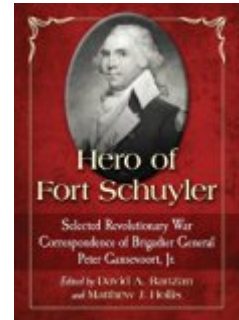


David A. Ranzan, Matthew J. Hollis, eds.. *Hero of Fort Schuyler: Selected Revolutionary War Correspondence of Brigadier General Peter Gansevoort, Jr.*
Jefferson: McFarland, 2014. 280 pp. \$49.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-7864-7948-1.



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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

In their new book *Hero of Fort Schuyler: Selected Revolutionary War Correspondence of Brigadier General Peter Gansevoort, Jr.*, editors David A. Ranzan and Matthew J. Hollis attempt to provide a deeper understanding of the war and its participants by examining the challenges and achievements of a junior officer. The book follows Gansevoort from his initial appointment as a lieutenant in the Albany militia in 1775 to his eventual appointment of brigadier general in the US Army more than thirty years later. The editors suggest that Gansevoort, as a junior officer, experienced the war in the middle ground between the hardships of the common soldier and the relative privilege of the senior leaders. Being in the middle, Gansevoort served “as a conduit of communication between the soldiers on the march and the superiors commanding them” and expressed an “occasional ire” toward both superiors and subordinates that was perhaps shared with other junior officers (p. 2). Additionally, the editors state that the book provides a glimpse into the personal fears and hopes of Gansevoort and

his family, along with “a detailed understanding of the northern campaign, including the fortification and supply of the Champlain-Hudson-Mohawk Valley forts of New York during the American Revolution as well as the battles fought in the area” (p. 3). Ultimately, they hope the book will “place a springboard before a new concerted effort in uncovering new angles of historical interpretation” (p. 2).

Roughly half of the readings within the 230 pages are selections of documents (mostly correspondence) that have been “transcribed verbatim, literatim et punctuatim” (p. 3). The other half is commentary on the documents provided by Ranzan and Hollis. While their commentary is supported by a credible list of secondary and primary sources, it occasionally leaves the reader wishing they had offered more insight and context for the correspondence. For example, an important narrative in the first two chapters involves the feud between Gansevoort and General Horatio Gates. The editors would have provided a greater service to H-War readers by explaining how this feud fit

into the larger context of Gates's feud with George Washington and related events, such as the Conway Cabal. To their credit, however, they do demonstrate the effects this feud had on Gansevoort's self-perception and behavior.

Ranzan and Hollis could have also made better use of their commentaries to fill in story gaps apparently created by missing documents. In chapter 3, they comment on several letters that reveal an emerging romance between Major Gansevoort and Catherine Van Schaick, the sister of his regimental commander. One of Gansevoort's letters expressed "his frustration that he could not leave his post" to visit Catherine because of the demanding duties of his position. In chapter 4, we find Gansevoort in the middle ground occupied by the junior officer. On one hand, he tried to motivate subordinates complaining "of perpetual Fatigue" and wished to leave their humdrum posts at their current station in order to participate in the action of the "Grand Army" (p. 93). And, on the other hand, he pleaded with superiors for more artillery and personnel. Somehow in the midst of all of these pressures, the editors casually acknowledge, Gansevoort managed to marry Van Schaick and find time for a honeymoon. The episode seems to support General Gates's belief that Gansevoort had a tendency to neglect his duties, but a short commentary providing more insight into the event would have been useful to the reader.

One of the book's strengths is the letters and the commentary that examine the relations between Gansevoort and Native Americans. These interactions are emphasized in chapter 5, "1779: Expedition into Indian Country," and continue through the remainder of the book. For example, the editors highlight the trouble Gansevoort and his men had determining "which tribes were friend or foe, often resulting in atrocious and needless native casualties" (p. 119).

And finally, one of the more interesting and insightful narratives follows the correspondence

between Peter Gansevoort and his brother Leonard, a member of the Provincial Congress. Through these interactions, we gain not only deeper insight into Peter's military challenges but also glimpses into the political pressures on junior officers and Leonard's personal views of his brother as a military officer. Unfortunately, after chapter 5, the narrative ends with little explanation for the decrease in their correspondence.

While some of their narratives seem truncated, overall Ranzan and Hollis achieve their goals of providing a middle-tier view of the American Revolution and a more detailed account of the northern campaign. Ultimately, these truncated narratives do accomplish the goal of inspiring deeper research into the topic. While the book does more or less deliver on the benefits suggested by the editors, H-War readers should recognize the perhaps more important benefit of being able to apply Gansevoort's experiences to the challenges and opportunities faced by a modern-day junior military officer.

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