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THE EMERGENCE OF MASONIC LEADERS

One of the key questions about the American War for Independence is how and why Britain contrived to lose it. For the war was not so much 'won' by the American colonists as 'lost', by Britain. Britain alone, quite independently of the colonists' efforts, had the capacity to win or lose the conflict, and by not actively choosing to win it, she lost it more or less by default.

In most conflicts - the War of the Spanish Succession, for example, the Seven Years. -War. the wars of the Napoleonic era, the American Civil War, the Franco-Prussian War, the two world wars of our own century -victory or defeat by one or another combatant can be explained in military terms. In most such conflicts, the historian can point to one or more specific factors - certain tactical or strategic decisions, certain campaigns, certain battles, certain logistic considerations (such as supply lines or volume of industrial production),- or simply the process of attrition. Any of these factors; the historian can say, either individually or in combination; brought about the collapse of one of the combatants, or rendered it untenable for one of the combatants to continue fighting. In the American War for Independence, however, there are no such factors to which the historian can satisfactorily point. Even the two battles usually regarded as, 'decisive'- Saratoga and Yorktown - can be: regarded as 'decisive' only in terms of American morale, or perhaps, with the wisdom of hindsight, in terms of intangible 'watersheds'. Neither of these engagements crippled, or even seriously impaired, Britain's capacity to continue fighting. Neither involved more than a fraction of the British troops deployed in North America. The war was to continue for four years after Saratoga, during which time the British defeat was redressed by a series of victories. And when Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, the bulk of the British forces in North America was still intact, still well-placed to continue operations elsewhere, still strategically and numerically in a position of advantage. There was, in the American War for Independence no conclusive victory comparable to Waterloo, no ineluctable 'turning point' comparable to Gettysburg. It seems almost as if everyone simply got tired, became bored, lost interest, decided to pack up and go home.

In American history textbooks, certain standard explanations are routinely presented as military explanations for the British defeat - because, of course, any such military explanation amounts to a testimonial of American prowess at arms. Thus, for example, it is often suggested, if not quite explicitly stated, that the whole of the colonial North America was up in arms, confronting Britain with a hostile continent arrayed against her - a situation akin to of Napoleon's or Hitler's invasion of Russia, with an entire people united to repel the aggressor. More often still it is maintained that the British Army was out of its element in the wilderness of North America - was untrained and unadapted to the kind of irregular guerrilla fighting employed by the colonists and dictated by the terrain. And it is often generally maintained that the British commanders

were incompetent, inept, lazy, corrupt, out-thought and out-maneuvered. It is worth looking at each of these assertions individually.

In fact, the British Army was not confronted by a continent or a people passionately united against it. Of the thirty seven newspapers in the colonies in 1775, twenty-three were in favour of the rebellion, seven were loyal to Britain and seven were neutral or uncommitted. If this can be taken to reflect the attitudes of the populace, fully 33 per cent were not prepared to support independence. In reality, a substantial number of colonists remained actively attached to what they regarded as the mother

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country. They voluntarily spied, voluntarily furnished information, accommodation and supplies to British troops. Many of them actually resorted to arms and campaigned, alongside British regular units, against their colonial neighbours. In the course of the war, there were no fewer than fourteen regiments of 'Loyalists' affiliated with the British Army.

Neither is it tenable to argue that the British Army was unsuited and untrained for the kind of warfare being waged in North America. In the first place, and contrary to popular impressions, most campaigning of the conflict did not involve irregular fighting at all. Most of it involved set-piece battles and sieges of precisely the kind being fought in Europe, precisely the kind at which the British Army, and the Hessian mercenaries within it, excelled. But even when irregular warfare was employed; British troops were at no disadvantage. As we have seen, Amherst, Wolfe and their subordinates a mere twenty years before, had employed precisely that kind of warfare in wresting North America from France. In fact, the British Army had pioneered the sort of fighting sometimes dictated by the forests and rivers in which the techniques and formations of the European battlefield were out of place; Hessian troops might indeed have been vulnerable to such tactics, but British units like the 60th Foot - Amherst's old rifle regiment could outdo (and often outdid) the colonists at their own game, a game which, after all, most of the colonists' military leaders had learned from British commanders.

There remains the charge of incompetence and ineptitude on the part of the British commanders.-So far as of those commanders is concerned - Sir John Burgoyne - the charge is probably valid. As for the three primary commanders however, - Sir William Howe, Sir Henry Clinton and Lord Charles Cornwallis - it is not. - In fact Howe, Clinton and Cornwallis were quite as competent as their American counterparts. All three of them won more victories against the colonists than they lost - and larger more substantial victories. All three of them had previously demonstrated their skill; and would have occasion to demonstrate it again. Howe in particular, had played a prominent role in the war against the French twenty years before - had learned irregular tactics from his brother, who died at Ticonderoga, had served under Amherst at Louisbourg and Montreal, had led Wolfe's troops up the Heights of Abraham at Quebec. And between 1772 and 1774, he was responsible for the introduction of light infantry companies into line regiments. Clinton had been born in Newfoundland, had grown up in Newfoundland and New York, had served in the New York militia before joining the Guards and seeing action on the Continent, where his rise in the military hierarchy has been described as "meteoric". Cornwallis also distinguished himself during the Seven Years War. Subsequently, during the fighting in Mysore, he was to win a string of victories that gave Britain control of southern India - and, in the process, was to act as mentor to the young Sir Arthur Wellesley, later Duke of Wellington. And during the 1798 rebellion in Ireland, Cornwallis proved himself not just a skilled strategist but also a wise and humane man, who had constantly to curb the over-zealous

brutality of his subordinates. These were not, in short, inept or incompetent commanders.

But if the British high command during the American War for Independence was not incompetent or inept, it was - to a degree never satisfactorily explained by historians-- strangely dilatory, desultory, apathetic, even torpid. Opportunities blandly ignored which would have been seized or pounced upon by far less efficient men. Operations were conducted with an almost somnambulistic, lackadaisical air. The war, quite simply, was not pursued with the kind of ruthlessness required for victory - the kind of ruthlessness displayed by the same commanders when pitted against adversaries other than the American colonists.

In fact, Britain did not lose the war in North America for military reasons at all. The war was lost because of other, entirely different factors. It was a deeply unpopular, much as the war fought in Vietnam by the United States two centuries later was to be. It was unpopular with the British public, with most of the British government, with virtually all the British personnel directly involved - soldiers, officers and commanders. Clinton and Cornwallis both fought. under duress, and with extreme reluctance. Howe was even more adamant; repeatedly expressing his anger, his unhappiness and his frustration about the command with which he had been saddled. His brother, Admiral Howe, felt the same way. The colonists,

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he declared, were 'the most oppressed and distressed people on earth.'

Amherst's position was more militant still. At the outbreak of hostilities, Amherst was fifty-nine -fifteen years older than Washington, twelve years older than Howe, but still perfectly capable of conducting operations. Following his successes in the Seven Years War he had become governor of Virginia, and had further developed his skills in irregular warfare during the Indian rebellion led by Chief Pontiac. When the American War for Independence began, he was commander-in-chief of the British Army, and had been chafing against the bureaucracy and tedium of his 'desk job'. Had Amherst taken command in North America, and (together. with his old subordinate, Howe) campaigned with the vigor he had displayed against the French twenty years before, events would questionably have fallen out differently. But Amherst exhibited the same distaste as those who did grudgingly take the field; and his superior rank permitted him the luxury of refusal. The first offer came in 1776, and Amherst declined it. In January, 1778, he was approached again. This time he was not even asked. The king, George III, actually appointed him 'commander-in-chief 'in America and demanded that he take control of the war there. Threatening to resign his commission, Amherst refused the king's direct order. Attempts to persuade him by members of the government proved equally futile. For Amherst, for Howe, for most of the other British commanders. as for the bulk of the British public at large, the American War for Independence was perceived as a kind of civil war, in effect, they found themselves, to their discomfiture, pitted against adversaries whom they could only regard as fellow Englishmen often linked to them not just by language, heritage customs and attitudes, but also, in many, cases, actual family ties. But there was even more to it than that. As we have seen, Freemasonry in eighteenth-century Britain, was a network pervading the whole of society. and particularly the educated classes, the professional people, the civil servants and administrators. the educators, the men who shaped and determined public It also engendered a general psychological and cultural climate, an atmosphere which suffused the mentality of the age. This was especially true in the military, where the field lodges constituted a cohesive structure binding men to their units, to their commanders and to one

another. And it was even more true among 'ordinary soldiers', who lacked the ties of caste and family which obtained in the officer class. During the American War for Independence, most of the military personnel involved, commanders and men both sides, were either practicing Freemasons themselves or were steeped in the attitudes and values of Freemasonry. The sheer prevalence of field lodges ensured that even non-Freemasons were constantly exposed to the institutions ideals. It could not fail to be apparent that many of those ideals were embodied by what the colonists were fighting for. The principles on behalf of which the colonists declared and then fought for independence were incidentally, perhaps, but pervasively, Freemasonic. And thus, for the British high command as well as for the 'rank-and-file', they were engaged in a war not just with fellow Englishmen, but also with Freemasonic brethren. In such circumstances, it was often difficult to be ruthless. This is not to suggest, of course, that British commanders were guilty of treason. They were after all professional soldiers, and were prepared,; however reluctantly to do their duty. But they were at pains to define their duty as narrowly as possible. and to do nothing more.

The Influence of Field Lodges

There are, unfortunately, no rolls, membership lists or other forms of documentation to establish definitively who among the British high command were practicing Freemasons. As a rule, most military men were initially inducted into field lodges, and field lodges were notoriously lax both in keeping records, and in returning such records as were kept to their parent lodge. Having once been chartered or warranted, a field lodge would usually tend to lose contact with its sponsoring body. This was particularly true of lodges warranted by Irish Grand Lodge, which had enough trouble with its own records; and it was Irish Grand Lodge, as we have seen, that warranted most of the early field lodges. In some cases, too, field lodges would warrant other field lodges and the original parent lodge would never be informed. And as regiments were disbanded or amalgamated, field lodges would migrate, mutate, transplant themselves, sometimes obtain new warrants from different sponsoring bodies. Even outside the military, documentation was often appallingly patchy. All three brothers of George III for example, are known to have been Freemasons one of them, the Duke of Cumberland, eventually became Grand Master of the

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English Grand Lodge. Records exist, however, only for the induction of the Duke of Gloucester on 16 February 1766. (2) There is no indication when, where or by whom the Duke of York, who at that time was already a Freemason, was initiated, although one historian says limply that he was 'initiated abroad'(3). If data are so haphazard and erratic in the case of a royal prince, they are all the more so in the case of military commanders.

Not surprisingly, therefore, it cannot be ascertained whether Rowe, Cornwallis and Clinton were indeed practicing Freemasons. There are certainly abundant grounds, however, for concluding that they were. Of the four regiments in which Howe served before becoming a general officer, three had field lodges; and as colonel, he would to condone, if not preside over, their field activities. As we have seen. moreover, Howe served under Amhurst and Wolfe, in an army where Freemasonry was rampant. During the American War of Independence, his statements and attitudes concur precisely with those of known Freemasons. And of the thirty-one line regiments under his command in North America, twenty-nine possessed field Lodges.(4) Even if Howe himself was not a Freemason, he could not but have absorbed something of Freemasonry's influence.

The same applies to Cornwallis, who enjoyed a particularly close rapport with

Howe. Cornwallis served in two regiments before becoming a general officer and was colonel of one of them. Both had field lodges. As we have seen, Cornwallis' uncle, Edward, subsequently a lieutenant-general, had become governor of Nova Scotia and, in 1750, founded a lodge there. And indeed, the whole Cornwallis family, during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, was one of the most prominent in English Freemasonry.

In Clifton's case, the evidence is rather more ambiguous. Prior to becoming a general officer, he did not serve in line regiments, but in the Guards, who did not have field lodges until later.. On the other hand, he was aide-de-camp, during the Seven Years' War, to Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, one of the most active and influential Freemasons of the age. Ferdinand had been inducted in Berlin in 1740. In 1770, he became Provincial Grand Master, under the auspices of the English Grand Lodge for the Duchy of Brunswick. A year later, he joined the Strict Observance. In 1776, he co-founded a prestigious lodge in Hamburg along with Prince Karl of Hesse. In 1782, he instigated the Convent of Wilhelmsbad, a major congress for the whole of European Freemasonry. As Ferdinand's aide-de-camp, Clinton would unquestionably have been exposed to Freemasonry and its ideals. Moreover, a record survives of a 'St John's Day' festival celebrated by the Master and brethren of Lodge No 210 on 25 June 1781, while the British Army was in occupation of New York. According to this record, toasts were drunk: - -

To the King and the craft.

The Queen with masons' wives

Sir Henry Clinton and all loyal Masons

Admiral Arbuthnot.. and all Distressed Mason

Generals Knyphausen and Reidesel. . and visiting Brethren

Lords Cornwallis and Rawden... with Ancient Fraternity(5)

Thus Freemasonry pervaded both the British Army and the rebellious colonies. It must be stressed at this point, however, that the evidence which follows does not attest to any kind of coherent, organized 'Freemasonic conspiracy'. Most historians of the American War of Independence have tended so far as Freemasonry is concerned, to fall into one of two camps. Certain fringe writers, for example, have sought to portray the war exclusively as a 'Freemasonic event' - a movement engineered, orchestrated and conducted by cabals in accordance with some carefully calculated grand design. Such writers will often cite lengthy lists of Freemasons - which proves little more than that they have lengthy lists of Freemasons to cite, and there is certainly no shortage of such lists. On the other hand, most conventional historians circumvent the Freemasonic aspect of the conflict entirely. Philosophers such as Hume, Locke, Adam Smith and the French philosophes are regularly enough invoked; but the Freemasonic milieu which paved the way for such thinkers, which acted as a kind of amniotic fluid for their ideas and which imparted to those ideas their popular currency, is neglected.

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In fact, there was no Freemasonic conspiracy. Of the fifty-six signatories of Declaration of Independence, only nine can definitely be identified as Freemasons, while ten others may possibly have been. Of the general officers in the Continental Army, there were, so far as documentation can establish, thirty-three Freemasons out of seventy-four.(6) Granted, the known Freemasons were, as a rule, more prominent, more instrumental in shaping the course of events than their unaffiliated colleagues. But not even they were working in any kind of concert towards any kind of prearranged grand design. It would have been impossible for them to do so. The movement which culminated in American independence was in effect, an ongoing and constant exercise in improvisation -

and in what today would be called a kind of ad hoc "damage control". Unexpected faits accomplis had to be confronted, accepted, contained and turned to account one step at a time - until the next fait accompli dictated a new sequence of impromptu adaptations and adjustments. In this process, Freemasonry tended, on the whole, to act as a restraining and moderating influence. In 1775, for example, a number of military radicals were already agitating for a complete severing of ties with Britain. As a Freemason, however, General Joseph Warren, subsequent commander of colonial troops at Bunker Hill was issuing statements that anticipate those of Ulster Unionists today - that he was defying Parliament, but remained loyal to the crown. Washington held precisely the same position; and even as late as December 1777, a year after the Declaration of Independence, Franklin was prepared to renounce all thoughts of independence if the grievances which had precipitated the war had been redressed(7) It is thus as foolish to speak of "Freemasonic conspiracies" as it is to discount Freemasonry altogether. Ultimately, the currents of thought disseminated by Freemasonry were to prove more crucial and more pervasive than Freemasonry itself. The republic which emerged from the war was not, in any literal sense, a 'Freemasonic republic' -- was not, that is, a republic created by Freemasons for Freemasons in accordance with Freemasonic ideals. But it did embody those ideals; it was profoundly influenced by those ideals; and it owed much more to those ideals than is generally recognized or acknowledged. As one Masonic historian has written:

"Freemasonry has exerted a greater influence upon the establishment and development of this [the American] Government than any other single institution. Neither general historians nor the members of the Fraternity since the days of the first Constitutions have realized how much the United States of America owes to Freemasonry, and how great a part it played in the birth of the nation and the establishment of the landmarks of that civilization..." (8)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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THOUGHTS FOR THE ENQUIRING MASON

MAR 98

AULD LANG SYNE

Brethren,

How often do we sing this short tune at lodge meetirigs and perhaps do not get the words correct. For The Sake O-Accuracy.

With a special thanks to "The Scots Magazine" (first published 1739) Vol.145 No.3 1996

Douglas M. Scott traces the origins of "Auld Lang Syne."

Also refer "The Penguin Book of Scottish Verse" by Tom Scott, 1970.

Auld Lang Sync was on the go many years before Burns came along. He was born in 1756 and died C. 1796. and what he did was produce a new version of a very much older song. Some authorities attribute the words to Frances Sempill who died in 1682, yet 'Auld Lang Syne also appeared in Watson 'S Collection of 1711.

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Other research puts the song even earlier. Sir Robert Aytoun (1570-1638), a poet and courtier was one of the first Scots to use English as a literary language.

He is believed by some to be the author of the original version of "Auld Lang Syne

(NOTE: - Can this be one of the Aytouns of Aitcheson Haven L. fame of the 1590's?)

In a letter to his friend James Thomson (1770), Robert Burns wrote: "It is the old song of the olden times, which has never been in print I took it down from an old man singing.

In another letter, Burns remarked, "Light be on the turf of the heaven-inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment."

Regardless of who came up with the time-honoured words no gathering of friends is brought to a proper finish without the song being sung, and the singers have taken the trouble to learn the correct words.

AULD LANG SYNE

Should auld acquaintance be forgot, We twa hae paidled I the bum,
And never brought to mind? Fra morning sun till dine:
Should auld acquaintance be forgot, But seas between us braid hae roar'd
And days of lang syne. Sin auld lang syne.

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For auld lang syne, my dear, And there's a hand my trusty
fiere,

For auld tang syne, And gie's a hand O thine,
We'll tak a cup O kindness yet, And we'll tak a richt gude willie-
waucht.

For auld lang syne. For auld lang sync.

We twa hae run about the braes And surely ye'll be your pint-stowp.
And pu'd the gowans fine; And surely I'll be mine!
But we've wandered mony fool, And we'll tak a cop O kindness yet,
Sin auld lang syne. For auld lang syrie.

*some versions include here

And surely you'll be your pint-stowp (stowp = tankard)
And surely I'll be mine,
And we'll take a cup of kindness yet
For auld lang syne!
Chorus

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