

Mark R. Anderson. *The Battle for the Fourteenth Colony: America's War of Liberation in Canada, 1774-1776.* Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2013. 460 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61168-497-1.

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Commissioned by Margaret Sankey (Air University)

Frequently throughout its history, the United States has sent military and diplomatic personnel abroad to wage what its leaders perceived to be wars of liberation, seeking to assist other peoples in throwing off the yokes of oppressive regimes. Born of good intentions, and of ascribing American political values to other nations, these efforts have, on many occasions, encountered difficulties due to differences in culture, language, religion, and other factors. Mark R. Anderson, who was himself involved in such recent efforts in Afghanistan and Iraq, discerns these patterns in what he considers to be America's first war of liberation, the abortive invasion of Quebec Province early in the Revolutionary War. Seeing parallels between resistance to Parliament's colonial measures in Quebec and in the thirteen colonies in the early 1770s, members of the Continental Congress optimistically envisioned the French and British settlers to the north joining them in common cause. As war clouds loomed in 1775, American congressional and military leaders also saw the importance of securing an alliance with Quebec to bolster the colonies' northern defenses. A bold, two-pronged invasion by the Northern Department Army under General Richard Montgomery and by a contingent of General George Washington's fledgling Continental Army (besieging Bos-

ton at the time) under the command of Colonel Benedict Arnold met with remarkable initial success in late 1775. However, overestimation of Canadian commitment, inadequate political guidance from Congress, and poor military planning ultimately doomed the enterprise.

Anderson contends that the root cause of the failure lay in the political and diplomatic realm. To begin with, Canadians bristling at the provisions of Britain's Quebec Act of 1774 (by which Quebec Province would be governed by a "hybrid of French civil law and English criminal law" with no elected assembly [p. 39]) lacked a widespread communications network akin to the Committees of Correspondence, which galvanized the resistance movement in the colonies to the south. Instead, they operated in relatively isolated cells and "did not make the slightest step toward coordinated political action" (p. 350). Separating these small groups of patriots was a population either steadfastly loyal to the Crown or of dubious and often shifting allegiances (as was frequently the case in the lower thirteen colonies). Many Canadian merchants, economically dependent on trade with Britain, balked at joining the lower colonies' Continental Association embargo against the mother country: "Isolated from other colonies and less self-sufficient as a province, a lost fur-trade

and wheat-marketing season would be economically devastating” (p. 351). Although Canadian patriots fought alongside and supplied the American armies throughout the campaign, they remained a distinct minority.

Compounding this problem was a lack of political direction from the Continental Congress, despite the repeated urgings of Montgomery and General Philip Schuyler, then in command of the Northern Army. Though American political and military leaders made some commendable efforts to win the hearts and minds of the Canadian populace, including translating official messages into French, financially compensating patriot Canadians for supplies used by the invading armies, and reassuring French Catholics that their religion faced no threat, the Continental Congress failed to help unify Canadian patriots or to assist them in forming a viable alternative government. Although Philadelphia tasked two different civilian committees to address these needs, the first (sent in November 1775) never ventured beyond northern New York, and the second (sent in April 1776) arrived as the American military position was collapsing. Consequently, administration of occupied territory devolved upon Continental Army officers, already preoccupied with commanding a campaign and with little or no experience in civilian governance. For them, immediate military and security needs often outweighed long-term socioeconomic concerns, causing tensions with the local population. Overseeing the city of Montreal for several months after Montgomery’s army captured it in November 1775, General David Wooster instituted several controversial policies, such as detaining and deporting known loyalists, and severely curtailing the business activities of local fur traders. As the campaign became stalemated in the early months of 1776, depletion of specie and endemic troop discipline problems, particularly among newly arrived units, further soured relations. (As an interesting contrast, Anderson devotes a chapter to the harmonious tenure of Captain William Goforth, who adminis-

tered the city of Trois-Rivières, located roughly halfway between the cities of Montreal and Quebec, from February to April 1776.)

Finally, faulty military planning also sabotaged the American effort. As the battered American army retreated back into New York in late June and early July 1776, Congress began an investigation into the causes of the failure, “with members distracted by other important tasks such as declaring independence.” Not surprisingly, the preliminary report did not address congressional neglect but rather blamed the Continental Army on three counts: “short enlistment terms of the Continental troops,” which forced commanders “into measures which their prudence might have postponed” before their soldiers left for home (such as the unsuccessful attack on Quebec City on December 31, 1775, in which Montgomery was killed and Arnold seriously wounded in the leg); the lack of hard money; and the smallpox epidemic that ravaged the ranks (p. 337). Interestingly, one might argue that General Washington grappled with the same problems. Anderson, however, perceives other military difficulties. Montgomery launched his invasion of the Richelieu Valley while Congress was in recess, thereby guaranteeing that “the Continental confederation would be politically, financially, and logistically behind from the start.” To add to the Northern Army’s difficulties, Arnold’s epic march to Quebec “effectively forced Montgomery to operate on a 150-mile span of the St. Lawrence River, a massive chunk of territory that the Northern Army was ill equipped to control and influence under the best circumstances” (p. 349). Anderson suggests that the campaign might have gone quite differently had Montgomery focused on consolidating his gains and bolstering defenses around Montreal, rather than advance to join Arnold in the ill-fated attempt to take the capital city.

Anderson has given us a thorough and well-written account of a campaign that, as the first

chapter of a major theme throughout American diplomatic and military history, deserves more than footnote status in Revolutionary War historiography. He provides a solid portrait of the Quebec Province society that the Americans of the mid-1770s encountered and tried to influence; succinctly recounts the army operations of the campaign; and deftly explains the political, military, and diplomatic difficulties that ultimately doomed the attempt. As he states in his preface, he made a point of focusing his attention on the campaign itself, allowing his readers to reach their own conclusions about similarities and differences between this and subsequent “wars of liberation.” While I agree with Anderson that it is indeed a “rich Revolutionary War story” that deserves to be the sole focus of this book (p. xi), it would also be interesting to read Anderson’s insights, derived from his studies and his career, about such similarities and differences, and lessons learned and disregarded.

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