

The Napoleon Series

Baron von Steuben: a Study of His Impact on the U.S. Army

By [Ümit Kaan Usta](#)

Introduction

Baron von Steuben, with his full name being Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben, is one of the outstanding figures in the first years of the US Army. His service in the Continental Army is described as the following by historian George Washington Greene: “In the military history of our Revolution, if we class men according to their services, no one after Washington and Greene stands so high as Steuben. For the services which Lafayette rendered, important as they were, were rather the effects of influence and position, rather than of individual superiority. All that Steuben owed to position was the opportunity of action, the action itself was the fruit of his own strong will and thorough knowledge of his service. He was the creator of our regular army, the organizer of our military economy. The impress which he made upon our military character remained there long after his hand was withdrawn. His system of reviews, reports and inspection gave efficiency to the soldier, confidence to the commander, and saved the treasury not less than \$600.000”¹

His Early Life and Service in the Seven Years’ War

The family name “von Steuben” is first mentioned in the 13th century, when the family left Franconia and came to the renowned district of Mansfeld in today’s Saxony-Anhalt region in Germany. Steubens joined the reformation under Luther, becoming Protestants like other noblemen in that part of Germany. The line of the von Steubens, that the general (Baron von Steuben) is descended from, is connected with some of the most prominent Prussian families by marriage. Captain Ernest Nicholas von Steuben, who fought for the Holy Roman Empire during the Thirty Years’ War, left but one son, Ludwig, who was a member of the Knights Hospitaller and the great-grandfather of the general. Ludwig’s son Augustin had seven sons, three of them died in the early youth while the remaining four pursued military careers.² The general’s father, Wilhelm von Steuben, was an officer in Prussia’s relatively inferior engineer corps. Since the Prussian artillery has not been given much importance compared with the other branches of the Prussian army, promotion was slow for artillery officers.³

According to modern sources, Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben was born on 17 September 1730, in Magdeburg. He was named after his godfathers; Ludolf von Lüderitz (royal forester in Magdeburg), Gerhard Cornelius von Walrave (colonel of artillery), Augustin von Steuben (the general’s paternal grandfather) and Friedrich-Wilhelm I of Prussia. The king himself being the godfather of this baby has

¹ Doyle, Joseph Beatty. Frederick William von Steuben and the American Revolution, aide to Washington and inspector general of the Army. Steubenville, Ohio: The H. C. Cook, 1913. pp. viii-ix.

² Kapp, Friedrich. The Life of Frederick William Von Steuben, Major General in the Revolutionary Army. New York: Mason Brothers, 1859. pp. 39-42.

³ See an overview of the evolution of the Prussian artillery and the rest of the Prussian army.: Liepman, James Morres. The Prussian Reform Movement: A Case Study in Defense Reform. MS thesis. Naval Postgraduate School, 1989.

already signed that there will be great expectations from the baby, should he survive into manhood.⁴ There had been some dispute both as to date and the birthplace of General von Steuben. Some historians, citing Sparks's series of American biographies, supposed that he was born in Swabia or somewhere else in the Holy Roman Empire, outside of Prussian lands. Friedrich Kapp, who has made a thorough investigation about the general and his family, said the general was born on 15 November 1730 "at Magdeburg, a large Prussian fortress on the Elbe."⁵ While the general was yet a child, he followed his father when his father entered the service of Tsarina Anna of Russia, living his infancy and childhood seeing guns, drums, trumpets, fortifications, drills and parades. The general saw his first military action by fighting as a volunteer under his father in the Siege of Prague, (1744) at the age of fourteen.⁶

Almost as soon as the end of the war, amazed by what he has lived through in Russia and Prague, he started his military career as an "officer cadet"⁷ in Infantry Regiment Nr.31 "von Lestwitz" in Breslau. He was commissioned as a lieutenant at the age of 22. By the time he acquired the rank "first lieutenant" in 1755, the footsteps of a war between the British and the French were heard in skirmishes in the Ohio Valley. To protect his foothold on Europe (Hanover) against Prussia -which was allied with France at that time-, King George II started providing financial aid to the Russian troops located on the Prussian border. Alerted to this situation, Friedrich II, with the intention of relieving the pressure to the west, signed the "Westminster Convention" on 16 January 1756. According to the convention, the British stopped the financial aid and agreed to jointly defend Hanover against French aggression. This maneuver caused Austria, Russia and France to forge an alliance against Prussia and the Great Britain. Friedrich II, expecting an offensive from the "coalition" by the spring of 1757, launched a pre-emptive strike by invading Saxony on 29 August 1756.⁸

Although Baron von Steuben's rank prevented him from being a prominent war hero, his name is often mentioned with bravery and virtue in the military records. His regiment belonged to the army of Field Marshal Graf von Schwerin and distinguished itself on all occasions where it was engaged. In the Battle of Prague on 6 May 1757, Steuben's regiment suffered heavy casualties, losing a colonel and two officers. Steuben himself was wounded in the action too. In the renowned Battle of Rossbach, the same regiment was in the van of the Prussian army, which made Steuben tell his American friends, with pride and satisfaction that he too had fought in the Battle of Rossbach.⁹ Later on, Steuben entered the *Freikorps* of General von Meyer. The *Freikorps* were the privateers on land; without being in the monotonous, disciplined structure of the army, they were employed to act independently from the army to deal damage to the enemy by different means. Under command of General Meyer, the

⁴ Lockhart, Paul. The Drillmaster of Valley Forge: The Baron de Steuben and the Making of the American Army. Washington, DC: HarperCollins Publishers, 2008. pp. 1-2.

⁵ Doyle, op cit, p. 8.

⁶ Greene, George Washington. The German Element in the War of American Independence. New York: The Riverside Press, 1876. p. 14.

⁷ All aspiring officers in the Prussian army had to serve some time in the ranks before qualifying for their commissions. Within this temporary service, they held the rank "officer cadet" (Called *Freikorporal* in the infantry). Officer cadets held the duties of an ordinary NCO during their time, however, they were discouraged from fraternizing with enlisted men.

⁸ Clark, Christopher. Iron Kingdom: The Rise and Downfall of Prussia 1600-1947. London: Penguin Books, 2007. pp. 159-160.

⁹ Kapp, op cit, pp. 51-52.

volunteer corps conducted raids in Franconia,¹⁰ stormed the rich towns of Nuremberg, Bamberg and Hof, pursued the French to Erfurt after the Battle of Rossbach, stood gallantly against Marshal Daun's army on the lines of the Elbe and actively participated to the defence of Dresden (1758).¹¹ During the years of his service under Meyer, he learned by practice the use of the light infantry, and experienced many skirmishes which would later assist him in the Continental Army.

After the death of Meyer, Steuben reentered his service in the regular army. In the army led by Prince Henry, he served under General von Hütten as adjutant-general. In the Battle of Kay against the Russians, he made contact with his old regiment. However, it is not certain whether Steuben engaged in the bloody Battle of Kunersdorf as Hülsen's adjutant; or in the ranks of his old regiment, his name is found on the list of wounded. From this date until September 1761, there is no mention of his name. When the King's camp at Bunzelwitz was besieged by the united armies of Austria and Russia, the King sent General Platen with 7,000 men to attack the Russian rear.¹² Steuben, at that time was the General Knobloch, whose brigade was attached to Platen's corps. While Platen was marching to relieve the siege on Kolberg, Steuben's brigade of 2,000 men was dispatched to Treptow, to protect the arrival of supplies to Kolberg. In Treptow, Steuben's superior, General Knobloch, with a force of 8,000 men was trapped in the town, he fought valiantly until he ran short of provisions and ammunition. The agreement of capitulation was made by his adjutant Steuben, on 25 October 1761. The capitulation was done "under honorable conditions, under consideration of the gallant and steadfast resistance of the Royal Prussian troops under the command of the General Knobloch". The number of prisoners was 1,800, including nine guns.¹³ With this capitulation, Steuben served a brief time as a prisoner-of-war in St. Petersburg, until Peter III's peace with Friedrich II.

Refusing offers of joining the Russian army during his captivity, upon returning home, Steuben was appointed as the king's aide-de-camp with the rank of captain. Steuben's intimate friend William North describes the reason of Steuben's appointment as following: "The Baron had been for sometime in the family and friendship of Prince Henry (William) the King's brother [...] In an unfortunate campaign of the Seven Years' War, the prince incurred the displeasure of his harsh brother, who directed him to retire from the army and ordered his aides-de-camp to their different corps, or put them on such unpleasant duty [...] Steuben was sent into Silesia to recruit, equip and discipline within a certain period, a corps broken down by long and hard service. [...] By the assistance of friends funds were found, and the regiment, complete, was marched to headquarters within the time. Pleased with the prompt performance of a duty, [...] the Baron received his compliments, and a little time after, the appointment of aide-de-camp to the monarch with the charge of superintending the department of the quartermaster general."¹⁴ Although the correctness of this explanation by North is doubtful, the information is valuable in other respects. At the end of the war, Steuben

¹⁰ Tempelhoff, Georg Friedrich von. Geschichte des Siebenjährigen Krieges in Deutschland. Vol. 2. Berlin: J. F. Unger, 1785. pp. 95-99.

¹¹ Tempelhoff, op cit, p. 358.

¹² Kapp, op cit, p. 54-56.

¹³ Schaefer, Arnold. Geschichte des Siebenjährigen Kriegs. Vol. 2. Berlin: Hertz, 1874. pp. 264-267.

¹⁴ Doyle, op cit, pp. 15-16.

resigned from the army. The king gave Steuben a canonry in the cathedral of Havelburg, with a salary of 1,200 German florins as a peculiar reward.¹⁵

The reason of Steuben's resignation is a debated issue up to this day. According to Kapp's biography, Steuben says that immediately after war, an inconsiderable step and an irreplaceable personal enemy had led to his resignation, giving no further information.¹⁶ Both older and modern sources, estimate that the enemy was General Wilhelmi von Anhalt.¹⁷ This general had a bad reputation for wrecking the careers of officers whom he had taken a dislike – and there were many of them. Steuben's fall from grace happened in the blink of an eye, in a typical way of dealing with his officers by Friedrich II. Just as he dismissed the afterwards celebrated field marshals Blücher and Yorck, (By saying "*Kann sich zum Teufel scheren!*") he dealt with his former favourite in the same way. It is still not possible to determine what exactly happened with his career, since Steuben did not blame Friedrich and mentioned the king with the purest reverence in his writings. Another possibility might be the reduction of the Prussian army after the war, to lighten the burden on the treasure.¹⁸ The question "Why would such a talented officer, who was on good terms with the king be the victim of this reduction?" has not seen a complete and logical answer yet.

Steuben as a Courtier

After leaving the army, Steuben felt completely lost. After a short while, in 1764, Steuben came to Swabia in the company of an old friend, Prince Württemberg. According to the letters, Steuben was seeking a job from the prince. By the help of Princess Württemberg, Steuben was appointed *Hofmarschall* (court chamberlain) at the Court of Hohenzollern-Hechingen. Hohenzollern-Hechingen was a small German principality and Steuben's job here did not carry a political significance, it was rather a position in the prince's personal staff.¹⁹ In a memorial he wrote: "My fortune not being sufficient to support me according to my rank, my intention was to enter the service of the King of Sardinia from whence I received generous offers – But upon the recommendation of Prince Henry of Prussia, the Prince of Hohenzollern conferred on me the Employment of Grand Marshal of his Court with a salary of 1200 German florins."²⁰ It would be useful to note that although the memorial in the "Steuben Papers" mentions Prince Henry of Prussia as the one who helped him, many biographies contradict this statement. Since the abovementioned memorial was written by his aide-de-camp Benjamin Walker, it is highly possible that this was just a mistake.

As the time passed, Steuben made friends with influential men from many courts in the region, including the prince's ranking minister, Chancellor Frank. Chancellor Frank asked Steuben repeatedly to handle the prince's finances, but Steuben refused it since he was not good at dealing with even his own household's finances and adding another household would be completely ridiculous. The prince, after being saddled with heavy

¹⁵ Bowen, Francis. Life of Baron Steuben. In "The Library of American Biography," edited by Jared Sparks, Vol. 9. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1844. p. 33.

¹⁶ Kapp, op cit, p. 61.

¹⁷ Schmitt, Nikolaus. Leben und wirken von Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, Vortrag, gehalten in dem Künstlerverein von Philadelphia. Philadelphia: John Weil, 1858. p. 38.

¹⁸ Lockhart, op cit, p. 20.

¹⁹ Greene, op cit, p. 19.

²⁰ Zemensky, Edith von, Pritchett, Morgan H. "Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben: Soldier of Fortune or Military Professional?," The Report: A Journal of German-American History, Vol. 36, 1975, p. 9.

debt in 1771, temporarily dissolved his household. The prince, his family and his chamberlain lived incognito in France for three and a half years.²¹ In 1774, after serving for 10 years under the Prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingen, Steuben started looking for a job in the military. He sought positions in Corsica and British East India Company, but failed to get one. Later on, Brigadier Hahn in the French Army urged Steuben to raise a regiment for the French carrying the name of Hohenzollern-Hechingen. When Steuben contacted the French minister of war, his hopes were dashed again. In 1777, he got another rejection from the Margraviate of Baden.²²

The explanation letter, dated 13 August 1777, says “[...] B. de Steuben is accused of having taken familiarities with young boys which the laws forbid and punish severely. I have even been informed that that is the reason why B. de Steuben was obliged to leave Hechingen and that the clergy of your country intend to prosecute him by law as soon as he may establish himself anywhere.” This letter was sent by the Privy Councillor of the Margraviate of Baden (Freiherr von Edelsheim) to the Prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingen.²³ Although there is no solid evidence of him being homosexual, accusations itself were enough to make him seek employment elsewhere. As a coincidence, in Karlsruhe, an English cartographer called Peter Burdett informed Steuben about the current political situation in the Thirteen Colonies. According to the nature of the conversation between the two, it was obvious that Burdett was on the rebels’ side. Lockhart claims that Burdett was one of the informants working for the representative of the “rebels” in Paris, Benjamin Franklin. This is a fact that is not written in older accounts of Steuben’s life. Interested by what Burdett said, Steuben gave him an account of his service under Friedrich II. Burdett informed Franklin with a letter, which would start Steuben’s journey to America.²⁴ During his “lost years,” Steuben’s correspondence clearly shows that he had a large circle of friends. His amiable personality helped him to become one of the most popular figures in the Continental Army later on.²⁵

Journey to America

Steuben went to Paris, to see a friend (Comte de St. Germain, the French Minister of War) before meeting with the American representatives. Since the American representatives in Paris (Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane) were tasked to be “talent scouts” for the army, many officers throughout Europe, seeking opportunities in a new theater, saw them for a position in the Continental Army. However, those representatives had no qualifications to distinguish a good officer from an incompetent officer in shiny clothes. The Congress was even worse, which made the Continental Army a disorganized mass of untalented but daring officers; causing great discontent amongst the leadership. By the middle of 1777, Franklin and Deane were under a great deal of pressure to choke off the flow of foreign officers to the Continental Army.²⁶ In such condition, Steuben’s decision of seeing a friend who is well connected with Americans first was a timely choice. During the meetings between Steuben and St.

²¹ Lockhart, op cit, p. 25.

²² Zemensky, Pritchett, op cit, pp. 10-13.

²³ Palmer, John McAuley. General von Steuben. New Haven: CT, Yale University Press, 1937. pp. 92-93.

²⁴ Lockhart, op cit, pp. 31-32.

²⁵ Palmer, op cit, p. 73.

²⁶ Lockhart, op cit, p. 36.

Germain, the minister informed Steuben about the political situation in America and the needs of the Continental Army.²⁷

In another meeting with St. Germain, he advised Steuben to see Beaumarchais, a man actively engaged with American affairs. Through Beaumarchais, Steuben was introduced to Franklin and Deane, meeting with them at Passy. The Americans were impressed by Steuben, however he was not going to receive any money, due to lack of funds, said Franklin. Although Steuben had told Beaumarchais that he did not want to hear any more of America, he changed his ideas after consulting with St. Germain and Prince William of Prussia. Steuben agreed to enter the Continental Army as a volunteer.²⁸ Steuben expresses his reasons in a letter to Franklin on 27 January 1790 as following: "Being sure of Success in my entreprize, as soon as the Commander in chief & the army Should be convinced of the advantages of my military arrangements, there was but one difficulty to surmount and from the complexion of the times, that difficulty was of the greatest magnitude. It depended, upon obtaining such a post in the army as would enable me to make use of the knowlege of my profession & to render it beneficial to the interest of the united States, without exciting the dissatisfaction & jealousy of the Officers of your Army. Any conditions proposed by me under these circumstances tending to ensure me a recompense proportioned to my Sacrifices and my Services, would not have failed to render all negotiations abortive. But proposals to serve the united States as a volunteer without rank or pay could give no umbrage—and surely the proposition was a generous one"²⁹

Steuben's ship, *Le Flamand*, dropped anchor in Portsmouth, New Hampshire on 1 December 1777. Immediately after setting foot on Portsmouth, Baron von Steuben wrote to the Congress, informing about his arrival. "The honor of serving a respectable nation, engaged in the noble enterprize of defending it's rights and liberty, is the only motive that brought me over to this Continent. I ask neither riches nor titles. I am come here from the remotest end of Germany at my own expense, and have given up an honorable and lucrative rank. [...] My only ambition is, to serve you as a Volunteer, to deserve the confidence of your General in Chief, and to follow him in all his operations, as I have done during seven campaigns with the king of Prussia."³⁰ After waiting in Boston for a short time, the four (Steuben, Francy, Duponceau, and Des Epiniers) set out for York. When they arrived, Lieutenant-General³¹ Baron von Steuben was received by Congress "with more particular attention than ever given to any foreigner."³² It is known that Steuben wrote the first of his three wills before going to America. The will is located in the Archives of Hohenzollern Family in Hechingen, but

²⁷ Doyle, op cit, p. 38.

²⁸ Doyle, op cit, pp. 40-42.

²⁹ "To Alexander Hamilton from Baron von Steuben, 27 January 1790." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 29 July 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-06-02-0113>.

³⁰ "Report on the Memorial of Baron von Steuben, 29 March 1790." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 29 July 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-06-02-0206>.

³¹ The rank "Lieutenant-General," is probably from a mistranslation in a letter from Franklin to Washington.

³² Morton, Brain N., "Beaumarchais, Francy, Steuben, and Lafayette: An Unpublished Correspondence or "Feux de joye" at Valley Forge," *The French Review*, Vol. 49 (May), 1976, pp. 946-948.

the exact date and the complete text can not be obtained, since the archives are not open to researchers.³³

After the reception, the Congress asked his conditions and whether “he had made any agreements with the commissioners in France.” Steuben denied making any agreement, stating he wished only to join the army as a volunteer and to render such services as General Washington might think him capable of. Steuben said he would consider United States free of any obligation to him, should the rebels fail to prevail against the British.³⁴ According to Claim of Baron de Steuben, Communicated to the House of Representatives on 6 April 1790: “The committee were pleased to applaud the generosity of his propositions, in thus risking his fortune on that of the United States. The committee then left him, in order to make their report. The next day, Congress gave him an ‘entertainment; after which, the President, Mr. Laurens, told him it was the desire of Congress that he should join the army immediately, which he did.”³⁵ The committee member John Witherspoon became Steuben’s interpreter during the talks between Steuben and Congress, since Baron von Steuben could not speak any English at that time.³⁶

In York, Baron von Steuben got what he wanted. The Congress accepted his military rank and financial status without question, although there was a significant bias against foreign presence in the Continental Army. Being instantly promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General by a mistranslation by Franklin, stating he had given up an “honorable and lucrative rank” to serve as an unpaid volunteer in America in his first letter to Washington, made Steuben a “soldier of fortune”. Before leaving York, Steuben also stipulated that his staff officers should be given appropriate commissions in the Continental Army. De Pontiere, Duponceau and L’Enfant thus became Captains. Steuben received \$500 from the Board of War for future expenses. After concluding his business with the Congress, Steuben set out for Valley Forge on 19 February 1778.³⁷ Before Steuben left for Valley Forge, Washington was informed with a letter dated 10 February 1778 by Charles Thomson. “It would, I confess, give me great pleasure to hear that the importt Services of the Baron de Steuben could meet with a reward adequate to his merits & sacrafices. What may have been his verbal, or other engagements with Congress, is not for me to say, further than is contained in the paper herewith enclosed but certain it is, he hazarded his life and fortune at a critical period of our affairs [...]”³⁸ According to these letters, it was obvious that Steuben was going to meet Washington as a successful and idealist officer who made the Americans believe in his story and talents without question.

³³ Zemensky, Edith von, Pritchett, Morgan H. “The Three Wills of Baron von Steuben,” The Report: The Journal of German-American History, Vol. 35, 1972, p. 19.

³⁴ Palmer, op cit, pp. 123-124.

³⁵ American State Papers, Documents, Legislative and Executive of the Congress of the United States, From the First Session of the First to the Second Session of the Seventeenth Congress. Washington, DC: Gales and Seaton, 1834. p. 12.

³⁶ See footnote 35 or footnote 29 for the source of Witherspoon’s service as an interpreter.

³⁷ Palmer, op cit, p. 126.

³⁸ “From George Washington to Charles Thomson, 10 November 1787.” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 29 July 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-05-02-0392>.

Inspector-General Baron von Steuben

Steuben arrived at Washington's camp in Valley Forge, on 23 February 1778. In their first meeting, Washington thought Steuben "appeared to be much of a Gentleman, a man of military knowledge and acquainted with the World."³⁹ Steuben inspected the troops of Continental Army for the first time in Valley Forge. It was a pure disaster. In the winter of 1778, over 4,000 men, a high percentage of Washington's relatively small army lacked shoes and proper clothing.⁴⁰ According to Lafayette, their limbs froze till they grew black, many of them had to be amputated. They passed whole days without food, yet the soldiers patiently endured all the hardships. Their hatred of British tyranny kept them strong.⁴¹ Another problem was the lack of officers and NCOs with tactical knowledge in the Continental Army, which made Washington avoid confrontations in the open field. Amongst all, the most significant problem was the inability of American soldiers to effectively fight in linear order. While they were good marksmen, due to fighting against disorganized natives, they were not so proficient in the art of close-combat. Instead of responding a British assault with fixed bayonets, the Continentals fired one or two volleys and ran away.⁴² Although the Americans knew how to march in loose order, (which was acquired from Indians) they could not march in lines and conduct complex maneuvers. Moreover, Continental Army needed a system of their own. Each state adopted its own military system, (Some chose the French system, some chose the English one, some chose the Prussian one e.g.) which further complicated maneuvers in battalion or regimental level.⁴³

Steuben sums up the situation of the Continental Army in a letter to Franklin: "I leave it to your other Correspondents to give you an Account of the present State of our Army; If they tell you that our Order & Discipline Equals that of the French and Prussian Armies, do not believe them, but do not believe them neither, if they compare our Troops to those of the Pope, & take a just medium between those two Extremes."⁴⁴ The position of "Inspector-General" was officially held by Conway, however, Washington ordered Steuben to draw up a plan for the training of the army in early March 1778. Steuben had to find a different method, since there were many regiments to be trained. Making the new recruits adapt to a different training method in their regiments would be another challenge. Washington wanted "a European army to fight a European war, but in America."⁴⁵ Steuben formed a model company of 100-120 men. Steuben personally drilled these men two times a day, as in the Prussian tradition. In literally two weeks, his company "knew perfectly how to bear arms, had a military air,

³⁹ "From George Washington to Henry Laurens, 27 February 1778." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 01 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-13-02-0585>.

⁴⁰ Griffin, Robert A., Shaw, Ronald M. School of the Citizen Soldier: Adapted from the Educational Program of the Second Army, Lieutenant General Ben Lear, Commanding. New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942. p. 174.

⁴¹ Tower, Charlemagne Jr. The Marquis de La Fayette in the American Revolution. Vol. 1. New York: Cosmo Classics, 2005. p. 255.

⁴² Osterhoudt, Henry Jerry. Towards Organized Disorder: The Evolution of American Infantry Assault Tactics, 1778-1919. MA thesis. Defense Technical Information Center, 1979. pp. 9-10.

⁴³ Danckert, Stephen C. "A Genius for Training Baron von Steuben and the Training of the Continental Army," Army History, No. 17 (Winter) 1990-1991, p. 8.

⁴⁴ "To Benjamin Franklin from the Baron von Steuben, 28 September 1779." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 01 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-30-02-0333>.

⁴⁵ Lockhart, op cit, p. 89.

knew how to march, to form in column, deploy and execute some little manoeuvres with excellent precision.”⁴⁶

Training was going successful in all aspects, but the language barrier was still a trouble. It is said that even though Steuben had memorized English commands, his heavy accent combined with a short temper caused some confusion in the ranks. His aide, Captain Benjamin Walker helped Steuben to translate his commands and even curses.⁴⁷ Steuben realized an important difference during the drills: Unlike their European counterparts, the American soldiers would not do something without knowing the reason; as a special character of republican armies.⁴⁸ After returning to their respective units, the men in the model company managed to train their battalions, regiments came next, then brigades, and then the divisions. By the end of the April 1778, the Continental Army became able to conduct grand maneuvers as a regular army.⁴⁹ Seeing this evident success, George Washington wanted to get rid of his rival, the (official) Inspector-General Thomas Conway. On 30 April 1778, in a letter to Laurens, Washington said: “The extensive ill consequences, arising from a want of uniformity in discipline and manoeuvres throughout the army, have long occasioned me to wish for the establishment of a well organized inspectorship. [...] Baron Steuben’s length of service in the first military school in Europe,⁵⁰ and his former rank, pointed him out as a person peculiarly qualified to be at the head of this department. [...] I therefore proposed to him to undertake the office of inspector-general, which he agreed to with the greatest cheerfulness [...]”⁵¹ After almost a week, Steuben was officially made “inspector-general” on 5 May 1778.

The new methods were tested for the first time on 20 May 1778. Washington learned that the British were making preparations to leave Philadelphia, perhaps to return to New York City. Lafayette offered to lead a detachment to watch the enemy and strike their supply lines if an opportunity arose. Washington sent Lafayette off with 2,200 men. At Barren Hill, the British, with a much superior force, almost trapped the Americans.⁵² Despite all, Lafayette “by his own dexterity or the enemy’s want of it, disengaged himself in a very soldierlike manner.” He had managed to orderly retreat, losing only three men against a greater British force. Had not Steuben reformed the training methods, the battle would possibly be a disaster for the Continentals.⁵³ The British completed their evacuation of Philadelphia on 18 June 1778. They were going to New Jersey. The Continentals followed the British, but failed to defeat them at the Battle of Monmouth, on 28 June 1778. Although the Americans proved that they were a match for the British henceforth, General Charles Lee did not want to attack

⁴⁶ Greene, op cit, p. 49.

⁴⁷ Middlekauff, Robert. The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763-1789. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985. p. 418.

⁴⁸ Palmer, op cit, p. 157.

⁴⁹ Greene, op cit, p. 50.

⁵⁰ After the Seven Years’ War, Friedrich II established a course taught by himself for promising officers to replace the losses in the officer corps. Steuben was one of the students of the course.

⁵¹ George Washington, The Writings of George Washington: pt. II. Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers Relating to the American Revolution, edited by Jared Sparks, Vol. 5. Boston: Ferdinand Andrews, 1840. pp. 347-348.

⁵² Middlekauff, op cit, p. 419.

⁵³ The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 7. pp. 31-32.

directly against British regulars, therefore losing a chance to achieve a significant victory.⁵⁴

Since General Lee had the guilt of this battle rest on his shoulders, it would be useful to dive into his hesitancy to attack more specifically. Under this hesitance laid his distrust to Steuben and the Prussian military system, which solely based on personal merit. Lee was not alone in his stance. Many officers thought Steuben was seeking more power under the disguise of his position, using the legal gap since the duties of the inspector-general was not defined openly in laws. Varnum, one of the most prominent opponants of Steuben, portrayed Steuben as a foreign know-it-all, who underestimated American officers' talents and wanted to be some kind of an equal to Washington.⁵⁵ Despite the fact that most of the accusations were just the products of jealousy, Lee managed to sabotage Steuben's ongoing progress with the army. Some of the accusations had a point though. It was obvious that Steuben would seek command in the field after the inspectorship. Washington's thoughts about making Steuben a commander in the field is described in a letter on 24 June 1778 to Governor Morris as following: "Baron Steuben, I now find, is also wanting to quit his inspectorship for a command in the line. This will be productive of much discontent to the brigadiers. In a word, although I think the Baron an excellent officer, I do most devoutly wish, that we had not a single foreigner among us, except the Marquis de Lafayette, who acts upon very different principles from those which govern the rest."⁵⁶

The Lee affair was solved in a court-martial. The court found him guilty of disobedience for his reluctance to attack in the Battle of Monmouth, of misbehavior before the enemy for his unnecessary retreat ,and of disrespect to the Commander-in-Chief. The court, on 12 August 1778, sentenced Lee "to be suspended from any command in the armies of United States for the term of twelve months."⁵⁷ Steuben challenged Lee to duel after Lee's derogatory remarks regarding the courage of Steuben in the trial. The matter was dropped after Steuben accepted Lee's explanations, saying that he had not questioned Steuben's courage.⁵⁸ In the meantime, Steuben was working on writing new regulations for the Continental Army. For his work, Steuben analysed European systems, with a special emphasis on 1764 British Manual of Arms. Steuben chose the Prussian model to be modified, for its efficiency and centralized structure. Those simplified drills made the Continentals fight more effectively against the British. Having nine loading steps instead of seventeen in the old manual, an increased marching pace, emphasize on the bayonet training to complement the marksmanship of the Continentals, were some of the advantages of the new system.⁵⁹

The Congress adopted Baron von Steuben's drill manual on 29 March 1779. The adoption of his drill manual is described in the Journals of the Continental Congress

⁵⁴ See Palmer, op cit, pp. 170-173 for the reason why Lee thought it was still not sensible to challenge the British regulars during that time.

⁵⁵ Lockhart, op cit, pp. 134-135.

⁵⁶ Sparks, Jared. The Life of Gouverneur Morris: With Selections from His Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers, Vol. 1. Boston: Gray & Bowen, 1832. p. 173.

⁵⁷ See Proceedings of A General Court-Martial, for the Trial of Major-General Lee. New York: J. M. Bradstreet & Son, 1864.

⁵⁸ "From Alexander Hamilton to Baron von Steuben, [19 December 1778]." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed on 03 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-01-02-0681>.

⁵⁹ Wright, Robert K. Jr. The Continental Army. Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 2006. p. 141.

as following: “A letter, of 25, from Baron Steuben was read, accompanied with a system of regulations for the infantry of the United States; also, a letter from the Board of War, representing that Baron Steuben, inspector general, has formed a system of exercise and discipline for the infantry of the United States; that the same has been submitted to the inspection of the Commander in Chief, and his remarks thereon and amendments incorporated in the work: that it has been examined with attention by the Board, and is highly approved, as being calculated to produce important advantages to the states; and therefore praying ‘that it may receive the sanction of Congress, and be committed to the press.’” Regarding this letter, the Congress ordered “That the following regulations be observed by all the troops of the United States, and that all general and other officers cause the same to be executed with all possible exactness.”⁶⁰

The “Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States” certainly was more than a simplified version of European drill manuals. The “Blue Book” (Steuben’s drill manual had this nickname) redesigned the basic tactical unit⁶¹ as the battalion, instead of the regiment. To ease maneuvers on the field, Steuben adopted *ordre mixte*, a concept invented by Guibert. In this concept, divisions and brigades march in closed columns for speed and control and rapidly form lines for musket fire or bayonet charge. To solve another major problem in the Continental Army, Steuben ordered officers to inspect the military equipment of their soldiers every day. If it appeared that a soldier had lost, damaged or sold a part of his military equipment, that soldier would have to pay a compensation for the missing item. For dealing with medical conditions, Steuben says: “There is nothing which gains an officer the love of his soldiers more than his care of them under the distresses or sicknesses; it is then he has the power of exerting his humanity in providing them every comfortable necessary, and making their situation as agreeable as possible.”⁶² The book’s “instructions” part is generally about keeping the soldiers in order, by constant supervision by their superiors. Steuben also emphasizes the importance of NCO corps, since the lack of a trained NCO corps caused disorder within the Continental Army.

After the Blue Book had been adopted, Washington asked Steuben to conduct army-wide inspections, he needed an immediate report on the condition of the Continental Army. Steuben personally started to inspect every single regiment, thoroughly and passionately. Steuben created a system to keep the situation of the military equipment in check. Every company started to have “company books” while private soldiers had their own, listing each item of government property, issued to each soldier. This caring, dedicated attitude of Steuben set an example for other officers to follow.⁶³ In the winter of 1779-80, the army was facing a disaster. The army at Morristown was almost paralyzed due to bad weather. On December 1779, Washington ordered Steuben to prepare another report on the condition of the troops in Morristown. Steuben found that no regiment was up to strength, the soldiers were suffering from carelessness and the army still lacked supplies despite all the efforts. Reorganizing the regiments (by

⁶⁰ Journals of the Continental Congress, Vol. 13. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909. pp. 384-385.

⁶¹ The term “basic tactical unit” determines the lowest level of the initiative. In a system where battalion is the basic tactical unit, initiative can not go lower than the level of the battalion commander.

⁶² Steuben, Baron von. Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States. Boston: Henry Ranlet, 1794. pp. 62-64

⁶³ Lockhart, op cit, p. 208.

reducing their number but making them larger units in standard sizes) was an option. However, many officers who would lose their posts, would not back this.⁶⁴

The debate upon the reorganization of the army was heated. During that time, Washington sent Steuben to Philadelphia to confer with Congress regarding the reform of the army. There was a prejudice against a standing army, many people thought that fighting some kind of an irregular warfare would be enough to exhaust the British. This caused a strong opposition to an army reform, the fact that the existence of the army being at stake did not change anything.⁶⁵ Steuben arrived in Philadelphia on 22 January 1780. By the time that he arrived, there was a plan to reorganize the army. There were 80 regiments in total in the army, it was impossible to maintain all those regiments under the voluntary system, given the fact that compulsory draft proposed by Washington was politically impossible. In order to reduce the expenses and make the army better organized, a new model was proposed, called the “incorporation plan”. This plan proposed to form an entirely new army by merging regiments, since it was impossible to find recruits for more than 40 effective battalions. The plan would also reduce the expenses by dropping half of the officers from the payrolls.⁶⁶

Steuben did not approve this plan, since it would only be useful for the short term. On the other hand it would lower morale, sacrifice experienced officers, even send an indirect message of encouragement for the British; but do no good for the defense of the country. The only possible solution would be postponing the reorganization and enlarging the army through vigorous recruitment.⁶⁷ On 5 February 1780, the Congress adopted the following resolution: “Congress resumed the consideration of the report of the Board of War; and the following paragraphs being severally debated, That for the ensuing campaign, the states be respectively required to furnish by drafts, or otherwise, on or before the first day of April next, their respective deficiencies of the number of 35,211 men, which Congress deem necessary for the service of the present year.”⁶⁸ Washington expressed his opinion regarding the decisions of the Congress in a letter to Steuben, dated 2 April 1780: “The propositions made by you to Congress for the arrangement of the army this campaign appear to me, upon the whole, best adapted to our circumstances, and especially since so much of the season has elapsed without entering upon it. I am glad the proposed incorporation has been suspended.”⁶⁹

After his service in the main forces, Washington sent Steuben to West Point, knowing that he would find much to reform at West Point. Steuben helped the fort’s commander, General Howe, reducing the routine details by two-thirds without impairing the service. This released 2,000 veterans for active military duty, making them be able to resume their long neglected drills. At the end of July 1780, the troops at West Point, consisting of veterans and recruits from New England, joined the main army while Steuben was given the command of a division. The troops were kept ready for an opportunity of a decisive action. On September 1780, Washington concluded that there would be no chance for a decisive action that year. In a war council, the decisive campaign against New York was postponed.⁷⁰ The Congress finally solved the incorporation affair

⁶⁴ Lockhart, op cit, pp. 215-216.

⁶⁵ Doyle, op cit, p. 153.

⁶⁶ Palmer, op cit, p. 221.

⁶⁷ Lockhart, op cit, p. 217.

⁶⁸ Journals of the Continental Congress, Vol. 16. p. 125.

⁶⁹ The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 7. pp. 9-11.

⁷⁰ Palmer, op cit, pp. 231-234.

favorably upon Washington's demands. While there was a long-lasting debate in the Congress, things were not going well in southern states. The Continental Army had lost South Carolina along with the core of the Southern Army, including Baron de Kalb. Washington appointed Greene as the new commander of the Southern Army, while Steuben would help Greene reorganize those worn troops.⁷¹

"Though I am sensible how important your services would be in this quarter, yet, as at the southward there is an army to be created, the mass of which is without any formation at all, your services there would be still more essential; and, as I am persuaded that your inclination is to be wherever you can be most useful, I have recommended it to Congress to send you with General Greene to the southern army. If Congress approve, you will take his orders and proceed as speedily as possible. I wish you may have been able previously to obtain a satisfactory establishment of your department, which, in your absence, will become more necessary than it has been heretofore."⁷² Said Washington, on 22 October 1780. Steuben's job there was not going to be an easy one, since many of the soldiers either got killed, wounded or became prisoners-of-war. It was Steuben's job to create a new army from the remnants of the forces of the Southern Army, while providing them adequate military equipment, since the British captured the majority of their supplies at the Siege of Charleston.

Steuben's Service in Virginia

Steuben and Greene arrived in Richmond, Virginia, on 16 November 1780. During the following six days, Greene contacted with the civil authorities of the southern states, informing them of the importance of the upcoming Southern campaign of 1781. Greene demanded supplies from the Governor of Virginia, Thomas Jefferson, along with \$5,000 for the expenses of the army.⁷³ Knowing that supplies from the southern states would not be adequate for the troops, Greene wrote to the Board of War, saying that "The whole southern operations will depend upon the stores coming from the northward."⁷⁴ The heart of the Southern Army were the infantry regiments from Maryland and Delaware. After the disastrous Battle of Camden, these troops formed a single regiment. With no organized forces from Georgia or the Carolinas, Greene had to rely on Virginia for reinforcements from the southern states. When Greene left Richmond for North Carolina, Steuben remained in Richmond to supervise the reorganization of the troops. Washington intended to replace the losses at Charleston by using new recruits, convalescents and repatriated prisoners. Steuben was unable to implement this program because of a series of problems, which led to a breach between Steuben and Jefferson.⁷⁵

The clash between Steuben and Jefferson was the clash of the Prussian mind which valued military efficiency, against the republican one which prioritized the preservation of rights and liberties. In the meantime, the Southern Army, being expelled from North Carolina, started preparing for a possible invasion of Virginia by Cornwallis. Despite all, Steuben was making good progress. In a short period, Steuben had managed to

⁷¹ Wright, op cit, p. 156.

⁷² The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 7. p. 276.

⁷³ Decker, Michael McMillen. Baron Von Steuben and the Military Forces in Virginia During the British Invasions of 1780-1781. MA thesis. University of Richmond, 1979. pp. 5-6.

⁷⁴ Greene, George Washington. The Life of Nathanael Greene : Major-General in The Army of the Revolution, Vol. 3. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884. p. 50.

⁷⁵ Wright, op cit, p. 164.

call in the scattered forces, improved recruitment of additional troops, provided troops to Greene, even made some preparations for a possible amphibious attack.⁷⁶ On 29 December 1780, a British fleet of 27 ships dropped anchor, carrying 1,600 British regulars commanded by Benedict Arnold. On 4 January 1781, the British set foot on Richmond. Jefferson ordered Steuben to defend Richmond by giving him the initiative to be in charge of all the troops, this would be the first battle by him in America. Steuben did not have the chance to mount a significant resistance against the enemy, therefore stood at the south side of the James River while the British were encamped on the northern side. On 5 January 1781, the British entered the town. Major Dick, with his militia, appeared before the British at Church Hill, only to be quickly dispersed. Another small force was defeated by the British at Shockoe Hill. After Simcoe destroyed the foundry, laboratory and the magazine at Westham, Arnold's troops set Richmond ablaze. Fortunately the fire only affected private property, dealing no damage of strategic importance.⁷⁷

Although the condition of the Southern Army was getting better, Greene's entire force, about 2,000 strong was not a match for Cornwallis yet. Greene decided to avoid a decisive engagement until he could receive the expected reinforcements from Virginia. In the meantime, Steuben had forced Arnold into Portsmouth. Steuben would have captured Arnold, which was strongly desired by Washington, had the French admiral blockaded the mouth of the river. Steuben continued to attack Arnold's outposts, while collecting supplies for the coming of Lafayette. Lafayette was ordered to capture Arnold, however, Arnold was replaced with William Phillips along with 2,000 men. Steuben's force was not able to confine the 3,500 men at Portsmouth. With the British were being constantly reinforced, Steuben's plan of expelling them from Virginia had to be abandoned. Steuben ordered his subordinate Muhlenberg to establish a defensive cordon around Portsmouth, gathering all his forces.⁷⁸ The new development shocked the Americans, if the British wanted to push further into Virginia, Muhlenberg could not stop him. Steuben needed to make a new plan. The State of Virginia had 4,000 militia, even if all of them were concentrated around Portsmouth, they would not be able to hold Phillips. Had Greene been reinforced with the half of the militia, he would enjoy numerical superiority against Cornwallis, whose army got badly damaged in the Battle of Guilford Courthouse. If everything went according to the plan, Phillips would be compelled to assist Cornwallis, therefore relieving the Virginia coast "by his own desire."

Everything was well planned, yet the Virginia State Council rejected it, without debate, since a large portion of the state's resources were going to be used in the plan.⁷⁹ In the meantime, by April 1781, the militia were not in good condition. Their three-month enlistment was about to expire, causing desertions as the time passed. Muhlenberg reported that 100 men left their posts and went home in just one night. Throughout the state, there were even open riots against militia duty. Only 700 militiamen remained from what Muhlenberg had outside Petersburg, with another 500 on the northern side of River James.⁸⁰ According to Steuben's letter on 21 April 1781, we know that his troops were in great distress for arms. Steuben distributed all those he had to the

⁷⁶ Decker, op cit, p. 15.

⁷⁷ Carrington, Henry B. Battles of the American Revolution 1775-1781. New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876. pp. 548-549.

⁷⁸ Doyle, op cit, pp. 223-225.

⁷⁹ Lockhart, op cit, pp. 248-249.

⁸⁰ Lockhart, op cit, p. 251.

militia. Notwithstanding the distress, he found that “1,000 Arms which have been distributed to the troops under Genl. Muhlenberg are not in a condition to be used.” He ordered the militia he assembled on Richmond to stay there, while ordering those at Manchester to march on Richmond and those at Richmond to march on Bland’s Ordinary.⁸¹

Finding the right time, Phillips set foot on City Point. Steuben was right in his prediction, the British intended to destroy the Continental Army’s supplies at Petersburg, before marching on Richmond. Steuben decided to engage the British only to buy some time for the evacuation of Richmond and Chesterfield, knowing that he would not be able to repel them.⁸² Thomas Jefferson provides a detailed account of the battle in a letter to Washington, dated 9 May 1781: “The Enemy after leaving Williamsburg came directly up James River and landed at City point being the point of Land on the Southern Side of the Confluence of Appomattox and James Rivers; they marched up to Petersburg where they were received by Major General Baron Steuben with a Body of Militia somewhat under 1000, who ’tho the Enemy were 2300 strong disputed the Ground very handsomely two Hours during which time the Enemy gained one mile only and that by inches. Our Troops were then ordered to retire over a Bridge which they did in perfect good Order. Our Loss was between sixty and seventy killed wounded and taken: the Enemy’s is unknown but from Circumstances of Probability it must have been equal to ours; for their own Honour they must confess this, as they broke twice and run like Sheep till supported by fresh Troops. An Inferiority of Number obliged our Force to withdraw about 12 Miles upwards, till more Militia should be assembled.”⁸³

After the battle, Jefferson congratulated Steuben for his “initiation of the militia into the business of war.”⁸⁴ Phillips died after a while and Arnold resumed the command. Meanwhile, Lafayette was marching to Virginia, with a force of about 1,500 light infantry to join Steuben.⁸⁵ No longer in charge of field operations, Steuben continued his duty of preparing troops for Greene, while Lafayette was facing 7,000 seasoned enemies with the arrival of Cornwallis at Petersburg. Many officers including Steuben and Lafayette, were laboring under the thought that the real war was going on Carolinas, not Virginia.⁸⁶ Washington was keeping a constant eye on the South, while making feints against New York to keep Clinton from sending reinforcements to Cornwallis. It was the time to engage Cornwallis in a decisive battle, after the successes of Greene in Carolinas. In a meeting with Rochambeau, Washington told him of the plans of liberating Virginia, but the matter was kept a secret as the details of Count de Grasse’s naval attack were still uncertain. On 11 August, Grasse informed the Americans that he was en route from West Indies to Chesapeake Bay and on 19 August, leaving

⁸¹ “To Thomas Jefferson from Steuben, 21 April 1781.” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 07 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-05-02-0651>.

⁸² See for a detailed narrative of the actions before, during and after the Battle of Petersburg: Selby, John E. The Revolution in Virginia, 1775-1783. Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 2007. pp. 265-276.

⁸³ “From Thomas Jefferson to George Washington, 9 May 1781.” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 07 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-05-02-0762>.

⁸⁴ “From Thomas Jefferson to Steuben, 26 April 1781.” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 07 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-05-02-0687>.

⁸⁵ Thacher, James. A Military Journal during the American Revolutionary War, from 1775 to 1783. Boston: Richardson & Lord, 1823. p. 313.

⁸⁶ Lockhart, op cit, p. 261.

enough troops at strategic points, Washington marched Southwards with a combined Franco-American force of about 6,000 men.⁸⁷

Washington then marched from the Head of Elk (today's Elkton, MD) to begin preparations for the siege. The troops of Lafayette were already assembled near Williamsburg, soon to be combined with those of Washington's on 26 September. Orders were given to march towards Yorktown on the next day. There was a debate in Lafayette's camp whether to wait for the arrival of Washington, since Comte de Grasse and Saint-Simon thought that they had adequate numbers for the siege. Lafayette refused the offer, suggesting that a frontal assault would be very costly, especially without the presence of siege artillery.⁸⁸ On 28 September, the army "marched from the right in one column," occupying a position on the south of Yorktown, while the French threatened Yorktown from the west. The British had completely abandoned their redoubts on 30 September to defend Yorktown with all of their forces. Even though the British at Yorktown were excellent fighters, the abandonment of the redoubts and the terrain eased the countervallation process.⁸⁹

Steuben had a division under his command, however, he also assumed the duties of an advisor during the siege, since Washington trusted Steuben's experience in that matter. He was the only American officer who participated in a regular siege. Another duty of Steuben was the management of the cooperation with the French staff, acting to insure the Americans were fairly participating in the action.⁹⁰ On the night of 11 October, Steuben's and Baron de Viomenil's divisions began the second parallel just 350 yards from Yorktown. Their job was done in two days, the only remaining obstacle was the Redoubts No. 9 and No. 10. On the night of 14 October, Lafayette's troops managed to capture Redoubt No. 10 in just 10 minutes. Cornwallis decided not to surrender without a sortie, which was repelled by the Franco-American troops. After the fall of the last outer defenses, over 100 guns started bombarding Yorktown. At 2:00pm on 19 October 1781, the garrison surrendered. The British handed over a large number of military supplies, along with 243 artillery pieces. With the victory at Yorktown, the British campaign in the South finally ended.⁹¹

Steuben's Last Years

After the surrender at Yorktown, Congress wanted to trim expenses. The last two years of the war were relatively quiet, the Continental Army did not engage in any major battles. The British still had armies in New York, Charleston, South Carolina, parts of Georgia, and Canada, however, the British Parliament did not want to pursue a lost cause. The Congress, concentrated on reducing the army's support structure, initiating the dismantlement process of the Continental Army. On June 1782, Washington and Steuben began a series of monthly inspections. They were satisfied by the condition of the troops. Even though their support structure was being dismantled, the troops kept a state of readiness. The Continental Army was finally reduced to a small force,

⁸⁷ Doyle, op cit, pp. 254-255.

⁸⁸ Decker, op cit, pp. 108-109.

⁸⁹ Wright, John W. "Notes on the Siege of Yorktown in 1781 with Special Reference to the Conduct of a Siege in the Eighteenth Century," *The William and Mary Quarterly*. Vol. 12, No. 4 (October) 1932, pp. 235-238.

⁹⁰ Decker, op cit, p. 110.

⁹¹ Morrissey, Brandan. *Yorktown 1781: The World Turned Upside Down*. London: Osprey Publishing, 1997. pp. 67-77.

designed for peacetime missions.⁹² Steuben acted as an advisor to Washington during this process, he advocated that “[...] a small professional army, supplemented in wartime by the trained militia, would do the trick.” Steuben also argued that the United States needed an army of 50,000 men to be more respectable in the eyes of European powers. The Congress in 1783 was more worried about getting rid of the expenses rather than forming a new one, therefore Steuben’s ideas were not even properly debated.⁹³

Washington planned to use British border posts as a wide defensive belt. “The posts should be occupied by United States troops the moment they are evacuated by the British. Should this be neglected, I have my fears, that they may be burned or destroyed by the Indians, or some other evil-minded persons, whose disaffection to the government of the United States may lead them to such enormities.” Said Washington, on 3 May 1783.⁹⁴ Washington tasked Steuben to receive the British-occupied posts. On 12 July, Washington informed Lieutenant-General Haldimand, the Commander-in-Chief of the British troops in Canada; that he ordered Baron Steuben, “an officer of rank and reputation,” to “receive possession of the posts and fortresses on the north western and western frontier of the territory of the United States.”⁹⁵ Steuben’s military career ended with honor on 24 March 1784. We will not prolong this chapter by mentioning his efforts to receive a military pension from the Congress⁹⁶, or his private life.

Steuben’s Legacy

“Sensible, Sober & brave; well acquainted with Tactics & with the arrangement & discipline of an Army. High in his ideas of Subordination—impetuous in his temper—ambitious—and a foreigner.”⁹⁷ Amongst all qualifications of Steuben, him being a foreigner stood there like a blot during those times. The words were written in a memorandum by Washington. Although he was really impressed by Steuben, he would prefer to fight this war with no foreigners within their ranks. (See footnote 56) He was thought to be an able soldier by most Americans, however, the jealousies and political intrigues kept him from serving as the Secretary of War after the war.⁹⁸ The opposition against Steuben can be separated in two different camps. On one hand, there were men who considered him as a political rival, seeing the Baron as an officer who sought pure adventure and glory. On the other, there were men who opposed his thoughts on military affairs. Steuben was raised in a system that valued a centralized command structure, he considered the war as a national issue therefore. On the contrary, men like Jefferson prioritized the defense and welfare of the state, putting national concerns behind. This was something that Steuben never understood. Why would there be disagreements between the officers of the Continental Army and the state militia? If

⁹² Wright, op cit, pp. 173-179.

⁹³ Lockhart, op cit, pp. 288-289.

⁹⁴ The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 8. p. 428.

⁹⁵ The Writings of George Washington, Vol. 8. pp. 461-462.

⁹⁶ See: “Baron von Steuben to George Washington, [26 October 1787].” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 9 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0150>. See for the solution of the “pension affair”: Journal of the House of Representatives of the United States, 1789-1793, Vol. 1. Washington, DC: Gales & Seaton, 1826. pp. 210-211.

⁹⁷ “Memorandum on General Officers, 9 March 1792.” Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 10 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-10-02-0040>.

⁹⁸ Proceedings upon the Unveiling of the Statue of Baron von Steuben. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1913. p. 39.

such an event occurred between Friedrich the Great's army and the Freikorps, the latter would obey the former's orders without questioning.⁹⁹ Why would executives with no military knowledge interfere in the conduct of the armies, as they did by refusing Steuben's plan in Virginia before?

The Continental Army back then had the characteristics of an 18th century republican army. The notions of order, efficiency, subordination, and rapid decision-making were replaced by separation of powers, republican rights and liberties. Military plans needed to be debated before a council of executives, reducing the maneuverability in exchange for a relatively democratic command structure. On the contrary, the Prussian Army did not even approve war councils held by high-ranking officers. Friedrich II thought that war councils would only be a gathering of irresolute ideas, since the men in war councils rejected every single plan, by pointing out their weaknesses. Prussian general Scharnhorst summarizes their understanding of war: "While at war, achieving integrity and efficiency in the conduct of maneuvers are more important than the maneuvers itself."¹⁰⁰ Another contradiction laid in the preference of citizen-soldiers as "Continental Militia," instead of a professional standing army. Steuben preferred a standing army, since the young republic was under threat by foreign powers. Only five decades after their establishment, the United States had gone through a war of independence, a quasi war against France, another war against the British, border skirmishes with Spain, and many conflicts against Indians.

Even though the United States was facing many threats, the notion of a professional standing army did not appeal to the Founding Fathers. They had lived with such a system under British rule, which made them skeptical of all forms of centralized power. Even the Articles of the Confederation created a very loose bond between the thirteen states, creating a weak central government. The will of the executives to avoid large military expenditures formed their military doctrine. The regulars only existed to guard the northern border, while large scale national defense was viewed as a responsibility of the American citizens. The regular army's duty was to keep the invader busy long enough for a popular army to be mustered, putting a cap on the size of the regulars. This strategy negated the "ill effects" of a large standing army, therefore ensuring the "civilian rule."¹⁰¹ On the other hand, the powers in Europe maintained large standing armies based on conscription. There were indeed many contradictions between Steuben's military thought and that of the Americans, however, some elements of Prussian military system were easily absorbed into the American system. Maneuvering with smaller tactical units, drills being conducted directly by officers, acting as a machine-like body while marching and on the battlefield, an organized system of inspections; these were some of the ideas adopted by the Americans from the Prussian system.

⁹⁹ The Continental Army called Virginia to provide trained soldiers for the campaign in South Carolina, even though the existence of the state was threatened by British forces in Portsmouth. See the following letters for detailed information: "From Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Huntington, 14 September 1780." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 10 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-03-02-0736>. "To Thomas Jefferson from Horatio Gates, 6 October 1780." Founders Online, National Archives. Accessed 10 August 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-04-02-0017>.

¹⁰⁰ Goltz, Colmar von der. *Millet-i Müselleha (Ordu Millet)*, edited by İsmet Sarıbal, Istanbul: Otorite Kitap, 2016. pp. 78-79.

¹⁰¹ Hart, John S. *The Demise of the Citizen-Soldier and its Implications for the Role of the American Army*. Undergraduate Thesis. UVM Honors College Senior Theses, 2014. p. 6.

I have provided an account of Steuben's military life, with emphasis on his service in the Continental Army thus far. There are still questions to be answered. How long did the Blue Book stay in use? How did the Blue Book affect U.S. Army's military doctrine today? From its adoption till the end of the War of 1812, the Blue Book remained as the drill manual, satisfying the needs of a newborn military. On 1798, in contemplation of war with the French, President Adams issued regulations for the militia as a supplement to the Blue Book.¹⁰² Throughout the world, the successes of the French Army against the coalition were being heard. Seeing the organization, flexibility, maneuverability, and discipline of the French, American military writers wanted a new drill manual based on French tactics. On 1807, the French "System of Discipline and Maneuvers of the Infantry" was published in the United States. The French system gave more initiative to the officers, unlike other manuals that set a long list of rules for them. The decline of the Blue Book began in the War of 1812, with the publication of "Regulations for the Field Exercises, Manoeuvres and Conduct of the Infantry" written by Alexander Smyth. Smyth's regulations directly adopted the administrative section of the Blue Book, while the parts concerned with drill were a shortened version of the French "1791 Réglement."

Smyth's manual was criticized for its lack of instructions for units larger than regiments. Even though the regiments performed well, they could not maneuver in larger formations. In the spring of 1813, William Duane introduced a new drill manual, called "Hand Book for Infantry." Duane criticized Smyth's work for being "no more than a very injurious mutilation of the French infantry system," but his was no different. The American military's situation resembled the times before Steuben's arrival, each officer chose a different drill manual to train their troops. The army's lack of a proper tactical system caused a massive disorganization, which made some officers either revert to the Blue Book or the 1791 Réglement. Brigadier-General William Scott chose the latter as the drill manual for his troops. Scott's troops proved quite successful compared to Major-General Izard's troops, trained by the Blue Book. After the start of peace negotiations on August 1814, a board consisting of high-ranking officers decided to adopt the 1791 Réglement with minor changes; thus ending the use of the Blue Book in the Army of the United States.¹⁰³

Many of the drill procedures written by Baron von Steuben stood until the end of the American Civil War. There are still references to the Blue Book in modern US Army field manuals.¹⁰⁴ Steuben's regulations may not be in use now, but his legacy lives on.

Conclusion

In this work, my aim was to provide a theoretical approach to Steuben's impact on the US Army during and after the Revolutionary War. Unlike just giving a solid account of the Baron's battles, I evaluated his military life with a selective method. Steuben's service in the Continental Army can not be considered as a soldier of fortune's adventures, trying his chance overseas; it is rather the introduction of Prussian values to the United States, which dominated the European military thought for a long time.

¹⁰² Lieber, G. Norman. Remarks on the Army Regulations and Executive Regulations in General. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898. p. 63.

¹⁰³ See for the adoption of the French system in the United States Army: Graves, Donald E. "From Steuben to Scott: The Adoption of French Infantry Tactics by the United States Army, 1807-1816," The War of 1812 Magazine. No. 26 (December) 2016.

¹⁰⁴ See US Army Field Manuals 22-5 and 100-5.

The Islamic scholars called Aristotle as their “first teacher,” since they were impressed by his works while creating their own. Baron von Steuben’s role in the American military thought is no different than that of the Aristotle’s.

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