

H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Mark V. Kwasny. *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783*. Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996. xv + 425 pp. \$35.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-87338-546-6.

Reviewed by Michael P. Gabriel (Kutztown University)
Published on H-PCAACA (August, 1997)

Although George Washington's major campaigns in the New York City area have been recounted many times, Mark V. Kwasny offers readers an interesting reassessment. Rather than focusing on the principal British and American armies, he places the emphasis on the "swarms of small detachments consisting of militia and regular soldiers maneuvering around the massed formations and creating a swirl of activity through which the armies moved and fought" (p. xii). In doing so the author draws attention to yet another aspect of Washington's generalship, that of a partisan commander. Kwasny argues that the general's employment of militia both alone and in conjunction with the Continental Army provided a model for Nathanael Greene's Southern Campaign. Even more importantly, Washington's partisan operations greatly contributed to the ultimate American victory.

Throughout the war, Washington expressed concerns about the militia's reliability and capacity to meet British regulars in open combat because of its short enlistments and limited training. At times he called upon militia to reinforce his army, but preferred to use it in more suitable roles with occasional assistance from Continentals. Militia provided local and coastal defense and raided British lines. The troops also proved to be effective forward skirmishers, shielding Washington's command while bloodying enemy foraging parties. Furthermore, patriot militia cowed loyalists, preventing them from aiding the British effectively, and supported whig governments in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey. Such activities freed Continental soldiers to concentrate on the main British Army.

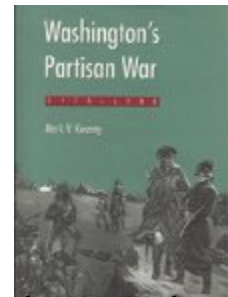
Kwasny partly attributes the militia's success to a flexible system which allowed Washington and other local commanders to call out troops when necessary with-

out going through state officials. He also notes Washington's increasingly wise utilization of militia as the war progressed. He learned not to request it too frequently in order to insure maximum turn out and so as not to interfere with the men's valuable agricultural activities. The author also praises Connecticut and New York governors Jonathan Trumbull and George Clinton, who doubled as a militia general, for their staunch service to the American cause.

British accounts of the militia's effectiveness further bolsters Kwasny's argument. Generals William Howe, Henry Clinton, and Secretary of State for the American Department Lord George Germaine all remarked on American partisan activities. While the author notes that such comments may have merely been attempts to find excuses for British failure, this does not appear to be the case. As Kwasny makes clear, American partisans influenced nearly every British operation in the region, including the New Jersey, Philadelphia, and Monmouth Campaigns. Furthermore, British concerns over the militia partly led to the orders which resulted in Lord Charles Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown in 1781.

Overall, *Washington's Partisan War* is a well-written and well-researched book. The inclusion of eleven maps further enhances it by allowing readers to visualize the armies' movements. Complementing and expanding upon the works of historians such as Don Higginbotham and John Shy, the book is a valuable addition to our understanding of the Revolution in the Middle Colonies.

This review is copyrighted (c) 1997 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations. It may be reproduced electronically for educational or scholarly use. The Associations reserve print rights and permissions. (Contact: P.C.Rollins at the following electronic address: Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu)



If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pcaaca>

Citation: Michael P. Gabriel. Review of Kwasny, Mark V., *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783*. H-PCAACA, H-Net Reviews. August, 1997.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1188>

Copyright © 1997 by H-Net and the Popular Culture and the American Culture Associations, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact P.C. Rollins at Rollins@osuunx.ucc.okstate.edu or the Reviews editorial staff at hbooks@mail.h-net.msu.edu.