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The Clothing Situation in the American Revolutionary Army

Richard G. Leonard

Loyola University Chicago

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THE CLOTHING SITUATION IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY ARMY

BY

RICHARD G. LEONARD, S.J.

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Richard G. Leonard, S.J. was born in Elmhurst, Long Island, March 5, 1923.

He was graduated from Xavier High School, New York, June, 1940, and entered the Society of Jesus at St. Andrew-on-Hudson, Poughkeepsie, New York in August, 1940.

In the same year he enrolled at Fordham University, Bronx, New York, in the Department of Arts, but transferred to Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois in 1944 when he registered in the West Baden College of that University, at West Baden Springs, Indiana.

The Bachelor of Arts degree was conferred by Loyola University, June, 1945.
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CHAPTER I

A GENERAL PICTURE OF THE CLOTHING SITUATION

Soldiers shivered not only at Valley Forge. Cold and want dogged the courageous colonials from their straggling ranks on Lexington Green to their orderly files at Yorktown. Reports, letters to Congress, circulars to the States, entreaties to his generals found throughout some twenty-five volumes of Washington's published letters, prove that clothing was an important factor in the conduct of the War for Independence.

That General Washington should have given this matter so much time and consideration, that it should have caused him so much anxiety and distress, that this constant and dire want of his army was such as to imperil even the very outcome of the conflict itself is sufficient justification for its study. Hence, a consideration of the clothing situation during the Revolution, the administration, and the reasons for the shortage will not be without value.

On the fifteenth of June, 1775 George Washington was unanimously elected general of the continental forces for


3. Ibid., III, 325.

Some such uniform would undoubtedly have been of value. But though Washington wrote to the Rhode Island and Connecticut governments, and even sent a hunting shirt as a pattern, and asked to be informed as to the number he might expect of this "Species of Uniform both cheap and convenient," the plan failed. On Sept. 21, 1775 Washington noted that the great scarcity of tow cloth would probably result in the failure of this plan, especially since Governor Cooke of Rhode Island and Governor Trumbull of Connecticut gave him very little encouragement. Thus, the army remained in its nondescript state with but few of its companies uniformed. Its officers, according to the Orders of July 14 and 23 were distinguished by various colored cockades, sergeants and corporals by stripes on the right shoulder, generals and a.d.c.s. by ribbons across the breast.

Along with his plan for hunting shirts, General Washington also recommended that the officers provide Indian boots or leggings for their men instead of stockings "as they are not only warmer, and wear longer, but contribute to uniformity in dress." The same day Washington wrote a long letter to

5. Writings, III, 387.  
6. Ibid., III, 422.  
7. Ibid., III, 387.  
8. Ibid., III, 511-512.  
9. Ibid., III, 339 and 357.  
10. Ibid., III, 404.
Congress. He informed them that the approach of winter made the clothing situation one of the most important considerations. The ever deferential leader is apologetic about bothering Congress. "My situation," he says in support of his request, "is inexpressibly distressing to see the Winter fast approaching upon a naked Army, the Time of their Service within a few weeks of expiring, and no provision yet made for such important events."

This request must have had some effect, for a month later the General Orders declare that since Congress have been at so much pains to clothe the army, the clothing will be reserved "for those brave Soldiers, who are determined to stand forth in defence of their Country another year." They add:

That every non Commissioned officer and Soldier may know upon what Terms it is he engages, he is hereby inform'd - That he is to be paid by the Kalender Month, at the present Rates; to wit.- Forty eight Shillings to the Serjeants, Forty-four to the Corporals, Drums and Fifes, and forty to the Privates.... That he is to pay for his Cloathing, which will be laid in for him, upon the best terms it can be bought; to do which a Stoppage of Ten Shillings a month will be made, until the Cloathing is paid for.

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11. Ibid., III, 509-512.
12. Ibid., IV, 56-58.
13. Ibid., IV, 57-58.
A further stimulus for the procurement of uniforms was given by the General Orders for Oct. 28, wherein the soldiers were encouraged to lay out their money for clothing. "Congress will lay in Goods...and will sell them to the Soldiers without any profit, by which means, a Uniform Coat...will come cheaper to them; than any other Cloathing of the like kind." On Nov. 4, 1775 Congress resolved that the clothing provided for the soldiers should be paid for by a stoppage of 1 2/3 dollars per month out of their wages, "Ten Shillings a Month." Resolutions so not, however, put clothes on men's backs, and the day before Christmas Washington was forced to admit that "we cannot get Cloathing for half of our Troops."

Early in the new year (1776) Major General Richard Montgomery was the recipient of a request from his commander-in-chief to supply the troops with stores from Quebec. Montgomery was informed that "the Wants of the Army...are not few, and if they cannot in some part be supplied by you, I do not know where else I can apply." Reports indicated that he would soon take Quebec, reputed to be a depot for all kinds of military

16. Writings, IV, 85.
17. Ibid., IV, 179.
18. Ibid., IV, 231.
stores. Major General Philip Schuyler also received a request 19
for "such clothing as you are able to spare," and within two
weeks Schuyler had sent some 1700 pounds (york currency) worth
of clothing which came "very seasonably as they (the troops) 20
are in great want."

These supplies must have temporarily alleviated
the clothing insufficiency, for it is not until June 19 that
we again find this subject occupying the attention of Congress.
The States were recommended to "cause a suit of cloaths...a
blanket, a felt hat, two shirts, two pair of hose, and two pair
of shoes, to be manufactured...for each soldier of the American 21
Army...." Moreover, since some of the soldiers had been sell-
ing the clothes with which they had been supplied, Congress
also found it necessary to consider passing a resolution inval-
idating any such sales.

In July of this year Washington returned to the
subject of hunting shirts. He informed his men that he was un-
willing to recommend, much less order, any kind of uniform since
he was aware of the difficulty and expense entailed. However,

19. Ibid., IV, 253.
20. Ibid., IV, 291.
22. Writings, IV, 102.
23. Ibid., V, 165.
as it was absolutely necessary that the men "appear decent and tight" he again encouraged the use of hunting shirts with long breeches made of the same cloth. He explained:

No Dress can be had cheaper, nor more conveneint, as the wearer may be cool in warm weather, and warm in cool weather by putting on under Cloaths which will not change the outward dress, Winter or Summer-Besides which it is a dress justly supposed to carry no small terror to the enemy, who 24 think every such person a complete Marksman.

Here again Washington must have been dis-appointed, for Colonel Wayne wrote to Dr. Franklin at the end of July that the men were "still Destitute of almost every necessary fit for a soldier, shoes, stockings, shirts and coats are articles not easily done without - yet they cannot be ob-tained." Washington himself admitted to Congress that although the army was in want of almost every necessity and he had order-ed the commanding officers to get such clothing as was absolute-ly necessary, "I do not know how they are to be got." The arrival of the Massachusetts and Connecticut militias made the situation even more critical for the army which was already in sufficiently great distress, and faced moreover with the prospect

24. Ibid., V, 335-336.
26. Writings, VI, 118.
of increased suffering as the weather became more severe. They were sent to join Washington's forces without "a necessary of any kind", nor could the general himself see how it would be possible to support them.

The clothing shortage was not at this time accompanied by a parallel food shortage, for we learn that while the army was "unprovided with all kinds of Woollens", still it was "well supplied with provisions." Washington hoped that if the enemy remained inactive for the months of October and November "they will not attempt to pass the Lakes till early in the Spring, by which time perhaps we may be able to recruit our Army, tho' I have my fears that the Business will not go on with the ease and expedition I could wish." He affirmed that he had done all in his power and urged Congress to give the soldiers a suit of clothes annually as well as raise the officers pay. Congress finally decided to add a suit of clothes to the former pay of privates but only after a long debate, and on Nov. 10, 1776 the General Orders contained the following terms according to which men might be recruited:

27. Ibid., VI, 86.
28. Ibid., VI, 236.
29. Ibid., VI, 193.
30. Ibid., loc. cit.
31. Ibid., VI, 156 for table of officers pay.
32. Ibid., VI, 271.
Twenty Dollars Bounty
A Suit of Cloaths
One hundred acres of land.
The same pay and Rations as are now given-
The service to continue during the present Contest with Great Britain.33

This was considered ample encouragement to induce "every true lover of his Country, to engage in its defence; to preserve it from the Horrors of Slavery, and the desolation of a cruel and barbarous enemy."

Capture by the British does not seem to have bettered the lot of continental soldiers. Washington deplored "the miserable State of our prisoners in New York, for want of Cloaths and Necessaries." But deeply though he felt the distress of the troops, Washington asks "what can I do?" This was no gesture of despair, for we again find the harassed commander addressing Congress on this his favorite theme:

The Cloathing of the Troops is a matter of infinite importance, and if it could be accomplished would have a happy effect, many of 'em being entirely naked and most so thinly clad as to be unfit for service.37

Congress was asked to write to the agents and contractors in

33. Ibid., VI, 263.
34. Ibid., loc. cit.
35. Ibid., VI, 308.
36. Ibid., VI, 309.
37. Ibid., VI, 381.
order that every possible supply might be forwarded "with the utmost expedition." This concern was evidenced not only for the men already in the service but also for those who might enlist. Robert Morris is addressed in this manner: "...for godsake hurry Mr. Mease with the Cloathing as nothing will contribute more to facilitate the recruiting Service than warm and comfortable clothing to those who engage." Judging by the emphasis he puts on clothing as an inducement to recruits, Washington would sooner go into battle unarmed than try to recruit a soldier without promising him a suit of clothes.

1777 strikes the same note as 1776 - no clothes and no place to get them. Major General Philip Schuyler's request for some blankets is regretfully refused because "we are not half covered ourselves, nor do I see where to get them." A circular letter written to the New England States at this time urges them to levy and equip the number of battalions allotted to them by Congress, and to "spare no pains to make a collection of all things necessary for their Equipment...such as spare Shoes, Stockings and Shirts; the want of which has been the ruin of the Old Army." By February Washington had

38. Ibid., VI, 420.
39. Ibid., VII, 69.
40. Ibid., VII, 60.
resigned himself to conducting the winter's campaign with a variously uniformed army. When asked by an officer for advice on making up a supply of cloth, the General told him that he had better have all his cloth made up "and delivered out promiscuously, as the Men of different Regiments want it."

Since previous efforts to put an end to soldiers selling their clothes had proved ineffectual, Congress passed a resolution "to abolish so pernicious a practice" by asking the legislatures of the States to provide by law a fine of ten dollars for every such offense. Throughout the war the selling or stealing of clothes was dealt with very severely, and these practices undoubtedly contributed in some measure to the almost continual complaints registered on the subject. For instance, James Bartley, a soldier, was court martialed for stealing and selling a skirt, found guilty and sentenced to receive 100 lashes. Similarly, Ensign Thomas Shanks of the Tenth Pennsylvania Regiment was discharged from the service for stealing two pairs of shoes from the regimental quartermaster.

There were times when want of clothing, ostensibly

41. Ibid., VII, 157.
44. Writings, IX, 360.
or otherwise, gave officers excuses for not marching their troops. Major General William Heath was informed on April 5th that this excuse would not be accepted because Washington had seen accounts from the agents for purchasing and providing clothes in Massachusetts which indicated that there was enough on hand to clothe Heath's quota of men. "I am convinced" he asserted, "that officers, unwilling to leave their quarters, will make every excuse to prolong the time of staying with their families and Friends...." As we shall see later on, considering the inefficiency which crippled the supply system, Heath might well have been telling the truth. For there was many a slip twixt the purchase and the provision of articles of clothing.

Another problem which occupied Washington's mind at this time was that of clothing the drafts, "the consideration of...(which) brings on many difficulties." He saw no point in clothing men who would be at liberty to leave the service the very next day provided they could find others to take their places. Yet he did think that they should be compensated "in some degree proportioned to their service." He makes the further observation that if clothes are not given, men might

45. Ibid., VII, 359.
46. Ibid., VII, 456.
be induced to enlist in order to obtain them; if they are given "it might in some measure prevent it, or their exertions...to 47 get others to fill their places...." In a word, he was of the opinion that whatever course was pursued the men should be required to return the clothes before being permitted to depart, if they left before their term of enlistment was up. As the total strength of the army at this time was about 8,100 men, five divisions of two brigades each, each brigade containing four or five regiments, it is clear that any expedient which 48 might increase enlistment was worthy of consideration.

The month of June found "universal complaints" dinning the General's ears. James Mease was informed that unless something could be done "many of the troops will be obliged to quit the Field, for some of them are already so naked that they cannot do duty." Washington asked that particular and immediate attention be given the supply of shoes since some Corps were reported to be almost entirely incapable of duty for want of them. Another indication of the scarcity of clothing is found in the General Orders for July 15 in which the commanding officers of the corps are ordered to make returns of the

47. Ibid., VII, 457.
48. Ibid., VIII, 99.
49. Ibid., VIII, 278.
50. Ibid., VII, 292.
clothing "most wanted" in their respective corps, "and as the quantity...to be distributed is not great, the Commander-in-Chief most earnestly desires that officers will make returns of no more than is indispensably necessary for their men.

Another stirring proof of the insufficiency just mentioned is furnished by the following pathetic letter written by Israel Angell to the Governor of Rhode Island on Aug. 27, 1777:

...I did indeed expect when I came from Home to find my men poorly Habitted nor was I disappointed their Dress even exceeded for badness what I had imagined to myself.

Not one half of them cannot be termed fit for duty or any immersency; Of those, who of them went with me on a late expedition to King's bridge many were bare foot, in consequence of which its probable they won't be fit for duty again for many week 5 of them were deserted to ye enemy....In fine Ye Regiment is scandalous in its appearance in ye view of everyone - and has because of this incurred from surrounding regiments from ye inhabitants of towns thro which they have lately passed, ye disagreeable and provoking epithets of the Ragged Lousey Naked Regiment.- Such treatment is...dispiriting...: it does effectually unman ye Man and render them almost useless in ye Army....

Conditions such as these finally caused Congress to recommend

51. Ibid., VIII, 413.
52. E. Field, ed., Diary of Israel Angell, Preston & Rounds Co., Providence, 1899, XI & XII.
earnestly that the States exert their utmost endeavors to procure, in addition to the allowance of clothing made by Congress, "supplies of blankets, shoes, stockings, shirts, and other clothing for the comfortable subsistence of the officers and soldiers of their respective battalions." Notwithstanding Congress' apparent acquaintance with the facts, Washington found it necessary to remonstrate that reflections had been cast on the army when in reality the "wonder will be, how they keep the field at all, in Tents, at this Season of the Year." As a matter of fact, some were not able "to keep the field." For a New York Colonel wrote to Governor George Clinton informing him that he had been left behind when the regiment marched from Goshen "with 273 Men including officers which are chiefly bare-footed, in Deed, almost Naked... a Considerable Part of my Detachment... are Rotten With the Itch; If I Could only Get Shoes for the Men I Could March on."

The same month that Governor Clinton received this disheartening information Washington wrote to Governor Thomas Johnson of Maryland asking for aid, assuring him that

53. Journals, IX, 969.
54. Writings, X, 76.
it "can never be furnished with more propriety, than at the present juncture." Lt. Col. Adams of Maryland had been sent with instructions to purchase all he possibly could from the inhabitants. The Governor's indulgence is requested since "These requisitions are not the result of Choice but of painful necessity" and there is "hope that we may be able to obtain some signal, if not some decisive advantage over the Enemy, by a Winter's campaign" if the troops can be properly provided for. The Clothier General was also requested to exert himself to the utmost "to procure such articles of Clothing as are of our own produce, and to have agents ready to purchase all that is imported." Mease was also asked to go to Yorktown and press Congress to call on the States to collect clothing, because "unless some mode of this sort is adopted, or they have a certainty of Clothing from abroad, ...it will be impossible for the Army to exist." Poverty was universal, and the Board of War was told very frankly that the difficulties would continue until the men could be given their yearly allowance all at once. If this is done, says Washington, there is hope that "They will ...take more care of what they get as they will know that anything further will certainly be deducted from their pay." The

56. Writings, X, 14.
57. Ibid., X, 46.
58. Ibid., loc. cit.
59. Ibid., X, 116.
piece-meal method of distribution made it very difficult to as-
certain who had received his just allowance and who had not.
Consequently, some received more than they should have, while
others did not even receive what was necessary. Bad as was the
lot of the soldier in many instances, Albigence Waldo wrote in
his diary for Dec. 28, 1777 that the circumstances of the sold-
ier were better by far than those of the officer. It would
seem, in this war at least, the "brass" fared not quite as well
as the private soldier.

Some indication of the serious state of affairs
may be gathered from the court martial sentence meted out to a
Captain Lamberth of the 14th Virginia Regiment who was sentenced
to be "cashiered, and deemed scandalous in an officer to assoc-
iate with him in future, and that his Crime, Name, Place of
Abode and punishment be publish'd in and about Camp and in the
News Papers of every State..." - all for stealing a hat!
Whether in Winchester or in New York the need was the same:
"nearly 4,000 of our men are rendered unfit for duty" for want
of clothing. "Our soldiers suffer amazingly" for want of

60. Albigence Waldo, _Diary_, Pennsylvania Magazine of History,
61. _Writings_, X, 314-315.
62. Charles Campbell, ed., _The Bland Papers_, Edmund and Julian
C. Ruffin, Petersburg, 1840, 2 vols., I, 80.
63. _Writings_, X, 33.
shoes and stockings. Even the clothing of dead men was to be preserved and reissued. Governor Clinton was surprised and alarmed at the necessities of the army; "the more so as I have not observed any Extraordinary Exertions for some Time past to relieve them." Possibly it was this very lack of exertion which caused Washington to pen one of his longer letters which deals at some length with the clothing situation and suggests remedies.

At least in one instance, Washington in depending upon the States for help was leaning upon a broken reed; for Governor Clinton told General Conway that he could not possibly furnish a necessary supply of clothing, since the State did not have "a Quantity worth mentioning of any of the Articles required." Furthermore, he explains that "the peculiar Situat'n of this state cutt off by the Enemy from every species of foreign Trade and deprived of its most opulent settlem'ts will fully account for the barren state of our cloathing store... I had frequently heard", he adds, "the Troops to the Northward were for a long time unpaid and Naked for want of Cloath'g

64. Ibid., X, 320.
65. Ibid., X, 406.
67. Writings, X, 382-384.
68. Clinton, II, 774.
which had Induced the officers to suffer many of them to go home on furlough."

The condition of the men at Valley Forge is so well known that we shall content ourselves with the obvious understatement that they were "badly clad," and that there was a time when nearly three thousand men were unfit for duty from want of clothing. Albigence Waldo gave his reaction to the whole situation in the following revealing lines:

I am Sick-discontented-and out of humour. Poor food-hard lodging-Cold Weather-fatigue-Nasty Cloaths-nasty cookery-Vomit half my time-smoak'd out of my senses-the Devil in't-I can't Endure it-Why are we sent here to starve and Freeze-What sweet Felicities have I left at home; A Charming Wife-pretty Children-Good Beds-good food-good cookery-all agreeable-all harmonious. Here all Confusion-smoke & Cold-hunger & filthyness-A pox on my bad luck."

By September, 1778, things seem to have improved considerably; for Washington wrote to the Board of War that he was happy to learn that "we are on so respectable a footing in the General articles of Cloathing," and he expressed the hope

69. Ibid., II, 775.
71. James Thacher, M.D., Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War, from 1775 to 1783, Silas Andrus & Son, Hartford, 1854, 127.
73. Writings, XII, 454.
that "proper and timely exertions" would always keep them well provided. As if to insure this, the committee on clothing reported to Congress that in their opinion it would be best in the future if the States made provision for clothing their respective quotas of troops for the colonial army. Clothing then seems to have been ample till the Spring of 1779 when Washington, with an army of 4,711 men, again noted that prospects for the further supply of clothing were deplorable. April, May, June and July were punctuated by letters indicating a growing clothing shortage.

On Aug. 26 the Board of War received a communication from the Commander-in-Chief expressing his sorrow that the essential clothing supply was in such unsatisfactory a condition, and that prospects for the future were uncertain. The evident urgency of the matter and his frequent representations had lead him to hope for some degree of comfort, but he was forced to admit that there was little reason to expect this. In particular, the officers were singled out and the fear expressed that in many instances they might actually be compelled to quit the service unless they were somewhat relieved. Previously,

74. Journals, XII, 996.
75. Writings, XIV, face 400.
76. Ibid., XIV, 389.
77. Bland, 121; Writings, XIV, 501; Bland, 136-137; Writings, XVI, 24.
78. Ibid., XVI, 177.
Washington had written in this same vein saying that "even a dissolution of the army is not an improbable event, if some effectual measures were not taken to render the situation of the officers more comfortable." He presents as an uncontroverted fact that the officers simply could not support themselves on their pay, and that grim necessity would oblige them to leave the service. The officers must be made to take pleasure in their situation, for if they merely endure it "the Army will be an insipid spiritless mass, incapable of acting with vigor and ready to tumble to pieces at every reverse of fortune."

One expedient which would help greatly, according to Washington, would be to provide the officers with clothing by public authority, at prices proportioned to their pay. Exorbitant prices had forced many officers of reputation and merit to resign their commissions. This difficulty would be obviated if there were some proportion between their salaries and the price they paid for goods.

In another letter dated Aug. 26 Washington re-

iterates the plea for State aid of his letter of Jan. 23: "I fear...that unless the Respective States interpose with their

79. Ibid., XIV, 27.
80. Ibid., XIV, 28.
81. Ibid., XVI, 174.
82. Ibid., XIV, 35-41.
exertions, our supplies...will be very deficient; and that the troops may again experience...those distresses which were so severely and injuriously felt in the past Stages of the War".

The Board of War was forced to admit that the condition of their finances made it impossible to procure sufficient clothing for the troops. It too was of the opinion that "without the speedy and indefatigable exertions of the States, no quantities of those necessaries adequate...to the wants of the Troops will be procured."

With one or two exceptions, the States had done little toward clothing the troops by the beginning of 1780. James Thacher struck a familiar note when he noted in his diary that "the sufferings of the poor soldiers can scarcely be described, while on duty they are unavoidably exposed to the inclemency of storms & severe cold:...they are badly clad, and some are destitute of shoes." The system of State supplies which Washington had advocated so frequently did not, in the long run, prove to be the solution to the problem. In April General Washington told Congress that dissatisfaction was more general and alarming than ever, mainly because of the disparity

83. Ibid., XVI, 174.
84. Journals, XV, 1038.
85. Ibid., XVI, 35.
86. Thacher, 185.
in provisions made for the troops by the different States. "The system of State supplies...in the commencement dictated by necessity, has proved in its operation pernicious beyond description." It seems that some States had found it possible to furnish their men rather well, not only with clothing, but also with other comforts and conveniences, whereas others were able to do little or nothing. Naturally, when officers and men intermingled they could not help but notice the differences. The result was dissatisfaction and resentment both against individual States, and against the confederacy in general. Men became disgusted with service; the officers resigned in such numbers that there was scarcely a sufficient number left to command the depleted Corps which remained. This spirit of dissatisfaction penetrated beyond the walls of military encampments. As Joseph Reed mentioned to his wife Hetty: it was "too obvious that the bulk of the people are weary of war."

September found the troops no better off. The Board of War reported to Congress that the Clothier General's last inventory showed a very scanty stock of clothing on hand,

87. Writings, XVIII, 209.
88. William B. Reed, Life and Correspondence of Joseph Reed, Lindsay and Blakiston, Philadelphia, 1847, 2 vols., II, 247.
and indicated the distress the troops would in all probability experience for want of supplies. A circular letter to the States in October was even less encouraging, for it plainly stated that the men were totally unprepared for the approaching winter. "We are without money...without provision...without clothing; and shortly shall be without Men", Washington told George Mason this same month. General Wayned informed Joseph Reed that his soldiers' uniforms were so worn that they had "adopted the idea of curtailing the coats to repair the elbows and other defective parts." The system of temporary enlistments in force at the time lead to clothing waste because men who were outfitted left before their clothes were half worn out. The result was a force which was "constantly fluctuating and sliding from under us as a pedestal of Ice would do from a Statue in a Summers day." "Means must be found or the soldiers go naked." Things had come to such a state that Washington told John Sullivan he considered a foreign loan absolutely necessary to the continuance of the war.

Such a situation was rendered all the more

89. Journals, XVIII, 835.
90. Writings, XX, 211.
91. Reed, II, 313.
92. Writings, XX, 206.
93. Ibid., XX, 242.
94. Ibid., XX, 373.
poignant because ten thousand complete suits of clothing lay in France because continental agents could not agree whose business it was to ship them. Another shipment had lain in the West Indies for more than eighteen months "owing probably to some such cause." Want of clothing rendered the levies of troops so unfit for duty that all were finally discharged. For "old worn out coats and tattered linen overalls...is but very wretched living and shelter against the winter's piercing cold, drifting snows, and chilling sleet." The Board of War, whose office it was to provide these necessaries, was penniless, and had to appeal to Congress for money when the opportunity to purchase enough cloth for 1,500 suits presented itself.

Lincoln's surrender at Charleston, and the precipitate flight of the army under Gates from Camden, made matters worse, for they were the reason, General Greene said, for "keeping...vast shoals of militia on foot who, like the locusts of Egypt, have eaten up everything.... North Carolina has militia enough to swallow up all the revenues of America ...." Whatever the reason, Lafayette was forced to borrow

95. Ibid., XX, 462.
96. Ibid., XX, 470.
97. Reed, II, 316.
98. Journals, XVIII, 1199.
2,000 pounds from Baltimore merchants on his own credit; and 26
Washington, on two occasions, said that either the States must 100
provide for the troops or "have an Army literally naked."

Evidently the States finally took the situation in hand, because from December the clothing situation improved. 101
The familiar complaints, requests and reports were supplanted by more encouraging statements. In fact, Washington even ventured the hope that Major General Heath and his men would "spend a happy and merry Christmas, a thing that has not happened for some years past." Thus, for all practical purposes, we may assume that the clothing problem had in the main been solved by 1782, since references to the matter from that time are few, scattered, and pleasant.

A few of the more enlightening references to clothing and its effect on health, strategy and morale, have been reserved to the end of this chapter in order to bring these three ramifications of the army clothing problem into bolder relief.

What effect the lack of necessary covering would have on the health of the soldiers is quite obvious. That it

100. Writings, XX, 34, note 56.
101. Ibid., XXII, 182 and 279.
102. Ibid., XXIII, 406.
actually did have a disastrous effect on the continental soldiers is stated very plainly in many sources. George Clinton wrote that he was likely to lose more men in his brigade by sickness, occasioned by want of covering, than by the most severe action he would engage in during an active campaign. Similarly, General Wayned assured President Wharton of Pennsylvania that nine out of ten deaths and desertions in the army were owing to dirt and nakedness. Later when Wayne's troops were enjoying good health he pledged his reputation to keep them so as long as they were provided with clothing. When that clothing was not forthcoming and the distresses of the troops "were such as to beggar all description" Wayne was forced to divide clothing for six hundred men among thirteen regiments in order to prevent a mutiny. He relates:

I am not fond of danger, but I would most cheerfully agree to enter into action once every week in place of visiting each hut of my encampment...where objects strike my eye and ear whose wretched condition beggars all description. The ball or bayonet could only pierce the body, but such Objects Affect the mind and give the keenest wound to every feeling of humanity. For God's sake give us,—if you can't give us anything else,—give us linen that we may be enabled to rescue the poor worthy fellows from the vermin which are now devouring them and which has emaciated and

103. Clinton, I, 400.
104. Stille, 126.
105. Ibid., loc. cit.
reduced numbers exactly to answer the description of Shakespeare's apothecary. Some hundreds we thought prudent to deposit some six foot under ground, who have died of a disorder produced by a want of clothing. The whole army at present are sick of the same disorder... 107

That clothing was a consideration in councils of war strategy is evident. In the very beginning of the war when Washington was contemplating an attack on the British in Boston clothing was one of the determining factors. At another time the lack of shoes prevented the American troops from pursuing the British after a favorable engagement. And the decision as to whether or not colonial successes in the North could be followed up with a winter campaign were influenced in large part by the straitened condition of the troops' clothing supply. "By continuing the campaign" Washington wrote, "perhaps

I do remember an apothecary,
And hereabouts he dwells, which late I noted,
In tatter'd weeds, with overwhelming brows,
Culling of simples; meagre were his looks,
Sharp misery had worn him to the bones:

.................
Art thou so bare, and full of wretchedness,
And fear'st to die? famine is in thy cheeks,
Need and oppression starveth in thine eyes,
Contempt and beggary hang upon thy back;....

108. Writings, III, 484.
many salutary, if not decisive advantages may be derived. But it appears to me, that this must depend upon the supplies of...

Cloathing which the men receive." Writing to Brigadier General Thomas Nelson General Washington insisted that a winter campaign was indispensably necessary "if we can get our ragged and half naked soldiers clothed." Indeed, deficiencies in this regard deprived Washington of a large part of his force, and caused General Wayne to cast his vote against a winter's campaign in the open field because the distressed and naked condition of the troops would not admit it.

Within a few months of the beginning of hostilities the sufferings endured for want of clothing had already begun to affect morale, making "a multitude of soldiers heartily sick of service." By July, 1776 Colonel Jedidiah Baldwin was making repeated requests for a discharge from "this Retreating, Raged Starved, lousey, thevish, Pockey Army." The

109. Ibid., IX, 480.
110. Ibid., X, 27.
111. Ibid., X, 172.
112. Stille, 111.
overall picture of discontent seems to have been pretty much the same; for Washington said, "you may as well attempt to stop the Winds from blowing, or the Sun in its diurnal, as the Regiments from going when their term is expired." Albigence Waldo explains why this is so:

...There comes a soldier, his bare feet are seen thro' his worn out Shoes, his legs nearly naked from the tatter'd remains of an only pair of stockings, his Breeches not sufficient to cover his nakedness, his hair dishevell'd, his face meagre; his whole appearance pictures a person forsaken & discouraged. ... 116

General Wayne told the Board of War that the First Pennsylvania Regiment was viewed with contempt by the other troops and was beginning to despise itself "from being in Rags." At a later date he said that he would much rather risk his life, honor, and the fate of America "on our present force neatly and Comfortable Uniformed than on Double their number covered with Rags & Crawling with Vermin." True, with some of the men morale was at such a low ebb at the outset that but very little fuel was required to fan discontent into a raging fire. The militia, for example, were notoriously

115. Writings, VI, 420.
117. Stille, 64-65.
118. Ibid., 139.
dissatisfied; and Washington spoke with brutal frankness when he said that depending upon the militia was the same as resting upon a broken staff. They are described as:

Men just dragged from the tander
Scenes of domestick life; unaccustomed
to the din of Arms; totally unacquainted
with every kind of military skill, which...
makes them timid and ready to fly from
their own shadows. Besides, the sudden
change in their manner of living...brings
on sickness in many; impatience in all,
and such an unconquerable desire of re-
turning to their respective homes that
not only produces shameful, and Scandalous
Desertions among themselves, but infuses
the like spirit in others. 119

Granted that the troops of the line did not desert as readily
as the militia, still desertion was not confined to the militia alone. Indeed, lack of clothing was a potent factor in these escapes from the burden of army life undertaken on private initiative. "Cloth feed & Pay us", said Ebenezer Huntington, 
"& you may have any service you wish, but you must not expect
nor shall you receive but little without." That desertions
and deaths from lack of clothing were numerous is an incontro-
vertible fact. But what was no less true was that for the same reason the troops who remained lost "that spirit and pride
necessary to constitute the soldier." Washington summed it

119. Writings, VI, 110-111.
120. -------, Letters Written By Ebenezer Huntington During the American Revolution, New York, 1914, 94.
121. Writings, XII, 279.
...It is a maxim that needs no illustration, that nothing can be of more importance in an Army than the clothing and feeding it well; on these, the health, comfort, and spirit of Soldiers essentially depend, and it is a melancholy fact, that the American Army are miserably defective in both these respects....

122. Ibid., VIII, 442.
CHAPTER II

THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CLOTHING DEPARTMENT

When we read of marching men, battling armies, and victories won, we seldom reflect that supporting them is a system, a supply service, upon which all completely depends. One of the most necessary items which it is the function of that system to supply is clothing. Indeed, it is an item rarely mentioned in military histories unless, as in the American Revolution, it becomes one of the determining factors in the conduct of the war. In the first chapter we saw that clothing was a determining factor and that the supply was totally inadequate to the needs of the troops fighting the war for Independence. It will be the burden of this second chapter to inquire into this system of supply, to consider the men whose office it was to clothe the troops, and the means they used to achieve their end.

Washington first mentions the office of clothier general in a letter dated Jan. 10, 1777. In this letter Washington informs James Mease that he has decided to bestow on

1. Writings, VI, 492.
him the office requested, and he adds that it will be necessary for the person filling this office to remain with the army in order that its wants may be known and properly administered. They have been distressed "beyond measure" for the want of clothing and for someone to attend to the duties of that department. Moreover, the general tone of the letter intimates that Mease will find himself in a very responsible and important position.

The official notification seems to have been contained in a letter written to Mease some two months later. In this letter Washington discusses in some detail the duties incumbent on the clothier general. Since Congress had by a resolve of Dec. 27, 1776 empowered Washington to appoint a clothier general and to assign a salary for the office, Mease is hereby appointed with a monthly salary of $150.00. His commission entitles him to appoint purchasing agents in each of the states who will be given commissions adequate to the amount of trouble involved. Mease is also entitled to as many clerks and storekeepers as he thinks necessary. Their salary he is to arrange on the most moderate terms possible. To enable him to make the necessary purchases sufficient sums of money will be furnished from time to time, either by way of draft from General Washington on the Paymaster General or the Continental treasurer or in such way as Congress thinks fit. He is to be prepared to
account for this money when called upon by the commissioners for settling public accounts.

Since many of the states, previous to the appointment of a clothier general, had employed agents to purchase clothing for their troops, Mease must write to them, inform them of his appointment, and ask to be informed as to what progress they have made in clothing their respective quotas. Washington suggests that if Mease finds the agents employed by the states capable and trustworthy, he keep them in office. Since, moreover, a supply of captured clothing or that imported by private adventurers cannot be depended upon, Mease must lay before the Congressional committee an estimate of the different kinds of clothing required for the next campaign as well as "the Colours of the Cloths proper to put the Troops into distinct Uniforms."

The next admonition is slightly ironical in the light of what we have seen regarding the difficulty of putting any kind of clothes on the men's backs. For the new clothier general is told that he should acquaint himself with the uniforms already decided upon by some regiments and continue to supply them with the same type.

On reading this letter one is inclined to picture

2. Ibid., VII, 247-249.
to himself a very responsible official whose office it was to coordinate the activities of those engaged in purchasing and supplying clothing and to see that the various regiments were kept similarly attired. And in ordinary circumstances such a surmise would probably be correct; but these were not ordinary circumstances. For although it was possible, at least to some extent, to comply with the above prescriptions, there is no indication that providing the different troops with regimentals was more than an unattained ideal till the war years were drawing to a close.

When he appointed Mease Washington had high hopes and he was confident that the new clothier general, together with the new Wagon and Forage masters, would keep the army better and more regularly supplied than it had previously been. Undoubtedly it was a great relief to the commander-in-chief to be able to write that "Everything in the Clothing Way passes thro' the hands of Mr. Mease," for thus freed, Washington could devote more of his time to strategy and strictly military matters. Previously, he had been forced to spend a large part of his time untieing the knots which an unorganized supply system had tied in army administration. Now that there was one

3. Ibid., VII, 69.
4. Ibid., VII, 118.
able and authorized person in charge, Washington should have been free to turn his thoughts to other things. But, as the following pages will show, the difficulty was not to be surmounted so easily.

However, the whole office of providing for the army did not devolve on James Mease. The Journals of the Continental Congress inform us that the Secret Committee appointed Messrs. Abraham Livingston and William Turnbull as their agents for the purpose of purchasing and collecting clothes for the use of the army. Nevertheless, most of the 1777 correspondence regarding clothing was directed to James Mease.

It was not long before the first signs of trouble with Mease appeared. On May 9 Washington transmitted for the Clothier's consideration the following extract from a letter of Charles Young, a clerk in Philadelphia, to Daniel Kemper, Assistant Clothier General:

...P.S. Since the foregoing, Mr. Mease has yours by the post, and he directs me, ...to forbid the fine Goods being given out at Morris Town, but to those of the Generals Family alone.... He tells me, they cannot be viewed as Clothing for the Army; that he particularly directed them to serve his own friends and he chuses himself to issue them;....

This proceeding surprised me much and requires but few comments. Those Goods are certainly Public property, purchased by Public Agents and were transported at Public expense and risk....I trust another instance of this Sort will never happen, nor can I bring myself to believe...that Mr. Young has not taken up a wrong idea of your directions.6

During April Washington again had occasion to take Mease to task, this time for storing a large quantity of clothing in Philadelphia where it was in danger of being captured by the British. Mease was further admonished:

...If timely steps are not taken, we shall next Spring be all in confusion again, and bring our army into the field half complete and of a thousand different Colours, as to uniform, which has not only an ill appearance, but it creates much irregularity; for when a soldier is convinced, that it will be known by his dress to what Corps he belongs, he is hindered from committing many faults for fear of detection.7

The General further reminded Mease not only to call occasionally on the Secret Committee in order to remind them of the wants of the army, but also to inquire whether or not any clothing would be forthcoming from agents abroad. In June Washington again found it necessary to admonish Mease about his distribution of some shirts evidently of a somewhat better quality, which the

6. Writings, VII, 32-33.
7. Ibid., VII, 420-422.
8. Ibid., VIII, 98.
clothier general had decided to distribute himself, not without suspicion of partiality.

Early in June, 1777 Washington asked Congress to do something about the "distress and confusion" which prevailed in the commissary department. A committee was appointed to "make diligent inquiry into the causes of the complaints in the commissary's dep't, and to make provisions as the exigency and importance of the case demands." Writing from camp shortly after the departure of this committee Washington notes that the shortness of their stay will probably occasion the omission of many matters which ought to be laid before them. Consequently, after discussing the completion of the Continental regiments and the poor food provided for the men, he takes up the matter of clothing. Very charitably he remarks he has no reason to accuse the clothier general of inattention to his duties, for, since Mease's supplies are unequal to the wants of the army, his resources must be insufficient. The distress of most of the soldiers for want of clothing is "painful to humanity, dispiriting to themselves, and discouraging to every officer." Without wishing to cast any reflections on James Mease, Washington

9. Ibid., VIII, 238.
10. Ibid., VII, 373-374.
11. Ibid., VIII, 442.
concludes by again suggesting the advisability of state aid.

The Committee reported to Congress of August 5th that there were difficulties in the clothier's department from the want of assistants in the camps as well as "Sundry Articles of Clothing." After some three weeks of study and debate Congress passed resolutions providing the clothier general with more assistants and defined rather carefully their respective duties:

(Resolved) That the Clothier General be directed forthwith to apply to the Commander-in-Chief, and inform himself of the number of Assistant Clothiers necessary for the Army...; that he appoint without delay as many assistants as they may respectively judge necessary, and report their names to Congress, that he take effectual care to send to each assistant a proportion of the Clothing on hand, ... ordering the said assistants to give to each non Commissioned officer and Soldier the Clothing due to him by the articles of Enlistment, and to take Receipts, and they supply the army with such other Clothing as shall be necessary, at the average cost and charges thereof, that he furnish each Assistant with the Names of the non Commissioned Officers and Soldiers of the Division of Corps to which they may be assigned, who have received the Bounty of Clothing or any part thereof; and also with the Account of each Officer and Soldier in such Division or Corps who is indebted to the United States for Articles of Clothing; that he direct each

Assistant, on the first day on every Month to render to the respective regimental Paymasters...particular accounts of all the Cloathing for which the Officers and Men are respectively indebted; and the several regimental Paymasters are hereby directed to make the proper Stoppages from the pay Rolls for discharging the said Accounts, and to deliver the money to the Assistant Clothiers...; that the several Assistants deliver the money so received to the Clothier General and account with him for all the Cloathing which they may receive as aforesaid.

Doubtless this legislation served to clear up some of the confusion, but the basic difficulty still remained. There does not seem to have been enough clothing for these men to distribute.

To facilitate the conduct of his office, Mease was authorized on Oct. 15 "to purchase, hire or press, as circumstances may require...such number of Horses and Wagons, as you shall stand in need of...." In view of the army's need of clothes, and the reluctance which some manifested when asked to sell on reasonable terms, Washington wrote:

You are also empowered to seize such articles as you know to be absolutely necessary to us, wherever you find them in private hands; paying a generous price for the same. At the same time that you will use this power...be careful to exercise it with all the discretion which

13. Ibid., VIII, 611-612.
14. Writings, IX, 374.
a power so important and delicate demands, remembering that an improper use of it may not only render it odious, but may defeat the advantages it is intended to produce.15

Possibly this increased power had the effect of making Mr. Mease just a little bit more impressed with the idea of his own importance, for not long afterward Washington found it necessary to voice another complaint. When General Woodford had written Mease a polite letter requesting supplies for his brigade, he received in return "a rough verbal answer," which gave him no satisfaction whatever. Since General Woodford "is an exceeding good officer" and one who would not make unnecessary demands Washington asked Mease to settle the matter to Woodford's satisfaction. Washington further instructed Mease to assure Congress that unless it was certain of receiving clothing from abroad it must either call upon each state to furnish what it could or face the fact that "it will be impossible for the army to exist." As Congress had heard similar protestations before, and the army had somehow always managed to exist, it is to be doubted whether such protestations made much of an impression.

15. Ibid., IX, 374-375.
16. Ibid., X, 45.
17. Ibid., X, 46.
At this time several of the general officers who were unable to procure clothing for their men through the regular channels decided to take the initiative and employ their own agents. For instance, General Wayne employed a Mr. Zantzing-er of Lancaster who purchased about 4500 pounds worth of clothing. This action may have been dictated by necessity; yet it could not but encourage confusion to have three groups purchasing clothes for the army, the clothier general and his agents, the state agents, and the various regimental agents. This resulted in competition which served to increase prices, accentuate state differences, and reduce cooperation to a minimum.

In November, 1777, Messrs. Otis and Andrews were appointed collectors of clothing for the Continental Army. Although, as Samuel Otis acknowledges, "the emoluments were considerable", it was an exacting and difficult position. As usual, the army was in constant need of clothing. When orders arrived Otis and Andrews would have to purchase the materials as best they could, see that the garments were made up, and finally forward them to the clothier general for distribution to the various regiments. Over a period of six months, from December, 1777 to July, 1778 the collectors sent from sixteen to eighteen

18. Journals, IX, 969.
thousand suits of clothes to the army. During the same period they were nearly 200,000 pounds in debt, so it would seem that the government had not paid for the clothing quite as rapidly as their agents would have liked. The multiform character of Otis's business is revealed in a letter to his brother Joseph: "Have so many Irons in the fire dont incline to Speculate at 19 Sea." Joseph himself managed to hold a commission as brigadier-general of militia, serve as a member of the local committee on clothing, and engage in business as a merchant. A further indication of the type of man chosen to be a collector of clothing is gathered from the following words of Samuel to his brother in September, 1778: "Am afraid you will be in too much a hurry about your winter goods, but you may as well make 100prc as 5 they grow exceedingly scarce and will be at 20 for 1 in a short time...." Of course, it may well be that Samuel did not try to make any such profit himself as he recommended to his brother Joseph, but if he was the usual colonial merchant, we may be quite sure that the government paid well for whatever he provided the troops.

On the first day of January, 1778, the Congressional Committee on Clothing brought forth a resolution to enforce

20. Ibid., 21.
a previous enactment. On the preceding November 26, 1777 Congress had passed a resolution enabling officers and soldiers to draw clothing at prices proportioned to their pay. At that time neither the quantities to be drawn, nor the price to be paid, had been determined. The present bill permitted officers to draw "a Suit of plain Regimentals, Six fine linen Shirts, ...a fine castor Hatt, six pair thread or fine worsted Hose, four pair Shoes, 1 pair Boots, 1 Blanket." In addition, each non commissioned officer and private soldier was allowed "two hunting frocks, one Woolen Waistcoat with Sleeve, two pair strong linen overalls, four pair Shoes." However, we may be quite sure that a mere Congressional resolution did not suffice to clear up the confusion in the department of the clothier general. Indeed, it is somewhat indicative of its inefficiency that such a resolution as that of Nov. 26 passed without any reference to amounts or prices. For all practical purposes Congress might just as well have done nothing.

The new year again found Mr. Mease the object of complaint. General Wayne wrote to the Secretary of War that he derived very little assistance from the civil authority and

"every let and hindrance in the power of the Clothier General seems to be thrown in the way." Mease was also a trial to Colonel Bayard, one of Wayne's officers. Bayard's criticism was a little more pointed when he wrote "It gives me pain to relate to you the difficulty of getting anything from Mease. Waiting his slow motion, dancing attendance &c are insufferable, ...but he Prides himself upon his being confined to no particular State."

Complaints such as these surely must have found their way to the commander-in-chief. It was probably as a result of them that Washington in August, 1778 again wrote to Congress about the clothier's department. Very frankly he states that he is

...perfectly satisfied, that unless this very important and interesting office is put under better regulations and under a different Head, than it now is, the Army will never be clothed. Mr. Mease is by no means fit for the business. It is a work of immense difficulty to get him to camp on any occasion, and no order can retain him there sufficiently long, either to answer the demands of the Troops, or to acquire more than a very slight and imperfect knowledge of them.24

Washington, moreover, charges Mease with "inactivity" in not

22. Stille, 116-117.
23. Ibid., 121.
24. Writings, XII, 278-279.
using all possible means for the provision of clothing for the troops. The clothier’s agents also have proved very incompetent, either from want of ability, industry, or proper instructions from their superior. As for Mr. Mease personally he is "of a very unaccommodating cast of temper, and his general deportment towards the officers who have had to transact business with him, has rendered him exceedingly obnoxious." It is not difficult then to understand why there have been "constant and daily complaints against him" and why Washington considers it his "indispensable duty" to mention this matter to the Congress, since both officers and men have suffered greater distress than ever before from want of clothing. This want has been the result, not of any real scarcity but of inexertion and improper management on the part of those whose duty it was to provide the Army with clothes. A letter such as this, coming from a man like Washington, always inclined to overlook the shortcomings of others, is certainly indicative of no slight irregularities in Mease's department, and leaves little doubt as to the incompetency of the first clothier general of the Continental Army.

Congress acted quickly upon receipt of this

25. Ibid., XII, 279.
letter; for on August 19th Washington was directed to appoint a court of inquiry into the conduct of James Mease "in his office of Clothier General, his Deputies and Agents; that it may be known whether the grievous sufferings of the army for Want of Cloathing have been owing to his or their misconduct or Neglect of Duty." Until the results of the inquiry were announced Mease was to be suspended. Just what happened after this the Journals of the Continental Congress do not make clear. Mease on September 19th seems to have sensed the turn of events and requested permission to resign. Yet on October 9th we again find the Committee on clothing indicting him in a resolution to the Board of War which was directed to inquire into the conduct of James Mease in his office of clothier general "that it may be known whether the Grievous sufferings of the Army for want of Clothing, have been owing to his... Misconduct or Neglect of Duty." What the findings of this investigation were we do not know, but it is significant that as late as June 4, 1779 James Mease is still referred to as the clothier general.

Leaving James Mease for the moment, let us return to a discussion of the clothing department in general. About

27. Ibid., XII, 997.
28. Ibid., XIV, 698.
the middle of January, 1779 the firm of Otis and Andrews was accidentally dissolved by Mr. Andrews shooting himself while handling a pair of recently purchased pistols. "The Ball went through his head and he instantly Expired." Since Otis and Andrews had been doing a rather creditable job, this accident was no less unfortunate for the troops who had been clothed through their efforts.

On January 23, 1779 Washington wrote a long letter to the Committee of Conference on the subject of clothing the army, the need and duties of a clothier general and his assistants, and the reasons for putting the army into uniforms of different colors. He begins by establishing the premise that clothing the army well is a matter of such fundamental importance that some plan for regular and constant supplies must be effected. Three modes are suggested: governmental contracts with the court of France or any other power which might be disposed to assist the colonies; commerce through a committee or individual qualified by his connections, talent for business, and integrity; or finally state provision of the supplies requisite for their respective quotas of troops.

29. Field, 42-43.
30. Writings, XIV, 35-41.
The united funds and credit of the Continent seemed to Washington to be the only adequate basis for the extensive supplies required. He believed that governmental contracts were the surest way of putting the business on a sound footing. However, if this was deemed impracticable, he suggested the plan of state supplies as an alternative. And it was, in fact, this plan which developed in 1780 into the plan of "specific supplies", by which individual states were assigned, instead of money, a quota of supplies, which was to be furnished the government for the use of the army.

Most of the remainder of the letter is devoted to the officers responsible for clothing the men, the clothier general, state and regimental clothiers. A clothier general was necessary to furnish estimates of the supplies needed, to receive and distribute those supplies to the state clothiers, and "to stand as it were between the public and the Army, seeing that the first is not imposed on and the last gets whatever is allowed in a regular, direct and seasonable manner." The clothier general was also to act as liaison officer between the Continent and the individual states, and between the army and the public, "settling all accounts with the state clothiers according to actual deliveries."

31. Ibid., XIV, 37.
32. Ibid., loc. cit.
The state clothier should be appointed by his own state. His duties will be to keep exact accounts with each regiment, inspect the accounts of the regimental clothier, and see that the articles delivered are issued to the troops, make sure that all clothing above the bounty allowance drawn by non-commissioned officers and privates be charged to them, and take care that the officers receive only their fair share and no more. The regimental clothier "who very properly under our present establishment is the Regimental Pay Master" is to keep an account with every officer and soldier, keep receipts for every article delivered and deduct the price of these articles from the monthly pay rolls.

By February the clothing department still had not been put on a satisfactory footing, for Major General Alexander McDougall was informed that the want of system in the clothing department made impossible regular distributions to the various posts. Although there was a shortage of supplies Washington insisted that the power of using their own discretion for supplying men under their command could not be granted to commandants of detached posts. If McDougall had inquired further how to procure a clothing supply Washington would have

33. Ibid., XIV, 84.
had to tell him that since James Mease, albeit unofficially, had to all intents and purposes given up the clothing department, all applications for clothing would have to be made to the Board of War. As we shall see, this latter arrangement did not prove satisfactory to any of the parties concerned, least of all to the Board of War.

It was two months before Congress acted on Washington's letter of the 23rd of January, but when it finally did act the decision ran to eight pages in the Journals of the Continental Congress. The first half of Congress' "Ordinance for regulating the Cloathing Department for the Armies of the United States" stated that there should be a clothier general, a sub or state clothier, and a regimental clothier. It then proceeded to delineate the duties of each in much the same way as Washington had outlined them in his letter. The second half of the Ordinance describes in some detail the type and number of articles of clothing to which each commissioned and non-commissioned officer was entitled. Since the provisions of the second half of the Ordinance are identical with the resolution

34. Ibid., XIV, 184.
35. Ibid., XIV, 275.
passed by Congress on Jan. 1, 1778, no detailed consideration of this part of the Ordinance will be necessary here.

Washington was rather sanguine about the expected effect of this Congressional Ordinance. He wrote to Major General McDougall that he was confident that the resolutions recently adopted by Congress would remove many of the difficulties which had hitherto plagued the clothing department. It was some time, however, before the Congressional Ordinance bore any fruit, for in April Washington still found it necessary to complain of the unsystematized clothing department, which, he said, exposed him to endless perplexities.

In August Congress passed further legislation which indicated that all was not well with the clothier's department. Washington had long advocated that the soldiers should either be provided with clothing as part of the terms of their enlistment or receive the equivalent in money. But since the scarcity of clothing had made it impossible for the government to fulfill its promise of a suit of clothes, the men were justly disgruntled and dissatisfied because of this seeming bad faith. Congress sought to remedy the situation by giving the men the cash value of the unfurnished clothes, thus redeeming its pledge and tacitly admitting that the clothing

38. Writings, XIV, 340.
39. Ibid., XIV, 391.
redeeming its pledge and tacitly admitting that the clothing department was still not equal to the supply problem.

During these developments James Mease seems to have disappeared from the scene, for on July 15 Perzifor Frazer was elected to succeed him in office. But on the 19th Frazer declined because he considered the salary insufficient. Congress made another choice on the 24th and elected James Wilkinson. The General Orders of September 13th announced his appointment to the troops, and the same day Washington wrote to Wilkinson saying that the inconveniences and weight of business which had been thrown on his shoulders hitherto by the lack of system in the clothing department, and the in-attendance of the clothier general, inspired him with the hope that the new clothier general would do all in his power "to put matters in a proper train." For guidance in the performance of his duties Wilkinson is referred to the Ordinance of March 23, 1778.

Judging by a remark Washington made to Lord

40. Journals, XIV, 970.
41. Ibid., XIV, 836.
42. Ibid., XIV, 853.
43. Ibid., XIV, 884.
44. Writings, XVI, 271.
45. Ibid., XVI, 282.
46. Ibid., XVI, 280.
Stirling after Wilkinson's appointment, the new incumbent would really have to plumb the depths of inefficiency before he could make matters any worse than they had been. The clothing department, Washington remarked, "has occasioned more trouble to me, and has given more disgust to the officers than any one thing besides in the service." Certainly, with a predecessor like Mease, Wilkinson would have to try hard to keep from improving matters. Be that as it may, Wilkinson lost no time in getting to camp and undertaking the task of systematizing the clothing department. Shortly after his arrival he told Washington that the first thing to be done was to put a stop to all partial issues made by purchasing agents or any other persons without the approval of the clothier general. The wisdom of this suggestion is obvious since partial issues inevitably resulted in no one ever knowing to whom articles had been supplied or in what quantities.

In November, 1780 all the rules and regulations concerning the clothing department were repealed, and it was resolved that each state should furnish its troops with clothing until the first of July, 1781. In a circular to the

47. Ibid., XVI, 350.
48. Ibid., XVI, 435.
49. Journals, XVIII, 1018 seq.
states dated November 10th Washington himself advocated this measure. He informed them that since a supply from Europe could no longer be depended upon, the only alternative was for each state to furnish its own troops "as the only means of preventing a number of them from experiencing extreme distress the ensuing winter." According to the Journals of the Continental Congress this system was protracted to the end of hostilities in 1782, for later legislation made no substantial change in the arrangements.

Unfortunately, however, it was necessary to make another change in the office of clothier general, for James Wilkinson seems to have inherited his predecessor's aptitude for staying as far away from the army for as long a period as possible. The long suffering Commander-in-Chief finally found it necessary to report Wilkinson's ineptitude and disobedience to the Congress. As a consequence, Wilkinson resigned March 27, 1781. His successor, John Moylan, took office on the following April 17; and since he continued as clothier general until the end of the war we are safe

50. Writings, XX, 331.
51. Ibid., XXI, 369-371.
52. Ibid., XXI, 363.
53. Ibid., XVI, 271, note 35.
in assuming that Washington finally found a competent and willing man to head the clothing department.

Thus far, we have treated the clothing department as such, and avoided any discussion of the various means used by officials in this department to supply the soldiers. The remaining pages of this chapter, therefore, will attempt to give a brief account of the three principal means, namely, purchase, collection and proscription, by which the clothier general and his subordinates undertook to fulfill the duties of their office.

Purchasing materials and ready made clothing, both at home and abroad, was the most common means of supplying the army, and was responsible for most of the clothing worn by American troops during the revolution. Before any attempt was made at systematizing and organizing the purchasing of clothing Washington exhorted the commanding officers of the various regiments to send officers out to purchase whatever they could. These men made their purchases from colonial merchants who in turn imported their stores from abroad and bought up the prize cargos brought in by colonial

55. Writings, VI, 87.
privateers. In February, 1777 a privateer belonging to the State of New York brought a quantity of woolens into Baltimore. In June Mease wrote to Washington informing him of the arrival in Salem of another prize ship containing some 4,000 blankets. About five months later Washington ordered Lt. Col. Peter Adams to proceed to Maryland and purchase whatever supplies the governor might have on hand, supplementing this supply "by purchasing from the Inhabitants and Individuals." The General very optimistically adds that he is confident that "the people at large from motives of generosity and a regard to the service, will make every contribution their circumstances will admit of and upon reasonable terms." But as will be seen in the next chapter, it was not always possible for purchasing agents to buy on the most "reasonable terms."

By November, 1777 the home supply seems to have been exhausted, for Washington wrote to Mease that unless considerable quantities could be expected from abroad or some other part of the continent "our prospects are Melancholy indeed." Congress, however, assured Washington on November 14th

56. Ibid., VI, 356.
57. Journals, VII, 152.
58. Writings, VIII, 288.
59. Ibid., X, 17.
60. Ibid., X, 18.
61. Ibid., X, 45.
that it had long since written to the commissioners in France for clothing sufficient for eighty-thousand men, and had received an answer that it might expect the delivery before winter set in. This assurance drew from Washington the reply that he was "well assured Congress have not been inattentive to the necessities of the Army, and that the deficiency in our supplies...has arisen from the difficulty of importing on account of the numerous Fleet which line our Coast."

The part played by the British navy in preventing importations from abroad is revealed by a reference to "British Cruizers" in the Journals of the Continental Congress. The success of the British blockade was not complete, however; for December, 1777 found one of Beaumarchais's ships docking at Portsmouth with a supply of clothing which "tho' not very great will be acceptable." Thus, though large quantities of clothing had been ordered in Europe, their arrival was fraught with such danger that they could not be depended on.

According to Albigence Waldo, a British Brigg captured in January of 1778 was "the greatest prize ever taken

63. Writings, X, 98.
64. Journals, IX, 968.
65. Writings, X, 147.
from them." "There is Scarlet - Blue - & Buff Cloth," he says, "sufficient to clothe all the Officers of the Army." This shipment had been sent to outfit the officers of the British army, and its capture netted the Americans, besides the clothing it contained, a set of silver plate which belonged to General Howe. Captures such as this, however, were few and far between, and certainly could not be relied on as a dependable source of supply. Washington, therefore, continued to emphasize internal manufacture, although he was always glad to learn of any possibility of augmenting this supply by imports from abroad.

A good example of just how disappointing any dependence on foreign aid could be was the case of the frigate "Alliance". For some time this ship had been expected with a large supply of clothing and ammunition. In fact, when word of its arrival in port reached Thomas M'Kean, Chief Justice of Pennsylvania, he wrote: "there are no official accounts received, but you may rely upon it, she has brought, at least, ...10,000 suits of clothes...." Well, when the official report was published the "Alliance" was found to contain none of the stores

66. Waldo, 322.
67. Ibid., loc. cit.
68. Writings, X, 319.
69. Reed, II, 250.
of clothing for which Washington had been waiting. Yet the
disappointment occasioned by the failure of the "Alliance" to
bring the long-awaited clothing supply was somewhat lessened
by prizes captured from the Quebec fleet, and a small quantity
of clothing which the French fleet brought on Sept. 16, 1780.

The Journals of the Continental Congress, in a
report of the Committee of Estimates and Ways and Means presented on Oct. 25, 1780, give us some idea of the amount of clothing which arrived from France between 1777 and 1780. The committee found that Mr. Beaumarchais, under the name of Roderique Hortalez et Cie., had sent a large shipment of clothing for the United States to a Mr. Carabasse at Cape Francois, Santo Domingo. Some of this clothing had been shipped to the United States in small vessels belonging to colonial agents; but a large part of this supply still remained in the hands of Mr. Carabasse in Cape Francois. This gentleman protested that he was unable to forward the goods because there were no ships available, so in 1780 Congress sent two ships to the island for the remainder of the consignment.

In general, French aid up to 1780 does not seem

70. Journals, XIX, 316-319.
71. Ibid., XVIII, 835.
72. Ibid., XVIII, 975.
to have been very great. By June, 1779 Congress thought it necessary to address a "representation to his most Christian Majesty, setting forth that the supplies of arms, ammunition and clothing for our armies have ever since the war been irregular, fortuitous and scanty." This memorial evoked from the Court of Versailles the reply that though the court was as favorable as ever to the American cause, it was unable to comply with Congress' demands since they were "too great and numerous to be immediately furnished." The colonists were more than satisfied with this response since it was accompanied by a grant of three million livres, an amount sufficient to buy ten thousand suits of clothes.

Purchasing, however, was not the only method used by Congress to provide its troops with necessary covering, for as early as December, 1775 Washington encouraged the Massachusetts legislature to make a collection of blankets from the townspeople. A year later he mentions clothing "so Charitably contributed by the Inhabitants of Philadelphia", and the Pennsylvania Council of Safety received his "warmest thanks" for their collection of old clothes for the use of the

73. Ibid., loc. cit.
74. Ibid., VI, 381.
75. Writings, IV, 178.
These collections were not always conducted by the state authorities, for army officers were often despatched to make collections from civilians. Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton's instructions made it clear that "delicacy and a strict adherence to the ordinary modes of application must give way to our necessities." The business is disagreeable, Washington admits, and Hamilton may meet opposition in the execution of his duty. Consequently, Washington empowered him to call in the militia if he should think it necessary. Thus the General made it clear that, willy-nilly, collections were absolutely necessary.

It was true that Washington lamented the necessity of asking private individuals to supply the wants of the army, but when its fate hung in the balance he felt that it was his painful duty to order these collections. He scrupled less at proscribing goods from those ill-affected, informing Colonel John Siegfried that "obtaining these things from the Quakers and disaffected inhabitants is recommended, but at all events to get them." The officers detailed to make these collections were ordered to keep a strict account of what they took or

76. Ibid., VI, 422.
77. Ibid., IX, 249.
78. Ibid., IX, 248.
79. Ibid., IX, 318.
received, in order that future settlements might be made with the owners. They were also ordered to "make a discrimination between the well affected and disaffected inhabitants." As far as was consistent with the needs of the army they were to take from the former with a "more sparing and indulgent hand."

In November, 1777 Washington informed the President of Congress that these voluntary collections of necessaries were of little avail, due in no small part to the fact that the officers sent out did their work either partially or not at all. This method of supplying the needs of the men did not appeal to their commander who admitted that he had been very careful not to stir up any ill-will in the people. The distinction between collections and proscription of clothing supplies would seem to resolve itself into a question of whether the possessor gave willingly or unwillingly. The same officers made collections from those who voluntarily gave what they could, or seized supplies from others who had more than they needed but would not contribute or sell to army purchasers. Instances of proscription are few. In general, the collection and proscription of clothing supplies was almost entirely

80. Ibid., IX, 357.
81. Ibid., X, 36.
82. Ibid., IX, 487.
83. Ibid., X, 159.
abandoned by the end of 1777. These two means were used but in-
frequently, and they account for comparatively little of the
supplies provided the army.
CHAPTER III

REASONS FOR THE CLOTHING SHORTAGE

Clothing, as we have seen, was a very important factor in the war, and its supply was totally inadequate to the needs of the troops fighting the war for Independence. This third chapter will attempt to show what were the reasons for this shortage. Six principal reasons may be assigned. Enumerating them in their logical order rather than in their order of importance the six principal reasons for the clothing shortage during the Revolution were: first, the dearth of materials; second, the inefficiency, negligence and corruption of those entrusted with the task of obtaining supplies; third, the depreciation of continental currency; fourth, profiteering by civilians and soldiers alike; fifth, transportation difficulties; and, sixth, stoppage by states and army officers. Thus, we can see that difficulties attended each step of the process of supplying the army with clothes, difficulties which explain only too clearly the conditions set forth in the previous chapters.

According to Wright's Economic History of the United States, at the beginning of the Revolution there was
not wool enough in the colonies to supply the people with hats and stockings alone. English mercantilists had done all in their power to discourage colonial manufacture, and the wool industry in particular was hedged about by a parliamentary decree of 1699 which forbade the export of wool from one colony to another or "to any other place whatsoever." England had long before decided that the chief value of the colonies lay in the market they provided for the manufactured goods sent from the mother country, and English mercantilists found conditions in the colonies a great aid to the furtherance of this doctrine. Poor transportation alone was sufficient to stifle any colonial attempts in the woolen industry. True, the advent of war considerably stimulated colonial manufacturing but not to the point where it was able to cope with the situation. Colonial manufacture was home manufacture; and although Washington hoped that it would prove adequate to his needs, events proved otherwise.

The second cause for much of the suffering and inconvenience endured by the troops for want of covering was the inefficiency and criminal negligence of many of the men

entrusted with the task of supplying the army. At times, as in
the case of the Massachusetts troops during 1777, complaints
for lack of clothing were actually a matter of "Surprise and
wonder" to General Washington. He remarked to Major General
William Heath that he could not understand this, especially
since he had recently heard news of large imports of clothing
goods. He asks what has become of this supply and "how can it
be supposed that they (the soldiers) can be furnished in these
states, which from their situation by Nature, having not any
or but very few advantages, and those intercepted by the Enemy's
fleet?" Again and again as time went on Washington was to ask
where was the clothing which had been purchased. Frequently,
consignments almost seem to have been swallowed up by the
earth itself, or to have disappeared in some other way no less
mysterious. When James Mease was questioned about clothing for
the Massachusetts troops he assured Washington that "upwards
of four thousand suits had been delivered to them." When we
recall that Washington's force amounted to between five and
ten thousand, of which Massachusetts certainly did not provide
one half, we are forced to conclude that there must have been
many a slip twixt the rack and the back.

4. Ibid., VIII, 388.
The inattention of officers to their duty, and their disobedience of Washington's express orders about "taking lists of their men's necessaries, examining them weekly, agreeable to General Orders, and calling delinquents to a severe account for what was missing" was another example of their inefficiency. Washington blamed the officers for the fact that "some regiments are destitute of necessary clothing, altho' they have been supplied with full suits allowed by Congress." Nor does he hesitate to label this "neglect of the worst kind, and most fatal tendency" which demands a speedy and effectual remedy. Repeated orders that a list of necessaries be kept and the articles inspected weekly had been ignored, and, as the General insists, will continue to be ignored until officers are taught to obey the General Orders. Not all of Washington's complaints about the officers, however, were due to negligence of duty. Some, like John Randall, were court martialed for "Unofficerlike behavior in distributing the clothes sent up by the State of Maryland for the use of her Officers in an unjustifiable partial manner."

Nor were army officers the only ones with whom

5. Ibid., X, 47.
6. Ibid., loc. cit.
7. Ibid., X, 115.
8. Ibid., XVIII, 269.
fault was found in the administration of their duty. Washington, as was seen in the previous chapter, had his difficulties with his clothier generals, and Governor Clinton wrote early in 1778 that "the Want of Order, Dillegence & Occonomy in the several offices of Commissary & Quarter & Forage Masters, ...greatly contribute to the Ill Supply of the Army." Colonel Malcom, in a letter to Governor Clinton concerning the scarcity of clothing and provisions, says that the latter "is only scarce by the neglect of the Banditti employed in that Dept.- nor is the Cloathier much better attended to - it would seem that Congress only had in view by their appointments, the making of great fortunes, to new converted Tories or Blockheads." The returns of his regiment, Malcom continues, shoe only ten men out of two hundred fit for duty. "This is enough" he adds, "to make a musleman turn Christian- it puts one mad - I know it might be otherwise."

These agents were not always, as is obvious, the most zealous men who might have been chosen. Governor Clinton speaks of a commissary of purchases on the East side of the Hudson who "has nothing to do with the troops on the West Side,

10. Ibid., II, 834.
even Curiosity has never led him to see the River or the Troops for which he ought to feed." The real reason may have been that this gentleman, like many another, was too busy with other affairs. One of his compatriots, for instance, simultaneously held the four posts of: Assistant Deputy Quarter Master General, Deputy Commissary, Deputy Barrack Master and Deputy Forage Master. We are forced to admit the catholicity of the gentleman's interests, but are inclined to doubt his ability to apply himself diligently to all four appointments.

Then again we find a situation like that reported by the Schenectady committee in March of 1778. It would seem that although the sick had already been removed from a certain military hospital "Some Considerable time ago, a Doctor Commessary, Deputy Commessary and their attendants are still keep in pay." While barnacles such as these did no irreparable harm to the ship of state they certainly weighed down her hull and made operating expenses heavier than they should have been.

Joseph Reed, President of Pennsylvania from 1778 to 1781, said

11. Ibid., II, 837.
12. Ibid., III, 65.
13. Ibid., III, 64.
that a mulatto in one county acquired "a very handsome fortune under Mr. Hooper, as Deputy Commissary, some say 10,000 specie!" At one time in this same county there were twelve deputy quartermasters employing clerks and drawing rations and pay. "Had a suitable inspection taken place twelve months ago," Reed remarked, "I am sure we would have saved many thousands, if not millions." Abuses were not, however, always due to a plethora of officials. A Lt. Bigham, for instance, was entrusted with about forty-thousand dollars to pay an arrearage of bounty to some recruits. Winter came and the recruits had still not received their bounty. Investigation revealed that the good lieutenant had spent the money, giving as an excuse, "his necessities on the road."

Not only were incompetents frequently chosen as purchasers for the army, but every once in a while a man like Colonel Francis Johnson was appointed. For some time previous to his appointment Colonel Johnson's health had so incapacitated him that there was not even a distant prospect of his arrival at camp. Washington consequently requested a substitute better fitted "to receive and distribute the Clothing collected by the

15. Reed, II, 284.
16. Ibid., loc. cit.
17. Ibid., II, 304.
Co!ll!!lisioners." But even a capable purchasing agent and a substantial purchase did not always spell success, for the Journals of the Continental Congress inform us that "great waste of clothing has arisen from the want of fidelity or skill in the persons employed to make up the same." The states were asked to remedy this state of affairs by appointing "one or more persons suitable to superintend and direct the tradesmen employed to make up the cloaths."

The depreciation of Continental currency was the third reason for the Revolutionary clothing shortage. By the close of 1776 Continental currency was already considered almost worthless. On December 22 Washington wrote that one of the commissaries was unable to prevail on the millers to grind "either from disaffection, or an unwillingness to take Continental Money in pay, which in fact is the same thing, this must be remedied by fair, or other means." In May of the following year Washington expressed himself on this subject in a letter to Major General William Heath:

Money is the sinews of war. That in which we are engaged is a just one, and we have

18. Writings, X, 447.
20. Writings, VI, 421.
no means of carrying it on, but the Continental or State notes. Whoever attempts to destroy their credit, particularly that of those admitted by the United States, is a flagitious offender and should forfeit his life, to satisfy the demands of public Justice.21

As it is unusual to hear Washington express himself in such strong language we are certainly safe in inferring an earnestness commensurate with the wording of the letter.

Aside from the fact that the army was very frequently unpaid, currency had so depreciated that even when paid the money issued hardly seemed worth carrying. Washington wrote Congress in December, 1777 that officers and men were not only poorly provided with clothing, but what was still worse, even if the opportunity of purchasing some presented itself, they were unable to do so "from the depreciation of our Money and the exorbitant price demanded for all Articles...." In a letter to Francis Lightfoot Lee on Jan. 10, 1778 Clinton insisted that it would be "utterly impossible to feed the army any longer on credit" and that "The Hardships that Individuals have long labored under, from being obliged to accept the Certificates, instead of money, are inconceivably great, many of

21. Ibid., VIII, 112.
22. Ibid., X, 126.
them having been unpaid for Months." Albigence Waldo also noted the prevailing depreciation of the Continental currency when he wrote in his Diary "All Hell couldn't prevail against us... if we keep up the Credit of our Money."

The Board of War told Congress that when it began to purchase clothing "the advance on the sterling cost of the articles was at an average about 15 to 1." It rose to forty to one until by September "one hundred pounds currency are demanded and given by private persons, and some state purchasers in the price of Dry Goods for the original cost 1 pound sterling."

By September, 1779, the Board of War was of the opinion that "unless some extraordinary event takes place, the present currency will cease to be a medium of commerce." Moreover, with the Continental money so depreciated, the Board was unable to purchase any clothing for the troops. Indeed, "the very low state of the public finances, in consequence of the rapid depreciation of the continental currency" also was remarked upon by James Thacher in his Journal and given as the reason for the "severe and distressing" winter of 1779-1780 during which the

24. Waldo, 315.  
26. Ibid., loc. cit.  
27. Ibid., XVI, 35.
troops suffered keenly from lack of clothing. Thacher further informs us that by May, 1780, Congress had established "a scale of depreciation by which the Continental bills are valued at forty for one of silver." By now the people had lost confidence in paper money. Thacher mentions having seen an advertisement in the newspaper "offering for an article forty dollars..., or three shillings in silver." "This," he says, "is the trash which is tendered to requite us for our sacrifices, for our sufferings and privations, while in the service of our country. It is but a sordid pittance...."

The scarcity of material coupled with the great demand for clothing so raised its prices that although Major General Benjamin Lincoln was able to tell Washington that enough clothing had been imported in December, 1780, to clothe the whole army, continental credit was such that the army was unable to "command a yard of it." Brooke, in his Family Narrative relates that when the officers received their month's pay in paper, it was so depreciated that as a First Lieutenant of Artillery he received thirty-three and two-thirds thousands dollars in paper money instead of thirty-three and two-thirds dollars.

28. Thacher, 190.
29. Ibid., 194.
30. Writings, XX, 462.
dollars in specie. With this he "bought cloth for a coat at $2,000 a yard, and $1,500 for the buttons." Brooke's next comment is heartwarming: "Nothing but the spirit of the age would have induced anyone to receive money so depreciated; but we were willing to take any thing our country could give." But for every one officer with spirit so generous there were two who wanted to resign from the "Raged Starved, lousey, thevish, Pocket Army."

Genuine Continental currency was worth little enough but during 1778 and 1779 counterfeit bills began to appear in increasing numbers. Things reached such a state that the genuine bill issues of May 20, 1777 and April 11, 1778 were withdrawn from circulation by a resolve of Congress on Jan. 2, 1779. Part of the flood of counterfeit bills was due to the activity of the British printing presses, but the rest was the work of unscrupulous colonists who were not deterred by the fact that the counterfeiting of early emissions was a capital crime. What the British gained from counterfeiting American bills is intimated by a letter of Washington:

32. Baldwin, 60.
33. Writings, XIV, 16, note 19.
34. Reed, II, 163.
...one would think it scarcely possible that they should keep a large force in America another campaign merely to hold possession of New York and Rhode Island, and yet I should not be much surprised if that should be the case, as they seem to entertain great hopes from the depreciated, and depreciating state of our currency.35

Colonial currency was rapidly depreciating; and Great Britain, he implies, was helping the process by flooding the colonies with counterfeit bills in the hope that ingenuity might succeed where arms had failed.

By June 1781 Reed wrote General Greene that gold and silver were the only medium of commerce, paper money having been reduced to the state where it was useless as a medium of exchange. As a consequence:

...The merchant, the farmer, the tradesman have all closed their hands, and we are at this moment in a state of the most shameful imbecility, tantalized with the show of plenty, which never was more conspicuous, and yet destitute of the means of procuring the smallest articles; not an ounce of provisions, not a single recruit, not a particle of military stores, can be procured.36

After this brief survey of colonial finance it

is safe to say that the depreciated condition of the Continental currency was at least a partial cause of the Revolutionary clothing shortage. But whereas the lack of materials and inefficiency of many of the men connected with the clothing department was somewhat remedied as the war years slipped by, the financial foundation upon which the Revolution rested continued to remain extremely weak until the end of the war.

The fourth cause for the shortage of clothing supplies during the War for Independence puts the colonial merchant in a bad light. That there should have been a certain amount of profiteering on the part of individuals was to be expected; but that it should have been so common is rather surprising. One wonders at these grasping merchants, spawn of Shylock, so despicable in their passion for gain when fellow Americans starved and froze. The war had not been in progress two years before Congress found it necessary to legislate against these human leeches, "In order to introduce immediate economy in the public expense, the spirit of sharping and extortion, and the rapid and excessive rise of every commodity being confined within no bounds." Congress resolved that "the respective state legislatures...enforce a temporary regulation

37. Journals, IX, 957.
of the prices of provisions and other commodities for the supply of the army." "Whereas certain persons, devoid of, and in repugnance to every principle of public virtue and humanity, instigated by the lust of avarice are...endeavouring by...sharpening and extortion to accumulate enormous gain to themselves" Congress, a month later, further recommended that the state legislatures enact laws limiting the number of retailers of goods, and oblige them to enter into bonds for the observance of laws made for their regulation.

Unfortunately, not all the states seem to have enacted such legislation. In Massachusetts when Samuel Otis, Deputy Clothier General, contracted with private individuals in the state for a large quantity of clothing, he was forced to pay "at the most extravagant rate of 10 to 18 hundred per cent" and when he was unable to pay the whole sum, these public spirited citizens refused to deliver the goods, "adding to extortion the crime of wounding the public credit." This "mean spirit of gain" was confined to clothing merchants. Stephen Barnes, a Commissary, wrote Governor Clinton that he was "embarrassed by Engrossers from the West Side of the North River",

38. Ibid., loc. cit.
39. Ibid., IX, 1044-1045.
40. Ibid., IX, 1071-1072.
and insisted that unless something be done to stop these colonial Shylocks "I shall not be able in three weeks time, to furnish you with one pound of beef." Indeed, Clinton himself was convinced that there was more to be feared from these engrossers than from the "Arms of our Common Enemy."

These "murderers of our cause - the monopolizers, forestallers, and engrossers", wrote Washington to Governor Reed, are the "pests of society" and "the greatest enemies we have to the happiness of America." The kind and patient Washington despised these men with all his heart and insisted that no punishment was too great for the man who could "build his greatness upon his country's ruin." "I would to God", he exclaimed, "that one of the most atrocious in each state was hung in gibbets upon a gallows five times as high as the one prepared by Haman." Such statements, infrequent with Washington, give proof of his genuine wrath.

This selfish and grasping attitude was confined neither to the wealthy nor to the avowed enemies of independence. Early in 1781 General Greene wrote Reed that all through

42. Ibid., III, 682.
43. Reed, II, 41-42.
the country people were engaged "in matters of interest and in pursuit of pleasure.... Public credit totally lost, and every man excusing himself from giving the least aid to government, from an apprehension that they would get no return for any advances."

Six months later Governor Reed wrote General Greene that:

I am sorry to be obliged by the all-powerful voice of indisputable facts to acknowledge that the Independence of the country seeming to be pretty well established, a passion, and a raging one, too, for gain, has evidently taken place of those considerations which were formerly deemed so honourable and so necessary. Every attempt to check it produces the vilest abuse of public and private character.45

Since there would not be the same demand for clothing and other supplies once the war was over many attempted now to make what profit they could.

Whatever the reasoning process which justified the grasping spirit that swept the country, the reality of this passion for gain is proved by the many fortunes made at the

44. Ibid., II, 344.
45. Ibid., II, 356.
expense of the army, by the "suspicion that some of the Com-
missaries are carrying on a traffic for provisions with the
enemy", and by officers "disposing of articles...out of the
public clothing store to private persons at a very great ad-
vance." Washington felt it "a melancholy thing to see such
a decay of public virtue, and the fairest prospects...clouded
by a host of infamous harpies, who to acquire a little pelf,
would involve this great Continent in inextricable ruin."

The British were quick to take advantage, and lost no time in sending spies "to promote the business of
speculation...and to engross what ever is found necessary to
the existance of our Army." For since Britain had been un-
successful on the battle field, she now hoped to conquer the
colonies by other means, as Washington had previously noted.

Transportation difficulties were the fifth ob-
stance which had to be surmounted before the army could be
clothed. These difficulties may be summed up under two headings:
those occassioned by the means of transportation, and those
occassioned by the men to whom this duty was entrusted. The

46. Writings, XIV, 27.
47. Ibid., XIV, 85.
48. Ibid., XVI, 89.
49. Ibid., XIV, 365.
50. Ibid., loc. cit.
first arises from the difficulty of obtaining wagons and teams, the second from negligence in the quartermaster's department.

Obtaining wagons and teams to pull them was a real problem. Deputy Quartermaster General Andrew Taylor wrote to Governor Clinton early in 1778 that he was stranded in Newburgh, New York, with thirty wagon loads of clothing badly needed by the army. Could Clinton provide him with teams? Clinton's answer and inability to comply with this request again brings to the fore the depreciated currency problem previously discussed. Farmers who consented to provide teams and wagons were paid in certificates instead of silver or gold, but "not worth a continental" had already become a byword. Consequently, even when the quartermaster's department was able to provide its own teams the farmers refused to accept the continental currency in payment for fodder, and the famished animals grew so weak that they were worthless. President Reed, lamenting the decrease in the number of wagons in Pennsylvania, gives as an example the county of Lancaster. The number of wagons had dropped from 1,620 to 370 because "The miserable wages allowed by the United States, have occasioned many farmers to break up

51. Hastings, II, 797.
52. Ibid., loc. cit.
53. Ibid., II, 538.
their teams...." The wages paid were only six shillings a day, a sum most farmers considered insufficient.

But why did farmers, unwilling to hire out their horses, break up their teams? The reason was that they feared their teams would be forcibly pressed into service if they refused to hire them out at the wages offered; and since they considered such use of military force a violation of their civil rights, they adopted the simple expedient of ridding themselves of their horses.

Because of frequent neglect in the quartermaster's department even when teams and wagons were finally provided supplies did not always reach their destination. Brigadier General Samuel Parsons relates some of his difficulties in a letter to Governor Clinton dated March 16, 1778. "Some of the Teamsters," he says, "have drop'd their Loads & gone off with their Teams, about 16 Still remain, determind not to cross over without military compulsion; some have drop'd their Loads on the Road from Bedford & are gone off." Officers furnished similar examples of criminal neglect. One in command

56. Ibid., III, 49.
of a clothing convoy left the supply somewhere along the way. "He makes," says Washington, "some trifling excuse, that the Waggons would not come any farther." Nor did it appear, added the General, "that he took any pains to procure others."

A further instance of carelessness is cited by Washington who remarks in a letter to General Heath that it had been the practice to send clothing in small parcels without a guard. This resulted in loss of time and "in many cases the loss of the clothing itself, which being scattered about at different places on the road, have often been converted to private use." Vast quantities of sorely needed clothing were lost during the winter of 1779-1780 on the road from Boston to Valley Forge "for want of proper persons to attend and conduct the wagons." Losses were "immense." Indeed, Washington believed that almost as much clothing had been lost in transit as had been used. In another letter he tells how "Genl. Putnam the other day discovered a considerable parcel of Cloths, Blankets, and Clothing...which had lain at Danbury above a year.

57. Writings, X, 331.
58. Ibid., X, 354.
59. Ibid., XII, 446.
60. Ibid., XII, 453.
61. Ibid., XII, 454.
62. Ibid., XIV, 217.
and were almost damaged by moth." Washington neatly summed up the situation when he wrote Governor Benjamin Harrison that a supply of clothing was generally "many Months in its passage and very often great part of what is sent never arrives."

The stoppage of goods by both state authorities and army officers is the sixth and last of the principal reasons for the unsatisfactory clothing supply during the Revolutionary War. As it seems to have occurred only during the year 1777, it may be considered the least important of the six reasons we have advanced. It merits, consequently, but the briefest treatment.

The evil effects which the stoppage and confiscation of clothing convoys during 1777 had on the distribution of supplies are recounted by Washington. In January he wrote that he was unable to understand why a supply of clothing for New England had not arrived. Later he learned that the State of New York on its own initiative had appropriated 26 bales, "a most extraordinary piece of conduct, and what involves me in the greatest difficulties; for depending upon that Cloathing, I have not applied elsewhere and the Troops in the Field are

63. Ibid., loc. cit.  
64. Ibid., XXV, 419.
now absolutely perishing for want of it." It is true that the New York troops were also in need of clothing but, as Washington wrote to the Committee of Safety of that State, they did not stop to consider that their men were living "in Comfortable Barracks, while ours are Marching over Frost and Snow, many without a Shoe, Stocking or Blanket."

In March Washington made a similar request to Governor Jonathan Trumbull of Connecticut, asking him to see that no clothing was stopped "to prevent Confusion and disappointment in future." Nor was the State of Rhode Island any less hesitant, for it too during March intercepted 1,000 blankets and 20 bales of cloth.

Officers of the army also intercepted supplies. General Gates confiscated a consignment which had been sent for the Massachusetts regiments, and in November General Putnam helped himself to 400 blankets destined for another part of the army. Indeed, Putnam seems to have made a practice of such confiscations, for Washington informed James Mease that he

65. Ibid., VII, 13-14.
66. Ibid., loc. cit.
67. Ibid., VII, 230.
68. Ibid., VIII, 223.
69. Ibid., X, 41.
had written to General Putnam "upon this constant practice of stopping part of the Clothing at Peekskill that is intended for this Army. Washington made it plain to Putnam that "these stoppages by the way disappoint and disarrange our plans" with the result that "those that are farthest off go naked." Washington's insistence must finally have won out for he makes no further references to such stoppages. So much then for this sixth and last of the principal reasons for the shortage of clothing supplies during the Revolution.

We have seen that the clothing supply was totally inadequate to the needs of the men until toward the close of the war. This not only caused suffering and hardship but affected the health and morale of the troops, as well as the strategy of their leaders. We saw that time after time Washington pleaded for more clothing if he was to preserve the physical and mental health of his men and if he was to prevent the army from dissolving like so many snowflakes in the sun. On more than one occasion it was clothing or chaos, clothe the men or loose them. This situation was chronic throughout the course of the war; and although there were times when the supply was sufficient, these were few and detract in no way from the grim picture revealed by our study.
After an inquiry into the supply system, and a consideration both of the men whose office it was to clothe the troops and the means they used to achieve their end, we found that the clothing department was characterized by inefficiency and neglect. The first Clothier General's assumption of office inspired Washington with the hope that his constant worries and continual embarrassment would give way to the calm assurance that his men would now be properly clothed. Yet before long Mease's disinclination to fulfill the duties of his office and the complaints of the officers who dealt with him caused him to be replaced by John Wilkinson. Although Wilkinson's early correspondence indicated a change for the better, he too proved unworthy of his trust and preferred to remain away from camp in blissful ignorance of the needs of the troops. He was replaced, therefore, by John Moylan who remained in office until the cessation of hostilities.

Next we gave a brief account of the three principal means by which the clothier generals and their subordinates undertook to supply the troops: purchase, collection and proscription. A brief study of the efforts made to purchase clothing showed us that frequently the soldiers' sufferings were not due so much to a shortage of stores as to faulty administration. Finally, we saw that some supplies were obtained
by collections made among the civilian population of certain states, and that for a brief while recourse was had to impressment.

Our study concluded with an examination of the six principal reasons for the clothing shortage during the Revolution. The keynote and predominating feature of these six factors might be expressed in the single word corruption. The inefficiency and negligence of those entrusted with obtaining supplies, the refusal of many to accept continental currency in payment for their wares, the grasping spirit of gain which gripped and shrivelled the hearts of so many colonial merchants—all are a sad commentary on the patriotism in which hundreds were so woefully deficient. Indeed, it is difficult to understand how men could be so mean and grasping in the face of such want, yet many colonial merchants were.

Through it all Washington and his soldiers carried on. In the face of neglect, mismanagement, dishonesty, and disloyalty they held aloft the torch of freedom till the price had been paid and their freedom won. Harassed as he was, not only by the multitudinous cares of a commander-in-chief but also pressed by the ever present problem of clothing his troops it is remarkable that Washington was able to carry on. His
patience and forebearance with Congress, the states, and his subordinates, set in new relief his magnificent character so frequently praised without true appreciation. For the men who served under him, for the men who shivered and froze for independence we have nothing but the highest praise. Those were the times that tried mens' souls. Tattered clothes and a biting wind made Tom Paine's summer soldier and sunshine patriot who shrank from the service of their country more than mere figures of speach. But the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph; so those who stood deserve the love and thanks of man and woman.
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The thesis submitted by Richard George Leonard, S.J. has been read and approved by three members of the Department of History.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

August 3, 1946

Charles H. Metzger S.J.

Date
Signature of Adviser