

ABSTRACT

David M. Miller. THE LOGISTICAL IMPACT OF PRIZE CAPTURE ON ARMIES AT THE SIEGE OF BOSTON 1775-1776. (Under the direction of Dr. Michael Palmer)
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The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate the significance of colonial prize captures during the siege of Boston. The siege has been largely minimized by many historians and presented as an introduction to the Revolutionary War with little depth of its own. In fact, events at the siege influenced the course of the war. Americans forced the British under General Sir William Howe to evacuate Boston and sail to Nova Scotia instead of New York as British strategy dictated. While the fortification of Dorchester Heights caused the early British retreat, logistical concerns forced the move to Canada. Because of American incursions on supply ships, Howe lacked the supplies and transports necessary to move his army to begin campaigning in New York.

Upon arrival in Boston, George Washington noted immediately that success at Boston depended on organizing and supplying his army while depriving the British of as many supplies as possible. For the task, he commissioned several schooners from Massachusetts and manned them with army personnel of maritime background. Throughout the siege, these and other colonial vessels raided British transports and supply ships. The British, cut off from traditional sources on land and dependant entirely on maritime supply, suffered prodigiously as a result of these prize seizures. In cases where the army was in short supply, Washington had the cargoes from captured ships sent directly to his army before prize adjudication, as permitted by a directive of the

Continental Congress. Particularly during the winter of 1776, the cargoes carried by supply ships became critical to both armies.

In this thesis, I have outlined the history of the siege of Boston, the needs of the opposing armies, and the prize captures. When possible I have listed the cargoes and based on contemporary ration amounts, calculated the number of men the captured cargoes theoretically supplied. The numbers are large and demonstrate that successful prize captures had a direct impact on the siege of Boston. Because logistical concerns dictated British strategy, and a shortage forced that strategy to change, prize captures by colonials influenced the course of the American Revolution.

THE LOGISTICAL
IMPACT OF PRIZE CAPTURE ON
ARMIES AT THE SIEGE OF BOSTON 1775-1776

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by
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In loving memory of
Anthony J. Sassa and David G. Miller
The greatest men I have known

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PREFACE

On 19 April 1775, the British at Boston, still shocked by the resistance encountered at Concord and the subsequent perilous return march, found themselves penned into the city by a sizeable force of hostile Americans. Thus began the siege of Boston, the first campaign of the Revolutionary War, which lasted from 19 April 1775 until 17 March 1776. For Americans, the events at Boston served as a training ground and “trial by fire” for waging war as a union. For the British, it was a hard lesson in transatlantic warfare against a hostile continent. In the previous colonial wars between Great Britain and France, Britain used her American colonies for staging and as a source of supply. Immediately after Lexington and Concord, all land supply sources were closed to the British. At the siege of Boston, the British faced logistical challenges for which they had never prepared.

For each side, logistics, rather than military accomplishment, secured success or failure at Boston. On the American side, a national army, complete with all bureaucracies and pertinent structure was formed from a collection of men who recognized themselves as autonomous members of individual territories. The Continental Congress, composed of few military veterans, was forced to learn and wage war simultaneously, forming, organizing, and supplying an army strong enough to face one of the world’s greatest military powers.

The British, though possessed of a long military tradition, suffered from indecision amongst their leaders regarding the war and the best means of waging it. An arrogant attitude taken by the British at the war’s onset led to a vast under-estimation of the commitment the war required. The “one great battle and the rabble would be smashed” sentiment prevailed with little exception until the pyrrhic victory at Bunker Hill in June 1775.

The largest obstacle to British success at Boston was undoubtedly the Atlantic Ocean. Roughly three thousand miles away in England, organizational difficulties, bureaucratic entanglements, and outright corruption delayed supply ships and often produced poor quality supplies in inadequate numbers. The lax attitude towards the war itself caused the supply process to begin later than it should have. There was no sense of urgency to supply an army that would be finished with its task after one battle.

When supply ships did embark, they faced a journey across a vast sea and all the hazards that eighteenth-century ocean travel entailed. Unfavorable weather and rampant illness amongst passengers and animals plagued voyages. During the journey's final leg, supply ships became fair game for the rapidly increasing numbers of enemy vessels that prowled the jagged and vast New England coastlines. Many supply ships approached New England only to be captured, their cargoes seized, and in some cases sent to supply the Continental army instead. British troops, dependant on these ships for virtually everything necessary to keep an army in the field, were forced to do without.

In the chapters that follow, I have examined the effects that prize captures by colonial ships had on the siege. Though often glossed over in historical accounts, the fact remains that the British lost at Boston. I intend to show that logistical failure contributed to this loss and that the seizure of British vessels by colonials helped to cause this logistical failure. Though other factors surely influenced the final British evacuation, the significance of the prize captures is too large to be overlooked. To my knowledge, no one has examined this aspect of the siege of Boston. Though historians may have skirted the issues or even mentioned the

prize captures, there has been little connection made between them and the successes and/or failures of the armies at Boston.

In the first section of this thesis, I provide an overview of the historiography of the siege of Boston. As stated above, many histories of the Revolutionary War neglect the siege. Those who do attempt to describe events at Boston either ignore or minimize colonial prize captures to insignificance. Even in specific histories of the siege itself, and/or the early years of the war, the same occurs. There are a few books that mention or discuss the seizure of British ships, but these fail to connect them to the war on land.

Following the historiography, I present a history of the siege of Boston. This will familiarize the reader with the general aspects and events of the siege, and help to provide an understanding of the logistical problems present. In short, I create a setting in which to place all subsequent information. General knowledge of the situations and occurrences at Boston is critical to understanding the importance of logistical issues at Boston.

Supplies needed by the armies and the methods of their procurement are the subjects of the next section. I present logistical studies of both sides, outlining the needs of the armies and explaining how each army met or failed to meet those needs. I also generated a history of the supplies on hand by each side throughout the siege, presenting the numbers for the subsequent quantitative analysis. This section certainly does not present every aspect of logistics and supply, or a totality of what the armies had or needed. My goal here is to present the most important supplies such as food and armaments and provide numbers that can be used to estimate the influence of the prize seizures.

In the next section I give a history of the captures themselves. This includes a history of the captures throughout the siege of Boston, describing the initiation and sanctioning of privateering by colonial governments at various levels, the exploits of individual ships, and some aspects of privateering in general. When available, I give information about the cargoes seized and where they went. This section provides the second set of numbers for my analysis.

The final section of this study is an examination of the tangible effects that colonial prize captures had on the course of the siege of Boston quantitatively. By comparing the captured cargoes to the armies' needs as expressed by contemporary ration lists and invoices, it is possible to see, that in many cases, particularly that of fresh provisions, fuel, and armament, prize captures had a dramatic effect on the situation of the troops at Boston.

The British lost at Boston. British strategy dictated a move to New York in the spring. At the level of operations and tactics, the British simply had to hold Boston until the move. Americans outmaneuvered them and forced them out by placing guns on Dorchester Heights. A lack of transports and supplies caused a change in British strategy. Instead of moving on New York, the British retreated to Nova Scotia, defeated at all levels. Colonial prize captures certainly helped cause the supply shortage, and thus indirectly helped change the course of the entire war.

CHAPTER I: HISTORIOGRAPHY OF THE SIEGE OF BOSTON

On 19 April 1775, the siege of Boston began. British troops reached the safety of Charlestown after skirmishing their way back from engagements at Lexington and Concord. The next morning they awoke to find themselves encircled by a ring of militiamen in hastily constructed but effective fortifications. Nothing major would happen until 17 June 1775, with the bloody and famous battle of Bunker Hill. After a pyrrhic victory, the British fortified Bunker Hill and remained entrenched at Boston, with little further activity until 17 March 1776. After a failed attempt to mount an offensive against American fortifications at Dorchester Heights, the British under General Sir William Howe evacuated Boston.

Historians assign different degrees of importance to the siege of Boston. The one certainty about the siege was that it was a failure for the British. In this chapter I shall examine the prominent reasons given by historians for this failure, paying close attention to accounts that support or discredit my own contention that the capture of British transports and supply ships affected British decisions regarding the city. To ascertain the extent to which this has been presented or overlooked by historians, it is necessary to examine all the reasons given for British failure at Boston and to gauge their relative importance.

Authors have approached the siege of Boston from a variety of perspectives. There are works from a naval point of view, including accounts of the Royal Navy and of George Washington's schooners and other colonial privateers. Accounts of army logistics, both

colonial and British, contain references to the siege of Boston and invariably mention prize captures as a problem or an aid. Though not numerous, there are works on the siege itself. Finally, there are many general histories of the Revolutionary War and its participants, some of which contain pertinent information. In this paper, I examine these different categories of books relevant to events at Boston and pay particular attention to the authors' treatment of logistical issues and colonial prize captures

General works are what they are. It is nigh impossible to detail any facet of the Revolutionary War in one convenient book. The siege of Boston is included in Henry Belcher's 1911 two-volume set titled: *The First American Civil War, First Period 1775-1778*.¹ According to Belcher, the "siege of Boston by the Continental Army, that is, the army of the United Colonies presents few features of interest."² He devotes only twelve pages to the siege; twenty-five to the Battle of Bunker Hill. Belcher mentions a shortage of British supplies, but blames it on Admiral Thomas Graves, calling him "a man of little energy and of no inspirations."³ Belcher declares that Graves held back from further attacks on port towns like Mowat's attack on Falmouth (which Graves had ordered) because he "was loath to proceed further with the burning of undefended towns."⁴ In almost all other accounts, Graves could not continue the onslaught against port towns because, in one of an endless series of disagreements between himself and General Thomas Gage, Gage would not part with the marines that Graves needed.

¹ Henry Belcher, *The First American Civil War 1775-1778 With Chapters on the Continental or Revolutionary Army and on the Forces of the Crown*, 2 vols. (London, 1911).

² *Ibid.*, 183.

³ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

Belcher's treatment of the siege contains a fallacy. Henry Knox, in an amazing logistical feat, transported the heavy cannon from Ticonderoga to Washington's camp at Boston. In the stealth of night, the Americans fortified Dorchester Heights, a point that allowed for easy bombardment of the British, both soldiers in the city and ships in the harbor. Belcher claims that Washington was supplied with the captured supply of powder from the brig *Nancy*. This captured brig, which I have used to support my own arguments, was not cited in any accounts as carrying powder beyond a couple of barrels. Furthermore, the brig was captured on November 27, 1775, four months before the final days of the siege. Any powder thus received had likely been long since expended. Belcher's work, though competent in some areas, is poorly researched regarding the siege of Boston.

The central theme in Robert Middlekauf's examination of the siege of Boston in his book, *The Glorious Cause*⁵ is highly relevant. A problem the British faced, beginning with Boston was: "how to subdue not just another army but a population in rebellion?"⁶ Events at Boston presented the British were at with all the information they needed to win the rest of the war. They were not fighting a nation, but a continent and its people. Conventional warfare was irrelevant. The seizure of a city and the taking of property were inconsequential. Officers such as Howe and his brother who sought both reconciliation and military success would fail. The war with North America required full commitment and drastic measures. Had Graves and Mowat been allowed to continue their raids of the coastline, burning ports and piers to ashes, destroying all vessels

⁵ Robert Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause: the American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York, 1982).

present, and moving on to the next port, the outcome might have been different. Yet the British in London and in North America failed to learn any lessons at Boston and continued along the same approaches to the war.

Middlekauf declares that Howe decided to evacuate Boston long before he actually did, which is true. Even during the summer of 1775 General Gage had considered leaving Boston, but felt honor-bound to succeed there. Howe had in fact received orders to abandon Boston as he saw fit by September of 1775. In October, he expressed the desire to switch the operational center to New York, but was unable to depart because he lacked the necessary shipping and supplies. *The Glorious Cause*, points out, as with almost all good accounts, that the fortification of Dorchester Heights served only to force Howe to leave prematurely. He planned to leave after supply ships arrived in the spring of 1776.

Middlekauf also includes a chapter on the naval operations of Americans during the war. Though his focus is on the formation and actions of the Continental Navy, he does mention the early actions of privateers around Boston preying on merchantmen and transports during the first year of the war and notes that “they did so to good effect,” capturing fifty-five prizes in the first year of the war.⁷

In *The War for America 1775- 1783*⁸, Piers Mackesy presents the same British decision to shift to New York. Mackesy astutely claims that supply failure at Boston thwarted their intent to leave in the fall of 1775, and forced the British to winter in the city. Mackesy devotes some time to an examination of supply difficulties in Boston and the city’s sufferings during the winter of 1775-1776, but he never makes a connection

⁶ *Ibid.*, 273.

between the problem and colonial prize captures. Though captures accounted for only a fraction of British losses, others being caused by corruption in England, mismanagement, and foul weather, which Mackesy cites, they were certainly significant. Every piece of meat and each potato that went into the city was critical during that winter.

In 1849, Richard Frothingham published the first edition of *The History of the Siege of Boston and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*.⁹ After describing the battles of Lexington and Concord, Frothingham begins a detailed account of the siege by outlining the formation of the colonial army and of actions taken at Boston by the British, including Gage's efforts to appease the civilian population by allowing them to leave, provided they left their weapons behind.¹⁰ He describes the early supply practices for colonial forces. Based on tradition, respective towns and colonies supplied their own men. Frothingham essentially describes the transformation of Boston and its environs between the engagements of Lexington and Concord and Bunker Hill from a tense, populated city to two opposing military camps. He describes in great detail the fortifications and entrenchments of each army prior to the Battle of Bunker Hill before entering into a vivid and detailed account of the battle itself, including its aftermath and the British shock at such a costly victory. Interwoven into this account is one of England's weaknesses, her overconfidence. Had General Howe and other British officers afforded some military respect to the colonials at Breeds and Bunker hills, things might have been different. Many militiamen were veterans of the Seven Years War. What they

⁷ *Ibid.*, 526.

⁸ Piers Mackesy, *The War For America, 1775-1783* (Nebraska, 1992).

⁹ Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* (New York, 1970).

lacked in military discipline, they made up for in relevant combat experience. British officers in their arrogance expected the “rabble” to flee before them.

Frothingham next describes the respective situations in both camps at the time of Washington’s arrival in July. Using contemporary letters and accounts, Frothingham outlines George Washington’s attempt to organize a collection of militiamen into an army. His “greatest anxiety was his short supply of gunpowder.”¹¹ The British camp was cut off from fresh meat and provisions after Lexington and Concord but “had an abundance of salt provisions, and of fish, but this exclusive diet rendered many unfit for service.”¹² The unhealthy diet of salt pork and fish hit the civilian population particularly hard. Imagine a diet of country ham and sardines, with no vegetables excepting occasional sauerkraut to prevent scurvy. There was also a deficiency of tents and straw for bedding. Many soldiers slept in the open air in Boston Commons. This may not seem so bad until consideration of the fact that almost 1000 men were in this situation. At this time there were no latrines. The filth and squalor in Boston would be inconceivable to most people in our own time. And it would only worsen. In a later comparison of the two armies during December, Frothingham represents the colonials as “well supplied with provisions” but says that they “suffered much for want of firewood and hay.”¹³ Frothingham quotes Nathaniel Greene of the continental army as saying, “we have suffered prodigiously for want of wood. Many regiments have been obliged to eat their provisions raw, for want of fuel to cook it...The fatigues of the campaign, the suffering

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 231.

¹² *Ibid.*, 235.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 275.

for want of food and clothing have made a multitude of soldiers heartily sick of service.”¹⁴

Conditions in the British camp were worse. One civilian reports: “The army in December suffered much for want of the necessities of life, food, clothing, and fuel. A few store-ships from England got in, but furnished but a small portion of the supplies that were needed and expected. To add to the distress, winter set in with uncommon severity.”¹⁵ Frothingham presents quotations from many military and civilian inhabitants in Boston that support a grim picture. Boston was literally torn apart for firewood. Regulars stripped Charlestown of everything that would burn. They even dismantled and burned the Old North Church.¹⁶ Conditions were terrible for both camps, far worse for the British who were trapped in a nest of disease, starvation, and death.

Frothingham does mention briefly the arming and outfitting of colonial vessels to sail against the British and harass them. There is no mention, however, of their supplying Washington’s army. He notes the capture of two ships that winter loaded with coal and potatoes but makes no mention of their fate. He also cites the capture of the *Nancy*, briefly listing some of her most important cargo (no powder).

Frothingham’s account is commendable until he draws near the end of the siege. The end begins with supplies to Americans improving, though he does not say from whence they came. Suddenly, Washington is equipped with gunpowder and shells, as well as cannon from Ticonderoga. After a daring, stealthy operation resulting in the fortification of Dorchester Heights, General Howe, who “had no disposition to make a sally out of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

Boston,”¹⁷ was forced to leave by valiant Washington. Frothingham fails to note Howe’s pre-existing plans to go to New York were stalled by logistical problems. The guns on Dorchester Heights were the reason the British left. Frothingham presents the siege of Boston as an American triumph. They were “inadequately supplied with materials of war and at some periods alarmingly weak in point of numbers... Washington had difficulties that seemed insurmountable...but he went triumphantly through them all.”¹⁸ It is hard to be overly critical of Frothingham, as the War of 1812 and the sacking of Washington, D.C., were probably still fresh in the minds of people in the mid-nineteenth century.

Allen French presented another history of the siege in *The First Year of the American Revolution*.¹⁹ The book covers from the spring of 1775 to the spring of 1776. French begins by outlining the spontaneous call to arms after news spread of Lexington and Concord, describing militias individually and collectively. He describes the British at the siege’s beginning, and devotes attention to women (camp followers) and civilians. This is important in examining the British supply failure. Civilians, women, children, and prisoners were issued rations from the king’s stores. In numbers that matched or exceeded the British soldiers, these groups were a constant drain on British reserves, even at the fraction of a soldier’s ration that each received. French sums up the British supply problem in Boston: “During the whole siege there was no shortage of muskets or cannon, powder or ball;” the “real shortage was in men, and later in provisions.”²⁰

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 294.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 333.

¹⁹ Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York, 1934).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

French also outlines the problems of the Royal Navy under the command of Admiral Thomas Graves. "Graves had under him a squadron of considerable size, yet not enough for the task in hand."²¹ The Admiralty expected Graves to support and supply the army, police the coast, and carry on his own offensives, but never provided him with the resources to perform adequately even one of these tasks. He also faced constant criticism and conflict with Gage and later Howe. The inability of the navy and army to cooperate was another reason for British failure.

French takes an interesting approach to Bunker hill; the "practical effect of Bunker Hill on the course of the Siege of Boston and of the whole Revolution was to encourage a false belief in the people-in-arms and the confidence that at any crisis the swarming of militia to the field would meet all emergencies. The result was the weakening of the army, and the coming of crises which need never have arisen."²² Shortly after, the author states that America could have won the war without French aid "if it sent but a fair proportion of its adult Whigs to the field to overwhelm the British by mere numbers."²³ These two statements, neither of which were supported with any evidence, suggests that Allen French had little understanding of eighteenth-century military matters, or even of the society that fought against the British. The Battle of Bunker Hill provides evidence to counter French's first argument. Militias represented only a fluctuating percentage of the American army at any time during the war. They were often unreliable and at Bunker Hill, many deserted before or directly after the first fighting. If anything, Bunker Hill revealed that an army of professional soldiers would be needed to defeat the British.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 168.

French's second statement that adult Whigs could overwhelm the British by sheer numbers borders on fantasy. Most adult Whigs had no military training. Even at ten Whigs to one British soldier, the outcome would have been grisly. Imagine sending an army of 1000 serfs against a fully formed phalanx of 100 Greek hoplites.

French does a commendable job of presenting the food shortages in Boston, both by use of contemporary accounts and by using the severity of penalties handed out for theft and insurrection to demonstrate an increase in shortages and a decrease in morale. One soldier was sentenced to death for theft, although he was eventually pardoned.²⁴

French mentions that the summer of 1775 was the first time the British discussed a move to New York. Gage was not ready to move. He was honor-bound by English military tradition to win, and more importantly, he had no instructions from England to leave.

French examines supplies to both armies, but he is largely superficial. Washington's largest problem was powder. In late August, he was down to about nine rounds per man.²⁵ Powder began to trickle slowly in as he appealed to Congress and to the other colonies, but it was never in abundance. The British during the winter were short of fuel and fresh food because of problems with shipments, including bad stores sent from England. French mentions the capture of the *Nancy* briefly, but treats it as an isolated event with little relevance. He makes virtually no other mention of colonial prize captures.

²² *Ibid.*, 267.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 325.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 487.

French's account of the siege's ending followed the prescribed path. The fortification of Dorchester Heights surprised Howe, who awaited spring and fresh supplies to arrive for a campaign against New York. Consequently, Howe was forced to leave early and head for Halifax after a storm ruined an attempt to engage the Americans.

Works related to the supplying of the continental army provide evidence and support for the necessity and importance of supplementing inadequacy with cargoes from seized vessels. Wayne Carp, in *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Supply and American Political Culture, 1775-1783*²⁶, sums it up neatly, "Congress would have to learn how to wage war while fighting it."²⁷ The inconsistent supply efforts at Boston were a product of experiments by the Continental Congress as they figured ways to perform a task they had never done. The siege of Boston was a logistical scramble, and the "lack of a unified, centrally controlled supply system characterized Congress's efforts to provide food, camp equipment, clothing, and medical supplies to the army."²⁸ The Continental Congress was a political body. Few among its members had any military experience. When it gave Washington command, Congress saw him as the messiah. In many regards they were right. Almost immediately upon taking command, he began organizing a supply system. He also sent out armed schooners to supplement scarce supplies. These ships met with almost immediate success.

Accounts of the British army's supply systems provide valuable insight into the failure at Boston. Arthur Bowler's, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in*

²⁶ Wayne E. Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure: Continental Army Administration and American Political Culture, 1775-1783* (North Carolina, 1984).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 23.

*America, 1775-1783*²⁹ presents the British supply problems in great detail. His basic premise is that the fighting efficiency of an army is a function of logistical efficiency. Bowler traces the ways in which logistical and administrative problems affected the war's course. Though devoted to the entire war, his book provides a valuable analysis on the siege of Boston.

At the beginning of the siege, the old system "collapsed entirely when, on the outbreak of fighting in Boston, Rebel organizations throughout the thirteen colonies began intercepting supplies destined for the army."³⁰ Under the old system, which had worked well during the Seven Years War, supplies came not only from overseas, but also from North America. This stopped almost immediately, as even those in colonies not yet directly involved faced severe social penalties for supplying British troops.

Bowler focuses on the formation of systems of supply, starting with Boston. "Serious incursions by Rebel privateers and a severe shortage of shipping,"³¹ led to re-organization. As arming transports became necessary, they could carry less; hence more ships were required. Under the old system, contractors were supposed to maintain a six-month reserve. By 24 March 1775, the British were already one and a half months short of meat and four months short of bread.³² By May, troop strength had increased by about 1000. At around the same time, Gage received some supplies from Halifax, that brought provisions up to about four months' reserve.³³ During the fall of 1775, the army was

²⁹ Arthur R. Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton, 1975).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*, 43.

³³ *Ibid.*

forced to subsist on reserves carried by naval vessels and by October less than a thirty-day supply was on hand.³⁴ When five supply ships carrying 5200 barrels of flour arrived from Ireland, most was rotten and unusable.³⁵ This was another problem that constantly plagued the British in America. Merchants in England and Ireland made fortunes sending bad provisions overseas. Though the British never solved this problem, it eventually led to government inspection of cargoes before shipping, which made vast improvements. In late December, twelve ships made it to Boston, while from January to March, only six arrived. The British army virtually lived hand-to-mouth for most of the siege. According to Bowler, the “timing of the evacuation of Boston was influenced as much by the fact that there were only two months bread and only one months meat in the storehouse as by tactical and strategic considerations.”³⁶ Supplies coming from Canada also dried up. Gage had appealed to Quebec for aid and was sent about two weeks’ worth of food between July and November.

Bowler mentions prize captures by privateers and by George Washington’s fleet, claiming that they captured a total of forty-three vessels.³⁷ He also asserts that the pressure from privateers caused the transfer of army supply responsibility from contractors to the Treasury Board. Bad provisions and the American capture of supply ships had their most serious effect in the winter of 1775-1776. Disease in Boston threatened much of the population, and many people died. When spring finally came, the small amount of supplies Howe had on hand caused great stress.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 96

Bowler presents much data to support the importance of colonial prize captures. By his totals, only twenty-five or thirty ships kept the British army alive. Forty-three had been captured. If those ships had made it through, Howe might have had enough supplies and shipping with which to move directly on New York. The whole war might have been different. Privateers forced arming of supply ships, which decreased their cargo capacity. It is almost certain that some of these cargoes went directly to the hands of the American soldiers encamped around Boston.

Ira Gruber's *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution*,³⁸ presents another factor that impeded the British. Sir William Howe took command of British forces on October 10, 1775. He commanded British forces until the end of the siege. He was an able commander but had affection for Americans, particularly those of Massachusetts. William's older brother George had been killed during the French and Indian War in 1758. The colony of Massachusetts had erected a statue in his honor. William Howe, and later his brother Admiral Lord Richard Howe, who took command of the Royal Navy in America in May 1776, simultaneously waged war while hoping for peace. Sometimes they subtly missed opportunities to smash the colonial army. Had Sir William pressed on at Bunker Hill, he possibly would have routed American forces already in flight. There might have been no siege of Boston. Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill would likely have been the beginning of British victory in New England. Better examples would come later in the war. Lord Howe actually served a dual role as admiral and official peace commissioner upon his arrival.

³⁸ Ira Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (New York, 1972)

Reginald Hargreave's *The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean*³⁹ paints another picture of the British in Boston. He begins with the Gage's problems. A major one being that he was both governor of Massachusetts and British general. He was responsible not only for a military garrison, but also for a civilian population.

Hargreaves argues that "neither England nor America could speak with one voice; both were as a house divided against itself."⁴⁰ This was certain. Parliament was divided, military officers were divided, the Continental Congress was divided, and individual colonies had different opinions about dealing with England. Uncertainty in any war leads to problems. The British leaders, for example, were torn between annihilating the Americans at one extreme and giving them freedom at the other.

As for things in Boston, Hargreaves states they were difficult and distressful. About 3500 troops were crammed into a city with about twice that many civilians. It was crowded, and there was scant comfort for anyone. The "shortage of fresh food, the humid, oppressive heat, and the overcrowded accommodation bred a wave of sickness in Boston which accounted for as many as thirty funerals a day."⁴¹ Morale was particularly low, and desertion was common. New England privateers preyed upon incoming ships, and Admiral Graves's coastal raids for supplies largely failed. The privateers' successes largely resulted from the inadequate number of Royal Navy ships present in North

³⁹ Reginald Hargreaves, *The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean, 1655-1783* (New York, 1968).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 249.

American waters. Hargreaves mentions the capture of the *Nancy* as an unnecessary and avoidable sacrifice due to this shortage of ships.

Interestingly, surrounding the evacuation of Boston, Hargreaves makes no mention of Howe's plans for New York or his botched attempt to take Dorchester Heights before the evacuation. The guns alone caused the British departure.

Interesting views on the events at Boston can be found in many books that relate the Royal Navy's involvement. David Syrett's *The Royal Navy in American Waters*,⁴² presents the Royal Navy's struggle as futile. Syrett outlines the majority of Britain's problems during and after the siege of Boston. America had a long, unfriendly coastline. There was dissention and indecision amongst the officers on how to carry on the war. Graves wanted to press the attack and smash the Americans by destroying their seaports. Gage refused him the marines to do it. A general belief in England held that defeating America would be easy. One major campaign would end it all. The Battle of Bunker Hill ruined this notion for those unfortunate officers there, if they survived.

At the siege of Boston, the Royal Navy was unprepared. Thirty warships patrolled the coastline from Nova Scotia to Florida.⁴³ Logistically, Boston quickly became a liability. It could not be easily evacuated for lack of transport, and the British were not given enough resources to both defend the city and destroy the colonial army. The most pressing problem was the lack of supplies. Graves tried to procure supplies along the coast but met hostility and was largely unsuccessful. In one case, the inhabitants of Machias in present day Maine (then Massachusetts) captured a Royal Navy vessel.

⁴² David Syrett, *The Royal Navy in American Waters* (London, 1989).

Graves lacked the manpower to capture and raid seaports as he wished to do. In addition to procuring supplies, England expected the Royal Navy to defend the town of Boston and Boston Harbor, to prevent supply ships from reaching colonials, and at the same time ensure that supplies to Boston arrived safely. Graves constantly complained to the Admiralty that he was powerless to stop privateers because they vanished into shallow inlets out of his reach. He appealed to England for smaller vessels such as sloops with which to combat the privateers but he received nothing. Clearly, the Admiralty and Parliament expected more of Graves than was possible. He eventually became the scapegoat for British failure and the Admiralty replaced him in early 1776 with Admiral Molyneux Shuldham. Shuldham did no better. He had inherited a disaster. In February, he reported that the situation in Massachusetts Bay was hopeless.⁴⁴ Like Graves before him, he pleaded with London for reinforcements but got none, only more orders and directives. He had no choice but to continue in Graves's footsteps, and he was replaced shortly after the siege.

Another book by Syrett looks at the British problems transporting troops and supplies during the Revolution. Syrett argues that the organization of transports, or lack thereof, affected the war's course in *Shipping and the American War 1775-83: A Study of British Transport Organization*.⁴⁵ He claims that a failure to understand or recognize the relationship between strategy, logistics, and shipping resources was Britain's largest problem. In many regards this is true. This can be applied to the siege of Boston. Howe

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴⁵ David Syrett, *Shipping and the American War 1775-83: A Study of British Transport Organization* (London, 1970).

received order in October to move on New York. Aside from not having enough men, he lacked shipping to move those he had. The lack of shipping, largely the fault of London politicians, was the primary reason he had to winter over in Boston. When Howe was forced to leave in March, he was waiting still for ships due to arrive from England. A long list of valuable supplies, equipage, and provisions, as well as serviceable artillery and ammunition was left on Long Wharf on 17 April 1776, because Howe did not have the ships to carry it. Much of this equipage was serviceable and accompanied Washington's army to New York.

John Tilley's *The British Navy and the American Revolution* is another relevant book on the Royal Navy.⁴⁶ Tilley's main premise is basically the same as Syrett's. Britain expected the Royal Navy to do too much with too few resources. It was "Graves's misfortune to have placed in his hands an instrument ludicrously unsuited to the job he was expected to do with it."⁴⁷ Tilley presents the same demands upon Graves as Syrett outlined. Like most others, Tilley presents Graves as a scapegoat for Britain's inability to deal with, or even figure out how to deal with, the war in America. The Royal Navy was designed for fleet engagements, not coastal blockading and prolonged amphibious warfare. Its officers were trained for fleet warfare and artillery support of land campaigns. Graves probably did a better job with the resources he was given. Had he and his chief lieutenant, Henry Mowat, been supplied and allowed to continue their savage coastal raiding, the siege of Boston and the war as a whole may have been different.

⁴⁶ John A. Tilley, *The British Navy and the American Revolution* (South Carolina, 1987).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

The final references I will examine are those outlining the colonial sea forces themselves, primarily Washington's schooners, responsible for almost all prizes captured during the siege. Washington commissioned the schooner *Hannah* in September 1775. From the time she set sail until the evacuation of Boston by the British, Washington's fleet captured thirty-one vessels. The estimated combined weight of these vessels totals four thousand tons burden.⁴⁸ If February 1776 is omitted (the schooners were kept in port), then Washington's fleet captured an average of about eight hundred tons of shipping per month during the siege. These captures were crucial to American success in Boston. The British infantry certainly suffered when these ships did not arrive. The capture of the *Henry and Esther* on 29 January 1776, stopped a supply of wood and soldiers' bedding. More important, American troops probably received this bedding, as Washington sometimes dispersed cargoes before prize cases were settled. In fact, he was under orders from Congress to do so as he saw fit. It is safe to say that a large number of militiamen and American soldiers fought with British muskets and mortars from the brig *Nancy*. Finally, the seizure of some thirty ships loaded with food supplies and provisions must have adversely affected the British troops who relied on the sea for almost everything. Deprived of food, clothing, bedding, firewood, coal, and other basic necessities, the men's morale probably dwindled, particularly during the wintertime. Although Massachusetts and other New England privateers sailed in the fall 1775, none of them, with the exception of a few near Boston, exerted anywhere near the influence that Washington's schooners had on British failure. They are also not the subjects of any

⁴⁸ Tons burden refers to cargo capacity. I have used an average tonnage for different vessel types for those

specific historical works. Most reports of early privateers are lumped together in the scarce, general works on privateering, some of which are problematic. The best information on these vessels and their captures is to be found in primary sources and will thus not be a subject of this essay.

William Bell Clark's *George Washington's Navy*⁴⁹ focuses on the ships and their sailors. Clark pays special attention to the difficulties of prize settlement. He focuses centers more on economics than on the schooners' relations to the war. In some ways, Clark presents the schooners and their accomplishments almost as if independent of the war. He gives more attention to their failures than to their successful captures and their positive contribution to the war. The one exception is three chapters devoted to the capture of the ordnance brig *Nancy*, the greatest capture made during the siege. Clark describes the capture itself, the cargo and its handling at Gloucester. He mentions the excitement in Boston when the giant brass mortar arrived from Beverly, but neglects to mention that over two thousand Brown Bess muskets arrived as well, complete with bayonets (equipment sorely lacking in Washington's army), a supply of cartridges, and thousands of musket-balls. The most useful part of Clark's book is Appendix A, which lists the known prize captures by Washington's ships, and their cargoes.

Chester Hearn's *George Washington's Schooners* is disappointing.⁵⁰ Hearn takes much the same stance as Clark, and Washington's schooners are largely disassociated with the rest of the war. The book is a history of men, ships, and captures. What purpose these captures served in the larger picture is mostly ignored. In some places, Hearn makes

not reported. All other numbers have come from Clark's *George Washington's Navy*, Appendix A.

speculative and incorrect statements. Relating to the end of the siege, Hearn states, “Washington learned on 9 March 1776 of British preparations to leave Boston in a day or two,”⁵¹ This is impossible. At that time, Howe was waiting for a fleet of supply ships from England, without which, he could not leave in an orderly fashion, or go to New York, his desired destination. He lacked the transports or the supplies to leave. This was the reason that on 17 March he was forced to leave an abundance of supplies behind and set sail for Halifax.

Donald Beattie and Richard Collins come closer to my own contention in their *Washington's New England Fleet: Beverly's Role in its Origins, 1775-1777*⁵², than any other book I have read thus far. Though it suffers from a slight case of ‘Beverly-ism’ in its attempt to portray Beverly, Massachusetts, as the nation’s first navy yard, Beattie and Collins do an exemplary job discussing Washington’s schooners and their role. They present much information regarding captured cargoes and in some cases their dispositions, but fail to adequately connect the schooners’ actions to the siege.

The purpose of Washington’s navy was interrupting supply lines in order to “embarrass the British and cause a withdrawal of their forces from Boston.”⁵³ The captures also immeasurably strengthened the rebel army.⁵⁴ Beattie and Collins outline in great detail and in concise language the histories of the ships and their captures. They also list known prize cargoes and note their significance. At the end of their short work,

⁴⁹ William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy* (Baton Rouge, 1960).

⁵⁰ Chester Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy* (Annapolis, 1995).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵² Donald W. Beattie and Richard J. Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet: Beverly's Role in Its Origins, 1775-77* (Beverly, Mass., 1969).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, ii-iii.

the authors sum up the successes of Washington's fleet. "It was a training ground for several officers in the Continental Navy,"⁵⁵ and "it was due partly to the little fleet's successes in capturing artillery and supplies from the enemy's ships which led to British evacuation from Boston harbor, March 17, 1776."⁵⁶

This work perhaps represents the heart of my own thesis and comes closer to my own contentions than any other. Beattie and Collins presented prize captures and cargoes, drew the logical conclusion that they certainly had an influence on the siege of Boston, but they fail to connect the pieces of evidence to support the conclusion, which is thus left speculative. That which seems so obvious, has yet to be proven. There is no report for example, of muskets from the *Nancy* being handed out to American troops in any of these works. This almost certainly happened, but it cannot be assumed. Until evidence appears to prove it for certain, the fact that colonial prize capture influenced the British failure at Boston, must remain speculation.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, iii.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 42.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

CHAPTER II: A HISTORY OF THE SIEGE OF BOSTON

Since the first time an army encircled a fortified enemy, siege warfare has been a part of military heritage. A siege is defined as “the surrounding and blockading of a city, town, or fortress by an army attempting to capture it.”¹ This, and driving the British back across the Atlantic, were the colonial army’s intents at Boston during 1775 and 1776. To accomplish either, the blockade aspect of siege warfare was vital. This entailed isolating an enemy from any supplies or provisions. Ultimately, this was the type of conflict the siege of Boston became. The British attempt to quell a rebellion became a struggle to simply survive until the move to New York could commence. Americans struggled to form and maintain an army in the field capable of resisting the British. Issues of logistics and supply became pivotal for both sides.

The siege began on 19 April 1775, after a devastating British retreat from Concord. Almost immediately, the British became cut off from the overland supply they had grown accustomed to in previous colonial wars, forcing the army to rely almost entirely on supplies from Britain, Canada, and other British maritime colonies in the tropics. With only two entries for ships into Boston Harbor, colonial privateers and state navies quickly put a major strain on these sources as well.

The siege ended on 17 March 1776 with a British evacuation compelled by the construction of significant works on Dorchester Heights by colonials, that rendered Boston indefensible and presented a severe risk to Royal Navy ships in the harbor. British

¹ *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3d ed., s.v. “siege.”

forces under William Howe left Boston in haste and British strategy had to be reformulated. Howe could not move to New York because he lacked sufficient troops, supplies, and transports. Instead, the British retreated to Nova Scotia.

Historians have often reduced the siege to a span of inactivity surrounding the Battle of Bunker Hill. Though it is true that Bunker Hill was the only clash involving large numbers of troops, several smaller engagements occurred between the armies at Boston. These centered on securing supplies. Conflicts and engagements during the siege that sometimes involved hundreds of men continued throughout the siege, sometimes with numerous casualties. I have attempted to outline as many as possible in an effort to demonstrate that the siege of Boston truly was a campaign, not just a prelude to the larger war to come as many histories might lead a reader to conclude.

Boston basically consisted of three peninsulas: Bunker Hill and Charlestown, Boston proper, and Roxbury. The British occupied Boston and the colonials entrenched in Roxbury and Cambridge; Bunker Hill and Charlestown remained a "no man's land." The stage was set, but little happened during the first month of the siege. The colonials were too disorganized to do anything and possessed insufficient powder supplies. The British, outnumbered and safe in Boston, dug in and fortified their positions: Work began at Boston Neck, where inner and outer lines were made strong. British forces placed a battery at Beacon Hill and another at Barton's Point to command the Mystic River basin.² On 19 May, Admiral Graves advised burning Charlestown and Roxbury, and the seizure

² French Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York, 1934), 163-4.

of Dorchester Heights. Gage declined: He feared the townspeople and did not want to divide and weaken his forces in Boston.³

In May 1775, British reinforcements began to arrive. These included seven hundred marines, the 35th, 49th, and 63rd Regiments with 477 men each, the 17th Light Dragoons (400), and five hundred extras to fill depleted regiments at Boston. These brought the total reinforcements to about three thousand effectives.⁴ With the new troops, Generals William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton arrived. Upon his arrival, Howe estimated there were 6400 troops at Boston.⁵ On 12 June, Gage and Burgoyne issued a proclamation that offered pardon to all but Samuel Adams and John Hancock, warned against supporting them, and declared martial law in Boston.⁶ Directives to promote discipline were initiated as well. They ordered soldiers not to strip wood from houses. Other directives forbade the sale of rum to the troops.⁷

General Gage, commander at Boston since 1774, had an idea of what was needed, but was consistently ignored. At the beginning of 1775, Gage had about three thousand men. As early as February 1775, he requested a “sufficient force to command the country, by marching into it, and sending off large detachments to secure obedience through every part of it”⁸ His request was turned down as impractical and unnecessary. The earl of Dartmouth replied to Gage saying that he was “unwilling to believe that matters are as

³ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 734.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 207.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁸ Thomas Gage to William Barrington, 10 February 1775, as presented in: Allen, *FYAR*, 15.

yet come to that issue.”⁹ Instead, Gage was promised three regiments and about five hundred drafts from Ireland and Britain. With these additions, Dartmouth expected Gage to go on the offensive with vague orders to secure the authority of British authorities and to arrest and imprison Massachusetts ringleaders.¹⁰ This is a good example of the early aristocratic incomprehension of the real situation in the colonies. Shortly after his arrival, General Clinton said that an attack would “shake these poor wretches and probably dislodge them totally, and possibly disperse them for a time.”¹¹ Clinton, like many others in Britain, still held little respect for the colonial military and did not yet take the rebellion seriously. This attitude is reflected in a letter to Gage from the Earl of Dartmouth written on 1 July 1775, Gage was advised that the “King therefore trusts that we shall soon hear that you are no longer within the town of Boston, that the rebels have been dispersed, their works destroyed and a communication opened within the country. Gage was also told that “Rhode Island appears to be a post of great advantage as it would keep open a communication between Boston and New York.”¹² Gage was expected not only to secure Boston, but to go on the offensive as well.

In early June 1775, British generals estimated how many troops were needed and where: Gage suggested 15,000 at Boston, 10,000 at New York, and 7,000 at Lake Champlain. Howe’s concept was very different. He advocated for a token force of 3500

⁹ Earl of Dartmouth to General Thomas Gage, 27 January 1775, *Documents of the American Revolution: 1770-1783 (Colonial Office Series)*, K.G. Davies, ed. (Dublin, 1975), IX, 38. Hereafter cited as *DAR*.

¹⁰ *DAR*, IX, 7-8.

¹¹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 202.

¹² Earl of Dartmouth to General Thomas Gage, 1 July 1775, *DAR*, IX, 24.

to hold Boston and its port, 12,000 at New York, and another 3500 in the Connecticut River valley.¹³ On 12 June, Gage again wrote to the earl of Dartmouth with his estimate:

it will be necessary in order to carry on a war with effect against this country that not less than 15,000 men should be employed on this side, a large part of which should be irregulars such as hunters, Canadians, Indians etc.; that another body of ten thousand should act on the side of New York; and a third corps of seven thousand, composed of some regular troops with a large corps of Canadians and Indians, on the side of Lake Champlain. It will be necessary also to augment the squadron with a number of frigates for we hear they are fitting out vessels of force in various places much superior to the armed sloops and schooners.¹⁴

Gage seemed to have a good sense of what was needed, but Britain largely ignored his insights and estimates and replaced Gage with General Sir William Howe shortly afterward.

Until the second meeting of the Continental Congress occurred on 10 May, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress was the only central authority for colonial forces. On 22 April, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress took depositions regarding events at Lexington and Concord to prove British aggressions. These were immediately dispatched to Britain and circulated in America.¹⁵ The Congress did little for the army at Boston initially, and the force remained disorganized and deficient until George Washington took command on 2 July 1775. At the siege's onset, the colonials lacked arms, camp utensils,

¹³ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 206-7.

¹⁴ General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 12 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 170.

¹⁵ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 131.

provisions, blankets, and tents. They had only twenty-four cannon by 15 May.¹⁶ Lack of firearms was so severe that many men were sworn in weaponless.¹⁷ On 5 May, the Provincial Congress repudiated Gage and rejected him as governor.¹⁸ In early June, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress received its first direction from the Continental Congress, instructing them to do what they had already done on 5 May.¹⁹

Also in June, the Continental Congress initiated steps to unify and supply the army, including arrangements to purchase gunpowder and move it to Boston, and to acquire flour and other basic provisions. These efforts did not produce results until well after Washington took direct command on 2 July 1775. He received his commission as commander of the Continental Army in June. Congress also commissioned General Henry Lee and ordered Washington to make a return of the forces and stores at Boston and also estimate British numbers upon his arrival.²⁰

Colonials almost immediately hindered or prevented supplies from reaching Gage at Boston. In a report from Nova Scotia, Admiral Thomas Graves stated: "Every day's expense shows that we can hope for no supplies the rebels can prevent. Their vigilance extends even to firewood which is expressly forbid[den] to be sold and I am informed that guards are placed along the coast for that purpose"²¹ In addition to blocking the shipment of supplies, ports along the east coast closed to British trade. In mid-May, Gage received reports that contractors sent for supplying the king's troops were unable to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 180.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 142.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 298.

perform their duties as all ports from which supplies usually came had refused to trade with the British.²² Supplies from land were stopped as well: On 13 May 1775, Gage stated that "all [supplies] from the country have been stopped."²³

Admiral Thomas Graves commanded the Royal Navy early in the siege, but he was unmotivated and lax to act, probably because he lacked sufficient resources. Graves's problems included a lack of ships, men, and supplies. Neither he, nor any other admiral early in the war, received enough to do the job expected. He had fewer than thirty ships to patrol the American coast from Halifax to Florida. He also remained desperately short of pilots because none would risk service with the British.²⁴ Still, Graves resolved to capture some particularly troublesome towns. An expedition under Captain Henry Mowat anchored before Falmouth, Massachusetts on 16 October 1775. Mowat warned inhabitants that he intended to burn the town, and after a day and night of bantering, he opened fire and burned it down.²⁵ On December 30, the Admiralty replaced Graves with Admiral Molineux Shuldham. Shuldham did nothing more than continue Graves's inactivity.

The earliest reports of colonial vessels fitted for war came in May. In a letter to a family member, a Tory in Canada wrote "that there's some vessels fitted out from different parts of New Britain to convoy smugglers safe to harbor and at the same time to

²¹ Rear Admiral Thomas Graves to First Secretary of the Admiralty Phillip Stevens, 12 May 1775, *DAR*, IX, 140-41.

²² General Thomas Gage to Grey Cooper, 19 May 1775, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775*, Edwin Clarence Carter, ed., (Hartford, 1931), II, 679. Hereafter cited as *CGTG*.

²³ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 13 May 1775, *CGTG*, II, 397.

²⁴ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 170.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 540.

intercept intelligence to and from General Gage. One brig in particular of 16 guns and well-manned is sent to cru[i]se for the packet boat."²⁶

The islands of Boston Harbor became an immediate and major concern for both sides. Used for grain and hay stores and cattle pastures, a significant amount of food was there for the taking. Thus began the largely successful colonial whaleboat ventures. Hog and Noddle's islands lay off Chelsea in the harbor. Both islands were used as pastures for sheep and cattle. After a debate in Congress on 24 May, Colonel John Nixon received orders to drive the stock from the island.²⁷ On 26 May, Nixon and his men forded the narrow channel (Chelsea Creek) at low tide and made it to Hog Island. They successfully drove the cattle, horses, and sheep off, then made for Noddle's next. Somehow Gage had found out their plans, and Nixon's men arrived on the afternoon of 27 May on Noddle's Island to find the British waiting for them. Admiral Graves had a depot of naval stores on the island. He sent the schooner *Dianna* up Chelsea Creek to cut off the provincial's retreat and landed a party of marines on the island. The Americans retreated, but managed to burn a large quantity of hay and a barn. They took sheep, killed what stock they could not move, and escaped safely, depriving the British of roughly one thousand sheep and lambs.²⁸

Far worse for the British was the subsequent loss of the *Dianna*. Ebb tide grounded her, and before she could get free, a force of about one thousand men under Col. Israel Putnam marched down to Chelsea with two field pieces. They pounded *Dianna* with cannon fire until the British relinquished her. Americans then looted and burned her, ma

²⁶ Hugh Finlay to his brother-in-law Ingram, 29 May 1775, *DAR*, IX, 145.

making off with four, four-pounder cannon and some swivels, along with much of her ironwork.²⁹

Over the next few days, Noddle's Island was stripped of everything. Graves removed his stores. Provincials carried off what they could and burned the rest, including any buildings that might be useful to the British.³⁰ Another skirmish occurred on Grape Island, where Americans drove off the British and burned eighty tons of hay.³¹

Thomas Graves reported that "...the rebels, pursuing their avowed design of cutting off every possible supply to the army and navy and of destroying what they cannot carry away, burnt a deal of hay on Hog Island the 27th of last month. A few hours after[,] they landed on Noddle's Island not only to burn the hay there bought for the army [,]but also to set fire to a storehouse hired when the *Glasgow* was ashore, on which I had deposited two large cargoes of lumber, board, and spars..."³²

Evidence of the success whaleboat raiders comes from a return on 22 July by one of George Washington's officers who had been ordered to prepare an estimate of what would be needed to complete one hundred more whaleboats for service.³³ Several days later, another report from the same officer listed boats taken into the colony's service, a

²⁷ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 190.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 190-1.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 192-3.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

³¹ Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* (New York, 1970), 108.

³² Rear Admiral Thomas Graves to First Secretary of the Admiralty Phillip Stevens, 7 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 163-4.

³³ Captain Joshua Davis to George Washington, 22 July 1775, *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, W.W. Abbot, ed., (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1985), I, 156. Hereafter cited as *PGW*.

list totaling 117 various types of boats, 96 of which were whaleboats.³⁴ Tensions rose as the skirmishing and whaleboat raids continued. Both sides were eager for battle, which led to events of Breed's and Bunker Hills.

The Battle of Bunker Hill was the largest clash between the two armies at Boston. In June 1775, Americans held three main positions. The bulk of colonial forces were in three forts at Cambridge. Two were near the Charles River and commanded a bend of it not far from the Great Bridge. The third was inland and commanded the roads from Charlestown to Cambridge.³⁵

On June 12, Howe sent two letters to his brother that outlined a general plan for Boston. His plan began with the capture of Dorchester on 18 June. Dorchester would then be retained and fortified with two redoubts. From there Howe would attack Roxbury then Charlestown Heights. Finally he would move on Cambridge.³⁶

Americans learned of this plan and countered by fortifying Charlestown on 16 June.³⁷ General Ward sent cannon captured from the *Dianna* to Bunker Hill.³⁸ Putnam advised fortification of Breed's Hill because even though it was lower than Bunker Hill, small cannon placed there could threaten Boston and compel the British to action.³⁹

A small redoubt was constructed there overnight on the 16th. It was about eight rods square⁴⁰ and 132 feet on a side. With the coming of daylight, Colonel William Prescott

³⁴ Captain Joshua Davis to George Washington, 27 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 179-80.

³⁵ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 212.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 207-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁴⁰ One square rod equals about 30.25 square yards. *American Heritage College Dictionary* (New York, 1993), 1181.

realized that the redoubt could be flanked on two sides. Under heavy artillery fire, these sides were extended. Scattered casualties caused by this fire led to the first wave of American desertion.⁴¹

Both sides faced problems at the onset of the engagement. The British had to move through swampy bogs; difficult for men, nearly impossible for artillery. Americans were short of powder and ammunition. Customarily, troops received thirty rounds per man. Before engaging at Breed's Hill, the men were given fifteen balls, one flint, and a gill⁴² cup of powder.⁴³

On June 17, the British advanced at high tide and formed three lines on a little hill at Morton's Point.⁴⁴ Howe then advanced with about 2200 rank and file.⁴⁵ The first British advance was decimated. In a terrible blunder, someone accidentally sent twelve-pound shot for the six-pounder cannon. This mistake cost many British lives early in the battle because the first waves advanced with little cover fire, until the correct shot could be sent over.⁴⁶ Howe reformed his lines and advanced, again to be repelled. Americans began to run out of powder, however.⁴⁷ Howe pre-empted his third assault by ordering artillery forward to riddle the colonials with grapeshot. Methodically, with intermittent cannon fire, the British overran the first redoubt and advanced on American forces. By now, Americans were out of powder. To meet the third charge, Colonel Prescott ordered

⁴¹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 216.

⁴² One gill is equal to ¼ pint or 4 ounces. *American Heritage College Dictionary* (New York, 1993), 575.

⁴³ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁴⁶ Description of the Battle of Bunker Hill by Private Thomas Sullivan, 49th Regiment of Foot. *From Redcoat to Rebel: The Thomas Sullivan Journal*. Joseph Lee Boyle, ed. (Bowie, Maryland, 1997), 16.

⁴⁷ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 239.

several artillery cartridges broken open, as that was the only powder available.⁴⁸ The British advanced on the American lines with bayonets. Americans, lacking bayonets, either fled or fought with clubbed guns, stones, etc.⁴⁹ They were driven back and fought a retreat over Bunker Hill and back over Boston Neck to safety.⁵⁰ While the Battle of Bunker Hill unfolded, Charlestown was burned. After the battle, Howe fortified Bunker Hill and strengthened the former American redoubts.⁵¹ The Americans strengthened their defenses at Roxbury and erected line of entrenchments across the isthmus at Dorchester.⁵²

British casualties totaled 1,054: 226 killed and 828 wounded. Many were officers.⁵³ American losses totaled at 140 killed, 271 wounded, and 30 captured.⁵⁴ Washington sent a letter to his brother shortly after Bunker Hill, citing British losses at 1,043 killed and wounded and American losses at 450. He also referred to the British in Boston as "sickly and scarce of fresh provisions."⁵⁵

Bunker Hill was a boost for American morale and a source of shock for the British, who vastly underestimated the colonials' capacity to wage war against them. Howe's subsequent conservative approach to the war in America, characterized by extreme caution and inactivity is attributed to his pyrrhic victory at Boston. It had a profound effect on the British commanders.

⁴⁸ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 148.

⁴⁹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 248-9.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 261-2.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 265.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 257.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 263.

⁵⁵ George Washington to John Augustine Washington, 27 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 183-4.

General Gage, in what was amongst his last statements as commander in Boston, wrote the earl of Dartmouth on 25 June 1775 to report Bunker Hill. After a summary of the battle, Gage stated: "I wish most sincerely that it had not cost us so dear. The number of killed and wounded is greater than our force can afford to lose...and we have lost some extraordinary officers." And then in a personal comment to Dartmouth, he offered his final advice regarding the campaign, the situation at Boston, and the war in general:

[The] rebels are not the despicable rabble too many have supposed them to be...they make a good stand, entrench and raise batteries. They have engineers...and have fortified all the passes and heights round this town from Dorchester to Medford or [Mystick]...The conquest of this country is not easy and can be effected only by time and perseverance and strong armies attacking it in various quarters and dividing their forces...In all wars against the French they never showed so much conduct, attention and perseverance as they do now...⁵⁶

During the last weeks of June, both sides struck minor blows at each other. On 21 June a party of colonials and Indians killed four regulars. On the next day, British artillery fired on American positions. On the 24th, the British shelled Roxbury. The following day small skirmishes were reported. On the 26th, a party of Americans and regulars skirmished near George's Tavern on Boston Neck.⁵⁷

The American army floundered between Bunker Hill and Washington's arrival. American troops were mostly militia from their individual colonies. There was little unity in the American camp. Supplies were not distributed uniformly, and many were lacking.

⁵⁶ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 25 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 199-200.

⁵⁷ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 213-4.

Powder and arms were still critically short. There was little central organization.

American leaders in Philadelphia vacillated regarding the war. Many in the Continental Congress still hoped for peace. One member said: " We have not raised armies with ambitious designs of separating from Great Britain" ⁵⁸

On July 1, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress welcomed Generals George Washington and Richard Henry Lee. Washington took command the next day and immediately strengthened works at Roxbury and Cambridge. He set out to give the army true military discipline. He cut loose undesirable officers, particularly those accused of poor behavior or cowardice at Bunker Hill.⁵⁹ He issued general orders designed to increase discipline. These included directives against cursing, drunkenness, property abuse, etc.⁶⁰ Slowly the army began to unify. Washington appointed various officers to create the organization of the army. New posts included quartermaster general, commissary, and commissary of artillery.⁶¹

Washington faced some unique problems upon assuming command, rooted in colonial history. These provided immediate challenges to his efforts to form a continental army from the men massed at Boston. First, was the historical inability of the colonies to unite militarily for long. Individual colonies viewed problems of other colonies, as the problems of other colonies. Second was the prevalence of the "militia" attitude. New Englanders had a long-standing pride in their militias and in their loose organization and local autonomy. Third, Washington sought to avoid the same criticisms that Americans

⁵⁸ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 443

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 302.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 306-7.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 318.

had of the British. The last thing Washington needed was for his army to be seen as a tyrannical entity on the land. Impressment of supplies and men, quartering, etc., had to be handled with great care and subtlety.⁶² Desertion was a serious problem in the colonial camp. The army was made up of many people not used to military discipline and included many farmers who wanted to return for crop harvests. Many men returned home on leave and either did not return or reported back late. Another problem was the camp itself. Poor organization led to unsanitary conditions and disease. In early August, there was a small pox epidemic in the Continental Army camp. A report from Braintree cited two to three funerals a day.⁶³

A return of 3 July placed the number of effectives for the colonials at 13,743.⁶⁴ At a council of war called by Washington on 9 July, the army was organized into three divisions, each consisting of two brigades or twelve regiments. Major General Artemis Ward commanded the right wing at Roxbury. Brigadier Generals Thomas and Spencer commanded brigades of the right wing. Major General Lee controlled the left wing, divided into brigades under Brigadier General Sullivan at Winter Hill and another under Brigadier General Nathaniel Greene at Prospect Hill. Stationed at Cambridge, the center division under Major General Putnam, divided into brigades under Heath and Putnam

⁶² Higginbotham, Don. *George Washington and the American Military Tradition*. Mercer University Lamar Memorial Lectures No. 27. (Atlanta, Georgia, 1985), 48-9.

⁶³ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 465.

⁶⁴ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 220. Also see Appendix B.

himself.⁶⁵ Rev. William Emerson observed that the “lines extended almost from Cambridge to the Mystic River.”⁶⁶

Few engagements occurred during the summer and early fall, but nothing approached the scale of Bunker Hill. The British lacked the manpower to do much beyond hold the city, and American forces were too disorganized to attack. On 8 July, a party struck the British advance guard on Boston Neck and captured several muskets.⁶⁷ On 20 July, Major Jonathan Vose “secured the barley on Nantasket...and landed on the light house island with six or seven boats, the light house was set on fire and the wood work burnt, the party brought off three casks of o[y]l, all the furniture of the light house, about 50 wt of gun powder, a quantity of cordage, &c...” The barley amounted to about one thousand bushels. They also seized a large quantity of hay. Shortly after, the British retaliated by attacking the Americans at Nantasket, killing two and wounding several.⁶⁸ On 31 July, the British attempted to rebuild the lighthouse, but were thwarted by a colonial force of about three hundred men. About eighty British troops were killed or captured, and the endeavor to rebuild was sabotaged.⁶⁹ Also on 31 July, regulars assaulted Roxbury, burning a guard- house and several other houses. There was one British casualty. At the same time (about one in the morning) two gunboats went up the Charles River and

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 219-20.

⁶⁶ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston and of the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*. 221.

⁶⁷ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 224.

⁶⁸ Brigadier General William Heath to George Washington, 21 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 151-2.

⁶⁹ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* 231.

opened fire on Cambridge.⁷⁰ On 26 August, 1200 colonials seized Plowed Hill and fortified it overnight. The British in retaliation cannonaded the hill from Bunker Hill and sent vessels up the Mystic River. Americans under Sullivan placed a nine-pounder to intercept them, and with it crippled a sloop and a floating battery. Another floating battery was sunk. The whole endeavor cost the lives of nine men⁷¹

British activity centered on strengthening defensive positions around Boston and planning. The arrival of troops from Ireland offset British losses at Bunker Hill, bringing total forces in Boston up to about 6000 effectives. About 1400 were reported hospitalized.⁷² Washington described the British positions on 10 July:

I found the latter (British) strongly [I]ntrenching on Bunker's Hill about a mile from Charleston and advanced about half a mile from the place of the late action, with their sentries extended about one hundred and fifty yards on this side of the narrowest part of the neck, leading from this place to Charleston. Three floating batteries lie in Mystic River, near the camp, and one twenty gun ship below the ferry place, between Boston and Charleston. They have also a battery on Copp's Hill, on the Boston side, which much annoyed our troops in the late attack upon Roxbury Neck. They are also deeply [I]ntrenched and strongly fortified...⁷³

⁷⁰ Journal entry, 31 July 1775. *From Redcoat to Rebel: The Thomas Sullivan Journal*. Joseph Lee Boyle, ed., (Maryland, 1997), 21-2.

⁷¹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 481. George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 29 August 1775, *PGW*, I, 379.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 321.

⁷³ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* 216-7.

In the last week of July, the civilians in Boston numbered 6,753. The number of troops with their dependents was 13,600.⁷⁴ A lady in Boston stated that the town was "deprived of fresh provisions." There was an abundance of salt fish and pork, but the diet of so much salt was problematic in the heat of summer, as many of the troops encamped in the open, without shelter from the sun.⁷⁵

In late July, Gage made the first suggestion for evacuating Boston. He wrote to Britain that "circumstance brought the troops first here which is the most disadvantageous place for all operations...Was this army in New York, that province might to all appearance be more easily reduced..."⁷⁶ Others in authority began to question the wisdom of staying at Boston as well.

In early August, the earl of Dartmouth posed a series of questions to Gage, which evidenced that he like many others had begun to take the war more seriously. He wished to know if Gage thought it advisable to "push the war...in the next campaign on the side of New England," or whether it would be more "advisable to make Hudson's River the seat of the war and for that purpose immediately take possession of the city of New York...leaving at Boston what is necessary to secure that post..." If neither of these options be viable he asked if Gage the British could "...make an impression in other places...and...collect a large supply of livestock and provision which is not trifling in your present circumstance." Lastly, he inquired if Gage advised that the army "be posted at Halifax and Quebec until the events of winter shall point out the best plan..."⁷⁷

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 24 July 1775, *DAR*, X, 58.

⁷⁷ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 2 August 1775, *DAR*, X, 63-4.

Coincidentally, Gage had already sent an answer to many of these questions to Britain before he ever received Dartmouth's message. In a secret letter, Gage related the "disadvantageous situation of His Majesty's forces" at Boston. He told Dartmouth that "nothing could justify the venturing [of] an attack upon the rebels." He cited that "in forcing the enemy, in which considerable loss must be expected, little would be gained...as neither horses carriages or other articles for moving forward could be procured..." Ultimately, Gage thought this would serve "no end but forcing the rebels out of one stronghold into another." Gage concluded that "New York independent of its situation appears to be a place preferable to all others." In New York, "the troops would be better supplied and great aid would be afforded to their operations by having the convenience of a large navigable river to transport the impediments of the army; and the possession of that river would render the communication difficult between the northern and southern provinces."⁷⁸

Little action occurred during the fall. Washington busied himself improving his army. He also sent forces into Canada. The British continued to debate strategy. Early in September, the earl of Dartmouth wrote to Howe suggesting a move to New York. He stated that the army at Boston was "deprived of the comforts and necessities of life, wasting away by disease and desertion faster than we can recruit, and no longer the objects of terror or the cause of distress to the rebels." He advised abandoning Boston before the winter.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 20 August 1775, *DAR*, X, 70.

⁷⁹ Earl of Dartmouth to General Sir William Howe, 5 September 1775, *DAR*, X, 9.

On 1 October, Gage wrote a response to the earl of Dartmouth's inquiry about what the army might do. Gage he stated that no military operations could "be carried on to advantage" from Boston. He advised making "Hudson's River the seat of the war." He also noted that Boston could be held through the winter without hazard. Later in the letter, Gage expressed that even with a move to New York, it would be best to maintain a foothold in New England. He recommended Rhode Island.⁸⁰

Howe gave Dartmouth a similar response to the same questions. He advised Dartmouth that removal of troops from Boston before the winter could not "be carried into execution." Howe cited lack of transports as a main reason. He also stated that there was no particular urgency, and like Gage, did not foresee any major problems with wintering in Boston, adding that because of sickness, the force at Boston was insufficient for any undertakings "of consequence."⁸¹ On 10 October, Howe assumed command and Gage departed.

The British army under Howe began to suffer at Boston. Shortage of food and provisions and disease became Howe's primary concerns. A return of the British army on 1 October from Clinton lists British troops at nineteen battalions of infantry, two battalions of marines, one battalion of dragoons, five companies of artillery and 1431 men sick or quarantined in the hospital. Total fit-for-duty is given as 5,694 and 167 effectives for the dragoons.⁸² In mid November, transports landed about 2500 British reinforcements at Boston.⁸³

⁸⁰ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 1 October 1775, *DAR*, X, 135-6.

⁸¹ Major General William Howe to the earl of Dartmouth, 26 November 1775, *DAR*, X, 191-4.

⁸² Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 530.

⁸³ George Washington to William Ramsay, 10-16 November 1775, *PGW*, II, 341.

On 27 November, Howe wrote a letter to Dartmouth describing the situation at Boston. He stated that sickness amongst the troops was increasing because of the severity of the winter, but hoped that recovery would be quick provided he did not have to "wait too long for the flocks, bedding, blankets [,] etc., expected from Britain..." He also complained of a great want of experienced seamen to man and navigate British ships and transports.⁸⁴

Howe also reported concern over the ordnance brig *Nancy* and several missing transports with troops from Cork. He told Dartmouth that he hoped they would arrive soon, not only for their utility, but also because he was concerned that they had been captured. Howe commented on the status of shipping to Boston:

It is much to be wished that they were arrived, not only for the use they may be of, but on account of the advanced season of the year and the dangers vessels must run by coming on this coast in the present situation of things without convoy or force and having no friendly port to receive them, while the rebels' cruisers are ever watchful to take the advantage of their weakness or necessities, wherein they have already been too successful and will probably do much more mischief unless the King's ships can contrive to cut them off.⁸⁵

On 27 November, British boats landed about three hundred civilians at Point Shirley after Howe basically evicted them from Boston. Colonel Joseph Reed described them to Washington as "destitute of everything." In the same letter, Reed reported hearing that

⁸⁴ Major General Howe to the earl of Dartmouth, 27 November 1775, *DAR*, X, 194-6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

British officers in Boston were distressed over a missing ordnance ship. Reed also reported that small pox was at an epidemic proportion in Boston.⁸⁶

In a letter read in Congress on 29 September, Washington reported the situation in Boston:

It gives me great pain, to be obliged to sol[ic]it the attention of the honorable congress, to the state of this army, in terms which imply the slightest apprehension of being neglected: But my situation is inexpressibly distressing, to see the winter, fast approaching upon a naked army: The time of their servitude within a few weeks of expiring, & no provision, yet made for such important events. Added to these, the military chest is totally exhausted. The Paymaster has not a single dollar in hand. The Commissary General assures me, he has strained his credit for the subsistence of the army to the utmost. The Quarter Master General is precisely in the same situation: And the greater part of the troops are in a state not far from mutiny, upon the deduction from their stated allowance. I know not to whom I am to impute this failure, but I am of opinion, if the evil is not immediately remedied & more punctuality observed in the future, the army must absolutely break up...⁸⁷

Things began to improve for the American army. During the month of August, the powder shortage began to subside. A report from Washington in early August stated that he had thirty-six barrels of powder. A report in late August gave the number at 184 barrels. On August 20th, six and a half tons came in from the South.⁸⁸ With powder adequate and supplies fairly good, Washington proposed an attack on Boston on 8 September. His generals stated "it was not expedient" because the Americans were not strong enough. On 18 October Washington again suggested an attack and was again

⁸⁶ Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed to George Washington, 27 November 1775, *PGW*, II, 492.

denied.⁸⁹ On 30 September, Congress appointed a committee to assist with the army. The committee arrived in Cambridge 15 October and on the 18th began a five-day sitting with Washington and representatives of the four New Britain governments. They recommended an army of 23,372, with regiments made up of 728 men including officers. Parameters were set for the standardization of pay.⁹⁰

The British went into winter quarters early in December. In October, British leaders agreed to depart from Boston, but lacked enough transports to do so. They had to winter in Boston until more transports could arrive in the spring. Winter looked bleak from its onset for the British. They had ample clothing, fair housing, and plenty of ammunition, but were severely short of food and fuel. By this time, American ships were seizing British supplies in fair numbers. In an attempt at humor after the loss of one ship, Englishman William Bartlett stated that "the oranges, being directed to his Excellency General Gage, hope they will be more acceptable to his Excellency General Washington."⁹¹ Sometimes, American captures illuminated problems of British supply. Amongst these was the difficulty of transport. The same shipment containing oranges also contained spoiled casks with lemons and limes. A different vessel seized by Americans contained barrels of flour that were three to five pounds short of their marked weight.⁹² The British also suffered from shipment of poor supplies. In early December,

⁸⁷ George Washington to John Hancock, 21 September 1775, *PGW*, II, 29.

⁸⁸ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 486-488.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 491.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 508.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 533.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 533.

Howe wrote that a ship brought 744 barrels of good flour, 288 for immediate use, and 813 sour and bad.⁹³

In a letter to a business associate in Virginia, Washington summed up the situation at Boston during winter:

I have no doubt but that you, my good sir, as well as others are wondering how it happens that two armies almost in stones throw of each other should keep so long from action- I can account for it in few words-Their situation is such-being on two peninsulas very strongly fortified and surrounded by ships of war and floating batteries) that we cannot get to them and they do not choose to come to us- This being the case we have spent the summer in drawing lines of circumvalation round them-cutting off all supplies of fresh provisions by land; and latterly by water; for finding no great prospect of a visit from them, I have fitted out (in behalf of the continent) six armed vessels; with which we have inter[s]cepted their provision boats from Nova Scotia and Canada, and taken some others from G. Britain & the West Indies with stores for the use of the garrison to the amount it is apprehended of near £20,000 sterger-...⁹⁴

On 12 December, American undertook construction of works at Litchmore's Point. The works were completed over several days under sporadic artillery fire from the British, and consisted of two redoubts with mortar beds. From this new position, Boston could be bombarded. One British officer said of the new batteries that, "had rebels erected their battery on the other side of town at Dorchester, the Admiral and all his booms would have made the first blaze, and the burning of the town would have

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 533.

⁹⁴ George Washington to John Tayloe, 11 December 1775, *PGW*, II, 538.

followed.”⁹⁵ The British did not know that Washington lacked sufficient powder or ammunition to bombard anything. That was soon to change. Knox sent a list of stores he would send from Ticonderoga. These included fourteen mortars, two howitzers, thirty-nine cannon, a large barrel of flints, and about 2,300 pounds of lead.⁹⁶

Though things had improved, Washington still had many problems. Enlistment was one of Washington’s biggest problems. Connecticut men’s service was up on 10 December, that of men from the other colonies on 31 December. During the first week of re-enlistment in early November, the service re-signed only 966 men of eleven regiments. The second week was little improved. As 11 December neared, many troops began to depart. On the 10th, most Connecticut men walked away. The militias of Massachusetts and New Hampshire filled their places in the regiments. Re-enlistment continued to go poorly and by the time Gage left in mid December, the Continental Army had only about 6,500 effectives.⁹⁷ Washington convinced some militiamen to stay another fortnight. He asked New Britain governments for thirteen regiments of militia to serve until April 1st.⁹⁸ Returns of 10 January showed 8,212 men, with only 5,582 fit-for-duty. Disease also became problematic. Washington stated on 15 December that “the smallpox is in every part of Boston.”⁹⁹

In what became a small skirmish, Washington sent a party of men under Major Thomas Knowlton to burn some houses at the foot of Bunker Hill and capture the guards.

⁹⁵ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* 270-2.

⁹⁶ Colonel Henry Knox to George Washington, 17 December 1775, *PGW*, II, 565.

⁹⁷ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 521-2

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 630-1.

⁹⁹ George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, 15 December 1775, *PGW*, II, 553.

Alerted, the British outpost fired upon the Americans. No colonials were killed or wounded. Five British guards were captured and one killed.¹⁰⁰

The new year began precariously for Washington, but things shortly began to improve. Gunpowder supplies increased. Supplies came in from abroad, and Americans had also began manufacturing powder. On 29 February, three tons of powder arrived in New York, and much of this was reported sent to Washington.¹⁰¹ Early in January, Washington learned that harsh weather was delaying the stores from Ticonderoga.¹⁰²

With the coming of 1776, British did little but suffer and wait for spring and the move to New York. Maintenance of a foothold in New Britain was still part of the plan as Howe had recently told Dartmouth that he wanted 20,000 troops, stating that with any fewer, successful offensive operations would be doubtful. By this time, Boston was well out of the equation. Howe wanted 12,000 at New York, 6,000 in Rhode Island, and 2,000 at Halifax.¹⁰³

In early February, Washington was still distraught. He told another officer: "I know the unhappy predicament I stand in. I know, that much is expected of me. I know that without men, without arms, without ammunition, without any thing fit for the accommodation of a soldier that little is to be done..."¹⁰⁴ But within weeks, everything changed. In early February Knox arrived with the stores from Ticonderoga. On 11 February George Washington received a military assessment of Dorchester Heights, including what was needed to fortify it. This is the first indication of George

¹⁰⁰ George Washington to John Hancock, 11 January 1776, *PGW*, III, 68.

¹⁰¹ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 654.

¹⁰² Colonel Henry Knox to George Washington, 5 January 1776, *PGW*, III, 29.

¹⁰³ Major General Howe to the Earl of Dartmouth, 16 January 1776, *DAR*, XII, 44-5.

Washington's plan.¹⁰⁵ On 13 February, troops at Roxbury and Cambridge received fifteen rounds per man.¹⁰⁶ At a council of war on 16 February, 288 men were reported at or on the way to Boston. Of these, 8,799 were reported as fit for duty. British strength was estimated at about 5,000.¹⁰⁷

The Boston garrison received twenty-four rounds per man.¹⁰⁸ On 26 February, George Washington reported his plans for Dorchester Heights to Congress.¹⁰⁹ Tired of inactivity, Washington, wished to force Howe's hand: "If anything will induce General Howe to risk an engagement it will be this, I am determined to do everything in my power to bring on one and that as soon as possible." He referred to fortification of works at Litchmore's Point and the seizure of Dorchester Heights.¹¹⁰

Over the last days of February and the first of March, G Washington's plan began to unfold. Litchmore's Point was fortified, and mortars and cannon at this location, Cobble's Hill, and Lamb's Dam began firing on Boston on Saturday 2 March. On Saturday 2 March, in the evening, Washington issued official orders to seize and fortify Dorchester Heights.¹¹¹ British responding artillery caused a few casualties. Bombardments continued as cover for the fortification of Dorchester Heights, which began on the evening of 4 March.¹¹² A participant, Private Thomas Sullivan, stated that 270 shots were fired from British thirty two-pounders and 300 mortar shells were

¹⁰⁴ George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, 10 February 1776, *PGW*, III, 286-7.

¹⁰⁵ Lieutenant Colonel Rufus Putnam to George Washington, 11 February 1776, *PGW*, III, 295-8.

¹⁰⁶ General Orders, 13 February 1776, *PGW*, III, 304.

¹⁰⁷ Council of War, 16 February 1776, *PGW*, II, 320-22.

¹⁰⁸ General Orders, 17 Feb 1776, *PGW*, III, 329.

¹⁰⁹ George Washington to John Hancock, 26 February 1776, *PGW*, III, 364.

¹¹⁰ George Washington to Major General Phillip Schuyler, 27 February 1776, *PGW*, III, 383-4.

¹¹¹ George Washington to Major General Artemis Ward, 2 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 401.

¹¹² George Washington to LTCol Joseph Reed, 26 February-9 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 370-3.

launched into Roxbury. Regarding American fire, Sullivan stated that “the shells and mortars it was supposed the Rebels got on board of an ordnance vessel that was coming in from Britain to Boston, and taken at sea by an American privateer.” This he assumed because “They never fired a shell into the town before that time.”¹¹³ On the morning of the 6 March 1776, the British were astonished to see two forts on the Heights, manned by two to three thousand men.¹¹⁴ Howe made an attempt to storm them, but the weather forced him to turn back.¹¹⁵ Washington had two plans in action, dependant on what Howe did. First, Howe would simply evacuate Boston. Otherwise, if Howe decided to fight, Washington had a plan to take Boston by force. Four thousand men, in two divisions, awaited orders at the mouth of the Cambridge River. The first division would seize Beacon Hill and surrounding locations. The second would assault Boston Neck, seizing the enemy’s gate and allowing colonial forces into the city.

The strategic position of the artillery made Boston perilous for the British army and navy. There was no choice for Howe but evacuation. On 9 March, the situation forced Howe’s hand. British and American artillery exchanged over eight hundred rounds. Five Americans were killed by artillery fire on the night of 9 March. These probably were the last casualties of the siege of Boston.¹¹⁶ The difficulty of the British position became obvious.¹¹⁷ They reached an agreement with Washington: Howe’s army would be allowed to leave if Boston was left intact. Embarkation began on the 10 March. Ships

¹¹³ Journal entry 3 March 1776. *From Redcoat to Rebel: The Thomas Sullivan Journal*. Joseph Lee Boyle, ed., (Bowie, Maryland, 1997), 33-4.

¹¹⁴ George Washington to Major General Artemis Ward, 3 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 401.

¹¹⁵ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 662.

¹¹⁶ George Washington to John Hancock, 7-9 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 422-427.

were loaded, cannon were spiked, and gun carriages broken. The evacuation was sloppy. Lack of seamen caused Howe to leave a large quantity of stores and shipping behind.¹¹⁸ Included in these stores were thirty cannon, two mortars, horses, forage, wheat, coal, salt, etc. Howe left Boston on 17 March.

Howe also left behind surprises throughout the city of Boston for the Americans. On the 14th many of Boston's streets were barricaded. Mixed into the barricades were clothes and bedding from pox houses and infirmaries. Fortunately, George Washington found out about Howe's plan to infect the Continental Army with smallpox and appropriate measures and limits on city entry were enforced.¹¹⁹ On 21 March, while on board HMS *Chatham* at Nantasket Howe wrote a final letter regarding Boston and the evacuation to the earl of Dartmouth.

My Lord, it is with great regret I am obliged to inform your lordship that after all my struggle to supply the army with provisions from the southern provinces and the West Indies, from whence none of the vessels have yet returned, and after anxious expectation of more transports...the enemy by taking possession of and fortifying the commanding heights on Dorchester Neck in order to force the ships by their cannon to quit the harbor has reduced me to the necessity either of exposing the army to the greatest distresses by remaining in Boston or of withdrawing from it under such strained circumstances...

¹¹⁷ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* 303.

¹¹⁸ George Washington to John Hancock, 7-9 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 422-427. Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 308. George Washington to Major General Schuyler, 19 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 496. For a complete list, see George Washington to John Hancock, 24 March 1776, Enclosure: Inventory of British Stores Left in Boston, *PGW*, III, 422-427.

Howe continued the letter by describing the fortification of Dorchester Heights and his failed attempt to assault them. He described the necessity of securing a month's provision from Admiral Shulldham, again citing a terrible shortage. This shortage of supplies and transports forced Howe to Halifax instead of New York. Referring to supplies to be sent to him, he states that "unless these supplies are sent under convoy or of force to defend themselves, they will become very precarious as the rebels have greatly increased their naval strength, an I fear that many of those now on their voyage will fall into the enemy's hands..."¹²⁰ And thus, the siege of Boston was broken.

¹¹⁹ General Orders, 14 March 1776, *PGW*, III, 466. Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 308.

¹²⁰ General William Howe to the Earl of Dartmouth, 21 March 1776, *DAR*, XII, 80-4.

CHAPTER III: LOGISTICS AND THE ARMIES AT BOSTON 1775-1776

The siege of Boston was the first campaign in a war that neither side was prepared to wage. It served as a training ground for both. Lessons learned at Boston applied to the remainder of the war. Britain, though possessed of a long military tradition, suffered from indecision amongst its leaders, both civil and military, as to the war itself, and how to deal with it. British arrogance, particularly in England, caused a vast under-estimation of the magnitude of commitment required to effectively manage the American war. The costly Battle of Bunker Hill disproved the "one campaign and the rabble would be smashed" belief so commonly held amongst the British. Britain faced a war across the Atlantic. Unlike the recent Seven Years War, or other colonial wars, few provisions could be secured from the American continent. The siege of Boston necessitated major re-organization in all aspects of army and naval bureaucracy. Indecision and misunderstanding caused a slow start. Hindrance by American land and naval forces and corruption in England caused additional hardship for British troops at Boston.

Americans, though spirited, lacked sufficient military discipline to wage a long war. Though many had valuable combat experience in the Seven Years War, few had any idea how to lead and organize an army capable of not only resisting, but also defeating, one of the largest military forces in the contemporary world. The Continental Congress, composed of very few military veterans, learned and waged war simultaneously. At the siege of Boston, Americans began the process of forming a military union. Supplying

American troops at Boston was the beginning of this process. New bureaucracies had to be formed; policies and standards rapidly instituted. Early disorganization in the siege caused many problems. Policies formerly used by colonial militias were inadequate. Ultimately, the process of organization and supply of the Continental Army improved, but the level of success fluctuated at Boston and for the remainder of the war.

The fighting efficiency of an army is largely a function of its logistical efficiency. Logistics encompasses the planning and implementation of all aspects of supply to and maintenance of an army. At the time of the siege, supplies included food and provisions, arms and ammunition, powder, clothing, bedding, camp equipment, fuel, tools, medical equipment, forage, etc., all the materiel needed by a soldier. Logistics also included the means by which these goods are procured, transported, and distributed to an army in garrison, or in the field. The siege placed logistical demands on the opposing armies that neither, for different reasons, was prepared to confront. This chapter will examine the challenges opposing forces faced; steps and actions taken by each to meet these challenges; and the nature and impacts of their respective successes and failures.

Though British troops were stationed at Boston for a number of years, this chapter concerns their condition after Lexington and Concord. Immediately after the engagements, the British occupied only Boston proper, fortifications on Boston Neck sealed them in the city. The Royal Navy had several warships roaming the harbor for its defense. After the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, British troops fortified Breeds and Bunker hills, sealing this peninsula, which also contained Charlestown. Outside these two peninsulas, the only safe place for the British was Boston Harbor and the ships of the

Royal Navy. Troops remained besieged here until March 17, 1776, when American fortifications on Dorchester Heights forced British evacuation. For nearly one year, these troops had to be supplied and maintained across three thousand miles of ocean. The ocean itself was a major hindrance. Foul weather caused supply ships to divert their courses to the relative safety of tropical waters. Those that attempted to reach Boston faced possible capture by increasing numbers of colonial privateers in the vicinity of Massachusetts Bay and in the shipping lanes between Canada and Boston.

Eighteen British regiments, including one cavalry regiment, secured Boston. Average regimental strength was 477.¹ A regiment consisted of ten companies. Of the ten companies, there was one grenadier company and one light infantry. Cavalry regiments contained fewer men, usually averaging about 231, divided into troops.² Two regiments had been in Boston since 1768 and one arrived in July 1774. The bulk of forces arrived just prior to Lexington and Concord. More reinforcements arrived before Bunker Hill, and the rest arrived subsequently.³ A report by George Washington just before Bunker Hill cited British forces as between 10,000 to 12,000 troops. The British lost about 1100 men at Bunker Hill.⁴ Reinforcements from Ireland shortly after the battle roughly equaled the losses and brought the number of troops up to between 7,000 and 8,000. Estimates numbered the civilian population of Boston in the fall around 7000.⁵ By late fall,

¹ Edward E. Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1926), 4.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

³ Lee Johnson, ed. *The British Army in North America: 1775-1783* (London, 1997), 21-2.

⁴ George Washington to Samuel Washington, 20 July 1775, *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series*, W.W. Abbot, ed., (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1985), I, 125.

⁵ French Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution* (New York, 1934), 481.

nominally, Howe had 13,000 troops. Of these, about one-third were unfit for duty due to wounds or disease.⁶

Everything a British soldier wore, ate, or used had to be supplied from outside Boston. Soldiers needed clothing and accoutrements, camp equipage, fuel for cooking and heat, weapons, ammunition, food, etc. British troops fared pretty well throughout the siege regarding arms and ammunition. With all else they suffered to varying degrees.

A British soldier's uniform consisted of a red coat, waistcoat, shoes, stockings, shirt, breeches, shoe-buckles, small clothes, gaiters, and a hat. A broad belt over the left shoulder supported a cartridge pouch, while a waist belt held a bayonet and/or short sword.⁷ A soldier carried a knapsack containing extra clothing, a brush and blackball, a blanket, plus a haversack with provisions, a canteen, and one-fifth of the general equipage for his tent.⁸ The expected life for these items was one year.⁹

Garrison equipage included beds and bedding, stoves, lanterns, fireplace equipment, coal, cooking pots, wood, and candles. Tents and camp equipage for a single regiment required twelve to eighteen-tons of cargo space onboard a transport.¹⁰ Camp equipage was always short in Boston. Beds accommodated two men. Each bed consisted of a paillasse, two sheets, two blankets, and a rug. Usually straw provided the cushion for the bedding. Replacements in the order of 10,000 blankets were required at Boston for the

⁶ Reginald Hargreaves, *The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean 1655-1783* (New York, 1968), 250.

⁷ Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution*, 15.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁹ Arthur R. Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1975), 7.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

winter of 1775-1776.¹¹ There was not a sufficient number of tents or straw for bedding.¹² Gage declared: "A combination among the Provinces having deprived us of all the [conveniency's] America can afford, and among others of straw for fitting the soldiers['] pallasses in winter, the only means left to procure them comfortable bedding is by getting flocks from England..."¹³ Inefficient housing in Boston required many to camp in tents throughout the city. Troops in Boston were deficient in tents in early 1775, and regiments arriving later came with old tents that would not repel rain. The resulting misery caused a high rate of disease and desertion. Compounding the problem, the poor equipment sent in 1775 required new equipage in 1776.¹⁴

Lack of wood and/or coal caused great distress at Boston for both armies. Fire and fuel were not only needed for warmth in cold weather, but for daily uses all year, such as cooking, baking, and washing. As an example, the British force at New York in 1776 consumed seventy cords per week.¹⁵ The force at Boston during the siege burned the town of Charlestown during the Battle of Bunker Hill, The old North Church, the West Church's steeple, wharves, ships, buildings, and fences were burned to keep warm during the winter of 1775-76.¹⁶ Building destruction for fuel became so bad that Howe ordered immediate hanging of anyone caught dismantling fences and buildings.¹⁷ Coal could be substituted for wood, but it was more expensive to ship and more costly. One-third

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹² Richard Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* (New York, 1970), 235.

¹³ General Thomas Gage to Lord Viscount Barrington, secretary of war, 22 July 1775, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775*, Edwin Clarence Carter, ed., (Connecticut, 1931), II, 692. Hereafter cited as *CGTG*.

¹⁴ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 146.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

chauldron¹⁸ of coal substituted for a cord of wood. Three thousand chauldrons of coal were shipped to the army during the summer of 1775.¹⁹

Candles provided light in a barracks. England produced and shipped sixty-three tons of candles to the army each year. Each barracks room required eleven pounds of candles per week. Enlisted men received dipped candles and officers were given more expensive molded candles.²⁰

The British had an ample supply of weapons and ammunition throughout the siege. For weaponry, a soldier carried a "Brown Bess" musket, bayonet, scabbard, cleaning equipment, flints, cartridges, and a cartridge box.²¹ Regulars had sixty rounds.²² A good musket flint could be used for about ten to fifteen rounds without sharpening. The flints provided to the British could barely account for six.²³ There was a saying amongst the British rank-and-file that "Yankee flint was as good as a glass of grog."²⁴ A bad flint caused miss-fires and detracted from effectiveness of the volleys upon which the regulars relied.

The British at Boston suffered from lack of food. An army of 20,000 men ate thirty-three tons of food per day. British leaders had to feed roughly 15,000 people, including civilians, at Boston.²⁵ On 20 June 1775, a report from the Treasury stated that there was enough beef in Boston to supply 4000 men until 9 September, flour until 11 September,

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

¹⁸ Chauldron- former unit of English dry measure equal to 36 bushels of coal or 32 bushels of grain. As a measure for coal, one chauldron equals 5,936 pounds. See Appendix E.

¹⁹ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 61.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.

²² Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, (New York, 1902), 122.

²³ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 150.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

and butter until 19 October. The report also stated that of 4000 barrels of pork, 6000 barrels of flour, and 1000 firkins butter requested, 1000, 2000, and 500 were sent, respectively.²⁶ On 20 August, Gage reported that a fleet of transports reached Boston with 1800 sheep and 100 oxen.²⁷ Ideally, an average weekly ration per man consisted of 7 pounds flour, 7 pounds beef or 4 pounds pork, 6 ounces butter, 3 pints of peas, and one-half pound of oatmeal.²⁸ Women, children and the sick also needed to be supplied at Boston. Howe stated that "provisions will be allowed at the rate of one-half ration for each [W]oman & a [Q]uarter for each child"²⁹ The sick received a diet similar in quantity to a typical ration, but it was supposed to include fresh meat and vegetables.³⁰ Rum, important as a water purifier and morale booster, was issued at one quart for six men per day. During the winter of 1775-1776, 468,750 gallons of porter were issued to the 12,000 men besieged at Boston.³¹ Animals had to be fed as well: Each dragoon's horse stationed at Boston required 20 pounds of hay and 9 pounds of oats per day.³²

The army needed cash for officers' pay, to secure forage, to pay civilian employees, and to aid loyalists. In Boston, specie was scarce. Bills issued by General Gage in Boston no longer produced cash and were only accepted at large discounts as their value dropped substantially. The cash shortage also led to illegal activity. The few with cash in Boston could make a fortune by purchasing bills at discounted rates and shipping them to

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁶ Grey Cooper to John Pownall, 20 June 1775, *Documents of the American Revolution: 1770-1783* (Colonial Office Series), K.G. Davies, ed., (Dublin, 1975), IX, 191. Hereafter cited as *DAR*.

²⁷ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 20 August 1775, *CGTG*, II, 413.

²⁸ Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution*, 89.

²⁹ Orderly Book Entry, 2 May 1776, Benjamin Franklin Stevens, *General Sir William Howe's Orderly Book 1775-1776*, (New York, 1970), 262.

³⁰ Curtis, *The Organization of the British Army in the American Revolution*, 88.

³¹ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 8-9.

England to be cashed in at face value. Members of the Barrack Master General's Office allegedly did this during the fall and winter of 1775.³³

Only two days after Lexington and Concord, virtually all trade between Boston and the countryside ceased. As news of the engagements spread, supplies were cut off from other colonies as well. Gage described the situation at Boston:

Very great pains have been taken to starve the troops and the friend of government in Boston, for no article necessary for the support of life is suffered to be sent there from any of the provinces from New Hampshire to South Carolina...They endeavor to prevent also the fishermen from supplying the town with fish by means of whale boats they have seized at Nantucket, and have lately on those boats destroyed the lighthouses off Cape Ann and at the entrance of this harbor to deceive ships bound in here...There is no rivers for the transportation of supplies, and land carriages are not to be procured.³⁴

The colonists also made it difficult for ships to reach Boston. An act initiated by the Rhode Island Assembly prohibited pilots from taking charge of any vessel not belonging to the colonies. Penalties for doing so were £500 and one year imprisonment.³⁵

Graves reported a similar situation for the navy. "In consequence of our being deprived of all communication by land, fresh beef for the squadron cannot be procured."³⁶ Supplies coming from Nova Scotia were problematic as well. A report from Halifax stated that it was "no sooner known that a quantity of hay was purchased for the

³² *Ibid.*, 9.

³³ *Ibid.*, 152.

³⁴ General Thomas Gage to the Earl of Dartmouth, 24 July 1775, *DAR*, IX, 56-7.

³⁵ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 103.

³⁶ Rear Admiral Thomas Graves to First Secretary of the Admiralty Phillip Stevens, 22 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 192.

horse in Boston than a stack of eight or ten tons was maliciously set on fire and destroyed..." Governor Legge also reported that a "quantity of supply ships bound from Nova Scotia to Boston were prevented from departure because of colonial vessels fitted out in the eastern coast of New England cruising in the Bay[of Fundy]"³⁷

At the outbreak of hostilities, the British government was ill prepared to deal with the required tasks. Excepting the Ordnance Board, the only permanent institution in place in 1775 for army supply was the War Office, responsible for uniforms, medical supplies, and camp equipage. It did little more than lay down standards of quality, design, and quantity. The actual responsibility for supply fell to regimental commanders who worked through contracting agents in London. In March 1775, Nesbitt, Drummond, and Franks, a prime food contractor for troops in North America warned the Treasury Department that the colonies were resisting shipments for the troops at Boston.³⁸ By the end of 1775, the War Office had to take over responsibility as the regimental system was failing. Another factor causing problems was communication across the Atlantic. For example, in June 1775, contractors estimated that supplies then in Boston would support the 10,000 men present until September.³⁹ They failed to account for women, children, loyalists, and civilian employees.

British troops at Boston first tried to live on livestock collected by foraging on local islands. The British and colonials had several clashes during the first months of the siege as they raced to secure these valuable food sources, and early foraging attempts often ended in disaster for the British. A foray to Grape Island ended with foragers fleeing from

³⁷ Governor Francis Legge to the Earl of Dartmouth, 24 July 1775, *DAR*, IX, 60.

a troop of Americans.⁴⁰ In seeking to protect cattle on Hog's Island from Americans, the Royal Navy ship *Diana* ran aground and was burned by colonials.⁴¹ Amongst the largest, Americans cleared Noddle's Island of all stock before the British acquired any.⁴² In one case of British success, Clinton ordered roughly 400 men on an expedition to Lechmere Point on November 9, 1775. The British made off with about forty heads of cattle before being driven off.⁴³

When local cattle sources became depleted or inaccessible by the summer of 1775, virtually everyone lived on salted provisions. Soon men were calling Boston "the graveyard of England." Death from disease was so rampant that mass graves containing as many as thirty bodies became commonplace around the city. "Between twenty and thirty officers tried to resign their commissions in protest" of conditions at Boston.⁴⁴ Numerous accounts by civil and military contemporaries attest to the vile conditions in Boston during the siege.

Over the course of the siege, New England privateers preyed upon incoming victualers with increasing success. The Royal Navy, lacking adequate shipping, could do little to stop them. Admiral Graves used his forces to supply troops at Boston. In June, he stated: "I have directed Captain Dudingston, in addition to his general orders respecting illicit trade...to seize and send all vessels laden with provisions, flour, grain, molasses, and salt

³⁸ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ David Syrett, *Shipping and the American War 1775-1783* (London, 1970), 237.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*, 239.

⁴³ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 482. Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 267.

⁴⁴ Sylvia R. Frey, *The British Soldier in America: A Social History of Military Life in the Revolutionary Period* (Austin, Texas, 1981), 33.

as well as to distress the rebels as to supply the army who are in want of [the] same articles of provisions.”⁴⁵ Coastal raids for forage were largely unproductive. Farther south, he had the *Rose* and the *Swan* seize supplies headed for Providence for the colonial army and send them to the army at Boston.⁴⁶ Later, under Shulldham and Howe, the army and navy squabbled over provisions, especially during the bitter winter of 1775-6.

Admiral Shulldham complained that Howe did not share provisions with the fleet. Howe responded to the accusation: “I beg leave to observe the deliveries of provision to the soldiers for some weeks past being without peas[e] or rice, the want of bedding, and the unavoidable exposure to the weather due to the nature of the duty, which has been very severe...make them require these refreshments more than the seamen...”⁴⁷

Washington also did his part to ensure British suffering: “The great scarcity of fresh provisions in their army has led me to take every precaution to prevent a supply, for this purpose I have ordered all cattle & sheep to be drove from the low grounds & farms within their reach. A detachment from General Thomas’s camp on Wednesday night went over to Long Island & brought from thence 20 cattle & a number of sheep...By some accident they omitted burning the hay & returned the next day at noon to complete it...”⁴⁸ By fall, the British were living on salted provisions. Shortages led to price increases that made extras unaffordable to most. During the summer of 1775, oppressive heat, a shortage of fresh food, and overcrowding in inadequate and unsanitary living

⁴⁵ Admiral Thomas Graves to Phillip Stevens, 16 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 172.

⁴⁶ Rear Admiral Thomas Graves to Phillip Stevens, 22 June 1775, *DAR*, IX, 192.

⁴⁷ General William Howe to the earl of Dartmouth, 16 January 1776, *DAR*, IX, 44-5.

⁴⁸ George Washington to John Hancock, 14 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 116.

spaces bred a wave of sickness that resulted in as many as thirty funerals a day.⁴⁹ During the summer of 1775, British commanders discussed a move to New York for the first time, but Gage was not ready to move and he had no orders from England.⁵⁰

The major responsibility for army provisioning was with the Treasury Department.⁵¹ The most taxing of these responsibilities was supplying food, which had not been overly difficult through the Seven Years War. It was never a large problem during that war because the bulk of food and provisions were supplied from the colonies. In 1775, the Treasury Department still relied on contractors for provisions sent to North America. Contractors were supposed to maintain a six-month reserve. By March 1775, troops under General Gage were already 1½ months short.⁵² In May, Gage estimated he had enough provisions for five months.⁵³ In June, two ships arrived from Quebec, and some surplus came from Halifax, that brought the reserves up to 130 days. Early in October, five contractor ships arrived carrying 5200 barrels of flour. No more came until five ships arrived in December.⁵⁴ Another contractor, Mure, Son, and Atkinson in London, dispatched thirty-six ships between October and November 1775, carrying in total: stores of beef, bread, oatmeal, peas, 4000 sheep and hogs, 500 tons potatoes, 468,750 gallons porter, 20 tons raisins, 60 tons onions, and 50 tons parsnips. Many ships turned back due to storms, fifteen sailed to Antigua, and privateers captured others. Only thirteen of these ships made it to Boston. Of the vegetables, 17 of 200 tons potatoes were useable; the rest

⁴⁹ Hargreaves, *The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean 1655-1783*, 249.

⁵⁰ Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 331-2.

⁵¹ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵³ General Thomas Gage to Grey Cooper, 19 May 1775, *CGTG*, II, 679.

were rotten. Of all provisions, only preserved foods such as sauerkraut, porter, and vinegar remained edible. Of the livestock, only 60 of 550 sheep and 88 of 290 hogs survived.⁵⁵

Ideally, salted beef and pork would last two years. Flour, properly dried and stored would last about the same. Oatmeal, butter, and cheese could also be preserved. Peas could be dried and cabbage soaked in vinegar. Food store edibility related directly to the care taken in preparation and storage. The problem with stores from England was that too many provisions passed through too many hands and presented opportunity for profit. Less time devoted to preparation and stowage caused stores to go bad. Time was money. Demand was unexpected, and delivery time was short. In the fall 1775, of 6995 barrels of flour that arrived in Boston, 4956 were condemned, 966 were fit for immediate use, and only 1069 were sound.⁵⁶ Bad provisions continued to be a problem until the Navy Board took over in 1777.⁵⁷

Two additional factors unique to the American situation caused a breakdown of the system. First, because of a cash shortage, General William Howe began issuing temporary warrants for provisions, a practice that spun out of control. The administrative load on the commander-in-chief became too heavy, as evidenced by his failure to turn in required accountings in 1775 and early 1776.⁵⁸ Second, contractors' protests because of shipping shortages, incursions by rebel privateers, and high insurance rates led to the Treasury Department taking on the task itself. By early fall 1775, the Treasury

⁵⁴ Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in North America 1775-1783*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

Department also had to take over the tasks of the Barrack Master at Boston, as supplies were no longer available in North America. The board established a collection and storage depot at Cork, Ireland, and shortly afterward, a commissary general in America, under the supervision of Daniel Chamier.⁵⁹ The Commissary oversaw distribution, received and stored supplies, and procured supplies locally. The last was tricky in hostile North America and involved secret trading and foraging parties. The task of supplying money and medical supplies also fell to the Treasury Department and Chamier in 1776.⁶⁰

The Board of Ordnance was responsible for cannon and artillery, small arms and ammunition for the entire army, as well as clothing and equipment for engineers and artillery personnel, axes, pick-axes, shovels, mobile forges, and shoes for artillery horses.⁶¹ It oversaw the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers and also planned and built defensive works and advised commanders on tactics and strategy against enemy works. The Navy Board was responsible for transports, camp equipment, clothing, horses, and quartermaster's stores. The Barrack Master General supplied wood and candles.

Three entities were responsible for transport across the ocean. The Ordnance Board delivered artillery, engineers, guns, and ordnance stores. The Navy Board carried infantry, cavalry, clothing, hospital stores, tents, and camp equipage. The Treasury Department was responsible for provisions. Conditions on transports were often fatal for men and beasts. One officer wrote, "there was continued destruction in the fore-tops, the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

pox above-board, the plague between decks, hell in the forecandle, [and] the devil at the helm."⁶² Transport shipping became a major problem and caused the British to stay in Boston for the winter, even after leaders decided to move to New York. Hearing of the American invasion of Quebec, London officials decided to send an expedition to Canada's defense rather than to aid Howe. Had this expedition not been diverted, Howe would likely have had enough transports to leave the city and move on to New York before the winter.⁶³

As a result of these logistical problems, survivors of Bunker Hill endured eight months of hardship behind makeshift defenses. While the British were immobilized, Washington organized his army. The British had been introduced to a kind of war they had not expected to fight. Attitudes in England delayed a proper response to the conflict. British ignorance and incompetence both in England and in North America caused immense suffering amongst the troops in Boston and ultimately led to the humbling evacuation in March 1776.

On 19 April 1775, British troops reached the relative safety of Boston after skirmishing their way back from engagements at Lexington and Concord. The motley gathering of Massachusetts' militia facing them from Cambridge, Roxbury, and Charlestown formed the foundation of the first organized armed forces of the United Colonies. After Lexington and Concord, a network of local committees initiated steps to disperse militia and volunteers to Boston.⁶⁴ Within a matter of days, 20,000 militia and

⁶² Henry Belcher, *The First American Civil War, First Period 1775-1778, With Chapters on the Continental or Revolutionary Army and on the Forces of the Crown*, 2 Vols. (London, 1911), I, 255.

⁶³ Syrett, *Shipping and the American War 1775-1783*, 206.

⁶⁴ Charles Knowles Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington* (New York, 1902), 15.

volunteers were gathered in and around Cambridge.⁶⁵ On 14 June 1775, the Continental Congress resolved that six companies of riflemen would be raised from Pennsylvania and Maryland to reinforce Boston. Each company contained a captain, three lieutenants, four sergeants, a drummer, a trumpeter, and sixty-eight privates.⁶⁶ The next day Washington was appointed commander, and the Continental Army was born. On 20 June 1775, the Continental Congress sent Washington instructions to "victual at the continental expense all such volunteers as have joined or shall join the united army." They appointed Joseph Trumball, formerly commissary for Connecticut as the first commissary general.

Trumball staffed his commissary with men who had formerly served him in Connecticut, mostly merchants.⁶⁷ On 4 July 1775, troops outside Boston numbered about 14,500.⁶⁸ George Washington estimated on his arrival that the "number of men fit for duty in the forces rais[e]d in this province including all the out posts and artillery does not amount to nine thousand...troops rais[e]d in other colonies more complete; but yet fall short of their establishment...I cannot estimate the present army at more than fourteen thousand five hundred men capable of duty."⁶⁹ By 19 July there were more than 17,000.⁷⁰ By fall 1775 there were about 19,000 effectives. In February 1776, Washington's forces numbered

⁶⁵ Hargreaves, *The Bloodybacks: The British Serviceman in North America and the Caribbean 1655-1783*, 230.

⁶⁶ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 20

⁶⁷ James A. Huston, *Logistics of Liberty: American Services of Supply in the Revolutionary War and After*. (Newark, Delaware, 1991), 67-8.

⁶⁸ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 19.

⁶⁹ George Washington to James Warren (Massachusetts Provincial Congress), 10 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 103.

⁷⁰ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 26.

about 8797 rank-and-file and about 7000 militia.⁷¹ Washington organized the army at Boston into three divisions; each divided into two brigades of about six regiments each. One division lay at Roxbury, one at Prospect and Winter Hills, and the third at Cambridge.⁷² Early in the siege, the army consisted of militia. In some ways, reliance on militiamen was harmful to the army. It hindered the pursuit of agriculture and helped lead to food shortages. Also, militia had to provide for their families, which very often took precedence over fighting a war.

On 4 July 1775, Washington ordered an "exact return to be made of all provisions [,] ordnance stores, powder, lead, working tools of all kinds, tents, camp kettles, and all other stores under their respective care, belonging to the armies at Roxbury and Cambridge"⁷³ Soon after, Washington expressed his needs to the Continental Congress, citing "want of tents, want of clothing, want of laws for the government of an army, and a want of money."⁷⁴ At first, provisions were not a problem. The primary concern quickly became the lack of guns and ammunition. The first and immediate supply source for the army at Boston was the domestic market. Demands for powder, forage, and provisions quickly far exceeded supply. The Continental Congress turned to the West Indies and Europe for supplies.⁷⁵ Lack of central authority caused initial problems with supply. Each

⁷¹ For troop numbers throughout the siege see: Summary of the Returns of the Army during the Siege of Boston, Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 406. See also, Appendix B.

⁷² Erna Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army* (Washington, DC, 1981), 33.

⁷³ General Orders, 4 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 35.

⁷⁴ George Washington to John Hancock, 10-11 July 1775, *PGW*, I, 35.

⁷⁵ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 25.

colony was required to collect a specified amount and deposit it at predetermined places for pick-up by their own troops.⁷⁶ Washington had to end this tradition to unify supply.

In establishing the various departments and organization needed to form a functional military, the Continental Congress had only its practical experience and knowledge of British agencies to draw from. On 16 June 1775, Congress appointed a Commissary General of Stores and Provisions for the Continental Army, and established the Hospital Department. In July, it authorized a Commissary of Military Stores, whose chief supplied requisite ordnance staff support for General Washington.⁷⁷ On 18 September, the Secret Committee was appointed as well as the Committee of Secret Correspondence. These departments handled foreign affairs.⁷⁸ Throughout 1775, the major supply agencies were the Quartermaster's and the Commissary Departments, under Thomas Mifflin and Joseph Trumbull respectively. Departmental units created by these men were responsible for procuring and delivering supplies to Washington's army. The Continental Congress issued \$6,000,000 in paper currency by the end of 1775. Its value progressively dropped from its time of issuance, causing a major problem for supply agents as many merchants resisted or refused deals to be paid with this unstable currency.⁷⁹

At times, the Continental Army resorted to seizing items it needed. Prominent amongst items seized were often wagons, critical to transport supplies. On 4 November 1775, the

⁷⁶ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 89.

⁷⁷ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 9.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

Continental Congress authorized Washington to impress wagons, horses, and vessels as needed for the army.⁸⁰

Ordinance problems plagued the colonial forces throughout the siege. The journals of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress list war-like stores in Massachusetts on 14 April 1775 as follows:⁸¹

Firearms: 21,549
 Lbs. Powder: 17,444
 Lbs. Ball: 22,191
 Flints: 144,699
 Bayonets: 10,108
 Pouches: 11,9769

In July 1775, the Continental Congress recommended that each soldier have a good musket that would carry a bayonet, steel ramrod, worm, priming wire, brush fitted thereto, a cutting sword or tomahawk, a cartridge box to contain twenty three rounds of cartridges, twelve flints, and a knapsack.⁸² Colonial forces at Boston never attained this goal.

Scarcity of firearms made it necessary for Washington to order that no soldier carry his arms away from camp if they were fit for use. Private property was appraised and purchased.⁸³ In January 1776, Congress authorized officers to buy any guns militiamen would sell. By February 1776, 2000 men in camp still lacked arms.⁸⁴ The arms that men

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁸¹ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 105.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 107.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

did posses were varied, and soldiers had to cast their own balls to suit their bore diameters. A soldier produced fourteen to eighteen balls from a pound of lead.⁸⁵

Powder shortage always remained critical at Boston. At the Battle of Bunker Hill, colonials were estimated to have fired only about thirty rounds per man.⁸⁶ On 19 July 1775, per Washington's request, Congress appointed a Commissary of Military Stores. The first was Ezekial Cheever.⁸⁷ His first duty was to make an immediate and exact account of stores in his department and deposit all powder, lead, and flints in a magazine designated for that purpose. Cheever placed the principal magazine at Cambridge and established others at Prospect Hill and Winter Hill.⁸⁸ As of 31 July, the American powder supply was estimated at 9,937 pounds.⁸⁹ At about forty rounds per pound of powder, this would have supplied roughly 14,000 troops at Boston with twenty-eight rounds per man and left nothing for artillery.⁹⁰

One major problem with ordnance, evidenced by the constant powder and arms shortages, was the lack of any central authority responsible for procurement. Congress soon waived non-exportation agreements on as much produce as was necessary to pay for ammunition, sulfur, and saltpeter.⁹¹ Early trade for ordnance and arms at the time of siege of Boston is difficult to trace because of the secret nature of many dealings, particularly those with the West Indies. After Bunker Hill, General Artemis Ward appealed to

⁸⁵ Belcher, *The First American Civil War, First Period 1775-1778, With Chapters on the Continental or Revolutionary Army and on the Forces of the Crown*, I, 60.

⁸⁶ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 121.

⁸⁷ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 310.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 312.

⁸⁹ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill* 232.

⁹⁰ Colonel Richard Gridley to George Washington, 20 October 1775, Enclosure: Colonel Richard Gridley's Estimate of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores. *PGW*, II, 209. See Appendix C.

Congress for spears to aid in the defense of fortifications. These were easier and cheaper to make than bayonets. Beginning in July, around 200 arrived and more continued coming. These were kept in the entrenchments, ready for use.⁹²

On 3 June, Congress appointed a committee to purchase gunpowder. A week later, it called for all colonies to send powder from their stores to Boston as they could spare. Connecticut shipped ten barrels or roughly 1000 pounds; New York supplied 655 pounds, and Pennsylvania 90 quarter-casks. On 21 July 1775, the Secret Committee sent 5000 pounds.⁹³ Early in August, Washington learned that he had thirty-eight barrels of powder on hand. This would furnish only eight rounds per man.⁹⁴ The king's troops had at least sixty rounds per man in their possession. Washington proposed that a 20,000-man army with the same supply as the British would require 400 barrels of powder.⁹⁵ In September 1775, the Continental Congress authorized the Secret Committee to import 500 tons of gunpowder. It also empowered it to purchase forty, brass six-pounder field pieces, 20,000 musket locks, and 10,000 stand of good arms.⁹⁶ During the fall, powder was damaged by rain, due to bad tents, and the continued arrival of militia without powder caused the situation to worsen. During the winter of 1775-76, Washington felt he could not issue more than twelve to fifteen rounds per man.⁹⁷ By February 1776, despite efforts by many parties, Washington still had less than 100 barrels on hand.

⁹¹ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 335.

⁹² Allen, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, 272.

⁹³ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 340.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 340.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 341.

⁹⁶ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 335.

⁹⁷ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 121.

Guns were another problem. On 4 November 1775, the Continental Congress requested that colonies require gunsmiths to make muskets with bayonets. Twelve shops located in Pennsylvania and Maryland produced only twenty muskets per month each, including ramrods and bayonets.⁹⁸ Most new recruits arrived in Cambridge without arms. Early in February 1776, Washington advised the Continental Congress that nearly 2,000 men in camp lacked arms, roughly ten percent of his army.⁹⁹

In the fall 1775, Colonel Richard Gridley, commanding the First Regiment of Artillery at Boston, reported that he had forty-one cannon, and three ten-inch mortars, nine eight-inch mortars, two seven-inch brass mortars, and three eight-inch howitzers. He also noted that he had 8,730 shot, most of which was for the smaller pieces. Gridley estimated that for the proposed 20,000-man army, he would need 100 cannon, 6 ten-inch mortars, 2 eight-inch mortars, 2 seven-inch mortars, and 8 three-inch howitzers. His estimate of shot included 10,000 for small guns and 5,000 for larger cannon.¹⁰⁰ These numbers were never met; there was never enough powder for any extended use of artillery.

When Henry Knox arrived from Ticonderoga in early February, he brought fourteen mortars, six of which were massive thirteen-inch iron mortars. He had two howitzers, thirteen brass cannon, and twenty-six iron cannon of various sizes. With these, he brought a large box of flints and 2300 pounds of lead.¹⁰¹ Though he did bring some powder, the amount was far from enough to use these guns effectively. It was fortunate that the

⁹⁸ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 346.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 350.

¹⁰⁰ Colonel Richard Gridley to George Washington, 20 October 1775, Enclosure: Colonel Richard Gridley's Estimate of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores. *PGW*, II, 209. See Appendix C.

¹⁰¹ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army d.*, 358.

British evacuation was based more on fear of the artillery's threat than its actual use, as Americans could not have maintained an artillery barrage for long.

Thomas Mifflin was the first quartermaster general, appointed by Washington on 14 August 1775.¹⁰² The quartermaster general furnished all camp equipment and tents, lumber, and articles needed to build shelters and fortifications. Troops at Cambridge built a variety of shelters with little uniformity or organization. Tents were made of whatever fabric was available, usually duck or tow-cloth. Shelters were made of boards, sailcloth, turf, and fence rails. Several contemporary accounts describe the motley, almost comical appearance of the rebel camp at Cambridge. The Continental Congress applied to the Committee of Philadelphia for all the quantities of duck, tow-cloth, or osnaburg it could supply in the summer of 1775. It required 21½ square yards of material to make one tent for six men.¹⁰³ In the fall of 1775, Mifflin submitted an estimate to Washington for housing 12,000 troops.¹⁰⁴ He proposed building ninety barracks at Cambridge and thirty at Roxbury. Each barrack would be ninety by sixteen feet, divided into six rooms.¹⁰⁵

Like the British, American forces suffered for lack of wood. Nathaniel Greene is quoted as having said on 31 December 1775: "We have suffered prodigiously for want of wood. Many regiments have been obliged to eat their provisions raw, for want of fuel to cook it...the fatigues of the campaign, the suffering for want of food and clothing have made a multitude of soldiers heartily sick of service."¹⁰⁶ The quartermaster general was

¹⁰² Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 30.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 147.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁰⁶ Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 276.

also provided fuel and bedding. Mifflin estimated that it would take 8000 cords of wood to supply Washington's army for six months, at 1½ cords of wood per 100 men, per week.¹⁰⁷ Mifflin was also responsible for transporting troops and supplies, including provision of boats, wagons, and necessary animals. Mifflin established a policy of hiring wagons and animals.¹⁰⁸ When he could not hire them, he impressed them. Even at the siege of Boston, when Washington required relatively few, Mifflin had to resort to this practice.¹⁰⁹

George Washington estimated that 30,000 men required a minimum of 200,000 barrels of flour and 40,000,000 pounds of meat per year.¹¹⁰ On 10 June 1775, the Massachusetts Provincial Congress authorized the standard ration for a continental soldier per day as follows:

One pound of bread. Half a pound beef and half a pound pork; if pork cannot be had, one pound and a quarter beef; and one day in seven they shall have one pound and one quarter of salt fish, instead of one day's allowance of meat. One pint of milk, or, if milk cannot be had, one gill of rice. One quart of good spruce or malt beer. One gill of peas or beans, or other sauce equivalent. Six ounces of butter per week. One pound of good common soap for six men per week. Half a pint of vinegar per week per man, if it can be had.¹¹¹

From 1775 until 1781, the commissariat system provisioned the Continental Army. To some extent, this was not difficult to initiate in Massachusetts, as the colonies had

¹⁰⁷ George Washington to John Hancock, 12 October 1775, Enclosure II. Thomas Mifflin's Estimate of Quartermaster Expenses. *PGW*, II, 150.

¹⁰⁸ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 66.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 88.

been accustomed to securing, accumulating, and distributing provisions through commissaries in earlier conflicts.¹¹² By 1776, Commissary General Joseph Trumball, of Connecticut, had established four issuing stores at Cambridge, Roxbury, Prospect Hill, and Medford.¹¹³ He estimated supplies needed and costs associated with supply of 22,000 men for the period between October 1775 and May 1776.¹¹⁴ Similar to those of the Massachusetts Congress, the rations established to be issued by Trumball at Boston and the Continental Congress were as follows: Daily rations included twenty-four ounces of salted or fresh beef, or eighteen ounces of salted pork, one quart of cider or spruce beer if available, and one pound of bread or flour. Weekly rations included three pints peas or beans, one half pint of rice or one pint of Indian meal. Other rations included six pounds of candles per 100 men per week, six ounces butter per man per week, and twenty-four pounds of soft or eight pounds of hard soap per 100 men per week. In the event that cider or spruce beer was unavailable, nine gallons of molasses per company of 100 men per week was to be issued.¹¹⁵ Though availability of many supplies varied, the army was consistently supplied with flour rations throughout the siege.¹¹⁶ The army was also fairly well provisioned with meat as New England had a thriving cattle industry.¹¹⁷

Salt was essential to an eighteenth-century army for preserving meat and fish. To secure a supply of salt, the Continental Congress exempted Bermuda and the Bahamas

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 78-9.

¹¹² Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 158.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 161.

¹¹⁴ George Washington to John Hancock, 12 October 1775, Enclosure I. Joseph Trumbull's Estimate of Commissary Expenses, *PGW*, II, 150. See Appendix C.

¹¹⁵ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 190.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 201.

from any trade embargo with the colonies.¹¹⁸ Near the end of 1775, Congress allowed Virginia, North Carolina, and Maryland to export foodstuffs if shipmasters posted bond to import salt on their return voyages.¹¹⁹

At Boston, even when relatively few animals needed food, a scarcity of forage developed almost immediately. In a common theme throughout the war, Washington declared that the scarcity was partially artificial. Suppliers hoarding forage and other provisions to raise prices.¹²⁰

Clothing was the quartermaster's responsibility. Cloth was scarce in America because little was manufactured. Coarse woolens and linens, including huckaback, osnaburg, and tow-cloth, were scarce. Felt hats, wool, shoes and other leather items were more readily available. Congress frequently called upon Mifflin to accept delivery of cloth imported by the Secret Committee or obtained through prize capture. As early as September 1775, Mifflin actively promoted the procurement of clothing. He set tailors amongst the troops to work making clothes from whatever cloth he had and directed the sale of clothing to the troops.¹²¹ During the siege, he never procured enough material. It was more a lack of adequate controls than a lack of fabric that led to clothing shortages.¹²² By the end of 1775, Washington appealed to New York for whatever clothing or cloth could be spared, as his troops had no winter clothes.¹²³ There was also a scramble for blankets, which were in great want. Contemporary reports from camps around Boston suggest that they

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 259.

¹²² Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 283.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 260.

were always in great want and were never adequately provided. In the fall of 1775, the Continental Congress resolved that any man enlisting who brought a good blanket would be allowed two dollars. Other efforts included a house-to-house collection of spare blankets in Massachusetts.¹²⁴ Shoes were not an acute problem at Boston, but they wore out faster than they could be replaced and subsequent campaigns included many soldiers with bare feet.

At the war's opening, there was no uniformity in clothing. Some militias had distinctive garb. Washington's first attempt at uniformity was the "rifle dress." This consisted of a hunting frock and long breeches with gaiter straps under the shoes. Gaiters were often made of tow cloth steeped in a tan vat until they turned the color of dry leaves. Ruffles of the same material were worn around the neck, bottom of coat, shoulders, elbows, and wrists. A round, dark hat was worn, turned up in three places. A white belt over the left shoulder held a cartridge-box.¹²⁵ Various resolves by the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts and the Continental Congress provided supplies of clothing in 1775 and 1776. Surges by women in the production of clothing that aided the Continental Army later in the war had not yet occurred. Soldiers at the siege of Boston wore clothes that were ragged and dirty. Soldiers wore shoes until they fell apart and often could not find replacements.

A lack of trained physicians, proper facilities, medicines, and surgical instruments led to inefficient care of the wounded. Regimental surgeons needed amputating and trepanning instruments, lancets, forceps, incision knives, catheters, needles, linens for

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 284.

bandages and tourniquets, and many other items. At Boston in 1775, there were only two surgeons at camp with medicine chests. All other surgeons or physicians had to apply to these two for medical supplies.¹²⁶ Three houses at Cambridge became the first American military hospital. Andrew Craigie, appointed by the Provincial Congress as a military commissary, resorted to impressment of items he needed to furnish and maintain this hospital. After Bunker Hill, the Continental Congress organized a Hospital Department. Its head, the Director General, was responsible for providing all medicines, bedding, and necessities for the hospitals. A policy was initiated which worked fairly well to help keep hospitals afloat that involved the value of a soldier's provisions. When a soldier became sick or wounded, the monetary value of his rations was paid to the hospital. Drugs and supplies for the hospitals were always in short supply, a fact that would be most damaging during later campaigns.

The colonial army throughout the siege of Boston truly was a rag-tag force. Men came and went as the siege continued. Supplies were unpredictable, largely owing to the inefficient logistical systems that developed as needed. There was little uniformity and wavering discipline. Low morale was problematic, and desertion became commonplace. Yet somehow, largely through the endeavors and influence of George Washington, the manipulations of the Continental Congress, and the sheer determination and heroics of men like Henry Knox and Colonel William Prescott, the force held together and prevailed.

¹²⁵ Bolton, *The Private Soldier Under Washington*, 121.

¹²⁶ Risch, *Special Studies: Supplying Washington's Army*, 380.

The siege of Boston presented new challenges to its participants. The British soon discovered that their arrogance was unfounded, many of their military traditions were irrelevant, and their existing supply systems were useless across an ocean expanse of three thousand miles to the waters of a hostile land. Americans, with little military tradition of their own to speak of beyond localized militia, united at Boston and became a world-class military power while besieging one of the strongest military forces of the eighteenth century. Logistics were the main hindrance for both forces, and ultimately allowed Americans at Boston to watch the British depart for Halifax. Logistical failure caused British failure and defeat on all levels. Tactically and operationally they needed to maintain hold of Boston until a strategic move to New York in the spring. Americans outmaneuvered them by placing guns on Dorchester Heights. The British lacked sufficient supplies and transports to move to New York and went to Nova Scotia instead, revising their strategy. Ultimately, logistics shaped the America Revolution's course and perhaps even changed its outcome.

CHAPTER IV: PRIZE CAPTURES AND CARGOES DURING THE SIEGE

The American Revolution began on 19 April 1775 with the engagements between Massachusetts militia forces and British army regulars at Lexington and Concord. The British pulled back into Boston, which they had been fortifying since late 1774. On 12 June, General Thomas Gage ordered martial law. Three days later, the Continental Congress nominated George Washington as general of the continental Army in Massachusetts. To the dismay of many, war was underway. It is certainly not by chance that it began in Massachusetts. The causes of the war were related to attempts by Parliament to regulate and tax maritime commerce. Massachusetts, which then included present-day Maine, had the longest coastline of any colony. Maritime commerce, as well as various fishing industries, composed the economic heart of Massachusetts. Consequently, the colony was most affected by the Parliamentary acts and thus more quickly resisted than other colonies. Massachusetts had a large population of skilled seamen and shipwrights. Massachusetts's merchants had participated in the West Indies and trans-Atlantic trades for over a century. Her whalers and fishermen were amongst the most successful in the world and navigated all the known waters of the Atlantic. By the time the Revolutionary War broke out, many seamen had been trained in combat at sea. The Royal Navy had impressed many; others had served as privateers during the French and Indian War. Beginning in 1764 with the Sugar Act, many Massachusetts merchants began smuggling to avoid British duties. Privateering in earlier French and English wars and smuggling soon after called for fast vessels, and the shipwrights of Massachusetts

supplied them. By the latter half of the eighteenth century, Americans were building many fast sloops and schooners. The American schooners possessed hulls capable of sailing well, yet were burdensome enough to carry heavy armament or cargo.¹ Many Massachusetts privateers and coastal raiders relied on these sturdy vessels. Given all these factors, it is not surprising that resistance at sea began in Massachusetts.

Resistance at sea came from different sources during the early months of the war; privateers, George Washington's fleet, and the early Massachusetts Navy took prizes during the siege of Boston. Contemporaries and some modern scholars confuse these forces. Contemporary reports refer to all of them as privateers. The British also referred to them as privateers. Proper identification was, and to a degree, remains difficult. Regardless of which label the American cruisers are assigned, they all performed the same mission: They halted the flow of supplies into Boston, and particularly in the case of Washington's fleet, they redirected these captured supplies to the American army. They captured prizes and carried them into Massachusetts ports, where ships and cargoes were condemned and sold. Cargoes critical to the army were shipped prior to condemnation when necessary; the army purchased other cargoes. If sold at public auction, the continental congress received a portion of the proceeds after sale. The actions of these early prize-takers in Massachusetts were a major factor leading to British failure at Boston.

In early June 1775, Captain Ichabod Jones arrived in Machias, Massachusetts,

¹ Howard I. Chapelle, *The History of The American Sailing Navy, The Ships and Their Development* (New York, 1949), 48-9.

(present-day Maine) with two sloops, *Unity* and *Polly*, escorted by the British frigate *Margaretta*, on a mission to obtain lumber for British troops in Boston. Patriots led by Benjamin Foster and Jeremiah Obrien were determined to sabotage this mission. After a failed attempt to capture Jones and the officers of the *Margaretta* at church on Sunday, 11 June, the captain of the *Margaretta* threatened to bombard the town if the people attempted to stop the lumber shipment. In response, the townspeople of Machias seized the two sloops. That evening, the *Margaretta* came within musket shot of the *Polly*, which was then run aground to escape the *Margaretta*'s guns. At the same time, a number of locals lined the shore and demanded her surrender. In response, the *Margaretta* opened fire. The next morning, Obrien in the *Unity* with forty men, and another small schooner with twenty men, went out to meet the *Margaretta*. After a battle that lasted over an hour and caused the death of the *Margaretta*'s captain, the *Margaretta* surrendered.²

Obrien brought the *Margaretta* into port and moved her armament to the *Unity*, which he renamed *Machias Liberty*. Soon after the report of the account, the Provincial Congress sent a reply back to Machias:

That the thanks of this congress are hereby given to Captain Jeremiah Obrien and Captain Benjamin Foster...for their courage and good conduct in taking one of the tenders belonging to our enemies, and two sloops belonging to Ichabod Jones...and that the said Tender, Sloops, and their appurtenances and cargoes, remain in the hands of the said Captains Obrien and Foster and the men

² James Lyons, Chairman of the Machias Committee to Massachusetts Provincial Congress, 14 June 1775, *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, W.B. Clark and W.J Morgan, *Et al.*, eds. (Washington, DC, 1964-), I, 676-7. Hereafter cited as *NDAR*.

under their command, for them to use and improve as they
shall think most for their and their publick's advantage...³

This was most likely the first prize seized after Lexington. In some respects, Congress's reply could be seen as The United Colonies' first prize adjudication and the *Machias Liberty* as the country's first privateer: Congress had basically thanked Obrien, told him to keep the prizes, and use them against the British as he saw fit.

The news of this capture commenced an attempt at retribution from the British. In July, the two armed sloops *Diligente* and *Tatamagouch* of Halifax sailed for Machias. Near Machias, locals captured and held Lieutenant John Knight, RN, and the commander of the *Diligente* after the officers made an excursion ashore. Obrien, onboard the *Machias Liberty*, and Foster, onboard the schooner *Portland Packet*, sailed out and seized the two sloops without any resistance.⁴

Fearing retaliation from the British, Foster and Obrien petitioned Congress for a commission: "That whereas your petitioners have been at Great Expence in fixing a Privateer for the Defence of the Place...we intreat with submission that there may be a commission for the officers and some of the men stationed on board...otherways we Humbly Conceive that if said Privateer should engage an armed Vessell and be Taken (which we are determined by Divine assistance never to be) we shall be Deemed & treated as Pirates. ..."⁵ While awaiting Congress's reply, the two captains cruised around

³ Journal of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, 6 June 1775, *NDAR*, I, 759.

⁴ Edgar Stanton Maclay, *A History of American Privateers* (New York, 1899), 58-9; Gardner W. Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1962), I, 12-13; Lieutenant John Knight, RN, to Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, 10 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1108.

⁵ Petition of Benjamin Foster and Jeremiah Obrien to the Massachusetts General Court, 19 July 1775, *NDAR*, I, 924.

Machias. Though there is little detail in the accounts, they reportedly seized a schooner and two transport barges on 9 August,⁶ although I have been unable to verify this report from other sources. Though documents exist regarding the prisoners from these transports and their disposition, they make no mention of the capture or the captors.⁷ On 16 August 1775, Congress resolved that:

There be raised at Machias a Company of fifty Men, Officers included, on the same pay and for the same time as the forces that are already raised for the defence of the Sea-coasts, and that there be allowed by this Colony six shillings a week per man, billeting, during their service...and the Colony to supply said Captain Jeremiah Obrien for the use of the Company with fifty weight of Powder, and Ball, equivalent, he to be accountable to the Court for the same...⁸

With payment of wages and the supply of armaments, the *Machias Liberty* and the *Diligent*, their officers and crews, became the foundation of the Massachusetts Navy. They existed, at least in theory, outside the conventional realm of privateering, though in most contemporary and subsequent accounts, Massachusetts's naval vessels are called privateers. In fact, their captains carried Massachusetts bonds of surety throughout the war. The fact that they were bonded and often called privateers makes them difficult to single out in the records. In a sense, they could be called the official privateers of Massachusetts. These accounts are included in my study because they represent the first seizure of a British vessel by a privately owned ship of war. Jeremiah Obrien privately owned the *Machias Liberty* from the time of her first prize until the issuance of

⁶ Maclay, *History Of American Privateers*, 60.

⁷ Brigadier General Horatio Gates to James Otis, President of the Mass. Council, 11 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1113.

Congress's directive. His seizure of the two British sloops was done at his own bidding; the ships and their cargoes were at his disposal. His alleged subsequent seizures were carried out in similar manner. Obrien was probably correct in thinking that had he been caught he would have been hanged as a pirate.

The story of Washington's fleet begins with the schooner *Hannah*. As commander of the army in Massachusetts, Washington quickly realized the need to cut the British off from supplies that arrived into Massachusetts ports. By the same token, it is almost certain that he realized the critical situation of his own troops. Redirection of the British supplies to his army was a necessity. To these ends, Washington leased the *Hannah* from John Glover, a Marblehead merchant and colonel in the Massachusetts marine regiment.⁹ Glover's colony ledger provides a figure of one dollar, per ton, per month.¹⁰ The 78-ton schooner was fitted out at Beverly in August 1775. At Glover's suggestion, Captain Nicholson Broughton assumed command of the *Hannah*. On 2 September 1775, Washington gave orders to Broughton:

You being appointed a Captain in the Army of the United Colonies of North America, are hereby directed to take the Command of a Detachment of said Army and proceed on Board the Schooner Hannah, at Beverly, lately fitted out & equipped with Arms, Ammunition and provisions at the Continental Expence. You are to proceed as Commander of sd Schooner, immediately on a Cruize against such Vessels as may be found on the High Seas or elsewhere, bound inward and outward to or from Boston, in the service of the ministerial Army, and take and seize all such Vessels, laden with Soldiers, Arms, Ammunition, or Provisions for or from sd Army, or which you shall have good reason to

⁸ Journal of the Mass. House of Representatives, 16 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1160-61.

⁹ William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1960), 5.

¹⁰ Donald W. Beattie and J. Richard Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet* (Salem, Mass., 1969), 4.

suspect are in such Service. If you should be so successful as to take any of such Vessels, you are immediately to send them to the nearest and safest Port to this Camp, under a careful Prize-Master...For your own encouragement and that of other Officers and Men, to Activity, and Courage in this Service, over and above your Pay in the Continental Army, you shall be entitled to one third Part of the Cargo of every Vessel by you taken, and sent into Port...¹¹

The document also outlined specific prize shares for each individual, ranging from six shares for the captain, down to one share for a private. It also provided guidelines for the treatment of prisoners and some specific orders, including one "to avoid any Engagement with any armed vessel of the Enemy."¹²

Having received her orders, that remained pertinent to all of Washington's vessels until late 1776, the *Hannah* set sail on 5 September 1775. On 7 September, *Hannah* took her first prize. This was the *Unity*, which had been captured two days earlier by HMS *Lively*, Captain Thomas Bishop. Bishop manned the *Unity* with a small complement of men and ordered her into Boston. Somewhere near Gloucester, the *Hannah* encountered her. Broughton ordered the British sailors to sail into Gloucester. The prisoners were turned over to the Gloucester Committee of Safety, and the *Unity* was taken to Beverly. There is inconsistency in the records of this exploit, both in later investigations and in contemporary accounts. State Navy, Washington's fleet, and privateers are in many cases interchangeable. In one account dated 14 September, a Boston newspaper reported that

a ship of about 260 tons, commanded by Captain Flagg, laden with lumber, etc., which sailed from Portsmouth, the

¹¹ George Washington to Brigadier General David Wooster, 2 September 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1288-9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1289.

beginning of last week, for the west Indies, was met and taken by the *Lively* man of war, the captain of which put two officers and 5 sailors on board her, in order to carry her into Boston. Soon after, a privateer from Beverly came across the ship, as she was going into Boston, retook and carried her to Cape Ann. On Saturday last the seven prisoners taken on board the prize, were brought to town, and committed to the care of the Main Guard.¹³

The story almost certainly referred to the recapture of the sloop *Unity* by the schooner *Hannah* on 7 September 1775. In a ruling that led to a mutiny by the *Hannah*'s crew, Washington declared the *Unity* an illegitimate prize because it was an American vessel. Prize shares for the crews were forfeit. The mutiny several days later led to various punishments for the thirty-six participants, ranging from flogging to dishonorable discharge. The *Hannah* is not reported to have had any successful voyages after that. Another report dated 12 October stated that "last Tuesday, one of our privateers from Beverly, having been on a cruise in the Bay, was followed on her return into port by the *Nautilus* man of war."¹⁴ The account then goes on to describe cannon exchange between the two vessels and the subsequent escape of the privateer. This is another reference to the schooner *Hannah*, which had an encounter with the *Nautilus* on 10 October, and narrowly escaped.¹⁵

Washington's fleet expanded in mid-October. Colonel Joseph Reed, in charge of outfitting the schooners, sent a report to George Washington on 29 October, summarizing his naval force: As of that date, the schooners *Lynch*, *Franklin*, *Lee*, and *Warren* lay at Salem and Marblehead. Reed fitted each of these with four, four-pounders and ten

¹³ *New England Chronicle or Essex Gazette* (Salem, Mass.), 31 August to 7 September 1775.

swivels. *Franklin* and *Lynch* each carried seventy men; *Lee* and *Warren* carried fifty apiece. The schooners *Washington* and *Harrison* cruised from Plymouth. *Washington*, largest of the fleet, bore ten guns and eighty to one hundred men. *Harrison*, had four guns, ten swivels, and carried fifty men.¹⁶ The Continental Congress informed Washington of two British vessels laden with powder, shot, and other military and naval supplies. Washington, desperately low on powder, leased two more vessels, the sixty-ton schooner *Eliza* and the seventy-two-ton *Speedwell*, renamed *Franklin* and *Hancock* respectively. Broughton received command of the *Hancock* and John Selman that of the *Franklin*. They received orders on 16 October:

The honorable Continental Congress having received Intelligence, that two North Country Brigantines of no force, sailed from England some Time ago for Quebec, laden with 6000 stands of Arms, a large Quantity of Powder and other Stores; you are hereby directed to make all possible Dispatch for the River St. Lawrence, and there to take such a Station as will best enable you to intercept the above Vessels. You are also to seize and take any other Transports laden with Men, Ammunition, Clothing, or other Stores for the Use of the Ministerial Army or Navy, in America and secure them in such Places as may be most safe and convenient.¹⁷

The rest of the orders were basically a restatement of the *Hannah's* earlier directives with the exception of a paragraph relating to the treatment of neutrals. The two vessels never found the two brigantines, taking only three small prizes, the *Mary*, the *Prince*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 5 October to 12 October 1775.

¹⁵ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 8-9.

¹⁶ Colonel Joseph Reed to George Washington 29 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 637.

¹⁷ Additional Instructions From George Washington to Captain Nicholas Broughton, 16 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 474.

William, and the *Phoebe*, all ruled illegitimate and released.¹⁸ In fact, this venture was an embarrassment to Washington. On 17 November, Broughton and Selman arrived in Charlottetown, capital of the Island of St. John's (Prince Edward Island). Displaying questionable, almost piratical conduct, they seized both private and public property, also carrying away three prisoners, including the acting governor. These prisoners were released, and the seized property returned.¹⁹

While these ships sailed the northern waters, Washington's fleet grew again. The seventy-four-ton schooner *Lee*, armed with six, three-pounders was outfitted at Beverly on 12 October. On 13 October, Washington acquired the *Warren* from Marblehead.²⁰ Also on 13 October, Washington wrote a very optimistic letter to his brother stating that "he had fitted out...several privateers, with soldiers, who have been bred to the sea; and I have no doubt of making captures of several...[British] transports, some of which have already fallen into our hands, laden with provisions."²¹

The *Harrison*, reputed to be the smallest of Washington's schooners, sailed on 26 October, commanded by Captain William Coit.²² Coit complained initially, but settled for the vessel after Washington told him of two vessels reported near Plymouth. Basically, if he captured them he could have one. On 5 November, *Harrison* intercepted the 75-ton sloop *Polly* and the 85-ton schooner *Industry*. Bound for Boston, both vessels carried livestock and provisions, including hogs, sheep, poultry, cattle, fish, cheese, potatoes, and

¹⁸ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 7.

¹⁹ Gardner W. Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution* (New York, 1962) I, 65.

²⁰ Beattie and Collin, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 10.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

²² Chester G. Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy* (Annapolis, Maryland, 1995), 58.

hay.²³ Coit returned with his valuable prizes. Misfortune and bad weather hindered *Harrison* until 1 December. By chance, she came upon a small fishing schooner bound for Boston carrying four pilots destined for British service. Coit brought the pilots to Plymouth in irons.²⁴ Because of issues with Washington over an illegitimate prize and conflict with his crew, Coit retired from Washington's navy. He continued later in the war as a privateer.²⁵

The *Warren* first sailed on 30 October, under the command of Captain Winborn Adams. Her first prize, captured on 2 November had to be released because it was not determined as bound for Boston, but she had better luck on 25 November 1775, with the capture of the 45-ton *Rainbow*, a British supply ship carrying 550 bushels of potatoes.²⁶ The *Warren* had no other reported success until Christmas when she sailed into Beverly with the sloop *Sally*, loaded with wine. It should be safe to assume that Beverly had a Merry Christmas in 1775.²⁷

On 23 November, the brigantine *Washington* joined Washington's fleet. She was outfitted at Plymouth harbor in Massachusetts. The *Washington* under Nicholas Martindale captured the sloop *Britania* of 80 tons on 27 November. She carried hay, cheese, potatoes, turnips, and cabbage for the troops at Boston. Her provisions instead went to Beverly.²⁸ The *Washington*'s largest claim to fame was perhaps as the first of Washington's ships captured by the British. The *Fowey* seized her on 4 December 1775

²³ Ibid., 59. For a complete listing of both vessels' cargoes, see William Watson to George Washington, 6 November 1775, *NDAR* II, 904.

²⁴ Ibid., 67.

²⁵ Ibid., 69.

²⁶ Beattie and Collin, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 11.

²⁷ Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 111.

and took her men prisoner. The prisoners were sent to England a week later. General Howe in a letter to Lord Dartmouth dated 14 December hoped “that the uncertainty about the fate of the crew of the *Washington* would deter others from privateering. ...”²⁹

The *Lee*, commanded by John Manley, became perhaps the most successful of Washington’s ships. Outfitted in Beverly on 12 October, she was a seventy-four-ton schooner, mounting four four-pounders and ten swivels.³⁰ Manley captured several small vessels on 6 November near Plymouth. On 7 November, he sent the prize *Ranger*, a schooner laden with firewood, into Marblehead harbor. The next day, Manley sent the schooner *Two Sisters* into Beverly with its cargo of beef, butter, potatoes, and eggs.³¹

On 27 November, Manley made the most significant capture of 1775. This was the brig *Nancy*. Her cargo included 2500 muskets with bayonets, thirty tons of musket shot, 30,000 round-shot, 100,000 flints, a great number of small arms cartridges, a number of cannon with carriages, mortars, eleven mortar beds, and one huge brass mortar. These valuable (perhaps critical) stores were taken to Cambridge.³² Regarding the *Nancy*’s cargo, General Gates stated that “was he to have made out an invoice for our purpose, he would not have add’d one artic[l]e more.”³³ The same day, in a letter from Major General Phillip Schuyler to John Hancock, the general reported that Washington had written him and said that “he is in very great Want of Powder, Lead, Mortars, Cannon & most sorts of

²⁸ Chester G. Hearn, *George Washington’s Schooners: The First American Navy* (Maryland, 1995), 65.

²⁹ Beattie and Collin, *Washington’s New England Fleet*, 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

³¹ Hearn, *George Washington’s Schooners: The First American Navy*.

³² Edward Green to Joshua Green, 3 December 1775, *NDAR* II, 1247. Allen, *A Naval History of the American Revolution*, I, 68.

³³ Edward Green to Joshua Green, 3 December 1775, *NDAR* II, 1247.

Artillery Stores & begs that I will send him all that can be spared from this quarter.”³⁴

Providence had certainly smiled on the American army on that day.

Manley's success continued late in 1775. The day after taking the *Nancy*, he captured and sent to Beverly, the *Polly*, loaded with turnips.³⁵ On 3 December, Manley seized the 800-ton ship *Concord*, carrying dry goods and a large supply of coal.³⁶ Washington ordered William Bartlett, his agent in Beverly, to send a portion of the *Concord's* cargo directly to camp for the troops. Bartlett sent 103 chauldrons of coal, twenty-four casks of shoes, several bales of blankets and linens, and clothing to the army.³⁷

The disposition of the *Concord's* cargo raised problems for Washington. Though letters and papers found on board the ship evidenced that the cargo was intended for the British Army, it was also clear that it was the property of the shippers, not the British. Washington appealed the problem to the Continental Congress in a letter to John Hancock on 4 December.³⁸ On 19 December, Congress resolved “that all transport vessels in the same service [British], having on board any troops, arms, ammunitions, clothing, provisions, or military or naval stores of what kind [what]soever, and all vessels to whomsoever belonging, that shall be employed in carrying provisions or other necessities to the British Army or armies, or navy, that now are or shall here after be within any of the United Colonies, or any goods, wares, or merchandizes, for the use of such fleet and army, shall be liable to seizure, and with their cargoes, shall be

³⁴ Major General Phillip Schuyler to John Hancock, 27 November 1775, *NDAR*, II, 1160.

³⁵ Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 92.

³⁶ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 17.

³⁷ Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 100. See also: “Accompt of Sundry Articles Delivered Col. Thos. Mifflin for Acct. of the United States of America by Wm. Bartlett from the Prize ship *Concord* by Order of his Excellency George Washington March 15, 1776.” *NDAR*, IV, 347-9.

confiscated.”³⁹ On 22 December, Hancock wrote Washington approving his “taking of such of the articles found on board the *Concord*, as are necessary for the army.”⁴⁰ Realistically, Congress sanctioned and legitimized what Washington had already been doing for months. A good example involves the captured 200-ton ship *Prince George*.⁴¹ Spirited inhabitants of Portsmouth captured her with a cargo of 1880 barrels and 24 half barrels of flour when her captain mistakenly entered the harbor on 2 October 1775.⁴² The Portsmouth Committee of Safety reported the capture immediately. Washington replied on the fifth, telling them to forward the flour to Boston immediately as the army was “defective in that article.”⁴³ Washington then dispatched Stephen Moylan, Muster Master General, to Portsmouth to oversee the transport of the flour.⁴⁴ After a small debate over Portsmouth retaining some flour for use by its militia and town, all but 400 barrels went to the troops at Boston.⁴⁵ The *Prince George*’s cargo and its fate provides a good example of direct supply of the army from captured ships and also of British supply problems, as Moylan found the barrels on board *Prince George* three to five pounds short of their marked weight.⁴⁶

Manley, with the *Lee*, made several other captures in December. On 8 December he took the *Jenny*, a 400-ton ship carrying 186 chauldrons of coal, 100 casks of porter, 40

³⁸ George Washington to John Hancock, 4 December 1775, *NDAR*, II, 1258.

³⁹ Journal of the Continental Congress 19, December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 171.

⁴⁰ John Hancock to George Washington 22, December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 209.

⁴¹ Richard E. Winslow, “Wealth and Honor” *Portsmouth during the Golden Age of Privateering 1775-1815* (Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1988), 15.

⁴² Portsmouth Committee of Safety to George Washington 2 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 267.

⁴³ George Washington to the Portsmouth Committee of Safety, 5 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 300.

⁴⁴ Colonel Joseph Reed to Hunking Wentworth, Chair of the Portsmouth Committee of Safety, 7 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 333.

⁴⁵ Portsmouth Committee of Safety to George Washington 18 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 502.

⁴⁶ Steven Moylan to George Washington 13 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 434.

live hogs, and 439 bushels of potatoes.⁴⁷ Later that same day he took the *Little Hannah*, a brig carrying 139 barrels of rum, gin, sweetmeats, and citrus fruit.⁴⁸ His final capture of was the sloop *Betsey* on the 17 December. In addition to her cargo of corn, potatoes, and oats, the *Betsey* carried a valuable packet of letters addressed from Lord Dunmore, royal governor of Virginia, to General Howe, that contained information related to British troops and plans in the Southern colonies.⁴⁹

The successes of Washington's fleet led to fortification at Beverly, Salem, and Marblehead. Most prizes captured were brought into these ports. Twelve-pounders and six-pounders from the *Nancy* were loaned to Salem and placed at strategic points in the harbor. Marblehead was similarly fortified. Of the three towns, Beverly received most prizes taken by Washington's fleet. Washington's prize agent William Bartlett also lived there. He presented the issue to his commander: "Those Valuable Prizes brought in here are much exposed as we have nothing to defend them with...Our forts & Brest works, built at the Towns Expense, would not only protect the Prizes but the Town if we had Guns and Ammunition to put in them..."⁵⁰ On 15 December, Washington authorized Bartlett to fortify the town with all available cannon, except those necessary for privateering and to take what powder he required from the prizes.⁵¹ Washington also supplemented Beverly's own militia with the 21st infantry regiment under John Glover, bringing the total number of men and officers stationed there to approximately four

⁴⁷ Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 101-2.

⁴⁸ Clark, *George Washington's Navy*, Appendix B; Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 19. Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 101-2.

⁴⁹ George Washington to Richard Henry Lee, 26 December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 253; Journals of the Continental Congress, 30 December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 301.

⁵⁰ William Bartlett to George Washington, 11 December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 44.

hundred.⁵² In January, Washington decided that all prizes taken by his fleet would be sent into Beverly.⁵³ Beverly could almost be said to be the first naval base of the United Colonies.

On 1 January 1776, Washington commissioned Captain John Manley commodore of the New England fleet, and he received command of the schooner *Hancock*. Command of the *Lee* went to Daniel Waters, the *Franklin* to Samuel Tucker, the *Warren* to William Burke, and the *Lynch* to John Ayres.⁵⁴ The small fleet remained relatively inactive until 25 January, when Manley took the ships *Happy Return* and *Norfolk*, both laden mainly with coal and provisions. Four days later the *Franklin* and the *Lee* captured the 45-ton sloop *Rainbow*, carrying 45 cords of wood, 10 bushels of potatoes, and 2 bushels of turnips. Later the same day they brought in the 300-ton brig *Henry and Esther* loaded with 62 cords of wood, 150 butts of butter, and 40 sets of soldiers' bedding.⁵⁵ After this burst of success, the fleet was confined to port until early March by the presence of the warship *Fowey* off Marblehead.

When the way cleared the small fleet set sail. On 3 March, *Hancock*, *Franklin*, *Lee*, and *Lynch* united off Gloucester just in time to engage the brig *Hope*, of fourteen guns. After a running fight of about thirty minutes, the vessels disengaged. The four schooners cruised off Cape Ann and met substantial success. On 6 March, they captured the *Susannah*, 300 tons, carrying coal, peas, potatoes, cheese, porter, and twenty hogs. They

⁵¹ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 22.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 22-3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁵⁵ Clark, *George Washington's Navy*, Appendix A. Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 135-6.

sent her into Portsmouth and continued cruising. On the 10 March, they ran into another of Howe's winter provision ships, the *Stakesby*, a 300-ton ship carrying coal and provisions for the British army. She had endured a terrible seventeen-week journey, and only 3 of 164 hogs she carried survived.⁵⁶

Manley took his last prize with Washington's fleet on 2 April. The *Hancock*, along with the *Lee* and the *Lynch*, captured the brig *Elizbeth*, loaded with woolen articles, shoes, rum, and sugar, total value set at £35,000.⁵⁷ On 17 April 1776, Captain Manley was elected a captain in the navy of the United Colonies.⁵⁸

Washington's fleet cruised the waters of Massachusetts until the Marine Committee of Congress disbanded it in early 1777. Continental privateers were numerous and it was no longer necessary. After Manley's departure, the small fleet captured fifteen more vessels with total tonnage of around 2500, mainly carrying various provisions, bringing the total during the whole time Washington's fleet operated to over 7000 tons, an average of 500 tons per month. Probably the most significant capture of Washington's fleet was made on 17 May 1776. The schooner *Franklin*, armed with four, six-pounders and several swivels, commanded by Captain James Mugford captured the ship *Hope* of 300 tons, mounting six carriage guns and a number of swivels. Amazingly, the *Hope* surrendered with little or no struggle.⁵⁹ Her cargo of arms and armaments was so significant to the colonial cause, that I will list it in its entirety:

⁵⁶ Hearn, *George Washington's Schooners: The First American Navy*, 144-6. Clark, *George Washington's Navy*, Appendix A.

⁵⁷ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 28.

⁵⁸ Journals of Continental Congress, 15 April 1776, *NDAR*, IV, 867.

⁵⁹ Beattie and Collins, *Washington's New England Fleet*, 29.

2700 barrels of powder, carbines, cartouch-boxes,
 slings, spare travelling carriages (24-pounders, Heavy),
 traversing hand-spikes, handsaws, 10,000 sandbags, cured
 hides, broad axes, hand-hammers, grindstones with troughs,
 felling axes, hand hatchets, hand-bills, wheelbarrows,
 ditching and common spades, iron shovels, and six
 complete sets of carpenters' tools.⁶⁰

Mugford had little chance to enjoy the glory or the spoils from this great prize. On 19 May, most likely in retaliation for the capturing the *Hope*, the British laid a successful trap for Mugford and the *Franklin*. Mugford was killed in the engagement.

In summation, Washington's fleet, from the time between capturing the *Hannah* until the evacuation of Boston on 17 March 1776, captured thirty-one vessels. The estimated tonnage of these vessels totals 4000.⁶¹ Omitting February 1776, Washington's fleet averaged about 800 tons of shipping captured per month.

These captures were crucial to success in Boston. The British soldiers certainly suffered when these ships did not arrive. The capture of the *Henry and Esther* on 29 January 1776 stopped a supply of wood and soldiers' bedding. More importantly, American troops probably received this bedding, as Washington dispersed cargoes before prize settlements were finished if he deemed them necessary for army supply.⁶² Most

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 29.

⁶¹ I have used an average tonnage for different vessel types for those not reported. All other numbers have come from Clark, *George Washington's Navy*, Appendix A.

⁶² Clark, *George Washington's Navy*, 121.

likely, a large number of militiamen and Continental soldiers fought with British muskets and mortars from the *Nancy*. Finally, though perhaps not valuable prizes by most standards, the seizure of almost thirty ships loaded with general food supplies and provisions adversely affected British troops who relied on supplies from sea for almost everything. The morale of men deprived of food, clothing, bedding, firewood, coal, and other basic necessities probably diminished, particularly during the wintertime.

The first "privateers" of Massachusetts are difficult to identify. Privateering was certainly not a new concept to Massachusetts's residents and it was considered an option long before Congress officially sanctioned it in November 1775. As early as 19 July 1775, Edward Emerson wrote a letter to the Massachusetts Provincial Congress explaining how a regiment from the county of Lincoln had captured five vessels in the employ of Britain, one of which, a schooner of 70 tons, was put into his care. His petition requested that he "be allowed to fit said schooner for a privateer."⁶³ This petition was read and committed by the Massachusetts House of Representatives on 22 August 1775.⁶⁴ Two days later, "the committee on the petition of Edward Emerson reported that it be referred to the next sessions. The Report was read and accepted."⁶⁵ Hereafter I have found no records of this report. Apparently, Congress was not ready to confront the issue of privateering. Americans were. As early as 24 July 1775, the British reported two privateers cruising off the Bay of Fundy.⁶⁶ In early August, Graves wrote to another

⁶³ Edward Emerson to the Mass. Provincial Congress, 19 July 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1200.

⁶⁴ Journal of the Mass. House of Representatives, 22 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1200.

⁶⁵ Journal of the Mass. House of Representatives, 24 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1219.

⁶⁶ General Thomas Gage to the earl of Dartmouth, 24 July 1775, *The Correspondence of General Thomas Gage with the Secretaries of State, 1763-1775*, Edwin Clarence Carter, ed., (New Haven, Connecticut, 1931), II, 410. Hereafter cited as *CGTG*.

officer stating that he received "information that the rebels have 5 or 6 sails of large schooners and sloops armed and full of men, crui[z]ing in and about the bay of Fundy to intercept vessels bringing fresh provisions, hay, and fuel to Boston, of which the garrison is in the greatest want. ..."⁶⁷ The vessels mentioned could not have been George Washington's, as his first vessel *Hannah* did not sail until September. Massachusetts had not yet issued letters of marque.

Perhaps these accounts could be classified with similar anomalous ones under the heading "Patriotic Pirates." Graves referred to them as pirates at this time and gave orders to treat them as such: In August 1775, he instructed officers to "Take, burn, sink, and destroy, all and every pirate and rebel wherever they can be found, and every vessel or person who shall be actually aiding and assisting such pirate or rebel." In the same letter, he stated that all armed vessels belonging to the four New England governments found armed would be considered pirates and treated accordingly.⁶⁸

Sometimes colonials captured enemy vessels by chance. The *Boston Gazette* reported on 2 October 1775, that "last Week, a Brig from New Providence with turtle and fruit, was taken by our People and carried into Cape Ann."⁶⁹ The schooner *Industry* accidentally sailed into Marblehead on 27 September. Residents in small fishing boats accosted and seized her. Bound for Boston with 150 turtles, 1400 lemons, 2000 oranges, and 19 barrels of limes for the British troops, she became a legitimate prize.⁷⁰ In similar circumstances, the residents of Portsmouth seized the *Prince George* on 2 October with her cargo of

⁶⁷ Admiral Thomas Graves to Captain Edward LeCras, 11 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1116-7.

⁶⁸ Admiral Thomas Graves to Captain Edward LeCras, 11 August 1775, *NDAR*, I, 1116-7.

⁶⁹ *Boston Gazette*, Monday, October 2, 1775, *NDAR*, II, 269.

⁷⁰ Journal of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, 30 September 1775, *NDAR*, II, 249.

flour that was so important to the Continental Army.⁷¹ Other times, British ships, lacking knowledgeable pilots, wrecked. The *Monmouth*, bound for Boston with 120 pipes of wine, beached near Eastham and became a prize for the locals on 3 November 1775.⁷² In another example, also from Cape Cod, a vessel bound for Boston bearing 100 hogsheads molasses and 100 hogsheads sugar wrecked near Yarmouth. The vessel was lost, but not before locals secured the cargo.⁷³

Privateering (by the conventional definition) began in Massachusetts on 1 November 1775, with the passage of *An Act For Encouraging the Fixing out of Armed Vessels to defend the Sea Coast of America, and for Erecting a Court to Try and Condemn all Vessels, that Shall be found Infesting the Same*. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects of this act is that its designers rooted its validity with English monarchical authority:

And whereas their Majesties, King William and Queen Mary, by the Royal Charter of this Colony, "for themselves, their heirs and successors, did grant, establish, and ordain, that in the absence of the Governor and Lieutenant Governor of the Colony, a Majority of the Council shall have full power by themselves or by any Chief Commander...to assemble in Martial array and put in war-like posture the inhabitants of their said Province...to Encounter, expulse, resist, and pursue by force of arms, as well by Sea as by Land...all and every person and persons, with their Ships, Arms, Ammunition, and other Goods, as should in a Hostile Manner invade or attempt the invading, Conquering or annoying of their said Province or Territory. ..."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Portsmouth Committee of Safety to George Washington, 2 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 267.

⁷² William Watson to George Washington, 3 November 1775, *NDAR*, II, 870-1.

⁷³ Major Enoch Hallet to James Otis, 14 February 1776, *NDAR* III, 1276-7.

⁷⁴ Mass. Act Authorizing Privateers and Creating Courts of Admiralty, 1 November 1775, *NDAR*, II, 834-5.

With this as justification, the act then allowed “that all armed and other vessels which shall be brought into this Colony and have been found Making unlawful invasions, Attacks or depredations on the Sea Coasts or Navigation of Any Part of America, or Improved in supplying the Fleet and Army...Employed against the United Colonies...and also all vessels whose Masters or Super Cargo’s carrying supplies of any kind to the Enemy...shall be deemed forfeited. ...”⁷⁵ The act next outlined the right of the colony to issue letters of marque and reprisal⁷⁶ and to issue bonds of surety.⁷⁷ These bonds were to be set at £5000. Prize courts were to be established in Plymouth and Ipswich and their policies were described. The act provided that the prizes “ be sold at public Venue...the charges of said trial and condemnation to be paid out of the Money such Vessell and Cargo shall sell for...unto the Treasury of this Colony and shall order the residue there of to be delivered to the Captors . . .”⁷⁸ Though prize taking in other colonies had probably begun by this time by early state navies, this act commenced the taking of prizes by privateers officially for the first time in the United Colonies. The Continental Congress did not follow suit until 23 March 1776.

The first bonded vessel to sail with a Massachusetts letter of marque was the *Boston Revenge*, an armed schooner of 32 tons commanded by Stephen Mascoll.⁷⁹ *Boston Revenge* was commissioned on 7 December 1775. On 25 January 1776, she carried into

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 835.

⁷⁶ Letters of marque were commissions given to privateers by the government to capture enemy ships. They set down the guidelines by which privateers would be bound. Letters of reprisal were issued to those who had lost property to an enemy, and these letters gave them the right to retake enemy property of sufficient value to offset these losses.

⁷⁷ Bonds were posted by privateers to ensure that they upheld the laws and guidelines as set down by those issuing letters of marque.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 838.

⁷⁹ Gardner Weld Allen, *Massachusetts Privateers of the Revolution*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1927), 87.

Cape Ann, the *Jenny* of 250 tons, carrying 1500 blankets, 100 bolts of oznabrigs, 100 casks of oatmeal, shoes, and coal.⁸⁰ The next privateer to receive a commission was the *Gamecock*, a sloop of 20 tons, commissioned on 11 December 1775, commanded by Capt. Peter Roberts. She was armed with six three-pounders and a number of swivels and manned by fifty men.⁸¹ On 15 December, the *Dolphin*, schooner of 17 tons, received her commission.⁸² Commanded by Richard Masury, the *Dolphin* provides an interesting case. On 22 November she had already captured and brought into Salem a sloop loaded with wood and potatoes.⁸³ This occurred three weeks before she received a commission. The *General Ward*, 20 tons, commanded by Mathew Kelly, received her commission on 19 December.⁸⁴ In chronological order commissions were given to the sloop *Yankee* of 75 tons on 4 January;⁸⁵ the *Yankee Hero*, a 120 ton brig of 14 guns under Thomas Thomas on 13 January;⁸⁶ the *Lizard* (Lyward) of 32 tons on 8 February;⁸⁷ and again the *Yankee Hero* under James Tracey on 20 February.⁸⁸ The *Yankee Hero* under Thomas Thomas sent into Newburyport a bark of about 300 tons, loaded with coal, pork, and flour on 16 February.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ *New England Chronicle*, Thursday 18 January to Thursday 25 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 966.

[Osnaburg]: A kind of course, heavy cloth, originally of linen, and now of cotton, used in making sacks, work-clothes, etc.: It was made originally at Osnaburg, in Germany. Definition taken from *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Second ed., 1975, World Publishing Co.

⁸¹ Commission of Captain Peter Roberts to Command Mass. Private Sloop *Gamecock*, 11 December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 52.

⁸² Allen, *Mass. Privateers of the Revolution*, 116.

⁸³ Extract of a Letter from Salem, 22 November 1775, *NDAR*, II, 1098.

⁸⁴ Allen, *Mass. Privateers of the Revolution*, 154.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 602.

⁸⁶ Colony Bond for the Mass. Armed Brig *Yankee Hero*, *NDAR*, III, 764.

⁸⁷ Colony Bond for the Mass. Private Armed Vessel *Lizard*, *NDAR*, III, 1172.

⁸⁸ Colony Bond for the Mass. Brig *Yankee Hero*, *NDAR*, III, 764.

⁸⁹ *New England Chronicle*, Thursday, 8 February to Thursday, 22 February 1776, *NDAR*, IV, 34.

These privateers were commissioned from the time the Massachusetts act authorizing privateering was issued until the evacuation of Boston. The captures listed are those reported with the accounts of an individual ship. Judging from British complaints about privateers and reports of prizes taken not listing captors, it is likely that many more prizes were taken. A report from Nova Scotia concerning American privateers came from the governor in Halifax:

Americans have fitted out vessels of war and have lately been cruising in these seas and intercepted several vessels bound from Europe to Boston, Two armed schooners were for some time in the harbor of Canso and carried off several vessels...And I hear a 220-g[un] ship from Philadelphia has been cruising in the mouth of St Lawrence Gulf b[e]tw[ee]n Cape Breton and Newfoundland.⁹⁰

On 13 December 1775, Vice Admiral Graves wrote General William Howe:

I wish it was in my power to give your Excellency more satisfaction...but altho' fully sensible of the Distresses this Garrison will be subjected to by the Rebels taking its supplies; Yet it is impossible entirely to prevent it with the Men of War alone at this Season. All that I can do is to place the Kings Ships in the most likely Situations to fall in with Vessels expected to arrive...But without our having possession of Marblehead and Cape Anne Harbour also, it is impossible for the Ships to keep on their Stations or prevent the Rebels from making further Captures.⁹¹

On 27 January, Graves reported that "the *Halifax* came in from Cat Island and brought a Letter from Captain [George] Montagu of the *Fowey*, acquainting the Admiral that he

⁹⁰ Governor Francis Legge to the earl of Dartmouth, 5 December 1775, *Documents of the American Revolution: 1770-1783 (Colonial Office Series)*, K.G. Davies, ed. (Dublin, 1975), IX, 202-3. Hereafter cited as *DAR*.

⁹¹ Vice Admiral Samuel Graves to Major General William Howe, 13 December 1775, *NDAR*, III, 82.

cannot put a stop to the Insolence of the Privateers without more force.”⁹² Though it is probably true that the British Navy titled all “rebel” cruisers privateers, it is likely that the combination of Washington’s fleet, the Massachusetts State Navy, and the known privateers were not sufficient in number to cause such distress with the Royal Navy.

Several reports of prizes taken that do not appear with accounts of known coastal cruisers support this conclusion. For example, these three reports came in three days. On 26 January, Francis Hutcheson reported that “yesterday two vessels taken by a Rebel privater off the Light House into Cowhasack [Cohasset] Harbor...O the Glory of the British Navy, two flags flying with all the Pomp of War, and Yankees can spit in their face. ...”⁹³ This again demonstrates the frustration that privateers caused the British. On 27 January, the *Providence Gazette* reported that “a ship from London, and a brig bound for Boston were last week taken at the Eastward by our Privateers...We learn that a ship from Whitehaven bound to Boston, was likewise taken a Few Days since at the Eastward, laden principally with coal and provisions: She had also on board, it is said, 1500 Blankets for the ministerial troops.”⁹⁴ The first two ships were the ship *Friends* and the brig *Sukey*. The *Friends* carried 52 chauldrons of coal, 20 hogsheads of vinegar, 86 butts of porter, 30 hogsheads of porter, 16 hogsheads of sauerkraut, and 23 live pigs. *Sukey* carried meats, vegetables, and other food supplies.⁹⁵ A caption under an illustration taken from a Connecticut newspaper depicting the *Sukey* being brought into port credits the

⁹² Narrative of Vice Admiral Samuel Graves, 27 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 1006.

⁹³ Francis Hutcheson to Major General Frederick Haidimand, 26 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 995.

⁹⁴ *Providence Gazette*, Saturday, 27 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 1010.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* For a complete listing of *Sukey*’s cargo see *Essex Journal*, 19 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 855.

capture to a small vessel named *Washington* (not the schooner from Beverly).⁹⁶ On 23 March 1776, the Continental Congress also sanctioned privateering and began issuing letters of marque. The contribution of American privateers during the rest of the war was significant and their existence was deleterious to the Continental Navy. These topics fall outside the realm of this thesis.

Early in the war, a member of Continental Congress said while debating about the worth of an American naval force, that “the probability of captures is much in favor of the adventure...it weakens & disappoints the enemy, strengthens & encourages our army.”⁹⁷ Between the time from the conflict at Lexington to the withdrawal of the British from Boston, successful raids on ships attempting to supply the British blocked the deliverance of provisions critical to the success of the army. The redirection of many of these captured goods to American defenders undoubtedly contributed to the success of the American army and the eventual withdrawal of British troops from Boston. There are many examples of British officers expressing frustration. Almost every piece of food eaten, every scrap of clothing worn, every source of warmth in the cold winter, every musket fired, every ball fired from them, etc., by a British soldier had to be supplied from the sea. With each supply ship captured, this soldier was forced to improvise or do without. Cold, hungry, low on powder and shot, a soldier could not be expected to perform optimally. The number of cargoes seized on their way to Boston in the early months of the war was substantial and likely caused great concern amongst British infantry officers and troops, particularly during the winter of 1775-6.

⁹⁶ Illustration from the *Connecticut Courant*, 22 January 1776, *NDAR*, III, 843.

It is clear that colonial prize captures undeniably played a significant role during the siege of Boston. The capture of supplies and even reinforcements to the British in Boston at sea and the redirection of these supplies to American forces contributed significantly to the British failure at Boston. The magnitude of this contribution may never be fully known, as citing every captured vessel and cargo, if not impossible would involve a commitment far beyond the scope of this thesis. During my own research, new information continued to surface and there is likely much yet to be discovered. I have presented enough information to prove that colonial prize captures and their effects on armies at the siege of Boston are too great to be overlooked.

⁹⁷ Journals of the Continental Congress, 30 October 1775, *NDAR*, II, 650.

CHAPTER V: ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The British relied on the success of shipping for their very survival. Every captured cargo denied them basic necessities. Howe intended to move on New York directly from Boston. A lack of transports and supplies prevented him from doing so. Though the fortification of Dorchester Heights was the immediate cause his departure from Boston, his army sailed for Nova Scotia instead of New York.

Captured supplies had a great effect on the situation at Boston. Sometimes they went directly to the American camps. Otherwise, the cargoes were sold, and the army or the Continental Congress received a percentage. In either case, the proceeds, whether monetary or actual cargo assisted the American efforts directly and caused the British forces stress.

In the preceding chapters, I provided the background information necessary to demonstrate the critical nature of logistics for both armies at Boston and the significance of prize capture by colonials during the siege. In this final chapter, I shall provide a quantitative examination of that significance. I shall examine each capture and ascertain mathematically exactly what was denied the British and possibly provided to Americans. I shall focus on provisions, armaments, and fuel (wood/coal), as they were critical to the armies. After presenting each cargo, I shall determine the number of men who could be supplied by it. Lastly, I shall provide a total of all cargo captured and determine the number of men that cargo could have supplied over time. All calculations are based on an

average of 20,000 men for each army. This includes the roughly 7000 civilians in Boston with the British.

As many cargo listings are imprecisely general, I extrapolated values from known cargoes. For unspecified cargoes, I used vessel tonnage and compared it to another vessel with similar cargo to determine a percentage. Using this fraction, I set up ratios for the cargo. For example a vessel of 100 tons burden should carry $\frac{1}{3}$ the cargo of a 300 ton vessel. In cases where cargo listed was specific, but I have no means of determining actual amounts, I provided a hypothetical and extremely conservative number, i.e. a ship listing live chickens, I felt it safe to assume it carried at least fifty.

Reference to a vessel's cargo in terms of a food equivalent (FE) signifies that the values are extrapolated and can mean one of two things. I either converted unknown cargo listed in general terms such as "provisions" into common provisioning products, i.e. flour, potatoes, or rum, for which I have known values, or I converted food items into the weight of flour or potatoes. Because I use them frequently, I include an explanation of my conversions, in Appendix E.

For many items I have concrete figures to determine the number of men a certain quantity could sustain. For some items, I either reasoned or calculated numbers as necessary. For example, I assumed that seven pounds of potatoes could supply one man for one week or that one chicken could feed two men. In these and in all other assumptions or calculations, I have been purposefully conservative. In many cases, even an underestimation by half, will provide a significant number. These estimations can be identified by (CE), for conservative estimate. For a complete listing of the methodologies

employed for determining derived and estimated numbers, and contemporary ration lists, see Appendix E.

Conversion Formulas Used

1. Potato formula: Based on cargo of the 45 Ton *Rainbow* captured 25 November 1775. She carried 550 bushels potatoes. $550/45T = 12.2$ Bushels/Ton. The same ratio will be used for turnips.
2. Flour formula: Based on cargo of the 200 Ton *Prince George* captured 2 October 1775. She carried 1892 barrels of flour. $1892/200 = 9.46$ Barrels/Ton. This number is also used to estimate the number of barrels of other items, as barrel weight for all items was 200 pounds.
3. Wood formula: Based on the cargo of the 60-Ton *Rainbow* captured 25 January 1776. She carried 45 cords of wood, 10 bushels of potatoes and 2 bushels of turnips. Based on potato formula above, potatoes and turnips theoretically accounted for only one ton. Thus I will not consider the value in the calculation. Thus $60/45 = .75$ cords/Ton. All coal values will be converted to cords of wood to determine supply values based on the formula that 1/3 chauldron of coal substituted for one cord of wood.
4. Mixed Cargo: Coal and Provisions. For vessels listing cargoes of coal and provisions, I have used the 400-ton ship *Jenny's* as a representative cargo. She carried: 186 chauldrons coal, 100 casks porter, 40 hogs, and 439 bushels of potatoes. For any ship listing coal and provisions as cargo without specifics, I simply compare that vessels

tonnage to the *Jenny*'s, calculate a percentage and give the vessel that percentage of the *Jenny*'s cargo.

List of Prize Cargoes

1. *Industry* captured 27 September 1775
 - 150 turtles: Could feed 900 men at six men per turtle.(CE)
 - 1400 lemons
 - 2000 oranges
 - 19 barrels limes: At a conservative estimate of 200 limes/barrel equaled 3800 limes.
 - Total fruits for this cargo enough for 7200 men at one fruit per man.
2. *Prince George* (200T) captured 2 October 1775
 - 1880 barrels flour: Enough to supply either army for 19 days.
 - 24.5 half barrels flour: Enough for 350 men for one week.
3. Anonymous vessel captured 3 November 1775
 - 100 hogsheads sugar
 - 100 hogsheads molasses
 - If cargo is considered as 200 hogsheads molasses, equal to 12,600 gallons, it was enough to supply weekly ration (colonial) for 1400 men.
4. Sloop *Polly* (75T) captured 5 November 1775
 - 7 tons hay: A horse required 20 pounds of hay per day, thus seven tons could feed 784 horses. The British had one cavalry regiment at Boston, probably not at full strength, thus probably somewhere around 200 horses.
 - 100 firkins butter: Roughly equal to 5000 pounds, this equated to the weekly butter ration for about 13,333 men.
 - 12 geese: Twelve geese could feed about 100 people.(CE)
 - 48 chickens: This could have fed about 100 men.(CE)
 - 350 pounds cheese: Enough cheese to ration about 930 men for one week.
 - 20 cords wood: Enough wood for 1330 men for a week.
 - 500 bushels potatoes: Enough to supply 4,285 men for one week.(CE)
 - 7 cows: Roughly equivalent to the weekly ration (British) of 600 men.
 - 8 sheep: Could supply daily ration (colonial) to about 1050 men.
 - 15 pigs: Could supply daily ration (colonial) to 2000 men.
 - 3 quintals fish: Could feed 200 men.(CE)
5. Schooner *Industry* (80T) captured 5 November 1775
 - 230 bushels potatoes: Could supply 1,971 men for one week.(CE)
 - 20 cords wood: Enough wood for 1330 men for a week.

- 3 cows: Equivalent to weekly ration of 257 men.
 - 13 sheep: Could supply daily ration (colonial) to 1733 men.
 - 7 bushels turnips: Enough for 60 men for one week.(CE)
 - 20 geese: Could feed 120 people.
 - 3 hogs: Could supply daily ration (colonial) to 400 men.
 - 10 chickens: Could feed 20 men.(CE)
 - 1 ton hay: Enough for 320 horses.
 - 6 quintals fish: Could feed 400 men.(CE)
6. Sloop *Ranger* (70T) captured 7 November 1775
- 45 cords wood: Roughly enough wood for either army for one day or for the weekly supply of 3000 men.
 - 10 bushels potatoes: Weekly ration for 85 men.(CE)
 - 2 bushels turnips: Weekly ration for 17 men.(CE)
7. Schooner *Two sisters* (80T) captured 8 November 1775
- Beef, butter, potatoes, and eggs.
 - Beef: $20T \times 9.46 \text{ Barrels}/T = 189 \text{ barrels} = 37,800 \text{ pounds beef}$. Could supply the weekly ration (British) for 5400 men
 - Butter: If converted to flour equivalent=189 barrels. Roughly enough butter to supply weekly ration for either army for five weeks.
 - Potatoes and eggs: If eggs are converted to potatoes, $40T \times 12.2 \text{ bushels}/T = 488 \text{ bushels}$. Enough to supply 4,182 men for one week.(CE)
8. Schooner *Rainbow* (45T) captured 25 November 1775
- 550 bushels potatoes: Enough to supply 4,714 men for one week.(CE)
9. Brig *Nancy* (250T) captured 27 November 1775
- 2500 muskets with bayonets: Enough for 1/10 colonial army.
 - 30 tons shot. At roughly 15 rounds per pound, close to 1,000,000 balls.
 - 100,000 flints: Enough to supply five flints to every man in the American army. At 10-15 shots per flint, equaled 50 to 75 shots per man.
 - 30,000 rounds of artillery shot: Though shot sizes are unknown, 30,000 significantly greater than Gridley's estimate (about 20,000 rounds) of the total number of artillery shot needed at camp.
 - Large brass mortar
 - Several smaller mortars fixed for service
 - A number of cannon of various sizes with carriages
 - A great number of small arms cartridges
10. Sloop *Britania* (85T) captured 27 November 1775
- Hay, cheese, turnips, and cabbage.
 - Hay: Based on tonnage and comparison with cargo of sloop *Polly*, could have carried 10 tons hay.(CE)

- Cheese: Based on tonnage and comparison with *Polly*, could have carried 400 pounds. This amount could supply the weekly ration for roughly 1500 men.
 - Turnips: $85T/4 \times 12.2 \text{ bushels}/T = 259 \text{ bushels}$. Weekly ration for 2,220 men.
 - Cabbage: Convert to potatoes = 259 bushels (FE). Weekly ration for 2,220 men.
11. Sloop *Polly* (80T) captured 28 November 1775
- Turnips: $80T \times 12.2 \text{ bushels}/T = 976 \text{ bushels}$
 - Enough to supply 8,365 men for one week.
12. Ship *Concord* (800T) captured 3 December 1775
- 103 chauldrons coal: $103 \times 3 = 309 \text{ cords of wood}$. Enough fuel to supply either army for roughly one week.
 - 24 casks shoes: Roughly equal to 4800 pounds of shoes. Estimating four pounds per pair, roughly 1200 pairs.
 - Several bales blankets and linens: With a conservative estimate of 100 per bale, roughly 400 blankets.
13. Ship *Jenny* (250T) captured 7 December 1775
- 1500 blankets
 - 100 bolts oznabrig: Enough to make 465 six-man tents or tents for 2800 men.
 - 100 casks oatmeal: Enough for either army for two weeks. (Based on British weekly ration)
14. Ship *Jenny* (400T) captured 8 Dec 1775
- 186 chauldrons coal: $186 \times 3 = 558 \text{ cords wood}$: Enough fuel for either army for 12-13 days.
 - 100 casks porter: Enough to supply daily ration to 12,000 men.
 - 40 hogs: Enough for daily ration (colonial) for 5,333 men.
 - 439 bushels potatoes: Enough for 3,762 men for one week.
15. Brig *Little Hannah* (140T) captured 8 December 1775
- 139 barrels rum: Enough for roughly 5 days for either army or weekly ration for 14,297 men.
16. Sloop *Betsey* (60T) captured 17 December 1775
- Corn, oats, and potatoes
 - Corn and oats: $40T \times 9.5 \text{ barrels}/T = 380 \text{ barrels flour equivalent}$. Enough to supply either army for about four days.
 - Potatoes: $20T \times 12.2 \text{ bushels}/T = 244 \text{ bushels}$. Enough for 2,091 men for one week.
17. Ship *Happy Return* (130T) captured 25 January 1776
- coal and provisions: 32.5 % of Jenny's tonnage

- $186 \times .325 = 60$ chauldrons coal: Fuel equivalent to 180 cords wood. Enough to supply either army for four days.
 - $100 \times .325 = 32$ casks porter: Enough to supply daily ration to 3,840 men.
 - $40 \times .325 = 13$ hogs: Enough for daily ration (colonial) of 1,733 men.
 - $439 \times .325 = 142$ bushels potatoes: Enough for weekly ration of 1,217 men.(CE)
18. Ship *Norfolk* (120T) captured 25 January 1776
- coal and provisions: 30% of Jenny's tonnage
 - $186 \times .3 = 55$ chauldrons coal: Fuel equivalent of 165 cords wood. Enough to supply either army for 3 and a half days.
 - $100 \times .3 = 30$ casks porter: Enough to supply daily ration to 3,600 men.
 - $40 \times .3 = 12$ hogs: Enough for daily ration (colonial) of 1600 men.
 - $439 \times .3 = 131$ bushels potatoes: Weekly ration of 1,122 men.
19. Sloop *Rainbow* (60T) captured 25 January 1776
- 45 cords wood: Enough to supply either army for one day.
 - 10 bushels potatoes: Enough for one week supply of 85 men.(CE)
 - 2 bushels turnips: Enough for one week supply of 17 men.(CE)
20. Brig *Henry and Esther* (300T) captured 25 January 1776
- 62 cords wood: Enough for one week's supply of 4,100 men.
 - 150 butts butter: Enough to ration either army for sixteen weeks.
 - 40 sets of soldiers' bedding
21. Ship *Friends* captured 26 January 1776
- 52 chauldrons coal: Fuel equivalent of 156 cords wood. Enough to supply either army for 3.5 days.
 - 2 hogsheads vinegar: Enough to supply weekly vinegar ration (colonial) to 2,016 men.
 - 86 butts porter: Enough for 2 days ration of either army and 1280 men for one day.
 - 12 hogsheads vinegar: Enough for weekly rations of 12,096 men.
 - 23 pigs: Daily ration (colonial) for 3,066 men.
22. Ship *Sukey* captured 26 January 1776
- 33 barrels beef: Weekly rations (British) for 943 men.
 - 150 firkins butter: Enough for weekly ration of either army.
 - 72 casks butter: Enough to ration either army for two weeks.
 - 16 barrels pork: Enough for daily ration (colonial) of 2,844 men.
 - 109 bushels potatoes: Weekly ration for 934 men.(CE)
 - 29 tierces beef: Enough for daily ration (colonial) of 3,866 men.
 - 1 tierce pork: Weekly ration (British) of 28 men.
 - 2 casks peas: Enough peas for weekly ration (British) of 160 men.
 - 8 barrels oats: Enough for weekly ration (British) of 3200 men.

23. Anonymous bark (300T) captured 16 February 1776

- Coal, pork, and flour
- I will assume 1/3 cargo quantity for each and vessel tonnage value as 75% of the Jenny for determination of coal quantity. Pork and flour values are based on barrels/T formula. As pork and flour barrels were ideally the same weight, I used flour formula to determine the number of pork barrels.
- 139 chauldrons coal: Equivalent to 417 cords of wood. Enough for either army for nine days.
- Flour: $100T \times 9.46 \text{ barrels/T} = 946 \text{ barrels}$. Enough for daily ration of entire army for nine days.
- Pork: $100T \times 9.46 \text{ barrels/T} = 946 \text{ barrels}$. Enough for daily ration (colonial) of entire army for eight days.

24. Ship *Susannah* (300T) captured 6 March 1776

- Coal, pork, peas, potatoes, cheese, porter, hogs
- I will assume 75% of Jenny's cargo for cargo quantity and only calculate coal, pork, potatoes, porter, and hogs.
- 139 chauldrons coal: Fuel equivalent of 417 cords of wood. Enough wood for entire army for 9 days.
- 329 bushels potatoes: Roughly enough for weekly ration of 2,820 men.
- 30 hogs: Daily ration (colonial) of 4000 men.
- 75 casks porter: Enough to supply daily ration to 9,000 men.
- Pork: $300/7 \times 9.6 = 411 \text{ barrels}$. Enough for daily ration (colonial) of entire army for 3.5 days.

25. Ship *Stakesby* (300T) captured 10 March 1776

- Coal and provisions
- I will assume 75% of Jenny's cargo for cargo quantity and similar cargo.
- 139 chauldrons coal: Fuel equivalent of 417 cords of wood. Enough wood for entire army for 9 days.
- 329 bushels potatoes: Roughly enough for weekly ration of 2,820 men.
- 30 hogs: Daily ration (colonial) of 4000 men.
- 75 casks porter: Enough to supply daily ration to 9,000 men.

Twenty-five known cargoes brought in by colonial forces are listed above. For each, I have listed the cargoes and determined the number of men they could potentially supply. To some extent the numbers speak for themselves. The amount of provisions and supplies

denied the British by these vessel seizures is great. Listed below, in four broad categories are the totals for the captured items.

1. FOOD

ITEM	AMOUNT	MEN POTENTIALLY FED
Meats		
Beef		
-Confirmed:	62 barrels (12,400#)	1,180 men for one week
-Estimated:	189 barrels (37,800#)	3,600 men for one week
-From cattle:	10 cows (6000#)	571 men for one week
-Total:	56,200 pounds	Weekly ration of 5,352 men.
Fish:	9 quintals	600 men for one day.
Fowl		
-Geese:	32	20 men
-Chickens:	58	116 men
Pork		
-Confirmed:	17 barrels (3400#)	485 men for one week
-Estimated:	1346 barrels (269,200#)	Army for one weeks and 18,457 men for one week
-Live pigs:	166 pigs (24,900#)	3,161 men for one week
-Total:	297,500 pounds	Army for two weeks and 2,500 men for one week
Sheep:	21 sheep	2800 men for one day
Turtle:	150	900
Vegetables		
Cabbage (converted to potatoes)		
-Estimated:	259 Bushels (15,540#)	2,220 men for one week. (CE)
Turnips (converted to potatoes)		
-Confirmed:	11 bushels (660#)	94 men for one week (CE)
-Estimated:	1235 bushels (74,100#)	10,585 men for one week (CE)
-Total:	1246 bushels (74,760#)	10,680 men for one week (CE)
Potatoes		
-Confirmed:	1409 bushels (84,540#)	12,077 men for one week. (CE)
-Estimated:	1663 bushels (99780#)	14,254 men for one week. (CE)
-Total:	3072 bushels (184,320#)	Army for 1.3 weeks. (CE)

Peas:	2 casks	160 men for one week
Fruits:	7200 citrus fruits	1,028 men for one week

Grains

Flour

-Confirmed:	1892 barrels (378,400#)	Army for 18 days
-Estimated:	1892 barrels (378,400#)	Army for 18 days
-Flour Equivalent:	380 barrels (76,000#)	Army for 4 days
-Total:	4,164 barrels (832,800)	Army for 6 weeks
Oatmeal:	108 casks (21,600#)	Army for 2.2 weeks

Dairy

Cheese:	750 pounds	1,430 men for one week
Butter:	923.5 barrels (184,700#)	Army for 24.5 weeks

Other

Vinegar:	12 hogsheads (756g)	12,096 men for one week
Porter		
-Confirmed:	444 barrels (13,320g)	Army for 2.7 weeks
-Estimated:	212 barrels (6,360g)	Army for 1.2 weeks
-Total:	656 barrels (19,680g)	Army for one month
Rum:	139 barrels (4,170g)	Army for 5 days
Molasses:	200 hogsheads (12,600 g)	1400 men for one week
Hay:	18 tons (40,320#)	200 horses for 10 days

2. FUEL

ITEM	AMOUNT	WOOD EQUIVALENT	MEN SUPPLIED
Wood:	192 cords	192 cords	Army for 4.2 days
Coal:			
-Confirmed:	341 chauldrons	1023 cords	Army for 22.7 days
-Estimated:	532 chauldrons	1596 cords	Army for 35.5 days
-Total:	873 chauldrons	2619 cords	Army for 58.2 days

Total fuel: Enough to supply either army for 120 days or four months.

3. ARMAMENTS

ITEM	AMOUNT	SIGNIFICANCE
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Muskets:	2000	Enough to supply 1/10 th either army
Shot:	30 tons	About one million balls
Shot (artillery):	30,000 rounds	10,000 greater than Gridley's estimate of need of the Colonial army
Flints	100,000	Enough for five flints or 50-75 shots per man

4. OTHER

ITEM	AMOUNT	SIGNIFICANCE
Blankets	1900	
Shoes	24 casks or	Roughly 1200 pairs
Oznabrig	100 bolts	Sufficient to make 465 six-man tents

The figures above demonstrate the significance prizes captured during the siege of Boston. The cargoes listed represent virtually everything needed by an eighteenth-century army. The effect of the captures probably more profoundly affected the British. Everything they needed came from the sea. The products denied them by prize capture represented a percentage of their most basic survival needs. For Americans at the siege, the products also helped them to survive while Congress organized a logistical infrastructure. At times, demand for the captured products compelled George Washington to order cargoes sent directly to the army before proper adjudication. Regardless of whether the cargoes are viewed as denying the British or providing for the Americans, the numbers are great. The largest and best examples are divided into the categories of meat, produce, grain, fuel, and armaments.

Meats included all sources of meat products, from bulk cargoes of beef or pork, to live animals such as turtles or chickens. Beef and pork, most abundant amongst the cargoes, accounted for 353,700 pounds. Including all sources, Americans denied the British over two weeks of meat rations.

Produce included all vegetables and fruits captured. Prize cargoes contained 184,320 pounds of potatoes and 74,760 pounds of turnips. Enough fruits and vegetables came into colonial ports to feed 275,808 men for a week or either army for 3.8 weeks. Captured fruits could have provided 7200 men with a ration, and as importantly might have helped offset the illnesses that increasingly plagued British troops during the siege. Fresh fruit may have helped some of them.

Grain cargoes consisted of flour and oatmeal. Prize takers denied the British of 832,800 pounds of flour and 21,600 pounds of oatmeal. Combined, this amounted to enough to feed either army for 8.2 weeks, or just over two months.

Butter and cheese provided the main source of dairy for men in Boston. Colonials seized an enormous amount of butter, 184,700 pounds, and 750 pounds of cheese. Combined, the products seized amounted to enough to supply either army for 24.7 weeks, roughly half the entire siege.

Rum and porter were critical to an army's survival. Fresh water was not always readily available. The British camped in squalid conditions outdoors and probably had little fresh water. Americans captured 4,170 gallons of rum and 19,680 gallons of porter, enough to last either army one month and five days.

Several contemporary accounts report the winter's severity during the siege. Fuel became critical for both armies. Colonials reported that soldiers ate raw food at one point, because there was no fire to cook it. The British camped outdoors. Conditions for the troops must have been terrible. As a testament to its importance, thirteen of the twenty-five ships cited in this thesis carried fuel. The prizes carried the equivalent of 2,619 cords

of wood. This amount represents enough fuel for either army for two months, perhaps the two most severe months of winter, as most of the fuel was taken during December and January.

Americans made a critical capture of armaments in late November 1775. In February Washington stated that 2000 men lacked muskets. The *Nancy* carried 2500 muskets, complete with bayonets, enough for over 12.5 % of the entire army. It would be interesting to determine how many men lacked muskets before her capture. She also had 100,000 flints on board, enough to amply supply the entire army. The cargo also included about one million balls for small arms and a number of cartridges. The balls alone could account for fifty shots per man. Besides these small arms and supplies, she had on board a large brass mortar, several smaller fixed mortars, and a number of various sized cannon complete with carriages. To go with this artillery, she carried 30,000 rounds of shot and a great number of cartridges. The cargo of the *Nancy* was quite simply a godsend for the American forces. The British reported incoming artillery fire from the seized weapons shortly after her capture.

A few other captured items deserve mention. One cargo brought in 100 bolts of oznabrig. This amount could have provided new tents for 2,790 men. Another cargo of at least 1200 pairs of shoes went directly to the American camp. One can imagine how important a new pair of shoes was in the cold winter. And lastly, I need only mention the 1900 blankets that the British did without, roughly a new blanket for one out of ten men.

Armies at the siege of Boston faced unique challenges. The British were deprived of virtually all sources of land supply they had relied upon in the previous colonial conflicts.

Americans began a war they were not prepared to fight. For both armies, logistics became critical. Howe had only to wait out the winter and the arrival of supply ships and transports in the spring to move to New York. He had no intention of leaving Boston on 17 March 1776. It is certainly true that the fortification of Dorchester Heights caused an immediate withdrawal, but he lacked the supplies to move directly to New York. As I have demonstrated, colonial prize cargoes represented a large percentage of the supplies the British lacked. Inclusive of all items, Howe was denied two weeks complete rations for his army. If meat is excluded the figure rises to four weeks. Prize takers robbed him of two months worth of vegetable, grain, and dairy rations. When these totals are understood and considered, it is no surprise that the British constantly complained about American privateers. The British basically sat helpless in Boston, while colonials deprived them of everything they needed. As impressive as they are, the figures presented actually understate the losses the British sustained. Many prizes were not reported, or the reports have not survived. Other reports of privateers and/or prizes lacked sufficient details to justify inclusion.

At the onset of this thesis, I stated that there has been little connection made by historians between the prize captures of 1775 and early 1776 and the successes and/or failures of the armies at Boston. I think that I have adequately made that connection. I believe that the numbers involved prove it impossible to say otherwise. While true that many numbers I cited are products of conservative extrapolations, without them, the quantities are so substantial the fact remains. Colonial prize captures played a significant factor in the British failure at the siege of Boston and contributed directly to their defeat

that necessitated forced evacuation and a change in overall British strategy that altered the American Revolution's course.

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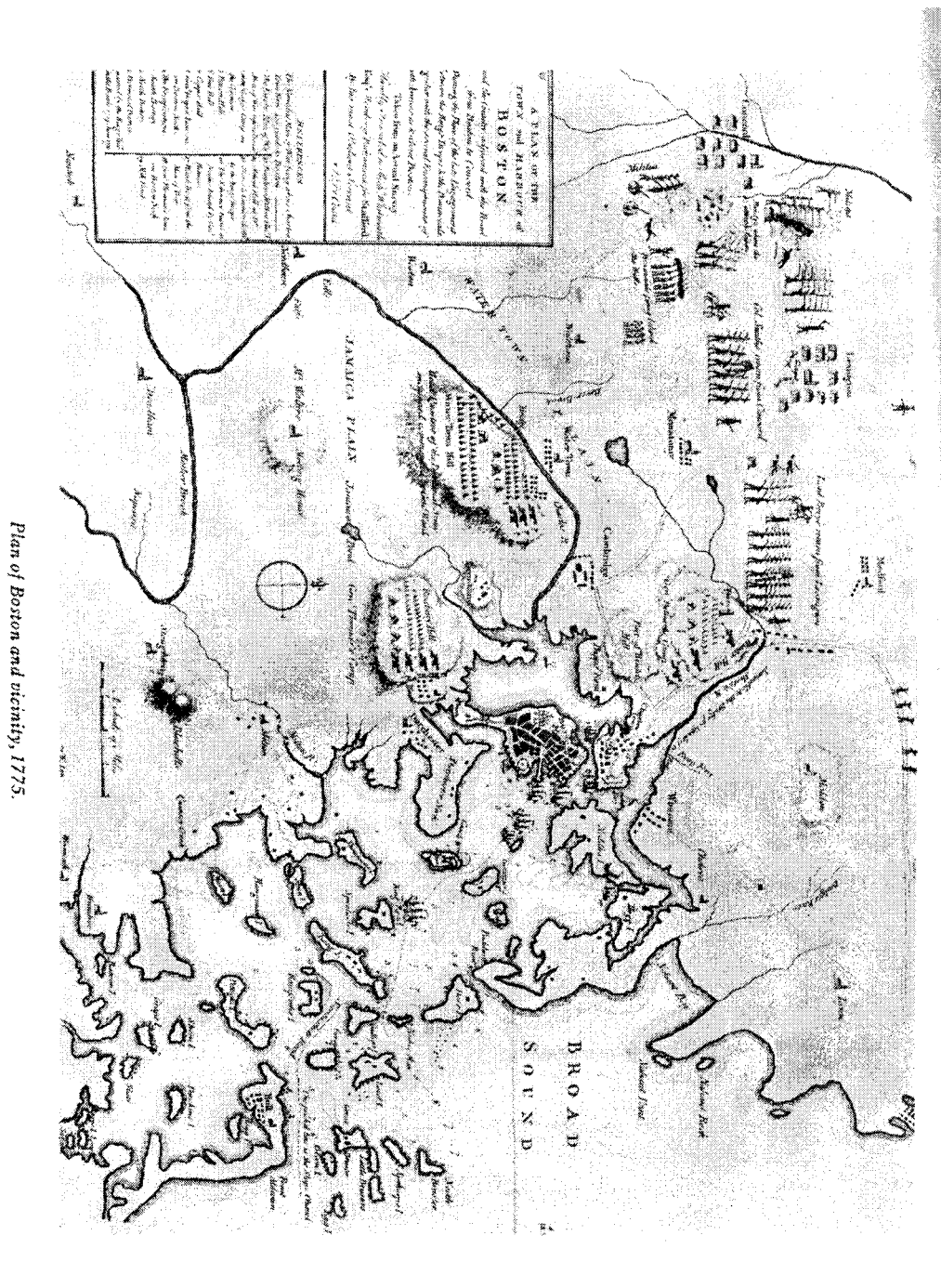
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APPENDIX A: MAP OF BOSTON AND THE HARBOR 1775¹



¹ "A Plan of the Town and Harbour of Boston, and the country adjacent, etc." From a survey by J. DeCosta, London, 1775. Illustration from *Naval Documents of the American Revolution*, W.B. Clark and W.J Morgan, *Et al.*, eds., (Washington, DC 1964-), I, 197.

APPENDIX B: RETURNS OF THE COLONIAL ARMY DURING THE SIEGE.²

	Officers and staff	Non-commissioned officers	Present Fit for duty	Sick Present	Sick Absent	Furlough	On Command	Total	Artillery
1775									
July 19,	1,119	1,768	13,743	1,108	490	376	1,053	16,770	585
July 29,	1,117	1,823	13,899	1,330	690	287	692	16,898	
August 5,	1,178	1,910	13,735	1,943	750	255	1,011	17,694	586
August 12,	1,234	2,023	14,544	2,131	977	187	1,124	18,963	
August 18,	1,231	2,007	14,442	2,218	1006	220	1,174	19,060	
August 26,	1,242	2,018	14,701	2,179	1071	225	1,127	19,303	596
Sept. 2,	1,226	2,028	14,868	2,221	985	262	1,043	19,379	
Sept. 9,	1,303	2,107	14,766	2,026	988	342	1,410	19,532	
Sept. 23,	1,225	2,034	14,330	1,886	931	468	1,750	19,365	500
Oct. 17,	1,191	1,988	13,923	1,476	952	746	2,400	19,497	
Nov. 18,	1,128	1,925	12,741	1,472	790	1,012	3,063	19,078	579
Nov. 25,	1,068	1,866	12,065	1,464	805	1,626	2,990	18,950	
Dec. 30,	1,088	1,736	11,752	1,206	542	1,013	2,273	16,786	590
1776									
Jan. 8,	979	1,150	10,209	705	233	1,044	1,318	13,509	
Jan. 21,	861	1,167	9,424	1,174	194	214	1,171	12,677	
Jan. 28,	850	1,194	9,799	1,422	245	420	1,248	13,134	
Feb. 4,	896	992	8,863	1,153	270	99	1,233	11,618	
Feb. 18,	1,245	1,452	13,396	1,687	364	49	1,569	17,065	622
Feb. 25,	1,228	1,515	14,123	2,056	389	63	1,845	18,276	
March 2,	1,217	1,521	14,140	2,398	367	49	1,574	18,528	635
March 9,	1,254	1,535	14,232	2,445	330	29	1,374	18,410	640

² Frothingham, *History of the Siege of Boston, and the Battles of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill*, 406.

APPENDIX C: SUPPLY ESTIMATES FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON'S STAFF

Excerpt from Colonel Richard Gridley's Estimate of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores³

Shot[t]	
Round for Batter[in]g Cannon	5 thousand
Round & Case for Small[e]r	10 thous[an]d
Shells for mortars	
Inch 10	1,200
8	1,000
7	400
Powder	
For Cannon & mortars	
200 rounds	1155
For 20 Thous[an]d men	
120 rounds or 3 lb. Per man	600
For Compositions and	
Extraordinarys	<u>245</u>
	2,000 Barrels
Lead	
For musketry	15 tons

Excerpt from Joseph Trumbull's Estimate of Commissary Expenses:⁴

An Estimate of the cost of such articles for the support of an American Army consisting of 22,000 men from the 10th October 1775 to the 10th May 1776 being 7 months; as fall within the Department of the Commissary General:

25,000 barrels flour	44/	£55,000
12,000 barrels pork	65/	39,000
1,000 barrels salted beef	50/	2,500
22,000 lb. Fresh beef 3 days in a week	25/Ct	29,100
200 barrels beer or cyder per day	5/	10,500
22,000 pints milk per day	@ 1d.	19,150
28,000 bushels peas or beans	6/	8,400
6 oz. Butter per man per week	8d. per lb.	10,080
2 gallons vinegar per man per week		10,000
100 Hhds N[ew] E[n]glan]d Rum		1,250
Hospital Stores uncertain—Say		
30 Pipes Teneriff wine		900
100 casks raisons	50/	250
100 barrels oatmeal		<u>200</u>
		£186.330
add Contingencys		<u>13,670</u>
		£200,000

³ Colonel Richard Gridley to George Washington, 20 October 1775, Enclosure: Colonel Richard Gridley's Estimate of Ordnance and Ordnance Stores. *PGW*, II, 209.

⁴ George Washington to John Hancock, 12 October 1775, Enclosure I. Joseph Trumbull's Estimate of Commissary Expenses, *PGW*, II, 150.

APPENDIX D: VALID PRIZE CAPTURES BY GEORGE WASHINGTON'S
SCHOONERS.⁵

<u>Date</u>	<u>Rig</u>	<u>Prize</u>	<u>Tonnage</u>	<u>Captured by</u>	<u>Cargo</u>
<u>1775</u>					
Sept. 7	Ship	<i>Unity</i>	260	<i>Hannah</i>	Fish, beef, and lumber
Nov. 6	Sloop	<i>Polly(1)</i>	75	<i>Harrison</i>	Provisions, livestock
Nov. 6	Schooner	<i>Industry</i>	85	<i>Harrison</i>	Provisions, livestock
Nov. 7	Sloop	<i>Ranger</i>	---	<i>Lee</i>	Firewood
Nov. 8	Schooner	<i>Two Sisters</i>	80	<i>Lee</i>	Provisions
Nov. 25	Schooner	<i>Rainbow(1)</i>	45	<i>Warren</i>	Potatoes & turnips
Nov. 27	Sloop	<i>Britannia</i>	80	<i>Washington</i>	Wood & hay
Nov. 28	Sloop	<i>Polly(2)</i>	80	<i>Lee</i>	Turnips
Nov. 29	Brig	<i>Nancy</i>	250	<i>Lee</i>	Ordnance stores
Dec. 3	Ship	<i>Concord</i>	800	<i>Lee</i>	Coal & provisions
Dec. 7	Schooner	<i>Unknown</i>	15	<i>Harrison</i>	Carrying pilots for Boston
Dec. 9	Ship	<i>Jenny</i>	400	<i>Lee</i>	Coal, porter, & provisions
Dec. 9	Brig	<i>Little Hannah</i>	140	<i>Lee</i>	Rum
Dec. 18	Sloop	<i>Betsey</i>	60	<i>Lee</i>	Indian Corn & oats
Dec. 25	Sloop	<i>Sally</i>	70	<i>Warren</i>	Wine
<u>1776</u>					
Jan. 25	Ship	<i>Happy Return</i>	130	<i>Hancock</i>	Coal & provisions
Jan. 25	Ship	<i>Norfolk</i>	120	<i>Hancock</i>	Coal & provisions
Jan. 30	Sloop	<i>Rainbow(2)</i>	60	<i>Franklin, Lee</i>	Wood & provisions
Jan. 30	Brig	<i>Henry and Esther</i>	300	<i>Franklin, Lee</i>	Wood & soldiers' bedding
March 6	Ship	<i>Susannah</i>	300	<i>Hancock, Lee,</i> <i>Franklin, Lynch</i>	Coal, cheese, and porter
March 10	Ship	<i>Stakesby</i>	300	<i>Hancock, Lynch,</i> <i>Lee, Franklin</i>	Provisions

⁵ Compiled using figures from: William Bell Clark, *George Washington's Navy: Being an Account of his Excellency's Fleet in New England Waters* (Louisiana, 1960), Appendix B.

APPENDIX E: CONTAINER CAPACITY, RATION LISTS, CONVERSION
FORMULAS, AND FORMULAS FOR DETERMINING RATION
QUANTITIES

Container capacities⁶

Barrel or Cask- Liquid measurement between 30-40 gallons. Dry measure of about 200 pounds.

Bolt- large roll usually of 100 square yards.

Bushel- 2,219 cubic inches, 36.3 liters, 32 quarts. Usually weighs 60 pounds.

Butt- About 126 gallons, usually 2 hogsheads

Chauldron- Former unit of English dry measure equal to 36 bushels of coal or 32 bushels of grain. As a measure for coal, one chauldron equals 5,936 pounds.

Firkin- usually $\frac{1}{4}$ barrel or 9 gallons

Hogshead- 63 to 140 gallons

Quintal- cask of one hundredweight.

Tierce- Roughly equivalent to a cask or barrel. Holds 42 gallons.

Ration lists used:

British weekly ration per man:

- 7 pounds flour
- 7 pounds beef or pork
- 6 ounces butter (also cheese)
- 3 pints peas
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound oatmeal

American daily ration per man:

- 24 ounces beef
- 18 ounces pork (in lieu of beef)
- one pound flour
- 6 ounces butter per week
- nine gallons molasses per 100 men per week
- one half pint vinegar per week
- one quart malt (porter) or spruce beer per day
- one and one half cords of wood per 100 men per week

Assumed or estimated consumption:

⁶ All measurements taken or derived from *The American Heritage College Dictionary*, 3d ed.; Russ Rowlett, *How Many? A Dictionary of Units of Measurement*, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.
May 31, 2001. Available FTP: <http://www.unc.edu/~rowlett/units/dictB.html>

- Seven pound potatoes or turnips per man per week
- 24 ounces fish for one day for one man
- A chicken fed two men
- A goose fed six men

Conversions or standards used:

- At 1.5 cords wood per 100 men per week an army of 20,000 uses 45 cords per day
- 1/3 chauldron of coal substituted for 1 cord of wood
- A butchered cow supplies 600 pounds of meat
- A butchered pig or sheep supplies 150 pounds of meat
- 21.5 square yards material needed to produce one six-man tent
- An army of 20,000 ate 33 tons of food per day.
- An army of 20,000 required 36,500 barrels of flour and 10.95 million pounds of meat per year.
- One flint could be used for 10-15 rounds without sharpening.

Formulas for determining ration quantities:

Beef or pork formula: Convert either barrels or live cows to pounds.

American ration = Convert to ounces and divide by 24 (18 for pork) to get the number of daily rations. For army supply divide this by 20,000

British ration = Divide pounds by seven for weekly ration. For army divide weekly ration by 20,000.

Butter or cheese formula (British): Convert quantity to pounds multiply by 16 ounces per pound and divide by 18 ounces. For army supply, divide this by 20,000.

Coal and wood formula: Multiply chauldrons coal by three for cords wood equivalent. Divide by 45 for number of days army supplied.

Flour formula: Convert barrels to pounds (200 pounds/barrel). Divide by 20,000 for entire Army supply. One pound per man per day for individual.

Oatmeal formula: Simply convert to pounds and multiply by two for number of men rationed. Divide by 20,000 for entire army supply.

Potato or turnip formula: Multiply number of bushels by 60 pounds per bushel. Divide by 20,000 for army supply.

Porter formula: Convert barrels to gallons then to quarts. Number equals number of men with daily ration. Divide by 20,000 for entire army supply.

Rum formula: Convert barrels to gallons then to quarts. Multiply by 6 men per quart per week. Divide by 20,000 for entire army supply.

Vinegar formula: Multiply gallons by 16 for number of men supplied a weekly ration.