

**German Soldiers Deserted and Settled in  
America After the War of Independence**

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### Introduction

“American reactions to the hiring of German soldiers by Great Britain are perhaps best summarized by quoting the passage from the Declaration of Independence in which the King is assailed for ‘transporting large armies of foreign mercenaries to complete the works of death, desolation, and tyranny already begun with circumstances of cruelty and perfidy scarcely paralleled in the most barbarous ages, and totally unworthy the head of a civilized nation.’”<sup>1</sup> By the summer of 1776, Americans feared and despised the arriving German auxiliary forces, so what accounted for the fact that many Germans remained in America? The Declaration’s strong message to the British certainly represented a great wall of hatred against their instruments of death—the German auxiliaries.<sup>2</sup> As a cultural and political wall of separation, Germans in the latter stages of their submission often scaled the wall for reasons explored herein. After fighting in most of the battles for eight years, living within a hostile environment and enduring significant hardships, many German soldiers, favorably impressed with the American way of life over the “Old Country,” decided to remain when their countrymen sailed for home.

Researchers have combed the German archives for evidence of the number of desertions. Historians have arrived at five thousand soldiers as a consensus. “At least twelve hundred of the German mercenaries were killed . . .

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<sup>1</sup> Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America: Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*, trans. and annot. Bernard A. Uhlendorf (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1957), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Generally, Americans refer to the German soldiers as Hessian mercenaries, and almost half came from the area in Germany called Hessen-Kassel. In fact, other Germans did not want to be called Hessians because the word was an affront to their principalities. Technically, they were sold by their princes so the word “auxiliary” better explained their station in life than “mercenary” since mercenaries ordinarily made their own contracts for hire.

and an estimated 6,354 died [from other causes],”<sup>3</sup> recorded George Washington Greene in his book published in 1876, using records compiled directly from the archives in Germany researched by Doctor Friedrich Kapp. Greene reported 29,166 soldiers sent by “wicked rulers” with 17,313 returning.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, over 23 percent of the Germans stayed in America. Why did almost thirty thousand German soldiers representing between 33 and 37 percent of the proportion of British strength in America from 1778 through 1781 come to America to fight a rival country’s war?<sup>5</sup> On the other side of the coin, since these soldiers were oppressed servants, why did not a higher percentage of them desert?

Greene called them wicked rulers and Robert H. Lowie wrote, “The Duke of Hesse-Cassel . . . felt no Christian scruples. . . about trafficking in the blood of his subjects.”<sup>6</sup> The princes were greedy, selling their subjects to the highest paymaster, and their primary goal was “how to fill their ranks and keep them full.”<sup>7</sup> For many of these principalities, this was a way of life that had evolved over many years of warring.<sup>8</sup> The idea of soldiers as a “merchandisable

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<sup>3</sup> Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, ed. and trans. Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1979), xx-xxi. This is the most important and comprehensive diary kept by a German officer. Ewald wrote it in the field over eight years, 1776 to 1784, and there are forty-one pen-and-ink maps and plans included. This determined man made entries almost every day, even on the days his troops were engaged in combat.

<sup>4</sup> George Washington Greene, *The German Element in the War of American Independence* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1876), v, 210. Rodney Atwood calculated that 3,014 Hessians remained. See Atwood, *The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 256.

<sup>5</sup> Atwood, 257.

<sup>6</sup> Robert H. Lowie, *Toward Understanding Germany* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954), 193.

<sup>7</sup> Greene, 175.

<sup>8</sup> One of the eminent translators of Hessian documents, Joseph G. Rosengarten wrote a late nineteenth century magazine article accompanied by his disclaimer, more as a spoof than anything else. Nevertheless, it made certain points that he believed the curious reader of Hessian publications would find interesting. His major points were these: (1) Great Britain paid the Hessian state treasury and not the Elector himself; (2) soldiers sent money home regularly; (3) the sale of the troops was absurd because they went freely; and (4) Hessian subjects could not be enlisted without their will. See “A Defence of the Hessians,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (vol. xxiii, 1899), 156-83.

commodity was not revolting to the German mind at that time.”<sup>9</sup> Stephan Popp remarked in his journal, “Some of the soldiers were glad, and I was of the number, for I had long wanted to see something of the world.”<sup>10</sup> Johann Gottfried Seume was forced into the Hessian military after being declared a vagrant despite his university education and family background.<sup>11</sup> In order to fill the ranks, the princes often kidnapped university students, drunks, and vagrants. In sum, Germans most often had no choice in the matter of military servitude. However, some adventurous men like Popp, willingly boarded the ships for the difficult voyage to fight the “rebels.”

As the Germans arrived, they found a vast country populated by rebels and loyalists. An unknown author recorded the prevailing sentiments of the rebels as follows: “[T]hey [government of King George III] Degenerateing into an Arbitrary power Prevail’d with the King and Parliament to Declare that they had a Right not only to tax (*but to*) Bind us, in all cases . . . [we supposedly owe] them as an Obedient child ought *to its Parent*”<sup>12</sup> [emphasis in the original]. The custodial British army in Boston had been soundly defeated in 1775 at the battles of Concord and Lexington.

Although twenty percent of the American colonists were anglophiles to the core, these loyalists were not experienced military fighters, and most of them had not participated in militia exercises conducted by the minutemen in the New England colonies. Thus, the British army, although the army

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<sup>9</sup> Baurmeister, 12.

<sup>10</sup> Stephan Popp, “Popp’s Journal, 1777-1783,” ed. Joseph G. Rosengarten (reprint from the *Philadelphia Magazine of History and Biography*, 1902), 5. This is from the journal, including three well-drawn, intricate maps, of Stephan Popp, who was a member of the Bayreuth regiment, which came to America in 1777. He probably felt less adventurous when he went into winter quarters at Newport. He recorded on page 10 of his journal: “. . . [quartered] in old empty houses, very badly suited, and the food worse. . . .” Popp was made a lieutenant on the day his unit surrendered to the French and Americans at Yorktown.

<sup>11</sup> Lowie, 37.

<sup>12</sup> *A Brief Narrative of the Ravages of the British and Hessians at Princeton in 1776-1777*, Varnum Lansing Collins, ed. (1906, reprint, New York: New York Times and Arno Press, 1968), 24-26.

commanded respect for its global exploits, could not rely upon American loyalists to fill out their ranks. "The British could not get enough troops in Britain," according to Baurmeister.<sup>13</sup> Just as Great Britain's largest colony was split into factions, the mother country was also separated: those who believed the rebels should be defeated without delay and those who desired a negotiated resolution of the insurgency. The great Hessian Jäger commander, Johann Ewald, a man born to commoners, and later to rise to the rank of general, succinctly summed up the British predicament, "England did not have a sufficient army for the American War."<sup>14</sup> Some of the Germans wrote first-hand reports about their adventures. James L. Stokesbury claimed, "One thing they did was leave intriguing memoirs and letters behind them."<sup>15</sup>

"They reported not only the movements of troops, but also recorded observations on the landscape, towns . . . inhabitants and their way of life, and on animals and vegetation," noted Ernst Kipping.<sup>16</sup> The German writers told their stories. Sometimes their accounts differed from the recognized English and American authorities," observed Max von Eelking.<sup>17</sup> Bruce E. Burgoyne in his translation of Philipp Waldeck's diary had this to emphasize: ". . . unexploited source of information on life in colonial America,"<sup>18</sup> and Ralph S. Walker, as the editor of the diary of the German officer, Andreas Wiederhold, reported, "one of the liveliest surviving Hessian diaries . . . and one of the most

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<sup>13</sup> Baurmeister, 3.

<sup>14</sup> Ewald, xix. Ewald's famous motto was: "Honor is like an island, Steep and without a shore; They who once leave, Can never return." see Ewald, v.

<sup>15</sup> James L. Stokesbury, "Hessians in the American Revolution," *American History Illustrated* (vol. xi, no. 8, Dec. 1976), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Ernst Kipping, *The Hessian View of America 1776-1783*, trans. Bernard A. Uhlendorf (Monmouth Beach, N.J.: Philip Freneau Press, 1971), 5.

<sup>17</sup> Max von Eelking, *The German Allied Troops in the North American War of American Independence*, trans. and abridged by Joseph G. Rosengarten (1863, reprint, Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing, 1990), 9.

<sup>18</sup> Philipp Waldeck, *Eighteenth Century America: A Hessian Report on the People, the Land, the War as Noted in the Diary of Chaplain Philipp Waldeck (1776-1780)*, trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne (Bowie, Md.: Heritage Books, 2003), v.

interesting eyewitness accounts. . . .”<sup>19</sup> “They described in an unbiased manner what they did, what they saw, what they heard, and what they felt,” as reported in Baurmeister; therefore, “the narratives. . . have failed to receive the attention they deserve.”<sup>20</sup> Therefore, my purpose in this brief essay is to give some attention to these diaries, journals, and reports, using the primary and secondary sources (oftentimes the secondary sources quoted the primary ones).

First, I want to tell about German opinions of the “spirits of the times.” These industrious men earnestly recorded their observations about various components of the American way of life. They found many differences from their restricted servitude in the Old Country. I believe a good place to start is with their political perspective about the American Revolution. How did they contrast rebel insurgency with their own allegiance to the hereditary princes? As is apparent to the reader, 77 percent of the soldiers maintained loyalty, forsaking the opportunities to escape into America’s vast landscape, even after being exposed to the positive forces seen in the American lifestyle. These positives were expressed in and with respect to the following subjects: the American army, George Washington, Washington’s relationship with the Continental Congress, American army officers compared to the British officers, American and French forces, as prisoners of war, religious practices, American hospitality, American women, the abundant resources, and why Americans had to abandon their resources at critical times. Germans also expressed their views about American cities, specifically Charleston, Pennsylvania and its German and Quaker populations (Philadelphia and Lancaster), Virginia (Williamsburg and Fredericksburg), Long Island (New York City), and Annapolis. They discussed Indians, loyalists, slaves, hardships, and the defeats

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<sup>19</sup> Andreas Wiederhold, “Trenton . . . I Shall Never Forget,” excerpts from a Hessian Officer’s Diary, ed. Ralph S. Walker, *American History Illustrated* (1901, reprint, vol. xi, no. 8, Dec. 1976), 43.

<sup>20</sup> Baurmeister, vii-viii.

of their elite Jäger corps. Although this paper approaches the subject from a non-military perspective, some brief comments will be supplied with regard to the German commanders: Colonel Johann Gottlieb Rall defeated and killed by the Americans at Trenton, and Colonel Karl Aemilius Ulrich von Donop, defeated and mortally wounded at Redbank. Second, I will cover desertion by the Germans. Why did 23 percent desert? What were the sanctions for a German soldier caught deserting? Americans gave what inducements for enticing desertion? Finally, in conclusion, I will restate my thesis and explain the significance and implications of my thesis. And add information on the place in history occupied by the German auxiliaries.

### German Opinions about the "spirits of the times"

One spirit of the times was that the rebels were disloyal to their King George III, a German who also was the Elector of Hanover, and an area which sent a small contingent of soldiers over to America.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the rebellion went against their ingrained sense of loyalty at all costs, and the King of England was one of their own. Stokesbury explained the German mind-set, "The whole concept of rebellion was outlandish to the Germans. . . . The kind of independence in the American view was unthinkable [to the Germans]."<sup>22</sup> Rodney Atwood in his well-researched book on the Hessians quoted an "Old Soldier" who wrote in the *London Chronicle* in 1778. This soldier explained the difference between the German and American soldiers. He said, "The German soldiers were trained in a thousand trifling ways so their habit of obedience would allow them to be led into any battle." On the other hand, he depicted the

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<sup>21</sup> Joseph G. Rosengarten translated from a pamphlet published in Cassel in 1879. Although Rosengarten placed a disclaimer as to the authenticity of the pamphlet after his translation, the following excerpt on the American rebellion asserted, "The rebels turned against England and denounced it as a tyrant, although to it America owed Magna Carta and the Habeas Corpus Act," see Rosengarten, "A Defence of the Hessians," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (vol. xxiii, 1899), 176-77.

<sup>22</sup> Stokesbury, 7.

American soldiers as “fighting for everything that is dear to freedmen so there is no need of so rigid a subordination.”<sup>23</sup> According to Edward J. Lowell, Americans had to rely on their own steadfastness, because they were often without money, credit, and clothing; and they could not count on foreign assistance until they had proven themselves in combat.<sup>24</sup> Kipping noted a stark difference in attitude about the struggle for independence between German officers and common soldiers: the attitudes of common soldiers for the cause of liberty generally changed in favor of the rebels over the loyalists as the war progressed, but the officers remained firm in their defiance against the rebels.<sup>25</sup> Captain Johann Hinrichs of the Jägers said this, “the present [rebellion] . . . is by the elites. . . to throw off Royal government and establish their own tyranny.”<sup>26</sup> Of Hinrichs little is known, except that he called himself an engineer, was wounded several times (once severely in New York), was elevated to nobility upon returning to Germany, and advanced to the rank of lieutenant general by his death in 1834.<sup>27</sup> By the time of the surrender of the Germans to the Americans and French at Yorktown on October 19, 1781, this remark by one of the German officers after the surrender summed up his viewpoint of why the Americans won. The officer wrote, “We must give up this country . . . the spirit of the Americans remained unbroken.”<sup>28</sup> This spirit of the times was a spirit of freedom. American soldiers were different from their German

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<sup>23</sup> Atwood, 240.

<sup>24</sup> Edward J. Lowell, *The Hessians and the Other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain* (1884, reprint, Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1965), 116.

<sup>25</sup> Kipping, 32-33.

<sup>26</sup> Atwood quoting from Hinrichs’s letterbook. This quotation is found on page 160 in chapter 7, entitled “The Hessian view of the American Revolution,” from Atwood, 158-170.

<sup>27</sup> Johann Ewald, Johann Hinrichs, and Johann Christoph von Huyn, *The Siege of Charleston*, ed. and trans. Bernard A. Uhlendorf (1938, reprint, New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1968), 8. This book contains the eyewitness accounts of three German officers. Hinrichs considered desertion. “He wrote his brother-in-law in 1778 and said, in part, ‘Gratitude toward my master obliges me to stay [in the Jägers].’” This is found in Atwood, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Eelking, 232.



adversaries because they were fighting for the freedom of men as sanctified by some of the ancient philosophers. German common soldiers and some of their officers picked up on this freedom spirit. The next paragraph will begin their observations on important components of America—a populace seeking to be free and a land to be the home of the brave.

Major Carl Leopold Baurmeister writing to Monsieur le Baron de Junckheim on September 2, 1776, unkindly remarked about American troops, “Generals Washington and Putnam are praised by friend and foe alike, but all their mastery in war will be of no avail with a mob of conscripted, undisciplined troops.”<sup>29</sup> Baurmeister letters and journals cover the period from March 1776 to April 1784. Bernhard A. Unlendorf in his Preface to Baurmeister’s writings suggested that “Baurmeister knew much of what went on behind the lines, was a keen observer, and had a knack for telling what he saw and heard.”<sup>30</sup> Eelking quoted General Adam Ludwig Ochs about the battle of Brandywine in a similar vein, “Washington . . . was wrong in trying to put his raw troops forward to fight experienced soldiers on a footing of equality.”<sup>31</sup> Ochs was a subaltern at this time. What did he think Washington should do in defense of Philadelphia, the American capital? This is one indication of the arrogance of some German officers, and more blatant examples of this arrogance will spell disaster for the German battalions at Trenton (considered a “turning point” battle by many historians) and Redbank.

Lowell explained the condition of the American militia at the battle of White Plains, New York in 1776. “These militiamen were in great measure ill-armed and in rags, undisciplined, and commanded by officers who had but a few

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<sup>29</sup> Baurmeister, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., viii. Unlendorf wrote about Baurmeister, “Throughout his service in America he was a general staff officer, serving as first adjutant to all three Hessian commanders in chief, von Heister, von Knyphausen, and von Lossberg, and for some time . . . as aide-de-camp to Sir Henry Clinton.” Ibid., 24.

<sup>31</sup> Eelking, 113-14.

months before left the desk or the plough.”<sup>32</sup> Arguably, the greatest Hessian officer of all, Captain Johann Ewald, described the American army in triumph at Yorktown, “The men looked haggard and pallid and were poorly dressed. . . . Many stood quite proudly under arms without shoes and stockings. . . . filled me with awe for them. . . .”<sup>33</sup> So the picture of the American fighting man’s dress changed little from 1776 to 1781. However, Captain Ewald, a great warrior, stood in awe of the American victors. He appreciated their *élan*. He recognized that American pride was the difference. The Germans admired the American army because they witnessed constant improvement from the rebels’ pitiful beginning on Long Island. Atwood quoted Captain Wagner from a letter in the German archives as follows: “That no troops could possible behave better than the American have done . . . manoeuvred and engaged with a skill, steadiness and Ardor that would have done Honor to the best Veterans.”<sup>34</sup> This *esprit de corps* defeated a well-equipped British army, victorious in multiple theaters of war, and augmented and buttressed by experienced German soldiers. Baurmeister was not the only German officer who praised American officers.

After two years of war, Captain Ewald observed, “the Americans have trained a great many excellent officers who very often shame and excel our experienced officers. . . .”<sup>35</sup> Baurmeister complimented General Putnam, but Lieutenant Wiederhold insisted, “He may be an honorable man, but only the rebels would have made him a general.”<sup>36</sup> Another turning point battle was the astounding victory by the Americans at Saratoga on October 17, 1777. A

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<sup>32</sup> Lowell, 77-78.

<sup>33</sup> Ewald, 355.

<sup>34</sup> Atwood, 241-42.

<sup>35</sup> Ewald, 108.

<sup>36</sup> Eelking, 80-81 was quoting from the diary by Andreas Wiederhold. This first lieutenant was also present at Trenton. Is this another indication of military arrogance brought to America by certain German officers?

German officer in a letter home, reported by Lowell, painted a picture similar to Ewald's characterization at Yorktown almost four years later. The officer wrote, "But few of the officers in Gates's army wore uniforms, and those few wore them according to their own fancy. . . ." <sup>37</sup> This lack of uniforms is in stark contrast to defeated British General John Burgoyne's extensive wagon train, carrying ever personal amenity Burgoyne contemplated.

German officers as they came in contact with the Americans commented among themselves that even the American officers were not professionals. In Germany, an officer was an officer and nothing else. <sup>38</sup> Eelking quoted Henrich Anton von Heeringen; "Among the so-called Colonels and other officers, many were tailors, shoemakers, barbers and base mechanics. My men would not let them pass as officers." <sup>39</sup> Johann Philipp Franz Elisaus Waldeck was appointed chaplain of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Waldeck Regiment when the regiment formed in 1776. <sup>40</sup> Chaplain Waldeck writing in his diary on September 26, 1777 related comments by General Charles Lee, the captured American general who at one time had served in the British army. Chaplain Waldeck recorded, "Washington [according to Lee] need only move from one province to another until the English are exhausted." <sup>41</sup> Once the war moved into the southern colonies, Lee's opinion was borne out. Returning the focus to Yorktown, the British commanding General Lord Charles Cornwallis refused to personally surrender to Washington, so Washington appointed his second in command, General Benjamin Lincoln, to accept the surrender. Even though General Lincoln had previously surrendered his army at Charleston on May 12, 1780, Washington had not lost confidence in this man described "as a man of clear and strong

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<sup>37</sup> Lowell, 182-83.

<sup>38</sup> Stokesbury, 7.

<sup>39</sup> Eelking, 33.

<sup>40</sup> Waldeck, xi.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

mind. . . ."<sup>42</sup> I believe there are obvious differences between the Germans and the American officers and armies. For example, Americans were not concerned with how they looked in battle. They persisted against two strong, experienced armies trained on the battlefields of Europe. American officers as depicted in these eyewitness accounts appeared less arrogant than their opposing officers, and not so intent upon saving face as winning. The attention now turns to the esteemed Washington.

Johann Conrad Döhla was a private in the Fourth Company of the Bayreuth Regiment . . . and had already served his prince for eight years before he was sent to America in 1777 where he served for five and one-half years until 1783, noted Burgoyne in his Preface to Döhla's diary, published first in 1913.<sup>43</sup> On January 4, 1779 Döhla made a long entry about Washington in extremely flattering terms and a small portion of what he recorded was the following: "His entire bearing is very reserved and careful, not profuse in words, and more loving of loneliness than great sociability, in order to use the time for thought and speculation."<sup>44</sup> "General Washington is a courteous and distinguished man, but seems to be very polite and reserved, speaks little, and has a shrewd physiognomy," observed Wiederhold as reflected in his diary on December 28, 1776.<sup>45</sup> Eelking included these comments from what a Hessian officer wrote in his diary, "His countenance is not that of a great hero; his eyes have no fire, but a friendly smile when he speaks inspires love and affection. He is a courtly man of fine aspect, polished and somewhat restrained; says little, has a shrewd look, is of middle height and a good figure."<sup>46</sup> Baurmeister wrote on June 15,

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<sup>42</sup> Eelking, 184-85.

<sup>43</sup> Johann Conrad Döhla, *A Hessian Diary of the American Revolution*, ed. and trans. Bruce E. Burgoyne from the 1913 ed. by W. Baron von Waldenfels (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1990), x.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 105-06.

<sup>45</sup> Wiederhold, 44.

<sup>46</sup> Eelking, 79.

1782, "The members of Congress are afraid of this barbarian [Washington], who has succeeded in having only petty and insignificant men elected to Congress from the several provinces. And on October 5, 1783, "General Washington lives near Princeton, like a private individual. . . . His frequent presence near Princeton is lending some dignity and respect to the declining Congress."<sup>47</sup> Baurmeister was the only diarist noted above who made a negative comment about Washington, but he also said Washington lent dignity. Washington's deportment and reputation probably made the decisions of many Germans to desert an easier one. The Germans were aware of Washington's extreme prestige in America from watching him and studying his relationship with the Continental Congress.

Quoting Baurmeister again, "Congress, which fears him very much, knows neither how to meet his demands nor how to refuse them. Intercepted letters . . . prophesy that all American enterprises will come to a bad end as long as Congress makes the decisions, for they are always too late and never right."<sup>48</sup> Baurmeister was intrigued by Congressional happenings. Here are some additional observations by him: "has no power except paper money, ideas of liberty guided by every hand of Congress, plans of Congress meet with endless resistance, increasing discord among members, and difficulty in collecting any taxes."<sup>49</sup> Germans recognized how different Washington was from their princes. Ideas were exchanged in the Continental Congress, whereas their princes ruled absolutely based upon their heredity. This liberal, pluralistic country of such vastness coupled with the manner by which their leaders interacted with each other must have weighed favorably upon the senses of

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<sup>47</sup> Baurmeister, 507, 589.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 311, 393.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 140, 146, 150, 252, 335.

many of the German soldiers. The Germans saw a difference between American officers and their British counterparts.

Kipping quoted Colonel Ludwig von Wurmb, “When people who were shoemakers, tailors. . . become generals and members of Congress, they do not like to take up their old professions again. . . .”<sup>50</sup> Americans were fighting for their freedom, and Döhla remarked that these “rebellious subjects would refute all submissions of persuasion by the British for a negotiated settlement of the war.”<sup>51</sup> General Friedrich Henrich Wilhelm von Lossberg summed up the American spirit, “the bitterness of the rebels is too widespread. . . in regions where we are masters the rebellious spirit is still in them.”<sup>52</sup> The Germans found fault with British arrogance. For example, “Hinrichs charged the British with carelessness at the siege of Savannah; whether from deceit or neglect, they omitted to repair the works . . . .”<sup>53</sup> The British had hammered the Hessian officers about their devastating defeat at Trenton. Rall, the German commander there, showed that German officers too could be guilty of arrogance.

Major Friedrich von Dechow, an experienced officer, suggested to Colonel Rall that outworks be constructed as a precaution against surprise attack. Rall’s refusal was rude, “Let them come. What, outworks! We’ll meet them with the bayonet.” After Colonel Donop begged Rall to entrench himself, Rall’s overconfidence continued, “Now he was ready for them. . . hoped that Washington himself would come over, that he might be taken prisoner.” A loyalist of Trenton warned Rall, who had not ordered reconnaissance, of a pending attack on Christmas Eve, but Rall replied laughing, “Let them come,”

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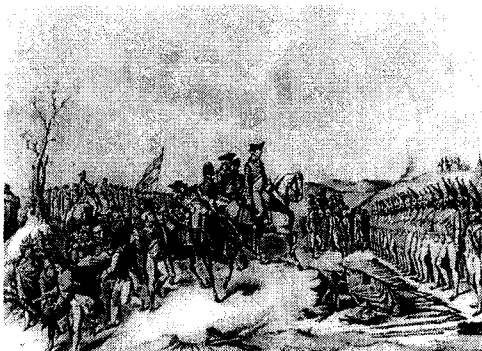
<sup>50</sup> Kipping, 34.

<sup>51</sup> Döhla, 91-92.

<sup>52</sup> Kipping quoted von Lossberg, 34.

<sup>53</sup> Atwood, 154.

but he sent out neither patrol nor a spy.<sup>54</sup> [two famous paintings of the Hessian surrender]<sup>55</sup>



Lowell quoted Washington's instructions to Major General John Sullivan, after Sullivan sent word to Washington about his soldiers' powder being wet, "to use the bayonet and penetrate into town, for the town must be taken, and I am resolved to take it."<sup>56</sup> Washington's command to use the bayonet was out of resolution, and he did not intend to abandon a well-planned and necessary attack. Whereas, Rall's offhand reference to the bayonet was spoken from a thought process characterized by arrogance and in disrespect of his enemy and their commander. Greene, the historian, called the surprise at Trenton a "fatal loss of prestige, a heavy blow."<sup>57</sup> Donop also suffered from a case of arrogance.

"The Jägers were greatly feared by the Americans because of their accurate fire and valor," wrote Uhlendorf.<sup>58</sup> Ewald's<sup>59</sup> tactics exemplified their

<sup>54</sup> Eelking, 61-65. According to Stokesbury, "Rall was careless, a heavy drinker, and above all contemptuous of his enemy," at 39. "On this side of the river there were no more than 300 rebels and they were roaming about in small troops. . . , Thomas Ryan Stephens quoted from a letter from Rall to Donop dated December 22, 1776, and found in his dissertation, "In Deepest Submission: The Hessian Mercenary Troops in the American Revolution," (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 1988), 88.

<sup>55</sup> British Battle.com, "The Battle of Trenton, 25<sup>th</sup> December 1776," <<http://www.britishbattles.com/battle-trenton.htm>> (26 April 2005), 4,7.

<sup>56</sup> Lowell, 93.

<sup>57</sup> Greene, 205.

<sup>58</sup> Baurmeister, 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> Eelking noted Ewald as "the original organizer of the Yäger corps, won a great reputation in the American War, became a nobleman, a Lieutenant General in command of Holstein [Denmark], and died in

methods: "... always to attack ... if the enemy is met at night, he must be attacked at once and followed by a bayonet charge, so that the leader of the advance can ascertain the strength of the enemy. ..."<sup>60</sup> The Jägers would be a complete match for the American riflemen," reported Atwood. Donop, commanded a Jäger battalion, and had distinguished himself in the battle on Long Island in 1776.<sup>61</sup> Eelking recorded these words of Donop, "We'll change the name from Fort Red Bank to Fort Donop," and he put himself, with his officers, sword in hand, at the head.<sup>62</sup> Were Rall and Donop both guilty of excess pride, precipitating their falls, and deaths at Trenton and Redbank, respectively. These two men were experienced battalion commanders. Ewald would not tolerate any disparaging remarks in his presence about either of these colonels. German soldiers undoubtedly noticed the differences in the attitudes of their patrician officers and the American officers--who came from all "walks of life." Since this is a non-military discussion of German attitudes and opinions about Americans, the German surrender at Yorktown will only be briefly commented upon.

German officers' arrogance persisted to the end, recorded Stokesbury, "many of them still considered Americans unworthy amateurs and were relieved to be able to surrender formally to the French rather than to farmers in uniform."<sup>63</sup> Popp wrote at Yorktown, "After depositing our arms, we marched back to our camps and had leave to go where we pleased. The French were very

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1813." See Eelking, 265-66. Tustin quoted from Ewald's son biography of his father, in part, as follows: Ewald was very intelligent; he comprehended quickly and had a good even excellent memory; but above all, he was a man of sound judgment," see Ewald, xxiv.

<sup>60</sup> Eelking quoted from Ewald's diary, 202. "Ewald's detachment often consisted of mounted and unmounted jägers, British or Scottish infantry, and sometime dragoons. Ewald himself was usually mounted," Tustin about Ewald in Ewald, xxi.

<sup>61</sup> Atwood, 59,65.

<sup>62</sup> Eelking, 118.

<sup>63</sup> Stokesbury, 42.



friendly and the Americans too.”<sup>64</sup> Ewald reported in admiration for the victorious Americans, “With what soldiers in the world could one do what was done by these men. . . . But from this one can perceive what an enthusiasm--which these poor fellows call ‘Liberty’—can do!”<sup>65</sup> Döhla was at Trenton also. He told of the surrender, “During the afternoon of 19 October [1781] . . . all the troops . . . marched out of our lines and the camp. Brigadier General O’Hara led us out and surrendered us.”<sup>66</sup> Germans were taken prisoners in large numbers at Yorktown, and they waited to accept their fate at the hands of the rebels. “The prisoners,” wrote Döhla, “looked with wonder on the great force of the enemy [at Yorktown] . . . and they saw the weakness of their own force. . . .”<sup>67</sup>

The prisoners received varied receptions from the American citizens. Eelking told about what Corporal Reuber wrote in his diary, “The old woman cried out that we ought to be hanged for coming to America to rob them of their freedom; others brought us bread and wine.” Wiederhold diarized, “It was surely a great thing to enjoy so much friendship, yes, love, I may say, from people whose enemies we were . . . .”<sup>68</sup> The prisoners possessed good hard cash.<sup>69</sup> Döhla reported that everything was available but expensive.<sup>70</sup> Possession of hard cash also helped the Germans when prisoner exchanges were consummated.<sup>71</sup> In late December 1782 Döhla prayed, “Our New Year’s

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<sup>64</sup> Popp, 23.

<sup>65</sup> Ewald, 341.

<sup>66</sup> Döhla, 174.

<sup>67</sup> Eelking, 213.

<sup>68</sup> Lowell quoted Wiederhold, 103-04.

<sup>69</sup> The merchandise arrived in ships. Baurmeister reported, “There are some forty Dutch merchantmen there, nine ships from Ostend . . . [he saw seventy-nine ships in the harbor]. All European merchandise finds a ready sale for hard cash . . . .” See page 577.

<sup>70</sup> Wiederhold quoted an American officer about the scarcity of commodities and the high prices. Wiederhold recorded, “All is now dear and there is nothing to be had; a yard of linen costs 8 shillings Virginia money, which is something more than 2 florins and would cost in Hesse no more than 8 *albus* . . . .” See page 46.

<sup>71</sup> George Washington wrote a letter on February 26, 1782 to Baron Wilhelm von Knyphausen, a German lieutenant general. Washington recommended, “As an Officer will be sent out by Sir Henry Clinton with Money for the prisoners . . . I would recommend it to your Excellency [Knyphausen] to direct the

wish is this: Almighty God, bring peace soon and send us all an early release and freedom from this captivity.”<sup>72</sup> The Germans enjoyed the hospitality offered by the loyalists.

Captain Hinrichs, who philosophized, described how a German could differentiate a loyalist from a rebel, “The safe rule. . . is to find out whether he profits more in his private interests, his mode of life, his way of doing things, etc., when he is on our side or on that of the enemy.”<sup>73</sup> Captain Ewald could not fathom why loyalists refused to take up arms against the rebels. Ewald’s judgment was particularly telling, “We are supposed to break our bones for you, in place of yours, to accomplish your purpose. We attempt everything, and sacrifice our own blood for your assumed cause.”<sup>74</sup> Ewald called the fight an “assumed cause.” Actually, most loyalists were not warlike, and they saw the British and German soldiers come and go as the years passed by. The loyalists worried about whether their allies could stand and defeat the rebels.<sup>75</sup> Naturally, loyalists feared for their own skins. On December 4, 1778, Döhla noted that two loyalists were hung, one had pointed out a crossing over the Schuylkill River, and the other had reviewed for the British the passes of travelers to Philadelphia.<sup>76</sup> The rebels had their way of discovering loyalists as related by Johann Heinrich Bartholomey, a soldier in Ewald’s company. After he had deserted to the Americans, Bartholomey wrote, “. . . six men went to the houses pretending to be Hessians and asked questions about Washington’s army. . . . If these people seemed to be glad to see us. . . soon the entire

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Gentleman who will be appointed by you to come at the same time.” See George Washington, “George Washington to Baron von Knyphausen, February 26, 1782, Passport,” *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799*, < <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/>> (2 February 2005).

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 190, 82-83, 213.

<sup>73</sup> Johann Ewald, Johann Hinrichs, and Johann Christoph von Huyn, *The Siege of Charleston*, ed. and trans. Bernard A. Uhlendorf (1938, reprint, New York: Arno Press and New York Times, 1968), 323.

<sup>74</sup> Stephens quoted Ewald, 192-93.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Döhla, 93.

detachment entered and took possession of the plantation.”<sup>77</sup> Germans discussed American hospitality.

Chaplain Waldeck on January 19, 1778 expounded about the Americans’ love of tea drinking and music: “I have been in a variety of tea-drinking situations.”<sup>78</sup> “No nation in the world loves music more than the Americans, but no nation in the world loves it with less taste than this one,”<sup>79</sup> observed Waldeck while he attended horse races on May 10, 1778. Baroness Riedesel came over with her husband, General Friedrich Adolf Riedesel, with their three small daughters in tow. The entire family had been captured by November 1778. The three little girls were hungry. An American rebel woman, truly scornful, still gave sufficient food to the children.<sup>80</sup> As late as 1782 Quartermaster Bockewitz described the good times enjoyed at a gentleman’s house (the gentleman sold hay to the regiment), “. . . and the gentleman’s house became a favourite visiting point . . . because he had such good Madeira wine, partly but more especially because he had such lovely ladies as daughters.”<sup>81</sup> A peace celebration was held on April 23, 1783. Döhla told how all the officers of the captive regiments were invited to this dance of joy and celebration of peace.<sup>82</sup>

Many Germans were Lutherans. Since America was mostly protestant, the Germans were not typically excluded on religious grounds. Freedom of religion was appreciated by Döhla and he asserted, “All religions are tolerated here, and everyone can and may speak and serve God without hindrance

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<sup>77</sup> Michael Bartholomew, “Johann Heinrich Bartholomey-Hessian and American Jager,” *Schwalm Historical Association*, 1999 <<http://www.captainselinscompany.org/bart.htm>> (02 February 2005), 4-5.

<sup>78</sup> Waldeck, 58-59.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>80</sup> Lowell quoted Baroness Riedesel, 187-90, 194.

<sup>81</sup> Atwood quoted Bockewitz, 236-37.

<sup>82</sup> Döhla, 220.

according to his propensity, judgment, and style."<sup>83</sup> Chaplain Waldeck preached in a German Lutheran church. With regard to the Americans, Waldeck admitted, "The people pleased me very much and I remained until ten o'clock in the evening."<sup>84</sup> Bockewitz was only one of several German diarists who elaborated upon the beautiful qualities of American women. American women played decisive roles in the war of independence.

Stokesbury summarized German attitudes, and his conclusion must be surprising to many of his readers, for he stated, "The Germans thought New England girls were better looking than Southern ones, but believed Southern women to be more industrious. . . ."<sup>85</sup> Starting in the northern colonies and moving southward, Döhla, our common soldier of sound literary talent, supported Stokesbury's conclusion and thought, "The women [of Staten Island] also do little work . . . pass the time walking, riding . . . wearing curls and French styles daily . . ."<sup>86</sup> A German officer captured with Baroness Riedesel, was quoted liberally by Lowell, and although the officer gave a positive assessment, he ended his critique with this, "It seems that all over America the men are entirely subject to the women. The women are extravagant."<sup>87</sup> When he first arrived in New York City, Chaplain Waldeck needed a place to sleep. He praised a kind woman, "She gave me her own bed . . . and slept on the floor with her husband."<sup>88</sup> Chaplain Waldeck in his journey through Pennsylvania praised the women for excellent child rearing. He observed that these women taught their children industriousness. Waldeck was amazed about how the women joined together inside a single building and trained the boys and girls in

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>84</sup> Waldeck, 57.

<sup>85</sup> Stokesbury, 7.

<sup>86</sup> Döhla, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Lowell, 185-86.

<sup>88</sup> Waldeck, 19.

numerous skills.<sup>89</sup> Lieutenant Wiederhold reluctantly left Fredericksburg, Virginia in March 1778. Wiederhold described a female acquaintance, "She was a good American, well-disposed, beautiful, and rich."<sup>90</sup> This German's definition of a good American woman must have been a common one among his compatriots. Döhla's opinion (July 13, 1781) trumpeted Wiederhold's definition, "The Virginia females showed great affection for the Germans. All the women [of Charleston] take great pride with their dress and appearance and spare no cost in obtaining the newest fashions from Europe."<sup>91</sup> All in all the Germans painted a favorable portrait of American women. As lovers of farms and vegetable gardens, the Germans were duly impressed by the abundant resources of America.

Waldeck was respectful of America's resources and expressed his belief that some Americans took their plenitude for granted. He felt this way, "They do not know how to treasure the blessings their land has above all others . . . ."<sup>92</sup> Waldeck recognized the farming situation in Pennsylvania, and he wrote on August 20, 1778 the following entry: "Anyone who settles in Pennsylvania and wants to work, receives a good return for his effort, and soon a surplus."<sup>93</sup> Baurmeister agreed with Waldeck, "This region [around Philadelphia] can justly be called most charming and fertile."<sup>94</sup> Lowell quoted a German officer about the land surrounding New York City, "for the worst man here, if he will only do something, can live like the richest at home."<sup>95</sup> The evidence was overwhelming that this way a land where a man could make his

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 77-78.

<sup>90</sup> Wiederhold, 48.

<sup>91</sup> Döhla, 155, 126.

<sup>92</sup> Waldeck, 61.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>94</sup> Baurmeister, 162.

<sup>95</sup> Lowell, 222.

way.<sup>96</sup> Döhla told of the inhabitants of Yorktown fleeing their homes when the British and German army arrived.<sup>97</sup> The war was devastating to the personal lives of Americans and to their homes and farms. Baurmeister observed, "It is likely, however, that this vexatious war will terminate by making America probably the most desolate country in the world. . . ."<sup>98</sup> The Germans appreciated American cities and towns almost as much as the farmlands.

About Long Island, Baurmeister declared, "The houses are beautiful and are furnished in better taste than any we are accustomed to in Germany." Looking at Annapolis through field glasses, Baurmeister "saw the streets, a large church, and other new, beautiful buildings. . . ."<sup>99</sup> Döhla found the Quakers in Philadelphia interesting and prosperous. He noted the beautiful market building in the middle of the city, and from there the "twelve main streets and gates, which are extraordinarily splendid."<sup>100</sup> Wiederhold was in Philadelphia on May 8, 1778. He called the city a gathering place of all religions and nations, and in no way inferior to Sodom and Gomorrah in the exercise of all vices.<sup>101</sup> Baurmeister wrote about many kinds of temptations which lured some of the common soldiers and made them break their oaths of allegiance to their princes.<sup>102</sup> Stephens quoted directly from Captain Ewald's diary. Ewald stated, "The inhabitants [of Philadelphia] are mostly Germans, but were against us, the most ill-natured people in the world, who could hardly

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<sup>96</sup> Stokesbury, 41.

<sup>97</sup> Döhla, 167.

<sup>98</sup> Baurmeister, 281.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 45, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Döhla, 66. Döhla had taught school in Ansbach-Bayreuth. Baurmeister wrote this: "Philadelphia is rather a lovely city of considerable size and is laid out with parallel streets. The public squares are beautiful. Classical architecture . . . are met with only in the churches and in a few public buildings. . . ." See page 117.

<sup>101</sup> Wiederhold, 48. Wiederhold reported, "This place [Philadelphia] is big and beautiful and lies on the right bank of the Delaware River. . . ." See page 44.

<sup>102</sup> Baurmeister, 185.

conceal their anger and hostile sentiments.”<sup>103</sup> Squarely, this city was not the “City of Brotherly Love” at this juncture. The British and Germans had already plundered New York and the Jerseys. Wiederhold wrote complementarily about Lancaster, “. . . is a big, beautiful city, mostly inhabited by Germans.” He certainly favored Lancaster over Philadelphia.<sup>104</sup> German soldiers acknowledged the large populations of Americans in the major cities who had immigrated from the Old Country.<sup>105</sup> German prisoners were marched hither and yon, so they saw a lot of the countryside and cities. Wiederhold called Fredericksburg, “the most beautiful of any American city at this time.”<sup>106</sup> Each German writer used the word “beautiful” in describing a city. Captain Ewald mostly wrote about military matters only.<sup>107</sup> He noted that Williamsburg was the capital of Virginia and “lies between the Archer’s Hope and Queen creeks, and is surrounded by hills between the sources of these two creeks.”<sup>108</sup> “Their houses [of the native Virginians] stand open to all travelers and anyone who shuns this custom of the land is treated with contempt,” claimed Döhla.<sup>109</sup> Captain Hinrichs wondered if the “race of people opposing us in the southern parts made up of timid peasants and ignorant commanders?”<sup>110</sup> He soon found out the medal that American commanders were made of after American generals Marquis de Lafayette and Nathaniel Greene used guerilla tactics after the American defeats at Savannah and Charleston in 1780 to the crowning

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<sup>103</sup> Stephens, 130.

<sup>104</sup> Wiederhold, 44.

<sup>105</sup> Popp pointed out, “Reached Fredericksburg,--where we found a good many Germans settled. . . .” On page 24 of his journal.

<sup>106</sup> Wiederhold, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Lowell on page 271 quoted from Eelking on Captain Ewald’s encounter with General Benedict Arnold on December 10, 1780. Ewald reproached the general for not reinforcing his detachment. Arnold answered Ewald by saying he thought the position was lost. Ewald said to Arnold, “So long as one chasseur [a Jäger] lives no-----American shall come over the dyke.”

<sup>108</sup> Ewald, 313.

<sup>109</sup> Döhla, 197.

<sup>110</sup> Ewald, Hinrichs, and von Huyn, 305.

American victory at Yorktown in 1781. Captain Ewald remarked on Charleston: "The city looks like a beautiful village and consists of about eight hundred houses. Most of the buildings are of wood and are small; but near the rivers one sees beautiful buildings of brick, behind which there are usually very fine gardens."<sup>111</sup> Germans also referenced their observations about Indians and slaves.

These American inhabitants represented to the Germans the class struggles. In their principalities the common soldiers were near the bottom rung on the totem pole. In America they observed how the poor whites, the people of the "lesser sort," were much higher in society than people of color. Captain Hinrichs believed the Indians in Georgia (mainly Cherokees) were almost useless in the field, but he reckoned why the King "attempts to have some of them in his pay is to have all Indians as his friends. . . ."<sup>112</sup> Indians handled their liquor poorly. Chaplain Waldeck observed, "And in their drunkenness they revert to the savagery of their wild nature, and are capable of the most terrible acts, limited only by opportunity."<sup>113</sup> Waldeck by August 1779 was in Florida among the Creeks. A chief told him that the Indians could not go hunting because they were fighting for the king across the great water.<sup>114</sup> Wiederhold recorded in his diary on the cruelty of slavery. "They [males and females from twelve to sixteen years of age] work naked in this way in rain, frost, and heat; and sleep nights on the cold ground. We treat cattle better."<sup>115</sup> British and German officers tried to use the Indians and slaves in their fight against the Americans. The bottom rungs on the society totem pole occupied by Indians and slaves created environments which inculcated them with inner

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 157-59.

<sup>113</sup> Waldeck, 33.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 127.

<sup>115</sup> Wiederhold, 46.



bitterness for the rebels. The terrible treatment of Indians and slaves handed out by Americans did not worry the Germans enough to prevent the numerous desertions of their rank-in-file.

### Desertion

The significant rates of desertion were induced by a synthesis of several reasons. Large contingents of Germans were already here by 1776, and as the war progressed over eight long years these immigrants became more accepting of their countrymen. About five thousand German soldiers deserted at great personal risk—desertion was the greatest crime a German soldier committed. Stokesbury claimed that the princes would not be paid for deserters.<sup>116</sup> Therefore, the princes set severe sanctions. A fortunate deserter upon capture was “made to run the gauntlet two days in succession, and twelve times each day [he usually died in this punishment].”<sup>117</sup> German deserters when caught were usually executed.<sup>118</sup> But temptations were offered by the fruitful farms and the ease with which a German was made an American citizen.<sup>119</sup> Some Germans had escaped from prisons to settle in the country and could not be induced to return to their homeland.<sup>120</sup> Some deserted to join the American army.<sup>121</sup> According to Joseph P. Tustin, who translated Ewald’s extensive diary, after the battle of Saratoga, Congress had offered the Hessians inducements to desert and promised them safety on the western frontier.<sup>122</sup> Döhla insisted that all of the captives had permission from Congress to “swear allegiance.”<sup>123</sup> In sum, “Little of this was lost on the Germans, land-hungry,

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<sup>116</sup> Stokesbury, 6.

<sup>117</sup> Greene, 194.

<sup>118</sup> Bartholomew, 4.

<sup>119</sup> Rosengarten, 170.

<sup>120</sup> Baurmeister, 8.

<sup>121</sup> Stokesbury, 41.

<sup>122</sup> Ewald, xx.

<sup>123</sup> Döhla, 211.

loving farms and gardens, with relatively little to go home to," contended Stokesbury.<sup>124</sup> Their thoughts, feelings, and actions caused many Germans to adopt America as their new country.

Professor Martin opined that he did not see why all the Germans did not desert considering their indentured servitude. Some class members supplied good reasons as follows: desired to maintain unit cohesion, loyalties to their officers, and did not want to shame their family. German princes smartly named each regiment or battalion after the commanding officer. If a leader was killed, the battalion or regiment was renamed. Many Germans had wives and children at home. Officers (as Captain Hinrichs expressed) felt obligated to their codes of allegiance to their princes and had chosen soldiering as their profession. Many officers were of nobility. The social stature at home was grand. Others like Captains Ewald and Hinrichs were elevated to nobility because of their combat successes. In the final analysis, the scales of pleasure tipped toward staying for almost a fourth of the Germans who fought in America.

### Conclusion

And Popp expressed his sentiments thusly, "The author begs his reader to excuse his bad spelling, and to preserve his little book, for it gave him *pleasure* [emphasis mine] to recall his campaign in America."<sup>125</sup> The Germans as a whole realized the Americans were a different breed of men than they had ever encountered. Rebels had a spirit of independence. Rebels had a kind of self-government. Rebels were not at the bottom of their society. The Germans found much that they liked in the people, places, and things American. Stokesbury summed it up, "The memoirs . . . move intriguingly from contempt,

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<sup>124</sup> Stokesbury, 41.

<sup>125</sup> Popp, 29.

to wonder, to faint glimmerings of understanding, and eventually to something like grudging admiration."<sup>126</sup> The scales of pleasure were part of a larger set of scales which weighed all the evidence of German thoughts, feelings, and actions. The scales were tipped by a preponderance of the evidence in favor of desertion for many German auxiliaries. The German manuscripts, especially, and the British archives, surprisingly, contain accurate data on the departures from and arrivals to the principalities of the German soldiers. Were most of the men who deserted young and single men? What percentage of men deserted from each principality? A statistical analysis of many German soldiers might recast general opinions held with respect to the German participation in America's war of independence. Greene lamented, "Men whose names might have stood high in the annals of war, if they had fought for their country, are known in history as fighters for hire."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Stokesbury, 7.

<sup>127</sup> Greene, 211.

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