreaks and they knew it. Thus, when the virus was mobilizing along with the British, they knew they had to combat both enemies simultaneously.[30]

The reality of smallpox did not simply pose a restraint on military capabilities and planning but induced incredibly traumatic experiences for the soldiers who contracted it. To die of smallpox was typically far worse an experience than to die from a musket ball. Elizabeth Fenn's excellent study on this smallpox epidemic explains the terror that virus wrought. "It inflicts unspeakable suffering upon its victims," she wrote. The virus "blinds, scars, and maims" those who contracted it. The virus had a typical fourteen-day incubation period between contraction and first symptoms. During this time, the host was non-infectious. Once the first symptoms arose (fever, backache, headache, nausea, malaise) the carrier became highly contagious through direct contact or droplets expelled

[30] Fenn, *Pox Americana,* 20.

from the nose or mouth. Soon after these initial symptoms, the host developed the most emblematic symptom of the virus, pustules and severe rash. At this point the victim began to emit a foul odor and was extremely ill for at least the next two weeks. After this period, the pustules turned into nasty scars. The fatality rate of the virus varied across populations due to differential immunity. In some populations it reached as high as a ninety percent fatality rate and, on the low-end, in the teens. For young North American soldiers, the fatality rate was likely on the lower end of that spectrum. At the end of illness (typically about one month in all), it left the host dead or conferred life-long immunity.[31]

When soldiers saw comrades suffering from smallpox in this way, they became fearful. At certain points during the war, smallpox was a more acute problem than at others. The men at Quebec experienced one of the worst outbreaks of the entire war. In the freezing landscape around Quebec, soldiers regularly saw comrades die of smallpox. Private Caleb Haskell wrote twice in the same week "one of our company died of small-pox." Word of this outbreak spread through the ranks and many soldiers were "frightened through fear of the small-pox" and became careful where and when they traveled. Lieutenant Benjamin Craft was aware of soldiers' fear of smallpox. He wrote how in his Cambridge Camp there were "Sundry of our people complaining of sickness." The invisible enemy of the smallpox spread fear through the ranks of troops perhaps as much as it spread virus.[32]

---

[31] Fenn, *Pox Americana,* 15-21.

[32] Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 15; Roberts, *March to Quebec,* 308; Craft, "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," 53.

Soldiers understood that they were more likely to die of disease while in the army than by British weapons. North American colonists were no strangers to smallpox epidemics. In fact, their highest officer, George Washington, had contracted and recovered from smallpox back in 1751 while in Barbados. Luckily, Washington survived, but he carried scarring on his nose from the bout; scars that everyone recognized. More immediately, perhaps, Massachusetts experienced a serious outbreak of smallpox in many towns that forced them to quarantine the sick. Soldiers knew of the seriousness of the disease and how they had to restrict their personal travel and the visitors into the camp were limited or not allowed if they presented any symptoms of illness. The troops themselves were very aware of deadly viruses and their vulnerability to them. One private wrote with dread about the upcoming "season for *fever* & *ague."*[33]

Soldiers' behavior and writings indicated that they had pretty good awareness of how the sickness spread and that they took measures to avoid it. During the 1775 outbreak of smallpox in British occupied Boston, only those who had already recovered from smallpox could go in. Even if the illness had been left in the city, which it had, those who had already recovered could not get sick and the men understood that. Troops across the colonies expressed similar understanding of the virulence of smallpox. Governor Trumball of Connecticut blamed widespread fear of smallpox among potential recruits for the lack of enlistments. Similarly, in the southern colonies, troops avoided the army to avoid smallpox. As Patrick Henry put it: "terrors of the smallpox added to Lies of Deserters....deter but too many." There were countless incidents of regiments, like Judah Frisbie's, who went into the barracks at Albany but being "frightened through fear

[33] Fenn, *Pox Americana*, 20, 46; Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins*, 43.

of the small-pox" they removed themselves and went elsewhere. Soldiers knew well the threat and reality of the spread of smallpox and that was why they feared it so much.[34]

In fact, soldiers were so afraid of smallpox that they circulated rumors that the British had infected enslaved Africans with it and sent them back into the colonial towns. As he was marching through Virginia, just southeast of Richmond, Private Josiah Atkins and his fellow troops had "taken notice of some villany." He saw "18 or 20 Negroes that lay dead by the way-side, putrifying with the *small pox.*" Atkins went on to explain this in a way that critiqued both southern slavery and General Cornwallis. He claimed that thousands of enslaved persons, "arising from their harsh treatment," fled in great numbers to the British army. Cornwallis took this opportunity to infect hundreds of them with smallpox and send them back into the colonies to die where the Continental Army would march and thereby infect the troops. "This," he concluded "is a piece of Cornwallisean Cruelty." After explaining this, Atkins launched into a religious eulogy in which he gave thanks that "there is a King superior to the British King," who would not commit such cruelties. Apparently, seeing corpses rotting with smallpox was so common when marching through Virginia that Atkins commented on the first pleasant march he had when he did not have to be "troubled with the loathsome & dangerous stench of putrifying Negroes."[35] Soldiers' fear of smallpox seemed to morph into a racialized fear of African Americans fleeing slavery.

Belief in this "Cornwallisean Cruelty" was widespread among the troops. Soldiers combined their fears of smallpox with their fears of cultural outsiders invading their

---

[34] Fenn, *Pox Americana,* 87; Roberts, *March to Quebec,* 308.

[35] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 36.

towns. Some troops believed that it was through enslaved Africans that smallpox was entering their cities, while others thought it was through women camp followers. But many had no doubt that the British were engaged in biological warfare by sending smallpox into the camps of the Continental Army. One soldier wrote that he knew the smallpox came from the "fascinating arts of the enemy.". While it is difficult to know whether these accusations were true or not, it was clear that soldiers had a profound fear about smallpox and sickness that they had to overcome.[36]

The fear of smallpox even extended to soldiers' families. The letters they sent back home revealed deep anxieties about their loved ones contracting the virus. Word spread quickly to the army about outbreaks of smallpox in their various hometowns. Naturally, this worried soldiers and caused them to write home about it. From his camp on Long Island in July of 1776, Lieutenant-Colonel Dudley Colman wrote a moving letter to his wife about his dread of the news of a smallpox outbreak in his hometown. He acknowledged that he was 'through the goodness of God at Present" healthy. Yet, he was "uneasy" about his wife's condition in particular on account of the "small pox which i understand is present in that part of the country." He urged his wife to be "as careful as possible to avoid it." And he hoped that "God will preserve you & the family" from contracting it. When men received unfavorable news about their families, it was very difficult to bear. Lieutenant Benjamin Craft lamented that he "Heard from my family at

[36] Henry, *An Accurate and Interesting Account,* 113; Jeffery Michael Weir, "A Challenge to the Cause: Smallpox Inoculation in the Era of American Independence, 1764 to 1781," Ph.D. diss. (George Mason University, 2014), 279-80. For an in-depth study of colonial newspaper's habit of printing distortions and mistruths to support their particular agenda, see Robert G. Parkinson, *The Common Cause: Creating Race and Nation in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture Williamsburg, Virginia, by The University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

Manchester to-day, that they continue unwell, which gives me great uneasiness." Not long after this, he received another letter from his wife that "our youngest child [was] very sick and was thought to be dying. I hope God will support me under this heavy news, as well as my poor sick wife." Wartime fears about smallpox extended beyond the soldiers' personal health and pressured on him to worry about his family's well-being also.[37]

The fears and dangers of smallpox were too much for many soldiers to ignore and thus they turned to their culturally inherited religious and scientific means of coping with the virus. These men came from a background that responded to viral outbreaks using both science and religion, a dual strategy that they carried into the war with them. In most of the communities from which these soldiers came, the typical response to an outbreak of smallpox, or any deadly illness, would have been to gather for a day of prayer and fasting. When in 1735, Haverhill and many other New England towns were hit with an outbreak of a throat distemper, the people responded very religiously by gathering for prayers and fasting. These events were to appeal to God for mercy that he would take away or lessen the severity of the outbreak. Closer to the Revolution, towns had instituted these same ceremonies in response to the smallpox outbreak in 1774. In February of that year, the town of Ipswich instituted a fast day to get the virus under control and in hopes that doing so would stay the divine hand, which they believed was behind all outbreaks.[38]

---

[37] Letter from 30 July 1776 in Dudley Colman, "MHS Collections Online: Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS; Craft, "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," 54, 57.

[38] For broader analysis of New England religious culture and their responses to such outbreaks, see Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light,* 60-1.

While this response to outbreaks was deeply theological, colonists seemed able to integrate new medicinal and scientific means of combating viruses. Although somewhat controversial at the time, many ministers and prominent figures in the colonies were staunch supporters of vaccination to fight smallpox. Smallpox vaccines were in a crude form during the eighteenth century, but still provided noticeable advantages from contracting the illness in the natural way. Those who contracted smallpox via vaccine noticed less severe symptoms and a lower fatality rate. In the face of the controversy, there were many religious leaders who championed the vaccine as a means appropriate to use alongside religious methods of combatting outbreaks. Most famously, Jonathan Edwards died after being vaccinated for smallpox in front of his Yale class in a tragic effort to convince them of its safety. Although vaccination was opposed for several other reasons, colonial culture employed both religious and scientific means to fighting viruses.[39]

Soldiers likewise blended science and religion to deal with the virus during the war. Religious soldiers' theology was not one that gave them any sort of assurances that they could never get sick. They knew many praying soldiers who had contracted viruses and died. Their religiosity did not act, in their minds, as total immunity. After Josiah Atkins witnessed a comrade die of a "camp distemper," he asked "Wherefore am I spar'd! Surely tis nothing in me Wherefore doth the Lord take one, & leave another? Surely it can be no merit in the surviver." Atkins expressed here what was the ordinary religious response to soldiers dying of sickness. It was not that only the non-religious were infected. Instead, the only thing that can be said about who did or did not contract it

[39] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 492-4.

was that it was ultimately up to God. Once when Atkins was exposed to smallpox, he thanked God that he did not contract it, but acknowledged that if God had allowed him to get sick he would have remained "truly resign'd to thy will!" Troops did not believe that their religiosity would shield them from infection.[40]

Religion was not immunity, but neither was it fatalism. Religious soldiers believed that God worked through natural processes to allow people to fight off things like small pox. God did not grant automatic divine protection from sickness, but he would provide tools like natural medicines and medical knowledge that humans could use to fight them off. Doing so was not thought to be against his will and plan, but part of it. Again, the diary of Josiah Atkins illustrated this tension well. Atkins was assigned in the army to a hospital to care for the ailing. While there he described the various medical processes that he used to aid comrades as "instrumental" under the hand of God. He was grateful that "Providence has so order'd it as to make me instrumental of some good to my country, at least to my fellow soldiers; which is by letting blood & drawing teeth." For Atkins, as for many religious men, there was a seamless integration of the latest modern medical techniques with the providence of God. As Dudley Colman wrote his wife: "I hope God will preserve you & the family from taking it in a natural Way." Here again, a soldier showed how religion could sanction vaccination and thus prevent his family from contracting smallpox in the natural way.[41]

Not all the religious responses to smallpox were positive. Indeed, many men cursed God under the weight of that disease. In January of 1776, Pennsylvania Private

---

[40] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 46, 31-2.

[41] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 41; Letter from 30 July 1776 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS.

Daniel McCurtin went into St. Thomas Hospital and described the horrors that he saw. The scene he described not only showed how desperate and difficult a situation existed in the army hospitals but also how soldiers had a binary religious response to illness. "O Good God," McCurtin exclaimed upon entering the hospital. What he saw he described as a "deplorable house of pangs and misery." The sick people everywhere were crying and sobbing, unable to find any comfort or relief. Some of these soldiers were "crying to their Lord for relief," while others "with a tremendous and shivering tongue, blaspheming his August holy Name." McCurtin was clearly disturbed by the latter irreligious response of many of the sick. What was also clear was that whether positive or negative, many of the soldiers had a religious response while sick and this was most striking to McCurtin. This little episode nicely conveyed how the army really did contain the religious and irreligious. However, these types of diary entries were a minority. Far more common, at least in the extant diaries, were soldiers drawing on religious strategies to cope with the virus.[42]

The first, and perhaps most obvious strategy that men employed were prayers of preservation from sickness. Often soldiers came into contact unwittingly with someone suffering from smallpox or they had to lodge in an area that was known to house infected people. It was in the face of such danger of contracting an illness that soldiers believed prayer could help them. As Private Josiah Adams of Massachusetts marched with his newly formed provincial army, he related his deepest prayers and desired the community join with him in praying that "God would protect & defend them in a Day of Battle...that He would save them from those mortal Diseases incident to an Army." Troops like Josiah

[42] Balch, *Papers Relating Chiefly to the Maryland Line,* 32.

Adams were sure to bathe themselves in prayer for hopes of not contracting illness and spiritual comfort in the face of the danger.[43]

Outbreaks of sickness in the army camps likewise drove soldiers to their knees for the blessing of protection. In September of 1776, Private Ezra Tilden wrote a series of entries in his diary about the poor sanitary conditions of the camps and how much this made him fear death by sickness. He wrote how "a young man" in his camp had died of "ye nervous fever & camp distemper" near to where Tilden was staying. Tilden lamented this proximity to unhealthy troops: "oh, it is exceeding bad being in tents have wch sick." He was also distressed by witnessing the groans of the sick who lay dying with "nothing Comfortable" to ease their suffering. Vaccinations alone could not aid Tilden in these struggles for they did not address the real emotional and psychological pain of such a situation. He turned, however, to a prayer: "oh, god preserve me from sickness, here, i beseech thee." Turning to prayer became a pattern for Tilden as he faced the threat of various disease while in camp. Not a few days later again he feared contracting an illness and again cried out to "ye most merciful god, my Lord, to preserve me, in health, while in the camps."[44]

Soldiers' religious strategy against viruses had to adapt once they became sick. They no longer petitioned God to preserve them from sickness, but rather sought to make courageous statements of resignation to their fate, or as they saw it, the will of God. Religious soldiers were admirably consistent in their ability to do this. Even when

---

[43] Josiah Adams' prayer bill is quoted in Karen Elizabeth O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration: Lived Religion, Obligation, and Political Identity in the American Revolution," PhD diss. (Northwestern University, 2005), 95.

[44] Ezra Tilden's Diary, 33, 36, MHS.

undergoing circumstances that seemed to be anything but just, they maintained that the proper course to deal with the sickness was resignation to the divine will. While marching near Richmond, one private knew that he "was expos'd again to the terrible distemper, the small pox." He was convinced that the outcome was fixed and so sought to align his will with the divine plan. Should "I have catch'd it," he resolved, he would have nowhere to turn but to God. And thus he sought to be "sincerely & truly resign'd to thy will!" Lieutenant Benjamin Craft employed a similar religious method to deal with contracting an illness when he heard "news of the sickness of my youngest child. I hope its sickness will not be unto death, and I desire to submit to the will of God." Religious troops like these thought that the best place for their will and emotions was to be resigned to the illness that was contracted.[45]

Others were not so passive toward their sickness, but instead tried to actively bargain with God via a covenant. These covenants took the form of quids pro quo with God; that he would spare their lives and they would live for him. Ezra Tilden made an elaborate and elegant covenant with God while he lay dying of smallpox at camp in Ticonderoga. It began simply: "Being still very sick, I make ye Solemn Covenant wth ye Lord." He continued with considerable theological depth to outline his duties to "take him for my God...his word for my Rule" and so on. In return, he prayed God "Restore me to health & strength again" and to bring him back to his family. In return for this healing, Tilden promised to be the ideal spiritual husband and father to his wife and children, always instructing them "in ye good knowledge of ye Lord; & teach ym ye ways of truth, & virtue Betimes." He ended his formal covenant by reassuring God that "all ys I

[45] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 31-2; Craft, "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," 53.

solemnly promise" to carry out if he should be healed. Tilden eventually recovered from smallpox. His recovery was a fortuitous outcome that he no doubt ascribed to the establishment of this covenant. Encounters with death often left men rattled and many turned to their religion to both understand it and grapple with its reality.[46]

Once they had recovered from an illness, soldiers were sure to thank God and credit their religious strategies for their recovery. Religious men had no doubt that it was God who had sustained them in sickness and brought them to health. Jonathan Todd was convinced that though he had the "Poc" yet through the "Divine Blessing I have recovered." Most soldiers who documented contracting illness, particularly severe ones like smallpox, attributed their recovery to divine blessing. There seemed to be little deviation on this practice. Dudley Colman wrote a moving letter to his wife after a severe illness in which he rejoiced to be able to acquaint his wife with the news that "thro the goodness of God I have so far recovered my Health as to be able to join my Regiment." Although he still lacked in his "Flesh and Strength," he hoped "with the Blessing of God to be hearty and strong again." Although soldiers adopted a dual strategy of religious and scientific means of combatting illness, nearly all the post sickness gratitude was directed exclusively in a religious direction.[47]

Soldiers who had survived illness often employed routine expressions of gratitude toward God for their health. Thankfulness for health became a repeated refrain for those

---

[46] Ezra Tilden Diary, 82, MHS. For less developed covenants made by soldiers, see Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 35-6; Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775, MHS.

[47] Letter 21 March 1777 Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA; letter from 29 September 1776 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS.

who recovered. Each time Lieutenant Benjamin craft noticed that his army camp was healthy, he broke out in religious gratitude. Anxieties about the smallpox were high for him as he arrived in camp and he was thrilled to find all "in health." He responded religiously by noting that we "have great reason to be thankful for all the mercies we enjoy." Only a day later and Craft was still writing: "All in health through the goodness of God." In nearly every letter that he wrote to his father from Valley Forge, Private Jonathan Todd was sure to add a comment to the effect of "by Gods goodness I enjoy good Health." Religious soldiers who had gotten sick often wrote about their gratitude for their health. The effect that the prevailing illness and fears of it in the army had on these soldiers was profound. It was their religion that aided them in dealing with sickness and they turned to it again and again.[48]

Coping with death by sickness in the Continental Army proved to be one of the most important hurdles for men to overcome. It was hardly pure sentiment, it had to be done for soldiers to sustain their moral and ability to function in the war. To do this, men relied on a combination of natural and religious strategies to combat the deadliest enemy during the Revolutionary War. Their religion embraced methods of infection prevention. More than that, religion provided soldiers with a set of tools that allowed them to cope with the fear of getting infected and with the hardship of enduring it. Understanding troops' needs during wartime as more than simply biological allows us to see that they needed to integrate the biological aid of inoculations with the emotional and psychological aids of religion. Soldiers liberally drew on both to endure. As religion was

[48] Craft, "Craft's Journal of the Siege of Boston," 51; letter from 3 January 1776 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS.

essential in understanding the war, so too was it essential in combating the disease amid the war.

The power that wartime death had on the psyche of soldiers was so profound, that it was often deliberately leveraged by authorities in the form of wartime executions. Public executions during eighteenth century wartime were, in effect, orchestrated religious scenes. They rehearsed notions of heaven and hell and impressed upon the conscience of the viewers the importance of dwelling on their eternal future. Chaplains were present at nearly every execution and labored to ensure that the spiritual message of what was taking place was made clear to the witnesses. Soldiers, for their part, often responded in deeply religious fashion. Many were convinced of the truth of an afterlife and took the lessons urged upon them by chaplains to heart. These were in essence visible sermons and onlookers were the attentive parishioners. Religious solders accepted the inherent justice of capital punishment and particularly sanctioned it in military life because it was couched as according to God's will and portrayed as an instrument of religious reform.

During the Revolutionary War, many transgressors of military law were publicly executed. The most common reason for a sentence of execution was desertion or enticement to desert. However, soldiers could also be executed for murder or other crimes. Some were sentenced for murder and others for lesser crimes like stealing. It was considered the last resort of all punishments, reserved for the intransigent offender or those whose crime needed to be made an example of. As the most heavy-handed punishment that could be meted out on one's own people, military officers knew it had to be used with caution. Too much of it could cause an uprising, while not enough of it

could breed lawlessness. Washington was a big supporter of these executions and specifically the public element of them because he believed in their ability to reform troops and deter them from like crimes. This ideal of public crime and punishment had deep roots in English culture and had been practiced for centuries. Public floggings and executions were thought to deter future crimes. Just because a crime carried the penalty of execution did not mean that all offenders underwent that sentence. Of the 225 death sentences issued, only about forty were ever carried out. In total throughout the war, likely less than a hundred people were executed. Yet, the influence that these episodes had on soldiers was profound beyond what the number alone suggest.[49]

Armies executed men in two ways: firing squad or hanging. By far the more popular of the two was hanging, but both occurred. This was likely because hanging was more public and could be used as a ceremony to influence the troops. This was a time-tested means of public execution that sent a dramatic message to the viewers. It was a long and drawn-out way to execute a person. For this reason, when troops were less organized or on the move, firing squads were used. This method would have the culprit blindfolded and kneeling by their grave and be shot by a line of soldiers. This latter method was more common in the southern theatre of the war.[50]

The influence of public hangings over the sentiments of soldiers was profound. Although the number executed was small, the number of viewers of those executions was extremely large. Whole regiments and large portions of the nearby civilian population

---

[49] For an excellent analysis and overview of executions in the military during the Revolutionary War, see Harry M. Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers: Policing the Continental Army* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009), 183-8.

[50] Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers,* 186-8.

would come out to witness the events. New Jersey Sergeant Thomas Roberts was astounded when in the summer of 1779 he attended an execution near Easton, Pennsylvania. At the place where three men were to be executed, Roberts was surprised at the size of the crowd, claiming "in my opinion theare was 4,000 that night" in attendance. Roberts admitted that he "never saw so many Specttators in my life I think."[51]

The setting of the executions, particularly hangings, were staged to have the maximal emotional effect on the viewers. The gallows for hanging were always set up on a hill or some form of elevation for greatest visibility. Indeed, nearly every element of the setting that was prepared for an execution site had to do with setting a stage for people to witness. Private Abner Stocking noticed the due preparations for the execution he attended. He commented on the fact that it took time to make sure the "gallows [were] erected, and all things prepared for his execution." The goal was not merely to mete out justice but to set a stage to convey a message that the authorities wanted the soldiers and witnesses to imbibe. Indeed, one private referred to the execution site, quite accurately, as a "theatre."[52]

These theatres were designed to convey a message, specifically a religious message. The execution was carried out in such an overt and religious way that its didactic elements rivaled those of a weekly sermon. Indeed, executions acted as visible sermons. The visible sermons began even before the day of the execution itself. Chaplains were instructed to meet with the condemned a few times before they were brought to the gallows to plead with them about their eternal souls. Reverend William

---

[51] Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 240.

[52] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal,* 11; Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 240.

Rogers of the New York Regiment met with two soldiers sentenced to death twice in the two days before their execution. He went to their prison cells and conveyed to them the spiritual realities, as he saw them, as to what was about to take place. The first day he visited them he impressed upon them "their awful condition by nature and practice." Because of this condition, he reminded them, they were guilty not merely in the eyes of the military court, but "in the sight of an holy God." To remove this guilt, he told them they must have "an interest in Christ" as the only way for a "due preparation for another world." After the first day of pleading, the two soldiers reacted in the same binary way that the army at large responded to religious appeals. One was "much softened, distressed, and anxious about his future state," while the other "said but little." This parable of two soldiers and their responses to religious appeals in the face of being executed was well known and those who saw or heard of it took note.[53]

Rogers visited the condemned again the next day with the same purpose. He once more pressed these men on "the realities of heaven and hell, and the justice and mercy of God." As the first day, one soldier "appeared still more penitent, and freely confessed the sentence of death passed against him to be just." At the same time, the other man "excused himself and insisted much on the innocency of his life." It was the religious soldier who accepted his condemnation and the justice of the entire event. Religious soldiers saw spiritual realities and divine justice behind their sentence and thus believed in the justness of what was to take place. The religious framing of the executions,

[53] I get the idea of reading events as "visible sermons" from Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 249.

beginning right at their start, worked to make them palatable to the condemned and moving to those who witnessed.[54]

Chaplain Ammi Robbins had a similar experience meeting with men before they were condemned. He likewise knew and sought to orchestrate visible sermons in the form of executions for the effect they would have on other soldiers. In the spring of 1776, he wrote how he twice went to "visit and to pray with a poor soldier of the Pennsylvania regiment under the sentence of death." Although he pleaded with him about spiritual things, the man "appeared much affected, but dreadfully ignorant." As much as Robbins seemed to be sincerely interested in the fate of that soldiers' soul, he did not lose sight of the public religious importance of these executions. The next day he wrote how "All the troops [were] drawn up on the prarde" to see the blindfolded prisoner brought out to be executed. Yet, at the last moment his commanding officer General Schuyler came on stage to make a moving speech and pardon the condemned soldier. Again, there is no question that it was known in advance that he was to be pardoned, yet Robbins and Schuyler carried out the visible sermon because they believed in the important moral and religious effect it would have on the soldiers.[55]

When military authorities staged executions of this sort, they were not ineffective. Soldiers attested in their dairies to the power that such pleading with those sentenced to death had on their religious sentiments. Private Abner Stocking recalled how he saw a chaplain conversing with prisoners about their upcoming execution and "the more awful and never-ending punishment that would await him in the eternal world." The scene

---

[54] Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 249.

[55] Ammi R. Robbins, *Journal of the Rev. Ammi R. Robbins: A Chaplain in the American Army* (New Haven: B.L. Hamlen, 1850), 3.

moved Stocking, not only to deter him from crime, but to think on eternal things and to be convinced of the reality of the religious shrouding over the whole process. Religious men had a very strong incentive to embrace and endorse this sort of punishment and theatrics. The religious soldier, like Stocking, was moved by the whole process and had their religious convictions about justice and the afterlife affirmed in a public way. Thus, they appreciated the visible sermons and were able to process one of the most graphic forms of death in military life.[56]

The religious covering over the entire ceremony continued when the prisoner was led to the gallows, always accompanied by a chaplain. The march from prison to the gallows was an elaborate process. The more notorious the execution the more the military did up the scene. For the execution of Major John Andre, a massive procession of sixteen officers, twenty-five sergeants, and one hundred rank and file soldiers accompanied him to the gallows. A staple of this procession ceremony was, of course, a chaplain. Typically, the prisoner was guided to his execution stage while blindfolded, both increasing the suspense for the one to be executed and adding to the drama for those witnessing. The chaplain provided reassurance to the soldiers that this was the will of God and reminded them of the religious importance of death and the afterlife. A message that was intended for the witnesses as much as it was for the condemned.[57]

Once they arrived at the gallows, the chaplain again had a chance to couch the event in religious terms, to make the visible sermon all the more overt. He did this by giving a small sermon on death. Such sermons were an old tradition in the colonies,

---

[56] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal,* 11.

[57] Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers,* 188.

dating back to the 1670s or 1680s. Their primary content had remained remarkably similar through the years: impressing heaven's sanction on the act and instructing all those who witnessed. A sermon preached at the execution of Native American Moses Paul in 1772 shed light on the themes soldiers heard from their chaplains about death. The sermon began with the thesis and aptly summarized the point of the execution day sermon. "Death is the King of Terrors," the preacher began, and it ought to be on the hearts and minds of men and women "daily." Since all die and know not when they will, they ought to mediate on its reality and "exert themselves in preparation for death continually." The execution of a person right in front of them was a visible reminder of this spiritual truth and no doubt had the desired effect on those witnessing. Major Raymond Demere recalled witnessing such a "solemn address made to the prisoners and the soldiers" and was struck by the impact that it had.[58]

At this point the prisoners were either executed or reprieved, both in dramatic fashion. It is difficult to determine what precisely were the factors in determining who was reprieved and who was not. Historian Henry Ward has argued that the difference between those prisoners who were executed and those who were reprieved is explained largely by class and political concerns. While this may have been true to some extent, it does not fully consider the importance of these executions as visible sermons. For the sermon to have the proper spiritual message, the penitent needed to be pardoned, while the impenitent hanged. It seemed that part of the calculation on the part of officers and

[58] For an overview of execution speeches in Early America, see Ronald A. Bosco, "Lectures at the Pillory: The Early American Execution Sermon," *American Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (Summer, 1978): 156-76; Samson Occom, *A Sermon, Preached at the Execution of Moses Paul, An Indian* (New Haven 1773), 4; Raymond Demere, "Journal of Major Raymond Demere," *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1968).

chaplains in determining who to pardon depended on how much such a pardon would mesh with the intended spiritual message that the execution was intended to convey. If the penitent were pardoned and those claiming innocence condemned, this fit with the intended message and influenced the possibility of pardon.[59]

Anecdotal evidence of the few executions we have support this contention. Before the execution of the two prisoners who were tended to by Reverend William Rogers, the authorities already knew that the penitent one was to be reprieved and the impenitent one was to be executed. Washington decided to pardon this soldier "under the gallows" because of his wife and family and "his decent behavior" and "former good character." Even though they knew this ahead of time, however, the execution was to continue for its effect on the witnessing soldiers. Thus, when the time came and the two condemned criminals were brought to the gallows Michael Rosebury, being impenitent, was hanged "the same stupid man he was at the first of our visiting him." Lawrence Miller however, played the proper role in the religious drama of those who are ultimately spared from God's justice. After seeing his fellow prisoner die, he was "much agitated" and began "commending himself to God." When he heard the news of his pardon, he was "greatly affected."[60]

It was clear to most witnesses that the point of the elaborate executions ceremonies was largely religious. The main drama of the sermon was resolved in a way that illustrated the predominant religious views of the soldiers. Those who were penitent were reprieved, while the impenitent received punishment, in this life and in the next.

---

[59] Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers,* 185.

[60] Cook, *Journals of the Military Expedition,* 249-50.

Religious soldiers thus embraced executions to an extent because they were validated by this religious framework. In this way religious men submitted to military discipline, even in the most extreme form of public executions. Thus, as religion aided soldiers in interpreting battle and mustering courage in the face of death, it also enabled them to embrace this most public and choreographed form of death in the army. Enduring and being able to rationalize strict military discipline and punishment was essential to enduring the war effort and religion played a role in how that happened for many soldiers.

The final stage of the ceremony made sure that the troops had time to reflect on what they had just seen. The ceremony did not end with the death of the executed, again, because it was about far more than meeting out justice on a single transgressor. It had to be ensured that soldiers and witnesses imbibed the proper message, both religious and disciplinary. After the execution, the whole army marched in formation "by the body of the criminal." Of course, this did not always occur. Often executions had to be done in a quicker manner and this part was omitted. However, it was revealing about the public importance of the execution that they wanted soldiers to walk by the condemned in order to give them time to reflect and imbibe the meaning of what they just witnessed. This little ritual certainly had no martial utility.[61]

All the ceremony surrounding executions did not go without effect. Soldiers responded to these visible sermons somewhere along the spectrum of contempt for the whole process to heartful outcries. Some responded to these scenes with contempt and indignation or indifference. One private seemed to be struck when he saw a condemned

[61] Demere, "Journal of Major Raymond Demere," 344.

man on the gallows who when asked if he wanted a chaplain refused, stating emphatically "that they wear all Cut throats." Perhaps this was a reference to the fact that the chaplain had been so involved in his execution ceremony. Many soldiers simply noted witnessing these events in their diaries and were apparently not moved enough to comment further. Private James Melvin summarized one of these scenes as the guilty man was "brought to the gallows and reprieved." Similarly, Captain John Davis of Pennsylvania noted that they captured deserting soldiers and simply "tried" and "executed" them. He wrote this with little reflection at all let alone a religious one.[62]

However, other soldiers clearly imbibed the intended religious experience of the executions. Josiah Atkins witnessed an execution and had a profound religious response, one that these visible sermons were orchestrated to induce. Atkins cried out after witnessing this execution ""O my God! Teach me that I am a dying man, expos'd continually to the devouring dart of the king of terrors!" He wanted to use the occasion to be reminded that he must have "trust & confidence" in God, so "as not to be surpris'd by death, let it come sudden, or not, sooner or later." When it did come and he met death like the men he just saw die, he prayed that he would be "landed safely in the mansions of eternal rest & peace!" Atkins touched on all the religious points that the visible sermon was intended to convey. He was moved by it and incorporated it in a sense, because it

[62] The Diary of Ensign Caleb Clapp in John Gilmary Shea and Henry Reed Stiles, ed., "The Historical Magazine," Vol. 3, no. 1 (January 1874), 136; James Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin: Private Soldier in Arnold's Expedition Against Quebec* (Portland: Hubbard W. Bryant Publisher, 1902), 43; John Davis, "Diary of Captain John Davis, of the Pennsylvania Line," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 1, no. 1 (July 1893): 5.

was consonant with his religious view of the world and reinforced his hopes of divine justice.[63]

Later on, Atkins again embraced the religious injunction intended from a particular execution. He had witnessed a man executed in his regiment for "breaking up a house & robbing it." This was particularly egregious behavior that the Continental Army wanted to snuff out. The people would not long support the Revolution and the Continental Army if they were continually getting plundered by them. The soldiers had to be made aware that both the military and God disapproved of this. Thus, a visible sermon was in order. After the execution, the ever-religious Atkins, embraced the meaning exactly as intended. "This is a plain evidence of the striking truth," Atkins declared, "*The love of money is the root of all evil"* (1 Timothy 6:10 KJV). Atkins quoted scripture to validate his religious response to the execution. He continued to prove his approval of what happened by concluding that "It was this that purchas'd this miserable wretch a rope."[64]

Private Abner Stocking was similarly moved in his religious sentiments after witnessing an execution. He noted how he had not seen anything like this before he joined the military and it was thus a new experience for him. He described his emotional state as "very awful and affecting." The scene moved him religiously. He made note of the themes of eternal life and punishment that were articulated by the chaplain and devoted nearly a whole page of his diary to this scene. Like Atkins, Stocking saw this religious scene as he was intended to. Religion was a key element for these soldiers in

[63] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 20-1.

[64] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 45.

interpreting and embracing this form of death in the military. It was an essential means by which they coped with death by execution.[65]

Religious soldiers also seemed to endure this form of punishment better because they hoped it would be a means of religious and moral reform of, not only to the viewers, but of those who underwent it. In a letter to his father about an execution he just saw, Jonathan Todd expressed this sentiment. He wrote how many viewing the execution were "disappointed after the Gaurds were Call'd out & the men bline folded they were reprieved." Todd, however, was not disappointed at the reprieve. He was "Extremely glad to hear it if it will reform them any as I hope it will." If the proper spiritual reform could take place in those condemned, then it was worth it. Todd provided another element as to why religious soldiers seemed to resonate with these scenes. They sincerely believed that they were for spiritual reform of the condemned and not simply an act of cruelty. Thus, executions were not only visible reflections of divine justice, but participated in the moral and religious reform of their fellow soldiers. This too lent the whole process to the religious viewer.[66]

The difference between how the religious soldiers interpreted these executions from the non-religious soldiers was significant. It seems that the religious man was better able to accept this most harsh of military punishments because it was clothed in religious trappings (like chaplains and sermons) and seemed to reflect the order of divine justice that soldiers believed in. The penitent were forgiven and the impenitent were not. Religious troops seemed never to question the propriety of the death penalty during the

[65] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal,* 11.

[66] Letter on 7 September 1777 Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA.

war and it seemed to them a valid religious experience. Thus, religious soldiers better endured this most difficult form of death in military life.

Death was the ever-present and dominating fear of military life; indeed, some soldiers knew it as the king of terrors. In order to sustain oneself during the gruesome realities of war, one had to have a way of dealing emotionally and psychologically with the death around them, whether it was spontaneous as in battle or from disease or orchestrated through public executions. Being in the military meant almost certain exposure to these forms of death and men had to cope with that. For many troops, religion was the way they did this. Religion seemed apt to provide various strategies that steadied the soldier as they grappled with the myriad of ways, they encountered death. Soldiers turned to their religion to provide them a framework to interpret the reality of death around them and to religious strategies to fortify themselves as they faced a very real chance of death. They saw battlefield deaths as part of God's timeline and as spurs to personal piety. They relied on their understand of religious methods and strategies alongside scientific measures to endure the reality of disease around them and when they personally contracted it. Finally, they embraced the public executions in the military because they saw them as visible sermons, reflections of the divine justice system that they believed in. While the non-religious soldier had their own ways of coping with these phenomena, the religious one found these helpful and empowering. Wartime death, in the many ways it came, was endured by many soldiers via using their religious convictions and practices.

CHAPTER 4

"I DESIRE YOUR PRAYERS": SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS WITH THE HOMEFRONT

God Give us Suckses is I Hop the Prayer of all His Peopel.

-William Greenleaf, New England Militiaman

Oh that offspring would learn to trust in the God of their mother!

-Margaret Morris, Member of the Quaker Community, Pennsylvania

Lieutenant Joseph Hodgkins of Ipswich, Massachusetts never felt comfortable with the fact that the war had put so much distance between him and his loved ones back home. While he wrote them as often as he could, he was unsatisfied with the number of letters he got in return. "I have Ben hear four weaks to night" he lamented in a letter home to his wife Sarah, "& I have sent you a grate many leters & I have Received But three from you." Despite these challenges, the Hodgkins' successfully used letter writing to maintain a sense of closeness during their separation. In their letters, Joseph and Sarah rehearsed many practical themes relating to army and home life but when they needed to comfort one another they relied on religious language and ideas. In October of 1775, after some months distance, Joseph wrote Sarah "I hope these lines will find you and my Children the same I whant to see you very much But as Providance has ordered it so that we are absent from Each other I Desire to be Content." Amid this struggle for

contentment, he reminded his wife of his confidence that God who "has Carred us through many Defcaltys will still be with us…[and] [g]ive us an opportunity of meeting & harts to Prase his name to geather." Sarah responded in kind. She reminded him of her trust in God and her "hope that all the . . . aflictions we meet with will be Sanctified to us for our good." In these letters, Joseph and Sarah took many pains to bridge the physical gap between them. Through many letters containing profound religious assurances, comforting ideas, and mutual prayers, the Hodgkins were able to overcome the physical distance and maintain a sense of their spiritual community.[1]

Historians and religious scholars have written much on religion's ability to create a connection between people even from afar. An excellent study on the twentieth century Aglow's Women's Fellowship examined how women from different areas of America were able to create a genuine community by publishing their stories and diligently praying for one another. This common venture allowed these women to join in a "collective process of narrative construction" in which they used religion to frame and deal with each other's difficulties in family life. These acts could so join these women together that they were considered each other's "alternative families" from the difficult ones that they had at home. Through mutual prayer and narrative sharing these women created a spiritual community, often at a distance, that enabled each other to deal with challenging life circumstances. Such construction of a spiritual community parallels the ways in which a nation coheres as an imagined community. Through shared religious discourse and tropes soldiers felt a sense of attachment with their families and home front

[1] The Hodgkins' letters are transcribed in full in an appendix to Herbert T. Wade and Robert A. Lively, *This Glorious Cause: The Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), 177, 180, 184.

churches. These constructed religious connections created a community to which many soldiers imagined they belonged.[2]

This chapter will argue that religious soldiers during the Revolutionary War used religion as a means staying connected with their cherished communities back home, and that this sense of connection was vital in coping with the hardships of war. War isolated soldiers from their families. Many of them had never been outside the town in which they were born and now found themselves marching across state lines hundreds of miles from anywhere familiar. Friends and family were left behind and in a day with no technology, soldiers had to find some means of staying connected with those they loved. Many soldiers turned to religion to cope with these new challenges. Soldiers used religion to relate to and build spiritual communities, most immediately, with fellow soldiers. Not all were religious, so when a religious soldier found another that was like-minded, there was instant connection and friendship that added to unit cohesion. Additionally, soldiers used religion to maintain the bands of community with the home front. They often prayed for those they loved and were comforted to hear that their prayers were reciprocated. As soldiers prayed for their loved ones back home, churches and towns gathered in prayer for the troops they sent away. The one form of direct communication that the soldiers did have, letter writing, became essential in this task of constructing and maintaining a

[2] R. Marie Griffith, "Submissive Wives, Wounded Daughters, and Female Soldiers: Prayer and Christian Womanhood in Women's Aglow Fellowship," in *Lived Religion in America: Toward A History of Practice,* ed. David D. Hall (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1997), 171-2; I borrow the idea of people feeling a sense of belonging and community with others, even at distance, from Benedict Anderson's analysis of nations cohering among people because they imagine themselves to be close to one another. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

spiritual community from afar. Soldiers wrote and received many letters to and from family members (particularly wives) in which they actively used religious discourse to comfort each other. In this process, women were especially prominent in that they took on the important role of spiritual advisors for their husbands and even spiritual leaders of their homes. Constructing spiritual communities in this way was particularly important for soldiers to maintain a sense of social support during a historical moment in which standing armies were looked at with skepticism and disapproval. Many soldiers turned to religion to construct spiritual communities both among the troops and with their hometown that carried them through the war.

Soldiers' sense of community was vital to sustaining their morale during the war. Social science has established an important link between social networks and one's ability to cope with stressful situations. One's connections to friends and family have been shown to significantly reduce their vulnerability to harmful amounts of stress, trauma-induced functional disorders, and even various medical conditions. Social support is defined as one's ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community mediated by both the quantity and quality of the relationships. Although both matter, research indicates that quality social support (consisting of both emotional and instrumental elements) is the more important of the two for sustaining individuals through stress. In other words, simply giving and receiving emotional support such as love, empathy, and approval go a long way in bolstering one's ability to endure stress and hardship. It not only increases their likelihood to endure their present circumstances, but also mitigates the harmful effects of stress and trauma after the fact. Social science seems to validate the commonsense adage that (when it comes to dealing with hardship at least) no man is an

island. These findings help illuminate the significance of soldiers' social attachments during the war.[3]

In studies of soldiers in particular, social support factored high in importance for successfully coping with the stresses of battle. Soldiers returning from the Vietnam War who had perceptions of extremely low social support were much more likely to develop PTSD, for example. Soldiers with higher amounts of social support fared far better in dealing with the traumas and stresses of war than those who did not. One study of Union soldiers during the Civil War had complementary findings that soldiers with more unit cohesion fared better in health outcomes than those that did not. This study noted that even perceived social support was an important factor even when support was not there. Union soldiers who came from cohesive units experienced this social support and had better health outcomes from the war. Studies of wars, both modern and historic, highlight the fact that social support is essential for troops well-being. Moreover, social context plays a significant role in how soldiers process and experience war itself.[4]

---

[3] For an excellent summary and analysis of these social science findings, see Ozbay, Faith et al., "Social Support and Resilience to Stress: From Neurobiology to Clinical Practice," *Psychiatry* 4(5) (May 2007):35-40.

[4] Feelings of low social support and approval greatly contributed to developing PTSD. Soldiers homecoming event was traumatic for them in large part because of their perceptions of low social support, see Johnson, D R et al., "The impact of the homecoming reception on the development of posttraumatic stress disorder. The West Haven Homecoming Stress Scale (WHHSS)," *J. Trauma Stress* 10(2) (April 1997): 259-77. Looking at more historic wars, social scientist have found a similar link between social support and mental health, see Dora L. Costa and Matthew E. Kahn, "Health, Wartime Stress, and Unit Cohesion: Evidence From Union Army Veterans," *Demography* 47(1) (February 2010): 45-66.

Researchers have further recognized the ability that religion has to foster these communities and networks of social support. In recent decades social science has been able to identify various positive health outcomes related to religious belief and involvement in a religious community. The primary putative mechanism for these benefits is suggested to be the healthy social networks that religion can foster. While certainly not always the case, religion can provide opportunities for friendships, involvement in a common cause, and a sense of doing good for others. These realities were particularly true in the 18th century when the primary form of social organization and community building was through organized religion. Soldiers of that era were accustomed to religious means of forming connections and receiving social support and encouragement through their town church.[5]

Many of the benefits of social support just outlined were intensely present in the tight-knit colonial towns from which Revolutionary War soldiers came. Most soldiers, particularly those from rural areas, were used to organizing their social lives around the town church, mediated by religious discourse. In New England, many soldiers' families had lived in the same town going back over one hundred years. Life in these small towns revolved around the church and the community. Thus, spiritual community was a part of everyday life. Praying with and for one another was how these people got through life and hardship. It was a world in which towns dealt with problems by gathering in the church and praying. Even in rural areas outside of New England, life was parochial and

[5] For an excellent summary and analysis on the ability of religion to foster positive mental and social health outcomes, see Kevin S. Seybold and Peter C. Hill, "The Role of Religion and Spirituality in Mental Health and Physical Health," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 10, no. 1 (February 2001): 21-4.

centered around the religious community. For example, Scottish Presbyterians who settled the Carolina backcountry (many of whom would go on to fight in the war) built their churches first and in the center of their new towns and much of life was run through it. Religion was, in many ways, the glue that held colonial social fabric together and soldiers took that mentality with them into the war to construct and sustain spiritual communities both in the camp and with their home.[6]

Most immediately, soldiers used religion to form communal ties among their fellow troops. Friendship and camaraderie among troops was essential not only for the functioning of the army, but also for sustaining morale throughout the duration of the war. Soldiers often eulogized these bonds with one another. Joseph Plumb Martin fondly recalled that soldiers "had lived together as a family of brothers for several years." Together they endured "hardships, dangers, and sufferings incident to a soldiers' life." They aided one another through "bearing each other's burdens or…make them lighter by council and advice." What Martin described here were constructed communities of social support among the soldiers. Called away from their hometowns, soldiers quickly went about using religion to form such connections. Religious soldiers were not keen on feeling isolated during the war, as many did. Thus, when one found a like-minded soldier

[6] See, for example, Douglass Winiarski's examination of the spiritual life of Haverhill New England inWiniarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light,* 107-24; Elizabeth Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution,* Vol. III (New York: Baker and Scribner, 1848), 118. Even in the decade leading up to the war colonists showed intensified interest in religion to deal with the hardships of colonial life. The renewed interest in religion at this time was not confined to parochial New England towns, but extended across the colonies. For example, see the explosive growth of Baptist and Methodist churches in Virginia in the decades leading up to the war. Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: Published for The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 161-77; McDonnell, *The Politics of War,* 29-30.

in their unit or encampment, they were quite excited by it. Part of forming this spiritual community was simply being able to discuss those religious ideas that they held dear with others in the camp. Even amid what he called a "Depraved and Degenerated" time, Private Amos Farnsworth was relieved to find in his regiment "a young Gentleman that I Could Freely Convers with on Sperital things." Leaving his hometown of Groton, Massachusetts and now being stationed at Cambridge was a transition for him. This friend encouraged Farnsworth in the army and made him feel that he was not alone. He was heartened that "God has a Remnant" of people he could relate to even amid the army.[7]

Many religious soldiers shared Farnsworth's enthusiasm to be able to discourse on heavenly matters. One unremarkable Sunday afternoon while stationed, Private Henry Sewall visited with a colonel and his two daughters who, he was pleased to find out, were "not ashamed to discourse with freedom on morality & religion." Here Sewall not only

[7] Martin, *Ordinary Courage*, 172; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 84-5. Many works have examined friendship among the officers in the Continental Army. They have argued that friendships among the officer corps were primarily mediated by Masonry clubs and characterized by elite ideals of sensibility. These friendships continued into the early republic and aided Washington's cabinet in governing the new nation. However, these studies lack an emphasis on the low-ranking soldiers, who instead relied on religion and shared experiences of suffering to form such friendships. See, Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840* (Chapel Hill: Published for The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Sarah Knott, *Sensibility and the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill: Published for The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture by University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Richard Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). For a solid examination of the differing ideas and practices of friendship among different ranks in the army, see Rachel A. Engl, "Forging Bonds: Examining Experiences of Friendship for Officers and Soldiers of the Continental Army, 1775-1783," (Master's Thesis 2012), Lehigh University.

got to know his colonel through discussion of religious topics, but even found grounds to discourse with some young ladies in the camp. This kind of fraternization with a superior officer was uncommon and clearly made an impression on Sewall. Facilitating discourse on shared religious interest went a long way toward helping soldiers build friendships and comradery in their ranks. It often heartened their moods as well. When one soldier was "dul in Religion" he was glad to be able to spend the day "riding with a Christion frind; had agreable Conversation on the rode." Indeed, soldiers believed that God often used their fellow Christian troops to manifest his presence to them and encourage them thereby. One soldier was convinced that he "Enjoyed somthing of the Divine Presence" while he was "with a Christion that spoke on the power of religion."[8]

Soldiers built these religious connections not only through discussion, but also mutual participation in the religious routines. The religious routines discussed previously had the unintended consequence of carving out time in a soldier's otherwise busy life to allow them to fraternize with each other. Although often unrecognized, this was a vital way in which religion fostered a sense of unity and cohesion among the troops. They were able to take time out of their busy days to simply be with one another. Religious soldiers seemed to encourage one another and to enjoy spending time with their friends at religious services, as Private David How often recorded when his friends attended services with him. While stationed at Cambridge during the difficult winter of 1775, How was particularly enthusiastic about being able to see his friends during worship services. After hearing a sermon from "Revelations the 19th 5th vr.," How was happy to see

[8] Farnsworth often wrote about religious discourse with other soldiers, to the point where it was clearly a common practice. For examples, see Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 85, 94-6; Entry for 26 March 1780, Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS.

"Nathan Ingalls & John Wilson" who had "come here to Meting This afternoon." But a week later and he enjoyed a similar experience of spending time with "Jonathan How" on a Sunday at Temple House. Soldiers found this sort of spiritual converse and community profoundly refreshing. As one private eulogized, "in the evening love was somewhat in Exercise by Conversing with Christions friends."[9]

These relationships that were fostered by religion often led to soldiers praying for one another. During the difficult campaign to Quebec, many of Samuel Haws' fellow troops were captured and put into British prison camps in the dead of winter. Haws knew the hardship that this would be for many of his fellow troops. Many would die from freezing or starvation in that prison. He however was not captured but felt compassion for his comrades and responded to their capture by noting in his diary: "we Pray God thy news may prove falce." Haws use of "we" in this diary entry may indicate that it was a formal gathering of the troops to pray for those captured. This was known to occur and certainly could have been the case, but it could also have been his personal prayer. Either way, it was clear Haws felt a sense of spiritual community with his fellow troops. Soldiers often saw each other infirm and nearing death and took the occasion to pray with and for each other and their families. Ezra Tilden noted with sadness a soldier who died in his regiment and prayed for him that "Oh, will god Sanctify it to your bereaved Relatives…" Religion could also be the means by which one soldier would approach and comfort another in their time of need. Tilden knew a fellow soldier was dying so he went to minister to him in the hospital: "oh god prepare him for his Change & receive his departing Spirit to his heavenly kingdom! & god prepare his friends for his Sovereign

[9] How, Diary of David How, 5-6; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 94.

will & pleasure, whatever it may be concerning him!" Religion was an essential means by which soldiers constructed and sustained friendships with fellow soldiers that helped them endure the length of the difficult war.[10]

African American soldiers likewise mingled their fighting the British with ardent praying for their comrades. At the seventy-second anniversary of the Battle at Groton Heights an eyewitness to the combat attested to this pious and martial behavior of the black troops who fought. In September of 1781, as the British stormed the town of Groton, "two colored men" by the names of Lambert Latham and Jordan Freeman fought back against the invaders "like tigers, and were butchered after the gates were burst open." After hearing the town alarm, both immediately took military posts at the nearby fort to defend it. The battle did not go well for the American side, as the British quickly overran the established defenses and took the town. Yet, during the battle one could see African American soldiers utilizing religion both to fight and to sustain their fellow troops. Although there "was not any negro pew in that fort," this eyewitness saw "some praying as well as fighting." The comment seems to indicate that although there was not an established pew for persons of color (as would have been the case in many churches), those faithful soldiers prayed anyway. As these African American soldiers fought to the death alongside white soldiers, the battle did create a symbolic view of equality as every soldier was so covered in smoke and powder that there was "little to boast of on the score of color."[11]

---

[10] Haws, *The Military Journals of Two Private Soldiers*, 88; Ezra Tilden's Diary, 33 & 90, MHS.

[11] William C. Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), 138-9.

Soldiers maintained religious community not simply with their fellow troops, but even with their families back home. A sense of community and support from the home front was vital to a soldier feeling that their country supported their mission in a large sense and that they had the support they needed in a personal sense as well. Here again, religion proved vital to many soldiers keeping encouraged from the home front. Colonists were largely skeptical of a standing army at all and many had very negative views of the army because they had stolen from them or destroyed land that they marched through. However, there was an important connection between the two in the form of religion. The home front cared for and spiritually encouraged many soldiers and the soldiers responded in kind. This is an overlooked element of how the home front related to the new standing army and highlights an area of exception to the otherwise fraught relationship between civilians and soldiers. Moreover, soldiers cherished and relied on these relationships to such an extent that it filled much of their diaries and letters. Soldiers' imagined spiritual communities were a vital part of their coping with the ills of war.[12]

Prayer was one important way in which soldiers remained connected with their loved ones back home. They both prayed for them and coveted their prayers. Soldiers were often thinking about and praying for the home front. Soldiers were very open in their writing about the importance they placed on these mutual prayers and the

[12] The literature detailing colonists' distrust of standing armies is extensive. Even beginning in the imperial crisis colonists viewed standing armies as intrinsically threatening to liberty. If a free people were not willing to defend themselves and instead had the state pay persons to protect them, they were already enslaved in their view. See, Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 112-3; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War,* 47-9. In addition to these prejudices against a standing army, colonists had many practical reasons to be averse to the Continental Army because of the behavior of the troops. See, Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence,* 90-107.

encouragement it provided them. Private Jonathan Todd wrote to his dad from Valley Forge about how "I very much want to see you all - hope the length of time will make our meeting much the sweeter." In the meantime while they were apart, they could take hope in the mutual religious prayers and assurances that If they cannot see each other again in this life, they may be prepared to meet in "an Eternal World of Rest...where there is Joy forever." Many soldiers similarly used assurances of mutual prayers as a means of remaining close to their loved ones. One Rhode Island private eulogized such spiritual connections in a letter he wrote to his sister: "I hope heaven will continually shower down Blessings upon you, family harmony particularly as most worthy the Choirs of the Celestial Regions."[13]

Soldiers at times wrote elaborate letters home as to how exactly they were praying for their families. One soldier was more poetic in describing how he prayed for others than perhaps any other single topic:

> In the mean time, I shall not be wanting to offer up my ardent Prayers to Heaven, humbly beseeching the Supreme Director of all Events, to dispell the gloomy Clouds that now o'erspread us, and is ready every moment to burst upon us; and to grant that the happy day may soon arrive, when we can once more return to our own Homes, in the Arms of Peace, Liberty and Happiness; that he wou'd in a particular manner shower down innumerable Blessings upon you my honoured Parents, that he wou'd be pleased to be your Guide and Director, through all the Changes and Vicissitudes of Life, and that when it is his blessed Will, that you leave this frail, fleeting Life, he may receive you into the Mansions of Celestial Bliss.

[13] Letter on 3 January 1778, Jonathan Todd, W2197, RWPA; Ryan, *A Salute to Courage,* 10.

This prayer functioned to connect this soldier and his family in many ways. At the most basic level, it served to remind his family that he was thinking of them and to give him an outlet to express the feelings of homesickness and loneliness he felt during his military service. It also reassured them that he was coping with the war in religious and salutary ways. He tried to give his family religious hope that these "gloomy" times they faced would give way to "Arms of Peace, Liberty and Happiness." This prayer provided both parties with a sense that they were enduring this hardship together. Finally, it gave them a kind of ultimate insurance against tragedy, by reminding one another that no matter what happens they will meet again in "the Mansions of Celestial Bliss." These powerful religious sentiments were used by many troops and their families to encourage one another. "May the Blessings of Heaven," read a letter written to Captain John Chester, "follow in answer to our prayers." Soldiers had limited space in these letters and the fact they spent so much of it using religious themes to stay connected with those at home indicates the importance that this spiritual communion played for them.[14]

Soldiers coveted and often requested prayers from those they loved. They believed in the efficacy of prayer and desired to know they had such support from the home front. Narrowly surviving a battle was a common time for such requests. Just after his dramatic experience at the Battle of Bunker Hill, Private Peter Brown wrote his mother "asking your Prayers" for his new endeavor as a soldier in the coming season. Likewise, after the evacuation of New York in 1776, Dominicus Hovey wrote to his father that "I Desire your prayers for me that I may be keept from sin…[and] that god

[14] Ryan, *A Salute to Courage*, 144; Letter to Captain John Chester 20 July 1775, Photostats Box 37, 1775-6, MHS.

would cover all our heads in the Day of Battell." Soldiers who were going off to battle often made their last request for the prayers of the home front that was sending them off. Just before joining the provincial army in 1775, Massachusetts Private Josiah Adams expressed on behalf of the enlisting troops that "they desired: the Prayers of Gods People in this Place, that God would protect & defend them in a Day of Battle...that He would save them from those mortal Diseases incident to an Army, & especially from all moral Evil." It was these prayers that soldiers believed had a real effect on how they would endure in the war. Providence was guided by prayer and soldiers who were so saturated in providentialism took confidence in such prayers of the people back home. It also had the sociological and psychological effect of sanctioning the troops behavior and validating their sacrifice on behalf of the people. By soliciting prayers, the troops were granted much needed reassurance that the home front supported their cause.[15]

Many soldiers felt a sense of loneliness after leaving their provincial lives and used prayer as a means of coping with the isolation. Josiah Atkins was not particularly keen on joining the army. By the time he was drafted into the war in 1781 much of the glamorized *rage militare* of 1776 had worn off. He knew the life of a soldier would be difficult, and, most importantly for him, isolated from the spiritual community that he loved. Many times, particularly on a Sabbath, Atkins would lament this sense of spiritual isolation. Instead of being joyful at the excitement of the cause, he would document his laments: "for tho I am here, yet my heart is at home with thy worshipping people." In the

[15] Brown, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775," MHS; Dominicus Hovey to Rev. Ivory Hovey, 7 October 1776, CLA; O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration: Lived Religion, Obligation, and Political Identity in the American Revolution," 95.

pre-technological world of the 18th century, there was little that they could do to still feel that sense of community with Atkins, but what little they could he desired. Atkins' entire diary reads as an attempt to bridge the distance between his spiritual community back home and the demands of a nomadic soldier's life. Thus, he made clear in a letter attached to his diary that he would "ask the Prayers of all you that stay at hom." [16]

Prayers were especially fervent between husbands and wives. A particularly poetic soldier would be able to write his wife about their prayers in a way that made their spiritual connection real and vivid. Many did precisely that. James Williams of South Carolina, for example, passionately reminded his wife of the importance of their common prayers when he exhorted her: "let us, with one heart, call on God for his mercies." This was a consistent message in the writings he sent back home. In a later letter he described the spiritual connection that they felt with one another through prayer: "our joint prayers meet in Heaven for each other and our bleeding country." During the wartime separation, the spiritual community took on a new importance and urgency for many soldiers to sustain their home front relationships. Prayer was among the few active ways the soldier could feel close to his wife. Such exhortations to mutual prayer to his wife not only emphasized their spiritual unity but called his wife to struggle with him in this battle through prayer.[17]

---

[16] The editor of Atkins' diary, Steven E. Kagle, makes this precise point in his introduction. Atkins clearly used journaling and prayers as the only available means to him to maintain closeness with the home front. Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 14, 27.

[17] Graves, *Backcountry Revolutionary,* 182, 196.

These mutual prayers simultaneously encouraged soldiers and enabled women to envision themselves as joining the war effort. Joining the struggle through prayer was a common notion among religious women during the war. Laurel Ulrich has demonstrated that a religious view of the war, held by most New England women, allowed "young ladies as well as soldiers to fight in the army of Christ." They did this actively beginning in the imperial crisis by holding their spinning gatherings to aid British boycotts (two-thirds of which were held in churches). They also fought in this metaphorical army of Christ through prayers for their husbands and sons fighting in the war. Mary Fish Noyes wrote a moving letter to her husband in which she described herself at prayer as "wrestling for you and our bleeding land." The martial imagery of the letter indicates how she viewed the power of praying for her husband as a way she too could fight. As she described "I have in some measur acted the *heroine* as well as my dear Husband the Hero." This type of prayerful struggling was the way of duty for a colonial wife, something that they felt they needed to do before God. As for the recipient of such prayers, it was clear they cherished them. Whether it was among families, spouses, or church members, there were clear lines of prayer and spiritual connection between the home front and the soldiers. These connections took up much of the soldiers writing and meditations during their downtime in the war. It bridged the wide gap between civilian life and a soldier's life.[18]

[18] For excellent analysis of the notion of women struggling in the war effort through prayer see, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty: Religious Women in Revolutionary New England," in *Women in the Age of the American Revolution,* ed. Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989), 211-43; Joy Day Buel and Richard Buel, Jr., *The Way of Duty: A Woman and Her Family in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1984), 129.

A rare collection of prayer bills submitted by soldiers and their families from Medfield, Massachusetts afford insight into the content of prayers between soldiers, their churches, and their families. Prayer bills were small slips of paper that contained prayer requests which were submitted to a church. They were a staple of New England piety reaching back to the days of John Winthrop. They were submitted by any church member for any reason that they desired the community to come together and pray. Prayer notes bound a spiritual community together. It made public private struggles and invited others to share burdens and help care for one another. In many ways, these small slips of paper acted as the bonds of a functioning spiritual community. Both soldiers and their communities back home continued this practice throughout the war, further evidence of the importance that both placed on maintaining their spiritual communities. These prayer notes demonstrated the effect that the war had in strengthening the bond between churches and the soldiers they sent, providing an important exception to the typically strained relations between soldiers and civilians. Churches took spiritual responsibility to pray for their troops very seriously and often did so by submitting these prayer bills. These notes were short and sometimes formulaic, but their contents showed how many families and churches felt keenly that they had sent their members into the war. This sense of spiritual community was certainly reciprocated by interested soldiers who often defined the end of the war by their ability to return to their church community.[19]

[19] Sincere thanks to Douglas Winiarski for sharing these prayer bills with me. For background on the practice and content of prayer bills, see Douglas L. Winiarski, "The Newbury Prayer Bill Hoax: Devotion and Deception in New England's Era of Great Awakenings," *Massachusetts Historical Review* 14 (2012), 53-86. The fraught relationship between soldiers and civilians is well documented, see Harry M. Ward, *George Washington's Enforcers: Policing the Continental Army* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 2006), 13-4; Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence,* 90-116.

Prayer bills reveal how and what spiritual communities did to pray for their soldiers. Some prayer bills indicated that families who had sent a son into battle used the occasion to teach their children to pray with the church for their warring siblings. One of the larger prayer notes, submitted by "David Perry and his wife," was clearly emulated by their children who wrote their own prayer requests on the same piece of paper. The Perry family had sent two sons into the army, one had died and the other was still fighting in "ye Publick Service of his Country." The Perry parents modeled how to write and pray over a prayer note with the church for their children and then asked them to follow along. Thus, the prayer note of the parents was mirrored by their three children "mary & martha and Tyler" who followed their parents' example in praying with the church for their brothers at war. Other prayer notes, like the one submitted by "Samson Wheeler and wife and Children" show the same pattern of whole families coming together through their church to pray for a "son and Brother" in battle. Even young siblings of soldiers, boys and girls, became part of the religious experience of the war.[20]

Churches seemed to be most important for women who were alone because their husbands or sons were away fighting. Although prayer bills submitted by married women usually only contained their husband's name, those submitted by single or widowed women contained their names. The "widow Tabitha" submitted a prayer of thanksgiving "to God in this congregation for his goodness to her in returning her from sickness to as much health and strength" as she now enjoyed. She was apparently all alone and her only son was serving in the army. Tabitha was grateful that during this time of loneliness she

[20] David Perry and his wife, and Mary, Martha, and Tyler Perry, Prayer Bills, n.d. [ca. 1770s], Miscellaneous Church Records Collection, Medfield Historical Society (MEHS).

could "wait upon him [God] in his house again." She continued to beseech her congregation for "ye continuance of your prayers for her son in ye army." Tabitha made tremendous sacrifices for the cause and it was the spiritual community of her church that held her up through so much distress and allowed her to participate in the cause through prayer for her son. Similarly, "the wife of Israel Heald" wrote a prayer note for her husband in the army. She too joined with the church and spiritual community in praying for soldiers. In the South, one patriot mother from New Rochelle likewise supported her sons with prayer. She "melted all the pewter she had into bullets for her two sons, sent them forth to join the continental army" and immediately went back into her house to "pray for their safety." Women turned to spiritual activities to build these communities of prayer that they knew their husbands and sons would find meaningful and to be active participants in the war effort.[21]

The most solemn of these prayer requests were from families who had already lost a son in battle and asked the church to pray for their religious improvement of the tragedy. This mirrored the religious strategy employed by soldiers who had experienced a tragedy during the war, they wanted God to turn it for their good. They had clearly learned such methods of coping with difficulty from these churches and carried it with them onto the battlefield. Families submitted prayer notes to the same effect. Such prayer

[21] Tabitha Proctor, Prayer Bill, MEHS. Ellet, *Domestic History*, 61. For analysis of ways women used religion during the war to define and expand their sphere of influence, see the classic work by Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 126-32. Women who had relatives in the army recorded similar prayers in their diaries, see Hannah Heaton, *The World of Hannah Heaton: The Diary of an Eighteenth-Century New England Farm Woman,* ed. Barbara E. Lacey (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 172-6.

notes typically asked that "God Would Sanctifie" unto them any tragedy or evil they encountered, meaning that they were asking God to use the tragedy that befell them for their spiritual good. Although many of these families were familiar with hardship, having a loved one in the war presented new spiritual challenges. The Perry family had already lost one relative in the war, and the younger siblings desired "Prayers that God Would Sanctifie unto them His Riteous Providence in Taking away their Elder Brother By Death." There was no hesitation in either of the Perry family prayer bills to affirm that it was God who had taken "away their Eldest Son by Death." Importantly, these families did not view the death of their son as a martyr for the cause of political liberty, but part of the spiritual plan of God, who, they prayed, would use the tragedy to mature them and bring the spiritual community closer together.[22]

More often than requesting help for enduring a tragic death, church members asked that God would protect and preserve their soldiers. These included requests for both spiritual and temporal preservation. Families knew the moral hazards that faced their sons while in the army, and civilian rumors about the low moral quality of the troops only exacerbated these fears. Prayer notes frequently contained requests that soldiers would be kept from "sin" or, more broadly, "from all Evel." They, and many of their men in the army, believed in a God who would judge them for moral failings, and they crafted their spiritual requests in this way to guard their loved ones from such divine chastisement. Families coupled requests for spiritual preservation with pleas for temporal preservation.

[22] David Perry and his wife, and Mary, Martha, and Tyler Perry, Prayer Bills, MEHS; Winiarski, "The Newbury Prayer Bill Hoax," 59-60. Ideas of martyrdom for a political cause were quite rare in soldiers' journals. For ideas of martyrdom surrounding fallen soldiers, see Sarah J. Purcell, *Sealed with Blood: War, Sacrifice, and Memory in Revolutionary America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 16-36.

These prayers were more numerous and included requests that "God Would save and Protect" their son from things like "death," "danger," and "sickness." While most prayer notes did not provide details on the exact situation of the soldier they prayed for, some did. "Ephraim Hargood & his wife & children" submitted a prayer bill that asked for "prayers for their son in ye army at Ticonderoga yt god would preserve his life & return him in safety." Such temporal concerns for the welfare of their family members in the war was the overwhelming concern of these churches.[23]

Almost all prayer bills concluded with a pietistic remark about being resigned to God's will or waiting for his good timing. While the frequency of their prayers demonstrated their belief in its efficacy, families always couched their prayers in ways that made them seem like requests, not demands. They believed God did intervene in history in response to these prayers, but he could not be manipulated. Family requests were always asking for their prayers to be heard in "God's own Due time." They requested that their soldiers be brought home from the war but acknowledged the real possibility that such a request would not be answered. Such remarks reflected their

[23] Winiarski, *The Newbury Prayer Bill Hoax,"* 57. Winiarski noted that these petitions for relief of temporal distress, what he calls *petitionary prayers*, account for forty-three percent of all prayer bills. For excellent analysis of and dissemination of a moral government theory of providence in the mid eighteenth century, see Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England: The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 140-3; Joseph Bellamy, *True Religion Delineated* (Bedford: Applewood Books, 1750). Bellamy's book was one of the most widely read books in the 1750s and it delivered a strong doctrine of moral government view of providence. Mary, Martha, and Tyler Perry, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Samson Wheeler and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Ephriam Hargood and his Wife, Prayer Bills, MEHS.

willingness to accept that their prayers may not be granted and that even if that became the case, they would remain in their pious course.[24]

Families and churches revealed in these prayer notes that they regarded the true end of danger and hardship to be upon the soldier's return home. Most of these prayer bills did not ask for their soldiers to be discharged from the army or simply be kept out of harm's way, but for their soldiers to be returned to their friends and church. Prayer notes typically ended with a request or thanksgiving that their soldier was able to return "Safe to his Relations and friends again." While the phrase occurs so often in these notes that one suspects it was merely formulaic, its ubiquity does suggest the communal orientation of these colonial towns. It was being reunited with their spiritual community that constituted the opposite of danger and the end of war for these soldiers. This communal emphasis highlighted the importance of a soldiers' spiritual community to their religious experience during the war and how that community supported them when they left for combat. [25]

Many soldiers were explicit that they did not like being away from their churches and desired to return to them. Spiritual community was far more satisfying to the average soldier than martial zeal. As Private Robert Rogerson put it in a letter home, "O My Dear

[24] The majority of prayer bills end with a statement about resignation to "God's due time," see David Perry and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Mary, Martha, and Tyler Perry, Prayer Bill, MEHS; John Gridley, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Samson Wheeler, Prayer Bill, MEHS; The Wife of Israel Heald, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Nehemiah Wheeler and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS.

[25] Families who ended their prayer bills with a statement of the importance of a communal note, include Samson Wheeler and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS; The Wife of Israel Heald, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Nehemiah Wheeler and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS; Ephriam Hargood and his Wife, Prayer Bill, MEHS.

Parents I long to be at Home & to partake with you in your uninterrupted & Calm Retreat of a Rural Life, free from the Noise & hurry of a Town, where is often Riots & Mobbs, where you Ears are often filled with Nise & Clamours of a Promiscuous Multitude and frequently accompanied with what is the worst & most disagreeable of all the rest Viz. cursing Swearing & Blasphemies, which must be extremely disagreeable to a Religious Ear." These men frequently expressed such sentiments. After spending nearly three years in the army, Nahum Parker lamented that he would often think of his "friends [who] are at home worshipping God [while] here I am doing my Duty." Soldiers who had experienced hardships during their time of service were most grateful to return to their churches and give thanks in the context of their spiritual community. Although the details of his service were obscure, Samuel Brown submitted a prayer bill in which he also desired to bless God for "Preserving his Life when in the hands of the Enemy and Returning him Safe to his Relations and friends again." After their difficult times of service one these soldiers' first acts was to reunite and celebrate by submitting a prayer note.[26]

The story of Private John Gridley illustrates how prayer bills functioned in the life of a soldier and how important spiritual community was for them during their at war. Gridley was an ordinary rural New England colonist who, by 1775, was living in Medfield, Massachusetts. In April of that year, he joined the colonial militia to contribute to the cause of defending his homeland, which he felt was under assault. Although he enlisted too late to see action at Lexington and Concord, Gridley participated in the Battle

[26] Letter from Robert Rogerson 3 October 1775, Photostats Box 37, 1775-6, MHS; Diary of Nahum Parker, S11200, RWPA; Anna Gridley, W23137, RWPA; Samuel Brown and his Parents, Prayer Bill, MEHS.

of Bunker Hill and went on the famous March to Quebec. While there, Gridley was among the many troops who were captured and thrown into a British prison camp during the bitterly cold Quebec winter. Gridley suffered tremendous hardship over the next nine months of his imprisonment, including punitive measures against him for attempting an escape. Gridley's own recounting of his military experience was quite harrowing, and he was convinced that it was only "by the assistance of God" that he was able to endure much of it.[27]

After spending months in a British prison in freezing conditions, Gridley's first impulse was to celebrate and give thanks to God in the context of his church community. Thus, Gridley authored a prayer bill, which was lost even to his wife who submitted his pension application. The bill read: "John Gridley and his relations desire to Bless god for his goodness to him in returning from captivity to his friends again." Gridley's piety expressed in his prayer bill was most notable in its communal emphasis. He did not thank God alone, but with "his relations" and his distressful situation of being a captive was finally ended by his returning to "his friends again." This was a soldier who saw himself as part of a spiritual community that sustained him during the war and to which he returned to give thanks. After enduring a trying time of service in the war, one of the first things that he did upon his return was go back to his church and submit a prayer bill of

[27] John Gridley's pension application was submitted by his wife, Anna Gridley, W23137, RWPA. For more context and background on John Gridley and his prayer bill, see Roberto O. Flores de Apodaca, "Giving Thanks: John Gridley's Prayer Bill," *Journal of the American Revolution* (September 2019), https://allthingsliberty.com/2019/09/giving-thanks-john-gridleys-prayer-bill/.

thanksgiving. Not only did the spiritual community sustain Gridley during his service, but it was the first place he went to give thanks upon his return home.[28]

Gridley and these soldiers were not alone in the importance they placed on prayer bills and spiritual communities. Many more soldiers submitted prayer notes that were lost. Private Simon Fobes, for example, wrote about his experience of authoring a prayer bill and what it meant to him. While the scrap of paper itself is lost, Fobes documented the experience of writing and submitting it. Upon his return home after his term of duty, he wrote the bill, went to church and "handed the note to the minister, which he took, looking at me with wonder and surprise, but said nothing." The minister held on to the note through the service and then at the end of it he "read the paper I had handed him, and then it seemed to me I never heard a more earnest and appropriate prayer than the one he offered." Fobes was particularly moved by the themes of the minister's prayer that were "thanking Almighty God for his special care of me, a youth; carrying me through the dangers of battle, the hardships of a prisoner's life, and bringing me at length safely to my home and parents." For Fobes, prayer bills were a sign that one had returned home and were a helpful way to express religious gratitude in the context of the community. Mutual prayers were a vital means of sustaining men off at war.[29]

At times, soldiers had the opportunity to put flesh on these prayers and physically reinforce the bonds to the home front by spiritually ministering to loved ones. It seems

---

[28] John Gridley, Prayer Bill, MEHS.

[29] Roberts, *March to Quebec,* 613. Like Fobes, a remarkable number of soldiers ended their wartime diary with their return home to a religious community, further highlighting the important role it played for them. The last page of William Farnsworth's diary, for example, reads "arrived Home Blessed be God." William Farnsworth, W24180, RWPA.

many soldiers felt equipped after their time of warfare to spiritually minister to sick or dying loved ones back home. Here too religion provided an important means of building spiritual community. Private Amos Farnsworth was keen to attend to the much older Abigail Stone back in his hometown. Stone had fallen gravely ill and thought she would die. Apparently, she called on Farnsworth who went and discoursed with her as she "was in great concern about her sole." Stone seemed to draw some comfort from Farnsworth as a few days later he again went to see her as she was "sick and very low" and he "Prayed with hur." The experiences of war gave Farnsworth grounds to spiritually minister to a dying friend. Such acts indicated that the prayers of soldiers were not empty gestures but, when they had the opportunity, translated into acts of service.[30]

As soldiers maintained their spiritual communities through mutual prayer, they also did so through frequent letter writing. Letters were essential to troops' ability to stay in contact with their homes and communities. It was in fact the only direct line of communication that physically distant people had. Letter writing during the Revolutionary Era took on heightened significance during the war. Historians have come to different conclusions about the meaning of extensive letter writing in colonial society and in wartime. Historian Konstantin Dierks has argued that letter writing during the Revolutionary War was indeed a way to cope with social isolation and the bigness of the war. Moreover, it was a fundamental act of autonomy to show that one was not controlled by the events around them. Soldiers triumphantly wrote letters to show that they were not consumed by the war nor dominated by it. Each letter between a soldier and his wife acted as a claim of "personal agency," argued Dierks. My argument about the importance

[30] Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 90.

of letters builds on Dierk's analysis that letter writing was indeed a coping mechanism for soldiers and their spouses. I contend that this coping mechanism was best understood in the context of many other strategies to maintain a fundamentally spiritual community like the church that they had experienced in civilian life. It was not isolated letter writing but letter writing alongside mutual prayers, prayer bills, and spiritual counsel for one another. The real value for soldiers was that letter writing was a means to maintaining their sense of community. It was not the mere act of writing a letter that was a coping mechanism, for letters could contain distressing news, rather it was the religious framing that soldiers and their wives utilized within letters to rise above terrible news and deal with it when it came. Letters were a medium through which religious coping between spouses was carried out, further demonstrating the importance of spiritual community in sustaining the soldiers.[31]

The practical difficulties of sending and receiving letters during the Revolutionary War were quite daunting. Post was unreliable; letters were often lost and sometimes intercepted. At times, letters took months to reach their destination, which could result in

[31] Konstantin Dierks, *In My Power: Letter Writing and Communications in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 191, 222. Letter writing has been studied in the context of the Atlantic World and the emergence of sentimentality of marriage in the eighteenth century. In Sarah Pearsall's excellent study of letter writing, she examines how the frequency and affection found in letters was a "signal of deeper anxieties about the ways that social, economic, and political situations were shifting." The increase of the sentimental family found in letter writing of the time was "one way of coping" with the transitions of the era. My study indicates that such a phenomenon is amplified among families that experienced dislocations through the traumas of the war. See, Sarah Pearsall, *Atlantic Families: Lives and Letters in the Later Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 7-9. For an excellent analysis of women's letters and their significance for understanding shifting views of marriage during the war, see Sara T. Damiano, "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution: Family Finances, Letter Writing, and Conceptions of Marriage," *William and Mary Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (October 2017): 697-728.

multiple letters sent from one party before receiving any in return. Collections of letters between soldiers and the home front were often lopsided, with the bulk of the letters preserved being those written by the soldier himself while those of the wife are often missing or appear in small numbers. Nevertheless, it is remarkable the volume of correspondence that remains for studying how soldiers and their households wrote to one another during the war. The unreliability of the postal delivery system, while it may have detracted from some sensitive personal or economic information that might be shared, seemed to only heighten the spiritual sensitivity and urgency of the letters. A worried soldier might write to his wife thinking it was his last letter and fashioned its contents accordingly. Thus, letter writing from both parties often took on a sense of spiritual urgency and husband and wife sought ways to comfort one another at a distinct. For this task, they almost universally turned to religion.[32]

Enlisted men placed great emotional and psychological importance on receiving letters. They found them a great source of comfort and no doubt read a single affecting letter many times over. To them, receiving a letter was the closest they could feel to the presence of their loved ones. It acted as a small respite amid the chaos of war. At times, soldiers expressed frustration in not receiving enough letters from home. They felt neglected and isolated during times when no post was arriving for them. On multiple occasions Private Joseph Hodgkins grew frustrated with the lack of letters he had received from his wife. In one letter he exclaimed his frustration that: "I have Ben hear four weaks to night & I have sent you a grate many leters & I have Received But three

[32] For an excellent analysis of the triumphs and difficulties of the American postal services during the war, see Damiano, "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution," 705.

from you." Most times, however, soldiers solicited more letters in a positive manner. Eloquently stating how much they valued the letters they received and hoped they would get more. As Private Elisha James put it in a letter back home to his wife: "Sarah James the Entimate Friend of E. James the Absent friend yet Almost present When the Post Brings me a Letter." Letters helped soldiers stay connected spiritually with their communities back home in a profound way. Although "placed as we are by an holy Providence at the Distance of almost 70 Miles," yet they could still have the sweet communion because "the Quill can be taught articulate sounds."[33]

Much of the scholarship on letter writing during the Revolution focuses on elite couples and their letters, like John and Abigail Adams. Letters of such couples tended to skew toward an emphasis on economic and sometimes political concerns. After all, elite couples had much by way of economics to discuss. However, poorer soldiers and families, while certainly touching on some items of household economics, were more focused on spiritually comforting one another. Many soldiers and their wives kept up an affecting stream of letters during the war and it was these letters that showed how wives and families were vital to spiritually encouraging the soldiers. They often wrote simple letters reminding each other of their mutual love and prayers and attempted to be near even when far. Analysis of these wartime letters highlights the prominent place of

[33] Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 177; Elisha James to Sarah James 19 October 1777, Elisha James Family Letters, Ms. N-1486, MHS; Buel, *The Way of Duty,* 115.

religion in the hearts and minds of the soldiers and the importance they placed on it. As one soldier promised his wife "I Commit you & our dear Children to God."[34]

Letters were vital during a time of war for sustaining troop's morale. James McPherson's excellent analysis of soldiers' morale during the Civil War was instructive here. He showed how troops were dependent on letters from home to keep their spirits up. Receiving letters was their favorite part of the day while not receiving one caused them to complain and be discouraged. In the first part of the war, Confederate soldiers and an intact mail system that allowed such correspondence and the troops appreciated it. However, as the Union army captured more territory the stream of letters to and from soldiers dried up and their morale did accordingly. Letters were key, argued McPherson, to sustaining morale in any literate army. This was as true for Revolutionary War soldiers as it was for those in the Civil War. Revolutionary War soldiers' emotional stability and hopefulness during the war depended much on positive interactions with their loved ones back home. In keeping their uplifting correspondence, religion was central to achieving these ends.[35]

Virginia waggoneer William Tyree and his wife Sarah wrote one another in terms that demonstrated the way letters and religion were intertwined. While hauling wagons through war-torn territories, William was convicted that he would be "wanting in Duty" should he omit an opportunity to write to his wife. The substance of his short letter was

---

[34] Analysis of the importance of economics in letters between husband and wife are ably detailed in Damiano, "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution," 697-728; Letter from George Reid to Mary Reid 17 July 1777, Photostats Box 38, 1776-7, MHS.

[35] James M McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 132-3.

to remind Sarah of his conviction that he firmly hoped that God "in his Davine protecsion has been as Mercifull to you & the Children" as He had been to him in keeping him safe. Sarah rejoiced to receive a letter reporting her husband's hope and well-being. She responded with a deeply religious letter of her own. "I Know that the Lord is all suficiant to preserve both you and me in our Absence as well as if we were to gether," she assured him, "and I do hope and trust that he Will continue his Goodness to us untill We meet again." Such comforting religious assurances were tied to letter-writing. The letters that Sarah had already received from William afforded her an "abundance of satisfaction." She ended the letter: "pray fail not to Write to me at Every opertunity." Religion and letters were necessarily combined during their time of absence. Their content showed the important role that praying families had in sustaining soldiers via writing.[36]

Letters functioned in a myriad of ways for soldiers and their loved ones to maintain their sense of a spiritual community. One simple way was to inform each other that they were still alive and doing well. Soldiers used the conventions of letter writing at the time to reassure one another of their health and safety. Most letters began with a perfunctory greeting and statement that reminded the recipient that all was well with the writer. For troops, these reminders often took on religious tones of thanksgiving to God for the health of both parties. They served as an occasion for mutual religious gratitude that drew the reader and writer together. Private Samuel Harris wrote his worried wife from the brutal conditions at Valley Forge. The opening line of his letter was: "Beloved Wife With the Blessing of God I am in Good Health hoping that thease Lines will find

[36] Two letters between William and Sarah are preserved in William's pension application, see William Tyree, W6331, RWPA.

you and my Dear Children in good Health." These reminders that all was well were not taken for granted, for when tragedy struck on either side such stock phrases were no longer found in these letters. Letters from the home front to the soldiers likewise contained phrases that showed that it was never a given that one's home was in peace. As Sarah Hodgkins informed her concerned husband, "we are all in a Comfortable State of Health once more through the goodness of God & I hope these Lines will find you posest of the Same invaluable Blessing." While rote, these reminders were deeply meaningful. It would often be months between letters from a spouse either at the home front or off at battle and it was likely that the few opening sentences that reminded the recipient they were in health were the most pleasant to read. Many phrases of this kind drew the two parties together to thank God for health and safety.[37]

Letters allowed men to use religious language and assurances to justify their absence from home. For many soldiers, the war was quite long. Enlistments were often three years in length or even the duration of the war. The stress that such absence could put on a household was profound. Letters between soldiers and the home front were often wrestling with ways to continually justify this absence and for soldiers to stay with the army. To couch this commitment in terms that satisfied both parties, soldiers and wives utilized religious language. Letters from Private James Knowles to his wife had a grave tone that used religion to comfort his family while he was at war. It seems that Knowles' wife and children may not have been as understanding or enthusiastic about his being gone as long as he was. Indeed, the contents of one of his first letters back home was

[37] Samuel Harris Letter March 1778, Miscellaneous Bound 1776-8, MHS; Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 185-6.

dominated by this topic. As he first left his home, knowing he would see battle soon, he used religion to assure his wife of what he was doing. The present times of service are a "duty which we all Owe to our Creator,' he wrote his wife. Yet though he is away he "Bequeth my Best wishes to you...hoping and Praying it may be Gods will" to bring this world out of the wars it is in into a time "where [there] is no wars Nor tulmuts." Yet in the meantime he assured her he remains a "servant of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior" and commits her to "Heavens Blessings."[38]

After Battle of Bunker Hill Knowles used letters to remain close to family and to reassure them of his religious well-being. Though the cannon fire that was unleashed on them at Bunker Hill was "such firing of Cannons [and] small arms Never was before [seen] in America." Yet, "thanks be to Almighty God for his Remarkable preservation of so many of us his goodness protects us through this Day and all our Days," he reminded his "Dear Wife & sweet Little Children." Thus, they ought to trust God as well to "Prese[rve] you and all our friends." Thus, soldiers used religion not only to justify their absence from home, but also to give hopes for protection in the meantime and reunion in the future. In his letters home, Knowles couched his service in religious terms. He was away not because he was thrill-seeking in a time of war, but because it was a divine mandate that he fight. He had a duty to be away and turning back or deserting were not options. To couch his absence and his service in this way made it impious for his wife to demand anything else and reassured them both of what he was doing.[39]

---

[38] James Knowles Letter Fragment, n.d. [ca. 1775], James Knowles letters, 1767-1775, Ms. S-730a, MHS.

[39] James Knowles Letter Fragment, n.d. [ca. 1775], MHS.

In a similar letter, Private Robert Rogerson used a religious framework to come to terms with his being away from home. Rogerson was from a small rural area in New England and frankly found military and urban life distasteful. Yet, despite these feelings, he had to "Acknowledge [that] we ought to be Contented and Resignable to the Decrees of Providence let it be in whatever Profession Station or Situation in life Providence has plotted out for us." Not only did his religious understanding keep him in the army and away from his beloved home, but it demanded that he perform well in his military service. One could not simply obey the station that providence put them in, but they must "fulfill it with the greatest Integrity & faithfulness that we are capable of. I can say with sincerity that I am resolved by the Graces of God so to do in my Professions & Situation that providence has assigned to me." Providence "assigned" to these soldiers a station away from home and it was that conviction that husbands and wives rested in during the long absences.[40]

Letter writing allowed families to continue the spiritual practices and reassurances that kept them close in normal life. Mary Fish Noyes and her Husband, Selleck Silliman, wrote many letters to maintain a sense of union between them while he was away fulfilling his duties as a Colonel in the Connecticut militia. Even before he left, the family ritually reaffirmed their religious bonds with one another and their commitment to maintaining them. At his parting, the family gathered for prayer and reading of Psalm 93, which reminded them "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night." While they were apart, their letters show a clear reliance on religious themes to maintain a sense of closeness with one another that they had practiced before he left. Silliman wrote home in

[40] Letter from Robert Rogerson, 3 October 1775, MHS.

sadness about how they were "placed as we are by an holy Providence at the Distance of almost 70 Miles," yet they can still have the sweet communion because "the Quill can be taught articulate sounds." He reminded Mary that the "inexpressibly Dear Delightful Converse & Intercourse with Each Other which the blessed Father of Spirits sent down our Souls to communicate Each to the other" can still be had through this letter writing. They were further connected, he insisted, by their mutual reliance on God. "Dearest Love let us both rely on the protecting & preserving Mercy of that God that has never forsaken us yet." Mary responded to such pleas by assuring him that they will trust in God as they wait and hope to be soon "restord to one another's longing arms as Isaac was to the arms of his resign'd father." Religion was a means of gluing this family together by way of common devotion. Both parties employed religious themes and languages to encourage and comfort one another despite their physical separation. These were powerful reminders that provided a sense of spiritual closeness that worked to sustain Colonel Silliman through the war.[41]

Religious discourse not only served to rationalize a soldiers' absence from home, but also allowed both soldiers and their loved ones to frame bad news in more positive terms. While away fighting, soldiers often received tragic news about sickness or death in their families. Likewise, families received news of death or injuries from the army. In both directions, religion was the primary means to attempt to blunt the sharp edge of tragic news. This process was essential to aid many soldiers in not losing morale under the sheer weight of difficult news. An affecting letter written by Private Ezra Tilden vividly illustrates the power religious framing had to soften hard news while, at the same

[41] Buel, *The Way of Duty,* 112-6.

time, strengthening the bonds of a spiritual community. While he was sick with smallpox at Fort Ticonderoga, Tilden was ministered to by a fellow soldier who was married to Jerosha Wadsworth. Tilden was deeply moved by that act of kindness and when this man died and left Jerosha a widow, Tilden felt compelled to write her a comforting letter about the death of her husband and his friend.

The contents of the letter reveal deeply spiritual people enmeshed in a community that was bound together by their shared beliefs even at a distance. He broke the news right away about the "unfortunate death of you dear & loving husband." Tilden assured her that he "took ye first opportunity, Dear Sister, that I had after your dear husbands death to write to you to let you know it." He went on to remind her that her deceased husband is now "gone from a world of sin, sorrow, & suffering to a world of Perfect joy, peace, Bliss, & happiness." After reminding her that he was now in heaven he sought to give her positive and spiritual advice on how to deal with the negative emotion. "Think not hard of god or any of his dealings Toward you," he exhorted her, "but consider his time was come." He prayed "oh that you might now bless a taking as well as a giving god." She ought to embrace, as her dying husband did, the providence of his death as "He was willing to die" for the cause he was in. She must now "search ye scriptures & pleade the gracious promises there made to widdows & fatherless children: ask the Lord jehovah for your god and husband." Tilden promised her whatever help and comfort he could and reminded her of his compassion toward her and the good character of her husband. He was, he ended the letter, her ever "sympathyzing brother Ezra Tilden." What is remarkable about the letter is the depth of the spiritual counsel at a distance. The trauma that both had just experienced was profound and both were unable to deal with it any

other way than religiously. As this deceased soldier spiritually cared for Tilden in a time of need and built the community thereby. Tilden carried on the practice and comforted this widow from afar, encouraging her with religious promises. Spiritual community was a real connection between troops and civilians, vital to their survival in the war.[42]

Tilden was only one of many soldiers who had to use letters to break hard news. When faced with a similar challenge, almost invariably other men used religious framing to do it. Soldiers were as loath to hear of bad news from home as home was to hear of bad news from soldiers. In both directions religious farming was near universal. This spoke to the importance of religious belief and framework in dealing with these tragedies. More specifically it showed how loved ones used religion to help each other endure hardship together. As Sarah Hodgkins reminded her husband at the end of a letter detailing her fears of an upcoming winter without him and the stresses of some sickness in the family: "I hope that all the . . . aflictions we meet with will be Sanctified to us for our good." Short of being with one another to endure tragedy, soldiers and their wives used religion to mutually comfort one another and to frame bad news. Thus, through religious discourse and ideas, soldiers and their loved ones endured the tragedy of war together.[43]

Religion was likewise central in these letters when husband and wife were helping one another endure the reality and anxieties of battle. This was especially true of letters written during or immediately after combat. Colonel Robert Heriot and Mary Heriot of

[42] Ezra Tilden, W14020, RWPA.

[43] Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 184.

South Carolina leaned heavily on religion when they were uncertain if they would live through the military conflicts they were experiencing. Mary wrote a letter shortly after the beginning of the engagement at Sullivan's Island that read as if she sincerely believed she would die. The letter, written after midnight, was uncertain to be delivered. Mary feared that "you may not be in a situation to read this note when it arrives." This "cruel thought" of her husband's possible death in battle "has forced the tears to find a passage from my heart." Yet, amid all this suffering and distress that they both experienced by their separation she still had "one comfort" and that was her religion. For, she was assured that even though they may be killed, the "Almighty God [would] grant that we may one day meet in those inhabitations of bliss where we may never more be parted." When the danger cooled, so too did the religious language of their letters. Some months later Mary's letter reached Robert with religious reassurances that God would restore him to her again and that in the meantime to "the protection of an all Merciful God I once more recommend you." This pattern of intense religious language following an intense battle was found in many couples' letters. Joseph Hodgkins had no hopeful news regarding the reality of an upcoming battle for his wife Sarah, so instead he attempted to comfort her by alluding to the Old Testament God who defeated armies of many with but a few soldiers: "But our army is Very thin now But in good spirits and I hope we shall Be asisted By him houe is able with a small number to Put thousands to flite." Processing the reality and dangers of battle was no easy task for many of these soldiers and their families. When it had to be done, they turned to their religion for aid.[44]

[44] Letter of Mary Ouldfield Heriot to Robert Heriot, n.d. [ca. June 1776], SCL; Mary Oulfield Heriot to Robert Heriot, 31 October 1780, SCL; Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause*, 184-5.

Despite these trying circumstances, letters allowed soldiers and families to help one another in maintaining a salutary sense of hope and optimism by citing religious promises. Such religious promises typically came in the form reminding each other that God had carried them through many difficulties in the past and that he would continue to do so through this time of war. Joseph Hodgkins wrote his wife knowing she was experiencing gloomy feelings, exhorting her not to "be Discoredged. I hope that we shall be carred thru all our Diffittes and have abundant occasion to Prase the Lord together." Such a word gave Sarah Hodgkins cause to be optimistic that they would survive their current circumstances and to stay hopeful that she would get to worship with her husband once again. Many men, even at the very outset of the war knew that fighting the British meant dark times ahead and many of the letters they wrote home to encourage acknowledged that fact and invoked religious promises to cope with it. Although it was a gloomy and difficult time, one soldier told his wife he truly could bless "God for it - I hope that God in whose hand we all are - & who giveth victory will grant us his Blessing in supporting it." Maintaining hope when in the military is key to sustaining troops morale. Both were aided by their religious correspondence with the home front.[45]

Soldiers and their wives invoked their shared convictions of providentialism to foster hope that they might be reunited soon. "And if it should please God to spare my Life & Health," Dudley Colman wrote to his wife, "as i hope it will I hope to be at home the beginning of January...I hope Providence which ordereth all things will permit that i may at least spend the Winter with you in Peace." Colman routinely ended his letters with

[45] Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 168; Letter from 6 July 1776 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS.

these appeals to providence to assure his wife that they will see each other soon. To show his love for her he wrote "all I can for you at present is only to wish you well & that providence may give a turn to our affairs as that we may soon see & enjoy each other." Also, after rehearsing the hardships of his recent battles: "I hope Providence that overrules all Events will Order it so that we will see our country in Peace again & have the pleasure of living & enjoying each other in Peace." Assurances that providence would bring the two parties together was one of the more common religious themes in these letters and clearly meant a lot to both parties. These invocations of the divine served to provide a more hopeful occasion than just chance. It made the two parties feel as if their being reunited was part of the divine plan and therefore more likely to happen. This closeness and communion were vital to the soldier's well-being.[46]

The seldom-analyzed letters between Private Elisha James and his wife Sarah James demonstrate how letter writing maintained the spiritual community of the enlisted soldier that was so vital to his well-being and ability to cope with the tragedies of war. A couple of relatively modest means, Elisha and Sarah of Massachusetts drafted many letters to one another during the war. James was a thirty-two-year-old blacksmith from the rural town of Scituate when he enlisted for one year of service in the Continental Army. During that year of 1777, James wrote or received thirteen letters, most of which were to and from his wife Sarah. Elisha often traveled as a soldier and experienced much during that important year of the war. He was in Ticonderoga, Saratoga, and even wrote

[46] Letter from 29 September 1776 and 8 August 1777 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS; Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 180.

about Burgoyne's surrender in October of that year. Through these undulations of his wartime experience, James relied on these letters with his wife to sustain him.

Sarah knew that her husband was a spiritual man and thus gave him appropriate reassurances that would resonate with him. Sarah first wrote Elisha in April of 1777 (about a month after his enlistment) to reassure him that her religion had kept her spirits up in his absence. She wrote that she hoped that he is "injoying the same blessing" that her and the family are while he was away. Although she could write of enjoying divine blessing, it did not mean that all was easy. Sarah was detailed in describing the prevalent sickness around the household, including "Thomas [who] has bin very purely with the fever and ague." After recounting much of the sickness that the family was going through, she reminded her husband how she had kept her spirits up by the help of God and how he must do the same. "I du not indulge despare," she wrote heroically, "I ought not to distrust his goodness who has bin my support and deliverer in time of deficulty and destress I ceep up my sperits as wall as can be expected." Sarah refused to give into despair (even though she had cause to) and cited religion as that which was able to "ceep up" her spirits. Reading about the strength of his wife no doubt encouraged Elisha and implicitly instructed him to do the same.[47]

Elisha and Sarah continued to share hard news with each other as they repeatedly attempted to rely on spiritual comforts in the face of them. The primary hardship that this couple faced in 1777 was the sickness and death of Sarah's mother. Her mother was very ill with cancer and she knew her death was imminent. Sarah confided in a letter to James that she knew she "must soon part with my beloved mother." Sarah's mother was "in as

[47] Letter from Sarah James to Elisha James, April 1777, MHS.

great destress as she Can bare." Her cancer had become so painful and caused so much swelling of the arms and legs that "she has no rest night nor day." Sarah had to care for her mother through all of this and to simultaneously endure the anxieties of the war. The normal tragedies of life continued even as the war was waged. This gave Sarah and Elisha occasion to comfort one another spiritually and counsel each other from afar. In response to Sarah's writing about her concern for her mother's ailing health, Elisha used religious ideas to counsel his wife, making him feel at home and like he was able to help her even at a distance. "I hope that She will Recover her health Again if it Be Gods holy Will, if not & She must Soon goe the way of all the Living She may obtain Forgiveness of all her Sins & Be Recd Into the Presence of Christ which is far Better than to be here." As Sarah had previously counseled him on his gloomy spirits, now he counseled her on enduring her mother's death.[48]

Sarah was comforted by Elisha's spiritual reassurances. She confided in him that she was handling her mother's death in appropriate religious fashion and used the occasion to remind him that though absent he is loved by both her parents. "She is willing to dye and leave this troublesom world in hope of abetter whare she shall have no pain no sorrow...she remembers her love to you for whom she has so great a regard." She asked for her husband's help to "bare with patience" all that she is going through and prays that she may cut "out any sinful murmuring against god whom has [been] my great support and deliverer." This tragedy did dominate most of the early letters from Elisha's time at war. Understandably, this took much of the emotional energy of Sarah as she sought to

[48] Letter from Sarah James to Elisha James, 5 July 1777, MHS; Letter from Elisha James to Sarah James, 3 June 1777, MHS.

run her own house and care for her ailing mother. In the face of this, both Elisha and Sarah leaned on religion to help one another and enduring the tragedies that they faced together even when they were at a distance. The religious bond that they felt and nurtured with one another was profoundly important to being able to sustain them in such times.[49]

Not all news was bad news during Elisha's year of military service. Some high points in life did come through the letters as well. As religion helped them process and discuss the hardships they were going through, so too did it color the joys they experienced. Sarah lost a mother but gained a child that year. Elisha rejoiced at the news and celebrated with her in his letters. "These Lines present themselves Laden wit thanks to God," Elisha wrote her, "who has Blessd me with Health ever since I Left you & whose Kindness has Been So Great Towards you in making you the living mother of a Living Child Praise the Lord o my Soul & all that is within me Bless his Holy name may the Same Divine Providence Restore you to Perfect health Again & Bless Both you & your Little ones." Religion was not simply a means to cope with tragedy together while at a distance, but even to mutual celebrate positive events in life. Whether to endure tragedy or celebrate good events religion allowed Elisha and Sarah to share them both at a distance.[50]

The emphases of the Elisha's letters were indicative of the contents of the letters of most ordinary families during the war. In the letters of elite couples, economic concerns did often take up the bulk of their contents. Wealthy families had many

[49] Letter from Sarah James to Elisha James, 5 July 1777, MHS.

[50] Letter from Elisha James to Sarah James, 3 June 1777, MHS.

decisions to make about their wealth and the burden of that fell on the woman remaining home and running the family's wealth. However, that emphasis was not as clear in the letters of ordinary couples like the Elisha and Sarah. They indeed faced economic challenges and used letters to facilitate Sarah running the home, but this was not their primary function. Instead, the letters acted as a coping mechanism to endure the tragedy of war with a sense of closeness to one's family. The letters were strong in emotion and sentiment to comfort one another at a distance. Religion was how the James' consoled and encouraged one another. Letters going to a from the home front were filled with religious promises that served to strengthen the ailing soldier and household alike.[51]

For some soldiers, diaries themselves could even function as a letter back home. Private Josiah Atkins structured his whole diary as a document about his military and spiritual difficulties to be delivered wife back home. After being drafted away from his devout community and wife, Atkins seems to have kept a journal for the sole purpose of feeling close to his wife, knowing he was writing for her. Atkins was careful throughout his journal to document the spiritual challenges that he faced and his thoughts and prayers for his wife back home. In fact, he was so desirous that the journal reached her eventually that he began it with a warning: "This is a thing I so anxiously desire, that if you do not use your utmost endeavor for this purpose, I cannot forgive you, neither will God (unless by bitter repentance) but the things you have taken will rise yes & may this book rise in judgement against you." Even when not directly communicating with his wife through

[51] These findings suggest that there may be a class dimension that effects the timeline of transition from economic marriage to sentimental marriage. While wealthier couple's letters were often economic, many of these poorer couples leaned more sentimental. For discussion of this historiographic debate, see Damiano, "Writing Women's History Through the Revolution," 697-728.

letters, Atkins used his diary to communicate with her, believing that it would be brought to her eventually. This intent for his diary explains the detail he goes into in discussing the ups and downs of his spiritual and emotional life. These musing were always intended to be shared with his wife, a thought that comforted Atkins as he journaled. Thus, at least for Atkins, even his diary acted as an extended letter.[52]

Through this letter writing, it was clear that women took initiative in the especially important role as spiritual encouragers. Much has been written on the role of women in the American Revolution. Since examining the topic closely, historians have outlined a myriad of vital roles that women played for the Revolution. These ranged from the more traditional understanding of women sewing homespun clothes to aid the British boycott to following cannoneers around with pitchers of water to cool them. There were also considerable numbers of women who, one way or another, engaged in combat itself. Apart from combat, women were obliged while the men were away to become surrogate leaders of their households and became responsible for everything from running the household finances to harvesting the annual crops. What is less known is the role that women assumed in becoming spiritual leaders and encouragers of their homes. In a myriad of ways women became active in promoting the spirituality of their own households and that of the soldiers at war. When it came to maintaining this spiritual community with the home front, so vital to the soldiers, women took a leading role.[53]

---

[52] Atkins, *The Diary of Josiah Atkins,* 14.

[53] Historians have examined the relationships between women and soldiers during the war from various angles, but never from a religious one. The various ways in which women aided the army has been the topic of many works, from spinning uniforms to making bullets. Charles Royster forwarded traditional ideas that men fought to get patriotic female approval and to satisfy colonial norms of men protecting women from

During the war, women became the spiritual leaders of their home, a role they never would have had if their husbands had not left. In a traditional colonial household, the husband was said to be the spiritual leader of both his wife and children. He was tasked with religious instruction of both and for ensuring that they maintained pious conduct. Fathers were expected to catechize their children, teach them the Bible, and to bring the family together each night for family worship. This was a time in the evening when a family would come to together to read the Bible, pray, and sing with one another. Although these practices were most common in the New England Colonies, they were a staple in protestant culture through the colonies and indeed throughout much of Europe at the time. This structure of household religion, led by the husband, fit neatly into the male-

---

harm, see Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War,* 30-2. Holly Mayer wrote the definitive work on the importance of women's role as camp followers to the sustaining and social makeup of the Continental Army, see Holly A. Mayer, *Belonging to the Army: Camp Followers and Community during the American Revolution* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996). Most recently, John Ruddimen has argued male soldiers' treatment of women was characterized by ritual shaming, streaking, and dominance in order to preform masculinity in front of their male peers, see Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of some Consequence,* 73-6. For an introduction to general experience of women during the revolution, see Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1980); Hoffman and Albert, ed., *Women in the Age of the American Revolution;* Carol Berkin, *Revolutionary Mothers: Women in the Struggles for America's Independence* (New York: Vintage Books, 2005); Woody Holton, *Abigail Adams* (New York: Free Press, 2009); Barbara B. Oberg, *Women in the American Revolution: Gender, Politics, and the Domestic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019). For specific anecdotes of women's involvement in military and logistical affairs during the war, see Paula D. Hunt, "Sybil Ludington, the Female Paul Revere: The Making of a Revolutionary War Heroine," *New England Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (June 2015), 187-222; Dann, *Revolution Remembered,* 424; Evans, *Weathering the Storm,* 1-30.

dominated society at large. However, like much of the established order at the end of the eighteenth century, the war brought social disruption and reordering.[54]

Women took up leadership roles to maintain their spiritual communities both at home and abroad in ways they would never have done so before. After her husband James Haynes was captured by the British, South Carolina matron "Mrs. Haynes" refused to let the void of spiritual leadership in her house go unfilled. Rather than lament or crumble under the stress of the dangerous situation, Haynes was determined that her family would continue to worship as usual. Thus, after her and her neighbors' houses were plundered and the men captured, she sent for Mrs. Brown and her children to come and stay with her. That night the "afflicted matron herself conducted family worship." She led her family and the neighbors in worship as she "prayed fervently for peace." She prayed especially for "the deliverance and freedom of her country" and "invoking the interposition of a protecting Providence for the rescue of her captive husband." The earnest prayers of Mrs. Haynes became renown as many knew she would pray that "God prosper the right!" For a pious family in the eighteenth century, spiritual leadership was arguably the most important form of leadership there was. It was ostensibly held only by men, but in times of war obscure women like Mrs. Haynes assumed that vital role for the spiritual good of themselves, their family, and their country.[55]

---

[54] For English and colonial concepts of authority in a male-dominated society, see M. Michelle Jarrett Morris, *Under Household Government: Sex and Family in Puritan Massachusetts* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[55] Ellet, Vol. III, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 229-30.

Women prayed fervently to maintain the spiritual connections between them and their beloved soldiers at war. Many of the material contributions that women made to the war are well known, but they made spiritual ones as well. Women did not simply supply the army with material necessities, but as historian Elizabeth Ellet understood ""The alarms of war... could not silence the voice of woman, lifted in encouragement or in prayer." Women were persistent in praying for their husbands who were away fighting. Witnessing the tragedy of the war in their own hometowns drove them to fervent prayer for their fighting relatives. Mary Almy of New Port, Rhode Island had a husband off fighting in Sullivan's campaign. While he was away, she witnessed the horrors of war up close. She saw a horrible scene of slaughter as the Hessians moved through Quaker Hill. Her familiar roads were "strewn with dead bodies." Wagons were wheeled around with dead bodies full from the battle followed by "their wifes screaming at the foot of the cart." Almy's response to the overwhelming moment was to "shut myself from the family, to implore Heaven to protect you, and keep you from imprisonment and death." When brought to the end of her courage and endurance, Almy turned to prayer for her husband.[56]

Almy's spiritual struggles on behalf of her husband continued throughout his absence. She prayed for his safety and protection and trusted that they were reciprocated as she awaited his return. One day she received by word of mouth from another man that her husband will soon come home. She prayed thanksgiving and was astounded at his optimism she prayed and blessed him. "Heaven, I hope, will support you, so positive, so assured of success, and remember in all your difficulties and trials of life, that when the

[56] Ellet, Vol. I, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 21, 34.

All-wise disposer of human events thinks we have been sufficiently tried, then our patience in waiting will be amply repaid by a joyful meeting." They had mutually supported one another using religion during the war and were grateful that it would soon be over. As her husband enlisted in the Continental Army, Almy took on the mantle of spiritual leader and encourager of her family.[57]

Women's prayers during the war were not vague and general but demonstrated a responsiveness to specific developments of the war. Hannah Heaton was an ordinary New England wife and mother who had two sons serving in the war. She was not passive during this time but followed the battles that involved her family and country closely and tailored her prayers accordingly. In April 1775, she was aware of all the skirmishes surrounding Lexington and Concord and that this meant war. She lamented that "genneral gages army and the boston men was fighting and great numbers was killed on both sides." She was not idle with the information but quickly used her religious zeal to contribute to the cause through her prayers. "O god have mercy on our nation," she prayed. She asked that God consider that "they are fighting for liberty" and hoped that "god will take care of his children." She knew further that the violence would touch even her own family. "Now here is a trial of faith but i hope yet in god." With a coming "hot war" in New England, she "must expect my husband and twoo sons must be in it. O lord pyty their souls." She was neither ignorant nor naive about the military and political trials ahead and boldly faced the challenges and embraced what she believed was her duty to pray for her family going to fight.[58]

---

[57] Ellet, Vol. I, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 36.

[58] Heaton, *The World of Hannah Heaton,* 159.

Other women likewise followed closely these military developments to guide their prayer lives. Sarah Hodgkins even kept up with the enlistment numbers of her husband's army regiment and prayed accordingly. At the start of the year in 1776, she knew many enlistments were ending and prayed accordingly: "I am a good deal concerned about you on account of the army being so thin for fear the enemy should take the advantage I hear you have lost one of your company & hope it will be sanctified to you all." Sarah knew that the army would be vulnerable to attack if a number of the enlistments ran out and the ranks were thinned. She turned this into a prayer for more troops and reminded her husband to do the same. Grace Barclay knew her husband's regiment had moved into the southern theatre of the war. The southern theatre was notoriously dangerous, and Grace knew it. Soldiers died in great numbers both from combat and from disease in the South. This move was very consequential for her husband's safety. Her "first thought and prayer is my husband's safety; the next for our country." These women used their military and political acuity to tailor their prayers lives and maintain a spiritual community that sustained many in the Continental Army.[59]

Many women across the colonies were not content to pray for these battles from a distance. Indeed, there were many groups of women who decided to go to the place of battle and pray on site for their political cause. In the Spring of 1781 at the Battle of Guilford Courthouse in North Carolina, "two collections of women" from churches in Buffalo and Alamance "assembled, and while the conflict was raging fiercely between man and man, engaged in earnest prayer for their defenders, their families, and their

[59] Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 189; Grace Barclay, *Grace Barclay's Diary: Personal Recollections of the American Revolution,* ed. Sidney Barclay (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph, 1866), 161.

country." These women met and beseeched their "God who hears prayers" for victory. At times, women's involvement in the war seemed political but may have been much more religious. For example, the spinning bees so essential to boycotting British goods during the imperial crisis was likely a simple extension of congregationalist meeting habits by religious women. In this instance, however, women's collective religious actions seem to be mostly political. There was no need theologically to have met by the battlefield, a place a danger, to pray for the troops. Prayer was thought to be heard from every place. But it was a powerful political statement about their devotion to the cause that they decided to go.[60]

This pattern of female prayer groups meeting to pray for the military cause was common throughout the colonies. New Englander Abigail Waters started a prayer group that was broken up by British taking Boston and so had to meet covertly at different places and times. Waters and her group were not deterred by the coercive removal from Boston by the British, but they "again assembled as before, though in a different place." Churches throughout the colonies facilitated these prayer meetings by women to encourage the war effort. Sarah Hodgkins wrote to her husband about how her church believed that "the times calld for fasting and acordingly he tirnd it into a day of fasting & prayer and desird our parrish to join with them I have been to meeting all day" Women's

[60] Ulrich, "Daughters of Liberty," 215; Ellet, Vol. I, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 303. Ellet was apparently so impressed by the story that she recorded it twice in her massive volumes. See also Ellet, Vol. II, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 180-1. For women prayer groups during the war and for women writing letters to encourage prayer, see Esther de Berdt, The Life of Esther de Berdt, reprint, ed. William B. Reed (New York: New York Times & Arno Press, 1971), 259, 91; Eliza Lucas Pickney, "Letters of Eliza Lucas Pickney 1768-1782," ed. Elise Pickney, South Carolina Historical Magazine (July 1975), 149, 165.

prayers meetings were extremely common and were an active way for women to influence the public sphere and demonstrate their solidarity and support with the revolutionary movement.[61]

Some women even weaponized prayer against the British. Prayers were not only for calling down blessings on the Continental Army but were also used to call down curses on the enemy. Experience Richardson made many such prayers during the war that she wrote about in her diary. "At night the Kings army moved off from Boston by water," she wrote, "Lord take there courige from them & cause them to go back by the way they come for Christ sake." She noted instances where she saw this to be true. In commenting on the two year anniversary of the Boston Port Act coinciding with the British fleet departing from Boston she made this witty observation: "this day two years ago Boston Port was shut up and the very same day this year it was opened again by our enemies being drove off by our own men...it appears that God has caused them Great men of war to be afraid of our small vessels." While these sorts of prayers were far less common, they did occur in these prayer groups. Women prayed not only for the bolstering of their own cause, but for the demise of the British army.[62]

Women's prayers had a profound effect on soldiers' sense of community and support that they needed from the home front. They drew courage from these praying women and often spoke about how much meaning seeing these praying women and on

---

[61] Abigail Waters, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Abigail Waters* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1817), 60-1; Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 190.

[62] Entries for 16 March 1776 and 14 June 1776 in Diary of Experience Wright Richardson, 1728-1782, MHS.

them and their zeal for the cause. Lemuel Haynes testified to the impact that such praying women could have on a soldier. In a sermon that he gave years after his service in Ticonderoga, Haynes eulogized the prayers of such women and the importance they had for him. The family he stayed with on part of the journey was particularly pious and made an impression on him. "What an example of piety was the aged mother," Haynes recalled. "What prayers, what fervent intercessions, ascended up from that consecrated altar for this people." Her prayers and piety during the war were not only recognized by Haynes, but "this mother in Israel" had a piety that was "spoken of through this and adjoining states."[63] The spiritual initiative of this kind taken by women during the war was deeply appreciated among many soldiers. As one soldier told his mother that "she must pray, and they would continue to fight." It is impossible to quantify the importance that such a woman had on public morale, but, if we are to take Haynes at his word, the influence was profound. Through religion these women maintained the spiritual community among the soldiers and the colonies and furthered the cause of Independence.[64]

Women did not just influence through their example, but acted directly as spiritual counselors to their men off in battle. Women often wrote to men in war to offer advice on how they ought to spiritually get through their present circumstances. When North Carolina Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Moore was on board a British prison ship in 1781, his sister Ann Moore wrote to him and encouraged him by reminding him of her

---

[63] Timothy Mather Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), 46-7;

[64] Ellet, Vol. II, *Domestic History of the American Revolution,* 36.

prayers that "the almighty Protect you & yours for ever." She continued by counseling him to "Pray Hourly," apparently in hopes of maintaining his sense of connection with her and the rest of his family. Ann, knowing her brother was in difficult straits, took it upon herself to counsel and guide him through his captivity. She used religion as a means of instructing him. Such comments were contained in many letters during the war. Mothers often wrote to their sons and encouraged them to be strong and remember their divine blessings. Elizabeth Melroy reminded her son Robert "Blesed Be God for all his Mercyes" as she hoped he would experience them. [65]

Soldiers at times confided in their wives about their spiritual struggles, seeking some form of encouragement from them. Joseph Hodgkins disclosed to his wife Sarah when he felt spiritually weak, knowing she would aid him. "I wish I was more sencebal of the goodness of god towards me for his mercys are many & grate to us all," he wrote. In her response to this letter, Sarah was careful to recount all the reasons that Joseph out to be grateful and not give into the despair he was facing. She reminded him that their daughter, though she was sick, was now "fine and well." This healthy outcome came in the context of "many others in this town who have had their Children taken from them by Death." Sarah was not so subtle in telling him to perk up and remember his blessings. She ended this thought with the pointed reminder to her husband that "I hope we Shall not forget his goodness towards us in this and many other instances." In this moment, Sarah was his emotional fortitude, and she would not let him give into the discouragement and

[65] Letter from Ann Moore to Colonel Stephen Moore, 5 May 1781, Stephen Moore Papers, SCL; Letter on 13 July 1776 by Samuel Phillips Savage, Samuel P. Savage papers II 1710-1810, Ms. N-885.2, MHS. The effect of women's encouragement to men's patriotism and enlisting in the army is well documented, see Royster, *A Revolutionary People,* 31; Ruddimen, *Becoming Men of Some Consequence,* 24.

ingratitude that seemed to be overcoming him. Such emotional and spiritual counsel was invaluable to Joseph's and the army's morale.[66]

Women also often used the times that they cared for wounded soldiers as an opportunity to spiritually minister to them. Grace Barclay, during a long separation from her husband who was an officer in the war, had the occasion to nurse many soldiers back to health. Although she was loath to have wounded British soldiers in her home, she took the opportunity to try and instruct many of them in her religious ways. Barclay was caring much for a British Major Thomas Musgrave. He was in such a "feeble" condition to her that it seemed he would not survive the winter. She went into his room one day to tend to him and they chatted a little and he seemed down and "did not offer to unburden his mind to me." So, Barclay took the opportunity to minister to him spiritual to ease his mind in his condition. She took up the book "Holy Living and Dying" and "read to him." She recalled that he "assented gratefully" as she read him "an appropriate comforting passage."[67]

Women even acted as spiritual encouragers to one another when they knew a friend had lost a loved one in battle. Phyllis Wheatley did exactly this when she wrote an elegy to Mary Wooster who had just lost her husband in battle. This letter from July of 1778, is an excellent example of how women could spiritually comfort one another after losing a loved one in battle. Wheatley wrote that she regretted to hear that he had "fallen in battle" but "the pain of so afflicting a dispensation of Providence must be greatly

---

[66] Wade and Lively, *The Glorious Cause,* 175-6, 176-7.

[67] Barclay, *Grace Barclay's Diary,* 87-8.

alleviated to you and all his friends in the consideration that he fell a martyr in the Cause of Freedom." Using religion and the political cause in which he died, Wheatley attempted to give Mary some consolation about his death. More than that, Wheatley reminded Wooster that her husband was now in heaven and "waits thy coming to the realms of light." As women were active and vital in maintaining the spiritual community that sustained soldiers, so too were they important in sustaining a spiritual community among one another that sustained them during the war.[68]

Women even acted as spiritual counselors to the public during this time of war. Molly Gutridge published a famous broadside to this effect in 1779. Gutridge's much talked about poem and broadside really should be understood in the context of women taking up the role of being spiritual counselors. It was an active spiritual role that she was able to take in the revolution, by encouraging others in the way they should go. The poem began with an assertion of the cultural assumption of female helplessness in a time of male absence. "We must do as well as we can, What could women do without man." She then rehearsed all that those at home have spent their energy on, namely, worldly goods. Buying, selling, farming are the things that have consumed the energies of those at home but, Gutridge reminded them, "Had we a purse to reach the sky, It would be all just vanity, If we had that and ten times more, 'Twould be like sand upon the shore." It was not such earthly goods that should occupy them to end the suffering of these hard times, but the answer was rather a spiritual one and Gutridge took it upon herself to remind the revolutionaries. Only by focusing on the "gracious GOD above, That deals with us in

[68] Phillis Wheatley, "MHS Collections Online: Letter from Phillis Wheatley to Mary Wooster, 15 July 1778," MHS.

tender love, If we be kind and just and true, He'll set and turn the world anew." Their sin must be forgiven before they could expect peace once more, argued Gutridge. And thus, she exhorted her readers: "If we expect to be forgiv'n, Let's tread the road that leads to Heav'n."[69]

Lydia Learned, a schoolmistress and a storekeeper from Framingham, Massachusetts, similarly took the opportunity of the war to offer spiritual counsel to soldiers and the public alike. In 1777, Lydia published "A Letter to a Worthy Officer of the American Army" in the form of a Massachusetts broadside. This letter was a poem in which she rehearsed how a godly officer was to be lauded and implicitly encouraged other soldiers to turn back to God. She exhorted troops that they ought not be aiming at a "great Recompense," but rather she hoped "God's Glory is your highest Aim." She warned this anonymous officer that "if our Sins displease our Maker so, the he will not forth with our Armies go." Thus, to "God's just will" should all soldiers resign. She further reminded them that soldiers ought not fear death. For "When your Body leave to sleep in Dust, having in your Redeemer put your Trust." By writing broadsides, women like Molly and Lydia diagnosed their colonies despair and hardships as a spiritual problem and urged them toward a spiritual solution. They took up the mantle of a spiritual counselor not just to their families, but to the armies and all the readers of Massachusetts broadsides.[70]

---

[69] Molly Gutridge, *A New Touch on the Times: Well adapted to the distressing situation of every seaport town* (Massachusetts, 1779).

[70] Mason I. Lowance, Jr., and Georgia B. Bumgardner, ed., *Massachusetts Broadsides of the American Revolution* (Amherst: university of Massachusetts Press, 1976), 92-3.

These women were not merely passive during the war, nor was their participation in it limited to boycotts and supplying the army with material. Women took on the essential role of spiritual counselors, both to their loved ones in battle and to one another in the home front. It is hard to overestimate the importance of the role that they played in spiritually encouraging others. Their letters with spiritual instruction and encouragement probably did more to support and boost morale among the troops than any other single thing. Troops filled their letters and diaries with appreciation for the women in their lives that took up this role. While unquantifiable, it was a role that played a vital part in sustaining the morale and strength of the soldiers through many years of a dark war.

In a letter written during the summer of 1776, Sarah Hodgkins perfectly summarized the argument that I have been making this whole chapter. She wrote Joseph that she was "almost impatient" of this present war and their being apart, but "concidering it is Providence that has parted us I desire to Submite." He felt the same way and shared her convictions that it was Providence that had separated them and brought him into the war and he therefore must not bicker or resist it but submit to it. Religion was the way Joseph rationalized his involvement in the war and more than that, it was his wife's reminders of that that sustained this conviction through difficult trials of the war. Because these two were able to "hear from one another So often" via letters, they were able to sustain a spiritual community that strengthened Joseph through the war.

Many soldiers throughout the war relied on similar communities and relationships to provide spiritual strength for them through the war. Soldiers would often discuss religious topics with one another and attend to each other when sick or wound. Religion provided a common ground for otherwise parochial soldiers to bond and unite with one

another no matter where they were stationed. Beyond their fellow soldiers, these men used religion to maintain a sense of community with the home front. While there was often great tension with the civilian world, soldiers often knew that they had the love and prayers of their churches and families back home and this enabled them to sustain their morale in trying times. Wives and churches wrote letters and prayer bills in massive numbers to spiritually encourage the troops they loved and both were appreciated and reciprocated by the troops themselves.

CHAPTER 5

"WE SAW THE FRENCH PRIEST": SOLDIERS AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

> *The poor Wretches, fingering their Beads, chanting Latin, not a Word of which they understood, their Pater Nosters and Ave Maria's. Their holy Water—their Crossing themselves perpetually—their Bowing to the Name of Jesus, wherever they hear it—their Bowings, and Kneelings, and Genuflections before the Altar...I wonder how Luther ever broke the spell.*
>
> -John Adams to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1774.

> *This day we saw the French priest going to visit a sick person...The people all have these beads when they go to church, to help them remember their prayers. They also use the same ceremony when they go to a burying, and have choristers singing before the corpse.*
>
> -Private James Melvin, March to Quebec, 27 July 1776

While similar in substance, the two above quotations certainly differed in tone. Both were made by parochial Massachusetts men who, perhaps for the very first time, witnessed the devotional practices of Catholicism. They were also both ardent revolutionaries who put their lives on the line for the cause of independence and were raised in a cultural milieu of religious intolerance. The two men were different, however, in status and in context. John Adams made his comments about viewing the rituals of the Catholic church from a place of security. He was visiting Philadelphia at the time and simply attended a Catholic service as a matter of "Entertainment." Adams had no real motive to move contrary to the grain of cultural prejudice against Catholicism and so he

did not; he condemned them. He viewed these religious people as "poor Wretches" going through meaningless worship as if they were under a "spell." The second quote, however, was made by Private James Melvin who on more than one occasion had his life saved by acts of charity from French Catholics. Starving and lacking shelter as he marched through the freezing conditions of Quebec, Melvin was quartered and given food in a nunnery. He and his fellow troops were, in many ways, at the mercy of those Catholics and received charity from them. Melvin's context disposed him toward a more favorable view of Catholicism and its adherents. Thus, when he commented upon their religion, there was no condemnation, simply descriptions with a tone of interest and even respect. These two quotes represent different attitudes toward religious others during the Revolutionary Era and their different contexts provide insight as to why.[1]

The Revolutionary War was unique in the way that it brought religiously diverse men together under one banner. Previous wars fought in the colonies, as a matter of principle, were local affairs in which state militias responded to their own military concerns. Colonial militias varied quite significantly in terms of how they were recruited, structured, and drilled. They were all, however, provincial and largely homogenous in religious terms. This general pattern was not true of the Revolutionary War in which the colonists formed a genuinely pluralistic Continental Army. Philadelphia riflemen joined ranks with Benedict Arnold and his Massachusetts soldiers to march on Quebec. Horatio Gates led regiments from Maryland, Delaware, and North Carolina into defeat in Camden, South Carolina. All this mixing and moving meant that many provincial soldiers

[1] "John Adams to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1774," *Founders Online*, National Archives, John Adams to Abigail Adams, 9 October 1774 (archives.gov); Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin*, 67.

not only traveled further from home than they ever had before, but also that they fought alongside religious others to whom they previously had little exposure. Troops had no choice but to cooperate and even tolerate their new comrades. In doing so, some men developed a genuine sense of respect and openness to their religious differences. In this microcosm of colonial society, soldiers may not have espoused theories of religious tolerance but under these conditions they were forced to practice it.[2]

Soldiers had to learn religious tolerance to survive various situations during the war and to fight effectively with troops of other regions and denominations. Religious practice did not merely aid soldiers' survival during battle, but also helped them transition into the religiously pluralistic society of the early republic. The war provided the occasion for soldiers to encounter and work with unfamiliar religious others. Soldiers now were intermingled with units from other colonies who were of a different religious sect and they were obliged to work with them. Moreover, they traveled to distant places and were exposed to religious groups whom they had only heard about before. These experiences cumulatively fostered a growing sense of religious tolerance and inclusion among the common soldier that became so necessary for ideals of religious freedom in the colonies.

While the soaring rhetoric of freedom of religion was heard by colonists from the mouths of elites, it was the everyday experiences and lived religious practices of the common soldier that paved the way for a religiously pluralistic society. These experiences are significant in themselves as they show the context and means by which

[2] For an excellent treatment on the dynamic and developing nature of colonial militias, see John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 37-9.

attitudes of religious tolerance were fostered in a culture that denounced them. Yet, additionally, men's religious interactions effected genuine military and political consequences after the war. The argument of this chapter, then, is twofold. First, practicing religious tolerance was a key means of survival and martial utility for soldiers in various regions. And second, that these instances of practiced religious tolerance had significant cultural and political effects on the adoption of religious freedom in some of the postwar settlements. By first examining how different religious denominations fought in battles together and then exploring how sojourning soldiers encountered religious others, we can see that the adoption of religious tolerance policies and practices did not begin with the institution of the First Amendment but sprouted up from the religious experiences of common soldiers.[3]

Prior to the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the individual colonies were largely homogenous and insular in their religious beliefs and practices. Religious life for most colonists was "steady." They believed, worshipped, and practiced religion in the same ways that their parents and grandparents had and that all their neighbors still did. The New England colonies had an established Congregational church in law and in

[3] The detailed work on the disestablishment of state churches in the original thirteen colonies in Carl H. Esbeck and Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent: Church-State Relations in the New American States, 1776-1833* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2019) has led me to look for factors leading toward American religious tolerance other than the First Amendment and Enlightenment ideals. Moreover, their careful treatment of each colony individually has forced me to narrow certain claims about the widespread impact of the religious tolerance practiced in the Continental Army. As they make clear, each colony was quite different, even if certain common forces were at play in each. For my conclusions about the importance of everyday religious interactions and experiences in breeding cultural and eventually legal religious tolerance I use as a model Stuart Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

culture. In the first half of the eighteenth century, this church establishment was not only strong but was growing. Tax records reveal dramatically growing church membership in Congregational churches in late seventeenth century and into beginning of eighteenth. Big port towns with competing religious factions were the exception not the rule. Most towns in New England had neither heterodoxy nor religious indifference. New England was marked by a satisfied and engaged laity in a uniform religious culture. Most New Englanders were born and died in such a religious world.[4]

Similar religious establishments were developed and sustained in the other colonies. Virginia and New York, for example, enjoyed a strong Anglican establishment that was legally backed and culturally reinforced in the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Georgia and the Carolinas also had an established Anglican Church. The exception to the seeming rule of an established church was Pennsylvania. Founded and run by Quakers who were sensitive to the importance of religious liberty, that colony experienced a degree of religious tolerance among its people. However, most colonies did have an established church and saw religious conformity as a prerequisite to a stable society. Religious dissenters (those who did not ascribe to the tenets and practices of the established church) in areas with established churches tended to remain in insular communities. Although there was a diverse religious population in these colonies, they never had a strong impetus to join ranks with one another in a common cause. Thus, while some colonies like Virginia had a diverse religious population, they never came

[4] Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light*, 111-15.

together and cooperated like they would during the Revolution but were content to remain apart one from another.[5]

This image of a steady and uniform religious life began to be disfigured during the Whitfeldarian revivals of the 1740s. In New England, the profound cultural hold that the Congregational church held for the last one hundred years was shattered. George Whitfield came into the colonies preaching a message about the need to renounce one's religious past in order to be awakened by the Spirit and to follow conscience instead of dead religious formalities that, he claimed, dominated Congregationalism. This message was profoundly effective. It led to an explosion of itinerant and unauthorized preaching that moved people out of their established churches and into new ones. The religious uniformity that New England once experienced was out and the proliferation of new churches and denominations was in.[6]

The destabilizing effects of the Whitfeldarian revivals were felt even in the southern colonies. Following the revivals, most new churches being formed in the southern colonies were of dissenting sects. Between 1750 and 1776 thirty seven percent of new southern churches founded were Baptist, followed by twenty nine percent Presbyterian, and six percent Methodist. This splintering effect on the churches had profound religious and cultural implications. For one, it worked against hopes of unity in the colonies. Within each colony, religious unity was thought to be the bedrock of

---

[5] For a summary treatment of the status of established churches in the colonies throughout the eighteenth century, see James B. Bell, *A War of Religion: Dissenters, Anglicans, and the American Revolution* (Chippenham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 107-20.

[6] For details on various New England towns' breakdown of church affiliation with the Congregational establishment and the proliferation of other churches, see Winiarski, *Darkness Falls on the Land of Light,* 490-7.

stability. As this began to quickly change, conflict seemed inevitable. However, these powerful religious forces and diverse perspectives were unleashed, not to be undone.[7]

Despite the growth of dissenting sects in the years prior to the Revolution, deep-seeded religious prejudice continued to reign in the hearts and minds of many colonists. Anglicans viewed Baptists with distrust and vice versa. Presbyterians were skeptical of Methodists and all joined ranks to denounce Quakers and Moravians. The most virulent religious prejudice in the colonies, however, was undoubtedly against Catholics. The enduring strength of anti-Catholicism in the colonies became evident with the passage of the Quebec Act of 1774. Passed by Parliament simply to afford greater religious freedom to practicing Catholics in Canada, it was interpreted as another punitive measure against the colonies for their late intransigence. Colonists up and down the coast railed against this act as supposed evidence of the British embrace of Catholicism and of their designs to subjugate the colonies to the Pope. In the years preceding the Revolution, this was not a world in which religious tolerance was idealized, let alone practiced.

These attitudes toward religious others were being acted out in serious political ways. Rather than embrace ideals of religious freedom, established churches worked to subordinate the religious dissenters in their colonies. Decades after the war, John Adams still recalled the potency of these religious conflicts and how they fueled anti-English and Anglican sentiment among the dissenters who fought in the war. “In Virginia,” Adams wrote, “the Church of England, was established by law, in exclusion, & without toleration of any other denomination.” He pointed to these religious tensions as a major cause of peoples support for the Revolution. Adams’ claim was not without grounds.

[7] O’Brien, “Pragmatic Toleration,” 88.

During that era there were anecdotes of Baptist ministers being harassed and violently dunked into water to mock their baptism. "In new York," Adams continued, "royal Governors, Counsellors, Judges &c had such overbearing influence, that they dared to grant, large tracts of fertile lands, to the Churches of England, and laid the foundation of the ample riches they still hold, which no other denomination could obtain." Similar practices against religious dissenters in the Carolina backcountry also spurred them to resentment of the Anglican establishment. Serious religious divisions haunted the colonies on the eve of the Revolution.[8]

When war came with Britain, these religious conflicts did not disappear. Indeed, as colonies began to recruit and fill the ranks of militias and eventually the Continental Army, troops brought this cultural baggage with them. To begin the war soldiers viewed religious others largely with suspicion if not contempt. These men were aware of denominational differences and often held them against their comrades. New Englanders distrusted soldiers from colonies affiliated with the Anglican Church for being too close to the British. Private Samuel Shaw mentioned it to his parents "as an instance that there are some exceptions to that almost general rule, that Churchmen are Tories."[9]

New England troops seemed especially uninterested in tolerating religious troops from other regions. In 1776, Lieutenant Dudley Colman of Massachusetts wrote a letter to his wife in which he expressed his distaste for those of other colonies. "The people here are not New England people," Colman concluded, "they are a people of no principle

---

[8] John A. Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty: How Virginia's Religious Dissenters Helped Win the American Revolution and Secured Religious Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2010), 5; John Adams to Jedidiah Morse, 2 December 1815, *Founders Online*.

[9] O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," 108-12.

either of Religion or Honesty but to get what money they can." Colman expressed a common attitude among New English soldiers. Those who were not religious in the New England way were not religious at all. Colman reacted as many troops did. When they were exposed to those of different religions from other colonies, they did not like what they saw. New Englanders received as good as they gave. It was somewhat common that Pennsylvania riflemen mocked New England Yankees for being afraid of bayonets. Of course, northern troops greatest prejudice remained against Catholics. One New England soldier even recorded an anti-Catholic poem in his diary. It read: "The Roman Catholicks we hate/ If Kings or Ministers of State/ Tyrants & Tories we abhor/ But love our Provincial Law." These attitudes were not helpful when trying to form cohesion in the military ranks and to work together for a common cause.[10]

In the South, religious prejudice among the troops was equally conspicuous. One Southern rifleman, Jesse Lukans, swiped at the Northern religion and culture all in one statement. He wrote that "Such sermons, such Negroes, such Colonels, such Boys, & such Great Great Grandfathers" were not to his liking. Lukans comment about grandfathers was referring to New Englanders' religious idea about being a covenanted people with God. These religious prejudices often reared their heads in times of military defeat. For example, Baptist minister Oliver Hart recorded in his diary that after the disastrous defeat of Horatio Gates at Camden a rumor circulated that the battle was lost in

[10] Letter from 29 September 1776 in Colman, "Dudley Colman Papers 1771-1849," MHS; O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," 116.

large part because Gates trusted a Baptist officer. Religious prejudices in the colonies ran deep and militated against the success of any genuinely continental war or settlement.[11]

This state of religious division among the troops was not a sustainable situation and army officers knew it. They quickly sprang into action to subvert the parochial and religious identity of soldiers to a newfound national one. The Continental Congress led the way. One of the first measures they adopted to unify the colonies was to institute a National Day of Prayer and Fasting in the summer of 1775. This proclamation was a denominationally neutral tool to invoke common tropes among religious groups and to bind these diverse religious people into a unified army. These measures were enacted specifically to draw out commonalities of religious belief and practice (providentialism and fasting) and to bury denominationally divisive issues. Thus, Congress was indeed promoting religion among the people and the troops with these measures, however, it was a religion of a particular cast and tone; a religion that was politically and militarily useful.[12]

Washington and military officers quickly followed suit and worked to unify the diverse religious troops in their ranks. In 1777, Washington fought in Congress to keep the pool of chaplains for his troops large because he felt that this minimized denominational tensions and helped soldiers cooperate with religious others. Virginia

---

[11] O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," 103-4; Entry for 31 August 1780 in Oliver Hart Diary, Oliver Hart Family Papers, MS(T) vol bd., 1769-1809, *South Caroliniana Library*.

[12] The nature of fast days and the ends for which the Continental Congress appointed them remain contested topics. For work that views fast days as religiously motivated, see Kidd, *God of Liberty,* 103-7; Derek H. Davis, *Religion and The Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 84-9. The most recent and extended treatment of fast days, in McBride, *Pulpit and Nation,* 30-7, characterizes fast days as largely ineffective at motivating the people and political in their underlying motivation.

pragmatically adopted a policy that allowed troops to enlist into regiments that shared their religious preferences. In effect, this allowed Baptist and Methodist troops to serve, in large measure, alongside their own. This too lessened religious tensions. Officers shaped even recruitment measures to unite religious others. South Carolina commissioned a Baptist and a Presbyterian minister to go into the backcountry and enlist the help of both denominations.[13]

The religious services held during the war were intentionally uncontroversial. Chaplains had a role to play here. They knew they were often preaching to mixed audiences and so were careful with their topics. As we have seen, topics of sermons tended to skirt arcane points of distinctive doctrine in favor of nationalistic and practical themes of martial courage and loyalty. Even divisive practices like the sacraments were rare while in the army. Instead, soldiers' religious routines were denominationally neutral. Worship services, prayers, and singing were religious actives that diverse men could unite around so it was no surprise that it was these that were pushed by their chaplains and officers. In the army, soldiers began to experience religion as a set of common practices that they shared broadly with other denominations, rather than weekly expositions on denominational distinctives. Such a shift in lived religion made room for practiced religious tolerance in the colonies.[14]

The move to have a religiously integrated army began from the Revolutionary leadership as a practical one. The colonies must learn to fight together and to unite despite religious differences. Had these historic denominational tensions gone unchecked

---

[13] Kidd, *God of Liberty,* 118; Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792,* Vol. I. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), 371-2.

[14] O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," 176.

they could have dissolved the strength of the Continental Army and the unity of the colonies. However, the clear success of a practiced religious tolerance in the Continental Army became the grounds for hoping for such a course in the nation at large. Washington held on to the strength of this example throughout both terms of his presidency and continued to hold it out as the model for religious tolerance going forward. "What," Washington asked during his famous Farewell Address, "but the mixing of people from different parts of the United States during the War" worked against "parochial jealousies & prejudices"? What the Continental Army achieved by bringing diverse colonial peoples together would not have been accomplished in a century of "ordinary intercourse." Washington's claim about the significance of the Continental Army in creating religious tolerance and national unity was not without grounds. It begs the question, however, as to how exactly such unity was achieved in the army. The answer is to be found not in the political decrees and intentions of elites, but rather in the lived religious experience of the troops.[15]

These pushes from above and below would have meant nothing had troops not learned to practice religious tolerance. It was soldiers themselves who had to make religious tolerance a reality in the Continental Army. While it is important to tell the story of policies and elite actions that pushed for such religious inclusion within the ranks of the army, without understanding the experience of the soldiers and the complex of motivations which caused them to adopt this posture of tolerance, historians give a skewed impression that this was largely a top-down process. The adoption of religious tolerance among wide swaths of the Continental Army and colonial militias was a

[15] Joseph J. Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 154.

bottom-up process. All the fast days and decrees in the world would have meant nothing had the soldiers not had the interest to adopt such an open attitude toward religious others. To tell this story, then, the soldiers and their experiences ought to take center stage.[16]

With the outbreak of the war colonies with established churches had to reach out to dissenter communities that they had actively suppressed. Stressed to meet their quotas of soldiers, leaders pursued every avenue they could to enlist troops. This meant that most colonies could not be particular about who joined their ranks and would have to find ways to give an olive branch to the very populous dissenter groups in their midst. What is remarkable is that in many cases dissenters turned out in droves to fight in the war. Apart from Quakers, who chose not to fight on principle, the colonies found success in recruiting among their dissenter populations. This led to the largest effort in colonial history to bring religious others to work one with another. It was a tall order to achieve and the ability to cohere as a nation largely depended on whether the Continental Army could cooperate amid its religious diversity.

Virginia was the most conspicuous case of a militant church establishment changing its policies for the pragmatic purpose of recruiting religious dissenters. By

---

[16] For a summary of the predominant popular understanding of religious liberty in America as emanating from the First Amendment, see Esbeck and Hartog, *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent*, 8-10. Many works have located the source of legal and cultural religious freedom in the desires and machinations of political elites. O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," for example, sees religious tolerance as an outgrowth of the policies that George Washington instituted in the Continental Army to subsume religious identity to national unity and purpose. Operating with the same model of a top-down understanding of religious liberty, Anthony J. Gill argues in *The Political Origins of Religious Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) that it was largely the secular governing officials who made economic and political calculations to permit religious freedom.

1775, the Anglican establishment in Virginia was growing. Yet, it knew that ⅓ of its population consisted of Baptists and Presbyterians. These groups were deeply distrustful of the Anglican establishment and were reluctant to fight against Britain which was one of the few checks against the unbridled power of the Anglican Church in Virginia. It was a complex situation. dissenters were not fond of the Anglican Church and English authority, but they also knew that the crown was one of the few avenues of recourse they had against excesses of the Virginia leadership. Thus, with the outbreak of the war, dissenters had a difficult decision to make. Knowing that they had some leverage in their position, dissenters used their willingness to fight in the war as a predicate for increased religious liberty. In the face of lagging recruitment, the Virginia leadership was forced to recognize dissenter petitions for religious liberty in exchange for enlistment in the army. The Virginia Assembly went so far as to allow dissenter groups to serve in segregated units (if they could come up with the numbers) and elect their own officers. It is unclear how many of these segregated units came to be in practice. Regardless, it was clear that this political compromise led to cooperation between dissenter soldiers and Anglican soldiers within the army.[17]

Virginia's religious dissenters kept their word and after securing some assurances and gesture of religious liberty from the assembly, they swelled the ranks of the Continental Army. While muster rolls did not include information on a soldiers' religious affiliation it is possible to determine in generalities how many dissenters fought. John Ragosta has presented two streams of evidence that indicate a resounding answer that dissenters from Virginia did indeed fight in the war. The first line of evidence he

[17] McDonnell, *The Politics of War,* 307-8; Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty,* 3-7.

presented was the turnout of dissenter chaplains in the Continental Army. The denomination of the chaplains was somewhat proportional to the denomination of the soldiers who fought. This was a way of ensuring religious activities during the war and a way to ease denominational tensions. After analyzing the number of chaplains out of Virginia, Ragosta concluded that both Baptist and Presbyterian chaplains turned out in strong numbers, indicating many dissenters did indeed enlist to fight. Remarkably, Ragosta even found nine Baptist ministers who became chaplains in the cause after suffering direct persecution at the hands of the Anglican establishment, further evidence of the quick turnaround that dissenters made to support the war and fight alongside religious others.[18]

The second stream of evidence was more direct and is based on country turnout records. Dissenter communities were not evenly distributed across the Virginia. They tended to have pockets of large numbers in some areas and be thinner in other areas. Looking at county enlistment numbers in 1776 and 1780-1, Ragosta showed that strong dissenter counties had a slightly higher rate of enlistment than even the largely Anglican communities. This indicates that the dissenters kept their end of the bargain and turned out in large numbers. Virginia regiments and militia ranks would have contained a substantial mixing of Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians. For religious groups that were largely at odds with one another, even violently so, this was quite the development. Soldiers in these ranks would have had to learn how to cooperate or at least tolerate religious others if they wanted to endure the war and enhance their martial utility. This

[18] Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty*, 89-99.

was a significant development and test case for a country unsure if it could ever achieve unity amid its religious diversity.[19]

This same pattern seen in Virginia was true for the army and the militias in the Carolinas. In the decades before the Revolution, the populations of dissenter groups was booming. Throughout the middle of the eighteenth century, Ulster Presbyterians came in droves to escape persecution under Queen Anne in England. Similarly, Baptist groups began to emigrate down into the Carolinas during the period of the religious awakenings. The Anglican leadership in the South Carolina Lowcountry was aware of their need to court these backcountry religious dissenters into the war. Indeed, the backcountry made up 60% of the non-enslaved white population of the colony and since the colonial leadership refused to arm enslaved persons, it had to draw militia members from among the dissenters. The backcountry dissenter population mobilized to take up arms in the Revolution because of their opposition to British intrusions on religious liberty in the past and the Anglican establishment doing so in the present. Various backcountry denominations were drawn into this common cause. These backcountry dissenters fought alongside one another, breeding a culture of tolerance.[20]

The Provincial Congress in Charleston was aware of these religious sentiments in the backcountry and attempted to harness them for the war. On 23 July 1775 they commissioned William Tennent (a Presbyterian), Henry Drayton, and Oliver Hart (a Baptist) for a backcountry tour to try and rally those inclined for Revolution. Both Tennent and Hart were well known ministers and the Congress knew that it was religious

[19] Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty,* 99-101.

[20] For an excellent background on the religious history of much of the backcountry militia in South Carolina, see Gilbert and Gilbert, *True for the Cause of Liberty,* 21-9.

sentiments that were the key to the hearts of the backcountry. They also attempted to galvanize Lutherans. Lutheran ministers held worship services to try and get German immigrants involved in the war at Monck's Corner. Although it met with little success (as the German people were wholly uninterested in this war) it did indicate South Carolina's willingness to reach out to religious others and form diverse units. Beyond revealing the establishments intentions to have a genuinely religiously diverse fighting force, this expedition also showed the centrality of religion in galvanizing, at least the South Carolina backcountry into fighting. The story of enlisting the Carolina backcountry not only revealed the importance of religion as to why these people fought, but also shows how a largely religiously divided populace came to join ranks one with another to fight against a common religious enemy.[21]

Most of the support for the Revolution in the backcountry came from recently arrived Scotch-Irish Immigrants. These immigrants mostly settled in the Piedmont Region and various parts of the backcountry. They were a deeply religious people who piously built the meetinghouse at the center of their settlements before even completing their own homes. They belonged to the Presbyterian sect known as the Covenanters. These fiery protestants in Scotland were often martyred for their refusal to allow English monarchs in the seventeenth century to interfere in matters of religious practice. They insisted that the state should not enforce religious belief and would even oppose monarchs to uphold these ideals. Such people were no strangers to war and religious conflict. As soon as they were convinced that England and not the low country was the

[21] Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution, 1775-1780*, Vol. I (New York: Russell & Russell, 1901), 42.

true threat to their religious liberty, they would make mighty allies for even religious others.[22]

South Carolina soldiers and revolutionaries deeply appreciated this religious history. Private Robert Long remembered that "his father's people lived in Scotland originally & in Charles the fifth's time opposed his tariff or ship money and being of that kind of Presbyterian called Covenanters in Charles the Second's time." And now seeing the British once again interfere with religious liberties, Long felt obliged to fight the British. Similarly, militiaman William Anderson made the connection between religious history and the present conflict most explicit when he proclaimed that "it shal ne'er be said that the Covenanters, the followers of the reformers of Scotland, would na lend a helping hand to the renewal of the Covenant in the Land of America." For these backcountry Presbyterians, this war was more about 1643 Scotland than it was about 1775 America. History and pragmatism allied to persuade even these intractable Protestants of the backcountry to ally with protestant others in the colonies.[23]

Backcountry clergy fueled the fire of this religious conflict with penetrating sermons and rhetoric. One minister spoke to his congregation and assured them that he had pondered the history and "examined the Scriptures" and was convinced that this was a righteous cause. And, therefore, as their pastor, he exhorted his people to maintain the fight "at all hazards." This was not an isolated case. Indeed, most of the pulpits in the

---

[22] Elizabeth F. Ellet, *The Women of the American Revolution,* Vol. III (New York: Baker & Scribner, 1850), 128; Joseph S. Moore, *Founding Sins: How a Group of Antislavery Radicals Fought to Put Christ into the Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5-8.

[23] Robert Long, Pension Application Record S7157, RWPA; Ellet, *Women of the American Revolution,* 128.

backcountry went ablaze with incendiary sermons calling for a revolution and appealing to the religious sentiments of the people. One modern historian has studied the forty-five Presbyterian clergy in the backcountry and concluded that most of them were in support of the Revolution.[24]

By 1777, the backcountry made clear that the conflict, for them, was a religious one. Seventy-nine churches had signed a petition for religious liberty from the established Anglican Church in South Carolina. The petitioners were outraged at the injustice of most of the backcountry having to support an Anglican Church establishment to which they did not belong. Thus, they sought to overthrow that established church and to get the English monarchy, once again, out of their religious lives. While Enlightenment notions of human rights were distant and abstract for South Carolina soldiers, religious freedom from oppressive Anglicanism was at the heart of their concern in this conflict. Based far more on pragmatism and anti-English sentiment than anything John Locke ever wrote, Presbyterians and Baptists in the backcountry put aside their hostility toward the Anglican establishment and joined common cause with them to form a unified yet diverse religious coalition against the British.[25]

The trying context of the war brought about not only novel alliances between previously hostile Protestant groups, but even between Protestants and Catholics. After John Burgoyne's famous surrender at Saratoga, France was persuaded that the colonies

---

[24] Ellet, *Women of the AMerican Revolution,* 124; Durward T. Stokes, "The Presbyterian Clergy in South Carolina and the American Revolution," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 71, no. 4 (October 1970), 270.

[25] William Tennent and Newton B. Jones, "Writings of the Reverend William Tennent, 1740-1777 (Continued)," *The South Carolina Historical Magazine* 61, no. 4 (October 1960), 194; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution,* 209-11.

could indeed win the war and decided to become their ally and get revenge on the British crown. In military terms, this was an unmitigated positive. France had the naval strength that the colonies lacked and their entrance into war brought about impressive military opportunities for the colonies. Culturally however, the Franco-colonial alliance posed a problem. France was a Catholic monarchy and alliance with them had been anathema for Protestant nationals for centuries. Many contemporaries noted as much and were skeptical about this new alliance both in practical terms (can we trust them) and in principle (Protestants ought not ally with Catholics). As was often the case in this era, the national and military concerns subordinated those of religion and culture. France was embraced as a heroic ally in February of 1778. The question remained, however, how these soldiers and officers would cooperate one with the other. It was one thing for the political elite to embrace the alliance for obvious reasons, but would the fighting soldiers do the same? Would they in fact fight alongside historic religious enemies to win a battle? Would soldiers adopt pragmatic religious tolerance to such a degree that they would even fight with Catholics? Two major southern sieges occurred with an alliance of French and American forces that demonstrate how exactly these issues were resolved via religious tolerance on the ground. The first such occasion was the Siege of Savannah.

In September of 1779, Charles-Hector, count d'Estaing, commander of the French fleet joined ranks with General Benjamin Lincoln to liberate the city of Savanah from British occupation. A total fighting force of nearly 8,000 men, this joint effort marked one of the earliest examples of Protestant colonials fighting alongside their newfound Catholic allies. While d'Estaing was acutely aware of the importance of this military operation because losing it would mean disgrace at home, its significance for religious

tolerance among the Continental Army was also at stake. Although this combined force of colonial and French fighters had the numerical advantage, the British (who were entrenched within the walls of Savannah) had the tactically superior position. The British had been busily fortifying the city for weeks as the French and American troops under d'Estaing engaged in fruitless negotiations with them. The British were simply waiting out the clock for their backup to arrive. Ultimately, d'Estaing lost his best opportunity to take the city. He waited in hopes of negotiating a victory and the British only made their position stronger. Thus, when d'Estaing finally ordered a frontal assault on the city on October 9th, they were pushed back by the British in roughly ninety minutes. The attack was a failure and they lost over one hundred troops and had an additional seven hundred wounded, including the French commander himself. This undoubted military failure turned out to be a victory for religious tolerance in the colonies as many a rebel soldier gained esteem for their Catholic allies.[26]

Many colonial soldiers remembered the heroic and courageous sacrifices of the French on that day. One North Carolinian, Private Robert Tharp, was there and decades later still recalled the great sacrifice that the French made for the cause. When recounting his experience of the siege he noted that "this attack was made in my presence although this plan failed in consequence of the great number of the French Army being slain in attempting to storm their enemy's Fort." Many more French soldiers did indeed die fighting for that colonial city than did American soldiers. Tharp clearly recognized that fact and had his impression of the French elevated. He also recalled the courage of the French commanders. Before the storming of the city was underway, Tharp witnessed "a

[26] For a summary of the Siege of Savannah see Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 382-90.

French officer by the name of Count gillaspey [who] was exercising his men on horses in full view of the enemy's Fort this officer was killed by a ball shot from the enemy's Fort this case of Count gillaspey was done in my presence." Tharp is likely referring to French officer Count Casimir Pulaski, who was shot dead by British grapeshot, receiving mortal wounds in the leg and chest while leading a calvary charge. While he was of Polish nobility and not French, he was from a distinguished Roman Catholic family and esteem for him would have cast Catholicism in an unusually favorable light among the troops. The vast majority of Protestant soldiers who were present saw heroic French Catholics storming the tall parapet to only be shot down and then repeating the process. The tremendous courage displayed by these new allies only earned them the respect of ordinary soldier like Robert Tharp who saw their military sacrifice.[27]

Count d'Estaing, the great French commander himself, earned the approbation of the colonial troops on that day. D'Estaing proved that French Catholics not only could fight courageously, but also that they could do so in an alliance with colonial Protestants. One private commented on this cooperation: "the Count d'Estaing a French officer was there cooperating with the American troops." It was a historic alliance in military and indeed religious terms and the successful cooperation with the French troops despite the military loss was important. As one officer put this sentiment: Count d'Estaing "has undoubtedly the interest of America much at heart...by bravely putting himself at the head of his troops and leading them to Attack." Despite losing the battle, Americans should not "lessen our Ideas of his Merits." This great alliance proved that not only could Protestant and Catholic soldiers fight together, but they could even gain the esteem of

[27] Robert Tharp, R10478, SCAR.

each other for that fighting. This was an episode of religious tolerance adopted for pragmatic purposes among the troops.[28]

The French and American alliance came to a crescendo toward the end of the war at the famous Siege of Yorktown. Far more than Savannah, this joint effort worked to solidify the importance of the French aid to the outcome of the war and in turn raised Protestant troops' esteem of their Catholic allies. In the fall of 1781, the allied armies of Washington and Comte de Rochambeau joined in New York and, through a turn of events, went south to capture Cornwallis and his army at Yorktown. The numbers of men on both sides of this siege dwarfed those at the siege at Savannah. The allied forces had roughly 19,000 men while the British under Cornwallis had only 9,000. Technically beginning in late September, the siege continued with heavy bombardments and assaults for nearly a month until the morning of October 17, when hours of particularly intense barraging forced Cornwallis to raise a white flag and send a note to Washington requesting that they met to agree on terms of surrender. The allied siege was a resounding success and ultimately it was the greatest stride toward the ending of the war, effected by this Catholic and Protestant alliance. That siege ought not to be merely lauded as a great turning point in American military history (which it surely was), but also examined in terms of its cultural and religious effects on the religious tolerance of the army and the people.[29]

The interactions between the troops of the two armies during this siege were extensive. Analyzing these interactions provides insight into how religious tolerance was

---

[28] Mahlon Pierson, S3663, SCAR; Franklin Benjamin, ed., *The Siege of Savannah: By the Combined American and French Forces* (Albany: J. Munsell, 1866), 156.

[29] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle*, 523-39.

bred among the soldiers on the grounds of military pragmatism and as a means of survival. In the summer before the siege, the French and colonists began to develop camaraderie as the French apparently celebrated fourth of July and American Independence with the colonial troops. Pennsylvania Lieutenant William Feltman was there at the celebration and noted in his diary that "This day we had a Feu de Joie in celebration of our Independency of America." After which, they apparently drilled and over it all, he noted they "had the thanks of the Marquis." Seeing the French allied with the colonial political interest and indeed celebrating the Fourth of July with them surely went a long way to quelling soldiers' suspicions regarding the loyalties of their new Catholic allies.[30]

Feltman was not alone in his warm reception of the French forces when they met prior to Yorktown. Indeed, the incoming French troops were often met with the adulation of Americans. Upon seeing the French allies come to join their ranks, the American troops applauded their allies and their shiny white uniforms. The sight of a well-trained and disciplined army was no small consolation for troops about to go into battle. Feltman was quite effusive about seeing these French. He claimed it "spread an universal joy amongst our officers and soldiers. Never did I behold a more beautiful and agreeable sight." After the warm greeting the French and American troops would have had ample time to see one another and be exposed to each other's religious routines. The military need of the alliance bred the occasion for exposure to the Catholic religious others and disposed soldiers to be warm and largely accepting of these religious differences on pragmatic grounds. Feltman wrote that "This day I walked with a number of French

[30] William Feltman, *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman of the First Pennsylvania Regiment, 1781-2* (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1853), 6.

gentlemen (of the Huzzars) at their request." This kind of fraternizing would had added to the religious tolerance that was bred from the battles themselves.[31]

When the fighting started, in a similar pattern to what happened in Savannah, the courage of the French endeared them to the Americans and vice versa. The fact that this campaign ended in great victory undoubtedly helped the cause of religious tolerance as well. Joseph Plumb Martin recalled that when the fighting was underway, he heard the French yell out "Huzza for the Americans!" Both sides were apparently quite lethal and effective in deploying their military strategies. As Feltman recalled, "The French and our Infantry killed a number of the enemy in the storm." Relentless and organized fighting by these forces did take its toll on Cornwallis and the entrenched British. They did surrender. The allies were no doubt elated with one another's military performance. Both among the soldiers and in the wider population the fact could not be ignored that it was only with immense help from French Catholics that the Siege of Yorktown was so successful. In celebrating this monumental victory, the Americans could not have been more effusive in their thanks to the French troops. Authorities and soldiers alike did not shy away from their praise of the new Catholic allies. A statement from New York Headquarters on 20 October 1781 praised even the French Catholic King as "his Most Christian Majesty" for his "attachment to the cause of America." Moreover, the success and loyalty of the French ought to "inspire every citizen of these States with sentiments of the most unutterable gratitude."[32]

---

[31] Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 523; Feltman, *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman,* 12-3.

[32] Martin, *Ordinary Courage,* 148; Feltman, *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman,* 20-3.

In solidarity, the armies held a joint religious service together. This only further demonstrated how the alliance of necessity and pragmatism led to religious tolerance as well. The statement from New York Headquarters stated that "Divine service is to be performed in the several Brigades or Divisions. The Commander in Chief earnestly recommends it that the troops not on duty should universally attend, with that seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interpositions of Providence demands of us." While we cannot know for sure how this service went or how many French Catholics were in attendance, it was clear that colonial religion at this moment was not seeking to exclude Catholics but to tolerate them. This newfound tolerance was a product not of philosophical conclusion, but of military necessity and the experiences of the common soldier.[33]

The effect of these fighting alliances was evident in the respect that American soldiers showed the French officers, even in religious contexts. The funeral of French Admiral De Ternay took place in Newport, Rhode Island. Ternay had distinguished himself as French Naval commander who had died suddenly of a fever before getting to execute his plans against the British. The funeral was attended by civilians and soldiers from both camps and showed the mutual respect that had been brewing since the French entrance into the war. As Ternay was buried many "chanted the Roman Catholic service and performed all the customary rites of the Catholic Church, with a genuine feeling of sadness, naturally awakened by the ability and virtues of the distinguished dead." Despite the explicitly Catholic nature of the funeral and beliefs of the dead, the attending "troops gave their last salute" and all the witnessing "people were deeply impressed by this

[33] Feltman, *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman,* 22-3.

strange, fascinating and mournful scene." The context of the war provided this opportunity for religious tolerance among the troops. It was an opportunity that they did not let pass by.[34]

The French and American alliances in these significant battles went a long way toward quelling soldiers' (and indeed American) suspicions of Catholicism. What would not have occurred naturally among these people if they had simply gone about their normal lives was achieved in the short years of the war. It was the dire circumstances of the war that bred this opportunity for religious tolerance. The effect of this tolerance was so real that it invited opposition from hardliners who had warned that a military alliance with the French would indeed lead to greater tolerance of Catholicism. One popular poem expressed this sentiment: "The French Alliance now came forth / The Papists flocked in shoals, Sir / Frizeur Marquises, Valets of birth, / And priests to save our souls, Sir, / our "good ally" with tow'ring ring / Embraced the flattering hope, Sir, / That we should own him for our King, / And then invite the Pope, Sir." Although not entirely correct (few colonies immediately adopted policies that tolerated Catholics in government) it was true that a great deal of cultural acceptance of Catholicism followed the war. A French officer, after returning from fighting in the colonies, reported to France in 1779 that the Royalists in the colonies "excite distrust" among the people because of the Patriot "alliance with Papists." Yet, despite these royalists' rumors, the people of America in general "long for peace" among the various religious denominations.[35]

---

[34] Edward Martin Stone, *Our French Allies: Rochambeau and His Army, Lafayette and His Devotion…* (Providence: Providence Press Co., 1884), 348.

[35] "Catholics and the American Revolution," in *The American Catholic Historical Researches* 2, no. 1 (January 1906), 37-9.

It was not only Catholics who gained some esteem and religious tolerance during the war, but also Jews. In terms of population, Jews were an even smaller religious minority than Catholics. There were roughly 2,500 Jews living in the colonies at the time and about one hundred of them served in the war. This fact was remarkable given that even in the eighteenth century most Jews were not allowed to serve in Western militaries. Although a very small proportion of the population, insular and successful Jewish communities made them highly visible among several of the colonies. Many stories of Jewish soldiers on the colonial side proved that they served with heroism and at times distinguished themselves among their fellow troops. Samuel Rezneck, who wrote an excellent analysis of Jewish peoples' role in the Revolution concluded that the "Revolution affected the Jews' role and future in America...It literally revolutionized and altered their special and peculiar place in a Christian society." A large part of how this dramatic shift came to take place in American society was Jewish service in the war.[36]

Francis Salvador, a South Carolina militiaman, is little recognized in modern accounts of the war, however, among his contemporaries he was well-known. Salvador was the first Jewish Patriot to die in the South Carolina Revolution and he was much lauded for it. In the summer of 1775, South Carolina launched an assault on the Cherokee people to the West. They strongly suspected that the British were allied with the Cherokees and that both would soon launch attacks on the South Carolina backcountry. Having experienced decades of warfare of this sort, colonists in the backcountry needed little persuading to join this assault. That July, Major James Williamson of the South Carolina Militia and just over 1,000 men pursued their targets to the West. On their way,

[36] Samuel Rezneck, *Unrecognized Patriots: The Jews in the American Revolution* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1975), 4-5.

they were engaged by a strong force of Indians and Loyalists. Williamson's men were overwhelmed and would not have held their ground had they not had reinforcements mid-fight by Andrew Pickens. Eventually, the militiamen staved off the attack although it was a damaging one. It was in the initial contact of this fight that Francis Salvador became the first Jewish soldier to die in South Carolina. He was shot off his horse while riding to regroup. While he was down, he was scalped by a Cherokee warrior who proceeded to retreat. Salvador was left on the battlefield and died shortly after the incident.[37]

Many soldiers who were at this engagement lauded Francis Salvador and his actions. One militiaman who was there that day, James Sherer, witnessed this battle and the fate of Francis Salvador. He recalled him with much admiration. "The Indians killed a man by the name of Sallvedore," Sherer relayed, "[he] was eminent for his bravery and much admired." Many other soldiers mentioned that they recalled Salvador being killed in their pension applications. In fact, his legacy was so strong in their memory that he was how they remembered what battle it was that they fought in. They knew few details but were sure they were in the battle in which "Salvador was killed." The impression he made among his fellow troops was quite remarkable, especially since he was a religious minority among soldiers who were previously unsympathetic to his beliefs. Later generations continued to bear witness to this Jewish man's sacrifice. He was given a heartfelt memorial service.[38]

---

[37] Gilbert and Gilbert, *True for the Cause of Liberty,* 62-3.

[38] James Sherer, W4512, SCAR; James McNees, R6802, SCAR; Rezneck, *Unrecognized Patriots,* 24. For more soldiers who mentioned Francis Salvador in their pension applications, see Joshua Hammond, S21803, SCAR; John Parker, S21414, SCAR; Samuel Baley, S30258, SCAR; James McElroy, S2786, SCAR.

Salvador was only one of the Jewish patriots who gained the esteem of the religious majority during the war. Many others contributed to this cause. Elias Pollock was a Jewish man in the war and served valiantly from 1778-80. He even fought in the Battle of Camden and was recognized for his service with a pension from the new government. Additionally, Benjamin Nones, a Jewish man born in France came to America at age 20 in 1777 and fought in the militia at Charleston. He claimed to have fought in "almost every action which took place in Carolina." His most heroic act was apparently carrying an injured Baron DeKalb from the battlefield during the Siege of Savannah. This feat of bravery was recognized and lauded by his fellow troops. One French Captain Verdier testified to this heroic act by affirming that Nones, under his command, served valiantly "under fire in all the bloody battles we fought." Nones was marked "by the bravery and courage" which one expects from a soldier. He fought heroically for the "liberties of his country" and earned "the esteem of General Pulaski as well as that of the officers who witnessed his daring conduct."[39]

Throughout the course of the war, soldiers encountered religious others in ways that bred tolerance beyond fighting side by side with them. Sojourning through new areas, in which soldiers were themselves the religious minority, forced them to adopt a tolerant attitude to survive and enlist help. Soldiers often encountered new religious peoples and traditions during their tenure in the army and used the opportunity to familiarize themselves with their unfamiliar religious practices. These soldiers acted as tourists in strange lands as they often soaked in new cultures and ways of life. All this exposure cumulatively laid the groundwork for a broader culture of religious tolerance in

[39] Elias Pollock, S40279, SCAR; Rezneck, *Unrecognized Patriots,* 37.

the new and unified nation ahead. The war moved troops geographically and provided an opportunity to move them spiritually.

Perhaps the most dramatic reversal was soldiers' adopting a tolerant attitude toward Roman Catholics during their March to Quebec. Prior to the Sieges of Savannah and Yorktown, this expedition showed soldiers embracing Catholics even apart from a formal military alliance. This event was quite unique and worth study because it took troops from areas most averse to Catholicism (mostly New England colonies) and brought them into an almost entirely Catholic area. How these soldiers responded to this new religious environment goes a long way toward explaining the effect that the disruptions and hardships of the war had on religious attitudes and levels of tolerance of those caught up in them. Just two years before the war, these areas were outraged that the British government would even grant these French Catholics a modicum of religious peace. Such tolerance toward Catholics was not only viewed as improper, but as the work of the devil and a political conspiracy to overthrow colonial liberties. The Quebec Act of 1774 launched more than a few conspiracy theories of precisely this occurring. In this religious context, what was it that opened these religious soldiers to Catholicism? How did they come to see them as allies and even to tolerate their religious differences? By examining the religious soldiers' attitude shift during their March to Quebec we see the shift was made by the need of the soldiers, not because of ideas or the First Amendment. Seeing this shift occur among ordinary soldiers before it did so politically in the nation helps us see the ground-up reality of religious tolerance in the colonies.

The March to Quebec in the winter of 1775 was conceived as a military necessity to quell possibly hostile populations in Canada and prevent the British from using this

area to descend on the colonies. In religious terms, the expedition boiled down to a group of mixed Protestants marching into Catholic lands. Under the famed leadership of Benedict Arnold and his harrowing march up the Kennebec River, were enlisted around one thousand soldiers, a surgeon, a chaplain, a few musicians, four Indian guides, and two women. There already existed noticeable religious diversity among the soldiers who marched. The majority of the troops from the New England Colonies were predominantly Congregationalist. However, they were joined by around three hundred riflemen from Virginia and Pennsylvania. Soldiers from these two colonies were used to an established Anglican Church and a larger mixed Protestant culture, respectively. These diverse Protestants endured one of the most grueling events of the war together and gained respect one for the other. They regularly faced starving and freezing conditions and lived in constant threat of a disastrous military attack. By necessity and survival, they embraced these cultural and religious others. One New England Soldier wrote with much joy about how "One of the young riflemen," from the Pennsylvania regiment, "killed a young Moose, which weighed 200lbs." This Pennsylvania soldier showed his mettle to those New Englanders by feeding them. Through it all they endured and even prayed with one another, gaining respect for these Protestant others.[40]

While coming from different religious backgrounds, they did share a common religious sentiment, anti-Catholicism. Many of these men set out on this trip virulently anti-Catholic but ended up adopting tolerant attitudes toward them and their religion as a means of survival. Daniel Barber, a soldier on this expedition recalled, that all agreed that "George, by granting the Quebec Bill... had thereby become a traitor; had broken his

[40] Stocking, *An Interesting Journal*, 13; Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 93; Darley, *Voices From A Wilderness Expedition,* 154.

coronation oath; was secretly a Papist; and whose design it was to oblige this country to submit... and be given up and destroyed, soul and body, by that frightful image with seven heads and ten horns... The common word then was, 'No King, no Popery.'" This cultural disposition, conditioned soldiers to have quite a negative reaction to their first encounters with Catholicism, a religion many of them had never experienced firsthand before. Apparently, soon after they arrived in Catholic regions, they saw "on the neck of the bust and hanging in the form of a rosary" seeing this "occassioned great confusion, much ill blood, and many menaces from officers and soldiers." Soldiers did not let the Catholic relic stand. The following night it was "broken to pieces and thrown down a privy." Overt acts of anti-Catholicism were the cultural norm for many of these troops.[41]

This overt anti-Catholicism could have spelled disaster for the military efforts in Quebec. Washington and Arnold quickly made strong statements to the troops that they would not tolerate any of this behavior against the native Catholics of this land. Washington issued a directive that, while in Canada "avoid all Disrespect or Contempt of the Religion of the Country." This was a tall order for the troops but had to be done if they were to survive in the land and Washington knew. During their tenure in that land much of their food and aid would have to come from goodwill commerce with the native population. If they were bluntly hostile toward their religion, it was unlikely that this would occur. Arnold was in lockstep with Washington on this directive and did what he could to see it was followed. Yet, all the directives would have meant little had the soldiers themselves not practiced religious tolerance.[42]

---

[41] O'Brien, "Pragmatic Toleration," 120; Evans, *Weathering the Storm,* 59.

[42] Quoted in Ferling, *Almost a Miracle,* 94.

The soldiers, in steps, began to adopt this posture of religious tolerance, more out of necessity than ideology. Their main concern was lack of food on this trip. After weeks of eating dogs and leather shoes, troops needed to secure steady supplies. The local Catholics in the area had such food. Shortly after the disastrous failure to seize Quebec, the soldiers were in desperate need. Seemingly out of compassion for their lot, a Catholic Bishop sent them provisions. As Henry Dearborn, who was among the injured soldiers, recalled, "The Bishop sent us two hogshead of port wine, six loaves of sugar, and several pounds of tea in a present, for which we sent him a letter of thanks." The fact that Dearborn mentioned that they wrote this man a letter of thanks indicated some significant elements to this story. One that this does not seem to be merely an act of commerce, for which, no letter of thanks would be in order. It was an act of charity. An act that these Protestant soldiers no doubt knew came from a sincere Catholic. Such acts of kindness towards these troops were not isolated incidents. One soldier wrote about how after starving for some time, he entered a French convent where he got bread and rum. These very same soldiers were the ones who acknowledged food as an act of Providence. Thus, in their time of need they could not ignore the conclusion that these religious others were the instrument of God in feeding them. In general, soldiers could not escape the conclusion that the "Canadians were very kind to our people."[43]

In addition to providing them with food, some Catholics even invited soldiers into their homes to escape the harsh winter. Whether out of religious compassion or simply sympathy for these dying soldiers, the fact was that many French Catholics took these

[43] Darley, *Voices from A Wilderness Expedition,* 109,118; Justin Winsor, *Arnold's Expedition Against Quebec, 1775-1776: The Diary of Ebenezer Wild* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, 1886), 9.

soldiers in. In a particularly important incident for exposure to the Catholic religion, many soldiers were housed in a nunnery. One soldier recorded that on December 5th "My company was ordered into the nunnery." Another soldier recalled the same experience rather bluntly but added that the stay was extended and not merely one night: "went to a nunnery which is in [the] edge of the suburbs of Quebec & there stay'd a few days." Soldiers must have been surprised at the goodwill that they received from many Catholics and that some of them even supported their cause. Henry Dearborn wrote that when they first marched to St. Augustine, they were "elegantly entertained there by the Curate of the parish, who at the same time possessed great regard for them, as well as for the glorious cause wherein they were engaged." While soldiers would have felt differently about all the exposure they would have had while staying there, all of them knew that it was at the goodwill of these nuns that they were kept from the harsh winter. It did not go unnoticed.[44]

Soldiers and local Catholics had many positive interactions unrelated to provisions. In one of the more remarkable displays of compassion of the entire war, Catholic friars and ladies cared for soldiers who were dying in British prisons of smallpox. Private Simon Fobes recalled how at times some friars would bring small apples and rum and leave them for the soldiers. Once Fobes himself was taken with the smallpox he was brought to a hospital of sorts. Here he recalled French ladies who "brought in some herb-drink, boiled rice, some sugar, and a little bread" for them to have. All of this care was to soldiers whose "flesh seemed a mass of corruption…[and] were almost covered with vermin." This was a pattern for soldiers who were afflicted with

[44] Darley, *Voices from A Wilderness Expedition,* 112, 166.

smallpox while on the journey; they were cared for by nuns and friars. Henry Dearborn wrote on a different occasion that "There was thirty Nuns in the hospital that attended the sick very carefully." Soldiers time of extreme need was met by Canadian religious others whom, out of sincere religious conviction, cared for them. This was one of the many ways that religious tolerance was adopted as a means of survival and not as a philosophical principle.[45]

The soldiers' reliance on these Catholic communities set the stage for many soldiers to attend their worship services and have a positive experience. Many soldiers commented mundanely on simply attending the worship services with themselves and other soldiers. Perhaps the reason many Protestant soldiers attended Mass was nothing more profound than curiosity. As many men wrote in their diary, they were fond of adventure and new experiences. This posture seemed to be exactly what drove them to attend Mass on occasion. One private documented that "It being St. Patrick's Day we had the curiosity to go to Mass in Bonpir." A few things were notable about this diary entry. First was that he mentioned it was St. Patrick's Day. Saints were strictly forbidden to be venerated or prayed to among Protestants. Since that was the entire purpose of the day it was odd that devout Protestants (as this diarist was) would have been drawn into that celebration. It seemed that simply being among these people that they had gained respect for induced them to ignore their traditional and parochial prejudices and to participate. Second, he mentioned that "we" went to Mass. Unfortunately, he did not record the entire number, but based on other uses of "we" in the diary it was entirely possible that he was referring to his entire regiment or at least a significant portion of it. As other diaries from

[45] Roberts, *March to Quebec,* 592-3; Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 15; Darley, *Voices from A Wilderness Expedition,* 120.

the same time indicated, there were many soldiers who went to Mass and did so on more than one occasion. Finally, he gave their motive. It was simple "curiosity" that drove them to expose themselves to religious others. There were no abstract philosophical principles but simply the opportunity that presented itself and set the stage for soldiers to be introduced to Catholic worship. For many of these soldiers this was the first time that they were exposed to a Catholic worship service. The mere fact that they attended was an exigency of the war and not something that they did out of principle and exposure to religious others was a prerequisite to adopting religious tolerance as a cultural practice.[46]

Some soldiers were quite critical of the Catholic church when they attended. Major Henry Livingston of New York was unimpressed with Catholicism as a religion and somewhat contemptuous of the piety of its followers. Although he had to admit that the "Architecture" of the church they attended was "truly grand," he echoed Protestant prejudices against Catholic piety as merely a "round of follies" and rituals that the partakers knew little about. More than religious prejudice, he attacked their politics as being Catholic and therefore "an Arch Villain & a Tory." Livingston's reiteration of centuries old prejudices against Catholicism should not be surprising. Many hardline Protestant soldiers who visited these Catholics churches had the same reaction. What was surprising, however, was that many did not. Even Livingston himself, after living a few more days amongst the Catholics perhaps warmed up to them some as he admitted some in the area "have a fine Church at their village…[and] were good Catholics by their frequent crossings and short prayers at particular times of the day." Although clearly

[46] Haskell, *Caleb Haskell's Diary,* 18.

sarcastic, many soldiers warmed up to Catholicism far more quickly and wholly than Livingston did.[47]

Captain John Fassett experienced a similar shock when he attended a Catholic Mass. I "Went to Mass in the forenoon," he noted, and saw "the strangest thing that ever I see in my life. Their ceremonies are beyond what I can express. They had six candle[s] burning all the time." For a Protestant who had very little ceremony in his worship services seeing candles lit seemed quite strange indeed. A typical Protestant service would not have had a single candle let alone six. Despite his initial reactions and for reasons that he did not disclose in his diary, Fassett continued to attend Mass while in the area. But a few days passed, and he recorded again that he went to Mass a second time and this time seemingly without the shock and awe. And not long after that he attended even again: "a great day among the French, it being All Saints Day. There was a great gathering among them and greater ceremonies at church than common." Here he not only showed a consistency in going to Mass but even a saint's day celebration. While these were strictly forbidden in colonial Protestantism, they were much valued by faithful Catholics. It seemed the days spent among the kind and faithful Catholics and ordinary interactions that he had with them induced Fassett to attend their services and after doing so for some time he warmed up to the people and their religion. Fassett's pattern of exposure leading to tolerance is a micro example of how the religious mixing during the

[47] Henry Livingston and Gaillard Hunt, "Journal of Major Henry Livingston, of the Third New York Continental Line August to December, 1775," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 22, no. 1 (1898), 19-20.

war led to a cultural tolerance of religious pluralism from the ground up. It was not total but did move at least these troops in that direction.[48]

One Massachusetts soldier, Bayze Wells, who was devoutly Protestant, seemed to soak in much of the Catholic Masses the he attended with interest and even approval. On April 7th, after arriving in Montreal but a day earlier, Wells recorded perhaps the most detailed explanation of a Protestant soldier reacting to a Catholic service that we have. His impressions were overwhelmingly positive. Wells recorded that he had heard that this day was a day that Catholics "Keep in Remembrance of our Savours Resurection from the Dead." Wells hinted at the common ground that he began to feel with these Canadian Catholics in writing that it was a day of celebrating "our Savours Resurection," a seeming admission of a common religious interest between him and these Catholics. This was likely the reason that he felt so keen and content with attending it. The day-long festivities began early and continued throughout the large portion of the day and Wells was there for the duration. The "Rising of the Sun and People going in to say their Prayers" was how the day began. Wells seemed to have been there at this opening and must have watched or even participated. After this the formal liturgical services began, and Wells wrote that he "tarred with them" until three o'clock in the afternoon. Wells spent at least five hours at this Catholic Mass, and he would have never done so had he not joined the roaming forces of the rebel army.[49]

Unlike some of the other soldiers who were quite skeptical, Wells soaked in the rituals of the Catholic Mass with much approval. The first thing he noticed about the

---

[48] Fassett, *The Follett-Dewey Fassett-Safford Ancestry,* 229.

[49] Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," 261-3.

service was that it "Began [with] all museic." He was shocked by the large number of instruments that were incorporated into the worship. He proceeded to list them in his diary: "Bells Bagpipes Flut Harp and Horn-pipe and Orgins and fiddls Going all." Traditional Congregational services that Wells was used to would have banned such instruments from being part of the singing. All songs were simple Psalms and were sung without any accompanying instruments. It would not be surprising if Wells had never heard these instruments before. The sound would have been overwhelming and uplifting and Wells seemed to welcome this as part of his religious experience. He stayed and continued to partake in the service.[50]

He next noticed another stark contrast from his usual form of worship: the elaborate vestments of the Catholic priests. In Congregational worship the preacher made it a point to project the egalitarian nature of their ecclesiology by dressing down, at least compared to his Catholic and Anglican colleagues. The preacher would wear a black robe, most recognizable as scholarly garb and not dress that was designed to display hierarchy or aw. This was the opposite of what Wells noticed about the priests in this Catholic Mass. The "Prests in Number about thirty...Drest Execssively Well," he wrote. They were all dressed in "White Surpluses" and carried about in a very ornate manner. The gowns of the Catholic church attempted to convey the majesty of the church and the heavenly matters in which they were occupied. Opposite both in ideological underpinning and aesthetic effect from what Wells was used to. The optic power of the episode no

[50] Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," 262-3.

doubt induced a religious experience that Wells appreciated and indeed remembered long enough to record in his diary.[51]

Of course, the ornately donned priests were not idle, but busily and purposefully engaged in the rituals of a Catholic Mass. In addition to the traditional liturgy, it seemed that this day entailed special rituals of which Wells took note. All the priests were "Singing and Bowing and on their Nees." Wells noticed that the lead Bishop (or perhaps even Cardinal) was "Sprinkling Holy water and Burning incense." Wells referred to this leading figure as the "High Prest" a simple reference to the Old Testament figure of the lead priest in Israel. Wells using this term for a Catholic Bishop illustrated his lack of knowledge of Catholicism and made his interest and seeming approval of it all the more important. While this Bishop engaged in this, the thirty or so other priests were "Walking up to the Vurgien mary...then to the Alter" carrying candles and singing a "mornfull tune." Wells would have been shocked by this veneration of the Virgin Mary as the Protestant tradition from which he came adamantly opposed such lifting her up as a religious figure. However, he made no qualms about witnessing it here. All the rituals seemed to end with what he called "A very fine tune."[52]

Wells' time at the Catholic church seemed to make a significant impact on him in terms of approving of Catholicism. But a couple of days after this initial experience, he decided to attend "mass in the Same manner as they Did." Here he seems to indicate that as before he was more of a spectator of what was going on, now he was a partaker. He had tasted the religious experience and now wanted more. He did not record all the

[51] Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," 262-3.

[52] Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," 262-3.

particulars, but based on what he had written before, Wells likely partook in the prayers, liturgy and perhaps even the sacrament of the Catholic church. He even adopted their religious terminology. He referred to this time as "Holey time," certainly not traditional Protestant lingo. Wells' time in the army led to exposure and it seems even adoption of many Catholic rituals. This episode, playing out in the lives of thousands of soldiers during the war, began to till the soil of religious tolerance of the new nation after the war.[53]

Of course, during their long stay in Catholic areas, soldiers were exposed to more than simply Catholic Mass. One of the biggest religious rituals that seemed to affect soldiers was Catholic funerals. As we have seen soldiers were often surrounded by death and needed ways to cope with it. Many did indeed find consolation and aid in the Protestant means of coping with death and warfare. There were other religious means of dealing with such realities and soldiers were exposed to them now during this time of war. While they were stationed in the areas many soldiers witnessed Catholic funerals and just as their reactions ranged on a spectrum from disdain to adoption regarding worship, so too with regard to funerals. What soldiers witnessed in these Catholic funerals could accurately be described as eighteenth-century last rites. However, soldiers had little to no vocabulary to describe these rituals and thus simply wrote down what they saw. Private James Melvin witnessed a "Frenchman being at the point of death" and undergoing these rites. Melvin saw a reverent scene in which "nuns came and read over him, afterward the priest came in, then they fetched in a table covered with a white cloth, and lighted two wax candles." The reading and tablecloth were elaborate ceremonies that

[53] Wells, "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington," 261-3.

Melvin was unfamiliar with. They "went on some time," he wrote, and he noted that it ended with the priest saying a prayer for the deceased man on his own and closing his eyes. Clearly intrigued at how religious others handled death, Private James Melvin watched on.[54]

This was not the last opportunity that Melvin would have to observe a Catholic funeral. Some months later he saw another giving of last rites, but this time with a larger crowd and he gave far more detail of the ceremony. He described a priest following the train of the sick man and his family. The priest was ornamented with many crosses on him and was saying many prayers around the sick man. There was a bell, Melvin noted. And every "one that hears the bell is obliged to kneel down while they pass by." The people around "all have these beads when they go to church, to help them remember their prayers. They also use the same ceremony when they go to a burying, and have choristers singing before the corpse." These tactile religious experiences were obviously foreign to Melvin. Soldiers had great regard for how religious people dealt with death. Having been surrounded by it often during their tenure as soldiers, they were clearly intrigued with how Catholics dealt with that reality. Having seen these rituals it was clear that they began to develop respect for them and for Catholics generally.[55]

Although the biggest change in religious attitudes was regarding Catholicism, there was also a great deal of being exposed to foreign Protestants while in the ranks. Soldiers, due to the itinerant military life, often attended various church services they never would have otherwise. Often, these religious experiences broadened soldiers'

[54] Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin,* 67, 81-2.

[55] Melvin, *The Journal of James Melvin,* 67, 81-2.

horizons in terms of religious practices. Moving soldiers geographically went a long way toward moving them spiritually. Take as an example, the experiences of ordinary Massachusetts soldier Ammi White. He attended various Protestant churches during his time in the military. In fact, his attendance at different churches was so varied it was difficult to discern to which denomination he belonged. In the span of a little over a month, White recorded attending the religious services of at least three different denominations. Clearly devout, White seemed to have a broad religious identity, at least while traveling with the military. Early in his military life, in the spring of 1776, White was near Cambridge and worshipped at "the Presbeterion meeting hous near the common." About a month after this, after traveling with the army, White recorded that "This day I went to meeten...to the low[?] Dutch church." Although similar in theology in practice, a Dutch church certainly would have differed from a colonial Presbyterian church in culture and perhaps even language. White's religious explorations did not stop soon after this. But two weeks later, White wrote in his diary that this "Evening I went Baptist Meating and heard a very good sermon." Baptists would have differed with both aforementioned Protestant denominations in belief and practice. Private White was a parochial Massachusetts soldier whose time in the army gave him ample opportunity to explore other religious denominations and he did so. In addition to fighting alongside other Protestant soldiers, as was reviewed earlier, attending their religious services was an important step toward adopting cultural tolerance of other Protestants.[56]

White was not alone in attending religious services of foreign denominations. Many soldiers took advantage of the same opportunity. Late in the war, Private Henry

[56] See entries for 21 April 1776, 28 April 1776, and 12 May 1776 in White, N18402, RWPA.

Sewall wrote an extended treatment of his impressions upon attending a Dutch church for worship. This was a novel experience for Sewall one that left him impressed with this foreign denomination and endeared that religion to him. He wrote candidly that the "Dutch, though they sit in prayer, & though their manner of singing is far from being agreeable to the ear - are exceeding devout in their worship." He was clearly impressed with their way of worship. He knew it was not English but acknowledged that it was certainly devout and respectable. One negative comment did make it into this entry. He was "sorry to observe, that the old people are the principal supporters of their religion," while the young "seem wantonly to cast off with their mother tongue Calvinistic religion which they brought from their native country." Sewall was impressed with the religion and lamented its generational decay in the colonies.[57]

The instability of war oftentimes meant that soldiers were forced to pray and worship with religious others in their own brigades. If a Baptist soldier was surrounded largely by Presbyterian soldiers, then it was likely that the only preaching and worship they would have access to would be Presbyterian. This seemed to happen to Private Arthur Fairies of South Carolina. He wrote that this "morning had the prayers of Mr. Hall, a Presbyterian Minister belong[ing] to the North Army." When Congregationalist Private Amos Farnsworth was stationed at Cambridge, one Sunday he heard a sermon from an "Anabaptis preacher," which seemed to go well. The experience clearly made an impression on Farnswoth for about a month later he went to the ordination of the very Baptists preacher and quoted a Bible verse about that event: "Commit thou unto faithfull

[57] Entry for 14 May 1780 in Sewall, Henry Sewall Diaries, MHS. For a more neutral description of attending a Dutch worship service, see entry for 21 April 1776 in Bangs, "Isaac Bangs Journal."

men who shall be able to teach others also." Acknowledging a preacher from another denomination as "faithfull" was quite the complement in religious terms and no doubt indicates Farnsworth opening to that Baptist minister.[58]

These experiences and instances of exposure to religious others did occasion a religious change of heart in some. One soldier was persuaded against the teachings of infant baptism and saw the light of adult baptism preached by his fellow Baptist soldiers. This changed soldier felt so strongly about his new convictions regarding baptism that he wanted his new beliefs to be displayed publicly. Much to the shock of Baptist minister Oliver Hart, many of the religious troops who disagreed with this were willing to attend the ceremony. Many Presbyterians witnessed without apparent rancor, Baptist practices. Hart noted in his diary the scene of baptizing this captain as a Baptist while many looked on, most of whom were Presbyterians, but that they all behaved well. It seemed that these different denominations gained respect as they experienced their honored captain embrace the Baptist principles.[59]

Being in the army and witnessing events of religious diversity often created a reason for soldiers of different religious persuasions to dialogue. After witnessing an unusual religious event like the one described above would surely bring about dialogue between soldiers. Soldiers did not always walk away from encounters with religious others silently, but at times discussed them. When stationed in Cambridge, one officer was called a "Blasphemer, at least against a man" by a chaplain in the camp. Although the diarist does not give detail about what the religious dispute it was over, it must have

[58] Fairies, Journal of 1776, 25; Farnsworth, "Amos Farnsworth's Diary," 93-6.

[59] Entries for 12 July 1780 and 3 August 1780 in Hart, Oliver Hart Diary, *SCL*.

been significant. Although there was this tension, their being in the same army facilitated time for them to dialogue about their differences. So, later that day, he had "considerable discourse with Capt. Jewett on the subject of Religion." This event began quite poorly and with tensions high but seemed to end in dialogue and with some form of resolution. Being the in the army created many of these micro events that fostered dialogue between different religions.[60]

In addition to encounters with more mainstream Protestant sects, soldiers had occasion to travel through some Moravian villages. A Protestant branch close to Lutheranism, Moravians came over from Germany and settled mostly in the northern colonies and the Carolinas. They were largely pacifist and did not partake in the war themselves. Soldiers would have had little to no understanding or exposure to Moravian religious ways before the war. An anonymous diary kept by a Moravian in Salem, North Carolina documented how Revolutionary War soldiers came, stayed, and even worshipped among the Moravians. On 4 April 1779, the diarist remarked that their church service that day was attended "by a rather large number of outsiders." The diary referred to many American soldiers that had come into the village. Toward the end of the month, the diarist noted that nearly "all the soldiers were present again" at worship. It seemed that the visit was pleasant for all. "They were all thankful," the diarist concluded, "for the good treatment they had received, and we for their good conduct." Other soldiers had more mundane, but usually positive, experiences with being impressed by Moravian

[60] John G. Shea, ed., *The Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America,* Vol. 8 (New York: John G. Shea, 1864), 327.

towns and general ways of life. Soldiers' encounters and impressions with Moravians fits the pattern of soldiers being open to religious tolerance in the context of need or travel.[61]

Soldiers attitudes towards and interactions with Quakers, however, were more complex. Although certainly a religious minority, Quakers had a longer history in the colony and were far more visible than Moravians to most colonists. Quakers were strict pacifists and to troops who had joined the army this was difficult to stomach. Many soldiers seemed to resent the fact that they did not fight and held it against them both during the war and after them. However, Quakers aided and gained respect, on a micro scale, by some interventions that they could sanction. Grace Barclay, the wife of an American officer, gained quite a bit of esteem for the Quaker doctrine of pacifism as she saw their compassion through the course of the war. One day she recorded a story in her diary about the Quaker neighbor, Mary Pattison, who she witnessed care for a beaten and bleeding soldier. This act of compassion was the most recent in a long string of behaviors that caused Grace to write in her diary that this Quaker, "whose sympathy for the suffering never failed, took the poor creature in." Pattison dressed the soldier's wounds and cared for him "like the good Samaritan." Such moving behavior caused Barclay to write laudatory remarks about the Quakers. "The principles of this peace-loving Society," she exclaimed, "are destined one day to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea." Through their wartime compassion and devoutness to principle, the Quakers earned the esteem of this onlooker and no doubt that of many soldiers.[62]

---

[61] Adelaide L. Fries, ed., *Records of the Moravians in North Carolina,* Vol. III (Raleigh: Edwards and Boughton Company, 1926), 1298-3001.

[62] Barclay, *Grace Barclay's Diary,* 87-8.

A couple of soldiers wrote poems in their war diaries about their feelings toward Quakers. The sum of them was, again, complex. Private James McMichael wrote a poem about Quakers that seemed to be somewhat understanding of their decision not to fight in the war. "These were the people called Quakers / And in War wou'd not be partakers / To Liberty's Sons this seem'd but light / We still allowed that we cou'd fight." McMichael seemed to say that he was not persuaded by their pacifist arguments, but he does not deride them outright either. Soldiers did give these issues quite a bit of thought, however. It was clear that the Quaker religious stance did challenge some soldiers' religious convictions about the propriety of warfare and violence. One of the more remarkable diary entries of a soldier along these lines was the entry in private Jonathan Libby's diary entitled: "A discourse between a continental officer and a Quaker concerning the lawfulness of war." The poem begins with a statement from the officer challenging the Quaker on what he would do if a hostile enemy came into his lands, threatening all with violence. Unfortunately, the manuscript of the diary ended there. What we can glean about this significance, though was the fact that Quakers got men questioning their own religious presuppositions about violence. Thus, Quakers too used this war to foster religious tolerance in the colonies.[63]

The war brought about these unique religious experiences for soldiers to encounter religious others. Many began to adopt a posture of religious tolerance based not on philosophical principle, but on need and pragmatism. Such a context brought about important elements of exposure to religious others and often led to adoption of measures of culture tolerance. In a revolution that sought to move from parochial

[63] Entry for 2 November 1777 in "The James McMichael Journal," *JAR;* Jonathan Libby, W24557, RWPA.

colonies toward a genuine unity this demand for religious tolerance was paramount. Thus, the religious experiences of soldiers proved an indispensable part of creating the culture for religious tolerance in the new nation.

The cumulative significance of these soldiers' experience with religious tolerance is to demonstrate how such tolerance came from the ground up in American culture and came from necessity and not ideology. These soldiers were quite ill-read in enlightenment ideals that birthed the first amendment and subsequent political changes. They were, however, aware of how religious others fought by their side during a time of war and how they received charity in times of need from foreign religions. These powerful motives of necessity and practically, in the context of war, did brew practiced religious tolerance among a wide swath of soldiers and, assuredly, many more colonists. Thus, in many colonies where the disestablishment of religion took decades after the war, these soldiers experiences demonstrate a brief respite, even if limited temporally and numerically, from the steady stream of anti-Catholicism and Congregationalist pride that was often characteristic of New England colonies. The history of religious prejudice in the colonies, these soldiers teach us, was not linear, but contingent and contextually determined. There are, however, limited examples where these soldiers' religious experiences of tolerance did lead to discernable political change. In the states of Virginia and South Carolina (colonies with the strongest established churches except for New York) dissenters fighting for and alongside the established church became a predicate for leveraging disestablishment in those colonies. In no small part due to these experiences of the war, the war saw a groundswell push for religious liberty. I would argue that one

indispensable component of the explanation for it was the learned tolerance of the troops during the war.

Had most of the experiences with religious others been negative, there would not have been pushes by religious others for postwar inclusion, but rather distance. Recent scholarship has affirmed the ground-up view of religious toleration during the Revolution. Conventional wisdom has the disestablishment movements in this country as a largely national phenomenon. It viewed the disestablishments as coming from the top down as mimicking the spirit of the first amendment in the new federal constitution. This was not only incorrect but blurs the reality of the ground-up nature of disestablishment and thus the contributions of the ordinary religious soldiers' part in this process. One of their central findings was the prominent role of dissenters in pushing for disestablishment. What they missed was the importance of the soldiers and the context of the war.[64]

While these moves against the religious establishments were not true universally among the colonies it did have a direct impact on some. Take, for example, Virginia and South Carolina, perhaps the two most powerful established churches in the South. In both colonies, the religious dissenters and soldiers' fighting experiences had a direct effect on disestablishment. Virginia dissenters were largely unsuccessful in their petitions for religious liberty in the decades leading up to the war. They were equally as angry about the state of living under an established church which controlled political authority and to which they had to pay taxes, but their petitions had very little leverage. This changed with the coming of the war. Anglican leadership in Virginia knew it needed the support

[64] Esbeck and Hartog, *Disestablishment and Religious Dissent,* 11.

of the dissenters and the dissenters shrewdly tied their military support to getting religious freedom in Virginia. As Ragosta concluded "A conjunction of political necessity in the midst of war and the dissenter's persistent demands and warnings were central to the establishment of religious freedom in Virginia." The context of the war was the opportunity for ground-up religious freedom to be born in Virginia. These political changes, combined with the cultural moves among many of the troops toward religious tolerance were powerful steps toward adoption of a posture of religious freedom and unity in the new nation.[65]

This was also true in South Carolina. In fact, in South Carolina the dissenters predicated their calls for religious freedom on their wartime experiences. They fought and died for their Anglican fellow soldiers and that sacrifice should be recognized. In his 1777 speech before the South Carolina assembly, chaplain William Tennent predicated the calls for religious liberty upon the sacrifice and cooperation of religious dissenters with Anglicans. In a stroke of rhetorical power, Tennent asked the legal body: "What are all the liberties for which we dare to grapple with Great Britain when compared with our religious liberties? Can you imagine that the numerous Dissenters who venture their all in support of American freedom would be fond of shedding their blood in this cause if they did not with confidence expect that they should have justice done them and that they should stand upon the same footing with their brethren"? This petition in South Carolina for religious freedom was made on 11 January 1777 and it had seventy-nine churches in

[65] Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty*, 69.

the backcountry subscribe to it, including many Anglicans. These were the very same churches that sent their sons and husbands to fight in the war.[66]

The grounds on which various religious minorities lobbied for and achieved religious toleration was their fighting more the cause. In addition to religious tolerance on the ground aiding soldiers' time in the military by cooperating with religious others, it also laid the groundwork for a religious establishment in the new nation. Thus, while we can trace the political consequences of some soldiers' experiences of the religious tolerance, it was the cultural movements that were equally important. The experience of French Catholic allies and the exposure that northern troops had to Catholicism were important episodes in the cultural moves toward religious tolerance. The wartime experiences of religious tolerance certainly did not end religious prejudice; indeed, many such prejudices came back in the eighteenth century, but it did show how in the right context exposure to religious others and a context of religious pluralism could breed understanding and even cooperation with religious others. Beyond this, it had immediate political ramifications in the disestablishment of churches in Virginia and South Carolina. Practiced religious tolerance not only aided soldiers' survival during the war, but also their transition into a pluralistic religious society beyond the war.[67]

---

[66] Tennent and Jones, "Writings of the Reverend William Tennent, 1740-1777 (Continued)," 203; McCrady, *The History of South Carolina in the Revolution*, 211.

[67] Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty*, 11.

CONCLUSION

The Revolutionary War lasted longer and tried its participants far beyond what any had expected. As a political and military movement, it was a resounding success. The colonies achieved their goal of independence from the British Empire and earned themselves the freedom to start the world anew with their own political and cultural systems. Morale was essential to sustaining this long war. A society engaged in war, and the troops in particular, needed an ideology to maintain their interest in the war at all. For many of the elite, the interest was clear, political independence so that they could institute their own form of government. The motivations for the soldiers were not always the same. Many indeed imbibed and touted the political rhetoric of the day. However, when it came to wartime, soldiers often turned to religion to find motivation and strength to endure their place in this conflict. While political ambitions gave the Revolution direction, it was religion that aided soldiers in dealing with the chaos, monotony, and death that they encountered during the war.

What then was the significance of religion to soldiers during the war? Their writings demonstrate a few distinct answers. First, religion provided the worldview that encouraged them to fight and sanctioned their violence. Here there was a distinct difference in emphasis between religious men and their chaplains. While chaplains often preached on the grand geopolitical motivations behind the war effort, soldiers saw fighting as a simple religious duty which God honored and their society needed. More than any other single motivation mentioned by soldiers, the language of religious calling

provided the drapery around many soldiers' involvement in the army. The troops' well-trained sense for reading ordinary events with a providential worldview reassured them of those initial convictions about a divine calling behind their military activity. Additionally, soldiers' brand of Christianity clearly promoted violence, at least in some contexts. This was not a given. Many religious views of the time explicitly forbade participation in the violence. Without this religious sanction of violence, the colonies would never have waged war in the first place.

Second, religion provided soldiers with tools that they used to deal with the most difficult parts of the war. Some of the hardest elements of being a soldier were undoubtedly chaos, isolation, and death. In all three of these instances, soldiers turned to religion. Men used prescribed religious routines to fill their downtime and maintain a sense of stability amid a changing environment. When they had to fight against the social isolation imposed on them by the war, again, they turned to religious tropes in letter-writing to their homes and drafting prayer bills for their churches to pray for them. It was not the only way to fight loneliness in the ranks, but it was the one that many soldiers used, and it worked for them. The most consistent instance in which soldiers turned to religion was when they faced death. Whether it came by bayonet, disease, or execution, men processed and coped with death by religious means. It allowed them to escape to their self-defined afterlife and seemed to give death more of an explanation than pure randomness.

Third, religion provided individual troops with a sense of hope and optimism even in the depths of the war that were translated into a national one. Men had these notions validated by winning the war and surviving its battles. When a soldier like Ezra Tilden

sustained something of an optimistic vision of his future through religion and then survived the war, he had his religious optimism validated. What happened to Tilden happened to many more soldiers and colonists through those eight years. The intense religious optimism was validated, for them, by the military victory. This set the stage for a religious sense of purpose and optimism for decades to come. Out of the religious experiences of the individual soldiers came a sense of a postwar religious optimism that imbued this young nation (or at least parts of it) and gave popular credibility to ideas like the Manifest Destiny, but a generation later. The individual religious experiences of the soldiers showed how the founding war of the republic established a national sense of religious purpose that shaped its trajectory and public discourse.

Colonial Americans did not win the Revolutionary War by superior military means or strategies. They had neither. The colonies often failed to supply basic military equipment and Washington was frequently outmaneuvered. As we now know, however, neither of these elements was decisive. Prolonged insurgency wars often hinge on the ability of the militant group to sustain the willpower to fight the war. Religion proved to be the most power single force in doing this for Revolutionary War soldiers. While it was certainly aided by interest and other factors, religion was a strong force that bolstered soldiers' resolve to fight in the army. Had colonial religion not been so conducive and adaptable to the cause of the Revolution, the masses would not have supported it, certainly not for as long as they did. Religion sustained the soldiers in battle who sustained the colonies in the war.

REFERENCES

Anonymous. “Camp Life in 1776: Siege of Boston.” *Historical Magazine* 8 (1864): 326-32.

Anonymous. “Journal of A Pennsylvania Soldier, July-December 1776.” In *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* 8 (1904): 547-49.

Anonymous. “The Doughboy of 1780: Pages from a Revolutionary Diary.” *Atlantic Monthly* 134 (July-December 1924): 459-63.

Atkins, Josiah. *The Diary of Josiah Atkins.* Edited by Steven E. Kagle. New York: The New York Times & Arno Press, 1975.

Balch, Thomas. *Papers Relating Chiefly to The Maryland Line During The Revolution.* Philadelphia: T.K. and P.G. Collins, 1857.

Bangs, Isaac. Isaac Bangs Journal, 1776. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Barlow, Aaron. “The March to Montreal and Quebec, 1775.” *American Historical Register and Monthly Gazette* (March-August 1895): 641-49.

Beatty, William. “The Journal of Captain William Beatty.” In *The Historical Magazine* 1, no. 1 (January 1867): 79-85.

Bemis, Phinehas. Pension Application Record W14278. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Bixby, Samuel. “Diary of Samuel Bixby.” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 14 (March 1876): 285-98.

Boynton, Thomas. Thomas Boyton Journal, 19 April- 26 August 1775. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Bradford, Thomas. Pension Application Record W17351. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Bringham, Paul. “A Revolutionary Diary of Captain Paul Brigham.” In *Vermont History* 34, no. 1 (January 1966): 3-30.

Brown, Obadiah. Obadiah Brown Diary, 1776-1777. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Brown, Peter. Letter from Peter Brown to Sarah Brown, 25 June 1775. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Burton, Jonathan. *Diary and Orderly Book of Sergeant Jonathan Burton.* Edited by Isaac W. Hammond. Concord: Republican Press Association, 1885.

Carpenter, Jonathan. "Jonathan Carpenter and the American Revolution: The Journal of an American Naval Prisoner of War and Vermont Indian Fighter." In *Vermont History* 36, no. 2 (Spring 1968): 74-90.

Chandler, Abiel. "Revolutionary Journal Kept by Abiel Chandler." In *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 47 (1911): 181-86.

Chase, Jonathan. Jonathan Chase Papers, 1775-1797. Digitized Collections of UM Clements Library, William Clements Library University of Michigan.

Chase, Samuel. Pension Application Record W22776. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Cheever, William. William Cheever Diary, 1775-1776. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Chester, John. "Bunker Hill and The Siege of Boston, 1775-76." In *Magazine of American History* 8 (1882): 124-29.

Clap, Caleb. "Diary of Ensign Caleb Clap of Colonel Baldwin's Regiment." In *Historical Magazine* 3, no. 1 (January 1874): 133-38.

Coffin, Charles Carleton. *The History of Boscawen and Webster from 1733 to 1878.* Concord: Republican Press Association, 1878.

Colman, Dudley. Dudley Colman Papers. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Cook, Frederick. *Journals of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians.* Auburn: Knapp, Peck & Thompson, 1887.

Corbett, Ichabod. "Diary of Ichabod Corbett." In *Proceedings of the Worcester Society of Antiquity* 19 (1903): 171-80.

Correy, Samuel. Samuel Correy Journal, 1776-1777. M-2146. William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Craft, Benjamin. “Craft’s Journal of The Siege of Boston.” In *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 3, no. 2 (April 1861): 52-7.

Cushman, Thomas. Thomas Cushman Diary, 1761-1775. Pre-Revolutionary War Diaries, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Danforth, Joshua. “Extracts of a Diary Kept by Joshua Danforth.” In *American Monthly Magazine* 1 (1892): 619-20.

Danridge, Danske. *Historic Sheperdstown.* Charlottesville: Michie Company, 1910.

———. *American Prisoners of the Revolution.* Charlottesville: Michie Company, 1911.

Darley, Stephen. *Voices from a Wilderness Expedition: The Journals of Benedict Arnold’s Expedition to Quebec in 1775.* Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2011.

Davis, John. “Diary of Capt. John Davis.” In *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 1, no. 1 (July 1893): 1-16.

Deall, Daniel. Pension Application Record W6999. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Denny, Ebenezer. *Military Journal of Major Ebenezer Denny.* Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1859.

Dewey, Adelbert Milton. *Life of George Dewey.* Westfield: Dewey Publishing Company, 1898.

Douglas, William. “Revolutionary War Letters of Colonel William Douglas.” In *New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* 13, no. 1 (April 1929): 149-54.

Eaton, Isaiah. Pension Application Record S18388. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Egle, William Henry. *Journals and Diaries of the War of The Revolution.* Harrisburg: E.K. Meyers State Printer, 1893.

Everett, Abner. Pension Application Record W6087. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Ewing, George. *George Ewing Gentleman a Soldier of Valley Forge.* Yonkers: Privately Printed, 1928.

Fairies, Arthur. “Arthur Fairies’ Journal of Expedition Against the Cherokee Indians.” In *Southern Campaigns of the American Revolution* 2, no. 1 (October 2005): 20-33.

Farnsworth, Amos. “Amos Farnsworth’s Diary.” In *Proceedings of The Massachusetts Historical Society* 12 (1897-1899): 74-107.

Farnsworth, William. Pension Application Record W24180. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Farnum, Benjamin. The Diary of Benjamin Farnum, 1775, 1777-1778. MS S394, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Fay, Hezekiah. Pension Application Record W21101. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Feltman, William. *The Journal of Lieut. William Feltman.* Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1853.

Finney, Walter. “The Revolutionary War Diaries of Captain Walter Finney.” In *South Carolina Historical Magazine* 98, no. 2 (April 1997): 126-52.

Fisher, Elijah. *Elijah Fisher’s Journal While in the War for Independence.* Augusta: Press of Badger and Manley, 1880.

Fitch, Jabez. Jabez Fitch Diary. MSCol 1016. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Manhattan, New York.

Foster, Thomas. Diary of Thomas Foster Massachusetts Brigade, 1779-1783. MSHM 643, Huntington Digital Library, San Marino, CA.

Gay, Fisher. “Diary of Lieutenant-Colonel Fisher Gay.” In *Magazine of American History* 8 (1882): 127-29.

Gilbert, Benjamin. *A Citizen-Soldier in the American Revolution: The Diary of Benjamin Gilbert in Massachusetts and New York.* Edited by Rebecca D. Symmes. Cooperstown: New York State Historical Association, 1980.

———. *Winding Down: The Revolutionary War Letters of Lieutenant Benjamin Gilbert of Massachusetts, 1780-1783.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989.

Goodwin, John. “Military Journal Kept in 1777, During the Rhode Island Expedition.” In *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 45, no. 3 (July 1909): 205-11.

Graton, Thomas. Pension Application Record W14824. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Graves, William T. *Backcountry Revolutionary: James Williams (1740-1780) with Sources.* Lugoff: Woodward Corporation, 2012.

Greenman, Jeremiah. *Diary of a Common Soldier in the American Revolution, 1775-1783.* Edited by Robert Bray and Paul Bushnell. DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1978.

Guild, Joseph. "Captain Joseph Guild." In *Dedham Historical Register* 7 (1896): 43-7.

Hadden, James Murray. *Hadden's Journal and Orderly Books: A Journal kept in Canada and Upon Burgoyne's Campaign in 1776 and 1777.* Bedford: Applewood Books, 2009.

Hamilton, Asa. Pension Application Record W14868. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Harris, Samuel. "Letter from Valley Forge, 1778." Miscellaneous Bound, 1776-1778, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Hart, Aaron. Pension Application Record W19707. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Hovey, Dominicus. Ivory Hovey Papers, 1731-1857. Congregational Library & Archives, Digital Materials, Boston, MA.

How, David. *Diary of David How: A Private in Colonel Paul Dudley Sargent's Regiment.* Edited by George Wingate Chase. Morrisania: Houghton and Company, 1865.

Huntington, Ebenezer. *Letters Written by Ebenezer Huntington During the American Revolution.* New York: C.F. Heartman, 1915.

Ingalls, Phineas. "Revolutionary War Journal Kept by Phineas Ingalls." In *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 53, no. 1 (January 1917): 81-92.

James, Elisha. Elisha James Family Letters, 1777. MS N-1486, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Jenks, John. John Jenks Diary, 1775-1776. Microfilm. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Joslin, Joseph. "Journal of Joseph Joslin Jr. of South Killingly." In *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society* 7 (1899): 299-369.

Kennedy, Benjamin. *Muskets, Cannonballs & Bombs: Nine Narratives of the Siege of Savannah.* Savannah: Beehive Press, 1979.

Kettell, Andrew. Pension Application Record W13568. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Killam, Thomas. Letter from Ticonderoga, 1776. Photostats Box 38. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Kimball, Daniel. Pension Application Record W15001. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Kirkwood, Robert. *The Journal and Orderly Book of Captain Robert Kirkwood.* Wilmington: Historical Society of Delaware, 1910.

Knowles, James. James Knowles Letters, 1767-1775. MS S-730a. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Larrabee, Benjamin. Revolutionary War Journal of Captain Benjamin Larrabee, 1776-1791. Undated Documents Relating to the Revolutionary Era. The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History.

Lawrence, Alexander A. "Journal of Major Raymond Demere." In *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (September 1968): 337-47.

Lender, Mark Edward and James Kirby Martin. *Citizen Soldier: The Revolutionary War Journal of Joseph Bloomfield.* Princeton: New Jersey Historical Society, 1982.

Lenoir, William. "Revolutionary Diary of William Lenoir." In *Journal of Southern History* 6, no. 2 (May 1940): 247-59.

Libby, Jonathan. Pension Application Record W24557. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Lincoln, Rufus. *The Papers of Rufus Lincoln.* Edited by James Minor Lincoln. Cambridge: Privately Printed, 1904.

Livermore, Daniel. "A Journal of The March of Gen. Poor's Brigade." In *New Hampshire Historical Collections* 6 (1850): 308-335.

Livingston, Henry. "Journal of Major Henry Livingston." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 22, no. 1 (1898): 9-33.

Lock, Benjamin. Pension Application Record S18492. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Long, Enoch. Pension Application Record W16138. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Lunt, Paul. *Paul Lunt's Diary.* Edited by Samuel A. Green. Boston: Privately Printed, 1872.

Lyman, Simeon. Pension Application Record W20548. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Mason, George. Pension Application Record R7003. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Medlicott, Carol. *Issachar Bates: A Shaker Journey.* Hanover: University Press of New England, 2013.

McIntosh, Jeremiah. Jeremiah McIntosh His Book of Accounts, 1776-1777. MSHM 69943. Huntington Digital Library, San Marino, CA.

McMichael, James. "The James McMichael Journal." In *Journal of the American Revolution. https://allthingsliberty.com/2018/02/james-mcmichael-journal-may-27-1776-october-29-1776/.*

Mills, Zachariah. Pension Application Record W9195. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Mountjoy, Alvin. Pension Application Record W8471. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Nichols, Francis. "Diary of Lieutenant Francis Nichols." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 20, no. 4 (1896): 504-14.

Ober, Nathaniel. Nathaniel Ober Diary, 15 May 1775- 3 September 1775. MHS Collections Online, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Orcutt, Samuel. *History of the Town of Wolcott (Connecticut) from 1731 to 1874.* Waterbury: Press of the American Printing Company, 1874.

Orderly Book and Journals Kept by Connecticut Men. In *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society* 7 (1899).

Oswald, Eleazer. "A Journal of an Intended Tour from Cambridge to Quebec." In *Peter Force's American Archives* 3 (April 1848): 1058-1062.

Parker, Nahum. Pension Application Record S11200. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Parker, Robert. "Journal of Lieutenant Robert Parker." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 27, no. 4 (1903): 404-20.

Peale, Charles Wilson. "Charles Willson Peale, Artist-Soldier." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 38, no. 3 (1914): 257-86.

Pierce, Nathan. "The Last Letter of Captain Nathan Pierce." In *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 76 (1922): 156-7.

Pierpoint, Thomas. Pension Application Record S32444. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Pond, Benjamin. Pension Application Record W2243. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Reid, George. Journal of George Reid. Photostats Box 40. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Roberts, Kenneth. March to Quebec: Journals of the Members of Arnold's Expedition. New York: Doran & Company, 1938.

Rogerson, Robert. Letter from Newport, 1775. Photostats Box 37. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Rudolphus, Ritzema. "Journal of Col. Rudolphus Ritzema." In *Magazine of American History* 1, no. 1 (1877): 98-107.

Ryan, Dennis P. *A Salute to Courage: The American Revolution as Seen through Wartime Writings of officers of the Continental Army and Navy.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1979.

Sewall, Henry. Henry Sewall Diary, 1776-1842. Microfilm. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Seymour, William. “A Journal of the Southern Expedition, 1780-1783.” In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 7 (1883): 286-394.

Smith, John. “Sergeants John Smith’s Diary of 1776.” In *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 20, no. 2 (September 1933): 247-70.

Spafford, John. Pension Application Record S14565. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Sproule, Moses. Moses Sproule Diary, 1779. N-YHS Digital Collections. New-York Historical Society Museum & Library, New York, NY.

Stedman, Levi. Pension Application Record W19108. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Steevens, William. Pension Application Record S11470. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Stevens, Elisha. *Fragments of Memoranda Written by Him in the War of the Revolution.* Meriden: Privately Published, 1893.

Stevens, James. “The Revolutionary Journal of James Stevens.” In *Historical Collections of the Essex Institute* 48 (January 1912): 41-71.

Stewart, Jehiel. Pension Application Record W25138. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Stickney, Nathan. Pension Application Record W4824. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Stone, Josiah. Pension Application Record W10211. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Storrs, Experience. “Connecticut Farmers at Bunker Hill: The Diary of Colonel Experience Storrs.” In *New England Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (March 1955): 72-93.

Swain, Anthony. Pension Application Record S7668. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Teachey, Daniel. Pension Application Record W4082. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Tilden, Ezra. "The Diary of Ezra Tilden, 1776-1777." MS N-2202. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

———. Pension Application Record W14020. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Tilden, John Bell. "Extracts for The Journal of Lieutenant John Bell Tilden." In *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 19 (1895): 51-63.

Todd, Jonathan. Pension Application Record W2197. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Tomlinson, Abraham. *The Military Journals of Two Private, 1758-1775.* Poughkeepsie: Privately Published, 1855.

Topham, Simeon. "Captain Topham's Journal." In *Second Record Book of The Society of Sons of the Revolution.* Newport: Mercury Publishing Company, 1902.

Treat, Robert. Pension Application Record R10691. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Tyree, William. Pension Application Record W6331. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Wade, Herbert T., and Robert A. Lively. *The Glorious Cause: The Adventures of Two Company Officers in Washington's Army.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958.

Ward, Henry Parker. *The Follet-Dewey Fassett-Safford Ancestry of Captain Martin Dewey Follett (1765-1831) and his Wife Persis Fassett (1767-1849).* Columbus: Champlin Printing Company, 1896.

Wells, Bayze. "Journal of Bayze Wells of Farmington." In *Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society* 7 (1899): 241-96.

Wells, Frederic Palmer. *History of Newbury, Vermont.* St. Johnsbury: Caledonian Company, 1902.

Weston, Abner. Pension Application Record W25961. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

White, Ammi. Pension Application Record W18402. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

White, Joseph. Pension Application Record W11805. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Wild, Ebenezer. "Ebenezer Wild Diaries, 1776-1792." Microfilm. Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA.

Wilder, Joseph. Pension Application Record S30798. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land-Warrant Application Files, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Willard, Simon. A Journal from Day to Day, 1775. Photostats Box 36. Massachusetts Historical Society.