ON the eve of the American Revolution, General Thomas Gage, Commander-in-Chief of the British army in North America, was asked what he considered to be the single most important reason for General Edward Braddock's defeat at the hands of the French in 1755. Unhesitatingly, Gage answered: "The cause of General Braddock's disaster is to be attributed first, to [Pennsylvania's] disappointing him in the carriages and provisions, they engaged to furnish by a stated time, by which he was detained several weeks, when otherwise ready to proceed. . . ." Gage went on to defend Braddock's successors, who, when faced with similar problems, impressed whatever their armies needed from American civilians. About the same time Gage was being interviewed, Thomas Pownall, one of a very few Englishmen who qualified as a knowledgeable observer of American politics, declared that British military power had to be subordinated to civil authority in America. The onetime governor of Massachusetts believed, for example, that the seizure of a citizen's property by the army was a "terrible Infringement . . . on the Liberty of the Subject. . . ."  

Contemporary historians of the French and Indian War have ignored Pownall's argument. Sympathetic with the problems faced by British generals in the conduct of the war, most historians have tended to regard those colonists who either refused or were reluctant to provide the army with the transport it needed as obstructionists whose selfish interests threatened to betray the imperial war effort. A

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1 "Queries of George Chalmers, with the Answers of General Gage, in relation to Braddock's Expedition — the Stamp Act — and Gage's Administration of the Government in Massachusetts Bay," in Massachusetts Historical Society, Collections (Boston, 1858), IV, 367-68.

2 Pownall presented his views on colonial government in a pamphlet entitled The Administration of the Colonies (London, 1774). His specific comment on impressment may be found in the Earl of Loudoun's letter to the Duke of Cumberland, Oct. 17, 1757, Loudoun Papers, 4653 (Henry E. Huntington Library) [hereafter cited as LOJ].

3 Lawrence Henry Gipson, The British Empire Before the American Revolution (New York, 1946-67), VI, 75-77; VII, 266-68.
less harsh critique finds the colonists merely acquisitive. If the army's contractors had paid the farmers more money, more expeditiously, there would have been no problem.⁴

There is truth in both these views. But it is not enough to say there was difficulty between Americans and Englishmen over the matter of impressment of supplies. It is necessary to know how this problem in civil-military relations, first observed by Pownall, was postponed, compromised, or decided, what the colonists thought was at stake, and how the incidents that arose in connection with the impressment of transport were interpreted by British officials and by Pennsylvania farmers and politicians.

Late in 1754, the Crown decided that in certain cases civil authority would be subordinate to military power in America during the war with France. The governors, for example, were instructed to obey whatever orders the commander-in-chief issued for "impressing carriages and providing all necessaries..." for the British army.⁵ In short, the Crown brushed aside the customary legal safeguards that in England protected a citizen from the arbitrary impressment of his property.⁶ This fact ultimately aroused considerable resentment among some Pennsylvania political leaders. But opposition went beyond constitutional objections. The Pennsylvania farmers who felt the brunt of this new imperial policy expressed their hostility toward the British army openly and directly. An account of what took place may set these men in a world where British oppression, or the threat of it, was not mere rhetoric but an everyday reality. Such an account also may help explain the growth of western Pennsylvania's political awareness.

Armed with the Crown's sweeping directive, General Braddock arrived in America early in 1755 to drive the French from the Ohio Valley. The governors of Virginia and Maryland had assured him that wagons, horses and forage would be assembled at Fort Cumberland upon his arrival, but they were not. Instead of 200 wagons, there were


⁶ The Mutiny Act, passed annually by Parliament, governed the British army whenever it left its barracks.
but 20, and instead of 2,500 horses there were only 200.7 Braddock's quartermaster-general, Colonel John St. Clair, was outraged. He told a group of Pennsylvania politicians that

instead of marching to the Ohio he would in nine days march his army into Cumberland County to cut the Roads, press Horses, Wagons, etc.; that he would not suffer a Soldier to handle an Axe, but by Fire and Sword obliged the Inhabitants to do it, and take away every Man that refused to the Ohio as he had yesterday some of the Virginians; that he would kill all kind of Cattle and carry the Horses, burn the Houses, etc., and that if the French defeated them by the Delays ... he would with his Sword drawn pass thro' the Province and treat the Inhabitants as a Parcel of Traitors to his Master.8

Although he was not as imperious as St. Clair, Braddock did threaten to use his discretionary power to impress horses and wagons from local farmers.

At this point, Benjamin Franklin arrived on the scene, ostensibly on post-office business; in truth he had been sent by the Pennsylvania Assembly to explain proprietary politics to the general.9 Learning of Braddock's plight, Franklin offered to assume responsibility for obtaining transport. He composed an advertisement promising fifteen shillings per day for a team of four horses, a wagon and a driver, seven days pay in advance, and the reassurance that the drivers would not be "called upon to do the duty of soldiers. . . ." In addition, he addressed an open letter to the residents of Pennsylvania's western counties, outlining the problem and the need for a prompt response. "If you do not do this Service to your King and Country voluntarily, when such good Pay and reasonable Terms are offered you," Franklin warned, "your Loyalty will be strongly suspected; . . . violent Measures will probably be used . . . [and] Sir John St. Clair the Hussar, with a Body of Soldiers will immediately enter the Province for the Purpose aforesaid. . . ."10 This skillful mixture of promise and

7 Braddock to Robinson, April 19, 1755, Public Record Office/Colonial Office 5/46. The arrangements that had been made in advance were very loose. Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland, for example, told Governor Robert Dinwiddie of Virginia, on December 26, 1754, that he had been unable to get enough wagons for Braddock because "I have no acquaintance near that part of the country [Will's Creek, Virginia] whom I could desire to make purchases for me . . . ." R. A. Brock, ed., The Official Records of Robert Dinwiddie, Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Virginia, 1751-1758, Collections of the Virginia Historical Society, II, 647.

8 "Letter from the Commissioners in charge of running the Road" to Governor James Hamilton, April 16, 1755, Minutes of the Provincial Council of Pennsylvania, 16 vols. (Philadelphia, 1838-53), VI, 368 [hereafter cited as Pennsylvania Colonial Records].


threat turned the trick. Within two weeks Franklin had 150 wagons and 259 horses, with more coming in daily. Braddock warmly praised Franklin in his report to the secretary of state. When the governors of Maryland and Virginia failed to provide wagons, Franklin took on the job, "which he . . . executed with great punctuality and Integrity, and is almost the only Instance of Ability and Honesty I have known in these Provinces." 11

Franklin’s success was only temporary, however. He had done nothing to bridge permanently the gap separating the army and the farmers of western Pennsylvania. Suspicion and hostility still characterized the relationship between soldiers and civilians. Only a short time after Franklin’s initial success, for example, Governor Robert Morris experienced considerable difficulty obtaining additional wagons for Braddock. He had to resort to the issuance of threatening warrants to the magistrates of four counties and pay from £5 to £15 over the usual rate of 12 shillings a day merely to get forty-one more wagons. 12

Undoubtedly, the people’s reluctance to rent their wagons to the army stemmed in part from the fact that payment due them was exasperatingly slow in coming. Six months after the army had used the wagons Franklin had contracted for, the process of payment had only begun. It was not completed until April 1756, nearly a year after the transactions had been initiated. 13 Even then, however, many debts were not satisfied. For, in order to collect what was due him, a farmer had to go to Philadelphia, an expensive and time-consuming trip many chose not to make. 14

Despite the difficulties created both for the farmers and itself in

11 Braddock to Thomas Robinson, June 5, 1755, LO 581; Ralph L. Ketchum, “Conscience, War and Politics in Pennsylvania, 1755-1757,” William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., XX (1963), 418, observes that the Assembly’s helping Braddock won it a round in its continuing battle with the governor and proprietor.


14 Charles Dick to Governor Robert Dinwiddie, Oct. 20, 1756, Louis K. Koontz, ed., Robert Dinwiddie Correspondence, Illustrative of His Career in American Colonial Government and Westward Expansion (Berkeley, 1951), 1115. Dick, who was an army contractor, commented that often the sum due a farmer was less than what it would cost him to travel to Philadelphia. He also noted that many of these people had brought suits against him.
1755-1756, the British army planned to use the same system of acquiring transport during the military campaign of 1758. General John Forbes, painfully ill and often irascible, and Colonel Henry Bouquet, a highly competent soldier of fortune who assumed the role of military manager during the campaign, were determined not to allow "the horrible roguery and Rascality in the Country people" to keep the British army from taking Fort Duquesne. Only if military success is taken as sufficient justification for the methods they employed can their record be praised. Judged by any other standard, their rough treatment of Pennsylvania's farmers must be seen as one of the factors contributing to the growth of an anti-British sentiment.

Bouquet and Forbes seem to have regarded the colonists as child-like; the frontiersmen could be easily manipulated with a little flattery and a little scolding. Like children, however, the Americans were untrustworthy. The fact is, Bouquet wrote Forbes, "no one in this country can be relied on." This was true, according to Bouquet, in large part because the authorities did not instill their people with the virtues of obedience. Forbes did not intend to make the same mistake. He told the Pennsylvania Assembly in September 1758 that unless he got enough wagons, he would "call in the whole troops from their Eastern frontier and sweep the whole Country indiscriminately of every Waggon, Cart, or Horse, that he could find." The Forbes-Bouquet method enabled the army to overcome the difficult logistical problem of transporting supplies from Philadelphia to the frontier outposts, but it aroused considerable resentment among the people directly affected as well as their elected representatives.

The farmers' anger was manifested in several ways. First, they harassed the army impressment officers who were sent into the western counties by bringing lawsuits against them and by having them jailed for unpaid debts. Second, they threatened officers and magistrates with violence. One of the army's agents confessed he was "afraid some obstinate Wretches will be too many for the Constable"

16 Bouquet to Forbes, June 7, 1758, Sylvester K. Stevens and Donald Kent, eds., *The Papers of Henry Bouquet, The Forbes Expedition* (Harrisburg, 1951), II, 50. For examples of Bouquet's method, see Bouquet to George Stevenson, June 3, 1758, *ibid.*, 27; and Bouquet to Conrad Weiser, June 5, 1758, *ibid.*, 33.
17 June 11, 1758, *ibid.*, 73; June 12, 1758, *ibid.*, 121-22.
to handle.\textsuperscript{20} Third, and most effective, the farmers made their resent-
ment known at the ballot box. In the opinion of many observers, the
elections of 1758 showed the people were angry about “the Conduct of
some of the Military Gentl. towards such as have supplied Our
Western Army with carriages; they are willing to bear these and
every Thing else in their power in hopes of preserving their Privileges
as Englishmen.” \textsuperscript{21}

Given this manifestation of discontent at the polls, it is not
surprising that the Pennsylvania Assembly adopted a firmer line
toward the British military in the spring of 1759. In response to a
petition from Chester County complaining about “the unequal Methods
hitherto pursued . . . for providing Waggon’s” the Assembly issued a
statement sharply criticizing the army. The lower house noted that a
considerable number of the wagons and horses impressed into service
during Forbes’ successful drive against Fort Duquesne had been de-
stroyed, abandoned, or returned to their owners in very poor condi-
tion. Moreover, the farmers had not yet been paid. Warming to its
subject, the Assembly charged that “both Officers and Soldiers have
paid so little regard [to the provincial law] in the manner of procuring
them, that some have terrified, abused, and Insulted the In-
habitants. . . .” \textsuperscript{22}

The commander-in-chief of the British army, General Jeffery
Amherst, took strong exception to the Assembly’s assertions. The
Assemblymen “have . . . mistaken the Extent of the Laws,” for if
transport could not be hired, then it was the army’s “Duty and in-
cumbent on them, for the Good of the Service, to impress them.”
In short, the general told the Assemblymen that military necessity
superseded civil law.\textsuperscript{23}

In an unprecedented and bold move, Amherst instructed his area
commander, General John Stanwix, to write a transport bill which
would best serve the army’s interests. Amherst then encouraged a

\textsuperscript{20} John Miller to Peters, Sept. 26, 1758, \textit{ibid.}, 545.
\textsuperscript{21} Isaac Norris to Benjamin Franklin, Nov. 21, 1758, Letterbooks of Isaac
Norris, II (Historical Society of Pennsylvania).
\textsuperscript{22} House to Governor William Denny, March 3, 1759, \textit{Pennsylvania Colonial
Records}, VIII, 282-83. It is instructive to note that the Assembly did not
adopt Chester County’s suggestion to elect assistants “to raise as much
Money upon the Inhabitants . . . as shall be judged necessary to procure
one or more Waggon’s, Horses, in each Township. . . .” \textit{Pennsylvania
Archives}, 8th ser., VI, 4917.
\textsuperscript{23} Amherst to Denny, March 7, 1759, \textit{ibid.}, 285.
Pennsylvania legislator to introduce the bill in the Assembly. Even as the proposed law was being studied, however, Stanwix and Bouquet were threatening to use force to get what their army needed. An ad placed in the Pennsylvania Gazette by Stanwix warned those farmers who "obstinately refuse to comply with the army's demands that they could expect to have their wagons and horses impressed." Bouquet showed even less restraint. "I would not move a step with the Troops," he told Colonel James Burd, "till I had every Waggon wanted and the Troops should be sent back to impress every horse in Chester, Berks, York and Lancaster Counties."

The Assembly fought back. If General Forbes had fulfilled the contracts he made last year, there would be no problem now, the house told Governor William Denny. Therefore, before any new law was passed, General Amherst must "order immediate Payment on the Old Contracts," and provide some assurance that the army would obey the law.

The Assembly's defiant attitude seemed to have encouraged western county magistrates and farmers to resist the army's efforts to impress transport. An angry Colonel Bouquet reported to Governor Denny that the impress warrant sent to local magistrates over a month ago had been "secreted" and that "the rest of the Justices do not seem dispos'd to forward the Service." Indeed, the sheriffs refused to levy the fine prescribed by the existing law on those who attempted to avoid impressment. Finally, influential political leaders, such as John Hughes, an Assemblyman from Philadelphia County and Franklin's lieutenant in the Quaker party, actively began to support the westerners in their struggle against army impressment procedures. Hughes accused Bouquet of deliberately misleading the people, of doing "a dishonest thing." "If Gentlemen, the Complaints of the Country Peo-

24 Pennsylvania Archives, 8th ser., VI, 4493. The general's bill established a rate schedule based on the weight each wagon carried, rather than a standard per diem rate. The army believed the latter allowed the farmers to cheat by not carrying as much as they should.
27 Assembly to Denny, July 7, 1759, Pennsylvania Colonial Records, VIII, 373-74.
28 Bouquet to Denny, July 12, 1759, Pennsylvania Archives, 1st ser., III, 670-71. Bouquet also remarked that sending soldiers with the sheriffs had not achieved any results either. General Stanwix filed an equally gloomy report about Buck and Chester counties; Stanwix to Denny, Aug. 13, 1759, Pennsylvania Colonial Records, VIII, 376-77.
ple are of Little Significance with You . . . . It is not my case by any Means . . . ," declared Hughes.29

Hughes’ statement should be seen as a manifestation of the emergence of a new politics in Pennsylvania. The French and Indian War produced a profound change in the colony’s political life. Stated simply, it was that the popular will could not be disregarded. Politicians anxious to ensure wider popular support for their views soon realized they could not be insensitive to the grievances of “the Country People.” Thus, the Assembly and other local political agencies refused to support unpopular measures such as the British army’s impressment of property.30 Moreover, in the process of protesting against the army, western farmers began to recognize the value of political power. In that sense, the British army may be seen as one of the elements contributing to the emergence of western political demands in 1763.

One way or another, the British army got the transport it needed to carry on the war in America, but it ultimately paid a high political price for its bravishness. For those farmers who were treated roughly or who had property seized by British soldiers, future warnings from colonial politicians about the dangers of arbitrary power needed no explanation.

30 In order to avoid dealing with recalcitrant colonials, the army resorted to buying wagons and horses; Bouquet to Harry Gordon, July 23, 1759, Papers of Colonel Bouquet, series 21652, XIX, 194, and Edward Shippen to Bouquet, Aug. 8, 1759, ibid., series 21644, IV, pt. 2, 15-16.