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## ***Those damned rebels: Britain's American empire in revolt***

by Michael Pearson

William Heinemann Ltd: London; 1972; 446 pp.; Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 562/34.002

## ***The Revolutionary War and the military policy of the United States***

by Francis Vinton Greene

John Murray: London; 1911; 350 pp.; Ursula Davidson Library cal no. 564/4364

Among the gems in the Ursula Davidson Library are these two books each of which provides a unique perspective on the War of Independence (1775-81) between Britain and her American colonies. The war lasted six years and drew in France, Spain and Holland, and very nearly Russia. It was a war of new political ideas and new military techniques and became critical to the survival of the British empire.

Previous historians have been sympathetic to the Americans and critical of the British. Pearson, however, in *Those damned rebels*, does not use hindsight. Writing primarily from the British perspective, he places the conflict in a contemporary context, portraying policies and decisions by generals in the field and politicians at home against the background of the information that was available to them at the time. He uses 18<sup>th</sup> century sources, including original documents and maps held by the Royal United Services Institute (London).

Commencing in 1774 with the British reaction to the Boston Tea Party, the perspectives of King George III, the House of Commons, the Prime Minister (Lord North), the Opposition, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies are reviewed. The dispatch of HMS *Lively* and 850 regular troops inflames the situation rather than returns control to Britain. The British draw comfort as they maintain Quebec in 1776. While invited to send delegates to the American Continental Congress, the Canadian colonies remain British.

Various battles on land and/or sea are detailed, with reproductions of original maps of the battles of Bunker Hill (Massachusetts), Long Island (New York), and Lake Champlain; and the sieges of Charleston (South Carolina) and Yorktown (Virginia). The tactics of the fleet are explained in several engagements. The arrival of the French Fleet in 1781 prevents the British forces at Yorktown from being rescued by sea and Lord Cornwallis surrenders to the tune *The World Turned Upside Down*.

When the war is formally ended in London, John Adams speaks of "restoring...the old good humour between people who, though separated by an ocean and under different government, have the same language, a similar religion and kindred blood". George III replies: "...let the circumstances of language, religion and blood have their natural and full effect".

*Those damned rebels* is a dramatic and well-written book which challenged my previous understandings of the

conflict. Many generic lessons can be drawn from it about how politicians, generals, luck on the battlefield and community attitudes on both sides of a conflict so frequently interact to determine the outcome.

In *Revolutionary War*, Major-General F. V. Greene considers the war from an American perspective. The book is in two parts. Part I is an analysis of the war, examining sequentially: Boston 1775-76, New York 1776, Philadelphia and the Hudson 1777, the French alliance 1778-81, the British conquest of the South 1778-80, the British defeat in the South 1781-82, and Yorktown 1781. Part II examines the effect of the war and the lessons learned on the subsequent military policy of the United States up to 1911, with particular reference to the historic prejudice against a standing army.

In analysing each of the major actions in the Northern and Southern campaigns, Greene examines the composition of forces, roles of various types of troops, and the effects of terrain, weather, *etc.* The critical role of leadership is emphasised by examining the effect of the loss of leaders on both military and naval forces. George Washington, as commander-in-chief, is depicted as having heavy administrative and political functions to perform in addition to his strictly military ones. I was struck by the parallels between the approach of the Continental (United States) forces and those of the North Vietnamese forces of the 1960s and 1970s in waiting, watching and strategically manoeuvring, rather than rushing to engage the enemy.

In Part II, the English prejudice against standing armies is linked to the Teutonic tribes who brought the idea of citizen military service to Britain, an idea that was amplified by immigrants to America, particularly Puritans and other religious dissenters who had been opposed to the efforts of the Stuart kings to use a standing army to oppress them. Greene, however, argues for a standing army and quotes Washington (1778) in support: "It is a maxim, founded on the universal experience of mankind, that no nation is to be trusted further than it is bound by its interest; and no prudent statesman or politician will venture to depart from it."

The major drawback of *Revolutionary War* is its use of maps from Avery's *History of the United States*, which, while clear, are not well integrated into the text itself. The book, however, is well written and argued and serves as an excellent complement to *Those damned rebels*.

**Priscilla Leece**