

The Road to Valley Forge: How Washington Built the Army That Won the Revolution. By John Buchanan. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2004. ISBN 0-471-44156-2. Maps. Illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. xvi, 368. \$30.00.

John Buchanan tells a familiar story, told again and again for more than two centuries, the story of how George Washington and the Continental Army survived humiliating defeat in their attempt to defend New York City in 1776, revived their fortunes and hopes for the Revolution in small but stunning victories at Trenton and Princeton, weathered a setback at Brandywine and another at Germantown, and battered but still intact in late 1777 made winter camp in a miserable mudhole known as Valley Forge. Buchanan's version emphasizes how Washington "developed [his army] from a rabble into the makings of a professional force" (p. xi), implying that previous historians have missed this vital point. Along the way, he does not hesitate to glance ahead in his tale, reminding the reader how, for example, the later, unhappy careers of Charles Lee and Horatio Gates should cast doubt on their role and reputations in this early period of the war. His readiness to incorporate eventual outcomes into what purports to be a story of cause and effect did not inspire confidence in this reader, nor did the author's taste for musty stylistic devices, warning us that the later role of Friedrich Steuben "awaits its place in the narrative" (p. 33), or apostrophizing Washington—"No, General, you made an unwise decision that night, and you were lucky to get away with it" (p. 229).

But he tells the old story with a straightforward vigor, relying on well-known published sources and the most recent published editions of the papers of Washington, Greene, and Hamilton, as well as the invaluable compilation from British archives by K. G. Davies. He cites modern authorities when he agrees with their judgments, and usually parks them in an endnote when he does not. Old as the tale may be, he sweeps the reader along, deftly incorporating large chunks of primary evidence into the narrative, and sketching a full picture of what the enemy was doing and thinking. Unsurprisingly, there are no startling new revelations. The author is not uncritical of Washington, but as he moves from the high point of Trenton-Princeton to the failures at Brandywine and Germantown in 1777 he relies more on repeated assertion than on evidence to make the case that both Washington and his army were steadily improving. Repeating the well-established legend that Friedrich Steuben completed decisively at Valley Forge the great work begun by Washington, he does not argue his case from the evidence, but instead attacks the recent, excellent book by Wayne Bodle, *Valley Forge Winter: Civilians and Soldiers in War* (University Park, Pa.: Penn State University Press, 2002), who heretically suggests that the later performance of the army at the battle of Monmouth hardly proves the profound and lasting influence of Steuben's training. Why Buchanan chose to attack Bodle, who offers far more evidence for the positive results of Steuben's work than does Buchanan himself, is a mystery.

In the first paragraph of his preface, Buchanan draws a line between

those who are concerned with the impact of war on society and his own book, whose focus is not on the politicians who make revolutions or the civilians who suffer through them, but on “the soldiers who win them” (p. xi). Fair enough, except that the soldiers of this army were not far removed from the civilians whose war they fought. The author’s drawing of the line between two kinds of military history invites us to compare his book to another work, published in the same year: David Hackett Fischer’s *Washington’s Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), whose 379 pages of text closely parallel the first 224 pages of *The Road to Valley Forge*, down to the end of the winter-spring campaign of 1777 in New Jersey. Fischer has dug more deeply in the record than has Buchanan, and while well known as a social historian, writes the history of war, including military operations, with an intelligence and insight that approaches brilliance. Buchanan gives a valuable few pages to the post-Princeton partisan warfare that raged in New Jersey, after Washington’s move to Morristown, but Fischer devotes a chapter to it, where the energy shown by the militia, whose lethargy and cowardice had previously triggered Washington’s notorious temper, becomes more understandable. Buchanan offers no good reason, except the encouraging effect of Washington’s recent success, for the impressive performance of militia as partisans after the main army’s withdrawal to Morristown. But Fischer, who has drawn no line between “soldiers” who fight and win victories, and the civilians from whose midst these soldiers emerge, sees the interesting question of why militiamen fought aggressively through the winter and spring, and he tries to answer it. Certainly they were heartened by recent victories that had led to the British pullout from all but one small corner of New Jersey, but they were also freed by the agricultural cycle. Rather than hunt game during the cold months, Jersey militia could ambush and harass the hated Hessian *Jägers*, British light infantry, and Tory irregulars who had so recently made life miserable, and whose own acute supply problems during that winter made their small foraging parties tempting targets. As Fischer points out, Washington did not initiate this partisan warfare, but he quickly sent officers to aid and direct it—while still complaining about the indiscipline of the militia.

Buchanan seems at a loss to explain why something comparable did not happen in the following year in the Philadelphia region. With what was left of Washington’s army hunkered down at Valley Forge after twice failing to protect the Revolution’s capital from British occupation, it was the enemy who won the partisan war around Philadelphia, intimidating rebel-supporters and protecting farmers who wanted to sell their produce to the enemy for hard cash. And the enemy seems to have won the intelligence war as well. Buchanan ignores all this, and spends his final pages dwelling instead on the famous hardships of Valley Forge and the importance of Steuben while defending Washington from his critics, contemporary and modern. Making sense of this sharp contrast between New Jersey in 1777 and Pennsylvania in 1778 would require a historian with more interest in crossing the putative line between the military and civil-political.

Moreover, Buchanan virtually ignores the profound effects of the American victory at Saratoga, except as an occasion for unwarranted criticism of Washington's leadership. That the performance of American soldiers under another commander might cast doubt on the thesis that Washington "built" the army into an effective fighting force goes unmentioned. A close reading of Buchanan's own book suggests an alternative thesis, well captured in the words of a perceptive officer, quoted by Buchanan from a letter written by Colonel William Douglas to his wife in the dark days of December 1776: "I hope the Country will not be Discouraged, at our making some mis-steps at first, we are new but Shall be old in time as well as they" (p. 147). In my judgment, Colonel Douglas of the 6th Connecticut had it just right; with experience, American soldiers, whether Continental or militia, acquired the skills required for Revolutionary warfare. Like later Presidents claiming credit for economic progress, Washington played an important but essentially limited role. With time and seeing combat, "new" American soldiers and unit commanders learned on their own how best to fight and survive, becoming "old" and effective, like their better-trained enemies.

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The Soldiers' Revolution: Pennsylvanians in Arms and the Forging of Early American Identity. By Gregory T. Knouff. University Park: Penn State University Press, 2004. ISBN 0-271-02335-X. Illustration. Notes. Index. Pp. xxiv, 312. \$45.00.

Focusing heavily on race and gender, Gregory T. Knouff takes a highly critical look at the formation of American national identity. By assessing how average soldiers experienced the Revolutionary War, Knouff concludes that these men created a "localist white male nation" before, during, and after the war" (p. xiii). He further suggests that the memory of the war allowed vestiges of this identity to persist until today, much to the detriment of those excluded from it. In fact, "these ideologies were precisely responsible for many problems in the new nation" (p. 286). Knouff selected Pennsylvania for this study because of its rich ethnic and religious diversity and because it contained urban, settled, and frontier regions.

Two different, yet associated, themes run throughout *The Soldiers' Revolution*. According to Knouff, a strong sense of localism united many Americans, whether they served in the militia or the Continental army. As British forces threatened the southeastern part of the state in late 1776 and then again in summer 1777, Pennsylvanians enlisted to protect their homes and communities. As the British threat receded, so did participation rates. A similar, but more consistent phenomenon occurred on the frontier as Loyalists and Native Americans raided the area throughout the war. In both regions men responded to appeals to masculinity by enlisting. This ties into Knouff's