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**CAMPAIGNING IN AMERICA:
CAPTAIN JOHANN EWALD'S HESSIANS
IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

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Honors Research Project

Prof. Paul Bushnell

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At a time when it would seem that all historical evidence concerning the American Revolution has been unearthed, history has surprised us yet again. In the aftermath of World War II, a journal, unknown except to a few, which had been kept by Captain Johann Ewald, a company commander in the Hessian Field Jäger Corps, was procured by an American historian assigned to intelligence and historical duties in the United States Zone of Occupation in Germany. After 30 years of piecing together the journal's scattered volumes, translating and editing, the journal was at last published in 1979, and now stands as "the most important and comprehensive diary kept by a Hessian mercenary" during the American Revolution.¹ Indeed, the Ewald diary opens anew to students of the Revolution a dimension of the conflict that has been somewhat discounted by American military historians: Hessian participation as auxiliary troops hired by Great Britain.

When the British government resolved to use force in order to subdue its rebellious American colonies, it was all but certain that the Ministry would turn to foreign auxiliaries, a convention which was by that time "accepted in international law as well as practice."² In the summer of 1775, the King of England, George III, had at most

¹ Joseph P. Tustin, Introduction to Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), xix. Although both the Hessian Corps and the British army included within their ranks mercenaries, i.e. foreigners who had enlisted for pay, properly neither of them could be called mercenary, even though by common usage the Hessians have been referred to as "mercenaries." Mercenaries, as distinct from auxiliaries, are foreigners who voluntarily enroll themselves as soldiers for a certain time, certain provisions, and a certain sum of money. Thus the Hessians with whom we are dealing were, strictly speaking, auxiliaries (and I will refer to them as such) and not mercenaries, as the money paid for their services went to their sovereigns.

² Auxiliary contingents served in the armies of all great powers (Russia excluded) in the wars of the eighteenth century. International jurists of the time recognized the practice of one prince sending aid to another at war, in the form of troops, in exchange for moneys called subsidies. Britain, during the Seven Years War, paid subsidies to Frederick the Great of Prussia to enable him to sustain his war effort against Austria and Russia, and paid subsidies to Hessen-Kassel and other German principalities for auxiliaries to fight against the French (Rodney Atwood, *The Hessians: Mercenaries from Hessen-Kassel in the American Revolution* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980], 1, 22).

8,500 effective land troops stationed in the American colonies and 18,000 in various garrisons of Great Britain, and it quickly became apparent that initial plans for the subjugation of the American colonies “had been conceived on too small a scale.”³ An army of 55,000 was authorized for America, but recruiting had become “a slow business.”⁴ Thus, if Britain wished to put down the rebellion by force, it could do so only by resorting once more to the practice of hiring foreign auxiliary troops. Without the German auxiliaries, “the attempt to subdue America would have [been] unthinkable.”⁵

After overtures to hire 20,000 additional troops from Empress Catherine II of Russia failed, England turned to the princes of Germany, several of whom were former military allies and had for many years been supplying troops to fight under foreign flags in return for financial remuneration.⁶ From the Duke of Brunswick, the Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, and the Prince of Waldeck, England hired at this time 17,775 men for service in America. Of the estimated 29,867 German troops that eventually fought for Great Britain on the American continent, nearly two-thirds came from the two Hessian states, Hesse-Kassel and Hesse-Hanau. In the American colonies, however, all of these German troops were collectively and indiscriminately called by one name, Hessians.⁷

While the presence of the Hessians in the American Revolution has been documented by military historians, their overall contribution to the British war effort has

³ Christopher Ward, *The War of the Revolution* (2 vols., New York: Macmillan, 1952), 208.

⁴ Willard M. Wallace, *Appeal to Arms: A Military History of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1951), 99.

⁵ Piers Mackesy, *The War for America, 1775-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), 62.

⁶ Hessians had shouldered arms on the North American continent for King George III in 1739, 1740, and 1742; and in Britain itself, they participated in the Battle of Culloden against the Stuart Pretender in 1746 (Don Higgenbotham, *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* [New York: Macmillan, 1971], 130).

⁷ Atwood, *The Hessians*, 1; Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, 209.

been significantly underplayed and at times overlooked altogether. Indeed, one could even assert that their treatment has been rather perfunctory. The Hessians have been treated as mere participants, “warm bodies” under careless and inexperienced leadership, a force of which was easily overrun by Washington at Trenton on Christmas night, 1776; certainly there are “few episodes so familiar to Americans” as Washington’s crossing of the Delaware en route to this famous engagement.⁸ However, relatively scant attention has been devoted to the overall contribution of the Hessian forces to the British war effort and the significance of their role has been neither fully appreciated nor completely understood.

The diary of Captain Johann Ewald, a company commander in the Hessian Field Jäger Corps, is an important contribution to the understanding of the nature of the War of the Revolution, as it enables us to arrive at a more accurate estimation of the significant Hessian contribution to the British war effort, particularly that of Captain Ewald and the Jäger Corps, the Hessian elite light infantry. Consequently, the standing military histories of the American Revolution are in need of a revision which will restore the importance of the Hessians as a far more significant part of the total British fighting force that attempted to subdue the American colonies. The Ewald diary opens up the wider issues of Hessian participation and our interpretation of the same, as we can clearly ascertain the importance and significance of Ewald and the Jäger Corps to the British army. Moreover, the Ewald diary deepens our understanding of the nature of the military conflict as seen through the eyes of a capable Hessian officer who fought in every major battle from New York to Yorktown, as well as dozens of the small engagements that characterized the war in America. Ewald’s observations shed new light on key military issues of the time, providing fresh evidence of historical issues of the American Revolutionary period. Thus, by thoroughly examining the diary of Captain Ewald, we

⁸Higgenbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 167.

can in essence understand more distinctly the nature of the conflict that ultimately resulted in the “utter loss of the thirteen splendid provinces of the Crown of England.”⁹

The Statistics

The sheer size of the Hessian contingent that went to America in 1776 warrants serious examination and assists in making the case that they were not a negligible factor in the British war effort. Indeed, nearly 30,000 well trained, well-disciplined soldiers, the total number of German troops that eventually served with Great Britain, is hardly an inconsiderable number.

At the time the British government was negotiating the treaties that would eventually bring the German auxiliaries into their service, the British army in America had at most 8,500 men. General Sir William Howe knew that his 1776 campaign had to wait on the arrival of the recently hired German troops, 8,000 of which were to be added directly to his army at New York.¹⁰ The Hessians were indeed “an essential part of the British war plan for 1776,” as a total of 12,974 entered British service that year.¹¹ They were also tough, disciplined regulars “officered by veterans trained in the school of Frederick the Great and Ferdinand of Brunswick.”¹² The Americans, on the other hand, had no where near that many trained, disciplined, professional soldiers under arms. Washington could boast a force near 19,000, but they were “largely untrained, undisciplined, untried amateur soldiers” who were poorly armed, with only 9,000 being

⁹ Johann Ewald, *Diary of the American War: A Hessian Journal*, ed. Joseph P. Tustin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 44.

¹⁰ R. Arthur Bowler, *Logistics and the Failure of the British Army in America, 1775-1783* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 147.

¹¹ Atwood, *The Hessians*, 52, 58.

¹² Mackesy, *The War for America*, 62. Frederick II, King of Prussia (1740-1786), who successfully pursued a course to aggrandize Prussia militarily, and Ferdinand, Duke of Brunswick, a subordinate and protégé of the Prussian king (Lynn Montross, *War Through the Ages* [New York: Harper & Brothers, 1944], 375-76, 384-89, 391-404, 405).

Continental regulars “possessing some small approximation of regular military skill . . . the rest [being] short-term militiamen.”¹³

Certainly, in sheer numbers alone the German auxiliaries were not a negligible factor. They were indeed a formidable presence and “indispensable additions” to the numerical strength of the British army, ultimately composing approximately one-third of the British fighting force in America.¹⁴

Political Implications

The hiring of the German auxiliaries in 1775 “reaped a harvest of hatred” in the American colonies.¹⁵ To the colonists, many of whom still regarded themselves as British subjects, the hiring of foreign troops to settle a domestic quarrel with the colonies “was a clear sign that the Ministry was relying on coercion, leaving no option but resistance.”¹⁶ By contemporary European standards, it was “normal practice” to hire auxiliary troops to fight against foreign enemies, “but the hiring of them by Britain seemed irrefutable proof to the colonists that they were to be treated as foreigners.”¹⁷ When the intercolonial Congress at Philadelphia heard the news of the German treaties, they immediately took further actions “to shore up the American cause.”¹⁸ Congress established the Committee of Secret Correspondence to conduct diplomacy with foreign nations and created a Continental navy.¹⁹ Moreover, many members of Congress called

¹³ Higgenbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 209; Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 4.

¹⁴ Alden, *The American Revolution*, 67

¹⁵ John Richard Alden, *The American Revolution, 1775-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 67.

¹⁶ Atwood, *The Hessians*, 31.

¹⁷ Alden, *The American Revolution*, 67.

¹⁸ Henry M. Ward, *The American Revolution: Nationhood Achieved, 1763-1788* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 67.

¹⁹ Jonathan R. Dull, *A Diplomatic History of the American Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 50-51.

for the establishment of state governments and a confederation of states, which were to be the first steps toward autonomy.

Thus, the news of the German treaties greatly increased colonial animosity toward the British government, solidified military resistance to the Crown as had few other factors, and “gave added impetus to the fateful Declaration of Independence.”²⁰

What Historians Have Said

It seems odd then that the Hessian contribution to the British war effort during the American Revolution has been somewhat overlooked and even discounted by prominent Revolutionary historians. The more notable literature concerning the military struggle either omits evaluation of the Hessian contribution or treats it in a rather perfunctory manner. The Hessians were there, historians admit; they were a part of the British forces, historians concede. A garrison of Hessians was defeated by Washington at Trenton. Fort Washington was renamed Ft. Mifflin after it fell to Hessian forces commanded by Lieutenant General Mifflin of the Hessian Corps. However, American military historians have not taken discussion of the Hessians much beyond the aforementioned, nor made any attempt to adequately evaluate their contribution to the British war effort.

Prominent Revolutionary historian John Shy, formerly of the University of Michigan, in his *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for Independence* (1976) made mention of the Hessians only six times. He stated nothing beyond the facts that England hired “German mercenaries,” that the Hessians served with the British army, and that a contingent of them was defeated at the battle of Bennington, 1777.²¹ In fact, most of the older authorities on the military history of the Revolution had even less to say regarding Hessian participation. Howard H. Peckham, in his *The War for*

²⁰ Alden, *The American Revolution*, 67.

²¹ John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 97, 151, 177.

Independence: A Military History (1958), mentioned only the “hiring” of the Hessian forces, their presence in Howe’s expedition to New York in 1776, the defeat at Trenton, and “as for the German mercenaries [at the end of the war], only 17,300 of the 30,000 employed went home; 7,500 had died, and 5,000 had deserted to remain in a country and a society which they saw were so superior to their own.”²² In like manner, Willard M Wallace’s *Appeal to Arms: A Military History of the American Revolution* briefly discussed the negotiations between Britain and the German princes, the presence of Hessians in the battle of Long Island, the defeat at Trenton, and their continued presence within the British army for the duration of the war.²³ Again, there was no appraisal or judgment whatsoever concerning the nature of the Hessian contribution to the British war effort.

While Christopher Ward’s *The War of the Revolution* (2 vols., 1952), mentioned Hessian participation a great deal more than Shy, Peckham, and Wallace, there still was no serious assessment or evaluation of Hessian contribution beyond the facts that Great Britain hired a substantial number of these auxiliaries, that 8,000 Hessians were part of the British camp on Staten Island in 1776, that they were present in the campaign that year (a garrison of them being defeated at Trenton that Christmas), and that they were a continual presence throughout the duration of the war, in the battles of Long Island, Fort Washington, Brandywine, White Plains, Newport, and Charleston. Ward’s lengthy discussion of Brandywine makes no mention of the fact that it was none other than Captain Ewald, as we learn from his diary, who led the Howe/Cornwallis column around Washington’s left flank. Additionally, nowhere in Ward’s two volumes are the Hessians mentioned as playing a significant or even decisive role in the combat.

²² Howard H. Peckham, *The War for Independence: A Military History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 38, 170, 194.

²³ Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 99-111 *passim*, 126-7, 251.

The only Revolutionary historian to make any evaluation whatsoever concerning Hessian participation is Don Higgenbotham, formerly of the University of North Carolina, in his *The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789* (1971). Yet while Higgenbotham reluctantly concedes that some of the German regiments, particularly the Jäger Corps, “compared favorably with the best in the British army” and “were effective in beating back American harassing parties,” this is neither a serious attempt to assess their importance to the British army nor a thorough evaluation of their overall contribution to the British war effort.²⁴

Indeed, from a thorough study of the existing military histories of the American Revolution, it would seem that the Hessian forces contributed virtually nothing of significance to the British war effort in America. We can clearly see that the Hessian forces were present, but we do not observe any awareness of a significant role played by them or any importance of the Hessians to the British army in America. These historians will concede that the Hessians added numerical strength to the British forces, but they have not undertaken any serious evaluation of Hessian contribution or significance in the war for America.

Hence, are we to conclude that Hessian participation was insignificant? The diary of Captain Johann Ewald replies resoundingly to the negative. By adding the diary of Captain Ewald to the existing literature of the American Revolution, we can remedy this serious case of oversight on the part of Revolutionary historians. In examining Ewald’s diary, students of the Revolution can understand the considerable importance of the Hessian Jäger Corps to the British army in America.

²⁴ Higgenbotham, *The War of American Independence*, 132.

Captain Johann Ewald and the Field Jäger Corps in America

The Jägers were the elite of the Hessian Corps, often called “chasseurs” by the British and Americans.²⁵ They were a small unit of elite light infantry troops who drew their rank and file from among huntsmen, foresters, gameskeepers, and others who were experts at shooting. In the American war, the Hessian Jägers served both mounted and on foot, and were equipped with rifled weapons. Unlike the British light infantry, the Jägers were not equipped with bayonets, and thus faced the danger of being spitted in a bayonet charge. Consequently, if the Jägers were not working directly with light infantry, they were combined with bodies of Hessian grenadiers doing service as light troops. Additionally, unlike soldiers of field and garrison regiments, the Jägers “had to be men of sufficient reliance and intelligence” to work in smaller units engaged in scouting and patrolling, as they so often did in America.²⁶ More importantly though, the Jägers were volunteers and professionals. And although the Jägers numbered slightly over 1,000 troops, the Ewald diary reveals that they performed duties that were quite disproportionate to their small numbers.

There were two Jäger companies sent to America in 1776, the 2nd Jäger Company being commanded by Captain Johann Ewald. From the outset of his diary, which began with the departure of the troops from Hesse, we can clearly see the importance of Ewald and the Jäger Corps to the army of General William Howe. Shortly after arriving off Sandy Hook on 22 October 1776, Captain Ewald received orders to “march at once to headquarters,” where he was “delighted with the message, for . . . I wished for nothing more than to get to know the enemy.”²⁷ The bulk of the British army was to take Long Island that day, and the Jägers and light infantry were to occupy the village of Flatbush.

²⁵The word *chasseur* usually referred to a French soldier in a special unit equipped and trained for rapid deployment. The word was taken from the French, meaning literally “hunter.”

²⁶Atwood, *The Hessians*, 132-3.

²⁷Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 8 (23 October 1776).

During the battle, however, there was a miscommunication between Ewald and Captain Wreden, commander of the 1st Jäger Company. Ewald mistakenly advanced his company upon several battalions of American riflemen in Major General Charles Lee's division, whereupon Colonel von Donop had to come to his aid with a battalion of English light infantry with two field pieces, "whose bayonets and grapeshot provided the precious air by which [Ewald] was saved."²⁸

After the engagement, Ewald received a "sharp reprimand" from the Commanding General of the Hessian forces, General von Heister, who was presumably upset that his elite unit could have erred in such a way. Ewald went on to record, however, that General Howe, "who apparently noticed that the Hessian general must have said something unpleasant to me, expressed his satisfaction to me through one of his adjutants," a compliment repeated in the order of the army the following day, which also said: "It is to be regretted that so many brave jägers have been sacrificed through a misunderstanding."²⁹ Thus, even after Ewald's first engagement on the American continent, the Commanding General of the British Army had expressed satisfaction with his conduct.

When the British army marched on 23 October to prepare for the attack upon Ft. Washington³⁰, Ewald recorded that "it was decided [from this day on] that the Donop Jäger Company should constantly cover the right wing [of the army] and I with my

²⁸ Ibid., 10.

²⁹ Ibid., 10. Ewald met Colonel Edward Hand's riflemen of Major General Charles Lee's division. The losses reported differ slightly (*Revolution in America; Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*. Bernhard A. Uhlendorf, ed. and trans. [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957], 62; Edward J. Lowell, *The Hessians and the other German Auxiliaries of Great Britain in the Revolutionary War* [Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1965], 199).

³⁰Fort Washington was situated on the highest eminence on Manhattan Island, above the steep and rocky slopes overlooking the Hudson River; the site between present 181st and 186th streets in New York City (Douglas S. Freeman, *George Washington: A Biography*, 7 vols. [New York, 1948-57], IV, 243-48).

company the left wing. Moreover, when the army marched in wing formation, or in two columns, a jäger company was to serve as the advance guard," a duty which they performed for the duration of the war.³¹ Certainly, the Jägers were a capable force if they had been entrusted with the safety of General Howe's army when on the march.

Indeed, throughout the rest of the 1776 campaign and into 1777, Ewald and the Jägers were constantly engaged with distinction. In the attack upon White Plains, 27 October 1776, the left column of the British force had encountered an advanced corps of Americans, "which [Ewald] had to engage supported by the light infantry."³² When the larger Hessian contingent had captured Chatterton Hill³³ and the Americans had given way, Howe disrupted Washington's efforts to set up and fortify his encampment "by the fire of the jägers and light infantry."³⁴

In preparation for the British attack upon Fort Washington one week later, Ewald was "cordially asked by Colonel Donop" to conduct the initial reconnaissance.³⁵ After the fort had fallen to British and Hessian forces and was renamed Fort Mifflin, General Washington crossed the Hudson River and occupied Fort Mifflin.³⁶ Shortly thereafter, the Hessian Jägers, grenadiers, and five English brigades under Lord Cornwallis invaded New Jersey. While on the march, Ewald fell upon and engaged a force of Americans, and "quickly sent back a jäger to fetch more men, but instead of the jägers, I received an order from Lord Cornwallis to return at once." When Ewald

³¹ Ibid., 10 (25 October 1776).

³² Ibid., 12 (26 October 1776). The American force Ewald encountered consisted of five to six hundred men, mixed militia and Continentals, sent out to delay the British advance (Freeman, *George Washington*, IV, 229).

³³ A commanding eminence defended by Major General Alexander Dougall's brigade, aided by troops from Delaware, Maryland, and Massachusetts, with two guns under Captain Alexander Hamilton (Freeman, *George Washington*, IV, 228-31).

³⁴ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 13 (26 October 1776).

³⁵ Ibid., 15 (14 November 1776).

³⁶ Of four main assault forces, General Mifflin at his own request had led the most important (Atwood, *The Hessians*, 77).

returned and informed Cornwallis of what he had discovered, the general replied “Let them go, my dear Ewald, and stay here. We do not want to lose any men. One jäger is worth more than ten rebels.”³⁷ Indeed, this remark by Cornwallis reveals the high esteem in which the Jägers were held and their value to the British army.

Likewise, further gestures by Cornwallis reveal the value of the Hessian Jägers to the British army. On 9 January 1777 Cornwallis visited Ewald’s advanced post, and when he found the Jägers “very cheerful despite their ragged clothing and hard duty, he ordered [Ewald] to assure [them] . . . that each jäger would be clothed at [Cornwallis’s] expense.”³⁸ Two weeks later, the promised clothing arrived from Cornwallis, “which consisted of a complete uniform for each man.”³⁹ Several days later and after another engagement in which Ewald’s Jägers fought bravely, Cornwallis “honored me by publishing an order expressing his satisfaction with me and my courageous men, and each jäger received a gift of one piaster.”⁴⁰

On 12 February Ewald received orders to report to headquarters, “where Lord Cornwallis showed his confidence in me by entrusting me with drawing up a plan for a surprise attack on Bound Brook,” an attack which due to the weather was postponed until spring.⁴¹ This gesture by Cornwallis again evidenced Ewald’s great value to the army, and more, evidenced his capability as a soldier as a British general was entrusting a company commander with the task of devising battle plans. Additionally, the attack was a success when carried out two months later. On 12 April, Ewald and a detachment of thirty Jägers drove the numerically superior force of Americans at Bound Brook into a

³⁷ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 18 (19 November 1776).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 52 (9 January 1777).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 52 (23 January 1777).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 55 (8 February 1777).

⁴¹ *Ibid.* (12 February 1777).

field fort, which was finally taken from the rear by a larger body of troops under General James Grant.⁴²

During Howe's campaign of 1777, the Hessian Jägers were included among the expeditionary force while many of the other Hessian units were left behind.⁴³ Ewald's Jäger company distinguished itself on numerous occasions during this campaign. Additionally, the Jägers under the command of Ewald and Captain Wreden formed the advanced guard and marched at the head of the British army at all times. On the march toward Iron Hill, Maryland on 3 September 1777 Ewald was again given the advanced guard, "whereupon the Commanding General [Howe] recommended the greatest caution." After the charge was sounded, "the enemy was attacked so severely and with such spirit by the jägers that we became masters of the mountain after a seven hour engagement."⁴⁴ The Jäger companies played such a leading part in the rout of the American troops that Ewald and the other officers of the Jäger Corps "received the following expression of thanks from the Commander in Chief" on orders:

The courageous manner in which . . . the entire personnel of the Jäger Corps, defeated yesterday the picked troops of the enemy . . . deserves the

⁴² Ibid., 56 (12 April 1777).

⁴³ General Howe's 1777 campaign, also called the Saratoga Campaign, involved a series of engagements fought (June-Oct. 1777) in New York. To split the colonies along the Hudson, the British planned a three-pronged advance on Albany from Canada, N from New York City, E along the Mohawk River. The northern force never arrived. The eastern force, under Barry St. Leger, besieged Fort Stanwix (Aug. 3) but, frightened by a rumor (Aug. 22), retreated to Canada. Coming south, John Burgoyne captured Ticonderoga (July 6), but was later defeated in a raid on Bennington (Aug. 14-16). Burgoyne halted near Saratoga Springs, where American forces, under Horatio Gates, prevented him from breaking through at Freeman's Farm (Sept. 19) and Bemis Heights (Oct. 7). Outnumbered and surrounded, Burgoyne surrendered (Oct. 17). This was the first great American victory of the Revolution.

The embarkation returns of the expedition show Howe's reduced dependence on the auxiliaries as a whole, as only 4,441 Hessians were taken (Atwood, *The Hessians*, 117). However, the fact that the entire Jäger Corps was taken is a further testament of their indispensability to Howe.

⁴⁴Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 78 (3 September 1777).

highest praise and the fullest acknowledgment of the Commander in Chief, and has attracted the greatest admiration of the entire army.⁴⁵

Likewise, in the attack upon Brandywine one week later, Ewald and the Jägers were again at the forefront of the attack. Ewald recorded that it was he personally who led the Cornwallis column around Washington's right wing.⁴⁶ After the battle of Brandywine⁴⁷, both Ewald and Wreden were decorated with the Hessian Knight Order *pour la vertu militaire*, an award given for their distinguished conduct. Indeed, this was a great honor for the two men, "as they were the first officers of the rank of captain to be thus distinguished."⁴⁸ In fact, Ewald left so favorable an impression upon Lord Cornwallis that when the latter left the army to return to England in December 1777, Ewald received from him the following letter:

Sir.

I cannot leave this country without desiring you to accept my best thanks for your good services during the two Campaigns in which I have had the honour to command the Hessian Chasseurs. If the war should continue, I hope we shall again serve together. If we should be separated, I shall ever remember the distinguished merit and Ability's [sic] of Captain Ewald.⁴⁹

In addition, General Howe, upon being relieved by General Clinton in May 1778, wrote a comparable letter to both Ewald and Wreden on his departure:

Gentlemen:

Please allow me to bear witness, before my departure, to the extreme satisfaction I have always had in your distinguished conduct in the two campaigns during which I have had the honor to command you. The conduct of the two premier companies of Hessian chasseurs, incited by the

⁴⁵ Ibid., 78 (4 September 1777).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 83 (11 September 1777); Atwood, *The Hessians*, 134-35.

⁴⁷ The battle of Brandywine was fought 11 September 1777, along the Brandywine Creek in southeastern Pennsylvania, between Sir William Howe and General Washington. Howe's strategy of attacking the American right flank forced Washington to retreat, and the advancing British took Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ Lowell, *The Hessians*, 199.

⁴⁹ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 110 (16 December 1777).

zeal and brave example of their chiefs - you gentlemen - has been noticed⁵⁰
by the entire army, and made such an unforgettable impression on me....

When the British withdrew from Philadelphia on 19 December 1778, Ewald and the Jägers frustrated an American attempt to break down several bridges and delay the march of Clinton's army. After finding two beams still remaining on one of the bridges, Ewald immediately crossed over with the advanced guard of eighty Jägers "to take post on the other side . . . by which the workmen were protected."⁵¹ He then discovered another bridge "on which people were working to destroy it" and quickly "let fly in earnest" a concentrated volume of fire on the enemy, whereupon "they abandoned the bridge and ran away into the nearest wood."⁵² After the bridges had been repaired, allowing the British to withdraw, Ewald "received from the Commander in Chief his thanks and the compliment that I had saved the army a longer march by my diligence."⁵³

In December 1779, while the British army prepared for its expedition to the south, Ewald reported to headquarters to find out the details of the approaching embarkation. Upon meeting General Knyphausen, then the Commanding General of the Hessian forces, Ewald heard the following words: "General Clinton and Lord Cornwallis request you for the approaching expedition," at which point Ewald "jumped for joy, hurried to the Corps with my orders, and readied myself for the march."⁵⁴ Again, for the Commander in Chief of the British forces to personally request the services of Captain Ewald in the approaching expedition tells us a great deal about the excellent capability of this officer and his troops.

Ewald's Jäger company and that of Captain Johann Hinrichs further distinguished themselves at the siege of Charleston in 1780. Ewald took it upon himself to have the

⁵⁰ Ibid., 131 (19 May 1778).

⁵¹ Ibid., 133 (19 June 1778).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 189-90 (14 December 1779).

Jägers fire rifle shots “at a communication consisting of palisades.”⁵⁵ After he “observed with astonishment the effect of the rifle shots. . . [he] decided to shoot at the embrasures. At sunset the Commander in Chief came into the trenches and took the firing in very good part, since the men had asserted the fire of the besieged on this side had become weaker”⁵⁶ At times, the Jägers “kept entire sections of [American] guns so warm that often not a shot was fired by the enemy for hours.”⁵⁷ After Charleston fell to the British, “the besieged tried to conceal their losses, but one officer told [Ewald] that the largest number had been killed by rifle bullets.”⁵⁸

In Benedict Arnold’s raiding expedition to Portsmouth, Virginia, Ewald and the Jägers were given the task of defending an important causeway. When the Americans advanced and the situation grew a bit precarious, General Arnold panicked and asked Ewald if the enemy would possibly take the post. Ewald wrote: “The question annoyed me, for he could see it all for himself. - I said, ‘No! As long as one jäger lives, no damned American will come across the causeway!’”⁵⁹ Ewald and the Jägers defended Arnold’s small post for four hours against a superior enemy force. Eventually the Americans gave up the action and hastily withdrew. Ewald “rejoiced over the magnificent behavior of my brave jägers, who with all éclat had thus distinguished themselves before the eyes of the English. For surely one jäger had fought against thirty Americans today.” Once again, he earned a British general’s acknowledgment of the “excellent conduct” of his Jägers on orders.⁶⁰

Captain Ewald received commendation not only from British generals but also from the Commanding General of the Hessian forces, General Wilhelm Freiherr

⁵⁵Ibid., 229 (13 April 1780).

⁵⁶Ibid. An *embrasure* is a slanted opening in the wall or parapet of a fortification, designed so that a defender can fire through it on attackers.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid., 238 (11 May 1780).

⁵⁹Ibid., 291 (18 March 1781).

⁶⁰Ibid.

Knyphausen. On 21 March 1781 Ewald received a letter from General Knyphausen which stated:

I cannot fail to take pleasure in mentioning the special trust which I have always placed in your well-known ability and bravery, which has been justified by the lauding example that you gave of it in your conduct of the affair on the 19th of March. Such an example by you and your detachment resounds to the greatest honor and has received the complete satisfaction of the Commanding General and the Army.⁶¹

In the final Virginia campaign, Ewald served with Colonel John Graves Simcoe, commander of the Queen's Rangers.⁶² The two became good friends and their corps worked together splendidly, in fact so splendidly that the following commendation was issued on 27 June 1781:

Lord Cornwallis desires that Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe will accept [the] warmest Acknowledgment for his judicious and spirited Conduct . . . [and] likewise desires that Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe will communicate his best thanks to Captain Ewald, to the Detachment of the Yagers [sic] and to the Officers and Soldiers of the Queens Rangers.⁶³

Simcoe, writing to Knyphausen to commend Ewald's service, called him "that most excellent officer."⁶⁴ In fact, Ewald recorded how "this worthy man" had in July 1781 said that "he wished that I would accept the major's berth in the Ranger Corps But I am Hessian, body and soul, and it seems to me that I could not be happy outside this splendid corps in which I serve."⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibid., 299 (21 May 1781).

⁶² The Queen's Rangers were a Loyalist cavalry unit originally raised by Colonel Robert Rogers in 1776 (Mark V. Kwasny, *Washington's Partisan War, 1775-1783* [Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996], 149).

⁶³ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 312.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Atwood, *The Hessians*, 135-6.

⁶⁵ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 316.

Ewald and Simcoe were both trapped with Cornwallis at Yorktown, and Ewald's company was down to a sixth of its original strength when Cornwallis surrendered on 17 October 1781, thereby bringing victory to the rebellious American colonies. Shortly after the siege ended, however, Ewald "had the pleasure and honor of being invited to dine with the general officers," including Washington, Comte de Rochambeau, the Marquis de Lafayette.⁶⁶ Also, as a prisoner of war on Long Island, Ewald received a letter with an enclosure from General Knyphausen, containing an extract of a letter from "his Serene Highness," the Landgrave of Hesse-Kassel himself, which read:

Among the reports reaching me is that of the . . . fine conduct of Captain Ewald of the Jäger Corps, which is altogether pleasing to learn.

The Lieutenant General,⁶⁷ therefore, desires to declare to . . . Captain Ewald, my extraordinary satisfaction and the assurance of my entirely special favor and grace.⁶⁸

Indeed, as evidenced by Ewald's accounts of his exploits over the duration of the war, we can clearly observe the indispensability of Captain Ewald and the Jäger Corps to the British army in America. The Jägers were employed to great advantage and their conduct did not go unnoticed, evidenced by the numerous commendations they were given and the many favorable letters which Captain Ewald received from the British generals. Furthermore, of twenty-five Hessian officers decorated with the order *pour la vertu militaire* in the war, five belonged to the Jäger Corps: Ewald, Wreden, Captain Philip von Wurmb, Lieutenant Colonel Carl von Prueschenk, and Colonel Ludwig von

⁶⁶ Ibid., 342.

⁶⁷ Lieutenant General Baron Friedrich von Jungkenn, minister of state, and minister of war (Carl Leopold Baurmeister, *Revolution in America; Confidential Letters and Journals 1776-1784 of Adjutant General Major Baurmeister of the Hessian Forces*. Bernhard A. Uhlendorf, ed. and trans. [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1957], x).

⁶⁸ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 345.

Wurmb.⁶⁹ Thus by examining Ewald's diary we can clearly see the need to revise the standing military histories of the Revolution to include the contribution of Ewald and the Jägers, as they were certainly a force of great importance to the army of Great Britain.

Captain Ewald and the American Experience

The diary of Captain Ewald reveals not only the importance of the Hessian Jäger Corps to the British army, but also gives students of the American Revolution a first-hand look at the partisan and irregular nature of the war.

In the American War, the Jägers participated in a military struggle that was very different from those they had seen in Western Europe, where war, including irregular war, was waged by professional soldiers, members of the regular forces. In America, the situation was much different. Here they experienced light infantry war not only against Continental regulars (permanent members of the field army) but also against the part-time citizen soldiery of the militia, "armed farmers" as Ewald described them, an "irregular" war by regulars against true irregulars.⁷⁰ Although the colonists lacked a standing army and were thus militarily the weaker side, they raised the concept of irregular warfare to a new level.⁷¹

Ewald was certainly not one to disparage the effectiveness of the colonial militia in this partisan war, however. After receiving heavy casualties on several foraging expeditions in New Jersey in early 1777, the British commanders were forced to send out increasingly larger foraging parties. Ewald recognized the capability of the New Jersey militia by recording that "[s]ince the army would have been gradually destroyed through this foraging, from here on the forage was procured from New York."⁷² In fact, after the

⁶⁹ Atwood, *The Hessians*, 134.

⁷⁰ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 338.

⁷¹ Robert A. Selig and David C. Skaggs, Introductory Essay to Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, 24.

⁷² Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 55.

war was over, Ewald remembered the determination of the militia in his own *Treatise on Partisan Warfare* (1785):

Never have I seen [evasive] manoeuvres [sic] performed better than by the American militia, and especially that of the Province of New Jersey. If you were forced to retreat against these people you could certainly count on constantly having them around you.⁷³

We again witness the capability of the colonial militia as Ewald recounted the British army crossing from Philadelphia into New Jersey in June 1778. Ewald noted on 17 June that “the militia received us with sharp rifle fire” and “the skirmishing continued without letup.”⁷⁴ Likewise, on 2 December 1778 Ewald recorded Brigadier General Sir William Erskine’s advance upon Tarrytown, New York, noting that Erskine’s force had dislodged the colonial militia only after “a stubborn fight.”⁷⁵ Ewald further recorded on 29 October 1779 that his “very good friend Lieutenant Colonel Simcoe” of the Queen’s Rangers had been “badly wounded in the Province of Jersey.”⁷⁶ Simcoe had taken a party of over two hundred to destroy several American weapons reserves in New Jersey and had succeeded in laying waste to one such magazine. “But as soon as the state militia learned of it,” Ewald noted, they “shot down the majority of his men, and finally wounded and captured him.”⁷⁷ Ewald certainly acknowledged the capability of these “armed farmers” throughout his diary.

⁷³ Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, trans. and ed. Robert A. Selig and David C. Skaggs (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 115. This edition is translated from the German *Abhandlung über den Kleinen Krieg* (Cassel: Johann Jacob Cramer, 1785).

⁷⁴ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 132.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 182. Simcoe was ambushed and captured near New Brunswick on 27 October 1779. He returned to active duty 31 December 1779 (Kwasny, *Washington’s Partisan War*, 251).

The diary of Captain Ewald further illuminates the partisan nature of the war in America.⁷⁸ The War of American Independence was at once revolutionary and partisan in the very scope of the colonists' objective: to eliminate British power completely from the vast extent of the thirteen colonies.⁷⁹ The war was also one of national liberation, which contributed to the partisan nature that Ewald recognized.

For the Jägers it was often a war of outposts, and of small detachments engaging regular troops as well as the "armed country people who are all excellent shots."⁸⁰ Furthermore, we can see that the nature of the military conflict in America was something quite new to the Jägers, as Ewald recorded how several of his officers "were young and inexperienced in this kind of warfare."⁸¹ Nevertheless they adapted, and adapted well.

As we can understand from Ewald's diary, the Jägers were employed as partisan troops for the majority of their time in America, even while they were still part of the overall war effort carried out by the regular British forces. Ewald's Jägers specialized in partisan operations in America, primarily in the ambush, or ambuscade. They frequently operated as detachments and small parties sent out "to annoy the enemy," and were employed to remarkable advantage in reconnaissance missions, patrol duties, and in protecting foraging parties.⁸²

⁷⁸The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines a partisan as a "member of a party of light or irregular troops employed in scouring the country, surprising the enemy's outposts and foraging parties, and the like; a member of a volunteer force similarly engaged, a guerrilla." A partisan is a "leader of such a party of light or irregular troops" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 20 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], s.v. "Partisan").

⁷⁹Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 19.

⁸⁰Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 182; posts, 10-11, 51-52, 92, 96, 105.

⁸¹*Ibid.*, 22.

⁸²*Ibid.*, 14; detachments and patrols, 11, 15, 31, 34, 39, 42, 51, 62, 68, 75, 76, 90-1, 93, 104, 122-3, 126, 130, 133, 140-1, 143, 150, 178, 195-220, 221-43, 261, 267-8, 274, 303-5, 312-3, 328, 349, 389.

Ewald recognized this partisan war as such, and wrote of attempting to develop “my own theory of partisan warfare.”⁸³ He was not slow in recognizing, additionally, the extremely harsh and dangerous nature of the duty performed by the Jägers in America. From Ewald’s many accounts, one can “perceive how dangerous is the service of light troops in this country.”⁸⁴ While the regular British army could enjoy a brief respite between engagements, Ewald noted that the partisan war “was carried on constantly in full force. Not a day passed in which the Jäger Corps, the light infantry, and the Queen’s Rangers were not alarmed, and several people of the parties killed, wounded, or captured.”⁸⁵ Hence, Ewald recognized exceptional confidence “which a partisan needs for this ticklish trade.”⁸⁶

And since in America the enemy could be anywhere, the Jägers had to be able to confront him anywhere. Thus, the only way to find the increasingly evasive enemy was to search him out, to deprive him of his cover in the populace. Hence, Ewald recorded several instances where he resorted to bribing the locals, which usually resulted in their cooperation as guides or informants. Shortly before the battle of White Plains in October 1776, Ewald recorded that a loyalist came to him and revealed the location of an enemy provisions depot, but only “would guide me to it if I would give him reward.”⁸⁷ Hence Ewald gave the man “a small recompense” and went off to headquarters with the

⁸³ Ibid., 10.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 182.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 104.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 11 (26 October 1776).

information.⁸⁸ During the Virginia Campaign, Ewald frequently recorded using Negroes as guides and informants. Ewald also noted obtaining “a faithful Negro . . . who for two guineas undertook to carry a letter from me to Lord Cornwallis.”⁸⁹ On one occasion, Ewald did not even have to pay for information, “when a loyal Negro informed [him] that one thousand Americans were lying in ambush” not far from where Ewald was patrolling. On another morning, Ewald recorded that “a Negro came running to me at top speed, who assured me that if I would give him two gold guineas he would reveal something valuable to me.”⁹⁰ Captain Ewald “quickly opened [his] purse and handed him the money,” whereupon his black friend informed him of recent American troop movements in the area.⁹¹

Clearly, this was a war with dimensions unlike any the Jägers had ever encountered in Europe.

Ewald as a Diarist

The diary of Captain Ewald is an significant contribution to the literature of the American Revolution not only because it reveals the usefulness of the Hessian Jägers to the British Army, but also because it sheds new light on several of the key historical issues of the struggle which eventually brought political independence to the American colonies. Moreover, a dimension is revealed here that is of rare perspective, as Ewald, by virtue of his position, witnessed and took part in considerably more action than the

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 302 (29 May 1781).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 323 (18 August 1781).

⁹¹ Ibid.

average officer. Moreover, he was an astute observer and shows considerable shrewdness in his remarks. As a result, Ewald's diary indeed helps us to better understand the nature of the military contest that was the American Revolution.

Ewald was in a very favorable position to comment, which adds considerable significance to his observations, not only because he was an officer in constant contact with those in the upper echelons of the British command structure, but more importantly because he was a company commander who actually led his troops in field operations and fought beside them. Hence, the view of the war that we get from the diary of Captain Ewald is of intrinsically more value to students of the Revolution than the letters and journals of Adjutant General Major Carl Baurmeister and those of Major General Friedrich Riedesel and Baroness von Riedesel, which are the standard accounts concerning Hessian participation in the Revolutionary War and have been regarded as valuable source materials for quite some time.

Major Baurmeister's journals, partly because of his position as an Adjutant General, the chief administrative officer of a major military unit, provides us with a view of the war that is somewhat removed from day-to-day action in the field, as Baurmeister was most likely at staff headquarters while Captain Ewald was leading his jägers on field maneuvers. Moreover, as Baurmeister's writings were regularly sent back to Lieutenant General Baron Friedrich von Jungkenn, minister of state and minister of war in Hesse, they lack the candor and veracity found within the diary of Captain Ewald, which was written only for him.

Likewise, the correspondence and journals of Baron and Baroness von Riedesel have also been regarded as valuable source materials for nearly a century. However,

these accounts are also very different from Ewald's account for two reasons.

Fundamentally, Baron von Riedesel's rank of Major General ensured that he was removed from the kind of action seen by Captain Ewald. Secondly, the Convention Army, which consisted of the force of British General John Burgoyne, of which Riedesel's Brunswickers were a part, surrendered to General Horatio Gates at Saratoga in 1777. Hence, Riedesel actually participated in military engagements for only a fraction of the time of Ewald's service in America.

The fact that Captain Ewald published his *Treatise on Partisan Warfare* almost immediately after his return from the American War is not only proof of his professionalism but also gives him greater credence as a diarist as well. Ewald's *Treatise* itself was an important contribution to the literature of eighteenth-century light infantry tactics. The work was even honored with the approval of Frederick the Great of Prussia. The difference with other light infantry manuals of the time, though, lies in the fact that Ewald's examples and analyses were to a large degree based on his experiences in the American War.⁹²

Moreover, Ewald had a very distinguished career after the American War. In December 1785 Ewald was ordered by the new Landgrave in Hesse-Hanau to organize the Hanau Jäger Corps. After he had received his discharge from the Hessian army in February 1788, Ewald entered active service in Denmark, which at that time was at war with Sweden. Soon after his arrival, Ewald organized the Schleswig Jäger Corps, which he levied and commanded with the rank of lieutenant colonel. In 1790 Ewald was elevated to Danish nobility, promoted to colonel in 1795, and to major general in 1802. He also founded a corps library and wrote and published three more military treatises.

⁹² Of the fifty-four examples in Ewald's *Treatise*, thirty-six are taken from the American War, sixteen from the Seven Years' War, and two from other wars. All four examples in Ewald's appendix are taken from the American Revolution as well (Johann Ewald, *Treatise on Partisan Warfare*, trans. and ed. Robert Selig and David Skaggs [New York: Greenwood Press, 1991], 50).

Ewald also fought valiantly during the Napoleonic wars, which resulted in his promotion to lieutenant general in 1809 and commanding general of the Duchy of Holstein in 1812. He retired from active duty on 1 May 1813, after fifty-three years of military service.⁹³

Thus, Ewald's diary is of particular value not only because it helps students of the Revolution understand the significant contribution of the Hessian Jäger Corps to the British war effort. The diary also aids in our understanding of the nature of the military struggle both through Ewald's accounts of specific engagements and also his observations concerning the British conduct of the war, the Continental Army, the American militia, and other insights that he provides.

British Conduct of the War

The diary of Captain Ewald is particularly significant for his critical opinions of British generals and their conduct of the war, and for his divulgence of substantial evidence relating to military activities and occurrences that continue to perplex historians of the Revolutionary period.

Ewald raised the serious accusation of British foot-dragging through New Jersey in late 1776. While the British and Hessian forces under Cornwallis were en route to the attack upon Fort Lee, Ewald's company had been protecting the right flank and had proceeded "further to the right in hopes of catching some [American] baggage," whereupon he received new orders to keep closer to the column.⁹⁴ "I now perceived what was afoot," Ewald recorded, as "[w]e wanted to spare the King's subjects and hoped to terminate the war amicably, in which assumption I was strengthened . . . by several English officers."⁹⁵

⁹³Tustin, Introduction to Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, xxvii-xxxii.

⁹⁴Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 18.

⁹⁵Ibid.

After Cornwallis had captured Fort Lee with over 100 prisoners, and was reinforced with nine more battalions, Ewald recorded that Washington's vanishing army was permitted to retreat across Jersey, an observation previously unknown. This deliberate delay on the part of Cornwallis enraged the citizens of Pennsylvania, including outspoken loyalist Joseph Galloway,⁹⁶ who arrived in the British camp and "implored the general to press General Washington as closely as possible" in order to "surely destroy and capture his disheartened army."⁹⁷ When Cornwallis did not do so, Ewald recorded Galloway as shouting, "I see, they don't want to finish the war!", which every honest man must think."⁹⁸ Ewald completed his entry by asserting again that "one had to conclude" that the British hoped to end the war "without shedding the blood of the King's subjects in a needless way."⁹⁹

Two days later the British army set out to follow Washington across the Delaware River, a march that took two days. Ewald was again critical of British slowness:

On this two-day march, which could have been done in twelve hours by an army that carried so little artillery, it became clearly evident that the march took place so slowly for no other reason than to permit Washington to cross the Delaware safely and peacefully. I was assured that Lord Cornwallis had orders from General Howe to proceed in such a way.-The two Howe brothers belong to the Opposition Party.-Therefore no more need be said. They will not and dare not act otherwise.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Joseph Galloway of Philadelphia, the most outspoken loyalist in America. He had been a member of the Pennsylvania Assembly and the First Continental Congress, but was an uncompromising Tory. Galloway had left his country home at Trevoise and made his way to the British army at New Brunswick in early December 1776. He criticized General Howe unmercifully for his conduct of the New Jersey campaign and thought Howe had deliberately allowed Washington to escape into Pennsylvania, as did Captain Ewald (William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961], 8-10, 47-48, 50-69, 135-9).

⁹⁷ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 25.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 30.

Observations such as the above reveal much not only about the highly politicized nature of the war, but also about the general problems with British strategy at the outset of the war.

In England, the American Revolution was a powerful political issue. The parliamentary minority was largely Whig and had supported many of the American protests and arguments as opposition policy.¹⁰¹ To command the British army and navy in America, the Ministry had appointed Major General William Howe and Vice Admiral Richard Howe, two brothers who were actually Whigs. Yet the Ministry also named them as peace commissioners to accept America's submission to British authority and then to open negotiations on political reforms. Historians have contended that this dual mission was probably an error on the part of the British Ministry. At the very least, this dual responsibility of being both warriors and diplomats proved a distraction to the Howes; at worst, it caused them to proceed more cautiously than they otherwise might have done.¹⁰² Whichever was the case, Ewald was obviously aware of the fact that the Howe brothers were of the opposition party in parliament, and believed this partisan orientation to be the main reason for General Howe's failure to capture Washington in 1776.

Ewald again raised the issue of politics after the battle of Brandywine on 11 September 1777. As he recounted the details of the battle, the British envelopment of Washington's right wing, with himself leading the column, he recalled the slowness of the march:

¹⁰¹ Peckham, *The War for Independence*, 39.

¹⁰² When General Howe testified before a Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry in 1779, he denied permitting Washington to escape (Troyer S. Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution* [New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1936], 183-4, 204-6, 208-9; Ira D. Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* [New York: Athenum, 1972], 156-7, 350-65). Professor Ira D. Gruber contends, though, that the Howe brothers' hopes of conciliation were primarily responsible for British military failure in 1776 (Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution*, 350-65).

For my part, I conclude that the slow march of the left column took place with all deliberation, so that the American army would not be destroyed to pay a fresh compliment to the Opposition Parry, and to bring forth a new proposal. My suspicions were strengthened anew when I observed the army on the battlefield overnight - perfectly quiet, without a single man sent after the enemy and without any outposts¹⁰³

Clearly, Ewald believed that Howe did not want to destroy Washington's army for political reasons.

In the next week Washington's army retreated to the Schuylkill River on the edge of Philadelphia and prepared for an attack against the British army while the latter was still on the march. Fortunately for the British, Washington's attack was drowned out in a torrential rainstorm. Ewald was critical of British slowness, and once again attributed their failure to catch up with Washington to General Howe:

I firmly believe that we still could have caught up with the greater part of the enemy army, at least the baggage, somewhere near the right bank of the Schuylkill River, if it had been the will of General Howe. But the three-day delay on the battlefield after the battle convinced me that we certainly would have halted even if no rain had fallen, because we surely knew that we were hard on Washington's heels.¹⁰⁴

Ewald's criticism of British strategy continued throughout the duration of the army's first several campaigns, recognizing that the army had "continually lost in the end what we won with the first rush in the beginning."¹⁰⁵

Captain Ewald was especially critical of Benedict Arnold, then a British brigadier general, and clashed with him over the general's tactics. Shortly after the army's disembarkation at the beginning of the Sixth Campaign¹⁰⁶, Arnold had ordered the Jägers

¹⁰³ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 87 (11 September 1777).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 89 (17 September 1777).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 173 (31 July 1779).

¹⁰⁶ The Sixth Campaign, 1781, also known as the Yorktown Campaign, involved the closing military operations of the war. After his unsuccessful Carolina campaign (1780-81), General Cornwallis retreated into Virginia, fortified Yorktown, and awaited reinforcements from Sir Henry Clinton in New York. Clinton delayed, however, and the French fleet under Adm. de Grasse blockaded Chesapeake Bay. Generals Washington

and a contingent of sharpshooters (soldiers without bayonets) to land at Ewald's discretion and attack a small body of Americans (equipped with bayonets), which had appeared on the left bank of the James River at Warwick, Virginia. Such poor judgment on the part of Arnold infuriated Captain Ewald, who did not deny "that this little trick left me with no great opinion of General Arnold's judgment . . . especially since the [British] light infantry was as close to [the Americans] as I was."¹⁰⁷ Ewald was also severely critical of Arnold's character, and noted that "his dishonourable undertaking . . . nevertheless cannot be justified," which itself testifies to the exceedingly honorable character of Captain Ewald. To him, Arnold's betrayal of his country was reprehensible:

If he really felt in his conscience that he had done wrong in siding against his mother country, he should have sheathed his sword and served no more This would have gained more proselytes than his shameful enterprise, which every man of honor and fine feelings - whether he be friend or foe - must loathe.

Gladly as I would have paid with my blood and my life for England's success in this war, this man remained so detestable to me that I had to use every effort not to let him perceive . . . the indignation of my soul.¹⁰⁸

Certainly, Ewald found fault not only with General Arnold's military judgment but with his ethical conduct as well.

Indeed, Captain Ewald's criticism of British strategy continued well into the Virginia Campaign of 1781. Ewald illuminates the controversy surrounding Cornwallis's impending march into Virginia in his diary entry of 12 April 1779, where he was especially fearful of what might happen if Cornwallis left North Carolina to rendezvous with Major General William Phillips and his force of 2,000 men in Virginia. Ewald concluded:

and Rochambeau rushed south with French troops, while Steuben and Lafayette maintained a holding action.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 259-60 (31 December 1780).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 295-6 (31 March 1781).

If the junction between Cornwallis and Phillips takes place, all but a few posts will soon fall into the enemy's hands again. I did not like the proposed combination of the two corps as long as [General Nathanael] Greene still had an army in Carolina, for it meant an acre of land won here and fifty lost there. But once again, it is the favorite plan of England to have something in every corner and much nowhere.¹⁰⁹

In truth, Ewald's apprehension concerning Cornwallis's march was quite similar to that felt by General Sir Henry Clinton, then Commander in Chief of the British forces, who had not given Cornwallis permission to march into Virginia. On 25 April, without waiting for orders from Clinton, Cornwallis started his long march northward across North Carolina, thus exposing several of the British posts in South Carolina to great danger.¹¹⁰ Cornwallis joined the army under Benedict Arnold (Phillips had just died) at Petersburg, Virginia on 20 May 1781, where he also took command. Clinton, upon learning of this, was astounded by Cornwallis's flagrant disregard for his original orders to safeguard South Carolina (as now the British army had been forced into solid operation in Virginia as well) and believed that the Southern campaign was therefore doomed.¹¹¹ Clearly, Ewald demonstrated sound knowledge of military tactics by observations such as this, especially when his criticisms of General Cornwallis were the same as those felt by the Commanding General Sir Henry Clinton.

Ewald also recognized the bleakness of the situation for the British at Yorktown, where in August 1781 Cornwallis's force of nearly 8,000 had taken up a defensive posture against a numerically superior combined American and French force of almost 18,000 troops. As a British naval force sailed from New York City to reinforce Cornwallis, the sinking spirits of the British soldiers were raised a bit. Ewald, however, took a more realistic view of their predicament:

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 297 (12 April 1781).

¹¹⁰ Cornwallis's departure left a young nobleman of twenty-six, Lieutenant Colonel Francis Lord Rawdon, in command of the small British field forces in South Carolina (Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 33).

¹¹¹ Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 247; Peckham, *The War for Independence*, 160.

Without bragging about my limited perception, I have told everyone that as soon as one of these redoubts is taken the business is at an end, and Washington has us in his pocket. Yet one still hears, "But our fleet will come before that time and raise the siege."¹¹²

Cornwallis, who by late September knew that he was in dire straits, shared Ewald's view. On the night of 16 October two vital redoubts fell, and the next day Cornwallis asked for terms of surrender.¹¹³ Two days later his troops, British, Loyalist, and German, marched into captivity. Ewald again illuminated the highly politicized nature of the war after Cornwallis's capture, noting that "[t]his disaster . . . will give the Opposition Party in England enough impetus to carry through its plan to give up the dominions in North America."¹¹⁴ And once more, Ewald offered up a critical assessment of British military failure:

This is the result of the absurd rules established during a war in which no plan was followed. The enemy was only pulled in all directions and nowhere driven by force, whereby all was lost, when it was desired to preserve all. It is terrible, when one considers that the finest and most valiant army - after six campaigns - was brought completely back to the point from which it started with the most auspicious prospects six years ago. And this, indeed, against a people who were no soldiers, and who could have been stamped to the ground in the first year.¹¹⁵

Obviously, Ewald believed that British strategy had been faulty from the outset of the war in America.

¹¹² Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 335 (12 October 1781).

¹¹³ A redoubt is a small independent earthwork, usually square or polygonal, completely enclosed (Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, 928).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 345 (10 December 1781). When news of the surrender reached Parliament, furious debates ensued. Prime Minister Lord Frederick North continued to justify the war on grounds of British rights in America. He was violently assailed by Charles Fox, Edwin Burke, and William Pitt the Younger. Lord North resigned on 20 March 1782. A new group of ministers came to power and began peace discussions with the Americans (Mackesy, *The War for America*, 460-70).

¹¹⁵ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 345-6 (10 December 1781).

Indeed, Ewald's critical opinions of the British generals and their conduct of the war help us to gain a better understanding of the highly politicized nature of the military contest and the problems of Britain's overall strategy, as the British army "was put to such poor use that eight campaigns were lost, followed by the loss of thirteen provinces, which in a word, had torn down the Crown of England from its loftiest peak."¹¹⁶ Moreover, Ewald's opinions are of considerable value because of his position as one who not only enjoyed professional relationships with the British commanders but who was also always active in the field fighting beside his troops in every major battle of the war plus a countless number of those smaller engagements which characterized, in the words of General Washington, the "War of Posts."¹¹⁷

The Continental Army

Equally important are Ewald's observations with respect to the Continental Army, as we can observe the changing nature of this army over the course of the war as well as the determined and resolute character of the Continental soldier.

Students of the Revolution can clearly observe the developing nature of the Continental Army as revealed by Captain Ewald's field notes. As the situation stood in 1775, the American colonies lacked a standing army and were thus the militarily weaker side. While the siege of Boston moved toward the fierce contest at Bunker Hill, the Continental Congress voted to raise 15,000 troops as a Continental army and selected Colonel George Washington of Virginia as commander in chief.¹¹⁸

Not only was the Continental Army a poor man's army, as there were outstanding uniform and equipment deficiencies, but it was also largely untrained and far less

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 354 (22 October 1783).

¹¹⁷ Sept. 8, 1776, John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington* (39 vols., Washington: Government Printing Office, 1931-44), VI, 28, quoted in Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 3.

¹¹⁸ Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 48.

disciplined than its European counterpart. Certainly, the Continentals “could not match the well-drilled British [and Hessians] in the battlefield maneuverability and tactical articulation of their battalions.”¹¹⁹ Indeed, neither Washington nor his lieutenants were soldiers “steeped in the literature of war.”¹²⁰

As the Ewald diary reveals, however, the American officers made strenuous efforts to correct this lack of doctrinal knowledge on the part of their army. He recorded in December 1777 how during the first two years of the war,

the Americans have trained a great many excellent officers who very often shame and excel our experienced officers, who consider it sinful to read a book or to think of learning anything during the war.¹²¹

On one occasion when Ewald examined a knapsack his Jägers had taken off of a Continental soldier, he discovered “the most excellent military books translated into their language.”¹²² Apparently this had been the case countless times before, as Ewald recorded that he had found several of these books, including Tielke’s *Field Engineer* and “the *Instructions* of the great Frederick to his generals . . . more than one hundred times.”¹²³ “Moreover,” he continued, “several of their officers had designed excellent small handbooks and distributed them in the army.”¹²⁴ Obviously, continual discoveries of this kind impressed Captain Ewald:

Upon finding these books, I have exhorted our gentlemen many times to read and emulate these people, who only two years before were hunters, lawyers, physicians, clergymen, tradesmen, innkeepers, shoemakers, and tailors.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ Weigley, *The American Way of War*, 4.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 13.

¹²¹ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 108 (2 December 1777).

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

Clearly, the American officers were quite conscious of what they did not know and recognized the disadvantage at which this deficiency placed them. Thus they strove not only to instruct themselves by reading military books but impressed this need to learn upon their soldiers as well.

Also visible through Ewald's observations are the improvements made in the training and drilling of the American army as a result of the efforts of Prussian drillmaster Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, who arrived in America on 1 December 1777 as "the answer to the American training problem and a way in which the American army could be made more effective."¹²⁶ Upon examining Washington's soldiers at Valley Forge in early 1778, Steuben instituted a training program (essentially an adaptation of the Prussian drill system) which would give the army a uniformity it had never possessed. His work proved exceedingly valuable, as the American soldiers learned close-quarter drill and ceremony, how to properly carry the musket, load it, and fire it, how to fix the bayonet, and how to charge.¹²⁷ Ewald attested to the effectiveness of Steuben's instruction:

The so-called Continental, or standing, regiments are under good discipline and drill . . . as well as the English themselves. I have seen the Rhode Island regiment march and perform several mountings of the guard which left nothing to criticize. The men were complete masters of their legs, carried their weapons well, held their heads straight, faced right without moving an eye, and wheeled so excellently without their officers having to shout much, that the regiment looked like it was dressed with a string.¹²⁸

The American Army thus became more skillful under the instruction of Steuben, as Captain Ewald could certainly affirm. Apparently the Continental Congress had taken notice as well, as they had in May 1778 appointed Steuben inspector general of the army with the rank and pay of major general.

¹²⁶ Wallace, *Appeal to Arms*, 177.

¹²⁷ Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, 553.

¹²⁸ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 340 (17 October 1781).

Additionally, the Ewald diary reveals the determined and resolute nature of the Continental soldier as seen through the eyes of a foreign observer. While conducting patrols in New Jersey in the late November 1776, Ewald and the Jägers skirmished with American riflemen from the corps of Colonel Daniel Morgan. When the Jägers took a prisoner, Ewald questioned the man to find out where the Americans were posted. “The captured rifleman,” Ewald recorded, “resolutely declared that he was my prisoner but not my spy. I admired this worthy man.”¹²⁹ Certainly, Ewald did not share the “contempt of the English” with regard to his enemy, but asserted that “one should not think that [the American army] can be compared to a motley crowd of farmers” such as the militia.¹³⁰ Ewald attested to seeing many Continental soldiers “without shoes, with tattered breeches and uniforms . . . who marched and stood their guard as proudly as the best uniformed soldier in the world.”¹³¹

Ewald’s most illuminating observations concerning the determination of the Continental army came shortly after Cornwallis’s surrender:

With what soldiers in the world could one do what was done by these men, who go about nearly naked and in the greatest privation? Deny the best-disciplined soldiers of Europe what is due them and they will run away in droves, and the general will soon be alone. But from this one can perceive what an enthusiasm - which these poor fellows call “Liberty” - can do!¹³²

Indeed, Ewald’s assertion was sustained by that of Steuben, who upon his initial inspection of Washington’s army at Valley Forge had reported that no European army would have held together under such deprivations of food, clothing, and shelter.¹³³ The determination of the American Army left such a considerable impact on Ewald that he

¹²⁹ Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 23 (28 November 1776).

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 340 (17 October 1781).

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² *Ibid.*, 340-41.

¹³³ Ward, *The War of the Revolution*, 552.

recorded a very similar analysis of his former opponents upon a visit to the garrison at West Point shortly before his return to Germany:

Although I shuddered at the distress of these men, it filled me with awe for them, for I did not think there was an army in the world which could be maintained as cheaply as the American army. . . .-What army could be maintained in this manner? None, certainly, for the whole army would gradually run away.-This, too, is a part of the "Liberty and Independence" for which these poor fellows had to have their arms and legs smashed.-But to what cannot enthusiasm lead a people!¹³⁴

Clearly, the Ewald diary reveals the fortitude of the American soldiers and their faithful devotion to their cause. Through Ewald we see the resolute character of an army that willingly endured the hardships of materiel deficiency in order to cast off the yoke of the English government once and for all.

Conclusion

The diary of Captain Ewald, an experienced, professional soldier, is a most important contribution to the understanding of the nature of the War of the Revolution. It enables us to arrive at a more accurate estimation of the significant Hessian contribution to the British war effort, particularly that of Captain Ewald and the Field Jäger Corps, the Hessian elite light infantry. The Ewald diary opens up the wider issues of Hessian participation and our interpretation of the same, as we can clearly ascertain the usefulness of Ewald and the Jäger Corps and the importance and significance of their service to the army of Sir William Howe and other British generals.

Even though the Jägers were only a small fraction (numbering slightly over 1,000 troops) of the total Hessian forces, the Ewald diary reveals that the Jägers did indeed

perform significant duties disproportionate to their relative numbers. The Jägers were extremely useful to the British army, and were especially effective against American riflemen and artillery positions during sieges. They often led the vanguard of British and Hessian forces or flanked both sides of the column, and just as often formed the rear guard which covered a retreat or withdrawal. When the troops deployed in battle, the Jägers usually formed the flanks. Frequently operating as detachments, they were also employed to great advantage in reconnoitering and patrol duties, and in protecting foraging parties and headquarters. Clearly, the Jägers added far more to the British war effort than numbers alone. Their active combat service was militarily significant, as they enhanced the power and maneuverability of the British army and thus strengthened British capability to conduct the war. In light of this, the standing military histories of the American Revolution are in need of a revision which will restore the importance of the Hessian Jäger Corps as a far more significant part of the total British fighting force that attempted to subdue the American colonies. Thus, the effect of the Ewald diary is not only to add depth to the existing body of knowledge concerning Hessian participation in the American Revolution, but also to allow us to make a different judgment which will correct the standing military histories of the conflict.

The Ewald diary is additionally important because it allows us to better understand the nature of the American Revolution as a military contest. His diary reveals not only the importance of the Hessian Jäger Corps to the British army, but also gives students of the American Revolution a first-hand look at the partisan and irregular nature of the war.

¹³⁴Ewald, *Diary of the American War*, 355 (22 October 1783).

Furthermore, Ewald is a unique observer and incredible commentator on the Revolution, and is able to reveal things about the total conflict that have otherwise received scant attention as well. Ewald's military judgments concerning British conduct of the war reveal the highly politicized nature of the conflict and the overall problems with British strategy. His observations concerning the American army reveal a determined body of soldiers who willingly endured continual hardship in order to cast off the yoke of the English government.

Moreover, Ewald is exceedingly qualified to comment and his observations are of far more value simply because of his position as an officer on the front lines who also enjoyed not only the professional friendship but also the confidence of numerous high-ranking British officers. Perspectives such as this are scarce, which is the reason that the Ewald diary is of such great value to students of the American Revolution. In addition, the fact that Ewald published his *Treatise on Partisan Warfare* (1785) upon returning to Germany reflects not only his real interest in military tactics but is greater proof of his professionalism and gives him larger credence as a diarist.

Indeed, through the diary of Captain Ewald we can not only correct the standing military histories of the Revolution to include the importance of the Hessian Jäger Corps as a far more significant part of the British war effort, but we can in essence understand more distinctly the nature of the conflict which, in the words of Ewald, ultimately resulted in the "utter loss of the thirteen splendid provinces of the Crown of England."¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Ibid., 44.

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