CAPTAIN LEWIS OURRY, ROYAL AMERICAN REGIMENT OF FOOT*

BY DONALD CORNU

AMERICANS owe a considerable debt to an obscure British officer who served in the colonies from 1756 to 1765 in the Royal American, or 60th, Regiment of Foot. Although Captain Lewis Ourry never led troops in battle, he was put to the equally severe test of carrying—month after month, year after year—administrative, logistic, personnel, accounting and civil responsibilities which were out of all proportion to his rank. His intelligence and unflagging concern for the good of the service, his patience and sardonic humor, above all his integrity and moral courage earned for him the respectful attention of his fellow soldiers and of all classes of civilians, from the poorest frontier settlers to the first families of Philadelphia. His part in the defense of Pennsylvania during Pontiac's uprising possibly was second only to that of Colonel Henry Bouquet, his commanding officer and closest friend.

Captain Ourry has received honorable, if brief, mention in the works of Smith, Mante, and Parkman.¹ The late Hervey Allen introduced Ourry as a minor character in the second and third volumes of his trilogy, The Disinherited. Allen's novel, however, takes great liberties with the well documented facts of the incidents he relates, and his portrait of Ourry, while not unflattering, is in my opinion anything but a likeness. No account of the man commensurate with his character and achievement has yet been published, although there is much documentary material which

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¹ William Smith, An Historical Account of the Expedition against the Ohio Indians in the Year MDCCCLXIV (Cincinnati, 1868), p. 14. This work was first published in Philadelphia in 1765; a London reprint followed in 1766 and a French translation appeared at Amsterdam in 1769.

Thomas Mante, The History of the Late War in North-America and the Islands of the West-Indies (London, 1772), pp. 492-493.

This illustration is reproduced from one in Smith's "Historical Account of an Expedition against the Ohio Indians." The figure holding the quill pen was probably intended to represent Captain Lewis Ourry, who had the duty of listing and classifying the white captives as they were delivered to Colonel Bouquet. No portrait of Ourry is known to exist.
bears on his military career in America. His relative obscurity is to be explained in part by his rank, for in the history of our past few but general officers have received attention. A better reason, perhaps, is that the hundreds of letters written by and to Lewis Ourry have been rather difficult for American scholars to get at for study.

Ourry can not be discussed without reference to Colonel Bouquet, whose correspondence file for the nine years of his American service fills thirty letter-books in the Additional Manuscripts of the British Museum. Two hundred and ninety-six letters written by Ourry, most of them addressed to Bouquet, and twenty-one to Ourry are preserved in these letter-books. Several hundred references to Ourry’s personality and activities, references which reflect the impression he made on his contemporaries, are scattered through the great mass of military correspondence which makes up the Bouquet Papers.

Ever since Parkman, historians have known of the riches in mid-eighteenth century military and social history in these papers, but they have been difficult both to come by and to work with. The National Archives of Canada has a longhand transcription of the entire collection, for which a useful calendar was published in 1890. The Library of Congress has had for some years photostats of nearly all of the documents. Using these photostats the Pennsylvania Historical Survey of the Works Progress Administration transcribed and published in mimeographed form between 1940 and 1943 nineteen volumes of the Bouquet Papers. This work followed the letter-book arrangement of the documents.

This last summer the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission published the first volume of what will certainly be the definitive edition of *The Papers of Henry Bouquet*. This attractive book—actually Volume Two—covers General Forbes’ expedition of 1758 against Fort Duquesne, on which Bouquet was second in command, and includes sixteen of the earliest of Ourry’s letters. Edited by Dr. S. K. Stevens, Pennsylvania State Historian, Mr. Donald H. Kent, Associate State Historian, and Mrs. Autumn L. Leonard, Research Assistant, it presents the items in chronological sequence for the first time and preserves their flavor in a literal and painstakingly accurate transcription. The documents

² British Museum Additional Manuscripts, Nos. 21631-60. Most of Ourry’s letters are in No. 21642.
are carefully but not obtrusively annotated, and facsimile illustrations, chronologies, and an excellent index are additional and helpful features of the work. With the completion of this ambitious project most of the letters of Captain Ourry which are known to have been preserved will be readily available to readers. So much for bibliography.

Lewis Ourry was born on February 21, 1717, to a Huguenot refugee family. His father, Louis Ourry, was born at Blois in France in 1682, and died at London January 4, 1771. According to the inscription on his tombstone in Bethnal Green Churchyard: "In the year 1707 He quitted his native Country for the sake of his religion and entered into the English army in which he bore a Commission from that time to his death. He left behind him four sons all of them engaged in service of their King & Country One in the Army and Three in the Navy." Of Lewis Ourry's three brothers in the Royal Navy, one, Paul Henry, rose to the rank of rear-admiral; a portrait of him as a young officer was painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds. Isaac and George Ourry became captains and commanded ships of the line. Lewis was commissioned a 2nd lieutenant in Churchill's Marines in 1747. Three years later we find him Fort Adjutant at Jersey, a post he held until 1756, when he was commissioned lieutenant in the Royal American Regiment, a regiment authorized by Parliament shortly after Braddock's defeat, the rank and file of which was to be recruited in the colonies. Henry Bouquet, a Swiss professional soldier, was commissioned a lieutenant-colonel in the Royal American at that same time, and he and Ourry came to America together in 1756. Bouquet commanded the first battalion of the regiment, with headquarters in Philadelphia, and Ourry served as his quartermaster. Shortly after the death of General John Forbes in 1759, Bouquet, who had been promoted to colonel, was given command of the British and Provincial forces operating in Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and on their frontiers. He leaned heavily on Ourry, now named Assistant Deputy Quarter Master General, for the solution of his logistic problems. Ourry was promoted to captain-lieutenant in 1759 and to captain in 1760. In addition to his duties as A.D.Q.M.G.

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Ourry was given the command of Fort Bedford, which he held from 1760 to 1764. Fort Bedford, about midway between Carlisle and Fort Pitt, was the most important logistic link on the Forbes Road, usually referred to as the "Communication." Here at Bedford, besides commanding the small garrison and maintaining the defenses of the post, Ourry was charged with the duty of paying the troops on the frontier; contracting for provisions and supplies; weighing, inspecting, and paying for such goods; hiring or impressing wagons, teams, packhorses and their drivers to carry supplies forward; keeping accounts of the King's money spent in all these transactions; preventing liquor and other forbidden goods from going west of Bedford to the Indian trade; maintaining a system of expresses to carry letters and dispatches up and down the Communication; entertaining the many officers and civilians of substance who stopped at Bedford on their "up" or "down" journeys; maintaining peace and order among the settlers who lived in or near the village of Bedford; and when the Indians threatened in 1763, organizing the male settlers into two militia companies to strengthen his garrison. It is no wonder that once, when he was exasperated by the "drunks, the cuckold, the whores, the loafers, the thieves, and the bitches" with whom he had been dealing, he referred half-jestingly to the weight of all his "honorable and dishonorable functions—Governor, Factor—Judge, Exciseman—Magistrate, Clerk—Contractor, Commissary—A.D.Q.M.G. H. I. K.I.M.&.&" This was the man who found time almost every day to write several letters, and whose neat and regular handwriting was almost as well known to General Amherst and Governor Hamilton, to Thomas Willing and Benjamin Franklin as it was to Bouquet. He once remarked that although his sword had rusted in its scabbard, his "indefatigable fingers had not left the pen since the year '58."

In a packet of letters, addressed to Colonel Bouquet at Fort Pitt, which passed through Ourry's hands in 1762 the Captain noticed one which bore General Amherst's new seal. It inspired this comment:

...I cannot help observing the Supporters of Sir Jeffrey's Arms on his new Seal, viz. two Indians... the one hold-

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2 To Bouquet, September 18, 1762 (21642).
3 To Bouquet, March 14, 1762 (21642).
ing a Tomahawk, the other a Scalp—When I am intitled to Supporters I’ll have on the dexter side a Waggoner, holding a Whip in one hand, leaning on a handscrew with the other. And on the Sinister a Pack Horse Man, holding a horse-bell in one hand, and a pair of hopples in the other. My Motto: PERMIT TO PASS. And if I may be allowed to change my Crest instead of a broken Sword, I’ll have the Stump of a Pen, in a dexter hand, which is constantly the case with me, and particularly at present.\(^5\)

While Ourry’s letters are for the most part concerned with the prosaic details of military administration—such matters as road conditions, troop movements, shipments of flour and salt, herds of beef cattle, and accounts of money spent in the King’s Service—they still are highly personal in nature and are written with such a liveliness of thought and word that they may, perhaps, belong to literature as well as to history. Ourry was bilingual, and for reasons of security, usually personal rather than military, he often wrote passages—sometimes whole letters—in a colloquial French. On occasion he amused himself—and Bouquet—by writing verses in that language. He was an inveterate punster and he enjoyed all kinds of word-play. He had read widely; his letters reflect an acquaintance with literature. He quoted Virgil and once parodied the then best-selling *Tristram Shandy*. And sprinkled liberally through these letters are to be found ironic understatement, caustic satire, descriptive vignettes, and passages of high-spirited playfulness. Lewis Ourry possessed, or rather was possessed by, the ironic temper. He was thereby enabled to objectify even his most trying experiences with men and things and to relate them with the spirit and the wit which we are accustomed to associate with the best in eighteenth century literature.

These statements call for supporting evidence. In spite of the danger one runs in attempting to prove that wit is witty or that the light touch is compatible with seriousness of purpose, I offer a few examples of Captain Ourry at play with his pen. Had he not always put military business first, and had he not in most of these letters been addressing a friend as well as a commanding officer, he might, perhaps, be described as frivolous. But what

\(^5\) To Bouquet, March 26, 1762 (21642).
we find in him is not any lack of seriousness but only the absence of solemnity.

The first example is a small one, but it is, I think, typical. In a letter Ourry wrote in 1761 from Fort Bedford to Bouquet, then at Fort Pitt, about regimental business—about supplies, packhorses, and the snow on the road—he concluded with his customary “most humble and most obedient servant” closing and his beautiful and unmistakable signature. Then follows a postscript:

I must scribble again but a P. S. will do. I had scarce light[ed] my Candle this Evening when a poor starved Drover, with some difficulty, got his benumbed fingers into his Breeches Pocket from whence he finally drew your Letter of the 8th.

The fact of the receipt of Bouquet's letter is business; the report of the manner of its coming is a touch of art.

The next example comes from a warmer season. The troops and the settlers on the frontier looked forward to the coming of Spring for many reasons, not the least of which was its promise of dietary relief. Garden seeds were an important item in military supplies. Ourry encouraged soldiers and civilians alike to cultivate garden plots. He wrote once in April:

I can't stay in the House now. The Gardens captivate me entirely... All my Inhabitants have each their little Spot of Ground, in which it is a pleasure to see them from Morning till Night, Men, Women & Children, digging, raking, sowing & planting; and those who have larger inclosures, ploughing, harrowing & fencing. And I am so conveniently situated that I can see the whole d'un Coupe d'Oeil.

As soon as word reached Ourry of Bouquet's victory over the Indians at Bushy Run and the successful relief of the besieged garrison at Fort Pitt, he wrote to Bouquet his congratulations on the “Decisive & well Conducted Battle & March, on the Fate of which depended, at least, that of the Provinces.” It is a long letter, full of news of the sort that Bouquet would need to know. He tells of the situation at Bedford, to which the settlers round about had been flocking for protection since the outbreak of Indian

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6 To Bouquet, December 13, 1761 (21642).
7 To Bouquet, April 22, 1762 (21642).
hostilities, of the measures he has taken to care for these refugees. He writes, "I have forwarded & provided Carriage for as many Women & Children as were willing to go below this Post, and indeed for a few more than were [so] inclined," and describes the scenes at Bedford village on Saturday, Sunday and Monday, August 20 to 22, 1763, in these passages:

Before Noon the Town was like a Fair. The mottled Crew of Women, Children, Sorebacks & Sidesaddles that flocked in, furnished, thro' the Dust that they kicked up, a diverting Scene to those that had nothing to do with them, but to me it was far otherwise, tho' I had not much trouble with them that Day, the sending the Dumb Creatures to Pasture being my first Care. The same afternoon Coll Stephen decamped.

The next Day, being the Sabbath, was a Day of rest; nevertheless I was harrassed with many Petitions & Intreaties, and my Floor was sprinkled, partly with Mother's Tears & partly with Children's P-ss-Distress-full Scene!

The [next day], Monday was a Day of Toil—draughting the Horses & appointing the Drivers—Matching stubborn Women with illnatur'd Waggoners—and impudent Strumpets with knavish Horse Masters. But finally I started the Carravan, and the Spit-fires lay that Night at the Snake Spring.

The next Morning early I sent an Officer and Party of Provincials to join & escort them to Littleton, where they arrived safe the 24th in the forenoon and proceeded without halting there.\footnote{To Bouquet, August 27, 1763 (21642).}

The following letter provides some evidence of the scarcity of dairy products on the frontier. It was forwarded On His Majesty's Service to Bouquet in May, 1762, shortly before strawberries might be expected to ripen.

Dear Sir.

The Bearer (Adam Walker) goes up with 33 head of Cattle, having left one, disabled, at Loudoun, and a poor Carrion at this Post, unable to proceed. The rest in general seem pretty fat. I have given the Drover Ten Bushells of Indian Corn, to feed . . . at proper times lest they should fall away.
In the Drove is a very fine Milch Cow, for which great application has been made to me here by several to exchange here. Nor was bribery neglected to corrupt me, but as it was in the presence of the Doctor it was ill-timed; therefore I resisted the pecuniary Temptation—nay a greater Temptation, which was my own Inclination to keep the Cow. But I thought her handsome and good enough for you, and have therefore recommended her strongly to the Drover. And I wou’d have you look upon her as a very genteel present from me (if such a great Beast may be called “genteel”), for tho’ she cost me nothing, I might have kept her or have received a Consideration for her, as the bribing Rascal term’d it.

She is White, with large Red Spots, her Face divided in exact Simetry by a White Strip in the Middle, and [she has] two red Flanches (as they are term’d in Heraldry) on the Sides, the whole surmounted by a pair of beautifull Horns. But what is no despicable Decoration is a large Bag of Milk appendant in Base.9

Unfortunately we do not know whether Bossy reached Fort Pitt, or, if she did, whether she fulfilled Ourry's expectations.

The last letters from which I shall quote concern a minor catastrophe on the Communication. Late in 1759 Ourry had built a bridge near Bedford. He was proud of his maiden effort in military engineering, and its completion he thus reported to Colonel Bouquet:

I have the pleasure to inform you, Sir, that I have finished what every body calls a very good Bridge, over the Creek about two miles above this Place, where there was an exceeding bad Ford. I have laid it about 60 or 80 Yards above the Ford, & cut a Road in the side of a Rocky Hill to the old Road. I began it the first of December, and a Waggon went over it on Christmas Day. Yesterday we roasted a Loin of Pork at the foot of it and Coll Shippen call’d it Ourry-Bridge. I believe it will be the most usefull of any on the Communication, and I dare say the most lasting, at least I have endeavour’d to make it so.10

Almost exactly two years later this bridge and Ourry’s pride were swept away together by a sudden flood. Ourry’s account of

9 To Bouquet, May 10, 1762 (21642).
10 To Bouquet, January 2, 1760 (21642).
the loss is a fine piece of burlesque and literary parody. It contains echoes of the classical epic as well as direct parallels in language and matter to Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* which, we may infer, both Ourry and Bouquet had recently read fresh from the London printer.

(Fort Bedford) Sunday Evening Jany 10th 1762

Such a Sudden Inundation, Sir, I never saw before, the Water rising a Foot in Ten Minutes. In a few Hours the whole space between l'Hotel Baltimore & Bedford Bridge was a perfect Sea, cover'd with floating Rocks of Ice, Rails, Logs & large Trees—a moving Forrest, tremendous to behold!—dreadfully roaring, impetuously descending, bearing down every thing in its Passage—

In short, OURRY BRIDGE itself could not long withstand the repeated Shocks of the huge Islands, and vast Forrests, which incessantly thundering with accumulated Force against his sturdy Ribs, and tumultuously crowding under his lusty Beams, finally bore him, with incredible Violence, off his lamenting Banks, and with irresistible Force bore him, groaning, down the rapid & relentless Stream.

Now, you may truly say, our poor Communication is unhinged, for I never was so much hors des gonds—Oh! Pity me—I've lost my dear Hobby Horse—What was Uncle Toby's Curious, whimsical Drawbridge to this Famous, Useful, Majestick Arch? (The Pride of my Heart! the Glory of the Woods! the Joy of the Traveler!)—No more to be compared, than Bridget's dribbling Cascade to that ever flowing & destructive Current that has so cruelly unhorsered me—I shall never more endure Floating Islands and Blanc Mange.

I hope the Effects of the Fresh have not been so fatal at Pittsburgh; and that your Nags are all safe . . . Then, we are not quite ruin'd. Tho' for my part I have nothing now to bear me over the Water but my little pony—Bedford Bridge—which, with the assistance of Corporal Trim, I with much difficulty preserved by keeping a constant Guard upon him . . . with stout Poles parrying the vigourous thrusts aimed at his slender Side by the Shoals of unwieldy, floating Battering Rams, which wou'd undoubtedely have left me quite on foot had they not been dextrously put out of their perpendicular Direction, and their Velocity somewhat impeded by judiciously directing their Course to where they cou'd do the least Damage—Tho' notwithstanding our indefatigable En-
deavours the poor Pony has received a bad Contusion in one of his Legs . . . , but not so as to render him unfit for Service.

—O! poor Uncle Toby! I never sympathised with you so much as now—I shall immediately fill up the horrible gaping Chasm . . . with a Hackney Horse ’till I can get my Favourite up again, or another in his Place—not a Hand or two, but three or four Feet higher—And . . . I’ll call him Bucephalus (for OURRY is an unlucky Name). And then I’ll bid Defiance to all the Floods, Freshes, & Torrents that Envy, Hatred, and Malice can pour upon,

Dear Sir, Your most Afflicted and almost Distressed humble Servant,

Ls Ourry11

Ourry’s letters abound in material which would interest the military, the economic, and the social historian. The passages quoted will show that they are more than mere repositories of factual data, that the persons and events therein recorded come to us, two centuries later, as things alive because they were originally perceived by the keen eyes of a man of intelligence and spirit.

At the end of the French and Indian War many British regiments were reduced, among them the Royal American. Along with many other officers, Ourry returned to England in 1765 to go on the half-pay list. I have not been able to gather much information about his later years. He appears to have lived for some time with his wife and daughter Ann in the London suburb of Hammersmith. In the Franklin Papers of the American Philosophical Society there is a letter written by Ourry from Hammersmith in September, 1765, to Deborah Franklin thanking her for her “Civilities to Mrs. Ourry’s Husband” and expressing the hope that he may be able to repay them in part to Franklin, who was then in London.12 Twenty years later Ann Ourry mentioned the “kind attention” Franklin had shown to her in her childhood, from which we may infer that Franklin on one or more occasions had called on the Ourrys at Hammersmith.13

In 1772 Ourry purchased a company in the 15th Regiment of Foot, then on garrison duty at Fort Augustus in Scotland. At

11 To Bouquet, January 10, 1762 (21642).
12 To Mrs. Franklin, September 26, 1765; in the Balche Collection.
13 To Benjamin Franklin; see note 17.
that post on August 31, 1773, Ourry breakfasted with Doctor Johnson and James Boswell, who were then on their famous tour of the Highlands and the Hebrides. Boswell recorded the event in his often printed Journal noting that Johnson had been "entertained . . . much with accounts of the Indians" told him by Ourry and a Captain D'Aripé, who also had been in America. Boswell spelled Ourry's name U-R-I-E which perhaps accounts for the failure to identify Johnson's host at Fort Augustus with Bouquet's correspondent in America until the publication of my article on Ourry and Johnson in 1951. One of the Indian stories Johnson heard at that leisurely breakfast we can almost reconstruct, and certainly Ourry, not D'Aripé, was the narrator. In his Life of Johnson Boswell reports the great Cham as concluding a discussion in 1778, five years after their meeting with Ourry, with these words:

JOHNSON. . . "You may remember an officer at Fort Augustus, who had served in America, told us of a woman whom they were obliged to bind, in order to get her back from savage life." BOSWELL. "She must have been an animal, a beast." JOHNSON. "Sir, she was a speaking cat."

Ourry was an eyewitness of this sensational incident. He was on Bouquet's staff during the expedition into the Ohio country in the autumn of 1764 which resulted in the capitulation of the hostile border tribes and their surrender to Bouquet of some two hundred white captives. As Bouquet reported to Governor Penn, many of the captives had lived so long among the Indians that they parted from them with the "greatest Reluctance," and one young woman actually was bound by her friends to prevent her rejoining her captors, exactly as Johnson had heard Ourry tell of it at Fort Augustus. The coincidence of joy and sadness in the delivery of these captives to Bouquet at the Forks of the Muskingum in

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17 This matter is related in some detail and with full documentation in my article "The Historical Authenticity of Dr. Johnson's 'Speaking Cat,'" The Review of English Studies, N. S. Vol. II (Oct., 1951), pp. 357-370.
November, 1764, made it one of the most dramatic events in our colonial history and provided a contemporary artist with the subject for the book-illustration reproduced at the beginning of this paper.

The Ourrys accompanied the 15th Regiment when it moved to Ireland in 1774, and there the captain died in 1779. A few details of the family's misfortunes are to be found in a letter written by Ann Ourry at Kinsale, Ireland, in 1785 to Benjamin Franklin, then in Paris. She begged Franklin to intercede with the American Congress to restore to her mother, the captain's widow, certain lands near Albany which had been granted to Ourry as a reward for his service in the colonies, basing her plea on the "long friendship that subsisted" between him and her father. She wrote:

You left him on half pay at Hammersmith. In '72 he got a Company in the 15th Regt but on its being order'd to America in '77 he sold out, tho still so attach'd to the Military line as to purchase the Fort Majority of Kinsale. In '78 he was appointed Commissary for Prisoners of War & in a few months he fell a Victim to his great Humanity to the poor Wretches under his care, having caught a violent and putrid fever in the prison. The remainder of the purchase money of His Company was unfortunately left at interest in the hands of His Agent Jervis Hall of Dublin, who became a Bankrupt soon after His Decease, so that all the benefit which remains to us of My Dear Fathers Three & Thirty Years service, is Capns Widows pension, £26 per Ann. during my mothers life, our only inducement to stay in this Kingdom.17

Thus ended the military career of Lewis Ourry, who played an important role in the preservation of the colony of Pennsylvania during a critical period. Unwittingly he bequeathed to us in his letters a lively account of his part in that dramatic action.

16 The Burial Register of the Church at Kinsale, County Cork, records his burial on April 25, 1779. The entry reads, "Oury, Lewis, Esq. Fort Major & Agent for Prisoners of War at Kinsale." For this information I am indebted to the present Rector, the Reverend Mr. W. E. White.

17 January 27, 1785. This letter is to be found in the Franklin Papers (VLII, 60) in the library of the University of Pennsylvania.