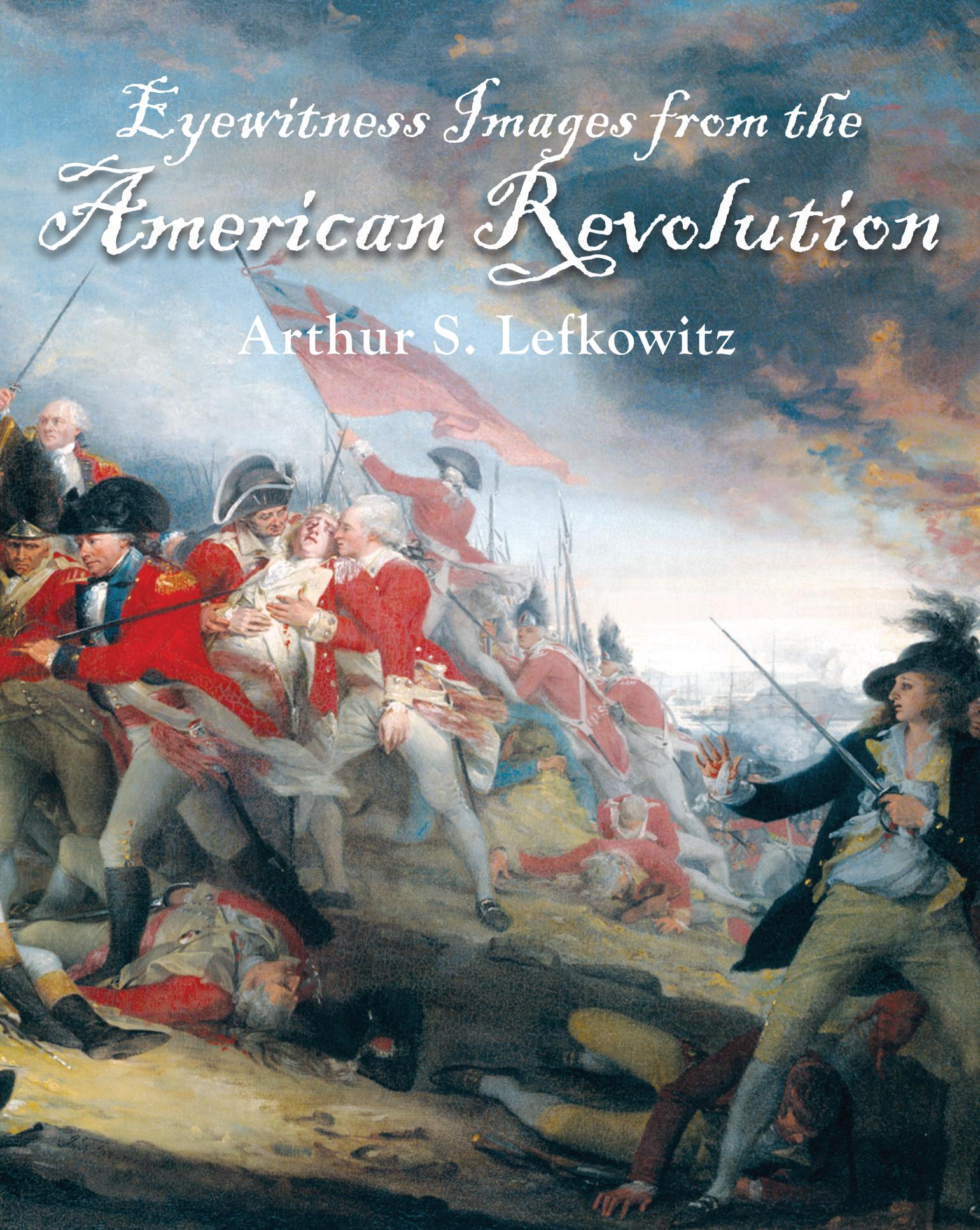


*Eyewitness Images from the  
American Revolution*

Arthur S. Lefkowitz



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Most images depicting the American Revolution are historically inaccurate recreations, such as the famous painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Historian Arthur S. Lefkowitz is working to correct these visual misconceptions by providing authentic, historically accurate, contemporary depictions.

Lefkowitz gathered images from artists who were eyewitnesses to the events of our War for Independence. His research in museums and private collections in the United States, Canada, and Europe spanned years and brought together professional, military, and amateur artist renditions, including those from British artillery and engineer officers who were trained to draw and paint military details. With over one hundred examples of authentic artwork, Lefkowitz draws readers into our nation's fight for independence. Maps, extensive notes, and a full index make this a must-have resource for both American-history and art-history enthusiasts.

*Eyewitness Images from the  
American Revolution*

Arthur S. Lefkowitz



PELICAN PUBLISHING COMPANY  
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*To my wife, Susan,  
whose knowledge of art has enriched my life  
and encouraged me to write this book*

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# Preface and Acknowledgments

I am intrigued by the large number of good books about the American Revolution that are illustrated with inaccurate pictures. And there are plenty of contrived images to choose from, many of which date from the 19th and early 20th centuries when the Revolutionary War was portrayed as a romantic crusade. The leading proponent of these erroneous representations of the Revolutionary War is the assiduous 19th century artist Alonzo Chappel. His dreamy depictions remain popular and continue to illustrate books by celebrated authors of the American Revolution.

Looking at all these fictional pictures for years prompted me to write this book. I wanted to identify the artists who were active during the American Revolution and show examples of their historically accurate work.

My experience is that despite the absence of photography and combat illustrators, the American Revolution was accurately recorded by a number of eyewitness artists. They created a visual record of the conflict in the form of historical paintings, portraits, maps, illustrations and rapidly drawn field sketches. Historians recognize the importance of these images as a source of valuable information about the war. However, the challenge is to identify these often obscure artists and to find surviving examples of their artwork.

Finding and selecting the images for this book was a challenging but worthwhile endeavor. My research led me to museums, historical societies, libraries, historic sites, college campuses and private collections in the United States, Canada, and Europe. The project was more challenging than I ever anticipated and included a research trip to Great Britain.

Despite the fact that some of the artwork shown in

my book is in the public domain and freely available, they are usually poor quality reproductions. I wanted to show the artwork I selected for my book in high resolution digital images from the original artwork. This meant either taking a photograph of the original (not practical or frequently not permitted) or acquiring a suitable digital image from the institution or person who owns the artwork. I was fortunate in this regard to have the cooperation of the organizations and people I contacted to obtain the images I wanted for my book. A list of the sources for my images is included on page 251.

My image selections were based in part on my goal of using accurate artwork to create a chronological history of the American Revolution. The focus of my book are the pictures with the accompanying text written to appeal to a general non-fiction audience. There is also enough detailed information to satisfy the more serious students of the Revolutionary War. I hope that my book achieves its goal of presenting the eyewitness artwork from the American Revolution in an entertaining and informative way.



*Retreat of the British from Concord by Alonzo Chappel. New York Public Library.*

Like some 21<sup>st</sup> century movies, this book was made possible by people skilled in computer graphics. The pictures in my book were produced from high resolution computer images of the original artwork by digital graphics expert Michael Spingeld. Through Mike's efforts I was able to show the images in my book in high definition, making it possible to see small and important historical details in the original artwork, in correct contrast, shading and colors. Mike also worked with me from the start of this project as my technical liaison with museums, institutions, and private collectors that own the original artwork. I am pleased to acknowledge his important contribution to my project.

I am also indebted to the many Revolutionary War scholars and authors who were generous in their advice and encouragement in crafting this book. They include Thomas Fleming who is the author of over fifty non-fiction and fiction titles with a special interest in the American Revolution. I recall one memorable conversation with Tom when I was talking about my "last book." Tom said "never use that term: refer to it as your most recent book."

Historian and author John Ferling was also an ardent supporter. His latest book, *Whirlwind: The American Revolution and the War that Won It* is an outstanding one volume history of the Revolution.

I also had the generous support of scholars who are experts in various aspects of the American Revolution. They are John Buchanan for his expertise in the 1777 Philadelphia campaign; Don Hagist who has written extensively on the role of the British army in the Revolution and David Wilson whose specialty is the Revolutionary War in the Southern colonies. David published an outstanding book on the subject titled *The Southern Strategy*. Nicholas Westbrook, the director emeritus of Fort Ticonderoga also generously shared his knowledge of the American Revolution with me.

I am also grateful to Raymond J. Andrews who advised me about the uniforms of the American Revolution. I also extend a sincere thank you to Mary V. Thompson, research historian, the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington, Mount Vernon, Virginia; National Park ranger and historian Eric Schnitzer at Saratoga Battlefield National Historical Park and Ronald Grim, curator of maps at the Norman B. Leventhal Map Collection at the Boston Public Library.

I next turn to the scores of people at the various institutions who arranged for me to acquire high resolution digital images from their collections. It would require a lengthy list to thank all the people who helped me and so I will mention a few who were especially helpful. They are Julie Cochrane, picture librarian at the Royal Museums, London; John French [sic] at the Yale University Art Gallery; Peter Basham at the Royal College of Surgeons in London and Valerie Lutz at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia.

My wife Susan encouraged and helped me by reading my manuscript and making excellent suggestions to improve the text and I am grateful for her support. I am also indebted to Nina Kooij, the editor-in-chief of Pelican Publishing. Nina liked my book from its inception. Her staff at Pelican Publishing are all professionals and it was a pleasure to work with them. I was especially impressed with Mark Mathes, my editor at Pelican. Mark made some excellent suggestions to improve my text.

It is said that the best way to learn about a subject is to write a book on the topic. I can vouch for its truthfulness as I look back and realize how much I have learned about the artwork of the American Revolution from researching and writing this book.

# Introduction

*If there must be trouble, let it be in my day,  
that my child may have peace.*

—Thomas Paine

The earliest known photograph of an American military force shows General John E. Wool and his staff in Saltillo, Mexico following their capture of the city in early 1847. The Mexican War (1846-1848) was the first mass-media war in American history. It was covered by newspaper reporters, illustrators, and photographers, although the photographer who took the picture on page 8 is unknown. The members of the press covering the war included one woman: Jane McManus Storm who was a reporter for the *New York Sun*. News from the front was quickly dispatched to newspapers and periodicals back home via the newly invented telegraph, railroads and steamboats.

The most popular image of the American Revolution is a nineteenth-century painting titled *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. It is a huge canvas, measuring 21 feet long and 12 feet high depicting the opening phase of the American attack against the German mercenary (Hessian) garrison at Trenton, New Jersey on December 26, 1776.

*Washington Crossing the Delaware* is often mentioned as one of the three most recognized paintings in the western world, the other two being the Mona Lisa and The Last Supper—both the works of the well-known Italian artist Leonardo de Vinci. Most people would be hard pressed to identify the artist who painted *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. His name is Emanuel Leutze, and he executed his famous painting in Dusseldorf, Germany in 1850.

The original remained in Germany where it became one of the art treasures of the Nazi regime. It was in the collection of the Kunsthalle (German for art gallery) Museum in Bremen and was destroyed in a British Royal Air Force bombing raid on the night of September 5, 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Fortunately, Leutze made a replica in 1851 that he sent to America where people paid to see it.

Viewing large-size melodramatic history paintings such as *Washington Crossing the Delaware* in exhibition halls was popular at the time. Called history paintings, they were regarded as the highest art form to which a painter could aspire. However, by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Leutze's huge canvas was considered a gaudy white elephant when it was donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York in 1897 by philanthropist John Stewart Kennedy. The Met was reluctant to accept the gift but eventually put the painting on display where the public loved its amazing size, heroic romanticism and its perceived realism. *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is one of the most popular objects in the Met where it can be seen today housed in a reproduction of its original ornate gilded frame.

Leutze's *Washington Crossing the Delaware* is our foremost visualization of what the American Revolution looked like. However, the painting fails miserably as a truthful historical record as Leutze was not interested in historical accuracy but in making an important political statement to the German people. The story of the artist and his famous painting is worthy of a detailed explanation because of its popularity and blatant historical errors.



*General John E. Wool and his staff in Saltillo, Mexico.* Photo courtesy of the Amon Carter Museum of American Art, Fort Worth, Texas.

Emanuel Leutze was born in the German city-state of Württemberg in 1816, the son of a political activist cabinetmaker who immigrated to Pennsylvania in 1835 with his family to escape harassment (or worse) by the ruling nobility.<sup>2</sup>

Young Emanuel showed artistic talent, and he got his first training with the Philadelphia draughtsman, John Rubens Smith. Emanuel attracted the patronage of some wealthy Philadelphians, who sponsored his further art education in Europe. History painting, through the late eighteenth and most of the nineteenth centuries, was idealized as the highest branch of art, *the epic of the art*.<sup>3</sup>

After studying in Germany and Italy, Leutze settled in Dusseldorf, Germany where he worked for the majority of his professional career.

His decision to paint a scene from the American rebel's dramatic raid on Trenton (December 26, 1776) was politically motivated; Leutze wanted to publicize the event to the then-subjugated German

people. Germany at the time was composed of numerous small states, each with its own monarch and nobility who derived much of their income by hiring-out their professional armies to whoever could pay.

These same soldiers, commanded by the nobility, also kept the German civilian population in check. During the American Revolution, six German states provide the British with troops, with a fixed payment for each man. In his painting, the patriotic Leutze reminded his fellow Germans that Washington crossed the Delaware with a ragtag army that defeated the German professionals defending Trenton. If the Americans could defeat a despotic German army, so could the German people. In time, the German nobility got the hidden message in Leutze's painting, a situation that probably forced him to leave the country. He returned to the United States where he died in 1868.

*Washington Crossing the Delaware* is a history



*Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of John Stewart Kennedy.

painting. Such works were the domain of artists capable of painting on a grand scale with many carefully posed people and complicated action in their pictures. These paintings were also described as romanticized, because the artist frequently exaggerated the truth including altering weather conditions for dramatic effect. For example, Leutze shows Washington and his army correctly launching their attack at night from the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware. However, as the action moves across the canvas, from right to left to the New Jersey side of the river, it is daylight. This is a brilliant symbolic representation of a new day and a bright future for the rebel cause, but historically inaccurate; it was still dark when Washington's army arrived in New Jersey.

People flocked to exhibition halls in America where they paid to see *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. However despite its artistic success, enduring popularity and an ongoing visual source for learning about history (visual literacy), the painting fails as an

accurate historical record. Perhaps the biggest error in the painting is the boat that dominates the canvas. Leutze painted Washington in a rowboat, when it was documented that he and his army crossed the Delaware in Durham boats that were 60-80 feet long and pointed at both ends. They were especially constructed to transport grain and coal from the upper Delaware to Philadelphia.

Another problem in the painting is the flag. Leutze shows the so-called "Betsy Ross flag" (the American flag). However, this flag did not exist until June 1777, six months after the Americans made their epic crossing of the Delaware. There are a few contemporary accounts of the American flag flying over stationary fortifications during the Revolutionary War and it may have flown over Washington's headquarters late in the conflict. However, the main American army (defined as the troops under Washington's immediate command—also called the Grand Army) never carried the American flag into

combat during the Revolutionary War, but marched and fought carrying state flags, regimental colors, and symbolic flags, such as a red flag with the word Liberty painted in large white letters. (The possible exception is that of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maryland Regiment which may have carried an American flag late in the war).<sup>4</sup>

The large mounds of ice in the river in Leutze's painting are also inaccurate. Based on eyewitness accounts of the crossing, there were sheets of ice flowing down the river that night.

There is a young man standing in the boat behind Washington carrying the American flag. He is James Monroe, the fifth president of the United States. While Monroe, a young American officer at the time, took part in the Trenton raid, there is no known evidence that he crossed in the same boat with Washington. Interestingly, Monroe was one of only four Americans wounded during the battle. Other glaring historical errors in the painting include the sword at Washington's side. It is an 1840s Prussian pattern that did not exist at the time of the American Revolution.

If you think you recognize your ancestors in *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, you may be correct. The American painter, Worthington Whittredge, who was Leutze's student in Dusseldorf recalled that the artist found German men "either too small or too closely set in their limbs" to be models for Americans, so he recruited Whittredge (who sat for both the steersman and Washington) and a number of American art students and tourists to pose for him. During one session, Whittredge had to stand for two hours motionless in Washington's cloak. He later wrote about his experience: ". . . clad in Washington's full uniform, heavy chapeau and all, spyglass in one hand and the other on my knee, I was nearly dead when the operation was over. They poured champagne down my throat and I lived through it."<sup>5</sup>

Leutze copied Washington's profile from the 1785 bust of the general by the French sculptor, Jean-Antoine Houdon. Leutze made Washington appear in the painting as a Moses-like figure leading his people out of slavery.

*Washington Crossing the Delaware* is the best known example of a painting which inaccurately depicts the Revolutionary War. However, there are many others including three paintings that are particularly interesting because of their subject matter and the superb artists who created them. Their canvases are presented in chronological order starting with the 1809 painting *The Death of Jane McCrea* by John Vanderlyn.

It was gossiped that John Vanderlyn (1775-1852) was the illegitimate child of Aaron Burr. (Another was said to be Martin Van Buren, the ninth president of the United States.) The rumor is supported by Burr's trips to Kingston, New York where Vanderlyn was born and Burr's financing the young man's art education, including studying in Paris. A more accurate story is that John was the son of a local Kingston artist and dealer in art supplies. John's grandfather Pieter came to Kingston from Holland and the Vanderlyns were proud of their Dutch ancestry. Even as a child, John was fluent in Dutch and English. Burr's law practice took him to Kingston where he met the Vanderlyn family and showed an unusual interest in young John. The younger Vanderlyn had artistic talent and Burr paid for him to take drawing lessons. He continued to finance young Vanderlyn's art training including paying for him to study in Europe. Burr was a sophisticated art patron who sent his protégé to Paris to study the new Neo-Classical style (a return to classical symbols and the flat, silhouetted figures found on Greek vases). Vanderlyn was the first American painter to study in France instead of England and the first American to exhibit at a French salon.

Vanderlyn applied his neo-classical style to his historical paintings the most famous of which was his *The Death of Jane McCrea*. Completed in 1804, the figures in the painting show the influence of Vanderlyn's study of antique statuary in the Louvre. The people are arranged on his canvas in classical relief with a dark background. It is Jane McCrea's terrified face that gives the painting its dramatic effect.

The story of Jane McCrea begins with Capt. David Jones who was betrothed to Jane. Jones was a Loyalist



*Painting showing kneeling woman surrounded by two Indians. One Indian is holding an upright hatchet. Wadsworth Atheneum.*

(an American who sided with Britain) officer in the army of Gen. John Burgoyne which invaded New York State in 1777. Burgoyne's Royal Army moved south towards Albany from Montreal accompanied by Indian warriors. As his corps approached the Hudson River town of Fort Edward, Capt. Jones sent two Indians to retrieve his fiancée Jane McCrea, and bring her to him. McCrea, who lived in the Fort Edward area, was described as being twenty-three years old, tall and beautiful and noted for her long, lustrous hair. Capt. Jones promised a reward to the Indians for bringing his betrothed to him. The Indians found Jane then quarreled over who would collect the reward and in a rage one of them smashed in Jane's skull with a tomahawk and scalped her.<sup>6</sup>

Within weeks of the news of her murder at the hands of Burgoyne's Indians was published in almost every patriot newspaper in America. Their accounts were exaggerated with gruesome details of how the beautiful young woman had been tortured, murdered and scalped by Burgoyne's savages. McCrea's death became a major propaganda coup for the patriots and reportedly motivated the largest enlistment of patriot soldiers during the Revolutionary War. The American commander opposing Burgoyne, Gen. Horatio Gates used McCrea's murder to help rally the patriot militia by describing her as ". . . a young lady lovely to sight, of virtuous character and amiable disposition. . . . scalped and mangled in the most shocking manner. He portrayed her as dressed to meet her promised husband."

The truth of how Jane McCrea died remains shrouded in legend. One story is that she was accidentally shot before Capt. Jones' Indians reached her. This story has validity since her body was later exhumed from its hastily dug grave for reburial in a Fort Edward cemetery. Upon examination, her skull was intact but there were three bullet holes in her body.

Growing up in the Hudson River Valley, Vanderlyn knew the story of Jane McCrea and captured the dramatic moment in his painting of the Indian poised to strike the mortal blow. The painting looks accurate but its foremost historical error is that McCrea is depicted wearing the latest French fashion.

Her simple, loose fitting and revealing neo-classical dress is incorrect for the American Revolution. There is also a histrionic but inaccurate detail in the background of the painting. It is a man racing towards McCrea carrying a gun. This is supposed to be the distraught Capt. Jones running to save his lover. There is a red plume in his cap to indicate that he is a British (Loyalist) officer.<sup>7</sup>

Vanderlyn's painting is the classic depiction of Indian horrors wreaked upon defenseless white woman. The artist purposely highlights McCrea's hair and the terror in her face as a heartless savage is about to smash-in her skull.

Vanderlyn's popular painting gave 19<sup>th</sup> century Americans an excuse for mistreating Indians. The words in the Declaration of Independence which stated that ". . . the merciless Indians Savages whose known Rule of Warfare, is an undistinguished Destruction of all Ages, Sexes and Conditions" got visual confirmation in Vanderlyn's painting and justification for generations of avaricious Americans to kill Indians and confiscate their land.

In 1834 American artist Asher B. Durand (1796-1886) completed this painting which he titled *The Capture of Major André*. Durand's canvas depicts a dramatic event in the American Revolution. The story begins when Major John André, an ambitious young British officer stationed in New York City, volunteered to go up the Hudson River to meet with American General Benedict Arnold in rebel occupied territory. Arnold commanded the American troops in the area around West Point, the strategic American fortress guarding the lower Hudson River. The purpose of André's dangerous mission was to confirm that the British were actually dealing with Arnold and to make final arrangements for his duplicity including his surrendering West Point in exchange for a commission as a British general and a large sum of money.

Following his clandestine meeting with Arnold, André was returning to New York City alone on horseback. He was wearing civilian clothes and carrying a map of West Point and another paper with the location of the troops defending the fortress



*The Capture of Major André.* Worcester Art Museum, Museum Purchase 1933.161.

concealed in his clothing. These documents had been given to him by Arnold in preparation for an imminent British surprise attack on the fort.

André's apprehension as a spy was the result of a chance encounter with three patriot militiamen on September 23, 1780 near Tarrytown, a village located along the shoreline of the Hudson River.

By the time Durand completed his painting, the tale of André's capture in the Benedict Arnold treason plot had reached mythic proportions. While the story was true, Major John André had become a legend of the Hudson River Valley along with Father Knickerbocker, the Headless Horseman and Rip Van Winkle. The latter were the invention of author Washington Irving. Besides being a great novelist, Irving was an impressive historian who included an

engaging account of André's capture in his book *Life of George Washington*. Irving describes how André was nearing the safety of the British defenses on upper Manhattan Island when:

...a man stepped out from the trees, levelled a musket and brought him to a stand, while two other men similarly armed, showed themselves prepared to second their comrade. . . . The one who brought André to a stand, was John Paulding, a stout-hearted youngster, who, like most of the young men of this outraged neighborhood, [the Tarrytown area was neutral ground; a lawless no-man's land] had been repeatedly in arms to repel or resent aggressions, and now belonged to the militia. Suspicious of the stranger, they obliged him to take off his coat and vest, and found on him eighty dollars in Continental

money, but nothing to warrant suspicion of anything sinister, and were disposed to let him proceed, when Paulding exclaimed, “Boys, I am not satisfied—his boots must come off.” At this André changed color. His boots, he said came off with difficulty and he begged he might not be subjected to the inconvenience and delay. His remonstrances [sic] were in vain. . . . his boots were drawn off and the concealed papers discovered. Hastily scanning them, Paulding exclaimed, “My God! He is a spy!”

While dressing himself, André endeavored to ransom himself from his captors; rising from one offer to another. He would give any sum of money, if they would let him go. . . . Here Paulding broke in and declared with an oath, that he if he would give ten thousand guineas, he [André] should not stir one step.<sup>8</sup>

André fortuitous capture and the subsequent discovery of Arnold’s sinister plot were interpreted by the patriots as divine intervention which had saved them from a catastrophe which might have ended the Revolution in a negotiated peace unfavorable to the colonists. The saga ended with André being hanged as a spy while Arnold managed to escape to British held New York City and spent the rest of his life as an exile despised by the Americans and distrusted by the British.

Artist Asher B. Durand lived for much of his professional life in New York City. He began his artistic career as an apprentice to an engraver. Striking out on his own, Durand’s big opportunity came when President Andrew Jackson closed the Bank of the United States in 1836.<sup>9</sup>

One result was that local banks began to issue their own paper money. Counterfeiting the bank’s currency followed which created a need for skilled engravers who could craft bank notes that were difficult to forge. Counterfeiters at the time had to make their own copper plates from which they could print money. Durand was a master engraver who created intricate often decorative designs for bank notes that were difficult for another engraver to copy.<sup>10</sup>

However, Durand had greater ambitions than printing money; he wanted to be a painter and his

*Capture of Major André* was one of his earliest works. Durand went on to become one of the leading painters of the Hudson River School. Their work was characterized by realistic depictions of American landscapes with many of their earliest paintings inspired by the scenery surrounding the Hudson River. Durand and his fellow Hudson River School artists believed that while America might lack the cultural heritage of Europe it possessed an abundance of majestic wilderness which the young nation could point to with pride. Durand’s landscape masterpiece is *Kindred Spirits* (1849) which was sold at auction in 2005 for over \$35 million to Alice L. Walton, the Walmart heiress. It was the highest price ever paid to date for a painting by an American artist.

Durand purposely took some historical liberties in his *Capture of Major André* to make a strong moral point. He showed John Paulding bigger than life and refusing Andre’s bribe. Paulding’s companions look on with similar contempt at Andre’s efforts to gain his release with a hefty pay-off. Durand selected this event from the American Revolution and Paulding’s stance as an allegory of the corruption of New York City officials. Durand lived in New York where public services like street lighting and public transportation were awarded to the wealthy friends of local politicians. At the top of the city’s turbulent combination of money and politics was Tammany Hall, a political machine founded by Aaron Burr in 1789 that could deliver an election through extortion, pay-offs and ballot stuffing. In his painting *The Capture of Major André*, Durand reminded his viewer of the honesty and integrity of the three Revolutionary War patriots who symbolized a generation of honest men who put the welfare of their country above any personal gain.

Along with the works of gifted painters, there were talented artists who created brilliant original illustrations for magazines and books. This art form reached its golden age in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century; the undisputed master was Howard Pyle (1853-1911). Pyle contributed pictures to the leading magazines of the day including *Harper’s*, *Collier’s Weekly* and *The Century Magazine*. He loved depicting historical events and some of his most enduring artwork dealt



*The Battle of Bunker Hill.* Courtesy Delaware Art Museum.

with the Revolutionary War including this painting titled *The Battle of Bunker Hill*. It was done as an illustration for the *Story of the Revolution* which was featured in the January-February 1898 issue of *Scribner's Magazine*.<sup>11</sup>

The story is that the so-called Battle of Bunker Hill took place on June 16, 1775 when British Redcoats attacked the rebel fortifications on Breed's Hill which was near the higher and more dominant topography known as Bunker Hill. The British were repelled twice with huge losses and only managed to capture the hilltop on their third attempt when the patriots ran out of ammunition.

Pyle prided himself on the accuracy of his historical images and one of his students recalled years later how the artist, "wrote to the Admiralty office in London for details about the formation of the British troops

during the Battle of Bunker Hill, but got very little information."<sup>12</sup>

However, Pyle had other sources for his artwork including his collection of authentic clothing and a reference library of illustrations, paintings and books. According to one of Pyle's biographers, "tracking down historical details for his painting became part of the pattern of his life."<sup>13</sup>

Arguably the best history of the American Revolution available to Pyle when he painted his *Battle of Bunker Hill*, was Henry B. Carrington's *Battles of the American Revolution* published in 1876. Pyle's depiction of the British assault matches Carrington's description: "The advance of the British army was like a solemn pageant in its steady headway, and like a parade in inspection in its completeness of furnishment. The army, bearing their knapsacks and

the full force of its closely knit columns it must sweep away all obstructions and overturn every barrier in its way.”<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, Carrington’s description is inaccurate. Today we know that the British charged up Breed’s Hill on the run in two open lines with their muskets at the ready with bayonets fixed. They were lightly equipped with only their blankets as they expected to spend the night in the captured rebel fortifications. The assault up the hill was actually a diversion to attract the attention of the rebels away from the main British attack which was aimed at the insurgent’s lightly defended flanks. Their plan was to break through the rebel positions on the flank and attack their main fortification from behind. The assault miscarried due to the numerous fences and unseen depressions in the high grass which slowed down the attack in addition to unanticipated strong rebel resistance.

The problem for 19<sup>th</sup> century historians such as Carrington was that researching their books using primary-source material was expensive and time consuming because the original documents were located in libraries and museums scattered throughout the USA, Canada and Europe. Carrington and others tended to rely on previously published histories of the Revolution particularly Charles Stedman’s (1794) *The History of the Origin, Progress and Termination of the American War*. Stedman was a Loyalist who served as a British officer during the war and his account is called “the best contemporary account of the Revolution written from the British side.”<sup>15</sup>

However, Stedman got much of his information from newspapers and periodicals such as the *Gentleman’s Magazine*. He also copied information for his book from the *Annual Register* which was published yearly with news from the previous year.

Plagiarism was common at the time. For example, here is an excerpt from Stedman’s account of the Battle of Bunker Hill: “It is said, that in this critical moment, General Clinton, who arrived from Boston during the engagement, by a happy manoeuvre, rallied the troops almost instantaneously, and brought them again to the charge.”<sup>16</sup>

Compare Stedman’s description with Edmund Burke’s *An Impartial History of the American Revolution* published in 1780. “At this juncture, General Clinton, who had arrived from Boston during the engagement, was most eminently serviceable in rallying the troops; and by a happy manoeuvre almost instantaneously brought them back to the charge.”<sup>17</sup>

Carrington’s statement that the British troops at Bunker Hill were shouldering heavy knapsacks can also be traced back to Stedman’s faulty text which reads:

In the middle of a hot summer’s day, incumbered with three days provisions, their knapsacks on their backs which, together with cartouche-box, ammunition, and forelock may be estimated at one hundred and twenty-five pounds weight, with a steep hill to ascend, covered with grass reaching to their knees, and intersected with the walls and fences of various inclosures. . . . The attack was begun by a most severe fire of cannon and howitzers, under which the troops advanced very slowly towards the enemy.<sup>18</sup>

Pyle added to his error regarding the knapsacks by showing the incorrect style for the period.

Pyle compounded his error of depicting British troops assaulting Breeds Hill carrying knapsacks by showing an early 19<sup>th</sup> century style of knapsack. The British Army common soldier in the background of this portrait is wearing a white goatskin knapsack which was popular during the American Revolution.<sup>19</sup>

Compare this accurate depiction of a British Army knapsack with the type shown by Pyle in his painting.

In spite of Pyle’s best efforts, his *Battle of Bunker Hill* is painfully inaccurate. His erroneous depiction of rows of British soldiers encumbered with heavy knapsacks slowly marching up Breed’s Hill in parade-ground formation has contributed to the mistaken idea that the British Army tried to crush the colonial rebellion with an overconfident, intransigent army led by incompetent officers.

Talented artists like Leutze, Vanderlyn, Durand, and Pyle looked back in history and found inspiration in the American Revolution. They created stirring,



*Portrait of Capt. John Clayton Cowell by Sir William Beechey. National Army Museum, London.*

but frequently inaccurate depictions of the conflict which we must leave behind and move on to look at the eyewitness images of the American Revolution.

However, before proceeding it is important to explain some of the terminology which I use. The most compelling term to me in describing the American Revolution is patriot. Americans who were loyal to Britain during the war were also patriots. They just happened to be on the losing side. However, for clarity and in keeping with the accepted practice, I call Americans who sided with the war Patriots and those who sided with Britain Loyalists.

Also, for historical accuracy I will use the term *colonies* for events which preceded the Declaration of Independence and *states* following its adoption.

Certain words or terms have changed from the time of the American Revolution and despite their popularity I do not to use them. Examples are *guerilla warfare* which was called petite war or partisan warfare in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Another is *sharpshooter* or *sniper*. *marksman* is correct for the period.<sup>20</sup>

I also refrain from using words or terminology which did not exist at the time. Examples are *logistics*, *general staff*, and the word *hello*.<sup>21</sup>

And finally, the war which proceeded the American Revolution was called the Seven Years War (1756-1763) in Europe and the American phase of the conflict was known as the French & Indian War. I will follow this same convention in my text.

# *Part One*

## The British Empire

*Single acts of tyranny may be ascribed to the accidental opinion of a day; but a series of oppressions . . . too plainly prove a deliberate and systematical plan of reducing us to slavery.*

—Thomas Jefferson<sup>1</sup>

On February 10, 1763 Britain, France and Spain signed the Treaty of Paris, ending an international conflict called the Seven Years War (1756-1763) or the French and Indian War as the American colonists called it. The British objective in the North American phase of the war was to seize New France, also called Canada, the vast French colony that had been obstructing English interests in North America for the previous century. French aggression from Canada included ruthless Indian raids against the English colonies.<sup>2</sup>

Frequently led by French officers, these brutal well-organized and equipped Indian attacks targeted isolated frontier farms and villages throughout the thirteen colonies with the exception of New Jersey which had no frontier. Tensions increased when France occupied the Ohio Valley a vast territory also claimed by Britain. The French built Fort Duquesne (modern Pittsburgh) in 1754 at a strategic location in the Ohio country to secure their claim.

Britain responded by sending an army to expel the French from the contested territory. The bitter rivalry for control of the Ohio Valley was the spark which ignited the French and Indian War. British strategy, defined as overall military operations while tactics, such as a cavalry charge, are the means by which strategy is implemented. The British planned

to commit substantial forces to America to expel the French from North America. British Army troops supported by colonial auxiliaries ultimately forced the French to retreat to Quebec, their fortress city and capital of Canada.

In one of the decisive battles in history, the British Army defeated the French forces defending Quebec on September 13, 1759. Montreal, which was weakly defended, capitulated soon after giving England effective control of Canada. In the Treaty of Paris, Great Britain acquired all of North America east of the Mississippi River including Canada and Florida. With the French threat removed, the American colonists rejoiced with a new sense of security and loyalty towards their mother country.

However, there were some unexpected consequences resulting from the Seven Years War. One was that France was humiliated in the conflict and began building a new army and navy to regain its prestige and retake its lost American colonies from Britain. While France lusted for revenge, of greater importance was the economic blow she had suffered from the loss of valuable colonies to Britain.

Another interesting outcome of the war was the low opinion British leaders had of the fighting abilities of the American colonists who had fought alongside British troops in the conflict. Typical was the opinion of British Gen. James Wolfe, “The Americans are in general, the dirtiest, most contemptible cowardly dogs that you can conceive. There is no depending on them in action. Such rascals as those are rather an encumbrance than any real strength to any army.”<sup>3</sup>

Comments like Wolfe’s led British government

leaders to conclude that the Americans could be intimidated by a few thousand British Redcoats and a couple of Royal Navy warships.

The conclusion of the Seven Years War also brought to an end Britain's policy of benign neglect towards the American colonists which had prevailed for generations. This lax imperial policy was due to the profitable trade that influential British merchants enjoyed with the colonists. In addition, the American colonies had supported Britain in three European wars against France and Spain. The colonists helped the mother country during these conflicts, fought between 1689 and 1745, by raising and financing provincial regiments and attacking French and Spanish strongholds in North America.

Britain's indifferent supervision of its American colonies changed at the end of the Seven Year's War when Britain began to take great interest in governing its American colonies. The apparent reason for this new policy was Parliament's interest in raising money by taxing the colonists to help pay for the expensive war which had benefited them by eliminating the French from Canada.

But there was a deeper and more compelling reason to account for the sudden imperial interest in America following the Seven Year's War: the American population was growing at an astounding rate. Writing in 1751, Benjamin Franklin effectively argued that the population of America was doubling every twenty-five years and that the population of America would exceed that of Britain in one hundred years.<sup>4</sup>

British leaders realized that Franklin was probably right. Abundant inexpensive land, religious

toleration and vast natural resources were attracting new immigrants to America at an astounding rate. The thought was frightening that England might become an American colony or that the Americans would eventually seek independence from England. Adding to their anxiety was that France was eyeing encouraging political unrest in America as a way to weaken Britain and possibly regain Canada.

With a long period of peace seemingly at hand, Parliament decided that it was time to tighten its control of America and prevent it from drifting towards independence. Every decision Parliament made starting from 1763 was an effort to reverse generations of lax supervision and paltry enforcement of existing imperial laws. Opposing that policy were years of experience in virtual self-rule by the colonists including controlling the royal governors appointed in London whose salaries were paid by the colonial legislatures. Britain was determined to rein-in the colonists and control them for the benefit of the mother country. John Adams understood what was happening as early as 1765 when he said, "there seems to be a direct and formal design on foot to enslave all America."<sup>5</sup>

What if military action became necessary to force the Americans to submit to British rule? Contrary to common belief, the British had an experienced volunteer army led by competent officers and the world's largest navy led by men who were arguably the finest sailors of their day. But were the Crown forces prepared to subjugate the Americans? The following three eyewitness images help to understand Britain's military power on the eve of the American Revolution.

# George III Reviewing the Fleet at Spithead

By Robert Cleveley

In the years leading up to the American Revolution Great Britain had a good army—and the best navy in the world. The Royal Navy was Britain's premier instrument of war and the island kingdom's first and foremost line of defense. The Navy's reputation was enhanced from its victories at sea against the warships of Spain, Holland, and France to become the dominant naval power in the world.

The mainstay of the Royal Navy was its fleet of 131 ships-of-the-line which were the battleships of the eighteenth century. These sea monsters carried between 60 to 100 cannons on two or three gun decks. They were big and slow and meant to operate in squadrons to bring tremendous firepower against an enemy fleet. Next in size and armament were frigates which mounted between 20 to 56 cannons on a single deck. They were the greyhounds of the sea: fast and maneuverable and designed to operate independently as the eyes of the fleet and to hunt down enemy merchant ships and patrol coastlines. Britain had 98 frigates in 1773 along with a number of smaller vessels for a total of 270 ships.<sup>1</sup>

The Royal Navy was governed at the time by a Board of Lords Commissioners composed of admirals called Sea Lords and civilians called Civil Lords. The president of the board was known as the First Lord of the Admiralty. It was a position of immense power and prestige and the First Lord was invariably an influential politician and a member of the British aristocracy.

In 1773, the First Lord of the Admiralty was John Montagu, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Sandwich. He was appointed to the post in 1771 and served until 1782, making

him responsible for the policies and administration of the Royal Navy during the majority of the American Revolution (1775-1783). Lord Sandwich was a savvy politician who wielded a strong influence over the young and inexperienced King George III who assumed the throne in 1760 at the age of 22. Sandwich methodically nurtured the interest of the king in the Royal Navy. His tactics included sending the king models of ships under construction along with copies of the latest naval charts and plans for new ships. Sandwich also took the king to watch the launching of new warships and inspect naval shipyards.

In 1773, Sandwich staged his greatest event to date for the king which was a review of the fleet at its deep-water anchorage at Spithead, England. The last time such a spectacle had taken place was in 1700 in honor of the visit of Peter the Great (the King of Russia) to England. At the time, the review of the fleet was staged to impress Peter with the size and firepower of the Royal Navy to discourage any ideas he had of going to war with England.

Lord Sandwich orchestrated the review of the fleet for the young monarch on June 22, 1773. The spectacle began days earlier when the king departed his palace at Kew in a royal coach accompanied by outriders (a military escort for protection and to clear the route). The king's destination was the Royal Navy shipyard at Portsmouth where he was met by his admirals and captains who stood at attention in their full dress uniforms. The fleet was anchored in formation near Portsmouth in a nearby sheltered deep-water channel called Spithead. Each admiral and captain had his personal barge waiting at Portsmouth with its crew of



*George III Reviewing the Fleet at Spithead.* Copyright National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

handpicked sailors. There was no standard uniform for Royal Navy sailors at the time and each officer dressed his barge crew in clothing of his own design and colors. There was also a royal barge reserved for the king flying a flag called the Royal Standard.<sup>2</sup>

Once underway, the colorful procession of barges made for Spithead and the review of the fleet.

This painting by naval artist Robert Cleveley (1749-1809) shows the highlight of the review as the barges rowed between the twenty-five assembled Royal Navy warships each of which fired a salute as the king approached. His barge is in the middle of the painting flying the Royal Standard. The large ship in the center of the painting is the HMS *Royal Oak*.<sup>3</sup>

The review of the fleet was a great spectacle of Britain's naval might—but below the surface there were serious problems. The Seven Year's War was costly and the Royal Navy budget had been cut back drastically at the end of the war. As a result, many of its ships were overaged derelicts by 1773. There

was also mismanagement and widespread corruption within the Admiralty which Lord Sandwich ignored in order to maintain his position and political power. More disturbing was that the French were rearming and building a modern fleet in preparation for a new war with Britain to regain the colonies she had lost in the Seven Year's War. The growing unrest in the American colonies was another problem. The Royal Navy had too many large ships in its fleet which could not operate in the numerous small harbors, shallow channels, and inlets scattered along the American coastline. The Navy needed small, fast warships that could intercept colonial merchant ships bringing military equipment from Europe and the Caribbean for the rebel army. But Sandwich did not take the colonists seriously, calling them "the most worthless race of men on earth."<sup>4</sup>

Artist Robert Cleveley was well qualified to record the 1773 review of the fleet. He was the son of shipwright (a carpenter skilled in ship construction)

and artist John Cleveley (1712-1777). Following in his father's footsteps, Robert trained as a shipwright at the Royal Dockyard at Deptford, England. He subsequently volunteered for the Royal Navy in 1770 and served as a purser on several ships until 1777 when he left the service to begin a full-time career as a marine painter. A purser in the Royal Navy was a civilian who was ranked as a ship's officer during his employment. As a purser, Cleveley was responsible for handling money and purchasing supplies such

as food, clothing, and candles. He capitalized on his employment in the Navy by signing his paintings *Robert Cleveley of the Royal Navy*. His marine paintings, particularly those depicting naval battles, were popular more for their accuracy rather than for their artistic execution. Several of his paintings were reproduced as prints which today are prized collectables. Cleveley died on September 28, 1809 when he accidentally fell off a cliff at Dover, England.