

"Knavish Charges, Numerous Contractors, and a Devouring Monster": The Supply of the
U.S. Army and Its Impact upon Economic Policy, 1775-1815

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the idea that the heightened level of economic activity required to supply the army acted as a powerful force engendering economic change within early America. The central question driving my research places the supply of the early American army in conversation with the nation's financial development. How did efforts to supply the army evolve over time and what role did this activity play in influencing the nation's changing economic policy in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries? How indeed did military procurement impact American economic development during the early years of the republic?

It is my argument that supply by contract emerged as the principal means by which to feed the army during the early republic due to expediency. Quite simply, early government officials reduced significant overhead procurement and distribution costs by turning over these responsibilities to credible bidders in a manner that fit well with the prevailing tenets of republican ideology yet acknowledged the advent of liberal motivations. Leaner government, for example, especially in those offices intimately connected with the military, appealed to those revolutionaries concerned about large standing armies. Reliance upon contractors, moreover, minimized in theory the likelihood that the military would need to forcibly impress supplies from the civilian population from which it so dearly needed support. These negotiated agreements shifted considerable burden away from the government while shielding it somewhat from any

criticism accompanying failure. The relative merits of the system never endured sustained scrutiny—more often than not, the end of a campaign or conflict obscured those inadequacies of the system that continued war would likely have exposed.

The interaction of government official, supply contractor, and army officer suggested a society struggling to reconcile values in a changing economic world. The triangular nature of their relationship revealed considerable tension in early America as the government sought to harness the forces of nascent capitalism to better supply armies made up of leaders who embraced a republican ideology. The results proved not always agreeable. Military leaders questioned the actions of even the most reliable contractors, doubting that any other motivation save profit could explain their behavior. Contractors in turn, while certainly driven by the desire to achieve a return on their investment, more often struggled to break even once the friction of war had its way with paper agreements. Finally, government officials, while ecstatic about the perceived savings accompanying supply by contract, wrestled with the question of how to ensure adequate supplies for the army now that they had relinquished a large amount of control to enterprising businessmen.

Most importantly, the support of the United States' early military efforts came at a high cost. Contracting, as the principal method by which to feed the army, played a substantial role in generating these expenses. The importance of paying these bills drove the financial reform that created the conditions for the country's rise to both economic and military power.

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Fields of Study

Major Field: History

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	ii
Vita.....	iv
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1. "The Great Object": Early Efforts to Supply the Continental Army, 1775-1776	23
The Committee System.....	28
The Early Quartermaster Department	42
The Early Commissary Department.....	57
Chapter 2. "Little Piddling Pilfering Plunderers": Reform of the Commissary and Quartermaster Departments, 1777-1780.....	68
The Reforms of 1777.....	69
The Aftermath of Reform: Valley Forge and the Eastern Department	80
The Reforms of 1778.....	92

The Failure of Centralization and the System of Specific Supplies.....	102
Chapter 3. Patriotism and Profit: Contracting in the Revolution, 1780-1783	114
The Failure of the System of Specific Supplies	116
The Beginnings of Supply by Contract	124
Contracting Introduced.....	126
Chapter 4. Fatal Mismanagements and Neglects: Supply in the Campaigns for the Old Northwest, 1784-1811.....	148
Supply Under Harmar—The Lean Years, 1784-1790	154
The Campaign of 1790.....	164
The Campaign of 1791—A Failure of Administration	168
Innovation and Initiative – The Supply of Wayne’s Legion.....	178
Procurement, the Economy, and High Finance.....	183
Conclusion.....	190
Chapter 5. Hawks and Buzzards: Disorganized Supply in the War of 1812	191
Commanders and Contractors: A Perceived Clash of Ideals	194
Supplying the Army in a Continued Swamp.....	199
The Emergence of John H. Piatt.....	203
The Trials and Tribulations of Orr & Greely	207
Conclusion.....	213

Chapter 6. Revenue and Frugality: The Costs of Supplying War and Its Impact on American Economic Policy	217
A Brief Overview of Military Expenditures in the Early Republic	220
Robert Morris and the Anticipation of the Hamiltonian System	225
Alexander Hamilton and the Establishment of National Finance	231
The Trial of Hamiltonian Finance: Albert Gallatin and the War of 1812.....	243
Conclusion	249
References.....	267

List of Tables

Table 1.1: Congressional Committees and Army Supply, 1775-1776	29
Table 3.1: November 4, 1780 Requisition for Specific Supplies	117

List of Figures

Figure 6.1: Annual Expenditures, 1789-1815	222
Figure 6. 2: Annual Military and Civil Expenditures, 1789-1815	223
Figure 6.3: Military Expenditures as Percentage of Total Government Appropriations	224
Figure 6.4: Comparison of Military and Naval Spending, 1789-1811	233
Figure 6.5: 1791 War Department Expenditures	237
Figure 6.6: 1792 War Department Expenditures	238
Figure 6.7: 1793 War Department Expenditures	239
Figure 6.8: 1794 War Department Expenditures	240
Figure 6.9: 1795 War Department Expenditures	240

Introduction

Struggling in the summer of 1781 to supply the Continental Army, Robert Morris, recently appointed financier, implemented a system of government contracts. Although countries in Europe had long supplied their armies by contract, the practice was relatively novel in the rebellious British colonies. Continental officials had employed myriad methods to supply the soldiers in the war's early years. And while these techniques enjoyed varying degrees of success, the army consistently stood on the brink of starvation. Morris's implementation of supply by contract sought to resolve the Continental Army's logistical woes by harnessing the forces of individual economic interest and steering them toward the accomplishment of national objectives. Successfully supporting the Continental Army through the last two years of war, supply by contract would remain the principal source of procurement for national defense through the War of 1812.

The supply of the army throughout the early republic became a powerful engine of economic change. Indeed, the story of American military effort from 1775 to 1815 is as much one of financial development as it is of achieving battlefield success. The cost of paying, feeding, and equipping soldiers dominated the federal budget during this period. Consequently, governing officials scrambled to develop the financial practices needed to

pay for it all. Issues of raising revenue, restoring public credit, establishing a reliable currency, and even creating a national bank all took their shape in a context of building, sustaining, and projecting the country's military power.

Prior to the War of Independence, the American colonies comprised a small but important component of the British mercantilist economy. Heavily dependent upon trade with Great Britain, they provided a wealth of raw materials to the empire in exchange for finished goods that were not manufactured locally. This trade had the effect of stunting colonial economic growth—British factories on the verge of industrialization in the mid-eighteenth century could produce higher quality finished products at much cheaper prices than could their colonial counterparts. Consequently, port cities such as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, came to dominate the colonial economy because they facilitated the outward flow of agricultural produce and the inward flow of imports. To the extent that transportation networks existed, they served to move goods from the interior to the coasts in preparation for export rather than support inter-colonial trade. Parliamentary acts in the wake of the Seven Years' War cemented the colonial dependence on Britain, restricting Americans' ability to trade with other nations.

The outbreak of war dissolved these economic bonds, forcing American merchants to seek other outlets for their exports and locate other means by which to obtain finished goods. More significantly, it placed the colonies in the difficult position of waging war absent the financial institutions needed to take on one of the world's foremost military powers. No uniform currency, for example, circulated within the American states. Moreover, the Continental Congress did not possess the authority to tax.

To pay for the war, Congress printed bills of credit, issuing over \$190 million during the course of the conflict. These instruments, amounting to a paper currency, were not backed by specie. Consequently, they depreciated very rapidly.¹ After his appointment in 1781, Morris worked to reduce expenditures and shore up public credit, implementing the contract system of supply for the Continental Army and securing congressional approval for the establishment of the Bank of North America. Through a not always successful combination of retrenchment, loans from the bank, foreign loans based on improved public credit, and notes backed by Morris's own resources, the Superintendent of Finance shepherded the nation through the remainder of the war.

Post-war America suffered from a severe depression as an unfavorable balance of trade with Britain hemorrhaged specie out of the country. Merchants saw a significant decline in export profits as the British imposed duties upon previously untaxed goods, including tobacco, rice, and iron.² Dissatisfaction with these economic conditions by the late 1780s inspired a "nationalist" movement that favored protective tariffs, the adoption of a national currency, and the promotion of domestic manufactures. It also created the conditions under which the federal Constitution was negotiated, highlighting the financial inadequacies of the Articles of Confederation.³ Under the Articles, Congress lacked the power to tax, regulate currency, and regulate commerce, engendering situations in which the states themselves could tax imports from their neighbors. The Constitution addressed

¹ Curtis P. Nettels, *The Emergence of a National Economy, 1775-1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), 24-26.

² *Ibid.*, 49.

³ *Ibid.*, 60 and 69.

these issues, granting Congress the power to tax and to regulate trade, signifying an important development in the progression toward a national economy.⁴

President George Washington and his Secretary of the Treasury, Alexander Hamilton, quickly set about creating the financial institutions and practices needed to promote economic growth. Implementing a system often referred to as either the Hamilton or Federalist Program, the administration pursued a series of initiatives intended to raise revenue, restore public credit, implement a national currency, and encourage internal trade and manufacturing. Hamilton, for example, sought to raise government revenues while encouraging the growth of domestic manufacturing by imposing a protectionist tariff on imports and a tonnage tax on foreign ships in 1789. To restore public credit, he advocated national assumption of state debts through the redemption of old currency issues in exchange for new federal securities and putting in place certain congressional guarantees regarding the payment of the public debt. On February 25, 1791, the administration secured approval of the Bank of the United States, an institution whose notes would be received as payment by the government. In so doing, the Bank effectively increased and stabilized the supply of reliable currency. This facilitated circulation of notes payable to the government while offering the latter loans and a reliable location in which to deposit revenues.⁵

The era following implementation of the Hamilton program saw considerable economic growth. Improvements in agriculture, transportation, and manufacturing all combined to improve the nation's economic condition in the ensuing thirty years. And

⁴ Ibid., 90-102.

⁵ Ibid., 109-118.

while the government still struggled to finance the War of 1812, the lessons learned in the process underscored the fundamental value of the Hamilton program.

While historians have produced several studies on the evolution of army logistics in the early republic, important scholarship has begun to explore the military impetus behind the development of Hamilton's financial revolution.⁶ Building upon works such as John Brewer's *The Sinews of Power* and Michael Mann's *The Sources of Social Power*, these scholars place military considerations at the center of early American state formation.⁷ State-managed violence, historian Max Edling contended, made possible the territorial expansion and economic growth underpinning the United States' rise to greatness. In order to direct war, however, the American state needed to figure out how to pay for it.

These studies open fertile territory in which to place supply by contract in conversation with the evolution of Hamilton's program. The contracts to feed the army represented a significant portion of the government's budget, at times consuming up to a third of all military expenditures. When contractors failed over the years, costs grew

⁶ See, for example, Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014).

⁷ In his study of Britain's rise to power in the eighteenth century, John Brewer drew a fundamental connection between the state's ability to raise revenue and the nation's military might. The need to wage war drove financial reforms that vastly increased state power. John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), xiv-xvi. See also Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power, Volume 2, The Rise of Classes and Nation-States, 1760-1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Mann argued that historical developments could be understood in terms of the interaction between economic, military, ideological, and political factors. In the eighteenth century, he argued, military factors predominated while driving economic change. Other scholars, such as Peter Zavodnyik and Brian Balogh, identified the early American period as an important time of political centralization while placing less emphasis on the role of financing war. See Peter Zavodnyik, *The Age of Strict Construction: A History of the Growth of Federal Power, 1789-1861* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007); and Brian Balogh, *A Government Out of Sight: The Mystery of National Authority in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

exponentially as officials resorted to hasty, expensive alternatives to feed the soldiers. Thus, while contracting was generally one of the more efficient methods to supply the army, its expense was a fundamental driver behind the need to develop new financial methods to pay for war.

Adopted as a formal system in the waning years of the American Revolution, supply by contract enjoyed enough success to secure its place as the foremost method by which to feed the United States Army over most of the ensuing four decades. The system functioned in a manner much like it proceeds today. Driven by the desire to reduce administrative and procurement costs, the government sought bids to supply pre-determined quantities of rations for the army. Upon receiving the bids, officials weighed the merits of the various proposals. Price per ration represented only one, albeit the most important, consideration in making this decision. Decision-makers quickly discarded bids at unreasonably high or low prices and those proposals entered by particularly dubious, speculative merchants. The reputation of the potential contractor often influenced the process, compelling officials to eschew the greater risk associated with lower bids from questionable bidders.

Three primary factors ensured a continual reliance upon supply by contract during this period: 1) a consistent perception that the system greatly reduced expenses; 2) successes sufficient enough to quell most objections; and 3) no conflict truly tested the system until the War of 1812. Indeed, contracting proved most effective when supplying small army detachments at a finite number of static frontier outposts, the situation of the army for at least twenty-four of the twenty-nine years between the Revolution and the

War of 1812. In these circumstances, suppliers could bid for contracts with confidence that their supply calculations would hold up. The unpredictability of large-scale campaigns, as seen during both the War for Independence and the War of 1812, quickly rendered these calculations, and the performance of a given contract, unreliable.

The longevity of supply by contract, however, does not tell the full story. Only three years following the adoption of the system, Benjamin Franklin condemned both contracting itself and the expense of the institution it supported. “An Army is a devouring monster,” he exclaimed, “and when you have raised it you have, in order to assist it, not only the fair charges of pay, clothing, provision, arms, and ammunition . . . but you have all the additional knavish charges of the numerous tribe of contractors to defray.”⁸ Franklin’s words reflected the experience of three years’ worth of exertion to supply an army by contract and foresaw the challenges such a system would pose for much of the early republic.

Yet, the facility with which Franklin and others condemned contractors obscures a larger phenomenon. Questions about the effectiveness of supply by contract prove mired in the developments of the period. The early republic, framed by two major armed conflicts, the Revolution and the War of 1812, witnessed the collision of republican ideology with emerging liberal tendencies characterized by the pursuit of individual interests in a free market. In this environment, contractors supplying the army placed themselves at the center of the debates over virtue and self-interest, of patriotism versus profit. Their conduct, both in the manner in which they conducted their business and what

⁸ As quoted in Harry M. Ward, *The Department of War, 1781-1795* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962), 55.

that tells us about the larger economic picture during the early republic, could offer revealing insight into a controversial period of American history.

The origins of republicanism can be traced to a colonial heritage of opposition Whig politics that took form in the early eighteenth century. A reaction to the corrupt prime ministry of Sir Robert Walpole, the political ideology concerned itself with the corruptive influence of power and sought the means by which to curtail a central government's ability to infringe upon liberty. While other influences shaped the nature of republican ideas, including Enlightenment thought, English common law, religious doctrine, and the literature of the ancient republics, the anti-authoritarian writings of Whigs such as Algernon Sidney, John Trenchard, and Thomas Gordon played the greatest role in shaping the ideology.⁹ These writers placed great emphasis on concepts of virtue, disinterestedness, the ability to check power, and fear of a standing army.

Virtue, considered an individual's willingness to sacrifice personal concerns for the public good, stood at the forefront of republican thought. The forgoing of private interest for the good of the whole in many ways represented the "essence of republicanism."¹⁰ Virtue took on very real significance for the army. It represented the ideological articulation of their choice to sacrifice personal well-being while defending the nation's interests. As such it laid the foundation for confrontation when soldiers came into contact with those whose sacrifice seemed less clear.

⁹ Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1967), vi-vii. See also Robert E. Shalhope, "Toward a Republican Synthesis: The Emergence of an Understanding of Republicanism in American Historiography," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 29, no. 1 (Jan., 1972): 49-80.

¹⁰ Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1969), 53.

The concept of disinterestedness worked hand in hand with virtue. In short, it referred to the ability to operate free of one's interests. But whereas virtue reflected one's character, disinterestedness generally described one's means. The upstanding republican possessed enough property to ensure that he operated without consideration for his own stake in a given situation. The less vulnerable an individual's economic status, the more likely he would serve the common good.¹¹

Eschewing the growth of centralized power and its vulnerability to corruption, Whig writers advocated a system of checks and balances. By erecting political structures to prevent the unimpeded abuse of power, they sought to preserve the people's liberties. This conceptualization played havoc with early attempts to create an army supply administration. Officials struggled to avoid centralization in a system that clearly benefitted from the more focused direction it provided.

Concerns about the corrupting influence of overly-centralized power naturally led to a fear of standing armies. Whig thinkers viewed the army as a tool by which government could enforce oppressive policies and suppress dissent.¹² Clashes between soldiers and civilians in Boston in the early 1770s only underscored these concerns. According to republican ideology, the army should be kept as small as possible and deployed far from population centers. This fear of a standing army created much of the pretext for the traditional American emphasis on citizen soldiers. It also placed a

¹¹ Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 22-24.

¹² Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 56-60.

premium on any efficiencies that would reduce the size of the army. Contracting did just this.

These republican ideals began to clash with emerging thought that emphasized a language of natural rights and individual interests. Historians have labeled this development liberalism. Liberalism held that the republican synthesis failed to connect the political ideas plausibly with the subsequent protest and violence of the Revolution. It ignored the mid-century social change accompanying the collapse of traditional colonial institutions. By the 1750s, population growth, increased immigration, rising land prices, and greater reliance upon credit all served to erode communal relationships. As society became less community-oriented and interdependent, dependence of any form appeared to be a threat to personal liberties and freedom. Fearful that dependence may endanger these rights, colonists resisted their encroachment at every opportunity.¹³ Central government existed, according to liberal conceptions, to protect individual liberties. Grounded in the thought of Hobbes and Locke, liberalism sought only the level of protection necessary to guarantee an individual's right to life, liberty, and property.¹⁴ The uninhibited pursuit of individual interest would ensure the common good much more effectively than republican disinterestedness. The growth of free-enterprise markets during the early republic represented an economic expression of liberal political concepts.

¹³ Joyce Appleby, "Liberalism and the American Revolution," *New England Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (Mar., 1976), 6-7. See also Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: Social Change, Political Consciousness, and the Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), vii.

¹⁴ Joyce Appleby, *Capitalism and a New Social Order: The Republican Vision of the 1790s* (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 18.

As early America moved toward more of a free-market economy, individualism gained momentum.¹⁵

In this transformative landscape, army officers represented one of the last bastions of republican ideals. They found the contractors' self-interested pursuit of profit contemptible and readily distrusted their commitment to fulfilling the agreement's terms.¹⁶ The contractors' business-like concern for the bottom line and adherence to the stipulations of a negotiated agreement stood in stark contrast to the army officers' involvement in patriotic causes of existential proportions. Although evident throughout the early republic, the War of 1812 quickly exposed these tensions and demonstrated that the army could not depend upon supply by contract alone as its system of supply.

The story of army logistics throughout the early republic is as much about administrative organization and reorganization as it is about the purchasing, transportation, and distribution of supplies.¹⁷ Creating a government for a nation that as yet existed only tenuously entailed overcoming huge obstacles. Supplying the army in this nascent state became exceedingly difficult. Strong resistance to the power of taxation, the absence of a sound currency, and the competitive presence of foreign armies that paid higher prices in hard money only exacerbated these difficulties. Louis C. Hatch's *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army* recounted how commissaries struggled to supply an army amid a population that had never endured

¹⁵ Steven Watts, *The Republic Reborn: War and the Making of Liberal America, 1790-1820* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), xvii.

¹⁶ For an accessible overview of republican ideology, see Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 95-110.

¹⁷ This definition of logistics is offered by John Lynn in "The Logistics of Warfare at Sea in the Sixteenth Century—The Spanish Perspective," *Feeding Mars*, 116.

military extraction.¹⁸ Although examples of poor conduct were not difficult to find among the contractors that bid to supply the army, Hatch concluded that, on the whole, they fulfilled their role in a satisfactory fashion.¹⁹ The introduction of the contract system in 1781, together with other measures implemented by Robert Morris, enabled the army to survive the remainder of the war if not amid abundance, than at least without overly suffering. Supply difficulties stemmed not from the availability of supplies or poor contract performance, but from the country's unwillingness to submit to taxation and the government's failure to centralize.²⁰

Indeed, much early scholarship focused predominantly on apportioning blame for the inconsistent supply of the American army. According to many historians, faulty administration explained much of what was wrong with the Continental Army's system of supply. James A. Huston, in *The Sinews of War*, lamented the lack of centralization that would have rendered the supply of the army much more efficient.²¹ Others pointed to the lack of adequate transportation to explain the poor support of the army during the Revolution and after.²² Shifting away from the emphasis on administrative failings, John Shy, in "Logistical Crisis and the American Revolution: A Hypothesis," argued that the

¹⁸ Louis C. Hatch, *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army* (New York: Burt Franklin, 1904; reprint 1971), (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

²¹ James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics, 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 103. See also Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 66. Risch offered a more extensive version of her account of supply during the Revolution in an earlier work written for the Army's Special Studies Series, *Supplying Washington's Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1981). R. Arthur Bowler, "Logistics and Operations in the American Revolution," in Don Higginbotham, ed., *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 54-71.

²² John Shy, "Logistical Crisis and the American Revolution: A Hypothesis," in John A. Lynn, ed., *Feeding Mars*, 163. Huston

lack of suitable transportation represented the largest factor contributing to American supply failures.²³

Shy's work is more important for our purposes because it bridges the gap between supply failures on one hand and financial reform on the other. Frustrated over the supply failures of the Continental Army, Americans may well have embraced Federalism, and ultimately the Constitution, when the principal cause of logistical difficulties lay with shortages of wagons, animals, and networks.²⁴ In this sense, the real or perceived inadequacies of the supply system highlighted the need for financial reform if the United States wished to achieve military respectability.

E. James Ferguson's *The Power of the Purse* is critical to understanding the way in which contracting was viewed during the Revolution. Robert Morris, the author argued, introduced the practice of supplying the army via contract in 1781 with the high hopes that it would at once greatly reduce government bureaucracy, procure decent provisions at competitive prices, and foster entrepreneurial development.²⁵ This system, Ferguson continued, emerged as a product of a country still very ensconced within a mercantilist world view in which as yet no government professionals existed and merchants were commonly called upon to provide financial expertise to governments. Hence, Robert Morris's appointment. In this context, these individuals were fully expected to sustain their private economic activity provided that their behavior remained

²³ John Shy, "Logistical Crisis and the American Revolution: A Hypothesis," in John A. Lynn, ed., *Feeding Mars*, 163.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

²⁵ E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 132-133.

ethical; a determination often arrived at through trust. The results, though varied, proved problematic more often than not.

The contractors, much more representative of a liberal capitalist than mercantilist system, favored pursuit of their own self-interest irrespective of the public good or the plight of the nation. Ferguson thus captured in the details what Gordon Wood would convey in synthesis in *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*.²⁶ Through the behavior of Robert Morris, Silas Deane, James Mease, and Nathaniel Greene, Ferguson portrayed a world in which deference and public virtue, hallmarks of republicanism, waned in the face of the pursuit of happiness. Old systems of mercantilism and republicanism gradually yielded to liberalism and capitalism. Curtis P. Nettels built upon the analysis begun by Ferguson, arguing a year later that the actions taken by the government during the American War of Independence and during the early republic proved critical in creating a national economy.²⁷ That much of the debt the government struggled to finance was incurred in the act of supplying and paying the army moves the subject of this study to the foreground in any discussion of American economic history.

J.G.A. Pocock portrayed the struggle over the economic future of the fledgling nation as an extrapolation of the debate between “court” and “country” ideologies. The country ideology, tracing its origins through English opposition Whig writers all the way to ancient thinkers such as Aristotle and Polybius, rejected standing armies, centralized

²⁶ Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 7-8, 368-369.

²⁷ Curtis P. Nettels, *The Emergence of a National Economy, 1775-1815* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1962), vii.

finance, paper currency and bureaucracy.²⁸ The court position accepted the demise of virtue in the face of expanding commercialism and professionalization, embracing such structures as a strong central authority, a standing army, and the replacement of deference with credit.²⁹ Pocock, over the course of his analysis, proved less willing than previous authors to cede the early surrender of republican virtue to the forces of liberalism, suggesting a later transition to capitalism for the early republic. But the conflict was present. This tension between the champions of virtue and their “liberal” opponents, he continued, would indeed shape much of early American history.³⁰

Pocock's placement of republican ideology in confrontation with emerging liberal or capitalist forces proves central to this study because it advances the military as a

²⁸ J. G. A. Pocock, “Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 3, no. 1 (Summer, 1972), 128.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 128-129. Arguably the most authoritative source on the court-versus-country debate is John Murrin's “The Great Inversion, or Court Versus Country: A Comparison of the Revolution Settlements in England (1688-1721) and America (1776-1816),” in J.G.A. Pocock, ed., *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 368-453. Murrin traced the development of the court mentality into the New England nationalists of 1790, arguing that figures such as Alexander Hamilton envisioned that the young nation would develop a “modern, integrated manufacturing economy,” much like that of Great Britain. Murrin found the country argument among the antifederalists of the late 1780s who emphasized westward expansion with minimal economic change. Madison, Jefferson, and the Republicans, Murrin continued, viewed Hamilton's financial philosophy with concern, finding in the drastic proposals for economic change the chains of corruption they had so recently thrown off in achieving independence from Great Britain. Murrin provided compelling evidence to suggest that dramatic economic change did indeed occur between 1790 and 1815, including the establishment of the first Bank of the United States, the doubling of patents between 1790 and 1814, and the five-fold increase in exports from 1790 to 1807. Hamilton and the Federalists likewise considerably furthered other reforms, including the introduction of a standing army, the firm establishment of the government's powers of taxation, and the Sedition Act, that rendered the United States not dissimilar to the country from which she had recently become independent. Unlike Great Britain, however, in which the Court won the revolutionary settlement following the English Civil War, in America dissension inspired by the oppressive actions of the Federalists led to a Country victory. Interestingly, Murrin noted that England remained in a state of war for all but six of the twenty-five years following its Civil War while the United States was at war for only six years in the same stretch of time, discounting the Indian conflicts. When the United States was at war, Murrin continued, the settlement began to look much more like that of England, including a larger army, a navy, and taxes. Like many others, Murrin argued that the United States would not establish a fully integrated economy until the 1830s or later.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

fundamental driver of economic change. Indeed, an emerging literature examines the close correlation between early America's use of state-sanctioned violence to advance policy aims and the development of national financial practices that would be the foundation for the country's remarkable economic development. This body of work flies in the face of interpretations that locate the emergence of capitalism much later in the nineteenth century.³¹

³¹ The historiographical debate regarding the emergence of American capitalism gathered steam in the 1970s and continued well into the 1990s. Writing in 1978, James A. Henretta posited that it would not be until the 1850s that bankers and merchants began to extend control over agricultural processes in something akin to a market economy as they dominated the ways in which migration unfolded. Until that point, however, Henretta emphasized that the familial understanding of economic relationships dominated rural America. Henretta took issue with Richard Hofstadter's claim that the yeoman farmer preferred to pursue profit rather than settle for a life of subsistence farming. See James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: *Mentalité* in Pre-Industrial America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 35, no. 1 (Jan., 1978), 3-32. See also Richard Hofstadter, as quoted in *ibid.*, 13, and Richard Hofstadter, "The Myth of the Happy Yeoman," *American Heritage* 7 (Apr., 1956), 43-53. Joyce Appleby challenged the interpretations of Pocock, Murrin, and others, arguing that instead of characterizing early American economic development as a struggle between the forces of modern capitalism and those of agrarian conservatism, it should be viewed as a competition between two different strands of emerging capitalism, one grounded in the market and the other in a growing Atlantic world trade in foodstuffs. Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 4 (Mar., 1982), 833-849. See also Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1955), 23-24, 30. Winifred B. Rothenberg examined the convergence of wage labor rates for like tasks in New England from 1750 to 1855 to suggest that the region was reasonably integrated into the market by 1800. See Winifred B. Rothenberg, "The Emergence of Farm Labor Markets and the Transformation of the Rural Economy: Massachusetts, 1750-1855," *The Journal of Economic History* 48, no. 3 (Sep., 1988), 537 and 542. Allan Kulikoff refused to pinpoint a finite stretch of time in which dramatic economic change occurred. Instead, he looked at the long *durée*, arguing that while the transitional process may have begun as early as the first settlements, it would not be completed until the twentieth century. Allan Kulikoff, "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 46, no. 1 (Jan., 1989), 122, 132-133, and 144. Charles Sellers proved less willing to cede economic transformation prior to 1815, arguing that activities often interpreted as early market participation should be looked at more as marginal market activity to augment subsistence. Sellers, Charles, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 6. Writing just a few years later, Michael Merrill redirected economic historians' attention to the importance of language and specifically, to their lack of precision in defining capitalism when searching for its indicators in the American past. These historians, Merrill continued, have defined capitalism in such a way that almost any expansion of trade, innovative technique, increase in individual freedoms or growth of wage labor must necessarily signify the advent of a capitalist system. Michael Merrill, "Putting 'Capitalism' in Its Place: A Review of Recent Literature," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 52, no. 2 (Apr., 1995), 315-326. Finally, Paul A. Gilje paid little heed to the criticism of Michael Merrill. Like others before him, Gilje argued that it was indeed during the early period that capitalism first took shape within the American economy. He identified five characteristics suggestive of a capitalist economy that emerged during the early republic: 1) a flexible

The historiography unfolds in two stages. The first requires the reader to re-conceptualize his or her understanding of the early American past with respect to the country's ability to project military power. Here, notions of an America too weak to impose its will clash with a story of aggressive trans-continental expansion that begins well before the United States is recognized as a military power.³² The second stage connects early American military effort with the development of national financial methods including the bank, taxation, funding war through long-term bonds, and the maintenance of a national debt. Scholars such as Max Edling, Richard Sylla, and Ben Baack, to name a few, link the early nation's waging of war with financial developments that paved the way for America's exceptional economic growth in the later nineteenth century.³³

The heightened level of economic activity required to supply the army acted as a powerful force engendering economic change within early America, yet historians have devoted comparatively little attention to this possibility. The central question driving my

money system; 2) banks; 3) corporations; 4) a transportation network; and 5) expansion on the frontier. He further argued that the American Revolution accelerated, rather than retarded, these developments. Paul A. Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1996), 159-181.

³² Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton argued that American wars from the Eighteenth Century on should be understood as part of a concerted effort to expand across the continent. See Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500-2000* (New York: Viking, 2005), xiv-xv.

³³ See, for example, Max M. Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), and Ben Baack, "Forging a Nation State: the Continental Congress and the financing of the War of American Independence," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 54, no. 4 (Nov., 2001), 639-656. Edling and Baack made the most direct connection between the need to finance American military endeavors and the development of institutions to do so. Others documented well the development of financial practices in the early republic that laid the foundation for the country's later economic growth. See Jonathan Prude, "Capitalism, Industrialization, and the Factory in Post-Revolutionary America," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1996), 237-255; and Richard Sylla, "Experimental Federalism: The Economics of American Government, 1789-1914," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States: Volume 2: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 483-541.

research places the supply of the early American army in conversation with the nation's financial development. How did efforts to supply the army evolve over time and what role did this activity play in influencing the nation's changing economic policy in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries? How indeed did military procurement impact American economic development during the early years of the republic?

It is my argument that supply by contract emerged as the principal means by which to feed the army during the early republic due to expediency. Quite simply, early government officials reduced significant overhead procurement and distribution costs by turning over these responsibilities to credible bidders in a manner that fit well with the prevailing tenets of republican ideology yet acknowledged the advent of liberal motivations. Leaner government, for example, especially in those offices intimately connected with the military, appealed to those revolutionaries concerned about large standing armies. Reliance upon contractors, moreover, minimized in theory the likelihood that the military would need to forcibly impress supplies from the civilian population from which it so dearly needed support. These negotiated agreements shifted considerable burden away from the government while shielding it somewhat from any criticism accompanying failure. The relative merits of the system never endured sustained scrutiny—more often than not, the end of a campaign or conflict obscured those inadequacies of the system that continued war would likely have exposed.

The interaction of government official, supply contractor, and army officer suggested a society struggling to reconcile values in a changing economic world. The triangular nature of their relationship revealed considerable tension in early America as

the government sought to harness the forces of nascent capitalism to better supply armies made up of leaders who embraced a republican ideology. The results proved not always agreeable. Military leaders questioned the actions of even the most reliable contractors, doubting that any other motivation save profit could explain their behavior. Contractors in turn, while certainly driven by the desire to achieve a return on their investment, more often struggled to break even once the friction of war had its way with paper agreements. Finally, government officials, while ecstatic about the perceived savings accompanying supply by contract, wrestled with the question of how to ensure adequate supplies for the army now that they had relinquished a large amount of control to enterprising businessmen.

Most importantly, the support of the United States' early military efforts came at a high cost. Contracting, as the principal method by which to feed the army, played a substantial role in generating these expenses. The importance of paying these bills drove the financial reform that created the conditions for the country's rise to both economic and military power.

The first chapter explores the states' initial forays into supplying an army following the outbreak of war with the British in 1775 through early 1777. Starting essentially from scratch and facing a daunting array of challenges, the Continental Congress, in conjunction with the army's leadership, attempted to supervise procurement and distribution via committee and experimented with methods ranging from direct purchase to contract to impressment and even captured prizes in order to secure needed materials. Additionally, Congress created both the Quartermaster General and

Commissary General departments, gradually articulating the roles and responsibilities of each and, perhaps more importantly, defining the character of those individuals it hoped to employ in republican terms.

By 1777, the Continental Congress finally accepted the reality that the Revolutionary War would not be a short conflict and reformed both the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments with an eye toward centralization, efficiency, and much more accountability. Turbulence caused by the timing of the reforms and a 1777 reduction in the compensation of supply officials, however, threw these institutions into considerable disarray. The second chapter examines how these departments struggled to supply the army while fending off allegations, often substantiated, of corruption. Driven to further reform following the suffering at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778, the Continental Congress continued to centralize power under the Quartermaster and Commissary Generals' direction but also placed a renewed emphasis on the character of those individuals appointed to the offices and on accountability. While 1778 and early 1779 saw less of the scarcity experienced at Valley Forge, continued failures combined with suspicions of corruption eroded what little faith Congress had in either the Quartermaster or Commissary Departments. Lamenting the vast expense incurred procuring supplies, and the accompanying overhead required to compensate the agents employed, it began to shift supply responsibilities away from the army and toward a decentralized system of specific supplies that placed the onus on the states.

The system of specific supplies failed almost from its inception and set the stage for the adoption of supply by contract in 1781. The third chapter examines why the

system of specific supplies failed to meet the army's needs and explores how Robert Morris implemented the system of supply by contract following his appointment as Superintendent of Finance in 1781. Supply by contract enjoyed early success following its implementation, securing its place as the fundamental method by which to supply the army for much of the next four decades despite never effectively supplying an army on the move.

While supply by contract would prove adequate in support of a small frontier army distributed across a number of fixed locations following the American Revolution, it struggled to answer the needs of offensive campaigns waged in the early 1790s against Native Americans in the Ohio River Valley. The fourth chapter examines the oversight of these contracts, tracing their execution through the successive campaigns of Josiah Harmar, Arthur St. Clair, and Anthony Wayne. The challenge of moving supplies through a frontier wilderness placed considerable strain upon the contract system, exposing the tension between contractors' self-interested pursuit of profit and the army's emphasis on national interests and republican character. While this tension rarely boiled over, contractor performance improved dramatically in proportion to the degree of military oversight and management exercised.

The War of 1812 exposed the weaknesses of supply by contract in a way that years of frontier service could never replicate. Significant increases in the size of the army and the scale of campaigns dictated the need for a much more robust system than had been necessary previously. Reforms implemented just before the war, including the re-establishment of the Quartermaster General, failed to address subsistence, presuming

that supply by contract would continue to provide adequately for the army despite dramatically different operating conditions. Chapter Five examines the breakdown of supply by contract as army officials competed with and even undermined their authorized suppliers in order to ensure they received sufficient support. War placed officers driven by republican ideals in direct conflict with contractors pursuing self-interested ambitions. The resulting battle sounded the death knell of reliance upon supply by contract as an overarching system and prompted post-war reforms that would re-introduce the Commissary Department.

Finally, Chapter Six attempts to summarize the economic significance of all this logistical activity. Rations contracts consumed a fair proportion of the army's budget, which in turn dominated federal spending for most of the early American period. The need to pay for American military activity indeed created the economic conditions in which the ideas of Nationalists such as Robert Morris and Alexander Hamilton flourished, calling as they did for the federal assumption of state debts, the imposition of taxes, and the establishment of a national bank. Supply expenses, second only to pay in quantity, provided much of the military impetus behind the adoption of American high finance.

Chapter 1. "The Great Object": Early Efforts to Supply the Continental Army, 1775-1776

Late at night on April 18, 1775, British redcoats mustered in darkness on the Boston Common, intent on seizing or destroying military stores in the nearby town of Concord. Although tensions between soldiers and civilians ran high on the streets of Boston, nothing prepared the British for the resistance they encountered while marching to and from their objective. Determined to protect valuable supplies and incensed by the opening shots at Lexington, Massachusetts militia ranged along the British return route to Boston and exacted a heavy toll on the regulars.

For the rebellious colonists, April 20, 1775, became a day of recovery. The assembled militia of Massachusetts encamped near Cambridge, opposite Boston, in hopes of deterring further Royal expeditions to the country. In the brief lull that followed the first clash of arms in the War of Independence, additional militia from towns throughout the colony flowed into the camp near Harvard College, swelling the ranks to nearly 20,000 citizens-in-arms by the evening of the 20th. This hastily-cobbled band established security around their new encampment, detached a company to return to the battlefield and bury the dead, and, perhaps most importantly, foraged for a meal. It was a simple but telling act, for it underscored one of the most basic yet challenging tasks in war: keeping fighting men fed and supplied. "How to feed the assembled and assembling militia,"

remarked Brigadier General William Heath, commander of the Massachusetts forces, "was now the great object."¹ The troops scoured Cambridge for any available food, ultimately procuring "some carcasses of beef and pork" that had already been prepared for market while liberating a large amount of hip-bread, a sort of hard cracker, intended for the Royal Navy. Having solved, at least for one day, the problem of from where their food might come, the militia prepared the meals in Harvard's kitchen.²

Despite their meal on the night of the 20th, the rebellious colonists struggled to supply this new force for much of the ensuing summer. Lacking any supply infrastructure, the militia relied primarily on their home communities for provisions and military stores. Both the Massachusetts Provincial Council and the Continental Congress created committees to direct supply matters rather than establish the necessary administrative apparatus. While Congress created the offices of Commissary General and Quartermaster General soon after General George Washington took command of the army, for the ensuing eighteen months it took little interest in streamlining army supply.³ Instead it created a bewildering array of committees. In the year 1776 alone, the Continental Congress spawned no fewer than twelve committees devoted to some aspect of army procurement and supply. When added to the existing committees—along with the positions of quartermaster general, commissary general, and their associated

¹ Major-General William Heath, *Memoirs of Major-General Heath. Containing Anecdotes, Details of Skirmishes, Battles, and other Military Events, during the American War* (Boston: I. Thomas and E. T. Andrews, 1798), 10.

² Ibid. For an estimate of militia strength at Cambridge on April 20, 1775, see Don Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1983), 65.

³ U.S. Continental Congress, *Journal of the Proceedings of the Congress, Held at Philadelphia, May 10, 1775* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, at the London Coffee House, 1775), 95. Hereafter referred to as JCC 1: 95.

deputies—the resulting process of procurement and distribution proved vulnerable to inefficiency, confusion, and corruption.

Hindsight renders it easy to condemn the inefficiency of supply practices in the early Continental Army. Previous historians have pointed to the lack of centralization, the unwillingness of the populace to submit to taxation, poor management, incompetence, corruption, and currency depreciation, to argue that the system was deeply flawed. Framed in this fashion, the story of logistics during the war becomes one of failure heaped upon failure, rescued from complete collapse only by a centralized contract in the final years of the war.⁴

When considering the sheer number of obstacles standing in the path of an effective logistical apparatus, however, it becomes all the more impressive that the army was supplied at all. The rebellious colonists created the army from scratch using ill-disciplined militia as its base and improvising supply methods as they went. The national government, in the form of the Continental Congress, had existed for less than two

⁴ While more recent work receives greater attention, Louis Clinton Hatch's *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army*, written in 1904 and reprinted in 1971, remains one of the more influential studies examining America's administrative mobilization for war. Hatch decried the government's ability to muster sufficient financial resources in order to supply the army, placing the greatest portion of the blame on the resistance of Congress to the notion of centralization and the people to taxation. Louis Clinton Hatch, *The Administration of the American Revolutionary Army* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1904; reprint New York: Burt Franklin, 1971), 19, 86-123 (page citations are to the reprint edition). See also Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Quartermaster Historian's Office, 1962), 1-72; R. Arthur Bowler, "Logistics and Operations in the American Revolution," in *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays*, ed. Don Higginbotham (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 54-71; E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 53-74; James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 6-84; and James A. Huston, *Logistics of Liberty: American Services of Supply in the Revolutionary War and After* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 104-162.

years.⁵ The relative lack of colonial military experience at any level, let alone that of army administration, thus hindered the adoption of effective and efficient supply practices.⁶ It would have been altogether more surprising had Congress, from the outset, created viable institutions functioning together to provide adequately for the army. Indeed, the rebellious British colonists found themselves at war with the mother country long before they had resolved the issue of their own governance. And while these upstart colonies possessed considerable experience in self-governance and even in waging war on a small-scale, militia basis, the challenges involved in extrapolating that wisdom to governing at a national level grew exponentially more complex. Having thrown off the yoke of oppressive Parliamentary rule, the colonies now found themselves in a quandary. To perpetuate the war against the British, they required some of the same institutions of centralized government against which they rebelled in the first place.⁷ Given this political context, historians should not have been surprised to discover rampant errors and inefficiencies in a system of questionable organization, dubious authority, and limited financial flexibility.

It is more useful to consider the development of the Continental Army's supply system from a perspective that acknowledges the existing challenges rather than insisting

⁵ Carp, for example, included a discussion of America's political heritage to explain the colonial reasons for war, popular resistance toward standing armies, and concerns about the potential abuse of centralized power. Yet, while acknowledging that the United States lacked the types of institutions (War Department, Treasury, Board of Ordnance, and Army Commissary, Quartermaster General, and Transportation Departments) necessary for waging war, he proceeded to measure its performance unfavorably against those countries which possessed all the requisites for supporting campaigns. Carp, 5-15, and 19.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 20-32. Carp acknowledged this lack of experience in order to lend weight to criticism of the Continental Congress.

⁷ James A. Huston, *The Sinews of War: Army Logistics 1775-1953* (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1966), 6.

upon expectations more appropriate for a mature national government. Rather than view the evolution of Revolutionary wartime procurement and distribution as a tale of stumbling from one failure to another while saddled with daunting financial constraints, it is better to consider this period as one of experimentation. In the first year of the war, for example, Congressional committees considered the means by which to provide for the Canadian campaign, contracted for supplies of provisions, gunpowder, and ordnance, created the commissary and quartermaster departments, and relied upon the states to sustain their own contingents.

Supplying the Continental Army required military and political leaders alike to forcibly re-direct an agricultural economy poorly suited for the demands of war. Heavily dependent upon waterborne transportation, colonial trade networks primarily existed to funnel agricultural goods from the interior to the coast and from there to markets in Europe and the Caribbean. Even inter-colonial trade relied heavily upon the movement of goods along the eastern seaboard. British naval control of the coasts rendered the movement of supplies by ship a gamble in the best of circumstances. And while inland waterways offered another efficient means of transporting provisions and military stores, Revolutionary War campaign plans rarely took advantage of these supporting rivers. Officials concerned with supplying the army thus found it necessary to transport supplies by wagon on a scale much greater than hitherto used in the thirteen colonies.⁸

⁸ Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 204. See also R. Arthur Bowler, "Logistics and Operations in the American Revolution," in Don Higginbotham, ed., *Reconsiderations on the Revolutionary War: Selected Essays* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 55.

The Revolutionary War required much greater change than merely the type of transportation used to supply the army. Shortages in gunpowder, firearms, ordnance, clothing, and camp equipment compelled the government to stimulate the development of the fledgling country's manufacturing capacity. To be sure, foreign sources of these commodities, particularly gunpowder and firearms, filled a critical need of the Continental Army for much of the conflict. French supplies of gunpowder and firearms, for example, proved essential in sustaining the war effort in the early years.⁹ Unfortunately, the safe shipment of these goods through British naval squadrons proved no easy task, representing more a windfall for the Continental Army than a reliable source of needed supplies. Supply officials thus encouraged the growth of manufacturing at every turn.

The challenge of supplying the Continental Army rose to daunting proportions. Although the adopted systems of supply throughout this period may have been dysfunctional by limiting the strategic ability to launch certain campaigns, hindering the conduct of those executed, and inflicting the army with high desertion rates and low morale, the success enabled by American logistical efforts stands as evidence of a great amount of progress over a quite short period of time.

The Committee System

⁹ For a discussion of the role played by domestic sources of manufacturing in supplementing foreign imports and the impact of Beaumarchais, see Huston, *Logistics of Liberty*, 104-122, and Higginbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 232-234.

Although the Continental Congress created the positions of Quartermaster General and Commissary General in 1775, it continued to direct much of the logistical effort through 1776. They established no less than nineteen committees dedicated to some aspect of army supply planning or procurement in the first year and a half of war.¹⁰

Committees ¹¹	Date Created	Initial Members
To consider on ways and means to supply these colonies with ammunition and military stores	May 27, 1775	Washington, Schuyler, Mifflin, Deane, Morris, and S. Adams
To devise ways and means to introduce the manufacture of Salt-Petre in these Colonies	June 10, 1775	Paine, Lee, Franklin, Schuyler, Johnson
To take into consideration the memorial of the commissary general, and report their opinion on the best means of supplying the army with provisions	September 21, 1775	Willing, Deane, P. Livingston, Cushing, Ward
To purchase a quantity of woolen goods for the use of the army, to the amount of five thousand pounds sterling	September 23, 1775	Lewis, Alsop, Willing, Deane, Langdon
To consider farther ways and means of promoting the manufacture of salt-petre	October 16, 1775	Randolph, Wisner, Chase, J. Rutledge, Morton
To contract with such person or persons as will undertake at the cheapest rate, to supply such continental troops as are or may be in the barracks at Philadelphia during their stay there, with the rations allowed by this Congress ¹²	November 11, 1775	Lynch, Lewis, Allen

Continued

Table 1.1: Congressional Committees and Army Supply, 1775-1776

¹⁰ See Table 1.1 below.

¹¹ JCC 1: 65; U.S. Continental Congress, *Journal of the Congress of the United States of America; Continued* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, at the Coffee-House, 1776), 20, 22-23, 54, 110-111. Hereafter referred to as JCC 1.5; U.S. Continental Congress, *Secret Journals of the Acts and Proceedings of Congress, from the First Meeting Thereof to the Dissolution of the Confederation, by the Adoption of the Constitution of the United States*, Vol. II (Boston: Thomas B. Wait, 1820), 5; and U.S. Continental Congress, *Journals of Congress. Containing the Proceedings in the Year, 1776* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1777), 15, 24, 53, 63,74,86,90, 186, 208-209, 211, 383-384, and 450. Hereafter referred to as JCC 2.

¹² Congress later expanded the powers of this committee, calling upon them to “contract for supplying the same wherever sent for twelve calendar months, provided they are so long continued in the continental service. . . .” JCC 1.5, 116. A few days later, it became responsible for the contract to subsist prisoners held in Pennsylvania. *Ibid.*, 118.

Table 1.1 continued

Secret Correspondence	November 29, 1775	Franklin, Harrison, Dickinson, Hay, Morris
To devise ways and means for furnishing the battalions destined for Canada, with provisions, and for expediting their march	January 8, 1776	Floyd, Deane, McKean
To make an estimate of the number of cannon, that may be wanted for the defence of the United Colonies, and to devise ways and means for procuring them	January 15, 1776	Wisner, Hopkins, Rogers, Allen, Paine
To contract with a proper person to supply colonel Wayne's battalion with the rations allowed them	February 8, 1776	Morton, Lewis, Wilson
To consider the best method of subsisting the troops in New York, and what sum of money it will be necessary to send thither	February 13, 1776	Sherman, Duane, Wilson
To contract for the making of muskets and bayonets for the use of the United Colonies, and to consider of farther ways and means of promoting and encouraging the manufacture of fire arms in all parts of the United Colonies	February 23, 1776	Paine, Wilson, Huntington, Lee, L. Morris
To enquire and report the best ways and means of supplying the army in Canada with provisions and necessaries	March 8, 1776	Gerry, Wolcottm, L. Morris
To inquire and report the best ways and means of raising the necessary supplies to defray the expences of the war for the present year, over and above the emission of bills of credit	March 13, 1776	Johnson, Duane, Hewes, Gerry, R. Morris, Ward, Wythe
To confer with general Washington, major general Gates, and brigadier general Mifflin, upon the most speedy and effectual means for supporting the American cause in Canada	May 23, 1776	Harrison, R. H. Lee, J. Adams, Wilson, Rutledge
A Board of War and Ordnance	June 12, 1776	J. Adams, Sherman, Harrison, Wilson, E. Rutledge (Richard Peters, Secretary)
To devise ways and means for providing cloathing and other necessaries for the army	September 23, 1776	R. H. Lee, Wythe, R. Morris
To devise ways and means for effectually providing the northern army with provisions and medicines, and supplying their other necessary wants	September 24, 1776	Rush, Hall, Chase, Johnson, Stockton
To consider and report under what restrictions the sutlers, who supply the army, should be laid	November 8, 1776	Gerry, Wythe, Wolcott

Creating and supplying an army where none had previously existed entailed the procurement of such a wide variety and large quantity of goods that the undertaking defied centralization. No one man, department, or committee could possibly supervise the acquisition and distribution of goods ranging from provisions, clothing, and shoes, to firearms, heavy ordnance, gunpowder, camp equipment, tentage, and transportation. Congress, consequently, supplied the army by committee, delegating specific responsibilities for planning, purchasing, transporting, and issuing to the quartermaster and commissary departments. Often, these committees formed as a result of specific requests from army, whether from the commander, his subordinates, or the Quartermaster and Commissary Generals. Congress, however, retained the right to pursue supplies on its own initiative by committee or through congressionally-appointed agents. What ensued proved a chaotic system in which many played a role in planning for and acquiring supplies absent any coordination or synchronization. Compounding the problem, commanders appealed to multiple sources for supplies, creating situations in which some Continental army units enjoyed comparative plenty while scarcity caused others to contemplate disbanding.¹³

The committees generally took one of three forms. The first group, by far the most common, comprised those committees responsible for procuring particular goods. During the first two years of the war, Congress created committees to purchase ammunition, military stores, salt-peter, provisions, woolen goods, muskets together with

¹³ George Washington to Richard Peters, June 30, 1777, *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

bayonets, clothing, and medicines. A second group of committees focused on supply planning for specific campaigns. Early in the war, this included committee consideration of ways to provide for the forces in Canada as well as in New York. A third group of committees, arguably the most powerful, possessed more overarching responsibilities, charged as they were with procuring large quantities of supplies, reforming the system, or investigating and restricting abuses within the supply-related departments. These included the Committee of Secret Correspondence, the Board of War and Ordnance, and a committee created to identify the best means by which to raise the necessary supplies to pay for the war's expenses.

The Committee of Secret Correspondence exerted a great deal of effort to procure supplies for the Continental Army. Created by Congress on November 29, 1775, to communicate with allies and friends throughout the world, the committee predictably played a critical role in securing foreign resources—both goods and finances—to sustain the fight.¹⁴ The number and variety of the supplies pursued by this committee conveys a sense of the scale of the task. Congress requisitioned everything from 20,000 stands of arms, 60,000 blankets, 300 tons of lead, and one million flints, to sail cloth, copper, and medicines in early January, 1776.¹⁵ Five months later, the committee received additional instructions to procure up to 10,000 muskets in the French West Indies.¹⁶ As extensive as the list of needed supplies appeared, it excluded the items that would require the vast majority of logistical effort during the conflict: provisions, gunpowder, finished clothing,

¹⁴ *Secret Journals*, Vol. II, 5.

¹⁵ JCC 2, 6-7.

¹⁶ May 18, 1776 entry in JCC 2, 177-178.

and transportation. The manufacture and procurement of ordnance, especially cannon, would also demand considerable attention.

To augment the efforts of the Secret Committee in obtaining supplies abroad, Congress, at times working as a committee of the whole and at others through subordinate committees or even through colonial assemblies, sought to acquire needed goods within the thirteen colonies. Even when acting as a whole, however, Congress decentralized responsibility for execution such that considerable opportunity for confusion and inactivity remained. To a large degree, this reluctance to direct procurement stemmed from the legislature's tenuous hold on that kind of power. The same republican ideology that had driven the colonies into conflict with Britain now hamstrung its efforts to sustain resistance. Rather than direct colonial assemblies to procure specific quantities of supplies, as it would do later in the war, Congress asked for assistance. And while this technique proved fairly successful in Massachusetts, the early seat of the conflict, its effectiveness varied considerably, and often disappointingly so, in other regions.

This lack of centralization became evident in the earliest supply efforts of 1776. Washington, for example, struggled to maintain accountability of weapons and camp equipment as initial enlistments expired and wrote Congress desperately in January to communicate the army's need for firearms and tents. Initially, he hoped to recover a good deal of weaponry from departing soldiers. Orders required each soldier deciding not to re-enlist to present his weapon for inspection. If the inspectors found the weapon in good order, they would compensate the bearer at the appraised value and retain the firearm for

future issue. Many, however, departed before their muskets could be inspected. Others failed to adequately maintain their weapons, allowing them to fall into such bad condition that they could not be repaired.¹⁷ This loss of muskets, when coupled with the arrival of large numbers of new recruits without weapons, created a scarcity that demanded immediate attention.

The Continental Congress's subsequent actions upon learning of the army's shortages in firearms and tentage reflected some of the obstacles erected in the path toward efficient procurement. Unable to command action throughout the colonies, the legislative body resolved to ask the various New England colonial assemblies to assist Washington in procuring firearms.¹⁸ This recommendation placed the onus for supplying muskets on the state assemblies absent any assignment of quotas or means of enforcing compliance. Congress also directed the purchase of any available tent cloth in New York and Philadelphia, indicating that the amount needed for the army's next campaign should be forwarded to Boston. Finally, and perhaps predictably in this period, Congress selected a committee of three to supervise the execution of the above resolutions.¹⁹ These actions do much to suggest a lack of centralization and organization. The inability to demand compliance subjected these requisitions to the whim of the state councils and assemblies.

¹⁷ George Washington to the President of Congress, January 14, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 73-75.

¹⁸ January 30, 1776, Entry in JCC 2: 44-45. By the time of his writing to Congress on January 14, 1776, Washington had already appealed directly to the General Courts of both Massachusetts and New Hampshire for a supply of firearms. See George Washington to the President of Congress, January 14, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 73-75.

¹⁹ January 30, 1776, Entry in JCC 2: 44-45.

Despite Congress's efforts, Washington received little assistance from the New England state assemblies. New Hampshire's General Court answered the commander's plea for aid on January 17, 1776, indicating that all the colony's arms had already been issued either to soldiers in the Continental Army or to the militia guarding the coast.²⁰ A little over a week later, Rhode Island confessed that it had become reliant upon its neighbors, Massachusetts and Connecticut, for defense and had allowed its stores of firearms to lapse entirely.²¹ Even outside of New England, Washington found little assistance. New York issued all of its arms to troops raised in the summer of 1775 and, faced with raising five additional regiments in the coming year, could ill afford to part with any additional weapons confiscated from Tories or in private possession.²²

Throughout the months of February, March, April, and May, Washington continued to call for support in procuring firearms. The scale of the problem became clear in a letter the commander wrote to Congress on February 9, 1776. Washington in essence gave up on procuring firearms in the northern colonies and turned to the South in hopes that they might fill the void.²³ He estimated that almost 2000 men in camp lacked muskets.²⁴ Returns from February, 1776, placed the Continental Army's strength, including both regulars and militia, at 21,870, meaning that almost ten percent of

²⁰ New Hampshire General Court to George Washington, January 17, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

²¹ Nicholas Cooke to George Washington, January 25, 1776, in *Ibid*.

²² New York Provincial Congress to George Washington, February 20, 1776, in *Ibid*.

²³ George Washington to the President of Congress, February 9, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 88-90.

²⁴ *Ibid*.

Washington's force lacked firearms.²⁵ The situation improved little, if at all, by April.²⁶ Writing to Congress, Washington pointed out that one of the New York regiments barely claimed enough weapons to arm a single company.²⁷ Returns of the army in June, 1776, revealed little improvement. Of 9,088 soldiers listed on the return, 816 men, or roughly nine percent, lacked firearms while 1,351 carried muskets deemed to be in bad condition.²⁸

His appeals to the contrary, Washington did not wait for Congress or the states to equip his force with firearms. Desperate to acquire muskets, the commander scrutinized his army in search of any potential sources of supply. On January 12, 1776, he optimistically wrote to Major General Richard Montgomery, then commanding forces in Canada, in hopes that with Quebec's imminent fall the Americans would gain possession of the considerable military stores reported to be in a magazine there. Unaware that Montgomery had been killed in a failed attempt to capture Quebec on New Year's Eve, Washington urged him in vain to forward supplies of arms as soon as they became available. "Arms we are exceedingly in want of," he wrote, "these I wish to receive without delay if you Can Supply them, from the King's Stores in Quebec."²⁹ Washington's plea went unanswered.

²⁵ For strength numbers in February, 1776, see Charles H. Lesser, ed., *The Sinews of Independence: Monthly Strength Reports of the Continental Army* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), 16.

²⁶ George Washington to the President of Congress, April 4, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 114-116; George Washington to the President of Congress, April 22, 1776, in *Ibid.*, 120-123.

²⁷ George Washington to the President of Congress, April 25, 1776, in *Ibid.*, 125-130.

²⁸ A Return of the State of Arms and Accoutrements in the Army, in and near New York, June 24, 1776, Reel 102, Peter Force Papers and Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

²⁹ George Washington to Major General Richard Montgomery, January 12, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

The commander received slightly greater assistance from Connecticut, where Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., scrapped together musket pieces captured at Fort Ticonderoga and assembled them into fully-functioning weapons. Trumbull directed armorers to assemble complete weapons from parts, matching musket barrels, once straightened, with wooden stocks, locks, loading rods, and bayonets. The governor estimated that it would cost fifty shillings to produce each complete weapon.³⁰ In the end, his efforts produced only thirty functioning firearms.

Washington's search for muskets continued. In early May, based on information provided by then-Colonel Anthony Wayne, the Continental Army commander wrote to Congress about a possible source of supply. The Philadelphia Committee of Safety, he indicated, held between two to three thousand stands of arms for use in provincial defense. Washington proposed that the army borrow a number of these weapons, to be replaced with continental firearms as they were procured.³¹ Frustrated at the continued lack of support, Washington once again took the opportunity to explain to Congress the extent of the army's need for firearms. Colonel Rudolphus Ritzema's regiment of the New York line, he indicated, possessed only ninety-seven firelocks and seven bayonets. Indeed, he continued, all the eastern regiments required between twenty-five and fifty muskets to fully equip their soldiers.³²

Occasional windfalls of supplies worked to truncate administrative development by masking the weaknesses of the committee system. Congress, for example, moved

³⁰ Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., to George Washington, February 16, 1776, in *Ibid.*

³¹ George Washington to the President of Congress, May 5, 1776, in *Official Letters*, 134-136.

³² *Ibid.*

slowly on Washington's request for access to Philadelphia's arms. Reading the letter on May 8, 1776, it referred the document to a committee of five.³³ Six days later, on May 14, the committee reported back to Congress, recommending and securing approval for only one resolution allowing Washington to employ an agent to purchase weapons from those willing to sell. This could hardly have been the response that Washington hoped to hear. To be sure, it remains unclear whether the Philadelphia Committee of Safety ever possessed the reported stores.³⁴ Ultimately, the timely capture of the British transport ship *Hope*, with its cargo of arms, supplied many of the army's shortages.³⁵

What begins to emerge from this picture is that no amount of bureaucratic organization could have rapidly produced the thousands of firearms needed by Washington's army at the outset of 1776. Put simply, the fledgling nation suffered from such a scarcity of weapons that no amount of capable administration could readily solve the problem. Reasons for this shortage varied. The westward movement of the frontier following the Seven Years' War so quieted concerns about colonial defense that some eastern colonies allowed their stockpiles of weapons to lapse. Issues to the first contingents of troops raised in 1775 further depleted available stocks. Finally, the American firearms industry was practically non-existent.

Though the Committee of Secret Correspondence bore a large share of the procurement burden, Congress created other committees as necessary to address specific

³³ May 8, 1776, Entry in JCC 2: 162.

³⁴ Risch, *Supplying Washington's Army* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1981), 350-351.

³⁵ JCC 2: 191. George Washington to Major General Artemas Ward, Philadelphia, May 28, 1776, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, vol. 5, *May, 1776 - August, 1776* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1932), 85.

needs and to plan for larger scale supply endeavors, such as the supply of campaigns. In the latter case, Congress established four such committees in the first three months of 1776.

While the main Continental Army squared off against the British in the heights surrounding Boston, Washington and Congress began to look north toward Canada. Hoping to enlist the support of the French Canadians in the fight against the British, they directed an invasion to the north in the waning months of 1775. The resulting campaign ended in failure in the cold snow outside Montreal on New Year's Eve. American forces, however, continued to lay siege to the city until May. The question became how to supply this effort.

On January 8, William Floyd, Silas Deane, and Thomas McKean formed a committee to consider methods by which to supply provisions to the two battalions of reinforcements destined for Canada.³⁶ The results proved a remarkable mix of regulation, delegation, micromanagement, contract, and hope. Upon receiving the committee's report, Congress resolved to fill any officer vacancies in the respective battalions, prescribed the numbers of rations due to each rank, recommended that the Pennsylvania Committee of Safety supply one battalion and contracted with Thomas Lowry to supply the other.³⁷ The resolution also included specific guidance about the manner in which each battalion was to move and directed the units' quartermasters and commissaries to

³⁶ January 8, 1776, Entry in JCC 2: 15.

³⁷ January 10, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 19.

travel in advance of their formations in order to secure lodging and provisions while on the road.³⁸

These Congressional resolves raise a good number of questions about the existence of any one supply system early in the war, supporting instead the argument that the legislature resorted to any means available to provide for the army. It contracted for one battalion while relying upon state action to support another. Even more remarkably, Congress dictated battalion-level maneuver along the route to Canada in order to ease logistic demands. The potential for confusion and corruption grew immensely as the army and Congress supplied each battalion in unique ways.

During the first year of the war, Congress relied heavily upon contracting to provide for its soldiers. In addition to the contracts for those battalions headed to Canada, Congress in February established a committee to negotiate three additional contracts, one each to supply Colonel Anthony Wayne's battalion, the Pennsylvania troops west of the Susquehanna River, and a Delaware battalion.³⁹ Just over a week later, a committee recommended that the New York Committee of Safety contract to procure rations for its troops. On the same day, Congress directed that the committee responsible for purchasing clothing for the northern army also contract for shoes in Canada.⁴⁰ Contracting played an important role much earlier than the traditional narrative, heralding its adoption in 1781, would suggest.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ February 8, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 53. Samuel Fairlamb eventually contracted to supply Wayne's battalion at seven ninetieths of a dollar per ration. See February 13, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁰ February 17, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 68.

The final type of committee implemented by Congress focused on the procurement of specific items or types of items. In June and July, 1776, for example, committees formed to procure clothing for the troops in Canada and to contract for one thousand tons of cannon.⁴¹ Later, Congress established committees to consider ways to supply the United States with salt and to supply the army with shoes, hats and shirts.⁴² Initially, these committees often acted on their own, interfacing directly as agents with producers or through certain appointed representatives to secure needed commodities. Ultimate approval authority for decisions on contracts and prices lay with Congress. The cannon committee, for example, secured congressional approval to contract directly with Daniel and Samuel Hughes for the casting of one thousand tons of cannon.⁴³ Requisitions thus flowed from Continental Army officers to Congress for procurement and initial distribution.

The secret committee, too, though responsible for procuring a much wider array of goods, worked either directly with producers or through hand-picked agents to obtain supplies and manage their allocation. A steady stream of directives flowed from Congress requiring the committee to ship powder to places as far apart as North Carolina and Canada, to send saltpeter to Philadelphia, New York, and Massachusetts, and to acquire thousands of muskets from the French West Indies.⁴⁴ These transactions, however, began

⁴¹ June 17 and July 19, 1776, Entries in *Ibid.*, 219 and 276.

⁴² June 3, 1777, Entry in *JCC* 3, 212.

⁴³ July 19 and July 22, 1776, Entries in *JCC* 2, 276 and 279. A month later, Congress directed the same committee to contract for “the immediate casting of six 6 pounders, six 12 pounders, four 8 inch howitzers, four 6 inch howitzers, and 6 cohorn mortars, to be made of brass, if a sufficient quantity of that metal can be procured.” See August 21, 1776, Entry in *JCC* 2, 322.

⁴⁴ January 10 and January 20, 1776, Entries in *JCC* 2, 20 and 33; February 12, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 58; May 18, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 178.

to ebb as the war progressed into its third full year. Institutions, including among others the Commissary and Quartermaster departments, evolved into more functional entities by the end of 1777, and although often still working at the direction of various committees, began to assume much more responsibility for interacting with the producers.

The Early Quartermaster Department

Quickly perceiving the shortcomings in this method of providing for the army, General George Washington recommended changes to the system of supply less than two weeks after taking command. While praising the logistical efforts of both the Massachusetts Provincial Council and multiple Continental Congress committees, the newly-arrived commander called for the appointment of a commissary general. “There is a vital and inherent principle of delay, incompatible with military service,” Washington wrote to John Hancock, the President of the Continental Congress, “in transacting business through such numerous and different channels.”⁴⁵ The commander justifiably expressed his concern about the delayed communication inherent in dealing with state and continental supply committees and the lack of coordinated, centralized effort. Such a structure lacked the responsiveness needed to support an army on campaign.

Congress had anticipated Washington’s demands for the appointment of certain supply officials. Only a day after electing him commander-in-chief of the Continental

⁴⁵ George Washington to John Hancock, Camp at Cambridge, July 10, 1775 in George Washington, *Official Letters to the Honourable American Congress, written during the war between the United Colonies and Great Britain, by His Excellency George Washington, commander in chief of the Continental forces, now president of the United States*, ed. John Carey, Second Boston edition (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1796), 8-14.

Army, it established the positions of Commissary General of Stores and Provisions and Quarter Master General, but neither filled these positions nor even defined any roles or responsibilities for them.⁴⁶ It was almost as if they recognized the proper form of an eighteenth century army, and therefore created the positions of commissary and quartermaster, without any deeper understanding of what those individuals did for the organization.⁴⁷

Major General Philip Schuyler, commander of the northern contingent of the Continental Army, actually pre-empted the appointment of commissary and quartermaster generals for the overall army, calling for the establishment of the same positions to support the troops only in New York. "I foresee," Schuyler wrote to Congress,

that unless a Commissary-General and a Quartermaster-General be appointed for this Department, that the service will not only suffer, (from disputes already rising,) but the waste of provisions that will be occasioned by the want of the first, and the extra expenses in having the necessary supplies forwarded to the different, armies through such a variety of hands, for want of the last, will enhance the expenses far, very far indeed beyond what their appointments will be made.⁴⁸

Schuyler had already identified what he believed to be excessive fraud within the logistics department. In a letter to Congress written on July 11, 1775, he documented the consumption of seventy-five thousand rations of flour and sixty-five thousand rations of

⁴⁶ June 16, 1775, Entry in JCC 1, 95.

⁴⁷ Kurt Daniel Korten Hof discussed the failure of Congress to define the roles and responsibilities of the Quartermaster General in Kurt Daniel Korten Hof, "Republican Ideology and Wartime Reality: Thomas Mifflin's Struggle as the First Quartermaster General of the Continental Army, 1775-1778," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 122, no. 3 (Jul. 1998): 189.

⁴⁸ General Schuyler to the Continental Congress, June 28, 1775, in Peter Force, ed., *American Archives: Containing a Documentary History of the English Colonies in North America, From the King's Message to Parliament, of March 7, 1774, to the Declaration of Independence by the United States*, Series 4, Volume 2 (Washington D.C.: M. St. Clair Clarke and Peter Force, 1839), 1123-1124.

pork by the garrisons of Ticonderoga, Crown Point, and Fort George alone. Schuyler had a right to be angry. Scarcely a month after their arrival in early June, the three garrisons, consisting of just under 1,300 Connecticut and Massachusetts troops, had consumed rations of meat that should have lasted almost four months.⁴⁹ In a war little more than two months old, this excessive waste greatly troubled the New York commander. Congress, perhaps influenced by the scale of the Northern Department's waste, reacted promptly, appointing Walter Livingston, Schuyler's nephew, as commissary general of stores and provisions for New York and Donald Campbell as deputy Quartermaster General for the same. Thus, a commissary for the separate army in New York, along with a deputy quartermaster general, came into existence before their superiors for the Continental Army had been appointed.⁵⁰

This discrepancy lasted only a couple of days. On July 19, in accordance with Washington's recommendations, Congress appointed Joseph Trumbull as Commissary General, leaving the selection of Quartermaster General to the commander.⁵¹ Trumbull, son of Connecticut governor Jonathan Trumbull, impressed Washington early on with his performance as commissary for the Connecticut troops. Indeed, in calling for the creation

⁴⁹ A total of 1,258 soldiers, predominantly from Connecticut, garrisoned Forts Ticonderoga, George, and Crown Point in July, 1775. Lesser, ed., *The Sinews of Independence*, 3. See also Richard Buel, *Dear Liberty: Connecticut's Mobilization for the Revolutionary War* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1980), 51. Buel argued that the Connecticut General Assembly voted their own troops a more generous ration than adopted by the Continental Army in general, causing Schuyler's concern. This incident alone suggests the difficulties involved in forming and supplying the Continental Army in 1775. Connecticut, contributing troops to the Continental Army, still bore responsibility for supplying provisions to their men. Reliant upon New York for the sources of supply, the General Assembly yet voted a larger ration for its troops than was approved for the overall army. The Connecticut regiments thus consumed rations at a much faster pace than practical, disrupting larger Continental supply efforts.

⁵⁰ General Schuyler to the President of the Continental Congress, July 11, 1775, in Force, ed., *American Archives*, Series 4, Vol. 2, 1645-1646; July 17, 1775, Entry in JCC 1, 191.

⁵¹ July 19, 1775, Entry in JCC 1, 196.

of the position, Washington pointed to the effectiveness of Trumbull's department in supplying the troops to justify the creation of a similar position at the Continental Army level.⁵²

Less than a month later, a merchant from Philadelphia, Thomas Mifflin, became the Continental Army's first Quartermaster General.⁵³ Son of a well-to-do Philadelphia merchant, Mifflin might have been better prepared than most to assume duties as Quartermaster General. Following graduation from the College of Philadelphia in 1760, he embarked on the career path of a merchant under the tutelage of William Coleman, himself a wealthy merchant. In 1771, Mifflin entered politics as a warden in Philadelphia and secured election to the Provincial Assembly just one year later. His political career truncated by the outbreak of war, Mifflin sought the glory more easily won through battlefield command than gained through the mundane management of army supplies.⁵⁴ His successor, Stephen Moylan, lasted less than four months before he too resigned from the position. Congress thus asked Mifflin to resume the post as Quartermaster General, a position he reluctantly accepted and performed for a little over a year before again expressing his desire to leave the office.⁵⁵

Mifflin presented an attractive candidate not only because of his mercantile background, which promised trade connections that might facilitate an adequate supply

⁵² George Washington to the President of Congress, Camp at Cambridge, July 10, 1775, in George Washington, *Official Letters*, 8-14.

⁵³ General Orders, Headquarters, Cambridge, August 14, 1775, George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 3G Varick Transcripts, Letterbook 1.

⁵⁴ Kenneth R. Rossman, "Thomas Mifflin—Revolutionary Patriot," *Pennsylvania History* 15, no. 1 (Jan. 1948): 9-14.

⁵⁵ George Washington, *Official Letters*, 32-37; JCC 2: 201 and 395; U.S Continental Congress, *Journals of Congress, Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1777, to January 1st, 1778*, Vol. III (Philadelphia: Dunlap, 1778), 480-481, and 487, hereafter referred to as JCC 3.

for the army, but also because of his radical politics, which ensured unwavering support for a split with the British.⁵⁶ While Mifflin did little to grab the spotlight early in his tenure as Quartermaster General, most contemporaries viewed his performance favorably. Washington, for example, praised Mifflin's diligence, noting the "great pains" the Quartermaster General took to procure blankets for the soldiers.⁵⁷

Congress provided little specific direction to Mifflin regarding the operation of his department, instead allowing him to structure it according to his own vision.⁵⁸ Although it is unclear whether they allowed Mifflin this flexibility in order to empower him or merely out of neglect, the choices made when it came to staffing his department and defining roles were left to the Quartermaster General. Gradually, a discourse evolved between Congress, Washington, and his principal administrative officers, including Mifflin, Trumbull, and others, that sought to identify more effective procurement and supply methods while addressing the immediate problem of sustaining the present army.

Only a month after learning that Washington had appointed Mifflin as Quartermaster General, Congress sent a delegation to the Continental Army to discuss a multitude of issues with the commander, his officers, and the regional political

⁵⁶ Korten Hof, "Republican Ideology and Wartime Reality," 187.

⁵⁷ Circular to the New England Governments, Cambridge, December 23, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. To be sure, there is little evidence in Washington's papers discussing the relative merits of Mifflin, or those of his successor, Stephen Moylan, as Quartermaster General. Mifflin's reappointment to the position following Stephen Moylan's resignation and the loss of New York in 1776, suggested that a considerable degree of faith remained in his abilities. For a brief discussion of this, see Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 8.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 5. Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure*, 19, 25, and 28. For a broader view of Carp's critique of Congress, see his first chapter, "War Administration, 1775-1776," in *Ibid.*, 17-32.

leadership.⁵⁹ Attendees included Matthew Griswold and Nicholas Cooke, the Deputy Governors of Connecticut and Rhode Island respectively, and James Otis, William Sever, and Walter Spooner, members of the Committee of Council of Massachusetts Bay. Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Harrison, and Thomas Lynch comprised the congressional delegation.⁶⁰

The October, 1775, conference at Cambridge covered extensive ground when it came to matters of supply, exploring issues ranging from the composition of the daily ration, to the best method of providing arms, clothing, and provisions to the soldiers, to an authorization to impress transport as needed to supply the army, and to the storage of tents over the winter for the ensuing campaign should one be necessary. Finally, the congressional delegation noted the necessary existence of assistants and clerks working for both the Commissary General and Quartermaster General and for whom no official provision had been made. The conferees agreed that both Trumbull and Mifflin would draft a document describing the ranks and duties of each individual within their respective departments to enable Congress to officially establish their compensation.⁶¹

While it is unclear when, or even if, Mifflin produced the information required by Congress, a list of department personnel drafted by the Quartermaster General in January,

⁵⁹ Though Washington appointed Mifflin Quartermaster General on August 14, 1775, he did not notify Congress of the appointment until a letter dated September 21. See Washington to the President of Congress, September 21, 1775, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 32-37.

⁶⁰ Minutes of a Conference of the Delegates of the Honorable Continental Congress, the Deputy Governours of Conneticut & Rhode Island, the Committee of Council of Massachusetts Bay with General Washington, Headquarters, Cambridge, October 18-24, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁶¹ Ibid.

1776, likely fit the bill.⁶² According to this document, the Quartermaster General divided his department up into three sections. The first, situated at Cambridge, encompassed the bulk of the department's personnel, including four office clerks, two men to operate an issuing store for camp utensils, two more to run a granary and stables, and two responsible for a lumber yard. Another clerk and assistant received and delivered wood at the camp. One assistant supervised all the smiths, armorers, and nailers supporting the army, while yet another served as captain of fifty carpenters. Mifflin also employed two men at Cambridge as wagon masters. All said and done, the Quartermaster General identified 17 employees working at Cambridge.⁶³

The second and third sections, located at Roxbury, Winter, and Prospect Hills, remained much smaller operations. Roxbury numbered only six clerks and assistants, including John Parke, the Assistant Quartermaster General, a barrack master, a wagon master, two clerks, and a man charged with receiving and delivering wood and regulating the market. The sections at Winter and Prospect Hills, under the supervision of Assistant Quartermaster General John G. Frazer, entailed only five employees and mirrored the composition of the Roxbury section save the absence of a barrack master.⁶⁴

The structure of the Quartermaster General's Department, as laid out by Mifflin above, failed to address the procurement component of the office's responsibilities. Missing are the myriad agents and contractors employed to acquire camp equipment, transportation, and other supplies. The reason Mifflin left these critical personnel out of

⁶² Thomas Mifflin, January, 1776, List of Quarter Master General Department Clerks, in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence, 1697-1799.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid. See also Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 6.

the departmental listing is not entirely clear. To a good degree, this may reflect role confusion between the Quartermaster General and Congress. As discussed earlier, Congressional committees worked to procure much of the equipment needed by the army during the war's first two years. It may also, however, suggest the unique circumstances surrounding the Continental Army and its sustainment. Severely constrained by the lack of financial resources, Washington's army operated very much on a needs-based methodology. Supply shortfalls in the present army and needs identified for the next campaign dictated the large majority of procurement efforts. These endeavors, with the possible exception of firearms, gunpowder, and rations, proved to be one-off transactions. Agents, empowered either by Congress or the Quartermaster, sought goods of a specific type and quantity to fill a current or anticipated need and no more. Rarely, if ever, did the Continental Army enjoy the luxury of stockpiling supplies beyond those needed for an ensuing campaign. As such, it may have seemed to Mifflin unnecessary to keep procurement agents on any sort of long-term payroll, their efforts often tied to a specific, short-term need and sensitive to the course of the war.

If confusion existed within the Quartermaster General's Department, the Summer and early Fall of 1776 exacerbated the situation. Mifflin resigned his post as Quartermaster General in May, 1776.⁶⁵ Washington named one of his own aides-de-camp, Stephen Moylan, as Mifflin's successor. Born in Ireland, Moylan emigrated to Philadelphia in 1768. Like Mifflin, he possessed the type of mercantile background that

⁶⁵ Congress elected Mifflin brigadier general on May 16, 1776. See May 16, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 175. See also Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 8. There seems to be little evidence suggesting why Mifflin chose to resign his post. Risch connected Mifflin's resignation to his promotion but offered no additional explanation. Ibid. James Huston merely indicated that he had resigned. See Huston, *Logistics of Liberty*, 71.

might have prepared him well for the position of Quartermaster General. By 1770, he owned outright two brigs engaged in trade, the *Minerva* and *Richard Penn*, totaling 150 tons, and held shares in three other vessels, the *Ceres*, *Santa Maria*, and *Don Carlos*. During the Revolution, Moylan initially served as Muster-master General of the Continental Army, a position entailing not only the enlistment of soldiers for the army and their support until received by the gaining unit, but also the outfitting of privateers, vessels commissioned to raid British commercial and naval shipping.⁶⁶

Moylan's brief tenure in the position remains cloaked in obscurity, in part due to the lack of documentation. Evidence suggested that he performed poorly in this role, a notion substantiated by his resignation after only four months on the job. To be fair, however, Moylan's brief service as Quartermaster General spanned a much more arduous set of logistical circumstances than experienced by Mifflin. While the latter worked hard to supply the army during the siege of Boston and the move, albeit unhindered, to New York, Moylan's appointment preceded British control of New York Harbor by only a couple of weeks and included the hasty evacuation of the Continental Army from Long Island to Manhattan.

Following the British evacuation of Boston and closely on the heels of American defeat in Canada, a British fleet moved into New York harbor in June 1776. Unopposed, the collection of British ships carrying his Majesty's troops swelled in number until General William Howe could count roughly 32,000 soldiers at his disposal. Through a

⁶⁶ Martin I. J. Griffin, *Stephen Moylan, Muster-Master General, Secretary and Aide-de-Camp to Washington, Quarter-master General, Colonel of Fourth Pennsylvania Light Dragoons, and Brigadier-General of the War for American Independence* (Philadelphia: Martin I. J. Griffin, 1909), 5-6, 9, and 10-12.

series of deft maneuvers in late August, Howe flanked the Continental Army and forced Washington to abandon first Long Island and subsequently Manhattan.

By late September 1776 dissatisfaction with the supply situation within the army rose to a level sufficient to attract the notice of Congress. Accordingly, on September 20, it appointed a committee to go to New York to assess the state of the army and determine the best means of supplying it.⁶⁷ A week later, the deputation met with Moylan near Harlem Heights and recommended that he resign his post for the good of the cause. Moylan, perhaps frustrated by the challenges of the job and unable to point to any substantial successes amid the demands, submitted his resignation.⁶⁸

While Moylan acknowledged Mifflin's superior capabilities in his letter of resignation, he also placed blame for his own failings on several factors that would come to haunt Continental Army supply efforts in the ensuing years. First, he argued that the loss of navigation on the North and East Rivers, owing to the arrival of the British fleet, forced the army to depend on wagons to move supplies, a necessity both unanticipated and for which the Quartermaster's Department was ill-prepared. Second, Moylan bemoaned the militia's consumption of supplies, noting that they drained needed resources while serving for only a short period of time. Finally, transportation shortages dictated that the Quartermaster General prioritize the movement of military stores over

⁶⁷ September 20, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 382.

⁶⁸ Stephen Moylan to the President of Congress, September 27, 1776, Vol., 15, 101-108; *Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M247, roll 99); Letters Addressed to Congress, 1775-1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

regimental baggage, including the personal baggage and possessions of the officers and soldiers. This decision resulted in considerable unrest among the soldiers.⁶⁹

British control of navigation on the North and East Rivers and the subsequent demand placed upon already inadequate numbers of wagons and teams presented a great challenge to army supply. Prior to the arrival of the British fleet, the Continental Army moved supplies primarily by boat in New York. This minimized the need to acquire or hire large numbers of draft animals, wagons, and wagoners. “The few Waggon, and horses we had,” Moylan explained, “tho almost wore down in the Service, with a few more added by me, were sufficient for all the exigencies of the army.”⁷⁰ The loss of the North and East Rivers, however, brought the practice of moving supplies by boat to an end. This development placed a much greater strain on wagon transport than the Continental Army’s meager resources could bear. To compound the problem, the army abandoned a large number of wagons and teams during the evacuation of Long Island and Manhattan. These transportation assets, Moylan lamented, could not be salvaged along with the army.⁷¹ The removal of military stores from New York demanded all remaining wagons, including those from the departments of the Commissary General, the Hospital, and the Commissary of Artillery. This left nothing to transport regimental baggage and fomented considerable unrest among soldiers toward the Quartermaster General’s

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Stephen Moylan to the President of Congress, September 27, 1776, Vol., 15, 104; Papers of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789 (National Archives Microfilm Publication M247, roll 99); Letters Addressed to Congress, 1775-1789; Records of the Continental and Confederation Congresses and the Constitutional Convention, Record Group 360; National Archives Building, Washington, D.C.

⁷¹ Ibid.

Department.⁷² This, according to Moylan, played no small part in influencing the Congressional deputies to ask him to resign.

Moylan's concern about the militia's consumption of precious supplies proved well-founded. "The militia," he argued, "coming in destitute of every necessary, drained our stores, and it must take up time to get fresh supplies."⁷³ Washington, less than a month later, cautioned Major General Philip Schuyler about this same militia effect. The army, George Washington warned, rarely recovered property once issued to the militia, losing valuable supplies to troops serving only short-term stints.⁷⁴ Moreover, the militia's short service clouded their judgment when it came to supply consumption rates. Envisioning only a brief tour, they consumed resources without concern for long-term availability. At least on this count, Washington endorsed Moylan's explanation of Continental Army supply problems.

The evacuation of Long Island, however, did little more than expose the fragility of a transportation network yet to be tested. Wagon and team availability had always been a problem for the early Continental Army and would remain so throughout the conflict. During the late summer of 1775, Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., alluded to the dangers inherent in relying upon the temporary hire of wagons to move supplies of flour. It would be particularly difficult, he wrote to Washington, to acquire wagon transportation during busy farming periods, to include planting and harvesting.⁷⁵ A month after Moylan's

⁷² Ibid., 105.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ George Washington to Major General Philip Schuyler, October 22, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁷⁵ Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., to George Washington, July 17, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

resignation in 1776, Washington issued orders collecting all wagon teams under the Quartermaster General and directed that no team be employed without written orders from either his headquarters or the those of the Quartermaster General's.⁷⁶ A day later, he communicated his concerns to Congress. "Our removal [to White Plains], and that of the stores," he wrote, "have been attended with a great deal of trouble, owing to the scarcity and difficulty of procuring waggons."⁷⁷ A week later, Washington again complained about the lack of wagons, indicating that efforts to procure teams extended to Connecticut.⁷⁸ Indeed, Robert Livingston wrote to Washington that while teams might be procured easily in Connecticut, the general could find sufficient quantities in New York if only he resorted to impressment. This statement alone reflected the reluctance farmers felt toward loaning or hiring their teams to the army. Unwilling to seize available wagons, Washington encountered similar problems well into 1777.⁷⁹

Moylan's largest mistake may have been the failure to anticipate the need for wagon transport as the army prepared to confront the British in New York. Had he predicted the demand, however, it is unclear whether he could have done anything to alleviate the situation. With the waterways open to American shipping until the arrival of the British fleet, it is improbable that Moylan would have been able to justify a request for the funds necessary to hire sufficient transport in advance. Such foresight would have

⁷⁶ General Orders, Head Quarters, White Plains, October 24, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁷⁷ R. H. Harrison [for Washington] to the President of Congress, October 25, 1776, in George Washington, *Official Letters*, 280-282.

⁷⁸ R. H. Harrison to the President of Congress, October 31, 1776, in *Ibid.*, 283-284.

⁷⁹ James Mease, for example, in September, 1777, struggled to find one wagon with which to transport necessary supplies from Philadelphia to Germantown. James Mease to George Washington, September 13, 1777 in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

demonstrated a far greater understanding of the tactical and operational situation in New York than that held by Washington. Moreover, the Continental Army rarely enjoyed the luxury of stockpiling resources for future campaigns during ongoing operations. At best, Moylan might have conserved his wagons and teams, dedicating smaller numbers in support of the troops on Long Island and ensuring improved care for the animals.

With Moylan's resignation, Mifflin resumed the post he had quit less than five months earlier. His re-appointment heralded a somewhat different approach to the position.⁸⁰ Although Mifflin may indeed have lost interest in supply matters, preferring instead to secure a field command, he may also have discovered that the nature of his old post was beginning to evolve. Congress, via more frequent and substantive consultations with the Quartermaster General, sought greater involvement in the process.⁸¹ In doing so, the legislature compelled Mifflin to relinquish much of his supervision of day-to-day logistical operations in favor of a role more aptly characterized as one of planning. Mifflin's early activities upon resuming the position included the development of a list of needed supplies and the identification of requirements for the spring campaign. Most importantly, Congress asked for his input on the overall reform of the Quartermaster General's Department. In late 1776, however, both Congress and Mifflin failed to address how this evolution in roles would impact the Continental Army. While Mifflin devoted much of his energies to long-term planning, responsibility for current logistical

⁸⁰ See Huston, *Logistics of Liberty*, 71-72. To be fair, Huston did not identify a true decline in Mifflin's performance until the latter's promotion to Major General in February, 1777. By the summer, however, Huston contended that Mifflin "ceased to function." Mifflin resigned a second time in October, but Congress did not identify a replacement until March, 1778.

⁸¹ Huston mentioned that Congress assumed greater control over the Quartermaster's Department upon Moylan's resignation but only in the context of reappointing Mifflin. *Ibid.*

requirements devolved unofficially to a number of officers, among whom Brigadier General Nathanael Greene demonstrated no small aptitude for matters of supply.

Long before Greene demonstrated his logistical ability in an official capacity, however, a committee of Congress together with Mifflin presented a detailed list of the supplies needed to sustain the Continental Army. The list suggested a clear desire to correct deficiencies in the Department's transportation capabilities. In order to adequately supply the army, the committee called for the acquisition of two hundred wagons with four horses each, fifty ox teams, two hundred additional horses for various purposes, and the appropriate corn, oats, and rye meal to feed these animals.⁸² In addition to these supplies, the committee continued, the spring campaign would require the procurement of 5,000 tents and the hiring of a number of craftsmen, to include blacksmiths, harness-makers, collar-makers, and wheelwrights.⁸³ The large number of draught animals, wagons, fodder, and related craftsmen underscored the collective desire to correct the army's transportation problems. Other supplies, notably the large amount of board-footage, indicated preparations for winter camp while items such as the knapsacks and tents hinted at arrangements for the spring campaign.

While Mifflin devoted his efforts toward procurement planning and departmental reform, Nathanael Greene picked up much of the slack when it came to sustaining current

⁸² The entire list included the following: "200 waggons with four horses each, —50 ox-teams, with 2 oxen each, for sundry uses, —50 drays, with one horse each, for various small services, —100 strong horses for the artillery, —50 horses for expresses and commissary uses, —25,000 bushels of indian corn, —15,000 bushels of oats, —10,000 bushels of rye-meal, —10,000 bushels of spelts, —1800 tons of hay, —50 cutting boxes, —2000 axes, —2000 wheel and hand-barrows, —8000 cords of wood, —a set of carpenters tools for each regiment, —a waggon-master and one deputy, —20 conductors of waggons on captains pay, allowing 10 waggons for each conductor, —5 conductors for artillery, —100 casks of nails and spikes, —10,000 knapsacks, —10,000 camp-kettles, —two million feet of boards, planks and joists, for barracks, platforms, &c." *Ibid.*, 396.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

operations. Forced out of New York by the adept maneuvers of British General William Howe, the Continental Army moved south through New Jersey in the late fall of 1776. During this time, Greene demonstrated an unusual talent for logistics. Writing to Washington two weeks after Moylan's resignation, Greene recounted his efforts to procure cartridges, wagons, and provisions, and to establish a secure line of communications between Philadelphia and the forts in northern New Jersey and in New York. "I have directed the Commissary and Quarter Master Generals of this department to lay in Provisions, and Provinder, upon the back Road to Philadelphia for twenty thousand Men for three Months, the principle Magazine will be at Equacanack."⁸⁴ A few days later, he forward to Washington an exemplary piece of staff work, estimating the quantity of provision by type to be laid in at each magazine in New Jersey and accompanied by an analysis of both the overland and water-carriage distances between each magazine.⁸⁵ Though he would not assume the role of Quartermaster General for almost a year and a half, Greene demonstrated in 1776 the abilities necessary to be successful in such a post.

The Early Commissary Department

The department of the Commissary General of Stores and Provisions began in much the same fashion as that of the Quartermaster General. Congress had established

⁸⁴ Major General Nathanael Greene to George Washington, October 24, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. For a discussion of Greene's logistical efforts in late 1776, see Huston, *The Logistics of Liberty*, 164-167.

⁸⁵ Nathanael Greene, "Estimate of Provisions and Table of Distances for New Jersey Magazines," October 29, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

both positions in the same resolution on June 16, 1775.⁸⁶ But whereas they allowed Washington to appoint a Quartermaster General, Congress reserved for itself the selection of a Commissary General.⁸⁷ Having created the position, however, the legislature allowed more than a month to elapse before selecting anyone to fill it. Encouraged by Washington to appoint Joseph Trumbull to the post on July 10, Congress followed through a little over a week later.

Trumbull had gained Washington's confidence by providing so well for Connecticut troops during the siege of Boston.⁸⁸ Early indications suggested that Washington, and Congress, had chosen well. Only weeks after his appointment, Trumbull proposed a plan by which a considerable savings could be realized by procuring flour in Philadelphia and transporting it to the army by ship rather than obtaining it in Connecticut and moving it by wagon. To prepare for the winter of 1775-1776, the Commissary General further urged the immediate purchase of hogs so that they could be moved on the hoof within twenty miles of Cambridge. Only upon arrival were the hogs to be killed and salted, enabling the army to avoid the transportation costs associated with salted pork acquired later in the season. This, Trumbull argued, would result in a savings exceeding £10,000 while providing for an army of 20,000 men.⁸⁹ While Congress

⁸⁶ June 16, 1775, Entry in JCC 1, 95.

⁸⁷ It is not entirely clear why Congress chose to handle the selection of these two individuals differently. Presumably, in the eyes of Congress, the Commissary's much more consistent demand for funds in order to subsist the army necessitated greater oversight. Indeed, plagued as the Quartermaster General's department would be in the first two years of the war with inefficiencies and poor performances, the Commissary General's department received the lion's share of the scrutiny when it came to charges of corruption.

⁸⁸ George Washington to the President of Congress, July 10, 1775, in *Official Letters*, 8-14. JCC 1, 196.

⁸⁹ Joseph Trumbull to George Washington, September 6, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

ultimately decided not to risk losing large shipments of flour to British naval patrols, the Commissary General's efforts to save money while providing for the army must have instilled confidence in his trustworthiness among the representatives.

The Commissary Department's primary responsibilities included procuring, storing, and issuing rations to the soldiers. Flour, beef, pork, and to a lesser extent, fish, comprised the main components of the ration. In October, 1775, a Congressional deputation to the Army at Cambridge agreed with Washington regarding the ration's composition.

- 1 lb. beef, or $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. pork, or 1 lb. salt fish per day.
- 1 lb. bread or flour per day.
- 3 pints of pease or beans per week, or vegetables equivalent, at one dollar per bushel for pease or beans.
- 1 pint milk per man per day, or at the rate of $\frac{1}{72}$ of a dollar.
- 1 half pint of rice, or 1 pint of Indian meal per man per week.
- 1 quart of spruce beer or cyder per man per day, or nine gallons of molasses per company of 100 men per week.
- 3 lb. candles to 100 men per week for guards.
- 24 lb. soft or 8 lb. hard soap for 100 men per week.⁹⁰

Despite this promise of a reasonably well-balanced diet, soldiers often received much less when it came time to eat. Commissaries and contractors, alike unable to consistently procure fresh vegetables, milk, and drink, focused their energies on obtaining meat and

⁹⁰ The quotation here is taken from Congress's November 4, 1775, resolution officially identifying the ration's components. See JCC 1.5, 80-81. It differed from the ration agreed upon in late October at Cambridge only in the price indicated for certain items. At Cambridge, for example, the conferees set the price for a bushel of peas or beans at £6, rather than the one dollar specified in the final version. Likewise, a pint of milk was valued at one penny rather than $\frac{1}{72}$ of a dollar. See Minutes of a Conference of the Delegates of the Honorable Continental Congress, the Deputy Governours of Connecticut & Rhode Island, the Committee of Council of Massachusetts Bay with General Washington, Cambridge, October 18-24, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. In part, this may have been due to confusion over local currency values.

flour.⁹¹ At times, they issued greater quantities of one or the other to make up for the absence of the more difficult to find components. Soldiers could also be compensated for missing parts of the ration, receiving script, notes, or on rare occasions, specie, which they could then spend to supplement their diet at the various sutler's and contractor's stores that accompanied army encampments.

Although Congress provided specific guidance when it came to ration components, it provided less direction when regulating the Commissary Department. As with the Quartermaster General's Department, Trumbull initially enjoyed minimal congressional interference when staffing the offices of the Commissary, at least with respect to those employees working directly for him.⁹² Trumbull amassed a staff over twice the size of the Quartermaster Department, manning issuing stores at Cambridge, Roxbury, Prospect Hill and Medford, and magazines at Cambridge and Roxbury. The issuing store at Cambridge required a staff of seventeen, including a storekeeper, eight laborers, one cooper, one cook, and six clerks to operate the store and scales and monitor weekly allowances. A similar number of personnel operated the store at Roxbury while only nine employees each worked in the stores at Prospect Hill and Medford. The magazines demanded a much smaller staff of two or three clerks and a cooper. In addition, Trumbull hired at least one employee with a separate detachment of the army

⁹¹ The Kitting Provision Book from 1776, for example, included columns only for beef and flour. The absence of other ration components in these records suggests that their issuance was not all that common. Microfilm Reel 102, Peter Force Papers and Collection, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁹² See Minutes of a Conference, October 18-24, 1775, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. Congress, as mentioned earlier, assigned to both Trumbull and Mifflin the tasks of documenting employees in their respective departments so that Congress could approve their compensation.

and needed two principal bookkeepers to stay on top of the department's accounts.⁹³ In total, Trumbull identified fifty-eight employees on the Commissary Department's rolls in his report to Congress.

Trumbull encountered much more difficulty, however, in depicting the procurement side of the department's business. He employed one agent "constantly in riding to one Place and another to get in Stores, procure Teams, &c."⁹⁴ The department also hired individual agents to procure flour, rum, and further provisions in New York, Newbury Port, Providence, and other locations. The absence of detail when it came to procurement likely reflected a multitude of factors. First, dependent as it was on army demand and market availability, the act of obtaining supplies escaped routine practice and therefore simple quantification. An individual employed to acquire beef from a particular region, for example, was usually selected because of his connections to that commodity's local market. Consequently he remained only temporarily in the department's employ. Inevitably, the depletion of regional beef or the fulfillment of army requirements brought this employment to an end. Second, although this was not as well understood in January 1776, the army's need to move dictated changes in sources of supply and consequently in the agents responsible for procuring them. Although the Continental Army remained comparatively static around Boston for much of the war's first year, subsequent moves to New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania required corresponding shifts in sources of supply. Finally, the complexity of the procurement

⁹³ A List of Persons employ'd in the Commissary General's Department in the Continental Army, January 20, 1776, in the George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence. 1697-1799.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

system defied simple explanation and, more tellingly, effective control. Procuring supplies in the early years of the war occurred through multiple vehicles, including by congressional committee, purchasing agents, and by contract. Trumbull, by employing some of the agents and negotiating a few of the contracts, controlled only a part of the procurement process, rendering it difficult for him to impose much order upon that aspect of the department's business.

To further compound the problem, Congress appointed individuals to the Commissary Department for those regions not occupied by the main army. Two days before they appointed Trumbull as Commissary General, for example, Congress created the position of Commissary General of Stores and Provisions for New York and selected Walter Livingston, a nephew of Major General Philip Schuyler, to fill the post.⁹⁵ Initially, there appeared to be no issues with this appointment. Livingston set about the work of supplying the troops in New York by contract while the main army, along with the large majority of the Commissary Department, remained in encampment around Boston.

Once the Continental Army shifted its efforts south to New York in April 1776, conflict between Livingston and Trumbull soon arose. The former, referencing his congressional appointment, insisted upon continuing to supply all soldiers in New York save those arriving from Cambridge. Trumbull, as Commissary General, countered that he should be responsible for the supply of soldiers in New York, including both the original contingent and recent arrivals. Washington, in a letter written on April 22, 1776, expressed his frustration with the situation to Congress. "I should be glad to know

⁹⁵ July 17, 1775, Entry in JCC 1, 191. For a brief discussion of Livingston's appointment, and the conflicts arising afterwards, see Huston, *Logistics of Liberty*, 90.

whether any part of the continental troops is to be furnished by any other than their commissary-general. I must needs say, that to me it appears very inconsistent, and must create great confusion in the accounts as well as in the contracts.”⁹⁶ Congress, in essence, tripped over itself in trying to provide for the army, appointing individual agents while also creating a department empowered to hire its own.

Although Washington backed Trumbull in this conflict, the ultimate solution stemmed as much from financial practicality than a need for centralization or bureaucratic efficiency. The commander solicited reports from both commissaries, Livingston and Trumbull, on their estimated cost per ration of supplying the troops in New York. Livingston, having already negotiated a contract for provisions, paid 10 ½ pence New York currency per ration.⁹⁷ Trumbull, by contrast, estimated that he could procure rations at 8 1/3 pence New York currency, saving even on the costs incurred around Cambridge due to a greater reliance upon water-borne transportation.⁹⁸ Unable to compete with Trumbull’s estimates, Livingston resigned his post as commissary in May.⁹⁹

A month later, a similar situation developed when Congress called for the recruitment of 10,000 soldiers, referred to as the “flying camp,” to secure the middle colonies.¹⁰⁰ Requests and bids to supply this newly created force flooded into both Washington and Congress. Concerned, the commander drafted a pre-emptive letter

⁹⁶ Washington to the President of Congress, April 22, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 120-123.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ Joseph Trumbull to Washington, April 19, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁹⁹ May 9 and 10, 1776, Entries in JCC 2, 164 and 166.

¹⁰⁰ June 3, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 197-198.

seeking to avoid another disturbance akin to the Trumbull-Livingston episode. Washington, however, was much more effective in communicating the potential problems posed by the appointment of yet another commissary outside of Trumbull's span of control. "I cannot discriminate the two cases," he wrote to Congress, referring to the dispute between Trumbull and Livingston and the current situation with the flying camp. The negative consequences of such a decision, Washington continued, would include the "clashing of interests,—a contention for stores, carriages,—and many other causes that might be mentioned if hurry of business would permit."¹⁰¹ Inevitably, the main army and flying camp, he added, would join forces for short periods of time in support of operations. In such an event, having multiple sources of supply would only increase confusion. Placing his faith in Trumbull, Washington sought to centralize Continental Army supply administration while eliminating the potential conflicts over price and transportation that would without doubt ensue from having more than one commissary. Indeed, he concluded, Trumbull had already made arrangements to supply the force in New Jersey.

Persuaded by Washington's argument, Congress left in his hands the decision with respect to supplying rations to the flying camp.¹⁰² Continuing what appeared to be a trend toward centralization of supply activities, Congress also authorized the Commissary General to supply both the main and northern armies in early July. Moreover, they granted Trumbull the power to "appoint and employ such persons under him, and to remove any deputy commissary, as he shall judge proper and expedient; it being

¹⁰¹ Washington to the President of Congress, June 28, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 163-166.

¹⁰² July 3, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 240.

absolutely necessary, that the supply of both armies should be under one direction.”¹⁰³

After a full year of war, leadership in both the army and in Congress began to believe in the value of a centralized supply system.

Trumbull did much to gain the confidence of both his military leadership and Congress. Despite suffering from a debilitating illness for almost four months early in his tenure, he earned Washington’s praise for his efforts in securing supplies for the summer campaign. “The commissary has told me upon inquiry,” Washington wrote to Congress that “he has forwarded supplies to Albany (now there, and above it) sufficient for ten thousand men for four months; that he has a sufficiency here [New York] for twenty thousand men for three months, and an abundant quantity secured in different parts of the Jerseys for the flying camp.”¹⁰⁴ In addition, Trumbull kept in reserve 4,000 barrels of flour stored in Connecticut. These efforts, at least for a short time, obviated Washington’s need to concern himself with provisions.

The general’s praise of Trumbull, however, offers us a unique opportunity to consider the magnitude of the problem when it came to supplying the Continental Army. Setting aside all the congressional interference, bureaucratic mismanagement, operational limitations, financial obstacles, and transportation issues, the Revolutionary War army of 1775 and 1776 lacked a fundamental understanding of sound supply management at the unit level. Extraordinary wastage occurred, perhaps nowhere more telling than in upper New York and Canada in the summer of 1776. Just two days after informing Congress

¹⁰³ July 8, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 253.

¹⁰⁴ George Washington to the President of Congress, July 14, 1776, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 183-187.

that the northern army received supplies sufficient for three to four months, Washington learned from Schuyler that they suffered from a want of provisions. Unable to fathom how such a situation arose, Washington wrote a critical rebuke to Schuyler, and by extension his army, lamenting the waste of such scarce resources.¹⁰⁵

To a large extent, Washington proved correct in his assumption. To be fair, Trumbull may have overestimated the availability of fresh meat along the upper reaches of the Hudson.¹⁰⁶ But Schuyler, in an attempt to explain the squandering of months' worth of provisions, painted a picture of waste and poor management throughout the theater that suggested an abundance of beef would have done little to alleviate the situation. In Canada, for example, Schuyler heard tell that soldiers were allowed to pick and choose what and how much they wanted from the barrels of provisions.¹⁰⁷ He attempted to bring the supply of the army there under greater regulation, but his efforts appeared to have been ignored. Although claiming greater success in regulating the New York portion of the supply system, Schuyler still encountered considerable waste. Arriving at Crown Point, he wrote to Washington, "I found the provisions laying in parcels on different parts of the Beach, exposed to the Weather and to be stolen; I ordered it and did see it put into the Stores, and then found much less than I had expected."¹⁰⁸ The war's progression in 1776, it seems, exposed problems throughout almost all facets of the Continental Army supply system.

¹⁰⁵ George Washington to Major General Philip Schuyler, July 17, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

¹⁰⁶ Schuyler to Washington, July 24, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

Through supply by committee, the Continental Congress sought to fill an administrative void. Their efforts in the first year and a half of war proved de-centralized and uncoordinated and often resorted to supplying the army's needs by ad hoc expedients. They established the Quartermaster General's and Commissary Departments, in form if not in function, and experimented with supply by purchase, contract, state-supervised action, and captured prizes. While their efforts proved only marginally successful, as the war continued, so would efforts to improve logistics.

Chapter 2. "Little Piddling Pilfering Plunderers": Reform of the Commissary and Quartermaster Departments, 1777-1780

A wave of reform swept through both the Quartermaster General's Department and the Commissary General's Department in 1777. Firmly disabused of the notion that the conflict might end quickly, Congress now believed it necessary to put the supply departments on a proper footing. In both cases, congressional committees met with supply officials to hear recommendations and discuss problems before putting forth resolutions. The results, though far from perfect, went a long way to imposing order on what had been an unregulated, ad hoc system ripe for corruption. Inefficiency, fraud, and failure nevertheless persisted into 1778, exemplified by the Continental Army's struggle at Valley Forge, and underscored the need for further reform. The supply of such a large army under arduous circumstances consistently pitted the republican ideals that drove much of the Revolution against the self-interested motivations of former merchants, who were arguably best equipped for procurement and distribution. This collision of mentalities fueled allegations of corruption, substantiated or not. Together with a host of other factors ranging from currency depreciation to territorial exhaustion, tensions between republican ideals and liberal realities eventually compelled Congress to abandon

the departmental reforms in favor of a system that placed the responsibility for supply on the states.

The Reforms of 1777

Congress received Mifflin's plan for regulating the Quartermaster Department on March 21, 1777, and promptly referred it to a committee.¹ The resulting regulations, published on May 14, increased the authority of the Quartermaster General, further articulated the department's roles and responsibilities, attempted to address some of the supply challenges encountered during the first two years of war, and placed a much greater emphasis on accountability. While many details regarding the department remained unaddressed, this initial effort to standardize supply practices in the army extended much greater oversight over supply official activities. Efforts to keep better records and accounts might have significantly enhanced logistical operations had they been adopted whole-heartedly throughout the army.² As it was, these measures made it easier to expose corruption and otherwise un-republican-like behavior.

Under the new regulations, Congress effectively assigned the Quartermaster General the responsibility to solve the transportation and forage problems that had plagued the early Continental Army since departing Boston. Much of this power came from the ability to appoint and oversee subordinates. The Quartermaster General, for

¹ March 21, 1777, Entry in *Journals of Congress, Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1777, to January 1st, 1778*, Vol. III (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1778), 94. Hereafter referred to as JCC 3.

² See May 14, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 183-191.

example, received authority to appoint a Commissary General of Forage for the army as well as one for each subordinate military department. In addition, he could appoint any forage masters necessary to assist in the process of procuring, storing, and distributing forage. Congress also empowered him with the ability to appoint any Deputy Quartermaster Generals, Wagon-Master Generals, and Wagon-Masters as needed. With this newly bestowed appointment authority, the Quartermaster General also gained the power to dismiss any employees in violation of the May 1777 regulations.³ Mifflin now possessed the ability not only to choose his subordinates but fire any who failed to perform.

Congress's emphasis on accountability represented the most significant of all the Quartermaster reforms implemented in 1777. The new regulations for the commissaries of forage, for example, called for the use of receipts for supplies received, vouchers to substantiate account claims, and monthly returns to document supplies received, on-hand quantities, and issuances. Similar reforms applied to all other departments responsible for maintaining stores.⁴ Loss of any items would result in the accountable individual being charged the cost, while illegitimate disposal of any supplies would be treated as theft. The regulations rendered any failure to submit monthly returns as sufficient grounds for dismissal.⁵ Thus, at least on paper, supply administration in the Continental Army now possessed a set of minimal guidelines defining how to conduct routine business. Whether

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵ Ibid., 185-186.

these reforms translated into substantive improvements in the Quartermaster Department remained to be seen.

Congress also took a close look at the Commissary Department in the spring and early summer of 1777. In this instance, however, allegations of corruption and mismanagement within the department dictated even more sweeping changes. Washington had expressed concern about the potential for corruption within the department as early as July, 1776. In short, he called for the appointment of auditors capable of reviewing the accounts of the Commissary General, Quartermaster General, and Director General of the Hospital. Without a dedicated official to oversee conduct in the supply departments, Washington could do little more than ask these men to account for their expenditures before approving any requests for more money. And even if the departments complied, Washington rarely had the time to review these reports in sufficient detail. Instead, he argued, someone should review the Commissary Department accounts, squaring them with purchases, expenditures, returns, and receipts, to ensure proper accountability. “Otherwise a person in this department,” Washington continued, “if he was inclined to be knavish, might purchase large quantities with the public money, and sell one half of it again for private emolument; and yet his accounts upon paper would appear fair, and be supported with vouchers for every charge.”⁶ Indeed, when it came to the actions of the Commissary Department, this potential for corruption often

⁶ George Washington to the President of Congress, July 11, 1776 in Washington, *Official Letters*, 179-182.

seemed more damning than the evidence. The perception of profiteering mattered much more to the public and the army than did concrete proof of such activity.⁷

Even before allegations of corruption gained momentum, the Commissary Department suffered from clashes of personality and self-interest that impeded the supply of the army. Trumbull, in mid-December 1776, left the main army in New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania in order to travel to New England. He believed his personal involvement in supervising the killing and salting of provisions there would best help the cause. The department began to fall apart in short order during Trumbull's absence. In his wake, he left affairs under the charge of his deputy commissary, Carpenter Wharton, a former contractor who had supplied the Pennsylvania battalions in New York earlier in 1776.⁸ Little more than a week after Trumbull's departure for New England, one of his assistants, Azariah Dunham, wrote of significant discontent among the commissaries left to support the main army.⁹

The timing of this unrest in the Commissary Department could not have been worse. By mid-December 1776, Washington and his Continental Army faced a British force almost twice its size across the Delaware River. Intent on securing a victory to bolster public morale, Washington conceived of an unlikely attack just as his opponent began to occupy winter quarters. As Washington began to position his command for the winter assault, the Commissary Department lapsed into confusion.

⁷ See Carp, 101-135, for a discussion of corruption within the Continental Army logistical departments throughout the war. Carp argued that suspicions, substantiated or not, often did much to damage the credibility of supply officials, though cases of this proved much more common after the army's winter at Valley Forge.

⁸ Joseph Trumbull to George Washington, December 13, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. March 16, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 94.

⁹ Azariah Dunham [presumably] to George Washington, December 21, 1776, in *Ibid*.

The short version of the story is that Trumbull's assistants and deputies all competed for influence and the right to provide for the army in the Commissary General's absence. Dunham, along with Robert Ogden, Thomas Lowrey, and Carpenter Wharton, had all been appointed by Trumbull during the summer as deputy commissaries responsible for purchasing and issuing provisions to the troops in Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Upon Trumbull's departure, however, rumors began to fly as the assistants jockeyed for position. Dunham learned from Wharton, for example, that Lowrey had resigned his position and that Wharton himself intended to do so before the New Year, ostensibly for reasons of health. Not believing the whole story, Dunham speculated that Wharton actually resigned for reasons of self-interest, indicating that in earlier conversations Wharton "was determined not to act in partnership and would have all or none."¹⁰ The historical record here is unclear. Wharton presumably knew that Trumbull had left him in charge during the Commissary General's absence but announced his intention to resign to Dunham anyway. Lowrey, too, had no intention to resign.

While these rumors could be written off as harmless office politics when considered in isolation, they injected confusion into the department precisely when the Continental Army needed its support most. Indeed, a lack of supplies forced Washington to delay crossing the Delaware River by two days, and, once on the other side, compelled him to direct his troops to subsist off the land.¹¹ Hindered by these failures, Washington became personally involved in the departments structure in order to ensure better support. He removed Robert Ogden from office and made Thomas Lowrey the sole Deputy

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Washington to Robert Ogden, January 24, 1777, in Ibid.

Commissary General for New Jersey, after which his supply troubles eased considerably. Frustrated by Ogden's and Dunham's failure to provide supplies, Washington appointed Lowrey to the position based on the recommendation of "several Gentlemen." Wharton, too, communicated to Washington that while he was immersed in arrangements for Pennsylvania and places south, Lowrey could supply all the army's demands in New Jersey.¹² Rendering Lowrey's appointment over the objections of Dunham and Ogden, Washington indeed alleviated his immediate supply troubles.

Even the general's personal involvement failed to rectify the Commissary Department's problems. By early February, it became apparent that the Continental Army's supply problems would not be so easily resolved. Confusion reigned as the commissaries disputed roles and competed against one another in the same market for goods required by their respective contingents. Supplies from both Wharton and Lowrey quickly dwindled to nothing, according to the Issuing Commissary Matthew Irwin, forcing him to make his own purchases to supply the army in New Jersey. Washington became concerned that the slighted Dunham and Ogden now took active measures to obstruct Lowrey's efforts in New Jersey. Further compounding the problem, Wharton prevented Irwin's brother, Thomas, from purchasing supplies of rum, soap, and candles in Philadelphia.¹³ Yet, after having disrupted Irwin's own efforts to procure supplies for the New Jersey contingent, Wharton made little effort to fill the requisitions.

¹² Washington to Jeremiah Wadsworth, February 3, 1777, in *Ibid.* Contrary to Dunham's earlier report, Wharton did not resign his position and Lowrey readily returned to service under different circumstances.

¹³ *Ibid.*

Frustrated by these developments, Washington asked Jeremiah Wadsworth to investigate the matter, directing him to talk to both Lowrey and Wharton in order to identify the issues. At this point, he feared that the infighting among supply officials would deprive the Continental Army of any supplies whatsoever.¹⁴ That Washington's patience had worn thin became clear in a letter written the next day to Wharton. Though the commander praised Wharton's efforts to establish magazines of provisions outside of Philadelphia, he also expressed his extreme disappointment that matters in the Commissary Department continued in such disarray. Washington indicated his willingness to punish those responsible. "I am determined to have a thorough enquiry into the Causes of the disorders in the Commissary line," he wrote, "and whoever appears to have been at fault shall answer for it."¹⁵ Driven as Washington was to find the root cause of the problems within the Commissariat, he only discovered disagreeable answers.

Further investigation revealed greater personality clashes at work. Wharton, on paper and after the fact, capably justified his conduct. Fully intent on providing Issuing Commissary Irwin any supplies that could not be procured in New Jersey, he purchased large quantities of alcohol, soap, candles, and other necessities and forwarded several wagons of these goods to Irwin at Morristown. Irwin, Wharton contended, refused the supplies, claiming that his appointment by Washington empowered him to employ his brother as the sole purchaser of articles within the city of Philadelphia. Based on this claim, Wharton discontinued his procurement efforts within the city.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Washington to Carpenter Wharton, February 4, 1777, in Ibid.

Ostensibly, Wharton provided a sound justification for discontinuing his purchases. The former contractor believed that multiple procurement officials operating in the same area would drive prices higher and create the appearance of scarcity.¹⁶ To be fair, he here identified a trend that Congress would discover only weeks later. Contractors, commissaries, and purchasing agents frequently found themselves in competition for the same goods, often out-bidding one another while driving prices significantly higher than the market would otherwise justify.

While concern for prices should certainly have ranked high among his concerns, Wharton's primary focus should have been providing for the army. His motivations became unclear, however, when he halted all efforts to provide for the New Jersey contingent from Philadelphia. Deputized by Trumbull in the latter's absence, Wharton might have coordinated supply efforts in Philadelphia so as to avoid competition rather than impose scarcity on the Continental Army. In his analysis, the questions of who provided the supplies became more important than their delivery. Frustrated by Irwin's alleged meddling, Wharton took actions which ensured only one outcome—needed supplies would not reach their destination. Whether this internal commissariat battle reflected the sacrifice of republican virtue upon the altar of self-interest, a patriotic miscommunication, or merely a clash of personalities, the ultimate loser of the contest proved to be the Continental Army. Viewed through this lens, it is difficult to conclude that anything greater than self-interest motivated Wharton's conduct.

¹⁶ Wharton to George Washington, February 17, 1777, in *Ibid.*

The questionable activity within the Commissary Department garnered the attention of Congress as well. In a report issued in April 1777, the congressional committee responsible for investigating the commissaries' conduct levied scathing criticism toward several unnamed commissary employees. The committee found that certain agents lacked competence or integrity, both of which incurred considerable public loss.¹⁷ The report focused on the behavior of certain men who, receiving commissions based on the sums of money passing through their hands, knowingly bid-up prices on goods in order to line their own pockets. Disturbed by the lack of patriotism evident in such behavior and by the overall poor performance in supplying provisions, Congress directed the committee to consider measures necessary to reform the Commissary Department.¹⁸

Much in the same manner as Congress had developed regulations for the Quartermaster General's Department in consultation with Mifflin, the committee charged with drafting guidelines for the Commissariat worked in conjunction with Trumbull.¹⁹ On April 23, for example, Congress consolidated the committee on the Commissary Department with another focused on the problem of supplying fresh beef to the Army and

¹⁷ April 14, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 137-138.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Congressional collaboration with the Commissary General perhaps proved too intensive as coordination with the committee, at least in part, prevented Trumbull from returning to his duties with the Army. Consequently, the Army's supply situation became so dire toward the end of May that Washington ordered Trumbull to return to camp in an effort to prevent the dispersal of his forces. See Washington to Colonel Joseph Trumbull, May 28, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. In addition to discussions with Congress, Trumbull felt that he could better supply the Continental Army in New Jersey from his location in Philadelphia, where he procured many of the provisions, a fact of which he soon convinced General Washington. See, for example, the notes to Washington's letter to Trumbull, May 28, 1777, in Ibid.

directed them to meet with the Commissary General in Philadelphia.²⁰ Trumbull remained in the city for almost the entire month of May, in part to consult with the committee but also, and perhaps chiefly, to procure additional supplies. Although Washington urgently ordered him back to headquarters at the end of the month, Trumbull managed one more meeting with the committee to discuss a current scarcity of provisions on May 29 before departing.²¹

The resulting regulations, published by Congress in early June, proved a much more dramatic change than had been imposed within the Quartermaster Department. The new 1777 regulation effectively divided the Commissary Department into two branches, creating a Commissary General of Purchases with four deputies and a Commissary General of Issues with three. In a controversial move, the Continental Congress retained the power to appoint each of these officials directly. In so doing, they interfered with the commissaries' ability to choose reliable deputies and yet held them accountable for their subordinates' actions.

Congress also laid out clear descriptions of each department's roles and responsibilities. The Commissary General of Purchases would be responsible for procuring all provisions and other supplies. Accumulated goods were to be turned over to the Commissary General of Issues for storage in magazines and ultimate issue to the soldiers. The rules authorized the appointment of a clerk for each commissary and deputy, as well as the hiring of any number of assistants deemed necessary. In an effort to control the prices paid by purchasing commissaries for supplies, the regulations directed

²⁰ April 23, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 152.

²¹ See Washington to Trumbull, May 28, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

the Commissary General of Purchases to set prices not to be exceeded for each commodity. As a further safeguard against overpayments, the Commissary General of Purchases would assign each deputy a district, beyond the borders of which they would not be authorized to make purchases.²²

Like the reform of the Quartermaster Department, the 1777 Commissary General regulations also placed considerable emphasis upon accountability. Article IX, for example, directed both Commissaries General to provide their deputies with account books, stipulating that each page should be divided into ten columns. Each column tracked information ranging from transaction dates, individuals involved, provision type and quantity, to prices paid, and so on..²³ The regulation also required Deputy Commissaries of Purchases to submit monthly returns documenting their expenditures and the quantities of supplies procured. Other articles directed the Commissaries General of Purchases and Issues to settle accounts on a semi-annual basis with a commissioner of accounts, specified punishments for neglect of duty, ordered issuing commissaries to maintain separate issuing accounts for each unit, and explained how they would document issuances through receipts and vouchers.²⁴

Finally, the 1777 Commissary regulation introduced oaths of office for the principal officers and their deputies in an attempt to discourage fraud and profiteering while assuaging public concern over the potential for corruption accompanying these positions. The Commissary General of Purchases and his deputies, for example, would

²² June 10, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 221-230.

²³ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 221-230.

swear not to artificially inflate prices in order to enhance their commissions. Moreover, the regulation required the commissaries to pledge their faithful service to the public.²⁵ Their counterparts in Issues would swear a shorter oath emphasizing honest accountability.²⁶ Although Congress had added a large number of measures intended to better account for commissary expenditures and issues, these oaths provided a further protection against corruption, one grounded in republican ideals of virtue, honor, and disinterestedness.

The Aftermath of Reform: Valley Forge and the Eastern Department

The reforms of 1777, though well-intentioned, proved disastrous, culminating in near total logistical failure at Valley Forge in the winter of 1777-1778. It would, however, be an over-simplification to argue that Congress alone caused the supply system to collapse. The introduction of new regulations for both the Commissary and Quartermaster Departments in the middle of a campaign caused great consternation among the Continental Army's leadership. But individual agency, or the lack thereof, often played an even greater role in the calamity. These personal failures, combined with new, sometimes disagreeable, regulations together with the nation's inherent financial and transportation constraints, injected much confusion into the Continental Army's supply services in the latter half of 1777. While Valley Forge may not have been

²⁵ Ibid., 229.

²⁶ Ibid., 229-230.

inevitable, it became clear to Congress that further supply administration reform would be necessary several months before the arduous winter in southeastern Pennsylvania.

The Commissary Department, the subject of greatest reform, also suffered the greatest setbacks. Things began innocently enough. Little more than a week after publishing the department's new regulations, Congress appointed Joseph Trumbull Commissary General of Purchases and Charles Stewart, an officer from New Jersey, as Commissary General of Issues.²⁷ Congress further directed Trumbull to continue to issue the Continental Army with provisions in his current capacity until the new establishment proved ready to take on the responsibilities.²⁸ Presumably, once Stewart indicated his readiness to assume the position of Commissary General of Issues, Trumbull would confine his activities to those of Purchases.

Reminders of why these reforms had been necessary surfaced later in the month. Upon reviewing the report of the committee directed to inquire into the commissaries' conduct, Congress brought several charges against former deputy commissary Carpenter Wharton. Wharton, according to the finding, neglected to provide provisions to the army, thereby forcing Washington to appoint a suitable replacement. When Wharton did procure beef, he brought in so much that proper care could not be taken of the cattle, resulting in the loss of over 250 head declared "unfit for killing." Congress also alleged that Wharton purchased flour at excessively high prices, either by delegating the purchase to novices or by paying higher prices in return for a commission. Additionally, "he raised

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 242. Trumbull's deputies included William Aylett, William Buchanan, Jacob Cuyler, and Jeremiah Wadsworth. Stewart's deputies included William Green Mumford, Matthew Irwine, and Elisha Avery.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

the price of pork,” according to Congress, “by bidding either by himself, or agents, much greater prices than people he purchased from had agreed to sell the same for to other commissaries.”²⁹ Finally, Wharton refused to cooperate with other commissaries to keep prices low, choosing instead to operate independently and encouraging others to do the same. In short, his brief stint as Deputy Commissary General lent credence to many of the trust-related concerns often directed toward Commissary Department members.

One of Washington’s greatest criticisms of the Congressional effort to fix the department focused on the introduction of change in the middle of operations. At the end of June, for example, Philip Schuyler wrote Washington from Ticonderoga pleading for tents and lamenting the failure of the commissary to provide adequate provisions. “If it be true,” Schuyler wrote, “that we may be so plentifully supplied with fresh Beef as Mr. Trumbull positively asserts, his Agents manage badly, for we have none, and hardly any Thing else of the Meat Kind on this side of Tyconderoga.”³⁰ Trumbull’s response to earlier requests submitted by Schuyler alleged the misguided distribution of army beef to the public and cast aspersions at the Quartermaster General Department for failing to provide wagons to transport supplies of flour. In the end, it may have been fortuitous that Ticonderoga lacked supplies. Captured less than a week after Schuyler lodged his complaints, any abundance would only have fueled the British war effort. Nevertheless, the supply system once again demonstrated the need for reform in its failure to provide for the army.

²⁹ June 26, 1777, Entry in *Ibid.*, 253-254.

³⁰ Major General Philip Schuyler to George Washington, June 30, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

More than the empty promise of improved supply, however, the 1777 reforms played an active role in disrupting logistical operations. July saw a rapid deterioration in performance as Commissary Department members struggled to deal with the implications of these new regulations. Writing from his headquarters in Morristown, New Jersey, on July 9, Washington attempted to communicate to Congress the seriousness of the situation. “The inclosed copy of a letter from the commissary-general of provisions . . . will convince Congress of the distress and confusion prevailing in that department. Without something is done in aid of Mr. Trumbull immediately, this army must be disbanded: if the present difficulties continue, it is impossible it can exist.”³¹ At the beginning of the month, the issuing commissaries with the main army threatened to abandon their positions in the face of these new regulations.³² Continued concern about the department compelled Washington to write Congress again on July 16. He called upon Congress to placate the concerns of the commissaries so as to ensure the resumption of a regular delivery of supplies.³³ Thus, a month after the publication of new guidelines for the Commissary’s Department, Washington still looked for any sign that the reforms would ensure a better flow of supplies to the army.

Nor was his confidence bolstered three days later when Joseph Trumbull officially rejected his appointment as Commissary General of Purchases. “In my Humble Opinion,” Trumbull wrote to Congress, “the Head of every Department ought to have the

³¹ George Washington to the President of Congress, July 9, 1777, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 105-106.

³² George Washington to the President of Congress, July 2, 1777, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 102-104.

³³ George Washington to the President of Congress, July 16, 1777, in Washington, *Official Letters*, 111.

Comptroul of it—In this Establishment an Imperium in Imperio is established—If I accept to Act, I must be at Continual Variance with the whole Department, & of Course in Continual Hot Water.”³⁴ In essence, Trumbull rejected a system in which Congress appointed his primary subordinates while holding him responsible for their performance.³⁵ Making clear his condemnation of the changes instituted, Trumbull expressed his lack of faith in the new regulations. “I can by no means consent to Act under a regulation, which in my Opinion will never answer the purpose intended by Congress, or supply the Army as it should be.”³⁶ Although Trumbull vowed to continue as Commissary General until his replacement was ready to take office, his expressed lack of confidence in the system suggested a dark future for the Commissary Department. Others followed Trumbull’s lead, including deputy commissary Jeremiah Wadsworth.³⁷

By August, Trumbull had lost even the desire to continue in an acting capacity, forwarding his resignation to Congress with an indication that he could serve no longer than the twentieth.³⁸ Congress then appointed William Buchanan, a Baltimore merchant before the war, to the post a few days later, but this placed the department in truly dire circumstances. Congress had little faith that the newly appointed logistician would be ready to take office in the span of only two weeks’ time.³⁹ With Trumbull’s departure on

³⁴ Joseph Trumbull to John Hancock, July 19, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³⁵ June 10, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 221-230.

³⁶ Trumbull to Hancock, July 19, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³⁷ Ibid. Robert Hoops resigned his post as deputy commissary as well, though for reasons as yet unidentified. See August 6, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 314.

³⁸ August 2, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 307.

³⁹ William Buchanan had already been appointed as a Deputy Commissary under Trumbull following the 1777 reforms. His elevation to Commissary General created a vacancy among the deputies, whereby Congress elected Ephraim Blaine to the post. See June 18, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 242. See also August 6, 1777, Entry in Ibid., 314-315.

August 20, congressional representatives feared that supplies would fail in the interim.⁴⁰ Consequently, Congress asked Trumbull, along with his deputies, to continue to serve until their replacements indicated a readiness to assume the responsibilities.

Confusion in the Commissary Department continued through September and well into October. On September 13, Brigadier General Smallwood attributed delays in his march to Nottingham, Maryland, to “meeting with many impediments in the Commissary’s & Quarter masters departments.”⁴¹ Major General Israel Putnam expressed even greater concerns in early October. “There appears to be (in all parts) the Utmost Confusion with the Commissary’s Departments,” he wrote to Washington. “I hope to god that some better Regulation will soon take Place & Proper Commissarys of Purchases sent to the Eastward or our Troop in General will suffer greatly.”⁴² Gates’s army near Saratoga, according to Putnam, had with it only twenty barrels of flour, with an additional hundred at Albany. Cattle seemed more obtainable in the Eastern Department, though this abundance proved limited by the availability of forage. Thus, while Gates professed to have 20,000 head of cattle, it was unlikely that adequate forage could be secured to fatten the herd sufficiently for killing.⁴³

By November 1777, it was becoming all too clear that Trumbull’s prophesy regarding the Commissary Department reforms hit close to the mark. Jeremiah Wadsworth’s resignation as Deputy Commissary of Purchases for the Northern

⁴⁰ Ibid., 316.

⁴¹ Brigadier General William Smallwood to George Washington, September 13, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁴² Major General Israel Putnam to George Washington, October 2, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁴³ Ibid.

Department had created a vacancy that Congress filled with the appointment of Peter Colt, a Connecticut graduate of Yale University. Colt, however, possessed reservations toward the new commissariat system as well and delayed his acceptance of the position until Congress addressed some of his demands in November.⁴⁴ In the interim between Wadsworth's resignation in August and Colt's acceptance in November, no one stepped forward to purchase provisions for the Eastern Department. When he learned of this failure, Washington wrote Putnam expressing his disappointment in the inactivity of Congress's appointee and complaining that the army would suffer from lack of meat due to Colt's unwillingness to act.⁴⁵ Again on November 5, Washington wrote of his dissatisfaction with the department, lamenting also the introduction of the new regulations in the middle of a campaign. "The present State of the Commissary's department gives me great uneasiness, and I fear, that by the removal of the old Officers during the active part of the Campaign, the Army will suffer."⁴⁶ No officer surpassed Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum in communicating his disgust with the Commissary Department. "I am out of Patience with the Commissaries," he wrote to Washington on November 9. "If these Gentlemen do not act with a little more Sincerity, I will lessen their Number."⁴⁷ Varnum left it to Washington's interpretation as to how, exactly, he might reduce the number of commissaries, but the message of dissatisfaction with their poor performance rang clear.

⁴⁴ William Buchanan to George Washington, November 12, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁴⁵ George Washington to Major General Israel Putnam, November 1, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁴⁶ George Washington to Major General William Heath, November 5, 1777, in *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum to George Washington, November 9, 1777, in *Ibid*.

The supply situation continued to worsen as the army drew closer to wintering at Valley Forge. In late November, William Buchanan met with a committee of Congress to discuss the middle department's logistical preparedness. The Commissary General painted a bleak picture. He knew of only two magazines capable of supplying the main army: one at Lancaster, Pennsylvania, and the other at Yorktown, Virginia. While he could not confirm the quantities of stores at each, Buchanan estimated that overall, the magazines contained 6,000 barrels of flour. Given that the main army consumed roughly two hundred barrels per day, the flour would last for only a month. The transportation available, however, rendered this source of supply even more tenuous. Though some wagons and teams were provided to move the flour, Buchanan indicated to the committee that many more were needed. And, he added, should there be any interruption in the supply chain, such as a strong storm, the army would surely run short of bread. To compound the problem, the Commissary General did not know where to procure any additional supplies of flour.

The situation with respect to the meat component of the ration proved to be similar. Buchanan expected that supplies of beef from the middle department would not last much longer and anticipated no relief from either the northern or eastern departments. He could not speculate on the availability of pork as the season for slaughtering pigs had not yet arrived. Shortages of transportation, salt, and barrels endangered even this aspect of supply. Left with the ominous portrayal of the middle department's logistical situation, the Congressional committee concluded that "the present prospect of supplies of provision for the army in this district is very precarious, and unless more effectual

measures are speedily adopted, disagreeable consequences must necessarily follow.”⁴⁸

Congress, it seems, would expand its involvement in the business of supplying the army.

Swift action occurred at two levels. First, to alleviate the immediate need for provisions, the committee urged Congress and the commissariat to adopt the recommendations of former Quartermaster General Thomas Mifflin. Buchanan, according to Mifflin, should employ twelve or more mills in close proximity to the army, purchase the needed wheat, and use soldiers if necessary to thresh the wheat so that it might be milled.⁴⁹ This, the committee explained, would generate an immediate supply of flour while buying time to establish magazines at Pottsgrove, Reading, and other places to prepare for future operations. At the administrative level, Congress further centralized the direction of army supply efforts. Initially, the committee advocated establishing a separate body of five members to supervise supply and procurement. Ultimately, Congress resolved to add to the Board of War “a person acquainted with the commissarial business,” and included supervision of the Commissary General’s department among the Board’s duties.⁵⁰ Continued failure in the autumn of 1777 compelled Congress to become even more involved, providing Buchanan with a specific plan to address the army’s immediate wants while placing the Commissariat under the direct supervision of the Board of War.

Confusion stemming from the swath of resignations in response to the 1777 reforms continued to plague the Commissary Department. Like the army's middle

⁴⁸ November 24, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 534-535.

⁴⁹ As quoted in *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 535-536.

department, the northern department experienced its share of supply challenges. In terms of military equipment, ordnance and stores began to arrive in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, with the assistance of the French. On December 7, for example, Major General Heath wrote Washington with tidings of the *Flamond*'s arrival, a ship laden with stores from the French port of Marseilles including forty-eight 4-pound brass cannon, nineteen 9-inch mortars, 2,500 9-inch bombs, 2,000 4-pound cannon balls, over 4,000 fusees, and nearly 18,000 pounds of gunpowder.⁵¹ Provisions, however, proved much more difficult to come by. The Commissary Department in the north remained in confusion despite Peter Colt's acceptance of the appointment as deputy in late November. "It is with the most painful sensation that I represent the State of the Commissary's Department," Heath wrote to Washington, "and how an Army is to be kept on foot another Campaign if matters continue as at present I cannot conceive."⁵² Twelve thousand bushels of salt, for example, which Congress back in October had directed to be delivered from the eastern to the middle department, yet remained in magazines in Massachusetts in early December. Acting in the absence of a deputy commissary of issues, for want of whom the transaction had been delayed, Heath became personally involved, delivering the supplies to Colt at risk to his own interest without proper documentation.⁵³

While confusion reigned throughout the commissariat, the army in the middle department suffered the greatest privation during the winter of 1777-1778. Within days of

⁵¹ Major General William Heath to George Washington, December 7, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

settling upon Valley Forge for the winter encampment, the supply system finally failed outright. “Three Days successively,” Brigadier General Varnum wrote to Washington on December 22, “we have been destitute of Bread. Two Days we have been intirely without Meat. It is not to be had from the Commissaries. Whenever we procure Beef, it is of such a vile Quality, as to render it a poor Succedanium [substitute] for Food. The Men must be supplied, or they cannot be commanded.”⁵⁴ Dr. James Thacher, a surgeon in the eastern department, learned of the privations at Valley Forge from a friend in Army Headquarters. The men, Thacher wrote, suffered for several weeks on half rations, went without bread for five days and meat for as many as ten. Malnutrition caused a predictable deterioration in the health of the army, making it difficult to find soldiers in a condition fit enough to perform the routine duties of a military camp. The general officers became concerned that the lack of provisions would result in the total dissolution of the army.⁵⁵

For Washington, things had come to a head. After receiving Varnum’s letter, he wrote to Congress that same day demanding congressional assistance. Forwarding to the representative the letters of Heath and Varnum, Washington emphasized the need for immediate attention before the army disappeared.⁵⁶ The Commissary Department stood in a shambles, incapable of supplying current demand and desperately in need of reform.

⁵⁴ Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum to George Washington, December 22, 1777, in *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ James Thacher, *Military Journal of the American Revolution from the commencement to the disbanding of the American Army; Comprising a detailed account of the principal events and Battles of the Revolution, with their Exact Dates, and a Biographical Sketch of the most Prominent Generals* (Hartford, CT: Hurlbut, Williams & Company, 1862), 127-128.

⁵⁶ George Washington to Henry Laurens, December 22, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition.*

Congressional frustrations with the Commissary Department's failings reached their peak in mid-January 1778. With the supply situation of the main army continuing to decline, Congress essentially cut the department out of the procurement process. Instead, it directed the Board of War to employ commissioners to purchase 30,000 barrels of flour or wheat, oversee the process of having it ground into flour, and hire or impress the wagons necessary in order to deliver it to the appropriate magazines. These magazines, according to the resolution, would be under the Board of War's direction.⁵⁷ In other words, unable to work through channels specifically created to procure, transport, and distribute supplies, Congress returned to an ad hoc system under its own control to sustain the army.

The Quartermaster General's Department fared little better, although the upheaval it experienced in 1777 proved much less dramatic than that of their counterparts in the commissariat. Mifflin, perhaps bitter over suspicions regarding his department or his failure to gain a command in the field, resigned his position as Quartermaster General for a second time in early October. Congress accepted his resignation on November 7 and promptly appointed him to the Board of War.⁵⁸ Until another Quartermaster General could be appointed, however, they requested that Mifflin continue to serve in the position. Mifflin exhibited little interest in doing so but did not refuse. The results became readily apparent through the army's suffering at Valley Forge in two months' time.

⁵⁷ January 15, 1778, Entry in *Journals of Congress, Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1778, to January 1st, 1779*, Volume IV (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1779), 30-31. Hereafter referred to as JCC 4.

⁵⁸ Mifflin resigned his post on October 8, 1777, in a letter to John Hancock. See Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 36. See also the November 7, 1777, Entry in JCC 3, 481.

Washington called upon Congress to appoint a new Quartermaster General on December 22.⁵⁹ The Quartermaster General's Department, he continued, "is now suffering much for want of a Head to direct the great business of it."⁶⁰ Despite the clamor over the failings of the department, Congress would take almost three months to appoint Mifflin's replacement. Meanwhile, the lack of adequate transportation made a fragile supply situation even worse, often preventing the delivery of provisions to the troops even when rations were available. On the eve of 1778, suggestions as to how both the Quartermaster's and Commissary's Departments might be reformed began to flow into the offices of Congress and the commander in chief, Washington.

The Reforms of 1778

The call to reform the Quartermaster's Department grew strong in the first month of 1778. In the closing days of December and in early January, perhaps in response to a call from Washington for advice, a number of his chief lieutenants, including Casimir Pulaski, George Weedon, Jedediah Huntington, Arthur St. Clair, Henry Knox, Nathanael Greene, and James Mitchell Varnum, all submitted recommendations for reform to the commander.⁶¹ Most of these recommendations, although uniform in condemning the Quartermaster Department's performance, offered little in the way of substantive changes to improve the system.

⁵⁹ George Washington to Henry Laurens, December 22, 1777, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See editors' notes from Brigadier General Jedediah Huntington to George Washington, January 1, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

Arthur St. Clair's comments were a telling example. "It has appeared to me," he wrote to Washington, "that the Quarter Master Generals Department has been for some time very ill executed, from what Cause I do not pretend to say, nor can I propose the necessary amendments as it is a Branch of the Science Militaire I am very little acquainted with, and it is much easier to discover faults than to apply remedies."⁶² St. Clair nevertheless offered two suggestions that would be taken seriously in the new wave of supply reforms. First, he recommended that the responsibilities of the Quartermaster General be considerably narrowed, both to render the job more manageable and to confine opportunities for fraud and abuse. Second, and perhaps most important, St. Clair argued that Congress needed to appoint the right man for the position. "The great Matter," he claimed, "is to find a Man who with a Capacity for Business has a disinterested Disposition and can resist the Temptations to Peculation which, it is said, that Office presents."⁶³ Although St. Clair did not know how to fix the problem, he suggested that Congress find someone of republican values who did.

Others provided even less insightful advice. "Experience has taught us," opined Henry Knox, "that without good Quarter Masters and Commissaries in an Army the most important designs will probably fail."⁶⁴ Beyond that, he continued, the Quartermaster should inspect and repair carriages, supply deficiencies, and establish magazines. Huntington focused his comments on supply at the brigade and regimental level, recommending that no special rank be accorded Brigade Quartermasters, who will have

⁶² Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, January 5, 1778, in *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Henry Knox to George Washington, January 3, 1778, in *Ibid.*

the backing of their commander in any event, while arguing that Regimental Quartermasters should receive greater pay for their laborious undertaking. He also advocated much less dependence on wagon transportation, instead calling for the movement of supplies on horseback, and for a reduction in officer baggage. Varnum, predictably, offered the most colorful commentary. “In the Staff Department,” he argued, “there are many and great Abuses. How to remedy them compleatly, requires more Leisure than I have, to point out. . . . There are many useless Branches in the Qr Master Department wch might easily be lopp’d off.”⁶⁵ Apart from offering the most thoughtful recommendations regarding overall reform of the military establishment, Nathanael Greene contributed the most dramatic suggestion regarding the Quartermaster General’s Department. According to Greene, the Quartermaster General should remain with the army, employing contractors to procure any goods or materials needed.⁶⁶

Ranging from the controversial to the trivial, it is unclear what impact most of these recommendations had upon the ultimate reforms. Toward the end of January, Congress resolved to appoint a new Quartermaster General, after which they would direct him to develop a new arrangement for the department subject to the approval of the Board of War.⁶⁷ A few days later, they published specific guidelines for the new regulations, significantly curtailing the Quartermaster General’s overall responsibilities. The Quartermaster department, Congress thought, should confine its energies to “the

⁶⁵ Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum to George Washington, January 3, 1778, in *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Nathanael Greene to George Washington, January, 1778, in *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ January 31, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 60. Arthur St. Clair, when offering his recommendations, understood this reduction of the Quartermaster General’s responsibilities to be Congress’s intent and thought it to be a good plan. See Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, January 5, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition.*

regulating of marches, encampments, order of battle, &c. &c. as described in the books of the profession.”⁶⁸ Consequently, very little money should pass through the hands of the Quartermaster General. Instead, the commissary of forage, the commissary for horses and wagons, and an agent responsible for purchasing tents, entrenching tools, and other supplies, would procure supplies in accordance with both the Quartermaster General’s and Board of War’s estimates and demands.⁶⁹ This much more limited view of the department’s role would govern the ensuing regulations, reducing the Quartermaster General’s involvement in procurement and prescribing specific roles for those individuals involved in purchasing in support of departmental needs.

Less than three weeks later, the members of Congress comprising the committee at camp recommended an altogether different plan for the Quartermaster General’s Department. Paramount among the committee’s concerns stood the potential for fraud and neglect in the current system. “Men without Morals, without Character, & without Property have been, & are intrusted with the Disposal of publick Money, & private Property. The Number of little, piddling, pilfering Plunderers in the Character of Deputies, & Deputies Assistants is sufficient almost to form an Army.”⁷⁰ Suspicious activity, according to the committee’s report, ranged from purchasing agents receiving 5 percent commissions on large purchases, the payment of 2 ½ percent on every ounce of forage, and the transportation of private goods on public wagons while public property lay neglected and eventually spoiled. Further compounding the problem, preparations had

⁶⁸ February 5, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 74.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Committee at Camp to Henry Laurens, February 25, 1778, in Paul Smith, et. al., eds., *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, Vol. 9, *February 1-May 31, 1778* (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1982), 169-174.

yet to be made for the coming campaign.⁷¹ Much closer to the source of the problem at Valley Forge than Congress, the committee at camp gained a more thorough understanding of the issues involved and the reforms necessary.

The power of the Quartermaster General, an object the February 5 proposal sought to curtail, was less the issue than the character of the individual appointed to that office and to those subordinate positions within the department. Believing that it would be much more beneficial to entrust one individual with overall authority, the committee rejected Congress's proposal to limit that individual's power by dividing it among four offices: the Quartermaster General's, the Commissary of Forage, the Commissary of Horses, and the Purchasing Agent. "So many independent Officers without a controuling Chief," the committee argued, "must necessarily involve Interference with each other."⁷² Moreover, the argument continued, the likelihood of fraud only increased with the number of departments while enabling individual heads to shift the blame to others and making corruption more difficult to detect.⁷³ Rather than eliminate centralization, and the fear of the accompanying power, the committee whole-heartedly endorsed it, arguing that the entirety of the Quartermaster General's responsibilities remain under the direction of one man.

Such a system, however, demanded the appointment of a disinterested man of character. To entice the right kind of individual, the committee proposed a new structure for the department. Their proposal recommended the appointment of a Quartermaster

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

General and two Assistants. The former retained overall responsibility for the department, supervising all issues and directing all purchases. One assistant would be primarily responsible for purchasing while the other kept the accounts. In an effort to ensure that only quality candidates would be selected to fill the positions, the committee suggested the payment of a commission based on the monies handled by the department. Thus, all three appointees would be paid a one percent commission on all money issued to the Quartermaster General's Department, to be divided according to agreement.

Taking their concerns a step further, the committee went so far as to nominate individuals for each position, offering General Nathanael Greene as Quartermaster General. Greene, an officer from Rhode Island, earlier demonstrated his capacity for logistical administration while in command at Forts Lee and Washington in 1776. The committee appointed John Cox, a Philadelphia merchant, and Charles Pettit, a lawyer and accountant from New Jersey, to serve as Greene's two assistants.⁷⁴ Each of these men, the committee argued, would be abandoning much more lucrative or promising positions to accept a difficult, often thankless, post supplying the Continental Army, thereby creating at least the appearance of disinterestedness.⁷⁵

Recognizing the potential for corruption inherent in paying commissions based on money handled, the committee clearly struggled with its decision. "To give a Commission upon publick Money," they opined, "is doubtless a Temptation to the Officers to peculate, & should in general be avoided."⁷⁶ Ultimately, the committee

⁷⁴ Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 40.

⁷⁵ Committee at Camp to Henry Laurens, February 25, 1778, in *Letters of Delegates to Congress, 1774-1789*, Vol. 9, February 1-May 31, 1778 (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1982), 169-174.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

derived solace from two considerations. First, they justified the payment of commissions by arguing that no man would take on such burdensome responsibilities absent the promise of gain. “Every Man has his Price in a good Sense,” the committee claimed.⁷⁷ To pay higher salaries to logistics officials would be to risk demands for similar payments from other officers of equal rank in the army—commissions enabled Congress to avoid this dilemma. Second, though the committee acknowledged that it would be nearly impossible to prevent fraud or neglect if the Quartermaster General proved so inclined, they held that internal scrutiny and the ease of detection would serve to deter such activity. “There is therefore no Possibility of obviating Peculation, but by drawing forth Men of Property, Morals, & Character—these are the only solid Basis of Security.”⁷⁸ Republican virtue, it seems, would combat the department’s susceptibility to corruption even as the committee acknowledged the self-interested motivations of the actors involved.

Congress nevertheless found the committee’s arguments persuasive, abandoning its February 5 plan to restrict the Quartermaster General’s powers in favor of this new, more centralized organization. According to the final regulation, forage masters, wagon masters, and other officers all fell under the responsibility of the Quartermaster General.⁷⁹ Perhaps ironically, the republican values that all too often questioned centralized authority served to guarantee its exercise. By creating a strong, centralized system under the direction of the Quartermaster General, Congress suppressed its

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ JCC 4, 125-126.

squeamishness over giving one man so much power by emphasizing the importance of republican values in his selection.

The most dramatic reform in the wake of Valley Forge dealt with the Commissary General's Department and, specifically, the Commissary General of Purchases. As with the Quartermaster General's Department, the army's leaders identified the need for change early. By January, 1778, Washington's principal lieutenants had submitted their recommendations to improve the commissariat. While these comments also generally lacked substantive criticism, the need for viable magazines and proper personnel emerged as a central theme. Henry Knox's thoughts, for example, more or less emphasized that commissaries should do their jobs, establishing magazines of provisions in secure places. The commissary should pay particular attention, he continued, to providing one gill [quarter pint] of rum per day to each soldier.⁸⁰ Varnum, by contrast, emphasized the importance of selecting the right personnel to serve in commissary positions. Those appointed, he opined, should be merchants already well-connected in the regions from which provisions would be obtained.⁸¹ In essence, Varnum called for a practice already in existence, perhaps an indication that the position demanded more than merely a regionally well-connected merchant.

Brigadier General Arthur St. Clair, while recognizing the importance of magazines, offered arguably the most thoughtful and yet controversial criticism. In doing so, he may have laid the foundation for things to come. St. Clair argued that the existing

⁸⁰ Henry Knox to George Washington, January 3, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁸¹ Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum to George Washington, January 3, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

regulations were impractical.⁸² Indeed, he rejected the notion that the 1777 reforms had ever been implemented, pointing to the resignation of the Commissary General in the middle of the campaign and the lack of magazines to bolster his contention. To be sure, St. Clair argued that even had the new regulations been executed, similar results would have been achieved. The problem boiled down, he contended, to the challenge in appointing the right personnel to serve in the commissariat. This, St. Clair believed, could not be achieved by regulation but by supplying the army by contract. “Congress are certainly right to take every precaution to keep Men honest in these great Departments where so much Money passes through their Hands, but too great minuteness has a contrary Effect by rendering the Detection of Fraud a Matter of too great Labour and Intricacy.”⁸³ St. Clair, naively, believed that supply by contract offered an opportunity to avoid these issues of fraud and negligence while keeping prices low. “The true way to have the Army well supplied,” he argued, “with the least possible imposition upon the Public, is by Contract. There was a time when that Mode would have produced great public good by keeping down the Prices of Provisions and it would yet have the Effect to prevent their becoming more exorbitant.”⁸⁴ St. Clair’s recommendations wrote off the Commissary Department altogether.

Although the eventual reforms of 1778 would not go so far as to abandon the Commissary in favor of contracting, Congress might have agreed with St. Clair’s desire to do away with the former. Events came to a head in mid-January 1778. On the

⁸² Brigadier General Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, January 5, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

fourteenth of that month, Congress resolved that the commissary system should be referred to a committee of three for alteration.⁸⁵ Just a day later, signifying their lack of faith in the current system, Congress cut the Commissary Department out of the business of procuring provisions. Instead, it reverted to an ad hoc approach to obtaining ration components not unlike that employed earlier in the war. Congress empowered the Board of War to employ commissioners to purchase flour and cattle, establish magazines for their storage, and impress wagons to facilitate the transportation of the acquired provisions.⁸⁶ The implications for the Commissary Department were profound. Not only would the Commissary General of Purchases not be involved in procuring the supplies, but the Commissary General of Issues would apparently not gain control of the magazines established until absolutely necessary. Through this action, Congress made it clear that they no longer trusted the abilities of the Commissary Department as currently constructed.

The reforms Congress implemented in March and April, 1778, reflected concerns regarding the potential for fraud within the department and Trumbull's protest over the inability of the Commissary General to control his own subordinates in the system created by the 1777 regulation. On March 13, 1778, Congress granted the Commissary General of Purchases full power to appoint and remove officers within his department. In an effort to restrain commissary expenditures, the new regulation also prescribed the allowable prices to be paid for provisions. Assistant purchasing commissaries, for example, would pay no more than six ninetieths of a dollar per hundredweight of flour

⁸⁵ January 14, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 28.

⁸⁶ January 15, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 30-31.

and twenty-four ninetieths per hundredweight of salt pork in barrels.⁸⁷ As with the Quartermaster Department, Congress included the practice of paying commissions to purchasing agents. Here, however, they perfected the implementation of these commissions, linking them not to a percentage of the overall monies passing through each agent's hands, but to the amount of money saved on the maximum purchase price of good provisions as specified by Congress. In essence, Congress created an incentive for agents to purchase quality goods at low cost to the public, finally articulating via regulation their understanding of the Commissary Department's role. The Commissary General and his deputies would each receive a percentage of their purchasing agents' savings, thereby incentivizing their performance as well.⁸⁸ Further reforms in April clarified the Commissary General of Purchases' power to appoint and remove subordinates, emphasized that deputies and assistants were to be assigned districts outside of which they would not purchase unless directed to do so, and restating the need for all officials to swear an oath affirming their responsibilities.

The Failure of Centralization and the System of Specific Supplies

In many ways, the 1778 reforms represented the peak of centralization during the course of the war. At no other point did a comparatively few number of individuals wield so much power over the Continental Army's logistical support. And while initially support of the army seemed to improve, subsequent years of war accompanied by

⁸⁷ March 13, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 150-154.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

additional supply failures and continued corruption steadily eroded this centralization. Congress eventually returned to committee supervision and the introduction, in late 1779 and early 1780, of the system of specific supplies. This last system signified the failure of the central government to supply its army and reflected the unique constraints of a country in which the national legislature could not direct the activity of the states but only request their participation. If the logistical architecture created in 1778 can be considered the peak of Continental Army supply organization, excepting for now supply by contract, the system of specific supplies surely represented the nadir.

Initially, the 1778 reforms seemed to produce dramatic improvement within the Quartermaster General's Department. In one of its better personnel decisions, Congress listened to the recommendations of its committee at camp and appointed Nathanael Greene to the post of Quartermaster General on March 2, 1778.⁸⁹ Greene had already demonstrated his aptitude for supply matters during the Continental Army's withdrawal through New Jersey in 1776.⁹⁰ Upon taking office, he immediately began an aggressive effort to acquire materials in support of the coming campaign. A letter written to Washington in May 1778, revealed just how far the department had lapsed, the degree of effort put forth by Greene, and the renewed emphasis on responsible procurement driven home by the recent reforms and the difficult financial situation. "From the Situation in which I found the Quarter Master General's Department on my entering upon the Office," Greene wrote to Washington, "it appeared to be absolutely necessary to make

⁸⁹ March 2, 1778, Entry in *Ibid.*, 125-126

⁹⁰ Nathanael Greene, Estimate of Provisions and Table of Distances for New Jersey Magazines, October 29, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

very extensive & speedy Preparations for the ensuing Campaign, especially in Horses, Teams, Tents, and other Articles of high Price.”⁹¹ Although Greene would learn that the campaign plan had been significantly scaled back, and reduced his endeavors accordingly to avoid unnecessary expense, his well-focused burst of effort suggested that his appointment, coupled with that year’s reforms, infused the department with a renewed energy.⁹²

The influence of both Greene’s appointment and the reforms can be seen at the lowest levels of the Quartermaster General’s Department as well. In an attempt to determine the status of the department’s supplies and preparedness, Greene directed all his subordinates to submit returns documenting available stores as well as those already purchased or contracted.⁹³ James Abeel, a deputy quartermaster general assigned by Greene to supervise all stores, promptly and aggressively did so. Abeel sent no less than nine letters in a two-week span requesting regional and state quartermasters to provide accurate returns of stores on-hand.⁹⁴ Though he would struggle to get the desired information, Abeel, in enforcing Greene’s call for accurate returns, signified the larger effort to bring the department under control in order to better support the army.⁹⁵ In doing

⁹¹ Nathanael Greene to George Washington, May 3, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ See, for example, James Abeel to Moore Forman, May 16, 1778, in James Abeel Letterbook and Correspondence, 1778-1780, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter referred to as Abeel Letterbook.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*; James Abeel to Col. John Davis, May 20, 1778; James Abeel to the Deputy Quartermaster General at York Town, May 21, 1778; James Abeel to Col. Udney Hay, May 25, 1778; James Abeel to the Deputy Quartermaster General at Reems Town or store therein, May 29, 1778; James Abeel to James Calhoun, May 31, 1778; James Abeel to Cornelius Sheriff, May 31, 1778; James Abeel to Col. Henry Hollingsworth, May 31, 1778; and James Abeel to the Deputy Quartermaster General of the State of Connecticut, June 1, 1778, in Abeel Letterbook.

⁹⁵ James Abeel to Charles Pettit, June 1, 1778, in Abeel Letterbook.

so, Abeel well represented the type of individual so sought after by Washington's lieutenants in their January recommendations for reform. In a letter to Greene written in early May, Abeel affirmed his commitment to duty and his desire to save public expense, establishing himself, at least in words, as a disinterested man of character. "You may be fully assured," he wrote upon learning of his appointment, "that I will take every Step in my Power that will contribute to the Interest of the Department & pay Sure attention to my Duty."⁹⁶ With diligent, dedicated assistants such as Abeel implementing the will of Greene, the Quartermaster General's Department seemed to be on the right track within only months of introducing the new regulations.

Even with the right personnel in place, however, guided by effective regulations, the Quartermaster General's Department faced a difficult task. Greene's correspondence with George Washington in October 1778 once again revealed the former's superior logistical planning while highlighting the considerable difficulties that his department would have to surmount. Greene initially wrote to Washington about the coming winter on October 24th, recommending for the encampment site a wooded area along the road between Peekskill and New York that offered abundant wood, water, and access to supplies from the west.⁹⁷ His subsequent letter of the 27th addressed the more challenging issue of supplying the army throughout the winter. The situation was grave. New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, fought over for the better part of the last three years, stood on the verge of exhaustion. The army employed many of the region's farmers as

⁹⁶ James Abeel to Greene, May 10, 1778, in Abeel Letterbook.

⁹⁷ Nathanael Greene to George Washington, October 24, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

militiamen, teamsters, or artificers, preventing them from planting and cultivating crops that would have supplied the Continental forces. As local supplies dwindled, the army relied even more on the use of wagon transportation to bring in needed provisions. In turn, an ever larger number of draught animals exhausted the available forage along major lines of communication.⁹⁸ In short, wherever the army encamped north of Maryland, it faced daunting challenges in procuring supplies, transporting them to the army, and feeding the draught animals responsible for that transportation.

Based on these mounting difficulties, and a detailed subsequent analysis of the Continental Army's consumption and transportation rates, Greene built a case in support of moving supplies by water, rather than by land, from areas as yet only minimally affected by the war. The main army, along with its smaller contingents in Massachusetts and Rhode Island, consumed roughly three hundred barrels of flour a day. To move this by wagon from Trenton to King's Ferry alone, Greene estimated, would require 1,340 wagons and 5,500 horses with accompanying forage teams. Despite great effort on the department's part, forage consumption rates continued so high that Greene's assistants could barely procure enough to satisfy current demand, let alone stockpile stores for the winter. The need to move supplies of forage to the army from locations further west only placed greater stress on the transportation system. The advent of winter, with its combination of muddy, icy, and snow-obstructed roads, threatened to create further delays.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Nathanael Greene to George Washington, October 27, 1778, in *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Financial considerations, Greene continued, further compounded the problem posed by the transportation and forage difficulties. The Quartermaster General estimated that the pay, rations, and forage required to hire one driver and his team for one day amounted to fourteen dollars. To hire the 1,340 teams mentioned above would require \$18,760 per day, producing expenditures in excess of half a million dollars over the course of a month. This amounted to paying almost six dollars to move one barrel of flour ten miles. In light of these expenses, Greene recommended the acquisition of a number of small vessels that could move two hundred to five hundred barrels of flour at once from the Chesapeake and Delaware River basins. Movement by boat would reduce reliance upon land transportation and its accompanying expense. Acknowledging the British presence at the mouth of the Hudson, Greene argued that if even one of every four vessels arrived safely, the effort would be worth the cost.¹⁰⁰ Washington never provided a clear answer on Greene's recommendations, although the mild winter and improved preparation for it ensured that Valley Forge would not be repeated, at least in the winter of 1778-1779.

Unlike the Quartermaster General's Department, the Commissary Department never fully extracted itself from earlier mismanagement and suspicions of corruption. The payment of commissions to commissary officials continued to draw the ire of individuals both within and outside of the military establishment.¹⁰¹ Along with the new 1778 regulations, Congress appointed Jeremiah Wadsworth, formerly a Connecticut merchant,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 54-55.

to serve as Commissary General of Purchases.¹⁰² Wadsworth inherited much the same department that had operated under Trumbull. Unlike his predecessor, however, the new Commissary General of Purchases came to the post armed with the ability to dismiss subordinates, firm guidelines on allowable prices to be paid for provisions, and commissions that incentivized the purchase of goods.

Following his appointment on April 9, Wadsworth worked together with Congress to further revise the regulations for the Commissary General's department. Most significantly, the nature of commissions paid to the Commissary General of Purchases, and his deputies and assistants, returned to a percentage of the overall monies handled by each rather than a calculation of the savings based on pre-determined price allowances.¹⁰³ Wadsworth had written Washington expressing his unhappiness over Congress's regulation of prices. While perhaps good in theory, the table of allowances for ration components, introduced by Congress with the reforms of 1778, failed to account for rapid increases in prices. Soon, the market price for supplies far exceeded that authorized by Congress. Without the suspension of the act, Wadsworth would be unable to procure provisions for the army.¹⁰⁴

Momentarily, commissions had gained in credibility when linked to expenditure reduction. Agents discovered, however, that the prices authorized by Congress wielded little influence in a market driven by high demand, scarcity, and dubious financial backing. The reversion to a system in which officials were rewarded for spending large

¹⁰² April 9, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 204.

¹⁰³ April 14, 1778, Entry in *Ibid.*, 210-212.

¹⁰⁴ Jeremiah Wadsworth to George Washington, June 4, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*. For a discussion of the rapid increases in price, see Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 48.

sums once again provided fuel for allegations of fraud and corruption. Whether these new regulations adequately addressed the commissariat's issues would be discovered over the ensuing months.

Despite these initial obstacles, supply of the army proceeded comparatively smoothly for much of 1778.¹⁰⁵ As with most years during the American Revolution, feeding the army in winter proved a far greater test than doing so in the spring and summer because it required prior planning. Even the winter of 1778-1779, however, presented fewer problems with respect to provisions when considered in light of previous experiences. Wadsworth, for example, assured Washington and his commanders that he had procured beef sufficient to supply the army for the winter's duration.¹⁰⁶

Obtaining flour proved a more intractable problem. The issue proved three-fold: a general scarcity of flour; elevated prices resulting from the actions of independent commanders to secure their own supplies; and finally, competition with newly arrived French forces willing to pay for goods with hard currency.¹⁰⁷ Although the Commissary Department improved its performance considerably over the past eight months, Wadsworth could not stave off criticism of his subordinates when flour supplies

¹⁰⁵ See Huston, *Logistics of Liberty*, 189.

¹⁰⁶ Jeremiah Wadsworth to George Washington, December 16, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

¹⁰⁷ French forces in 1778 numbered around 4,000 soldiers and twelve ships of the line. For the scarcity of flour, see George Washington to Jeremiah Wadsworth, December 2, 1778, in *Ibid.*; Jeremiah Wadsworth to George Washington, December 16, 1778, in *Ibid.*; and Jeremiah Wadsworth to George Washington, December 18, 1778, in *Ibid.* The exchange between Washington and Major General John Sullivan from November 18 through November 29, 1778, documented the consequences of a commander seeking supplies independent of coordination with the Commissary General. Sullivan, in attempting to secure his own sources of flour, drove up the price by creating a greater sense of demand than was warranted. See Washington to Major General John Sullivan, November 18, 1778 in *Ibid.* and Sullivan to Washington, November 20, 1778, in *Ibid.* For a brief discussion on the impact of the French forces on procurement, see Washington to Sullivan, November 18, 1778, in *Ibid.*

dwindled. Major General John Sullivan, for example, minced no words in condemning the commissaries' inability to procure flour. "Little faith is to be placed in the promises of the Commissaries," he wrote to Washington. "They Lead us along by promises from Day to Day till our Stores are Compleatly Exhausted & then Leave us to provide for ourselves or Starve. If their Impudence as well as Indolence did not Baffle all Description They would (to Save their own Credit) have paid Some attention to this post."¹⁰⁸ Accustomed to several years of supply failures, Sullivan seemed predisposed to assume the worst when confronted once again with shortages.

The experiment with centralized supply under the direction of the Quartermaster General and Commissary General of Purchases was short-lived. Over the course of 1779, Congress stepped back from the centralization it had achieved a year earlier while exhibiting an increasing lack of trust in the two principal departments, if not their principal officials. The process began in November, 1778, when Congress placed both the Quartermaster General's Department and the Commissariat under the supervision of a committee.¹⁰⁹ The large sums of money expended by the departments, when coupled with the payment of commissions, brought considerable scrutiny upon their activities. By May 1779, the Board of Treasury urged Congress to revisit the practice. The public, the Board argued, had expressed their dissatisfaction with a system that incentivized exorbitant expenditures by paying commissions.¹¹⁰ In early June, Congress restated its confidence in both Greene and Trumbull while calling into question the performance of their

¹⁰⁸ Major General John Sullivan to George Washington, November 29, 1778, in *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ November 10, 1778, Entry in JCC 4, 648.

¹¹⁰ May 28, 1779, in *Journals of Congress. Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1779, to January 1st, 1780*, Vol. 5 (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1782), 232. Hereafter referred to as JCC 5.

subordinates. It began with a declaration that Congress had “full confidence in the integrity and abilities of the quartermaster general and commissary general” and concluded by saying that “many of them deserve well of their country.” But sandwiched between these words of praise was the comment that “there is reason to believe that abuses have been committed by inferior officers in their respective departments.”¹¹¹ In issuing such a statement, Congress cast a pall over the entire department.

Tired of the burdensome office of Commissary General of Purchases, a position made worse by constant criticism and suspicion, Jeremiah Wadsworth attempted to resign in early June. Congress’s above statement placated him for the time being, although he would once again submit his resignation in October.¹¹² Greene, likewise frustrated by the criticism of his department and the financial woes of the republic, resigned his appointment in December. With both departments struggling, the harsh winter at Morristown effectively sealed the short-term fate of a centralized supply system in the Continental Army.

With the power of both the Quartermaster General and Commissary General of Purchases on the wane, Congress implemented a new system of specific supplies to support the army. Rather than procure supplies through relatively small departments working in close proximity, Congress placed the onus on the states to provide certain specified quantities of provisions. This diffused responsibility for supporting the war effort across all states, perhaps in part to alleviate the exhaustion experienced by New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. Congress tailored its demand for supplies from

¹¹¹ June 7, 1779, Entry in JCC 5, 244.

¹¹² Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 55.

each state according to that state's resources and hoped to benefit from the geographical expertise possessed by a state's leadership, a knowledge that commissary officials too often lacked when conducting business.

Congress first began experimenting with the system in December 1779, when it called upon six states to provide supplies in support of the army by April 1, 1780. The act directed Virginia, for example, to provide 20,000 barrels of Indian corn. Maryland needed to produce 5,000 barrels each of Indian corn and flour. Congress asked Pennsylvania and Delaware to provide 50,000 and 10,000 barrels of flour or wheat respectively. New Jersey and Connecticut would each deliver 8,000 barrels.¹¹³ When fully established in February 1780, the system of specific supplies placed substantially greater demands upon the states. Virginia alone needed to provide 47,000 hundredweight of beef, 1,278 barrels of flour, 10,700 bushels of salt, 400 tons of hay, 200,000 bushels of corn or short forage equivalent, 6,000 hogsheads of tobacco, and 100,000 gallons of rum.¹¹⁴ The commander in chief would direct each state on where such supplies should be deposited within that state. Congress also specified the prices per commodity at which each state would be credited, promising final settlement in Spanish milled dollars and hard currency.¹¹⁵

The system of specific supplies emerged as an appealing answer to the financial difficulties posited by a de-valued currency and the elevated prices of ration components. Congress, lacking the power to impose taxes and incapable of generating any income

¹¹³ December 11, 1779, and December 14, 1779, Entries in JCC 5, 448-450.

¹¹⁴ February 25, 1780, Entry in *Journals of Congress, from January 1st, 1780, to January 1st, 1781* (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1781), 65-69. Hereafter referred to as JCC 6.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

otherwise, called upon the states to support the war effort in a very de-centralized fashion. Procurement, once the activity of a handful of purchasing agents, now became the duty of all the states in the union. While there existed considerable potential in tapping into states as yet untouched by war, with the diffusion of procurement came a diffusion of responsibility. While this new system may have resonated well with a republican ideology that held central authority in suspicion, it contained grave portents for the army it was intended to support. Washington would now have to struggle with myriad state officials unbound by any federal appointment to secure needed supplies. Just over a year after the introduction of the 1778 reforms, it seemed the government and army strove to ignore the lessons of centralization and accountability learned during the first half of the conflict.

Chapter 3. Patriotism and Profit: Contracting in the Revolution, 1780-1783

On a cold December morning in 1779, Dr. James Thacher breakfasted with a friend in General Glover's brigade while in transit to the winter camp at Morristown. "The only food he could furnish was coffee, without milk or sugar, and meagre beef-steaks, without bread or even salt. Such has been for sometime the unaccountable scarcity of provisions in the main army."¹

Scarcity and deprivation indeed preceded the introduction of the system of specific supplies in the winter of 1779-1780. Plagued by heavy snowfalls and poor logistical arrangements, the Continental Army suffered even more in its camp at Morristown that year than it had two years earlier in the legendary ordeal at Valley Forge. "Our baggage," Thacher lamented, "is left in the rear, for want of wagons to transport it."² Conditions worsened by January. "For the last few days we have received but two pounds of meat a man, and we are frequently for six or eight days entirely destitute of meat, and then as long without bread."³ The arduous winter, coupled with the nation's financial difficulties, underscored the need to implement a new system of supply.

¹ James Thacher, *Military Journal of the American Revolution from the commencement to the disbanding of the American Army; Comprising a detailed account of the principal events and Battles of the Revolution, with their Exact Dates, and a Biographical Sketch of the most Prominent Generals* (Hartford, CT: Hurlbut, Williams & Company, 1862), 180.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, 185.

Unfortunately, that system faltered almost from the outset. It persisted for the remainder of the conflict (albeit in altered form), but the new "system of specific supplies" never adequately provided for the army. Initially conceived as an in-kind tax directly payable in commodities, Robert Morris, with his appointment in 1781 as Superintendent of Finance, converted it to a system that asked states for money in an attempt to bolster public credit by increasing revenues. To provide for the army, he introduced a new system of supply by contract. Businessmen placed bids for the right to supply ration components to troop contingents at pre-determined prices. Deemed far better than its predecessors, supply by contract, at least for the main army, continued for the rest of the war and would remain the principal method of supplying the army through the conclusion of the War of 1812.⁴

The new supply system represented a fundamental shift in approach from its predecessors. No longer did the army assume that merchants would rise above self interest, in good republican fashion, to pursue quality goods at low prices, though naturally officials continued to value those who embodied this sacrificial spirit. Instead, officials accepted that self interest would be the engine that drove contractors who chose to participate in the system. Put simply, profit replaced patriotism. Robert Morris and others, in essence, sought to harness the forces of private enterprise to better supply the army. As a result, profit and its associated requirements began to play a much more significant role in influencing Continental Army logistics. This represented more than

⁴ E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 213; James A. Huston, *Logistics of Liberty: American Services of Supply in the Revolutionary War and After* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), 279; and Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Quartermaster Historian's Office, 1962), 71-72.

just a shift in the method by which the government supplied the army. It reflected an ideological shift from republicanism to a liberalism that prioritized the pursuit of individual interest to ensure the common good. True, republican rhetoric remained, but increasingly it was just that as far as those responsible for supplying the army were concerned.

The Failure of the System of Specific Supplies

The system of specific supplies, already showing signs of ineffectiveness, remained the principal mode of supplying the army in 1780. The list of supplies called for by Congress from the states, already extensive in April 1780, increased over the ensuing months, placing even greater demands upon the system. Following an exchange with Washington in August 1780, for example, Congress sought to vastly increase supplies of cattle. Accordingly, on September 15, they passed a resolution directing the northern states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts Bay, and Connecticut to supply one thousand head of cattle weekly. In addition, Congress requested that three additional states provide an immediate supply of 2,056 head of cattle, including 275 from New Jersey, 1,251 from Pennsylvania and 530 from Delaware.⁵

⁵ September 15, 1780, Entry in *Journals of Congress, from January 1st, 1780, to January 1st, 1781* (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1781), 288. Hereafter referred to as JCC 6.

These demands intensified as time passed. Requisitions in November placed further orders upon the states while also specifying the payment of an additional tax.⁶

The following table illustrates the extent of the new burden.

State ⁷	Beef (in barrels)	Beef (cwt at \$5.50 per)	Beef (cwt at \$8 per cwt)	West India Rum (gallons)	Pork (barrels)	Salt (bushels)	Flour (barrels)	Money (silver dollars)
New Hampshire	2,500	6,000	2,000	20,124	0	0	0	47,623.00
Massachusetts Bay	16,000	29,250	9,750	74,576	2,000	13,000	0	273,831.67
Rhode Island & Providence	900	0	1,500	20,000	83	0	0	23,797.67
Connecticut	15,000	18,750	6,250	25,000	3,500	813	0	202,399.33
New York	2,800	1,320	441	0	2,500	0	16,000	89,295.50
New Jersey	3,000	4,000	1,333	0	4,000	996	12,000	107,152.00
Pennsylvania	3,000	1,500	500	50,000	2,000	13,028	55,000	273,832.67
Delaware	0	0	0	2,000	800	500	3,471	20,240.67
Maryland	4,800	9,000	3,000	17,007	5,500	4,000	20,000	188,111.00
Virginia	9,000	23,670	7,890	70,292	10,617	6,673	7,529	297,645.00
North Carolina	3,000	7,500	2,500	21,000	5,000	991	6,000	119,060.00
Total	60,000	100,990	35,164	299,999	36,000	40,001	120,000	1,642,988.51

Table 3.1 November 4, 1780 Requisition for Specific Supplies

The staggering quantities specified by Congress for 1781 amounted to over twenty-eight million pounds of beef, almost twenty-seven million pounds of flour, and nearly eight million pounds of pork. In addition, the army required almost 300,000 gallons of rum and 40,000 bushels of salt.⁸ But such supplies would not magically appear. Where would

⁶ See Table 3.1.

⁷ November 4, 1780, Entry in JCC 6, 355-360.

⁸ Ibid. Congress specified that each barrel of beef contain 240 pounds, with barrels of pork and flour containing 220 and 224 pounds respectively.

these goods be procured? When and where would they be consolidated into places of deposit? And in light of the difficulties encountered in previous years, how would these supplies be transported from their points of origination to the army?

The congressional resolution offered few concrete answers. In an effort to better manage the flow of supplies, and thereby reduce spoilage, Congress did stipulate to each state the date by which certain quantities were to be provided. The resolution directed North Carolina, for example, to provide 3,000 barrels of beef, 5,000 barrels of pork, 2,000 barrels of flour, and 4,000 gallons of rum on or before January 1, 1781. By March 1, the state needed to produce an additional 1,000 barrels of flour and 2,000 gallons of rum. A further 2,000 barrels of flour and 4,000 barrels of rum were due on May 1, and, finally, 1,000 barrels of flour, 11,000 gallons of rum, and 991 bushels of salt on July 15.⁹ This schedule, by spreading out the delivery of goods, sought to prevent wastage associated with the accumulation of stockpiles larger than the army could consume. The resolution further directed that the states deposit the accumulated supplies at the direction of the commander in chief. But it said nothing on the critical subject of transportation, either to the places of deposit or from those locations to the army. Given the obvious problems of transportation in previous years, this was a stunning oversight.

It did not take long for this method of supply to exhibit signs of strain. As early as March 1780, Washington identified a fundamental flaw in the system. The Continental Army was not a static organization. It maneuvered from place to place according to operational concerns, and in ways that could not be easily anticipated. It hardly helped if

⁹ Ibid.

supplies were delivered to deserted encampments. The solution called for the delivery of supplies to specified places of deposit, after which they would be transported to the army when needed. But this clumsy system did not incorporate the flexibility required in a war in which the British largely retained the initiative and determined the locations of the Continental Army far more than the Army itself.

No one understood this better than Washington. “In the case of a defensive war like ours,” Washington opined, “which depends almost wholly on the movements and operations of the Enemy, it is difficult if not impracticable, to fix on the Places of Deposit for Stores, which may not be rendered improper by subsequent events.”¹⁰ Still worse, places of deposit deemed safe based on current troop dispositions might as easily become vulnerable should the British assume the offensive in a particular direction.

Washington nonetheless did not immediately grasp this problem because so many other issues obscured it. In his early analysis of the system of specific supplies, Washington focused on the practicalities of the method rather than analyzing its underlying assumptions. He did not question, for example, whether states would provide the requested quantities of provisions in a timely manner. Nor did he anticipate transportation difficulties in moving supplies from procurement locations to places of deposit.

It did not take long, however, for Washington to recognize these additional weaknesses. The question of who should bear financial responsibility for the movement

¹⁰ George Washington, Circular to the States, Headquarters, Morristown, March 26, 1780, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 18 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 159-160.

of supplies to the places of deposit rose almost immediately. To a great extent, this reflected the same transportation difficulties encountered by the Continental Army under earlier supply systems. The fledgling country simply lacked the transportation infrastructure to support the supply of a sizeable army for an extended period of time. Farmers proved ever more reluctant to part with their own wagons out of concern that they would never get them back and that their own agricultural labor would suffer in the absence. Thus, while the Congressional requisition for specific supplies clearly stated that the States were to bear the risk of transporting provisions to the places of deposit, Washington found himself restating this position several times in 1780 and early 1781.¹¹

By the end of April 1780, after consulting with his leadership in council, the Continental Army commander identified both the quota and transportation issues in a letter to the President of Congress, Joseph Reed.¹² Washington and his lieutenants began to question whether the states would meet their assigned quotas. They also recognized that Congress had adopted the system almost out of desperation amid the government's financial difficulties and hinted that the question of transportation rendered the system vulnerable to failure. "It was owing I imagine to the pressing necessity of the case and the very unhappy state of our Public finance," Washington continued in his letter to Reed, "that this mode of obtaining supplies was adopted; and it appears evidently to me, to be the spirit and the expectation of the system, founded I suppose in the same unhappy

¹¹ See, for example, George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Udney Hay, Headquarters, New Windsor, January 31, 1781, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, Vol. 21 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 160.

¹² George Washington to President Joseph Reed, Headquarters, Morristown, April 28, 1780, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 18, 309-310.

necessity which led to the requisition for specific supplies, that each State should transport the articles they are to furnish, to the places appointed within them as deposits.”¹³ The commander seemed to place little trust in the states transporting provisions to the deposits, portraying it as a decision of last resort.

Washington offered even more candid thoughts on the system in a letter to Brigadier General John Cadwalader in early October 1780. “To suppose,” Washington opined, “that this Army will be subsisted by State supplies, and that taxation alone is adequate to our wants, is, in my Opinion absurd and as unreasonable as to expect an Inversion in the order of nature to accommodate itself to our views.”¹⁴ Indeed, he continued, “a thousand arguments, resulting from experience and the nature of things, might also be adduced to prove, that the Army, if it is to depend upon State supplies, must disband or starve.”¹⁵ Even more troubling to Washington, the nature of the system deprived his Commissary General of the authority to purchase supplies on his own. The system of specific supplies rendered the army wholly dependent upon the unreliable activity of the states without a fallback should the states fail to meet their responsibilities.¹⁶

In camp, the system of specific supplies exhibited early signs of failure. Dr. James Thacher noted "a scarcity of provisions is again complained of in camp."¹⁷ Two months

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ George Washington to Brigadier General John Cadwalader, Headquarters, Tappan, October 5, 1780, in John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 21 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 121-123.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ George Washington to Major General William Heath, Headquarters near Passaic, October 28, 1780, in Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, Vol. 20, 258.

¹⁷ Thacher, 236.

later, he felt on the brink of starvation. "For three days," he wrote, "I have not been able to procure food enough to appease my appetite."¹⁸ In place for less than one full campaign season, the system of specific supplies earned the contempt of its sole customer, the Continental Army.

Although Washington exhibited great concern about the system's ability to support more fluid operations, the method proved challenged even in supplying the more sedentary components of the Continental Army. In a diary entry on May 11, 1781, George Washington alluded to the poor state of the northern army due to lack of supplies and empowered its commander, Major General Heath, to fix it.¹⁹ Heath's efforts in the northeastern states to address the flaws of the system of specific supplies and secure reliable support initially seemed promising. In essence, the Massachusetts general interfaced directly with state officials to coordinate supply deliveries. Less than two months later, Washington received word from Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., that "a convention of Eastern Deligates gives better hope of a regular supply of provision than we have been accustomed to for more than two years as the business seem to be taken up Systematically and regular modes adopted to furnish supplies at stated periods."²⁰ Heath, too, wrote the commander in chief expressing his confidence in the eastern states' efforts. Thus, despite almost a year and a half of setbacks in the system of specific supplies, coordination between the army, in the form of Major General Heath, and the states finally arrived at a solution to the problem to which all agreed.

¹⁸ Ibid., 242.

¹⁹ May 11, 1781, Entry in George Washington's Diary in Theodore J. Crackel, ed., *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008).

²⁰ July 10, 1781, Entry in Ibid.

Nonetheless, Heath's work with the states represented more a triumph in civil-military relations than the creation of a functional supply system.

The system of specific supplies enjoyed less success in other regions of the country. During the month of August 1781, as Washington prepared to march his army southward in order to combine forces with Lafayette, Robert Morris, recently appointed Superintendent of Finance, found himself in the unfortunate role of pressuring states, including Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, and Virginia, to comply with Congress's requisitions.

Morris's appointment made perfect sense—a well-established merchant in Philadelphia before the war, he contracted with the Continental Congress's Secret Committee to procure gunpowder early in the conflict. Morris eventually built a network of agents and contracts involved in procuring tent cloth, arms, powder, and even flour to both the Continental Army and its French counterparts.²¹ Upon assuming office, the Financier embarked upon an ambitious plan to restore public credit through the establishment of a national bank and the appreciation of Pennsylvania currency.²²

Immersed in the details of mitigating the country's financial crisis, Morris only reluctantly became involved in securing supplies for ongoing operations. Indeed, he had accepted the position under the condition that he would not be involved in supplying the current campaign. Disappointment with the states' performance, however, compelled him otherwise. On August 8, 1781, for example, Morris's assistant wrote the Governor of

²¹ Charles Rappleye, *Robert Morris: Financier of the American Revolution* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 36-113.

²² *Ibid.*, 226-245.

Maryland expressing dissatisfaction with that state's ability to meet requisition deadlines.²³ Morris pressed the Governor of Maryland for supplies again on August 21 and August 26 as Washington's march to southern Maryland and Virginia intensified the need for provisions.²⁴ The system proved so faulty that Morris threatened the Governor of Delaware with impressment should the required supplies not be provided. "It is needless to say," he wrote, "that a Body of Soldiers will not Starve in the midst of a plentiful Country."²⁵ Confronted with continual delays on the part of the states, Morris finally articulated the consequences of their failure to comply with the system of specific supplies. States either provided their quotas of provisions according to a specified schedule or risked enduring seizure of the same goods due to military necessity. Yet, even as Morris threatened Delaware with impressment, he began to implement a new system for supplying the Continental Army.

The Beginnings of Supply by Contract

Although Congress officially adopted supply by contract for the main army only in May 1781, it was not completely a novel system. Commissaries and quartermasters had experimented with it on a localized level since the war's inception.²⁶ In

²³ Office of Finance to His Excellency the Governor of Maryland, August 8, 1781, Box 4, Robert Morris Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. Hereafter referred to as RMP.

²⁴ Office of Finance to His Excellency the Governor of Maryland, August 21, 1781, and Office of Finance to His Excellency the Governor of Delaware, August 26, 1781, in Ibid.

²⁵ Robert Morris to His Excellency the Governor of Delaware, September 1, 1781, in Ibid.

²⁶ Contractors routinely supplied European armies for at least a century prior to the American Revolution. See Martin Van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 33.

Massachusetts, for example, before the creation of the Continental Army, the Provincial Council had established a Committee of Supplies to contract for provisions to supply the troops around Boston. Following the creation of the Commissary General's Department and the incorporation of Massachusetts's units into the Continental Army, however, the Council agreed to terminate its contracts in favor of those arrangements made by the Commissary General.²⁷ The spring of 1776 saw a flurry of contracting as units and states sought to supply their own troops. On February 13, 1776, for example, Congress approved a \$600 payment to Samuel Fairlamb, who had contracted to supply Anthony Wayne's battalion in and around Chester at 7/90 of a dollar per ration.²⁸ A few days later, Congress recommended to the committee of safety in New York to supply its troops by contract. Over the course of the next six months, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Delaware, and New Jersey likewise negotiated contracts to provide for the troops within the respective states.²⁹

The Army moved away from localized contracts when it shifted from supply by Congressional committee to the Commissary General's Department in late December 1776.³⁰ While this heralded an era of supply centralization under the Commissary General, proponents of contracting remained. Only a few months later, Congress appointed a committee to confer with Colonel William Buchanan on the subject of

²⁷ A Committee of the Massachusetts Council to George Washington, August 11, 1775, in Theodore J. Crackel, ed., *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, Rotunda, 2008).

²⁸ February 13, 1776, Entry in *Journals of Continental Congress, Containing the Proceedings in the Year, 1776* (Philadelphia: R. Aitken, 1777), 61. Hereafter referred to as JCC 2.

²⁹ See February 17, 1776, Entry, in *Ibid.*, 71; March 16, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 94; March 25, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 109; April 30, 1776, Entry in *Ibid.*, 155; and Brigadier General Hugh Mercer to George Washington, July 9, 1776, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³⁰ December 28, 1776, Entry in JCC 2, 509.

supplying the army by contract.³¹ Although this committee never seemed to have issued a report, the notion of supply by contract continued to garner attention. Major General Arthur St. Clair, for example, advocated a contract system early in the winter at Valley Forge, arguing that a contract for supplies would have likely kept provision prices lower.³² Washington, too, expressed his preference for contracting over impressment, though he admitted so to the Commissary General of Military Stores in reference to the acquisition of leather, not provisions.³³ In one fashion or another, contracts at the local level persisted, for Congress felt it necessary in December 1780, to restrict the ability of officers to negotiate contracts unless stocks at public magazines and stores had already been exhausted.³⁴

Contracting Introduced

The official implementation of the contract system began with a congressional resolution. On May 22, 1781, Congress directed the Board of War to review and confirm the composition of a ration, estimate the needs of both the northern and southern armies, and solicit bids from contractors in order to provide the same to the army. The terms of the contract would, in theory, cover much of the remaining calendar year, running from

³¹ February 20, 1777, Entry in *Journal of Congress, Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1777, to January 1st, 1778* (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1778), 71.

³² Major General Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, January 5, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³³ George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Flower, March 11, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

³⁴ December 4, 1780, Entry in *Journals of Congress, from January 1st, 1780, to January 1st, 1781* (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1781), 387.

July 1, 1781, to January 1, 1782.³⁵ Morris welcomed this development, believing that supply by contract would both alleviate the army's earlier procurement woes and contribute as part of a larger program to the easing of the government's financial difficulties. Over the course of June and July, he began to solicit bids from willing merchants interested in supplying rations to the army. On July 10, 1781, Congress formally authorized the office of Superintendent of Finance, or his appointed agent, to negotiate contracts for all supplies needed by the Army and Navy, effectively placing Morris in charge of all army procurement activities.³⁶ As with earlier "systems," the government continued to obtain supplies via multiple methods. Morris, for example, continued to press the states to provide their quota of specific supplies, although gradually these requisitions would be converted to monetary payments in lieu of goods. Moreover, the Superintendent of Finance never supplied the entire army by contract, proving reluctant to implement the system in regions where states had failed to collect sufficient taxes. Nevertheless, supply by contract now stood as the official system of procuring rations.

Initially, Morris advertised contracts to supply troops at fixed locations spanning the middle and northern states. He solicited bids, for example, for contracts in support of troops at Philadelphia, Lancaster, Yorktown, Carlisle, Fort Pitt, West Point, Wyoming, and Fredericktown, to name a few of the more prominent posts. Morris took out advertisements in newspapers to announce this solicitation of bids. "Notice is hereby

³⁵ May 22, 1781, Entry in *Journals of Congress, and of the United States in Congress Assembled, for the Year 1781* (New York: John Patterson, 1782), 103. Hereafter referred to as JCC 6.

³⁶ July 10, 1781, Entry in JCC 6, 145.

given,” the advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Packet* read, “that Proposals will be received in this office from the date hereof untill Saturday the seventh of July next, for supplying, by contract, the Rations to be delivered by the public to the Troops, Artificers, Prisoners, &c. which are or may be in this City.”³⁷ Morris asked that the proposals be sealed and that potential contractors offer the lowest prices coupled with the longest re-payment terms to which they were willing to agree.

Six bids to supply the troops in Philadelphia arrived at the Office of Finance by July 7. Morris promptly reviewed the proposals and noted in his journal that the terms proposed by Philip Wager and Isaac Serrell, two Philadelphia merchants, appeared the most reasonable.³⁸ After directing the Board of War to draft the contract, Morris informed Wager and Serrell that their bid had been accepted. A flurry of contract negotiations unfolded over the next several weeks concerning not only the terms of the Philadelphia deal but also regarding bids for contracts in Lancaster and Reading.

Despite a comparatively smooth beginning to the system of supply by contract, challenges arose only days after Morris accepted the Wager and Serrell bid. Wager, it seems, rejected the terms of the contract drawn up by the Board of War just five days later.³⁹ In attempt to address their concerns, Morris met with the prospective contractors throughout the day and again on July 13, although to no avail.⁴⁰ While no record of Wager’s objections appeared in Morris’s papers, we can speculate that a dispute arose surrounding the components of the ration to be provided by the contractors. The

³⁷ Advertisement, *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 2 July 1781. See also Advertisement, *Freeman’s Journal* (Philadelphia), 4 July 1781; June 30, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

³⁸ July 7, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

³⁹ July 12, 1781, Diary Entry in *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*; See also July 13, 1781, Diary Entry in *Ibid.*

advertisement for bids to supply the Philadelphia troops defined a ration only in terms of its per soldier components, including one pound of bread, one pound of beef or three quarters of a pound of pork, and one gill (approximately equal to a quarter of pint) of rum.⁴¹ The solicitation made no mention of the additional components typically provided for every one hundred rations, including one quart of salt, two quarts of vinegar, eight pounds of soap, and three pounds of candles. Wager and Serrell likely constructed their bid under the presumption that they would be required to provide only those ration components listed in the advertisement. When the Board of War drafted a contract that probably included these additional supplies, both Wager and Serrell would have objected to the subsequent increased per-ration expense they were expected to absorb.

Morris's own diary supported the idea that Wager's and Serrell's initial bid did not include the salt, vinegar, soap, and candles. Following the potential contractors' initial protest, the Board of War sent a new version of the contract to the Office of Finance on July 13, 1781. Wager again rejected the terms and withdrew from the bid. Jonathan Hazlewood volunteered to partner with Serrell in Wager's place, "but they demand a higher price," Morris continued in his diary, "in consequence of the ration being altered."⁴² Later advertisements soliciting bids for contracts listed those items to be issued per one hundred rations, including the salt, vinegar, soap, and candles, confirming that the issue with the Philadelphia deal revolved around these articles.⁴³ The willingness of Hazlewood to enter into the contract with Serrell, albeit at a higher price per ration,

⁴¹ Advertisement, *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 2 July 1781.

⁴² July 13, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

⁴³ Advertisement, *Pennsylvania Packet* (Philadelphia), 26 July 1781.

hastened the conclusion of Morris's first contract negotiations. By July 16, they agreed with the Superintendent of Finance to supply the troops in Philadelphia at 9 ½ pennies per ration.⁴⁴

Although Morris had only been in office for a few weeks, the pace of contract negotiations quickly gathered speed following the deal with Hazlewood and Serrell. On the same day he finalized the Philadelphia contract, Morris negotiated an agreement with Henry Dering to supply the troops at Lancaster for 8 ¾ pennies per ration and forwarded advertisements for bids to supply troops at Fort Pitt, Reading, and York.⁴⁵ By early August, Morris completed contracts for the latter two and Carlisle. It took longer, however, to secure a contractor to provide for Fort Pitt, likely due to its remote location. Nevertheless, by September 12, the Superintendent of Finance successfully executed a contract for this outpost with Ephraim Blaine, the Commissary General of Purchases, and Michael Hoofnagle.⁴⁶ Thus ended what could be considered the first phase of implementing the contract system, executing arrangements to procure supplies for the remainder of 1781.

The second phase, including the negotiation of contracts to supply troops throughout 1782 and an expansion of the system to encompass more static posts, began in earnest in November. Within the span of only a few months, the process of supplying the army by contract became increasingly complex. Faced with the task of feeding troops at a larger number of stationary locations, Morris found himself interacting with prospective

⁴⁴ July 16, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

⁴⁵ Ibid. See also July 18, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

⁴⁶ July 28, July 30, August 1, August 2, September 7, and September 12, 1781, Diary Entries in Box 1, RMP.

contractors well outside his existing network of merchants. Inherently, at least from the Superintendent's perspective, this introduced a greater degree of risk into the system. During the first phase of implementation, all of the executed contracts supplied troops in Pennsylvania, enabling Morris, a highly successful Philadelphia merchant in his own right, to rely upon previously established relationships and networks in order to verify the dependability of various bidders. The inclusion of posts outside of Pennsylvania, coupled with the larger, more diverse array of merchants entering bids, forced the Superintendent of Finance to pay much greater attention to safeguarding against risk. This shift away from a system founded upon comfortable personal business relationships toward a more impersonal process, signified that republicanism began to fade in favor of a burgeoning liberalism.

Not surprisingly, in light of the tremendous hazards associated with procuring and transporting supplies during war, the contractors sought to minimize their exposure to loss even before the government took such measures. William Cooke, for example, while negotiating the contract terms to supply troops at Wyoming, wished to add a clause that obligated the government to cover any loss of supplies incurred while transporting them to the place of issue. This would become a standard point of contention in contract negotiations. Contractors throughout this period strove to indemnify themselves from losses incurred by enemy action, weather, and even theft. Fortunately for the government, Robert Morris set an early precedent by rejecting Cooke's demands. The Superintendent of Finance argued that the Wyoming contract included the same language as those for the other posts and would not be modified. Should, Morris added, Cooke suffer a loss that

might reasonably be attributed to the public, he would need to bring his claim to Congress with sufficient evidence in support, whereupon the contractor could expect to receive relief.⁴⁷

The government also assumed a considerable amount of risk in supplying its army by contract. The fate of battles, campaigns, and even the war itself could now depend upon individuals tied to the cause solely by means of a paper agreement. To be sure, Morris and Congress both operated under the presumption that the contractors performed their roles with at least equal measures of patriotic fervor and business acumen. Nevertheless, it stood to reason that a great deal of the country's military fortune depended on merchants answerable to Congress only by contract terms. Compounding the problem, these businessmen could cite the all too infrequent compensation for their efforts to justify their own inadequate performance. Indeed, well aware of his office's limitations when it came to paying contractors, Morris hoped that a fear of public censure would keep contractors in line where the government's failure to live up to its financial obligations would otherwise provide sufficient reason to invalidate the entire contract.⁴⁸

The Superintendent of Finance also sought to safeguard contract performance through much more tangible methods. At times, Morris pressed comparatively unknown merchants to partner with proven contractors and occasionally even required the latter to provide a bond backing their lesser-known counterpart's abilities. In the case of the 1782 Philadelphia contract, for example, Peter Summers, a merchant unknown to Morris,

⁴⁷ November 20, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

⁴⁸ Morris discussed the possibility that contractors failing to perform would fall prey to public scrutiny in a letter to Tench Francis, February 21, 1782, in Letterbook C, RMP.

offered the lowest bid. Consequently, on December 21, Morris asked Summers “for such Evidence of his Character & Abilities as will satisfy me of his Abilities to perform the Engagements in the Contract.”⁴⁹ The next day, the Financier asked Jonathan Hazlewood, the previous contractor, to join Summers in executing the deal, thereby alleviating any concerns about contract performance.⁵⁰ During the same week, Morris concluded the Reading contract with Nicholas Lutz after requiring that he sign a bond backing his performance.⁵¹ Likewise, William Turnbull, an associate of the Financier, signed a bond backing William Duer’s contract to supply the posts north of Poughkeepsie in February 1782.⁵²

Early reviews of the contract system appeared promising. Morris’s enthusiasm for the system bubbled at the surface of a letter he wrote to Major General Heath in February. “I trust that before this Letter reaches you,” he wrote, “you will have had Experience of the Benefits which result from Contracts in the more full effectual and punctual Supply of the Army. This will doubtless give you Pleasure both as a Soldier and as a Man. But when the great saving which results from it is taken into Consideration I have no Doubt that you will rejoice most sincerely as a good Citizen for the public.”⁵³ Morris clarified the financial benefits of supply by contract in a circular addressed to the state governors. The annual salary, the Financier indicated, for the Department of the Issuing Commissary north of the Potomac, a body rendered superfluous by contractors, totaled \$126,000. This figure encompassed salary only and did not include expenses.

⁴⁹ December 21, 1781, Diary Entry in Box 1, RMP.

⁵⁰ December 22 and December 24, 1781, Entries in Box 1, RMP.

⁵¹ December 24, 1781, Entry in Ibid.

⁵² Robert Morris to William Duer, February 7, 1782, in Letterbook B, RMP.

⁵³ Robert Morris to Major General Heath, February 7, 1782 in RMP, Reel 4, pg 3.

Using the current price per ration at West Point of 9 ½ ninetieths of a dollar, Morris estimated that he could purchase 1,196,526 rations, or nearly 3,300 per day, with the same money. When he included the department's expenses, he believed he could feed 5,000 soldiers a day under contract.⁵⁴ As this clear statement of the contract system's advantages suggests, Morris accomplished two of his primary goals as Superintendent of Finance: first, he reduced the Commissary Department's expenditures, and second, he created conditions in which the Continental Army might hope to be more reliably supplied.

Morris's confidence in the contract system continued well into the spring of 1782. The Financier sang the praises of the contractors to Washington himself on March 22. During a meeting with the Continental Army commander, Morris "mentioned how usefull they [the contractors] are, how much money is saved by that mode of supply and therefore how necessary to facilitate and assist their Operations by all means that consist with the Interest of the United States."⁵⁵ Just over a week later, Morris continued his praise of contracting in a letter to Oliver Phelps. "I will therefore content myself with observing," Morris exclaimed, "that in all Countries engaged in War, Experience has sooner or later pointed out Contracts with private Men of Substance and Talents equal to the Undertaking as the cheapest, most certain and consequently the best mode of obtaining those Articles which are necessary for the Subsistence, Covering, Cloathing

⁵⁴ Robert Morris, "Circular to the Governors of the States," February 15, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, pg 26-28.

⁵⁵ March 22, 1782, Diary Entry in RMP, Reel 1.

and moving of an Army.”⁵⁶ Morris bolstered his claim by citing the large savings enjoyed by the United States as a result of the contract system’s implementation.

Based on the Superintendent’s reports alone, there seems to be little reason to question why the Army would continue to be supplied by contract for the next three decades. Closer examination, however, reveals that the contract system likely benefitted from the unique set of circumstances created near the Revolution’s end. The British surrender at Yorktown in the fall of 1781 and the subsequent reduction in active operations masked problems in the contract system that additional years of vigorous war might have exposed more fully. Indeed, several problems with the system of supply by contract became evident even in the absence of more complex, rigorous operations.

First, contracting seemed most effective when employed to service static locations, such as those bodies of troops stationed more or less permanently at places like Philadelphia, Reading, York, Lancaster, and Fort Pitt. It proved much less reliable when used to supply an army on the move. Second, even in the case of location-bound contracts, the system at times struggled to provide adequately for the soldiers. Finally, and perhaps most intriguing, the contract system’s struggles seemed to illustrate the collision between republican philosophy and an emerging liberal enthusiasm for enterprise that continued to unfold over the next half century. Morris and others, under the presumption that the republican ideals of patriotism and virtue remained the primary motivation of the contractors, too often failed to scrutinize questionable conduct or implement the measures necessary to ensure contract performance. Consequently, not

⁵⁶ Robert Morris to Oliver Phelps, March 30, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, pg 134.

only did the Army suffer due to lack of supplies, but the effort to correct these contractor deficiencies frequently cost much more than initial estimates.

To the first issue, that of supplying static locations rather than moving armies, Morris's activity in 1781 is telling. The Superintendent of Finance negotiated no less than thirteen contracts over the second half of the year, all of which supplied troops at stationary locations. These contracts included Philadelphia, Lancaster, Reading, York, and Fort Pitt. In the second phase, encompassing contracts for 1782, Morris added the posts of West Point, Wyoming, Frederick, Carlisle, Winchester, Morristown, New Jersey, and those fortifications north of Poughkeepsie. By contrast, no contract existed to supply the troops participating in what would turn out to be the last major campaign of the war, Yorktown. Morris, in fact, supplied that campaign in much the same ad hoc fashion as operations earlier in the war had been resourced. Through a combination of reliance upon personal credit and business relationships, the Commissary Department, the system of specific supplies, and direct purchase, the Superintendent of Finance cobbled together provisions adequate for the troops in and approaching Virginia.⁵⁷ Morris would not attempt to negotiate a contract for the moving army until the Spring of 1782.

To supply a moving body of troops, from the perspective of the contractor, proved a much more complex undertaking than sustaining a stationary post. The ability of a contractor to profit from a provisions contract hinged upon calculations. He agreed to provide rations for a certain number of troops for a specified period of time at a

⁵⁷ For Morris's initial arrangements in support of the Yorktown campaign, including an account of his use of personal credit and the activities of Ephraim Blaine, Commissary General of Purchases, see Robert Morris to George Washington, August 28, 1781, in RMP, Reel 3, pg 40-43. For a general overview of Morris's efforts in support of the campaign, see Victor L. Johnson, "Robert Morris and the Provisioning of the American Army during the Campaign of 1781," *Pennsylvania History* 5, no. 1 (January 1938): 15-20.

predetermined price. That price encompassed much more than the mere cost of procuring individual components. Additional expenses might include the manufacture of containers in which to ship foodstuffs and the construction of storage facilities in which to maintain stocks prior to issue. Transportation often represented the largest expense, entailing the hiring of wagon-drivers, carriages, and animals, and the purchase of their subsistence and forage. All of this could be managed fairly easily when supplies were to be directed to fixed locations. When the army became mobile, however, the calculations quickly turned against the contractor. Transportation distances became longer, thereby increasing all the associated expenses while also rendering the provisions more vulnerable to loss or spoilage. The mobile army was also typically a much larger force, requiring greater resources across a geographically diverse country.

The bidding process for the first moving army contract alone belied the increased complexity of such an endeavor. Morris received five bids to supply the moving army. The first, tendered by Daniel Parker of Watertown, Massachusetts, proved too expensive at 8 ½ pennies per ration lawful money. William Duer, hailing from Albany, New York, offered a price of 8 5/8 Pennsylvania currency, but required an advance and could not find anyone to guarantee the contract performance on his behalf. Morris ruled out the third bid, entered by William Livingston, because he too required an advance in order to execute the contract. Ephraim Blaine, still the Commissary General of Purchases, made the next most desirable proposal at 10 pennies per ration acting on behalf of a friend. Blaine, however, would not disclose the identity of the individual. Morris ultimately decided in favor of a fifth proposal submitted by a number of contractors working in

concert, including Comfort Sands and Co., Trench Francis, Oliver Phelps, Timothy Edwards, and Thomas Lowry. To this band of contractors, Morris recommended the addition of William Livingston and, by extension, William Duer.

The resulting contract suffered at the hands of so many participants.⁵⁸ Predictably, Morris found himself working as hard to find agreement among the multitude of contractors as he did to finalize the contract terms. Over the course of a four-day period, the Superintendent of Finance met with various of the contractors no less than six times to discuss necessary changes and alterations. At one point, on April 5, Morris and Benjamin Lincoln, the Secretary at War, together with Thomas Lowry and William Livingston thought they had arrived at a final contract and directed that it be copied in preparation for execution. Other contractors, however, appeared at Morris's office with still more alterations the next morning. Tempers flared but the Financier and his contractors gradually worked their way closer to a finalized, albeit imperfect, agreement.⁵⁹ The longer it took to arrive at a consensus on the contract, the more impatient the potential contractors became. "The Gentlemen concerned were so long in agreeing on several points regarding each other," Morris wrote to Washington, "that at last they grew too impatient to allow the Secretary at War time sufficient to have the Contract drawn with that Precision and clearness which he intended it."⁶⁰ The difficult and sometimes warmly-contested contract negotiation suggested a dark future for contractors who would now need to work together to supply the army.

⁵⁸ Robert Morris to the President of Congress, April 3, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, p. 141-142.

⁵⁹ April 3, April 4, April 5, and April 6, 1782, Diary Entries in RMP, Reel 1, p. 28-33.

⁶⁰ Robert Morris to George Washington, April 5, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, pg 144.

Little more than a month passed before the Army began to experience difficulties with the contract. Washington, in a letter to the Superintendent of Finance written on May 17, 1782, indicated that he had begun to hear complaints about the performance of Comfort Sands and his partners. “The contractors seem to think themselves under no legal obligation or controul to fulfil their contract,” he wrote to Morris, “and are determined to encounter no expence which they can possibly avoid.”⁶¹ The Army lodged a number of complaints, charging the contractors with providing poor quality bread and beef, removing the kidneys and kidney fat from the beef provided, issuing officers only one gill of rum rather than one per authorized ration, and insisting upon only issuing whole rations rather than by component as available. Additional grievances included the contractors’ failure to provide any vinegar, shortages in hospital stores, and the excessive distance between the places of issue and the army’s location.⁶²

The Army’s complaints drove Washington to issue a scathing rebuke to the contractors in late May.

Why, Sir, are the Troops without Provisions? Why are the Deposits which have so often, and so long ago been required by General Heath, and pressed by myself, been neglected? Why do you so pertinaciously adhere to all those parts of the Contracts as are promotive of your own Interest and convenience (several of which from the plain import, and natural meaning of the Words, and were these out of the question; from usage and custom in like cases) you cannot be justified by, and at the same time disregard the most essential claims of the public; thereby hazarding the dissolution of the Army, and risking the loss of the most important Post in

⁶¹ George Washington to Robert Morris, May 17, 1782, in Series 3A Varick Transcripts, Reel 16, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶² Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., Notes on the Army Contract, July 9, 1782, in Series 4 General Correspondence, Reel 86, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., and Benjamin Walker, Notes on the Army Contract, July 9, 1782, in Series 4 General Correspondence, Reel 86, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

America? Is it because it is a little more expensive to keep a stock of Cattle on hand at Pasture than to Slaughter them one by one as they arrive? Is it because it served your Interest and convenience better to delay making the deposits of Salt Provision &c. at West Point to a more convenient Season, that that important Post has stood and now stands in jeopardy? And is it to these causes I am to attribute the want of Vinegar (so essential to the Health of the Army) and other breaches of your Contract?⁶³

Nevertheless, despite Washington's strong condemnation of their behavior, failings continued well into the summer. The contractors ran short of beef in mid-June and late-July and of both beef and bread in early August.⁶⁴ In September they again failed to procure sufficient supplies of flour and had all but stopped issuing rum.⁶⁵ Washington grew so frustrated with the poor performance of the contractors that he scoured the contract itself looking for possible methods of recourse. Finding nothing other than a provision regarding the establishment of an inspector of contracts, the commander urged Robert Morris to appoint a suitable individual as quickly as possible. A sign of his growing exasperation with Comfort Sands, Washington closed his communication to Morris with yet another severe criticism of the contractors. "Mr. Sands's disposition is such," he wrote, "that I have not the least hope of relief from him. So long as he can impose upon the Army and thereby serve his own Interest with impunity I am persuaded

⁶³ George Washington to Comfort Sands & Company, May 25, 1782, in Series 3B Varick Transcripts, Reel 22, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁴ June 14, 1782, Diary Entry in RMP, Reel 1, p. 97; Sands, Livingston & Company to William Heath, July 28, 1782, in Series 4 General Correspondence, Reel 86, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; August 2, 1782, Diary Entry in RMP, Reel 1, p. 152.

⁶⁵ George Washington to Robert Morris, September 4, 1782, in Series 3A Varick Transcripts, Reel 16, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

he will continue to do it.”⁶⁶ Although Washington seemed reluctant to condemn the contract system itself, his disapproval came crashing down on the first major contractor.⁶⁷

To be fair, however, the contractors put together at least some semblance of a legitimate grievance in their own right. As early as June 17, Comfort Sands and Walter Livingston wrote to Robert Morris complaining about a late payment, the difficulty in converting notes into specie in order to pay the beef contractor, and the supply shortages that would likely result. Perhaps going a step too far, they anticipated that Morris would face difficulties in making consistent payments to the contractors and suggested that this uncertainty could be blamed for any failures on their part.⁶⁸ The Superintendent wasted no time in providing a response, answering that he expected Comfort Sands & Company to fulfill their obligations and reminding them that he had already paid considerable advances. Moreover, having anticipated a difficulty in obtaining funds in May and June, Morris reminded Comfort Sands that he had asked not to be pressed for money during this period.⁶⁹

Morris’s definitive response appeared to quiet contractor complaints for most of the summer, although it had become clear that the contractors had already developed an interest in shifting blame for any potential failures away from their own organization. The

⁶⁶ George Washington to Robert Morris, August 5, 1782, in Series 3A Varick Transcripts, Reel 16, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁷ At least as late as May, 1782, Washington appeared willing to give the contract system a fair shake, even in the face of early complaints and growing suspicions about Comfort Sands. See George Washington to Robert Morris, May 17, 1782, in Series 3A Varick Transcripts, Reel 16, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁸ Comfort Sands & Co. and Walter Livingston to Robert Morris, June 17, 1782 in Series 4 General Correspondence, Reel 85, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁹ Robert Morris to Comfort Sands & Co. and Walter Livingston, June 22, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, p. 441; and Robert Morris to Comfort Sands & Co. and Walter Livingston, June 22, 1782, in RMP, Reel 5, p. 442-443.

months of July and August, however, bore out their concerns about Morris's ability to make timely and sufficient payments. On July 1, for example, the Superintendent of Finance should have paid the contractors \$15,861. Instead, three payments of \$1,000, \$5,000, and \$700 trickled in respectively on July 4, July 18, and July 27, leaving a balance of \$8,161 still to be paid. In August, Morris owed \$47,000, of which he paid \$15,000 by August 9. Thus, by mid-August, the Superintendent of Finance owed over forty thousand dollars to the contractors.⁷⁰

The problem for the contractors became one of balancing payments from the government against obligations to subcontractors providing various components of the ration. The beef contractor, for example, proved the largest stumbling block by demanding regular payments in specie at terms much shorter than those dictating government payments to the contractor. Further compounding the problem, the contractors insisted, the government failure to make payments in July and August coincided precisely with that time in which it would have been most economical to stockpile supplies of flour for the coming months. Consequently, when Comfort Sands & Company wrote Morris on September 11, they had only a ten day supply of flour on hand and enjoyed little prospect of bringing in more due to a host of reasons ranging from low water levels to the arrival of the French Army. Clearly, the poor state of the government's finances placed the contractors in a difficult position.

⁷⁰ Sands, Livingston, and Company to Robert Morris, September 11, 1782, in Series 4 General Correspondence, Reel 87, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The contractor version of events becomes more difficult to digest, however, when it is considered that Morris paid Comfort Sands a \$50,000 advance. To be fair, the advance would not be redeemable until January and February, 1783, but its purpose was to provide the contractors with sufficient financial backing in order to fulfill the terms of the contract.⁷¹ Had their finances been managed properly, the contractors should not have felt the impact of the government's delayed payments in July and August until well after they had stockpiled sufficient supplies for the Army. The advance should have provided them the flexibility to procure the necessary supplies. Where the contractors truly came up short, however, was their faith in the government's willingness and ability to fulfill its financial obligations. The entire premise of each of Morris's advertised contracts throughout both 1781 and 1782 was based on the execution of the contract on long-term credit. Given the advance paid to Comfort Sands, a perfect illustration of this type of credit, the contractors should have been capable, on entering the deal, of absorbing short-term financial risks. Their unwillingness to do so, arguably even before they should have felt a pinch from the government's delayed payments, marked a fatal weakness in the system of supply by contract. Contractors entered into a high risk, high reward, business focused primarily on profit at the expense of the ideological commitment needed to ensure the Army would be well-supplied.

Where did Washington, Morris, and Congress go wrong? The basic answer is that they fundamentally misunderstood the motivations of the contractors supplying the Army. Obvious to us now, the shift from republicanism to liberalism understandably

⁷¹ Ibid.

eluded them. Clinging to their concept of republicanism, perhaps further masked by their focus on waging war, these leaders failed to appreciate wholly the perspective of the suppliers. Washington and Morris frequently allowed their desire for men of character, virtue, and republican ideals, when evaluating contract bids, to cloud their later judgment when managing the subsequent contract. “The Contractors should be men of Integrity and Fidelity,” Morris wrote to General Heath in February 1782, “or the Public might be defrauded or betrayed. It gave me therefore very sincere Pleasure to find the Terms offered by Mr. Comfort Sands were the lowest Because altho he was not personally known to me his Character as an honest Man and a good Whig stood on high.”⁷² By securing men of this supposed fiber, Morris and Washington operated under the presumption that the contractors would demonstrate the same fidelity to cause that they themselves exhibited. When men like Comfort Sands failed to do so, it profoundly disappointed both Washington and Morris.

Contractors, despite the great issues at stake in the war, focused more on profit than on performance. The need to place the Continental Army in the best logistical position possible drove their calculations far less than did the price per ration. William Duer and Daniel Parker, for example, conducted a detailed analysis of potential profits as they entered into their 1783 contract. They examined each of the ration components, identifying the corresponding government price for each item and determining how to procure the same items at lower prices. The government fixed the price of beef per ration, for example, at 4 ¼ ninetieths and flour at 5 ¼. Meanwhile, Duer and Parker estimated

⁷² Robert Morris to Major General Heath, February 7, 1782, in RMP, Reel 4, pg 433-434.

that they could obtain the same for $3 \frac{3}{5}$ ninetieths and 3 respectively. This alone created a profit of $2 \frac{9}{10}$ ninetieths per ration. When the contractors took into account prices they had already negotiated and the efficiency of purchasing and transporting larger quantities, they arrived at a profit of \$3.33 per ration through June, and of \$4.10 afterwards, culminating in a final estimate of total profit at \$104,234.79.⁷³ Nowhere in their calculation of profit did a discussion of the potential campaign plan or the needs of the Army appear. Indeed, the calculations were drawn with such precision that any significant change in circumstances brought on by the vagaries of war might significantly eat into the hoped for profits, rendering the contractors all the less receptive to military priorities.

Morris's and Washington's emphasis on republicanism led to three fundamental mistakes when it came to dealing with the contractors. First, Morris delayed appointing an inspector to evaluate contract performance and arbitrate disputes, prioritizing finding the right man for the job at the expense of having contract oversight. Second, greater emphasis should have been placed on making payments in order to deny the contractors any claim to grievances. By failing to make the payments in July and August, Morris offered Comfort Sands & Company an easy justification to bow out of their obligations. Finally, under the pretense of pooling risk, unified purpose, and securing the deal, both Washington and Morris urged the contractors to work together. Logistically, this made sense. A variety of merchants coming together to perform the contract increased the odds that the terms of the deal would be met while reducing the proportion of risk shared by

⁷³ Statement of the Value of the Contingent Parts of Rations and Profits Thereon per Ration, Estimated 1782, Container 19, John Holker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

each individual. In practice, however, the contract continued to be parceled out by ration component, thereby reducing the value of pooled risk from the government's perspective. When the beef subcontractor failed to provide adequate beef, for example, other contractors did not step forward to fill the gap. Instead, the Army simply went without that portion of the ration. Most significantly, the contractors banded together in opposition to the government when the contract's performance encountered financial troubles.

These lessons would not go unlearned. As Morris began to enact the contracts for what would turn out to be the final year of the war, Washington wrote the Superintendent of Finance with some very specific recommendations. Previous contracts, he noted, allowed the Army to reject spoiled or otherwise unwholesome rations in favor of making an immediate purchase on the local economy. While sound in theory, in reality the Army could rarely, if ever, make such large purchases locally on such short notice. Consequently, rather than let their men go without food, they accepted the rations as good and issued them to their men. Washington proposed that in future contracts, the inspector render a determination about the quality of the rations and, if necessary, issue them to the men under a lower price, providing a due bill to the contractor for the difference. Other recommendations included the addition of salt meat and hard bread to the contract for the moving army.

Thoroughly disabused of the notion that republican ideology might grease the wheels of supply by contract, Washington no doubt communicated more recommendations to Morris during the struggle with Comfort Sands & Company. The

closing line, however, in his letter to Morris of October 31, 1782, seemed to be telling when it came to evaluating the merits of supply by contract and the republicanism of contractors. “Were we always certain of having men of honour and of liberal principles in the contracts,” Washington opined, “there would not be so much need of the foregoing and many other Guards; But we have experienced so many inconveniences from a Man of contrary conduct that too much care cannot be taken in future.”⁷⁴ The results of supply by contract during the American Revolution thus proved ambiguous. Though the system enjoyed initial success while supplying static locations, the demands of supporting the moving army, coupled with severe government economic difficulties, placed too great a strain on the contractors. In the face of significant financial losses, suppliers advanced personal business interests rather than adhere to republican ideals, leaving the army in the lurch.

⁷⁴ George Washington to Robert Morris, October 31, 1782, in Series 3A Varick Transcripts, Reel 16, George Washington Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Chapter 4. Fatal Mismanagements and Neglects: Supply in the Campaigns for the Old Northwest, 1784-1811

The Franco-American triumph at Yorktown in October 1781 ended major operations. The British government substantially abandoned its effort to subdue its wayward colonies. But the American War for Independence did not formally end until September 1783. In the meantime the Continental Army remained in the field—mostly watching New York, the last British bastion. And it continued to need food and forage, thus perpetuating the system of supply by contract at levels not much different than during active hostilities.

With victory attained, the Continental Army simply went out of existence, replaced by a somewhat bizarre hybrid force including a miniscule regular contingent augmented by militia and long-term volunteers. More importantly, from a logistical standpoint, the force was so small that the supply by contract system easily fulfilled its needs. Tensions simmered in the Northwest Territory—the future states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and a sliver of Minnesota—as frontier garrisons came into contact with Native American tribes. Shortly after the adoption of the Constitution in

1788, major hostilities began. Initial combat operations took place mainly in the Ohio territory.

The territorial governor of Ohio was Arthur St. Clair, the same St. Clair of Revolutionary War note. In the autumn of 1791, St. Clair led an army of roughly 2,000 men—a mixed force of Regulars, conscripts, and Kentucky militia—northward along the approximate present-day border between Ohio and Indiana. On November 3, this force suffered the worst defeat in American military history, with a casualty rate of over 90 percent.

The defeat, occasionally called the Battle of the Wabash, is generally and accurately referred to as St. Clair's Disaster. The causes of failure were plentiful. The regular troops under St. Clair's command, for example, accounted for only a small force and, tied to a growing number of frontier garrisons, demonstrated no exceptional abilities at fighting their Indian opponents. The commander compounded this problem by detaching nearly half of his most reliable regulars to track deserters and protect supply trains only days before the pivotal engagement. The militia proved raw and ill-equipped, yet they comprised the bulk of the army.

The contract system of supply, providing the logistical basis of St. Clair's army—and indeed the garrisons scattered around Ohio before and after the disaster, also failed. It could not even to support the static posts situated along the Ohio River and its environs, let alone the much larger organization intended to assume the offensive. Delays induced by recruiting, the stockpiling of provisions, and training, forced St. Clair to launch the campaign so late that he risked losing men whose terms of enlistment had expired. Early

frost destroyed the forage needed by the expedition's packhorses and baggage trains. Finally, the force occupied its final camp in darkness, after a long day's march, straddling a creek, and ignored overnight reconnaissance which suggested that a large number of Indians were located nearby. Indeed, not much had gone right for Arthur St. Clair.

The roots of the disaster are nowadays assumed to be the result of military incompetence. Congress, however, did not see it that way. To read the Congressional report on Arthur St. Clair's disastrous expedition is to see a very different interpretation of the principal causes of failure. Congress, intimately familiar with St. Clair—a veteran leader of the American Revolution, past president of Congress, and current governor in the Northwest Territory—exonerated their former colleague. The blame lay instead, the committee claimed, with the contractors and quartermasters responsible for supplying the army. The bulk of the report communicated to Congress on May 8, 1792, focused on “the delays consequent upon the gross and various mismanagements and neglects in the Quartermaster's and contractors' departments.”¹ Although certainly too lenient on the campaign commander, Congress's findings regarding army supply were not without merit. Corruption and mismanagement in a contracting system first implemented in 1781 plagued army leaders throughout the early republic. Nevertheless, despite the shortcomings of supply by contract, most importantly the robust potential for corruption amid minimal oversight, it remained the principal source of procurement for national defense through the War of 1812.

¹ Causes of the Failure of the Expedition Against the Indians, in 1791, Under the Command of Major General St. Clair, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1: 39.

The committee's report raised two important questions. First, after such a strong condemnation of the procurement and supply system as it existed in 1791, did the government implement changes to better support the subsequent, far more successful army, led by General Anthony Wayne and dubbed the Legion of the United States, that defeated the Indians at the battle of Fallen Timbers in 1794? Second, though the committee's report focused predominantly on the flawed supply system, it did not absolve the role played by Congress in the military disaster. A year before St. Clair's expedition, Brigadier General Josiah Harmar, another veteran of the Revolutionary War, led an ill-fated raid on the Miami villages near the junction of three rivers—St. Mary's, St. Joseph, and Maumee—in present-day Indiana. Frustrated by unreliable militia and outmaneuvered by an Indian force better prepared for wilderness warfare, Harmar retreated in the face of adept resistance and growing casualties among his small regular contingent. The prolonged delay between Josiah Harmar's earlier defeat in mid-October, 1790, and the passage of an act providing for frontier defense in early March, 1791, squandered valuable time needed to properly recruit, train, and equip an expeditionary force. Given the slow, deliberative process that typically confronted any considerations of military import in a republican Congress, what measures, if any, did the legislative body take to avoid such a delay in the future? How did a fledgling republican government, burdened with extensive debt from its War of Independence, muster the resources required to expand and enhance the military procurement system?

Erna Risch has characterized this period as “the Era of Civilian Ascendancy,” asserting that civilians assumed control over military procurement and supply following

the Revolution and retained such authority until the outbreak of the War of 1812.² Risch's claim holds true for much of the period in question. It is my argument that the evolution of procurement through the successive tenures of Josiah Harmar, Arthur St. Clair, and Anthony Wayne, reflected both a change in mentality and a substantial change in procedure. Civilian contractors continued to supply the army throughout the conflict for the Old Northwest, guided in their conduct by agreements negotiated with the Treasury and instructions issued by both the Treasury and War Departments. Each commander, however, enjoyed a progressively greater amount of authority over the procurement and supply system. Under Harmar, this proved only a temporary relationship, limited to the span of his 1790 expedition. St. Clair benefitted from a more permanent subordination of contractor and quartermaster to his authority in theory, though he appeared incapable of making this arrangement reality. Anthony Wayne exerted a much greater influence over the logistical preparations for his campaign than either of his predecessors.

The tension between army officer and contractor, between a republican outlook and a liberal one, remained during the wars for the Old Northwest. Nevertheless, the frontier experience somehow modified this dynamic—republican rhetoric and patriotism still held sway but seemed less charismatic when considered against the stark realities of life in the Ohio River Valley. Virtue took second place to outright survival. Likewise, contractor profits, and often their very lives, were inextricably linked to the fate of the army. If these factors seemed to bring the officer and contractor close together, they also

² Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army: A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, 1989), 76.

justified the subordination of contractor efforts to military command. While the contractors continued to protest requests for support to mobile expeditions, the clear articulation of a hierarchy in which contractors answered to the military stifled liberal appeals.

To be fair, the three commanders operated under markedly different circumstances. Wayne, following two years of defeat and calamity, operated with considerably greater latitude in terms of resources and time in which to conduct his expedition than did Harmar or St. Clair. Moreover, the damning report produced by the congressional committee charged with the inquiry into St. Clair's conduct led to the replacement of certain key personnel with much more capable alternatives, including both the Quartermaster General and the primary contractor.

Despite these changes, the contracting system remained flawed. Wayne himself cut short an expedition in 1793 when provisions promised by the contractor failed to materialize at Fort Jefferson.³ His enthusiastic involvement, however, in even the smallest details of logistical preparation created the conditions for a successful campaign. Here, the military, if only temporarily, reasserted control over logistical concerns, bringing the contest for the Old Northwest to an acceptable conclusion.

Although far from a perfect system, supply by contract consumed large portions of overall military expenditures and therefore heavily influenced contemporary financial discussions. The ability of Congress to raise funds with which to provide for the frontier

³ Letter from Wayne to Knox, October 23, 1793, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Anthony Wayne: A Name in Arms, Soldier, Diplomat, Defender of Expansion Westward of a Nation, The Wayne-Knox-Pickering-McHenry Correspondence* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1960), 278-281.

army, for example, occupied a central place in the formative economic debates of the late 1780s and early 1790s. Military procurement shaped the discussions over issues ranging from the federal power to tax, to the creation of a national bank, and the encouragement of manufactures. The financial practices introduced as a result of these debates would have implications for the nation far exceeding their connection to unreliable contractors.

Supply Under Harmar—The Lean Years, 1784-1790

The army under Lieutenant Colonel, then Brigadier General, Josiah Harmar endured difficult years following the American Revolution. Reduced to a force of only seventy soldiers manning garrisons at West Point and Fort Pitt, the republican atmosphere which spurred independence threatened to eliminate the organization altogether in favor of relying upon militia.⁴ Recognizing the importance of securing the western posts relinquished by the British, the need to protect frontier settlements, and the necessity of guarding considerable quantities of stores left over from the war, Congress created a new organization to consist of seven hundred soldiers enlisted for twelve months. Four states, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, provided the soldiers comprising this new regiment, which was subsequently organized into eight companies of infantry and two of artillery. Pennsylvania provided the single largest

⁴ June 2, 1784, Entry in *Journal of the United States in Congress Assembled*, Volume IX, November 3, 1783 - June 3, 1784 (Philadelphia: Dunlap, 1784), 294-295. Hereafter referred to as *Journal of Congress*.

number of troops and therefore earned the honor of having the overall commander, Harmar, appointed from its ranks.⁵

Congress never intended that this force possess an offensive capability. The purpose of this regiment was threefold: 1) assume control of the western posts as the British relinquished them in accordance with the treaty concluding the War of Independence; 2) protect frontier settlements from Native American attack; and 3) guard military stores left over from the recent conflict. Although by 1787 the purpose of this small standing force had evolved, it remained defensive in nature. Congress charged Harmar's regiment in 1787 with only two objectives: protect frontier settlements and facilitate the survey and sale of Northwest Territory lands to reduce the public debt.⁶

The contracts for the supply of this force, negotiated by civilians well in tune both with the legislature's intent and the need for economy, reinforced this defensive mentality. Rather than fix a price for rations to be provided to the army wherever it may be located, the Treasury agreed to contracts that stipulated set prices for specific posts. This rigid a system—one from which contractors obstinately refused to deviate, always concerned as they were with the bottom line—allowed for minimal flexibility in the event of an unanticipated expedition or even the uncertainty introduced by uncooperative weather patterns and the relative remoteness of some of the frontier posts. Harmar struggled throughout his command to secure adequate support even for the stationary posts enumerated in the contracts, haggling most frequently over the costs and

⁵ Ibid., 302-304.

⁶ October 3, 1787, Entry in *Journal of the United States in Congress Assembled: Containing the Proceedings from November, 1786, to November, 1787*. Volume XII (New York), 172.

availability of transportation. Limited in their freedom to direct the activities of the contractors, Harmar, and his successor St. Clair, often found themselves in debates with these suppliers. Far removed from decision-makers in Philadelphia, they waited weeks for an answer as to the interpretation of a particular clause in the contract. Such a system, controlled by civilians, ensconced in a defensive mentality, and dictating only the supply of provisions to static outposts, afforded any offensive expedition scant chance for success.⁷

The system of civilian control created considerable confusion from 1784 to 1790, the tenure of Harmar's command. Congress authored its most clear-cut delineation of military procurement responsibilities on January 27, 1785. They directed the Secretary of War to, among other tasks, “form estimates of all such stores, equipments, and supplies as may be requisite for the military service, and for keeping up competent magazines, and to report the same to the commissioners of the treasury of the United States, that measures may be taken in due time for procuring the same.”⁸ Returns of supplies and ordnance on hand and estimates of those items needed would be prepared by the army, submitted to and verified by Henry Knox as Secretary of War, whereupon the requirements of the military would be communicated to the Treasury. The Treasury

⁷ Many of these contracts, in fact, indicated the prices for rations delivered to places between the outposts. Practice, however, became precedent. Contractors routinely delivered supplies to garrisons and the absence of large-scale expeditions until 1790 meant that most parties not in garrison carried their supplies with them from the posts. Thus, rarely would the contractors have been called upon to deliver supplies anywhere but a garrison. This would hinder the army through even Wayne's campaign in 1794. See Contract Between Turnbull, Marmie, & Company and Daniel Britt and the Commissioners of the Board of Treasury, January 6, 1786, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan (hereafter referred to as the Harmar Papers) and Contract between James O'Hara and the Commissioners of the Board of Treasury, May 23, 1787, Harmar Papers.

⁸ January 27, 1785, Entry in *The Journal of the United States in Congress Assembled: Containing the Proceedings From the First Monday in November, 1784*, Vol. X (John Dunlap, 1785), 37-38.

would then negotiate bids with civilian contractors with little input from either the War Department or the army.⁹ Predictably, the system entailed a fair amount of delay, and often at moments when the army most needed efficiency and quickness. When Harmar identified an urgent need for wagons in 1786, for example, Robert Pemberton, an inspector in the War Office, penned a letter to Henry Knox updating him on the status of the request. “Mr. Hodgdon wrote to you the 6th inst acquainting you with the pressing demands on him for the hire of the waggons. I applied by letter to the board of treasury on your estimate for 1000 dollars on the receipt of his letter, which the board have not been pleased to ans.”¹⁰

Knox’s frustration with his own inability to shape the procurement process, and the resulting lamentable impact upon operations, emanated from a letter he wrote Major John Doughty in 1787.

You will probably be in this City a sufficient time previous to your departure in order to consult on the Stores essentially necessary for the western country, when I will decide on the number of pieces of Artillery and stores which shall be forwarded. I mean for which I shall make estimates to the Board of Treasury—they hold the purse string.¹¹

No official or set of officials possessed overall responsibility for procurement, resulting in the bureaucratic equivalent, at times, of a cat chasing its tail. Nor did the army itself retain a position dedicated to logistics. Doughty, a career artillery officer and Revolutionary War veteran, frequently acted in this capacity while in command at

⁹ October 11, 1786, Entry in *Ibid.*, 244-245.

¹⁰ Robert Pemberton to Henry Knox, War Office, August 17, 1786, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XIX.

¹¹ Henry Knox to Major Doughty, New York, March 27, 1787, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XIX.

various posts, involving himself in everything from supervising contracts to securing specie for pay and constructing wilderness forts.¹²

Despite the administrative challenges inherent in such a system, the initial concept to support the army in 1784 and 1785 seemed relatively simple on paper. The original contract, for example, made in 1785 between James O'Hara and the Board of Treasury supplied rations to the only three occupied posts, Fort Pitt, Fort McIntosh, and Fort Harmar, at 13 ½ ninetieths of a dollar per ration.¹³ O'Hara, an Irish immigrant, served during the Revolutionary War under George Rogers Clark and would later be appointed Quartermaster General under Anthony Wayne.¹⁴ The ration itself consisted of one pound of beef or ¾ of a pound of pork, one pound of bread or flour, and one gill of rum. Additionally, one quart of salt, two quarts of vinegar, two pounds of soap, and one pound of candles would accompany every one hundred rations.¹⁵ To some extent, this represented a reduction of the ration as articulated by Congress during the Revolution, which included three pints of peas or beans a week, one pint of milk per day, and ½ pint of rice or one pint of Indian meal per week.¹⁶ This may reflect the emphasis on economy under the Articles of Confederation, the remoteness of the frontier posts from sources of supply, or the reality that often the latter components were left out of even the

¹² Harmar to the Secretary of War, January 14, 1790, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair*, Volume II (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 129-130; John Doughty to Henry Knox, March 25, 1787, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XIX; and Henry Knox to John Doughty, March 27, 1787, in *Ibid.*

¹³ Journal of Congress, Volume XIII, 156-168.

¹⁴ William H. Guthman, *March to Massacre: A History of the First Seven Years of the United States Army, 1784-1791* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975), 63.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Risch, 9.

Revolutionary War ration.¹⁷ Regardless, O'Hara's outfit needed to supply only three posts, all situated on navigable waterways, in 1785.

Subsequent contracts over the years provided the same ration at reduced rates as competing companies sought to underbid their counterparts with the Board of Treasury and later the Treasury Department. Turnbull, Marmie, and Company provided the same three posts in 1786 with provisions at the lower rates of $10 \frac{1}{3}$ ninetieths of a dollar for Pitt, and $11 \frac{1}{2}$ ninetieths of a dollar each to McIntosh and Harmar.¹⁸ O'Hara resumed the contract in 1787 through the first half of 1788, although in this instance, two additional posts were included: Fort Steuben, located along the rapids of the Ohio River, and Fort Franklin, near Venango, Pennsylvania. Prices ranged from $9 \frac{1}{4}$ ninetieths of a dollar per ration at Fort Pitt up to 14 ninetieths of a dollar at Franklin. All in all, although O'Hara now found himself supplying five garrisons instead of three, they remained on navigable waterways and four of the five garrisons—Pitt, McIntosh, Steuben, and Harmar—followed the course of the Ohio River.¹⁹

Frontier logistics, dependent as they were on the navigable Ohio River, rarely turned out to be as easy as they would appear from a simple survey of the map. Setting aside the ever present threat of Indian attack for the moment, natural considerations presented obstacles sufficient to frequently disrupt supply lines. Water flow often diminished to such low levels during the summer and fall months that even empty

¹⁷ Risch, 10. August 26, 1778, Entry in *Journals of Congress, Containing the Proceedings from January 1st, 1778, to January 1st, 1779*, Volume IV (Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1779), 497. Hereafter referred to as JCC 4.

¹⁸ Journal of Congress, Volume XIII, 156-168. Contract between Turnbull, Marmie, & Company and Daniel Britt and the Commissioners of the Board of Treasury, January 6, 1786, Harmar Papers.

¹⁹ Contract between James O'Hara and the Commissioners of the Board of Treasury, May 23, 1787, Harmar Papers.

flatboats could not make the passage downriver, let alone those loaded with thousands of pounds of supplies.²⁰ Adding insult to injury, the same water powered the mills that ground the flour provided to the army. When water levels dropped precipitously, not only did it negatively impact the contractors' ability to transport supplies to the frontier posts, but prevented even the accumulation of those supplies to be transported. Thus, in November, 1792, Anthony Wayne lamented:

Such is the real State of the Waters, that not a grist or Saw Mill, in all this Country has ground a single bushel of grain or cut one inch of Lumber for these three Months past—nor can the Contractor supply us with flower but from hand to mouth, & that on pack horses—nor can they possibly do otherwise until a General rise of the Waters, the greater part of the flower we now use is ground by Horse Mills.²¹

Water scarcity did not present the only threat. During the winter, the Ohio generally froze over, preventing the movement of any supplies by boat until the spring thaw.²²

Constructing posts some distance from the waters of the Ohio multiplied the challenges inherent in supplying the early United States Army. In 1787, Harmar added what would become known as Fort Knox near Vincennes, to the list of posts occupied by his troops, a full seventy miles up the Wabash River from the Ohio. Initially, Harmar hoped that he could resupply even this post by water. Writing of his plans to visit the location in the summer of 1787, Harmar expressed his intent to move both men and supplies to the mouth of the Wabash, where he would unload the cattle before continuing

²⁰ See, for example, Harmar to the Secretary of War, August 7, 1787, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers: The Life and Public Services of Arthur St. Clair*, Volume II (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 26-30. Low water levels hindered Kentuckian George Rogers Clark's militia expedition against the Indians in the Illinois territory in 1786. The resulting delay and scarcity inspired a mutiny within Clark's force, forcing a premature conclusion to his campaign. Sword, *President Washington's Indian War*, 36-37.

²¹ Wayne to Knox, Pittsburgh, November 9, 1792, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Anthony Wayne*, 129.

²² See Harmar to the Secretary of War, Fort Harmar, January 10, 1788, Harmar Papers. In 1788, ice blocked the river route to Fort Franklin, forcing soldiers to eat bad flour or starve. Sword, 82.

upriver with the herd moving on the hoof along its banks. Harmar ardently sought to avoid the expense of an overland march with all his supplies, an endeavor which would have required an estimated seventy packhorses, each hired at roughly half a dollar a day.²³

On July 10, Harmar put his plan into execution. Arriving at the Delaware Old Town, he dispatched Major John Francis Hamtramck at the head of 100 men together with all the boats and supplies save the cattle, tasking them to move to the Wabash River and then ascend that tributary of the Ohio to Vincennes. Harmar set out the ensuing day with the remainder of the troops and the cattle and, moving by land, arrived at their destination a full eight days ahead of Hamtramck. Low water levels had forced Hamtramck to ground most of his supplies, including the bulk of the post's flour and whiskey, at the mouth of the Wabash, necessitating a detachment to move the provisions over land after all.²⁴ Supply by water, it seems, would not be a viable method of providing for this new garrison.

Even before the addition of a post near Vincennes, contractors struggled to meet the demands of the frontier army. Turnbull, Marmie, and Company, although offering cheaper rates than their predecessor, James O'Hara, poorly executed their contract. Indeed, Robert Pemberton informed Mr. Turnbull upon his arrival in New York of complaints about the contractors and particularly about delays in the arrival of beef on the

²³ Harmar to the Secretary of War, Camp at the Rapids of the Ohio, June 15, 1787, Harmar Papers.

²⁴ Harmar to the Secretary of War, August 7, 1787, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 26-30.

hoof.²⁵ But Turnbull, Marmie, and Company's failures ran much deeper than one incident. In July, 1787, Harmar expressed little faith in the company. "I placed no dependence on supplies from them," the commander wrote Henry Knox, "nor did I know of any further engagement of theirs to supply the troops."²⁶ Desperate to provide for his men, the commander tasked an issuing commissary, Mr. Bradshaw, to secure what provisions he could on credit from Kentucky.²⁷

Although Congress believed the next year's contract, once again under O'Hara, to be executed better than its predecessors, there exists little evidence to suggest that this resulted in noticeable change at the consumption end of the supply chain. Harmar expressed no more confidence in the new supplier than he had in the old. "The river is now fast bound with ice," Harmar wrote Knox in January, 1788, "and, according to custom, we have only twelve days' meat and flour on hand, through the neglect of the contractors. The men have nearly forty days' whisky due them."²⁸ Harmar felt compelled to transport supplies to Vincennes on the public expense rather than rely on contractors in June, 1788.

The remoteness of Vincennes proved to test the ability of the contractors more than any other location. Major Hamtramck, commander of the isolated outpost, resorted

²⁵ Robert Pemberton to Henry Knox, War Office, August 17, 1786, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XIX.

²⁶ Harmar to the Secretary of War, Camp on the Kentucky Shore just below the Rapids of the Ohio, July 7, 1787, Harmar Papers. See also Journal of Congress, Volume XIII, 156-168, and *The Military Journal of Ebenezer Denny: An Officer in the Revolutionary and Indian Wars* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1849), 95. Harmar received news of the new contract, awarded to James O'Hara, in August. See Harmar to the Secretary of War, August 7, 1787, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 26-30.

²⁷ Harmar to the Secretary of War, Camp on the Kentucky Shore just below the Rapids of the Ohio, July 7, 1787, Harmar Papers.

²⁸ Harmar to the Secretary of War, Fort Harmar, January 10, 1788, Harmar Papers.

on more than one occasion to supplying his men via his own personal credit. He supplied his command, for example, with beef bought on his own credit for almost the entire month of October, 1787, with the exception of one cow provided by the contractor.²⁹ Indeed, the garrison survived for much of the winter of 1787-1788 on flour provided on credit by Francis Vigo, a local trader and inhabitant of Vincennes.³⁰ Aware of the particular vulnerability of Vincennes to any Indian effort to cut off supply lines, Hamtramck recommended over a period of months that several measures be taken to safeguard the viability of the post. First, he proposed that Fort Knox should always maintain no less than three months' worth of provisions on hand. Second, the most common supply of beef should be driven from the falls of the Ohio and, when butchered, great care should be taken to properly salt the provisions so as to waste nothing.³¹ Finally, Hamtramck concluded that supplies should only be laid in at Vincennes twice a year given the dangers to shipments of provisions posed by Indian attack and the arduous task of ascending the Wabash.³²

Sensitive to the unique vulnerability of Vincennes, Arthur St. Clair, as governor of the Northwest Territory, expressed his dissatisfaction with the contracting system as early as 1788, a reversal of his position during the American Revolution.³³ Concerned about the contractors' tendency to only provide from hand to mouth, he argued that this

²⁹ Hamtramck to Harmar, Poste Vincennes, November 3, 1787, in Gayle Thornbrough, ed., *Outpost on the Wabash, 1787-1791: Letters of Brigadier General Josiah Harmar and Major John Francis Hamtramck and other letters and documents selected from the Harmar Papers in the William L. Clements Library* (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Society, 1957), 44-46.

³⁰ Harmar to Hamtramck, Fort Harmar, July 26, 1788, Harmar Papers.

³¹ Hamtramck to Harmar, Poste Vincennes, January 1, 1788, in Thornbrough, ed., *Outpost on the Wabash*, 58-63.

³² Hamtramck to Harmar, Poste Vincennes, August 12, 1788, Harmar Papers.

³³ Major General Arthur St. Clair to George Washington, January 5, 1778, in *The Papers of George Washington Digital Edition*.

rendered the frontier posts more susceptible to Indian efforts to cut them off from all sources of supply.³⁴ Perceiving that tensions between Native Americans and the United States may soon devolve into hostilities, St. Clair suggested to the commander of troops that some other means of providing for the army should be adopted. He thought little of Harmar's chances for success if required to wage an offensive campaign under the current system. Indeed, St. Clair was so distraught over the inadequacies of the contractors that he delighted in Harmar's tales of supply challenges in the hopes that they might serve to better illustrate the need for a different system. "I have made pretty strong representations," he communicated to Harmar, "on that head [the need for a new system] to the President and the Secretary of War . . . and I was wicked enough not to be very much displeased to hear that you had been obliged to disperse your garrison to prevent them from starving; that will have more effect than all that could have been written on a quire of paper."³⁵ Calls for change at this stage did little to assist Harmar who, in a matter of months, would be fashioning a hastily-assembled force of those regulars he could spare from garrison duty together with large numbers of militia in preparation for an expedition against the Northwest tribes. His inability to do other than plead with the contractors to supply the army remained a point of frustration.

The Campaign of 1790

³⁴ William Knox to Henry Knox, New York, October 28, 1788, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XXIII.

³⁵ St. Clair to Harmar, May 1, 1790, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 144-145.

By 1790, the Northwestern frontier had settled into a cycle of violence. Native American groups resisted the westward expansion of white settlements, launching attacks to deter such growth. Settlers and squatters alike responded with reprisal campaigns equal to, if not surpassing, their opponents in violence and brutality. Prompted by consistent complaints about Indian attacks and at the request of both Harmar and St. Clair, President Washington approved a campaign in the spring of 1790.³⁶ The objectives of Harmar's campaign remained relatively modest. "The proposed expedition," Knox articulated to St. Clair, "is intended to exhibit to the Wabash Indians our power to punish them for their positive depredations. . . . This power will be demonstrated by a sudden stroke, by which their towns and crops may be destroyed."³⁷

Early planning began in May, 1790. Knox envisioned a raid targeting Native American villages and food supplies on the brink of winter. The expedition, he continued, should consist of a small force of 400, including 100 regulars and 300 hand-picked militia, all mounted on horseback, with the purpose "to strike a terror in the minds of the Indians hostilely disposed."³⁸ The men would carry with them thirty days' worth of provisions, move fast, and return before the expiration of the militia's thirty-day enlistments.

The preparations for this campaign offered a glimpse of what might be achieved if the government centralized issues of procurement and supply under its military

³⁶ Wiley Sword, *President Washington's Indian War: The Struggle for the Old Northwest, 1790-1795* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 86-87.

³⁷ Knox to St. Clair, September 14, 1790, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 181-183.

³⁸ Summary of the Situation of the Frontiers by the Secretary of War, May 27, 1790, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 146-147. See also The Secretary of War to General Harmar, June 7, 1790, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 97-98.

leadership. The short timeline under which the expedition was to be conducted forced Harmar to abandon the bureaucratic process that had, until 1790, hindered effective supply operations. A temporary relationship, in which the contractors, Robert Elliot and Eli Williams, would assume duties as the quartermaster department under the immediate direction of Brigadier General Harmar, took its place.³⁹ Knox communicated the degree to which the reigns of procurement had been handed over to Harmar in a letter dated September 14, 1790, in which he expressed his trust that the commander would keep economy in mind and only acquire that supply and transport considered military necessity.⁴⁰

The plan became considerably more involved by late August. With Congressional authorization to call up 1,500 militia, Harmar and St. Clair designed a two-pronged attack aimed at the destruction of the Miami village believed to be the principal source of Indian depredations across the Northwestern frontier. Major Hamtramck, at the head of a small regular force comprised of the garrisons of both Vincennes and Fort Steuben together with 300 Virginia militia, would attack north along the Wabash. Hamtramck's detachment would destroy those villages within the power of his force and prevent a significant number of Native American warriors from responding to a larger assault directed against Kekionga, the Miami village. Harmar would lead a combined force of 1,200 militia and 300 regulars against the village itself.⁴¹ This updated plan required an altogether greater level of support than did Knox's May vision of a small, mobile force.

³⁹ Secretary of War to the Secretary of the Treasury, August 23, 1790, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 98.

⁴⁰ Secretary of War to General Harmar, September 14, 1790, in *Ibid.*, 1: 100.

⁴¹ Governor St. Clair to the Secretary of War, August 23, 1790, in *Ibid.*, 1: 92.

Surprisingly, the contractors Elliot and Williams seemed to have answered the call, although this can largely be attributed to their temporary subordination to the command of Harmar. “The General,” according to Ebenezer Denny, an experienced frontier officer, “commenced his preparations; calculations of provisions, horses, stores &c., were immediately made out and ordered accordingly. Every day employed in the most industrious manner.”⁴² Harmar’s hard work, coupled with the extraordinary and unexpected efforts of the contractors, ensured that any failure of the campaign could not be attributed to logistical mistakes. Indeed, so successful had Elliott and Williams been that, on October 14, 1790, they wrote Knox boasting of their performance. In support of Harmar, the contractors procured 180,000 rations of flour, 200,000 rations of meat, 868 pack and artillery horses, and a good number of horse masters and wagon drivers. To accomplish this, Elliott and Williams had exhausted their own funds and greatly extended their credit.⁴³

To be sure, Major Hamtramck felt compelled to cut his expedition short in part due to the lack of provisions. This, he admitted, resulted not from any failure on the part of the contractors, but from the wastage of the troops at the outset of the campaign.⁴⁴ Though Harmar’s campaign ended in defeat, tactical errors coupled with the unreliability of the militia shouldered the majority of the responsibility. His temporary authority over the contractor had produced an abundance of supplies that previous failures would have suggested were not even possible.

⁴² *The Military Journal of Ebenezer Denny*, 139-140.

⁴³ Messrs. Elliot and Williams, Contractors, to the Secretary of War, October 14, 1790, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 96.

⁴⁴ Hamtramck to Harmar, Fort Knox, Vincennes, November 2, 1790, Harmar Papers.

The Campaign of 1791—A Failure of Administration

The defeat of 1790 emboldened hostile Native Americans along the frontier and led to settler demands for a more substantial response. St. Clair, designated as Major General in command of the army in March 1791, confronted a daunting challenge. To be sure, his timeline from inception of the campaign to execution differed only a little from that of Harmar's. Knox and others, in both instances, formulated plans in the spring for an expedition to be conducted in the late summer or early fall. Harmar first learned of his mission in May and marched in late September, allowing for a rough total of four months of preparation. St. Clair understood at least as early as March that he would be leading a campaign against the Indians. His command departed in October and suffered defeat in early November, allowing a full six months to coordinate preparations.

The difference lay not in the amount of time allotted to prepare but in the scale of the task that each leader faced. During the summer of 1790, Harmar anticipated incorporating nearly 1,500 militia with his regiment of regulars already in being. St. Clair, by contrast, not only needed to recruit and train new personnel for the existing regiment, but for a second regiment, doubling the size of the regular army. Moreover, Congress also called for the raising of 2,000 levies and authorized the general to raise as many as one thousand fifty militia.⁴⁵ When all recruits reached the frontier, St. Clair

⁴⁵ Congress of the United States, 3rd Session, An Act for Raising and Adding Another Regiment to the Military Establishment of the United States, and for making Further Provision for the Protection of the Frontiers, March 3, 1791.

would possess a force of regulars, levies, and militia numbering 3,726 men, roughly twice that of the organization under Harmar.⁴⁶

The act creating this new force structure also sought to implement change, albeit limited, in the military procurement system. Recognizing the value in centralizing the supply system in one department answerable to the commander, Congress re-established the position of Quartermaster General.⁴⁷ Henry Knox communicated the Quartermaster General's precise roles and responsibilities to Major General St. Clair. "Samuel Hodgdon, who has been appointed the quartermaster, under your directions, will repair to the frontiers as soon as he shall have made the necessary arrangements here of the supplies. He will be entirely under your orders, in all respects; and he must produce your orders for all the general objects of expenditures."⁴⁸ The quartermaster, Knox continued, is responsible for coordinating all transportation, including that of ordnance, hospital stores, provisions, troops, and baggage. While primary contracts continued to be negotiated by the Treasury Department, the re-establishment of the Quartermaster General position represented a significant delegation of procurement authority. The final reform with respect to supply addressed the award of the contract for the upcoming campaign. Much to St. Clair's later regret, the contract was awarded to former Revolutionary War contractor, and active speculator in everything, William Duer.

The campaign plan which Duer and Hodgdon would be charged with supporting was more demanding than any effort since the Revolution. Mounted militia from

⁴⁶ For a discussion of total numbers of soldiers authorized and recruited for each of the components, see "A summary statement of facts, relative to the measures taken, in behalf of the United States. . .", in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 139-140.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Instructions to Major General Arthur St. Clair, in *Ibid.*, 173.

Kentucky, under the command of Brigadier General Charles Scott, would conduct two or three preliminary raids intended to prevent the Indians from dispersing throughout the frontier to conduct their own attacks. The main expedition sought to establish a strong post in the vicinity of the Miami village to prevent further Indian depredations through intimidation. St. Clair also had authority to construct those posts necessary to maintain a line of communications between the post at the Miami village and the new army headquarters at Fort Washington on the Ohio.⁴⁹

To support these operations, the general envisioned stockpiling over 400,000 rations. The army would move, according to St. Clair's concept, to the first post in the line of communication accompanied by at least 45,000 rations, translating to a 15-day supply.⁵⁰ Additional trips would transport 90,000 rations to the first post every ten days until that garrison accumulated 360,000 rations. When the army moved from the first to the second post, it would once again take with it 45,000 rations, while the remainder of the 360,000 would be transported to the second in the same fashion as to the first. This process would continue from post to post. St. Clair believed he had developed a very methodical plan by which to advance supplies to the head of the line of communication posts prior to moving for the Miami village.

The plan, however, failed to address three important considerations—the time available to conduct this movement, the distance between posts, and the availability of

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 171-172.

⁵⁰ St. Clair to Samuel Hodgdon, October 21, 1791, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 248-249. This is a rough estimate based on the assumption that St. Clair might have 3,000 effectives. In reality, the committee that investigated the expedition found that he had only 1,700 effectives by October 24, 1791. The army would then be moving with over 26 days' of supply. For numbers of soldiers available, see *Causes of the Failure of the Expedition Against the Indians, in 1791, Under the Command of Major General St. Clair*, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1: 37.

transport. According to St. Clair's own calculations, it would take forty days merely to move the 360,000 rations to the first post of communication, Fort Hamilton.⁵¹ Assuming a consumption rate of 3000 rations per day, 240,000 rations would remain available to be transported to the next post of communication, Fort Jefferson. Adhering to St. Clair's timeline, it would take an additional 25 days to move these provisions to the next post, during which an additional 75,000 rations would be consumed. This would place 165,000 rations at the head of the line, Fort Jefferson, roughly sixty-five days after the army's departure from Ludlow's Station, its starting point on the Ohio. When combined with the 45,000 rations accompanying the force, St. Clair would have well over a two-months' supply of provisions. Given his departure on September 17, however, his force would not be ready to advance against the Miami village until late in November.

The distance between posts would further complicate St. Clair's vision. Fort Hamilton, roughly twenty miles from Ludlow's Station, could easily be supplied within the general's timeline. Forty-four miles, however, separated Forts Hamilton and Jefferson, rendering St. Clair's concept less plausible. A packhorse train may be able to make one trip between Hamilton and Jefferson in ten days but would be unlikely to complete two. To be sure, this could be overcome by the employment of additional packhorses. St. Clair's concept, however, already called for significant numbers of such animals. 300 packhorses alone would be needed to transport the 45,000 rations to accompany the army on the move.⁵² If the army dedicated only one other train of

⁵¹ This figure is based on two trips, each transporting 45,000 rations, every ten days.

⁵² St. Clair to Samuel Hodgdon, October 21, 1791, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 248-249. St. Clair here used the assumption that the typical packhorse hired on the frontier could carry a load of roughly 150 pounds. Thus, 300 packhorses would be needed to carry 45,000 rations, or, in essence,

packhorses to moving supplies from post to post 45,000 rations at a time, as specified by St. Clair, an additional 300 packhorses would be needed. Thus, before even considering the additional animals needed to move camp equipage, ordnance, and baggage, St. Clair found himself in need of 600 packhorses. Any additional trains capable of moving 45,000 rations would add yet another 300 animals.

It was over the issue of packhorses that St. Clair's concept to support his campaign began to come apart. Considerable confusion permeated the correspondence regarding the procurement of transport for the expedition. St. Clair wrote to Henry Knox on August 8, 1791, that he had directed two hundred horses to be purchased for the quartermaster's department.⁵³ A little over two weeks later, he learned that the contractor, William Duer, had empowered an agent in Kentucky to purchase 400 horses for the expedition. Having already issued instructions for the purchase of animals to transport provisions, St. Clair ordered the agent to delay the acquisition until the contractor or his appointed subordinate arrived to clarify the situation.

The general's efforts to explain the dilemma to the Secretary of War did little to alleviate the problem. He indicated to Knox that he had heard rumors of up to 800 horses needed, though St. Clair cautioned that these would only be required during the campaign itself, when supplies were to be moved from post to post. Based on St. Clair's instructions, the contractor's agent, Israel Ludlow, arrived at a number of 650 packhorses,

45,000 pounds of flour. Beef would be moved on the hoof. This planning factor seems reliable based on other contemporary accounts. Ebenezer Denny, for example, noted the arrival on October 28 of 74 packhorses carrying nearly 12,000 pounds of flour, or just over 162 pounds per animal. Three days later, he noted the arrival of a 212-packhorse convoy carrying an average of 150 pounds per animal. See *The Military Journal of Ebenezer Denny*, 160 and 162-163.

⁵³ St. Clair to Knox, Fort Washington, August 8, 1791, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XXIX.

to be augmented with ox teams as necessary.⁵⁴ Knox, seemingly unsure as to the details of the situation, communicated to the President that St. Clair disputed the authority of the contractor to purchase horses and had directed that his own order for 800 animals be executed.⁵⁵ Confusion reigned as St. Clair struggled to ensure he had sufficient transport to supply his army.

The issue of packhorses became symptomatic of a much larger problem within the procurement system. Congress, influenced by input from the Secretary at War, took strides to make permanent under St. Clair what had been a temporary arrangement under Harmar. They appointed Samuel Hodgdon Quartermaster General and directed that both he and the contractor, William Duer, take orders from the commanding general. This system should have provided a level of support far in excess of that achieved when Henry Knox ordered the contracting firm of Elliot and Williams to serve Harmar. Robert Elliot and Eli Williams, however, were far more responsive than their successors. Whereas they largely conducted their business from the frontier, often accompanying convoys of provisions to the remote garrisons, Hodgdon and Duer performed their roles in absentee-like fashion.

Hodgdon possessed a considerable background in matters of army supply, having served in the Commissary of Military Stores in various capacities since 1777.⁵⁶ Although he moved to Fort Pitt in mid-June, the Quartermaster General did not arrive at Fort Washington until September 10, little more than a week in advance of the army's

⁵⁴ St. Clair to Knox, Lexington, September 4, 1791, and Israel Ludlow to St. Clair, Fort Washington, September 14, 1791, *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Knox to the President, September 16, 1791, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 240.

⁵⁶ Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army*, 77.

departure.⁵⁷ To be fair, he spent time both in Philadelphia and at Fort Pitt ensuring that the logistical arrangements from the east were in order. That Hodgdon would have been much more effective supervising preparations from Fort Washington seems to merit little debate. Having already taken care of business in Philadelphia, he could have easily spent a week or two at Pitt clarifying instructions to an agent before moving down the Ohio. Western Pennsylvania had long provided considerable supplies to the frontier army, most importantly flour, and therefore the habitual relationship between farmers and army agents and contractors minimized the importance of the Quartermaster General himself supervising arrangements. Kentucky proved an equally important supplier, especially when it came to beef cattle and animal transport. By positioning himself at Fort Washington, Hodgdon would have been better able to coordinate supplies from both regions while, most critically, ensuring that the supplies demanded were indeed delivered.

Finally, St. Clair complained to Knox about the absence of his Quartermaster General.⁵⁸ The poor communication between St. Clair and Hodgdon, induced by Hodgdon's absence from the frontier, alone justified the commander's concerns. Unable to communicate directly with his subordinate, St. Clair found himself reduced to speculation in trying to determine what actions Hodgdon had taken respecting the packhorse situation. "The commander in chief," the Congressional committee reported, "in addition to the duties of his office, discharged those of the Quartermaster General,

⁵⁷ "Winthrop Sargent's Diary While with General St. Clair's Expedition Against the Indians," *Ohio State Archaeological and Historical Quarterly* 33 (Jul., 1924): 242-243. Ebenezer Denny noted the Quartermaster General's arrival on September 7. See Denny, *The Military Journal of Ebenezer Denny*, 153.

⁵⁸ Knox to the President, September 16, 1797, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 240.

and the military stores furnished by that department were so deficient, from mismanagement and neglect,” that the Army either did without or manufactured poor substitutes at Fort Washington.⁵⁹

Hodgdon’s indiscretions and failings paled in comparison to those of the contractor, William Duer. A well-known figure in government circles, Duer recently served as a secretary within the Treasury Department and partnered with Henry Knox in an attempt to secure portions of Maine for the construction of a canal. He no doubt benefitted from these contacts when securing the contract for 1791, a process facilitated by his exceptionally low bid. Duer intended to rely on hunted meat and Indian corn meal so as to reduce his costs in providing the ration at such a low price.⁶⁰

In support of the contract, the Treasury advanced Duer \$85,000 over a four-month period from late-March to mid-July. Whether this money ever made it to the contractor’s agents out on the frontier is a matter of speculation, although it appears unlikely. The Congressional committee inquiry reports that Mr. Smith, the contractor’s agent at Carlisle, had received no money in May and depended upon credit to procure supplies for the army though Duer, by this time, had already been advanced \$75,000. John Kean and General Neville, additional agents, also relied on their own credit to purchase rations and transport in the absence of money.⁶¹ This use of credit introduced delays in the

⁵⁹ Causes of the Failure of the Expedition Against the Indians, in 1791, Under the Command of Major General St. Clair, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1: 37.

⁶⁰ Robert F. Jones, “*The King of the Alley*”: *William Duer, Politician, Entrepreneur, and Speculator, 1768-1799* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1992) , 156-157.

⁶¹ Causes of the Failure of the Expedition Against the Indians, in 1791, Under the Command of Major General St. Clair, in *American State Papers: Military Affairs* 1: 36. According to Wiley Sword, Duer invested much of the \$75,000 advance in land speculation in partnership with Henry Knox. Sword, 149-150.

procurement system that culminated in the failure to provide rations and animals to locations at specified times.⁶²

By July, Knox had become increasingly concerned about the behavior of his occasional business partner. In a private letter dated July 7, 1791, the Secretary at War urged Duer to ensure that all necessary preparations for the campaign had been made. “I am alarmed by the information just received,” Knox wrote, “that you are yet to make arranging for the pack horses for the expedition. I hope in God you have made other and more effective arrangements or you will suffer excessively in your interests. . . . I pray you to let me know by the return post the exact steps you have actually made.”⁶³ The concern evident in Knox’s tone, he felt compelled to communicate his lack of faith in Duer to St. Clair just two weeks later.⁶⁴ The scale of Duer’s failure only became evident when the army readied to move forward from Fort Hamilton in early October.

On October 8, St. Clair chastised yet another contractor’s agent, Israel Ludlow, for failing to move a sufficient number of rations forward to Hamilton and for failing to provide enough animals to ensure that 45,000 rations could move with the army, as outlined in the commander’s earlier proposal. Instead, St. Clair found himself with only two days’ rations.⁶⁵ His force having been in the environs of Fort Hamilton for more than ten days, the contractor should have easily been able to move forward adequate amounts

⁶² Jones, 158.

⁶³ Henry Knox to William Duer, Philadelphia, July 7, 1791, Microfilms of the Henry Knox Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Volume XXVIII.

⁶⁴ Knox to St. Clair, War Department, July 21, 1791, in *American State Papers: Indian Affairs* 1: 179.

⁶⁵ St. Clair to Israel Ludlow, Agent, October 8, 1791, in William Henry Smith, ed., *The St. Clair Papers*, 246-7.

of supplies and transport had such been available. The scarcity of provisions, however, would plague the remainder of the campaign.

Duer offered a feeble rebuttal to the Congressional inquiry in an essay published in the *National Gazette* on May 21, 1792. There, he provided receipts documenting that he had forwarded just over \$3,200 to his frontier agents, a paltry sum when it is considered that he was advanced \$75,000. Moreover, Duer attributed the scarcity of flour to the retreat, arguing that the abundance of provisions must have been lost as the army fled from the field of battle.⁶⁶ These arguments held little water against the weight of the evidence. It could not have helped matters that Duer found himself imprisoned for debt at the time the committee published its findings.

Despite the poor performance of both the Quartermaster General and the contractor, a subject well-documented in the Congressional report, logistical failures represented only one among a multitude of causes explaining St. Clair's defeat, and arguably not the principal one. Whatever delays resulted from the failure to provide provisions and transport, the campaign had not proven a disaster until the battlefield defeat of November 4, 1791, a loss resulting not from a starvation-induced surrender or the scarcity of supplies, but from tactical errors in the disposition of troops, the fortification of the encampment, and the ignoring of intelligence. Hodgdon's and Duer's failures were indeed real, substantial, and greatly hindered frontier operations in 1791, but they could not alone account for the military disaster that befell the army. Likewise,

⁶⁶ William Duer, "Strictures, on the Report of a Committee of Congress, on the Western Expedition," *National Gazette* 1, no. 59 (May 21, 1792): 234-235.

while St. Clair proved incapable of exercising the authority granted to him over matters of supply, it was other failings that more adequately accounted for the disaster.

Innovation and Initiative – The Supply of Wayne’s Legion

Anthony Wayne encountered a dramatically different environment than did his predecessors in preparing for campaign. While Harmar and St. Clair both led expeditions on comparatively short notice with forces consisting largely of militia, the fledgling nation could ill afford another defeat in the wake of their failures. Wayne, therefore, marched for the Miami village in 1794 at the head of an American army significantly increased in size and with nearly two years of preparation under its belt. No longer, at least for Wayne’s purposes, would frontier warfare be waged on the cheap. The new commander would enjoy levels of resources in troops, time allowed, and supplies inconceivable during the tenures of Harmar and St. Clair. But his success where others had failed should not be attributed solely to the act of throwing more at the problem. Wayne proved himself both an innovator and an enthusiastic manager when it came to supplying his Legion, embracing his involvement in logistical matters where Harmar had engaged reluctantly and St. Clair had expressed an utter distaste. While Wayne’s success could no more be pinned on logistics than could St. Clair’s defeat, his innovative approach ensured that supplies would not hinder the army’s battlefield performance.

Congress passed the act establishing the organization that would come to be known as the Legion on March 5, 1792. In addition to the two regiments already in

existence, which would be recruited to full strength, three additional regiments of the same size would be organized. Each of these five regiments would have three battalions of infantry and muster 960 men save one, which would have two battalions and a squadron of light dragoons. The artillery battalion already in existence would also be recruited to full strength.⁶⁷ Anthony Wayne accepted command of this new organization a month later.⁶⁸

Henry Knox granted Wayne the same authority over both his quartermaster general and the contractor that St. Clair had enjoyed in theory, although in this instance Wayne exerted a much greater influence over his subordinates' activities.⁶⁹ While Duer remained in New York throughout St. Clair's command and Hodgdon arrived at Fort Washington only a week before the army departed, Wayne's newly appointed quartermaster general and contractor proved more accessible. James O'Hara, a contractor held in considerable esteem, became the newly appointed Quartermaster General and generally remained on the frontier throughout Wayne's tenure. The commanding general bestowed great praise upon O'Hara's efforts in securing supplies and transport for the Legion's move from Legion Ville to Fort Washington in the spring of 1793. "Altho the notice was short," he explained to Knox, "such have been the exertions of the Quarter Master General, that the boats and every necessary for the transportation, were on the spot agreeably to the period mentioned in your letter of the 5th. Ultimo."⁷⁰ The firm of Elliot and Williams once again successfully secured the contract for the supply of the

⁶⁷ An Act for Making Further and More Effectual Provision for the Protection of the Frontiers, March 5, 1792.

⁶⁸ Wayne to Knox, Philadelphia, April 13, 1792, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Anthony Wayne*, 16-17.

⁶⁹ Knox to Wayne, War Department, June 29, 1792, in *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁰ Wayne to Knox, Legion Ville, April 20, 1793, in *Ibid.*, 225.

frontier army. This firm proved extraordinarily resourceful while preparing for Harmar's expedition and promised similar exertions under Anthony Wayne.

Wayne's concept of support did not differ all that significantly from that of St. Clair. The commander of the Legion certainly profited from the hard work accomplished by the army in 1791 in constructing Forts Hamilton and Jefferson. Wayne even pursued the same strategy as St. Clair, using these posts of communication as a means by which to advance supplies as deep as possible into the wilderness before moving against the Miami village. He took advantage of the time afforded him to construct additional posts intended to enhance the line of communication, building Forts St. Clair, Greenville, and Recovery. Indeed, as early as July 1792, unsure of when hostilities might resume, Wayne pressured General James Wilkinson, his at-times controversial second-in-command, to forward as many supplies as possible to Fort Jefferson, then head of the line. "I have directed Genl Wilkinson," he reported to Knox, "'to improve the present opportunity (i.e. this temporary suspension of hostilities) to throw as large a supply of Provision and forage into Fort Jefferson, and the intermediate posts as circumstances will admit of.'"⁷¹ Uncertain as to when a campaign might be required of him, Wayne sought to make the most of the time available. In May 1793 he ordered the construction of a road between Forts Hamilton, St. Clair, and Jefferson. The project's completion in August greatly facilitated the transport of supplies to these garrisons.⁷²

It was not merely that Wayne had improved upon a large amount of work already done, but the way in which he threw himself into the task with an energy not at all

⁷¹ Wayne to Knox, Pittsburgh, July 13, 1792, in *Ibid.*, 27-29.

⁷² Wayne to Knox, Hobson's Choice, May 27, 1793, in *Ibid.*, 241-243.

exhibited by previous commanders, that produced such a different result. His preparations in 1792 alone suggest the vigor with which he would pursue the campaign against the Indians. Wayne, in the hopes of laying in enough provisions to support the army while keeping the Indians busy until 1793—the earliest he believed his force would be ready for a campaign—sent large supplies of grain along with two three-pound cannon and six tons of three- and six-pound shot to Fort Washington. He also “ordered the purchase of One hundred & Fifty tuns of best Clover and timothy hay at Whelen to be delivered . . . at Fort Washington, so that our Cavalry can be supported there as cheap and as well as in any part of the United States.”⁷³ Rather than complain about the someone else’s failure to make the arrangements, Wayne clearly linked meticulous logistical planning with the success of his overall expedition.

The commander of the Legion proved a capable innovator as well when it came to military procurement. Wayne experimented, for example, with drilling a new touchhole in muskets at an oblique angle such that the action of forcing down the charge would by itself prime the weapon. This would facilitate much quicker loading, reduce the loss of powder, and possibly even enable men to load at the trot. He devoted considerable effort in trying to persuade Henry Knox to acquire a grained powder suitably fine to support this innovation.⁷⁴ While mandating an aggressive marksmanship training plan, Wayne insisted that his men fire at trees so they would be able to recover the lead and cast new bullets.⁷⁵ His delight in observing the effectiveness of hand mills in grinding corn

⁷³ Wayne to Knox, Pittsburgh, August 10, 1792, in *Ibid.*, 63-66.

⁷⁴ Wayne to Knox, Pittsburgh, July 13, 1792, in *Ibid.*, 27-29.

⁷⁵ Wayne to Knox, Pittsburgh, July 27, 1792, in *Ibid.*, 47-50.

substantiated his enthusiasm for logistical preparations. “The hand mills full answer my expectations,” he again articulated to Knox, “five of them will grind twenty bushels of Corn in two hours, with ease, which in this way will be double the service to the horses, than if given them in whole grain.”⁷⁶ Perhaps learning from St. Clair, whose horses suffered the loss of forage to an early frost during the 1791 campaign, Wayne ensured that no such obstacle would threaten his campaign with failure.

Despite Wayne’s meticulous preparations, the contractors continued to have difficulty in fulfilling the expectations of the contract. Early on, Elliot and Williams disputed their obligation to support the army on the move, claiming that they were responsible solely for delivering supplies to fixed garrisons. They appealed to the Secretary of the Treasury in hopes that his interpretation of the contract would match theirs. Alexander Hamilton, however, clearly indicated that the contractor should be responsible for the transport of provisions to both fixed garrisons and the army on the move as necessary, with prices either fixed by the contract itself or agreed upon with the Treasury afterwards.⁷⁷ While this dispute unfolded, Elliot and Williams avoided acquiring any more pack animals than required to deliver supplies to the forts.

Wayne, upon learning that the contractors possessed not even enough animal transport to supply the army hand to mouth in 1794, was “at a loss to account for this continued & criminal default upon the part of the Contractors.”⁷⁸ It is at this moment, on the verge of launching his campaign in the late summer of 1794, that the differences

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Knox to Wayne, War Department, May 17, 1793, in Ibid., 236-241.

⁷⁸ Wayne to Knox, Headquarters, Greenville, May 7, 1794, in Ibid., 322-326.

between Wayne and St. Clair become most clear. Whereas St. Clair identified problems with provisions and transport almost too late to rectify, Wayne's early and active involvement in the logistical preparations ensured that the most obstinate of difficulties could be overcome. By the end of May, 1794, Wayne had directed his Quartermaster General to procure that transport necessary which could not be supplied by the contractor.⁷⁹ Wayne, in essence, ensured theory became reality by adhering to a system in which both the Quartermaster General and the contractor were subordinate to the commander.

Profit once again clashed with purpose as contractors sought to protect their interests at the expense of providing sufficient support for the campaign. While Elliot and Williams had at times performed well, their concern for the bottom line placed them at odds with the commander.

Procurement, the Economy, and High Finance

The nation found itself, after the Revolution, in a fairly chaotic economic state. It had accrued enormous debt, both foreign and domestic, in the process of fighting for its independence. To compound matters, the heavy dose of republicanism extant in the Articles of Confederation rendered it nearly impossible for Congress to raise sums of money sufficient to pay off even the interest on these loans in a given year, let alone cover the expenses of a frontier army. The Revolutionary War debt loomed over any

⁷⁹ Wayne to Knox, Headquarters, Greenville, May 30, 1794, in *Ibid.*, 334-336.

discussion of government finances in the first decade of the United States' existence, playing a dramatic role in the adoption of a new Constitution while complicating any simple analysis of economic development. The absence of a national currency further complicates any attempt at analysis. Army paymasters, for example, found themselves converting pay for the soldiers into four or five different types of currency before deeming it acceptable for issue. Bank notes issued by one state were often rejected altogether by another, while all were generally accepted on the frontier, albeit at a considerable discount.

Against this backdrop, it becomes clear that military procurement influenced the development of government finance and the national economy in three unique ways. First, the supplying of the frontier army made it possible to survey and sell the lands of the Northwest Territory, all the while underscoring the importance of internal improvements to the future growth of American trade. Second, contractors, both in purchasing supplies on the frontier economy and by operating sutler outfits at most army posts, stimulated the development of the western economy. These occurrences accelerated the formation of market activity in places such as Kentucky by introducing amounts of specie and currency that would otherwise not have been present on the frontier. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the need to supply the army wielded a profound influence over the development of high finance, working in concert with a host of other motivations to propel the national political leadership toward pursuing the power to tax, the adoption of a bank, and the encouragement of manufactures.

It is first necessary to establish to what extent contracting and military procurement represented significant activity before discussing the ways in which they influenced economic development. The data available is best for the period from 1791 to 1794 in which the Secretary of the Treasury provided to Congress clear statements of the accounts of the United States.⁸⁰ According to these figures, money devoted to contracting rose steadily from \$247,348.12 in 1791 to \$500,506.37 in 1793 before ballooning to over \$1.4 million in 1794. As a percentage of total government expenditures, contracting increased from 6.5% in 1791 to roughly 15.7% in 1794. 1792 represented something of an aberration. While government expenditures in that year rose over 100% and military funds nearly doubled, money allocated to contracting rose only moderately. Presumably, the rise in military expenses in 1792 reflected the creation and recruitment of the Legion. The costs of the recruiting service, the payment of enlistment bounties, and the dramatic increase in payroll likely explain the large growth in expenditures, while the time required to officially muster the new soldiers and move them to the frontier probably delayed any corresponding increase in contracting expenses. It is fair to say that throughout this period, military procurement via contracting represented a significant portion of government economic activity.

To the extent that contracting enabled the army to remain on the frontier, it facilitated the surveying of the Northwest Territory. Congress, as mentioned earlier,

⁸⁰ See, for example, U.S. Treasury Department, *The Treasurer of the United States' Accounts of Payments and Receipts of Public Monies, from 1st October, 1790, to 30th June, 1791* (Philadelphia: Childs & Swaine, 1791). See also U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States for the Year 1792* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1794); U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States for the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795); and U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States for the Year 1794* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795).

intended to survey the Northwest Territory as quickly as possible so that profits from the ensuing land sales could be applied to the public debt. Thus, the legislature believed the protection of the surveyors to be among the army's principal roles.⁸¹ "You are already sufficiently impress'd," Knox wrote to Josiah Harmar on May 24, 1786, "with the importance of having the western country surveyed with all convenient speed. You will therefore afford every facility to the surveyor general in the prosecution of his duty."⁸² While the contractors proved no more reliable in this process than they did in supplying routine army operations, the smaller size of these guard details made things easier. Early on in the process, the occasional party found it necessary to curtail surveying operations due to the lack of provisions.⁸³ Nevertheless, the surveyors managed to complete the survey of four of the seven ranges by the fall of 1786 and, Harmar hoped, would complete the remaining three over the course of the winter.⁸⁴ Despite this early optimism, the geographer, Captain Thomas Hutchins, would not initiate the survey of the fifth, sixth, and seventh ranges until the summer of 1787. Within a year, however, the surveyors would be marking out the exterior line of the first purchases of the western territory, that of the Ohio Company. This effort also proceeded with guards supplied by the army and provisions provided by the contractor.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Journal of Congress, Volume XII, 172.

⁸² Knox to Harmar, War Office, May 24, 1786, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁸³ Harmar to Hamtramck, Fort Harmar, September 21, 1786, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁸⁴ Harmar to Hutchins, Fort Harmar, November 6, 1786, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁸⁵ Harmar to Knox, Fort Harmar, June 7, 1787, and Harmar to Hamtramck, Fort Harmar, October 13, 1788, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan. Sword estimated that the United States earned \$213 million off land acquired from the Indians between 1775 and 1820. Sword, 338.

The army's presence on the frontier, in addition to facilitating the survey of western territory, introduced a considerable amount of specie and other forms of money into a regional economy that otherwise would have gone without. Historian Craig T. Friend, while studying the moral economy of the Kentucky frontier, noted the influx of specie and cash that accompanied the presence of the army.⁸⁶ This cash had the effect of stimulating commercial relationships much more closely aligned to market activity than would otherwise have occurred on the frontier at this stage. Businessmen moved from a barter economy based on the exchange of goods and account book credit to a system more dependent on the exchange of cash for goods at prices established by the market. The defeat of the Native Americans in 1794 led to the departure of the army and, consequently, the draining of this cash from the Western economy back east.⁸⁷ As merchants in this environment struggled to preserve their communal relationships, they were forced to revert to account-book credit even as they pushed the region into a broader national economy.

Considerable amounts of both specie and currency, of various forms, indeed flowed into the frontier through the hands of soldiers. Wrangling money out of the Treasury under the Articles of Confederation proved no easy task. Major Doughty worked for several months before finally securing \$5,000 for pay and forage, though even this was not in hard money but in notes from the Treasury of New York and the same of a local banker. In an effort to convert this money to gold, both suitable as hard

⁸⁶ Craig T. Friend, "Merchants and Markethouses: Reflections on Moral Economy in Early Kentucky," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1996), 560-562.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 563, 570.

currency and small enough to transport to the frontier without too much of a logistical challenge, Doughty needed first to convert the notes into French crowns, with which he purchased Philadelphia Bank Notes, whereupon, after a trip to Philadelphia, he successfully converted the notes into gold specie.⁸⁸ A year later, Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty enjoyed considerably greater success, returning to the frontier with \$17,000 in solid coin.⁸⁹

When pay went west to the soldiers, so did the contractors, intending to open, if they hadn't already, sutler's stores at which the army could spend its pay to augment the ration, such as it was. Thus, Joseph Howell, Jr., an eastern businessman, wrote to Harmar, "the circumstance of the Troops being paid in this manner being generally known will no doubt induce many persons to try their fortunes in sending goods to the Western Territory."⁹⁰ These contractors and sutlers offered one of the few outlets for soldiers' pay, and in turn, either in the execution of their contract or for other business purposes, they invested the money in the frontier, catalyzing the development of a market economy in places such as Kentucky, though only in temporary fashion.

Military procurement wielded its most profound long-term influence in shaping the development of governmental financial practices. Nearly all the financial debates of the period, including those surrounding the federal assumption of state debts, the power to tax, the establishment of a bank, and the encouragement of manufactures, were

⁸⁸ Major Doughty to Harmar, Fort Harmar, June 24, 1787, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁸⁹ Harmar to Hamtramck, Fort Harmar, March 1, 1788, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

⁹⁰ Joseph Howell, Jr. to Harmar, New York, October 25, 1789, Harmar Papers, William L. Clements Library, The University of Michigan.

motivated in great part by the need to provide for the common defense. Congress recognized as early as April 1783 and again in February 1786 that in order to provide adequately for the military while continuing to pay off the debt, the legislative body must have the power to levy taxes.⁹¹ The power to tax and the need to provide for the frontier army proved, of course, closely linked. Thus, when Congress created an additional regiment in 1791, the bill articulated just how the additional funding to pay for the military establishment would be raised. The appropriation “will be paid out of the monies, which . . . shall arise from the duties imposed upon spirits distilled within the United States, and from the stills.”⁹²

The bank, Alexander Hamilton argued, rendered this collection of taxes easier by increasing the amount of money in circulation and, to some extent, standardizing the means by which the taxes could be paid.⁹³ These taxes, he continued, generated the revenue necessary to raise and maintain fleets and armies and were essential to supplying the current frontier army.⁹⁴ “The support of government,” Hamilton stated, “the support of troops for the common defence; the payment of the public debt; are the true final causes for raising money.”⁹⁵ Military needs also occupied a central place in Hamilton’s 1791 *Report on Manufactures*. The Secretary of Treasury here clearly linked the future viability of national defense to the need to terminate the United States’ dependence upon foreign nations for military and other critical supplies. To achieve this independence, he

⁹¹ Journal of Congress, Volume XII, 24-25.

⁹² An Act for Raising and Adding Another Regiment, March 3, 1791.

⁹³ Harold C. Syrett, ed., *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, Vol. 8 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 121.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121 and 127.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

continued, the government must encourage the development of manufactures, especially of those sectors such as arms, iron, and lead, in a country in which constant expansion tends to stifle growth and innovation.⁹⁶ Contracting, to the extent that it represented a large portion of military expenditures—in 1794 it comprised over 54%—thus played a profound role in shaping the government’s methods of finance during this formative period in American history.

Conclusion

Supply by contract remained the primary system of military procurement from the end of the Revolution through 1795. Rather than herald the ascendancy of civilian control over logistics, this period saw the extension of military authority over both contractors and the quartermaster department when it mattered most. While Harmar suffered years of frustration before finally receiving this authority, and St. Clair proved incapable of exerting it, Wayne possessed both the command presence and enthusiasm for detail that made it work. The process of paying for these contractors, meanwhile, shaped the pressing financial debates of the day and propelled the country to move toward granting Congress the power to tax, establish a bank, and encourage manufactures. While certainly no military-industrial complex had been created, the groundwork may well have been laid.

⁹⁶ U.S Treasury Department, *Report of the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States on the Subject of Manufactures, December 5, 1791* (Philadelphia: Childs & Swaine, 1791), 1, 30, and 44-45.

Chapter 5. Hawks and Buzzards: Disorganized Supply in the War of 1812

"I have been hawk and buzzard as to supplies—the commissary and contractor—and I fear that with all the exertions that can be made some of the posts must suffer; at Meigs no flour, and two or three other posts in nearly the same situation. I called on the contractors and urged the necessity of some immediate supplies, but I cannot rely on their promises."

- John S. Gano, January 17, 1814¹

Writing from his camp in Franklinton, on October 22, 1812, only a month after assuming command of the Northwestern Army, Major General William Henry Harrison exhibited some of the frustration that would accompany him for most the War of 1812. "I am," he wrote, "out of all patience with the rascally contractors."² Harrison indeed faced a tall order. Following in the wake of William Hull's costly surrender at Detroit in August, he struggled to impose order upon a command impaired, if not crippled, by the accompanying loss of supplies and transportation to the British. To compound the problem, the American presence at Detroit had afforded covering protection for most army operations within the Ohio territory. Its loss rendered all American supply lines in the Northwest more vulnerable. Despite these challenges, Harrison's lack of patience with the contractors supplying the army seems particularly abrupt and persistent. His distrust

¹ John S. Gano to General William H. Harrison, January 17, 1814, Inquiry into the Conduct of General Harrison, in Walter Lowrie and Matthew St. Clair Clarke, eds., *American State Papers, Class V, Military Affairs*, vol. 1 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 656.

² William Henry Harrison, Headquarters, Franklinton, to John H. Piatt, October 22, 1812, in the William Henry Harrison Papers, The Cincinnati Historical Society. Hereafter referred to as WHH.

of the practice remained a theme throughout the conflict and caused him, in 1815, to call for an inquiry into his conduct in relation to supplying the Northwestern Army and dealing with its contractors.³

Supplying the army during the War of 1812 turned out to be a challenging task in the best of circumstances. A host of factors, ranging from struggles with an untamed wilderness, the navigability of critical waterways, the availability of transportation, government financial constraints, and negligent wastage, continued to disrupt even the most meticulous logistical plans.

Two factors emerged during the War of 1812 to render the supply of provisions controversial, if not problematic. First, Congress and the War Department never really developed a system for the procurement and distribution of rations. Both during the American Revolution and the Northwest Indian Wars, the government and army had experimented with a variety of methods to supply the troops with provisions. Eventually, they arrived at an acceptable, if not optimal, solution. Although Congress re-established the Quartermaster Department on the brink of the war and reformed it in 1813, none of these efforts addressed the subsistence of the army. Supply by contract thus persisted under the dual direction of the Secretary of War and army commander. Consequently, no centralized logistical department existed capable of simultaneously harnessing supply efforts to campaign goals while synchronizing purchases to avoid waste and inflation.

Intermingled with this first factor, military officers demonstrated remarkably little patience with issues or delays attributed to the contracts. While contractors clearly

³U.S. Congress, *American State Papers, Class V, Military Affairs*, vol. 1 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1832), 644-661.

struggled to meet the terms of their agreements throughout the war, their military counterparts appeared all too ready to condemn them as greedy profiteers and to abandon the agreed-upon terms in favor of short-term purchases and alternative contracts negotiated by various deputy commissaries. The absence of any subsistence system made it all the easier for commanders to circumvent contracts in favor of more immediate, albeit more expensive, alternatives. The issue here is less about expense, although that is a subject worthy of its own discussion. It is about the underlying factors rendering the relationship between military officer and contractor so inexplicably poisonous. One of the last true bastions of republican ideals amid growing liberal capitalist impulses, army officers required scant evidence of failure to confirm their opinions of contractors. When compared against officer notions of virtue and disinterestedness, the army's suppliers appeared to be corrupt businessmen seeking only to ensure their own profits at the expense of the nation's existential crisis. This republican rejection of contracting hindered effective supply during the War of 1812 and spelled the demise of supply by contract in the years following the conflict.

That a system seemingly so well-entrenched might break down so soon after the outbreak of war merits explanation. What led military officers to so universally and quickly condemn contractor performance? What factors contributed to the challenges encountered by contractors in the course of supplying the army? And finally, what did the government and military leadership do to improve the system of supply over the course of the conflict in light of these failings? The answers to these questions defy simple categorization.

It is worth noting that supply during the War of 1812 never experienced the degree of failure suffered during the Revolution or even during the campaigns in Ohio. No equivalent to the harsh winters at Valley Forge or Morristown surfaced in the years of fighting between 1812 and 1815. Acute regional shortages of rations clearly impeded or constrained campaigns, but these failings all too often competed with other organizational, operational, and tactical blunders to vie for attention as contemporary leaders and modern scholars sought to determine the causes of failure. Contractors, while rarely fulfilling all the terms of their agreements, at times provided large quantities of supplies. In this context, the army officers' general intolerance of contractors at the slightest hint of failure cries out for explanation.

Commanders and Contractors: A Perceived Clash of Ideals

Between Anthony Wayne's 1795 victory over Native Americans at Fallen Timbers and the commencement of the War of 1812, surprisingly little changed about the manner in which the army supervised its procurement of provisions. Although initially it retained the position of Quartermaster General, Congress eliminated the post with the passage of legislation on March 16, 1802. Supply by contract thus endured as the method by which the army obtained rations. In 1798, supervision of these contracts shifted to the Secretary of War with little effect upon performance. Supplying an army greatly reduced in size and generally situated at static frontier posts, the contract system seemed adequate to those in government and army administration, if not to the soldiers forced to consume

substandard rations to enable contractor profits. Perhaps most surprising of all, legislation in 1812 that re-established the Quartermaster Department and the Commissary General of Purchases and subsequent reforms in 1813 all failed to even address the subsistence of the army.⁴

Weaknesses in the contract system became evident early on in the conflict. Little over two weeks after the war began, Major General William Hull learned that the contractor responsible for supplying the Michigan territory, Augustus Porter, would not be able to fulfill the army's requisitions. Porter's agent, David Beard, informed Hull that he did not have enough provisions on hand nor any means of procuring what he lacked.⁵ Taking command of the army in September following Hull's premature surrender, Harrison alluded to this failure of the contractor in letters to the Secretary of War, William Eustis, in September and November. In the waning days of 1812, he informed the Secretary of War that he placed little faith in either Porter's ability to provide supplies north of the 41st latitude or that of James White, another contractor, to provide supplies south of the same line.⁶

Despite these critical assessments of the contractors, there existed at least two mitigating factors that should have tempered the officers' loud condemnations of supply by contract. First, the contractors' failures were not complete. While Porter and White did not fulfill the bulk of their requisitions, Harrison indicated that the provisions they did

⁴ Erna Risch, *Quartermaster Support of the Army, A History of the Corps, 1775-1939* (Washington, D.C.: Quartermaster Historian's Office, Office of the Quartermaster General, 1962), 111-112, 117-118, 130, and 142-144.

⁵ William Hull to John H. Piatt, July 9, 1812, in WHH.

⁶ Harrison to William Eustis, Head Quarter 17 Miles from Fort Wayne, September 11, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 3, 30; and Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters Franklinton, November 15, 1812, in *Ibid.*, 49-52.

procure would be sufficient to supply any shortages encountered through the commissaries' efforts. Second, and perhaps more importantly, the loss of control over Lake Erie presented a major obstacle to the execution of Porter's contract.⁷

Harrison, however, sympathized little with the contractor's plight. Augustus Porter found himself in an untenable situation that looked little like the world in which his original contract had been conceived. "This contract," he wrote, "was entered into by men in time, and with a view to a State of peace, and with an expectation that the supplies might be furnished as they have heretofore been, and transported in Vessels over the Lakes."⁸ Indeed, Porter negotiated his contract with Eustis before the declaration of war, agreeing to supply rations to the army at Chicago, Michillimackinac, Fort Wayne, Detroit, and all other places in Ohio and Indiana north of the 41st latitude. Before the outbreak of hostilities, he had accumulated large quantities of provisions along Lake Erie in both Ohio and Pennsylvania and began preparations to forward them to Detroit for further distribution. The loss of his ability to move supplies along the lakes, coupled with the absence of any reliable roads in northern Ohio and Indiana, would force him to transport his loads on packhorses. And while this represented the cheapest of the remaining options, Porter worried about the increased risk posed by roving bands of Native Americans seeking to prey upon lightly-guarded supply columns. Moreover, as with arrangements during the Revolution and Ohio Indian Wars, the contract never

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Augustus Porter to Governor Return Jonathan Meigs, Jr., July 28, 1812, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Document Transcriptions of the War of 1812 in the Northwest*, vol. 2, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Historical Society, 1957), 11.

envisioned supplying an army on the move. Additionally, once Hull's army crossed into Canada, it exceeded the bounds of Porter's contract.⁹

Porter's situation revealed just how brittle supply by contract was. Shifts in the fortunes of war could easily negate conditions under which an agreement was negotiated, wiping out anticipated profit margins or even causing losses. Additionally, contractors were no better postured to support armies on the offensive during the War of 1812 than were their predecessors. All of this suggested that supply by contract did not meet the needs of the army. Armed conflict, fraught with contingency, was quite inhospitable to a practice in which precise calculations dictated the margins of one's profit.

It is worth considering, however, that something more fundamental underlay the ready distrust military officers exhibited toward their supplier counterparts. Critiques of supply by contract maligned a system that always forced the contractor to choose between the good of the army and safeguarding his profits. In the view of critics, contractors always decided to protect their own interests. Thus, while Harrison acknowledged Porter's inability to rely upon Lake Erie to move supplies, he exhibited little concern that transporting rations by packhorse over land might eliminate altogether the contractor's profits. His lack of regard for Porter's plight fits well within an army perspective much more concerned with feeding its soldiers than funding its contractors.

⁹ Ibid. This last argument of Porter proved only partially correct. Most contracts during the War of 1812 obligated the contractor to provide provisions at specified points. Increased expense caused by change in location would occur on the government's account. See, for example, the third clause of the Articles of agreement made on the 10th day of March, Anno Domini 1813, between John Armstrong, Secretary of War of the United States of America, of the one part, and Benjamin G. Orr and Aaron Greely, of the city of Washington, of the other part, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 647.

Military leaders saw little evidence of character or public virtue in men whom they believed to be solely motivated by profit.

William Henry Harrison did not stand alone in his early and consistent condemnation of contractors. His predecessor, William Hull, complained about the failings of a contractor only two weeks after the war's declaration.¹⁰ Brigadier General Alexander Smyth, a brigade commander, warned the Secretary of War in October not to place much faith in the contractors. "Do not rely on the contractor for provisions," he advised, "he has no salt meat and only damaged flour. If you have any compassion on the service, send money either to Lieutenant Allison, my brigade quartermaster, or to some public agent under my orders. Without it, we cannot supply the contractor's deficiency."¹¹ First Lieutenant John G. Camp revealed that "the contractor has never issued a complete ration to twelfth or twentieth regiment since the 25th October, from which time I have been acting a quartermaster."¹² Colonel William H. Winder, Alexander Smyth's deputy, presented the most damning critique. "We are literally starving on this end of the line for bread," he wrote, "and unless the supply is more abundant, the contractors will be answerable for consequences more fatal to their country than treason."¹³ General Duncan McArthur's disgust toward contractors almost leapt off the page in a letter to Thomas Worthington about the subject. "If I had room," he wrote, "I would say a word on the subject of our Pinch-penny contractors who feel our existing on carron beef and musty

¹⁰ Brigadier General William Hull, Detroit, to John H. Piatt, July 9, 1812, in WHH.

¹¹ Brigadier General Smyth to the Secretary of War, near Buffalo, October 20, 1812, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 493. See also Smyth to Major General Dearborn, Camp near Buffalo, October 24, 1812, in *Ibid.*, 494; and Smyth to Dearborn, Camp near Buffalo, November 9, 1812, in *Ibid.*, 497. See also Major Armistead to Smyth, Lewiston, November 22, 1812, in *Ibid.*, 510.

¹² Certificate of Lieutenant John G. Camp, Williamsville, February 1, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 508.

¹³ Colonel William H. Winder to Smyth, November 7, 1812, in *Ibid.*

shorts whilst Fat beef & good Flower would be had at 1/2 penny more a lb."¹⁴ All of these complaints occurred within the first five months of war and, based on their near universality and scathing nature, suggest that supply by contract must have failed almost entirely.

What led army leaders to so resoundingly condemn the character of the men who had supplied them for much of the past thirty years? If the contractor could not supply the soldiers, then commanders and their appointed commissaries would have to seek rations elsewhere. And while this explanation alone might explain army officers' frustrations with contractors, it does not account for the rapidity with which they condemned them or the nature of the attacks they levied. Army officers often expressed their dissatisfaction with the contractors by not only recounting their failures but by attacking their very character. Disagreements between commander and contractor may well have stemmed from a clash of values within the military officer's mind: the virtuous, disinterested soldier juxtaposed against the self-interested businessman seeking profits. Looked at through this lens, the slightest sign of failure on the part of the contractor would trigger biting condemnation from the military officer. The army saw contractor failings as representative of a defective system but also as a result of the flawed character of the individuals involved.

Supplying the Army in a Continued Swamp

¹⁴ Duncan McArthur to Thomas Worthington, Detroit, July 7, 1812, in Richard C. Knopf, ed., *Document Transcriptions of the War of 1812 in the Northwest*, vol. 3, (Columbus, OH: The Ohio Historical Society, 1957), 106.

Supplying the Northwestern Army in northern Ohio, the Michigan territory, and in Canada, presented challenges sufficient to test any method employed. The movement of trade goods and supplies along the Ohio River Valley and its watershed had become somewhat routine by the War of 1812, accompanied by and in conjunction with considerable settlement. Somewhere between the fortieth and forty-first degree of latitude, marking the rough northern terminus of the Ohio's tributaries, the movement of supplies northward in support of the army became much more difficult. To move goods principally by water entailed back-breaking portages of twenty miles or more between the Ohio River system and the network that fed into Lake Erie. The ebb and flow of water levels across seasons lent a degree of uncertainty to this already arduous method. Transporting supplies over land required the construction and maintenance of roads through untamed forest.¹⁵ This process would turn out to be slow and laborious and when finished, might still be unsuitable for the wagon carriage of provisions.

Eager to establish a reliable line of communication from Ohio to Detroit and points north, Hull had set about constructing such a road from Urbana north to the foot of the Maumee Rapids in the summer of 1812. Known as Hull's Trace, this wilderness pathway would link central Ohio to the Maumee and the eventual location of Fort Meigs. It would be Hull's most substantial contribution to the war effort in an otherwise dismal performance. Along the route, he ordered the construction of periodic blockhouses both

¹⁵ Brigadier General William Hull to the Secretary of War, Washington, March 6, 1812, in E. A. Cruikshank, ed., *Documents relating to the Invasion of Canada and the Surrender of Detroit, 1812* (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1912), 21.

to provide security for the line of communication and to establish storehouses to facilitate the movement of provisions northward.

Progress, predictably, was difficult. "The heavy & incessant Rains which have fallen since the Army marched from Urbana," Hull wrote the Secretary of War, "have inundated the Country and rendered it impossible to make that expedition which the state of things may require, and my own wishes strongly impel."¹⁶ A later letter from William Henry Harrison to Eustis further underscored the challenges posed by the terrain in northern Ohio. "You can scarcely form an Idea Sir of the difficulty with which land transportation is effected North of the fortieth degree of latitude in this Country. The country beyond that is almost a continued swamp to the lakes."¹⁷ Although river transportation was preferable to moving by land, Harrison continued, the areas between river networks often became flooded, rendering even more difficult an already arduous portage. Rather than construct roads, the army needed to build elevated causeways in order to preserve their supply lines from the ravages of rising water levels.¹⁸

Provided reliable lines of communication could be established, the early stages of the War of 1812 saw a fundamental shift in the source of supply for the Northwestern Army. Whereas in previous conflicts in the Ohio territory the army relied on the Fort Pitt area for provisions, and to a lesser extent Kentucky, Harrison believed that Ohio alone could provide the vast quantities of rations needed to support their campaigns. Harrison's predecessor, Hull, recognized that with the loss of Lake Erie most supplies for the

¹⁶ Ibid., 36.

¹⁷ Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 49-52.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Northwestern Army would at least pass through Ohio.¹⁹ Thus, when the War Department received early notifications that Augustus Porter, himself a contractor heavily reliant upon western Pennsylvania and eastern Ohio for provisions, would fail to fulfill his contract, Eustis turned to Ebenezer Denny, a former army officer turned contractor from Pittsburgh, to provide over one million rations to fuel the army's next campaign.²⁰ Supplies procured by Denny would either flow to the Northwestern Army in much the same manner as they had over the previous thirty years, via the Ohio River, or over land along a route from Canton through Wooster and Mansfield to Sandusky.

Harrison, however, while welcoming the additional rations provided through Denny's efforts, saw the procurement of supplies in the Pittsburg area as incurring unnecessary expense. He directed Major Denny to forward 400,000 rations along the Canton and Wooster route but indicated that no further supplies should be shipped from Pennsylvania with exception of whiskey. "All the information I receive corroborates the opinion I have given that any thing else can be procured here [Ohio] cheaper than it can be brought from Pittsburg."²¹ Indeed, Harrison recalled the difficulties inherent in moving supplies along the Ohio River during Anthony Wayne's campaign against the Native Americans. Unless control of Lake Erie could be wrested from the British, he did not see the purpose in procuring supplies from eastern Pennsylvania. In seeking sources of supply primarily from Ohio, Harrison would eliminate the expensive process of

¹⁹ Cruikshank, ed., 21.

²⁰ William Eustis to Ebenezer Denny, September 1, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 2, 41. Eustis called for 1,098,000 rations, including the small parts, and directed Denny to move the beef on the hoof and procure transportation for the other components.

²¹ Harrison to Eustis, October 15, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 38-41.

transporting provisions from Pittsburg to the southern terminus of his supply lines in central and northern Ohio.²²

The commander of the Northwestern Army devoted considerable attention to the improvement of these Ohio lines of communication. By the end of 1812, Harrison envisioned operating along three principal supply routes from central to northern Ohio. The principal route began at its southern terminus in Franklinton, a modern day neighborhood within Columbus. From there, it proceeded north along a road through Delaware to Upper and Lower Sandusky. Water transportation via the Sandusky River when feasible, would ease reliance upon ox teams and packhorses carrying rations on land. A second route, Hull's Trace, began at Urbana and led north through Kenton to Fort Findlay and eventually the Maumee Rapids. Finally, the western route started at Piqua and, following a brief trip over land, afforded the army the option of utilizing either St. Mary's River to Fort Wayne or the Au Glaize River to Fort Defiance. This logistical network offered Major General Harrison a great deal of flexibility. He could now echelon supplies across a wide swath of northern Ohio, creating some redundancy while ensuring that quantities could be concentrated as necessary to support the army's endeavors.²³

The Emergence of John H. Piatt

²² Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters, Piqua, September 24, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 33-34; and Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters, Piqua, September 27, 1812, in Ibid., 35-36.

²³ Harrison to Piatt, Piqua, October 9, 1812, WHH; Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Franklinton, October 21, 1812, WHH; Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Franklinton, January 3, 1813, WHH; Harrison to Glenn, Camp Meigs, Maumee Rapids, March 1, 1813, WHH; and Harrison to Eustis, October 15, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 38-41.

The absence of any administrative body responsible for supervising the feeding of the army, coupled with the contractors' early and extensive failures, created a vacuum in which military leaders deputized commissaries or agents in order to supply any shortages. Due to the failure of the contract, these agents needed to procure large quantities of provisions on comparative short notice. Consequently, they incurred considerable government expense. Nevertheless, they delivered on the army's requisitions. These deputized agents' efforts proved so reliable that commanders began to prefer the mode over the uncertainty provided by the contract system. Reliance upon commissary agents early in the conflict effectively destabilized the contract system for the remainder of the war as leaders readily authorized their purchases at the earliest sign of contract failure.

John H. Piatt, a Purchasing Commissary for the army and a merchant from Ohio, became one such agent. Immediately upon learning that Augustus Porter would not be able to meet the terms of his contract, William Hull appointed Piatt an agent to purchase both beef and flour sufficient for 200,000 rations, asking him to secure the lowest possible price. In addition, Piatt needed to procure transportation for the same. For his troubles, Hull promised to pay a five percent commission on Piatt's purchases as well as reimburse any expenses.²⁴ Presumably Hull made additional requisitions on Piatt. By September 6, only a few weeks after the surrender of Detroit, William Henry Harrison noted that Piatt had on hand 400,000 rations of beef, more than 150,000 rations of flour, and three hundred packhorses with which to move the supplies. The commander

²⁴ Brigadier General William Hull to Mr. John H. Piatt, Detroit, July 9, 1812, WHH.

requested an additional fifteen to twenty thousand rations worth of bacon and enough component parts to render the 150,000 rations worth of flour complete.²⁵

Unhindered by contract terms and the need to turn a profit, Piatt accumulated an impressive quantity of provisions in only a matter of weeks. The promise of a commission offered no small incentive. Army officers, likewise unconcerned by the bottom line, clearly preferred this responsive system of appointing purchasing agents to the inflexible, corrupt practice of supply by contract. Harrison was so impressed with Piatt's performance that he appointed him a Deputy Commissary General on September 27 and directed him to procure provisions for the Northwestern Army.²⁶

Envisioning a campaign to retake Detroit in the fall of 1812, Harrison set about accumulating large supplies for his army. To do so, he communicated almost constantly with his newly appointed Deputy Commissary General. By early October, the commander asked Piatt to move five or six hundred thousand rations north along the St. Mary's route beginning at Piqua. Just two days later, having relocated to Urbana, Harrison expressed his concern that no flour had been purchased there and directed his agent to acquire 200,000 rations and move it forward along the central route to McArthur's Blockhouse.²⁷ Writing only a week later from Franklinton, he noted that the season had arrived for purchasing pork and ordered Piatt to procure 500,000 rations of it to move along the Defiance route.²⁸ Harrison's industriousness along his supply lines

²⁵ Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Piqua, September 6, 1812, WHH.

²⁶ Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Piqua, September 27, 1812, WHH; and Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters, Piqua, September 27, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 35-36.

²⁷ Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Piqua, October 9, 1812, WHH; and Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Urbana, October 11, 1812, WHH.

²⁸ Harrison to Piatt, Head Quarters, Franklinton, October 21, 1812, WHH.

proved second in impressiveness only to the vast quantities of supply he believed Piatt could command.

The commander of the Northwestern Army would not rely solely on his Deputy Commissary General. Redundancy was the name of the game. In addition to those requisitions made to Piatt, Harrison continued to press the contractors for supplies, securing at least some quantities of provision from both Augustus Porter and James White. He also counted on the requisitions made by Secretary of War Eustis on Ebenezer Denny. Thus, by the end of November, Harrison found himself in fairly comfortable circumstances. In a summary of the Northwestern Army's situation, the commander reported that he had on hand 1,098,000 complete rations, 12,000 barrels of flour, 1500 head of stall-fed cattle, and 3 million rations worth of salted meat arrayed along his principal supply routes. The army, he added, laid in an additional 200,000 rations minus the meat component. To further provide for his command, Harrison indicated that he had ordered an additional 800,000 to one million rations yet to be procured.²⁹

While still frustrated with the performance of the contractors, Harrison could hardly claim to have suffered the same degree of supply scarcity known in previous conflicts. By December, in fact, the commander seemed to realize that he had built for himself a complex operation bringing a host of different resources to bear on the problem of supplying the Northwestern Army with rations. To help manage this effort, Harrison appointed John C. Bartlett as Field Commissary, assigning him the duty of receiving and

²⁹ Harrison to John C. Symmes, Head Quarters, Franklinton, November 30, 1812, WHH.

accounting for all provisions purchased for the United States.³⁰ Writing to Eustis just a few days later, Harrison stated, "I have so many Engines in operation for forwarding provisions that I scarcely believe it a possibility of our not having a sufficiency."³¹ While he made these arrangements at the expense of the supply by contract system, Harrison justified his decisions by placing the well-being of his army above matters of expense. Driven to provide for his soldiers amid considerable contractor failure, Harrison balked at no arrangement that might result in better supplies for his army.

The Trials and Tribulations of Orr & Greely

The absence of any kind of subsistence department became telling as Harrison sought to control the significant logistical forces he had put in motion. While he clearly succeeded in procuring large quantities of rations, rumors began to circulate that he did so while incurring great expense and suffering considerable waste due to mismanagement in transporting, storing, and issuing. That he never launched his campaign to retake Detroit in 1812 could not have helped. Undermining the contractor may have provided for the army, but in doing so it exposed the lack of a true system for managing subsistence. Presumably the contractor would have supervised many aspects of the business up until the issuance of rations to the soldiers. Once cut out of the process, however, contractors had no role to play, leaving the agents and commissaries appointed by Harrison to rely upon ad hoc arrangements in order to ship and store their provisions.

³⁰ Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters, Delaware, December 11, 1812, in Knopf, ed., vol. 1, 56.

³¹ Harrison to Eustis, Head Quarters, Delaware, December 14, 1812, in Ibid., 61.

Harrison's Northwestern Army would remain on the defensive for much of 1813. The British control of Lake Erie and invasions of Ohio prevented him from going on the offensive. Commodore Oliver H. Perry's victory over the British on the lake in early September, dramatically altered the contest. The British in northern Ohio and Detroit found themselves cut off from reliable supply lines tracing back to Canada. Consequently, Harrison's army recaptured Fort Detroit and pushed into Canada.

The supply situation came to a head in 1813 with the advent of a new contractor responsible for supplying the army in Ohio, the Michigan territory, and in Canada along the shores of Lake Erie. On March 10, 1813, Benjamin Orr and Aaron Greely signed an agreement with John Armstrong, the new Secretary of War, to effectively supply the Northwestern Army.³² Unlike the case with Augustus Porter, Orr and Greely never even enjoyed the opportunity to fail before running into disagreement with Harrison.

The initial trouble stemmed from the transition between one contract and the next. Having accumulated large quantities of supplies during the tenure of the previous contract, Harrison needed to work with the new contractors, Orr and Greely, in order to transfer the deposits of provisions on hand and arrange for their issuance.³³ This the commander readily agreed to do, writing Orr on June 20, 1813, in order to set up a meeting at which to discuss the specifics of the transfer. Harrison, however, also dropped the first of two bombshells on the new contractors in that letter. His army, he wrote to Orr, already had on hand sufficient provisions for the next campaign with the exception

³² Articles of Agreement made on the 10th Day of March, *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 647.

³³ Armstrong to Harrison, May 31, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 645.

of fresh beef.³⁴ Such a statement must have dampened Orr's and Greely's enthusiasm considerably. Contractors would profit little from a contract from which the army required no supplies.

Further compounding the problem, Harrison seemed incapable of articulating the quantities of rations the army had on hand. Orr and Greely began to wonder if the commander's claims to have sufficient provisions for the ensuing campaign remained credible.³⁵ The contractors were concerned that a premature failure of the supplies on hand would reflect negatively on their performance and wrote Armstrong in August seeking exoneration in the event that such a shortage occurred.³⁶

The second bombshell Harrison dropped upon Orr and Greely involved the transfer of the on hand deposits. Indicating that very few of the provisions currently sat at the locations at which they were needed, Harrison argued that they should be transported to their final destinations at the expense of the contractor.³⁷ Orr and Greely clearly protested such an arrangement and seemed to have the terms of the contract on their side. "It is understood," the contract read, "that if the contractor shall be required to deposite provisions at one place or post, and shall afterwards be required to move them, to be delivered at another place or post, the expenses of transportation to such other place or post shall be borne by the United States."³⁸ Regardless of who proved correct, the

³⁴ Harrison to Orr, Head Quarters, Franklinton, June 20, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 645.

³⁵ See, for example, Harrison to Orr, Head Quarters, Franklinton, May 19, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 645; and Harrison to Orr, Head Quarters, Franklinton, June 20, 1813, in *Ibid.* See also Statement of Benjamin G. Orr, Washington, March 21, 1814, in *Ibid.*, 648-649.

³⁶ Orr to Armstrong, Washington, August 4, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 646.

³⁷ Harrison to Orr, Head Quarters, Franklinton, June 22, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 645.

³⁸ Articles of Agreement made on the 10th Day of March, in *Ibid.*, 647.

disagreement had the effect of delaying Orr's and Greely's ability to issue supplies to the army while Harrison sought the advice of the Secretary of War.

The supplies of the Northwestern Army remained robust during the Summer of 1813, as Harrison's update of November 30, 1812, suggested.³⁹ According to Piatt's Report of Provisions dated June 24, 1813, the Northwestern Army had on hand 4,422 barrels of flour, 193 barrels of biscuit, 607 1/2 barrels of whiskey, 252 1/2 barrels of salt, 28 barrels of pork, 162,660 pounds of bacon, 95 boxes of soap, and 73 boxes of candles.⁴⁰ Yet, Harrison's claims to have sufficient supplies for the coming campaign to the contrary, he ordered additional requisitions totaling 300,000 rations from Orr and Greely in late August and early September.⁴¹ What prompted this unanticipated demand for supplies when Harrison consistently emphasized that nothing would be needed for the campaign?

According to his own testimony, provided in support of an inquiry Harrison requested into the matter in 1815, a long list of misfortunes struck the army's supplies resulting in the spoilage or damage of much of the beef and flour. Harrison revealed that the initial loss of flour occurred in transport between St. Mary's and Fort Meigs, believing that his soldiers likely off-loaded a good deal of flour at Fort Winchester in order to arrive at Meigs unencumbered. Enemy shot destroyed the storage containers of flour and salted meat at Fort Meigs, resulting in considerable loss and spoilage. Meanwhile, flour

³⁹ Harrison to John C. Symmes, Head Quarters, Franklinton, November 30, 1812, WHH.

⁴⁰ John H. Piatt, Report of provisions remaining at different posts . . . on the 24th day of June, 1813, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 653.

⁴¹ Statement of Benjamin G. Orr, Washington, March 21, 1814, in *Ibid.*, 649. See also Harrison to Major Peter G. Voorhies, Agent for Orr and Greely, Head Quarters, Seneca Town, August 18, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 653.

purchased in Chillicothe and transported along the eastern route between Franklinton and Sandusky suffered from rough roads and frequent loading and unloading on different carriages, resulting in damaged barrels and considerable further loss. Harrison also indicated that consumption along the right wing of his army proved greater than anticipated due to the arrival of large numbers of Ohio militia.⁴²

Though Orr and Greely could rightly claim that they never expected to provide supplies as early as August based on Harrison's earlier statements, they proved quite responsive to the requisitions. By September 10, the contractors provided 300,000 rations, delivering 200,000 to various points along the shores of Lake Erie and the remainder to the mouth of the Sandusky River.⁴³ Within a week of Harrison's August 18 requisition, Orr and Greely had already positioned 144,704 rations of pork, 168,136 rations of flour, 159,968 rations of whiskey, 50,000 rations of soap, 23,333 rations of candles, 110,000 rations of vinegar, and 600,000 rations of salt along Lake Erie.⁴⁴ Yet, when Orr attempted to secure payment for these efforts, he learned that Harrison had protested their bills, arguing that the purchases had been made with money already advanced to the commander. This action destroyed the contractors' credit, rendering their subcontractors unwilling to provide the abstracts needed to secure further reimbursement and impairing their ability to purchase provisions in the future. Only days later, a clerk wrote General Harrison indicating that the War Department paid John Piatt \$25,000 for

⁴² Statement of General Harrison, Cincinnati, December 20, 1815, in *Ibid.*, 651.

⁴³ Statement of Benjamin G. Orr, Washington, March 21, 1814, in *Ibid.*, 649.

⁴⁴ Orr and Greely, Return of provision now deposited at different places on the shore of Lake Erie, August 25, 1813, in *Ibid.*, 654.

supplies purchased and seeking to confirm whether these expenses occurred as a result of the contractors' failures.

Orr and Greely arguably exceeded any expectations the army should have had, fulfilling requisitions in ten days when the contract allowed for no less than thirty days' notice. The destruction of their credit effectively terminated their ability to perform the contract. Consequently, the Northwestern Army's requisitions flowed almost exclusively to Piatt in the Fall and Winter of 1813. Even before the failure, Bartlett directed the Deputy Commissary General to procure 250,000 rations of bacon or salt pork to be delivered to Lower Sandusky. Subsequent orders placed on Piatt called for 800,000 and 500,000 rations at Detroit and Lower Sandusky respectively in November, and for 200,000 rations at Fort Meigs in December.⁴⁵ In his final condemnation of the contractors, Harrison made much of a comment supposedly issued by Orr that Orr & Greely had made \$100,000 on the contract and might have made three times that but for the general's interference.⁴⁶ Orr countered that the practice of employing commissaries placed them in competition with contractors, driving market prices up by twenty to forty percent and securing provisions at fifty to one hundred percent more than the contract price.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Bartlett to Piatt, Head Quarters, Seneca, August 18, 1813, WHH; William Oliver, Aide de Camp, to Piatt, Detroit, November 5, 1813, WHH; and Cass to Piatt, Detroit, December 11, 1813, WHH. Interestingly, none of these Fall requisitions appear on the Statement, showing the amount expended in the purchase of provisions . . . between the 1st of June 1813, and 1st June 1814, particularizing those purchased to supply failures on the part of the contractors, Orr and Greely, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 659.

⁴⁶ Statement of General Harrison, Cincinnati, December 20, 1815, in *Ibid.*, 652.

⁴⁷ Statement of Benjamin G. Orr, Washington, March 21, 1814, in *Ibid.*, 649.

Conclusion

Generals Winfield Scott and Edmund P. Gaines, two of the most prominent post-war army officers, uniformly condemned the practice of supply by contract at the conclusion of the war, finding fault not only in a system seemingly designed to test the virtue of its proponents but fraught with individuals who routinely failed such trials, readily choosing their own self-interest over the needs of the army. In late 1814, the House of Representatives Committee on Military Affairs sought input from the War Department on the preferred method of subsisting the army. Both Scott and Gaines argued in favor of a commissary system in preference to supply by contract. "The interests of the contractor," Scott argued, "are in precise opposition to those of the troops. . . . Every option given to the contractor under the contract, operates to the prejudice of the troops, and frequently embarrasses the General."⁴⁸

To illustrate his argument, Scott pointed to the practice of issuing flour or bread. According to the terms of the contract, the contractor retained the right to issue either flour or bread at his discretion. The specified ration of eighteen ounces of flour, however, generally yielded twenty-seven rations' worth of bread. Thus, when ample time existed for baking, the contractor would extend his supplies of flour by baking the bread and issuing it to the soldiers, thereby denying the soldiers the opportunity to do the same. When little time existed for baking, Scott continued, the contractors would issue flour, either forcing the army to allow time for baking or, in the alternative, charging the

⁴⁸ Documents Communicated to Congress on the Best Mode of Subsisting the Army, January 25, 1815, in *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 599-601.

government an additional commission to bake it into hard bread for the soldiers. "It would be endless," Scott concluded, "to trace the petty villanies which contractors are daily tempted to commit, to the prejudice of the troops, arising out of this opposition of interests before noticed."⁴⁹

Both Scott and Colonel John R. Fenwick expressed the belief that a contractor might be likely to betray an army to the opposing side. "The best planned operations," Fenwick stated, "may be frustrated by the perverse or tardy contractor, or his dishonest agent, who, if base enough to defraud the soldier, would be equally so in communicating with the enemy."⁵⁰ He soundly condemned the practice of supply by contracting, arguing "the necessity of destroying the evil."⁵¹ Fenwick offered a litany of complaints, ranging from the spoiled meat and flour to the inefficiency of the redress system and the rarely-provided smaller parts of the ration, meaning in particular the soap and vinegar, but also salt and candles. "Contracts are never fulfilled to the letter," he argued, "and never will be so long as avarice exists; and where so many opportunities present themselves to the military contractor for imposition and fraud, we must expect he will avail himself of them."⁵² Fenwick clearly held contractors in contempt, believing that greed motivated their actions at the expense of the soldier and suggesting they possessed so little virtue that treason might have appeared no significant object.

General Gaines employed a fair amount of sarcasm in criticizing the practice of farming out contracts to various subcontractors. "Original contractors," he mocked,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 600.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 601.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

"seem to be a privileged order of men, who, by virtue of the profits of the contract, are elevated above the drudgery which a common sense view of the contract would seem to impose upon them."⁵³ Upon arriving at contracts with the War Department in Washington, he continued, contractors ensured their own profits before turning to subcontractors in order to execute the terms. From subcontractors they often accepted such low bids that their subordinate agents could only manage meager profits through fraud or the issuance of sub-par rations. Indeed, Gaines opened his statement with complaints about subcontractors at Wilmington, Billingsport, and Marcus Hook. In the first instance, the subcontractor had failed to supply one ration in the previous two weeks. The subcontractors issued either spoiled provisions or none at all at the latter two locations. Supply by contract, Gaines argued, caused the army more harm than did enemy fire.

While it proved easy to cloak decisions to procure supplies from sources other than the contractor in language of military necessity, in doing so, commanders simultaneously undercut the long-term ability of contractors to meet the remaining provisos of their agreement and increased overall government expenses. Determining culpability in this inflationary cycle can prove problematic. Who, for example, do you blame when contractors barely enjoy enough time to meet the terms of their contract before purchasing commissaries, anticipating failure, drive regional prices higher by acquiring large amounts of provisions on short notice at higher rates? Already operating on something of a narrow profit-margin, contractors found it all the more difficult to

⁵³ Ibid.

supply the army amid the subsequent scarcity of ration components and the corresponding rise in price caused by purchasing commissaries. The fact that they likely underbid the contract in order to secure it during the bidding process only compounded the problem.

That the interests of military officers and contractors appeared diametrically opposed did little to help the latter's cause when it came time to weigh the merits of supply by contract against that of the commissary. Army officers, driven by a sense of republican virtue and disinterested service, rejected a system that placed profit in the path of adequate subsistence support. Though Orr and Greely, perhaps one of the better contractors available, may have been undermined by the purchases of commissaries, their vulnerability to such forces reinforced ideas about the frailty of the contract system. Operating on a narrow profit margin, especially at the subcontractor level, contractors could ill afford increases in market prices beyond the ration component prices stipulated in the contracts. Instead, they opted simply to fail to meet the requisitions. While a true subsistence system might have mitigated this clash between contractor and army officer, the failure to develop any formalized structure for procuring provisions placed contractors at a disadvantage with their commissary peers. Ultimately, the inflexibility of the contract system, coupled with army officer's contempt for contractors, compelled leaders such as Winfield Scott and Edmund P. Gaines to call for the adoption of a commissary system at the conclusion of the war.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ For Scott's and Gaines's recommendations, see *American State Papers, Military Affairs*, 600-601.

Chapter 6. Revenue and Frugality: The Costs of Supplying War and Its Impact on American Economic Policy

One of the first French agents to arrive in the United States in 1778, John Holker encountered an economic environment lacking structure and regulation. Raised in France, this son of an English Jacobite quickly immersed himself in the American wartime economy, nurturing durable relationships with many of the most influential merchants connected to military supplies. The list of Holker's business associates in 1780 reads like a veritable who's who of late-nineteenth century military contractors, including William Turnbull, Peter Marmie, William Duer, Matthias Slough, and Robert Morris. Backed by hard French currency in his position as agent of the Royal Marine and later as supplier of Rochambeau's army, Holker presented formidable competition to those Continental Army supply officials offering little more than promises of payment in exchange for goods. In 1780 and early 1781 alone, he committed over 700,000 *livres Tournois* to providing the French army with provisions through contracts with various American suppliers.¹ The French agent's ability to marshal large sums of reliable currency in exchange for provisions displaced the Continental Army's efforts to procure supplies

¹ *Approvisionnement pour L'Armée française a son arrivée en Amérique*, 1780, in John Holker Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Microfilm, Reel 7.

from its own population and caused considerable unrest among American commanders frustrated at the difficulties inherent in securing good rations for their soldiers.²

Yet, few within the ranks of American military officers or mercantile circles should have been surprised by the French influence upon provisions transactions. The rapidity with which Holker penetrated the American market for provisions highlighted the fundamental weakness behind the young country's financial position. In many ways the year 1780 represented a tipping point, if not the financial nadir, of the United States during the American Revolution when it came to army supply. Monetary depreciation, largely a result of excessive paper money issues, reduced federal purchasing power to almost nil. In 1777, for example, two dollars of Continental currency could purchase one dollar's worth of specie. By 1780, that ratio had risen to sixty-to-one. Although the Continental Congress implemented a policy intended to stop paper money emission and tax existing supplies out of circulation, depreciation ultimately compelled the federal government to adopt the system of specific supplies and caused supply officials to issue certificates in exchange for goods. To farmers and merchants, these certificates differed little from impressment.³ Indeed, some mid-Atlantic and New England farmers preferred to sell their goods to the British army rather than accept Continental script or certificates of dubious value. The system of specific supplies, dependent upon states to raise and deliver quotas of supplies to a location designated by the commander, never adequately

² For the French use of solid coin, see James Thacher, *A Military Journal of the American Revolution from the commencement to the disbanding of the American Army* (Hartford, CT: Hurlbut, Williams & Company, 1862), 265-266.

³ E. James Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse: A History of American Public Finance, 1776-1790* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 32-48.

supplied the army. There can be, therefore, little question as to the impact that a European force might have upon the procurement of provisions.⁴

The failure of the system of specific supplies in 1780, however, heralded the appointment of Robert Morris as Superintendent of Finance. And it was Morris, working against considerable odds to pay and supply the army, who anticipated many of the programs later advocated by Alexander Hamilton in the 1790s and regarded as the development of national public finance.

While the advent of the American financial system, including the adoption of a stable currency backed by specie, the creation of the bank, the implementation of taxes, and the funding of the debt, received a good deal of historical attention over the past fifteen years, the reality that military circumstances constituted a driving impulse in their creation has received comparatively little notice. Even discussion of the Revolutionary debt, almost exclusively a product of military endeavor, subordinated the significance of its source to debates over the unifying influence of federal assumption and neo-natal conversations arraying state against federal power. The need to pay, feed, and equip the army of the United States from the outbreak of the Revolution in 1775 to its conclusion in 1783 profoundly shaped the economic circumstances in which the country developed its fundamental financial institutions and practices over the ensuing thirty years. Moreover, the continued financial demand placed upon the government by military considerations

⁴ John Shy discussed the competition for resources posed by the British and French armies in Shy, "Logistical Crisis and the American Revolution: A Hypothesis," in John A. Lynn, ed., *Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1993), 170.

throughout the early republic both sustained demand for the development of public finance and shaped the discourse underscoring its creation.⁵

A Brief Overview of Military Expenditures in the Early Republic

Any examination of American finance, government spending, and economic development during this period proves problematic. The depreciation of Continental currency during the Revolution, for example, almost defies simple quantification. The continued circulation of foreign specie well into the 1790s likewise complicates ready comparisons of even basic transactions. Calculations of national gross domestic product during this period represent conjectures that induce error in a multitude of fashions while placing values on such activities as farm and artisan output in an economy not yet predictably defined by market forces.⁶

To minimize the potential for error, less attention will be paid to establishing the real value of expenditures measured against a fixed point in time in favor of considering values as a percentage of overall government appropriations and expenditures. In essence, it seems sufficient to contend that the manner in which the government decided

⁵ That the period between 1789 to 1815 represented a time of transformative economic development is not universally accepted. Nor is there consensus on what factors may have driven the change. John Joseph Wallis, for example, argued that while 1790 to 1842 saw the first U.S. system of government finance, state governments exerted the most influence by promoting corporations and banks. John Joseph Wallis, "American Government Finance in the Long Run: 1790 to 1990," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 62. Wallis's argument is primarily predicated on the activity of states after the War of 1812, when significant investment in transportation infrastructure attracted heavy state involvement.

⁶ See, for example, Richard Sutch's discussion of the challenges inherent in calculating gross domestic product prior to 1840 in Richard Sutch, "Table Ca9-19, Gross Domestic Product: 1790-2002 [Continuous Annual Series]," in Susan B. Carter, Scott, Sigmund Garter, Michael R. Haines, Alan L. Olmstead, Richard Sutch, and Gavin Wright, eds., *Historical Statistics of the United States*, Millennial Edition On Line, 3-23-3-28.

to spend its money in the early republic is both reflective of federal priorities and causative in the development of public finance. The imposition of taxes, for example, to fund government expenditures bore a direct connection to the military appropriations that dominated federal spending.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the question of debt-related finance following the American Revolution, military-related spending constituted the single largest budgetary item in every estimate of federal appropriations from 1789 to 1815. Indeed, during this twenty-six year span, military spending as a percentage of total government appropriations dipped to fifty percent or lower only three times: 1789, 1790, and 1797. Considered from the perspective of a seven-year moving average beginning in 1795, military expenses consistently ranged between sixty and seventy percent of total government appropriations save the years during the War of 1812, when it predictably rose to well over seventy percent as contemporary war-related costs consumed over ninety percent of the federal budget (See Figures 6.1-6.3).⁷ Irrespective of where the

⁷ For the years from 1789 through 1815, excluding 1793, 1799, 1801, and 1802, see Estimates for the Year 1789, July 9, August 27, and September 24, 1789, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 11-13; Public Credit, January 9, 1790, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 33; Estimates for the Year 1791, January 6, 1791, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 82-88; Estimates of Receipts and Expenditures for 1791-2, January 23, 1792, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 146; Increase of Duties, April 17, 1794, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 276-278; Public Debt, December 15, 1794, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 319; Estimates for 1796, December 14, 1795, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 359-362; Additional Revenues, May 1, 1798, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 582; Estimates for the Year 1800, February 21, 1800, *American State Papers: Finance 1*: 627-628; State of the Finances, December 20, 1802, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 5-6; Sinking Fund, March 3, 1803, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 47-48; State of the Finances, November 21, 1804, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 107-108; State of the Finances, December 9, 1805, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 142; State of the Finances, December 8, 1806, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 204; State of the Finances, November 7, 1807, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 247; State of the Finances, December 16, 1808, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 308; State of the Finances, June 2, 1809, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 365; State of the Finances, December 8, 1809, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 374-375; State of the Finances, December 12, 1810, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 442; State of the Finances, November 25, 1811, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 495; Receipts and Expenditures Estimated for 1812, June 29, 1812, *American State*

early American government dedicated its efforts during this period, it spent most of its money on the military. Indeed, military considerations dominated federal spending in a stretch perhaps most known for temporary mobilizations of troops in 1794 to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion and in 1798 in anticipation of a potential war with France.

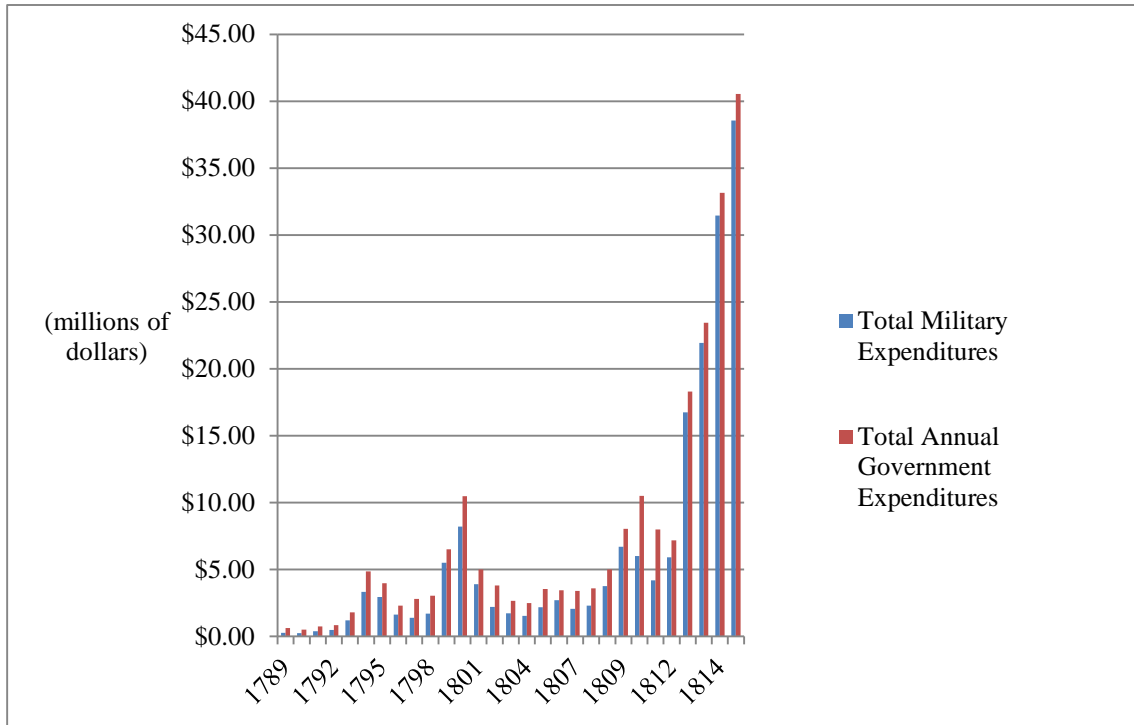


Figure 6.1: Annual Expenditures, 1789-1815⁸

*Papers: Finance 2: 569; State of the Finances, December 7, 1812, American State Papers: Finance 2: 580-581; State of the Finances, January 10, 1814, American State Papers: Finance 2: 651-652; and State of the Treasury, January 21, 1815, American State Papers: Finance 2: 885-886. For 1793, 1799, 1801, and 1802, see Paul Studenski and Herman Edward Krooss, *Financial History of the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1952; reprint, Washington, D.C.: Beard Books, 2003), 54 and 66 (page citations are to the reprint edition).*

⁸ Ibid.

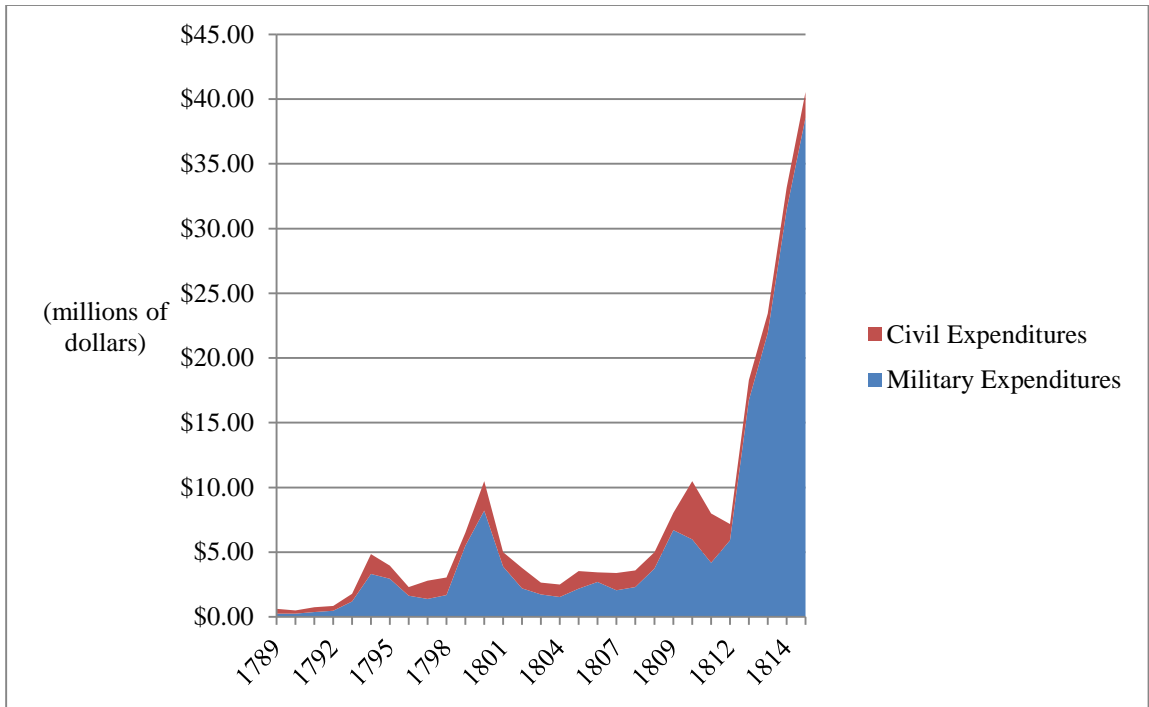


Figure 6.2: Annual Military and Civil Expenditures, 1789-1815⁹

⁹ Ibid.

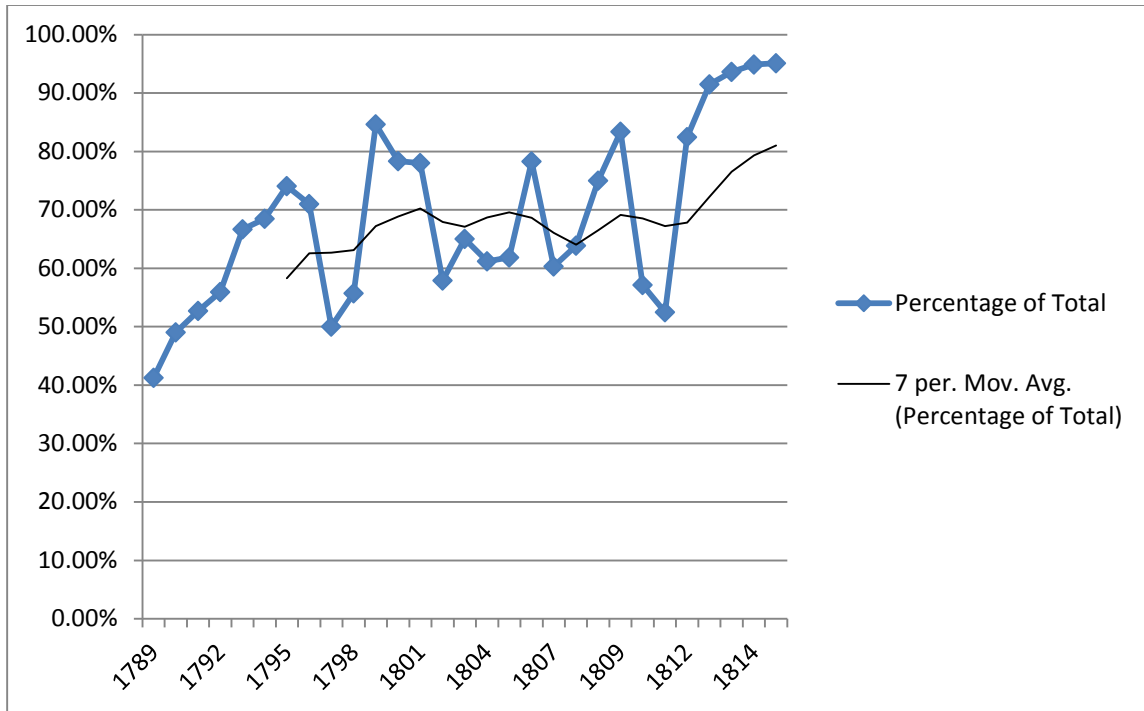


Figure 6.3: Military Expenditures as Percentage of Total Government Appropriations

Factoring in those funds appropriated for the payment of the principal and interest on America's Revolutionary War debt only underscores the profound influence military costs wielded upon federal spending. Funds dedicated to the payment of the United States' war-related debt rivaled annual military expenditures on an almost one-to-one basis, doubling defense-related expenses between 1789 and 1815 and, considered together with annual military spending, consuming roughly ninety percent of all government appropriations. Indeed, the necessity of funding previous and current military endeavors constituted a fundamental force shaping the nation's development of public finance in the early republic.

Robert Morris and the Anticipation of the Hamiltonian System

While some colonies had gained experience in financing small-scale militia expeditions before the American War for Independence, these experiences benefitted from occurring within a British economic system. The move for independence in 1775 effectively divorced the former British colonies from this economic safety net. Lacking any formal financial system, the Continental Congress relied upon several methods to fund the Revolutionary War. Initially adhering to colonial legislature practice, the Congress employed currency finance—printing paper money with which they paid the expenses of the war effort. During the colonial period, legislatures backed these issues with anticipated revenues from imposts. The Continental Congress, however, did not possess the power to tax and therefore lacked the ability to link its issues to a reliable source of revenue. During the course of the war, the government issued over two hundred and forty million dollars in this fashion. Predictably, as issues increased, the value of these notes depreciated, reducing the young nation's purchasing power and forcing its leaders to search for alternative methods of financing the war.¹⁰

Domestic loans in the form of stocks redeemable at three years at four percent interest and later six percent provided some additional financial leverage. Once it became evident that the government might not be able to meet its obligations, however, these stocks quickly lost their value and became prone to speculation. Foreign loans began to

¹⁰ Thacher, *A Military Journal of the American Revolution*, 194; Studenski and Krooss, *Financial History of the United States*, 27-29; Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse*, 26-32. For the impact upon of this depreciation upon the Continental Army's officer corps, see Thacher, *A Military Journal of the American Revolution*, 136-137.

ease the burden somewhat following the 1777 victory at Saratoga. Nevertheless, by 1779, the Continental Congress still found it difficult to supply or pay the army. Unable to impose taxes, they levied unenforceable requisitions upon the individual states in the form of the system of specific supplies. This method combined the payment of certain amounts in currency with the provision of a predetermined quantity of supplies to the army at locations to be determined by the army's commander. It achieved marginal results in the best of circumstances.

Into this chaotic system of war finance stepped Robert Morris, appointed Superintendent of Finance by Congress in 1781. Morris inherited a troubled national financial system plagued by lack of credit, currency depreciation, and the inability to tax. Inefficiencies existed at almost every level in the network charged with securing funds with which to supply the army. "The Derangement of our Money Affairs," Morris explained in a letter to John Jay, "the Enormity of our public Expenditures the Confusion in all our Departments, the Languor of our general System, the Complexity and consequent Inefficiency of our Operations, These are some among the many Reasons which have induced Congress to the Appointment of a Superintendant."¹¹ No small task lay before the newly appointed Financier in mid-1781.

Seeking to place the nation on a sound financial footing, Robert Morris immediately set about reforming existing institutions while gaining support for programs intended to better facilitate the war effort by establishing a healthy economy. "The whole

¹¹ Robert Morris to His Excellency John Jay, Esqr., Philadelphia, July 4, 1781, Robert Morris Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington D.C., Microfilm, Reel 3. Hereafter referred to as RMP.

Business of Finance," Morris believed, "may be described in two short but comprehensive sentences. . . . It is to raise the Public Revenues by such modes as may be most easy and most equal to the People and to Expend them in the most frugal, fair and honest manner."¹² The establishment of good public credit, he argued, should stand as the ultimate goal of his department. In Morris's appraisal, resuscitating the nation's credit was a fundamental pre-condition required before any effective revenues could be raised and therefore intimately connected to the supply of its army.

The nation's financial solvency corresponded directly to its ability to procure supplies. Morris, for example, clearly linked the ability to hire provisions contractors to the likelihood that the government would be able to make its payments. Should the government's handling of finances convey the appearance of corruption or waste, the Superintendent of Finance believed that it would be all the more difficult to raise sufficient funds from the people to supply the army.¹³ His two principles, raising revenues and exercising frugality, intermeshed in something of a feedback loop. The creditability of government financial practices, Morris argued, correlated directly to public faith in the system, which in turn enhanced the administration's ability to raise revenues both domestically and abroad.

The need to restore frugality and public credit, along with a desire to establish a free market economy, shaped much of Morris's thinking about supply by contract. The Superintendent of Finance believed that contracts, in harnessing the pursuit of individual

¹² Robert Morris to the Honorable Thomas Burke, William C. Houston, and Oliver Wolcott, March 1781 (estimated), RMP, Reel 3.

¹³ Robert Morris to His Excellency John Jay, Esqr., Philadelphia, July 4, 1781, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 3.

interests in a free market economy, would be dramatically more efficient and cost-effective than predecessor supply systems that encouraged waste and fraud. Indeed, he wrote in March 1782 that the path toward economic viability lay through opening all the ports to unrestricted trade and enabling the collective judgment of individuals to establish market prices. It was only through this kind of free market activity, Morris continued, that he could entice merchants to contract to supply the army.¹⁴

Morris tied the efficiency of the contract system to the overall health of public credit. Potential contractors needed to be confident not only that the federal government would adequately fund expenses incurred in the course of supplying the army, but also that fellow merchants and businessmen would accept forms of government payment at or near face value. Restoring public credit through efficiency and frugality would increase confidence in the government's ability to pay. Additionally, a free economy, in which individuals could pursue their interests unbound by federally-imposed restrictions, would create the conditions in which businessmen might be willing to take on risky government contracts.

Morris had in mind more than just the reform of the army's supply system. He sought to introduce economy and efficiency in all manner of government transactions. Morris, for example, sought the power to dismiss corrupt and incapable officials who served only to obstruct efficiency while miring the department in allegations of corruption.¹⁵ Thus, streamlining government financial practices became a central tenet of

¹⁴ Robert Morris to Oliver Phelps, March 30, 1782, in RMP, Microfilm, Reel 5.

¹⁵ Robert Morris to the Honorable Thomas Burke, William C. Houston, and Oliver Wolcott, March 1781 (estimated), RMP, Reel 3.

his reforms. He argued that the Paymaster General, for example, should serve as the conduit of funds from the Treasury to the army, rather than work for both. Likewise, the duties of the Quartermaster General required that the position answer to a military chain of command rather than the Finance department. Morris, rather than supervise the various departments of the army directly in tandem with a military chain of command, preferred to exercise oversight over the manner in which these various offices expended their money, claiming the authority to arrest or suspend those individuals suspected of misconduct.¹⁶ By building confidence in the reliability of government, Morris hoped to improve faith in its solvency.

The desire to establish public credit also drove Robert Morris to call for the creation of a national bank. The formation of such an institution, he believed, would attack the nation's financial problems on multiple levels. A bank would enable the federal government to substitute a reliable currency in exchange for the greatly depreciated medium currently circulating throughout the United States. It would also build the kind of credit needed to guarantee current transactions and secure future loans, increasing the volume of money available for military expenses. Morris lamented the country's loss of public credit in the world's eyes as its efforts to curb depreciation failed during the war. And while the practically worthless currency could no longer sustain the war effort, the Superintendent acknowledge the importance of having a paper medium in place in order

¹⁶ Ibid.

to back current expenditures with anticipated revenues. The best means of accomplishing this financial goal, he concluded, was to establish a national bank.¹⁷

Morris successfully petitioned the Continental Congress in May, 1781, to create the Bank of North America with an initial capitalization of \$400,000. As always, concerns about public credit remained central to his actions. He avoided setting the initial capitalization any higher for fear that, should investors fail to meet it, the resulting damage to public confidence would become insurmountable. And here again, Morris linked the pursuit of private interests to public credit and the advancement of national power. Investment in the bank will increase significantly, he contended, once subscribers observe the benefits to both their own interests and those of the nation.¹⁸ A central component of his plan to build both public credit and a sound economy, the Bank of North America laid the foundation for the establishment of the First Bank of the United States just under a decade later under the Constitution.

Morris's allusion to the depreciating medium as part of the justification for a national bank touched on yet another pillar of his plan to establish public credit and a stable economy: a reliable currency. Not only had Continental currency depreciated to a considerable extent, but such a wide variety of currencies circulated throughout the United States that routine transactions became complicated and difficult to understand in financial terms. Morris articulated the problem best in his own words:

The commonest Things become intricate where Money has any thing to do with them. A Farmer in New Hampshire, for Instance, can readily form an

¹⁷ Circular, Office of Finance, June 11, 1781, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 3.

¹⁸ Plan for Establishing a National Bank for the United States of North America, May 17, 1781, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 3. For a discussion of Morris's concerns about the capitalization of the bank, see Robert Morris to Colonel Hamilton, May 26, 1781, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 3.

Idea of a Bushel of Wheat in South Carolina weighing sixty pounds and placed at one hundred Miles from Charlestown; but if he were told that in such Situation it is worth twenty one Shillings and eight pence, He would be obliged to make many Enquiries, and form some Calculations, before he could know that this Sum meant, in general, what he would call four Shillings. And even then, he would have to enquire what Kind of Coin that four Shillings was paid in, before he could estimate it in his own Minds, according to the Ideas of Money which he had imbibed. Difficulties of this Sort do not occur to Farmers alone; they are perplexing to most men, and troublesome to all.¹⁹

Consequently, as the Bank worked to eliminate the old depreciating Continental script, Morris called for the issuance of a new, coined currency that would simultaneously build public credit and displace other forms of money. The Superintendent of Finance contended that this coin should be constituted legal tender, rendering it the only suitable medium by which to pay off debt or taxes. This would, effectively, force competing currencies out of circulation as people sought the legal protection conferred by a currency of known, stable value.²⁰

Alexander Hamilton and the Establishment of National Finance

Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury under the Constitution, picked up where Robert Morris had left off. Like his predecessor, Hamilton believed that the route to national financial strength lay through the establishment of public credit. Yet, in reviewing Hamilton's program, it quickly becomes clear that he operated in an entirely

¹⁹ Robert Morris to His Excellency, the President of Congress, January 15, 1782, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 4.

²⁰ Ibid. See also Robert Morris to His Excellency, the Governor of Connecticut, January 22, 1782, RMP, Microfilm, Reel 4.

different economic environment than did the Superintendent of Finance. Whereas Robert Morris undertook an almost Herculean task to restore public financial health in the midst of an ongoing war, Alexander Hamilton encountered an altogether more friendly atmosphere within which to work. Frustration with the weakness inherent in the Articles of Confederation created an atmosphere more favorable to those conceptions of strong central government embodied both in the Constitution and the Secretary's fiscal policies. Thus, while Morris attempted to raise revenues and supply the army under severe constraints, Hamilton used those struggles as a foundation upon which to legitimize policies seeking to create a strong, free market economy capable of generating the wealth needed to oppose future enemies.

Military expenses indeed dominated government appropriations during and after Hamilton's tenure. But what did these expenses include? Although the campaigns of Harmar, St. Clair, and Wayne, accounted for some increased costs, the army remained comparatively small throughout this period. Total military expenditures, as referred to in Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.33, generally included the costs of sustaining the War Department, the army, the navy, Indian affairs, and military pensions. As the Treasury Department's methods of accounting evolved, it captured each of these figures in different ways. The government, for example, included no money in its appropriations for the naval department from 1789 to 1793. Military expenditures during this period primarily consisted of the army's pay and subsistence, along with the expenses of the Clothing, Quartermaster, Hospital, and Ordnance departments and contingency funds. The Treasury also included the expenses of the Indian Department, the purview of the Secretary of War

until 1811.²¹ In 1794, the Treasury began to include expenses for the Naval Department, delineating these costs from those of both the War Department and the "military establishment." This would generally remain the practice, although in some years, such as 1811, estimates lumped military and naval expenditures together in one sum.²²

Military expenditures, meaning those directed toward the army, far outpaced those of the navy in the first decade following ratification of the Constitution. From 1789 to 1798, the United States government allocated almost \$11.5 million to the army, a figure well over five times the amount appropriated for the navy. In no year during this period did military establishment spending drop below double that of the naval department (See Figure 6.4).²³

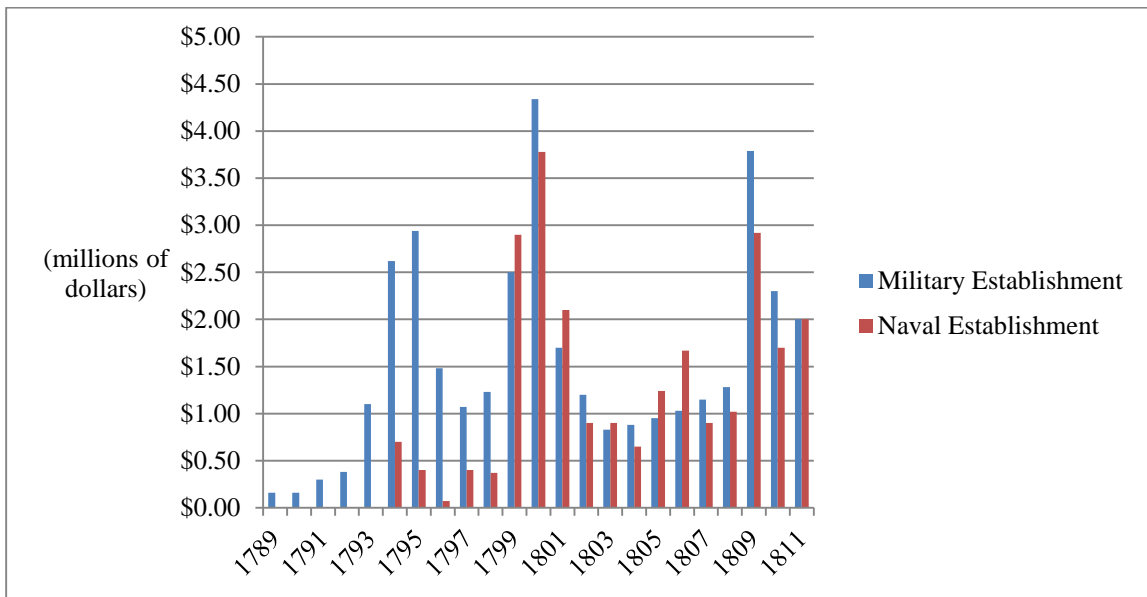


Figure 6.4: Comparison of Military and Naval Spending, 1789-1811

²¹ After 1811, the Treasury itemized the expenses connected with Native American affairs separately in annual estimates.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

The above figures help us to understand more about the nature of military spending in this period. While the statistics clearly make the case that War Department appropriations in the early republic represented the single largest component of federal spending, it is necessary to place these numbers in context to avoid over-stating the importance of either spending directed toward land forces alone or that portion of military expenditures consumed by provisions contracts. Across the entire period, the government spent almost two and a half dollars on the army for every one spent on the navy, constituting roughly seventy percent of total military expenditures. With this figure in mind, we can better understand the significance of spending on provisions contracts both within the military establishment and the government as a whole.

Determining how the War Department spent its money with any degree of precision proves a frustrating and, at times, impossible objective. The account books maintained by successive department accountants rarely provided the kind of specificity needed to identify the exact nature of a particular line item. While expenditures connected to the principal contract to supply the army with provisions are clear, a number of important associated costs remain masked within categories less effectively articulated. Transportation expenses, for example, fell under the purview of the Quartermaster General's Department. Accountants listed agent purchases of ration components made due to contractor failure, although clearly relevant to the overall expense of contracting, as the acquisition of supplies, rendering these transactions

indistinguishable from the procurement of other military stores and necessities. The account books also generally lumped pay, subsistence, and forage together in one sum, again unintentionally masking costs that might be more accurately associated with the contract. Finally, smaller contracts to supply individual military posts other than those manned by the main army, while primarily focused on the procurement of rations, also included the minor supply of various necessary articles such as camp equipment and wood for fuel. The accountants recorded these expenses as contracts for supplies rather than delineating the nature of each cost.

Despite the challenges inherent in building a precise understanding of supply-related expenditures, it is still possible to gain a general appreciation for overall logistical costs and corresponding contract expenses. The records from 1791 through 1795 prove particularly instructive here, both because they are better organized than their counterpart documents from other years and because they suggest ways in which provision contract expenses varied with the scale of military endeavor in a given year. During those years in which the army either conducted significant military campaigns or undertook substantial preparations for a future effort, such as in 1791, 1793, and 1794, provisions contracts constituted larger proportions of overall military expenditures. By contrast, in the comparatively static years of 1792 and 1795, they comprised a smaller percentage of overall costs.²⁴

²⁴ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, commencing with the Establishment of the Treasury Department* (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1793), 40-44; U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1792* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1794), 35-40; U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 35-44; U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year*

The provisions contract for 1791, the year of Arthur St. Clair's defeat, amounted to thirty-two percent of overall War Department expenditures (See Figure 6.5), second only to the lump-sum total of pay, subsistence, and forage.²⁵ By percentage, this represents the largest portion of annual military expenditures devoted to provisions contracts in the five-year span from 1791 to 1795. St. Clair's logistical preparations for the campaign, although hindered both by the failure of the initial contractor, William Duer, and the less-than-stellar performance of his newly appointed Quartermaster General, Samuel Hodgdon, demonstrated considerable forethought and attention to detail and suggested at least a partial explanation for the larger percentage of expenditures. The need to supply a larger army in an active campaign necessarily entailed greater expense in order to feed it. The absence of any substantial logistical infrastructure—the Quartermaster Department had only recently been re-established—also likely shifted expenses to the contractor that would be borne by other departments in the future.

1794 (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 41-53; U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1795* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1796), 40-55.

²⁵ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, commencing with the Establishment of the Treasury Department* (Philadelphia: Childs and Swaine, 1793), 40-44.

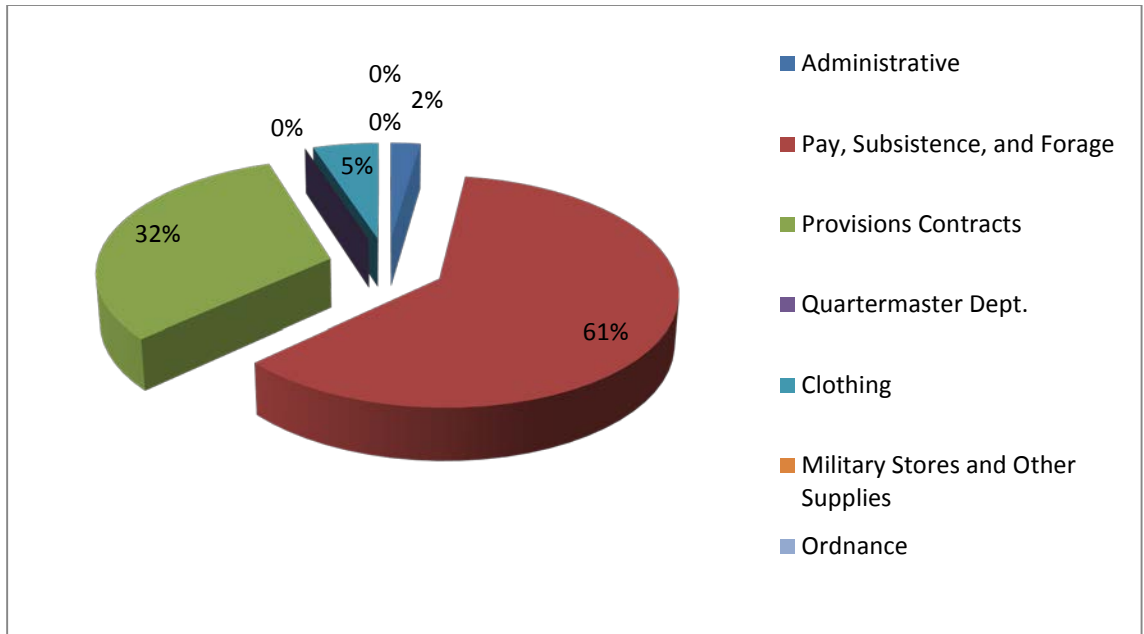


Figure 6.5: 1791 War Department Expenditures²⁶

By contrast, in 1792, a relatively static year that saw the army struggling to recover from its defeat of the previous November at the Battle of the Wabash, spending on the provisions contracts constituted only thirteen percent of total War Department expenditures (See Figure 6.6). Given the absence of an active campaign, this number is not all that surprising. The demands of supplying a comparatively small army distributed across a finite number of fixed locations incurred less expense than that of supporting an army on the move. Provision contract expenses in real terms, however, actually increased by over \$8,000. That they represented a lower percentage of overall military establishment spending can be attributed to greater increases in other areas of supply. Perhaps predictably in a year when leaders dedicated much effort to recruiting, clothing

²⁶ Ibid.

expenses increased by roughly 800%, from just over \$20,000 in 1791 to over \$160,000 the next year. Additionally, the Quartermaster's Department consumed eleven percent of military establishment funds.²⁷

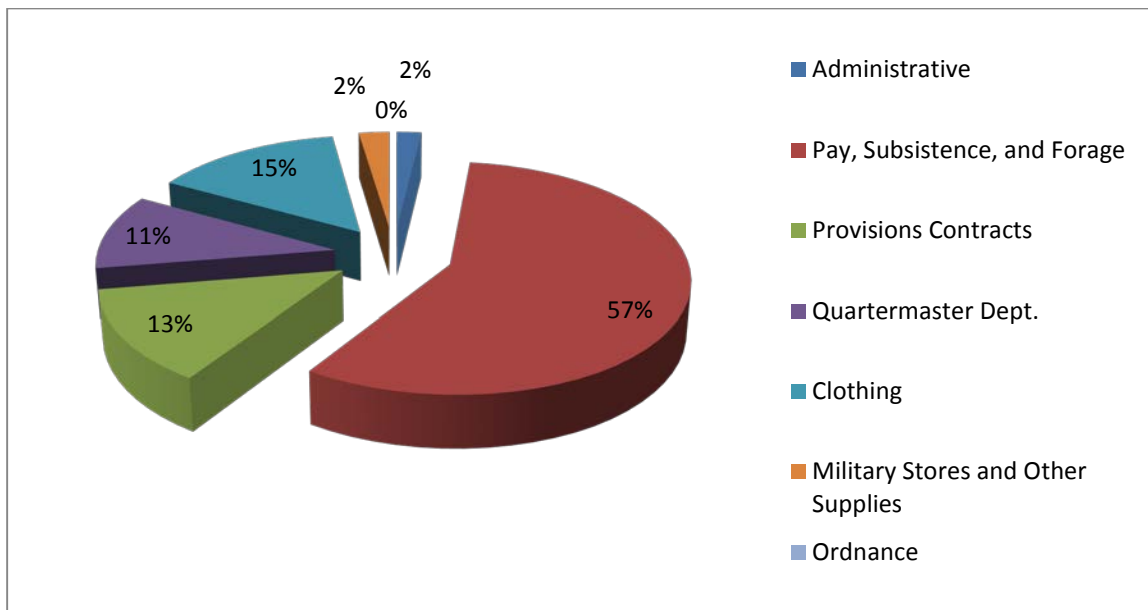


Figure 6.6: 1792 War Department Expenditures

As Wayne's legion prepared in earnest for a campaign in 1793 and conducted one in 1794, funds dedicated to the provisions contracts rose accordingly. Thus, in 1793, rations contracts totaled twenty-five percent of War Department expenditures (See Figure 6.7).²⁸ By 1794, these figures grew to twenty-seven percent (See Figure 6.8).²⁹ Only with the resumption of a more static posture in 1795 did provisions contract expenditures drop

²⁷ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1792* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1794), 35-40.

²⁸ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 35-44.

²⁹ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1794* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 41-53.

to seventeen percent (See Figure 6.9).³⁰ These trends correspond with observations made earlier in the dissertation. The difficulties inherent in supplying an army on the move entailed greater expense than that of feeding a force posted to fixed locations. They also suggest that provisions contracts gained in importance, with respect to overall military spending, precisely when it became most critical—during periods of active campaigning or accelerated preparations.

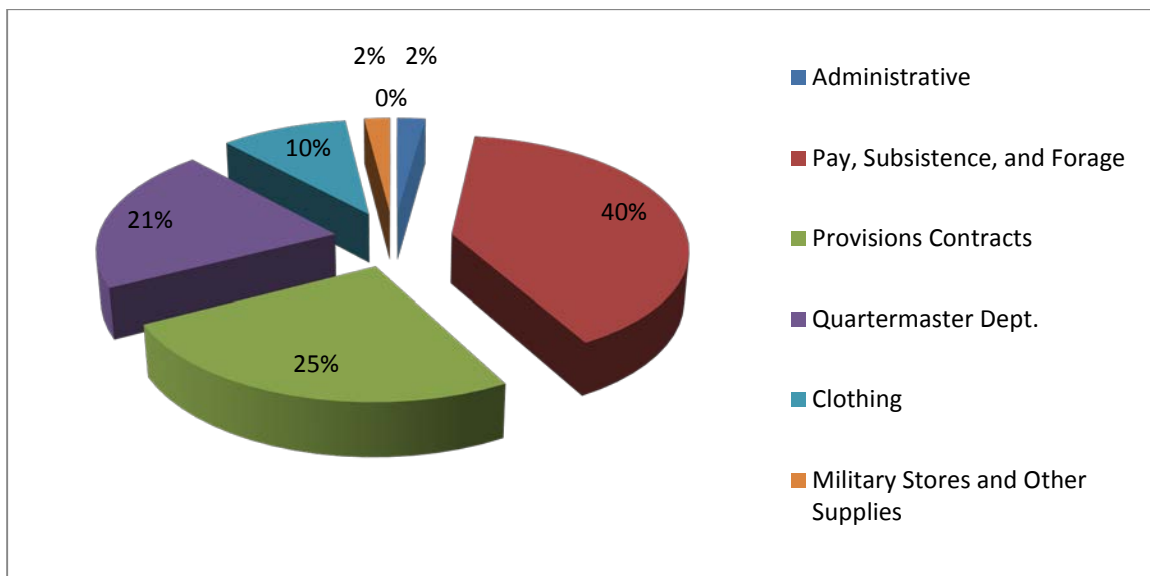


Figure 6.7: 1793 War Department Expenditures³¹

³⁰ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1795* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1796), 40-55.

³¹ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1793* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 35-44.

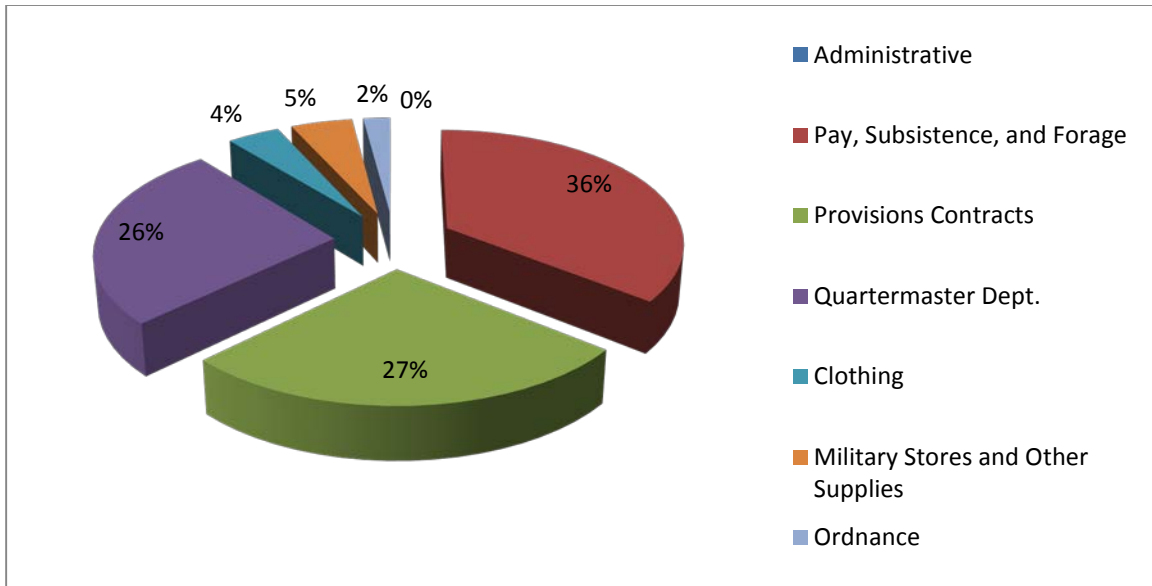


Figure 6.8: 1794 War Department Expenditures³²

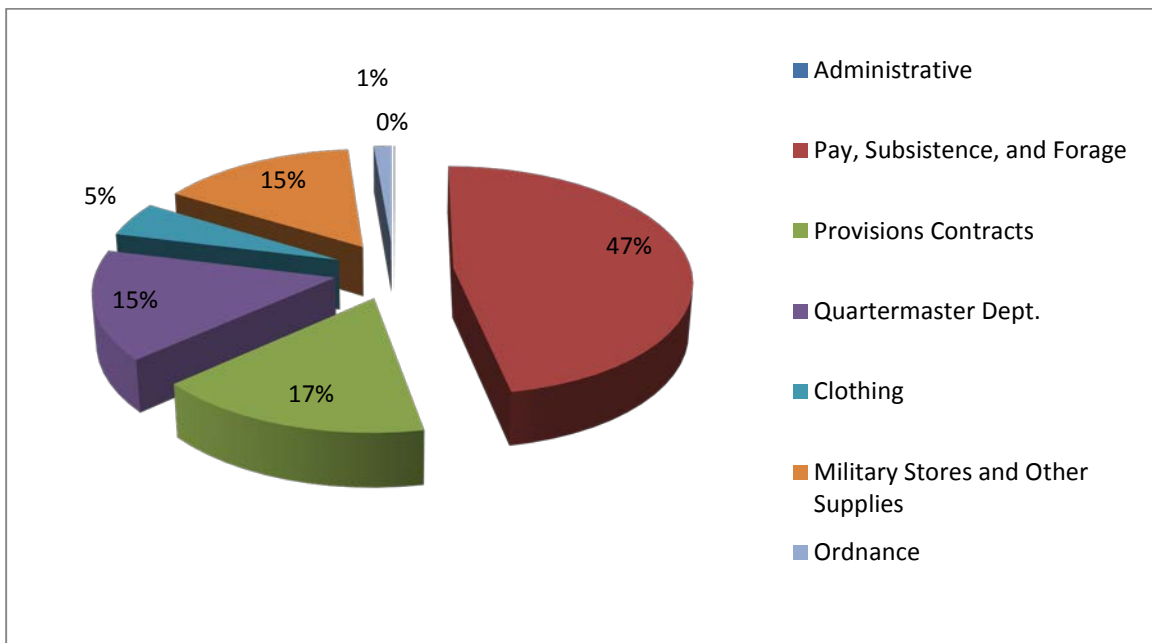


Figure 6.9: 1795 War Department Expenditures³³

³² U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1794* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1795), 41-53.

Hamilton's success in creating the American financial system postured the United States both for this early projection of military power and for unprecedented economic growth in the early decades of the 19th century.³⁴ His policies consisted of three main pillars: federal assumption of state debts from the American Revolution; the imposition of taxes to raise revenue; and the establishment of a Bank of the United States. The Secretary of the Treasury, as did Morris, deemed public credit to be the primary goal of his system. The federal assumption of state debts and their subsequent funding in accordance with earlier promises played, according to Hamilton, a fundamental role in establishing public confidence in the government's fiscal policies. His logic followed similar lines to those earlier articulated by Morris. Acknowledging the fledgling nation's limited ability to marshal sums of capital sufficient to hold off the world's more formidable powers, the Secretary believed that American success in future conflicts would depend upon the government's ability to secure foreign loans. Lacking the establishment of solid public credit, the interest rates offered on these loans would likely be prohibitive, deepening the United States's economic woes at a critical juncture. In order to secure its public credit, Hamilton continued, the United States needed to fund the debts it accumulated over the course of the Revolutionary War and ensure their payment

³³ U.S. Treasury Department, *An Account of the Receipts and Expenditures of the United States, for the Year 1795* (Philadelphia: John Fenno, 1796), 40-55.

³⁴ Peter L. Rousseau and Richard Sylla, "Emerging Financial Markets and Early U.S. Growth," *Explorations in Economic History* 42 (2005): 3. Paul Gilje also acknowledged the importance of the bank in the rise of American capitalism. Paul A. Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (Summer, 1996): 163-164. See also Richard Sylla, "Experimental Federalism: The Economics of American Government, 1789-1914," in Stanley L. Engerman and Robert E. Gallman, eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the United States: Volume 2: The Long Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 500.

in specie if necessary.³⁵ Indeed, he argued, the Constitution obligated the country to do so.³⁶ In order to ensure the potential for future loans, the country needed to demonstrate that it would answer its existing financial commitments.³⁷

Hamilton's justification for the creation of a bank likewise bore similarities to Morris's approach. The Secretary of the Treasury, in a report to Congress submitted in December 1790, defended the importance of a national bank along three principal lines. First, the presence of a national bank would expand the nation's existing productive capital. Rather than store idle money in a locked chest for safekeeping, merchants could earn interest through bank deposits while enabling others in the country to access that wealth, in the form of loans, to fund additional enterprises. Second, a bank afforded the government both the security of a large pool of wealth at its disposal in the event of an emergency, such as the outbreak of war or economic depression, and the corresponding growth in public credit that flows from the reliable accumulation of the same wealth.³⁸

³⁵ For the importance of paying the federal debt in specie, see Ferguson, *The Power of the Purse*, 342.

³⁶ Alexander Hamilton, Report on Public Credit, January 14, 1790, *American State Papers: Finance* 1: 15-25.

³⁷ Many authors fail to identify the role played by the need to fund war in these financial developments. Rousseau and Sylla, for example, attributed these activities to purely financial ends, including the acquisition of land, the promotion of trade, and the creation of a modern sector. Rousseau and Sylla, "Emerging Financial Markets and Early U.S. Growth," 21. Gilje, by contrast, acknowledged the role of the Revolutionary War in creating the conditions for the rise of capitalism, both in terms of financial methods used to fund the war and the resulting freedom from British methods. Gilje, "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic," 171-174. Max Edling made the most direct connection, arguing that the nation's growth, both territorially and economically, could only be explained as the result of war. Max Edling, *A Hercules in the Cradle: War, Money, and the American State, 1783-1867* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2014), 12.

³⁸ For the replacement of currency finance with bank finance, see Sylla, Legler, and Wallis, "Banks and State Public Finance in the New Republic," *The Journal of Economic History* 47, no. 2 (June 1987), 391-403.

Finally, a bank would ease the payment of taxes by facilitating transactions across the country via the circulation of bank notes that held a common value.³⁹

Hamilton's third justification for the bank belied the final pillar of his fiscal policy: the imposition of taxes. In this regard, Congress enjoyed Constitutional powers to impose taxes not conferred by the Articles of Confederation. Consequently, Hamilton sought to impose taxes on a variety of articles in order raise revenues sufficient to service the debt, pay a portion of the principal, and cover the current costs of operating the government.⁴⁰

The Trial of Hamiltonian Finance: Albert Gallatin and the War of 1812

The strength of Hamilton's financial system can readily be observed in the wartime policies of his successor in the Treasury, Albert Gallatin. An accomplished politician in his own right, Gallatin advanced a program to fund a potential war that relied heavily upon the public credit and institutions established under Hamilton's tenure. Yet, the story of government military finance preceding and during the War of 1812 is not one of unopposed triumph but rather of speculation about what might have been. Several years of declining trade caused by the Jefferson administration's non-intercourse policies and the outbreak of war with the British changed the economic conditions in which Gallatin had to implement his theories of wartime finance. In this context, we learn as

³⁹ Alexander Hamilton, Report on a National Bank, December 13, 1790, *American State Papers: Finance* 1: 67-68.

⁴⁰ Alexander Hamilton, Public Credit, December 13, 1790, *American State Papers: Finance* 1: 64-67.

much about the significance of Hamilton's policies in their absence as we do in their application. The beneficiary of a comparatively healthy economy in the early 1800s, Gallatin struggled to adequately fund the war a decade later without the national bank that had been so fundamental to Hamilton's program. The introduction of the Second Bank of the United States, only five years after the previous bank's charter lapsed, testified to the importance of the institution to the nation's financial fabric.

By the time Albert Gallatin advanced his earliest theories on wartime finance in 1807, he did so from a strong economic position. Writing in early November, the Secretary of the Treasury anticipated annual revenue surpluses in excess of six million dollars in the next few years. Indeed, total government revenues rose steadily since 1803, peaking in 1808 at \$17.1 million. 1807 proved to be a record year in generating annual surpluses for the federal government, producing \$8 million in unobligated funds.⁴¹ Moreover, he continued, the Bank of the United States allowed the government to collect interest on public deposits while underpinning the nation's credit. In this context, Gallatin debated whether the government should rely on increased taxes or the securing of foreign loans to fund a coming war.⁴²

Flush with confidence that revenues would continue sufficient to both fund the current government establishment and service the existing debt, Gallatin believed that the government should rely upon loans to cover the expenses of a potential war. He argued that the situation of the citizens would be too materially affected by the loss of foreign

⁴¹ Studenski and Krooss, *Financial History of the United States*, 68.

⁴² Albert Gallatin, State of the Finances, November 7, 1807, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 248-249.

commerce during the conflict to endure taxation. By contrast, the United States, he continued, had already demonstrated how quickly it could pay off loans in times of peace. The strength of American public credit, itself the product of the Hamiltonian financial system, would enable the government both to secure foreign loans and borrow from various U.S. banks that held roughly \$40 million in capital.⁴³ Should these measures prove insufficient, Gallatin proposed the adoption of a number of taxes, to include the revival of the duties on salt and Mediterranean commerce, and even the addition of an indirect duty on all imports. Direct taxes, Gallatin concluded, should only be adopted as a last resort.⁴⁴

The adoption of the Embargo Act just two months later compelled Gallatin to revisit his proposals. To be sure, Gallatin's thoughts remained consistent with the program he had outlined two months earlier. Any difference stemmed from a concern that the non-importation act would so reduce revenue in 1809 as to require a reliance upon new sources of income. This, Gallatin concluded, justified the continuance of the Mediterranean duties without undermining the premise that war might be funded by loans.⁴⁵ Generally, Gallatin's theory on wartime finance remained consistent until the brink of war with Great Britain. Brief attention to the potential for increased duties and taxes seemed more of an insurance policy should loans fail than an acknowledgment that they would not be sufficient.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 249. Gallatin's theories fell well in line with eighteenth-century British practice. Brewer documented the impact of shifting the country's tax practices from direct to indirect and using the subsequent anticipated revenue to secure foreign loans, enhancing public credit and establishing a national debt. Brewer, *The Sinews of Power*, 100.

⁴⁵ Albert Gallatin to G. W. Campbell, Chair of the Committee of Ways and Means, December 28, 1807, in Ibid., 263.

By the end of 1808, the Secretary of the Treasury remained steadfast behind his contention that any war could and should be financed primarily by loans. Gallatin pointed to the high price of public stocks, the reduction of the debt, and the large amount of current bank stock, to suggest that optimal conditions still existed for securing a loan because of the nation's solid public credit. These loans would finance the extraordinary demands of war, with revenue from present duties sufficient to pay the expenses of the current establishment and service the debt.⁴⁶ Gallatin re-stated his position again in 1809 and even in late November, 1811, highlighted the ability of the U.S. to discharge a public debt of \$42 million in ten years of peace, strengthening the case for wartime loans.⁴⁷

The dissolution of the Bank of the United States in late 1811 compelled Gallatin to rethink his theory but not abandon it. In short, the absence of the bank made securing public and foreign loans increasingly difficult, and the Secretary of the Treasury therefore advocated a significant increase in taxes.⁴⁸ And although Gallatin's proposals would not gain immediate traction within Congress, the House Ways and Means Committee recommended the same in mid-1813. By September, 1814, it had become abundantly clear that loans would not be sufficient to pay the expenses of the war.⁴⁹ Exacerbating the situation, many remaining banks suspended specie payments, making bank notes the circulating medium. Consequently, transactions became more unpredictable. Banks often

⁴⁶ Albert Gallatin, *State of the Finances*, December 16, 1808, in *Ibid.*, 309.

⁴⁷ Albert Gallatin, *State of the Finances*, December 8, 1809, in *Ibid.*, 374; and Albert Gallatin, *State of the Finances*, November 25, 1811, in *Ibid.*, 497.

⁴⁸ Albert Gallatin to Ezekiel Bacon, Committee of Ways and Means, January 10, 1812, in *Ibid.*, 524. See also Alexander S. Balinky, "Gallatin's Theory of War Finance," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 3rd Ser., 16, no. 1 (Jan., 1959): 75-76.

⁴⁹ G. W. Campbell, *State of the Finances*, September 26, 1814, *American State Papers: Finance* 2: 840-843.

confined the circulation of notes within state limits, further restricting transactions and the fluidity of capital.⁵⁰

The chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, John Wayles Eppes, and Alexander J. Dallas, soon to be Secretary of the Treasury, weighed their options in October 1814. Eppes, not unlike Gallatin, believed the answer lay in some combination of taxes and loans, but also advanced the use of treasury notes. Taxes, Eppes argued, could not be raised in time to affect the immediate expenses of the war. Any recourse to loans, moreover, would come at extremely unfavorable terms. But by issuing treasury notes, Eppes continued, in combination with expanded taxation, the government might be able to make ends meet.⁵¹

Treasury notes proved a solution not too different from the reliance upon fiat currency by the Continental Congress during the American Revolution. Issued at a prescribed interest rate or even without interest attached, they contributed to inflation by increasing the available money supply. While not accepted as legal tender in personal transactions, banks often purchased these instruments with their own notes, raising the amount of circulating paper. By the end of the conflict, the government sold over \$36 million of these notes.⁵²

Fortunately for all the parties involved in U.S. war finance, the war ended before America's financial weaknesses could truly be laid bare. The failure of government

⁵⁰ Ibid. See also John Wayles Eppes, Committee of Ways and Means, State of the Finances, October 10, 1814, in Ibid., 854-855; Daniel J. Elazar, "Banking and Federalism in the Early American Republic," *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (Aug., 1965): 310.

⁵¹ John Wayles Eppes, Committee of Ways and Means, State of the Finances, October 10, 1814, *American State Papers: Finance* 2: 854-855.

⁵² Studenski and Kroos, 76-77.

finance during the War of 1812, however, could not be blamed on Albert Gallatin's policies. Grounded in an economic environment far different from that which took shape during the fighting, the contention that loans alone could fund the extraordinary expenses while a combination of taxes and duties covered the operating costs of the government remained a reasonably sound policy.

The failure to renew the Bank, however, changed much of the math upon which Gallatin based his assumptions. The bank's absence caused considerable inflation as payments in specie dwindled and circulating paper increased. Moreover, the good public credit so vital to Gallatin's plan dissipated with the charter's lapse. Ironically, Alexander Dallas, in the months before he became Secretary of the Treasury, proposed a plan that looked similar to that of Gallatin before the war. First, the government needed to raise taxes in order to cover the costs of the current establishment and the servicing of the existing debt. Second, the government needed to re-establish the national bank in Philadelphia, incorporated for twenty years with an initial capitalization of \$50 million. And third, the U.S. should secure money to cover the costs of war expenses via a combination of loans and the issuance of treasury notes.⁵³ Although Dallas's proposals included expedients to shepherd the nation through the current crisis, his long-term measures clearly reflected the contention that Gallatin's theories in conjunction with Hamilton's institutions presented the most effective method by which to fund military endeavors.

⁵³ A. J. Dallas to J. W. Eppes, Esq., Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means, October 17, 1814, in Public Credit, *American State Papers: Finance 2*: 866-868.

Conclusion

American military history from 1775 to 1815 does not readily submit to a coherent linear analysis. There existed within the early army no systematic process, as there does today, for gathering together lessons learned in order to improve upon past experience. Moreover, the army adopted no less than four dramatically different organizational structures over this period and flirted with several more. Developed in reaction to remarkably different circumstances, these unique organizations retained some continuity through personnel but defied the simple evolutionary found in more stable institutions. The Commissary Department, for example, came in and out of existence during this period. Created early in the American Revolution and responsible for the subsistence of the Continental Army, it was eliminated at the conflict's conclusion. The duties remained, subsumed first in practicality by the principal contractor and subsequently by the Quartermaster Department, itself an organization that would phase in and out of existence. Even during the War of 1812, when presumably the amount of work alone would dictate the re-establishment of the commissary, Congress and army administrators settled for a Quartermaster Department, contractors, and the ability to appoint temporary deputy commissaries acting directly on behalf of commanders. The

absence of stable supply institutions necessarily weighed against any form of evolutionary-style development in logistical methods and systems.

What emerges in the early American period might better be described as an age in which necessity trumped process but also one in which important precedents were established. Upon closer examination, supply by contract neither appears to be the pre-eminent logistical method of the American Revolution nor the herald of an era of civilian ascendancy, as suggested by historian Erna Risch. Contracting offered a convenient means by which to reduce overhead expenses while securing, in theory, a comparatively low price per ration via a written agreement. In practice, however, contracts negotiated in eastern city offices rarely proved flexible enough to adapt to battlefield contingency and all too often were undercut by more practical, and more expensive, alternatives. By the conclusion of the War of 1812, the army's leadership clearly condemned supply by contract, preferring instead to re-establish the Commissary Department.

It is important to note, too, that logistical efforts in early America faced unique considerations that often turned European supply principles and practices on their head. In many ways analogous to discussions that have compared American tactical and operational formations to their European counterparts, U.S. supply efforts emulated European forms if not always their functions. American armies could not live off the land in the same manner as did like organizations in Europe, always conscious that to do so risked alienating the local population and while being harmful to the overall cause. Even those campaigns which extended north into Canada drew supplies from bases in the northern United States. Campaigns conducted in areas predominantly inhabited by Native

Americans almost never found the type and volume of foods required to supply the army. While in Europe it was more practical to keep armies on the move before they exhausted regional supply sources, in the nascent United States, it was more practical to supply detachments at fixed locations. The immature transportation infrastructure, including both road networks and carriage availability, rendered it more difficult to supply an army on the move. Thus, it was precisely when the army needed to do so in order to conduct a campaign that systems, including contracting, broke down and leaders resorted to ad hoc expedients.

The prevailing historical treatment of logistics during the American Revolution portrays it as a story of failure punctuated only in the end with the adoption of a centralized system of supply by contract. While this interpretation proves correct in pointing to the frequent shortcomings of Continental Army supply efforts, it favors an almost teleological explanation of American logistics which crowns contracted supply as the solution to all previous woes. Accordingly, this contention justifies the army's subsequent reliance upon the method for much of the next four decades. Closer analysis reveals a much more muddled picture. The emphasis on early failures holds the Continental Congress and army administration to an inappropriately high standard rather than viewing the first years of the Revolution as an experimental period in which multiple techniques were employed to supply the soldiers.

The early years of the conflict indeed saw a variety of logistical methods introduced, including supply by Continental Congress committee, requests for contributions from the states, reliance upon captured stores, contracts negotiated at

multiple levels, and the eventual appointment of both a Commissary General and Quartermaster General. All of these systems had their flaws. Hindered by the very republican ideology that played so influential a role in compelling the colonies to rebel in the first place, with its resistance to centralized authority and taxation, the Continental Congress found it difficult to direct state efforts when it came to matters of supply. Consequently, the nascent legislature could only ask or recommend that states provide certain quantities of needed stores. Captured stockpiles and provisions, while providing the occasional boon, such as the capture of Ticonderoga in 1775, rarely proved a consistent source of supply. Contracts negotiated at levels ranging from the small unit up to the state committees of safety and even the Continental Congress often served to fill shortfalls.

Yet, within this period of supply by any means necessary, the Continental Congress worked with George Washington and his army to attempt to improve logistical effectiveness. In October, 1775, the legislature sent a delegation to Washington's camp at Cambridge to discuss myriad issues pertaining to the supply of the Continental Army. This Cambridge conference represented something of a turning point in the early American management of logistics. The conference defined the daily ration and agreed that Thomas Mifflin and Joseph Trumbull, Quartermaster General and Commissary General respectively, should draft descriptions of the ranks and duties of each individual within their departments to enable Congress to officially establish their compensation. There ended, however, congressional oversight over the Quartermaster and Commissary Departments. The Continental Congress afforded both Mifflin and Trumbull the latitude

to establish their departments as they sought fit, intervening only occasionally in the appointment of officials to posts in departments other than the main army. This benign neglect set the stage for future administrative conflict when the efforts of the congressionally-appointed officials competed with those of either Mifflin or Trumbull.

Gradually, the Continental Congress began to see the advantages of centralizing supply efforts, and particularly those related to provisions, under the authority of Joseph Trumbull. It helped that Trumbull had early established his reputation as a Commissary General by trying to minimize expense while avoiding reliance upon wagon transportation. While at Cambridge, the Commissary General moved supplies of flour to the army by ship and herds of beef and pork on the hoof to avoid the exorbitant transportation costs associated with land carriage. By mid-1776, confident in his trustworthiness, the Continental Congress granted Trumbull the authority to appoint and remove commissary agents as necessary.

Despite Trumbull's praise-worthy efforts to procure much needed provisions, wastage at the point of issue often negated even the best-laid logistical planning. The reforms of 1777 sought to curtail some of these abuses, expanding the appointment powers of the Quartermaster General while calling for the use of receipts to verify supplies received, vouchers to substantiate account claims, and monthly returns to document supplies received, on-hand quantities, and issuances. Regulation of the Commissary Department, driven by allegations of corruption tied to commissions paid, imposed even greater accountability. The updated articles, passed by the Continental Congress, divorced the act of purchasing from that of issuing, creating Commissary

Generals for each, and directed that they provide their deputies with account books in order to record details of every transaction. They further called upon the Commissary Department to set prices for each item beyond which the purchasing agents could not go. Finally, the 1777 reforms introduced a system of reconciling accounts semi-annually and implemented an oath of office for commissary officials in order to discourage corruption.

Rather than render the Commissary Department more efficient, however, the reforms of 1777 introduced even greater confusion. Joseph Trumbull rejected the notion that the Continental Congress would appoint his subordinates and yet hold him accountable for their conduct. His subordinates objected to the greater scrutiny regarding their conduct and many resigned soon after the implementation of the new regulations. Introduced in the middle of a campaign season, this left many critical posts unoccupied precisely when they were needed most. To further compound the problem, William Buchanan, the Commissary General, pointed to the inadequate transportation resources to suggest that the department would be hard-pressed to move even the small stores of provisions on hand to where they were needed. In this context, the main army encamped at Valley Forge and endured the almost total collapse of the supply system.

Unable to supply the army through the Commissary Department, the Continental Congress resorted to an ad hoc system of procuring flour and the needed transportation through the Board of War. In the late winter and early spring of 1778, Congress quickly set about reforming the department, granting the Commissary General full power to appoint and remove his subordinates as necessary while linking commissions paid to agents to those monies they saved in the purchase of good provisions. Similar reforms

implemented within the Quartermaster General's department rendered 1778 the pinnacle of centralization when it came to supply administration. Not until the adoption of contracting in 1781 would so much logistical power be concentrated in so few hands.

Continued supply failures and allegations of corruption, however, prompted the Continental Congress to revert to committee supervision and the eventual implementation of the system of specific supplies during the winter of 1779-1780. Shifting away from the centralized purchase of provisions by small numbers of agents while seeking to reduce the financial burden of providing for the army, Congress diffused responsibility for procuring food among the states. Legislation passed in December, 1779, for example, called upon six states to provide specified quantities of supplies at the direction of the commander in chief. With the object of reducing the wastage so common in the first five years of war, the Continental Congress laid out a schedule according to which the supplies would be provided, ensuring that the states would not overwhelm the army with stockpiles that could not be consumed before spoiling.

Although the system of specific supplies would remain in existence, in one form or another, for the duration of the war, it failed almost from its inception. As early as March, 1780, Washington complained of the challenges inherent in anticipating where campaigns in which the British retained the initiative might take the army, rendering it difficult to specify logical and secure places of deposit. More pressing, the legislation enacting the system of specific supplies did not address the means of transportation either to the places of deposit, the responsibility of the states, or from deposits to the army, the responsibility of the army. Nor did it address the likelihood that states would not meet

their specified quotas in accordance with the corresponding schedule. Thus, while Washington argued with the states about who was responsible for transporting supplies, Robert Morris, appointed Superintendent of Finance in 1781, continuously pressured the states to meet their obligations in as timely a fashion as possible.

Frustrated with the inability of the system of specific supplies to provide for the army, the Continental Congress, under the influence of Robert Morris, introduced a resolution to supply the army by contract on May 22, 1781. In July of that same year, they authorized the Superintendent of Finance, or his appointed agent, to negotiate contracts for all supplies needed by the Army and Navy, effectively placing Morris in charge of all procurement activities. Initially, the Superintendent of Finance advertised for bids only for the supply of fixed locations in the middle and northern states, including Philadelphia, Yorktown, Carlisle, and Fort Pitt, to name a few. 1782 saw the expansion of supply by contract to locations outside Pennsylvania and beyond Robert Morris's well-established network of commercial relationships.

Contracted supply enjoyed considerable initial success, both reducing significantly the Commissary Department's expenses while providing well for the army. It also represented a fundamental shift in the manner in which the Continental Congress viewed the motivations involved in supplying the army. Prior to 1781, congressional committees and commissary officials alike, influenced by republican ideology, sought disinterested individuals of virtue and character to provide supplies. These men, contemporary logic held, motivated more by zeal for the cause and therefore less vulnerable to corruption, would act solely on behalf of the Continental Army's interests.

While some individuals lived up to these expectations, six years of war did much to malign contentions that army supply could be dependent upon the character of the system's agents. The adoption of contracting heralded a shift to more of a free market construction in which competition for contracts would help to control both prices and expenses while the contract itself safeguarded army supply by tying the contractor's credit to the reliable fulfillment of his obligations. Contracting's success in the waning years of the war ensconced it for much of the ensuing four decades.

Upon closer analysis, however, the effectiveness of contracting during the American Revolution appears more ambiguous. Vestiges of republican ideology continued to influence Robert Morris and others when conceiving of and implementing the contract system. Presuming that patriotism and virtue continued to drive contractor actions, Morris too often failed to scrutinize questionable conduct or implement sufficient regulations. In addition, the reduction in active operations following the British surrender at Yorktown in 1781 rendered it much easier to anticipate where and when supplies were needed, making the system appear more successful than it might have looked in support of an offensive campaign.

The contract system indeed was most effective when supplying static locations. With one exception, all the contracts negotiated in 1781 and 1782 supported soldiers at fixed locations while Robert Morris and others pulled together an ad hoc combination of measures to supply the Yorktown campaign. Less than one month after the awarding of the contract for the moving army in 1782, the Continental Army began to complain about contractor failure. The contractors in turn, while not disputing their failures, cited

Morris's inability to make required payments, a result of the nation's poor financial situation. While they may have been right to question the soundness of government finances, the healthy advances they received at the outset of the contract should have delayed supply problems longer than one month, providing Morris invaluable time to shore up national credit. Operating under the presumption that the contractors were men of virtue and character, Robert Morris delayed for too long the appointment of an inspector to oversee contract fulfillment.

Despite these shortcomings, the Continental Congress continued to supply the army by contract even after the Revolution. This largely entailed supplying small numbers of soldiers at fixed locations, a task at which contracts had proven sufficient. The agreements negotiated proved remarkably inflexible, however, stipulating specific prices for ration components at each location and providing no recourse for the support of detachments on the move. Thus, when Josiah Harmer sought to conduct even limited expeditions against Native Americans in the Ohio River Valley, his plans collided headlong with a system ill-designed to support them. Even the supply of static posts proved more challenging than during the Revolution, for contractors needed to push provisions west to a frontier comparatively lacking in predictable sources of food and reliable transportation networks. The supply of flour became particularly dependent on water levels, initially to power the mills in order to grind the wheat, and subsequently to transport the finished product to its consumer. Low water levels caused by drought could therefore significantly impair efforts to feed the army.

Complaints about the contractors persisted in the late 1780s and early 1790s. Ironically, Arthur St. Clair, who had advocated supply by contract during the American Revolution, condemned the practice by 1788. To be fair, on the eve of Harmar's 1790 campaign, the supply system enjoyed minimal oversight and no central direction. Henry Knox, Secretary at War, submitted army supply requisitions to the Board of Treasury, who would subsequently negotiate the contract and nominally supervise its execution. To prepare for the imminent campaign in 1790, Knox out of necessity directed that Harmar rely upon the principal contractors, Robert Elliot and Eli Williams, as a de facto quartermaster department under the commander's immediate supervision. Despite the previous six years' worth of dissatisfaction with contractors, Elliot and Williams answered the call, providing an abundance of supplies under the careful direction of Brigadier General Harmar.

Recognizing the usefulness of centralized control over logistical efforts in the wake of Harmar's expedition, Congress re-established the Quartermaster General in 1791, appointing Samuel Hodgdon to the position. Hodgdon, along with the contractor for the coming year, William Duer, would serve under the immediate direction of the army's new commander, Major General Arthur St. Clair. Charged with waging a reprisal campaign against the Native American groups that had defeated Harmar's expedition, the general embarked upon an aggressive plan to stockpile large stores of provisions along a line of communications running north from the Ohio River, relying on packhorses to transport the rations. St. Clair should have benefitted from his immediate supervision of both Hodgdon and Duer. The former, however, arrived at Fort Washington scarcely a week

before the army's departure, while the latter, a known speculator who never left New York during St. Clair's expedition, squandered over ninety percent of his \$85,000 advance, causing considerable scarcity in provisions and delays in the overall campaign. While St. Clair's eventual defeat bore many authors, contractors absorbed a large portion of the blame in an official congressional inquiry.

Anthony Wayne, appointed commander of the newly created Legion in 1792, enjoyed much greater support from his Quartermaster General, James O'Hara, a former contractor held in high esteem, than Duer provided St. Clair. Elliot and Williams, the same firm that had ably served Josiah Harmar two years earlier, secured the contract under Wayne. The commander of the legion also clearly benefitted from the hard work accomplished under Arthur St. Clair. Wayne continued to improve the line of communication initiated by his predecessor, surpassing St. Clair only in the attention to detail and energy with which he approached logistical planning. Unlike St. Clair in 1791, Wayne detected early in 1794 that the contractor had failed to procure adequate pack animals to transport provisions and directed O'Hara accordingly to purchase the necessary horses to make up the shortfall. Wayne's campaign in many ways represented the pinnacle of centralization while supplying the army by contract. With direct supervisory authority over both the Quartermaster General and contractor, and the willingness to use it, Wayne ensured that logistics alone would not determine the fate of his campaign. Alas, with the victory at Fallen Timbers in 1794, the army reverted to a decentralized system in which small contracts were negotiated in support of static frontier

posts with minimal oversight, a system that would supply sufficient, if not abundant, provisions for almost twenty years.

The absence of any real system of supply for most of the period from 1794 to the outbreak of the War of 1812 would prove telling in what some scholars refer to as America's second War of Independence. Indeed, even during the conflict, Congress and the War Department never really arrived at a consistent method for the procurement and issuance of rations. To be fair, Congress re-established the Quartermaster Department on the eve of war and reformed it in 1813. Neither of these efforts, however, addressed the supply of provisions. Supply by contract thus persisted under the dual direction of the army commander and the Secretary of War absent any means of centralized planning or synchronization of purchasing to avoid wastage or inflation. In addition, and more so than in previous conflicts, commanders proved eager to condemn any perceived failure on the part of the contractors and were quick to direct deputy commissaries to proceed with short-term purchases and contracts that often undermined and circumvented contractor efforts.

The willingness of commanders to criticize the conduct of their contractors during the War of 1812 should not be all that surprising. No longer operating under the premise that contractors were disinterested men of character, military officers saw in their business-minded counterparts a concern for profit that stood in contrast to their own republican ideals. Toward the conclusion of the conflict, both Edmund P. Gaines and Winfield Scott condemned the practice of supply by contract, arguing that the interests of the contractors clashed directly with those of the army. Indeed, so intolerant did

commanders prove at even the slightest hint of contractor failure that they readily, and all too often prematurely, deputized commissaries to procure perceived shortfalls in contract performance. This appointment of temporary commissaries created something of a vicious cycle. Driven by a sense of urgency and uninhibited by either contract prices or concerns with budget, the commissaries purchased provisions at elevated prices. Consequently, they incurred greater expenses, attributable to the War Department, and drove market prices so high that contractors found it even more difficult to answer requisitions. To be fair, contractors rendered themselves more vulnerable to these events by underbidding the contract and sub-contracting various components of the ration. The resulting anticipated profit margin left little room for price flexibility before the contractor suffered a loss, resulting in frequent potential for failure.

The War of 1812 also exposed with stark clarity what had become evident as early as the American Revolution and recurred during the wars against Native Americans in the Ohio River Valley—supply by contract, while adequate in support of stationary posts, proved ill-suited to meet the requirements of an active campaign. Changes in the strategic and operational situation caused problems for supply contracts. The math is simple. Contractors, in order to realize profits from their activities, strove to ensure that the circumstances in which they executed their agreements remained as stable as possible. Variables ranging from changes in the mode of transportation, quantities desired, spoilage, place of deposit, and loss of a line of communication, all frequent occurrences during war, negated contractor calculations and quickly ate into profits. Thus, when the United States lost control of Lake Erie in 1812, contractor Augustus

Porter found it nearly impossible to meet the obligations of a contract negotiated under the premise that he could move supplies via waterborne transportation. While the American army in the War of 1812 never saw the scarcity experienced at Valley Forge or Morristown during the Revolution, the actions of deputized commissaries surpassed those of contractors in ensuring that the army did not suffer from want.

Throughout the early American period, the need to fund and supply the military constituted a fundamental force behind the development of public finance, including the creation of the bank, the issue of a stable currency, the imposition of taxes, and the restoration of public credit by funding the debt. Military expenses, including subsistence, largely defined the country's economic circumstances during the early republic and played an instrumental role in shaping the nation's resulting financial institutions and practices. Indeed, military related spending represented the single largest item in every estimate of federal appropriations from 1789 to 1815. When considered in conjunction with those funds allocated for the service and payment of the debt, itself accrued in the funding of the Revolutionary War, well over ninety percent of government expenditures stemmed from the need to pay, subsist, cloth, and equip the military.

The fledgling American government struggled to meet these financial obligations. During the American Revolution, for example, the country initially relied upon the excessive issue of paper money and foreign loans secured after the victory at Saratoga. When paper depreciated to almost worthlessness in 1779, and foreign loans could only be secured at exorbitant rates due to the dubious value of U.S. public credit, the Continental

Congress resorted to the system of specific supplies, a form of indirect taxation intended to shift the burden of supplying the army onto the individual states.

Appointed Superintendent of Finance in 1781, Robert Morris, along with successors Alexander Hamilton and Albert Gallatin, paved the way toward development of those core financial institutions and practices that would define American public finance. Morris sought to reform vast inefficiencies existing within the establishment he took over while working to restore public credit. Indeed, he intended the introduction of supply by contract to accomplish greater savings by both reducing the expense of a large commissary department and tapping into efficiencies stemming from the pursuit of individual interest in a free market economy. The viability of the contract system depended upon the restoration of public credit, as contractors pursuing transactions backed by various forms of government payment required that fellow businessmen accepted these transactions at or near face value. Morris called for the creation of a national bank for a number of reasons, to include enabling the introduction of a sound circulating currency and the building of public credit to back transactions and secure future loans.

Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury under the Constitution, picked up where Robert Morris left off in his emphasis on establishing the public credit. Hamilton's program advocated the federal assumption of state debts, the imposition of taxes in order to raise revenue, and the creation of the Bank of the United States. With most of Hamilton's program in place upon his ascension to the Treasury under Jefferson and, subsequently, Madison, Albert Gallatin could promulgate a theory of war finance

that relied primarily on foreign loans to fund the elevated costs associated with war. Gallatin argued that the peace establishment could be funded by revenues raised via taxes already in existence. Funds could be secured for the War Department, he continued, by calling upon foreign nations to provide loans secured by nation's own reliable credit.

Unfortunately for Albert Gallatin, circumstances combined to render the economic atmosphere during the War of 1812 altogether different from the preceding period. Most significantly, Congress failed to renew the bank's charter in 1811, thereby fundamentally altering the government's ability to regulate circulating medium, demonstrate sound public credit, and secure foreign loans. Successive embargoes adopted in the years preceding the conflict, together with presumptive blockades stemming from the European wars, sufficiently reduced tax revenues to the point that they could no longer cover the costs even of the peacetime establishment. These developments cast doubt upon American credit, forcing Gallatin and his successor to consider foreign loans at much higher rates than he had previously anticipated.

Logistical efforts from the American Revolution through the War of 1812 profoundly shaped the realms of military procurement and public finance in the years after 1814. Soon after the war's conclusion, Congress chartered the second Bank of the United States, acknowledging its connection to the fiscal, and by extension, military might of the country. By 1817 and 1818, John C. Calhoun, Secretary of War, and Thomas Sydney Jesup, Quartermaster General, together with Congress embarked upon an aggressive series of reforms that terminated the supply by contract system, reintroduced the commissariat, created the Subsistence Department, and demanded both greater

efficiency and effectiveness in providing for the army. Incorporating experience earned through trial by fire over the previous forty years of war and peace, Calhoun and Jesup began to put together the makings of a viable supply system.

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