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WASHINGTON AND STEUBEN

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IN 1776, when the United States of America declared their independence from the old world, the American stock was already of mixed blood. A study of the muster-roll of Washington's revolutionary army reveals a surprisingly large number of non-English foreigners in the America of colonial times.

The Germans contributed their full share to the success of the American Revolution and their services to the cause of American Independence have been detailed on many occasions. By 1750, a zone of almost continuous German settlements had been established on the American frontier extending from the head of the Mohawk River in New York to Savannah, Georgia. In Pennsylvania, the mecca and distributing center for the German immigration of the colonial period, this element constituted one third of the total population.

German sectarians, like the Mennonites, Dunkards, and Quakers had religious scruples against active participation in war, and although these religious convictions had been a matter of common knowledge for years, many a little German congregation had difficulty with its patriotic neighbors during the course of the war. Some sectarians, like the Moravians of North Carolina, paid triple taxes in lieu of military service. Others furnished food supplies, or did hospital or relief work, and the pious Germans of Bethlehem,—"Christian Socialists"—were the Good Samaritans for Washington's ragged, hard-pressed army during the terrible winter at Valley Forge. Their colony was overrun by sick and wounded American soldiers, and one building intended for two hundred and fifty beds, had a thousand packed into it.

German Lutherans and members of the Reformed church,—the "Church People" as contrasted with the sectarians—of course had no scruples against warfare, and these elements took a lively part in the war for independence. On May 22, 1776, the Continental Congress recruited a wholly German regiment in Maryland and Pennsylvania. Its colonel was first Nicholas Haussegger and then Ludwig Weltner. Hundreds of German names appear on the muster-roll of Pennsylvania regiments. Armand's Legion, a corps of

dragoons authorized in 1776, was recruited by Baron von Ottendorff, a Saxon who had served in the Seven Years' War under Frederick the Great. Washington's bodyguard contained recruits from Pennsylvania German counties, and was commanded by a former cavalry lieutenant of Prussia. In the Mohawk Valley in New York it was the German farmer militia under Nicholas Herkheimer who turned back the forces of Colonel St. Leger in the battle of Oriskany and thus contributed decisively to the failure of General Burgoyne's campaign of 1777—a campaign which was a turning point of the Revolution, and led directly to the French Alliance, by which the Revolution became a world war.

The patriarch of the Lutheran Church in America was Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg. His son, Peter, born in America, but educated in theology at Halle, became a brigadier-general in the Revolutionary Army. Christopher Ludwig, a veteran of Prussian wars, was superintendent of bakers and director of baking for the Revolutionary Army. Gerhard Wieden, of Hanover, became a brigadier-general and played a conspicuous role in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. Heinrich Emmanuel Lutterloh of Brunswick, in the closing years of the war, was quartermaster-general of the Continental Army.

When the Revolution ended, over 12,000 so-called "Hessians," Germans who had been hired to fight under the British flag, remained in America, and they and their descendants were rapidly assimilated into the American population. Upon their arrival in the United States, many of the German mercenaries had had nothing but contempt for their American opponents. "These frightful people deserve pity rather than fear," wrote the Hessian Colonel von Heeringen, after the battle of Long Island. "Among the prisoners are many so-called colonels, lieutenant-colonels, majors, and other officers, who, however, are nothing but mechanics, tailors, shoemakers, wig-makers, barbers, etc....Every man has a common gun, such as citizens of Hesse march out with at Whitsuntide...." It was not long however before the Hessians were impressed with the comfort and relative plenty enjoyed by the ordinary people of America, and American propaganda, designed to detach them from the British cause met with marked success. Carefully prepared propaganda was translated into German, and put inside packages of tobacco intended for the German soldiers. Every man who would

desert to the American colors was promised fifty acres of land, and eight hundred acres of woodland, four oxen, one bull, two cows and four sows were offered as rewards for the captain who would bring forty men with him into the Continental lines. Hessian prisoners of war were taken into the German settlements of the Shenandoah Valley, to Frederick, Maryland, and to the German counties of Pennsylvania, where they were well received by these Americans who spoke their mother tongue. At the close of the war, thousands became respected citizens of the nation whose independence they had opposed on the battle field.

A number of foreign officers came to America to offer their courage, skill and experience in the War for American Independence. Lafayette, ardent young Frenchman who hailed the revolution as the harbinger of a better day, placed himself under Washington's command, as the symbol of the Franco-American Alliance. Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Pole, served as an Army artillery officer, and the gallant Count Casimir Pulaski, fell at the siege of Savannah. The Chevalier du Portail served as an officer of engineers, and John Kalb, son of a Franconian peasant born in Huttendorf, but known in the United States as Baron de Kalb, came to America in 1777, with Lafayette. He fought with reckless courage in the Southern campaigns, and died of the eleven wounds he received at the Battle of Camden. Perhaps the services of the German Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben were less romantic and less spectacular, but they involved the all-important task of making an army out of an undisciplined rabble.

Baron von Steuben came from a military family. In 1744, he had participated in the siege of Prague, as a volunteer; thirteen years later he was wounded in the second battle of Prague. He participated in the famous battle of Rossbach also. Why he left the service of Prussia and of Baden after such a distinguished record, is still a matter of controversy. In 1777, von Steuben was in Paris, for an interview with Count St. Germain and Beaumarchais and as a result of this conference he was introduced to Benjamin Franklin. It is quite clear that the French government was eager to send this competent soldier of fortune, who was temporarily out of employment, to America. Franklin offered von Steuben two thousand acres of land in America, but could offer no other financial inducements. Von Steuben returned to Germany; the French and Franklin

increased the offer, and in 1777, provided with letters of introduction from Franklin to Washington, Samuel Adams, Robert Morris, and Henry Laurens, the president of Congress, von Steuben embarked for America, to seek honor and fame in the American Revolution, and if possible, to establish his fortune. He had not been a general in Baden, probably nothing higher than a major or colonel, but the Continental Congress soon gave him a major-general's commission. He arrived in the United States in December, 1777, after a very stormy passage, and at the age of forty-seven, cast in his lot with Washington's army.

On July 4, 1779, von Steuben described his American reception in a letter to Geheimrat von Frank, in Hechingen. He had landed on December 1, 1777, at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, accompanied by a secretary, a servant and a cook,—with the guns of the fortress and the ships in the harbor booming a salute to the former officer of Frederick the Great's army. Three days later von Steuben reached Boston, where he was cordially received by John Hancock. Five weeks passed before the necessary arrangements for the journey to Pennsylvania were completed. Carriages, sleighs and horses were procured for the Baron; five negroes were assigned to him as drivers and grooms; an agent was commissioned to provide quarters and provisions for his party; and von Steuben himself engaged two English servants "as field equipage" for him and his officers. On January 14, von Steuben reached York, Pennsylvania, where the Continental Congress was in session, and offered his services as a volunteer to the revolutionary cause. On the way from York to Valley Forge, where Washigton's army lay encamped, von Steuben was entertained at a subscription ball by the Pennsylvania Germans at Lancaster.

Von Steuben was a sober, practical, matter-of-fact soldier, who came to America to contribute his talents for whatever reward he might eventually be able to get. There was none of the romance of the ardent, young Lafayette about him. And yet, the spirit of young America quickly entered his soul, and after seven months in the United States, he wrote home to a German friend,—. . . . *Welch ein schönes, welch ein glückliches Land ist dieses! Ohne Könige, ohne Hohepriester, ohne aussaugende General Pächter, und ohne müssige Baronen. Hier ist jedermann glücklich. Armut ist ein unbekanntes Ubel. . . .*" And in the same letter he added,—

Courtesy of United States George Washington Bicentennial Commission
GENERAL VON STEUBEN

"Wir sind hier in einer Republik, und der Hr. Baron gilt nicht Heller mer, als Mstr. Jakob oder Mstr. Peter und hierzu können sich die (deutschen und) französischen Nasen schwerlich gewöhnen...."

The real service of von Steuben to the American Revolution and General Washington's deep appreciation for his talents, can be understood only if one remembers the conditions that prevailed in the revolutionary army during the early years of the war for independence.

When Washington journeyed to Boston in 1775 to take command of the army that had been hastily assembled after Lexington and Concord, he encountered conditions which would certainly have hopelessly discouraged an ordinary man. What he found was an armed mob, torn by local jealousies, commanded by civilian officers many of whom were dissatisfied, incompetent, and jealous of each other. There was no efficient direction of the commissary department, and barracks, hospitals or any of the other prime necessities for field operations were entirely lacking. The military chest of the revolting colonists was practically empty; the troops were without uniforms, and the powder supply woefully near to exhaustion. The army was infested with swarms of colonels and war profiteers, and General Montgomery described the New England soldiers as "every man a general and not one of them a soldier." Von Steuben, in 1784, in a letter to Knox, referred to the United States in these early years of the Revolution as "a country where Caesar and Hannibal would have lost their reputation, and where every farmer is a general, but where nobody wishes to be a soldier." Washington alternately prayed and cursed for better times. "Such a dearth of public spirit, and want of virtue," he complained, "such stock-jobbing, and fertility in all the low arts to obtain advantages of one kind or another,—I never saw before, and pray God I may never be a witness to again—Such a dirty, mercenary spirit prevades the whole that I should not be at all surprised at any disaster that may happen."

Washington's problems were by no means over when the British evacuated Boston. In spite of many patriotic accounts to the contrary, the Revolutionary Army was raised and maintained in a period of rather widespread apathy toward the progress of the war. At least a third of the American population were active or passive loyalists, and it has been asserted that probably more Americans fought in British regiments during the Revolution than in the Continental Army of Washington. If the population supporting the war be put at 1,400,000 the United States of 1776 might have

yielded a total fighting strength of 400,000. As a matter of fact, the American army never exceeded 90,000, not even on paper and including all the undisciplined militia. The actual field forces never reached 30,000 and the total effectives fluctuated from 5,000 to 20,000. In February, 1778, out of an army of 17,000, only 5,012 were capable for service. The American army that marched from the Hudson River to Yorktown for the final great battle of the war, numbered 2,000, and Yorktown was won, largely by a foreign, (French) army and navy. Desertions were so numerous that on January 31, 1777, General Washington wrote "we shall be obliged to detach one half the army to bring back the other." Enlistments, especially in the early years of the war, were for short terms only, usually from three to six months, and Washington's operations were seriously handicapped in numerous campaigns because of the fluctuation in the size of his army. It should be added, however, that not the force actually under arms constituted the American military strength, but the potential power of the farmers and planters and frontiersmen of the continent who could be rallied in special crises.

The militia was a particular source of worry, and Congress, full of the democratic spirit of the Declaration of Independence, always financially embarassed, and fearful of a military dictatorship, refused to create an adequate standing army and only in most pressing emergencies granted the commander-in-chief sufficient authority to enable him to carry out policies without a constant reference to Congress. Democracy was the passion of the day, and was carried to curious extremes. Provincial officers were generally elected to their commissions, and in Washington's own words, were "nearly of the same kidney with the Privates." Even John Adams, in a sudden *flair* for democratic procedure said, "I will vote upon the general principle of a republic for a new election of General Officers annually." General Knox, Washington's chief of artillery, complained that the militia "get sick, or think themselves so, and run home; and wherever they go, they spread a panic," and the commander-in-chief concluded that "to place any dependence upon militia is assuredly resting on a broken staff." To his nephew, Washington confided, "Great bodies of militia (are) in pay that never were in camp," and "immense quantities of provisions (are) drawn by men that never rendered....one hour's service."

Discipline, it goes without saying, was difficult to maintain under these conditions, but General Washington, stern and rigid disciplinarian that he was, struggled courageously with the problem, by introducing punishments for which he was severely criticised. One captain was found shaving a private on the parade ground. At Bunker Hill, another ordered his men to march into battle, promising to "overtake them directly," and then did not reappear until the next day. Nathanael Greene insisted that "We want nothing but good officers to constitute as good an army as ever marched into the field. Our men are much better than the officers." Eighteen generals abandoned the service, one for drunkeness, another to avoid arrest for taking double pay, and the rest mainly for petty personal reasons. A lieutenant was dismissed for sleeping and eating with privates, and for buying a pair of shoes from a soldier. Cases of insubordination, gambling and drunkeness were frequent, and many privates were absent without leave to work on their farms. Order after order was necessary to induce the men to shave and to pay some attention to their personal appearance—a matter which the commander-in-chief constantly stressed. An American staff officer described the army of 1776 as "a receptacle for ragmuffins." Bounties sometimes reaching $750 to $1000 were offered for recruits and led to the new evil of bounty-jumping. When men left for home, they usually took their arms and blankets with them. In desperation, Washington introduced lashing and running the gauntlet, as a means of dealing with cases of desertion, stealing, insubordination, cowardice and other offences.

In the early years of the war, the army often suffered most from the absence, or total collapse of the quartermaster's and commissary departments. Because Congress had tried to democratize these departments, responsibility was centered nowhere. There were no engineers to build roads and bridges, and no good maps. Surgeons and nurses were lacking in every campaign, and epidemics of small-pox ravaged the army. In one Southern campaign, hundreds marched naked except for breech cloths, and two days before Christmas, 1777, Washington reported to Congress that nearly 3,000 men were "barefoot and otherwise naked." Powder and lead was not available on time, and the muzzle-loading flintlocks proved very inadequate weapons, especially because men frequently had to mould their own bullets, since there was no uniform

standard rifle. For weeks, the army was without vegetables, salt and vinegar, and the lack of soap contributed to the spread of disease.

In December, 1777, Washington led his army into winter quarters at Valley Forge, among the hills about twenty miles from Philadelphia. The British spent the winter in plenty and in revelry in Philadelphia. The English historian, Trevelyan, has remarked that the camp at Valley Forge "bids fair to be the most celebrated in the world's history." The suffering and privation of the army in the winter of 1777-1778 makes the story of Valley Forge the most gripping chapter in the history of the war. It was Washington alone who held the army together in that critical year; he was the government and the Revolution!

The men lay in huts or wigwams made of boughs, and were often forced to sit up all night by the blazing camp fires, to keep warm, for no blankets were available. Two days before Christmas, there was not an animal in camp which could be slaughtered for food, and the supply of flour had been reduced to 25 barrels. For food, many resorted to "fire cake," a dirty, soggy dough, warmed over smoky fires, and washed down by polluted water. The commissary department had broken down. Washington reported that "hogsheads of shoes, stockings, and clothing were lying at different places on the roads....perishing for want of teams," or teamsters. Men without shoes moved about the camp, reddening the snow by their bleeding feet. Horses died by the hundreds, and men had to be hitched to the wagons. Washington warned Congress that "this army must inevitably....starve, dissolve or disperse." During the winter, as a matter of fact, over 2,300 deserters entered Philadelphia to receive the royal pardon, or to join the British forces. As one officer expressed it,—"the love of freedom....is controlled by hunger, the keenest of necessities." The British general in Philadelphia had gold to exchange for supplies. Washington had only worthless paper. Consequently, no amount of legislation, and not even Washington's threat to hang the profiteers, could stop the practice of American farmers selling to the British, while their own army starved at Valley Forge. Thousands of people in the middle colonies hastened to make their peace with the mother country during this dreary winter.

In this darkest hour of the American Revolution, von Steuben

arrived at Washington's winter quarters at Valley Forge. General Washington came several miles to meet the distinguished foreigner, and accompanied von Steuben to his quarters, where he found an officer with twenty-five men as a guard of honor. Although at first he could talk with von Steuben only through interpreters like Hamilton and Laurens who knew French, General Washington quickly recognized the skill and experience of this veteran of Frederick the Great's army. On the day of his arrival, von Steuben's name was given as the watchword of the camp. The following day, the Continental Army was mustered, and passed in review before the commander-in-chief and his foreign guest. What the shattered and demoralized army needed was a drillmaster and organizer and Washington promptly recommended von Steuben's appointment as Inspector-general of the Continental forces. He began his duties immediately, although it was not until April 27, 1778, that Congress issued the necessary commission. According to von Steuben's own statement, his pay was fixed at approximately $3300; horses were placed at his disposal and a personal guard consisting of a captain, two lieutenants and forty dragoons were provided to attend the newly appointed major-general.

Many of von Steuben's fellow-officers resented the encroachments of this foreigner upon their authority over their own brigades, and Washington frequently had to restore peace between them and the irascible Prussian. Von Steuben was eager to serve at the front, as an officer of the line, but in spite of his numerous requests, Washington insisted on utilizing his talents for the development of his army of ragmuffins at Valley Forge into a drilled and disciplined military force.

Von Steuben wrote, "I have seen a regiment consisting of thirty men and a company of one corporal." Quartermasters collected commissions on all their expenditures, and names once on the muster-roll remained there, because they furnished the basis for calculating pay and provisions. Bayonets before von Steuben came, were valued as utensils on which to toast beef-steaks over the camp fire, but hardly as weapons of warfare. Guns were rusty, and no account was kept of equipment. Arms and clothing were usually carried home at the completion of the brief terms of enlistment. "Every one would command his own regiment, tho' he could have no more than 40 men under arms," von Steuben wrote to the War

Board from Valley Forge. "Each colonel exercised his own regiment according to his own ideas, or to those of any military author that might have fallen into his hands. . . .the march and the manoeuvering-step, was as varied as the color of our uniforms."

Von Steuben brought order out of the prevailing chaos. He drilled the men with meticulous care, and introduced a rigid system of accounts. It was not easy to introduce a Prussian system of subordination into an army, "where," as von Steuben wrote in 1782, "a few days previously a captain had chosen his colonel, and a sergeant nominated his captain." Under von Steuben's orders, careful inventories were made of all military equipment, and such a rigid system of accounts was introduced that at the end of the first year of his activities, the number of guns lost had been reduced from many thousands to eight, and even some of these were accounted for. With justifiable pride, von Steuben wrote to General Knox in 1784,—"I am satisfied with having saved the country, since the establishment of the inspector-generalship, at least $600,000 in arms and accoutrements alone."

Washington and Congress approved the system of military discipline von Steuben outlined with German thoroughness in his voluminous reports on the duties of the Inspector-general, and von Steuben's "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States," did service, not only during the Revolution, but for many years after von Steuben's death, it was used as the basis of the American system of military tactics. Von Steuben wrote out every chapter first in German; then he translated it into bad French. His friend, Fleury put it into good French, and then it passed through two other hands before it appeared in its finished English form. The Prussian code of discipline and military organization, wisely modified to fit the American psychology and American frontier conditions, was the basis of *Steuben's Regulations*. Von Steuben also prepared a plan for an American military academy, in whose curriculum he would include natural and experimental philosophy, eloquence and *belles lettres*, civil and international law, history and geography, mathematics, civil architecture, drawing, French, horsemanship, fencing, dancing and music.

At the close of the war, von Steuben was with General Greene in the campaigns in the Carolinas and Virginia, and at Yorktown, where he was the only American officer who had ever participated

in siege operations, he had the honor of receiving Lord Cornwallis' letter requesting an armistice and terms of surrender. Von Steuben had many controversies with the authorities of Virginia and with Congress, with Lafayette and with other officers, and Washington sometimes referred to the "warmth of his temper," but it is significant that the last letter written by the commander-in-chief, before his retirement from the army, was addressed to Baron von Steuben in appreciation of the latter's invaluable services as drill-master and inspector-general of the American army. And the Baron graciously replied,—"If my endeavors have succeeded, I owe it to your Excellency's protection."

After the war, von Steuben became one of the founders of The Society of the Cincinnati, an organization of Revolutionary officers to which Washington, Lafayette, De Grasse and others belonged. Von Steuben also was appointed a regent of New York University and served as president of the German society of New York for the protection of newly-arrived immigrants. That the Baron, like General Washington and other conservative leaders, was greatly disturbed by the financial confusion and apparent collapse of governmental authority after the war, is clearly shown by a letter von Steuben wrote to a friend in 1783,—"A money without gold or silver, military schools where they teach the Presbyterian catechism, arsenals filled with the Word of God, and even the hereditary sin of Congress, an empty purse, are things to make the gloomiest pedagogue laugh. But what will the world say if this great independent empire, which has supported a war for eight years against Great Britain, cannot support itself during one year of peace?"

When von Steuben resigned his commission to Congress on March 24, 1784, he got a resolution of thanks, and a promise of a gold hilted sword, which he did not receive until three years later. What he needed was money, for his personal finances were in a chronic state of disorder. At Yorktown, when every major American officer entertained the captive British officers of Cornwallis' army von Steuben tried to sell his horse to raise the necessary funds. After the war, the Baron bombarded Congress with his requests for the well-merited pay for his valuable services. He was completely dependent on his former comrades for financial aid, and in 1784, he wrote bitterly to Knox,—"My friends in America have an opportunity to commit another (folly), namely,

to erect a monument to my memory. The inscription will be found all ready on the tomb of the celebrated poet who died of hunger in England." In 1788, he actually considered establishing a German colony in that part of Western America which still belonged to Spain, and he asked the Spanish government to grant him 250,000 acres on the Mississippi River.

In his appeals to the United States Government, the Baron had the entire support of Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and other influential leaders. Nevertheless, when Vice-president Adams extolled von Steuben's contributions to the success of the Revolution in an address to the United States Senate, one of the ardent democratic Senators from Pennsylvania, (Maclay) recorded in his diary,—"Childish man to tell us this, when many of our sharpest conflicts and most bloody engagements had terminated fortunately before even we heard of the baron." President Washington, continued to press von Steuben's claims and interpreted his demands virtually as a contract between von Steuben and the preceding government. Washington's *Diary* indicates that the Baron was several times entertained at President Washington's home along with the most distinguished company of guests which on one occasion included Frederick Augustus Mühlenberg, first Speaker of the United States House of Representatives. Washington on several occasions presented von Steuben with tickets for the theatre. Early in his administration he sought his advice about the organization of the national defense forces. Moreover, when Washington entered upon his duties as first president of the United States, Baron von Steuben was apparently one of those who participated in the discussion of the momentous question of the proper etiquette to be observed in the presidential office. John Adams advised "splendor and majesty" to support "dignity and authority." But von Steuben wrote more facetiously, in a letter to his friend, General North,—"Our politicians are busi in setling the Etiquette of the New Court ....My opinion as an old Courtier has been asked. I begun by abolishing all nut cracking after the desert....As to the Queen's Levee, I shall say nothing. I wish it could be very late in the evening, and without candlelight."

Republics, as a matter of fact, have probably been no more ungrateful than capricious monarchs, although they may have been slower in manifesting their appreciation. Eventually, Congress

passed an act which President Washington signed on June 4, 1790, giving von Steuben an annual pension of $2500 for life. Virginia gave him 15,000 acres of her western land, Pennsylvania, 2000 acres, New Jersey, a loyalist estate which von Steuben refused to accept, and New York 16,000 acres near Lake Ontario, in a tract of land that once belonged to the Oneida Indians. It must be remembered that land was the cheapest thing the states had at their disposal.

On the New York tract, near the present town of Remsen, the Baron spent his last years, after the fashion of a country squire eager to develop his huge estate. He kept a regular journal of his activities on the farm, and made his entries as regularly as though they were his official reports in the service. Among his friends, he numbered the best families of New York, like the Schuylers, and the Van Rensselaers of Albany. Each autumn, von Steuben returned to New York City to spend the winter months among his old acquaintances. His relatives in Europe applied to him so often for money and assistance, that he finally gave up all correspondence with his family, and ignored them altogether in his will. Von Steuben died on his farm, on November 28, 1794, and was buried two days later—without military salute, funeral oration, or any public honors, but with the respect and affection of the thirty neighbors who had gathered at the farm to pay tribute to their fellow townsman.

In September, 1931, a memorial, consisting of a fifty acre plot which contained the five acre grove where the Revolutionary General is buried, and lying within the 16,000 acres granted to the veteran by the state legislature, was dedicated by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Governor of New York, and the German Ambassador to the United States, F. W. von Prittwitz and Gaffron. Both seized this opportunity to emphasize again the distinguished services of the drillmaster of the Revolutionary Army, the great contribution of the German element to American progress, and the warm friendship that exists today between the people of the United States and the people of Germany.