The Virginia War Department during the American Revolution

Thomas Gregory Tune

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ABSTRACT

“THE VIRGINIA WAR OFFICE DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION”

THOMAS GREGORY TUNE

CANDIDATE FOR DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

AUGUST 2006

PROFESSOR ROBERT C. KENZER

The Virginia War Office was a critical component of the Virginia government during the American Revolution. Its duties encompassed every aspect of planning, supplying, and waging war in the state. The Commissioner of War gathered strategic information, superintended the state’s military factories, and provided continuity between the administrations of Governors Jefferson, Nelson and Harrison. The ability of the War Office to execute its duties depended largely on the diligence of the Commissioner of War and his ability to cope with problems beyond his control. Unfortunately, the trials and tribulations of the War Office have been overlooked by historians focusing on the luminary figures involved in Virginia’s Revolutionary War efforts. This thesis examines the effectiveness of the Virginia War Office. It faced many problems that were beyond its control, including Virginia’s economy, the constant invasions by the British, the autonomy of local officials, and the interference of the Continental Army. Analyzing the obstacles the War Office faced in the performance of its duties highlights its impact on the Revolutionary War in Virginia.
I certify that I have read this thesis and find that, in scope and quality, it satisfies the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Professor Robert C. Kenzer, Thesis Advisor

Professor John L. Gordon Jr., Thesis Reader
THE VIRGINIA WAR DEPARTMENT DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

By

THOMAS GREGORY TUNE

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Greg Tune

July 2006
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviations</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Creation of the Virginia War Office</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Commissioner of War</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: The Challenges of the War Office</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographical Statement</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FWGW</td>
<td>The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources: 1745 - 1799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EWOLB</td>
<td>Executive War Office Letter Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JP</td>
<td>The Papers of Thomas Jefferson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JWO</td>
<td>Journal of the War Office, January 18, 1781-December 31, 1781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LV</td>
<td>Library of Virginia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MHS</td>
<td>Minnesota Historical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGP</td>
<td>The Papers of Nathanael Greene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NYHS</td>
<td>New York Historical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SP</td>
<td>The Papers of Major General Friederich Wilhelm von Steuben: 1777 - 1794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCAL</td>
<td>Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VGAHJ</td>
<td>Virginia General Assembly House Journals, etc. 1773 - 1781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VHS</td>
<td>Virginia Historical Society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VMHB</td>
<td>Virginia Magazine of History and Biography</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VWOLB</td>
<td>Virginia War Office Letter Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WMQ</td>
<td>William &amp; Mary Quarterly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOLB</td>
<td>War Office Letter Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WOR</td>
<td>War Office Records</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

The history of the American Revolution in Virginia has fascinated historians since the birth of our nation. Scholars have written at length on the major events and the roles of the founding fathers in shaping them. Virginia was fortunate to have such leaders as George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry and many others call her home. Historians justly have focused on these men and their actions. However, these luminary figures did not act alone. They had the help of the people and their subordinates in the army and the government as well. In the biographies and narratives on the Revolutionary War period, these subordinates are often given a paragraph or a footnote for their contributions, despite playing a valuable, yet behind the scenes, role in the shaping of our nation. This was certainly the case with the Virginia War Office.

The Virginia War Office labored under three governors during the war and was critical in its conduct, yet historians have written relatively little about it despite the large number of historical records it produced. In fact, entire books about the Revolutionary War in Virginia have been written in which the Virginia War Office and its Commissioners are barely mentioned. For example, in John Selby’s *The Revolution in Virginia 1775-1783* the War Office and its Commissioners are referred to only nine times. This is not to say the War Office was unimportant, but rather reflects on the use of the records by historians. Selby used the documents of the first Commissioner of the War Office, George Muter, to indict Thomas Jefferson’s tenure as Governor of Virginia: “Worst of all, [John] Brown and another key bureaucrat Commissioner of War George Muter, were simply incompetent. Their continuance in office seriously reflects
Jefferson’s capacity as an administrator.”¹ It is clear from this statement that Selby views the post of the Commissioner of War as “key,” but he never explains why. Selby further suggests the importance of the War Office when writing about the expansion of executive power by the Virginia Assembly during Thomas Nelson’s term as Governor of the Commonwealth: “In addition, the assembly granted the commissioner of war powers over other agencies of government that for practical purposes rendered him a prime minister of war.”² Selby insinuates that the War Office became the second most powerful post in the Commonwealth, yet he declines to provide any further analysis. While Selby’s book offers a great political and military narrative of the war in Virginia, it contains little analysis of the War Office, and only alludes to its importance.

Emory G. Evans, the biographer of Thomas Nelson, also danced around the subject of the Virginia War Office. He, at least, offers some explanation as to the general purpose of the War Office:

The problem of supply was even more difficult. Responsibility for coordinating and carrying out the supply function was in the hands of the War Office. All State Quartermasters and Commissaries, as well as the State Clothier and the Commercial Agent, reported to that office. Fortunately its direction was in the competent hands of William Davies. . . .³

Evans partially explained the function of the War Office, and offered his opinion on the conduct of William Davies, the second Commissioner of War. Evans, however, takes the subject no further than stating that “Nelson was fortunate to have William Davies as Commissioner of the War Office” because Davies carried out his duties “with

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² Selby, Revolution, 284.
admirable efficiency."\(^4\) Jefferson biographer, Dumas Malone, barely acknowledges the War Office in his treatment of Jefferson's time as governor. He refers to both Commissioners of War once and suggests that Jefferson's poor showing as governor had more to do with the failure of government agencies than Jefferson's leadership.\(^5\)

Unfortunately, Malone omits which government agencies in particular are to blame. He, like many other biographers of Jefferson, chooses to bypass an examination of the Virginia government agencies and instead focuses on Jefferson's leadership. The truth of the matter is that most historians who mention the Virginia War Office and its commissioners do so only in passing. Most of their comments center on the personalities of the commissioners and not the War Office's role.

Other than John Selby, only a handful of historians have offered an opinion on the significance of the War Office and its Commissioners. A prime example is found in Harry Ward's and Harold Greer's book, *Richmond during the Revolution 1775-1783*:

> The most important office of the revised war administration was that of Commissioner of War. George Muter proved inefficient and Col. William Davies replaced him on March 22, 1781. Davies, the son of the Great Awakening Divine, Samuel Davies, was a superb administrator and perhaps the ablest man in the Virginia government. As Virginia's Commissioner of War, he directed all facets of the war effort.\(^6\)

Again, authors allude to the importance of the War Office, yet they do not deliver any more substantial analysis of the subject. Ward and Greer quickly summarize the

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duties of the War Office and lavish praise on Davies without giving any indication as to how they formulated their conclusion. They are not alone in praising the War Office and Colonel William Davies in particular. John McBride’s dissertation, “The Virginia War Effort: 1775-1783: Man Power Policies and Practices,” goes even farther than Ward and Greer. He provides the strongest statement in favor of the War Office of any historian that has touched on the subject:

One can argue that only the fact that William Davies was an excellent administrator who was willing to assume responsibility that properly belonged to the Governor enabled the state to retain a modicum of control over its military affairs. Davies took charge of the War Office about 3 months before Jefferson left office, provided the essential continuity between two administrations and perhaps deserves much of the credit which is generally given to Nelson, particularly with respect to the collection of supplies and provisions.7

McBride’s powerful statement leaves us wanting for more information on the Virginia War Office. His topic is sufficiently narrowed to include only a small part of the War Office’s duties and therefore he only offers a few brief comments on the office. These comments, however, leave an impression of the importance of the War Office. It is clear that McBride has utilized records related to the Virginia War Office in his analysis of Virginia’s militia laws and their application. Otherwise, he would not be able to make such a bold statement about the Commissioner of War. Unfortunately, McBride did not devote more time and space in his study to expand on the role and importance of the Virginia War Office. In fact, no detailed study of the Virginia War Office exists even though extensive records were left behind by that office.

While secondary sources specific to the Virginia War Office are virtually nonexistent, there are extensive primary sources directly related to it. The Library of

Virginia is the natural launching point for any study involving Virginia history and its collections hold many primary sources related to the Virginia War Office. The correspondence of the civilian and military leaders during the American Revolution contain many letters from and to the Commissioners of War. The Governors of Virginia, in particular, were in constant contact with their primary military advisor during the war. The Papers of Thomas Jefferson, edited by Julian P. Boyd, contains hundreds of letters between Governor Jefferson and both Commissioners of War. Governors Thomas Nelson and Benjamin Harrison also had extensive communication with the Virginia War Office as illustrated in the third volume of the Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia, edited by H.R. McIlwaine. Most of these letters come in the form of instructions to the War Office or in response to questions posed by its Commissioners.

The Governors were not the only high ranking officials to exchange letters with the Virginia War Office. The Continental Officers serving in the Southern War Department also produced a large amount of correspondence with the War Office. The Papers of General Nathanael Greene, edited by Richard Showman and Dennis Conrad, contain many communications with the Virginia Government and the War Office in particular. General Greene, the commander of the Southern War Department, constantly dealt with the Virginia government and Colonel William Davies, in particular. When Greene left for the Carolinas to assume control of the Continental forces there, he left General Baron von Steuben in Virginia. The Baron’s correspondence, collected by the New York Historical Society and edited by Edith von Zemensky, is overflowing with letters addressing every aspect of the war in Virginia. The Baron worked very closely with the War Office and its commissioner William Davies. As a result of Lord
Cornwallis's invasion and eventual entrapment at Yorktown, letters to and from the War Office can be found in the correspondence of General Marquis de Lafayette and General George Washington. The list of officers and minor state officials who dealt with the War Office is too numerous to cite, but suffice it to say that the Library of Virginia has all of these records and more. Luckily, one does not have to rely exclusively on the papers of other notable historic figures to piece together a record of the Virginia War Office.

As a state agency, the Virginia War Office produced its own records which are collected at the Library of Virginia. Most of these records can easily be accessed by microfilm and provide volumes of information on the daily operation of the War Office. The most important of these primary sources are the War Office Records, which contain the War Office Letter Books and the Executive War Office Letter Book. These books include copies of the letters sent by and received in the War Office for the years of 1780 to 1782. These collections of letters provide a unique look into the daily conduct of the war in Virginia and the operation of the War Office in particular. There is also the Virginia War Office Letter Book 1779-1781 which contains a fragmented look at the daily operations of the War Office. It features an incomplete record, largely because of the loss of most of the records during to Benedict Arnold's sacking of Richmond and the Westham foundry in 1781. The bulk of this primary resource deals with the aftermath of Arnold's invasion and the subsequent removal of the first Commissioner of War.

Another primary resource, the Journal of the War Office, includes daily entries of the business of the War Office. The minutes of the journal help fill in some gaps in the War Office Letter Books. There are other unpublished manuscript collections relating to the War Office in the Library of Virginia, such as the records of other agencies like the
Public Store and Commercial Agent. Many other documents relating to the War Office can also be found in the Calendar of Virginia State Papers and Other Manuscripts edited by William Palmer. There is an abundance of primary source material on the War Office that can be easily accessed and has been used by many historians on other projects. With this plethora of information, it is unclear why no one has attempted a more in-depth study of the Virginia War Office.

This thesis will provide a comprehensive analysis of the Virginia War Office during the American Revolution. A study of the War Office must start with its origin and, therefore, with the legislation that created it. This thesis will explore the reasons for the creation of the War Office and its legislative evolution into one of the most powerful agencies in the Commonwealth of Virginia. It will also discuss the War Office’s legislative demise near the end of the war as the Virginia General Assembly began to shrink the government in cost-saving measures.

The second part of this thesis will examine the lives of the men who worked in the Virginia War Office. The personalities and qualifications of the two Commissioners of War are directly related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the office. No study of the War Office would be complete without examining the backgrounds of Colonel George Muter and Colonel William Davies. Their life experiences helped to formulate the type of Commissioner each man turned out to be, while the circumstances of war dictated how they were judged by their peers and history.

The third chapter of this thesis will discuss the difficulties facing the War Office in the performance of its duties. Many factors affected the ability of the Commissioner of War to carry out his actual duties; most of these factors were completely beyond his
control. The circumstances of war often dictated what options the War Office had and what it could do. Virginia was the warehouse for the Continental Army in the South, and the constant invasions by the British certainly hampered that role. The War Office faced many obstacles, not the least of which was the beleaguered finances of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Military failures and defeats in the Carolinas also weighed heavily on the War Office’s planning and recruitment of soldiers. Unfortunately, it seems the War Office had to plan and fight the war against friend and foe. Virginia’s own local officials were often at odds with the state government and worked contrary to the wishes of the War Office. The Continental Army also frustrated the War Office’s plans with its regulations and practices. The Continentals in Virginia frequently crippled the ability of the War Office to carry out its primary function of supply by competing for the same resources. Finally, by examining the difficulties the War Office faced in executing its duties, we can judge its impact on the Revolutionary War.
On June 1, 1779, during the midst of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Jefferson was elected as the second Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia. The situation facing Jefferson and Virginia was grim indeed. Since 1776, Virginia had supported the Continental war effort with troops and military supplies while the fighting took place elsewhere. The war had left the state with an exhausted treasury, rapidly depreciating currency, heavy taxes and a dwindling military establishment.\(^1\) In addition, Virginia was just recovering from the shock of an incursion into the state by the British in May 1779. Major General Edward Mathew’s 1,800 men, with the support of Commodore Sir George Collier’s naval squadron, had descended on Portsmouth and Suffolk in the last weeks of Governor Patrick Henry’s term and demonstrated how vulnerable Virginia was to invasion by burning Suffolk and capturing over 130 vessels before departing.\(^2\) This proof that the war had shifted toward the South forced Jefferson to realize he had to plan to defend Virginia while continuing to support the Southern Department of the Continental Army with troops and supplies.

Jefferson, realizing that his gubernatorial duties were too much for one man alone to carry out, began the process of overhauling the Virginia government. At his urging, the Assembly passed legislation in the May 1779 session creating a number of advisory

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boards to aid the Governor and Executive Council.\(^3\) Because Virginia’s war effort was far too encompassing for Jefferson and the Council to manage effectively without neglecting their other duties, the General Assembly passed “An Act Establishing a Board of War” which created a board of five men “to superintend and manage, subject to the direction and control of the Governor with the advice of the council, all matters and things within the department of war, and all persons holding offices or performing duties within that department.” The act also assigned specific duties to the Board of War, such as supervising the Commissioner of the Navy and appointing a Commissary of Prisoners, as well as visiting every magazine in the state and reporting its condition.\(^4\) The intention of this act clearly was to relieve the Governor and Executive Council of routine military administrative duties and to provide a source of knowledgeable advice on technical military matters.\(^5\) However, the Board of War quickly proved to be inefficient for the needs of the state and in aiding Governor Jefferson. It failed to relieve the Executive of routine military matters because every plan or order had to be submitted to the Governor and Executive Council for approval before taking affect.\(^6\) For example, on January 21, 1780, the Board of War wrote Jefferson alerting him that the state artillery officers were requesting boots. Jefferson countersigned the letter and added that the Board should provide the boots at their discretion.\(^7\) Essentially, the Board of War became a

\(^{3}\) Selby, Revolution, 239.


\(^{5}\) McBride, “Virginia War Effort,” 146-47.

\(^{6}\) Hening, Statutes, 10:18.

bookkeeping committee for the Governor and Executive Council, occasionally offering advice based on the reports received from officers in the field.\(^8\) The new Board of War often found it difficult to even conduct such business because it required at least three members to be present for a quorum. Absenteeism became such a problem that in October 1779, the Assembly reduced the quorum by one member in the hopes that business could be conducted with some regularity. This measure, however, did little to improve the usefulness of the Board of War. Instead, it placed most of the burden of its functions on James Innes, the chairman, and James Barron, formerly of the Naval Board.\(^9\) The Board of War continued to be inefficient due to its structure and lack of authority until April of 1780 when it disintegrated. The members of the Board of War were opposed to moving their offices from Williamsburg to Richmond where the capital of the state was being transferred. In a letter dated February 18, 1780, the Board of War informed Governor Jefferson that it would be impracticable to move the Board to Richmond in April for several reasons. It stated that the distance from seaports would hinder supply gathering, and that it would be too difficult and expensive for the state to move the Board and its related offices, such as the Commissary of Stores. The Board of War concluded that Jefferson’s only option was to allow the Board to stay in Williamsburg or to abolish it entirely.\(^10\) Governor Jefferson took advantage of the move to Richmond to eliminate the troublesome Board of War by simply allowing it to disintegrate. Both Innes and Barron performed their duties until April 7, 1780, the last

\(^8\) Selby, Revolution, 240.

\(^9\) Ibid., 241.

\(^10\) Board of War to Thomas Jefferson, February 18, 1780, in JP, 3:297-98.
day Williamsburg was the official capital of Virginia. Governor Jefferson and the Council then assumed the duties of the Board of War.\textsuperscript{11} The Board had been a failure and the problem it was intended to alleviate still existed and required another remedy.

In the May 1780 session, the General Assembly ordered that General Thomas Nelson Jr., Mann Page, Jr., Bolling Starke, George Lyne, James Innes and Robert Lee form a committee to propose a bill to repeal the act establishing the Boards of War and Trade and to appoint a Commissioner of the Navy, a Commissary of Military Stores, and a Mercantile Agent.\textsuperscript{12} On Wednesday June 14, 1780, Starke presented the bill before the House entitled “An Act to repeal an Act establishing a Board of War, and one other act establishing a Board of Trade; and appointing a Commissioner of the Navy, a Commissary of military stores, and a Commercial Agent.” The bill was read twice before the House and then ordered to be committed to the Committee of the whole House on the next Friday.\textsuperscript{13} This bill marks the birth of the Virginia War Office, although it was not specifically mentioned in the title of the act. The purpose of the bill was undoubtedly to relieve the Governor and Executive Council of their more menial tasks. It is interesting to note that the framers of the bill initially thought that only a Commissary of Military Stores was needed and not a Commissioner in a War Office. Perhaps, the legislators wished to avoid the mistakes made with the Board of War and forego the possibility of another body of men to bicker with the Governor and Executive Council as had happened with the Board of War.

\textsuperscript{11} Selby, Revolution, 246.

\textsuperscript{12} Journal of the House of Delegates, May 1, 1780, in VGAHJ, LV, microfilm reel 331, 8.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 47.
The bill, however, was subjected to several amendments while being considered by the Committee of the whole House. During this period, the delegates realized that a Commissary of Military Stores, while clearly necessary, would fail to provide the Governor and Executive Council with the kind of aid they needed for running the war effort. On June 29, 1780, after three days of debate, the amendments were agreed to and the bill was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time.\textsuperscript{14} The next day, the bill was read for the third time and passed the House under the title of “An Act to repeal the Act establishing a Board of War, and one other Act establishing a Board of Trade, and for appointing a Commissioner of the Navy, a Commissioner of the War Office, and a Commercial Agent.” Starke then carried the bill to the Senate for its concurrence.\textsuperscript{15} This version of the bill marks the first mention of a War Office and demonstrates that the House clearly believed that the new office’s duties would stretch far beyond those of a Commissary of Military Stores. The Senate returned the bill on July 4, 1780 with several amendments which the House assented to on July 6, 1780. The bill was then sent back into the Senate where it was approved and then signed by the Speaker of the Senate and returned to the House. “An Act to repeal an Act establishing a Board of War, and one other Act establishing a Board of Trade, and authorizing the Governour and Council to appoint a Commissioner of the Navy, a Commissioner of the War Office, and a Commercial Agent” was then signed by the Speaker of the House and passed into law on Saturday July 8, 1780.\textsuperscript{16} The General Assembly recognized the need for a central office

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 66-67.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 74-79.
to manage the many duties related to the state’s war effort that the Governor and Executive Council were too busy to address. The new law read:

For the purpose of introducing economy into all the various departments of the government, and for conducting the publick business with the greatest expedition, Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That the act entitled “An Act establishing a board of Trade and one other act establishing a board of War,” be and the same hereby repealed; and it shall and may be lawful for the governor with the advice of council, to demand and receive from the commissioners of the Board of War and of the Board of Trade, all records, papers, vouchers, and other documents which shall belong to the commonwealth, and which have been heretofore in the custody or keeping of the said boards, and upon receipt thereof, to grant all and every of the commissioners such full and proper acquittances or indemnifications for, or an account of their transactions during their continuance in office as shall seem just and reasonable, and to dispose of such records and papers, in such a manner as they shall think proper. And that the business which was heretofore conducted by the boards of war and trade, may be executed with the greatest expidition, Be it enacted, That a commercial agent, a commissioner of the navy, and a commissioner of the War Office, be appointed by the governour with advice of council. The said officers shall be under the control and direction of the governour and council, and discharge the several duties which shall be by executive adjudged to appertain to their respective offices, to whom they shall from time to time be amenable for their good conduct, and by whose direction they shall act in their several functions.\(^{17}\)

This act represented an improvement over the Board of War Act in many ways. By strengthening the ability of the Executive to manage its branch of the government, the General Assembly sought to alleviate the problems that the Board of War had caused. Its first improvement was to streamline the chain of command from an unwieldy Board to that of a single Commissioner. Furthermore, while the Board of War Act called for the General Assembly to appoint the members of the Board, the War Office Act allowed the Governor and Executive Council to select the individual they deemed suitable for the role of Commissioner. This clause was included in the legislation to ensure that the Executive would not be at odds with the new Commissioner. The Governor and Executive Council

\(^{17}\) Hening, Statutes, 10:291-92.
could now only blame themselves if they chose a Commissioner who would spend more
time bickering with them than running the war effort, as the Board of War had done.  

The War Office Act also allowed the Governor and Executive Council to assign the
powers and duties of the Commissioner of the War office as well as the Commissioner of
the Navy and the Commercial Agent. This fostered the division of responsibilities rather
than loading them all on the back of the Commissioner of the War Office, as had been
done with the Board of War. Under the previous act, the Board of War was responsible
for all military or war matters and had supervisory powers over the Commissioner of the
Navy. This meant that the Board of War was faced with the overwhelming task of
conducting the war on land and sea. Under the new act, the Commissioner of the War
Office had responsibility only for the land forces while the Commissioner of the Navy
managed all of Virginia’s naval matters.

Although the new War Office Act marked an improvement over the Board of War
Act, it still suffered from the greatest weakness of the old law. Under the Board of War
Act all actions of the Board had to be approved by the Governor and Executive Council
before being implemented. This provision had rendered the Board virtually powerless
and reduced it to the role of a clerk. Unfortunately, the War Office Act retained this
check on the autonomy of the Commissioner of the War Office. The Commissioner had
to act under the direction of the Governor and Executive Council, which meant that he
was required to have their approval before implementing any plans. The only difference
between the two acts in this respect was that the Commissioner of the War Office could
respond more promptly to instructions than the Board of War, which required a quorum

to be present in order to conduct business. The General Assembly had scrapped a board of clerks for a single official and allowed the Governor and Executive Council to decide his duties and powers. Consequently, the new Commissioner of War had virtually the same duties and powers that the Board of War had possessed. He was to act like an adjutant general to the Governor and supervise all the departments in the state military service including the Quartermaster, Commissary General, Commissary of Military Stores, State Clothier General, and Commercial Agent. The new Commissioner was also responsible for the military public works, such as the state tannery and the state laboratory. The only real difference in the Commissioner’s powers from those of the Board of War was that he did not superintend the Commissioner of the Navy.

The law creating the Commissioner of the War Office remained unchanged until the May 1781 session of the General Assembly. In the time that elapsed from the creation of the War Office and the May 1781 session of the General Assembly, Virginia suffered serious setbacks in its war effort. Almost all of the Virginia Continental Regiments were captured at the siege of Charleston and Colonel Abraham Buford’s detachment was destroyed at Waxhaws in May 1780. These events forced Virginia into recruiting and equipping more Continental Regiments, only to see them obliterated in the Battle of Camden in August 1780. Virginia lost two armies in the span of three months. To further compound these setbacks, Virginia was invaded in October 1780 by General Alexander Leslie, in December 1780 and January 1781 by the traitor, Benedict Arnold, and in April 1781 by General William Phillips. Virginia’s lack of preparedness to repulse the British reflected seriously on the Commissioner of the War Office and his efforts to keep Virginia in a sound military state. When Lord Cornwallis and Benedict
Arnold completed a juncture of their forces in Petersburg on May 20, 1781, it became clear to the General Assembly that stronger legislation was needed if Virginia was to continue to survive as a state. So in the May 1781 session, the General Assembly began crafting legislation to strengthen the powers of the Governor and the Commissioner of the War Office.

On June 15, 1781, the House of Delegates, meeting in Staunton, ordered Mann Page, Jr., Benjamin Dulaney, and William Campbell to prepare and bring in a bill to regulate the department of the War Office. Mann Page, Jr. presented the bill before the House of Delegates, which ordered it to be committed to the Committee of the whole House. The bill to regulate the department of the War Office was debated on June 20, 1781, and several amendments were added until it was finally ordered to be read a third time and engrossed. On June 21, 1781, the House of Delegates passed “An Act to regulate the Department of the War Office” and ordered it carried to the Senate for its concurrence. The Senate wasted no time in considering this bill and added their own amendments before sending it back to the House. The House, on June 22, 1781, assented to the Senate’s amendments and the bill was signed into law on June 23, 1781. “An Act to regulate the Department of the War Office” was intended “to invest the Commissioner of the War Office with more ample powers, and more expressly to define his duty” and it did just that.

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20 Ibid., 39-41.

21 Ibid., 49.

22 Hening, Statutes, 10:426.
Whereas the act creating the War Office had left the Commissioner’s duties up to the definition of the Governor and Executive Council, the regulatory act precisely defined them. The Commissioner now had the power to demand and receive returns relating to military affairs from all public offices, which could aid him in accurately reporting the state’s situation to the Governor and Assembly. Under the previous act, it was assumed that the Commissioner of the War Office would gather information for the benefit of the Executive, but there was no law requiring the several departments to comply with the requests of the Commissioner of War. Because the Commissioner lacked any means of coercing the various department heads into complying with his requests, information often was never transmitted to him.

Under the new regulatory act, the various departments within the Department of War were now required by law to provide timely returns to the Commissioner. The Quartermaster General was required to submit a return every three months which included all the stores in his department and exact accounts of all forage collected by his department. In addition, he was to report the quantity and quality of magazines with the types of stores he had in his care, as well as accounts of his transfers and issues to Continental agents. The Commissary General was required to furnish quarterly returns detailing what military stores were received and which counties met their quota of supplies. The State Clothier or Subclothier also had to make returns to the War Office of his receipts and issues. The Commercial Agent, the man who replaced the Board of Trade, was to issue quarterly returns to the War Office detailing the amount of tobacco

\[23\] Ibid., 10:426.

\[24\] George Muter, to Quartermaster General for State, December 11, 1780, WOLB, July 21, 1780-January 2, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 72.
and taxes raised to purchase goods that the state’s war machine needed. The Commissary of Military Stores was also required to file returns detailing the state of his department, its magazines and laboratory. He was also responsible for reporting all of his issues to and receipts from state and continental agents. Last but not least, the Commissioners of the Specific Tax and Provisions were required to send in quarterly returns of all tax-levied supplies collected and issued. The new regulatory act also made it clear that the Commissioner of the War Office was to act as an Adjutant General’s Department for the state. In other words, all orders concerning the military in Virginia given by the Executive were to be issued from and recorded in the War Office.

The new law did not merely direct that the Commissioner of the War Office was to act like an Adjutant General, but it defined some of those duties. For example, the Commissioner was to keep a roster for the regulation of militia duty and a register of militia officers with rank included. These militia officers were to submit semi-annual returns of the strength of their corps and the number and condition of their arms. The Commissioner of War was also required to keep descriptive lists of all recruits, deserters, and militia delinquents, as well as the proceedings of all courts martial. Lists of the Virginia Continental Regiments and state regiments detailing the rank of officers and strength of the corps were also to be kept in the War Office. The new act gave the War Office the power to issue all commissions to the Continental and militia officers after they were signed by the Governor and attested to by the Commissioner of War.

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26 Ibid., 10:426-29.
All the powers so far defined in “An Act to regulate the Department of the War Office” were designed to improve the Commissioner’s ability to carry out the War Office’s prime mission, which was to provide military information to the Executive. The act, however, also gave the Commissioner of the War Office expanded powers beyond those of simple information gathering. He was given the authority to “Superintend the establishment of magazines, regularity of issues, and shall in general direct and manage all matters and things within the department of war, as well as all persons holding offices or performing duties within that department.”

The General Assembly had finally given the Commissioner of the War Office the autonomy his position required. The regulatory act contained no restraining clause dictating that the Commissioner could only act under the direction of the Executive, as had the Board of War Act and the Act creating the War Office. The Commissioner of War was empowered to act independently in the management of Virginia’s war effort. He was, however, limited by being second in command to the Governor and Executive Council. The Governor was the supreme commander of the Commonwealth of Virginia and the Commissioner was still subject to his orders and could not countermand them on his own authority, but the War Office relieved the Executive of the burden of routine military matters on a daily basis.

Through the various acts creating and modifying the Virginia War Office, one can see the evolution of the office and the potential it had to impact Virginia’s war efforts. The War Office started out as a simple continuance of the Board of War with a few notable changes and ended up as the second most powerful office in the Virginia government. One historian, in referring to the Commissioner of the War Office, noted

27 Ibid., 10:426-29.
that “An Act to regulate the Department of the War Office” had “for practical purposes rendered him a prime minister of war.”

28 Selby, Revolution, 284.
CHAPTER 2:
THE COMMISSIONER OF THE WAR OFFICE

The creation of the Virginia War Office and its alteration into a powerful component of the executive branch was certainly a legislative odyssey. The necessity of the office was evident to everyone, but required much trial and error to implement. The transformation of the Virginia War Office was driven by several factors. The temperament of the politicians and the fortunes of war definitely played major roles. The other key ingredients in the transformation, however, were the men who held the post. Their skills and personalities were the driving force behind the changes to the laws governing the office and its overall effectiveness. An examination of the War Office must therefore include an analysis of these men.

During its existence two men held the post of Commissioner of the War Office. The first, Colonel George Muter, was officially appointed on July 17, 1780. Before the war, Colonel Muter had been a lawyer, whose practice ranging from Richmond to the Chesapeake Bay, had allowed him to accumulate substantial property holdings in several cities as well as a number of slaves. In January 1767, Muter advertised in the Virginia Gazette a Portsmouth lot with a “good storehouse, quite new, and also a negro woman, who is a good cook, & negro man, and large boy, both of which are used to work on ships and go by water.” The advertisement concluded by revealing that Muter would accept credit until June, which suggests that he could afford to wait for payment. In addition to his Portsmouth holdings, he also owned land or resided in Richmond and Norfolk. Later

1 George Muter to Thomas Jefferson, March 6, 1781, JP, 5:78-80.
2 Virginia Gazette (Purdie), March 6, 1778, LV, microfilm 11, reel 6.
in 1767, Colonel Muter advertised again in the *Virginia Gazette* for a runaway slave named Will, who could be returned to either Alexander McCaul in Richmond or Henry Tucker in Norfolk, who were acting as Muter’s agents in those cities. By 1775, Muter was seeking to rent some of his Richmond property. In an advertisement in the *Virginia Gazette*, he listed a tenement across from Mrs. Younghusband’s Tavern that could serve as a tavern or a house for two families. The tenement was said to be in good condition with a large garden and a stable for twelve horses. Muter had little use for the residence during 1775, since he was currently involved in military duty at Williamsburg.

At some point during the latter half of 1775, Muter began his military career, perhaps serving in one of the many volunteer corps about Williamsburg. The earliest record of Muter’s service appears in the December 13, 1775, *Virginia Gazette*. “General Orders” were issued from “Headquarters, Williamsburg, November 19, 1775,” in which all the troops quartered in the city of Williamsburg were ordered to be guarded in their conduct to all Americans. The “General Orders” were signed “George Muter, Sec’ry, C.C.” and given to the paper by the Mayor of Williamsburg, who received them from Colonel Henry. Muter’s first military experience in the patriot cause was as a secretary to the acting Commander in Chief of Virginia’s military forces. He probably continued in those duties until March 16, 1776, when the Council of Safety appointed him a Captain in the state navy. Muter was later reappointed by Governor Henry on July 16, 1776 to

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3 *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon), January 1, 1767, LV, microfilm 11, reel 2.

4 Ibid., September 24, 1767.

5 *Virginia Gazette* (Dixon & Hunter), November 18, 1775, LV, microfilm 11, reel 5.

6 *Virginia Gazette* (Pinkney), December 13, 1775, LV, microfilm 11, reel 5.
command the **Hero**. He remained in command of the **Hero**, a ninety-foot galley made of oak, with yellow pine decks, that carried two cannons and a crew of fifty, until he resigned in late 1777 to enter the newly-raised Virginia State Artillery Regiment. Muter was given a new commission ranking him as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Virginia State Artillery dating from November 15, 1777. On November 21, 1777, the *Virginia Gazette* announced the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Muter and the other field officers of the Virginia Artillery Regiment. Upon hearing of their appointments, their former subordinates at Hampton fired the cannon located at Little Scotland and from the deck of the **Hero** in honor of their commanders. Lieutenant Colonel Muter and the other officers of the Virginia State Artillery Regiment immediately set out to recruit the eleven companies of men they would need. However, before the State Artillery Regiment could be completed, Lieutenant Colonel Muter was given the assignment of recruiting a separate unit in the artillery, which would become known as the Virginia State Garrison Regiment. This assignment also promoted him to Colonel as of June 24, 1778 and required that he enlist eight companies of infantry to man the various posts in Virginia. Muter’s task was to ensure that Richmond, Portsmouth, Williamsburg, Hampton, and Yorktown had companies from his Garrison Regiment. He continued in these duties until early in 1780 when calls for aid from South Carolina prompted Virginia to send a special

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9 Ibid., 124.

10 *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie), November 21, 1777, LV, microfilm 11, reel 6.

detachment of state troops to the Southern Continental Army. Colonel Muter probably had ambitions to go southward, but Governor Jefferson and the Board of War had other plans. On February 18, 1780, Governor Jefferson, on the advice of the Board of War, wrote to Colonel Muter and ordered him to take charge of the state’s river defenses and specifically the construction of the battery at Hood’s, a key position on the James River. Colonel Muter’s troops were to be incorporated into the detachment, now under the command of Muter’s subordinate Lieutenant Colonel Charles Porterfield, and militia were ordered to replace them at the river defenses. Colonel Muter must have been disappointed at losing the chance to command troops in the field. Instead of going south, he faced the tedious but extremely vital duty of constructing the battery at Hood’s and overseeing the state’s other river defenses.

Colonel Muter began his new duties about the same time Governor Jefferson decided to allow the Board of War to disintegrate. On the same day that Muter received his new orders, the Board of War told Jefferson that it would rather disband than move to Richmond. By April 7, 1780, the Board of War had ceased to function and laid its duties into the lap of Governor Jefferson and his Council. Consequently, the Executive needed to fill the void left by the Board of War or be swamped with its daily business. Governor Jefferson and the Council alleviated their dilemma by calling on Colonel Muter to assume the duties of the Board of War. Colonel Muter must have seemed like the natural successor for the Board of War. He was a high-ranking officer, who had served since 1775, and was currently overseeing the main defensive installations in Virginia.

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13 Board of War to Thomas Jefferson, February 18, 1780, Ibid., 3:297-98.
addition, his duties as commander of the State Garrison Regiment had given him valuable knowledge of the state’s military complex and experience in organizing military departments on a statewide scale. It is not clear exactly when Governor Jefferson selected Colonel Muter to assume the duties of the Board of War; it was either shortly before or just after the House of Delegates ordered a bill be drawn up repealing the Board of War and replacing it with a Commissioner of the Navy and a Commissary of Military Stores on May 12, 1780. Governor Jefferson’s correspondence reveals that he unofficially appointed Colonel Muter to act for the Board of War before May 27, 1780, nearly two months before the War Office was officially created. Colonel Muter’s correspondence with the Council indicates that he may have been acting as early as March 28, 1780, when the Council ordered him to take steps to remove framing from Sydnor’s and erect it at the foundry. Although this job could be related to his duties as overseer of Virginia’s river defenses, it did not involve river defenses and fell under the responsibility of the Quartermaster’s department. It is more likely that the Board of War was not meeting at this time and Governor Jefferson turned to the highest ranking officer of state troops present, as he had done in the past, to take care of the matter. By July 8, 1780, the General Assembly had passed the act, which abolished the Board of War and created the post of Commissioner of the War Office. This paved the way for Colonel

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15 Thomas Jefferson to George Muter, May 27, 1780, VWOLB 1779-1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 264, 60.


Muter's official appointment as Commissioner of the War Office. Although no government record exists of his appointment, Colonel Muter and Governor Jefferson considered it official by July 17, 1780. In agreeing to undertake the duties of the Commissioner of War, Colonel Muter insisted on certain conditions of service. He demanded that he retain his rank and commission in the state troops, as well as all the rights and emoluments associated with it. This included half pay for life and land grants that were due to all officers serving honorably in the state forces. Colonel Muter, in exchange for his demands, voluntarily agreed to give up his current pay, rations and forage privileges in lieu of the salary he would obtain as Commissioner of the War Office. The exact amount of salary Colonel Muter received is unknown, but it was certainly less than 40,000 pounds of tobacco per annum, as that was the salary after it was raised by the act to regulate the War Office in May 1781. As Commissioner of the War Office, Colonel Muter’s duties were now significantly expanded from his previous ones. He was now the adjutant general for the Governor and had to supervise all the military departments in the state, as well as obtain and provide any information needed to assist the Governor in making command decisions. In essence, he had the powers of the Board of War, but without control of the Commissioner of the Navy.

Colonel Muter began his tenure in office during an extremely difficult time for Virginia. The state was trying to replace its Continental troops, which had been captured or destroyed at Charleston and Waxhaws. Colonel Muter was presented with the

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18 George Muter to Governor Thomas Jefferson, March 6, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 68-70.

19 Ibid.

20 Henning, Statutes, 10:426-29.
challenge of equipping a new Continental army, while maintaining the current state establishment. The War Office also met a series of rapid setbacks as the year progressed. Soon after Virginia managed to provide troops for the Continental army, General Horatio Gates led them into the disastrous Battle of Camden. The loss at Camden on August 16, 1780 meant that Virginia needed to replace yet another set of Continental troops and their equipment. Any progress Colonel Muter had made as Commissioner of War was effectively erased and before he could reestablish order in the war department, Virginia was invaded.

General Alexander Leslie arrived in the Hampton area on October 20, 1780 and found that Virginia was unable to repel his troops. The disorganized defense of Virginia’s ports caused the House of Delegates, on November 11, 1780, to order a committee to be formed “to enquire into the business of the war department, and the management thereof.” Colonel Muter had only been in office for five months and his abilities and qualifications were already questioned. Before the results of the Committee’s inquiry could be obtained, Virginia was invaded a second time. On December 30, 1780, Benedict Arnold arrived in the Chesapeake Bay with a small raiding force. By January 5, 1781, Arnold and his troops had marched unopposed to Richmond and sacked the capitol. The lack of opposition to such a small force seriously reflected upon the abilities of Colonel Muter as Commissioner of the War Office. Arnold’s invasion, which will be discussed in a later chapter, demonstrates the total lack of preparedness of Virginia’s military establishment to meet just such an invasion. As Commissioner of War, it was Colonel Muter’s duty to ensure the readiness of Virginia’s

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defenses for such an occasion. After Arnold went into winter quarters at Portsmouth on January 19, 1781, Virginians began to hunt for the persons responsible for the poor showing of their military against the traitor. Colonel Muter was their first and best target. As a result of Arnold's invasion, Colonel Muter was eventually forced to resign as Commissioner of the War Office. On March 2, 1781, General Baron von Steuben, the Continental commander of forces in Virginia, accused Colonel Muter of neglect of duty and laid much of the blame for Virginia's woes on him. Colonel Muter was shocked and outraged and responded by writing a letter to Governor Jefferson which asserted:

Major General Baron de Steuben has this day publicly accused me of having neglected my duty, so as materially to injure the United States, & declared that he had the proofs in his possession. Though I am conscious of having, in every instance done my duty to the utmost of my power, yet as my character may be injured by such a public accusation being thrown out against me, I must request that your Excellency will be pleased to order such an enquiry into my conduct as may set it in its true light, & that you will take such measures as you think most proper to have the proofs the Baron alledges he has against me, produced to such Gentlemen as you think proper to authorize for the purpose of enquiring into my conduct. I must further beg of your Excellency that you will be pleased to direct that I may be furnished with a copy of the proofs the Baron says he has against me (if you think proper) as soon as may be convenient.\(^22\)

It is clear by the letter that Colonel Muter believed he had served faithfully to the best of his ability. The letter also implies that he felt that he would be vindicated by asking for an inquiry into his conduct as Commissioner of War. Jefferson and the Executive Council responded the same day, when the Governor declared:

The board has considered your request that they should make an enquiry into your conduct as Commissioner of the War Office. No complaint having been lodged with them on the subject, no prosecutor offering himself, no witness pointed out, nor even a charge specified, they do not know that they can, either with propriety or practicability enter on such an enquiry, the more especially as they know no

\(^{22}\) George Muter to Thomas Jefferson, March 2, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, , 49-50.
instances themselves, in which you may be justly charged with inattention to the duties of your Office.\textsuperscript{23}

This was not the answer Colonel Muter had hoped to receive. Jefferson and the Council had stated that they knew of no instances Colonel Muter could be charged with neglect, but certainly did not rush to his defense. By refusing the inquiry, Jefferson denied Colonel Muter any effective defense against Baron von Steuben’s accusations. Colonel Muter was quick to realize this harsh fact and tried to remedy it by writing to the Baron’s aide, Jonathan Walker:

Thus, Sir, the matter at present stands, no accusation has been yet (that I know of) given into the Council, & I must still suffer the uneasiness arising from a severe accusation being thrown out against me, in harsh terms, without an opportunity of vindicating myself unless the Baron mentions the circumstances on which he founds his accusation to the Supreme Executive. My request to you is, that you will be so obliging as to apply to the Baron to transmit to the Supreme Executive as quickly as possible, the particulars of neglect of duty which he has to lay to my charge. This I have a right to expect he will most certainly do. Justice to the public, as well as to me, absolutely requires it.\textsuperscript{24}

Walker, in Williamsburg, answered Colonel Muter’s letter five days after it was transmitted by responding that the Baron would file his charges with the Executive as soon as he had the leisure time to do it.\textsuperscript{25} Colonel Muter was left at the mercy of his accuser’s leisure until March 12, 1781. Baron von Steuben appeared before the House of Delegates and charged Colonel Muter with neglect of duty. Steuben represented to the House that the state had only 4,000 stand of small arms fit for duty and that the ammunition, bombs, shells, and cannon balls were in extreme disorder. The House responded by passing a resolution that called for a committee to be formed to confer with

\textsuperscript{23} Thomas Jefferson to George Muter, March 2, 1781, JP, 5:45-46.

\textsuperscript{24} George Muter to Jonathan Walker, March 3, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, , 64-65.

\textsuperscript{25} Jonathan Walker to George Muter, March 8, 1781, Ibid., 77.
the Commissioner of War and look into "such shameful neglect." Baron von Steuben had taken the liberty of going over Governor Jefferson’s head and accused Colonel Muter in front of the House of Delegates. Hot on the heels of the resolution of the House, Colonel Muter received a letter from Mann Page, Jr., notifying him that the committee would meet with him that afternoon at five o’clock in his office. Colonel Muter had wanted an inquiry, but the language in the resolution suggested that the outcome was already determined. The House committee met with Colonel Muter and issued the following report on March 20, 1781:

In short the whole business of the War Office appears to be entirely deranged arising from the following causes, the loss of the Papers belonging to the Office the want of a sufficient number of Assistants and the irregular manner in which the Business seems heretofore to have been conducted. Resolved that George Muter Esqr. The present Commissioner of the War Office is not qualified to fill that important Office and ought to be discharged therefrom.

The Committee decided that Colonel Muter had not neglected his duty but was simply unable to perform it competently. Baron von Steuben’s charges had been of neglect, but should have been based on incompetence. The Committee found that Colonel Muter could answer few questions about the status of the state’s military stores. The loss of the War Office records during Arnold’s invasion prevented Colonel Muter from giving any answer but an educated guess. It also handicapped the primary function of the War Office, which was to provide military information to the Governor and

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Council. In addition, the Committee discovered that Baron von Steuben’s assessment of the disorderly nature of the state’s military stores was accurate. Colonel Muter, upon hearing of the resolution of the House, tendered his letter of resignation on March 22, 1781:

A Resolution of the Hon. the General Assembly (I am informed) has passed, requiring that I shall be dismissed from my appointment as Commissioner of the War Office. I am of opinion, that after having notice of such a Resolution’s having passed, it becomes improper for me to act any longer as Commissioner: I must therefore beg leave to resign my appointment to that office, & request that your Excellency will be pleased to give orders for the papers belonging to that office, now in my custody, being examined & received by a proper person, authorized for that purpose. Conscious of having ever discharged my duty, as a Servant of the State, to the best of my power, I am enabled to bear up, under the pressure of the Resolution of the Legislature; and I am induced to assure your Excellency of my best exertions in the service of the State, in the station my resignation of the appointment will immediately place me, as Colonel of Infantry. I shall think myself honored by your Excellency’s commands, and with pleasure and alacrity obey them.

Governor Jefferson and the Council accepted it and immediately dispatched a letter to Colonel William Davies desiring to know if he would accept the appointment of Commissioner of the War Office. After his resignation, Colonel Muter wished to return to his old duties as commander of the Virginia State Garrison Regiment, but due to the arrangement of the State Regiments on February 6, 1781, he was left without a command. Colonel Muter was mustered out of service on April 1, 1781. He was still willing, however, to serve his state. He notified Colonel William Davies, the new Commissioner of War, on May 5, 1781 that he was retiring to Albemarle County to reside with Colonel

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29 Ibid.

30 George Muter to Thomas Jefferson, March 22, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, , 92-93.


John Coles, but would gladly serve again if he were honored with a command.  

Colonel Muter would never again command troops for the state of Virginia. After the war had ended, he removed to Woodford County, Kentucky and started a new law practice, which would eventually lead to his election as Chief Justice of the Western District in 1785.  

Colonel Muter remained in Kentucky until his death in May of 1811.  

Colonel William Davies, the second Commissioner of the War Office, began his tenure four days after Colonel Muter’s resignation on March 22, 1781. Like Colonel Muter, Davies had been a lawyer before the outbreak of hostilities. He was the oldest son of Samuel Davies, the Great Awakening divine, and was born in Hanover, Virginia in 1749. By 1759, his family had removed to Princeton, New Jersey where William became the ward of Richard Stockton after the death of his father in 1761. William supported himself by reading law with Stockton and teaching grammar school until he completed his Master of Arts at the College of New Jersey in 1768. Shortly thereafter, Davies returned to Virginia and set up a law practice in Norfolk. By 1773, Davies had established himself as a prominent lawyer in Norfolk and formed a pact with other lawyers in town. They advertised in the Virginia Gazette on December 30, 1773 that they would no longer accept cases, save for merchant business, unless their fees were paid up front due to the complexity of the law practice, the smallness of their fees, and

33 George Muter to Colonel Davies, May 5, 1781, VCAL, 2:87.
34 George Muter, D, November 15, 1785, Ibid., 4:67.
35 Stewart, Navy, 229.
36 William Davies to James Hunter, March 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 94.
the difficulties in collecting them.\textsuperscript{38} In addition to his activities as a lawyer, Davies also was interested in local politics and active in the patriot cause. He served as the secretary of a meeting of “Freeholders, Merchants, Traders, and other inhabitants of the county and borough of Norfolk” which issued resolutions instructing their Burgesses to call for a Continental Congress, announcing support for the people of Boston against the Intolerable Acts, and asking everyone to support the Continental Association.\textsuperscript{39} By January of 1775, Davies had been elected as Secretary of the Norfolk Committee of Observation. As part of his duties he was required to advertise the Committee’s findings in the \textit{Virginia Gazette}. Whenever the Committee found a person in violation of the Association, Davies would publish its findings which would censure the guilty party publicly and request that people not associate with them in any way. For example, Davies placed an ad in the \textit{Virginia Gazette} on March 23, 1775, in which the Committee censured the merchant John Brown for violating the Association by importing slaves into the country from Jamaica and attempting to conceal it from the Committee. The slaves were ordered to be sent back on the same ship with no other cargo.\textsuperscript{40} Davies continued his secretarial duties in July of 1775 by acting as the Secretary of the Norfolk Committee of Safety. He continued to place ads at the direction of the Committee, but instead of simply pointing out violations of the Continental Association, the Committee condemned men as traitors to the American cause. For example, on August 11, 1775, Davies placed an ad declaring John Schaw a traitor for identifying Alexander Main to Lord Dunmore as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Purdie & Dixon), December 30, 1773, LV, microfilm reel 11, reel 4.
\item \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Rind), July 14, 1774, LV, microfilm reel 11, reel 5.
\item \textit{Virginia Gazette} (Pinkney), March 23, 1775, LV, microfilm reel 11, reel 5.
\end{itemize}
a fifer in one of the volunteer companies, resulting in Main’s imprisonment aboard the sloop of war Otter.  

Davies also handled all of the Committee’s correspondence. On July 28, 1775, he wrote to the Virginia Convention stating the position of the Norfolk Committee on the resolution the Convention passed which called for restrictions on exporting provisions. The Norfolk Committee maintained that though it was a good resolution, it was enacted without any warning, leaving the merchants with too many goods on hand that would go to waste. They asked for its repeal until the merchants could satisfy their present contracts. While he continued to serve on the Committee of Safety, Davies began to recruit a company of infantry in Princess Anne County. Davies hoped he would be able to qualify for the rank of captain under the provisions outlined by the third Virginia Convention on July 17, 1775 for raising troops for state defense. He was successful and was commissioned as a captain in the First Virginia Regiment of Foot on September 30, 1775. By October 14, 1775, Captain Davies had assembled his company, designated the fourth, and marched into Williamsburg. His regiment drilled in Williamsburg under General Andrew Lewis until ordered on Aug 16, 1776 to join Washington’s army in New Jersey. Earlier in 1776, the First Virginia Regiment of Foot had been annexed into Continental service and Captain Davies now possessed a Continental commission instead of a state one.

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41 Virginia Gazette (Purdie), August 11, 1775, L V, microfilm reel 11, reel 5.


44 Virginia Gazette (Dixon & Hunter), October 14, 1775, L V, microfilm reel 11, reel 5.

During his stay in Williamsburg, Captain Davies performed many regimental duties that proved he was a well-trusted and respected officer. On May 3, 1776, he served as President of a Court-Martial, which tried several men for various offenses ranging from encouraging desertion to drunkenness. The fact that he was President of the Court-Martial demonstrates the confidence that his fellow officers placed in him. Captain Davies also was often asked to sign recommendations for promotions and commissions. His stay in the Williamsburg camp, however, was not without incident. On July 2, 1776, Colonel William Woodford claimed that Captain Davies and his brother John Davies were spreading false and scandalous reports in their correspondence about Woodford's conduct as an officer. Colonel Woodford ordered a Court of Inquiry to sit and render their opinion on the matter. Captain Davies had some cause to be disgruntled with Colonel Woodford and may have censured him in his correspondence. Captain Davies was one of the many freeholders of Norfolk who lost the majority of their property in the looting and burning of that town. Possibly Davies held Colonel Woodford responsible for the looting and burning the American troops visited upon Norfolk after Lord Dunmore began his bombardment in January 1776. What is known is that if the inquiry resulted in censure or court martial for Captain Davies, it certainly did not affect his military career. It is clear that Colonel Woodford and Captain Davies did not like one another at all. Later in his career, Davies wrote to George Washington

referring to the “deep rooted aversion and I may say hatred, which General Woodford has invariably manifested towards me ever since the campaign at Norfolk.”\textsuperscript{50} Despite his rivalry with Colonel Woodford, Captain Davies quickly rose in the ranks after the troops joined Washington in the North.

In late 1776, Captain Davies was promoted to Major of the Seventh Virginia Continental Regiment. It appears, however, that he never actually served with the Seventh Regiment, as evidence indicates that he was captured following the surrender of Fort Washington on November 14, 1776.\textsuperscript{51} If Davies was taken prisoner, he was quickly exchanged and back in service in two months. Major Davies was promoted for the second time on February 21, 1777. He was given a Lieutenant Colonel’s commission with the Fourteenth Virginia Regiment in order to replace Lieutenant Colonel Richard Meade, who was appointed to Washington’s staff. His new regiment, marching from Virginia, did not arrive at Washington’s camp in Morristown, New Jersey until July of 1777. Later in the year, Lieutenant Colonel Davies and the Fourteenth Regiment saw action as part of General George Weedon’s Brigade at the Battles of Brandywine and Germantown. Davies served as the Lieutenant Colonel of the Fourteenth Virginia Regiment until the resignation of Colonel Charles Lewis allowed him to be promoted to Colonel and Regimental Commander on March 20, 1778.\textsuperscript{52}

Davies had risen quickly in the ranks and had proven himself a competent and able officer on many occasions. While serving in the Fourteenth Regiment, Colonel

\textsuperscript{50} William Davies to Colonel Robert Hanson Harrison, March 20, 1780, in Stewart, Woodford, 2:1157.

\textsuperscript{51} Sanchez-Saavedra, Guîde, 51.

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 70.
Davies was honored with the appointment of sub-inspector on March 28, 1778. On that day, General Washington had given General Baron von Steuben the temporary appointment of Inspector General of the Army. Steuben’s task was to turn the American forces into a professional army. Steuben appointed five sub-inspectors, who were to learn the manual of drills from Steuben and then teach them to the rest of the army. Colonel Davies was obviously thought of as a highly competent officer to be chosen as one of five sub-inspectors. His new duties meant detached service from the Fourteenth Regiment, but he still retained nominal command. He was now responsible for drilling all the troops and inspecting the various military posts in the northern theatre of the war. So trusted was Colonel Davies that he was given the responsibility of inspecting West Point, the most important military post in North America. While Davies was engaged in his sub-inspector duties, an arrangement of the Virginia Continental Regiments was held at White Plains, New York on September 10, 1778. In this arrangement, Colonel Davies’s regiment was renumbered the Tenth Virginia Regiment and, in general, the Virginia troops were reduced from fifteen to eleven regiments due to insufficient manpower. Colonel Davies was issued a new commission dated September 14, 1778 as Colonel of the Tenth Virginia Regiment. He still retained nominal command of the Tenth Regiment while on sub-inspector duty but, in May 1779, at Middlebrook, New Jersey, another arrangement of the Virginia Regiments took place. In this arrangement, Colonel Davies’s regiment was merged with the First Regiment and ordered to go south,

54 Ibid., 227.
where it eventually was captured at Charleston in May of 1780. Because the Tenth Regiment was now detached with the First Regiment, Colonel Davies had lost his field command but still served as a sub-inspector.

After the arrangement at Middlebrook, Colonel Davies applied for and obtained a leave of absence, and returned to Virginia to attend to his private affairs. He applied for the leave in order to survey the damage to his remaining property in Suffolk, which had been sacked by General Edward Mathews earlier that May. While in Virginia, Davies became aware that the General Assembly was looking for candidates to fill a position on the Continental Board of War. He immediately wrote to General Nathanael Greene seeking his recommendation for that position. Evidently, Davies and Greene had previously talked about Davies taking a position on the Virginia Board of War, but now Davies requested to serve instead on the Continental Board of War. This would allow him to retain his rank and half pay after the war. If Greene wrote a recommendation for Colonel Davies it has not been found, but Davies was nominated for the position on the Continental Board of War. William C. Houston of New Jersey nominated him, but Davies lost the appointment to Colonel William Grayson of Virginia.

Colonel Davies remained in Virginia until he received word from General Washington that if he wished to continue in the post of sub-inspector he would have to join the Virginia regiments going south under the command of General Woodford. Washington added that if Davies’s affairs were not completed and he could not join the

56 Ibid., 63.
troops, General Woodford was authorized to appoint Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Cabell as sub-inspector.\textsuperscript{59} It must have been disheartening news to Colonel Davies to serve under General Woodford who so disliked him. Unfortunately for Davies, his situation went from bad to worse as he later explained:

His Excellency directed me to join the Virginia troops on their march, but if it was inconvenient to signify it to General Woodford, who was empowered to appoint Colonel Cabell to be sub-inspector. I accordingly attended at this place [Petersburg, VA], but found that no command in the line had been reserved for me, that Colonel Gist without any right or justice had been given one of the regiments, owing as I am informed to a direction from General Woodford to exclude from the arrangement all officers serving in any of the staff departments, I therefore availed myself of the obliging permission his Excellency has given me, and Colonel Cabell was accordingly appointed Sub-Inspector on the 6\textsuperscript{th} Post. The post of inspector without any command in the line is by no means agreeable, but the deep rooted aversion and I may say hatred, which General Woodford has invariably manifested towards me ever since the campaign at Norfolk decided me fully against serving with him, where I should be under his immediate command and without any acquaintance or interest with the commanding General, which could avail me against arbitrary or unjust act of his, should he attempt any.\textsuperscript{60}

Colonel Davies’s troubled past with General Woodford had come back to haunt him. Woodford’s directions at the arrangement, whether intentionally aimed at Davies or not, had effectively relieved him of command of his regiment. With the loss of his field command, Davies refused to serve as sub-inspector under Woodford and complained to Washington. Washington answered Davies on April 20, 1780 that he was unaware of the reasons for appointing Colonel Nathaniel Gist over Davies, but supposed it was from the prevailing rumor that Davies planned to leave the service. Washington added that he had suggested Davies to General John P. G. Muhlenberg as the proper person to superintend

\textsuperscript{59} George Washington to Colonel William Davies, December 16, 1779, FWGW, 17:274.

\textsuperscript{60} William Davies to Colonel Robert Hanson Harrison, March 20, 1780, in Stewart, Woodford, 2:1157.
the gathering of recruits and levies in Virginia during the coming year. Washington had answered Davies’s complaints in a manner which suggested that he would not overturn Gist’s appointment and that Davies should find a new line of service to pursue instead. This was not the answer Colonel Davies was hoping for, but at least it offered the hope of future employment in Continental service.

Colonel Davies’s military career was now in a state of limbo. He had been suggested to General Muhlenberg as a proper officer for superintending the recruiting service in Virginia, but the state’s finances and military disasters in 1780 greatly retarded that endeavor. He was only able to watch in horror as Charleston fell and General Gates was defeated at Camden on August 16, 1780. He was still actively seeking a new duty when he was called into service to organize the militia against General Alexander Leslie’s invasion of Virginia in October 1780. Before he was called out on this new duty, Colonel Davies had applied to Timothy Pickering to be appointed Deputy Quartermaster for the State of Virginia. Davies offered to serve in the post if the present candidate, Colonel William Finnie, resigned or was not appointed. In a letter to Governor Thomas Jefferson, Pickering discussed the need for a deputy quartermaster and Davies’s application:

Colonel Davies abilities are indesputable, and I do not know that his integrity is suspected: but whether he is industrious I am altogether uninformed. It seems too that he is of an uneasy disposition, and less accommodating than could be wished at a time when by every just means we should conciliate the affections of the people as so much depends on their good will. Yet upon the whole, from the vast superiority of his abilities, he may merit a preference to Colonel Finnie. However, I would not wish to decide the case.

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61 George Washington to Colonel William Davies, April 20, 1780, FWGW, 18:288-89.
Colonel Davies made a strong candidate for the position, but Colonel Finnie had already been suggested for the job. Perhaps Davies’s “uneasy disposition” prevented Jefferson and Pickering from changing their opinion on Colonel Finnie. Judging from Colonel Davies’s actions after being appointed Commissioner of the War Office, Pickering’s worries about his disposition seem unfounded and based more on an unfamiliarity with Davies rather than on first hand knowledge. As to Pickering’s comment on Davies being “less accommodating than could be wished,” Davies’s later actions as Commissioner of the War Office show him to be a stickler for the rules, but also demonstrated a willingness to bend them in certain situations. Before Davies got word that Colonel Finnie was appointed, General Alexander Leslie invaded Virginia and all available Continental officers in the state were called upon to oppose the invasion by assuming command of the militia called out by Governor Jefferson. General Muhlenberg immediately ordered Colonel Davies to begin arranging and drilling the militia so it could be sent to his camp for active duty in hemming the British in Portsmouth.63 While engaged in this duty, Colonel Davies’s military career received an incredible boost from General Greene’s appointment of General Baron von Steuben as commander in chief of Continental forces in the state of Virginia. Steuben and Davies had become friends when he served under Steuben as the senior sub-inspector at Valley Forge. Steuben, with the hardy approval of General Greene, immediately appointed Davies to superintend the recruiting service in the whole state. General Greene had left Steuben in Virginia to speed the process of building another southern Continental army, while he went south to

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63 William Davies to Nathanael Greene, November 18, 1780, NGP, 6:483-84.
take charge of the remnants of General Gates’s defeated army. Colonel Davies’s new duties were to oversee the rebuilding of General Greene’s new southern army.\footnote{Nathanael Greene to Baron Steuben, November 20, 1780, Ibid., 6:496-98.}

Colonel Davies was placed in command of the general rendezvous at Chesterfield Courthouse. Steuben ordered Davies to assemble and equip the new recruits as they arrived. He was also ordered to build barracks, renovate the courthouse into a hospital and turn the jails into magazines for the commissary and quartermaster. Under Colonel Davies, Chesterfield Courthouse quickly became the largest and most important recruiting and supply depot in Virginia.\footnote{Michael M. Decker, “Baron Steuben and the Military Forces in Virginia During the British Invasions of 1780 – 1781,” (M.A. thesis, University of Richmond, 1979), 34-35.}

It was during this duty that Colonel Davies began to display the skills necessary to run the Virginia War Office. He became intimately familiar with the War Office and Colonel Muter as he tried to equip and assemble his recruits. At every turn Davies was met with obstacles that Colonel Muter and the War Office could not overcome. When Steuben and Davies wished to send recruits south to Greene in November of 1780, they found that the state had no money for clothing and that the militia had used all the available military equipment during Leslie’s invasion.\footnote{Palmer, Steuben, 241.} In response to this disappointment, Colonel Davies quickly established a tailor shop using skilled recruits and informed Governor Jefferson that he could also have deer skins dressed for breeches.\footnote{Bettie Weaver Woodson, The Continental Training Depot and General Rendez-Vous at Chesterfield Courthouse, Virginia 1780 –1781: with Roster of Chesterfield County Militia Officers 1775 – 1783 (Midlothian: Bettie Woodson Weaver, 1976), 5.}
Colonel Davies’s innovations at Chesterfield were still not enough to alleviate the problems which were supposed to be handled by the Virginia War Office and the cash poor government. The recruits still suffered from a lack of clothing and equipment by mid-December 1780, but Davies managed to overcome this obstacle allowing Steuben to send off a detachment of recruits under Colonel John Greene to General Nathanael Greene.  

Colonel Davies’s difficulties at Chesterfield were increased when Benedict Arnold invaded Virginia in early January of 1781. As Arnold advanced up the James River, Steuben ordered Colonel Davies to evacuate Chesterfield Courthouse and remove the stores and hospital. Davies quickly and efficiently evacuated Chesterfield and then proceeded with his nearly-naked recruits to a position opposite of Westham to aid the state in the removal of their stores to the south side of the James River. His efficiency in carrying out his orders prompted General Steuben to claim that he was indebted to him on this occasion. As Arnold retreated down the James River after sacking Richmond, Colonel Davies returned to Chesterfield Courthouse to reestablish the post there while Steuben and the recruits proceeded to Petersburg.

Colonel Davies’s duties were now even more difficult to accomplish due to Arnold’s total disruption of the Virginia government and War Office. Davies, however, was quick to reconstitute his post and even add some improvements to it. The lack of clothing was still the foremost problem, so Davies had a shoe factory built and managed to get his tailors to put out fifty to sixty regimental coats per week. By March 18, 1781, Colonel Davies’s factories had amassed a considerable supply of clothing to send to

68 Ibid., 3.

69 Baron Steuben to General Greene, January 8, 1781, NGP, 7:76-81.
General Greene.\textsuperscript{71} Davies was displaying a talent for administrative duties that put Colonel Muter and the War Office to shame. Governor Jefferson was so confident in his abilities that he requested Davies to submit a plan to clothe the Virginia troops in the future. In a letter to Captain John Peyton, the Clothier General for Virginia, Jefferson wrote that Colonel Davies “having been so kind as to consider the subject and furnish us with a plan and observations on the minuter parts of the business I beg leave to recommend them to your consideration, as they will furnish you with very useful ideas on the details of your office.”\textsuperscript{72}

What is significant about Davies being asked to submit a clothing plan to the Virginia executive is that it would properly fall under the duties of Colonel Muter and the Virginia War Office. It suggests that Jefferson had already lost confidence in Muter’s abilities and was seeking expert help from outside his administration. Colonel Davies was recognized as a highly efficient and able officer by his superiors and the Virginia government. General Greene even requested Steuben to consult with Colonel Davies on the proper forms for furloughs and discharges because Davies was “a man of great observation and has had long experience respecting the abuses prevailing in the army and state in this matter.”\textsuperscript{73}

While at Chesterfield Courthouse, Colonel Davies was finally rewarded for his hard work with a new regiment. General Greene had ordered that a new arrangement take place to reconstitute the Virginia Regiments, which had been annihilated in the

\textsuperscript{70} Woodson, \textit{Continental Depot}, 8.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 15.


\textsuperscript{73} Nathanael Greene to Baron Steuben, January 13, 1781, \textit{NGP}, 7:109-11.
previous campaign under Generals Benjamin Lincoln and Horatio Gates. Colonel Davies was part of the Board of Officers that met at Chesterfield Courthouse to make the new arrangement on February 10, 1781. Because over thirteen hundred men were still captives in Charleston, the arrangement was mostly on paper only. Its purpose was essentially to determine the seniority of individual officers within the Virginia continental service. The arrangement, however, did create one new regiment and re-designate another. Colonel Davies was the recipient of the command of the newly-created First Virginia Regiment on February 12, 1781. He had finally regained the field command denied him by General Woodford’s arrangement of the regiments. The Ninth Virginia Regiment was renumbered to be the Seventh and the rest of the Virginia troops, consisting of the Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth and Eighth regiments, contained prisoners and existed on paper. Colonel Davies’s new regiment also existed on paper only and consisted of himself and other officers who had escaped capture at Charleston. The plan was to recruit the First Regiment and send it on to Greene.

Although Colonel Davies seemed to fare well in this new arrangement there were other problems. It seems that General Weedon, who had resigned in 1778 over a dispute in rank, was ordered to be included in the new arrangement and a number of officers, led by Colonel Davies, believed this was unfair. Davies addressed several letters to

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74 Sanchez-Saavedra, Guide, 28.
75 Ibid., 29.
76 Ibid., 28.
77 Ibid., 33.
Greene, Steuben, Washington, and Congress outlining the reasons the officers opposed General Weedon’s inclusion in the Virginia continental service. In a letter to Steuben, who was presiding over the arrangement, Davies wrote that General Weedon had been retired under unusual circumstances for three years while the rest of the officers included had continued to serve. Davies also maintained that the many changes in the organization of the army would make Weedon’s inclusion troublesome. Davies’s last reason probably strikes more to the heart of the Board of Officers’ concerns. There now existed within the Virginia Continental service enough officers with more experience than Weedon who deserved promotion, if there were to be another general in the Virginia service. Colonel Davies would have certainly been one of the men eligible for promotion to general, and was known as an ambitious officer. It is important, however, to note that Colonel Davies and the other officers on the Board made it known that they had nothing personal against General Weedon and even sent him a copy of their grievances so everything would be in the open. In his letter to General Greene, Davies mentioned other occasions when officers in similar situations had been denied inclusion and that the Board based their opinion on “impartial justice.” General Greene responded to Davies’s letter on March 30, 1781, stating that he disagreed with the Board on Weedon’s situation and maintained that general officers belonged to the Continent at large and not to a particular state. Greene also added that Weedon’s situation was misunderstood and when he resigned it had been in good standing and the fault lay with Congress’s inability to delegate powers to alter the standing of officers of the same grade.

79 William Davies to Baron Steuben, February 18, 1781, SP, 4:55.

80 Ibid.
This was not the answer Davies desired, but Greene ended his letter by conveying he would leave it up to Congress and Washington to decide the matter.\textsuperscript{82} Davies replied to Greene that although General Weedon’s standing as an officer was different from the inferior ranks, the state’s quota of troops determined the number of general officers. Since the quota was reduced, so should the number of general officers. He argued that the real point was that “the long absence of any officer from service on account of private resentments or private business, ought to be a sufficient bar to his resumption of his former command.”\textsuperscript{83} Despite Colonel Davies’s and the Board of Field Officers’ attempts, General Weedon was included in the arrangement due to Washington’s referring it to Congress, which took no action on the matter. It seems that Colonel Davies and the Board of Officers let the matter drop once they realized that no action was going to be taken in their favor. Colonel Davies must have been disappointed, but he did not let that affect his working relationship with General Weedon. In fact, their correspondence indicates a good working relationship and a high respect for the abilities and opinions of each other.\textsuperscript{84}

While Colonel Davies was busy with the arrangement and his duties at Chesterfield Courthouse, Colonel Muter and the War Office were suffering the political fallout from Benedict Arnold’s invasion. Colonel Muter was being investigated by a special committee, which delivered its report on March 20, 1781. The result of the report

\textsuperscript{81} William Davies to Nathanael Greene, February 20, 1781, \textit{NGP}, 7:322.

\textsuperscript{82} Nathanael Greene to William Davies, March 30, 1781, Ibid., 8:5.

\textsuperscript{83} William Davies to Nathanael Greene, April 18, 1781, Ibid., 8:112-13.

\textsuperscript{84} William Davies to [George Weedon], August 21, 1781, and George Weedon, to William Davies, August 25, 1781, in Allyn Kellog Ford Collection, MHS, microfilm, 2:432, 5:1505.
was a resolution passed in the House of Delegates for Colonel Muter to be discharged. The Senate made it official on March 21, 1781. On that same day a group of gentleman visited Colonel Davies at Chesterfield Courthouse and requested that he offer himself as a candidate for the post of Commissioner of the War Office. Colonel Davies immediately wrote to General Steuben for his opinion on the matter and requested that “this application may be secret and confidential.” Colonel Davies was interested in the prospect of holding the office and thought he could be “of use in it” and that the War Office could “use my endeavors.” Before Steuben could reply to Davies’s letter, Colonel Muter resigned as Commissioner of the War Office. Governor Jefferson and the Council received Muter’s resignation on March 22, 1781 and immediately dispatched a letter to Colonel Davies appointing him to the post.

Governor Jefferson wrote Davies that the Council had appointed him to succeed Colonel Muter and that they would do all in their power to persuade him to take the post. Jefferson ended the letter with a plea to Colonel Davies writing that “in the mean time I hope it will be in your power to come immediately to the office, as its duties are such as to admit of no intermission and impossible to be executed by the Executive in addition to their other duties.” Jefferson and the Council were desperate for Colonel Davies’s help. Colonel Davies was eager for the position on the flattering terms that it was offered, but would have to receive the permission of his immediate superiors in order to accept. On

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86 William Davies to Baron Steuben, March 21, 1781, SP, 4:362.


March 23, 1781, Colonel Davies wrote General Steuben to solicit his permission to act in the office:

In my last I mentioned to you that application had been made to me respecting the post of Commissioner of the War Office. I observed that I thought I might probably be of some use in it, and that if you approved of it I would be glad of your interest in the matter. Since I wrote I have been informed of Colonel Muter’s resignation, and have this evening received a very polite letter from his Excellency the Governor informing me that the Executive had appointed me to that office, and requesting to know whether I would accept of it. In answer I have accepted it conditionally, alledging that as I was under your immediate orders, I could not leave this post without your particular permission, and that as I belonged to the service of the continent more immediately, I could not therefore accept the appointment determinately, until I could obtain the permission of Congress or the Commanding General, as I could not think of giving up my commission and rank in the army with all the emoluments allotted, tho’ at a distant period, for the officers; and after having spent the most valuable part of my youth in the service of my country, to throw myself into a state of dependance upon an office, which the next session of Assembly may entirely abolish. Aware of this inconvenience his Excellency without solicitation is kind enough to say his endeavors shall not be omitted to obtain every permission from the commanding officer or other person which may be necessary to reconcile my acting in that office to the reservation of any other interests I may wish to retain. Under these circumstances I would beg your permission in the first instance, and your interest in the next with Congress and the Commanders in chief, that I may be allowed to act in this department, as long as my services can by any means be dispensed with in the field. I would wish to have it in my power to act in the field, whenever it should be necessary, and I would wish too, to have the allowance of half pay & land and reimbursement for depreciation which all other officers have; but if I lose my commission by accepting this appointment, I shall of course be deprived of all those privileges and advantages. I do not mean, however, to ask any pay from the continent while I act in the war office but only to be put on the same footing that the members of the board of war were in Philadelphia as expressed in the resolution of Congress of the 7th of July 1779, which allowed them to hold their rank in the army, but to be paid only as commissioners. There are many precedents on the continent in favor of my request. General Clinton is Governor of New York and General McDougal a delegate in Congress, and yet both those officers retain their rank in the army. As to the officers of the Virginia line several of them have expressed their wish that I would undertake to act in this post, and I hope it would be for their advantage to have the department put into the hands of a continental officer. From the urgency of the Governor’s application to me to accept the office, and his pressing request that I will immediately undertake the business of it, I propose to repair to Richmond tomorrow. . . .

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89 William Davies to Baron Steuben, March 23, 1781, SP, 4:383.
This letter clearly showed he wanted to act as Commissioner of War, but that many impediments stood in his way. Despite his eagerness and that of the Virginia Executive, Colonel Davies was too shrewd to cast away the advantages of his present situation for the uncertain prospects of the Virginia War Office. His rank and emoluments represented all the wealth that he could hope to obtain after the war was over and it would be folly to lose them. That is the reason he only accepted the post conditionally. The letter also made it clear that Colonel Davies did not foresee any opposition to his serving in the post from his superior officers. On this part, Colonel Davies was right on the mark. Both Steuben and Greene enthusiastically endorsed his application. Steuben notified Greene of Davies's appointment on March 30, 1781 expressing that Colonel Davies was the "properest person" for the post and would render great service in it. General Greene was pleased about Colonel Davies's appointment and wrote to Colonel Davies on April 11, 1781:

Nothing would induce me to consent to your taking the direction of the war department; but a persuasion that you can render more important services to the public in general and not less to the army in particular by holding that office than without it. However you must continue at times to assist all in your power to compleat the arrangement of the army. I believe no state abounding with such a plenty as Virginia, ever experienced such a scarcity for want of order and proper application of her supplies. From your abilities and application I am in hopes there will be a great reformation, but before you engage in this business give me leave to tell you it will be difficult under the best arrangement to keep pace with the demands of the service, and therefore don't get discouraged because you cannot at once effect what you wish and what is absolutely requisite.

90 Baron Steuben to Nathanael Greene, March 30, 1781, NGP, 8:14-16.

91 Nathanael Greene to William Davies, April 11, 1781, Ibid, 8:80-82.
The wise general praised Colonel Davies’s abilities, but also warned of the difficulties involved in the task. With the endorsement of Steuben and Greene, Colonel Davies needed to pass one other hurdle before he could accept the post of Commissioner of the War Office. Unfortunately for Colonel Davies, it proved to be impassible on the terms he wished. True to his promise, Governor Jefferson had solicited Congress in favor of Colonel Davies’s appointment to the War Office while retaining his rank and emoluments. Jefferson wrote to the Virginia Delegates asking for their support, citing the numerous examples of Continental officers holding civil positions while still actively holding rank. His examples included officers such as Governor George Clinton of New York and General Alexander McDougall, a delegate in Congress.  

Jefferson also wrote a letter to Samuel Huntington, the President of Congress, stating that the post of Commissioner of the Virginia War Office was essential to Virginia and the Continent and that they could find no one else worthy and willing to do the job.  

Despite Jefferson’s appeals and the logic of his argument, Congress decided that Colonel Davies could not hold the position while retaining his rank and emoluments. It considered the Commissioner of the War Office to be a civil post and therefore an active military officer would be ineligible to hold it.  

The best the Virginia Delegates in Congress could manage was a compromise that would allow Colonel Davies to retire without losing any emoluments to which he was entitled. This was not acceptable to Colonel Davies as he wished to retain his active duty status and rank.

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93 Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Huntington, March 26, 1781, Ibid., 5:246-47.
94 Samuel Huntington to Thomas Jefferson, April 18, 1781, VCAL, 2:53.
95 Virginia Delegates to Thomas Jefferson, April 17, 1781, Ibid., 2:50-52.
Indeed, Colonel Davies was rather shocked that Congress had barred his way by considering the Commissioner of the War Office as a civil post. General Greene had given his approval and clearly considered the post as part of the state military establishment. In response to General Steuben's inquiry, Greene had written that the regulations of Congress only barred an officer from holding "two offices under Congress" and not a state and continental office simultaneously.\(^96\) Greene would not have made such a ruling if he did not consider the Commissioner of the War Office as a state military office. At any rate, the resolution of Congress stood. If Colonel Davies wished to accept the appointment to the War Office, he would have to give up his rank and active status in the Continental Army. Colonel Davies had maintained all along that he would not accept the appointment on such conditions. By the time Governor Jefferson received word of Congress's determination on the matter, Colonel Davies had been acting as the interim Commissioner for almost a month. Steuben had given Colonel Davies permission to act on March 26, 1781.\(^97\) Greene, Steuben and Jefferson all agreed that Colonel Davies was the right man for the job, but could not prevail on Davies to relinquish his rank in the army. A compromise was needed and it fell to General Greene, as Commander in chief of the Southern army, to arrange one. Since Virginia had so few men in the field and Colonel Christian Febiger, whose commission had seniority over Davies's, was available to take over Davies's duties in recruiting, Colonel Davies could remain as acting Commissioner of the Virginia War Office until Virginia had raised enough recruits to require his attendance in the field. This meant that Colonel Davies

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\(^96\) Nathanael Greene to Baron Steuben, April 15, 1781, \textit{NGP}, 8:98-99.

\(^97\) William Davies to Baron Steuben, March 27, 1781, \textit{SP}, 4:406.
was able to act as Commissioner of the War Office, but that he would not be officially appointed to that post. In fact, Colonel Davies never took an oath of office even though required by law and never made use of any official signature annexed to his name.\(^{98}\) As part of the compromise, Colonel Davies was left off the Continental payrolls and subsisted on the salary of the Commissioner of the War Office. He still drew Continental forage and rations as he continued to perform some Continental duties from time to time, as assigned by General Greene.\(^{99}\)

While Colonel Davies and Jefferson were waiting on the resolution of Congress, Colonel Davies waded into the confused business of the Virginia War Office. He officially began entering letters in the War Office Letter Book on March 26, 1781, four days after Colonel Muter had resigned.\(^{100}\) As one of his first acts as interim Commissioner of War, Colonel Davies began to streamline the business of the War Office. He applied to Jefferson to allow one of the officers of the new State Regiment to do the duty of Town Major in Richmond and to superintend the public works. He complained to Jefferson that “It is impossible for the duties of this office to be done without confusion, if the Commissioner’s attention is perpetually distracted with orders for provision for this man, and rum for another, and a pair of shoes for a third.”\(^{101}\) The duties of the War Office were vague and confusion reigned supreme when Colonel

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\(^{99}\) William Davies to Richard Claiborne, November 14, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781 – January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm 632, 54-56.

\(^{100}\) William Davies to James Hunter, March 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm 632, 94.

\(^{101}\) William Davies to Thomas Jefferson, March 26, 1781, \textit{JP}, 5:244-46.
Davies assumed the duties of the post. In addition to the confusion in the War Office, Davies was still under Steuben's orders to superintend the recruiting at Chesterfield Court House. Colonel Davies tried to explain to Steuben the impossibility of doing both jobs, but failed. In the end Davies was prevailed upon to do both duties by attending Chesterfield on “Saturdays after noon and Sundays.” In order to relieve himself of around the clock work at both positions, he requested an additional clerk for the War Office, which Jefferson granted on a temporary basis. Colonel Davies was now overcome with work but diligently attended to his duties.

As Davies began the business of reorganizing the Virginia War Office, an interesting development occurred. The General Assembly had requested that Governor Jefferson submit a new plan of operation for the War Office before the next session. Governor Jefferson, already planning to resign when the next session met, referred the matter to his new interim Commissioner. Colonel Davies was placed in the enviable position of writing his own job description. In a letter to General Greene, Colonel Davies stated that the War Office “stands upon a very insufficient footing” and that the state’s quartermaster department was in a “deplorable and indeed ridiculous situation.” Colonel Davies planned to rectify the weaknesses of the Virginia War Office in hopes of establishing regularity and efficiency. He immediately set about developing a plan for the operation of the War Office. He had until the May 1781 session of the General Assembly to assemble the plan, but due to the invasion of Virginia by Generals Phillips and Cornwallis the General Assembly had to meet in June at Staunton. Colonel Davies

103 William Davies to Nathanael Greene, April 2, 1781, NGP, 8:26-27.
submitted his plan to the Executive Council on June 18, 1781. He considered his present employment as Commissioner of the War Office, and his six years of service in various military branches as qualifications enough to offer his opinion to the Council. He also asked that it pass along his plan to the legislature with any observations they might have.

Colonel Davies plan pointed out that:

... frequent examination, is the way to make men diligent as well as honest; without it, fraud and negligence would soon exhaust the riches of a country much more wealthy than ours—From this cause chiefly, originate the complaints which so generally prevail, of mismanagement in the several military departments. With an infinite variety of business on the hands of the Executive, it will always be impossible for them to attend to scrutinies of this kind; and of course they will never be able to obtain a just knowledge of the real state or application of the stores and resources of the country. This then is one of the great duties of the War Office, to prepare for the inspection of government, such documents as will enable them to form proper ideas of the state of the public supplies, and of the conduct of their servants in the discharge of the duties of their several appointments.\(^{104}\)

Colonel Davies was not proposing a new idea, but merely reinforcing an old one. The War Office was always intended to collect and report all military information to the Executive. Colonel Davies was maintaining that, although this was obvious, it had not always been practiced. In order to correct this problem, he suggested that the Commissioner of the War Office be vested by law “with an inquisitorial power, and have authority to demand from the different military departments exact returns of their receipts and issues, and of all other matters incident to their offices, according to the nature of their respective employments.”\(^{105}\) Colonel Davies was insisting that the Commissioner have real authority delegated by law instead of implied through the authority of the Governor. Under the Act of 1780, the Commissioner of the War Office had no powers

\(^{104}\) William Davies to the Executive, June 18, 1781, \textit{VCAL}, 2:166-69.

\(^{105}\) Ibid.
spelled out for him in the law, save what the Executive decided to give him. This resulted in a powerless Commissioner who could request information but had no punitive measures to enact if the request was ignored. Under Davies’s plan, the military departments were required by law to deliver periodic returns to the Commissioner. Colonel Davies’s plan also detailed what returns should be sent to the War Office from the Quartermaster, Commissary, and Clothing departments. He listed the several complaints about the mismanagement in those departments that could be avoided by investing the Commissioner of War with an inquisitorial power. He also mentioned that the Commissary of Military stores should make periodic returns to the War Office as well as oversee the laboratories and magazines in the state. His plan went beyond just the military departments to include the Auditor’s Office. He maintained that returns of articles impressed by the various military departments and settled at the Auditor’s Office should be made to the War Office in order that they may count against the Continental quota required from the state. He further stated that this would allow the Executive to detect the great abuses which occur during impressments and put a stop to them.106 Evidently, the War Office had not been keeping such records before Davies suggested it, which meant that Virginia was paying out more than its quota required.

Another major suggestion in Colonel Davies’s plan for the War Office was that the Commissioner of the War Office should be allotted the duties of the Adjutant General’s department. All of the Executive’s orders should issue through the War Office to prevent confusion and descriptive lists and rosters should be lodged there as well. This was a powerful suggestion, because previously the War Office would sometimes order

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106 Ibid.
one thing and find that the Executive had ordered another. Colonel Davies was trying to avoid the confusion caused by a splintered chain of command. It would also mean that an order from the Commissioner of War would carry the same weight as if it were from the Governor. Colonel Davies's plan quickly vested the Commissioner of the War Office with real power and moved him away from simply being another clerk for the Executive. Davies, however, was aware that even the Commissioner needed some check against his powers. Davies's plan stated:

He [the Commissioner] should at all times be responsible to the Executive for his conduct, and controllable by them; yet it will be wrong to subject him to the delay of taking their opinion in every step he may think necessary for the public good, and of having their previous approbation as a prerequisite, before he can do anything, as is the case at present. It is sufficient that the Executive can interfere when they please, and give him such orders as they think proper. A prudent Commissioner however, will, for his own security crave their advice and directions on every matter of importance in his department: the officer should be displaced that would not.\(^{107}\)

Colonel Davies recognized the need for the Commissioner of the War Office to have real power in order to execute his duties. His plan allowed the office some autonomy while still subjecting it to the power of the Governor and Executive Council. He also recommended that a few clerks be allowed in case the Commissioner had to be out of the office on business.\(^{108}\)

Colonel Davies submitted this plan to the Executive Council on June 18, 1781, the same day that the House of Delegates brought in a bill to regulate the department of the War Office. It is assumed that the Executive Council transmitted Colonel Davies's plan to the legislature because the House of Delegates debated the bill on June 20, 1781

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\(^{107}\) Ibid.

\(^{108}\) Ibid.
and made several amendments to their original bill.\footnote{Journal of the House of Delegates of Virginia, May 1781 Session, in VGAH, LV, microfilm reel 331, 39.} The next day the bill was passed in the House and sent to the Senate which returned the bill with several amendments. The House agreed with the Senate's amendments and passed "An Act to regulate the Department of the War Office."\footnote{Ibid., 47.}

Colonel Davies must have been elated to find that the new War Office Act was almost a direct copy of the plan he submitted to the Executive. The legislature had obviously used it in determining the new War Office's functions. The act vested the Commissioner with an inquisitorial power and even spelled out for each department the kind of returns that were required and set up a periodical schedule for their filing. The Act also gave the Commissioner the powers of the Adjutant General's department and even spelled them out as in Davies's plan. The most important part of the new act, however, was the clause which gave the Commissioner of War the autonomy he needed to function efficiently. The Commissioner received the authority to "Superintend the establishment of magazines, regularity of issues, and shall in general direct and manage all matters and things within the department of war, as well as all persons holding offices or performing duties within that department."\footnote{Hening, Statutes, 10:426-29.} This clause provided the Commissioner of War sweeping powers to do his duty, but the most important part was what was left out. There was no restraining clause that required that the Commissioner act only under direct orders from the Governor. Colonel Davies had received the autonomy he knew would be needed to operate the War Office efficiently.
Colonel Davies continued to serve as Commissioner of the Virginia War Office until December 1782. After the Siege of Yorktown, the prospects of peace with Great Britain had been increasing in the minds of the General Assembly and it began to dismantle the military establishment in Virginia. With peace thought to be on the horizon, the General Assembly quickly moved to relieve Virginia of its wartime tax burden and expenses. One of the first cuts in Virginia’s military establishment was the Virginia War Office. A bill was introduced in the House to repeal all of the acts relating to the War Office on November 20, 1782.\footnote{Journal of the House of Delegates, October 21, 1782, in \textit{VGAHI}, LV, microfilm reel 331a, 26.} Colonel Davies was hardly pleased as he felt that the War Office was finally getting all the military departments into order. In a letter to Richard Henry Lee, he insisted that the bill was directed against the War Office on other grounds rather than financial concerns. He wrote that the state needed the War Office “but a few gentlemen have conceived a jealousy that there is danger to the constitution in entrusting any authority to the Commissioner of War, because I happen to be an officer in the army.”\footnote{William Davies to Richard Henry Lee, January 5, 1782, WOLB November 2, 1781 – January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 166.} Colonel Davies clearly thought that the War Office was a necessity to his state and could not comprehend why these gentlemen feared a position, which was subject to the immediate control of the Executive.

Despite Colonel Davies’s opinion, the General Assembly passed an act, which repealed all the legislation relating to the War Office on December 24, 1782.\footnote{Journal of the House of Delegates, October 21, 1782, in \textit{VGAHI}, LV, microfilm reel 331a, 79.} The act abolished the Virginia War Office and returned all of its duties to the Executive or whomever they chose to appoint. The act also instructed Colonel Davies to turn over all
of the War Office's accounts, books and vouchers as well as any other public property to
the Governor and Executive Council. Colonel Davies was aware of the developments
in the General Assembly and had already been preparing himself to give up the post of
Commissioner of War. On December 9, 1782, Colonel Davies wrote Governor Harrison
that he was ready to settle his accounts and deliver up the War Office whenever so
commanded. His only request was that he be allowed to settle with warrants, as he had
not been paid a farthing since August of 1779. The Executive replied on December 11,
1782 instructing Colonel Davies to deliver his papers to the Clerk of the Council. It is
interesting to note that six days later the Executive Council was forced to appoint Thomas
Meriwether as an additional clerk. The Council blamed its need for an additional clerk
on its increased business due to the abolition of the War Office. Colonel Davies had
been right that the state still needed the Virginia War Office.

After leaving the War Office, Colonel Davies began to rebuild his life as a lawyer.
He had wished to remain in the army but "being the youngest Colonel in the Virginia
Line" he found that as Congress cut back its military establishment, he was to be
retired. In the arrangement held at Winchester Barracks in January 1783, Colonel
Davies was officially mustered out of service as the Colonel of the First Virginia
Regiment. The arrangement as a whole simply wiped away the paper establishment that

115 Hening, Statutes, 11:133-34.
116 William Davies to the Governor, December 9, 1782, VCAL, 3:393.
117 H. R. McIlwaine and Wilmer L. Hall, eds., Journals of the Council of the State of Virginia
118 Ibid., 3:193-94.
119 William Davies to the Governor, December 9, 1782, VCAL, 3:393.
had been created at the Chesterfield Arrangement in 1781.\textsuperscript{120} He was now faced with the task of rebuilding his law practice. Unfortunately for Davies, he had lost most of his law books and property in Norfolk and Suffolk during the war. With nothing tying him down in Chesapeake, Davies moved to Petersburg and set up a new law practice after the war. He may have moved to Petersburg in order to court Mary Murry Gordon, the widow of Alexander Gordon of Petersburg, whom he eventually married.\textsuperscript{121} As he resumed his law practice, he kept his eye on the political situation in Virginia. When it became known that agents for the state were to be elected to settle Virginia’s accounts with the United States, William Davies offered himself as a candidate. In 1788 he was elected and traveled to Philadelphia and New York attending the business of the settlement. He was perhaps the most qualified man for this endeavor as the former head of the War Office. He was intimately familiar with both the state and Continental supply systems and had served during General William Phillips’s invasion of Virginia and the campaign at Yorktown. This gave him personal knowledge of many of the claims against the Continent. Through his efforts, Virginia was able to get a satisfactory settlement with the United States, which did justice to the claims of Virginia.\textsuperscript{122} After returning from his employment as State Agent, William Davies moved back to Norfolk and was appointed Collector of the Port by President John Adams in 1800. He lived there until his death on December 23, 1805.\textsuperscript{123}

\textsuperscript{120} Sanchez-Saavedra, \textit{Guide}, 28.

\textsuperscript{121} McLachlan, \textit{Princetonians}, 492.

\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., 491.

\textsuperscript{123} Ibid., 492.
CHAPTER 3:
THE CHALLENGES OF THE WAR OFFICE

The War Office Records provide an interesting glimpse into the hardships of planning, supplying, and waging war. These records clearly demonstrate the issues that affected the strategies and preparations for war in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The duties of the War Office were broadly defined and encompassed almost every aspect of the war effort. The Commissioner of War’s duties ranged from adjutant general to superintendent of the Commonwealth’s military factories and beyond. Naturally, a public official charged with so many responsibilities would face multiple trials in carrying out his job. He confronted many obstacles that were beyond his control, but that had to be overcome for the good of the war effort.

The first major problem facing the War Office was the lack of information on the state’s ability to wage war, which affected every aspect of the war effort and the state’s ability to plan accordingly. The Commissioner of War viewed the gathering and reporting of information to government as “one of the great duties of the War Office.”¹ In fact, it was the primary responsibility of the War Office to gather information so that it could accurately report to the government on the condition of the state’s war machine. Unfortunately for the Commissioner of War, many impediments stood in his way of procuring accurate information.

From the beginning, one of the most frustrating obstacles in collecting information was the willful neglect or outright refusal of the state’s own military staff departments and County Lieutenants to report information to the War Office. One of the first surviving records of the War Office is a letter from Governor Jefferson to

¹ William Davies to the Executive, June 18, 1781, VCAL, 2:166-69.
Commissioner of War Muter, in which Jefferson complains about the State Commissary not obeying two previous orders to file a return and asks the Commissioner to issue a third order.\(^2\) It is interesting to note that the Commissioner of War’s powers at this point were defined by the Governor, and therefore when the Commissioner of War was writing to request information it was assumed the order really come from the Governor. This example clearly illustrates that the origin of the order did not concern the Commissary at all.

Other departments were also at fault. Colonel Muter complained about “No account from the Quarter Master General’s department for articles and services furnished the continent have ever come in to be examined.”\(^3\) The staff departments were also negligent in dealing with the second Commissioner of War, Colonel William Davies. This took place despite the fact that the Assembly had tried to help the War Office by making it a law, not just an order from the Executive, for the staff departments to file returns with the War Office. Colonel Davies ordered the Commissary General of Provision, John Browne, to provide an immediate return of his department. To induce him to comply, Davies added:

I enclose you an extract from an act for regulating the war department; for your more particular information, and to show you how far you and I are connected. The business prescribed in it is essentially necessary to be immediately attended to, and I must insist upon a speedy compliance with the law, and request a state of your department to the first of July.\(^4\)

\(^2\)Thomas Jefferson to George Muter, May 27, 1780, VWOLB 1779-1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 264, 60.

\(^3\) George Muter to Quarter Master General for State, December 11, 1780, WOLB July 21, 1780-January 2, 1780, WOR, LV microfilm reel 632, 72.

\(^4\) William Davies to Browne Commissary General of Purchase, no date, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 151-152.
Unfortunately, even the Assembly’s measures to aid the War Office proved ineffectual in getting the reports filed in the War Office. The state military staff departments were not the only culprits in failing to make proper and timely returns. The County Lieutenants, who administered the affairs of government at the local level, were also delinquent. Many other local officials like the Commissioners of the Provision Law and the Commissioners of the Specifics Tax were also offenders. The local county officials were responsible for their county’s supplies and militia and were therefore supposed to report their condition to the War Office. Colonel Davies constantly complained to the County Lieutenants and the various Commissioners about their inattention to filing their returns. He was quite fond of reminding his correspondents that their returns were required by the law. 5

Receiving returns was not the only problem the War Office faced in gathering information. When the Commissioner of War received a return it was frequently incomplete, or worse, exaggerated in its scope. Colonel Muter complained to an unknown correspondent, but probably a member of the Assembly, that though many County Lieutenants had made returns, “this however has by no means produced full returns.”6 Colonel Davies added that “the regularity of returns is so generally neglected by County Lieutenants” that “government have it not in their power to make any equitable distribution” of muskets to the militias of the various counties. 7 With his keen

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5 William Davies to Commissioners of Provision Law, August 14, 1781, Ibid., 214. and William Davies to County Lieutenants, October 12, 1782, WOLB May 6, 1782 – October 12, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 160.

6 George Muter to (Unknown), December 29, 1780, WOLB July 21, 1780 – January 2, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 81.

7 William Davies to County Lieutenant of Richmond, August 30, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 9-10.
attention to detail, Colonel Davies often mentioned the faults of particular returns. In a letter to Major Richard Call, he observed that the dragoon who delivered the Major’s return was wearing a shabby uniform, but the return itself did not mention a single coat or waistcoat. Colonel Davies remarked that he hoped the dragoons were not naked as represented in the return.\textsuperscript{8} A more serious problem than an incomplete return was an exaggerated one. The Commissioner of War also addressed this issue with Major Call:

\begin{quote}
I will conclude with one friendly remark, that it is bad policy in a corps to exaggerate its wants. Government will be more disposed to supply a corps that is half equipped than one that has hardly anything, both because they despair of ever equipping them, and because it will unavoidably occasion some small diffidence of the care of the Officers. I am persuaded, considering the frequent applications of Lee’s and Nelson’s Corps, you will not think this hint amiss.\textsuperscript{9}
\end{quote}

Obviously, incomplete and exaggerated returns affected the ability of the War Office to assess need properly and supply the various departments under the War Office. This, however, was not the only problem with the information contained in the returns. Upon occasion, the information in a return was presented in such a confusing manner that the Commissioner of War could not decipher what the return was trying to report.\textsuperscript{10} In addition to these problems with information gathering, the War Office had to deal with many other issues that affected their ability to report accurate information to government. Letters could take quite a long time to reach their intended destination and it was quite easy for them to miscarry altogether.

Another issue was the invasion of the state by the British. Each time the British arrived, it caused supplies and men to be dispersed in an emergency fashion which was

\textsuperscript{8} William Davies to Major Call, August 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 209-210.

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10} William Davies to Colonel Francis Taylor, August 10, 1781, Ibid., 166.
often unorganized. The most glaring example was the sacking of Richmond and Westham by Benedict Arnold in early January of 1781. Unfortunately for Colonel Muter, the acting Commissioner of War, the records of the state were mistakenly deposited in a magazine at Westham during Arnold’s invasion and were destroyed. This was a real blow to the state and especially to the War Office, since it lost all the information it had gathered prior to the invasion.\textsuperscript{11} The ultimate consequence of the loss was the dismissal of Muter and the appointment of Colonel Davies as the Commissioner of War. In addition to invasion by the enemy, the War Office had to contend with improper forwarding of supplies and unauthorized seizures which inevitably nullified the accuracy of the original return.\textsuperscript{12}

The Commissioner of War, well aware of all of these obstacles, tried to use every means available to combat them. The War Office attempted various ways to obtain the information the government needed so badly. The most often used tactic was simply to write and complain to the offending party while reminding them of the law. When that approach failed, multiple letters were sent to remind the offender to file the returns.\textsuperscript{13} In dealing with Continental Officers, who were not subject to control of the War Office but still had valuable information relating to the supply of the Virginia Continental Line, the Commissioner of War often had trouble getting the proper returns to make his plans. Colonel Davies’s best tactic in this case was to apply directly to the Commander in Chief of the Southern Army, General Greene. On at least one occasion, when Davies was

\textsuperscript{11} Malone, \textit{Jefferson the Virginian}, 340.

\textsuperscript{12} William Davies to Colonel Hendricks, September 17, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 77-78.

\textsuperscript{13} William Davies to Colonel Thinker, November 6, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781 – January 22, 1781, microfilm reel 632, 19.
frustrated in his attempts, he complained to General Greene about his inability to obtain returns of the Virginia Cavalry & Artillery from their officers. He asked Greene to order the officers to send the returns to the War Office.\(^{14}\) In this manner, the Commissioner of War went over the heads of the noncompliant officers to achieve his goal.

Another favorite tactic of Colonel Davies was to remind the County Lieutenants and staff departments that they were required by law to furnish the War Office with returns. When that failed to produce the desired effect, the Commissioner of War had other means at his disposal. In the case of John Browne, the Commissary General of Provision who refused to file returns, Colonel Davies asked for an enquiry into his conduct by the Executive Council. In a letter on July 19, 1781, the Commissioner of War admonished the Commissary for not providing information to the War Office “which was in a position to aid his department” with the consequence of a government enquiry into his conduct.\(^{15}\) Luckily for Davies, the Commissary decided to resign rather than submit to the enquiry, and in doing so saved the Commissioner of War the trouble of conducting the investigation. Davies, in a letter to Governor Nelson, congratulated the country because it could now receive a better arrangement that would cause fewer problems for the War Office and better provisions for the troops.\(^{16}\) The enquiry was but one tool the Commissioner of War could use to overcome the negligence of some officers to file returns. On another occasion the Commissioner of War asked for a special resolution of

\(^{14}\) William Davies to General Greene, September 28, 1782, WOLB May 6, 1782 – October 12, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 155.


\(^{16}\) William Davies to Governor Nelson, September 6, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 40-41.
the Executive Council requiring the manager of the arms factory in Fredericksburg to file monthly returns. The manager of the factory, Charles Dick, was supposed to be under the Commissioner's supervision, but had trouble making timely returns to the War Office.\textsuperscript{17} In this way, the War Office hoped to reinforce the idea of timely returns without removing an important component in the public armory.

The problems of inaccurate and exaggerated returns were handled in a different manner. Originally, the Commissioner of War provided specific instructions as to what he wanted in the return. The Commissioners of the Provision Law, for example, were to record the name and rank of individuals who drew supplies from them. They were also instructed to make returns to the Quarter Master of their forage and a return of provision to the Commissary General of Provision.\textsuperscript{18} Colonel Davies, however, decided that the best way to ensure consistent information was to enclose forms in his circular letters and to instruct the County Lieutenants and staff departments to use the new forms.\textsuperscript{19} It was hoped that if a standard form were used the returns would be complete and accurate. The officer filling out the form simply completed each column with the desired information.

The issues that faced the War Office when gathering information for the government still remained, but the Commissioner of War did everything in his power to overcome them. The efficacy of the War Office can be judged by a report submitted to the General Assembly by the War Office on December 1781. In it, the War Office was

\textsuperscript{17} William Davies to Governor Nelson, September 11, 1781, Ibid., 56-57.

\textsuperscript{18} William Davies to Commissioners of Provision Law, August 14, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 214.

\textsuperscript{19} William Davies to County Lieutenants, September 6, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 137.
able to provide substantial information, but by the admission of Colonel Davies it was not as much as he hoped. He apologized to the Speaker of the House that the returns are so imperfect I sincerely lament, but my repeated solicitations to the different officers and agents for the necessary papers have not proved effectual to procure them. I hope therefore the indulgence of the house will pardon the defective state in which the enclosed reports unavoidably appear.\(^{20}\)

The Commissioner of War made seven reports to the House and attempted to explain the problems with each return. In the first report on militia strength, Davies complained that the County Lieutenants sent inaccurate and incomplete forms. He summarized:

In short so various were the modes adopted, that no certainty of information could be obtained from them, and government were almost as much instructed after receiving the returns as they were before. To alleviate this inconvenience a model was transmitted to each county for their observance but which I am sorry to say has been very little attended to.\(^{21}\)

Despite the inadequacies of the militia returns, Davies did believe that some useful information was present. For instance, in the report on the total strength of the state’s militia he estimated that at least one-tenth of the state’s militia were fit only for invalid duty. He was also able to point out that the number of militia officers were disproportionate to the number of militia effectives in many counties. In some counties that meant they had too many officers, and in others too few.\(^{22}\) In the second report about arms, ammunition, and accoutrements, Davies determined that the chief problem with the military stores was the militia’s absconding with the public arms at an alarming rate. If


\(^{21}\) Ibid.

\(^{22}\) Ibid.
the militia did not keep the public arms, then they damaged them during use, creating yet another problem. Davies explained “as matters are now arranged, all the state armories in our intervals of peace have been found unequal for the reparations of the injuries of the arms have received during the several invasions.” The Commissioner of War recommended allowing the public, under certain regulations, to purchase the arms. He reasoned that if the militia owned the arms themselves they were more likely to take care of them.23

In the third report, Davies presented what returns he had of the state’s recruits for the Continental Line. Once again, he lamented that the counties had paid little heed to keeping good records and transmitting them to the War Office. In fact, most of the information he did have seems to have been transmitted from the Continental officers. Because the counties had not used the descriptive forms he sent, he feared that many recruits, who had enlisted for the war in the counties, simply told the Continental officers at the general rendezvous that they had enlisted for eighteen months. Consequently, Virginia was denied proper credit for the bounties it had issued to the recruits. The Continental books would only give Virginia credit for the smaller bounty paid to eighteen months men instead of the larger bounty already advanced for an enlistment for the war.24

In the fourth report, the Commissioner of War provided all of the information he had on the various militia delinquents from each county. Unfortunately, the inattention to the enforcement of the militia law, which required delinquents to be sentenced to six months of service, allowed many to escape unpunished. Davies even stated that

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
numerous delinquents appeared to have enlisted in the volunteer legions to try to avoid their regular duty. The volunteer legions up to that point had not been called into service.\textsuperscript{25}

In the fifth report, Colonel Davies reviewed the current state of the clothing law which required the counties to provide a certain amount of clothing for the Virginia troops. Many of the counties had not started to collect clothing and those counties that had could not give an accurate accounting. In many cases, Davies believed the clothing to be of poor quality and not necessarily the required type. The most worrisome trend noted in this return was many county commissioners’ issuance of clothing without authorization from the state government. This, of course, would dramatically affect any plans the War Office had made to clothe the Virginia troops. Davies ended this report by reminding the House that “as the law now stands there is no prohibition to restrain the county lieutenants from issuing the clothing they receive nor is there a mode prescribed for the transportation or collection of it.”\textsuperscript{26}

In the sixth report, Colonel Davies provided all the information he had on the quantity of supplies the Commissioners of the Specifics Tax had collected and applied. Once again, he lamented that many of the commissioners went beyond their duties and issued the provisions without orders from government. The Commissioner of War predicted that unless laws were enacted, the specifics would continue to be misapplied,

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
and worse, the state would receive no credit from the Continent because the specifics were issued outside of proper channels.\footnote{Ibid.}

In the last report to the Assembly, the War Office accounted for the wagons the state had collected for the use of the Continent. Davies reported some were turned away as insufficient, and those that were taken often were not given vouchers to make it a Continental charge. Another problem, the Commissioner of War mentioned, was that the law for providing wagons did not require their value to be ascertained. Consequently, the Commonwealth relied on the books of the Continental Quartermasters for their value. Davies pointed out that the wagons could be undervalued and Virginia would have no way of arguing the point. At the end of this last report, Colonel Davies concluded:

\begin{quote}
It would have afforded some great satisfaction to have been able to have laid before the house the various other returns which by law are required from me. But the confusion and derangements which were occasioned by the rapid incursions of the enemy followed by the great and [repeated] exertions required from every public department for the facilitating and support of the late operations below rendered it impractical to obtain the necessary information from the different officers.\footnote{Ibid.}
\end{quote}

While the War Office freely admitted that its information was incomplete, it was still effective in providing information to the government. Its inability to procure the correct information rests on the shoulders of others. The War Office Records show the diligence of Colonel Davies in asking for returns. The underlying problem is the autonomy of the County Lieutenants who seem not to recognize any responsibility to state government. In fact, the state government had no way to coerce local officials to do
their duty. The War Office relied on their good will to answer its calls for returns. In spite of this weakness, the War Office did provide logistical support to the government.

While information gathering was a major problem for the War Office, it was not the only difficulty the Commissioner of War faced. The many different missions of his office meant that he dealt with other issues as well; the most important of which was the finances of the Commonwealth of Virginia. Money is a critical ingredient to waging a successful war, and the State Treasury was depleted. The economy was already burdened with debt from the French and Indian War. This meant that the current war would have to be funded largely on credit. The initial plan of the Assembly was to fund the war with paper money backed by the collection of future taxes. This failed because few taxes were collected and therefore the public credit rapidly declined. By 1779, the Commonwealth was forced to use commodity taxes to try to bolster the public credit. This, however, also proved ineffective in establishing the public credit on sound footing. When the War Office was created in 1780 the state’s finances were in disrepair and paper money was depreciating rapidly. The value of the state’s paper money depreciated from 40 to 1 in 1780, to 150 to 1 in April of 1781 and finally to 800-1000 to 1 by September 1781. This financial climate placed the War Office in the unenviable position of waging war with an empty war chest. The scarcity of funds affected the War Office in many ways.

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31 Ibid., 16-18.
32 Ibid., 21-23.
One of the War Office's financial duties was to pay the salaries of the state troops and staff departments involved in supplying the army. The Journal of the War Office is filled with warrants issued by the Commissioner of War to the paymasters of the various corps of state and continental troops. For instance, on January 30, 1781, Colonel Muter issued a warrant in favor of Robert Boush, the paymaster for the State Garrison Regiment, for 78,244 pounds 6 pence. This amount compensated the regiment for the months of August through December and settled their account in new money at 40 to 1 depreciation.\(^\text{33}\) The War Office was able to pay the troops in many cases, but that was not always true. After the invasions by the enemy had passed, supernumerary officers often applied for pay. The Commissioner of War, conscious of the state of the Treasury, issued instructions to the paymaster on how their pay should be administered. Since the Treasury could not afford to pay all of the supernumerary officers, Captain Windsor Browne was ordered to issue warrants to officers only if they had proper vouchers and proof of actual service in the invasion.\(^\text{34}\) Supernumerary officers were not the only ones to feel the effects of the budget crunch. The War Office reported to the executive that repeated applications for money were coming in from the officers of the Virginia Continental Line. Colonel Davies believed the reasons for so many requests to be the depreciation of money and the delay of their past payments. In fact, Davies reminded the Governor that the officers had not been paid in over a year and a half, except on account.\(^\text{35}\) This exemplifies the problem the War Office faced. Because the Treasury

\(^{33}\) Warrant to Robert Boush, January 30, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 17.

\(^{34}\) William Davies to Captain Windsor Browne Paymaster, July 10, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 115.

\(^{35}\) William Davies to Governor, July 10, 1781, Ibid., 87.
lacked the funds, the War Office was forced to delay payments. When the situation of
the officers became too grim, the Commissioner of War would allow officers to draw
supplies on account in lieu of their pay. The regular troops, however, did not have this
luxury and the irregularity of their pay clearly undermined morale and led to desertion.

The financial situation not only affected the troops in service, but it also greatly
impacted the state’s ability to recruit new troops. The recruiting laws offered generous
bounties for recruits that signed up for the service. The longer the recruit was willing to
commit to service, the higher his bounty. The War Office was in charge of issuing the
recruiting money to the various officers of the Virginia Continental Line. Two critical
problems faced the War Office when dealing with recruiting. The first depended solely
on the Treasury and the second on the recruiting officers themselves. In the first case, the
issue was the amount of money government could afford to allocate to recruiting. This
was out of the control of the War Office, but there appears to have been a small but
steady flow of money from the Treasury. This was especially true during the Yorktown
Campaign. The War Office issued 18 warrants for $3,100,000 in paper money between
September and November 1781.\textsuperscript{36} Obviously, the prospect for victory over Cornwallis
was a recruiter’s dream and it seems like an outrageous sum of money until depreciation
is calculated. At a rate of 1000 to 1, the princely sum of $3,100,000 is reduced to a mere
$3,100.

Once the War Office had the warrant for the recruiting money, the second
problem became evident. Paper money was depreciating so quickly that the longer the War Office had the warrant, the less it was worth. Colonel Davies wasted no time in

\textsuperscript{36} Warrants, September 5, 1781 to November 27, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 136-183.
calling the various recruiting officers to get their money. In a letter to Major Thomas Posey on September 4, 1781, Davies repeated his request for an officer to come get the warrant "because money is daily depreciating." On September 11, 1781, the Commissioner of War again wrote to Posey complaining that "if not put to use [the money] will depreciate into a worthless condition." Finally, Major Posey sent a Captain, who drew the warrant from the paymaster on September 20, 1781, to recruit for the regiment.

Most of the issues relating to recruiting were beyond the control of the War Office. The Commissioner of War could only issue what funds he received from the Treasury, which necessitated an urgent request for the proper officer to come take it. Aside from that, the War Office’s only control over the finances of the recruiters was to admonish them to spend it frugally. The biggest concern for the recruits was the bounty itself. If it was in paper money, they refused to enlist, and if they had enlisted, they refused to march. Depreciation caused morale to plummet and led to desertions and mutiny.

In 1782, recruiting became more difficult when the Assembly abolished paper money, but neglected to update the recruiting law. The recruiting law stipulated that the bounties were to be paid in paper money. The end result was few enlistments and some

37 William Davies to Major Posey, September 4, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781-November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 29.

38 William Davies to Major Posey, September 11, 1781, Ibid., 57.

39 Warrant on Foster Webb Paymaster, September 20, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 150.

40 William Davies to Colonel Febiger, August 27, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 211.

41 William Davies to Governor Harrison, December 17, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 140-141.
very puzzled recruiting officers. The War Office was powerless to help and the Treasury was bankrupt.

Besides recruiting and paying the troops, the War Office was also responsible for the pay of the state staff departments. This included the Commissary of Hides and his tannery, the State Clothier and his factory at the Albemarle Barracks, the Quartermaster’s Department and the Commissary of Military Stores, as well as the Commissary General of Purchases. Many examples of issued warrants exist in the Journal of the War Office. For instance, a warrant issued on July 20, 1781 for 9,698 pounds 10 shillings to pay the Commissary of Military Stores and his assistants. As expected, when the Treasury was low, these departments suffered a similar fate as the troops and officers of the line.

The War Office was also responsible for the pay of the workmen in the factories and labs which made the supplies for the army. When the Treasury had the money, many warrants were issued to pay the men working in the factories and especially the foundry at Westham. Unfortunately, when the money in the Treasury ran low, the state’s artificers and workmen suffered as much as the troops in the field. It was far more urgent to pay them, however, as many were not enlisted and therefore could abandon the public work. If the workmen in the public works stopped doing their jobs, the consequences could prove fatal to the troops in the field. By December 1781, the situation of the clothing factory at Albemarle Barracks was horrible. The workmen were unpaid and destitute for clothing themselves. The state was completely dependent on this factory to

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42 William Davies to Colonel Roe Cooper, March 23, 1782, WOLB January 22, 1782 – May 5, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 65.

43 Warrant to Captain Windsor Browne, July 20, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV microfilm reel 633, 96.

44 Warrant to Phillip Moody, April 6, 1781, Ibid., 84.
clothe all of its troops. The Commissioner of War represented to the Governor that despite the emptiness of the Treasury, something had to be done or it would “ruin us.”

The clothing factory at the Barracks was not the only public works to suffer from want of pay. Colonel Davies had to “acknowledge [the] embarrassing situation of the [gun] factory due to want of pay, depreciation of money, and the confusion due to the approach of the enemy.” All Davies could do to help Charles Dick, the manager of the Fredericksburg gun factory, was to issue a certificate and offer the following advice. “Tell the men to wait awhile and not worry because [their] pay will match [the] depreciation.”

Without money, the War Office was powerless to pay the workmen, but there were other alternatives.

The War Office did try to work around the finance problem by prevailing on the workmen to take late payments and in some cases finding an alternative to pay. In the case of the clothing factory, Davies asked for an order from the Governor to allow the Commissary of Stores to supply the workmen with articles of clothing to be deducted from their earned pay. If the War Office could not pay the workmen their salaries, it would at least try to pay them in kind. The Commissioner of War also recommended to the County Lieutenants that they should sell spoilable commodities collected as taxes to raise money to pay their wagon teams. He argued that punctual payments were

\[\text{References}\]

\[\text{45 William Davies to Governor Harrison, December 8, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 115-116.}\]

\[\text{46 William Davies to Charles Dick, September 20, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781- November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 92-93.}\]

\[\text{47 William Davies to Governor Harrison, December 8, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 115-116.}\]
impossible due to the state of the Treasury, and that if government began missing payments the public would lose even more faith in its credit.\textsuperscript{48}

Colonel Davies expanded his efforts to get money to his factories by allowing various managers to take on private work to raise money for their departments. He gave orders to Captain James Anderson to "employ the public artificers in private works for money when there is no public business to be done."\textsuperscript{49} With money growing more and more scarce, the Commissioner of War was forced to adopt another measure to get work done. Since he could not pay salaries with regularity, Colonel Davies turned to militia exemptions as his last option. It did not cost the state and that gave a potential artificer or workman an incentive to enlist. Davies was adamant men sign up for at least six months as an artificer in order to procure a militia exemption. In order for the exemption to be official, it had to be countersigned by the County Lieutenant and registered in the War Office.\textsuperscript{50} Colonel Davies wanted to preserve the authority of the County Lieutenant over his militia, but the need for labor at a cheap rate was of a higher priority. In circular letters to the County Lieutenants, the Commissioner of War explained that the Commissioners of the Specifics Tax "need aid and since [we] can't pay wages we must offer people exemptions from service."\textsuperscript{51}

\textsuperscript{48} William Davies to Colonel Von Learingham, August 10, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 163-164.

\textsuperscript{49} William Davies to Captain James Anderson, December 24, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781 – January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 150.

\textsuperscript{50} William Davies to County Lieutenant of Caroline, August 1, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 129-130.

\textsuperscript{51} William Davies to County Lieutenant of Amelia, August 2, 1781, Ibid.,136-137.
The War Office tried its best to keep the military factories of the state running, but the finances of the state became increasingly worse. In 1782, the General Assembly abolished paper money and embarked on a cost cutting scheme that devastated the ability of the War Office to meet its contracts. The War Office was ordered to trim the staff departments, reduce the number of state troops and not to advance any more supplies to the Continent except for the funds required by the Continental Congress. Colonel Davies was horrified for his prospects of supply when he realized that the “abolition of paper money” and the “slow business of taxes” would mean the Treasury would be “penniless until next fall.” In a letter to the Commercial Agent, who purchased the materials for the factories, the Commissioner of War warned that it was better to buy clothing instead of cloth because there was no money to pay the artificers and he did not know if they would stay together. Colonel Davies ended the letter with “I hope you have funds for these articles, it is still my duty to inform you of the troops wants.” The situation was so bad at the foundry that Colonel Davies implored the Governor to find some assistance for Captain Anderson. Evidently, his shops were unfinished because the state could not afford to buy any more siding and his workmen were idle because they lacked nail rod. To make matters worse, Capt Anderson threatened to resign because his family was starving since he had no money or supplies.

It seems that the shortage of money not only affected the pay of the artificers but also the ability of the state to buy materials for their factories. It was especially evident


53 William Davies to Commercial Agent, February 26, 1782, Ibid., 33.

54 William Davies to Governor Harrison, January 31, 1782, Ibid., 11-12.
in the repair of muskets. The militia damaged the public arms at such a rate that they could not be repaired quickly enough to ensure a constant supply. The lack of money compounded this problem because the War Office could not buy the materials needed to repair them or pay the various smiths. Colonel Davies was acutely aware of the problem and expressed it in a letter to Governor Benjamin Harrison:

The State is in point of arms in a more defenseless situation at present then at any period prior to the capitulation of York; and how the grand object of repairing our arms can be accomplished while the heavy expense of maintaining the Continental Garrison at York and Hampton is thrown upon the State, I leave to your Excellency to judge. I know, sir, the censures which would be cast upon my conduct should the enemy visit us, and our arms be without repairs; and I am sensible the repairs of our arms cannot be effected for want of money (and nothing else will do it) so long as the state is encumbered with the heavy expense of the troops below.

It is clear that the lack of money was placing the state in danger. Colonel Davies was just as afraid for the state as he was for his reputation. Davies, however, was resourceful and tried to come up with money to aid the factories. He suggested to the Governor that a few of the public houses that were empty in Richmond be rented out to raise money for the foundry. He also noted that the private Rope Walk in Richmond was hiring and the state had a few rope makers that might be hired out for a profit. Despite the War Office’s best attempts it could not overcome the chronic shortage of funds. Finances remained the thorn in the side of the War Office’s plans throughout the war. Even the War Office itself became a casualty to cost cutting as the prospects of peace improved toward the end of 1782.

56 William Davies to Governor Harrison, July 18, 1782, WOLB May 6, 1782- October 12, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 84-86.
57 William Davies to Governor Harrison, February 2, 1782, WOLB January 22, 1781 – May 5, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 12-13.
Another issue facing the War Office was competition for the state’s supplies and manpower. Virginia was the warehouse for the entire Southern Department of the Continental Army. Not only did the War Office supply the State Garrison Regiments, but it supplied the Continentals in Virginia as well as the Continental Army to the south. This meant that three different armies were vying for the same supplies and manpower. Naturally, conflicts arose and the War Office was left to sort them out. A good example occurred in December of 1780 when the state foundry was in need of nail rod. It also happened that the continental lab needed nail rod. The Commissioner of War realized this would create a bidding war for the nail rod and tried to prevent it. Colonel Muter ordered the state’s Commissary of Stores to agree on a price with the Continental Commissary and then divide the nails.\footnote{George Muter to Armistead, December 11, 1780, WOLB July 21, 1780 – January 2, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 71-72.} Manpower was also in demand by both the state and continent. Workmen quickly figured out they could play one off the other for better wages. The War Office fixed this problem by ordering the State Quarter Master to adopt the same wages per day as the Continental Quartermaster.\footnote{Letter from Council, February 7, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 30.}

The competition for manpower and supplies grew worse as the war progressed because of invasions and changes in policy. The Continental Congress complicated matters by adopting a policy of decentralization in its supply chain. The states were placed in departments which were assigned certain Continental Armies. Since Congress and the states were cash poor, they directed that the Continental Army be supplied through provision laws. Virginia had already adopted a provision law to provide supplies for its troops and the result was that both supply chains were effectively merged.
Competition for supplies soon grew fierce as the weakness of the new policy was exposed. When the number of Continental troops in Virginia increased, the War Office was not able to call on other states to help supply them. The end result of the new policy was that confusion prevailed as to which stores were under the orders of the Continent and which were under those of Virginia. For instance, Colonel Muter tried to collect 200 state-owned cartouche boxes at Petersburg only to find that before his conductor arrived, Baron Steuben had sent them to the Continental Rendezvous at Chesterfield Courthouse. With the two supply systems effectively merged, the War Office’s best laid plans were often obstructed by unauthorized seizures and orders of Continental officers. Colonel Davies, a stickler for the rules, was highly incensed by these derangements of his plans. In a letter to John Pryor, the State Commissary of Military Stores, Davies complained:

Major Call honestly told me that he had sent to Potomack to seize the State accoutrements that were coming on from Philadelphia, Dr. Wilson said all our medicines that were on their way were seized by somebody and Mr. M Roberts, your deputy was taking measures to dispose of 2000 stand of arms that were coming in from the Northward; and all this without the consent or knowledge of the State and without a single voucher or receipt. If these things are tolerated, I will at once abandon a situation, where I am held responsible for derangements and losses that originate totally from the licentious interference of any individual that pleases.

The Commissioner of War was constantly frustrated when people broke in on his plans by assuming they had the authority to seize supplies. Colonel Davies wrote many letters trying to deter the various Continental Officers in the state from seizing supplies.

60 Selby, Revolution, 263.
61 Muter to Jefferson, March 5, 1781, JWO, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 633, 61.
62 William Davies to John Pryor, August 10, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 159-160.
He admonished them not to supply their troops through unauthorized seizures because it ruined his calculations, could lead to fraud, and prevented the regular and complete supply of the Continental Line.\(^{63}\) It seems many Continental Officers went to great lengths to ensure their own supply over that of the state’s. The Commissioner of War was livid when he found out that some state arms in a repair shop, along with the armory tools of the state, were branded with the Continental seal. It appears the Continental Commissary of Military Stores needed guns and his were damaged, so he seized the state’s arms and by way of apology offered Colonel Davies his damaged ones. The Commissioner of War refused the damaged arms and demanded the state’s arms back branded or not.\(^{64}\) Perhaps the biggest Continental offender and thorn in the side of the War Office was General Weedon in Fredericksburg.

General Weedon had retired from Continental service and was called on by the Governor of Virginia to lead militia during invasions. Unfortunately for the Commissioner of War, Weedon wanted to make sure his militia was expertly fitted out to the detriment of the entire state. On multiple occasions, Weedon took it upon himself to order the state’s arms here and there without consulting the War Office. On August 31, 1781, Davies told Captain Pryor, the Field Commissary of Military Stores, that it was rumored that Weedon had sent the arms meant for Fauquier County’s militia to Orange County. The Commissioner of War’s response to this news was, “I hope to God he has

\(^{63}\) William Davies to Major Posey, September 14, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 623, 69.

\(^{64}\) William Davies to Bowen Price, August 24, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 205-206.
not done so."[65] That same day, Colonel Davies dispatched a letter to General Weedon addressing another of his misappropriations of state-owned stores. It seems Weedon had requested some cavalry stores in Winchester that the Commissioner of War had ordered from Philadelphia for the Continental Cavalry. Davies wrote:

[It is] very unfortunate you sent to Winchester for Cavalry Equipment because [it] belongs to [the] state and are allotted to Major Call’s Cavalry....I must beg a stop may be put to any distribution or appropriation of them, and that you will be kind enough to inform me where they are, that I may direct their destination according to the orders of government.[66]

Weedon’s actions were disrupting the plans of the War Office and the Commissioner of War was becoming increasingly agitated. Colonel Davies believed Weedon may even have been involved in the Continental theft and branding of the state arms. Weedon claimed he knew nothing about it, but Davies thought he was trying “to cover his interferences.”[67] To make matters worse, Weedon provided a return of arms delivered to the Northern Neck that fell far short of the number the War Office had records of his receiving.[68] The Commissioner of War eventually suggested prosecuting General Weedon over the arms he had seized.[69]

Seizure and misapplication of stores were not the only problems caused by Continental interference. The Commissioner of War also had to deal with the confusion caused by orders for supplies. The War Office might order one thing and the Continental

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[65] William Davies to Captain Pryor, August 31, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 623, 16.


[69] William Davies to Captain Pryor, October 6, 1781, Ibid., 126.
Quartermaster another. This put the subordinates in the supply chain in a tough position. They were getting directions from too many leaders which resulted in waste. The chain of command was quickly splintered when the two supply chains were unofficially merged. A perfect example occurred in the summer of 1781. The Marquis de Lafayette was trying to out-run Lord Cornwallis in Virginia and urgently needed boats to cross rivers. Lafayette wrote to the War Office and others asking for help building boats. Colonel Davies began receiving complaints about the boats being built from several different officers. It led him to observe, “I have directed one thing, the Quartermaster another, the Commissaries a third, and the Marquis a fourth. With respect to the make of the boats there have been various opinions and everyone undertook to direct.” The chain of command was blurring in Virginia and the result was confusion.

Some officers attempted to take advantage of the confusion to get favorable orders. Colonel Davies had started to use militia exemptions to meet manpower needs in the Continental and State Quartermaster’s Departments, but had issued strict rules on how and when men were to be exempted. Major Richard Claiborne, the Continental Quartermaster, applied to Davies for some exemptions, but did not like the War Office’s directions concerning them. Instead of following the rules, Claiborne applied to Governor Nelson for the same exemptions. Claiborne was taking advantage of the fact that the Governor had been absent from Richmond and unaware of Davies’s exemption regulations.

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70 William Davies to Captain Hogsdale, August 6, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781 – September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 149-150.

71 William Davies to Colonel Turner Southall, September 10, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 623, 53.
for the Commissioner of War to maintain the chain of command and regular supply lines.

It was bad enough that the War Office dealt with competition and interference from the Continentals, but it also faced the same problems from the local County Officials. The County Lieutenants and local Commissioners of the Provision Laws were entrusted with a great deal of autonomy and more often than not abused this authority. The War Office used circular letters to try to communicate the orders of government to these officials. The distance from Richmond to some of these counties often meant that the County Lieutenants had to act on their own before instructions arrived. Many of the War Office’s plans were ruined by County Lieutenants operating in ignorance of the wishes of government. Some County Lieutenants availed themselves of the public property to outfit their militia. This was especially true in the case of military stores. The Fairfax County Lieutenant seized the cartridge boxes meant for the State Garrison Regiment in September of 1781. Colonel Davies complained that now Colonel Dabney’s Regiment would have to march to Yorktown without them. In fact, Davies complained that various County Lieutenants were responsible for seizing over 1200 arms intended for the use of the regular state troops. The seizure of arms was not the only infraction the County Lieutenants committed. The War Office was constantly forced to alter its plans because local officials had taken it upon themselves to issue provisions and clothes collected under law for the army. The County Lieutenant of Westmoreland issued the clothing his county had collected before Colonel Davies could have it forwarded to the

72 William Davies to Captain Pryor, September 19, 1781, Ibid., 86.

73 William Davies to Colonel John Taylor, September 21, 1781, Ibid., 95-96.
State Clothier. The War Office handled many other interferences and abuses of the County Lieutenants. When the state’s budget crisis worsened in 1782, Colonel Davies complained to Governor Harrison that many of the County Commissioners refused to turn in the tax money they had collected. It seems they wanted to keep it on hand in case expenses arose. They also violated orders by selling specifics for money and taking it as their pay, instead of the 10% of the specifics they were allowed. This was a very serious problem at the time because paper money had been abolished and the Treasury was virtually empty. The War Office needed the money badly to repair arms.

Despite the problems with the Continentals and local officials, the War Office was able to take steps to limit their interference. The main weapon at the hands of the Commissioner of War was communication. He wrote frequent letters to officers and County Lieutenants with instructions not to issue any supplies unless by the order of the proper department head. The War Office’s most successful campaign to establish regularity of issues was with clothing. Colonel Davies formulated a clothing plan for regular spring and winter issues with the help of John Peyton, the Clothier General for the State. With an iron will, Davies insisted on orders from the head of the Continental Quartermaster’s Department that “under no pretence should any of the articles be appropriated” without express orders from the War Office or Captain Peyton.

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74 William Davies to Colonel Towles, August 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 211.

75 William Davies to Governor Harrison, July 18, 1781, WOLB May 6, 1782-October 12, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 84-86.

76 William Davies to Thomas Jefferson, February 3, 1781, JP, 4:514-516.

77 William Davies to Major Claiborne, August 2, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 138.
Commissioner of War also went after the County Lieutenants instructing them that "any supplies received that are property of this state cannot be issued without orders from this office or the Department Head to whom they belong."\footnote{William Davies to Colonel John Holmes, August 30, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 623, 12-13.} Davies was quick to censure any County Lieutenant or Commissioner who overstepped his bounds and issued the clothing. The Commissioner of War insisted that the offender replace the clothing and demanded to know to whom it was issued. If the local official refused, Davies turned the matter over to the Attorney General to prosecute.\footnote{William Davies to Colonel Peachy, January 10, 1782, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 173-174.} In this manner, Colonel Davies was able to establish regularity in the clothing department and Captain Peyton, the Clothier General, with his tailors at the Albemarle Barracks were able to make regular issues to the various corps throughout the state.

It appears from the War Office Records that the Commissioner of War was diligent in his efforts to establish regularity of issues and minimize confusion in the chain of command. However, the circumstances of war and Congress’s policy of decentralization certainly handicapped his ability to do so. The independence of local officials and the interference of Continental officers also limited the effectiveness of the War Office. Despite these impediments, the War Office was able to keep supplies flowing to the Continental and State Regiments for which it was responsible.

Absenteeism in the staff departments was another predicament the War Office had to handle. The staff departments of the state suffered a lot of turnover during the war. Many times the War Office was left to fill the breach. The Commissioner of War
normally did the duty himself until a proper officer could be found. The post of Commissary of Military Stores was constantly a problem in early 1781. The original appointee quit and his replacement, Captain Nathaniel Irish, was ordered to join his regiment in the Southern Continental Army. Colonel George Muter finally found a replacement for Irish on February 13, 1781. In the interim, Muter and the Deputy Quartermaster General, William Rose, were obliged to fulfill the duties normally associated with that department. When Colonel Davies was the Commissioner of the War Office, he had to assume the duties of the Commissary of Public Stores William Armistead. This was especially hard on the War Office because it diverted its attention from its proper duties. Colonel Davies complained to Governor Nelson that “Mr. Armistead’s long absence has thrown his duties unfairly upon me.” Unfortunately, both Commissioners of War were imposed upon by the Commissary of Provision John Browne. This officer of the state was so neglectful of his duties that even when he was present, nothing in his department got done. Major Robert Forsyth, the Deputy Commissary for Purchases of the Southern Continental Army, whose job it was to receive specifics from John Browne, complained to the War Office that despite repeated requests he could get no information from him. Colonel Davies answered Forsyth:

You know my opinion of Browne and his management: I see daily less reason to hope an alteration for the better. Under his guidance there have been immense misapplications, wastes and irregular issues; that altho’ there have been enormous

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80 George Muter to Windsor Browne, February 20, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 37.

81 George Muter to William Rose, February 13, 1781, Ibid., 29.

82 William Davies to Governor Nelson, September 28, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781-November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 114-115.

83 Major Robert Forsyth to William Davies, April 23, 1781, VCAL, 2:68.
expenditures for the purposes of the continent, yet vouchers for them are so irregular and insufficient, that I fear they never will make the continent chargeable.\textsuperscript{84}

It took Colonel Davies four months in office to get the Executive to order an enquiry into the conduct of Browne. Rather than submit to the enquiry, Browne resigned.\textsuperscript{85}

An even bigger issue for the War Office was the absenteeism of the Governor. On several occasions, the Commissioner of War was left to fend for himself while the Governor and the Executive Council were away. During June of 1781, the state was left without a Governor for nine days while Cornwallis’s troops ravaged the countryside all the way up to Charlottesville. Governor Jefferson’s term had ended on the third of June and Cornwallis’s army had forced the Virginia Government to retreat to Staunton. Colonel Davies was left to maintain the integrity of the war government until Governor Nelson was elected on the twelfth of June.\textsuperscript{86} While Jefferson had been a diligent Governor, he let others lead the troops in the field. Nelson, on the other hand, assumed control of the Virginia militia leaving the Executive Council and Colonel Davies to run the government. While the Governor was away at camp, Colonel Davies could direct the war effort as he saw fit. It was during the intervals of Nelson’s absence from Richmond that Davies was able to hatch and enforce his militia exemption plan.\textsuperscript{87} Governor Nelson also suffered from an illness that kept him from his duties and rendered him incommunicado for weeks. Colonel Davies was forced to answer some of Nelson’s

\textsuperscript{84} William Davies to Major Forsyth, June 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR,LV, microfilm reel 632, 111-112.

\textsuperscript{85} William Davies to Governor Nelson, September 6, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 40-41.

\textsuperscript{86} Selby, Chronology, 44.

\textsuperscript{87} McBride, “Virginia War Effort,” 82.
correspondence while the Governor was ill. 88 Obviously, the absence of the Governor placed a hardship on the government, but in Nelson’s case, Colonel Davies likely enjoyed it. He by no means abused his freedom to act. Whenever a piece of business came to the War Office that would normally require the attention of the Executive, Davies dutifully wrote to the correspondent that his business would have to wait until Nelson appeared or enough of the Executive Council was present. 89 The absence of the Governor did hinder the War Office, but in many ways, as with the militia exemption plan, it gave the Commissioner of War a free hand in implementing policy.

Another problem the War Office faced was the invasion of the state by the British. Early in the war, Virginia was spared from invasion, but was compelled to replace two whole Continental armies. The first army was captured at Charleston in May 1780 and the second was destroyed at Camden in August 1780. On the heels of these disasters came a major invasion of Virginia in October 1780. A British fleet carrying General Alexander Leslie and his troops arrived in the Chesapeake Bay and captured Portsmouth. This invasion marked the beginning of an entire year of enemy occupation for Virginia. Besides the occupation of Portsmouth, the British made three major raids into central Virginia reaching as far as Charlottesville. The first raid was Benedict Arnold’s plundering of Richmond in January of 1781 and the second was General William Phillips drive to Petersburg in April of 1781. The third was Lord Cornwallis’s juncture with Phillips in Petersburg. Cornwallis then drove through Richmond to

88 William Davies to Count de Rochambeau, November 23, 1781, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 99.

89 William Davies to Captain DePontiere, August 29, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781 – November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 5-6.
Charlottesville in June of 1781, before retreating to Yorktown in August. Aside from the obvious depredations of the enemy, these invasions posed a series of problems for the War Office.

The chief evil of an invasion was the mobilization of the militia. This was expensive for the cash-depleted Commonwealth and led to a host of other problems. When the militia was mustered into service, it placed a tremendous burden on the state for supplies. The troops had to be fed on their way to the general rendezvous and in most cases armed. The militia was supposed to supply their own arms, but most were too poor to afford them. This placed the onus of arming them on the state, and, therefore, the War Office. The Commissioner of War had problems supplying the militia with arms for several reasons. The irregular distribution and seizure of arms often depleted the stock of state arms available for the militia. Also, a majority of the public arms were in disrepair from overuse by the militia and the War Office lacked the funds to get them repaired. There were other problems related to militia mobilization as well. The Continental Draft was based on the militia system. When the militia mustered, the draft and recruitment of Continental soldiers stopped in those counties. Because Virginia was keeping one quarter of its militia in the field during 1781, the draft was never completed in many counties. The constant use of the militia put a huge strain on the resources of Virginia and disrupted recruiting for the Continental Army. The delay of the draft coupled with

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91 William Davies to Captain John Pryor, July 30, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 123-124.

92 William Davies to Richard Henry Lee, April 10, 1781, WOLB January 22, 1782-May 5, 1782, WOR, LV microfilm reel 632, 11-112.

93 McBride, “Virginia War Effort,” 120.
the depreciation of the bounty money crippled Continental recruiting in the counties.
Since the militia was the backbone of defense in the Revolutionary War, the War Office
was unable to correct any of the evils caused by its use.

The Commissioner of War recognized the problems caused by militia and even
suggested some measures to overcome them. In August 1781, Colonel Davies, fearful of
the militia damaging the public arms while serving with Lafayette, proposed to appoint a
Field Commissary of Military Stores. The Field Commissary’s job would be to attend to
the public arms in the militia’s hands.94 Lafayette liked the idea and made a counter
proposal to Colonel Davies, which advocated that any militia turning in bad arms be
required to serve an extra fifteen days.95 The Marquis allowed Davies to appoint John
Pryor the new Field Commissary of Military Stores, but was frustrated in his attempts to
get longer service for the militia. The appointment of a special officer to oversee the
arms of the militia was only one of Davies’s ideas to fix the problem. In October of
1781, Colonel Davies suggested that captured arms of the British might be sold to the
public. He hoped that if the militia owned their own guns, they would take better care of
them. Colonel Davies proposed that every man with $10,000 in taxable property be
required to buy arms and accoutrements within six months, and men with $5,000 in
taxable property would get a year to buy them. The guns would then be lodged with the
County Lieutenant for the use of the local militia. Davies also proposed stiff penalties for

94 William Davies to Marquis de Lafayette, August 7, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September
1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 153-154.

95 Lafayette to Colonel Davies, August 6, 1781 in Gilbert Chinard, ed., Lafayette in Virginia
those who refused to purchase. 96 His plan was not adopted, but it raised awareness of the problem in the government.

Another problem invasions caused the War Office was the dispersal of its stores and supplies. When an enemy incursion came through an area, all the military stores and provisions had to be moved. In the heat of the moment, many decisions were made by the men on the ground as to where the stores were sent. It was also standard practice not to gather all of the stores in a single place if it could be helped, as large quantities of stores would be targeted by the enemy. This dispersal of stores was problematic for the War Office because it was easy to lose track of which stores were sent where. The commanders in the field often did not have time to fill out the proper paperwork to notify the War Office. Colonel Davies often complained that “due to the late incursions many arms and accoutrements of the state have been dispersed in confusion.” 97 After Benedict Arnold’s sacking of Richmond, Governor Jefferson and Colonel Muter did not know where the public arms had been dispersed. Jefferson appealed to Colonel Davies, then the Continental commander at Chesterfield Court House, for their location. Colonel Davies’s answer speaks volumes to the problem of dispersed stores:

I am surprised your Excellency could conceive I should know where the military stores of this state were dispersed having had no kind of connexion [sic] with them, either in point of authority or information. I have, it is true, done everything to gain intelligence where they have been hid, and am endeavoring to get them together as well as I can. I was fearful, when I attempted to furnish the militia with the necessary equipments for the field, that I might be blamed by them for their very insufficient state, but I always thought I should stand acquitted before the Executive; who must, I think, by this time, be fully sensible that the former management of the military stores of this country was never adapted to the

96 William Davies to Captain Pryor, October 3 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781-November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 118.

97 William Davies to County Lieutenants, July 19, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 119.
defense of it. Should it, however, be desired I would not hesitate with the necessary tools to attempt to put the public arms into a condition, that would not again expose this country to such disgraces, as it has lately suffered.\textsuperscript{98}

The public arms were issued to militia and hidden away in so many places that Jefferson and Muter could get no account of them. When Colonel Davies was appointed Commissioner of the War in late March, the stores were still in a diffuse state from Arnold’s raid on Richmond. He wrote to Governor Jefferson that the “scattered state of military stores [is] alarming.”\textsuperscript{99} While Colonel Davies was more equal to the tasks of the War Office than George Muter, dispersal of stores and supplies remained a problem for the War Office while the enemy was in Virginia.

Moveable goods and military stores could be dispersed quickly, but the state’s military factories were not so easily moved. As a result of enemy incursions, most of the factories had to be relocated to the western part of the state. This was a hard lesson that the War Office learned in early 1781. The principle arms factory of the state was located seven miles above Richmond at Westham. Unfortunately, Richmond proved vulnerable to enemy attack when on January 5, 1781, Benedict Arnold’s raid up the James River caught Virginia unprepared and resulted in a devastating blow to the state’s military factories. Arnold’s men ravaged the Westham foundry and destroyed the military stores they found. They burned the boring mill, magazine, ordinance shop, warehouses and the roof of the foundry.\textsuperscript{100} Arnold’s unopposed foray up the James reflected poorly on the Jefferson administration. Not only was the foundry destroyed but many state records,


\textsuperscript{99}William Davies to Governor Jefferson, March 29, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 98-100.

\textsuperscript{100} Ward and Greer, \textit{Richmond}, 78.
including the papers of the War Office, were lost. The Commissioner of War, George Muter, shouldered the blame for the losses, but it appears he may have been the patsy. Governor Jefferson should bear the majority of the blame, since he delayed ordering out the militia, and instead of using expresses to carry the dispatches, he allowed members of the Assembly to carry the letters back to their counties. This method proved to be too slow.\textsuperscript{101} Thus, when Arnold arrived in Richmond, few militiamen opposed him. The Commissioner of War cannot be blamed for the late orders, but he was not without blame for the disaster that was to follow. His culpability was exposed when he could not arm the militia that did arrive in Richmond. A few days earlier, Jefferson had ordered Muter to remove the military stores of the state to the south side of the James River. Muter could not arm the militia on the Richmond side of the river because he had already sent the arms across.\textsuperscript{102} This was a major mistake by the Commissioner of War, who knew the ill-equipped militia would be called out. While it was necessary to remove the stores from Richmond as Arnold approached, the Commissioner of War should have anticipated that the militia would need some arms. As the full extent of the confusion and losses came to light, it was clear that the military resources of the state were not effectively organized. The inability to arm the militia caused the loss of the foundry and injured the ability of the state to supply its armed forces. It would cost Muter his job and demonstrate the ineffectiveness of the War Office under his direction.

The War Office was faced with another task that would give it troubles throughout the war. The Commissioner of War, as head of the staff departments, was responsible for collecting the accounts of the departments so that Virginia could charge

\textsuperscript{101} Decker, “Baron Steuben,” 18.

\textsuperscript{102} Palmer, Steuben, 246.
the Continent for the expense of the war. The Continent was charged for any expenditure that occurred during invasion and in the process of providing the state’s regular quota of supplies. The War Office Letter Books are full of letters from the Commissioner of War asking for accounts to be filed so that the Continent could be charged.\textsuperscript{103} The quality of the returns received by the War Office helped determine how well accounts were settled by the auditors. The problems involved in information gathering definitely affected the War Office’s ability to supply the auditors with good accounts. While this was a problem, it was not the most serious one. The larger issue the War Office faced was making sure the staff departments complied with the Continental Regulations for supply. The Continental Congress issued regulations on supply to provide a check on unwarranted expenses. The Continental Army kept accounts of what it received and the State kept accounts of what it issued. When the auditors settled, they tried to reconcile the two accounts. The Commissioner of War was faced with the problem of ensuring that the issues of the state were on the Continental Books. This, of course, depended on the Quartermasters and Commissaries in the field following the Continental and State guidelines for issuing and receiving supplies. Unfortunately, through incompetence and neglect of duty many state staff departments failed to issue the proper vouchers and keep good books. As the War Office tried to put these departments back in order, it encountered two significant problems.

The first problem was that some state officials were also acting as their Continental counterparts. This meant that the same person was keeping both books. If that official was diligent and capable, it was still difficult at best to keep accurate books.

\textsuperscript{103} George Muter to Quartermaster General for the State, August 9, 1780, WOLB July 21, 1780-January 2, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 30.
It appears this was the case for John Robertson, the State Commissary of Issues and the Deputy Commissary of Issues for the Continental Army. The Commissioner of War constantly chided Robertson about filing accounts with his superiors in the Continental service. He also warned Robertson about overlapping his posts because it was causing waste.\textsuperscript{104} John Browne, the head of Virginia’s Commissary Department, decided, without authorization, that he would act for the Continental Army in Virginia as well. This was an extraordinary occurrence because the properly-appointed Continental Officer, Major Robert Forsyth, could not get Browne to cooperate with him. In fact, Forsyth decided to leave Virginia rather than deal with Browne. This left the state without a proper officer to keep the Continental accounts. Browne acted for both departments, resulting in the state’s being denied many of her credits on Continental accounts.\textsuperscript{105}

The War Office’s second problem with keeping the State and Continental accounts balanced was the incompetence and negligence of some state officers. The worst offender was the Commissary, John Browne. His department was in shambles from the beginning of the War Office’s tenure as the manager of the state’s war machine. Browne elected not to follow the regulations of Congress and, of course, had assumed his Continental counterpart’s duties. Colonel Davies addressed the problem in a letter to the Governor while making his case for the Commissary’s dismissal. Colonel Davies wanted to “convince Government that we are pursuing a system totally wrong, a system very

\textsuperscript{104} William Davies to John Robertson, June 26, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 109.

\textsuperscript{105} William Davies to Marquis de Lafayette, August 19, 1781, Ibid., 191-193.
burthensome to the State, and liable to great dispute at settlement with Congress.”

Davies enclosed a copy of the Congressional Regulations and observed that Browne had “thrown this business” into an “entirely different channel” by taking it into his own hands. Upon consulting with Major Forsyth, Davies found that the credits Virginia had on the Continental Books did not amount to a “fiftieth part of what she had supplied.”

Browne’s actions damaged the state and created a huge problem for the War Office.

It is alarming that the previous Commissioner of War, George Muter, had not discovered Browne’s actions. The War Office under Colonel Davies attempted to rectify the problem, but the injury to Virginia had already occurred. While examining the issue, Colonel Davies discovered that Virginia did not possess a current version of the Regulations of Congress. The only Congressional Regulations Virginia had received were those from December of 1780. It seems that while the Virginia government possessed the Congressional Journals of 1780, no one had extracted the necessary regulations. Colonel Davies asked Governor Nelson to let him appoint a person to comb the journals for the regulations pertaining to the various staff departments. He felt that armed with these regulations, the War Office could set matters straight in the staff departments.

106 William Davies to Governor Nelson, August 16, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 171-174.

107 Ibid., 171-174.

108 William Davies to General Sinclair, January 21, 1782, WOLB November 2, 1781-January 22, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 190-191.

109 William Davies to Executive, August 24, 1781, WOLB January 18, 1781-September 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 204-205.
The Commissioner of War issued many instructions to the staff departments to try to bring them into compliance with the Continental Army’s regulations for supply. Colonel Davies informed John Robertson, the Commissary General of Issues, that he should only deliver his stores to the Quartermaster & Commissary General of Purchases’ Departments. If he issued to anyone else, the charges would not appear as a credit on the Continental Superintendent General of Finance’s books.\footnote{William Davies to John Robertson, September 17, 1781, WOLB August 15, 1781-November 1, 1781, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 80-81.} The Commissioner of War implored the staff departments and County Lieutenants to keep proper vouchers but realized that while the British were in Virginia, irregularities would continue. The Commissioner of War was conscious of the irregularities and decided that instructions alone would not stop irregular issues and accounts. Davies decided that the only way to get the State and Continental Departments to cooperate in bookkeeping was to call a conference. He proposed the idea to Major Richard Claiborne, the Deputy Quartermaster General of the Southern Department. Davies reiterated that a conference was needed that “we may form one uniform system for the future conduct of these departments.”\footnote{William Davies to Major Claiborne, October 13, 1781, Ibid., 145-147.} The Commissioner of War hoped that by fostering communication between the department heads the accounting issues could be solved. The conference, however, could not be held before the Virginia General Assembly intervened. Virginia’s financial situation in 1782 had convinced the Assembly to pass an act forbidding the advancement of supplies to the Continental Army unless specifically requested by Congress or the Financier.\footnote{William Davies to Captain Peyton, March 3, 1782, WOLB January 22, 1782-May 5, 1782, WOR, LV, microfilm reel 632, 40-41.} The War Office ordered its departments to withhold supplies and refused to supply the
Continental Army unless the Financier sent a letter of credit. Colonel Davies was mortified because the troops in the field suffered from the law. The Commissioner of War wrote to General John P. G. Muhlenburg, who was overseeing the Continental Rendezvous for the new recruits, that Virginia would not supply him unless he could obtain a letter of credit from the Financier. Davies added that he had already written the Financier many times for a letter of credit but had not received an answer.\footnote{William Davies to General Muhlenburg, April 29, 1782, Ibid., 152.}
CONCLUSION

The War Office’s ability to handle the problems that plagued it during the war determined its effectiveness. The critical component was the Commissioner of War. How this gentleman dealt with insurmountable issues decided the degree to which the problems were limited. The Commissioner of War could not be expected to eliminate the problems caused by lack of funds, enemy invasions, and the autonomy granted to local officials under the Virginia Constitution. He could, however, find ways to cope with these issues. The Commissioner of War could be expected to deal with chain of command issues, irregular seizures, absenteeism and neglect by state officers. The War Office under the direction of Colonel William Davies was able to combat these problems to a tolerable degree. Colonel George Muter’s War Office, on the other hand, failed to find a way to manage these problems.

In fact, the evidence points to the ineffectiveness of the War Office under Muter’s command. The single greatest indictment of his tenure was the loss of the War Office Records during Arnold’s Invasion. The primary function of the War Office was to provide strategic information on the state’s ability to wage war, and Muter was careless with its records. The fragments of Muter’s War Office records show his efforts in attempting to complete his duties, but they also reveal his lack of proactive thinking. His mistake with the arms at Westham Foundry offers a perfect example. Muter should have realized the militia would require some arms. The fact that two months after Arnold’s invasion the military stores and supplies were still in disarray also reflects poorly on the War Office. Muter’s failure to investigate and discover John Browne’s incompetence is another critical mistake. Browne was allowed to assume duties not properly assigned to
him and poorly execute them. This reveals Muter’s poor management of the War Office and clearly illustrates its ineffectiveness. Colonel Charles Harrison, in a letter to General Steuben on January 12, 1781, summed up the efficacy of the War Office: “Colonel Muter [was] still at [the] helm and in a perfect lethargy.”

Colonel Davies’s War Office stands in stark contrast to that of George Muter. The War Office was effective at curtailing many of the problems that afflicted it. Colonel Davies’s War Office overcame the issues of information gathering. He was able to produce a report to the General Assembly that was insightful and suggested many cures for the evils that plagued the state’s war management. He handled the autonomy of the County Lieutenants by improving communications with them. Davies made it a point to constantly inform them of the desires of government. His circular letters are filled with instructions, prohibitions and advice to the County Lieutenants. Colonel Davies notified these men that the War Office was watching their conduct by requesting frequent returns, and he did not hesitate to rebuke them for irregularities. Colonel Davies’s creative ideas allowed the War Office to cope with a lack of funds. While the problem was still chronic, Davies never gave up trying. He prevailed on troops to wait for payment and when that failed, offered to pay them with supplies. Davies instructed his factory managers to take on private work to earn money to buy supplies. He attempted to discover how to address the issues that affected him. In handling Continental interference and competition, Davies met the problem head on with the same tactics he applied to the County Lieutenants. He was watchful and quick to rebuke officers who strayed from regular channels. Colonel Davies fostered cooperation and better

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1 Charles Harrison to Steuben, January 12, 1781, in Palmer, _Steuben_, 249.
communication between the Continental Officers and the State Staff Departments. His attempts at establishing regularity in the accounts of both are to be lauded. Colonel Davies seized initiative and acted positively to affect change in the derangements of the state. His censure and ousting of John Browne represents a glaring example. Colonel Davies, unlike Muter, was a proactive thinker. His idea to appoint a Field Commissary of Military Stores to limit the damage the militia did to the public arms provides an excellent example. Davies was adaptable and little fazed by the fog of war. When the Governor was absent, he carried on with his duties and even seized the initiative to enact new policy. The move to militia exemptions instead of pay for workmen illustrates his command of the situation. Davies’s steady hand provided the continuity between the administrations of Governors Jefferson, Nelson and Harrison.

The War Office was an effective part of Virginia’s war time government when it had an able Commissioner. Muter’s tenure adversely affected the defensibility of the state and caused the troops in the field untoward hardship. Davies’s tenure restored the War Office to effectiveness and aided the troops in the field. The success of the Yorktown Campaign demonstrates the War Office’s effectiveness. It was Davies’s constant efforts to bring down supplies that allowed the French and American Armies to conduct a proper siege. The fact that so many supplies could be procured from the country after Cornwallis penetrated it all the way up to Charlottesville shows how able Davies was in handling the dispersal of supplies and the resulting confusion. John McBride was correct in his assertion that Davies deserves much of the credit given to Governor Nelson in the Yorktown Campaign.²

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