

“An Arduous Service”: The Pennsylvania Backcountry Soldiers’ Revolution

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On September 30, 1839, Peter Keister made the following deposition about his service in the American Revolution as a ranger on the Pennsylvania frontier:

The Indians would take advantage of any temporary absence of the rangers and burn property, kill and make prisoners, and drive off cattle. They [the rangers] were kept continually on the alert, marching to and fro, to protect the county from the enemy who was only know by his sudden burning and murders and escape to the depths of the forest. . . . They were all well-armed as riflemen during their service and drew their arms at Sunbury. Such was the nature of their service that he [Keister] cannot state any prominent fact which entered into the history of the country. It was an arduous service marked by individual murders and burnings. . . . I recollect Michael Lamb, John Ebby, John Clinesmith[?], and Jacob Beekle were killed by the Indians. John Stomilch[?] and his wife were tomahawked and scalped and the old man had seven stab [wounds]. He [Keister] helped to bury them.¹

This article seeks to recover the voices of common soldiers like Peter Keister in order to cast new light upon the meaning of the American Revolution. Specifically, it focuses on militiamen, rangers, and Continental soldiers from the Pennsylvania backcountry. Their experiences reveal an aspect of the conflict that is unique to the frontier and absent from the historiography of the Revolution. Although motivations for service varied, one crucial pattern emerges as salient: backcountry soldiers pursued the frontier war with far more ardor than they did the war against the main British Armies in the East. This clear priority accorded the war in the West derived from local conditions, racial animosity to Indians, and commitment to their communities. The result was brutal, racially-charged combat close to home and relative indifference toward the main theaters of operation. The Pennsylvania hinterland soldiers’ Revolution was violent and distinct. We can begin to grasp the essence of that war by understanding its meaning to the ordinary people who carried it out.²

Recent scholarship about the social aspects of Revolutionary War military service

has significantly enriched our knowledge of the conflict and its participants. In particular, historians have explicated economic, social, and political motivations of soldiers and Continental Army officers. No one, however, has analyzed the perceptions of the rank and file from the frontier regions. A focus on common backcountry soldiery contrasts with studies that concentrate primarily on officers. It also provides an opportunity to compare the Revolution in the West to that in the East. Finally, the experiences of these soldiers offers a new perspective on the meaning of violence in early America.³

This essay compares the two distinct wars within the Pennsylvania backcountry soldiers' Revolution. The first part examines the motivations and experiences of these men in the East. It addresses their reasons for serving as well as for not serving. An analysis of their eastern experiences reveals how they perceived military service, combat, and their professional soldier enemies. The second part explores the soldiers' Revolution on the frontier. It contrasts their motives and experiences in the West with those in the East. Specifically, it takes up why the backcountry soldiers fought on the frontier, how they prosecuted the war, and their perceptions of their Indian and Tory opponents.

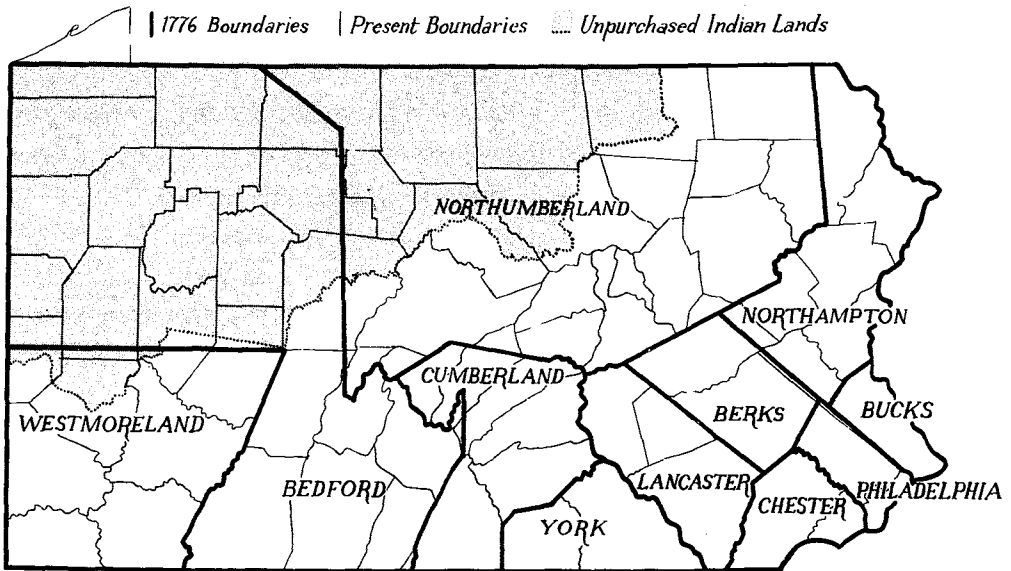
MOTIVATIONS FOR SERVICE IN THE EAST

The backcountry soldiers' reasons for service in the East suggest that the local concerns of frontier life were more influential than a desire to fight the British army. Those who volunteered for long terms were often servants whose motives derived more from their marginal social status than from an overwhelming desire to serve in the regular army. Some soldiers served only when drafted. Still others were brought into service by dubious measures. Also, the many frontiersmen who served in the East as substitutes often did so to protect their families and preserve the competence of their families' farms.⁴

Like many who joined the Continental Army from other regions, some frontier inhabitants enlisted in order to improve their lives. Men of lower economic status from the Pennsylvania hinterland were among the most likely to be willing to travel east to fight. A number of the backcountry soldiers who served extended tours with the main army came from the ranks of servants and apprentices who had little stake in the frontier social order. Since they did not own land and probably would not in the near future, enlistment offered a measure of economic gain and relative autonomy. Samuel Solomon Dotter of Berks County, Pennsylvania was typical. A supporter of his pension deposition recalled that, "Dotter left his master and enlisted into the service of his country in the Continental Army. . . . After his return, he and his master not agreeing, said Dotter went

Courtesy of Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

COUNTIES of PENNSYLVANIA



Map of Pennsylvania showing 1776 county boundaries in bold over the present counties. From John B. B. Trussell, Jr., The Pennsylvania Line: Regimental Organization and Operations, 1776-1783 (Harrisburg, 1977).

and enlisted again.” Apparently the young apprentice found long-term military service more agreeable than being bound out to a domineering master. With nothing much to look forward to in the immediate future, the army offered a degree of economic independence to such unhappy servants.⁵

Continental recruiting officers appeared to have been well aware of this potential human resource in disenchanted apprentices and servants. Certain masters soon came to resent the appropriation of their bound workers. In May 1777, recruiter John McDowell wrote to his superior that, “you cannot imagine what disorder the enlisting of servants and apprentices has occasioned in this county [Cumberland]. Some officers have been handcuffed and others shot at as they rode along.” In the same year, the Committee of Cumberland County angrily resolved:

that all apprentices and servants are the property of their masters and mistresses and every mode of depriving such masters and mistresses of their property is a violation of the rights of mankind. . . . Resolved that every officer, non-commis-

sioned officer, and soldier or other person who has enlisted any servant or apprentice the property of any inhabitant of this county to return all . . . to their proper owner.

A year later, an "Act for compensation for masters' echoed these sentiments, asserting that the "great number of servants and apprentices enlisted into the Continental Army" promoted "the public service" while the "private interests of the masters and mistresses [were] greatly endamaged." Much to their masters' chagrin, many rural servants were willing to risk their lives far from home rather than continue to be treated as "property."⁶

Other masters were less possessive and were not above profiting from their own servants' service. Some turned their bondsmen out as substitutes for themselves, as did Peter Protzman's master, who substituted his Lancaster County apprentice for himself twice. Masters sent some servants in other men's stead and apparently kept the substitution fee. George Hess of Lebanon recalled that "my master made me turn out for a person by the name of John Adam Laudermilch as a substitute." Recruiter Adam Hubley of Lancaster County was able to "obtai[n] . . . six or seven servants . . . from their masters." Thus, many servants and apprentices had no say in whether they wanted to fight, but as "property," they were simply sent. Their reason for joining the main army in the East was that they were compelled to do so by virtue of their role in an unequal social power relation.⁷

Other men from the frontier were "recruited" by the Continental Army under slightly dubious circumstances. Force and trickery could be used to motivate reluctant backcountry men into service in the East. For example, a party of Continental soldiers led by Lieutenant William Reynolds entered a York County tavern seeking recruits. Local resident Daniel May refused to enlist and was promptly declared a deserter, bound, and carried off. Other recruiters were a bit more subtle, if not less treacherous. Franz Dido of York County recalled, "when I enlisted, I was told by the recruiter that I should be sergeant of horse." Dido soon found that he had really signed up as a private of foot. He decided to serve despite the ruse but his twin brother, Jacob, and several other men who had enlisted with him under the same promise quickly deserted and urged Franz to do the same.⁸

Other backcountry inhabitants never volunteered and served only when drafted. Like residents of other regions and states, a significant number of Pennsylvania frontiersmen were reluctant to fight when the war did not directly threaten the safety of their own communities. These men served in the East simply because they had to. Pennsylvania's militia laws allowed the payment of fines for nonassociation and the hiring of substitutes.

Consequently, the lower and middling sorts bore the brunt of military service. When drafted, if one lacked the funds to hire a substitute, one had to go. Backcountry soldiers like Peter Deemer, Jacob Kehl, George Kerebs, and Samuel Snodgrass all joined the army only when drafted in the militia. John Torrence and John Campbell had to be drafted into the Cumberland militia to defend Philadelphia. Interestingly, their pension depositions fail to reveal a sense of imminent danger embodied by the British invasion of their state. Both quietly returned home while the redcoats and their auxiliaries occupied the capital.⁹

What did make the Pennsylvania hinterland privates' motives distinct from those of troops from other regions was the advent of war on the northern frontier. When Indian attacks commenced in earnest in summer 1777, the draft was increasingly necessary to get frontier residents to fight in the East. The Revolution was now raging close to their homes and was being carried out by their Indian and white neighbors. During this period, the protection of Philadelphians (who never seemed to care much about the safety of the frontier in earlier wars) was not a high priority among frontiersmen. Robert Scott volunteered in 1776 for the Pennsylvania Flying Camp but did not reenlist for duty in the East. Instead, he served four tours in the frontier militia. On one, he recalled that he specifically "enlisted to bury those killed" by Indians. John McCaslin of Cumberland County volunteered for the New York campaign, had to be drafted into service at Valley Forge, and "went out as a volunteer under General Clark" twice against "troublesome" Indians. James Morrison volunteered in 1775 and 1776 for service in the East but volunteered for two tours in 1777 on the frontier. War in the backcountry would take precedence. Over the course of the conflict, the number of frontier volunteers increased for Western service, while they decreased for the main theater.¹⁰

Another motivation for service in the East among frontiersmen was a desire to protect their families and farms. Pennsylvania backcountry communities were centered around the farm and many young men served in the military in their fathers' or older brothers' stead, especially during the harvest season. Their substitution was not motivated by bounties but primarily by family concerns. By serving in place of the heads of households or older brothers, they allowed the more experienced farmers to stay home. Young Peter Kessler of Northampton County served as a substitute for his father during the 1778 harvest season and again the following year. Seventeen-year-old Peter Krumbine of Lancaster County went in place of his father Leonard in 1777. Henry Ream fought at White Marsh and Brandywine while substituting for his father. Samuel Quigley marched to the defense of Philadelphia with the Cumberland County militia in place of his father. Andrew Ream

substituted for his brother in 1778 as a guard for British prisoners. John McCaslin went on a 1778 militia tour as the substitute for his "weakly and infirm" brother. Thus, these men were protecting their own families and their livelihoods on the frontier by going to serve in the East.¹¹

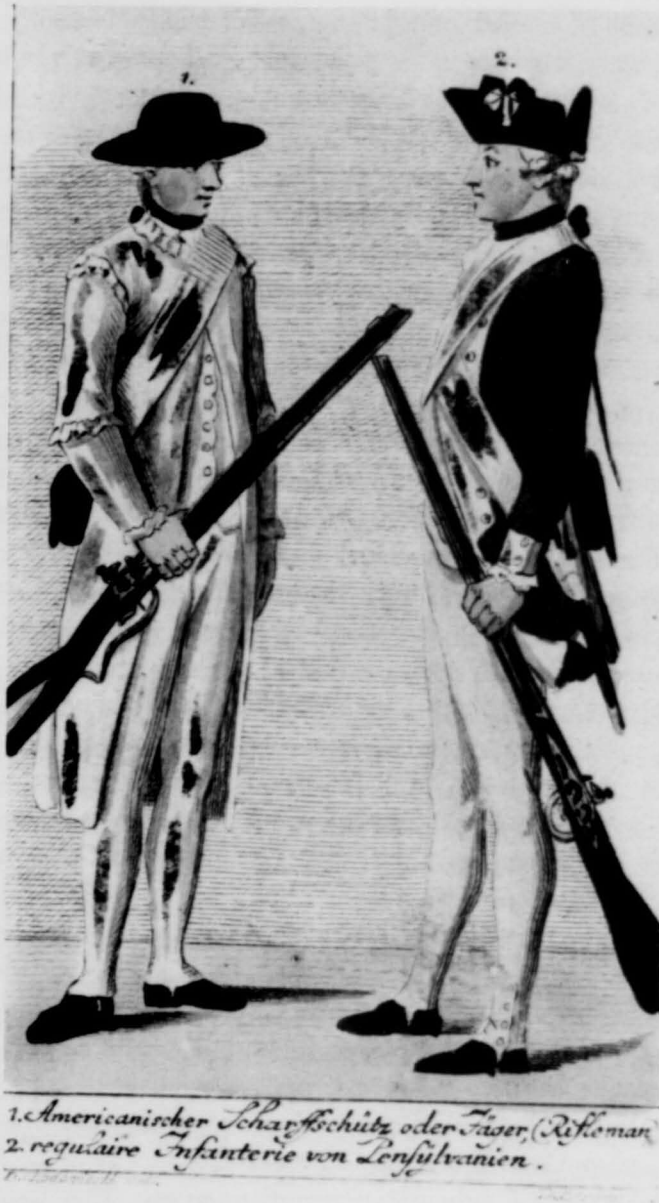
Distinct motives for protesting and avoiding service in the main theaters of operations also reveal much about how backcountry soldiers perceived the Revolution. Two reasons emerge as conspicuous. First, few would turn out for service if it interfered with their agricultural pursuits. Second, the outbreak of war on the frontier led to a fear of leaving their communities unprotected. Men would not join the main army only to leave their families and property vulnerable to their despised Indian and Tory enemies. The frontier war was far more immediate than conventional combat in the East.

During the harvest and plowing seasons, it was not uncommon for militiamen to fail to turn out. Also, few officials attempted to collect fines from the farmers for the neglect of their duty. Even General William Howe's invasion of the state in 1777 could not motivate certain hinterland men to muster. "When the enemy was in the city," the eighth class of York County militia had "only one man turn out of the battalion and those that stayed home got off for paying a trifle." Samuel Hunter, the Lieutenant of Northumberland County, protested the calling out of two classes of militia to join Washington in November 1777. He argued, "I had promised the poor back inhabitants to relieve the first class whose time is expired the sixteenth of this month, the people there are in a bad way as they have got in no crops this fall which is very hard on them, being generally poor." In Bedford County in September 1777, Samuel Todd was to hold elections for "field officers for the upper district" at his house, but "people in the glade had not yet finished their harvests and could not come." Bringing in their crops was more important than electing military leaders during wartime. In the small town of Hanover, no one was turning out to face Howe. Richard McCollister observed of the militia, "they will not muster . . . in some parts, they carry the matter so far as to threaten the lives of the officers." Apparently these backcountry farmers felt that they were not threatened directly by the British invasion of the southeastern portion of the commonwealth. The care of their crops was more important.¹²

The grumbling about having to serve in the East persisted after the British left Philadelphia. The Fourth Battalion of York County militia complained in 1779 that:

We are informed we must either go or pay one hundred pounds and what further adds to our grievance to be called from home at a time when we should put our

Courtesy of Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



A Revolutionary-Era German drawing of an American rifleman and Continental regular from Pennsylvania.

spring crops in the ground and if we are to stay two months out at this time of the year, then we will be deprived of putting any fall crop in the ground.

Nor was the avoidance of service in the East restricted to those who owned land. The recruiter John McDowell remarked on his inability to raise volunteers for the Continental Army in Cumberland County:

I can't be answerable for the success as there is no such thing as getting men while wages in the country are so high. Farmers are giving five pounds per month for common ploughmen and men will not be so foolish, one in ten, as to list for fifty percent when they earn double and stay at home.

Even rural wage laborers were more interested in pursuing their vocations than in soldiering when the former was more lucrative.¹³

The second reason for avoiding or protesting service in the East was the commencement of the frontier war. Some backcountry soldiers were incensed to find themselves attached to Washington's Army when they were promised that their units would be used for the protection of the frontiers. Believing that they enlisted to protect their families and property, these men were forced to abandon all they held dear. Members of the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment recruited from the backcountry were angry when they received orders to march East. Colonel George Wilson of the regiment observed, "as both the officers and men understood they were raised for the defense of the western frontiers, [for] their families and substance to be left in so defenseless a situation in their absence, seems to give sensible trouble." Soldiers from the Wyoming Valley echoed this resentment:

Your petitioners in the year 1776 enlisted in Continental service . . . for the defense of this place and the frontiers but, contrary to our expectations, were, in a few months after our engagement, called away to join the Continental Army under his excellency General Washington where we continued almost two years which was so great trouble to us in leaving our families exposed to be ravaged by the savages.

These men felt deceived into fighting with the main army when they were promised that they were enlisted to protect their homes. Much like militia units, companies of Pennsylvania Continental units were raised in a single area and maintained their regional identity and outlook. It is not surprising then that local concerns were more important to these regular soldiers from the frontier than the war in the East.¹⁴

Other frontier military units simply refused to go east. They were not about to abandon their communities while war was raging on their own doorsteps. Samuel Hunter

protested the calling out of the Northumberland Militia to face Howe's invasion in September 1777. He argued that no one would turn out because "at the present time, the inhabitants of this county are afraid of the Indians coming down upon our frontiers." A few months later Hunter again pleaded that, "the generality of the inhabitants do not think it prudent to let any out of the county at this present call for the militia when the frontiers are likely to suffer by a cruel and savage enemy." Pennsylvania President Thomas Wharton was forced to allow the fifth class of Northumberland Militia to remain at home. Captain Philip Shrawder of Northampton County told Pennsylvania President Joseph Reed in 1781 that it would be difficult to raise recruits for the Continental Army because the militia "had . . . the greatest assurance from the most respectable men of these parts that they should not be taken off but employed for the defense of this county." Also in Northampton County, officers of the Third Militia Battalion reported:

the companies which live on the more remote side of Blue Mountain alleged in general as a reason of not complying [with the call for service in the East] that they were repeatedly told that the Indians would be down upon their families immediately and therefore would not leave them.

Thus, direct disobedience was a way in which backcountry soldiers could avoid service in the East and prosecute what they saw as the more immediate war on the frontier.¹⁵

THE EXPERIENCES OF BACKCOUNTRY SOLDIERS IN THE EAST

The frontier troops' ambivalence about going east is also reflected in their experiences and perceptions of service in that theater. Since they did not regard this war as their own, they pursued it with neither ardor nor hatred for their opponents. Their experiences with the main army evince a frontier disdain for formal discipline, an awe of the spectacle of conventional battles, and a lack of hostility toward their opponents in the British Army.

The traditional Pennsylvania backcountry distrust of central authority manifested itself among the frontier soldiers serving with the main army. They were used to running their own affairs when engaged in military service on the frontier and apparently expected to do the same in the East. The Pennsylvania riflemen posted at Cambridge, Massachusetts thought of themselves as an elite unit of backwoodsmen that should receive special treatment while part of the Continental Army. When several of their number were court-martialed, they rose up in true frontier vigilante fashion and attempted to free them. Their captain, Matthew Smith, had in fact "been a leader of the Paxton Boys," the notorious group of colonial rioters and Indian murderers. When the riflemen's uprising was put

down, many soldiers became so disillusioned with the discipline of the main army that they "were now deserting to the enemy"¹⁶

A Philadelphia area minister, Henry Muhlenberg, decried the loose discipline of the Pennsylvania frontier militias during their stay in his neighborhood. He lamented that they "go here and there to private homes and trouble the inhabitants for food, drink, and lodgings." Muhlenberg compared the backcountry soldiers unfavorably with New England soldiers who "have a good reputation; they do not curse and swear like others, nor do they rob and steal." Apparently, the frontiersmen had little patience for the strict discipline expected in the main theater.¹⁷

How Pennsylvania frontier soldiers perceived combat in the East is also instructive. Men from the backcountry experienced the horrors of battle with British regulars, but their reaction was usually one of awe rather than of animosity. The image of thousands of men marching toward each other with the ostensible purpose of killing each other was unique and unforgettable for most frontiersmen. Michael Kuhns of Northampton County, who could not recall when he enlisted in Continental Army, remembered clearly the spectacle of the Battle of Three Rivers. He cited exaggerated figures of 7000 British soldiers engaging 5000 Americans. Simon Krysher of Berks County was at Brandywine and recalled that, "in this battle, deponent fired so often that the barrel of his rifle was quite hot." Jacob Kehl, a drafted militiaman, was also "at that memorable battle [Brandywine]. The battle commenced about nine A.M. and lasted until sunset." Yet the accounts seem curiously devoid of the kind of contempt in which backcountry soldiers held their frontier opponents.¹⁸

Others, like John Boon of York County, were able to exploit the confusion of battle and escape the remainder of their service in the main army. Boon (who coincidentally was the nephew of the famous frontiersman Daniel) marched south with the Continental Army under Gates. He found military life in the East disagreeable and remembered that, on the march, "the army suffered much fatigue and hardship." Boon fought at the disastrous Battle of Camden and recollected:

He was in this battle and was among the last to retreat. He saved himself from the pursuing enemy by fleeing through an unknown country. . . . At length he arrived at Washington Ironworks where he remained some years. . . . After this dreadful defeat, the officers and soldiers with whom he served had all fled in different directions and he did not know where to find them so as to get a discharge.

It is a bit difficult to believe that in the course of "some years," Boon was unable to locate the Continental Army. It appears that he skillfully turned the defeat at Camden to his own advantage and got out of his full five-year term.¹⁹

A third experience of the backcountry privates, their perceptions of their eastern enemies in combat, reveals a decided lack of hostility toward their professional soldier opponents. Much like soldiers from other regions, Pennsylvania hinterland troops spared British and German regulars the special animosity that was reserved for their American enemies, Tories and Indians. In many areas, such as the South, New York, and New Jersey, European-Americans who took up arms against the Revolutionaries were more hated than foreign regulars. In the Pennsylvania backcountry, hostile Indians and whites who sided with them were disdained in a way that European professional soldiers never were. In addition to the influence of local conditions, race relations on the frontier undoubtedly played a role in the soldiers' attitudes toward the enemy. Unlike their Indian opponents, the British and their Hessian mercenaries were white Europeans. Cumberland County militiaman, John McCaslin's experiences vividly illustrate the frontiersmen's perception of their enemies. While on a drafted militia tour in January 1778, McCaslin was assigned to interdict Hessian foragers in the countryside. He recalled a memorable incident:

We approached near the house and discovered a large Hessian standing in the yard with his gun, as a sentinel we supposed, and by a unanimous vote of the company present it was agreed on that Major McCorman or myself, who were good marksmen, should shoot him....we cast lots, and it fell to my lot to shoot the Hessian. I did not like to shoot a man down in cold blood. The company present knew I was a good marksman, and I concluded to break his thigh. I shot with a rifle and aimed at his hip. He had a large iron tobacco box in his breeches pocket, and I hit the box, the ball glanced, and it entered his thigh. . . . At length one of the Hessians came out of the cellar with a large bottle of rum and advanced with it at arm's length as a flag of truce.²⁰

Most remarkable about this episode is how chivalrous and humanitarian McCaslin's response was to his Hessian enemy. Significantly, he showed no such concern for his enemies on the frontier. When he went out under Clark in 1782, he recalled how they treated their Shawnee opponents: "We burnt their corn, which was gathered, and burnt as many as seven little towns, took five Indians (women and children) prisoners, and killed five or six warriors who were scouting about." So much for McCaslin's convictions about "not lik[ing] to shoot a man in cold blood." He was probably able to accommodate this

apparent contradiction by assuring himself that the Shawnee were not real men like the Hessians.²¹

Other acts of military bravado and verbal exchanges further demonstrate the lack of animosity for eastern enemies among frontier troops. The men of Thompson's Pennsylvania Rifle Battalion were chided for "continually conversing with the officers and soldiers of the enemies." Peter Tritt of the York County militia recalled that when the British fleet was off of Long Island, "by speaking loudly, we could converse with them." John Joseph Henry of Lancaster County recalled how, during the campaign against Quebec, the men he served with and the British soldiers inside the city huzzahed each other before the battle. Similarly, Michael Graham recalled how the British were "huzzahing when they took prisoners" during the Battle of Long Island. On the frontier, there was no conversation between enemies, no huzzahing, and little taking of prisoners. The overall perception of the British and Hessians in the East among the Pennsylvania backcountry soldiers was not of a bestial enemy. That image was applied to their frontier adversaries.²²

Thus, common soldiers from the frontier served in the East with a pronounced lack of enthusiasm and little disdain for their enemies. The soldiers' motivations and experiences in the western war demonstrate that their Revolution was closest to home. Their reasons for serving, perceptions of frontier enemies and the manner in which they carried out the war in the West differed significantly from their experiences in the East.

MOTIVATIONS FOR SERVICE IN THE WEST

Pennsylvania frontier soldiers fought far more willingly in the backcountry war. On the frontier, they served in order to protect their communities, property, and families. They were also strongly motivated by racial animosity toward their Indian adversaries. Third, they took up arms against local Tories in response to long-standing social and political hostilities. Finally, they often served in the hopes of opening up a new supply of western lands by carrying offensive operations into Indian territory. Such attitudes toward military service contrast sharply with the backcountry soldiers' reluctance to fight in the East.

A pronounced increase in voluntarism is noticeable for service on the frontier. Northampton County resident Abraham Arnold, who was drafted three times for duty in the East, volunteered twice for duty against the Indians. George Black of Cumberland County, who had to be drafted to defend Philadelphia, enlisted for several tours as a frontier ranger. Other backcountry soldiers like John Vandyke of Northumberland County

Courtesy of George C. Neumann.



*A typical frontier rifleman, armed with a Pennsylvania long rifle, shown cutting linen patches. Illustration by George C. Woodbridge from George C. Neumann, *Swords and Blades of the American Revolution* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1973).*

never went east but volunteered every year for frontier duty until the end of the war. Others served even longer than the duration. Westmoreland County militiaman Jacob Deem recalled fighting the Indians over the period 1781-1795. For Deem, his Revolution did not end with the Treaty of Paris in 1783 and he was prepared to fight on. When family, friends, property, and prosperity were threatened, few waited to be drafted. They were quite willing to fight for their communities, especially when they were threatened by hostile Indian neighbors.²³

Many frontier soldiers specifically recalled volunteering to assist their neighbors and family members. They sought to insure the safety of local family farms during the important harvest season. Communal solidarity in the face of Indian attacks was a powerful motivation for military service. George Wertz "volunteered his services for the defense of his fellow citizens" when Bedford County was in danger. He guarded families who sought protection and was "scouting through the county and spying after the Indians and marching [to] any place threatened with danger, at any time and on all occasions." Wertz also willingly traveled to bury his neighbors who had been killed by Indians, "going upwards of twenty-five miles to perform that task." William Campbell of Northumberland County was candid about how he came to identify his own interest with the community at large. He explained that he was "driven by the Indians into Fort Kelly where he volunteered his services." Angus McCoy of Washington County recounted how "the Indians being very troublesome on the frontier . . . [and] I having no family at that time, volunteered to guard [farmers] . . . cutting and gathering their harvest in their collective capacity." Similarly, John Dougherty recalled his motives for fighting on the frontier:

The Indians were continually committing depredations against the whites and whenever the alarm was given (which was very frequent). . . . I was as willing to go when not drafted as when I was. Some of my relations and acquaintances had been killed by the Indians and thought it my duty at all times to assist in protecting those that remained. Samuel Dougherty, a relation of mine, was killed at Freeland's Fort. My service and readiness to fight the Indians was well known at that time.²⁴

Others did not even formally enlist in military units, but fought to protect their communities anyway. Samuel Hunter of Northumberland County noted the special care taken to protect women and children in the community:

A great many more . . . will use arms in their own defense than we have enrolled in the militia. Especially men above the age of fifty-three and under eighteen will

do to be stationed at such little forts as they are erecting for the preservation of women and children.

The mere act of protecting and continuing frontier agriculture could become military service. In Bedford County, it was noted that, "small parties on our extended frontiers . . . for considerable time past have been holding their weapons with the one hand and laboring with the other."²⁵

Also, substitution for family members persisted through the frontier war. This practice in the Western conflict again underscores the importance of the preservation of the family and the family farm. Even during times of danger, someone had to stay behind to bring in the harvest. Younger men often went in place of relatives who were more important in the family economy. John Kuntz headed over Blue Mountain twice as a substitute for two of his brothers. George Martz of Northampton County served on the frontier in the place of his father. Robert Hunter of Westmoreland County substituted for his father as a scout. Angus McCoy explained that, "I volunteered and served a tour of military duty in the room or place of my brother, William McCoy, who had charge of a family." As noted above, Angus stressed that he had "no family at that time" of his own. He went in order to protect the sufficiency of his brother's family.²⁶

A second major source of motivation for backcountry soldiers was a hatred of Indians. Settlers coming to the frontier following the growth of the American white population after 1750 were usually farmers rather than Indian traders. These new colonists were not as sympathetic to Indians as the traders and were less likely to live among or even close to Indians. Violence and racism resulted. Deriving from years of bitter interracial war on the Pennsylvania frontier that extended back to the French and Indian War, hostility often ran deep. Robert Scott recalled how his "father and family were banished by the Indians and driven to Bucks County where we lived for many years, returning to our farm in the county of Northampton in the year 1772." Similarly, Archibald Loudon, a Cumberland County soldier, noted that "after Braddock's defeat by the Indians, they began to murder the inhabitants in Sherman's Valley where we lived so that we fled." Like Scott, Loudon and his family left behind their own farm and were forced to work other people's land while the Indians and whites fought. These experiences of dislocation and violence were not easily forgotten and it comes as little surprise to learn that both men subsequently volunteered for frontier duty during the Revolution. Scott proudly declared, "I got no pay for my services, nor asked for any compensations."²⁷

The recurring terms of "savage" and "barbarities" are indicative of the way backcountry

inhabitants perceived Indians. The Fourth Battalion of Northampton militia declared, "we are now [on] the frontier against a cruel enemy, the Indians." John Struthers, a Washington County soldier, described his "pursuit of the savages who had committed . . . barbarities." Soldiers from the Wyoming region angrily related how "the savages . . . made incursions and in a most barbarous and inhuman manner killed numbers of our parents and friends and destroyed all our effects." Thomas Hartley noted that, "the barbarians have frequently appeared in open ground." Most frontiersmen were only too glad to take up arms against these people whose culture they considered to be the antithesis of their own.²⁸

The racial hatred of the Indians by the frontier inhabitants was so intense that it even made Continental officers in the region uneasy. A frustrated Colonel Daniel Brodhead was unable to procure supplies for his Indian allies because "so violent are the prejudices against the Indians . . . [among] the people in the back counties." Even though most Eastern Indians allied with the British during the war, some nations and small groups aligned with the Revolutionaries or attempted to maintain neutrality. As Brodhead's account reveals, many hinterland residents refused to distinguish between belligerent and nonbelligerent Indians. Later, when the Treaty of Paris formally ended hostilities between the Americans and the British, General William Irvine lamented that the Indians were still fighting and went on to assert:

I presume this conduct will give force to a temper already pretty prevalent among the back settlers, never to make peace with the Indians; and, indeed, I am almost persuaded it will be next to impossible to insure peace with them till the whole of the western tribes are driven over the Mississippi and lakes, entirely beyond American lines.

Such strong feelings against the Indians was one of the primary motives for the backcountry soldiers' participation in the Revolution. Unfortunately, Irvine's prediction proved remarkably prescient.²⁹

A third motive was a desire to secure a supply of open land. As Irvine's comments on the frontiersmen suggest, this process naturally would entail the removal of the Indian inhabitants of the region. Thus, fighting in the West held up a dual promise to the backcountry soldiers: the removal of Indians and new land for settlement. Adam Hubley of Lancaster County could not help but notice the fine agricultural potential of the Indian lands on the upper Susquehanna while he was on Sullivan's Expedition. He has extensive entries in his journal which describe the "excellent rich soil, abounding with large

timber of all kinds" and the "abundance of grass, soil excessively rich." Also, certain members of the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment in the western department seemed to be staking out claims on the land for later use. Their officers chastised the men who "presumed to mark trees in the woods with initial letters and their names at large, thereby giv[ing] great uneasiness to our good friends and allies, the Delaware Nation."³⁰

The frontier soldiers' land hunger was even considered for use by the Pennsylvania government as a military strategy. The Supreme Executive Council informed Irvine that:

It has been suggested to the General Assembly the best and perhaps [easiest] means of protecting the frontiers, will be found in the invasion of the Indian country. . . . Perhaps the disposition of the people of Westmoreland County to emigrate into the Indians' country may be diverted and applied to this end.³¹

At other times, the backcountry soldiers' motives for aggrandizing more land for settlement conflicted with the goals of the central government. William Irvine approved a Pennsylvania militia expedition on the Indian town of Sandusky,

on the express conditions that they did not mean to extend their settlement, nor had anything in view but to harass the enemy, with an intention to protect the frontier, and that any conquests they might make should be in behalf and for the United States.

Later, Irvine was disturbed by ideas among some of the backcountry inhabitants to form a new state west of Pennsylvania. The general feared that "a great majority have no other views than to acquire lands." Thus, land covetousness provided a strong incentive for backcountry men to participate in the Revolution in the West.³²

A fourth motivation among backcountry soldiers was related to prewar social and political animosities that determined who took which side in the Revolution. These men took up arms on behalf of the Revolutionaries or the crown often on the basis of their peculiar regional situations. Anne M. Ousterhout in her study of resistance to the Revolution in Pennsylvania found that, on the frontier, people were most likely to support the side that coincided with their interests. In the Wyoming Valley, those who supported the Pennsylvania claim to the region became identified as Tories while Connecticut settlers were considered Patriots. Similarly, in the southwest region of the commonwealth, over which both Virginia and Pennsylvania laid claim, people sympathetic to Virginia often became Tories while Pennsylvanians were more likely to be Patriots. Other frontier residents were simply hostile to any government that attempted to impose its jurisdiction over them. Ousterhout rightly notes that in this regional context, the term "loyalist" is

inappropriate. She argues that, "if we define Revolutionary dissent in terms of 'disaffection with' rather than 'loyalty to,' the point of attention shifts from England to the colonies themselves." The motivations for becoming or fighting Tories on the Pennsylvania frontier were more closely related to the local situation than to the issue of national independence.³³

Officers noted the difficulty of maintaining a united frontier defense in the face of rival factions who sought to control the land. James Marshall informed the Pennsylvania government of his great difficulty in recruiting men for the Washington County militia in the face of interference of those favoring the Virginia claim. Similarly, the Continental commander of the Western Department, Colonel Daniel Brodhead, warned in 1781, "it seems the state of Virginia is now preparing to acquire more extensive territory by landing a great body of men." Connecticut settler, Nathan Denison, complained that, in the wake of the July 1778 Pro-Pennsylvania claim "Tory" and Indian attack on Wyoming, "there are numbers of people in this state [who] desire to take the advantage of our distressed situation to get possession of our settlement." These conflicts between so-called Loyalists and Revolutionaries in the commonwealth's backcountry were often a contest over which group of settlers would control the land.³⁴

Thus, a strong desire to protect their families and communities, racial animosity toward Indians, a desire to secure a new source of open land, and local grievances with those perceived as Tories formed the core of the backcountry soldiers' motivations for fighting in the West. With an understanding of their motives, the frontier troops' experiences in the western campaigns are more comprehensible. Given the racial hatred of their Indian foes, it is little wonder that the frontier conflict was an incredibly bloody affair. Also, a desire to secure land and eliminate any possible threat to the backcountry communities helped ensure that the war would be total. That is, the soldiers not only sought to defeat their adversaries in combat, but also to destroy their villages, families, and take the land that they used. The salient experiences, then, of Pennsylvania backcountry soldiers in the frontier conflict were total war, extreme violence, and strong hostility toward their opponents.

THE EXPERIENCES OF BACKCOUNTRY SOLDIERS IN THE WEST

Indians were not the only practitioners of total war and terror on the frontier. Both sides sought to wipe out the social infrastructure of the other. The frontier war was a life and death struggle between two cultures that left few residents of the Pennsylvania

backcountry untouched. Interestingly, the conflict was also an event of cultural creation in which Native and European Americans developed a common irregular style of war that was often fueled by a desire for revenge for the deaths of neighbors or relatives. The result was brutal hit and run skirmishes between frontier inhabitants in which all residents were seen as combatants. Additionally, the enemy's property and livelihoods were seen as valid targets. Peter Mancall asserts that, during the Revolution, "troops invading the [Susquehanna] valley all shared the goal of destroying the local economy." This was the case throughout most of the Pennsylvania backcountry during the war. The irony of the frontier war was that, although backcountry white soldiers often viewed their Indian opponents as subhuman, both groups conducted the conflict in a very similar manner.³⁵

For instance, the destruction of towns and crops was ardently pursued by both sides. Despite the frontiersmen's condemnation of the actions of Indians against white communities and property, the former group practiced the same tactics. Joseph Keefer, a "regular soldier" from Northumberland County recalled having "a skirmish with Indians and burnt and destroyed their town." John McCaslin, the Cumberland County militiaman who could not bring himself to kill the Hessian forager, "burnt their [the Indians'] corn . . . and burnt as many as seven little towns." George Wertz of Bedford County recalled burning three Indian towns and "destroy[ing] 350 acres of corn."³⁶

The war in the West was also one waged without mercy. Since many Indians and whites were fighting to destroy each others' communities, they made few distinctions between soldiers and civilians. Furthermore, neither side was much interested in taking prisoners among combatants. In fact, white soldiers were far less apt to take captives than Indian warriors. Backcountry whites saw scant utility in capturing and caring for hostile Indians. In contrast, Native Americans had a long tradition of taking prisoners among whites either to adopt into their villages or to trade to European allies in exchange for goods. Nevertheless, Indians often killed or tortured civilians and wounded soldiers. Accounts of Indians murders of women and children are well known; what is less familiar is how whites also pressed a campaign of terror and murder. The Westmoreland County militia in 1778 conducted its "Squaw Campaign" in which they killed four women, a man, and a young boy. Samuel Murphy recollected how on this campaign "a small boy was out with a gun shooting birds was discovered and killed, and several claimed the *honor*." Murphy also recalled that:

An old Dutchman scalped the squaw that had been killed and put the scalp in his wallet with his provisions, and in swimming a stream on return the Dutchman

lost his wallet and exclaimed pathetically, 'O, I loss my prosock and my sculp [sic].' This was long a byword with the troops.³⁷

William Irvine described the "Gnadenhutten Affair" of 1782 in which a backcountry militia massacred unarmed Moravian Delaware Indians: "About 300 [militiamen] . . . found about ninety men, women, and children, all of whom they put to death, it is said, after cool deliberation." Even George Washington was struck by the violence on the Pennsylvania frontier. Considering the Indians' treatment of captives from the Sandusky Expedition, he advised Irvine that:

No other than the extremest [sic] tortures that could be inflicted by the savages, I think, could have been expected by those unhappy enough to fall into their hands; especially under the present exasperation of their minds, for the treatment given their Moravian friends. For this reason, no persons, I think, should at this time submit themselves to fall alive into the hands of the Indians.

Unlike the war in the East, the frontier had no true civilians and no quarter was expected by those who were captured. Peter Keister was right about the nature of the backcountry war: "it was an arduous service marked by individual murders and burnings."³⁸

The extreme violence experienced by backcountry soldiers was related to the nature of total war on the frontier. Men serving in the West witnessed scenes of horror that few could have imagined in the East. Lieutenant Erkuries Beatty, a regular officer on Sullivan's Expedition against the Iroquois in 1779, was horrified when he found the body of a Lieutenant Boyd, who had fallen into enemy Indian hands. Beatty noted in excruciating detail how Boyd's "head [was] entirely taken off and eyes pushed out . . . [his] privates was nearly cut out and hanging down . . . dogs eaten part of his shoulder." Simon Krysher witnessed Indians shoot "through the ear" of his captain and scalp one of his comrades in a skirmish.³⁹

Again, such acts of violence were not confined to Indians. Backcountry soldiers also committed atrocities. Samuel Hunter described in 1780 how "there have been several parties [who have] made attempts to get scalps" sent out from the white settlements in Northumberland County. John Lerner of Northampton County was unable to gather his war trophy during a skirmish with some Indians. He "immediately fired and shot him [an Indian] through the head, but dared not venture to scalp him at that time." A 1781 expedition against the Delawares resulted in the murder of prisoners and an Indian peace emissary. Lieutenant William Barton, a regular officer on Sullivan's Expedition, noted how Continental soldiers were just as capable as the militia of carrying out atrocities:

At the request of Major Piatt, sent out a small party to look for some of the dead Indians—returned without finding them. Toward noon they found them and skinned two of them from their hips down for boot legs; one pair for the Major and the other for myself.⁴⁰

The ways in which the soldiers faced their opponents demonstrates that they were more apt to kill first and ask questions later. These attitudes embody a conviction among many backcountry soldiers that the only good Indian was a dead one. It also further illustrates how the rules of war, utilized against the British in the East, were of little use in the struggle for survival on the frontier. For example, soldiers in the Pittsburgh garrison serving in the Eighth Pennsylvania, a Continental regiment raised chiefly in Westmoreland and Bedford Counties, apparently did not bother to differentiate between hostile, friendly, or neutral Indians. Officers reported to the men that, “the commandant [has] received information that some person maliciously fired a gun at one of the friendly Delaware as he was swimming over the river Allegheny, within sight of the fort.” Other units carried out deadly search and destroy missions. William Campbell of Westmoreland County explained how his patrol “discovered a light, three of us went to see what it was and found four Indians encamped; we fall on them and killed them all without firing a shot, they being asleep.” Similarly, James Hutson, another Westmoreland County militiaman, recalled how he and his comrades “espied the Indians kindling a fire . . . then retired . . . and stayed there until they . . . would be in their first sleep.” Hutson’s company planned to “surround the Indians and tomahawk them without giving any alarm.” One militiaman used his gun and Hutson lamented that “one [Indian] made his escape.”⁴¹

Given the total nature of the frontier war and the horrible violence it engendered, it is not surprising that backcountry soldiers displayed more hostility toward their opponents in the West. In addition to the extremities of combat, the frontier inhabitants’ racist attitudes toward Indians also shaped how the troops perceived their enemies. The resulting image was a subhuman, savage enemy who had to be destroyed. The perspective of the Fourth Battalion of Northampton militia was common. They declared their Indian adversaries to be “a cruel enemy.” John Dougherty and his frontier soldier comrades sought to locate their enemies’ “haunts” (typically, rangers like Dougherty refused to believe Indians were human enough to have homes) and “deflect their intended cruelties in any way we could.” Peter Keister noted how “the Indians lurked around but never attacked” in what the white soldier considered to be true, manly fashion. These soldiers’ accounts illustrate how language can represent perceptions of the enemy. White Revolutionaries per-

Courtesy of Chicago Historical Society.



Alonzo Chappell's conception of the Indian and Tory attack on Wyoming (near present-day Wilkes-Barre). Note the graphic depiction of scalping, a practice widely utilized by both sides in the frontier war.

formed "scouting" and "defended the frontier" while Indians "lurked" and were "killing white people wherever they could find them." One of the most interesting examples of how common soldiers perceived their Indian opponents as something less than fellow human beings is John Daley's account of how he and Daniel Bean, both of Washington County, served their country. Daley explained how they were "with parties that were hunting the Indians." His racism is betrayed in his use of metaphor. Indians were hunted down like animals according to the veteran. One can hardly imagine Daley explaining that he was with the Continental Army "hunting" the British.⁴²

A second illustration of the vehement hostility that backcountry soldiers held for their Indian opponents is anger over the killing of friends, family, and the disruption of their communities. This experience in the western war was an intensely personal one. Although a war driven by a desire for vengeance over the killing of friends and neighbors was something white soldiers and Indian warriors had in common, it became the basis of

much of the former group's racial hatred for all Indians. In the eyes of many frontier inhabitants, Indian warriors were seen as subhuman murderers, even though, as we have seen, white troops carried out the war in much the same manner. The backcountry patriots often held all Native Americans responsible for attacks on their homes. Significantly, many backcountry soldiers applying for pensions as late as fifty years after the Revolution, recall individual deaths and incidents in remarkable detail. The horror of watching friends and family die in the frontier war was burned into their memories. Apparently, they could neither forgive nor forget the deeds of their enemies. Andrew Dougherty recalled how just before he left for a drafted militia tour on the frontier,

my father and brother were taking the horses to pasture when I heard them shouting and looking around. I saw a number of Indians . . . I took my sister (who was about two years old) in my arms and ran into the woods. The Indians followed me and shot me."

Dougherty witnessed the Indians kill his brother Robert and his young sister. He was taken prisoner to the British at Niagara. When Dougherty returned to Westmoreland County, he enlisted in the militia at Fort Ligonier until the end of the war.⁴³

The memories of soldiers for details and names of those killed by the Indians indicate how close the frontier war was to their hearts. The "individual murders" committed by their "cruel" opponents enraged the frontiersmen. Peter Keister recalled that among his neighbors in Northumberland County,

Michael Lamb, John Ebby, John Clinesmith[?], and Jacob Beekle were killed by the Indians. John Stomilch[?] and his wife were murdered on their farm . . . they were tomahawked and scalped and the old man had seven stab [wounds]. He [Keister] helped to bury them.

Similarly, John Dougherty's recollection of names and details is impressive. He explained how:

we buried a man of the name of Craft who had been killed by the Indians. . . . Many other persons were killed about this time by the Indians. Captain Brady (with whom I was well acquainted) was killed at Wolf Run. Ned Lee, the sergeant of Captain Robinson's Company was killed. Two men of the name of Criswell were also killed at Bosley's Fort. Captain Boon who I knew well was killed with many of his men at Freeland's Fort. Nathaniel Smith was killed at that time. I helped to bury the dead after the taking of this fort.

It is little wonder that men like Keister and Dougherty were more interested in pursuing

the killers of their friends and neighbors than in fighting the British Army in the East.⁴⁴

Another aspect of the soldiers' war in the West that indicates that the enemy was more hated than in the East was the tendency to note carefully casualties in engagements with the Indians. This running "body count" suggests that the number of Indians killed was far more important to the backcountry soldiers than the number of redcoats killed. James Piper of Westmoreland County remembered killing at least twenty-three Indians during engagements in 1779. William Campbell proudly recalled killing twelve Indians. James Hutson gave similar accounts of the exact number of Indians killed in skirmishes in which he participated.⁴⁵

Finally, it is interesting to explore how notions of race played into hostility toward Tories on the frontier. Since the hinterland disaffected who actually took up arms against the Revolutionaries often ran away to join the Indians rather than the main British army, they were seen in a unique light. People from the backcountry perceived these Tories not only to be traitors to their country but also traitors to their race. This status was odious indeed. Here were white men rejecting "civilization" to live and fight with "savages." To side with the archenemies of the frontier inhabitants and to kill former neighbors, family, and friends, was enough to earn these Tories the undying enmity of the backcountry.

A newspaper account of the Tory and Indian attack on Wyoming illustrates how race complicated the status of the disaffected. It noted that "many of the Tories belonging to the state of Pennsylvania and a number of canoes with families from that state went about this time to settle among the Indians." Thus, Pennamites were seen as rejecting "civilized" society and taking up arms with Indians against the Connecticut settlers. The account implied that joining the Indians turned these Tories into fratricidal "savages." It reported, "Thomas Hill (whose father was killed by the Indians last Indian war) with his own hands killed his own mother, his father in law, his sisters, and their families." Also, it was noted that "Partial Terry . . . with his own hands murdered his father, mother, brothers, and sisters, stripped off their scalps and severed his father's head." While these accounts may or may not have been exaggerated for propaganda purposes, the symbolism is clear. Siding with the Indians was seen as a rejection of one's race.⁴⁶

A survivor of the ill-fated Sandusky Expedition, undertaken by Pennsylvania backcountry militia, evinced a similar view of the Tories involved as traitors to both country and race. Dr. Knight described in horrifying detail the torture of Colonel Crawford, the leader of the mission. Knight displayed a special animosity toward Simon Girty, the Tory who fought with the Indians. Knight noted how, during the torture, Crawford,

called to Simon Girty and begged of him to shoot him; but Girty making no answer he called to him again. Girty then, by way of derision, told the Colonel he had no gun, at the same time turning about to an Indian who was behind him, laughed heartily, and by all his gestures seemed delighted at the horrid scene.

Knight expected that little mercy would be shown by the Indians, but Girty's behavior was another matter. He was a white man acting like a "savage." Girty is a far more heinous villain in Knight's narrative than any Indian.⁴⁷

Thus, the motivations and experiences in the frontier war were more immediate to the backcountry soldiers than those in the main theater. Racial hostility toward Indians coupled with a desire to protect and expand their family farms formed the essence of the soldiers' Revolution on the Pennsylvania frontier. The hinterland rank and file went east usually because they had little choice. They displayed animation in their pursuit of the war in the West and a decided indifference to the main theaters of operations. The soldiers' Revolution was forged in the crucible of frontier life and was only loosely related to the national struggle for independence.

The unique character of the war fought by Pennsylvania backcountry soldiers suggests that the experience of the American Revolution varied regionally and among social groups. An understanding of local conditions goes a long way in explaining why and how men fought. Economic and ideological motives did not exist in isolation. To comprehend fully soldiers' reasons for risking their lives in war, one must examine the regional social and cultural context from which these men came. Pennsylvania frontiersmen were most concerned with protecting the interests of their families and communities. The locus of their patriotism was their localism. The Revolution on the northern frontier was different than the ones experienced by the Philadelphia militia, Concord minutemen, southern soldiers, or Continental Army officers with the main armies. Additionally, a focus on all soldiers from a given area reveals patterns of common motivations and experiences that transcend the conventional Continental regular versus militia dichotomy. Thus, there was no single Revolution, but rather many. It was fought by groups of people, each with their own distinctive ambitions and expectations.

Finally, this essay seeks, above all, to underscore the importance of taking the voices of common soldiers seriously. In light of the emphasis on understanding the Revolution from the "bottom up," historians can no longer afford to ignore the aspirations and actions of such a significant group of participants. We can not hope to comprehend the meaning of the Revolutionary War without considering what it meant to those who car-

ried it out. To make better sense of the conflict, this study has looked beyond muster roles and officers' diaries to what lower and middling class soldiers themselves said and did. The result is a new understanding of the meaning of the American Revolution. The war was not fought by men interested only in individual material gain offered by military service. Nor were soldiers' ideas about the conflict mere variations of those of their officers. Rather, common soldiers conducted a Revolution that was integrally related to their distinctive notions concerning community, family, and what the war was about. An analysis of these soldiers' Revolution offers a window into what the conflict meant to the lower orders of Early American society. Their expectations and experiences contributed to the complexion of the republic that they helped to found. Unfortunately, the most enduring contribution of the backcountry soldiers would be their violent racism and expansionist ambitions. Yet, they also evinced a healthy disrespect for authority and a commitment to community. Their Revolution left an important, if not always positive, legacy.⁴⁸

Notes

1. Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Warrant Application Files (National Archives, Washington, D.C., microfilm M804, 1974), File R5819. (Hereafter cited as RWPF). The spelling and punctuation from the primary sources have been modernized.

2. On the eve of the Revolution, the backcountry was still a substantial portion of Pennsylvania. For the purposes of this study, the backcountry is defined as predominantly rural regions that are vulnerable to Indian attacks. This area comprises what during the Revolution were Bedford, Berks, Cumberland, the northern and western parts of Lancaster, Northampton, Northumberland, Washington, Westmoreland, and York Counties. The preference of militias for protecting their homes and ambivalence over service with the main army far from their communities is well known and is con-

vincingly addressed in John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Independence* (New York, 1976). This essay, however, attempts to take a broader view by analyzing the motivations and experiences of all soldiers (militiamen, informal ranger units, and Continental regulars) from the Pennsylvania frontier. The emphasis is on the shared perceptions of all common soldiers from the region. There are also numerous older studies on war on the northern frontier that address the violent nature of the conflict. Yet none satisfactorily account for how the soldiers' racial prejudices contributed to the manner in which the Revolution in the West was carried out. On the continuity of conflict with Indians on the Pennsylvania frontier see: Randolph C. Downes, *Council Fires on the Upper Ohio* (Pittsburgh, 1940), 80-169; Brook Hindle, "The March of the Paxton Boys,"

William and Mary Quarterly 3d ser., 3 (October 1946): 461-486; Peter C. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity: Economic Culture Along the Upper Susquehanna, 1700-1800* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1991), 69-74; James Kirby Martin, "The Return of the Paxton Boys and the Historical State of the Pennsylvania Frontier," *Pennsylvania History*, 38 (April 1971): 117-113; and Linda A. Ries, "The Rage of Opposing Government: The Stump Affair of 1768," *Cumberland County History*, 1 (Summer 1984): 23-33.

3. Historians of the social aspects of military service in the American Revolution owe a great intellectual debt to the provocative essays in Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed*. Mark E. Lender, "The Mind of the Rank and File: Patriotism and Motivation in the Continental Line," in *New Jersey in the American Revolution III*, ed. William C. Wright (Trenton, 1976) and James Kirby Martin and Mark E. Lender, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the Republic, 1763-1789* (Arlington Heights, Ill., 1982) both uncover the material motivations of soldiers. Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1774-1783* (New York, 1979) offers a persuasive analysis of how Revolutionary ideology evolved among the officer corps of the Continental Army. Robert Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976) explores how the social structure of Concord, Massachusetts shaped the town's wartime experience. Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible: The Northern Seaports and the Coming of the Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1986), and Steven Rosswurm, *Arms, Country and Class: The Philadelphia Militia and the "Lower Sort" During the American Revolution* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1987) all place the democratized militia of Philadelphia within that city's political and social milieu.

4. On the continuity of frontier family farms and kin ties as a basis of community see: David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York, 1987), 759-765. Rodger C.

Henderson, "Community Development and the Revolution: Transition in Eighteenth-Century Lancaster County" (Ph.D. Diss. State University of New York at Binghamton, 1982), 114-139, William E. Price, "A Study of a Frontier Community in Transition: The History of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1750-1800," (Ph.D. Diss. Kent State University, 1979), 163-201, and Jack M. Sosin, *The Revolutionary Frontier, 1763-1783* (New York, 1967), 39-40. On the importance of maintaining the independent family farm in the Revolutionary period, see: Daniel Vickers, "Competency and Competition: Economic Culture in Early America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 47 (January 1990): 3-29.

5. On the importance of economic concerns in motivating men to enlist in Revolutionary War service see: Mark E. Lender, "The Enlisted Line: The Continental Soldiers of New Jersey," (Ph. D. Diss., Rutgers University, 1975); Martin and Lender, *A Respectable Army*; and Edward C. Papenfuss and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of a Revolutionary War Private," *William and Mary Quarterly* 3d ser., 30 (January 1973): 116-132. RWPF file S22735.

6. John McDowell to Col. Grier, May 21, 1777, Records of Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Governments, 1775-1790 (Microfilm, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission) Reel 12, frame 346 (Hereafter cited as PRG); Resolutions of the Committee of Cumberland County, 1777, PRG, Reel 12, frame 334; *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, July 28, 1778, p. 261.

7. RWPF Files S3742 and W3418; William Henry to James Cunningham, March 8, 1781, PRG, reel 17, frame 723.

8. Paul E. Doutrich, "The Evolution of an Early American Town: Yorktown, Pennsylvania, 1740-1790" (Ph.D. Diss. University of Kentucky, 1985), 133; RWPF file W7017.

9. On the tendency of men to be more likely to serve in the military when the Revolutionary War threatened their locale directly see: Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* and Shy, *A People Numer-*

ous and Armed. Arthur J. Alexander, "Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Militia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 69 (January 1945):15-25; RWPF files S6792, W2811, W3094, S6136, S6257, and W9772.

10. RWPF files W3305, S4197, and S23816.

11. On Early American commitment to family agriculture over individual gain see: James A. Henretta, "Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (January 1978): 3-32. RWPF files W2127, S23756, S23863, S4746, S4067, and S4197.

12. Alexander, "Pennsylvania's Revolutionary Militia," 23; Petition of the Fourth Class of the Fourth Battalion of the York County Militia, April 30, 1779, *Pennsylvania Archives*, 2d ser. XV, 657-658 (Hereafter cited as PA); Samuel Hunter to Pres. Wharton, November 7, 1777, PRG, reel 12, frame 1352; Deposition of Samuel Todd, September 1777, PRG, reel 12, frame 991; Richard McCollister to Pres. Wharton, July 23, 1777, PRG, reel 12, frame 505.

13. Petition of the Fourth Class of the Fourth Battalion of the York County Militia, April 30, 1779, PA 2d ser. XV, 657-658, John McDowell to Col. Grier, May 28, 1777, PRG, reel 12, frame 363.

14. Lt. Col. George Wilson to Col. James Wilson, December 5, 1776, PA 5th ser. III, 305-306; Robert J. Taylor, ed. *The Susquehanna Company Papers*, vol. VII (Ithaca, 1969), 79. On the regional identity of Pennsylvania Continentals see John B. B. Trussell, Jr., *The Pennsylvania Line: Regimental Organization and Operations, 1776-1783* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1977), 158.

15. Hunter to Bryan, September 10, 1777, PRG, reel 12, frame 1022; Hunter to Wharton, January 14, 1778, PRG, reel 13, frame 513; Wharton to Hunter, January 19, 1778, PRG, reel 13, frame 553; Captain Philip Shrawder to Joseph Reed, September 6, 1781, PRG, reel 18, frame 1154; Report of the Field Officers of the Third Battalion, PRG, reel 10, frame 820.

16. Henry J. Young, "The Spirit of 1775: A Letter of Robert Magaw, Major of the Continental Rifle-

men to the Gentlemen of the Committee of Correspondence in the Town of Carlisle . . ." *John and Mary's Journal*, 1 (March 1975): 15-50, 39-40, 17. On the persistent frontier hostility and distrust of Philadelphia and central authority see: Hindle, "March of the Paxton Boys"; *A Declaration and the Remonstrance of the Distressed and Bleeding Frontier Inhabitants of the Province of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1764); John Shy, *Toward Lexington: The Role of the British Army in the Coming of the American Revolution* (Princeton, N.J., 1967), 204-210; and Thomas P. Slaughter, "Crowds in Eighteenth-Century America: Reflections and New Directions," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 115 (January 1991): 3-34.

17. Theodore G. Tappert and John W. Doberstein, eds., *The Notebook of a Colonial Clergyman: Condensed from the Journals of Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg* (Philadelphia, 1959), 185, 198.

18. RWPF files W3564, S23755, and W2811.

19. RWPF file R1017.

20. Lender, "The Enlisted Line," 156-160. On the bitter relations between Tories and Revolutionaries and the local conditions that spawned them, see, for example: Edward Countryman, *A People in Revolution: The American Revolution and Political Society in New York, 1760-1790* (New York, 1989), Adrian C. Leiby, *The Revolutionary War in the Hackensack Valley: The Jersey Dutch and the Neutral Ground* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1962), and Jerome J. Nadelhaft, *The Disorders of War: The Revolution in South Carolina* (Orono, Maine, 1981). RWPF file S4197.

21. RWPF file S4197.

22. Cambridge Orderly Book of Thompson's Pennsylvania Rifle Battalion, Mss. Historical Society of Pennsylvania, p. 19; RWPF file S23974; "John Joseph Henry: Campaign against Quebec" in Kenneth Roberts, ed., *March to Quebec* (New York, 1938), 354. John C. Dann, ed. *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (Chicago, 1980), 50.

23. RWPF files S6533, W3211, W3168, and R2838.

24. RWPF files R11329, S3130; Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 310; RWPF file S12779.
25. Hunter to Bryan, June, 1778, PRG, reel 14, frame 173; "To the Inhabitants of Quemchoning Township," September 1, 1780, PRG, reel 16, frame 1071.
26. RWPF files S2713, S22378, and W3424; Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 310-311.
27. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 74-93; RWPF files W3305 and S4573.
28. Petition of the Fourth Battalion of Northampton Militia, PRG, reel 14, frame 992; Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 254; Taylor, ed. *The Susquehannah Company Papers*, vol. VII, 79; Thomas Hartley to Council, September 1, 1778, PRG, Reel 14, frame 648.
29. Quoted in Downes, *Council Fires*, 250; Irvine to Washington, April 16, 1783, in C. W. Butterfield, ed., *Washington-Irvine Correspondence* (Madison, Wis., 1882), 149.
30. "Journal of Lt. Col. Adam Hubley" in G. S. Conover, comp., *Journal of the Military Expedition of Major General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians in 1779* (Freeport, N.Y., 1972), 146-147; Orderly Book of the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment, Draper Manuscript Collection (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, microfilm) 2 NN 33, (Hereafter cited as DMS).
31. Supreme Executive Council to Gen. Irvine, December 17, 1781, PRG, reel 19, frame 301.
32. Irvine to Washington, May 21, 1782, *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, 113; Irvine to Washington, April 20, 1782, *ibid.*, 109.
33. Anne M. Ousterhout, *A State Divided: Opposition in Pennsylvania to the American Revolution* (New York, 1987), 230-270, 5; For an interpretation of Toryism in the Wyoming Valley similar to Ousterhout's, see Price, "A Study of a Frontier Community," 131-132.
34. James Marshall to Joseph Reed, June 5, 1781, PRG, reel 18, frame 318-319; Col. Brodhead to Joseph Reed, February 19, 1781, PRG, reel 17, frame 366; Nathan Denison to Jonathan Trumbull, *Susquehannah Company Papers*, vol. VII, 48.
35. For an excellent account of how the conduct of the Revolution on the northern frontier was the result of cultural exchange and creation see Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York, 1992), 366-412. Mancall, *Valley of Opportunity*, 149.
36. RWPF files R5815, S4197, and R11329.
37. On the Indian tradition of taking white captives and adopting them, see James Axtell, "The White Indians of Colonial America" in Stanley N. Katz and John M. Murrin, eds., *Colonial America: Essays in Politics and Social Development* (New York, 1983), 16-47. A typical example of an older study of the Revolutionary Pennsylvania frontier that dwells on Indian atrocities is C. Hale Sipe, *Fort Ligonier and Its Times* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1932). Downes, *Council Fires*, 211; Reuben Gold Thwaites and Louise Phelps Kellogg, eds., *Frontier Defense on the Upper Ohio, 1777-1778* (Madison, Wis., 1912), 219-220.
38. Irvine to Washington, April 20, 1782, *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, 99; Washington to Irvine, August 6, 1782, *ibid.*, 131-132; RWPF file R5819.
39. Journal of Lt. Erkuries Beatty *PA*, 2d ser., XV, 245; RWPF file S23755.
40. Samuel Hunter to Joseph Reed, June 27, 1780, PRG, reel 16, frame 524; Robert Levers to Joseph Reed, July 8, 1781, PRG, reel 18, frame 574; Downes, *Council Fires*, 265-266; "Journal of Lt. William Barton" in *Journal of the Military Expedition*, 8.
41. On the regional identity of the Eighth Pennsylvania, see Trussell, *The Pennsylvania Line*, 106; Orderly Book of the Eighth Pennsylvania Regiment, DMS, 2 NN 108; RWPF file R1638; Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 266-267.
42. Petition of the Fourth Battalion of Northampton Militia, PRG, reel 14, frame 992; RWPF files S12779, R5819, R11329, and W8124.
43. White, *The Middle Ground*, 378; RWPF file W2078.
44. RWPF files R5819 and S12779.

45. RWPF files R8267 and R1638; Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, 266-267.

46. *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, August 18, 1778, p. 297; *Ibid.*, July 30, 1778, p. 264.

47. "Narrative of Dr. Knight," *PA*, 2d ser. XIV, p. 714.

48. The Revolutionary War Pension Applications are both useful and problematic sources. They are enlightening because they give a voice to (often illiterate) lower and middling class veterans. It is one of the few massive sets of documents dealing with the Revolutionary period that offers the perspectives of common people. The files are problematic for several reasons. First and most obviously, the accounts are retrospective. Veterans gave their depositions between about forty and fifty years after the Revolution. Second, the applications were mediated by the courts who heard and recorded the depositions.

I have attempted to interpret these sources cautiously. Certainly, these files are as much documents of the early nineteenth century as they are of the late eighteenth. Therefore, I have endeavored to focus on the personal motives and experiences of the soldiers that seem least colored by the nineteenth century collective memory of the Revolution and, where possible, to corroborate my conclusions with supporting evidence from Revolutionary-era sources. Also, I recognize that the memories of men in their seventies and eighties might well be faulty. Yet it seems that A. T. Welford in *Aging and Human Skill* (Westport, Conn., 1973) is generally correct to point out that many older people "remember well events which occurred many years before even though they are forgetful of more recent happenings" (229-230). These veterans' memories of certain details appear to have deteriorated while their memories of the larger general framework of events stays intact. Many applicants did indeed forget the more mundane details of their service such as the date they enlisted or the first names of their junior officers. Yet, their descriptions of certain experiences are often remarkably vivid. Often a single anecdote

is recalled in minute detail, which infers it was the most meaningful memory of the soldier. Here, it seems, historians stand the best chance of recovering the meaning of the Revolution to these veterans.

Additionally, a possibility exists that the memory of Revolutionary War service might be refashioned over time (consciously or unconsciously) in order to eliminate unpleasant aspects. The prospect of revision occurring would seem to be increased by the presence of the court hearing the deposition. Undoubtedly, this kind of "editing" happened. Yet it also seems that many of the depositions were quite candid. Paul Thompson in *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (New York, 1978) describes a process called "life review—the desire to remember," which entails "a special candor which goes with a feeling that life is over, achievement is complete" (112-116). Many elderly veterans were engaged in a "life review" of one of the most important parts of their lives. A number recount embarrassing experiences. Others were willing to share detailed stories of the Revolution which were not necessary for the completion of their applications. In general, it appears that the majority of the deponents were reasonably honest about their service as long as it did not endanger their chances of being granted a pension. For the 1818 pension act, all former Continental soldiers who could prove that they served and needed financial assistance qualified. The more liberal 1832 act provided pensions for anyone who could demonstrate that they served at least six months in any military unit, including militia, rangers, etc. The only real requirements for these applicants were to either produce documentation of service or to state their unit, officers, how, where, and when they entered the military, and to name any battles in which they participated (Dann, *The Revolution Remembered*, xv-xvii). Stories offered by veterans above and beyond the necessary criteria for a successful application were apparently important memories about the Revolution that the old soldiers felt compelled to share.