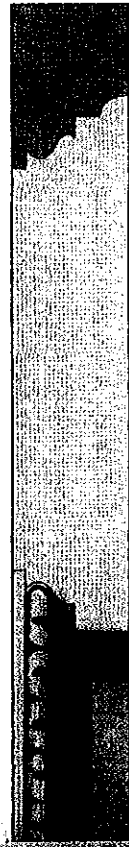


Philip II's niece and cousin as well as his wife. This endogamy—or as Spain's enemies termed it, incest—arose from the desire to join territories together. Don Carlos descended from three generations of intermarriage between the ruling dynasties of Portugal and Spain. This policy, although technically successful (the kingdoms were united in 1580), literally carried within itself the seeds of its own destruction. No wonder the Spanish Habsburgs died out after only two more generations of endogamy! The conquest of England would have done nothing to improve the Habsburg gene pool; it would merely have served to create more for Philip III and his successors to lose. Second order counterfactuals suggest that, even had the armada succeeded, Spanish hegemony would not have lasted for long.

At least, however, Philip's victory in 1588 would have gone down in history as an exemplary "combined operation." Historians would have praised the selection of an ideal invasion area, the formidable planning, the immense resources, the successful diplomacy that neutralized all opposition, and the operational brilliance that (against all the odds) joined an irresistible fleet from Spain with an invincible army from the Netherlands. If, despite all its deficiencies, the duke of Parma and his veteran troops had begun their march on London on Monday August 8, 1588, then—whatever the ultimate outcome—everyone today could regard the invincible armada as Philip II's masterpiece, all Americans would now speak Spanish, and the whole world might celebrate August 8 as a national holiday.



THOMAS FLEMING

UNLIKELY VICTORY

Thirteen Ways the Americans Could Have

Lost the Revolution

The American Revolution is practically a laboratory of counterfactual history. There is hardly an opportunity for an alternative scenario that doesn't exist in those eight years (1775-1783). At times, as Thomas Fleming demonstrates, the unexpected seems the only real certainty. Sometimes sheer luck intervenes. A British marksman has Washington in his sights and doesn't pull the trigger. Commanders display too much or too little caution. The British make a picture-perfect landing on Manhattan Island, and then pause to wait for reinforcements while George Washington and his Continentals slip the noose. At the Battle of the Clouds, Banastre Tarleton, like the emperor Valens at Adrianople, is too impetuous, and the Americans hold on in the South. (There are times when a short rest and a good breakfast could have changed history.) Gambles work. Washington attacks Trenton in a Christmas night snowstorm and reinvigorates the patriot cause. Good or bad choices are made under stress. Benedict Arnold disobeys orders at Saratoga, and the result is an American victory. Would the French have joined the war on our side otherwise? Antipathies influence events. In a turf struggle, the British

commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, tells his Southern commander, Charles, Lord Cornwallis, to retreat to an obscure Virginia tobacco port called Yorktown, fortify it, and ship much of his army back north. The vagaries of weather are a given, of course, as they always have been in military operations. Take the two violent storms that sealed the fate of the British troops trapped at Yorktown in October 1781: The first prevented a rescue fleet from sailing from New York harbor and the second, a breakout attempt across the York River a few days later. How different would the outcome of the Revolution have been if the British had escaped?

By any reasonable stretch of the imagination, Fleming reminds us, the United States should have expired at birth. We were hardly inevitable.

◆ Thomas Fleming is the author of such historical studies as *1776: Year of Illusions*, biographies of Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, *The Man from Monticello* and *The Man Who Dared the Lightning*, *Liberty: The American Revolution*, and, most recently, *Duel: Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr and the Future of America*. He has also written numerous historical novels, including two set during the Revolutionary War, *Liberty Tavern* and *Dreams of Glory*. Fleming has served as chairman of the American Revolution Round Table and is the former president of the American Center of P.E.N., the international writer's organization.

When a historian ponders the what ifs of the American Revolution, chills run up and down and around the cerebellum. There were almost too many moments when the patriot cause teetered on the brink of disaster, to be retrieved by the most unlikely accidents or coincidences or choices made by harried men in the heat of conflict. Seldom if ever was there a war with more potential for changing the course of history. Imagine the last two hundred years—or at the very least, the last hundred—without a United States of America! Picture a world in which the British Empire bestrode not only the subcontinent of India, but the entire continent of North America.

Almost as tantalizing is the society that might have arisen, with a different outcome. If the Americans had lost the war early in the struggle, they might have been permitted a modicum of self rule; there would have been few, if any hangings or confiscations. If victory had come later, when the British government and people were exasperated by long years of resistance, Americans might well have become a subject race, savagely repressed by a standing army, and ruled by an arrogant local aristocracy. The impact on Great Britain would have been almost as dire. The hardliners in the aristocracy, backed by a king who was equally narrow-minded, would have created a state that was relentlessly intolerant of democracy.

Within these extremes are other outcomes. One of the most intriguing appeared even before the war began. The child—independence—could easily have been strangled in its cradle, if some of its parents had not realized that they were performing on a stage far larger than the provincial seaport of Boston.

What if Samuel Adams had gotten his way after the Boston Massacre?

Sam Adams deserves his niche as the master agitator on the torturous path to independence. But he had a tendency to brinkmanship, demonstrated by his less than brilliant staging of the Boston Massacre. With the town occupied by two regiments of British troops, Sam thought his well-armed bullyboys from the North End of Boston could terrify the royal army into a humiliating evacuation. On the night of March 5, 1770, a well-armed 400-man mob pelted the seven-man British detachment guarding the customs house with chunks of ice and pieces of lumber. Screaming insults, they surged to within a few feet of the soldiers' guns. Sam had assured the rioters that the redcoats would never pull their triggers without a magistrate first reading the riot act, officially branding the mob as violators of the king's peace and warning them to disperse. This was something no judge in Boston dared to do, lest he get his house torn down around his ears.

Someone in the crowd struck a soldier with a club, knocking him to the ground. The man sprang to his feet and was struck by another club, thrown from a distance. He leveled his musket and pulled the trigger. Seconds later, the other members of the guard imitated him. The mob fled. As the gunsmoke cleared, five men lay dead or dying. Six more men were wounded.

Although he professed to abhor the bloodshed, Sam Adams was secretly delighted. He foresaw a trial for murder in which the soldiers would be found guilty. Rather than let them hang, the British would intervene, declaring their indifference to the verdicts of American juries. Meanwhile, Sam's propaganda machine would be denouncing the royal murderers and their London backers. It never occurred to Sam that moderates in other colonies and in England would see this denouement as proof that Boston was in the hands of an anarchistic mob, and the British might be excused for resorting to draconian measures to restore law and order.

Fortunately, one man in Boston saw this clearly—Sam's cousin, John

Adams. Although he had been active in Sam's movement, John was shocked when friends of the soldiers informed him that not a lawyer in Boston was willing to defend them, for fear of getting his windows and possibly his face smashed by Sam's sluggers. John announced he would take the soldiers' case. With masterful skill, he managed a plea of self-defense without quite revealing Sam and his friends as the perpetrators of the riot. The soldiers were acquitted and for the rest of his long life, John Adams maintained that his "disinterested action" in defending the redcoats was "one of the best pieces of service I ever rendered my country." He was unquestionably right. Moderate men in England and New York and Virginia were able to tell each other that the Bostonians were worthy of their support.

If Sam had triggered a draconian response, there might never have been a Boston Tea Party. In a town patrolled by six or seven regiments, no further riots would have been tolerated, and Sam and his lieutenants might well have been taken into custody during the peaceful three years between the Massacre and the dumping of the tea into the harbor. Instead, outsiders viewed the confrontation over a piddling but highly symbolic tax on-imported tea as British arrogance and stupidity in action. The tea party was greeted with tut-tuts by the moderates but no one saw it as another demonstration of endemic Yankee lawlessness—and the moderates quickly agreed that the British government's reaction to it—closing the port of Boston and remodeling the government of Massachusetts to extract the democratic elements—was egregious overkill and a step toward tyranny. Soon Sam and John Adams were on their way to the First Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Back in Massachusetts in early 1775, with the British 4,500-man army in Boston under a state of semisiege, confronted by swarms of well-armed minutemen whenever detachments marched into the country, Sam showed he had learned nothing from the Massacre fiasco. He proposed bringing matters to a head by launching an all-out attack on the regulars. Cooler heads prevailed, arguing that the rest of America would never support such a move—and the British would welcome it as proof

that there really was a rebellion in Massachusetts, no different from the ones they had suppressed with ruthless efficiency in Ireland and Scotland.

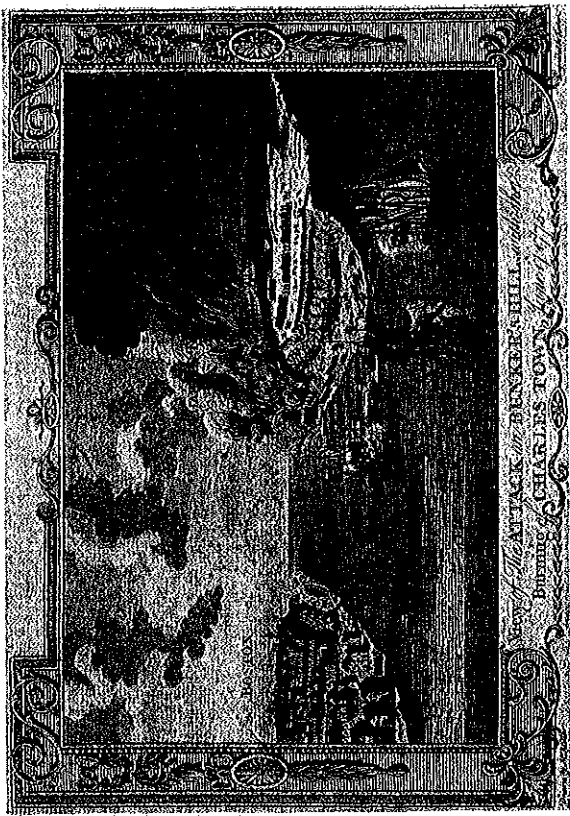
Again, there is no doubt that the cooler men were right. When an impatient ministry pushed the British commander in Boston, Major General Thomas Gage, into action, he sent 700 men on a night march to Concord, hoping to seize the rebels' gunpowder and other war material and effectively disarm them. On Lexington Green, the marchers encountered the town's militia company. Gunfire broke out, leaving dead men on the grass. It was followed by more gunfire and bloodshed at Concord and by a running battle between the British and swarming minutemen on the road back to Boston. Sam Adams had the incident he needed to unite the Americans—and give moderate men in England grounds for attacking the government in Parliament and in the newspapers.

What if the British plan had worked at Bunker Hill?

Two months later the embryo war could have gone either way at Bunker Hill. The mythical version of this battle has the British marching stupidly up the hill to get blasted by American marksmen. In fact, the British had a sophisticated battle plan that could have ended the war if they had been able to execute it.

The field commander, Major General William Howe, intended to outflank the exposed fort on Breed's (not Bunker's) Hill by sending a column of crack light infantrymen up the beach on the shore of the Mystic River and sealing off the narrow neck of the Charlestown Peninsula, trapping the Americans like insects in a bottle. Simultaneously, the other half of the British army was to assault the weakened American lines around Cambridge, where the rebels had most of their powder and ammunition. If all went well, the Americans would be a fleeing mob by the end of the day.

Fortunately for the future of the yet unborn United States, Colonel John Stark, commander of a New Hampshire regiment and a veteran of the French and Indian War, spotted the deserted beach as a potentially fa-



BUNKER HILL: REVOLUTION'S PREMATURE END?

An early nineteenth-century engraving shows the Battle of Bunker (Breed's) Hill and a burning Charlestown, Massachusetts, on June 17, 1775. Had even one of the naval vessels in the harbor come to the aid of the British troops trying to take the hill from the other side—out of view, here—the Revolution might have been throttled that afternoon.

(Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library)

tal flaw in the American position. He ordered 200 of his best men there and took personal command of them. When Howe saw this checkmate, he asked the British admiral on the Boston station to send a sloop up the Mystic River to scatter Stark's men with a few rounds of grapeshot. The admiral demurred, saying he had no charts of the river.

Howe sent his light infantrymen forward anyway, gambling that the American amateurs could not get off more than a round before the professionals were on top of them with their bayonets. It did not work that way. Stark's New Hampshire sharpshooters littered the beach with British dead and Howe was reduced to a desperate frontal assault, which cost him almost half his little army before he carried the Breed's Hill fort.

WHAT IF?

If that British admiral had the energy or the brains to chart the Mystic River, or if John Stark had failed to spot the importance of that beach, Bunker Hill would have been a very different story. Except for some sputters of resistance in Virginia and a few other colonies, the American Revolution might well have ended on June 17, 1775. Instead, the Americans were enormously emboldened by their ability to inflict crippling casualties on their foes—and the British were forced onto a humiliating defensive in a Boston ringed by hostile Yankees.

What if Washington had attacked the British army in Boston in early 1776?

A fascinating possibility preoccupied George Washington after he took command of the American army outside Boston in July of 1775. For nine months a stalemate ensued, largely caused by Washington's shortage of artillery and his inability to prevent most of his Yankee army from going home on January 1, 1776, when their enlistments expired. In March of 1776, his spies reported that numerous British ships in the harbor were taking on water and provisions, preparing to withdraw from Boston. Their destination was presumed to be New York.

By this time, Washington had acquired plenty of artillery from captured Fort Ticonderoga and his army was again a respectable size. The American commander decided to abort this enemy plan to seize New York, where they would be far more dangerous to the Revolution than they were on a cramped defensive in Boston.

Washington concocted a daring, even a hair-raising plan. First he would seize Dorchester Heights, south of the city, and emplace cannon on it. When the British attacked the position, he would send 4,000 men in forty-five bateaux, supported by 12-pound cannon on rafts, to assault Boston from the Charles River. While half the force seized Beacon Hill and similar high ground in the city, the other half would attack British fortifications on Boston Neck, opening the way for reinforcements waiting to rush overland from Roxbury. Washington was convinced that the

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destruction of Howe's army would cripple the British war effort and lead to an immediate peace.

At first, everything went according to plan. On the night of March 4, Washington seized Dorchester Heights and mounted cannon in a series of forts that the British would have to attack or abandon Boston. General Howe readied his army for an assault on March 5. Still an ambitious gambler, Howe planned to attack Washington's Roxbury lines with 4,000 men as the rest of his troops—about 2,200 men—advanced on Dorchester. That left only 400 redcoats guarding the side of Boston at which Washington was aiming his amphibious assault.

The stage was set for a titanic showdown. But as darkness fell on March 5, a cold, biting wind began to blow, mixing snow and hail. Soon it was a "hurricane," in the words of one of Washington's junior officers. Howe called off his attack and Washington's plan also went into the circular files. Would it have worked? When the British evacuated Boston thirteen days later, Washington had a chance to study, at close range, the fortifications he was hoping to assault. He was awed by their strength. "The town of Boston," he admitted, "was almost impregnable." In a letter to his brother Jack, Washington called the storm a "remarkable interposition of providence."

A Washington defeat at that point in the war, while it would not necessarily have ended the conflict, would have been calamitous for his reputation. Critics in the Continental Congress and in the army were already sniping at him, fretting over his supposed timidity and indecisiveness. Would a Washington victory have ended the war, as he hoped? Probably not. The British government was in the process of shipping to America an army four times the size of the one in Boston.

What if the British had trapped Washington's army on Long Island or Manhattan?

George Washington had urged the Continental Congress to give him an army of 40,000 men, enlisted for the duration of the war. Congress be-

lived the fantasy Sam Adams exported from Boston after Lexington and Concord: Yeoman farmers had sprung to arms to defeat British regulars. In reality, Massachusetts had an embryo army of minutemen who had been training for nine months and were five times the size of the British garrison in Boston. Washington was told to limit his army to 20,000 men, enlisted for a single year, and rely on militia—part-time soldiers who, unlike the minutemen, had little or no training. Then Congress nibbled away at Washington's army, demanding that detachments be shipped to bolster the losing war the Americans were fighting in Canada.

As a result, Washington showed up in New York with little more than 10,000 regulars—Continentalists, as they were called—and summoned a horde of militia from New England, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania to bolster his force. He confronted a royal army that numbered almost 30,000 men, including about 12,000 German mercenaries. At the battle of Long Island on August 27, the British, once more commanded by William Howe, devised a flanking strategy that worked. The calamitous day ended with most of Washington's army trapped in forts in Brooklyn Heights.

Two nights later, with the help of a favorable wind and a fortuitous fog, Washington stealthily withdrew his army to Manhattan. There he had two more narrow escapes. On September 15, the British landed at Kips Bay (present-day Thirty-fourth Street), routing thousands of Connecticut militia. Only excessive caution prevented the British from trapping a third of the Continental Army in lower Manhattan.

On October 18, the British landed at Pell's Point in Westchester. A fighting retreat by a 750-man Massachusetts brigade gave Washington time to get his army off Manhattan Island. By this time Washington had no illusions about the militia; most of them had gone home. While many American leaders despaired, Washington kept his head and took charge of the war. He told Congress the American army would no longer seek to end the struggle in one titanic battle. "We will *never* seek a general action," he informed the president of Congress, John Hancock. Instead, "We will protract the war." This seemingly simple change in strategy trans-

formed the conflict into a war of attrition—precisely the kind of war the British were least prepared to fight.

If Washington and his army had been trapped in Brooklyn Heights or Manhattan, the war would have ended quickly. The stupidity of Congress's reliance on militia had become apparent to everyone. It would have been very difficult for Americans to raise another army, after the routs on Long Island and at Kips Bay. Worse, the alternative general action strategy called for replicating the Battle of Bunker Hill, an idea that obsessed most American generals. The British would never have repeated that mistake. Without Washington's new strategy, despair would have seeped through the revolutionists' ranks.

What if Washington had decided not to attack Trenton and Princeton or failed in either attempt?

Retreating across New Jersey, Washington watched the the British begin pacifying this crucial state. They circulated a proclamation, urging the civilians to swear "peaceable allegiance" to George III and receive a "protection," a guarantee that their lives and property would not be forfeited. Thousands took advantage of the offer to bail out of the apparently lost cause. The New Jersey militia, 17,000 strong on paper, evaporated. Barely 1,000 men turned out. It was a preview of how the British hoped to end the war in other colonies.

To protect the loyalists, the British stationed garrisons in various towns across the state. Washington noted they were "a good deal dispersed"—making them ripe targets for a defeat by a concentration of superior force. On Christmas night, 1776, Washington slashed across the Delaware in a driving snowstorm to capture three German regiments at Trenton. New Jersey and the rest of the almost stillborn nation became, in the words of one dismayed Briton, "liberty mad" again.

Ten days later, Washington took an even more nerve-racking gamble. He had returned to the New Jersey side of the Delaware to rally the state—and found himself confronting some 7,000 well-armed redcoats

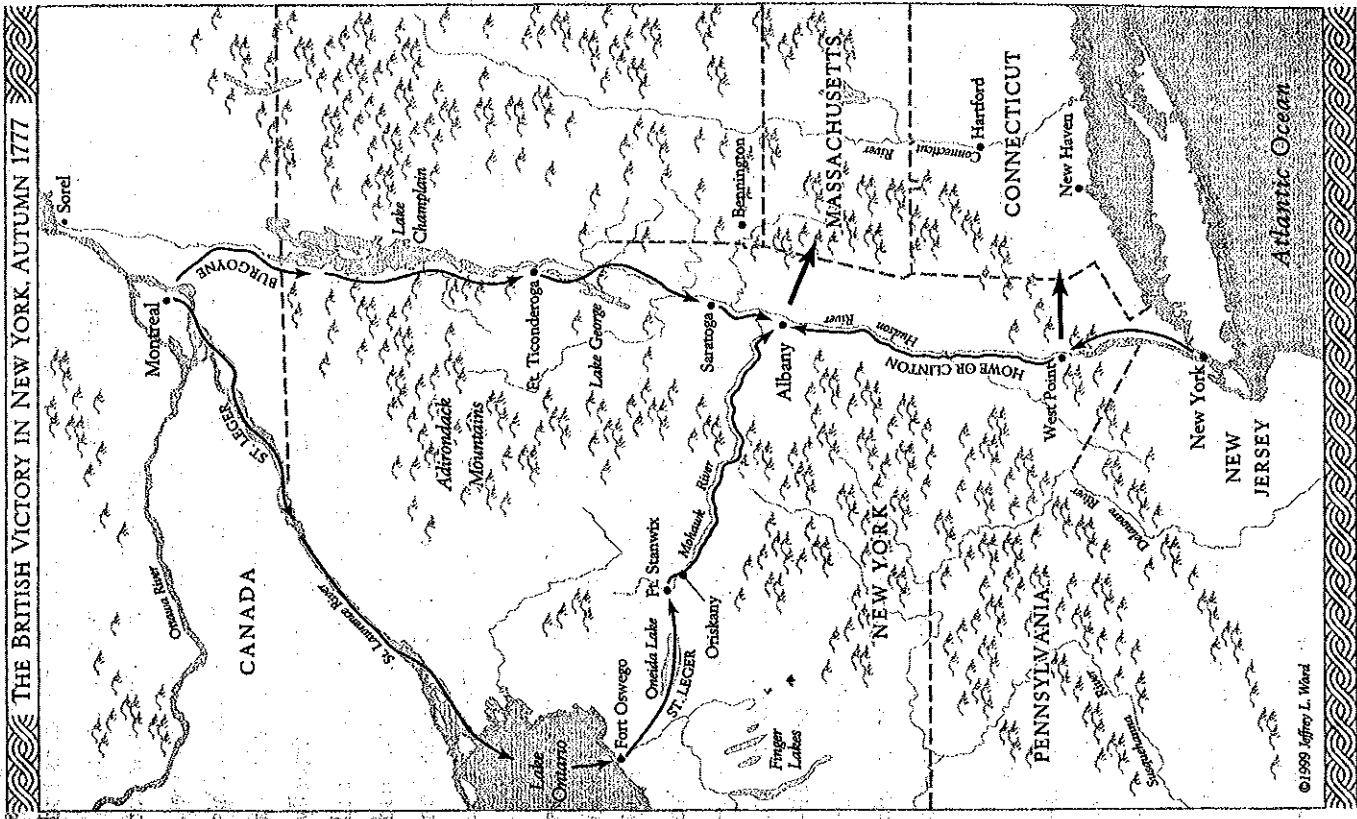
commanded by Charles, Lord Cornwallis. Wheeling around the enemy flank in a night march that was a neat riposte to Howe's maneuver on Long Island, Washington chewed up the British garrison at Princeton and retreated with booty and prisoners to high ground in Morristown. The befuddled British, fearful that he was planning to strike their main base at New Brunswick, relapsed to a timid defensive around that town, abandoning most of New Jersey to the rebels.

If Washington had hesitated to launch these two daring attacks with his ragged, barefoot army, or had failed in either attempt, the middle colonies—New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Delaware—would have surrendered almost immediately. The South, or at least haughty Virginia, might have taken longer to subdue and the stubborn New Englanders even longer. But King George's men, skillfully appealing to moderates with the assurance that "British liberty" was a central part of the conciliation package, would have inevitably prevailed. Within a year or two at most, Americans would have been on their way to becoming replicas of the Canadians, tame, humble colonials in the triumphant British empire, without an iota of the independent spirit that has been the heart of the nation's identity.

What if General Benedict Arnold had not turned himself into Admiral Arnold on Lake Champlain?

A similar outcome could have resulted if things had gone differently in another part of the war in the fall of 1776. If Brigadier General Benedict Arnold had lacked the nautical know-how—and incredible nerve—to launch an American fleet on Lake Champlain in the late summer of 1776, the British would have wintered in Albany and been ready to launch a war of annihilation against New England in the spring of 1777.

Routed from Canada by massive British reinforcements, Arnold and the remnants of the so-called Northern Army had retreated to Fort Ticonderoga, at the foot of Lake Champlain. A more unpromising situation was hard to imagine. The British commander, Guy Carleton, was



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planning to assault the so-called "Gibraltar of America" with perhaps 16,000 men and numerous Indians. To oppose him, the Americans had barely 3,500 broken, dispirited men, ravaged by smallpox and defeat.

Marching down Lake Champlain's forested 135-mile shore was out of the question. Carleton planned to come by water, backed by a fleet. Arnold decided to turn himself into an admiral and create a fleet of his own. He had made many voyages to the West Indies and Canada as a merchant and knew his way around a ship. Procuring carpenters virtually by legerdemain, he knocked together thirteen clumsy row galleys and gondolas made of green wood and crewed them with soldiers who had never been on a ship in their lives. With an insouciance that bordered on insanity, Arnold sailed this makeshift squadron up the lake and dared the British to come out and fight.

Almost too late, the impromptu admiral learned that Carleton was building a full-rigged 180-ton man-of-war, HMS *Inflexible*, which had enough firepower to annihilate his matchbox fleet all by herself. Arnold retreated down the lake to Valcour Island, where he took up a defensive position. In the British camp, numerous officers urged Carleton to advance without *Inflexible*. It was already September. In another month, snow might begin to fall. They had twenty-four gunboats, two well-armed schooners, and a huge artillery raft called the *Thunderer* afloat. But the cautious Carleton, impressed by Arnold's bravado, demurred and his army sat at the head of the lake for another four weeks while *Inflexible* was rigged and armed.

Not until October 11th, 1776, did Carleton's armada approach Arnold's fleet, anchored across the mouth of Valcour Bay. In a wild six-hour melee, the Americans took a terrific beating but held their battle line until nightfall. In the darkness, Arnold led a runaway retreat but the British caught up to him over the following three days and destroyed all but five of his ships. Ticonderoga was Carleton's for the taking. He had a five-to-one advantage in men and guns.

The American garrison pretended to be eager to fight, hurling cannon balls and curses at British scouting parties. Carleton, remembering

Bunker Hill, ruled out a frontal assault and decided it was too late in the year to begin a siege. As the British retreated to Canada for the winter, one of Carleton's officers groaned: "If we could have begun our expedition four weeks earlier." It had taken exactly four weeks for Carleton to launch *Inflexible*. Admiral Arnold and his green fleet had broken the momentum of the British counterattack from the North.

If Carleton had captured Ticonderoga in the fall of 1776 and routed or captured the Northern Army, there would have been nothing to prevent him from seizing Albany before the snow fell. In the ensuing spring he would have been able to smash into New England wherever he chose, much as Sherman ravaged the South from its exposed western flank in the Civil War. Even before he marched, Carleton would have converted Albany into a center of loyalist resistance to the Continental Congress. The Canadian commander was a far more astute conciliator than the Howes. He paroled all the prisoners he had captured in Canada and sent them home well fed and forgiven. Loyalty was strong in Northern New York, as the five-year-long bloody battles of the so-called "border warfare" would soon attest.

What if Benedict Arnold had obeyed orders at Saratoga?

A year later, it did not look as if General/Admiral Arnold's Valcour Bay heroics meant much. General John Burgoyne had replaced Carleton as the British northern commander and in early July he sailed unopposed down Lake Champlain and captured Ticonderoga with stunning ease. The disorganized Americans had largely wasted the precious months. Arnold had bought them with his driving energy and combative spirit.

To oppose Burgoyne's 9,000-man army, Congress chose Major General Horatio Gates, a former British staff officer with no battle experience worth mentioning. To bolster him on the fighting side, Washington sent him Arnold, now a major general, and huge pugnacious Colonel Daniel Morgan of Virginia with his corps of riflemen. Constructing elaborate fortifications on Bemis Heights, some twenty-eight miles north of Al-

his leg. Gates finally emerged from his tent and ordered the redoubt held at all hazards." Its cannon commanded the British camp.

The following night, the British tried to retreat. But swarming militia cut them off and Burgoyne surrendered his army to Gates on October 17, 1777, an event of earthshaking importance in both the military and diplomatic history of the Revolution. In France, Louis XVI's advisors decided the Americans could win the war and began backing them with desperately needed money and guns. England declared war on their ancient enemy and the conflict spread to the West Indies, Africa, and India.

If Arnold had gone along with Gates at the first battle of Saratoga, Burgoyne, a far more aggressive general than Carleton, would almost certainly have destroyed Gates's army and seized control of the Hudson River Valley. If Howe had stayed in New York and then advanced up the Hudson to meet Burgoyne, Gates's destruction would have been guaranteed with or without Arnold's heroics. A halfhearted last-minute attempt to rescue Burgoyne by a 4,000-man detachment from the New York garrison threw the Americans into near panic, even though it came to nothing.

Without Benedict Arnold at Valcour Bay and Saratoga, the war might well have ended in 1777. Without the feud between Burgoyne and Howe, it might have ended no later than 1778. By this time, the denouement would not have been so conciliatory. Many British and loyalists were calling 1777 "the year of the hangman." America's future as a dominion of England was veering from the benign fate of loyal Canada to the tragedy of rebellious Ireland. This trend would acquire ever-more vengeful momentum as the war dragged on.

What if Captain Ferguson had pulled the trigger?

Meanwhile, George Washington was fighting and losing the battles of Brandywine and Germantown in defense of the American capital, Philadelphia. As the first of these clashes developed there was a moment

bany, Gates hunkered down to await Burgoyne's attack. He seemed to think he could reenact Bunker Hill in the forest.

Burgoyne had no intention of cooperating with him. He had gone to immense trouble to drag some forty-two heavy guns through the woods from Ticonderoga. His plan of attack called for a flanking movement that would enable him to position these guns on high ground and hammer Gates's fortifications—and army—to pieces. Arnold saw the danger and after a ferocious argument convinced the timid Gates to let him fight the British in the woods. The result was a tremendous battle in and around cleared ground known as Freeman's Farm, in which Arnold and his men inflicted heavy casualties on the British and forced them to retreat.

Three weeks later, on October 7, Burgoyne attacked again. Now his motive was desperation. His men were on half rations; sickness and defeatism were multiplying. In a move that combined jealousy and stupidity, General Howe had abandoned him. Instead of fighting Washington in New Jersey, from which forced marches could have brought him to Burgoyne's aid, Howe had sailed south from New York to attack Philadelphia from the head of the Chesapeake. Capturing the American capital seemed to Howe a far better way to end the war than Burgoyne's plan to subdue New York and split the New England states from the rest of the American confederacy. As the British commander in chief, with an army three times the size of Burgoyne's, Howe also had no enthusiasm for letting Gentleman Johnny become the man who won the war. This otherwise incomprehensible decision is a good example of how often history turns on grudges and antagonisms between men in power.

On the American side, the sneaky Gates had infuriated Arnold by giving him no credit for his exploits in the first battle of Freeman's Farm. After an exchange of insults, Gates had relieved Arnold of command and confined him to his tent. But when the second battle began, Arnold disobeyed orders and rode to the sound of the guns. Once more his presence on the battlefield was electrifying. At the climax of the struggle, he led a frontal assault that captured a key British redoubt as a bullet shattered

when the twitch of a finger on the trigger of a rifle might have changed American history forever. Washington was reconnoitering the countryside, trying to decide where to position his army to stop Howe's advance from the head of the Chesapeake. As he rode through a patch of woods near Brandywine Creek, he encountered Captain Patrick Ferguson of the British Army.

Ferguson was the inventor of the first breech-loading rifle, and he had one of those deadly weapons in his hands. It could spew out six bullets a minute and was far more accurate than the musket that was the standard gun in both armies. With no idea he had come face to face with Washington, Ferguson called on the horseman and his escort, a brightly uniformed hussar officer, to surrender. The officer shouted a warning and Washington wheeled his horse and galloped away. Ferguson took aim, then lowered his gun. He could not bring himself to shoot an unarmed enemy in the back. He was also more than a little impressed by the man's cool indifference to sudden death.

If Washington had been killed in the fall of 1777, the American war effort would have been more than a little demoralized. By now it was becoming apparent to many people that the tall Virginian was the linchpin of the struggle, the man who combined an ability to inspire loyalty in the Continental Army with a steadfast commitment to the ideals of the Revolution. On the eve of Trenton, Congress had given Washington dictatorial powers to deal with the situation—and he had humbly returned this Cromwellian authority to the politicians six months later. The probability of finding another Washington was more than remote—it was almost certainly impossible.

What if Gates had replaced Washington as commander in chief?

A few months after Washington's narrow escape from Captain Ferguson, the American commander confronted a conspiracy inside the army and Congress to depose him in favor of Major General Horatio Gates, the victor at Saratoga. If the plot had succeeded, the results would have

been, if anything, more disastrous than an outcome wreaked by Ferguson's bullet.

Horatio Gates was a cunning egotist who allowed aides and friends to puff him into a competitor for the top command. After all, Washington had lost two crucial battles and the British had captured Philadelphia. The American army was now starving at Valley Forge. It was at least superficially plausible to call for new leadership.

One of the pointmen in the conspiracy was an Irish-born volunteer from the French Army, General Thomas Conway, whose name has become affixed to the plot. In fact, the "Conway Cabal" was a New England conspiracy, run from Congress by Sam Adams (once more demonstrating bad political judgment) with some background encouragement from Cousin John, who intensely resented Washington's soaring popularity. Conway was a loudmouth whom the real plotters manipulated. It soon became apparent that the cabal lacked a serious following in the army or in Congress. But for a few months, Washington's headquarters was in frequent turmoil, responding to it.

If the cabal had succeeded and Gates had become the American commander in chief, the Revolution would have almost certainly ended in a whimper. In no way could the short fussy Englishman, called "Granny" by his troops, have replaced Washington as an inspiring figure. Worse, in 1780, when Gates led an army into the South to repel a British invasion that had already captured Charleston and most of South Carolina, he met a catastrophic defeat at Camden. On the fastest horse he could find, Horatio did not stop retreating until he was 160 miles from the battlefield.

A frantic Congress, its Continental dollars degenerating into wastepaper, the Southern states about to be overrun, might well have turned to a general with a reputation as a fighter: Benedict Arnold. By this time, however, the disgruntled hero of Saratoga was deep in correspondence with the British high command about how to best betray the American cause. Imagine his delight if he had been made commander in chief of the Continental Army! He would have been able to fulfill the

ambition he hinted at when he signed some of his early letters to the British "General Monk." The pen name suggests Arnold saw himself as a reincarnation of General George Monk (or Monck), who switched sides in 1660 after the death of Oliver Cromwell and backed the restoration of the Stuart monarchy. No doubt Arnold was thinking of the wealth and titles that a grateful Charles II heaped on Monck.

Even without this gift from Congress, Arnold's plotting came close to unraveling the Revolution. His plan to surrender the key fortress of West Point to the British in the fall of 1780 went awry only because the chief of British intelligence, Major John André, was captured by some wandering American militiamen while returning to British-held New York with the plans for the fortress in his boot. A seizure of West Point would have given the British their long-sought control of the Hudson River, enabling them to isolate New England from the rest of the colonies. Such a blow, coming in a year when the American Army had been shaken by a serious mutiny in its winter quarters, the South was being overrun by British and loyalist armies, and the depreciation of the Continental dollar had reached the nadir of total collapse, could well have been the *coup de grace* that the British sensed was within reach.

What if the British had destroyed the French expeditionary force within days of its arrival?

Another moment when the war hung in the balance was rescued by George Washington's talent for espionage. With some help from a Long Island-born cavalryman, Major Benjamin Tallmadge, Washington was his own intelligence chief. He operated several networks inside New York. One of these, known as the Culper ring, smuggled him alarming news in July of 1780. The British were putting 6,000 men aboard ships for a preemptive strike at the French expeditionary force that had just landed at Newport, Rhode Island.

Nothing would have more certainly ended the war than the destruction of this 5,500-man army. Rampant inflation and war weariness were

eroding the Continental Army's morale. Recruiting new men was becoming impossible because of the worthless currency. Thus far, the French alliance had been a series of bitter disappointments for the allies. A 1778 attempt to capture British-held Newport ended in a fiasco. A 1779 assault on Savannah was repulsed with severe losses. A devastating defeat such as the British hoped to inflict would have knocked a discouraged France out of the war.

Washington could not outmatch the British fleet in a race to Newport. He fell back on his spy master's role. A double agent approached a British outpost with a packet of papers, which he claimed to have found on the road. It contained detailed plans for a massive American attack on New York. The British transports and their escorting men of war were already heading down Long Island Sound for the open sea. Signal fires were lit at strategic points on the shore (Long Island was in British hands) and the fleet hauled into Huntington Bay to receive the "captured" American war plans, rushed there by hard-riding horsemen. The dismayed British abandoned the descent on Newport and rushed back to New York, where they hunkered down in their numerous forts for an attack that never came. By the time the British realized Washington had gulled them, the French had fortified Newport, making a successful assault impossible.

The failure to knock the French out of the war forced the British to maintain a serious army in New York, complicating their new strategy, to conquer the South.

What if Daniel Morgan had lost at Cowpens?

While a stalemate prevailed in the North, the South continued to slide into British control. Georgia had returned to royal allegiance in 1779. The capitulation of Charleston in the spring of 1780, with its 5,000-man garrison, more than balanced Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga. After the Camden rout, the Southern Continental Army dwindled to some 800 half-starved men. The new commander, Major General Nathanael

Greene, tried to persuade guerilla leaders such as Thomas Sumter to operate under his control, with no success.

Greene saw that the British would snuff out these pickup bands one by one. Under burly, aggressive Lieutenant Colonel Banastre Tarleton, the royal army had perfected a quick strike force, the British Legion, a mix of cavalry and infantry, that could travel as much as seventy miles a day, often catching the guerillas in their camps. The tough policy of requiring men to serve in the royal militia or have their crops and houses burned was also proving brutally effective. By the end of 1780, South Carolina's resistance was at the vanishing point. The British were discussing a quick conquest of North Carolina and an assault on Virginia.

In a gesture that was half strategic and half despairing, Greene ordered Daniel Morgan, now a brigadier general, to take 600 regulars and the remnants of the American cavalry, about 70 men under Lieutenant Colonel William Washington (George's second cousin) and march into western South Carolina in an attempt to rally the prostrate state. The British commander, Lord Cornwallis, dispatched Tarleton and his British Legion to finish off Morgan's feeble foray.

There seemed little doubt that the redheaded cavalryman would do the job. Scooping up reinforcements en route, Tarleton headed for Morgan at his usual pace, ignoring the cold December rain that turned the roads to gumbo. The Old Wagoner, as the muscular, six-foot-two Morgan was called, saw no alternative but headlong retreat. Barely 300 militia had responded to his pleas. As Morgan approached the Broad River, Tarleton's scouts were only about five miles behind him. The Broad was in flood and Morgan realized he might lose half his little army if he tried to cross it.

Nearby was a patch of rolling lightly wooded ground called The Cowpens, where local farmers used to winter cattle. Morgan decided to make a stand in this deserted pasture. A last desperate exhortation persuaded another 150 militia to join him. The big Virginian drew up a battle plan that made maximum use of these temporary soldiers, without

depending on them too much. He positioned the amateurs in two echelons well forward of his Continentals. They were told to give him "two fires" and then they could run for their lives—which was what they would do anyway.

About 150 yards behind the second line, Morgan took personal command of his Continentals on a low ridge. Behind them, sheltered by the rise, he held William Washington and his cavalry in reserve. Morgan spent the night going from campfire to campfire, explaining his battle plan to every man—assuring them that if they did their jobs, the Old Wagoner would crack his whip over "Benny" Tarleton in the morning.

Tarleton arrived on the battlefield at dawn on January 17, 1781, after an all-night march. Without giving his tired men a chance to pause even for breakfast, he ordered them into line of battle and advanced. That was his first blunder. His second was ignoring the way the militia marksmen emptied the saddles of his flanking cavalry and cut down a ruinous number of his officers at the head of their companies.

The militia raced for the rear, giving Tarleton the impression the battle was as good as won. But he soon collided with the Continentals, who poured volley after volley into his ranks. The British commander threw in his reserve, the 71st Highlanders, to outflank them. To meet this threat, the Americans ordered their flank companies to fall back and face the Scots, a standard battlefield maneuver known as "refusing" one's flank. In the confusion, the whole American line began to retreat and Tarleton, thinking a rout was imminent, ordered a bayonet charge. Cheering ferociously, the redcoated line surged forward.

But Morgan was still in command of the situation. He got a message from William Washington, now out on the British right flank: "They are coming on like a mob. Give them one fire and I'll charge them." Morgan shouted the order to the Continentals, who turned, fired from the hip and charged the onrushing British with the bayonet. Simultaneously, the cavalry hit them in the rear, slashing men with their fearsome sabres.

The British, exhausted and with many companies leaderless, pan-

icked. Some threw down their guns and surrendered; others ran. In five minutes the battle was over. Morgan had won a victory that destroyed Tarleton's army and dramatically reversed the tide of the war in the South. If Tarleton's frontal assault had succeeded, there is little doubt that North and South Carolina would have followed Georgia into royal government. Virginia, which was showing ominous signs of war weariness, was equally vulnerable, and Maryland, too, would have been sucked into this defeatist vortex. With the virtually bankrupt French government already sending out feelers for a peace conference, the British might have ended the war in possession of the entire South. In a few years they would have undoubtedly launched a renewed assault on the precariously independent Northern colonies from this base.

What if Washington had refused to march to Virginia to trap the British at Yorktown—or the British had escaped after the siege began?

After fighting a costly battle against a revived Continental Army at Guilford Court House in North Carolina, the British Southern commander, Charles, Lord Cornwallis, retreated to the coast and decided to discard the state-by-state strategy the Royal Army had been following. Only if wealthy, populous Virginia was reduced would the South surrender. Marching north and taking command of troops raiding the Virginia coast, the earl found no resistance worth mentioning from a tiny American army under Marquis de Lafayette.

But Cornwallis met a great deal more opposition from the British commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, who felt the earl had invaded his bailiwick and was in danger of losing the lower South to the resurgent Nathaniel Greene. An exchange of acrimonious letters let Cornwallis know who was running the war—and he glumly retreated to a small tobacco port, Yorktown, at the tip of the peninsula of the same name, with orders to fortify it and ship most of his army to Clinton in New York.

The earl nastily informed Clinton he would have to keep the entire

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army of 7,500 men to build the required fortifications. So the war spilled to the late summer of 1781, still stalemated in the North and only slightly less deadlocked in the South. More and more, it was obvious that whoever struck the next blow—a victory on the level of Saratoga or Charleston—would win by a knockout.

Outside New York City, George Washington and the Comte de Rochambeau, the commander of the French expeditionary force, conferred about where to strike this blow. Washington wanted to attack New York. But his army, even with French reinforcements, was too weak. The French commander argued for a march south to try to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. Washington dismissed it as a waste of time and energy as long as the British Navy controlled the American coast. They would rescue Cornwallis before the Allied army could force him to capitulate.

Rochambeau informed Washington that the French West Indies fleet had orders to sail north to escape the hurricane season. Why not tell them to head for the Chesapeake—while they did likewise with their soldiers? Washington reluctantly assented, although he still thought the British Navy would rout the French fleet, as they had so often in the past. He also worried that a substantial number of his unpaid war-weary soldiers would desert rather than make the march.

If Washington had refused to march to Yorktown, the French would probably have given up on him. The Revolution looked moribund. The Continental dollar was so worthless, it took, Washington gloomily noted, "a wagonload of money to buy a wagonload of hay." Recruiting officers reported zero interest in army service. The French were ready to withdraw their expeditionary force and throw in the diplomatic equivalent of the towel.

Instead, Washington marched south and a series of miracles occurred. Desertions were few, thanks to a hasty infusion of hard money from the French army's military chest, and the French fleet arrived just in time to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. The British fleet sallied from New York to rescue the earl and his men. On September 5, in the little known

Battle of the Chesapeake Capes, the Royal Navy, commanded by a third-rate admiral named Thomas Graves, did everything wrong and the French did a few things right. The badly battered British limped back to New York and Cornwallis remained trapped on the tip of the Yorktown peninsula, a prime target for Allied siege guns.

If Graves had won the sea fight off the capes and rescued Cornwallis, American disillusion with the French would have been little short of overwhelming. The discouraged Continental Congress might have told their diplomats to get the best deal they could manage from the British in the looming peace negotiations. The Americans might have been forced to surrender large chunks of New York and most of the South. The British would also have probably claimed the trans-Appalachian west, where their Indian allies were waging a sanguinary war. The American alliance with France would have collapsed, exposing the infant republic to a world in which England remained the dominant power.

In New York, a frantic Sir Henry Clinton proposed to Admiral Graves a rescue plan that called for putting most of the army on navy ships and fighting their way into the Chesapeake to join Cornwallis. Together they would launch an all-out attack on Washington and Rochambeau that would decide the war. Alas for Sir Henry, Admiral Graves had no stomach for such a venture. He insisted he had to repair his damaged ships first. This led to a series of excuses and delays that dragged on for weeks.

On October 13, the fleet was supposed to sail—when a tremendous thunderstorm swept over New York harbor. Terrific gusts of wind snapped the anchor cable on one of the ships of the line, smashing her into another ship and damaging both of them. Once again Admiral Graves decided he could not leave until the damage was repaired. It was not the first nor would it be the last time that weather played a crucial role in the struggle for independence.

By October 15, French and American artillery had pounded Cornwallis's defenses to a shambles. Picked troops had captured two key redoubts, which enabled them to enfilade his lines. The moment

approached when the Allies would launch a decisive frontal assault. A desperate Cornwallis decided on a daring getaway plan. Across the York River in Gloucester was a British outpost. Only about 750 French troops and some Virginia militia were stationed on its perimeter, largely to prevent foraging. Perhaps remembering Washington's escape from Brooklyn Heights, Cornwallis decided to ferry most of his army across the river on the night of October 16 and break out of the Gloucester lines at dawn. By forced marches, they would head north to the mouth of the Delaware, where they could easily contact British headquarters in New York.

As the Allied guns continued their relentless pounding, Cornwallis relieved the British light infantry in the front lines and marched them to the water's edge. There they boarded sixteen heavy flatboats manned by sailors of the Royal Navy. They were joined by the elite Foot Guards and the better part of the equally elite Royal Welch Fusiliers. It took at least two hours to make the trip back and forth across the broad river. Around midnight the boats returned and a second contingent embarked.

About ten minutes later a tremendous storm broke over the river. Within five minutes, there was a full gale blowing, as violent, from the descriptions in various diaries, as the storm that had damaged the British fleet in New York. Shivering in the bitter wind, soaked to the skin, the exhausted soldiers and sailors returned to the Yorktown shore. Not until two A.M. did the wind moderate. It was much too late to get the rest of the army across the river. Glumly, Cornwallis ordered the guards and the light infantry to return. About 7 A.M. on October 17, the earl, his second in command, Brigadier Charles O'Hara, and their staffs went to the forward trenches and morosely studied the sweep and scope of the allied bombardment. The commander of the artillery informed them that there were only 100 mortar shells left. The sick and wounded multiplied by the hour.

Cornwallis asked his officers what he should do. Fight to the last man? Every officer told him that he owed it to his men to surrender. They

had done all that was expected of them, and more. Silently, Cornwallis nodded his assent. He turned to an aide and dictated a historic letter.

Sir, I propose a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours, and that two officers may be appointed by each side . . . to settle terms for the surrender of the posts at York and Gloucester.

Not a few military authorities think Cornwallis's getaway might have succeeded, if it were not for that storm. Without the previous storm in New York harbor, Sir Henry Clinton might have embarrassed Admiral Graves into sailing on October 13. That would have gotten him to the Chesapeake before Cornwallis signed the articles of surrender on October 19. Either alternative would have created the possibility of a far different outcome. A Cornwallis getaway would have left the French and Americans frustrated and hopeless, facing a stalemated war they no longer had the money or the will to fight. American independence—or a large chunk of it—might have been traded away in the peace conference. A Clinton invasion of the Chesapeake would have triggered a stupendous naval and land battle that might well have ended in a British victory—enabling them to impose the harshest imaginable peace on the exhausted Americans and shattered French. Instead the Allies had landed the knockout blow.

What if George Washington had failed to stop the Newburgh Conspiracy?

As the war wound down to random clashes between small units in the South and West and along the northern border of New York, the American Revolution confronted one last crisis that might have made the long struggle all but meaningless. Once more the cause was rescued by that man for all seasons, George Washington.

As 1783 began, word arrived from Europe that Benjamin Franklin and the other American negotiators in Paris had signed a triumphant peace, recognizing the independence of the United States and extending American sovereignty to the east bank of the Mississippi. All that was

needed now was a peace treaty between France and England. But this good news did not produce diapasons of joy inside the Continental Army.

On the contrary, this glimpse of peace just over the horizon aroused in the officer corps a surge of sullen fury. Congress had not paid them for years. In 1780, they had been promised half-pay for life. Now Congress no longer needed them and was reportedly going to welch on this agreement. Antagonism between the lawmakers and "the gentlemen of the blade," as some hostile New England congressmen called the officers, was not new. The officers decided to settle matters while they still had guns in their hands.

The officers dispatched a delegation to Congress led by Major General Alexander McDougall of New York. Choosing McDougall as a spokesman was a statement in itself. In the early 1770s, this abrasive demagogic New Yorker had been second only to Sam Adams as an agitator. The officers wanted an advance on their back pay, a solemn commitment to pay the balance eventually, and negotiation to settle the promise of half pay for life either by a lump sum payment or full pay for a number of years.

When McDougall met with James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and other congressmen on January 13, 1783, Madison thought his language was "very high colored." Another member of the military delegation, Colonel John Brooks, warned that a disappointment would throw the army into "extremities." On February 13, Alexander Hamilton, who had retired from the army after Yorktown, wrote Washington an urgent letter, warning him that the situation was close to exploding.

Hamilton's letter arrived just in time. A dangerous conspiracy was simmering between officers at Newburgh and the army delegation in Philadelphia. Among the leaders was Major John Armstrong, aide to Washington's old enemy, Major General Horatio Gates. From Philadelphia, Armstrong wrote Gates that if the troops had someone like "Mad Anthony [Wayne] at their head," instead of Washington, "I know not where they would stop," especially if they "could be taught to think like politicians."

Soon Armstrong and another Gates man, Pennsylvania Colonel Walter Stewart, began circulating anonymous "addresses" in the camp at Newburgh, calling on the army not to disband "until they had obtained justice." Next came another anonymous letter, urging the officers to meet and resolve to do something about a country that "tramples on your rights, disdains your cries, and insults your distresses."

Forewarned by Hamilton's letter, Washington's reaction to these Newburgh addresses was immediate and fierce. He condemned the unauthorized meeting and announced his determination to "arrest on the spot the foot that [is] wavering on a tremendous precipice." The dawn of peace had made him acutely aware that they were setting precedents for a new country. If the army got away with bullying Congress, it would cause America endless tragedies in the future.

On March 13, 1783, Washington convened a formal meeting with the officers in a large building in the Newburgh camp called The Temple. It was used as a church on Sundays and as a dance hall on other occasions. The commander in chief gave a passionate speech, pleading with the men, "as you value your own sacred honor," to ignore the anonymous letters calling for a march on Congress. He urged them to look with "utmost horror and detestation" on any man who "wishes, under any specious pretenses, to overturn the liberties of our country."

The men listened, but their faces remained hard. They were still angry. Washington closed with a plea that the officers conduct themselves so that their posterity would say, "Had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection to which human nature is capable of attaining." Still, the resistance in the room remained almost palpable.

Washington drew from his pocket a letter from Congressman Joseph Jones of Virginia, assuring him that Congress was trying to respond to the army's complaints. After a moment's hesitation, he pulled out a pair of glasses. Only his aides had seen him wearing them for the previous several months. "Gentlemen," he said. "You will permit me to put on my

spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in your service."

A wave of emotion swept through the officers. More effectively than all Washington's exhortations, this simple statement of fact demolished almost every man in the hall. Many wept openly. Washington read the congressman's letter and departed, leaving the men to make their decision without him. They voted their thanks to the commander in chief, repudiated the anonymous letters, and expressed their confidence in Congress.

Washington's report on the Newburgh meeting reached Congress just in time to prevent the lawmakers from declaring war on the army. James Madison noted in his journal that the dispatch dispelled "the cloud which seemed to have been gathering." Congressman Eliphalet Dyer of Connecticut proposed that they offer the soldiers a deal—commutation in the form of five years pay in securities redeemable when the U.S. government achieved solvency. The officers accepted and the worst crisis yet in the brief history of American liberty was over.

Washington's use of the word "precipice" in describing the Newburgh confrontation was not an exaggeration. If he had failed to change the army's mind, the Revolution could have unravelled. The army might have marched on Congress to dictate terms at the point of a gun. The states, especially the large ones such as Virginia and Massachusetts, would almost certainly have refused to approve such a deal. If the army had attempted to force their compliance, civil war would have erupted. The shaky American confederation might have collapsed and the British, still with a fleet and army in New York, would have been irresistibly tempted to get back in the game. It is hard to imagine any of the states returning to the empire but some with strong loyalist minorities, such as New Jersey and New York, might have formed defensive alliances with the British to protect themselves against the rampaging Continentals. Such a foot in the door would have proved ultimately fatal to American independence.

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Many years later, George Washington reportedly corresponded with Charles Thomson, the secretary of the Continental Congress, about writing their memoirs. Thomson had been present at virtually every session of the Congress, from its inception in 1774 to its dissolution in 1788. Between them the two men probably knew more secrets than the entire Congress and the Continental Army combined. They decided that memoirs were a bad idea. It would be too disillusioning if the American people discovered how often the Glorious Cause came close to disaster. They jointly agreed that the real secret of America's final victory in the eight-year struggle could be summed up in two words: Divine Providence.

◆ IRA D. GRUBER ◆

GEORGE WASHINGTON'S GAMBLE

By late December of 1776, the British had driven George Washington's dwindling and demoralized forces out of Manhattan and across New Jersey. The enlistments of all save 1,400 of Washington's men were due to expire by the end of the year. Nearly all were suffering from shortages of food, clothing, blankets, and tents while thousands of ordinary citizens in New Jersey were accepting British offers of pardon. The Continental Congress, anticipating the loss of Philadelphia, had withdrawn to Baltimore. It was, as Thomas Paine said, a time to "try men's souls."

If at that moment Washington's desperate attacks on the British outposts at Trenton and Princeton had failed, and if the British had destroyed his army, the rebellion might well have collapsed. Indeed, had Congress in those circumstances been tempted to seek a negotiated peace, they would have found the British offering surprisingly attractive terms (a proposal for replacing Parliamentary taxation with limited colonial contributions for imperial defense). Such terms in such circumstances might have appealed to many Americans.

But if stakes were high at Trenton and Princeton, it should still be asked whether Washington was in danger of losing his desperate gamble. Perhaps not at Trenton, where he had the advantages of surprise, superior numbers, and well-coordinated attacks, and where he gained a complete victory over a Hessian garrison besotted from celebrating Christmas. His successful attack on the British at Princeton little more than a week later—on a larger and better-prepared enemy—could much more easily have gone disastrously wrong. Had Washington been detected during his long night's march around Lord Cornwallis's flank, had the garrison at Princeton been united when the Americans arrived, or had that garr-

son been able to hold out longer, Cornwallis might have arrived to overwhelm Washington's exhausted men. And had those men been crushed at Princeton, Washington's reputation, the remainder of American forces, and the rebellion might have collapsed in all too rapid succession.

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DAVID MCCULLOUGH

WHAT THE FOG WROUGHT

The Revolution's Dunkirk, August 29, 1776

For all that can be said for a deterministic view of history—for the inevitability of what T. S. Elliot called “vast impersonal forces”—chance and luck (two related but altogether different phenomena) also play a part. How else to explain the events of mid-August 1776, when, badly beaten at the Battle of Long Island (Brooklyn, actually), George Washington and his small army faced what seemed to be certain annihilation by a larger British army, one of the world's best. As David McCullough points out, nothing less than the independence of the United States was at stake. But the whims of weather were beyond prediction then, as they often still are. Perhaps in this case the most you can say about inevitability is that Washington almost always had the knack of seizing the right moment.

◆ David McCullough is one of the most deservedly popular historians of our time. His TRUMAN won the National Book Award and Pulitzer for biography; THE PATH BETWEEN THE SEAS, his account of the building of the Panama Canal, also won the National Book Award for History. His other books include THE JOHNSTOWN FLOOD,