

'Rebel' Prisoners Detained in North America

By Paul J. Rastatter

http://www.earlyamerica.com/review/2002_summer_fall/pows.htm

For the British, the American Revolutionary War was not one war but two.

First, there was a civil war with the American Colonies, beginning in 1775 and ending at Yorktown in 1781. A second war started in 1778 when the French (and later, the Spanish and Dutch) entered the conflict and this war lasted until 1783 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

American prisoners captured before 1778 were not legally 'prisoners of war'. Not until March 25, 1782, (six months after Yorktown) did Parliament pass a law designating Americans as prisoners of war, allowing them to be detained, released or exchanged. [ii] This method of dealing with 'rebel' prisoners provided the British with a free hand to treat their captives in any manner they saw fit.

In August 1775, General Gage in Boston spelled out the 'prisoner of war' position of the British government in a letter to General Washington: "Britons, ever pre-eminent in mercy, have outgone common examples, and over-looked the criminal in the captive. Upon these principles, your prisoners, whose lives by the laws of the land are destined to the cord, have hitherto been treated with care and kindness, and more comfortably lodged than the King's troops.

"...I understand there are some of the King's faithful subjects...laboring like negro slaves to gain their daily subsistence, or reduced to the wretched alternative to perish by famine, or take arms against their King and country. ...I acknowledge no rank that is not derived from the King" [iii]

On September 14, 1775, Americans received the notice of the death of twenty of the thirty-one prisoners taken at Bunker Hill. [iv] The reason why over half these men died is unclear. Some may have suffered from wounds and others may have succumbed to the crowded, unsanitary conditions of prison life. Soon afterwards, Sir Joseph Yorke, British foreign minister at The Hague, advised the British government for the adoption of an exchange program in connection with his recruiting campaign in Hesse and other German principalities. Mercenary soldiers did not want to fight without assurances of an exchange policy or if they thought they might be subject to retaliatory action stemming from British mistreatment of prisoners. [v].

In the following summer of 1776, Lord Admiral Richard Howe tried to bring about reconciliation with the 'rebel' colonials. He sent his communication to

George Washington, Esq., and had it delivered under a flag of truce to the American army. "With seals unbroken it was returned to the admiral with the explanation that General Washington was in command of the American army but that plain Mr. Washington was unknown in the army." [vi]

Likewise, when General William Howe, the admiral's brother, responded to complaints about the treatment of his prisoners of war, his letter too, was returned unopened being addressed only to George Washington, Esq.

The British armada arrived in New York on September 15, 1776 and captured Fort Washington on November 16. A detailed account of the capitulation of Fort Washington is described in Richard Ketchum's book, *The Winter Soldiers*. Ketchum writes that of the 230 American officers and the 2,607 American soldiers who surrendered at Fort Washington, only 800 were still alive eighteen months later. [vii]

The treatment of American captives progressively worsened the farther they were removed from the battle area. Typically, they were stripped of their clothing and given old worn-out garments. They were marched through the streets of the city and subjected to insults from the Loyalist crowds. During the winter of 1776-77, snow would blow in and sweep across the great rooms. [viii]

For the most part, British combat officers behaved correctly but provost personnel in New York and Philadelphia acted with brutal severity.

"Each morning several frozen corpses were dragged out, thrown into wagons like logs, and then pitched into a large hole. In a brief time, the naked bodies would be exposed because of the weather conditions and afterwards be consumed by swine and wild animals". [ix]

Samuel Young recalls being confined in a stable with 500 men where food was thrown to them, "...in a confused manner, as if to so many hogs, a quantity of old biscuit, broken, and in crumbs, mostly moulded, and some of it crawling with maggots... next day a little pork given to each of them, which they were obliged to eat raw". [x]

Prisoners received their rations twice a week: one-half pound of biscuit, one half pound of pork, one-half pint of peas, one-half gill of rice, and a half ounce of butter. [xi] They were allowed one fire every three days on which to cook their food. Guards would sell old beef bones and other types of garbage to the Americans. They slept in bare rooms with no straw or hay on which to lie. Their water was brought to them in chamber pots. They became afflicted with lice and other vermin. "As a consequence, the men began to die like rotten sheep, with cold, hunger and disease as constant comrades." [xii]

On December 24, 1776, a group of prisoners were released, but several of them had fallen dead on the way to the ship. According to Ambrose Serle, somewhere in the neighborhood of two thousand militia-men were released without exchange and allowed to return to their homes to spread the message of Howe's humanity and the futility of further resistance. [xiii] The health of these men was so deplorable that many died before reaching home. One man, Lieutenant Oliver Babcock, brought smallpox home with him and died of the disease on January 24. A short time later, two of his children died of smallpox. [xiv] As a result, Washington refused to return healthy British prisoners for Americans who were so ill that many died. One of the captives later reported, "The guards were wont to tell a man, while in health, 'You have not been here long enough, you are too well to be exchanged'". [xv]

Beginning in September 1776, several notorious prisons were established in New York City. One of the first was the three-story, Provost, located in the Old Jail, where American prisoners who were difficult to control, civilians suspected of espionage, local criminals and derelicts of all types were housed. [xvi] Ethan Allen was known to have spent some time in the Provost.

William Cunningham, the Provost Marshal, had a reputation for being harsh with the prisoners. Among Americans, he was well known and feared. Cunningham had originally come to New York in 1774 with a shipload of indentured servants whom he had kidnapped in Ireland. While he was auctioning off his servants, the Liberty Boys of New York City freed the Irishmen and dragged Cunningham face down across the cobblestones to the base of the Liberty Pole. [xvii] Cunningham fled to the British and volunteered his services "in order to wreck vengeance on the Americans." [xviii] While serving as Provost marshal, Cunningham was even put in charge of the hanging execution of Nathan Hale, a graduate of Yale, a captain in the Knowlton's Rangers, who was caught spying in occupied New York City. Before he died, Hale issued the infamous remarks of our revolution, "What a pity it is ...that we can die but once to serve our country." [xix]

Another prison in New York was the New Bridewell, used to house privates from the Continental and militia units. Oliver Woodruff spent the winter in the New Bridewell prison, where he "never saw any fire except what was in the lamps of the city. There was not a pane of glass in the windows and nothing to keep out the cold but the Iron Gate". [xx] Three sugarhouses along the waterfront area of New York, which were used to store rum, sugar and molasses were converted into prisons for the British. Van Courtland's, Rhinelander's and Liberty Street sugarhouses were commandeered and refitted into prisons. The largest and most infamous of the three was the five-story Liberty Street building. The Liberty Street prison was spacious and spartan but lacked adequate sanitary facilities. These sugarhouses tended to be dirty, too hot in summer and too cold in winter.

Captured American officers were housed differently than enlisted men. One reason for this practice was that the prisons were overcrowded and locating the officers elsewhere gave some relief to the enlisted men. It also served the British to replace the officer's authority over their men with their own discipline. And, better treatment and conditions for American officers would also ensure that British officers in American hands would receive favorable treatment while waiting to be exchanged. The officers were put under parole and allowed the freedom of the city. Paroled men pledged, upon their word as gentlemen, not to escape or engage in sabotage or espionage. Americans were expected to pay for their room and board with available funds or by using credit their landlords might agree to extend them. Parole violators were sent to the Provost, which was usually enough to intimidate most men. [xxi]

Joseph Plumb Martin's autobiography of his life as a revolutionary soldier, had this to say about the Provost in Philadelphia and his treatment of American prisoners of war,

"At the Battle of Germantown, in 1777, a Dutchman, an inhabitant of that town, and his wife fired upon some of the British during the action. After the battle, someone informed against them and they were both taken and confined in the provost guardhouse and there kept with scarcely anything to sustain nature and not a spark of fire to warm them. On the morning that the Augusta was blown up at Fort Mifflin, the poor old man exclaimed 'Huzzah for General Washington. Tomorrow he comes.' The villain Provost Marshal upon hearing this put him into the cellar, without allowing him the least article of sustenance, till he died." [xxii]

Prison Ships

The first ships used by the British to hold prisoners were originally transports in which cattle and other stores were carried across the Atlantic. The first prison ship was the "Whitby". The captives aboard were allowed to keep their clothing and bedding but received no more of such commodities while on the ship. They were given no medical attention. The rations they received were either cut or substituted with unwholesome meat by corrupt British commissaries. The men aboard the "Whitby", seeing no hope for an exchange, set fire to their ship in October 1777, choosing death in the flames to lingering sufferings of disease and starvation. [xxiii] The burning of the "Whitby" and others like it did not bring the prison ships to an end.

The most infamous of the prison ships was the "Jersey" which was an old converted sixty-four-gun man-of-war, stripped of all its fittings except for the flagstaff. Every three days, rations would be given out to a six-man mess. On certain days, men were not allowed to cook fires and had to wait another twenty-four hours or consume their meat raw. Having no fruit or fresh vegetables, scurvy was naturally one of the diseases that afflicted the prisoners.

The "Jersey" had on board anywhere from 400 to 1200 prisoners. The British never bothered to clean the ship, which lay imbedded in mud in Wallabout Bay. The summer confinement was the worse. Yellow fever, smallpox and dysentery multiplied. The men were roused in the mornings with the cry, "Rebels, turn out your dead". [xxiv] The "Jersey" alone proved the means of destruction to more Americans than any other ship in the British navy. It is estimated that over eleven thousand died on board the "Jersey" as deaths averaged five a day from 1780 to 1783. [xxv]

As conditions worsened during the summer months, many American sailors chose to alleviate their suffering and join the Royal Navy. In May 1782, British Admiral Robert Digby wrote to Lord Shelburne that, "was it not for the Europeans taken in the American Privateers it would be impossible to keep the Ships Mann'd.... I have no doubt that there is a fourth of our seamen to whom it is now indifferent on which side they fight." [xxvi] With as many as one-quarter American sailors on British ships, it is no wonder why, "On at least, three occasions, former patriots seized control of small British vessels and tried, unsuccessfully, to sail them to a port held by Americans." [xxvii]

Christopher Hawkins wrote an autobiography of his years as a marine prisoner of war. (This book was written many years after the war while Hawkins was in England!) Hawkins ran away from an indentured apprenticeship at the age of thirteen to join an American privateer. The privateer schooner was captured and sunk by the British and her crew were taken into New York harbor and detained aboard the prison ship, Asia. As a young boy, Hawkins was soon rescued from the conditions aboard the prison ship and forced to serve as a cabin boy/servant for a British officer on board the frigate, Maidstone. [xxviii] After fifteen months, Hawkins made good his escape, returned to Rhode Island and spent a year or so farming. He was soon out to sea again on another privateer, an American Brig out of Providence but was again captured and sent to New York to confinement aboard the prison ship, Jersey, in Wallabout Bay:

"When our crew was put on board her, the number of prisoners amounted to about 800. ...Our situation here was extremely unpleasant. Our rations were not sufficient to satisfy the calls of hunger. ...We had a great deal of sickness on board the Jersey and many died on board her. The sickness seemed to be epidemic, which we called the bloody flux or dysentery. ...Boxing (among prisoners) was tolerated without stint. Pilfering of food was another evil, which prevailed. ...The situation of the prisoners was truly appalling." [xxix]

Canada and Elsewhere

In Canada, prisoners were kept in Quebec and Halifax. Most of the captives were remnants of the 1775-76 invasion of Canada led by Richard Montgomery, or prisoners taken by Indians on raids into New York, Pennsylvania and New England, or men taken during General John Burgoyne's invasion of the Hudson

River valley in 1777. [xxx] In the city of Quebec, the public jail and the facilities at the Jesuits' College were used to hold prisoners. In Halifax, a large one-story building on Hollis Street was used for American captives.

From the end of 1777 until the summer of 1778, the British Army captured and occupied Philadelphia. Prisoners were kept in the public jails and officers were billeted in the state capitol. In 1778, the British started keeping American prisoners in St. Augustine, Florida. After the British Army captured Charleston in 1780, large numbers of men from South Carolina militia units were incarcerated in St. Augustine. The regular, Continental forces captured at Charleston were placed in prisons in and around the city. A special prison camp was set up outside Charleston at Haddrell's Point. [xxxi] A few of the soldiers but most of the American naval personnel were placed aboard prison ships anchored in Charleston harbor. A similar prison system existed in Savannah, Georgia, when that city was taken in 1778.

Several American soldiers were held in prisons outside of North America. In January of 1777, sixteen Americans were sent from Quebec to Senegal in Africa. Benjamin Franklin sent several letters of protest, while serving at his diplomatic post in Paris. [xxxii] Dozens of prisoners were sent from the American Colonies to Antigua in the West Indies and as many as four hundred American captives were transferred from South Carolina to England in 1780. [xxxiii] This number of men sent outside the US was relatively small but was deeply resented and bitterly attacked by American military and political figures.

Prisoner Exchanges

On December 3, 1776, General William Howe, the Commander in Chief of British forces in America, recorded that his command held no less than 4,430 American troops as prisoners of war resulting from the New York and New Jersey campaigns of that year. [xxxiv]

AdChoices 

```
<a href="http://media.fastclick.net/w/click.here?sid=7651&m=6&c=1"
target="_blank"></a>
```

They were faced with the problem of providing food, clothing and shelter for over 4,000 captives during the winter of 1776-77. General Howe tried to exchange 43 officers and 848 enlisted men before the winter set in. Although, Washington was willing, he couldn't get the New England governments that held most of the British prisoners to part with them. [xxxv]

Through Washington's recommendation, the Congress appointed Elias Boudinot as Commissary General of Prisoners. The only money that Boudinot could obtain was Continental currency, which had little or no value in New York City. Congress added to the problem by allotting 2.5 pounds per barrel of flour when flour had risen to 6 pounds per barrel. Despite these problems, Boudinot arrived in New York in Feb. 1777 and Aid for American captives began to arrive. After Burgoyne's surrender at Saratoga in the fall of 1777, specie became available and was funneled to New York to relieve some of the suffering. John Beatty replaced Boudinot when the latter fell ill and his tenure is noted for paying off some of the debt incurred by American officers living on parole. Beatty struggled to promote exchanges of prisoners and improve the lot of Americans sitting in British prisons.

In 1780, Beatty resigned and Abraham Skinner took his place. Skinner chose Lewis Pintard, a resident of New York, to act as his agent. Pintard was officially recognized by the British and allowed to visit the prisons once a week to distribute food and medicine. In Nov. 1780, Governor Thomas Jefferson was granted permission to send 5000 pounds to help the prisoners held captive in Charleston. Encouraged by this acceptance, Maryland and other states began to send foodstuffs, tobacco, firewood and money to the Charleston prison. In addition to the funds that Congress gave him, Abraham Skinner started to receive aid from the individual states.

With Congress so close in Philadelphia or York, negotiating a general cartel (of prisoners) became impossible in the north, although partial exchanges took place throughout the war. [xxxvi]

In the south, where commanders could negotiate with fewer political intrusions, three important cartels treating prisoners by category released many men and proved that a general formula could have been found. [xxxvii]

After the fall of New York City, the British held many more prisoners than the Americans. Even if Washington could have rounded up all of the British prisoners held by the New England states, he still would have had trouble persuading Congress to accept the terms offered by the British. When Gen. Burgoyne's army surrendered at Saratoga in late 1777, several thousand British prisoners became available for exchange. With Washington at his winter headquarters at Valley Forge and General Howe in Philadelphia, negotiations over a prisoner exchange began at Germantown in March, 1778.

Besides the obvious fact that Congress wanted the British to admit to the sovereignty of the new United States, Congress also inserted into these negotiations that captured Loyalists (civilians) "be returned to their states for prosecution," and that all outstanding accounts for prisoners held by Americans be settled in gold or silver. [xxxviii] In other words, Congress wanted any former citizens who fought for the British to be prosecuted as criminals; plus,

they wanted to settle accounts over the upkeep of prisoners and be paid in gold by the British where we could only have paid by Continental currency.

Commissary Boudinot, who worked at the negotiations from the American side, wrote that he did not think that even this plan would succeed because Congress feared the mounting cost of redeeming prisoners and "there would be a considerable Balance in favor of Mr. Howe." [xxxix]

Still, negotiations went forward until American commissioners objected that the British commander did not have the authority to negotiate, since he could only conclude agreements on his word and during his tenure of command. [xl] At issue here was the fact that Congress wanted Parliament or the King to acknowledge this transfer of men, which would have given 'de facto' recognition of the sovereignty of the United States.

In December 1781 after the American victory at Yorktown against General Cornwallis, negotiations over a prisoner exchange (cartel) was resurrected between General Washington and Sir Henry Clinton, the new British commander in chief and their representatives at Elizabethtown, New Jersey. Conditions onboard the prison-ships were well known to Washington and his staff. When the British commissary of naval prisoners suggested that American marine prisoners be exchanged for British soldiers, Washington refused to negotiate. One historian writes, "It would have provided the British with considerable reinforcement (of troops) and would cause a constant depletion of prisoners in American hands available for exchange, while providing no benefits to the Continental war effort, since few or none of the naval prisoners in New York were in Continental service." [xli]

On February 9, 1782, an agreement was signed by Abraham Skinner and Joshua Loring, the British commissioner of prisoners, to exchange General Burgoyne who was taken at Saratoga in 1777 and was now free on parole, "for an equivalent of 1,047 officers and soldiers, and other officers for their equivalent in rank on the other side." [xlii]

Congress in the meantime passed a resolution allowing General Washington the power to negotiate a general cartel and to settle all past due accounts for the upkeep of prisoners although he was forbidden to exchange General Cornwallis. Washington argued with the Congress stating that one of the first demands of the British would certainly be the release of Lord Cornwallis and any prohibition against his release would sabotage the whole negotiations. A compromise was reached with the Continental Congress, "...authorizing Washington to exchange Cornwallis by composition provided Henry Laurens was liberated and all accounts for the support of prisoners were speedily accepted." [xliii]

In the end, these negotiations also failed due to British and American intransigence, especially the American insistence on 200,000 pounds to settle

prisoner accounts. Not until the end of the war in 1783, were American prisoners released.

Benjamin Franklin and his aid to Prisoners in Britain

At the beginning of the Revolutionary war, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Arthur Lee were sent to France as a commission representing the American colonies. The purpose of the commission was to raise money for the American war effort, to negotiate for arms and other military equipment and to promote the conclusion of an alliance. [xliv]

Almost from the very start, Benjamin Franklin became involved with the problems of the American prisoners of war held captive in England. The ship that had brought him to France, the *Reprisal*, returned a month later on February 13, 1777 into Port Louis with one hundred British seaman, providing Franklin with his first opportunity to offer a prisoner exchange. [xlv] Franklin approached Lord Stormont, the British ambassador to the French court, with the idea of exchanging his British sailors with an equal number of Americans held in England. The British ignored the proposal, considering the fact that France's neutrality precluded Americans from the use of French prison facilities and guards. Indeed, after a few months of sitting idle, Captain Wickes of the *Reprisal* transferred his prisoners to a local French port official, who ultimately released them. [xlvi]

Franklin next tried the granting of sea paroles to captured British sailors. By the spring of 1778, he held over five hundred of such paroles. With these documents in hand, Franklin applied once more to Lord Stormont who replied, "The King's ambassador receives no applications from rebels unless they come to implore his Majesty's mercy." [xlvii]

The correspondence between Franklin and Stormont found its way into the *London Chronicle*. As a result, members of the British opposition and others formed a committee of relief for American prisoners held in England, raising 3,700 pounds for distribution. [xlviii]

Through a Member of Parliament in opposition, David Hartley, Franklin was able to send an American envoy, John Thornton, to visit the prisons in England. Thornton was to report on the conditions he found, compile an accurate list of the Americans held in confinement and distribute relief among them. [xlix] In England, American prisoners were housed in the Old Mill prison at Plymouth and Forton prison at Portsmouth on either the charge of 'treason' or 'piracy'. The Old Mill prison could accommodate about 800 men, but only 625 were ever there at any one time, and usually only about 300. The Forton population at the time of Thornton's visit was 119; later the number probably reached 400. [l]

Thornton reassured the men of the genuine concern of the American commissioners in Paris. He told them of the attempts to bring about a general exchange and of the committee of relief program. He met their immediate needs for tobacco, tea, and money. He found that clothing was desperately needed. According to Thornton, the daily allowance for each prisoner was twelve ounces of meat, one pint of beer, and one pound of bread. In addition, each received a half-pint of peas every other day, as well as six ounces of cheese and four of butter on Saturday. [li]

The Reverend Thomas Wren, a dissenting minister at Portsmouth and a member of the British relief committee, devoted himself to the Forton prisoners throughout the Revolution. Wren counseled and assisted them, providing news of the outside world, and sheltering those who escaped. So highly did Franklin come to prize Wren's services that he was instrumental in securing for Wren an honorary degree of divinity from the College of New Jersey after the war. [lii]

Wren informed Franklin that the men at Forton would prefer a cash allotment each week to the supplementary meals they had received through Thornton's intervention. Weekly allowances were instituted both at Forton and at Old Mill. The allowance continued with some interruptions for the duration of the war: five or occasionally eight shillings for officers and two shillings for (enlisted) men, at best, and at worst, three pennies per person. [liii]

After the news of the British defeat at Saratoga, the North government sent emissaries and friends such as David Hartley to Paris to see Franklin in a vain effort to forestall a Franco-American alliance. One of their points of agreement was the need for a prisoner exchange program although at the time, Franklin had no British prisoners. But with the entry of France into the conflict and the emergence of American privateers and Naval Captains such as John Paul Jones, Franklin would have many British prisoners to exchange. After months of negotiations between Franklin and Hartley, lasting from mid-September 1778 to mid-March 1779, a cartel ship, full of American prisoners, was exchanged on April 1 at the port of Nantes in France. [liv]

When American prisoners arrived at Nantes, Franklin was confident of a routine continuation of the exchange. He assured Congress that the cartel "is to continue till all are exchanged," and indeed the second shipload of Americans, those from Forton, did arrive in July. But the agent for American affairs in Nantes, had only ninety-two British prisoners to return, and about three hundred Americans still remained in Great Britain. [lv]

It is during this time that Franklin decided to issue commissions to three vessels as American privateers. The Black Prince, the Black Princess and the Fearnot were French owned with American Captains and had Irish and American crews. They were considered extremely fast cutters with sixteen guns and it was hoped that they would bring back to France many British seamen that could be

exchanged as well as the capture of British mercantile goods. Franklin wrote out the instructions himself to Captain Marchant of the Black Prince telling him to bring in as many British prisoners as possible, "because they serve to relieve so many of our Country-men from their Captivity in England." [lvi]

William Bell Clark has written an interesting and readable book on Ben Franklin's Privateers, in which he discloses that the real owners of the Black Prince were Irish smugglers who sold half their interest in the ship to a reputable French firm for rearmament and three months provisions. [lvii] The real owners duplicitously took on an American captain and first officer and fooled the Honorable Ben Franklin into granting them a commission. The Black Princess was a captured English cutter refitted to give the Black Prince a consort. Together, they preyed upon British shipping. In one summer, they bought in twenty-seven prizes, twelve of which they ransomed. [lviii]

Although the privateers contributed many British seamen to Franklin's exchange program, the largest catch of prisoners came from the exploits of John Paul Jones and the Bonhomme Richard. When Jones sailed into the port of Texel in Holland after his victory against the British warship, Serapis, he held over 500 British prisoners. [lix]

Franklin was exuberant. He reported to Jones that his "cool Conduct and preserving Bravery" were the talk of Paris. But he worried about the prisoners held in Holland, "I wish they were safe in France. You will then have completed the glorious work of giving Liberty to all the Americans that have so long languished for it in the British prisons." [lx]

With so many British prisoners to exchange, Franklin hoped to clear the English prisons of Americans but this was not to be. More exchanges did take place but only in lots of one hundred alternately from the Old Mill and Forton.

Another autobiography to come out of the war is entitled, A Relic of the Revolution and was written by Charles Herbert. Herbert served aboard the US Frigate, Alliance, and was captured and spent several years at the Old Mill prison in Plymouth until he was exchanged. His narrative, written in diary form, describes privations, sickness, escape attempts, boredom and gossip:

"December 25. Christmas. ...Today our baker, who supplies us with bread, instead of brown bread, sent us white, and our butcher, instead of beef, gave us mutton, and instead of cabbage we had turnips; and the butcher's wife gave us oatmeal to thicken our broth, and salt to salt it; so that on the whole, we had not so hungry a Christmas as the last. I must confess I have a very agreeable expectation, if my life is spared and the Lord pleases to permit me, to sit down at my father's table next Christmas." [lxi]

British, German and Loyalists' Captives in America

Eugene Fingerhut wrote a biography of a Loyalist prisoner of war, Cadwallader Colden II. In a unique view of the 'revolutionary' era, Fingerhut accurately portrays Colden as a victim and survivor of the American style of justice. Cadwallader Colden II was the son of a former Governor of New York State. His sister, Elizabeth, married into the well-known loyalist family, DeLancey. He was a deeply committed Anglican in an area (Ulster County, New York) that was mostly Presbyterian. He inherited an estate called Coldenham along with six slaves. When the troubles broke out, his neighbors (some that still owed him money) contrived to have him thrown in jail.

For his part, Cadwallader Colden refused to renounce his oath to the king but he desired to stay neutral and remain on his estate. He was at various times jailed, set free on parole, sentenced to a prison ship and finally banished to British occupied New York City where he could do no harm. Leading revolutionaries such as John Jay, Gouverneur Morris and George Clinton played roles in Colden's saga. [Ixii]

From an aristocratic background, Colden had certain amenities provided to him that other poorer prisoners had to do without. Eugene Fingerhut writes, "By his standards he suffered, but by comparison to the fates of American prisoners on the British Jersey prison ship in New York harbor, or loyalists deep in the Simmsbury mine prison of Connecticut, his travail was indeed light." [Ixiii]

Laura L. Becker of Clemson University wrote a journal article focusing on a single town, Reading, Pennsylvania, and the role of her citizens in housing British and Hessian prisoners of war. As early as February 1776, Reading was already receiving prisoners of war and her leading citizens petitioned the Pennsylvania Assembly to erect barracks "capable of containing four or five hundred men." ...They were "much surprised at so large a party being ordered here without any previous notice." [Ixiv]

Reading was a small, backwater market town of roughly 300 heads of families of mostly German decent. For the first few years of the war, a substantial proportion of the prisoners were officers but "in October of 1781, no fewer than 1050 prisoners arrived, most of whom were privates." [Ixv]

When they arrived, the prisoners were disarmed and subject to an eight P.M. curfew. Laura Becker writes, "This curfew was not strictly enforced because at least some of the officers participated in the town's social activities. One British officer who 'was under the patronage of Doctor Potts...had been introduced to our dancing parties and being always afterwards invited, he never failed to attend.' Although POW's were not allowed to leave Reading without permission, grants of parole were readily available, and a substantial number of the officers held in Reading were permitted to go to Philadelphia, New York, or elsewhere. Still others were exchanged." [Ixvi]

The mostly German citizens of Reading were perhaps harsher in their treatment of their own countrymen than English, Scottish or Canadian prisoners. One German officer wrote that the German-Americans of Reading "could hardly hide their anger and hostile thoughts." [Ixvii] Many former Hessian captives did stay in the county after the war. They were referred to as "Brunswickers and Hanauers" in local church records. The expression "Du bist ein Hesse" was an insult in Reading well into the nineteenth century. [Ixviii]

Conclusion

Colonial prisoners of war started with a hand-full collected by the British after the Battle of Bunker Hill. A year later, the humiliating defeat and surrender of Fort Washington in New York City greatly increased the number of 'rebel' prisoners that the British were forced to warehouse and feed. The American failure of the Canadian campaign, the occupation of Philadelphia and the loss of several southern cities, overburdened the feeble English effort to properly house and feed the numbers of colonial prisoners that were forced upon them.

When I first started my research into prisoners of war, I was shocked to learn from one book, *The Winter Soldiers* that over two-thirds of the prisoners taken in the New York campaign perished. I thought that they should not have surrendered Fort Washington, that they should have fought to the last man and given General Howe's British and Hessian soldiers a good fight. Now, through more careful checking of sources, I believe that approximately two thousand militia prisoners were released because the British did not have the facilities to house them and it stands to reason that Howe would send home the far away militia units that might not cause him much harm in the future. Howe recorded that he possessed 4,230 prisoners right after the New York campaign but he did not record how many he released before winter set in. The Continental soldiers and the so-called troublemakers who remained suffered terribly. Lack of warmth, clothing, and crowded, unsanitary conditions with often-brutal jailers did not make a pleasant experience for most enlisted men.

Prison ships were another place where conditions were intolerable. The stink and the filth and the bugs must have been a forerunner to German concentration camps. But again, certain patriotic historians try to estimate the amount of deaths over a multi-year period and come out with figures like eleven thousand. These numbers do not take into account the number of sailors who defected to save their lives nor the number of prisoners shipped to England after 1781. Probably, only the young age of Christopher Hawkins if he truly was held captive, saved his life from perishing on the infamous *Jersey*.

Were the leaders of both sides at fault for considering political issues over humanitarian concerns? Washington refused to accept peace overtures and correspondence about prisoners because they were not addressed properly. He also refused to exchange British regulars for American sailors taken off

privateers. Because certain Congressmen wanted to see their Loyalist neighbors punished, they inserted improper demands into the cartel negotiations. Congress did not act with a democratic spirit when they refused soldiers the chance to come home over financial and sovereignty issues. The British for their part were no less guilty; many lesser officers thought that General Howe was just going through the motions of trying return prisoners of war. The fact that during the first negotiations, Washington's main concern was trying to keep his army together at Valley Forge but the failure on the second attempt after 1781 was pure stupidity and seems downright insensible.

Benjamin Franklin is to be commended for his efforts on behalf of prisoners in England. Although he blundered somewhat by commissioning Irish smugglers his heart was in the right place. Charles Herbert and the other prisoners held in England must be grateful to the ordinary Englishmen such as the minister, Thomas Wren, or the butcher and the butcher's wife who relieved their suffering by some small degree.

As for the British, German and Loyalist prisoners in American hands my research only turned up the one book and one article mentioned. I'm sure there is much more material out there for later research. My findings perhaps may seem oversimplified. I'm sure there are horror stories to be told from the British side. I do find it believable that these men were sent to frontier towns off the beaten track and if they escaped, which many did, they would have a difficult time finding their lines again.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[i] Bowman, Larry G. Captive Americans Athens, Ohio: University of Ohio Press, 1976. p3-4

[ii] Lindsey, William R. Treatment of American Prisoners of War During the Revolution Emporia, Kansas: Kansas State Teachers College, 1969.

[iii] Lindsey. p 7 . General Gage letter to Geo. Washington "...destined to the cord..."

[iv] Lindsey. p 8. 20 of 31 died from Bunker Hill

[v] Lindsey. p 9. Sir Joseph Yorke - recruiting campaign in Hesse

[vi] Metzger, Charles H. The Prisoner in the American Revolution Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1971. pIX.

[vii] Ketchum, Richard R. The Winter Soldiers New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc. 1973. p156.

- [viii] Lindsey p10 "...provost personnel acted with brutal severity."
- [ix] Lindsey p10. "...naked bodies exposed... and afterwards consumed by swine..."
- [x] Lindsey p11. "...as if to so many hogs, a quantity of old biscuit... crawling with maggots..."
- [xi] Metzger p71. "...one-half pound of biscuit, one half pound of pork, one-half pint of peas..."
- [xii] Lindsey p11. "...the men began to die like rotten sheep..."
- [xiii] Bowman p12. ...2000 militiamen released...
- [xiv] Lindsey p11. Lieutenant Oliver Babcock, brought smallpox home with him...
- [xv] Lindsey p13. "...you are too well to be exchanged."
- [xvi] Bowman p11. "...the three-story, Provost, located in the Old Jail..."
- [xvii] Ford, Corey. A Peculiar Service Little, Brown & Company Boston MA 1965. p34 ...dragged Cunningham across cobblestones...
- [xviii] Ford p34 "...wreck vengeance on the Americans."
- [xix] Ford, Corey. p36-38 ...Nathan Hale quote...
- [xx] Ketchum p158. "...not a pane of glass... and nothing to keep out the cold but the Iron Gate."
- [xxi] Bowman p15. "...their word as gentlemen, not to escape or engage in sabotage or espionage."
- [xxii] Martin, Joseph Plumb. Adventures of a Revolutionary Soldier Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1962. p245. 'Huzzah for General Washington. Tomorrow he comes.'...
- [xxiii] Lindsey p15. "...set fire to their ship in October 1777, choosing death in the flames..."
- [xxiv] Lindsey p18. ..."Rebels, turn out your dead".
- [xxv] Lindsey p19. "...deaths averaged five a day from 1780 to 1783."

[xxvi] Ranlet, Philip. British Recruitment of Americans During the American Revolution Military Affairs January, 1984. P27 "...to keep the Ships Mann'd."

[xxvii] Ranlet p27 "former patriots seize control of British vessels..."

[xxviii] Hawkins, Christopher. The Adventures of Christopher Hawkins Arno Press 1968. p33. ...British Frigate Maidstone...

[xxix] Hawkins. P67 "...pilfering of food was another evil which prevailed..."

[xxx] Bowman p 9. "...prisoners were kept in Quebec and Halifax..."

[xxxi] Bowman p10. "...kept outside Charleston at Haddrell's Point."

[xxxii] Bowman p10. "...sixteen Americans were sent from Quebec to Senegal in Africa..."

[xxxiii] Bowman p11. "...400 American captives were transferred from South Carolina to England."

[xxxiv] Bowman p12. ...4230 prisoners held...

[xxxv] Lindsey p10. "...General Howe tried to exchange 43 officers and 848 enlisted men..."

[xxxvi] Knight, Betsy. Prisoner Exchange and Parole in the American Revolution William & Mary Quarterly Nov. 1992 201-222 ...cartel became impossible in the north...

[xxxvii] Knight p202 In the south ...three important cartels released many men...

[xxxviii] Knight p203 Loyalists "...be returned to their states for prosecution,"...

[xxxix] Knight p205 "... a considerable Ballance in favor of Mr. Howe."

[xl] Knight p206 ...objected to the British commander's authority...

[xli] Casino, Joseph. Elizabethtown 1782: The Prisoner of War Negotiations and the Pawns of War New Jersey History p6 "...no benefits to the Continental war effort..."

[xlii] Casino p5 Exchange of Gen. Burgoyne for 1,047 officers and soldiers...

[xliii] Casino p7 "...exchange Cornwallis provided Henry Laurens was liberated..."

[xliv] Prelinger, Catherine M. Benjamin Franklin and the American Prisoners of War in England William and Mary Quarterly Nov. 1988. p261. Purpose of the commission...

[xlv] Prelinger p262 ...the Reprisal returns with 100 British seaman...

[xlvi] Prelinger p263 ...the release of Capt. Wickes prisoners...

[xlvii] Prelinger p263 "...no applications from rebels..."

[xlviii] Prelinger p264 ...committee raises 3,700 pounds...

[xlix] Franklin, Benjamin. Letter of Franklin to Hartley Oct. 14, 1777 Writings of Franklin VII, p75. "...John Thornton, to visit the prisons in England..."

[l] Prelinger p267 "Old Mill could accommodate 800 men..."

[li] Prelinger p268 "...12 ounces of meat, one pint of beer..."

[lii] Prelinger p268 "...honorary degree of divinity (for Wren)"

[liii] Prelinger p270. "...three pennies per person."

[liv] Prelinger p276 "...April 1-(prisoner exchange) at Nantes..."

[lv] Prelinger p276 "...only 92 British prisoners to exchange."

[lvi] Clark, William Bell. Ben Franklin's Privateers Louisiana State Univ. Press 1956 p22 "...relieve so many of our Country-men..."

[lvii] Clark, p24 ...real owners were Irish smugglers.

[lviii] Clark, p71 ...27 prizes, 12 of which she ransomed...

[lix] Clark p116 ...over 500 prisoners.

[lx] Prelinger p278 Franklin's quote- "...prisoners safe in France."

[lxi] Herbert, Charles. A Relic of the Revolution Charles H. Pierce: Publisher 1847 p83 ...Christmas dinner.

[lxii] Fingerhut p52. "...John Jay, Gouverneur Morris and George Clinton played roles..."

[lxiii] Fingerhut p87 "...loyalists deep in the Simmsbury mine..."

[Ixiv] Becker, Laura L. Prisoners of War in the Amer. Revolution: A Community Perspective Military Affairs December, 1982. p169. "...her leading citizens petitioned the Pennsylvania Assembly to erect barracks..."

[Ixv] Becker p169 "1050 Convention prisoners..."---Convention prisoners should be Burgoyne's Army but Becker has them arriving late in 1781, which is after Cornwallis and Yorktown?

[Ixvi] Becker p170 "...introduced to our dancing parties"

[Ixvii] Becker p171 "...hardly hide their anger..."

[Ixviii] Becker p172 "Du bist ein Hesse..."