

STORIES of New Jersey

families. British victories brought avenging Tories plundering through the countryside, and with American recovery of the territory, revolutionary Whigs rose up to rob, destroy and murder in turn. Spies were everywhere.

This was the war-torn New Jersey with which George Washington had to contend when he settled down for the winter at Morristown in January 1777. Congress, fleeing from Philadelphia to Baltimore in December, fearful of disaster in New Jersey, had finally entrusted the commander in chief with dictatorial powers for six months. Accepting the new responsibilities from a weak central government that was extremely jealous of its few powers, Washington wrote:

Instead of thinking myself freed from all civil obligations, by this mark of their confidence, I shall constantly bear in mind that as the sword was the last resort for the preservation of our liberties so it ought to be the first thing laid aside when those liberties are firmly established.

Almost immediately, and in the face of opposition from patriots and Tories alike, Washington commanded all who had had any connection with the enemy to swear allegiance to the United States within 30 days or "withdraw themselves and their families within the enemy's lines." Those refusing to obey the order would be "treated as common enemies of these United States."

More serious than the Tory situation was the old struggle to maintain an army that would not break at the moment of crisis. From headquarters in the old Freeman Tavern in Morristown Washington directed construction of the fortification which later became known as Fort Mifflin. The fort, not of any military value, was important in keeping the idle troops occupied. The people were against long-term enlistments, and the states, jealous of their independent status, encouraged desertions by paying better wages for service in the local militia than the moneyless congress could afford for the country's army. Too, it was the end of the enlistment period for many of the men, and they hastened home to their families and the neglected soil which soon would have to be plowed for spring planting. Washington was helpless to stop this exodus. He could only remark ironically: "We shall be obliged to detach one half the army to bring back the other."

British bribery, poor living conditions and lack of provisions also contributed to increase desertions. At Princeton on February 9, the entire artillery force attached to the outpost garrison there took French leave, because they had been denied an extra ration of rum. Along the Delaware sentries in charge of the ferries charged exorbitant fares to make some spending money. The private soldier stole and plundered where he could, and the officers were often no better than the men under them. They embezzled funds intended for the army; went off on a good time when sent to round up deserters; and resigned or deserted when they had accumulated a few dollars. Corruption penetrated practically every single agency of the Continental Army.

Washington, who had long been aware that many officers were "not fit to be shoeblacks," now angrily wrote to Governor Livingston concerning the New Jersey militia: "Their officers are generally of the lowest class of people; and instead of setting a good example to their men, are leading them into every kind of mischief, one species of which is plundering the inhabitants, under the pretense of their being Tories." An aristocratic Virginian, Washington never had patience with the lower classes. This attitude was reflected in his statement: "Take none but gentlemen" to be officers.

Even his own staff officers were a headache. From



Gov. Livingston