



Quarters: The Accommodation of the British Army and the Coming of the American Revolution by John Gilbert McCurdy.

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American children are taught that the revolt that led to independence from Great Britain stemmed from policy changes made after the French and Indian/Seven Years' War (1756-63). They then learn about legislation like the Sugar Act and the Stamp Act, as well as the effects of the problematic housing of British troops on colonists, the latter being the least understood of Britain's policies regarding its North American possessions. In *Quarters*, historian John McCurdy (Eastern Michigan Univ.) seeks to correct this deficiency in the scholarship.

In particular, he clarifies the difference between civilian and military spaces as understood by contemporaries. He also analyzes the concept of military geography, "which considers the influences that soldiers, weapons and martial codes have on notions of place" (7). He describes how the military quartering of troops evolved to meet different contingencies and respond to changing notions of what constituted appropriate military vs. private space.

In chap. 1, McCurdy highlights the changes brought by the English Civil War (1642-51), a conflict between king and Parliament that involved key changes in the quartering of British troops in their home country. The emergence of a standing army in seventeenth-century England led to a sharp discrimination between public and private houses. Once British troops came to the North American colonies, however, there were not enough public spaces to house them, so they were again billeted on civilians, a practice that generated much resentment.

As a result of these controversies, the colonies began to erect barracks for the housing of troops (chap. 2). This practice was accepted, if not embraced, by civilian and military leaders alike. On the one hand, it kept the soldiers out of private spaces; on the other, it facilitated the controlling of troop movements and the prevention of desertion. Construction of such barracks peaked during the French and Indian War.

Chapter 3 concerns changes in quartering after the Treaty of Paris (1763), when British authorities sought to more fully integrate the colonies into what McCurdy calls a "unitary empire" (8). Much of this chapter details efforts to find the proper place for soldiers within colonial society.

In chap. 4, the author reconstructs attempts to station peacekeeping troops on the borderlands between the English settlement and Native Americans. While these measures ultimately failed, they helped shape the attitudes of both supporters and opponents toward further colonization.

The fifth chapter returns to the cities, where soldiers initially lived peacefully with colonists. This tranquil coexistence was shattered, however, as protests over new ministerial policies intensified and put the troops in the position of de facto enforcers of British policy. Rising tensions led directly to the Battle of Golden Hill (19 Jan. 1770) and the Boston Massacre (5 Mar. 1770).

Chapter 6 examines the role of quartering in the breakdown of the colonial relationship, especially following the Boston Massacre. McCurdy notes that the rejuvenation of colonial militia forces made the presence of British regulars superfluous in the eyes of the colonists.

Finally, a brief epilogue traces the long-term influence of the disputes over quartering in the composition of the Third Amendment to the Constitution. McCurdy notes the absence of direct challenges to the quartering of troops on American citizens; he also points out how later Civil Rights and LGBTQ movements have tapped into central concepts of public vs. private space in the amendment to advance their causes.

Several factors combine to make *Quarters* a most welcome and original contribution to our understanding of the American Revolution. For one thing, McCurdy perceptively extends his purview beyond the thirteen seaboard “old” colonies to investigate the problem of quartering in the “new” colonies Britain acquired as a consequence of the Seven Years’ War. He shows very persuasively that, while the presence of soldiers was increasingly resented in the old colonies, it was accepted, if not welcomed in the new colonies. This may help explain the failure of later attempts to gain Canadian participation in the rebellion through diplomacy and outright force. Likewise, European residents of the Sugar Islands (Barbados and Jamaica) were grateful to have British regulars deter slave uprisings.

The central figure in McCurdy’s investigation is Maj. Gen. Thomas Gage, whom he depicts as a harried administrator anxious to implement the directives from his home government in such a way as to make them palatable in the colonial environment. While Gage never succeeded in that task, McCurdy portrays him as a sharp administrator who actively advised his home government but failed to build the unitary empire. When he sought to enforce and preserve Crown authority by making an example of Boston, the resulting concentration of forces in the city had a broader unintended consequence: “With the British army gone, the military geography in American cities and towns collapsed” (227). In short, Gage’s attempt to preserve the empire hastened its dissolution. McCurdy’s Gage is no dull administrator out of touch with the times, but a man striving mightily to swim against the tide of events.

John McCurdy has produced a clear and cogent study of an under-discussed topic in the history of colonial and revolutionary America. *Quarters* will spark salutary further discussion on the subject of American independence. It will certainly appeal to an audience of scholars of the Revolution, as well as anyone interested in eighteenth-century military institutions, including advanced undergraduate and doctoral students. Most importantly, it may alter for the better how civil–military relations in the colonial period are taught in American History classrooms.