

John Adams, Knox, and Washington

BY BERNHARD KNOLLENBERG

ON September 24, 1798, in the heat of a bitter controversy later described, President John Adams drafted a reply to his Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Wolcott, declaring:

General Knox is no favorite of mine, any more than General Hamilton. I have no kind of attachment to him or affection for him more than for Hamilton: He never was my intimate nor my friend.¹

But luckily for my belief in Adams' superior honesty, the contemplated letter was not sent.²

I have found nothing as to Adams' pre-war acquaintance with Knox, who was fifteen years his junior, beyond the statement in Adams' unreliable autobiography that "Colonel Knox³ had been a youth who attracted my notice by his pleasing manners when I was a man in [law] business in Boston." The first contemporary mention is in a letter of July 23, 1775, from Adams to James Warren, president of the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, recommending Knox for a commission. He again put in a good word to Warren for Knox on October 21.⁴

Correspondence between Adams and Knox was opened by the following letter from Knox:⁵

¹ Charles Francis Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, Boston, 1850-56, vol. 8, p. 603 n. hereafter cited as Adams, *Works*.

² James McHenry wrote Washington on October 26, 1798: "The President has neither acknowledged nor answered Mr. Wolcotts letter. I suppose he does not intend any direct notice of it." John Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 36, p. 503 n. 50, hereafter cited as Washington, *Writings*.

³ While clerk and later owner of a book shop in Boston. Adams, *Works*, vol. 3, p. 86.

⁴ Worthington Chauncey Ford, *Warren-Adams Letters (Coll. Mass. Hist. Soc. vol. 72-3)*, vol. 1, pp. 87, 157.

⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all letters quoted are from the originals, drafts or copies, in the Massachusetts Historical Society.

Cambridge October 26th 1775

SIR

Encouraged by your kindly mentioning my name in your letters to several gentlemen this way. I now take the liberty of writing you.

A number of generals desired me to act as engineer and said that when the delegates from the Continental Congress came here the matter should be settled—myself as chief engineer with the rank and pay of Col. and a Lt. Col. Putnam as second also with the rank of Col.—But the Gentlemen (Two of them. Dr. Franklin was of another opinion.) delegates did not see proper to engage for any other rank than that of Lt. Col. and I believe have recommended us in that order to your Congress.

I have the most sacred regard for the liberty of my country and am fully determined to act as far as in my power in opposition to the present tyranny attempted to be imposed upon it—but as an honor is comparative I humbly hope that I have as good pretensions to the rank of Col as many now in the service, the declining to confer which by the delegates not a little surprised me—If your respectable body should not incline to give the rank and pay of Col. I must beg to decline it. But I will do every service in power as a Volunteer It is said and universally believed that the officers and soldiers of the train of artillery will refuse to serve under their present Commander [Richard Gridley] the reasons of which you no doubt have heard—If it should be so and a new Col. appointed I should be glad to succeed to that post where I flatter myself I should be of some little service to the cause—the other field officers of the regiment wish it and I have great reasons to believe the Generals too—this would be much more agreeable to me than the first and would not hinder me from being useful in that department—It ever appears to me to detract from the merit of a person when he takes the liberty to recommend himself—nothing but the flattering idea of being in a small measure assisting to free my country would induce me to it.

Considering that Knox was twenty-five years old only a few months before, and had been but a lieutenant in the Boston Grenadier Corps, his request seems a bit cheeky, but Adams' encouraging response of November 11 indicates that he had not aimed too high:

Philadelphia Novr. 11, 1775

DEAR SIR

I had the Pleasure of a Letter from you a few days ago and was rejoiced to learn that you have at last determined to take a more important share than you have done hitherto in the Conduct of our military Matters. I have been impressed with an opinion of your Knowledge and Abilities in the military War for several years, and of late have endeavoured, both at Camp, at Watertown and at Philadelphia, by mentioning your Name and Character, to make you more known, and consequently in a better Way for Promotion.

It was a sincere opinion of your Merit and Qualifications, which prompted me to act this Part and therefore I am very happy to be able to inform you, that I believe you will very soon be provided for according to your Wishes, at least you may depend upon this that nothing in my Power shall be wanting to effect it.

It is of vast Importance, my dear sir, that I should be minutely informed of every thing which passes at the Camp, while I hold a Place in the Great Council of America: and therefore I must beg the Favour of you to write me as often as you can by safe Conveyances. I want to know the Name, Rank and Character of every Officer in the Army. I mean every honest and able one. But more especially of every Officer, who is best acquainted with the Theory and Practice of Fortification and Gunnery. What is comprehended with the Term Engineer? and whether it includes skill both in Fortification and Gunnery—and what skillful Engineers you have in the Army and whether any of them and who have seen service and when and where. . . .

I want to know if there is a compleat set of Books upon the military Art in all its Branches in the Library of Harvard Colledge, and what Books are the best upon those Subjects.

On November 2, 1775, Washington wrote favorably to Governor Jonathan Trumbull of "Mr. Knox⁶ a Gentleman of Worcester,"⁷ and on November 8, recommended Knox to Congress for the artillery command, impliedly with the rank of colonel.⁸ Nine days later Knox was chosen by the

⁶ Washington and Knox met July 12. Knox to his wife, Lucy Flucker Knox, July 13, 1775; Allen French, *The First Year of the American Revolution*, Boston, 1934, pp. 299-300.

⁷ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 4, p. 61. Knox was presumably described as "of Worcester" because Mrs. Knox was living there temporarily. Henry Knox in *D.A.B.*

⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 4, p. 74.

Continental Congress to succeed Colonel Richard Gridly as "Colonel of the regiment of Artillery."⁹

Knox's long delay in answering Adams' letter of early November was explained in the following reply from New York on May 16, 1776:

I did myself the honor to address you some time ago, soon after which I [set] out upon a Journey to New York, Ticonderoga. While I was upon my Journey your kind letter Came to Cambridge, but by some mischance i[t] was but lately I had the pleasure to receive it. I blush at what you must think of my negligence—I am much oblig'd for the favorable opinion you are pleas'd to conceive of me, and wish my conduct may be such as may Merit it—The information you wish to receive from this army concerning the army I will with pleasure communicate.

The officers of the army in General is exceedingly diffident in Books upon the military art which does not arise from their disinclination to read but the impossibility of procuring the Books in America, something has been done in Philadelphia to remedy this and I hope they will not stop there. Marshall Saxe is a writer whose great experience renders his book infinitely valuable. It is not this or that particular Situation for which he gives particular pedantic Rules, but in General under such and such situations carries the principles of War to their surest source, the human heart—the hopes & fears of which have been the grand cause of all [indecipherable] of Victory and the misfortune of a defeat—His reflections upon the propagation of the human Species are abominable & put to death all the fine generous feelings for which I wish America to be ever distinguish'd. I do not know of any Book that would be of more service to our Young army and I have This—There are others that are more scientific which those who intend to be a Warlike people had not ought to be without. Monsr. Clairac, Muller, & Pleydell held Engineering the most useful Kind of Fortification. Vauban, Coehorn, Blondel, Count Pagan, Belidor & Muller, all foreigners but Muller are upon regular fortified places. Muller appears to have collected the Essence of the others and would be of great service to have it printed as likewise his Treatise on Artillery, Holliday on Gunnery is an Excellent treatise—

⁹ Worthington C. Ford, *Journals of the Continental Congress*, vol. 3, p. 359, hereafter cited as *Journals*.

The consequences of the Cause in which we are engag'd are of such infinite moment to ourselves & posterity; no cost or trouble can be too gr[eat] to bring them to a happy Conclusion.

Such Opportunities as the present do no[t] turn up often in the course of human events—the happiness or misery of a great proportion of the human race is at stake. And if we make the wrong choice, ourselves & our posterity must be wretched—wrong Choice! there can be but one choice consistent with the character of a people possessing the least Spark of Reason—& that is to separate from those people who are the source of our present contest. An Event which I devoutly pray God may soon take place.

In the homeward course of the journey to which Knox refers he brought cannon from Ticonderoga to Dorchester over a road that passed within a few rods of where we are here gathered.¹⁰

Adams replied on June 2 in a friendly letter, long in print, notable for its early wish for “establishing academies for the education of young men in every branch of the military art.”¹¹ Knox, by this time overwhelmed with work in fortifying New York City against imminent British attack, did not write again until July 29:

Mr. Paine has done me the honor to write to me on the subject of casting cannon, in consequence of which Mr. [John] Byers a Cannon founder from this place has proceeded to Philadelphia.—I take the liberty to beg he may be set to work immediately and if upon a large scale the advantages must be proportionate. As every hint to a Gentleman—acting in your important station may be attended with good consequences. I also take the liberty of mentioning the Importance of the working the Copper mine in the Jersies; the members of Congress from that Province can without doubt give you some good information respecting it—I am inform'd if the works were repair'd 100 tons a year might be gotten from it—if so it is of infinite consequence that it should be look'd into. I hope the importance of the affair will be a sufficient excuse for my troubling you with it—wishing you every blessing in Life I am with the utmost Respect.

¹⁰ The journey is described by Alexander Flick in the *Quarterly Journal of the New York Historical Society* for April, 1928, vol. 9, pp. 119 ff.

¹¹ Adams, *Works*, vol. 9, p. 384.

The "important Station" presumably refers to Adams election as a member of the Board of War and Ordinance established by Congress on June 13, 1776.¹²

Adams replied with his usual promptness:

Philadelphia August 13, 1776

DEAR SIR:

Yours of July 29, I duly received—But had not the Pleasure of seeing Mr. [John] Byers, the Cannon Founder.—Mr. Paine who is upon the Cannon Committee, I suppose has attended to him. He informs me that the Committee of which he is one are taking measures to procure Copper as well as Sulphur to be made in New Jersey.

I have obtained from a Gentleman here, very particular Directions concerning Fire Ships and Rafts, and Receipts for all the Compositions. They are long, and will be some trouble to transcribe: But if this Business lies within your Department, and you have any Curiosity to see it, I will send it you.

I am very much chagrined that the Massachusetts has not its Proportion of General Officers. I wish I was better acquainted with the Persons and Characters of the Colonells from that State. It will never do, for the Massachusetts to furnish so many Men, and have so few Generals while so many other States furnish so few Men and have so many Generals.

The "Mr. Paine" referred to was of course, Robert Treat Paine, Adams' fellow delegate in Congress from Massachusetts.

Knox responded some weeks later:

New York 21 Aug 1776

DEAR SIR:

I received your favor by the post for which please to accept my thanks—I hope the Copper you mention will be purchased as speedily as Possible, as it appears to be to be matter of the utmost consequence. I have purchas'd about two tons but this is nothing equal to what I wish was collected. We ought at least to have enough to cast an hundred Mortars, Howitzers & Field-pieces. A numerous and well serv'd field Artillery in action very often confers victory—As Copper can be purchas'd at a little advanc'd price we may be possess'd of a fine field train,

¹² *Journals*, vol. 5, p. 438.

but if for fear of trouble or expence we omit getting them and any bad consequences happen, our Enemies will laugh at us, and posterity curse us. Let us for a moment suppose a misfortune happens to the field artillery we have in this army; where shall we get immediately supplied?—Not in America—With you I very much lament the want of General Officers for the state of Massachusetts Bay. In confidence I am sorry to observe that few men of Genius, Spirit and solid judgment are high up in the list of Colonels from that state. The requisitions necessary for a General Officer are so many that I tremble to think of some certain situations where true greatness of soul alone could extricate an army out of its difficulties. The remedy is local. We have a number of our young men of sense and abilities in the army, but not the greatest proportion there ought to be drawn into it. It is from men of solid abilities united with Spirit that a country is to expect great actions. A man being a good marksman cannot in the nature of things alone be a sufficient recommendation to make him either a Colonel or a General Officer. There is Col Glover of the 14 Reg from Marblehead who appears to be the most suitable man I know in our list of Colonels for promotion. He is brave and is said to be a man of reflection.

Pray, my dear Sir, when is the army to be re-enlisted? How much bounty is intended to be given? It is said you intend to attempt raising an army for three years with ten dollars bounty. In my opinion you could *create* an army with equal ease. When the soldiers of this army who are the yeomanry and the yeomanry's sons first engag'd in the service, their country was the immediate seat of war—and had there have been no pay they would have been obliged by the laws of self preservation to have continued for some time embodied. The first emotions subsided and the people thought it reasonable that those who did not fight should pay—As the pay of the soldiers was high in their opinions they rais'd every necessary the soldier wanted to enable them to pay their proportions—which spirit has diffus'd itself to every place to which the army has remov'd so that in fact that which appear'd at first to be great pay will not now afford them decent clothing—nothing to remit to their families except they go as ragged as beggars—From the observations and inquiries I have been able to make it appears to me that nothing short of 25 or 30 dollars bounty and 100 to 150 acres of land at the expiration of their service will produce an army from the New England Colonies—Any attempt at a less expence will be fruitless—The pay of the officers must likewise be raised or you will find very few

of the present officers to continue longer in the service—They are not vastly riveted to the honor of starving their families for the sake of being in the army. I wish you to consult Marshal Saxe on the matter of paying the troops—I am not speaking for myself but I am speaking in the behalf of a great number of worthy men who wish to do the country every service in their power at a less price than the ruin of themselves and families—I write thus freely to you as I am certain you wish to be inform'd of *naked facts*.

The enemy appear to hesitate where to attack us—their protraction is of service to us as we are daily receiving large reinforcements—If they make their push on Long Island I think we shall beat them—If they make their attack on the Island of New York they will stake an empire on the cast of a die on the success of one action—They will act unlike good Generals for if they are beaten they must be ruined past redemption—For these reasons I think their first attempts will be on Long Island—They have got sick of the North River—In a day or two we shall have the East River stopp'd sufficiently. I am, Dear Sir with the greatest Respect

Adams replied:

Philadelphia August 25.1776

DEAR SIR Your Favour of the 21. is before me. I agree that we ought to have an hundred more of Mortars, Howitzers and Field Pieces, And if I knew where to procure the Brass, I should be glad to promote the Manufacture of that Number.—You say that Copper can be purchased at a little advanced price. I wish I knew, where, and at what Price. We have contracted with a Gentleman in Maryland, for a large Quantity of Iron Cannon.

Able officers, are the Soul of an Army.—Gentlemen of Sense, and Knowledge, as well as valour must be advanced.—I wish you would give me in Confidence a List of the best officers from the Massachusetts, with their Characters—this may be Delicate, but it will be safe.—pray write me the Characters of Coll Shepherd, Coll Hinshaw and Major Brooks.—Does Austin merit Promotion, or not?—I am much distressed for want of a List of all the Massachusetts officers, in their Ranks, as they now stand.—I have Sought it, a long time but never could obtain it.—Will you favour me with one. I am determin'd to find out the Characters of our officers, by some means or other. if a Second Battalion of Artillery. is formed, who are the officers, of it? Would not

Austin make a good Lt Coll of Artillery? Pray give me, your sentiments promptly, and candidly. We have been delicate too long. Our country, is too much interested, in this Subject.—Men of Genius and Spirit, must be promoted, wherever they are. If you have no Lt Coll, who shall We put in that Place? I wish Austin was in the Artillery, because I know him to have a Capacity equal to any thing, and I conjecture he would turn his Thoughts to those Sciences, which an officer of Artillery ought to be Master of.—

I am a constant Advocate for a regular Army, and the most masterly Discipline, because, I know, that without those we cannot reasonably hope to be a powerfull, a prosperous, or a free People, and therefore, I have been constantly labouring to obtain an handsome Encouragement for inlisting a permanent Body of Troops. But have not as yet prevailed, and indeed, I despair of ever Succeeding, unless the General, and the Officers from the Southward, Should convince Gentlemen here; or unless two or three horrid Defeats, Should bring a more melancholly Conviction, which I expect and believe will one day, or other be the Case.

I particularly prize this letter because it supports the view expressed in my *Washington and the Revolution* that New England Congressmen as a group did not oppose long-term enlistments and adequate bounties to secure them.¹³

Within a few weeks following the date of this letter, the Americans were ingloriously driven from Long Island and New York City. In the bitterness of humiliating defeats, Knox answered Adams's letter of the month before:

Heights of Harlem Sepr 25 1776

DEAR SIR

Thro' the hurry and confusion of one retreat after another I have omitted to answer your last favor. You are pleas'd to desire a list of the officers from Massachusetts Bay noting such as bid fair to rise superior to the commonality. I have endeavor'd to procure the whole list but in vain. The General sometime since order'd a list to be given in of the officers of every Regiment in order to go to the War Office at Philadelphia. This must be more correct than any other that can be procur'd. The Character of Major Brooks is that of a sensible, brave, good officer,

¹³ *Washington and the Revolution. A Reappraisal Gates, Conway and the Continental Congress*, New York, 1941, pp. 118-19, 126-7.

a man of reading and who will if God spares his Life be an ornament to his Count[r]y—Lt Colo Shepard is brave and clever but [h]is views of things is not so extensive or his education equal to the other.—Major Austin's Genius is equal to any science, but I am not so certain that his application is—if Austin could by any ways or means have infus'd into him certain principles of inflexible honor and sentiment, and a proportion of Judgement with his Genius, I think he would be one of the first Characters coming on the stage—This in my opinion would be essential of a Lt Colo Artillery. “If another Battalion of Artillery shall be rais'd who are to be the field officers?” This sir may be difficult to answer without the Congress or the General know persons suitable for those offices—I confess I do not, at least not in the army and there are so few inducements, excepting a Love to their Count[r]y which seems to go a precious little way that I know not how we shall get them.—There is but one Lt Colo to the present Battalion and but one Major altho the Congress allow two of each.—The Lt Colo is David Mason, who is but so-so, the Major is an exceeding fine Spirited fellow, [John] Crane, and were his education equal to his station he must cut an excellent figure—He was wounded some time ago in the foot so that is disabl'd for the Campaign—Mason has been sick for some time,—I am alone and have been so for a long time. The petty business of paying the regiment which till Now has been I think *impos'd* upon me together with the arrangement & disposal of all the Cannon & stores and discipline of the regiment has so fully employ'd me that I have scarcely had time to take the common refreshing of nature—This I mean not by way of complaint for I rejoice exceedingly that I have been in the least assisting my injur'd and insulted Count[r]y—

I am sorry to observe the same popular plan for raising a new army Still continuing—which will most assuredly give the continent the same unmeaning [noun crossed out] for officers with which she has been curs'd—If the Congress do not administer a radical cure they will in the end repent it. Military Accademies must be Instituted at any expence, We are fighting against a people well acquainted with the Theory and practice of War—brave by discipline and habit furnish'd with every implement of war necessary for any enterprize—what do we oppose to these?—We oppose a ———. Tho they are brave and furnish'd with all these matters yet from some causes They discover very little of the great or vast in their designs or executions. Otherways this army would have been annihilated. Had they at their head our

amiable and worthy General I think poor America would have ere now have felt the [word obliterated by the seal] severely—We had one chance and only one for the defence of New York and that they completely put into our hands, & which some of our G—— most vilely miss'd improving. The ignoran[ce] of the Grounds and the not occupying the passes on that Island sufficiently has been the sole and only cause of our subsequent Retreats and —— had General Greene been fit for duty I flatter myself matters would have worn a very different appearance at present—These and other matters may form some very pertinent inquiries in some future day—The enemy have now suffer'd us quietly to fortify heights which they cannot storm or take—when the Grounds on the other side Kings Bridge and about Morisania shall be sufficiently fortified I think they will not be able to disposess us of the places where we now are—this will be a negative advantage and I hope some lapse in their Conduct will give some very capital and positive advantages—I am asham'd of this Letter it being written amid the Hurry interruption and Confusion of a tent.

Major Jonathan Williams Austin, whose supposed want of “a proportion of Judgment with his Genius” was referred to by Knox, soon vindicated the latter's appraisal by getting drunk, burning houses at White Plains, and bringing on himself a court-martial and dishonorable discharge from the service.¹⁴

Before learning of Austin's misbehavior, Adams replied:

Philadelphia, September 29, 1776

DEAR SIR,

This evening I had the Pleasure of yours of the 25th. I have only to ask you to have Austin made your Lt. Coll! Let me know sincerely, for I will never propose it [in Congress] without your approbation.

The rest of the letter is in print.¹⁵ It includes the well-known passage “Pray tell me, Colonel Knox, does every man to the southward of Hudson's River behave like a hero, and every man to the northward of it like a poltroon. . . . I must say your amiable General gives too much occasion for

¹⁴ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 6, pp. 259, 275; vol. 7, p. 335.

¹⁵ Adams, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 256-7.

these reports by his letters, in which he often mentions things to the disadvantage of some part of New England, but seldom any thing of the kind about any other part of the continent."

The rebuke to "your amiable General," presumably intended for Washington's eye, was only too well deserved. Washington, paralleling his indiscretions of the French and Indian Wars, was spreading defamatory reports in private letters which were anything but wholesome in effect. That Knox had the temerity to show the letter to Washington may be doubted. Colonel Joseph Reed of Pennsylvania is apparently entitled to the credit of delivering the warning that put a stop to Washington's damaging indiscretions.¹⁶

The correspondence seems to have lapsed until the following April when Knox, promoted to brigadier general in December, 1776, wrote Adams:

Morris Town 12th April 1777

DEAR SIR

This will be deliver'd to you by Le Chevalier de Ma[u]duit Duplessis, a Gentleman well recommend by Doctor Franklin and other Gentlemen in France—I wish he may be employ'd by Congress and sent to Camp as I think he may be of service to us.¹⁷

Knox wrote again the next month:

Head Quarters, Morris-Town 3d May 1777

DEAR SIR

It is a long time since I have had the pleasure of a Line from you—I was in hopes to have seen you when I went to Boston but you had previously set out for Congress and I miss'd you on the road—since my return from thence the duties of my department have taken up the whole of my time, which together with the fear of trespassing on your more important engagements has prevented my writing to you.

¹⁶ *Washington and the Revolution A Reappraisal*, pp. 112-4.

¹⁷ DuPlessis was appointed captain on April 15, 1777, and resigned with the rank of brevet lieutenant-colonel, November 5, 1778. *Washington, Writings*, vol. 7, p. 399, n. 4.

We are now my dear sir engag'd in a War pregnant with the happiness or misery of America, and to ensure the former much will depend upon the mode of carrying it on—experience is a good master and I hope we have not purchas'd it at too dear a rate.—many things may be mended and as you are one of the Board of War I may with propriety address myself to you on the subject of the Ordnance Department. It will be necessary to have it regulated with the utmost precision the success of the great movements of the Army depend upon it.

Arsenals, Magazines, Founderies, and Laboratories have been order'd by Congress to be erected at Springfield and Carlile. those at the former were left to the superintendence of the Council of Massachusetts Bay—a previous resolution of Congress had determin'd the Works should be at Brookfield, but Springfield being for many reasons greatly preferable, I took the Liberty of giving my opinion to His Excellency General Washington and the Congress who have determin'd upon Springfield, whether the Council of Massachusetts have received this last resolution of Congress I cannot say but am inclin'd to believe they have not. I wish sir you would be pleas'd to inquire into the matter and favor me with a line on the subject.—

—The season is advancing fast the Foundery for Cannon ought to have been finish'd ere this but for the reasons mentioned before is not begun. I have collected at Springfield 8 or 10 tons of Copper which is the principal ingredient in casting Cannon and a proportionable quantity of block tin. Considerable quantities of powder and other stores are collected there all of which is deposited in places not very proper—Its true the Workmen are at Work in the different branches of the ordnance department, but I submit it to you whether the buildings ought not to be immediately erected as first order'd by Congress.

I wish to be inform'd what steps have been taken to get supplied with Iron Cannon and Whether any can be had at Philadelphia for the nothern department—some time ago General Schuyler applied to me for 40 pieces of Cannon, Viz.

10—9 pounders

15 6 do

15 4 do

immediately upon the receipt of his Letter I wrote to Boston as being the only probable place at which they could be had, but have been able to procure six of the smallest size only which are now on the Way to Ticonderoga. If there is not a board of Ordnance already approved

particularly for the Ordnance department it would facilitate matters exceedingly to have it done as soon as possible—who shall in conjunction with the commanding officer of Artillery regulate every thing throughout to the department.—if this measure should be adopted I shall be happy in contributing every thing in my power to make all parts of the Machine harmonize—It appears from the best accounts received that the Danbury affair was the very copy of Lexington

Adams replied to both these letters, but I have not found the replies. Knox answered from Morristown, New Jersey, May 10, 1777:

I am obliged to you for your two favors, one of the 25 ulto, and the other of the 6 inst., both of which I have received.

I know not in what condition the Furnace at Salisbury is, but, from the reports which I had of the ore, I should suppose they must be bungling workmen indeed if they do not succeed. Shall I inquire into the management of it, and, if practicable, endeavor to get some cannon cast there of different sizes?

There are a number of Furnaces in this State where I believe we may get some cannon made. If it be agreeable to the Board of Ordnance, or the Congress, I will set some of them at work, and should, at the same time I am informed of it, be glad to know the price to be given.

Some time last winter the Congress sent Colonel [Walter] Stewart, an Aid de Camp of General Gates, to New England for cannon, etc. to be sent to Ticonderoga. He engaged with Mr. [John] Brown of Providence at the modest sum of 100 L.M. [long measure?] per ton; the 18-18 pounders to be delivered the 10th March. Mr. Brown cast 10 by the first of March, and would have had the whole complete by the time fixed, but the Committee of Congress disapproved of the price agreed upon,—and Ticonderoga remains without the cannon. I believe the French Gentlemen [unidentified] in Massachusetts has not succeeded very well, owing to the badness of the ore.

I sincerely wish that the spirit of enterprize may animate our army; but you well know, My Dear Sir, during the winter past, and the most part of the spring, we have had no army to be animated. The time may shortly arrive when I hope we shall receive your approbation in this way.

As the establishment of our currency is a matter of the utmost importance, and every thing proper ought to be adopted to support it, pray would it not be practicable for all armed vessels, both public and

private, to give bonds at the time receiving their commissions to pay into the Treasury of the Continent all gold and silver taken in prizes, whether in specie or otherwise, to be funded, in the manner of the Bank in England, for the redemption of the Continental money. Any sum so funded would give full credit and currency to three times the amount in paper.

Adams apparently failed to answer this letter, possibly because of his resentment at Knox's having joined major-generals Nathanael Greene and John Sullivan in sending a menacing letter to Congress.¹⁸ The action of Knox must have been particularly painful to Adams because of the General having been his protege.

If I am correct in thinking there was a two years' estrangement, Knox broke the ice by the following letter on the occasion of Adams' safe return from his first diplomatic mission abroad:

West point Hudsons River 4th Sept 1779

DEAR SIR

To the numerous congratulations which you have received on your safe arrival in America, permit me to add my tribute, and to felicitate you on your safe return to your Family, friends and Country, an event which I am certain gives you true pleasure & happiness, whatever motives produc'd it. Whether Faction, Ambition, or—as I am a very bad Statesman—true policy in order to procure proper information of the politics of Europe.

Thank Heaven and the ability and Industry of some-body. The State of Europe appears to be such as will in proper time effectually confirm That Peace, Liberty and Safety which America has been so long sighing for.

If it is your design to pass through Camp to Congress I pray you to make me so happy as to take up your residence with me for the time you shall be in Camp

¹⁸ The details are in my "The Revolutionary Correspondence of Nathanael Greene and John Adams," *Rhode Island History* (July 1942), vol. 1, pp. 73-83.

Adams replied cordially from Braintree on September 19th:

DEAR SIR

I have had the Honour of your Letter of the 4th of this Month, and I thank you for your obliging Congratulations on my Return, which gives me Happiness, whatever Passions or Reasonings produced it.

You have Cause to thank Heaven, that the state of Europe is so favourable. It is scarcely possible it should be more so. France is already elevated to the highest Degree of Reputation and England depressed to almost the lowest of Contempt in Consequence of this Revolution.—It is under Heaven the general Wisdom of the present Reign in France and the universal Depravation and Folly of that of England and the general ability of American Councils and Arms, that have done it.—Washingtons Negotiations have done more in Europe, than all our Ambassadors, but Gates was the successful Minister that brought the Treaty to a Crisis at the particular Time when it was done; by mentioning these Names in particular I dont mean to exclude a Multitude of other officers who had a proportional share in the Work, more especially the American Artillery and its worthy Commander.

This is very free and very saucy—so that you must not say much about it, but believe me, with affection & Respect, your F'nd

& svt

I have no expectation of going to Congress, and therefore must wait for the Pleasure of seeing you, untill you make a Visit, this way, which I hope will be soon.

It is pleasant to find the returning envoy doing full justice to Washington in spite of Adams' fondness for Horatio Gates,¹⁹ who by this time had broken with Washington.

Knox replied:

West Point 10th October 1779

DEAR SIR

I received your obliging favor of the 19th last month by Mr Lowell, for which I thank you.

Mr. Gerard has been to Camp, and has return'd to Philadelphia, to embark on board of the Confederacy for France, on board of the same

¹⁹ The relations between Adams and Gates are brought out in my "The Correspondence of John Adams and Horatio Gates," *Proc. Mass. Hist. Soc.*, vol. 67, pp. 135-51.

Ship Mr Jay & his Family embark. Mr Gerard made us happy, politically so I mean, by informing us of your appointment as sole Minister plenipotentiary for the purpose of negotiating a peace and that you were to embark on board the Frigate le sensible for France, to reside in Paris, untill an opportunity for so desirable an event should present itself. Heaven send you a safe passage and a speedy opportunity of exercising your abilities in bringing the War to an Issue, and presenting to your Country the object of their wishes and prayers, *Peace, Liberty and Safety*.

I have taken the liberty to enclose a packet for Mr Jonathan Williams in France, in which there is a Letter for my Brother who I expect is in France—should you see him previous to seeing Mr Williams I shall be much obliged by your breaking open the packet and taking out the Letter for my brother—

On Adams' return to France the correspondence was continued. The first letter from abroad was a pleasant but unimportant note of February 7, 1780, from Adams, speaking of Lafayette's services to America in France.²⁰ The second, also unimportant but unpublished, is given for the record:

Paris March 18th 1780.

DEAR SIR,

I embrace the Opportunity by the Viscount de Noailles just to repeat to you the assurances of my Respect and attachment, & to ask the favor of your Correspondence. The Communication will be more frequent this year, and every Information you may give me, shall be discreetly used for the public good.

Your Brother [presumably William Knox] is well in France, and I hope soon to have the pleasure of seeing him in Paris, but he is not yet arrived.

There are great things in agitation, in England, Ireland, Holland, and the Northern Powers, as well as France and Spain, all tending to second and assist the Operations of your arms, which will finally be triumphant, how long soever it may be, before your final Success.

My best Respects to General Washington, and all other officers of my Acquaintance, and believe me your Friend & Servant.

Knox apparently answered these notes and also a letter from Adams which I have not found. Nor have I seen any

²⁰ Adams, *Works*, vol. 7, pp. 129-30.

of Knox's replies, which are perhaps in London among the scores of intercepted American letters now reposing in the Public Record Office. Their sending appears from the following letter of Knox to Adams, concluding, as far as I know, their Revolutionary correspondence.

Camp before York in Virginia 21 October 1781.

I have had the honor of receiving several Letters from your Excellency, since your departure from America, which I have duly answered, and hope you have received them. Your ideas of the necessity of some important blow to the british power in the Southern States were extremely just. The reasons are too obvious to be mentioned.

I am happy my dear sir, in having it in my power to announce to you the joyful event of the reduction of Lord Cornwallis & his whole force in Virginia. This important affair has been effected by the most harmonious concurrence of circumstances that could possibly have happened. A fleet & troops from the West Indies under the orders of one of the best men in the World, an Army of Americans & French troops, marching from N. River 500 miles, and a fleet of Count De Barras, from Rhode Island, all joining so exactly in point of time as to render what has happened almost certain.

I shall not enter into a detail of circumstances previous to the collection of our force at Williamsburg, which was made on the 27th ultimo, on the 28th we marched to this camp & on the 29th & 30th we completed our investiture of York, a body of American Militia in Duc de Lauzun's Legion & some Marines from the fleet of Count De Grasse at the same time formed in the vicinity of Gloucester so as to prevent any incursion of the Enemy into the Country—from the 1 of October to the 6th was spent in preparing our materials for the siege or bringing forward our Cannon & stores, and in reconnoiting the points of attack. On the evening of the 6th we broke ground & began our first parrell[e] within 600 Yards of the Enemies Works undiscovered. The first parrallel, some redouts & all our batteries finished by the 9th at 2 oClock PM when we opened our batteries & kept them playing continuously. On the night of the 12 we began our second parrallel at 300 yds distance from the Enemy 12 miles distance from this place, and on the night of the 14th we stormed the two redoubts which the Enemy had [in] advance] of their main works. The gallant troops of France under the orders

of Baron Viomenil and the hardy soldiers of America under the Marquis de la Fayette attacked separate works and carried them both in an instant—This brilliant stroke was effected without any great loss on our side, the Enemy lost between one & two hundred.

This advantage was important as it gave us an opportunity of perfecting our 2d parall[el] with which we took the two redoubts—On the 16th just before day the enemy made a sortie and spiked up some of our Cannon but were soon repulsed & driven back to their Works—the Cannon were soon cleared and the same day our batteries in the 2d parallel began to fire & continued on without intermission untill 9 oClock on the morning of the 17 October ever memorable on account of the Saratoga affair, when the Enemy sent a flag offering to treat of a surrender of the posts of York & Gloucester. The firing continued untill two oClock when Commissioners on both sides met to adjust the capitulation which was not finished and signed, untill 12 oClock on the 19th—Our troops took possession of two redouts of the Enemy soon after, and about two oClock the Enemy marched out and surrendered their Arms.—the whole Garrison are prisoners of War and had the same honors only as were granted to our garrison at Charleston—Their Coulers *were cas'd* & they were prohibited playing a french or American tune.—The Returns are not yet collected but including the sick & well they are more than 7000, exclusive of seamen who are supposed to amount to 1000. There are near forty five of topsail Vessels in the harbour, about one half of which the Enemy sunk upon different occasions—About two hundred pieces of Cannon, nearly one half of which are brass, a great number of Arms Drums & Colours are among the trophies of this decisive stroke. The prisoners are to be sent into any part of this State, Maryland or Pennsylvania—

The consequences will be extensively beneficial. The Enemy will immediately be confined to Charleston & New York reduced to a defensive war of those two posts, for which they have not more troops in America than to form island Garrisons.

The exalted talents of General Greene have been amply displayed in North & South Carolina—without an army without Means, without anything he has performed Wonders—he will now be reinforced with a large body of troops which will enable him to push the Enemy to the gates of Charlestown.

This Army is compos'd of French & American troops 3000 of the former came from the West Indies, with the whole commanded in person

by our beloved General Washington whose distinguished patriotism & worth rises every day, & demands the pen of some animated republican to do him sufficient justice. The Harmony and good understanding between the American & french troops exceed all description—one soul actuates the whole mass, and all are fired with Zeal for the interests of America—The troops which came with Count de Grasse from the West Indies under the order of Marquis St. Simon will return with him immediately—The Army which came from France under Count Rochambeau will be contin'd for the present in this state—The American troops belonging to the states east of Pennsylvania will immediately depart for the north River—Those west from Pennsylvania inclusively will go to the southward—The Enemy have a post at Wilmington in North Carolina, of which these troops will dispossess them & then join General Greene.

We have a very respectable & seasoned force on the Hudson River amply sufficient to garrison the important posts in the Highlands and to form a small covering army.

If I can possibly procure copies of the capitulation and returns of the troops & stores taken I will do myself the honor to enclose them.

The unequivocal testimonies which America has already received of the friendship of France induce us to hope much from the future. If it shall be found possible to have a superior french fleet before New York by the 1st of next June to stay certainly through the operation, I should not hesitate to pronounce with as much decision as military affairs will admit that in six weeks we should wrest that important place from the hands of the English.

My Brother will soon go to Europe & will certainly have the honor to wait on you. I think it would be unnecessary for me to request the favor of your civilities to him. . . .

P.S. Since writing the foregoing his Excellency Gen. Washington has informed me that he has encl[os]ed to you authenticated copies of the capitula[tion] and returns as far as can be collected.

From 1789 to 1796 Knox and Adams were thrown together at New York and Philadelphia in the service of the new federal government, Adams as vice-president, Knox as Washington's first Secretary of War. Their friendly relations are indicated by the Adams' lending the Knoxes their country

home near Philadelphia, Buck Hill, during the summer of 1791.²¹

After Knox's resignation as Secretary of War to supervise his wife's property in Maine, their correspondence was resumed. On March 19, 1797, Knox wrote, urging Adams to send Jefferson as a special ambassador to France in the hope of preventing war, assuring him that most Federalists, whatever the views of the extremist wing, "wish peace with all the world."²² Evidently Knox, though a Federalist, did not subscribe to the view that Jefferson, if given a chance, would betray his country. Adams replied on March 30, that Jefferson, for sound reasons, had declined the mission.²³

The long friendship seemed doomed, however, by the incident referred to in the following letter of October 23, 1798, from Knox to James McHenry, President Adams' Secretary of War:²⁴

Sir, I have received your letter enclosing a commission, and giving me to understand that Alexander Hamilton is ranked as the first, Charles C. Pinckney the second, and myself as the third major-general [in the provisional army to be formed to resist French invasion], and that this arrangement is considered as definitive.

In so plain a case it is unnecessary to multiply words. The impossibility of my serving under officers so much my juniors, must have been known to those, who made the arrangement. . . .

The duty which I owe to myself precludes my placing myself in such a situation. I therefore definitively decline the appointment of third major-general.²⁵

²¹ Knox to Adams, June 19, 1791; Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, p. 503.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 533.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 535-6.

²⁴ Adams, on becoming president, retained the whole of Washington's Cabinet, including McHenry.

²⁵ Jared Sparks, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 11 (1836), pp. 550-1, hereafter cited as *Sparks*.

Knox's letter marked the culmination of a footnote to history, the details of which have not heretofore, as far as I know been fully drawn together.²⁶

On May 19, 1798, in the first stage of the Federalist hysteria, real or feigned,²⁷ of invasion by the French, Alexander Hamilton wrote Washington:

You ought also to be aware, my dear sir, that in the event of an open rupture with France, the public voice will again call you to command the armies of our country; and . . . it is the opinion of all those with whom I converse, that you will be compelled to make the sacrifice.²⁸

Washington replied on May 27, asking Hamilton if he would take part,²⁹ to which Hamilton responded, June 2:

If I am invited to a station in which the service I may render may be proportionate to the sacrifice I am to make, I shall be willing to go into the army. If you command, the place in which I should hope to be most useful is that of Inspector-General, with a command in the line. This I would accept.³⁰

On June 22, Adams wrote Washington he might soon be called,³¹ and four days later McHenry wrote his former chief inquiring whether, if nominated, he would take command.³² To McHenry, Washington replied on July 4 and 5 that he would serve upon public demand, if he could defer taking an active part until the threat became more imminent and

²⁶ The fullest and fairest accounts I have found are in Edward Channing, *History of the United States*, New York, 1907-25, vol. 4, pp. 190-6, and Adams, *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 527-30, and vol. 8, pp. 573-604.

²⁷ The so-called "War Federalists" of course, appreciated that a declaration of war would make it relatively easy to muzzle the Democrats. Senator George Cabot of Massachusetts wrote Oliver Wolcott on October 8, 1798: "It is unfortunate that Congress did not declare war . . . Traitors and sedition-mongers, who are now protected and tolerated would then be easily restrained or punished." Henry C. Lodge, *Life and Letters of George Cabot*, Boston, 1877, pp. 168-9.

²⁸ John C. Hamilton, *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, New York, 1850-51, vol. 6, p. 290, hereafter cited as Hamilton, *Works*.

²⁹ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 272-3.

³⁰ Hamilton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 294

³¹ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 572-3.

³² *Sparks*, vol. 11, p. 246 n.

if he were allowed to choose his staff officers.³³ He authorized McHenry to show his letter mentioning these conditions to Adams.

To the President, Washington replied on July 4, expressing concern over the French menace and his conviction that "recourse must be had (for the greater part at least) to the well known, most experienced, best proved and intelligent officers of the late Army, without respect to grade."³⁴

On July 2, Adams nominated Washington as Commander-in-Chief and the nomination was immediately confirmed by the Senate.³⁵ On July 7, apparently before receiving Washington's letter of July 4, Adams wrote him, announcing his appointment and "the urgent necessity I am in of your advice and assistance—indeed, of your conduct and direction of the war. . . . Mr. McHenry will have the honor to consult you upon the organization of the army, and upon every thing relating to it."³⁶

In his letter of instructions to McHenry, dated July 6, Adams said:

His [Washington's] advice in the formation of a list of officers would be extremely desirable to me. The names of Lincoln, Morgan, Knox, Hamilton, Gates, Pinckney, Lee, Carrington, Hand, Muhlenberg, Dayton, Burr, Brooks, Cobb, Smith, may be mentioned to him, and any others that occur to you³⁷

After talking matters over with McHenry at Mount Vernon, Washington wrote Adams on July 13 accepting on condition that he should not be called into the field until the army was in a situation to require his presence.³⁸ This condition was supplemented by a letter of July 12 from

³³ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 304-12, 318-20.

³⁴ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 312-5.

³⁵ McHenry to Washington, July 2, 1798, Hamilton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 309 n.

³⁶ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, p. 575.

³⁷ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 573-4.

³⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 327-9. I have found no reply from Adams to Washington's letters of July 4 and 13.

McHenry to Adams which Washington helped draft,³⁹ saying "He [Washington] has shown me the copy of a letter he had written to me, and which must have got to Philadelphia the day I left it, in which he treats on several points that will require your attention. I have, therefore, desired it to be delivered to you, and shall obtain from him the names of the persons he considers the best qualified for his confidential officers, and without whom, I think, he would not serve."⁴⁰

These names were contained in the following letter of July 14, from Washington to Hamilton, which McHenry carried with him from Mount Vernon:

By the pending Bill, if it passes to a Law, two Major Generals, and an Inspector Genl. with the Rank of Majr. General, and three Brigadiers are to be appointed. Presuming on its passing, I have given the following as my sentiments respecting the following characters, fit, and proper to be employed; in which the Secretary [McHenry] concurs:

Majr. Genls.

Alexr. Hamilton, Inspector.
Chas. C. Pinckney,
Henry Knox, or if either of the last mend. refuses,
Henry Lee, of Virginia:

Brigadiers

Henry Lee (if not Majr.Genl.)
John Brooks, Massachusetts
Willm. S. Smith, N:York, or
John E. Howard, Maryld.

Adjt. Genl.

Either Edward Hand, Pennsa.
Jonathan Dayton, Jr. N.Jer
Willm S. Smith to be;
Edwd Carrington, Qr.Mr.Genl.
James Craik, Directr of Hosl. . . .

³⁹ On September 16, 1798, Washington wrote McHenry pointing out that the "strong point" of McHenry's letter of July 12 to Adams was "inserted *after* it was drawn, at my request." Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 447.

⁴⁰ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, p. 574, n. 1.

And now, my dear Sir, with that candour which you always have, and I trust ever will experience from me, I shall express to you a difficulty which has arisen in my mind relative to seniority between you and Genl. Pinckney; for with respect to my friend General Knox, whom I love and esteem I have ranked him below you both. . . .

The services and influence of General [Charles Cotesworth] Pinckney in the Southern States would be of the highest, and most interesting importance. Will he serve then, under one whom he will consider a junior Officer? . . .⁴¹

Under this view of the subject, my wish to put you first, and my fear of losing him, are not a little embarrassing. But why? for after all it rests with the President to use his pleasure. I shall only add therefore, that as the welfare of the Country is the object. . . I shall sanguinely hope that, smaller matters will yield to measures which have a tendency to promote it.⁴²

McHenry showed Adams this letter of Washington to Hamilton. Adams was thereby informed that Washington looked to him to make the final decision on the suggested order of precedence.⁴³ On July 18, Adams sent Washington's list to the Senate, and, on the day following, the Senate confirmed the nominations.⁴⁴ Adams immediately left for Quincy where his wife was lying critically ill, leaving the final decision on precedence to when he signed and dated the commissions. On August 29, Adams wrote McHenry:

I made the nominations according to the list presented to me by you, from General Washington, in hopes that rank might be settled among them by agreement or acquiescence, believing at the time and expressing to you that belief, that the nominations and appointment would give Hamilton no [line] command at all, nor any rank before any Major-

⁴¹ Pinckney, when put to the test, behaved handsomely, consenting to serve as junior to both Hamilton and Knox; Pinckney to McHenry, October 31, 1798, *Sparks*, vol. 11, pp. 551-2.

⁴² Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 329-32. This letter was in reply to a letter from Hamilton to Washington, dated July 8, urging the latter to accept the command but asserting: "the arrangement of the army may demand your particular attention. The President has no *relative* ideas, and his prepossessions on military subjects in reference to such a point are of the wrong sort." Hamilton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 317.

⁴³ McHenry so wrote Washington on September 19, 1798; *Sparks*, vol. 11, p. 542.

⁴⁴ *The Annals of Congress, 1797-1799*, vol. 1, p. 623.

General. This is my opinion still. I am now willing to settle all decisively . . . by the dating the commissions, Knox on the first day, Pinckney on the second, and Hamilton on the third.⁴⁵

McHenry wrote Washington on September 10, telling him of Adams' decision and that Wolcott and three members of the Cabinet proposed to ask Adams to reconsider.⁴⁶ Washington replied on the 16th:

Your confidential letter, dated Trenton⁴⁷ the 10th Instant, with its enclosures, has been duly recieved. . . . It is impossible for me to make any move, in consequence, at this time, without betraying your confidential communication. I can perceive pretty closely however, that the matter is, or very soon will be brought, to the alternative of submitting to the Presidents forgetfulness of what *I* considered a compact, or condition of acceptance of the Appointment with which he was pleased to honor me, or, to return him my Commission.⁴⁸

In this letter, Washington (apparently annoyed at McHenry for divulging to Adams that Washington and he had been corresponding behind the President's back) took a dig at McHenry by referring to "my *private* letter to you of the 16th. ulto [the underscoring is Washington's], extracts from which you sent to the President of the United States." He told McHenry to burn the current letter "as soon as it is perused, as I will do your answer."⁴⁹

McHenry took care this time not to show Washington's letter to Adams, but he sent Adams extracts from it and expressed the hope that "you will upon a review of all circumstances give your assent to his arrangement."⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8; p. 587. Adams was informed by a letter from McHenry of August 4, that the question of rank had become an issue., Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, p. 580 and 580 n. 2.

⁴⁶ Bernard C. Steiner, *The Life and Correspondence of James McHenry*, 1907, p. 337.

⁴⁷ Where Government officials were living temporarily because of an epidemic of yellow fever in Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 447.

⁴⁹ Washington to McHenry, October 1, 1798; Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 476-7.

⁵⁰ McHenry to Adams, September 21, 1798; Channing, vol. 4, p. 196, n. 3.

McHenry wrote Washington on the same day telling of his letter to Adams.⁵¹ Washington replied to McHenry on September 26:

As you have given extracts of my letter of the 16th, to the President, and informed him, that you thought it necessary to apprise me of his seeming determination relatively to the rank of Major Generals Hamilton and Knox, I conceived I had sufficient ground to proceed upon, and have, accordingly, in a letter of yesterday's date, given him my ideas in a lengthy detail, on the *whole* of that business; that I may know *at once* and precisely, what to expect.⁵²

In his letter to Adams (September 25) to which he thus refers, Washington said:

In the arrangement made by me, with the Secretary of War, the three Major Generals stood, Hamilton, Pinckney, Knox; and in this order I expected their Commissions would have been dated. . . . In the first moments of leisure, after the Secretary of War had left this place, I wrote a friendly letter to Genl Knox. . . . Sending him at the sametime a copy of the arrangement, which I supposed *to be final*. . . . I have addressed you, Sir, with openness and candour, and I hope with respect, requesting to be informed whether your determination to reverse the order of the three Major-Generals is final, and whether you mean to appoint another Adjutant General without my concurrence.⁵³

Washington was unaware, at the time he wrote this menacing⁵⁴ letter to Adams, that McHenry had shown to Adams Washington's letter to Hamilton, dated July 14, saying "after all it rests with the President to use his pleasure" in arranging the order of precedence. McHenry advised Washington of this in a letter of September 19,⁵⁵ but

⁵¹ Steiner, *McHenry*, pp. 339-40.

⁵² Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 463.

⁵³ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 453-62. The implied rebuke concerning the adjutant-generalcy was justified. When a candidate recommended by Washington—Adams' son-in-law, Colonel William G. Smith of Maryland—had been rejected by the Senate, Adams, without consulting Washington, sent in the name of William North, Jr., Senator from New York, an experienced officer but not on the list proposed by Washington.

⁵⁴ Washington wrote Secretary of State Timothy Pickering and McHenry on October 1, clearly implying he would resign if Adams did not give in. Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 475, 476.

⁵⁵ Sparks, vol. 11, p. 542.

this letter did not reach Mount Vernon until September 28⁵⁶—three days too late to warn Washington that his letter to Hamilton had been seen by Adams.

The President, provoked as he must have been by Washington's disingenuity, wisely replied on October 9 that he would, of course, accept Washington's preference, that the commissions were all dated the same day and that Washington was at liberty to arrange the respective ranks by the order in which he delivered the commissions.⁵⁷ On October 21, Washington acknowledged Adam's letter. He wrote Hamilton at the same time, advising him of the President's favorable action and entreating him "to give without delay your *full* aid to the Secy of War."⁵⁸ The incident was closed.

I think Adams probably wrote his letter of acquiescence with relief. His letter of August 29 favoring Knox was written under the impression that, during the Revolution, the seniority of officers of the same rank appointed the same day was determined by their previous order of seniority rather than by the order in which their names were listed. On September 17, Oliver Wolcott, Secretary of the Treasury wrote, setting him straight.⁵⁹ Adams' precedent, Wolcott pointed out, was unique. The *general* rule established by the Continental Congress early in the Revolution was that officers of the same rank appointed on the same day took precedence in the order of entry of their names in the minutes of Congress.⁶⁰ Furthermore, on September 29, George Cabot, senior Senator from Massachusetts, at the suggestion of Timothy Pickering, Secretary of State,⁶¹ wrote Adams that, in

⁵⁶ Washington to McHenry, October 1, 1798; Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 477.

⁵⁷ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 600-1.

⁵⁸ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 500, 501.

⁵⁹ George Gibbs, *Memoirs of the Administrations of Washington and John Adams*, Edited from the Papers of Oliver Wolcott, New York, 1846, vol. 2, pp. 95-6.

⁶⁰ Resolution of January 4, 1776; *Journals*, vol. 4, p. 29.

⁶¹ Pickering to Cabot, September 20, 1798; Henry Cabot Lodge, *Life and Letters of George Cabot*, Boston, 1877, p. 163.

confirming the three major-generals, the Senate, believed that the order of submission (Hamilton, Pickering, Knox) determined the order of seniority.⁶² Finally, Adams, at Braintree, presumably got wind of the reports current in Boston that Knox was hard pressed financially (true), and that General Benjamin Lincoln, outstanding supporter of Knox's claim to seniority, was a heavy endorser of Knox's paper and therefore selfishly interested in buttressing the latter's prestige.⁶³

Charles Francis Adams, in his biography of his grandfather, attributes Washington's final insistence upon the appointment of Hamilton ahead of Knox to the "Most extraordinary influence" of Pickering and McHenry.⁶⁴ I doubt if McHenry's influence was great. Washington wrote of him to Hamilton on August 19: "Your opinion respecting the unfitness of a certain Gentleman for the Office he holds accords with mine."⁶⁵ Pickering's influence was presumably considerable, especially his concealment from Washington of the fact that Hamilton was willing to rank after Knox and possibly even after Pinckney. Hamilton wrote Pickering to this effect on July 17,⁶⁶ but Pickering, as he wrote Hamilton on August 21, "concealed it, in order that the arrangement of nominations of major-generals, which I had seen as formed by General Washington, and which I saw would govern [if Hamilton's spirit of accommodation was concealed], might leave you where you ought to be."⁶⁷ Washington, however, presumably needed little additional influencing. He seems to have convinced himself again⁶⁸ that those who

⁶² Lodge, *Cabot*, pp. 165-7.

⁶³ Cabot to Pickering, September 27 and October 26, 1798; same, pp. 164-5, 174.

⁶⁴ "The Life of John Adams," Adams, *Works*, vol. 1, p. 529.

⁶⁵ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 394.

⁶⁶ Hamilton, *Works*, vol. 6, p. 326.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 343-4.

⁶⁸ Washington had similar delusions in 1755-56 and 1777-78; Louis K. Koontz, *The Virginia Frontier, 1754-1763* (*Johns Hopkins University Studies in Historical and Political Science*, 1925), pp. 76-84, and my *Washington and the Revolution*, pp. 65-77, 186-201.

disagreed with him were enemies and scoundrels, and was therefore ripe to join the rabidly pro-war, anti-Democratic, wing of the Federalist party of which Pickering and Cabot were leaders.⁶⁹

What occasioned Washington's loss of perspective is not clear. Possibly the recent publication in New York of John Robinson's alarmist *Proofs of a Conspiracy against all Religions and Governments of Europe carried on in the Secret Meetings of Free Masons, Illuminati, and Reading Societies*⁷⁰ was a factor. Washington took the book seriously enough to avow to a minister who sent him a copy of it that he had attended masonic meetings not "more than once or twice within the last thirty years."⁷¹

The revival of excitement over the silly "John Langhorne" (Peter Carr) letter, which Washington apparently believed was an "insidious attempt" by "that man" (Jefferson) to entrap him, may have contributed.⁷² But whatever the cause, the manifestations of it are unmistakable. On July 5, writing McHenry, "under the rose," that the surviving Revolutionary War generals as a group were not acceptable, he condemned some of them because of old age, or lack of enterprise. But others were to be excluded because of their "opposition to the Government, or their predilection to French measures, be their present conduct what it may, for those who will come up with a flowing tide, will descend with the Ebb, and there can be no dependence upon them in Moments of difficulty."⁷³ In short only true-blue Federalists

⁶⁹ Hamilton's correspondence indicates that he was not among the extremists.

⁷⁰ Vernon Stauffer, *New England and the Bavarian Illuminati*; and my "Jedidiah Morse and the Yale Library," *The Yale University Library Gazette*, vol. 13 (1939), pp. 76-81. Morse was one of the promoters of the Illuminati scare in 1798-99.

⁷¹ Washington to the Reverend G. W. Snyder, September 25, 1798; Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 452.

⁷² Bushrod Washington to Washington, August 12 and Washington's reply, August 27, 1798, Washington *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 419-20. This affair can be followed through the index to volume 36 of Washington, *Writings*, under "Langhorne, John."

⁷³ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 319-20.

could be trusted not to be traitors or poltroons. Furthermore, while Adams' list of officers submitted for Washington's consideration included three Democrats—Muhlenberg, Gates, and Burr, as well as about a dozen Federalists,⁷⁴ Washington's counter list contained only Federalists,⁷⁵ and all but two of these—Knox and Dr. James Craik, Washington's family physician—were active politicians. Finally, in submitting to Hamilton a long list of names for possible field officers, Washington added the notation "There may be among the foregoing some of bad political principles, and others whose true characters I have mistaken and the whole of them requiring to be investigated."⁷⁶ The field officers, too, apparently must be federalists.

In a letter of September 30 to McHenry, Washington's rabid partisanship exploded in the following blast:

I have lately received information, which, in my opinion, merits attention. It is that the brawlers against Governmental measures, in some of the most discontented part of this state [Virginia], have, all of a sudden, become silent; and, it is added, are very desirous of obtaining Commissions in the Army, about to be raised. . . . But, as there will be characters enough of an opposite description, who are ready to receive appointments, circumspection is necessary; for my opinion of the first are, that you could as soon scrub the blackamoor white, as to change the principles of a profest democrat; and that he will leave nothing unattempted to overturn the Government of this Country.⁷⁷

Many illustrations of Washington's state of mind at this time could be given,⁷⁸ but we must close with a final glance at Knox's relations with his old friends.

Knox, as we saw from his letter of October 23, 1798, declined to serve as junior to Hamilton and Pickering. But

⁷⁴ Adams letter of instructions to McHenry for the proposed conference with Washington, July 6, 1798. Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 573-4.

⁷⁵ Washington to Hamilton, July 14, 1798; Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 331.

⁷⁶ Washington to Hamilton and list enclosed; Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 331 and 333-4.

⁷⁷ Washington, *Writings*, vol. 36, p. 474.

⁷⁸ See for example, Washington's *Writings*, vol. 36, pp. 366, 385, 388, and 504.

he apparently held no grudge against either Adams or Washington. When New England Federalist leaders were in full bay against the President because of his final, successful effort for peace with France,⁷⁹ Knox, on March 5, 1799, wrote him warmly and reassuringly that, whatever war-mongers might say, the main body of Federalists, no less than the Democrats, would back his conciliatory policy.⁸⁰ And one of the last letters to Washington is a touching if somewhat fulsome note from Knox, written December 22, 1799, before news of the General's death had reached the Maine woods.⁸¹

⁷⁹ For example, Theodore Sedgwick and Pickering to Hamilton, February 19 and 25, 1799, Hamilton, *Works*, vol. 6, pp. 396, 398.

⁸⁰ Adams, *Works*, vol. 8, pp. 626-7.

⁸¹ Francis S. Drake, *Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox*, Boston, 1873, p. 114.

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