

A Regular Army and an Irregular War:

Gen. George Washington, Gov. William Livingston,
and Civil Warfare in New Jersey
During the American Revolution

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A Little About My Research...

- 20+ years of research on the American Revolution in Central NJ
- Focus on ordinary people and civil warfare
- Two large datasets: Bio File; Events Database

Publications include:

- *The American Revolution in Monmouth County*
- *The Razing of Tinton Falls*
- *The Roster of the People of Revolutionary Monmouth County*
- Five journal articles, including works in JER and JMH

Today's Topic:

A Regular Army and An Irregular War

What is a Regular Army?

- The main body of the Continental Army stationed in NJ was
 - An increasingly professional standing army (“regulars”)
 - Generally concentrated in its encampments
- Americans were suspicious of standing armies
 - Hostile experience with the British Army
 - Standing armies are “Engines of Tyranny”
 - State/local militias should police local problems
- American leaders want to focus the Continental Army on external enemies and limit its contact with civilians

Today's Topic, cont'd

A Regular Army and an Irregular War

What is an Irregular War?

- A war between non-professional soldiers (“irregulars”)
- Civil warfare in which the rules/norms of war are not enforced
 - Blurry line between combatants and non-combatants
 - Tactics include kidnapping, plundering property, etc.
- Civil war existed in NJ throughout the Revolution
 - Loyalist counter-insurrections, 1776
 - Loyalist raids from bases in NJ and NY, 1777-82
 - Maritime warfare to curb contraband trade, 1777-83
 - Campaigns vs. Loyalist partisans in the Pines, 1779-83

The Problem

Irregular Warfare in New Jersey

- Irregular warfare in NJ is too intense to be handled by state/local militias alone
- The fledgling government New Jersey cannot protect the state from either external or internal enemies
- William Livingston, NJ's Governor, gets over reservations about asking the Continental Army for help with domestic problems
- George Washington, based in NJ, wants to help but is aware of the limitations of the Continental Army

Today's question: How helpful were the Continentals when intervening in irregular warfare?

New Jersey's Civil War

The response: Gen. George Washington and Gov. William Livingston reluctantly commit the Continental Army to NJ's civil war

Today's talk focuses on four interventions:

- January 1777 – toppling the Loyalist insurrections
- October 1777 – projecting NJ's salt works
- January 1779 – restraining the “London Trade”
- December 1779 – Harry Lee's counter-attacks

January 1777

Toppling the Loyalist Insurrections

11/6, Gen. Hugh Mercer to Congress, “The Disaffected... expect daily that the enemy will make a descent... They are forming associations to join the British troops upon their landing.”

- 11/24, George Washington dispatches Col. David Forman’s regiment to break up an insurrection led by George Taylor (senior Colonel of the Monmouth militia). “There is a danger of an insurrection of Tories in the County of Monmouth... You are hereby ordered to march, with your regiment... and on your arrival there, to apprehend such persons.”

Result:

- Forman marches on Middletown, reports that his Continentals “took nearly 100 of his [Taylor’s] friends and relatives, who were removed 300 miles to Fredericktown, Maryland, and there confined to jail.” But Taylor escapes, and Forman’s enlistments expire on Dec. 1.
- December – As Continental Army retreats into PA., Taylor returns and a full scale “Tory ascendancy” takes hold of Monmouth and eastern Middlesex Counties.
- January – PA Continentals and Forman’s new “Additional Regt” break it up

October 1777

Protecting New Jersey's Salt Works

- 10/19, GW to David Forman, “am very sorry to hear... that the intent of the enemy to destroy the salt works upon the coast of Monmouth County will divert you from coming to the reinforcement of the Army; but these works are so truly valuable to the public that they are certainly worth your attention.”
- Forman's Additional Regiment goes to Manasquan to protect the salt works rather than support the main army, but controversies erupt
 - The soldiers employed as laborers at works co-owned by Forman
 - The soldiers harvest wood from the land of nearby salt works
 - NJ Legislature investigates and censures Forman

Result:

- 3/25/78, Washington transfers Forman's men away from Forman and the salt works “to avoid imputation of partiality and remove cause of censure.”
- 4/5, British/Loyalist raid destroys salt works at Manasquan and Shark River
- Significant body of Continentals never again stationed on the lower shore; seven more salt works razed before war's end

January 1779

Combatting Loyalist Raids

1/78, Livingston begins asking Washington for troops to guard the exposed shore:

- 4/14, GW to Livingston, “A few hundred Continental troops quiet the minds and give satisfaction to the people of the Country; but considered in the true light, they do rather more harm than good. They draw the attention of the Enemy, and being not able to resist them, are obliged to fly and leave the Country at the mercy of the foe. But as I said before, the people do not view things in the same light, and therefore they must be indulged.”
- 10/7-10/15, British/Loyalist raids raze Chestnut Neck, the shore’s busiest port, and slaughters Count Pulaski’s men on Osborn Island
- 12/14, Livingston pleads for help, “considering the number of disaffected in the County of Monmouth... I should therefore think a few Continental troops might be posted in that County to great advantage.” Requests 400 troops.
- 12/16, Washington declines, but reverses himself a few weeks later after “repeated intelligence” of continued disaffection

January 1779

Combatting Loyalist Raids, cont'd

Result: Two Regiments sent to the Raritan Bay Shore

- NJ Gov't commits to constructing beacons and raising a regt of State Troops to augment the Continental commitment
- 1/8/79, Col. Caleb North of PA sent with 250-men
 - 1/17, 200 raiders “re-imbarked in the night, without penetrating the country”
 - 2/12, recaptures French vessel that British had taken and brought into Sandy Hook
 - 3/28, 12-men hosted by Essek Hartshorne, “his cellar was broke into by the soldiery”
 - 3/29, North seen spending time with “two very agreeable ladies at a sociable gaim [sic] of Whist.” Attends ball at the house of disaffected merchant, 4/1.
 - 4/3, “Captain Patterson's company mutinied at Middletown, was disarmed, and sent to camp under guard.” Local militia must help put it down.
 - 4/5, Loyalists land, Continentals march against them but “missed the main object”
 - 4/13, soldiers commit another robbery, but officer “restored the goods, and punished the delinquents”
 - 4/15, North withdraws his men
- 4/15, replaced Col. Benjamin Ford's VA Continentals who are already deployed

January 1779

Combatting Loyalist Raids

4/22, Washington to Livingston, “You will perceive that I mean to withdraw the Monmouth detachment... the enemy appear to have a number of active emissaries in that part of the Country, who have been very successful in corrupting our men. An alarming spirit of mutiny and desertion has shown itself on several occasions and there is no saying how far the infection might spread.”

- 4/23, Washington tells Livingston he will recall Ford’s men. Livingston requests a little more time to “allow me to provide for the security of those parts of the country by detachments of our militia.”
- Ford’s Continentals remain at Shrewsbury, “we continued very peaceable, spending our spare time with a number of fine ladies in this neighborhood”
- 4/25, 700-raiders land and march on Ford’s camp at Tinton Falls; Ford “retired to Colts Neck” without offering any resistance
 - Local militia, 15 NJ Continentals, and state troops harass raiders through the day
 - Loyalists “took between 20 and 30 prisoners, burnt a mill and two or three houses”
 - 22-man scout party of the Continentals also captured
 - Robert Morris notes, “Col Ford is censured by some of inhabitants for his conduct”
- Ford does little more, but stays until 6/1, Tinton Falls sacked again 6/10

Other Cont. Army Actions in NJ's Civil War

- 7/76 – against Loyalist insurrection along NJ shore
- 1/77 – against Loyalist insurrection in Monmouth Co.
- 4/77 – campaign to seize livestock near Sandy Hook
- 7/78 – curb contraband trade
- 10/78 – repel large raid against Little Egg Harbor
- 10/79 – campaign against Loyalist Pine Robbers
- 12/79 – guard to prevent illegal trade with British
- 1/80 – use illegal trade to procure blankets for army
- 7/80 – protect pilots in anticipation of arriving French fleet

January 1782

The Final Request for Help

1/11/82 – Livingston to GW on Pine Robber threat: “[They] have several armed boats, with a number of men, fortifying Osborn's Island near Egg Harbor ... The vicinity of that part of the State is so disaffected or intimidated that the Refugees have reigned in it.”

- Calls for a Continental guard "to prevent the well affected in those parts from deserting their habitations... thereby extending the Enemy's lines.”

1/12/82, Washington replies, “Had I found the report to be well-grounded, I should have concerted my measures to dislodge them.” But GW does note, “A constant intercourse is carried on by water between the refugees and inhabitants, no force which I could spare would prevent it, as they would, if kept out of one inlet, use another for their purposes.”

- Suggests that making contraband trading a capital offense will be more useful in bringing order to the shore than Continental troops

Putting it in Perspective

The Continental Army's Interventions

George Washington understood that:

- A regiment of out-stationed Continentals living among the civilians for too long would...
 - Be indecisive to turning the tide of civil war
 - Lead to disorders among the Continentals
 - But.... the political needs within NJ trumped his concerns
- Participating in NJ's civil war was part of a larger pragmatic dialog between GW and Livingston
 - Raising supplies for the Continental Army
 - Bringing order to POW exchanges
 - Establishing "Additional Regiments" and State Troops

Conclusion

- To most Revolutionary Era leaders, a permanent, regular army was a necessary evil to be contained
 - Limit its scope to external enemies
 - Limit its exposure to civilian populations
 - Keep it as well disciplined as possible
- But the scope and severity of civil warfare in NJ forced Washington and Livingston to expand the Continental Army's presence
 - The Continental Army's record in intervening the local civil wars was mixed, but often ineffective
 - 4/82, British decision to pull support from Loyalist irregulars is the decisive act in ending NJ's civil war

Following Up and Further Reading

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Broader than New Jersey

- E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve an Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Policy Culture, 1775-1783*
- Mark Lender & James Kirby Martin, *A Respectable Army: The Military Origins of the New Republic, 1763-1789*
- Edward Lingle, *George Washington: A Military Life*
- Judith Van Buskirk, *Generous Enemies: Patriots and Loyalists in Revolutionary New York*
- Harry Ward, *Between the Lines: Banditti of the American Revolution*

Specific to New Jersey

- Michael Adelberg, *The American Revolution in Monmouth County: The Theatre of Spoil and Destruction*
- Todd Braisted, *Bergen County Voices from the American Revolution*
- Leonard Lundin, *Cockpit of the Revolution: The War for Independence in New Jersey*
- Barbara Mitnick, *New Jersey in the American Revolution*
- Arthur Pierce, *Smuggler's Woods: Jaunts and Journey's in Colonial and Revolutionary New Jersey*