Major Problems in the Era of the American Revolution, 1760–1791

DOCUMENTS AND ESSAYS
SECOND EDITION
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HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
Boston New York
For my students
to you, to carry into immediate effect. Without a well disciplined Army, we can never expect success against veteran Troops; and it is totally impossible we should have a well disciplined Army, unless our Troops are engaged to serve during the war. To attain therefore this most desirable End, I am to request you will at once, and without a moments delay, bend all your attention to raise your Quota of the American army.

4. A Soldier Views Mutiny Among American Troops, 1780

We left Westfield (New Jersey) about the twenty-fifth of May and went to Basking Ridge to our old winter cantonments. . . . The men were now exasperated beyond endurance; they could not stand it any longer. . . . What was to be done? Here was the army starved and naked, and there their country sitting still and expecting the army to do notable things while fasting from sheer starvation. All things considered, the army was not to be blamed.

We had borne as long as human nature could endure, and to bear longer we considered folly. Accordingly, one pleasant day, the men spent the most of their time upon the parade, growling like soreheaded dogs. At evening roll call they began to show their dissatisfaction by sniping at the officers and acting contrary to their orders. After their dismissal from the parade, the officers went, as usual, to their quarters, except the adjutant, who happened to remain, giving details for next day’s duty to the orderly sergeants, or some other business, when the men, none of whom had left the parade began to make him sensible that they had something in train. He said something that did not altogether accord with the soldiers’ ideas of propriety, one of the men retired; the adjutant called him a mutinous rascal, or some such epithet, and then left the parade. This man, then stamping the butt of his musket upon the ground, as much as to say, I am in a passion, called out, “Who will parade with me?” The whole regiment immediately fell in and formed.

We had made no plans for our future operations, but while we were consulting how to proceed, the Fourth Regiment, which lay on our left, formed, and came and paraded with us. We now concluded to go in a body to the other two regiments [the Third and Sixth] that belonged to our brigade and induce them to join us with us. These regiments lay forty or fifty rods in front of us, with a brook and bushes between. We did not wish to have anyone in particular to command, lest he might be singled out for a court-martial to exercise its clemency upon. We therefore gave directions to the drummers to give certain signals on the drums; at the first signal we shouldered our arms, at the second we faced, at the third we began our march to join with the other two regiments, and went off with music playing.

By this time our officers had obtained knowledge of our military maneuvering and some of them had run across the brook, by a nearer way than we had taken.