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BOOKSHELF

Book Review: 'George Washington: Gentleman Warrior,' by Stephen Brumwell and 'Sons of the Father,' edited by Robert M.S. McDonald

By 1775, Washington had strong ideas about how to run an army. Officers, he said, should be men of independent financial means.

By **ALAN PELL CRAWFORD**

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In 1757, when troops of the Virginia Regiment reported for duty in the French and Indian War, their British superiors were surprised by what they saw. The British had expected to confront "a parcel of ragged, disorderly fellows headed by officers of their own stamp." Instead, they met "men properly disposed who made a good and soldier-like appearance," capable of performing "in every particular." The Virginians' officers, moreover, wore "genteel uniforms," with sashes and swords. Their troops "know the parade as well as Prussians."

Allowing for a splash of braggadocio—the rave reviews come from the regiment's own officers—there was no doubt a good measure of truth in the account. The Virginians had been well-trained because their commander, George Washington, saw to that. Every book on the American Revolution, including Stephen Brumwell's solid military

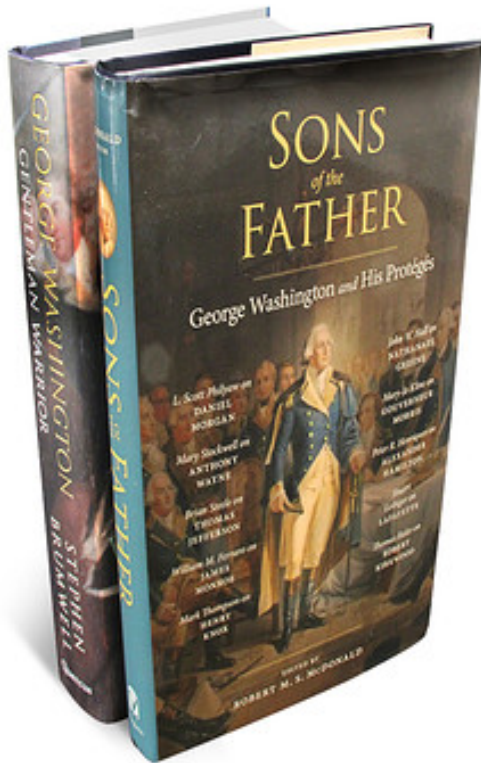
biography, "George Washington: Gentleman Warrior," uses "ragtag" to describe the Continental Army. This term would have mortified Washington, a stickler for orderly appearance even in his mid-20s, when he led the Virginia Regiment.

By 1775, when he took command of the Continental Army, Washington had developed strong ideas about how to staff a fighting force—ideas that looked more to Old Europe than to the New World. Washington told Gov. Patrick Henry, then assembling battalions from Virginia, that he should avoid "the soldier and the officer being too nearly on a level." Because America didn't have a long military tradition, and its men lacked experience, Washington thought that other considerations should be weighed: The "true criterion . . . is to consider whether the candidate for office has a just pretension to the character of a gentleman, a proper sense of honor, and some reputation to lose."

The best officers, Washington told John Hancock, the president of the Continental Congress, would be men of means. Only financial independence would allow "men of character to engage," Washington said, "and till the bulk of your officers are composed of such persons as are actuated by principles of honor, and a spirit of enterprise, you have little to expect from them." It is Mr. Brumwell's thesis that Washington's own "pretension to the character of a gentleman" explains his success in the War for Independence. It is a plausible supposition—and probably correct—though the author could have done a more thorough job tracing exactly how this aspect of Washington's personality colored his conduct as a general.

In "Sons of the Father: George Washington and His Protégés," we can see how Washington's ideas about character evolved over the course of the war and after. This collection of essays, edited by Robert M.S. McDonald, explores Washington's relationships with a series of younger men. These include familiar names—Thomas Jefferson, James Monroe, the Marquis de Lafayette—and less well-known ones, such as Daniel Morgan, Nathanael Greene and Henry Knox. The selection seems somewhat arbitrary. John Marshall—described in passing by Brian Steele, one of the contributors, as "the public figure perhaps closest to Washington in his final years"—is left out, while Capt. Robert Kirkwood of Delaware, who never met his commander in chief, gets an entire chapter.

It is a stimulating collection all the same, especially for what it tells us about Washington's understanding of the traits he sought in his subordinates. He found these qualities, it turns out, in unlikely places. In a number of cases, he had more trouble with scions of the landed gentry like Jefferson and Madison—both of whom he grew to distrust and dislike—than with men of less illustrious origins. By Yorktown, Washington



GEORGE WASHINGTON: GENTLEMAN WARRIOR

By Stephen Brumwell
(Quercus, 514 pages, \$30)

SONS OF THE FATHER

Edited by Robert M.S. McDonald
(Virginia, 285 pages, \$35)

seemed less the Old World patrician than New World democrat, as he relied increasingly on the sound judgment and native ingenuity of men such as Henry Knox.

Knox came to Washington's attention in 1775 for his work on the defenses around Boston. His resourcefulness and keen interest in military science proved invaluable. When Washington allowed Knox to head for Fort Ticonderoga in hopes of retrieving some 50 British cannon captured by Ethan Allen, Knox succeeded against long odds. Over nine harrowing weeks, Mark Thompson writes, Knox and his men hauled 60 tons of artillery 300 miles "through the New York backcountry, along waterways and gullied roads, across ice and snow." Deployed on Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston, the guns helped persuade the British to abandon the city. But Knox was far more than a herculean teamster. Washington put him in charge of all Continental artillery, and the batteries under his direction loomed large at Trenton, Princeton, Monmouth and Yorktown. After the war, Knox became Washington's secretary of war.

Washington saw merit in the unprepossessing Knox, as he did in others, despite the lack of a "gentlemanly" pedigree. Forced as a child to support his mother when his father

abandoned the family, Knox was a mere bookseller before the war, self-educated and obese. But he understood artillery and could see its role in sieges and in the mobile warfare that would characterize the Revolution. More than that, he could discuss its theory and application with Washington. Jefferson and Madison, in their more playful approach to ideas, complicated matters; Knox clarified them.

Of Knox, Washington wrote to John Adams in 1798, "there is no man in the United States with whom I have been in habits of greater intimacy." Even so, the nature of their

friendship remains something of a mystery, as do Washington's relations with the other men discussed in this volume. Washington simply didn't reveal his feelings about others the way Jefferson and Adams did. Younger men certainly craved the great man's approval. That he could be downright parsimonious in expressing his affection, austere when protégés ached for something deeper, might explain why they worked so hard to earn it.

Mr. Crawford is the author of "Twilight at Monticello: The Final Years of Thomas Jefferson."

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