

LUISS 

Department of Political Science  
Chair of History and Politics of USA

**Beyond Nathan Hale:**  
The Culper Ring and US Intelligence during the War of  
Independence

Prof. Gregory Alegi  
SUPERVISOR

Prof. Carlo Magrassi  
CO-SUPERVISOR

Arianna Vicinanza–645982  
CANDIDATE

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# **Beyond Nathan Hale: The Culper Ring and US Intelligence in the War of Independence**

## **Introduction**

The word “*Intelligence*”, comes from the Latin verb *intelligere*, meaning the acquisition, processing, and storage of information. The Oxford dictionary defines intelligence as *secret information that is collected, for example about a foreign country, especially one that is an enemy*<sup>1</sup>. In our days, even though it represents the last frontier in democratic States, Intelligence is a fundamental part of any government and its activities are regulated by Constitutions and International Law. The executive branch monitors the intelligence services by giving them directions and instructions. Parliament instead oversees the intelligence alongside its budget. The judiciary monitors the use of special powers that are bestowed upon the secret services<sup>2</sup>. Through this division, it is obvious that intelligence is one of the columns that hold the government together. Intelligence is not only crucial at a national level with internal threats, but is essential at the international level regarding external threats such as terrorism and international crime.

The intelligence’s mission is to gather foreign or national information that will be used by the government for the safety of the nation. Because of its importance within the executive branch, intelligence must be neutral to politics. The politicisation of intelligence represents a threat to the safety of the nation, used for personal scopes, secret services are highly dangerous. In authoritarian regimes, secret services are used against political opponents and instead of protecting citizens, they represent a threat to the well-being of the population. Two examples of politicised intelligence are represented by the Stasi and KGB during the Cold War. In the aftermath of WWII and during the Cold War, secret services became part of the heart of the government.

In 1947, with the establishment of the CIA, a new era began. During the years of nuclear terror, the CIA was used to monitor foreign threats, mostly from Russia, but was also used to control

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<sup>1</sup> Oxford Dictionaries.

<sup>2</sup> H.Born-I.Leigh, (2005). *Making Intelligence accountable: Legal standards and Best Practice*. P. 15-16. Publishing House of the Parliament of Norway, Oslo.

the Anti-Vietnam war protests in the US. In the United States, intelligence agencies were perfected and integrated step by step. The tragic events of 9/11 represented a turning point globally, especially for the US secret Service. The inability of the CIA to prevent the attack caused an important realisation, the intelligence services needed to improve and adapt themselves to the challenges of the new millennium. After the attack on the Twin Towers, the US Intelligence Services became one of the leading security agencies in the world, working alongside other nations in the fight against terrorism. Nowadays, the US is acclaimed for its secret services' efficiency and the latter's continuous technological development. Even though it is acclaimed and renowned, the past of American Intelligence is even more peculiar.

1947 is usually considered as the year in which American Intelligence was born. The establishment of the CIA and its aim at the defence of the country during the Cold War, made the agency one of the most famous agencies in the world. Despite the importance and popularity, the CIA is not the first American intelligence service. As a matter of fact, American intelligence has deeper roots. Roots that can be traced back to the American Revolution.

The CIA doesn't keep its origins a secret, but proudly acknowledges its history.

The statue of a proud and strong young man stands right in front of the CIA's original headquarters. The young boy represented is Nathan Hale, the first martyr spy of the American Revolution. Captain Nathan Hale from Connecticut, was employed as a spy by George Washington and Captain Knowlton. Hale's task was to retrieve information in the recently British occupied New York, during the mission he was caught and then hanged as a spy at the end of September 1776. His service and sacrifice were never forgotten and he remained a symbol of patriotism and honour. Hale's death was not exactly what prompted Gen. Washington to rely on intelligence, but his service inspired other young soldiers. Washington himself was a great estimator of intelligence, his experience during the Seven Years' War educated him on the subject. The past experience was then put to use during the war for American independence.

After the occupation of New York by the British troops, the Commander in chief was famished for information and starved by the absence of allies inside the city. From 1776 to 1778, Washington sharpened his intelligence knowledge and abilities, relying on figures like Nathaniel Sackett and then Clarke's spy ring in Pennsylvania. The General's focus was mostly on timely and precise intelligence that helped the Continental Army to win the conflict.

Washington held records of his intelligence expenses and reserved a good part of his resources for the various undercover missions<sup>3</sup>.

A great change occurred in 1778, when with the help of Major Benjamin Tallmadge, the future president built the most efficient spy ring of the Revolution. The Culper Spy Ring proved to be essential, through the six spies and the help of other agents, Washington had moles inside New York and along Long Island. As the former head of British intelligence, Major George Beckwith stated; "*Washington did not beat us militarily. He simply outspied us*<sup>4</sup>." This quote alone shows how important intelligence was for the outcome of the Revolutionary war.

The aim of this dissertation is to answer two main questions; Did intelligence and the Culper Ring help winning the war? And what is the Culper Ring's legacy?

Through the use of academic resources such as journals, books, papers, and official websites, I will try to answer the two main questions. Original sources like diaries, memoires, letters, and original records will accompany the other literary sources aforementioned. The results of this dissertation have been supported by documents consulted at the Society of The Cincinnati, Gelman Library, and Manuscript Room of the Library of Congress in Washington DC.

Divided in four chapters, each chapter has a main topic and subtopics linked to the main one.

The first chapter introduces espionage in 18th Century Europe. In the 1700s, espionage was indeed considered dishonourable and obscure, but diplomats and royal ministers never refrained from using it. The first part of the chapter introduces espionage in the 18th Century and the type of spies involved in the undercover business. The division between Professionals and Amateurs spies has more branches; military and improbable spies such as women. Women have always been the best type of spies because of various factors. Given the main topic of the dissertation, the women mentioned played important roles in the American Revolution, on both American and British sides.

A second part, mayhaps more historical, follows the history of European intelligence in the years prior and during the Seven Years' War. The Seven Years' War is strictly linked to the American war for independence, fought not only in Europe, it can be considered the first world war. It was during this war that George Washington became acquainted with intelligence for

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<sup>3</sup> Michigan Today, (fall 1999), Cool Blue Website. Courtesy of the Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>4</sup> International Spy Museum. Washington DC.

the first time and understood the military benefits of precise and timely information. It is thanks to these formative years that Washington was able to build the Culper Ring.

The final part of the chapter raises the curtains on the American Revolution. At the dawn of the Franco-American alliance, Benjamin Franklin used agents and intelligence techniques to gain France's approval to the alliance.

The second chapter introduces the main topic of the thesis, the beginning introduces the American situation after the evacuation of New York. A major topic in this initial part, is the struggle of the Continental army and the first missions aimed at obtaining intelligence. The Knowlton Rangers are usually identified as the first American attempt at an intelligence service, and through their story, the martyr spy of the American Revolution makes his appearance. Nathan Hale's tragedy has always been wrapped between myth and reality. After the tragic death of the Connecticut spy, there is an evident development of the undercover activities. With the introduction of Nathaniel Sackett and Major John Clark, Washington and Tallmadge will be able to establish the famous Culper Ring.

Towards the end of the chapter, the members of the famous spy ring finally make their appearance; the existence of the Culper Ring was discovered only in 1929, thanks to Sir. Henry Clinton's personal diary that belonged to the Clinton family at the beginning of last century. These six patriots joined a greater cause for different reasons but they all shared the dream of liberty. The final part of the chapter will focus on the Culpers' lives, personalities and reasons for joining the spying business.

A last session of the chapter is dedicated to spies that helped the Culper Ring and risked their lives for the American cause. This part also reflects on African Americans and their involvement in the Revolution.

The third chapter will focus on the methods used by Washington's spies and their most important missions. An initial part, will focus on what makes a good or bad spy and will provide examples by using Nathan Hale as a bad example while the members of the Culper Ring and other spies as successful agents.

After drawing a line between a bad spy and a good one, the methods used by the American spies are introduced. These methods allowed Culper Jr and the others to maintain their identities a secret, and such techniques enhanced the quality of their intelligence. Amongst the various methods, some of these are still used today, obviously in a modern key.

Once these systems were used, the agents put them into practice during their missions. The Culper Ring was able to change the course of the conflict through its missions. The most important and famous mission will be the focus of the second part of the chapter.

The end of the chapter will focus on the complicated relationships between Washington and his spies. The bond between agents and Commander was not an easy one, but it allows us to reflect on the humanity of these figures. Many times, historical figures are mystified or dehumanised, but in reality they were simply human beings like us.

The fourth chapter, will shed the light on one of the most interesting conspiracies of the Revolution, the Arnold - André conspiracy. The chapter shifts its focus on the two main actors of the famous tragedy, Major John André and the traitor General Benedict Arnold. The first part of the chapter explores these two complicated men's lives, careers, interests, and dreams. After introducing Arnold and André, the plot to sell West Point to the British is explained and analysed, through the use of primary sources found at the Library of Congress and Society of The Cincinnati. For centuries the West Point plan has been a point of interest, turning a real story into tragic plays and novels.

At the time of the conspiracy, Benjamin Tallmadge's experience as the leader of the Culper Ring made the unmasking of the plot possible. The most incredible plot of the American Revolution did not involve only the Culper Ring, but also the gathering of intelligence from the most unexpected characters.

Finally, the conclusion will be dedicated to the legacy of the first American spy Ring and to its ability to achieve victory from behind the scenes.

## **1. ESPIONAGE IN THE 18<sup>th</sup> CENTURY**

### **1.1 Professionals and Amateurs.**

Spying is without any doubt amongst the oldest professions in the world, after all, talking and gathering information are two of the most basic activities of Homo Sapiens. Spies were present in biblical times and usually who employed secret agents relied on outcasts or people alienated by society. In early modern Europe (1450-1789), the State employed such characters when there was a need to defend itself against its people and foreign threats. The spying that took part during WWII is completely different from the espionage of the 18th Century. Before the 1700s spying was seen as an obscure affair that could only belong to obscure and low



individuals. Even though spies had a bad reputation, they were not uncommon and served princes, religious personalities, and royals. In England, Anglican bishops established private networks to identify religious non-conformists<sup>5</sup>. In the fight between Protestants and Catholics, spies were usually employed. In the 18th Century, there were two different branches of undercover agents that can be divided into Professionals and Amateurs.

The first branch was well-known and certainly more respected, aside from carrying out international relations, diplomats also served as spies. These ministers, while handling the economic and political relationships between their host and home country, had also the task to keep an eye on local politics in order to report secret information. Ambassadors were highly encouraged to cultivate a private network that could supply good information. A famous example was set by the French diplomat François De Bussy who from 1734, spied for the British without being unmasked. De Bussy was recruited by the British ambassador to France to spy in exchange for payment<sup>6</sup>. De Bussy was an incredibly able spy and gave information on a planned invasion aimed at the restoration of the Stuart dynasty in England. Through De Bussy's services, the English government discovered many pro-Stuart Jacobin rebels. Not only diplomats used espionage, but Statesmen used undercover agents to gain influence inside their government. Good intelligence was highly valuable and could influence the government's policies and decisions. The communication methods were not as good as today, and there were many limitations. Maximilien Robespierre was able to climb the ladder of success through his constant discoveries of spies and traitors<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, statesmen and foreign ministers were prone to employ undercover agents for their personal affairs.

The second branch can be defined as "amateurs". They were at the service of princes, courts, and ambassadors, they were part of their channels of information even though they were easily unmasked and poorly paid. Involved in internal security, amateurs engaged in the spying business mainly because of their will to find a better life<sup>8</sup>. An example of an amateur spy who was easily unmasked can be found in the young Nathan Hale, a hero, and martyr of the early days of the American Revolution that will be mentioned more than once in this thesis. Hale, disguised himself as a Dutch, entered British-occupied New York to gather information on the

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<sup>5</sup> P.S.Fritz, (1975), *The English Ministers and Jacobitism between the rebellions of 1715 and 1745*. PP 51-58. University of Toronto Press.

<sup>6</sup> A. Christopher (2018). *Secret World P.281*, Yale University Press.

<sup>7</sup> P.S.Fritz, (1975), *The English Ministers and Jacobitism between the rebellions of 1715 and 1745*. PP 59-108. University of Toronto Press.

<sup>8</sup> D. Szechi (2010), *THE DANGEROUS TRADE. Spies, Spymasters and the making of Europe. P.26*. Edinburgh University Press.

British. He was caught and hanged as a spy in 1776 just at the beginning of the revolution. Through Hale's sacrifice, Gen. George Washington understood how important intelligence was and established the Culper Ring two years after Hale's death.

Nathan Hale's mission and sacrifice are nowadays remembered as the greatest act of patriotism of the early years of the Revolution. But while Hale's patriotism and bravery are undeniable, it can't be said the same of his abilities as a spy. Too talkative and trustworthy, Nathan Hale possessed qualities that are considered flaws in espionage. His propensity to trust the first apparent friend to the American cause brought him to an early grave and led the mission to failure.

Robert Rogers trapped him with ease and was also able to extrapolate important information and a confession from Hale of being a spy.

Obviously the blame can't be put all on the Captain from Connecticut, but it must be put also on his superiors that organised the mission. Both Knowlton and Washington did not give him precise information or instructed him on how to behave while being in action. What is surprising is that despite Knowlton and Washington's experience, none of them instructed the amateur agent. Perhaps, taken by the situation around New York and the instability of the army, Washington did not think about educating the spy, his first priority must have been strictly gathering information.

Whatever the reason, what is true is that disorganisation and an untrained amateur spy proved to be a deadly mix. As a proof of Hale's mistakes as an undercover agent there is an important account from a witness to the event. The Library of Congress possesses a diary of a Tory storekeeper, Consider Tiffany, who wrote down Hale's story and highlighted his mistakes.

*"Rogers detected several American officers, that were sent to Long Island as spies, especially Captain Hale, who was improved in disguise, to find whether the Long Islands inhabitants were friends to America or not.*

*Colonel Rogers having for some days, observed Captain Hale, and suspected that he was an enemy in disguise; and to convince himself, Rogers thought of trying the same method, he quickly altered his own habit, with which he made Capt Hale a visit at his quarters, where the Colonel fell into some discourse concerning the war, intimating the trouble of his mind, in his being detained on an island, where the inhabitants sided with the Britains against the American Colonies, intimating withal, that he himself was upon the business of spying out the inclination of the people and the motion of the British troops. This intrigue, not being suspected by the Capt, made him believe that he had found a good friend, and one that could be trusted with the*

*secrecy of the business he was engaged in; and after the Colonel's drinking health to the Congress: informs Rogers of the business and intent. The Colonel, finding out the truth of the matter, invited Captain Hale to dine with him the next day at his quarters, unto which he agreed. The time being come. Capt Hale repaired to the place agreed on, where he met his pretended friend, with three or four men of the same stamp, and after being refreshed, began the same conversation, a company of soldiers surrounded the house, and by orders from the commander, seized Capt Hale in an instant. But denying his name, and the business he came upon, he was ordered to New York. But before he was carried far, several persons knew him and called him by name; upon this he was hanged as a spy, some say, without being brought to a court martial”<sup>9</sup>*

This account allowed historians to make sense of Hale's tragedy and also of his failures. His enthusiasm in the belief of a found friend, led him to overshare and give up his mission. As previously said, these mistakes were the most common amongst those that approached espionage for the first time.

Between the various elements that make Hale's tragedy so appealing, there is also the matter of his last words.

For many years, Cato's verse “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country” has been cited as Hale's last words before he was hanged. This attribution made the figure of Nathan Hale even more fascinating, inspiring plays, poems, and tragedies in honour of a young Captain who looked proudly into death's eyes.

For how romantic and heartbreaking the verse is, Nathan Hale never said those words before dying.

Recent records from a British officer's diary, Captain Frederick Mackenzie, show that Hale's words were quite different from the ones that William Hull cited. In his personal diary Mackenzie wrote: “*He thought it the duty of every officer, to obey any orders given him by his commander in chief; and desired the spectators to be at all times prepared to meet death in whatever shape it might appear*<sup>10</sup>”

Even though his final words did not come from a celebrated play, they have a strong meaning and show Hale's sense of duty and respect for his commander in chief. The legacy of Nathan

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<sup>9</sup> Consider Tiffany Sketch, circa 1778-circa 1796. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

<sup>10</sup> The American Revolution Institute, *Statues of Nathan Hale*. Online source consulted after in person interview at the Society of the Cincinnati, Washington DC. .

<https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/masterpieces-in-detail/nathan-hale-statues/>

Hale's last words is visible in all the intelligence officers that carry out their duties with passion and pride.

Many inexperienced spies became secret agents because of their faith. Religion was the heart of life in Europe in the 18th Century, countries were divided between Protestants and Catholics who despised one another. The animosity between Catholics and Protestants is still today one of the major issues in many European countries. In Ireland for example the Catholic minorities struggle compared to the Protestant majority. This religious division divides the country and creates unrest amongst citizens.

The relationship between Catholics and Protestants in 18th Century Europe was the same if not worse. Catholic countries like France and Spain wanted the hegemony of Europe, and often fought with Great Britain and other Protestant powers. Wars over territories were often masked as wars to defend the Catholic or Protestant faith. At the dawn of the Seven Years' War, Europe was a powder keg about to explode and while rulers fought for powers, who paid the worst price, in both Protestant and Catholic countries, were the various religious minorities, often seen as a threat.

On both sides, because of the continuous persecution, some minorities worked as undercover agents. These religious agents existed in countries where minorities were actually present and represented part of the population, there was no need for Protestant spies in Spain or Catholic counterparts in Sweden<sup>11</sup>. Religious minorities in countries like Spain were extremely isolated and did not represent a danger to the State. The enemies of a State were used to maintain good relationships with religious minorities because they could have been useful in the future. Both England and The Netherlands corresponded with Huguenot minorities in Catholic France. These agents were not part of any institution and were solely linked individuals.

Between Professionals and Amateurs there was also another category of spies. These could be both well informed on the undercover trade, or completely unaware of how the business worked. Military officers did not agree much on spying, since it was viewed as dishonourable and not in line with military codes. Even though it was not well seen, espionage was crucial in war and was important to understand how to move in the field. Undercover agents allowed

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<sup>11</sup> D. Szechi (2010), THE DANGEROUS TRADE. Spies, Spymasters and the making of Europe. P.25. Edinburgh University Press.

Britain to win the Seven Years War and helped officers to understand how and when the army had to attack the enemy. Military spies engaged in the trade because of orders or because of their belief in the cause they were fighting for. The Culper Ring during the American Revolution worked undercover, especially because of its members' ideals of independence and freedom. The existence of the Culper Ring was discovered in 1929 by accident; As Sir Henry Clinton's great great great grand-daughter placed on sale the family papers, she found a letter that contained the Culper Ring's code names<sup>12</sup>. The spies behind the Ring are nowadays known as Anna Strong, Caleb Brewster, Major Benjamin Tallmadge, Austin Roe, Abraham Woodhull (Culper SR), and Robert Townsend (Culper Jr). These impeccable patriots never revealed their sacrifices and involvement in the Ring after the war, even if they were not trained as agents, they took their secret to the grave. The importance and recognition of their services were only discovered last century, since then more information emerges about Washington's incredible spies. The majority of members of the Culper Ring were simple men and women that felt compelled to act for the independence of their nation. Since the majority of these undercover agents were soldiers, not trained in the subtle art of espionage, mistakes were easier. The members of the Culper Ring were not trained spies, but through their experience and intuition, they were able to outsmart the British and help in the war for independence.

Another example of an amateur military spy in the American Revolution, can be seen with, Sir Henry Clinton's aide de camp and spymaster, Major John André who, in 1780, was captured and killed because of poor planning and inexperience<sup>13</sup>.

John André is without any doubt one of the most beloved figures of the American Revolution, on both British and American sides. His name and legacy will always reside in Benedict Arnold's plot to sell West Point to the British. His tragic final days and death are melancholically described by Benjamin Tallmadge in his memoir. The American head of intelligence, describes André with deep affection, feeling sorry for his fate. His British companions and superiors were all destroyed by his demise, figures like Banastre Tarleton and John Graves Simcoe wished to save their friend and bring the American traitor Benedict Arnold to Washington as an exchange.

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<sup>12</sup> Michigan Today, Fall 1999. Consulted in person at the Society of The Cincinnati.

<sup>13</sup> R.M. Hatch, (1986), *Major John André, A gallant in Spy's Clothing*. PP 243-246. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

After his death, André's memory was glorified by the British especially by King George III who admired the gallant Major that lost his life for his country. For the Americans, Arnold was to blame for André's death.

In history, the names of Arnold and André always go together as if they belong to a different side of the same coin. Two different men, with different ideals, priorities, and lives. These two men, apparently united only by one of the most intriguing conspiracies of the Revolution, were maybe united by their love for one woman. The involvement of Peggy Shippen Arnold in the West Point plot is certain, sources from the Society of the Cincinnati affirm her involvement in passing letters between the American traitor and the genteel Major. What is still a mystery is a love triangle between the belle of Philadelphia and two men with so little in common. Their story has been put into poems, plays, and films, but their history is still a mystery.

## **1.2 Roses with Thorns.**

Amongst Professionals, Amateurs, and the Military, because they were constantly overlooked, underestimated, and considered inferior, women were the perfect undercover agents. Even before the 18th century, in European courts the Queen's ladies in waiting were used as undercover agents, reporting any information or secret. Not all men were unaware of women's incredible wit and sharpness, many used their wives' 'tea parties' as an excuse to extrapolate important information. During the American Revolution, women proved to be essential agents, on both Patriot's and Loyalists' sides. Working as cooks or cleaners for various officers, women were able to eavesdrop on conversations and passed the information to the other agents. George Washington took advantage of women's reputation of being "too stupid", and used them as scouts or spies to gather important intelligence<sup>14</sup>. On the Patriots' side, the most well-known spies are Anna Strong, Agent 355, and Lydia Darragh. Anna Strong was one of the members of George Washington's Culper Ring. Located in Setauket<sup>15</sup>, Anna Strong transferred information by hanging her laundry in specific patterns based on a secret code. Alongside her clothesline and handkerchiefs, Strong hung a black petticoat. The Petticoat meant that

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<sup>14</sup> Master Sgt. Quinnus G. Caldwell, (2018), The importance of spies to Washington's success: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> Master Sgt. Quinnus G. Caldwell, (2018), The importance of spies to Washington's success: <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b.pdf>

messages were ready to be picked up, while the handkerchief signalled where the messages were hidden<sup>16</sup>. Agent 355, for a time rumoured to be Anna Strong, found out that Benedict Arnold was a traitor, and passed the information to the American agents. Agent 355's identity remains unknown, probably a servant, she was quite close to Major John André. Soon after André's death, she was captured and held aboard the prison ship HMS Jersey in New York, where she died<sup>17</sup>. In the TV Series *Turn: Washington's spies*, agent 355 is portrayed as a former slave who after receiving her freedom from the British became John André's servant. The decision of portraying Agent 355 as a former slave, was extremely important for the production, the intention was to shine the spotlight on the great involvement of African-Americans in the war. Often forgotten, these unsung heroes fought for the hope of real freedom and equality. Still on the Patriots' side, emigrated from Dublin to Philadelphia in 1753, Lydia Darragh was another fierce spy for the Patriots<sup>18</sup>. A Quaker and a pacifist, Darragh and her family tried to be neutral during the war. When her son Charles enlisted in the Continental Army, Lydia Darragh picked her side. In 1777, when the British attacked Philadelphia, General William Howe moved into a home close to Lydia's family residence. While living so close to Howe, Darragh gathered information regarding Howe and the British's activities and passed the information to her son through secret codes<sup>19</sup>. Ann Bates and Peggy Shippen Arnold, are amongst the most well-known loyalist secret agents. Located in Philadelphia, just like her Patriot counterpart Lydia Darragh, Ann Bates<sup>20</sup> was a school teacher and one of the most successful British spies. She was married to a British soldier, Bates was introduced to Major Duncan Drummond who used her as a spy. In 1778 the British spy impersonated a peddler and infiltrated herself in Washington's camp at White Plains. The spy was able to gather information on the exact location of officers' quarters and munitions. Furthermore, she obtained intelligence concerning supplies, the number of soldiers, and guns. No one suspected

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<sup>16</sup> National Women's History Museum (2017), Revolutionary Spies:

<https://www.womenshistory.org/articles/revolutionary-spies#:~:text=Strong%20hung%20a%20black%20petticoat,designated%20as%20dead%20drop%20locations.>

<sup>17</sup> Master Sgt. Quinnus G. Caldwell, (2018), The importance of spies to Washington's success:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b/pdf/GOVPUB-D101-4befe158d588257bee04b421cf3e881b.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> American Battlefield Trust, Lydia Darragh: <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/lydia-barrington-darragh>

<sup>19</sup> H. Darrach- D.Bacon-J. Drinker-G.Scattergood, Lydia Darragh of The Revolution. University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>20</sup> Intel.Gov, Revolutionary War/British Espionage: <https://www.intelligence.gov/evolution-of-espionage/revolutionary-war/british-espionage/ann-bates>

her and once reunited with Drummond, she was recognized by the latter as the most efficient secret agent. At the end of the war, Bates went to Great Britain where she was able to earn a small pension as payment for her services as a spy. Major John André, head of British intelligence, regarded her as his best spy. Another important woman on the British side was certainly Margaret Shippen, or Peggy Shippen<sup>21</sup>, well-known amongst historians of the American Revolution. One of the richest and most attractive women of Philadelphia, Peggy Shippen married America's first traitor, Benedict Arnold. For historians, the Arnold-André conspiracy cannot be explained without Peggy's involvement in it. Evidence suggests that she often acted as messenger between her husband and her old acquaintance John André. One of her most famous "operations", was carried out right in front of George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Le Marquis De Lafayette after the discovery of her husband's plot. Left alone while her husband ran towards British lines, Peggy used women's reputation of being hysterical and fragile to trick the founding fathers and the French nobleman. The men were terrified by the scene and felt nothing but sadness<sup>22</sup> for her condition, but that was only a trick.

What is certain is that women were as capable as men in the spying business, if not better than them. Men's mistake, as always, was deeming women inferior and not their equal. These brilliant and capable girls used men's beliefs against them and won.

### **1.3 Shadows within History.**

A true revolution for intelligence happened in the mid-1700s when intelligence was more respected and understood. The 18th century represented fertile land for espionage. By 1720, the majority of European powers used well-structured secret channels of information. During this period, the figure of the codebreaker became fundamental. Codebreakers were trained and highly skilled. Code Breakers were able to decipher letters written in codes or with misplaced letters. With the coronation of King George I in England in 1714, British intelligence aimed at the disruption of Jacobite's' plots to restore the Stuart dynasty<sup>23</sup>. The "old pretender", James

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<sup>21</sup> Intel.Gov, Revolutionary War/British Espionage: <https://www.intelligence.gov/evolution-of-espionage/revolutionary-war/british-espionage/peggy-shippen>

<sup>22</sup> From Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, 25th of September 1780. "Hamilton Papers" PP 441-442. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

<sup>23</sup> D.Szechi, (1984), *Jacobitism and Tory Politics, 1710-14*. PP 6-32 (Chapter 1). J.Donalds Publishers, Edinburgh.



Stuart, son of James II, employed a small number of covert agents who informed him of the situation in Britain. James Stuart's network was deemed to be ridiculous, primitive, and ineffective. The undercover agents used rather old and easily traceable techniques; such as dead letter boxes and easily understandable codenames. A dead letter box was a known spy method where two people met in a secret location where they passed information and evidence, this method was easily tracked by enemies. The chaos of the Jacobite intelligence led to a chaotic Jacobite preparation for revolution<sup>24</sup>. The Jacobite's threat came mainly from Scotland, while in the south the rebels were easily unmasked. The modus operandi of the rebels was always the same, asking for European help. On the other side, King George I had an incredibly skilled channel of spies, able to track Jacobite spies and solve their codes. The king assembled an underground web of spies between his Hanoverian codebreakers and the British ones. In 1716, the talented Edward Willes became the royal decipherer. Willes was given a secret government office and was soon able to break French, Prussian, Swedish, and Jacobite codes<sup>25</sup>. One of Willes' most important victories was in 1716 when he was able to decrypt correspondence about Swedish negotiations between the Jacobites and the Swedish Chief Minister Görtz, alongside the Swedish ambassador in London, Gyllenborg. The Swedish ambassador, Gyllenborg, was arrested and after being released he returned to Sweden. After this episode, the Swedish foreign ministry adopted different ciphers that Willes could not break easily. The royal decipherer continued to win over his opponents and slow down the Jacobites. With the help of his assistant Anthony Corbiere, Willes was able to track and decipher correspondence between Francis Atterbury, the Bishop of Rochester, and the Jacobites<sup>26</sup>. Another member of the government who suspected Atterbury of treason was Sir Robert Walpole, who became Prime Minister in 1721. Atterbury's treason was masked through the help of a double agent. The Scot Earl of Mar became a British double agent in 1722. The disillusioned Mar exchanged ciphered correspondence with Atterbury. The latter, unaware of Mar being a double agent, dictated his replies to George Kelly, these replies were then given to Mar, who handed them to Walpole's agents. On the 24th of August, Atterbury was arrested and sent to the Tower of London, where he remained for several months<sup>27</sup>. The deciphering was not only popular in

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<sup>24</sup>D.Szechi, (1984), *Jacobitism and Tory Politics, 1710-14* PP 41-54. J.Donalds Publishers, Edinburgh.

<sup>25</sup>P.S Fritzs, (1973), *The Anti-Jacobite Intelligence System of the English Ministers, 1715-1745*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>26</sup> P.S Fritzs, (1973), *The Anti-Jacobite Intelligence System of the English Ministers, 1715-1745*. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>27</sup> P.S.Fritz, (1975), *The English Ministers and Jacobitism between the rebellions of 1715 and 1745*. PP 81-108. University of Toronto Press.

England, but all over Europe the deciphering branch was highly developed and ready to be surpassed by the black chamber in the mid-1700s. The existence of these “Black Cabinets” allowed States to have well-detailed intelligence and to organise their secret services. The famous French Black Chamber was surpassed by the Austrian Black Chamber<sup>28</sup>. By the 1720s, the Austrian black chamber was able to decipher French codes easily. Without any doubt, the Austrian Black chamber was extremely successful in decrypting French diplomats' intelligence. Important figures inside the Austrian black chamber were also the translators that worked alongside the decipherers. In the aftermath of the War for Austrian succession, French decrypts were essential during the restoration. The Austrian Diplomat Count Kaunitz forged an alliance with France against Prussia and was sent Intelligence from decrypted French diplomatic despatches during his service as ambassador to France from 1750 to 1752<sup>29</sup>. In Paris, Kaunitz was also supplied with decrypted British information from the Duke of Newcastle. In 1751 France believed that there was going to be a war in Europe soon, and the French ministers were suspicious of Britain, Russia, and the Habsburg empire. During the first half of 1751, the Austrian black chamber was able to decrypt eighteen French ciphers. Kaunitz represented a master of intelligence and his talents were well spent in the period in which he found himself. He became a prominent figure in Habsburg's foreign policy mainly because he was backed up by French intelligence. He concluded an alliance with France through the Treaties of Versailles in 1756 and 1757<sup>30</sup>. In the meantime, the Seven Years War was at Europe's doorstep.

#### **1.4 The faces of the undercover trade.**

Alongside codebreakers, spies were important figures at the service of Intelligence. The term spy, in the French Ancien Regime, was used to describe enemy agents. In 1796, there was the first use of the term “espionage”, written in French dictionaries<sup>31</sup>. The employment of undercover agents was so common that many famous spies are still known today. Some of these undercover agents ended their lives in poverty while others died rich and were showered with praise. Nathaniel Hooke is known as one of the most successful spies of the 18th century

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<sup>28</sup> C. Andrew (2018), *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* P.277. Yale University Press

<sup>29</sup> J.W. McGill, *The roots of policy: Kaunitz in Vienna and Versailles, 1749-1753. The University of Chicago Press.*

<sup>30</sup> *Correspondance secrète entre le comte A.-W. Kaunitz-Rietberg, ambassadeur impérial à Paris, et le baron Ignace de Koch, secrétaire de l'impératrice MarieThérèse, 1750-1752* by Hanns Schlitter. From Jstor: [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40940111.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A75051d4be308941f7336ec639bdc7480&ab\\_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40940111.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A75051d4be308941f7336ec639bdc7480&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1)

<sup>31</sup> Online Etymology Dictionary: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/espionage>

in France. Hooke was at the service of different masters and represents the archetype of the professional spy-cum-secret agent. He was able to become rich through espionage and unlike many other agents, he was praised and rewarded for his services<sup>32</sup>. On the 11th of March 1708, an invasion fleet anchored in the Firth of Forth. The intention was to strike a blow to England and put the exiled James Stuart VIII on the throne. The operation failed since a Royal Navy squadron was just right behind the French fleet. The plotter of the operation was the secret agent Nathaniel Hooke<sup>33</sup>. Even though the mission failed, Hooke's story illustrates how a good agent can use an unsuccessful story to better his career. Born in 1664 in Dublin, Hooke was an important participant in the Monmouth rebellion of 1685. During the rebellion, Hooke was already serving as an undercover agent instead of a soldier. After the rebellion in 1688, Hooke was pardoned, became a Catholic, and royal messenger for King James II and VII. After the abdication of the king, He joined Viscount Dundee in Scotland. The agent was captured and held at the Tower of London in 1689. After his release, he went to his motherland Ireland and became a Jacobite soldier. During this period, he undertook a secret mission in England acting as a courier. A greater turn in his life occurred in 1702 when after befriending the Duke of Marlborough, he was given command of the Sparre regiment and fought alongside the French army in the War for the Spanish succession<sup>34</sup>. In 1708 he was appointed Brigadier-General of the French army and plotted the Restoration of James Stuart on the throne of England. After the failed rebellion, Hooke was praised for his professionalism and the French recognized him and his heirs as nobles. Because of his genius behind a plan that would have benefitted France, in 1712 Louis XIV awarded him a pension of 1500 livres for his services. By 1712, He was a professional secret agent, crucial for France's contacts with Scotland. This was the first time that an undercover agent became popular and admired for his services.

A well-known 18th-century spy was the Spanish cover agent Melchor Rafael De Macanaz. Born in Murcia in 1670, De Macanaz is an example of loyalty to one's country. In the crisis of the war of the Spanish succession, Macanaz was King Philip V's secret agent. He was Philip V's most valuable agent, especially for his activities as an agent in North Western Europe,

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<sup>32</sup>T.Byrne, (2006), *From Irish Whig Rebel to Bourbon Diplomat: The life and career of Nathaniel Hooke (1664-1738)*. PP 349-358. Thesis for the degree of PhD Department of History National University of Ireland Maynooth.

<sup>33</sup> T.Byrne, (2006), *From Irish Whig Rebel to Bourbon Diplomat: The life and career of Nathaniel Hooke (1664-1738)*. PP 315-322. Thesis for the degree of PhD Department of History National University of Ireland Maynooth.

<sup>34</sup> J. Rule (1992), *Gathering Intelligence in the Age of Louis XIV*, P. 738. Jstor, Taylor & Francis, Ltd. [https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40107117.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab86d9d656f3a0360667b017a2b5c1a4f&ab\\_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1](https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40107117.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Ab86d9d656f3a0360667b017a2b5c1a4f&ab_segments=&origin=&acceptTC=1)

where he worked as the Spanish ambassador<sup>35</sup>. When the sovereign died in 1746, Macanaz became an able negotiator until He was accused of compromising Spain's safety and went to jail until 1760. Macanaz died a few months after his release. Many agents acquired their fame for other reasons, and their involvement in espionage was discovered centuries later. Amongst these types of agents, there was Giacomo Casanova. Nowadays, Casanova is mainly known as a famous womaniser and not as a spy. Casanova used to be a spy for the Venetian Republic. The Republic was not a stranger to espionage, the illustrious Council of Ten had a meticulously structured channel of the information under its command<sup>36</sup>. The famous lover born in Venice in 1725, worked as an agent not only in Venice but in France as well. In 1757, the French Secretary of State commissioned him to travel incognito to Dunkirk, where he had to gather important military information<sup>37</sup>. In 1780, back in Venice, he worked for the Inquisition and became their most trusted confidante. Casanova's fame with influential Venetian families was extremely useful for the Inquisition. Casanova was a successful spy especially because of his personality. His extravagance and flamboyant personality disguised his talent as an undercover agent. The Venetian lover was not the only extravagant man to become a spy. In 1774, the gambler and eccentric Charles Thévenau De Morande became a spy in London for king Louis XV. At the dawn of the American Revolution, De Morande controlled British docks, reporting information on armaments, supplies, and new navigation practices. The French spy was able to organise a shipment of guns to the American rebels<sup>38</sup>. The gambler spy was helped by his British wife Eliza, who reported to him conversations she held with the wives of some British officers. He was suspected of espionage in 1776, but there was not enough evidence to incriminate him. The growing tension in the British colonies, encouraged France to employ more spies; After the 7 Years' War, the French knew that only a rebellion in America would have brought England to weakness. The Duke of Choiseul, Louis XV's Anglophobe minister, used spies to monitor the American opposition to British rule.

### **1.5 The Seven Years' War as a training field for the American Spymaster.**

Around the world, from 1756 to 1799, States were occupied with wars and revolutions and it was in these years of constant change that spies became essential. Louis XV of France, used

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<sup>35</sup> H.Kamen, (1965), *Melchor de Macanaz and the Foundations of Bourbon Power in Spain*. PP 699-716. Oxford University Press.

<sup>36</sup>P.Preto, (2016), *I Servizi Segreti Di Venezia*. Introduzione, PP 4-12. Il Saggiatore, Milano.

<sup>37</sup> D.Parker, (2002), *Casanova*. PP 197-198. Stroud, Sutton.

<sup>38</sup> The official website for BBC History Magazine and BBC History Revealed (2010), Charles Thévenau de Morande: an 18th-century French spy in London, History Extra:

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/georgian/18th-century-espionage-the-french-spy-in-london/>

his secret department the Secret Du Roi for internal threats, especially to monitor Frenchmen who mocked his authority. The Secret Du Roi became more active during the Seven Years' War. A great enthusiast of spies in this period was Frederick II of Prussia, also known as "The Great"<sup>39</sup>. The War of Austrian Succession boosted his interest and passion for espionage. Frederick II's instructions to his commanders always referred to the importance of good intelligence, and how the latter could be used in times of crisis. The Prussian king believed that there were four categories of spies<sup>40</sup>: The Common People, Double Agents, Spies obliged to engage in the trade, and Diplomats. Common people were able to reveal the enemy's current location, but these types of spies were not very useful. Double Agents instead were crucial to understanding the enemy's plans. Frederick The Great used double agents to give false information to the enemy and to know the opponents' next steps. The third type involved people who were almost obliged or manipulated into joining the trade. The use of blackmail was also considered and understood in times of need.

*"If one has no other means in hostile territory to procure news of the enemy, there remains only one option, even though it is harsh and cruel. You take a well-off citizen, who has house and home, wife and children, and you give him a clever man, whom you disguise as a servant, but who must understand the local language. The citizen must take him along as a coachman and go into the enemy camp, under the pretext of complaining about some injustice he has suffered. At the same time, you threaten him: if he does not bring back your man after a sufficient time in the enemy camp, then his wife and children will be beaten and his house will be ransacked and set on fire. I had to use this method when we were in the camp at Chlum, and I was successful with it<sup>41</sup>."*

The last category instead was represented by the diplomats or influential characters. An example of a valuable diplomat spy at the brink of the Years' Years War, was François de Bussy, agent in the Foreign Ministry of Saxony. The agent warned Prussia of a planned attack on the country from Catherine the Great, Louis XV, and Maria Theresa of Habsburg. Thanks to this information, Prussia decided to strike first. De Bussy worked for Britain, Prussia's ally in the war. Thanks to De Bussy's intelligence, the British were able to monitor their enemies

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<sup>39</sup> S.Genêt, (2013), *Les Espions des lumières: Actions secrètes et espionnage militaire sous Louis XV*. PP 7-9. Éditions du Septentrion.

<sup>40</sup>Vol. 6 (1913): *Militärische Schriften*. pp38–40. Berlin: Hobbing.

<sup>41</sup> Vol. 6 (1913): *Militärische Schriften*. pp38–40. Berlin: Hobbing.

as well as their allies<sup>42</sup>. The British Cabinet easily broke all of Frederick's codes and was able to acquire information through the use of ministers like De Bussy. At the eve of this influential war, intelligence was reconsidered and seen as essential in the conflict. Britain's intelligence improved a lot during the war, especially due to the excellent channel of information of the Empire. Britain's War Minister, William Pitt (The Elder), through the interception of correspondences between the Spanish ambassadors in London and Paris, acquired knowledge of the end of the Franco-Spanish alliance<sup>43</sup>. Furthermore, the Minister was an avid reader of diplomatic interceptions. When Pitt resigned, foreign policy went into the hands of Lord Bute. Bute was the mentor of the new monarch, George III. As Secretary of State, before becoming Prime Minister, Bute drew the attention of the new king to the importance of intercepted correspondence. As Prime Minister, through the Treaty of Paris in 1763, Bute concluded peace with France and Spain. With the Treaty, Britain acquired once again its dominance overseas, outshining France's prestige at the international level<sup>44</sup>. The defeat in the Seven Years' War, convinced France to aid the American revolutionaries.

It was during the Seven Years' War that George Washington had his first encounter with espionage. The first President of the United States of America is not only considered the founding father of the country, but also the founding father of Intelligence. His first acquaintance with the underground business was in 1753. In that year the governor of Virginia, Robert Dinwiddie sent the future president to the Ohio territory. His task was to deliver a letter and return with a response, in the message Dinwiddie urged the French to leave the region and ordered them to cease their harassment of English traders<sup>45</sup>. In the meantime, Washington had to gather intelligence regarding a possible invasion of British territory. His main objective was to observe and report French military facilities and forces located in the Ohio territory and absorb information on France's plans for the territory. During this expedition, Washington wrote a journal in which he took note of every single detail. The journal of Major George Washington was well received and published not only in Williamsburg but also in London<sup>46</sup>. Washington's journal was used to inform the population of the growing French threat in the

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<sup>42</sup> C. Andrew (2018), *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* P.287. Yale University Press

<sup>43</sup> C. Andrew (2018), *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* P.289. Yale University Press

<sup>44</sup> A.Roberts, (2021), *George III: The Life and Reign of Britain's Most Misunderstood Monarch*. PP 99-102. Penguin Books.

<sup>45</sup>W.R.Haeefe, (1989), *General George Washington Espionage Chief*. PP 22-27. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>46</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon, *Ten Facts About George Washington and the French and Indian War*: <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/french-indian-war/ten-facts-about-george-washington-and-the-french-indian-war/>

Ohio Valley. Annotation is one of the most important skills of an agent, this skill was essential for the first American spy ring of the Revolution. Washington obtained his first information in November 1753 from four French deserters. The four deserters informed Washington of the presence of French Forts alongside the Mississippi River, on Lake Erie and French Creek. Three days later, he learned about France aiming at war against England, plus the relocation of soldiers down the rivers of the Ohio territory. The Virginian arrived at Indian Town on the 4th of December, where he presented his letter to a French officer. In pure European fashion, the officers invited him to dine with them, and Washington was able to gather important information. After drinking heavily, the French spoke openly of their plans for the Ohio territory. During the dinner, Washington used his elicitation skills for the first time, realising how important it was to keep the conversation flowing without giving away other information<sup>47</sup>. During the American Revolution, Washington's spies were encouraged by the General to infiltrate themselves in the enemy's camp and extrapolate important data while having a normal conversation. Washington's elicitation skills did not come from training, but he made use of the education he received during his life. These rules all came from a book called "*The Young Man's Companion*" describing basic rules of conduct. Some of these rules applied to elicitation as well, such as:

*Rule 86: "In a dispute, don't overwhelm your opponent so they cannot clearly state their position."*

*Rule 105: "Avoid showing anger."*<sup>48</sup>

By following these, and other rules, Washington was able to encourage the French officers to share their opinions and plans. He was able to report the precise number of troops and learned about the existence of another fort near Montréal. To Dinwiddie, He reported that the outpost located in Venango was used to block English settlers that entered the area, furthermore Washington counted 600 to 700 troops holding four forts. One fort near French Creek, a second on Lake Erie, a third at Lake Erie falls, and a last on Lake Ontario. Between Montréal and the third fort, Washington discovered three outposts guarding the supply route<sup>49</sup>. After receiving such intelligence, Dinwiddie appointed Washington Lieutenant Colonel and put troops under Washington's command. 150 troops left Alexandria, Virginia for the Ohio territory. By late May, the 22 years old Colonel reached Great Meadows and built a defensive stockade that he

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<sup>47</sup> J.C.Fitzpatrick, (1925), *The Diaries of George Washington 1748-1799*. PP 17-26. Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>48</sup> J.C.Fitzpatrick, (1925), *The Diaries of George Washington 1748-1799*. PP 17-26. Houghton Mifflin Company.

<sup>49</sup> J.C.Fitzpatrick, (1925), *The Diaries of George Washington 1748-1799*. PP 55-56. Houghton Mifflin Company.

named Fort Necessity<sup>50</sup>. After receiving reports from Indian scouts, he led his troops against a small party of French soldiers. The operation was successful. The Colonel used Indian scouts to gain data on his enemies. These scouts were able to track the French's position alongside French deserters<sup>51</sup>. In June 1754, nine deserters were collected by a small force. In this case, Washington used an important intelligence tactic to influence French soldiers. After debriefing the deserters, he made up a propaganda story, the propaganda was styled as a letter from the French deserters to their former fellow soldiers. In the letter, they described the benefits of joining the British side and deserting the French one<sup>52</sup>. False propaganda, in the style of letters and newspapers, was highly used in New York and Philadelphia during the revolutionary war. The second example of Washington's tendencies to intelligence comes from his meetings with the Indian tribes of the region. These meetings aimed to gain the Indians' help and loyalty in the fight against the French. Washington was not the only one using Native American tribes, the French sent their Native American spies to the meetings, to gather military information. In this case, the Colonel used another useful intelligence tactic, disinformation. Spreading false reports on supplies and locations had a great influence on the enemy's tactics. During one of the meetings, held on the 21st of June, Washington wrote in his journal about the French spies and the false information he gave them. Even though he engaged in intelligence actions, Washington was never well informed on the enemy's actions. Military speaking his actions were not successful, and his military tactics were not adequate. The Franco-Indian proved to be essential for the future General. Historians like Fred Anderson, believe that the Seven Years' War was essential for Washington's growth as a military officer. At the end of the war, he understood the importance of intelligence beyond simple scouting. His skills in Elicitation, Propaganda, and Deception helped him during the war for independence. Proof of his great understanding of intelligence can be seen in a letter that Washington sent to the Governor of Pennsylvania, Robert Hunter Morris, in 1756;

*“There is nothing more necessary than good intelligence to frustrate a designing enemy, & nothing that requires greater pains to obtain<sup>53</sup>.”*

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<sup>50</sup> W.R.Haeefe, (1989), *General George Washington Espionage Chief*. PP 22-27. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>51</sup> W.R.Haeefe, (1989), *General George Washington Espionage Chief*. PP 22-27. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>52</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.31, Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

<sup>53</sup> Letter from George Washington to Robert Hunter Morris. Governour of Pennsylvania, January 1 1756. Founders Online: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/02-02-02-0255>



## 1.6 Franklin's game.

The American Revolution brought ferment in Europe as well, and from the beginning to the end of the war, Paris was the perfect battlefield for many spies. As a matter of fact, in the years of the American Revolution, Paris attracted more spies than any other European country. European rivalries played an important role in the American Revolution, especially the historical rivalry between France and Britain. European support, mostly French and Spanish, was crucial. In late December 1775 in Philadelphia, one year before Franklin's arrival in France, Julien-Alexandre de Bonvouloir began his operation<sup>54</sup>. De Bonvouloir was an agent of the French Foreign Ministry acting as a Fleming merchant. De Bonvouloir approached Franklin through a friend to inquire about the seriousness of the Colonies' dispute with Britain. Franklin introduced him to some members of the Committee of Secret Correspondence and during these secret meetings, the French agent was informed that the Continental Congress was going to declare independence soon<sup>55</sup>. De Bonvouloir was asked if the Colonies had France's support and hinted that France was surely going to support American independence. After these fruitful conversations, supported by contacts with a French agent in London and a Colonial lawyer, the committee sent Silas Deane to Paris. Deane arrived in Paris during the spring of 1776, disguised as a merchant<sup>56</sup>. In July Deane began his negotiation to obtain military supplies with the French Foreign Minister Vergennes. Vergennes arranged the meeting between Deane and Louis XVI's secret agent Beaumarchais<sup>57</sup>. The French agent was instructed to work with Deane to obtain military supplies to America in exchange for agricultural products. To carry out this plan, Beaumarchais established the Proprietary Company "Hortalez & Company" directed by the imaginary Roderigue Hortalez. Through Hortalez & Company, military supplies were shipped to the Colonies. By using this counterfeit company, Beaumarchais laundered French and Spanish government financing for military purchases. The agent financed the fictitious Hortalez with a one-million-livre loan from the French government in June 1776. Two months later, he received a million from the Spanish government. Finally, he obtained another million from French merchant investors that wanted to purchase American agricultural products<sup>58</sup>. Under the name of Durand, Beaumarchais used a hotel in Paris as the company headquarters.

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<sup>54</sup>C.Van Doren, (1938), *Benjamin Franklin*, PP 538-539. Penguin Books.

<sup>55</sup> C.Van Doren, (1938), *Benjamin Franklin*, P 539. Penguin Books.

<sup>56</sup> G.L.Clark, (1913), *Silas Deane*. PP 38-51. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

<sup>57</sup> G.L.Clark, (1913), *Silas Deane*. PP 52-72. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

<sup>58</sup> T.Spiegel, (2021), *The Franco-American Revolution Part 1*. Consulted at the Library of Congress. Can be found online at: <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2021/06/the-franco-american-revolution-part-1/>

By the end of 1776 the secret agent collected 200 field pieces, 300.000 muskets, 100 tons of gunpowder, 3000 tents, ammunition and uniforms<sup>59</sup>. In April 1777, the first Hortalez vessel arrived in Portsmouth carrying all the supplies. This shipment proved to be vital during the autumn of the same year against the British forces who were led by Gen. Burgoyne. In the meantime, at the end of 1776, Franklin arrived in France. Franklin's arrival was of utmost importance for the solidification of the American and French alliance.

The 70 years old Benjamin Franklin, arrived in France in December 1776 as the principal commissioner of the Continental Congress. Already known as a man of letters and scientist, the American received a warm welcome. Through his clothes and manners, Franklin impersonated the virtues of the New World and fascinated the French court. He wore homespun clothes and a long Fur Cap that became his signature. The CIA, in 1997, listed Franklin as a founding father of American intelligence, able to charm and influence the French court<sup>60</sup>. From the moment he set foot in France, the founding father became a secret agent occupied with a covert propaganda campaign against the British. Franklin's favourite targets were the Hessian soldiers employed by the British crown. He published a fake letter to the commander of the Hessian mercenaries, impersonating a German Count who was promised a bounty for every killed American. The "Count" wrote that the British did not honour their promise and never paid the soldiers<sup>61</sup>. In 1782, Franklin forged a copy of a Boston newspaper, including advertisements and local news. In the forged paper Franklin wrote that the British Royal Governor of Canada, paid his Indian allies for each American scalp provided. The scalps, Franklin wrote, were of women and children.<sup>62</sup>

While successful in his propaganda Franklin did not realise how a British agent was playing him. His chief assistant, the Massachusetts-born Edward Bancroft was in fact a spy. Bancroft arrived in France alongside Silas Dane and was given an important role in the American-French negotiations. Usually sent by Franklin and Dane in London for intelligence missions, Bancroft

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<sup>59</sup> T.Spiegel, (2021), *The Franco-American Revolution Part 1*. Consulted at the Library of Congress. Can be found online at: <https://blogs.loc.gov/international-collections/2021/06/the-franco-american-revolution-part-1/>

<sup>60</sup> P.K.Rose, *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*. CIA.GOV. <https://www.cia.gov/static/4c28451b90165b446ac948e3dd47c972/The-Founding-Fathers-of-American-Intelligence-.pdf>

<sup>61</sup> P.K.Rose, *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*. CIA.GOV. <https://www.cia.gov/static/4c28451b90165b446ac948e3dd47c972/The-Founding-Fathers-of-American-Intelligence-.pdf>

<sup>62</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.123, Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

was arrested in 1777. What the Americans did not know was that Bancroft was a double agent and his imprisonment was used only to strengthen his cover, hence the arrest was staged<sup>63</sup>. Bancroft was recruited by Paul Wentworth, who was running an undercover channel of information in France. The terms of agreement for Bancroft's involvement as a British agent can be found in a letter, December 1776, from Wentworth to the undersecretary of state in the Northern Department of the British Foreign Ministry, William Eden. Eden was also responsible for intelligence coordination.

*“Dr. Edwards [Bancroft's cover name] engages to correspond with Mr. Wentworth and to communicate to him, whatever may come to his knowledge on the following subjects. The progress of the Treaty with France and of the assistance expected, or commerce carried on in any of the ports of that kingdom. The same with Spain, and of every other court in Europe. The agents in the foreign islands in America, and the means of carrying on the commerce with the northern colonies. The means of obtaining credit effects and money; and the channels and agents used to supply them; the secret moves about the courts of France and Spain, and the Congress agents, and tracing the lives from one to the other. Franklin and Deane's correspondence with Congress, and their agents; and the secret, as well as the ostensible letters from the Congress to them. Copies of any transactions, committed to papers, and an exact account of all intercourse and the subject matter treated of between the courts of Versailles and Madrid, and the agents from Congress. Subjects to be communicated to Lord Stormont. Names of the two “Carolina ships, masters both English and French, descriptions of the ships and cargoes; the time of sailing, and the port bound to. The same circumstances representing all equipment in any port in Europe together with the names of the agents employed. The intelligence that may arrive from America, the captures made by their privateers, and the instruction they received from the deputies. How the captures are disposed.”<sup>64</sup>*

Bancroft's compensation was a yearly salary of 500£, recruitment bonus of 400£ and a yearly pension of 200£. Amongst Bancroft's intelligence reports of French ships' movements across the Atlantic, there was also a detailed description regarding the departure of the 20 years old

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<sup>63</sup> T.J.Schaeper, (2011), *Edward Bancroft*. PP 83-106. Yale University Press.

<sup>64</sup> S.F.Bemis, (1924), *British Secret Service and the French-American alliance*. PP 474-495. Oxford University Press on behalf of the American Historical Association.

Marquis De Lafayette. The ship, paid by Lafayette himself, was headed directly to Port Royal, South Carolina. Lafayette regarded Bancroft as a friend and told him of his plans, and of his desire to fight for America's independence. Thankfully, the Royal Navy was not able to use Bancroft's information and intercept Lafayette's expedition<sup>65</sup>. If the Royal Navy had been able to use that information, America would have been deprived of one of its greatest heroes. The Marquis De Lafayette became a hero of the American and French Revolutions, and his contribution to the American cause is still celebrated today. Lafayette's friendship with George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and Thomas Jefferson was proof of the deep bond between France and the United States. Bancroft proved to be an important agent for the British, once a week he left messages written with secret ink, hidden in a tree.

In the meantime, the Franco-American treaties of February 1778 were highly facilitated by Franklin's influence. After the American victory at Saratoga, Wentworth offered a secret peace term to Franklin, terms that he did not want to accept since they did not agree on America's independence. In order to solicit the French to agree to an alliance, Franklin decided to feed France's fears that he was going to accept the terms. Furthermore, he encouraged press articles reporting the presence of British envoys and the possibilities of an agreement between America and Britain. He sent a distorted account of his meeting with Wentworth to the French Foreign Ministry, in which Franklin stated that he was favourable to the terms offered by the British. Through a technique called "Perception Management", Franklin was able to reach his aim and gain France's support<sup>66</sup>.

Franklin then proceeded with the outline of the treaties that were signed on the 6th of February 1778.

Apart from his influence in France, Franklin also had important contacts in Britain. In the enemy country, Franklin was in contact with influential Whigs. These contacts were all old acquaintances from his days in London as a colonial agent in 1757. Whigs shared American views and were favourable to American independence. Since his first days in Paris, Franklin never broke his communication with these contacts. Correspondences were conducted through

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<sup>65</sup> C. Andrew (2018), *The Secret World: A History of Intelligence* P.297. Yale University Press

<sup>66</sup> P.K.Rose, *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*. CIA.GOV.  
<https://www.cia.gov/static/4c28451b90165b446ac948e3dd47c972/The-Founding-Fathers-of-American-Intelligence-.pdf>

aliases and mail drops at the addresses of other American sympathisers in Britain. Amongst the most important Whig personalities there were Lord William Petty Fitzmaurice Shelburne, and Lord Charles Pratt Camden. Lord Shelburne was a politician with close ties to the king. Lord Camden instead was a former lord chancellor<sup>67</sup>. After the Franco-American alliance was confirmed, Franklin sent Jonathan Austin, a trusted agent, to stay with Lord Shelburne. Austin used Shelburne's access to Parliament to lobby for the American cause<sup>68</sup>. From his contact in London, Franklin obtained information on Gen. Cornwallis reports to the British government. One of the most important pieces of information received in 1778, was Cornwallis' opinion that the conquest of the Colonies was impossible.

Following the agreements between France and America, there was an actual breach in diplomatic relations between France and Britain. With the closure of the British embassy in France in 1778, Bancroft's intelligence activities became more difficult. Until the Netherlands' entrance in the conflict in 1780, Bancroft communicated with Wentworth through the United Provinces. After 1780, his messages were taken by small boats at night<sup>69</sup>.

Benjamin Franklin's ability to use his charm and influence in France was a result of his hard work in public relations and political influence. From his first to his last day in France, he presented himself as the enlightened American that dreamed of independence from the cruel British monarch.

## **2. America's first secret agents: The Culper Ring.**

### **2.1 New York is lost!**

1776 is one of the most important dates in American history. On the 4th of July the Declaration of Independence declared that all men were created equal, and stated that Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness were the founding ideals of the new nation. The declaration was signed on the 2nd of August and around the 13 States people echoed Thomas Jefferson's words. But 1776 was also catastrophic for The Continental army. While people celebrated independence in Philadelphia, New York became Loyalist, and not by choice. The Battle of Long Island on

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<sup>67</sup> C. Van Doren, (1938), *Benjamin Franklin*, P 577. Penguin Books.

<sup>68</sup> C. Van Doren, (1938), *Benjamin Franklin*, P 597. Penguin Books

<sup>69</sup> T.J.Schaeper, (2011), *Edward Bancroft*. P 159. Yale University Press.

the 27 of August became a dark day, George Washington had lost the battle against the British forces. It was a hard blow and now the Continental Army retreated north, to Manhattan's Harlem Heights. But alas, the most difficult part was deciding the fate of New York whose importance derived especially from its position. The port was essential for trade and observation of foreign fleets. Now the Americans found themselves without their most valuable port and were quite puzzled on the destiny of the city. The riddle was to leave it in British hands or destroy it. General Nathaniel Greene, one of Washington's most trusted officers, believed that burning the city was the right decision. In a letter to Washington on the 5th of September, Greene stated that burning New York would have deprived the enemy of a strategic location and strong market. In the letter, Greene continued by claiming that if the British took possession of New York, it would have been almost impossible to retake the city without a strong navy.

*I would burn the City & suburbs—and that for the following Reasons—If the Enemy gets possession of the City, we never can Recover the Possession, without a superior Naval force to theirs. It will deprive the Enemy of An Opportunity of Barracking their whole Army together which if they could do would be a very great security. It will deprive them of a general Market. the price of things would prove a temptation to our people to supply them for the sake of the gain, in direct violation of the Laws of their Country. All these Advantages would Result from the destruction of the City. And not one benefit can arise to us from its preservation that I can conceive off. If the City once gets into the Enemies hands, it will be at their mercy either to save or destroy it, after they have made what use of it they think proper<sup>70</sup>.*

Greene was completely aware of how harsh and extreme his decision was. He apologised and excused himself by saying that leaving New York in the British's hands would have been a great disadvantage for the Americans.

At hearing of Greene and other Officers' plan, the Convention of the State of New York begged Washington to reconsider, burning the city would have reduced to misery the entire population. The Commander agreed with the Convention, but decided to pass the burden of the final word to Congress. From Philadelphia the answer came promptly, burning the city would have been

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<sup>70</sup> Gen. Greene to Washington, 5th September 1776.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-06-02-0180>

an atrocious mistake. This time New York was saved from the flames but its salvation from fire did not last long<sup>71</sup>. In the night between the 20th and the 21st of September near White Hall Street, a wooden building caught fire. The building was close to the “Fighting Cocks Tavern”, frequented by British soldiers. The fire rapidly expanded from White Hall street to the surrounding houses and stores. The British blamed the Americans for the fire and arrested many patriots. Historians have never been able to find out who started the fire.

After receiving Congress’ response, the only option was abandoning the city. The evacuation of New York lasted nine days, from the 7th to the 15th of September. It was during these days of retreat that Washington desperately needed eyes and ears in the city. It is said that every cloud has a silver lining and in Washington's case it proved to be true. Undoubtedly tragic, the loss of New York opened the doors of intelligence. By losing the city, the General decided to remove the dust from what he learned during the Seven Years’ War and put it into practice once again. His experience with the Franco-Indian war made him aware of the importance of good intelligence and Washington always required his agents to send timely and precise intelligence. Precision was what the Commander in Chief required from his agents, especially with the Culper Ring two years after leaving the city. Espionage before the loss of New York was almost non-existent, it was considered a dishonest affair who did not bring any fortune, but it was through undercover agents and espionage that victory was achieved. But even if he was aware of how important intelligence was, Washington struggled without a structured network that helped him. The main problem was that there was a lack of agents or soldiers that agreed to spy on the enemy. He needed crucial details regarding the British army, their movements and ammunition. But the lack of interest in soldiers and the scarce information he had been able to receive, prompted Washington to turn to another veteran of the Seven Years’ War acquainted with intelligence. On August 12th 1776, Washington gave Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Knowlton command of the Knowlton’s Rangers. Even though the Rangers had a short life of three months, they were the first elite spy organisation and were tasked to discover information on the British location and their movements. The establishment of the Knowlton’s Rangers signed the birth of Military Intelligence. The modern seal of the Army’s intelligence services is “1776” in honour of the Rangers<sup>72</sup>. A veteran of the Franco-Indian War, Washington chose Knowlton not only because of his experience as a scout during the Seven Years War, but

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<sup>71</sup> B. Carp, (2006), The night the Yankees burned Broadway, University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>72</sup> DIA Public Affairs, (2014). Knowlton’s Rangers: But one life to give. Defense Intelligence Agency. <https://www.dia.mil/News-Features/Articles/Article-View/Article/566972/knowltons-rangers-but-one-life-to-give/>

especially because of the Colonel's exploits at the Battle of Breed's Hill (Bunker Hill) on the 16th of June 1775. During the battle he was able to calculate in which ways and through what means General Howe would attack the Rebels. Through his calculations, Knowlton planted obstacles that succeeded in slowing down the British advance, allowing the Americans to survive. At the end of the battle English casualties were over 1000, against the 449 of the Americans. Knowlton's company only lost three men. After his exploits in the field, he was given command of a group of soldiers that later became Knowlton's Rangers. The rangers, directed by Washington, provided the Commander in chief information about the enemy. Knowlton's career was brilliant but brief, the Colonel died on the 16th of September at the Battle of Harlem Heights.

Few days before the 15th of September, Washington confessed to his fellow veteran that he was in dire need of intelligence. The Commander asked Knowlton to recruit a few spies between his rangers in order to retrieve information on the enemy<sup>73</sup>. Amongst the Rangers, the offer caught the interest of the commander of one of the unit's four companies, a 21 years old Captain from Connecticut, nowadays remembered as a spy and martyr of the revolution, Nathan Hale.

## **2.2 The White Devil's trap.**

In the memory of many scholars and historians, Nathan Hale is the first American spy to be executed. Hale's aspect is not known, wrapped between mystery and legend. The statue that represents him at the CIA headquarters, represents him as noble and resolved. Born in Coventry, Connecticut in 1755, Hale attended Yale in 1769 and graduated in 1773 to become a school teacher<sup>74</sup>. The college years proved to be fundamental for Hale's ideals of freedom and liberty. His strong sentiments for liberty were also heightened by his friendship with Benjamin Tallmadge, Washington's future spymaster and lead of the Culper Ring. The two patriots shared a deep bond and continuously shared correspondence, they encouraged each other to join the American cause<sup>75</sup>. On April 19th 1775, the Battles of Lexington and Concord

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<sup>73</sup> C. Coffin, (1845), *Lives and Services of Major General John Thomas, Colonel Thomas Knowlton, Colonel Alexander Scammell, and Major General Henry Dearborn*. P. 73-75. Egbert, Hovert and King, New York.

<sup>74</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.145-146, Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC

<sup>75</sup> National Military Intelligence Foundation (2018), *George Washington's Application of Denial and Deception Operations Supported by a Multifaceted Mix of Defensive and Offensive Counterintelligence Measures*. P.52. Counter Intelligence and the Insider Threat.



made the two friends realise that they had to take an active part in the Revolution. A year before the Declaration of Independence, 4th July 1775, Tallmadge wrote a letter to Hale where he described America as a flowing land that was holding up her arms and calling for help. Tallmadge continued by writing that they had to be ready to join the common cause<sup>76</sup>. When Knowlton requested a volunteer, Nathan Hale might have felt that that was his way to serve the cause so close to his heart. Spying was still seen as corrupt, dishonourable, and a path that led to an early grave. By accepting that mission, Hale sealed his fate and became the first American spy-martyr. The Hale mission was governed by chaos since the plotting of the mission itself. An intelligence-collection action discussed in public was not a wise choice. Furthermore, Hale's fellow officer Captain William Hull tried to persuade Hale to not accept the mission. Hull believed that Hale was not fit for the mission<sup>77</sup>. He was too frank, naive, open, and easy to deceive. Another mistake was discussing the mission with someone else, even a friend. As a matter of fact, he was a lousy spy and his lack of training made him easy to unmask. Nathan Hale can be described as the classic amateur spy. After making his final decision, Hale left on September 15th and went to Norwalk with sergeant Hempstead in order to secure a boat to reach Long Island. In Norwalk, Hale changed his clothes and dressed as a Dutch school teacher, here he made the mistake of bringing with him his school diploma with his real name on it. Hale could have used an alias in order not to give a false identity, but wanted to keep his real one in order to prove that he was a school teacher<sup>78</sup>. But the war did not only divide political thinkers, it divided families. Hale's family, for instance, was one of the many families divided between Loyalists and Patriots. Hale's cousin Samuel was a senior British officer operating in New York, and was aware of his cousin being in the Continental Army. There is no proof that Samuel played a role in identifying Hale as a spy, but historians have speculated that Samuel Hale might have played an important role in Hale's identification. With his diploma, Hale carried a letter from Washington directing captains of armed watch to take him where he had to go. The Captain chosen for the task was Hale's old friend from the 19th regiment, Captain Charles Pond. The trip to Long Island was a dangerous one, where smugglers and thieves used to scout for both sides. The Sloop used by Pond was the four-gunned Schuyler<sup>79</sup>. Even though

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<sup>76</sup> Johnston, Hale: Biography and Memorials P.216.

<sup>77</sup> I.W. Stuart - E.E. Hale, (1856), *Life of Captain Nathan Hale, the martyr-spy of the American Revolution*. PP 93-96. Hartford : F. A. Brown; New York, D. Appleton co.

<sup>78</sup> I.W. Stuart - E.E. Hale, (1856), *Life of Captain Nathan Hale, the martyr-spy of the American Revolution*. P 99.. Hartford : F. A. Brown; New York, D. Appleton co.

<sup>79</sup> Huntington Historical Society, *Nathan Hale (1755-1776), Hero of the American Revolution*.  
[https://huntingtonny.gov/filestorage/13747/99540/16499/Nathan\\_Hale.pdf](https://huntingtonny.gov/filestorage/13747/99540/16499/Nathan_Hale.pdf)

they were hidden by darkness, the Americans did not go totally unnoticed. The British Captain William Quarme, received the notice that on the 17th of September, Continental vessels had been spotted lurking during the previous day. Quarme, suspicious, sent armed boats to inspect the Huntington bay until 6pm, but did not catch the Schuyler. Hale departed on the sixteenth and waited on Huntington until night and was rushed ashore at 4:00am on the 17th of September. Once Hale was brought aground, Pond left before dawn. This time, the sloop was noticed by another vessel a few miles behind it, the Halifax. Aboard the British vessel, there were Robert Rogers and his rangers. Rogers must have been alerted of suspicious movements on the American side of Long Island but received the intelligence too late. On the Halifax he was able to see two men arriving on land, but only one leaving. Unable to confirm his theory that someone was being dropped on the shore, Rogers wasn't able to catch Hale.

Robert Rogers, was a ruthless frontiersman and soldier. His contemporaries referred to him as a man who was as subtle as a Devil. Born on the New Hampshire frontier, Rogers developed a fascination and admiration for the Native Americans<sup>80</sup>, learning their fighting techniques, medicine, and languages. His relationship with the various Indian tribes was so close that the Indians nicknamed him "Wobomagonda<sup>81</sup>", The White Devil. At the outbreak of the Seven Years' War, Rogers became Captain of the New Hampshire regiment and in 1756 he was given command of the Independent Company of Rangers. At the end of the war, he emigrated to London, but returned to the Colonies at the dawn of the Revolutionary War. Insolvent and in need of a job, Rogers decided to play both sides and see who paid him the most<sup>82</sup>. In November 1775, the British General Howe declared himself more than happy to have Rogers as one of his soldiers. The frontiersman then decided to test his luck on the American side in December. Washington, already aware of Rogers' character, confessed his suspicions to General Philip Schuyler, charged with the invasion of Quebec<sup>83</sup>. In February 1776, Rogers passed through the British lines again and met General Clinton, who referred to him as a welcome guest and was actually happy to add Rogers to his army, since He knew the Colonies and its terrain. His last attempt to extrapolate money from the Americans, was in the summer of 1776, a month before Washington's defeat in the Battle of Long Island. Once in Philadelphia, Washington

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<sup>80</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring.* P.19-20, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>81</sup> National Military Intelligence Foundation (2018), *George Washington's Application of Denial and Deception Operations Supported by a Multifaceted Mix of Defensive and Offensive Counterintelligence Measures.* P.53. Counter Intelligence and the Insider Threat

<sup>82</sup> R. Rust, "Robert Rogers". American History Central.

<https://www.americanhistorycentral.com/entries/robert-rogers-american-ranger/>

<sup>83</sup> J.R. Cuneo, (1959), *Robert Rogers of the Rangers.* PP 257-265. Oxford University Press, New York.

interrogated him and then imprisoned him. He was able to escape on the 8th of July, and finally picked his side, the British one. Howe gave him command of the Queen's Rangers, who soon became Rogers' Rangers<sup>84</sup>. The American Queen's Rangers, were a band of skilled but rough soldiers, often uneducated and prone to violence.

While Nathan Hale was crossing aboard the Schuyler, ready to follow his mission, Rogers and his rangers had the task to monitor the Americans' activities alongside Long Island and the Connecticut coast. The ranger was not able to catch the spy during the night of the 16th of September, but after years of experience he detected Hale's possible movements. He was aware that the rebels had to move along the coast to go back to their side. It did not take much for Rogers to identify the spy, Hale moved towards Brooklyn, raising doubts amongst people. He asked uncomfortable questions, gave too many details, took notes whenever he saw a British officer or ammunition. Furthermore, on his face He had a mark that was not proper for a school teacher. Due to a musket-flash accident, the spy had a severe burn on his right cheek that made his military career easily recognisable<sup>85</sup>. While Nathan Hale was leaving dangerous evidence of his true self around the city, Rogers followed him. The night of the 20th September, Hale booked a room in a tavern and was approached by Rogers at dinner. The frontiersman, after gaining the rebel's trust through small talk, put his plan into action. He confided to the young man that he was a Continental soldier "imprisoned" in an island of Loyalists. Rogers expressed his anger at being detained in such a place and confessed that he ardently believed in the American cause. Hale, moved by Rogers' words of friendship, believed he had found a friend and ally, fell into Rogers' trick, the young spy told him of his mission. This was another serious breach of security operation, the secrecy of the mission is always fundamental, even in front of apparent allies. With that confession, the young patriot signed his death sentence. After spending an evening with his executor, Hale agreed to meet Rogers for breakfast the next day. The following day, Hale met Rogers and his rangers, who were posing as rebels at a tavern. While they were having breakfast, other rangers surrounded the building, so that the spy could not escape. During the meal, the patriot explained the details of his plan, told them that he was an officer of the Continental Army, and that Washington himself sent him to collect intelligence<sup>86</sup>. Through those affirmations, Nathan Hale indirectly confessed to being a spy. Rogers had his confession in front of witnesses, and when he called for Hale's arrest, it is not

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<sup>84</sup> J.R. Cuneo, (1959), *Robert Rogers of the Rangers*. PP 257-265. Oxford University Press, New York.

<sup>85</sup> K. New England Historical Society. *The Capture of Nathan Hale, a hidden story surfaces after 224 years*. <https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/capture-nathan-hale-hidden-history/>

<sup>86</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring*. P.29, Bantam Dell, New York

hard to imagine the shock that the young rebels must have felt. Aghast, Nathan was seized and manacled. At first he denied being a spy, but it was pointless. He was taken to General Howe's headquarters in Manhattan where he was submitted to many controls. The British found Hale's notes, collection of British' troops movements and intelligence regarding armaments. These documents, his confession to Rogers in front of witnesses, and his civilian clothes were a confirmation of Nathan's status as a spy. In the morning of the 22nd of September, Nathan Hale was brought to the artillery park near the Dove Tavern. Wearing a white gown, with his hands tied behind his back, it is easy to imagine a young man shaking with terror. Behind the prisoners, British soldiers marched holding their muskets and carrying a cart with pine boards, used for his coffin. As the spy climbed the ladder and stood on the high branch, a grave was awaiting him on the other side of the tree. Before meeting his fate, the young martyr was granted the final last words. Nathan Hale's last words have always been a topic of discussion for historians. Many believed that his last words were Cato's "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country", but this was only a rumour spread by William Hull decades after Hale's death. The famous spy's last words, have been discovered thanks to a diary of the British Captain Frederick Mackenzie, "*He thought it the duty of every officer, to obey any orders given him by his commander in chief; and desired the spectators to be at all times prepared to meet death in whatever shape it might appear*"<sup>87</sup> The hanging was also recorded by Howe's aide who specified that the spy was hanged at 11.00am. Shockingly, Nathan Hale's family was not informed of their son and brother's death. On the 30th of September, Nathan's brother Enoch, heard rumours concerning his brother's sentence. One month later, at the end of October, Enoch Hale rode to White Plains to meet the officers of the nineteenth regiment, there they finally told him that Nathan was dead.

### **2.3 The spying game begins**

Hale's mission represented a bad example of how to conduct intelligence, a mission flawed since the beginning. Poor planning, and an amateur spy left to himself without many indications turned out to be a deadly mix. Despite the tragedy of Hale's story, it was not with his death that

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<sup>87</sup> The American Revolution Institute, *Statues of Nathan Hale*. Online source consulted after in person interview at the Society of the Cincinnati, Washington DC. .

<https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/masterpieces-in-detail/nathan-hale-statues/>

Gen. Washington realised that he needed a decent channel of information. New York was lost, and the Commander in Chief of the Continental Army desperately needed timely and accurate intelligence. One of the main problems was that Washington did not have fixed headquarters where people could find him or report to him. The majority of intelligence received came from soldiers sneaking between British and American lines. In January 1777, a restless Washington wrote to William Duer, a member of New York's Committee for detecting and defeating conspiracies<sup>88</sup>. William Duer is nowadays famous for his speculations during his time as First Assistant of the Secretary of the Treasury under Alexander Hamilton. Duer answered promptly and gave him the name of a man who he believed to be honourable, Nathaniel Sackett.

*I beg Leave to introduce to your Excellency's Acquaintance Mr Sacket, a member of the Convention of the State, a Man of Honor, and of firm Attachment to the American Cause.*

*He will communicate to your Excellency some Measures taken by him, and myself which if properly prosecuted may be of infinite Utility to the present military Operations—I have therefore recommended it to him to wait on you in person in hopes that some Sysematical Plan may be adopted, and prosecuted for facilitating your Manoeuvres against the British army.*

*To say more in a Letter, might be imprudent; I shall therefore content myself with observing that Mr Sacket is (As I know by experience) a Person of Intrigue, and Secrecy well calculated to prosecute such Measures as you shall think conducive to give Success to your generous Exertions in the Cause of America.*

Nathaniel Sackett proved to be an important addition to Washington's camp, resourceful and creative, Sackett was always looking for new tactics and techniques. In order to facilitate Sackett's work, the Commander in Chief appointed Captain Benjamin Tallmadge as his military contact.

Benjamin Tallmadge was born in Setauket in 1754, and received a liberal education thanks to his father, a Reverend. In 1769 he became a student at Yale and then worked as a teacher after obtaining his diploma<sup>89</sup>. During college, Tallmadge became close friends with Nathan Hale,

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<sup>88</sup> Letter from Duer to Washington, 28<sup>th</sup> January 1777.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0179>

<sup>89</sup> B. Tallmadge. Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge. P.8.

and the two exchanged many letters. When in 1775 the Revolution erupted, Tallmadge did not enlist in the Continental Army even though he was encouraged to join by his friend Captain John Chester. As the war continued, Tallmadge's sentiments changed and one year later decided to join the Continental Army. In his memoirs, Benjamin Tallmadge wrote that in 1776 he decided to "*lay aside my books and take up the sword in defense of my country*"<sup>90</sup>

Tallmadge's military career was a success from the beginning. In June 1776, he was appointed Lieutenant by Captain Chester, one month later, he became Regimental Adjutant, and in October Brigade's Major. Again, in December, he became Captain of the Second Dragoons. In the span of six months he was able to obtain important commissions thanks to his talent and military discipline<sup>91</sup>. It was under his appointment as Captain that in the early months of 1777 he caught the attention of Gen. Washington. His rigour and temper, convinced Washington to appoint him as Sackett's point man for intelligence operations. Through this collaboration, Sackett began to send undercover agents in New York, using commerce as a disguise and relied on the young Captain's help. Tallmadge's first encounter with the undercover trade was in February 1777<sup>92</sup>. His mission was to arrange a safe passage to British-occupied Long-Island to Major John Clark. The Major travelled through the Northern coastal road from Tallmadge's birthplace Setauket, to Oyster Bay. During his travels, the Major informed Tallmadge that many people were patriots or friendly to the American cause. Unlike Hale, Clark was assured a safe home and warm food. During his operation, he wrote reports on the population and on the British troops' methods. Furthermore, Clark's messages were probably carried from Setauket to Connecticut, by a future member of the Culper Ring, Caleb Brewster. Evidence of Clark's intelligence work was found in Washington's accounts book, where in June 1777, he recorded money spent for secret services alongside Clark's payment. The information was sent to Tallmadge and Sackett who then passed it to Captain John Davis. After receiving the intelligence, Davis communicated it to William Duer who finally referred it to Washington<sup>93</sup>.

*"25th Feby 1777*

*Mr Talmadge writes that he received Intelligence from Long Island by one John Clarke that there were no Troops at Satauket but part of two Companies at Huntington and one Company*

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<sup>90</sup> B. Tallmadge. Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge. P.15

<sup>91</sup> B. Tallmadge. Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge. P. 10-11.

<sup>92</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. P.45-46, Bantam Dell, New York

<sup>93</sup> George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General correspondence. (<http://www.loc.gov>).

*at Oyster Bay. That the said Clark saw the Companies at Huntington that the Militia of Suffolk County was Ordered to Meet on the 16th Febry in order to be drafted for the Ministerial Service but that they were Determined not to serve, however if their services were Insisted upon, they were Determined to make their Escape in time.*

*That they are but few who are not friendly to the Cause. That they had beat up for Volunteers in the Western part of the County but that only three had inlisted.*

*I do hereby Certify that the Intelligence I have Communicated to Mr Sackett that came from Long Island I took from Gentr whose Truth and Veracity may I think be Depended on.*

*John Davis Captn 4th New York Regt”*

In the meantime, Sackett used his own agents as well, mostly civilians or merchants. Sackett's most remarkable operation was in March 1777 when he sent a woman into the city. The agent was married to a Loyalist and her task was to complain to the British authorities about American troops seizing her property. The spy reported that the British were building flat-bottom boats to use against Philadelphia. Her mission lasted a few weeks and at the beginning of April she provided Washington details on the British's plans against Philadelphia. Washington answered to Sackett's reports avidly, reminding him that it was important to compare information. What Washington valued the most though was timeliness and precision, and it was probably because of Sackett's habit of not sending information in time that his appointment ended in early April 1777. After Sackett's resignation, Washington kept sending agents to monitor the situation, but what was needed was information on Gen. Howe's plans in Philadelphia<sup>94</sup>. Upon his return from Long Island, Clark became Washington's ears and eyes in Philadelphia. Severely wounded, the spy began to work as soon as Washington told him to act. On October 4th 1777, Clark sent his first two letters to the General. In three months he sent fifty detailed letters regarding British troops, their numbers, checkpoints, and infantry positions. During three months of operations, Clark was highly secretive about his agents or sources, and they are still unknown nowadays. Clarke's channel of information was incredibly astute and probably formed by Quakers and civilians. Still suffering from his wound, Clarke resigned from his spying business and was assigned a desk job. Clark's resignation coincided

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<sup>94</sup> B.M. Allen, (2014), *Spies of Revolutionary Connecticut, from Benedict Arnold to Nathan Hale*. PP 55-56. The History Press.

with what can be described as the worst winter of the war. Valley Forge was one of the hardest trials for Washington, who found himself surrounded by a frozen land and a discouraged army. But was this frozen terror that allowed the Viriginian veteran to reinforce his reputation as a General able to encourage his troops during proving times. While the Continental Army was fighting against the snow, Tallmadge and his Dragoons spent the winter at Trenton. After months of struggle, desperation, and cold, Spring was the bearer of happy news. In May 1778, General Henry Clinton became the commander of the British army, and retreated from Philadelphia to New York. Washington's army, now recovered from the traumatising winter and reinvigorated by General Von Steuben's training , faced Clinton at the Battle of Monmouth on the 28th of June. The battle ended in a draw, but left the British General shocked.

With Clinton Camped in New York, the Continental army's camp stretched from the New Jersey Highlands to the Connecticut coast. As the Continental army settled in the new camp, New York was totally silent in regards to intelligence. As a matter of fact, there wasn't any type of network or informant in the city. Learning from previous experiences, the General understood that single agents were a bad choice; what He needed was a channel of information similar to Clark's network in Philadelphia. The best man for this task was Major Benjamin Tallmadge. Thanks to his previous experiences alongside Nathaniel Sackett and Major Clark, Tallmadge understood the importance of intelligence. In November 1778, Washington appointed him director of military intelligence, and was entrusted with the creation of a spy network inside New York.

#### **2.4 Of Whalers, Farmers, and Quakers.**

For the creation of such a network, Tallmadge decided to rely on his childhood friendships and connections. Caleb Brewster, Abraham Woodhull, Anna Strong, and Austin Roe, were all Tallmadge's friends from his childhood's years in Setauket. The only member of the ring that wasn't Tallmadge's friend was Culper Jr, also known as Robert Townsend. Amongst his connections, only one member became acquainted with the General before the establishment of the Ring. In August 1778, Lieutenant Caleb Brewster already met General Washington. At the beginning of August, Brewster offered to report on the enemy's movements around



Newport. By the 27th of August, the General received his first intelligence<sup>95</sup>. The Lieutenant informed him on the exact numbers of British troops and their movements. Born in Setauket in 1747, Caleb Brewster was an expert sea-man who enjoyed action above anything else. At 19, he embarked on a Nantucket whaler to Greenland. After spending months on the whaler, Caleb became an expert sailor, able to navigate through stormy waters. Once bored of his travels, and a seasoned sealer, He joined a merchantman in London only to return to Setauket in 1775 because of the Revolution<sup>96</sup>. Moved more by a thirst for action rather than patriotism, Brewster joined the Suffolk County Militia as second Lieutenant, but was promoted to Lieutenant in 1776. Brewster used his abilities as a sly sailor in the Autumn of 1776. With 35 men, He took six whaleboats in order to hand the personal belongings of Colonel William Floyd. During the mission, the company captured two Sloops carrying wood<sup>97</sup>. Until 1778, He remained in the Second Continental Artillery. In August 1778, after sending important information to Washington, his talents were finally recognised. It was Tallmadge that gave the name Abraham Woodhull as a contact for Brewster. With Woodhull aka Culper Sr, and Brewster, the Culper Ring was coming into existence.

Abraham Woodhull was born in Setauket in 1750 and was a farmer. If Brewster was mostly moved by his need for action and adventure, Woodhull was driven by revenge and patriotism. Already an ardent patriot in the early years of the revolution, the Battle of New York affirmed Culper Sr decision on which side he was. It was revenge that made him join the undercover business. General Nathaniel Woodhull, a close relative to Abraham, was a Patriot officer and President of the Provincial Convention. In the summer of 1776, he was ordered to burn grain and livestock, to make it harder for the British to access provisions. As he was lodging at a tavern, the officer was taken prisoner and murdered<sup>98</sup>. His death was considered a mystery, and a Patriot journal stated that he was wounded by a Cutlass on his head, and a Bayonet through his arm. The brutality of his relative's death made Abraham more eager to join the American cause. Filled with hatred, the young American wished to destroy the British and their allies. Few months before Brewster's espionage business in Newport, Woodhull was taken prisoner while navigation between Connecticut and Long Island, his charge was his involvement in the

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<sup>95</sup> Letter from Brewster to Washington 28<sup>th</sup> August 1778.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-16-02-0421>

<sup>96</sup> R. Foley, "Caleb Brewster in The Revolutionary War". Bridgeport Library.

<https://bportlibrary.org/hc/historical-accounts/caleb-brewster-in-the-revolutionary-war/>

<sup>97</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring*. P.83, Bantam Dell, New York

<sup>98</sup> S.E. Siry, (2012), *Liberty's fallen Generals: leadership and sacrifice in the American war of Independence*. PP 25-35. Potomac books, Washington DC.

“London Trade”. Smuggling was severely punished by Congress, and since he was caught in action, the future Culper Sr was imprisoned until August 1778. It was Tallmadge who released him in late August, and proposed that he joined the secret network. Woodhull accepted the new job. At the end of August 1778, Tallmadge assured his General of his friend’s integrity and honour<sup>99</sup>. With Woodhull in, the Culper Ring took shape. To keep the Spy Ring a secret, Tallmadge drafted a code book<sup>100</sup> with coded names and specific numbers for people and locations. Major Tallmadge himself became “John Bolton 721”, Woodhull instead became “Samuel Culper, 722” and was named Culper Sr only when Robert Townsend joined. The name Samuel was chosen by Tallmadge to honour his brother, Washington instead advised the name Culpeper in reference to Culpeper County in Virginia. Brewster, not a fan of coded names, was content with being simply “725”. As Woodhull and Brewster conducted their operations, near Setauket, other two spies joined the undercover network. Born in 1740 in Setauket, Anna Strong was Abraham Woodhull’s neighbour. As it was usual during the Revolution, many British soldiers resided in people’s houses and were provided with food and shelter. Anna Strong’s mansion in Long Island was not an exception and she hosted British officers in her house. In her case, she was able to retrieve important information thanks to the British officers in her house. Under the enemy’s nose, Anna Strong passed information to Caleb Brewster and was never discovered. It is said that the best spies are the ones that are able to merge completely with their surroundings and never raise suspicion. With enemy’s troops inside her house, the patriot was able to collaborate with the Culper Ring thanks to a common activity for women. Laundry<sup>101</sup>. Strategically located towards the mouth of the bay, her clothesline was her main source of communication. When a message was ready, she hanged first a black petticoat signalling that there was new information. Then she hung a precise number of white handkerchiefs that pointed to the numbered cove in which the message was stored. One white handkerchief meant that the message was inside cove number one. Her activity was never discovered but her contribution to the American cause was very important. Many historians in the past believed that she was also Agent 355, named “lady” in Tallmadge’s code book. This theory has been dismissed for various reasons; lack of evidence, and the fact that agent 355 must have been close to prominent families in New York in order to pass information about

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<sup>99</sup> Letter from Tallmadge to Washington. 25<sup>th</sup> of August 1778.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-16-02-0411>

<sup>100</sup> The Culper Code Book. George Washington’s Mount Vernon. <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/the-culper-code-book/>

<sup>101</sup> Master Sgt. Q. G. Caldwell, (2018). “The Importance of spies to Washington’s success”. NCO Journal, Army University Press.

Arnold's treachery. The new system of espionage proved to be highly effective, in January 1779, the spies were able to pass a letter from New York to Washington in less than a week. This was very impressive considering that the spies usually took longer. The reports, made by Woodhull and Brewster were well detailed even though Brewster was more concerned with Naval matters and Woodhull on troops and their movements. Woodhull's letters were long, and some even reached seven pages. A seven page letter<sup>102</sup> was sent from Woodhull in February 1779, in the letter the spy told Washington that the British had a force of 34 battalions and confirmed the presence of 8500 men. Culper also confirmed Brewster's naval reports, stating that General Clinton spent many hours at the port. The journey from Setauket to Manhattan was not an easy one, the possibility of being discovered with incriminating evidence was always high. Culper Sr, being over cautious, asked Tallmadge to destroy all his letters as soon as they received them. Furthermore, Woodhull confessed that he was quite displeased by the notion of going many times to New York. Terrified of ending like Nathan Hale, Culper Sr found another man who was not so afraid of passing through British lines. A Setauket born Patriot and long time friend with Tallmadge and Woodhull, Austin Roe joined the network because of his patriotic ideals just like Tallmadge. Austin Roe, born in 1749, was the owner of a tavern and the most resourceful courier of the ring. He was recognized by Benjamin Tallmadge, under recommendation of Culper Sr, as an ally and became part of the network under the name of "Agent 724". An able horseman and trusted man, Roe rode back and forth for fifty-five miles, from Setauket to Manhattan in little time<sup>103</sup>. His journeys were dangerous and many times he did not only pass on intelligence but other information that he himself had retrieved. Roe was not only an exceptional courier, but was also good at gathering intelligence. In July 1780, he communicated to Washington that the British Navy was plotting to ambush the French fleet in Rhode Island. Intelligence was handed to him by the last member of the Culper Ring; Washington's only man in New York, Robert Townsend. In just one year, Tallmadge and Washington's visionary spy ring was completed. In 1779, the network already had a well detailed operational scheme and was able to pass timely intelligence. Robert Townsend closed the circle and with him New York seemed brighter to the Commander in Chief. Culper Jr, also known as Robert Townsend, was an unexpected addition to the network. His father Samuel, despite being a Quaker, believed in the American cause even if he was a Quaker. Since father and son were both Quakers, they were expected to stay away from the

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<sup>102</sup> Letter from Woodhull to Tallmadge. 26<sup>th</sup> of February 1779.

<sup>103</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. "Culper Spy Ring".

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/culper-spy-ring/>

conflict. The Society of Friends disregarded violence, firearms, and invited its members to be as neutral as possible<sup>104</sup>. Robert Townsend, born in 1753, tried his best to follow the Society's advice and was mostly concerned about his own catering business activity. During the British occupation of New York, Townsend purchased a share in the coffee house of the famous journalist James Rivington<sup>105</sup>. But as it is known, there are some things that cannot be met with neutrality or indifference. Many Quakers, even without sharing it with the outside world, picked the side in which they believed the most. In 1779, Townsend put aside his neutrality and became a supporter of American independence. There are two main reasons that brought Culper Jr to the Patriots side. What moved Townsend's spirit was a pamphlet, a milestone of the American Revolution, Common Sense by Thomas Paine. Ironically, just like Townsend, Paine was a Quaker's son and grew up with Quakers traditions. If truth be told, Common Sense has some traits that resemble Quakerism, for example the responsibility of people to take part in struggles against corruption. Paine's words divided many Quakers, some were horrified by the harshness of such words, others felt inspired. Robert Townsend pertained to the latter, and inspired by Paine's passionate words, he began to understand on which side he belonged. Paine's words alone were not enough to move the taciturn Quakers into espionage. What made him agree to Woodhull's request in June 1779, was the destruction of Oyster Bay by the British troops. During the war, Long Island became a fully military zone, where unlawfulness reigned. Houses and shops in Oyster Bay were pillaged and turned into stables or offices for British troops. Boards from churches and school were used as firewood, and the Quakers' meeting house became an arsenal and commissary store. Citizens were not allowed to go where they pleased and were constantly monitored by the British forces. The disfiguration of his home, convinced Robert Townsend to join the group and become Culper Jr or Agent 723. The new spy did not waste any time and sent his first intelligence at the end of June 1779, regarding British movements in Connecticut. Townsend showed off his abilities when he alerted Washington of a spy amongst the Americans.

*“Christopher Duychenick, is amongst you and is positively an agent for David Mathews, Mayor of 10, under the direction of Tryon.”<sup>106</sup>”*

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<sup>104</sup> D. Johnson (2022). “Revolutionary PHL: Exiled from Philadelphia: Quakers during the Revolution”. 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022, American Philosophical Society. <https://www.amphilsoc.org/blog/revolutionary-phl-exiled-philadelphia-quakers-during-revolution>

<sup>105</sup> J. Rather (1985). “Remembering a Master Spy at home”. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/15/nyregion/rememberng-a-master-spy-at-home.html>

<sup>106</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. P.170, Bantam Dell, New York

The Culper ring was finally active, each member with his/her own task. In order to make the job clearer to Culper Sr and Jr, Washington drafted a memorandum of the two spies' responsibilities with Tallmadge<sup>107</sup>. In the memorandum, Townsend's responsibilities were to remain in the city, try to mix with the refugees and officers by going to coffeehouses and public spaces. Culper Jr, had to monitor the transportations within the city and port, the number of men defending the city, number and size of the cannons. In the memorandum, it was stated multiple times that the most important thing was to always stay in the city. Culper Sr's responsibilities were to monitor the situation along Long Island and to always receive the intelligence transmitted by Townsend. Furthermore, Washington recommended him to never trust people outside the network with intelligence or other activities related to the mission. Culper Jr was what Washington needed, finally there was a trustworthy agent in New York. With him, the spy ring developed a clever and efficient system of delivery<sup>108</sup>; The man in the city, Culper Jr, passed the information acquired to the courier, Agent 724. Roe, with incredible speed, rode to Setauket to give the message to Culper Sr. At this point, there were two different options to take in consideration. Woodhull could directly give the dispatch to Brewster himself, or he gave the intelligence to Anna Strong who then signalled it to Agent 725. Brewster then returned to camp to give the operation to John Bolton. Finally, Tallmadge brought the collected intelligence to Washington. Thanks to this system, the ring was able to outsmart the British many times without getting caught. With Robert Townsend inside the city, there was one more chance to win the war. The Culper Ring's methods and missions were crucial for the results of the conflict, such methods and activities will be discussed in the next chapter. Apart from the six members of the ring, there were others considered subagents. These Subagents were usually masked as royalists and tried their best to merge with their surroundings. Their service and loyalty to liberty did not go unnoticed when the war was over.

## **2.5 An Irish Tailor spying on the British government**

The six members of the Culper Ring put on an outstanding system, able to outsmart many British officers. But it is important to state that they were not the only spies and that they never retrieved all that information simply on their own. Sub-agents were extremely useful,

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<sup>107</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *General Washington's spies on Long Island and New York*. PP 49-50. East Hampton Free Library, East Hampton.

<sup>108</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. "Culper Spy Ring".

<https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/culper-spy-ring/>

especially when they were well inserted in British society or amongst British officers. These agents operated in daylight and held conversation with loyalists on a daily basis. Amongst the most outstanding sub-members there was Hercules Mulligan. Mulligan was born in Ireland in 1740 and emigrated to America, New York, with his family in 1746. In New York the Mulligans became able merchants. In 1773 through their shipping company, the family took over Alexander Hamilton, who used to work at a branch of the company located in St. Croix in the West Indies. Mulligan, even though older than Hamilton, became a close friend of the founding father. It was through Mulligan that Hamilton joined the American cause while studying at King's College (Now Columbia)<sup>109</sup>. In 1775, the two patriots hauled off a cannon from a battery. One year later in 1776, Hamilton obtained his commission as Captain thanks to Hercules' help. Between stealing cannons and sharpening his patriotic ideals, Mulligan opened a clothing emporium in 1774. The emporium soon became one of the most successful and stylish of the city, not only because of Hercules' exceptionality, but also because he allowed his clients to feel at ease with him. He entertained basic conversation and became a sort of confidante for his clients. His shop attracted many gentlemen and especially British officers. The tailor, as seen as a respectable loyalist by many of his clients who entrusted him with any type of information. Mulligan joined the Sons of Liberty in 1770 and with his family decided to leave New York when the British occupied it. Unfortunately, he and his family were captured by Tory militia while escaping and brought back into the city. Back in the city, the tailor decided to dedicate himself to his emporium while working for the New York Committee of Correspondence. The committee was tasked with writing letters and campaigns in favour of the revolution<sup>110</sup>. In the summer of 1779 he joined the Culper Ring as a sub-agent. Hercules joined the ring only a few weeks after Townsend, and Woodhull referred to him as an acquaintance of Hamilton, who was now George Washington's aide. It is probable that Hamilton vouched for his friend in front of the General. Hiding behind his cordiality and professionalism, Mulligan became of great importance for Washington and the Culper Ring. The various officers attended by Mulligan were talkative and prone to share information with a proud Tory man. He treated his clients in an impeccable manner, presenting himself as a friend. What they did not know was that Mulligan was also an able spy. As soon as he joined, he passed on important information, for example he gathered that between 4 or 5 regiments

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<sup>109</sup> P.R. Misencik, (2014), *The original American spies: seven covert agents of the Revolutionary war*. PP 95-97. McFarland & Company. Jefferson, North Carolina.

<sup>110</sup> American Battlefield Trust. "Hercules Mulligan". <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/hercules-mulligan#:~:text=By%20outfitting%20verbose%20British%20officers,officers%20needed%20their%20uniforms%20back.>



were embarking for Quebec with thick clothing that he believed was for Georgia rather than Quebec<sup>111</sup>. On his side, Mulligan had his slave Cato, nowadays considered as an ardent patriot. When He received important information from his officers, Mulligan sent Cato as a courier to Culper Jr or Woodhull. More than once, Cato and Mulligan saved Washington's life<sup>112</sup>. The first time was in 1779, when an oversharing officer confessed that the British were planning to ambush the Americans. A second time, the two spies were aided by Hercules' brother Hugh, who worked at the British Commissariat of New York. The plan was to take Washington by surprise through the Connecticut shoreline. Cato advised Hercules, who then passed the plan to Culper Jr. Thanks to this important information, Washington changed route and arrived without any problem in New England. Mulligan's service was extremely effective and conducted with utmost secrecy. He was never unmasked as a spy and because of his reputation as a Tory, he was seen as a traitor after the war. In order to calm the Americans, Washington decided to shop at his emporium and silenced the ugly rumours<sup>113</sup>. After the war, he kept working at the emporium and became one of the founders of the New York Manumission Society, even though he owned slaves. Hercules Mulligan died in 1825, in New York, and is buried in Trinity Church near Hamilton.

## 2.6 The Free Man.

The war expanded in every corner of the contended country, touching men and women of any social class. In these years in which the dream of liberty was being fulfilled, liberty and freedom were not referred to everyone. The enlightenment was a privilege as well, and the notion of freedom was completely different to ours. People of Colour, were not considered equals and lived in inhuman conditions under the abomination of slavery. The author of the Declaration of Independence himself, Thomas Jefferson, wrote of liberty and rights while owning other human beings. The effect of the war stretched towards slaves as well who had ideals, hopes, and morals just like the white men. Enslaved people enlisted in the Continental and British army as well. On one hand they joined the Americans in the hope that the Revolution would

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<sup>111</sup> P.R. Misencik, (2014), *The original American spies: seven covert agents of the Revolutionary war*. PP 119-120. McFarland & Company. Jefferson, North Carolina

<sup>112</sup> American Battlefield Trust. "Hercules Mulligan". <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/hercules-mulligan#:~:text=By%20outfitting%20verbose%20British%20officers,officers%20needed%20their%20uniforms%20back.>

<sup>113</sup> American Battlefield Trust. "Hercules Mulligan". <https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/hercules-mulligan#:~:text=By%20outfitting%20verbose%20British%20officers,officers%20needed%20their%20uniforms%20back.>

finally put an end to their sorrows, on the other they picked the British side who granted them freedom for enlisting. In 1780, Benedict Arnold's treachery shocked the Americans. The betrayal of the Hero of Saratoga was definitely a hard blow, and now the Chief in Command needed more information about the British. The solution to Washington's problems was an enslaved man, James Armistead<sup>114</sup>. James Armistead was born in 1760 and lived most of his life on a Virginian plantation. When the war erupted, Armistead was granted permission to serve the French General Marquis De Lafayette. In 1780, Armistead was enlisted by his master in Lafayette's French Allied Units where he served as a double agent. His task was to act as an escaped slave who wished to spy for the British. His story was soon believed by the British, who were mostly disgusted by slavery, and they allowed him to access the British War Department<sup>115</sup>. By British officers, he was entrusted to infiltrate himself behind American lines. He acted as a double agent going back and forth between American and British sides. His work impressed the British who soon put him to work under Benedict Arnold himself. Thanks to this connection to Arnold, James Armistead was able to gather information about British movements in Virginia. His mastery and ability was crucial for the decisive battle of the Revolution, the Battle of Yorktown. In October 1781, He informed Washington and Lafayette about British supplies and reinforcements. This information allowed the Franco-American alliance to organise a blockade to block British advancements and to earn the final victory at Yorktown. At the end of the conflict, He tried to fight for his freedom through a petition to Congress which was never heard. The spy did not receive his freedom from the Americans for which he fought for, but from the Marquis of Lafayette in 1787<sup>116</sup>. Lafayette was an ardent abolitionist, disgusted by the horrors of slavery. He invited his American friends, Washington and Jefferson to recognize slavery as dishuman and barbaric. By Washington's side during the Revolution, the Frenchman was disgusted by slavery and tried to put an end to it. During his service in America, Lafayette supported John Laurens' plan to create a battalion of freed black men and finally put an end to slavery after the war<sup>117</sup>. One of the most convinced abolitionists of his time, John Laurens was Washington's aide de camp, a close friend of Alexander Hamilton and Lafayette. Laurens died in South Carolina in 1782. The black soldiers who fought

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<sup>114</sup> American Battlefield Trust. "James Armistead Lafayette".

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/biographies/james-armistead-lafayette>

<sup>115</sup> Salmon, John & Dictionary of Virginia Biography. James Lafayette (ca. 1748–1830). (2021, December 22). In Encyclopedia Virginia. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/lafayette-james-ca-1748-1830/>

<sup>116</sup> Salmon, John & Dictionary of Virginia Biography. James Lafayette (ca. 1748–1830). (2021, December 22). In Encyclopedia Virginia. <https://encyclopediavirginia.org/entries/lafayette-james-ca-1748-1830/>

<sup>117</sup> National Historical Park Pennsylvania, (2019). "Lt Colonel John Laurens". National Park Service. <https://www.nps.gov/vafo/learn/historyculture/johnlaurens.htm>



with him were soon returned to their masters when the war was over, Laurens' dream of abolition was going to be fulfilled 83 years later.

### **3. Methods and Missions.**

#### **3.1 Good Spy/Bad Spy**

With the Culper Ring and its sub agents in motion, Washington was finally able to put in action his plan for the liberty of his country. The American undercover network could now operate by using new methods and tricks in their many missions. Without any doubt, the Culper Ring was a success, and its structured system was one of the many reasons. But before analysing the methods and mission of the Revolutionary spy network, it is important to underline the differences between a successful and an unsuccessful spy, and also the difference between a well devised plan and a chaotic one. The comparison between 1776 espionage and nowadays secret services is obviously impossible. Today's agents are well trained, most of them studied in prestigious universities and received years of training before actually taking part in operations. The operations in which these agents take part are studied in every single detail and the spy knows exactly what to do and when he/she has to do it. During the American Revolution, as previously said, spying was seen as dishonourable. Being a secret agent was something to be ashamed of, something that was relegated to the lower classes or to desperate individuals. Because of the stigma that espionage brought within itself, there was no training or explanation on how to conduct an operation even though many officers and congressmen agreed on the importance of gathering intelligence from the enemy. Few understood how much intelligence mattered, but most of the time their lack of experience made them act chaotically. Benjamin Tallmadge was an excellent Spymaster thanks to Washington's guide, but also because he had the support of men like Nathaniel Sackett and Lieutenant Clark, both of them able spymasters and agents. The case was different with Knowlton and Hale. In the previous chapter, Hale's mission was described as doomed from the beginning for a variety of reasons; the operation was poorly planned, badly executed, and the agent was not protected.. Amongst the reasons, the most important is that a successful mission doesn't come only from the agent's abilities but it is the planning behind it that does all the work. In this case it is important to ask, who was behind the plan? The planning obviously did not come from Hale, who must have been asked basic questions related to how he wanted to present himself. Knowlton for its part

was merely following Washington's instructions to find an agent to send behind the British's lines, and was not given any other direct instruction. If the aim is to find the one responsible then one must point to the Virginian veteran<sup>118</sup>. Washington did not plan the operation meticulously and did not take any responsibility in planning it. What the General needed was information and he did not have much time to think about how to get it. An important consideration to add, is that the occupation of New York represented Washington's lowest point in the conflict; the army's morale was not the best and the evacuation of New York was so hasty that there was no time to plan. Low morale or not, what is evident is that the plan can nowadays be used as a "What not to do list". The organisation of the mission was risky itself; the first mistake was discussing the operation in public. Asking for volunteer spies out loud could have ended the mission long before Hale's arrival in the city<sup>119</sup>, this because Knowlton did not think about the possibility of undercover British agents within his soldiers. The use of double agents was common on both American and British sides. It is shocking that despite Knowlton's abilities as a scout and tactician, he did not take in consideration basic security measures. After choosing an agent, Knowlton should have given him a secret identity and explained how he had to behave in the city. A secret identity could have protected the spy and the commander of the operation<sup>120</sup>. In addition, The agent should have been provided with a believable cover, he posed as a school teacher but roamed around camps and fortifications, making his cover not convincing. Spies like Mulligan and Townsend were so successful because of their ability to mix up with all the other Tory citizens without raising any suspicion. To the eyes of the British, they were simple workers who were loyal to the King. Furthermore, unlike Clark in Setauket, Hale did not have a safe house where to go in the city and was left completely to himself. Besides, the success of the Culper Ring resided in the perfectly tailored system that they had, every agent had a specific duty and was aware of who was doing what. Another example can be seen with Clark's network in Philadelphia, so efficient that the names of the agents remain unknown. Clark and his agents knew what they had to do and had specific instructions, fake identities, and collection points. The Connecticut soldier did not have specific instructions and he had no one inside the city. The various agents of the Culper Ring were also

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<sup>118</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.162., Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

<sup>119</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.151-152., Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

<sup>120</sup> J. L. Smith Jr (2015). "9 rules of spying that Nathan Hale failed to follow". *Journal of the American Revolution*. [https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#\\_ednref3](https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#_ednref3)

chosen in regards to their personality and attitude, something that did not happen with Hale. Nathan Hale was not the right man to send in incognito. Too friendly and talkative, he wasn't able to keep the mission to himself and confided it in Hull. Common sense was shown by Hull<sup>121</sup>, who advised his friend against this mission. Hale, like many other young gentlemen, knew nothing about spying, and broke many important rules that are known to many spies. There are some important rules<sup>122</sup> that a successful spy must follow, alongside innate qualities that make the agent perfect.

- 1) **“Ability to deceive”** is something that the young spy did not possess. In his memoirs, William Hull describes his friend as an unfortunate choice for that type of mission, too frank, unable to lie and hold a secret, Hale was also extremely naive. All these aspects of Hale's character shows that he was indeed the wrong choice, even though He believed himself able to carry out such an operation. Different was the case of the Culper Ring. By using her reputation as a woman and his status of slave, Anna Strong and James Armistead were both successful in deceiving British officers. Anna Strong fooled the officers living in her house through acting like a naive woman with no thoughts on the revolution. Armistead's deception was admirable, he tricked the enemy through his status of an oppressed man and was able to use the tragedy of slavery on his side.
- 2) The website cites another quality rather than a rule, **“Ability to Blend in.”** Blending in was certainly not something that the Connecticut soldier was able to do. He drew attention everywhere he went through his nosy behaviour and his appearance. Even though he was posing as a schoolteacher, he certainly did not look the part. The scar on his face, his height and physical structure were enough to describe him as a military man rather than a schoolmaster. Hercules Mulligan and Robert Townsend were exceptional at blending in. Mulligan's job as a tailor allowed him to be around many British senior officers and took information from them without being caught. His ability to blend in with the officers and their ideals helped his success. Culper Jr on the other hand took advantage of his status as a peaceful Quaker who only advocated for his job

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<sup>121</sup> G.D. Seymour, (1941). “Documentary life of Nathan Hale. Comprising all available and official documents bearing on the life of the Patriot”. 2013 edition. Literary Licensing.

<sup>122</sup> J. L. Smith Jr (2015). “9 rules of spying that Nathan Hale failed to follow”. Journal of the American Revolution. [https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#\\_ednref3](https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#_ednref3)

and his activity. He blended in with other Quakers who did not want to associate themselves with the Revolution. His discretion allowed him to be an indispensable spy.

- 3) **“Use of forged documents is recommended<sup>123</sup>”**. A fake identity can save a spy’s life especially with the help of forged documents. While crafting the doomed plan, Nathan Hale decided to retain his school diploma with his name on it in order to excuse why he was looking for a job as a teacher. Alongside his diploma, the 21 years old also had papers signed by Washington that gave him up to the British. Hale’s best friend from Yale, Benjamin Tallmadge understood the importance of forged identities and gave the Culper Ring’s members code names, for example Tallmadge became John Bolton and Abraham Woodhull Samuel Culper.
- 4) The fourth rule is extremely important to follow, because it reminds agents of the reason why they must be careful. **“Remember that you are inside the enemy’s territory”**. The notion of being inside the lion’s den must not be taken lightly, carefulness will secure the safety of the operation, operator and organiser. The amateur spy committed the mistake of moving around suspiciously, he asked many questions regarding the sympathies of New Yorkers for the American cause and did not take in consideration that he was inside loyalist territory. Tories around the city must have been alarmed by a schoolteacher asking so many unusual questions. Perhaps thanks to his taciturn and introverted nature, Robert Townsend was always aware of where he was and never asked uneasy questions related to the rebels.
- 5) Many times an operation can be too much to handle, hence it is fundamental to **“Know when to get out.”** There are a lot of things that can go wrong in action, but it is never too late to withdraw. The martyr’s mission coincided with the great fire of 1776, an event that surely alerted British authorities and increased their presence in different areas of the city. The authorities were looking for an arsonist and the critical situation was not good for the operation. In this case, the young soldier should have understood that it was time for him to go back to American lines. The same situation happened between Townsend and Mulligan. The tailor was held by Arnold for questions, and an afraid Townsend decided to step back for a while in order not to raise any other suspicion.

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<sup>123</sup> J. L. Smith Jr (2015). “9 rules of spying that Nathan Hale failed to follow”. Journal of the American Revolution. [https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#\\_ednref3](https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/05/9-rules-of-spying-that-nathan-hale-failed-to-follow/#_ednref3)

- 6) As it has been analysed before, the American Revolution put an end to many friendships and good family relations. Enemies were in every corner and especially for a rebel and a spy, it was important to remember that **“no one is your friend.”** When Robert Rogers showed himself at the inn offering his friendship and help, the agent should have recognised the red flags. People like Rogers who appeared over friendly and over sharing were the ones from which a spy had to stay away. Robert Rogers’ abilities as a covert agent are indeed worth praising, he was able to lure the naive boy into his web and use his friendliness against him. Hale, on the other hand, lowered too much his guard, he was glad to have found a fellow comrade that he could trust. His inability to analyse Rogers’ suspicious behaviour led the poor boy to an early grave. Washington specified the importance of not trusting anyone to the two Culpers in the memorandum about their responsibilities.
- 7) An agent must be careful and it is important to acquire knowledge on the enemy’s soft spots, but what is even more important for the spy is the ability to **“beware of its own weak points.”** As humans, in almost every situation even when spying is not involved, we tend to concentrate on our stronger points and forget to realise what are our weakest ones. In Hale’s case, the spy was completely unaware of his soft spots. If he realised he was too talkative and with a tendency to over share, he might have survived the mission instead of becoming a martyred spy. Another important soft spot that Hale did not think about, was his liking of alcohol despite being a pious man. Too much alcohol might have dulled his senses, allowing him to overshare sensible details. While on his collecting mission in the Seven Years’ War, Washington discussed the importance of remaining sober during a mission without raising suspicions<sup>124</sup>. Maybe Washington should have shared his acquired wisdom with Nathan Hale before sending him on his mission.
- 8) Once the evidence has been collected, it doesn’t mean that the operation is over and that the spy can relax or lay down its guard. This phase is highly delicate since the agent now must **“take care of the evidence.”** The information collected is essential if the aim is to achieve a successful mission, henceforth if the smallest piece of data is taken by the enemy then the entirety of the mission is compromised. By showing his notes to Rogers, Hale jeopardised the mission, putting in danger not only himself but also his

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<sup>124</sup> W.R. Haefele, (1989), *General George Washington espionage chief, November/December 1989*. Society of the Cincinnati.

fellow revolutionaries. Unlike Hale the members of the Culper Ring were always concerned about the safety of the evidence and did their best to protect it, by using an invisible ink and other tricks.

By this analysis it has been proved why the Hale's operation was a fiasco and turned a young, inexperienced man into a martyr. These mistakes were not only Hale's fault, but also his Commander's; he was supposed to be informed on how to behave in action instead of being sent around with no instructions. The situation in New York changing quickly can be addressed as a major fault, alongside Washington's anxiety to evacuate the city as soon as possible. There was no time to plot an intricate spying plan, the Commander in Chief needed an agent just before leaving the city. What is certain, is that the main difference between 1776 and 1778 was organisation. The Culper Ring was perfectly tailored, the intelligence was timely, and the agents were more efficient through the network of information. If only Hale had other agents to rely on, the outcome could have been different. Through their abilities, personalities, methods, and organisation, the other spies reached 1783 alive. What made the Culper Ring successful, apart from timeliness and efficiency, were the methods employed in their many missions.

### **3.2 Coded Names and Invisible Letters.**

One year after its establishment, in 1779, the American network of intelligence was already fighting its battles in the shadows. Tallmadge and Washington's ability to master the Ring and guide it was formidable and through time their craft increased. With its system of delivery, Culper Sr and Jr provided useful information to the American General. One problem that made the two SpyMasters itch, was that if the spies were discovered or their documents lost, the enemy would have known every single detail. Solutions came with time and developed alongside the growing channel of agents. To deliver their information, the spies used many methods, some of them arrived directly from headquarters. Invisible Inks, Coded Books, Propaganda, and Newspapers were all used to deliver messages. These various techniques came from Europe and America as well and allowed the Culper Ring to work with more security, even if stopped by British officers they could hide their operation under their noses.

## **The Invisible Ink**

In our day invisible ink is pretty common, in fact at the beginning of the new century this type of ink was even used for children's toys. Every shop in the world sells pens with invisible ink that can be detected through a special light. During the Cold War and WW2, invisible ink was used to hide important messages related to the enemy. This ink, rather than invented, was perfected during the last century. The story of the mysterious ink is as old as time goes on; it can be traced to ancient Greece and Rome. The period in which the ink was used the most was the American Revolution, when it was used by agents to pass information without being caught. The introduction of the ink was revolutionary especially for the Culper Ring in its missions. The first time the ink was recommended to Washington was in 1778 when the Culper Ring was already in action. To inform Washington about such an important creation, was the future co-author of the Federalist Papers and President of the Continental Congress John Jay. In November 1778, Jay confided in Washington that his brother Sir James, a Physician, had invented a special ink that was able to disappear. The invention failed many times before succeeding and for this, Jay asked Washington to be extremely secretive about the ink. Sir James<sup>125</sup> resided in England and was knighted by King George III, Jay at times acted as a spy and sent information to his brother in the Colonies. The mixture reached Washington in the Spring of 1779 and Sir James instructed the Americans how to use it. The agent had to write on a white paper and then apply the fluid on the letter, by doing this the ink would become invisible. To retrieve the message, what was needed was a different chemical liquid that revealed the hidden words<sup>126</sup>. Sir James' invisible ink was revolutionary for the time because of its ingredients. In the 18th century, invisible inks were not used because of the lengthy and difficult chemical process, these primitive inks were made of cabbage or lime juice and to develop them the recipient had to use an iron on the letter to heat it. This process was expensive and dangerous since it required a lot of time<sup>127</sup>. The ink of the Revolution was quite different because it was easier to use, was impervious to heat, and impressed Washington who was constantly looking for timely options. Carrying out a deep research on the materials used in the Culper Ring letters is not possible since the letters could be damaged, but through

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<sup>125</sup> D. Markle, (2014), *The Fox and the Hound, the birth of American spying*. PP 226-227. Hippocrene books, New York.

<sup>126</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. "Spy Techniques of the Revolutionary War". <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/spy-techniques-of-the-revolutionary-war/>

<sup>127</sup> D. Markle, (2014), *The Fox and the Hound, the birth of American spying*. PP 226-227. Hippocrene books, New York.

Washington's advice to the Culper Ring and other evidence, understanding how the ink was produced can be discovered. Washington advised his agents to write only on white new paper and to avoid using cheap ones since the ink had better results on a new paper<sup>128</sup>.

*"I mean that he should occasionally write his information on the blank leaves of a pamphlet—on the first second &c. pages of a common pocket book—on the blank leaves at each end of registers for the year—almanacks, or any new publication—or book of small value. He should be determined in the choice of these books, principally by the goodness of the blank paper as the ink is not easily legible unless it is on paper of a good quality".*

The second advice issued by the General, was to wet the paper with a fine and delicate brush that could avoid any damages. Through these clues and further research on Sir James Jay's studies on the fluid, it is possible to understand how Jay's formula was created. The Agent consisted of a mix of tannic acid and powdered acacia, and this mix would have created the ink itself. The reagent instead was made of ferrous sulfate and distilled water<sup>129</sup>. Once the ink was ready to use, the Culper Ring began to store it in Setauket under the guard of a merchant named Lewis Pintard. The latter was asked to work as a spy for Washington, since he was so close to the enemy, but the merchant refused since the request was too dangerous.

The ink proved to be an exceptional resource for the spies but because of how scarce it was, members of the Culper Ring were afraid of abusing it. Woodhull was so afraid of running out of it that began to store it instead of using it, enraging the General. In a letter dated 5 February 1780, Washington expressed his annoyance towards Culper Sr to Tallmadge<sup>130</sup>,

*"The stain in the small Phial is more than half I have—I wish C—— would use it carefully what I have sent for him at different times would have wrote fifty times what I have recd from him".*

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<sup>128</sup> Letter from Tallmadge to Washington, December 11th 1778.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-24-02-0308>

<sup>129</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. Spy techniques of the revolutionary war

<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/spy-techniques-of-the-revolutionary-war/#:~:text=During%20the%20Revolutionary%20War%20invisible,heat%20or%20a%20chemical%20substance.>

<sup>130</sup> Letter from Washington to Tallmadge, February 5th 1780.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-24-02-0308>



The fluid was usually used between the lines of casual letters, in any type of book and newspaper. Using a common book or newspaper was a better choice than a letter, the ink placed at the extremities of the book or on the entry of a newspaper was not as suspicious as a letter.

*“He may write a familiar letter on domestic affairs, or on some little matters of business to his friend at Satuket or elsewhere, interlining with the stain his secret intelligence, or writing it on the opposite blank side of the letter. But that his friend may know how to distinguish these from letters addressed solely to himself—he may always leave such as contain secret information without a date or place (dating it with the stain); or fold them up in a particular manner, which may be concerted between the parties. This last appears to be the best mark of the two, and may be the signal for their being designed for me.*

*The first mentioned mode however, or that of the books, appears to me the one least liable to detection<sup>131</sup>”*

Agents were always warned to use it for critical messages that could have altered the course of a campaign or battle. It had to be the last resource in case of highest necessity.

The ink was in fact treated as the most precious resource not only by the Americans, but also by the British who used it a lot in their correspondences. Furthermore, it wasn't only difficult to find the ingredients, but buying a great amount of them would have been suspicious. The ink was nicknamed “stain” or “medicine” by Washington and his agents to hide the real identity of the fluid. Because of its preciousness, the stain was a luxury that could not always be used. Despite its usefulness, because of all the reasons aforementioned, the ink wasn't the only method used by the spies, the Culper Ring needed another way to communicate in secret, code names were what the American Spy Ring needed.

## **711 and 722.**

In our modern imagination, coded names are strictly linked to famous blockbusters like James Bond and other action films, where spies have unforgettable names and fake identities. Coded names are not at all fictitious, actual spies use them to safeguard themselves during operations.

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<sup>131</sup> Letter from Washington to Tallmadge, 24th September 1779.  
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-22-02-0414>

During the American conflict for independence, code names were used to describe not only spies but also places and other important key words.

Since the ink was too expensive and difficult to find, Tallmadge had to work on other methods to ensure the safety of the Culper Ring and its success. The Spymaster lacked experience and knowledge to be able to create a code book from scratch, so he had to rely on code makers of the past.

Coding was highly used in Europe by professional foreign ministers, who sent secret information to their sovereigns by using secret names and numbers to hide crucial information. Diplomats, as stated in the first chapter, could be able and successful spies. For his Code Book, Tallmadge was inspired by the Ave Maria cipher written by Johannes Trithemius, author of the "*Polygraphiae*" written in 1518. The Code was a table that paired the 24 plaintext letters of the alphabet with various nouns, verbs, and adjectives. The sender had to replace these corresponding words for every letter of the plaintext message to form a prayer<sup>132</sup>. This code was indeed useful but extremely laborious and hard to use, and for this reason it wasn't the only example used by Tallmadge.

An important figure in coding during the American Revolution was Charles Willim Frederic Dumas, who was a firm believer in the American Revolution, Dumas was in Holland and corresponded with Franklin. Dumas established a new cipher in which any letter in the passage had a number assigned to it from 1 to 682, in this way a single letter can be enciphered in as many ways as the letter is in the text. The Code was extremely hard to decipher and it proved to be difficult to decode for the Continental Congress as well<sup>133</sup>. Tallmadge, by using these excellent examples, was able to create an easier code for the Culper Ring. The Code used by Washington's spies wasn't intricate and hard to understand, Tallmadge devised a simple code that his agents could understand and learn how to use in a little amount of time.

Creating the Culper Code was a hard task, but the spies were already using a sort of Code before the Code book was established where the number 10 represented New York, 20 Setauket, 30 and 40 the two raiders including Austin Roe.

Tallmadge on the other hand, used Entick's Spelling Dictionary as a source for his Cipher. His inspiration also came from the beloved French General Lafayette, who had a knowledge of cryptography and codes.

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<sup>132</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. P.114, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>133</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. PP.117-118, Bantam Dell, New York.

The code was made of 673 numbers, each number representing a name, place or word that was put in the left column in alphabetical order. All the members of the Culper Ring knew each other's code and communicated between them through it. Washington was 711, Tallmadge/John Bolton was 721, CulperSr or Samuel Culper was 722, Culper Jr was 723, Roe 724. In the names, The agents and allies were not the only ones included in Tallmadge's book, General Clinton was referred to as 712. New York was 727. Long Island 728, and Setauket 729. The only member of the network that didn't want to use a coded name was Caleb Brewster, who was given only a number, 725<sup>134</sup>.

The code's missing words and digits were signalled with bare-bone and mixed-alphabet schemes. The digits in the code had a double line under them to avoid confusion with the enciphered ones. Words in past and future tense were signed with a small squiggle that was left above the number.

Although Tallmadge was ingenious in the creation of his code, the cipher was far from perfect. The numbers instead of being randomised, were all in alphabetical order. This represented a great weakness for the book that could have been easily deciphered by a Black Chamber expert<sup>135</sup>. Tallmadge committed another error while drafting the code, many important words that were essential in that situation were missing. In the Culper Book the word "officer" doesn't appear, and it is puzzling how such an important word wasn't used in the Spy book.

Furthermore, the agents were difficult to train on how to use the code and this lack of training resulted in confusion and mistakes. For example, soon after the introduction of the book, Culper Jr committed the error of coding common words like "the", "of", and "with" but remained crucial words like "intelligence" and "army" uncoded and readable. These mistakes could have given out the entirety of a mission and endangered the agents. Thankfully, after using the code book many times, the Culper Spies learned how to use it and were careful not to repeat the same mistakes.

Even though the book had its weak spots, it was useful and served the agents in their missions, it allowed them to trick an ordinary reader as well as a simple soldier who did not know how to decipher. The book was an important addition that gave the Setauket spies more professionalism and discipline, the code was what made them different to the other spy networks.

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<sup>134</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *George Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. PP 252, 253, 259, 266, 270. East Hampton Library, East Hampton.

<sup>135</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring*. P.123, Bantam Dell, New York.

**Culper Jr coded letter to Tallmadge and Washington**<sup>136</sup>: *“Sorry 626.280 cannot give 707 an exact account 431.625 situation. 431.625.635.707.373. Think 626.280.49 not taken sufficient pains 634.442.284. I assure 707.626.280.240.190.284. More 146 than 280 expected. It is 282 some measure owing 683,379.414 having got 287.1.573 line 431.216 intelligence. To depend 668.80 reports 683.183-1537.5 conversed 680 two qjcgilw 431 different 76 from 730 from 419.431 which 280 could 442.2 account 431.625 situation 431.625. Army 630. I was afraid 430 being too 526”*

**The Deciphered message:** *“Sorry that I cannot give you an exact account of the situation of the troops. You may think that I have not taken sufficient pains to obtain it. I assure you that I have, and find it more difficult than expected. It is in some measure owing to my not having got into a regular line of getting intelligence. To depend upon common reports would not do. I saw and conversed with two officers of different corps from Kings-bridge from neither of whom I could obtain an account of the situation of the army there. I was afraid of being too particular”.*

A different example can be seen by a coded letter written by Culper Sr to John Bolton(Tallmadge), where he communicates the destruction of a letter by a second messenger, Jonas Hawkins, who had been briefly captured by the British<sup>137</sup>.

*“Sir, Dqpeu Beyocpu (Hawkins) agreeable to 28 met 723 (Culper Jr) not far from 727 (New York) and received a 356(Letter), but on his return was under the necessity to destroy the same, or be detected, but have the satisfaction to inform you that there's nothing 317 (important) to 15 (advise) you of.”*

As it is possible to notice, the coded words were far too easy to understand and in enemy hands would have compromised the safety of Culper Jr and other spies around the city. Culper Sr was instead more able in using the code, and coded only the most important elements like the identity of the spy.

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<sup>136</sup> B.Bleyer, (2021), *George Washington's Long Island Spy Ring*. P 70. The History Press.

<sup>137</sup> Deciphered letter from Samuel Culper Sr to Tallmadge. 15th of August 1779. Founders Archives. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-22-02-0039-0002>

Code and Ink, were only the most resourceful and creative techniques implemented by Culper Sr and the others, many other methods were older but effective, Propaganda for example was a powerful tool to use against the British.

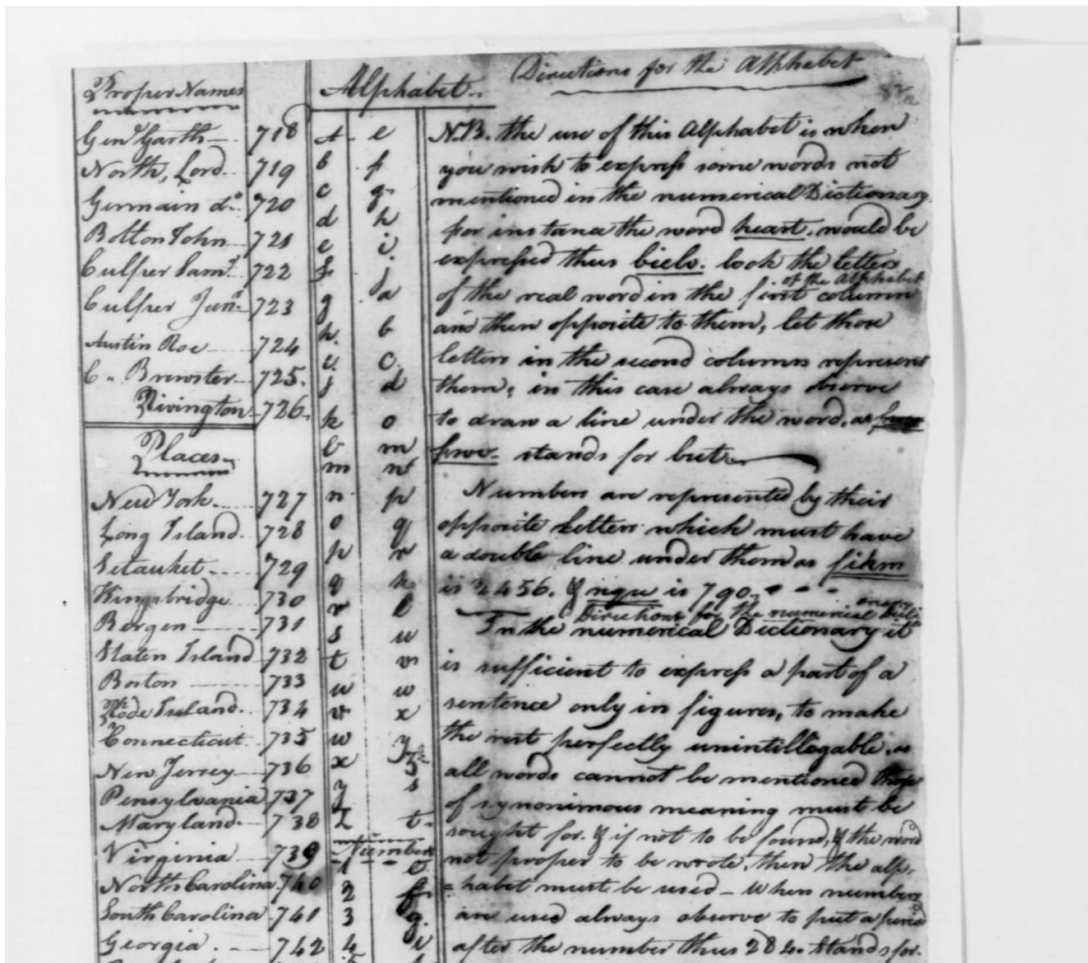


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711 aka George Washington is visible at the end of the page, by the reader's right side.

Under Gen. Washington, with the coded name 712, George Clinton appears. In the same column it is possible to read the names of other important officers.

<sup>138</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. "The Culper Code book". Images are courtesy of the Library of Congress. <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/the-culper-code-book/#->



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In the second image, the Culper Ring members' coded names are at the top of the page, by the reader's left side. Soon after the names of the undercover agents, Tallmadge wrote the coded names of various places.

727 New York, 728 Long Island, 729 Setauket, 730 Kingsbridge, 733 Boston.

The other two column represent the original alphabet and the corresponding coded letter A was E, B was F, C was G etc...

### Hear Ye Hear Ye.

Fake News, just like the previous methods that have been analysed before, have always been around. In our modern days the presence of false information is enhanced by television and

<sup>139</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. "The Culper Code book". Images are courtesy of the Library of Congress. <https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/the-culper-code-book/#->

social media. Propaganda through fake news is a powerful tool to use against the enemy. Nowadays it is being used in modern conflicts and during the American conflict was as brutal as it is today. Propaganda usually consists of information that is one sided and that doesn't show the entirety of a situation. In the American Revolution, Propaganda was one of the first methods to be used by both Americans and British before the actual fighting began. Benjamin Franklin, acting as minister in France, was amongst the first Americans to understand the importance of spreading fake news to discredit the enemy. George Washington approached the use of propaganda during the French and Indian war and was able to use his experience in the American conflict as well. Both sides were acquainted with the fact that many times a pen was mightier than the sword, and that people tended to trust what journals said. When using propaganda, what is important to have in mind is the need of a precise political objective that highly engaged people. At the eve of the Revolution, amongst the first groups to use propaganda in favour of independence were the Sons Of Liberty. Sam Adams, cousin of the second US President John Adams, was the leader of this group of revolutionaries. Through propaganda in newspapers, advertisements and in the streets, Adams convinced many Americans that they had to fight for their freedom, and that their own liberty was in danger. Samuel Adams was successful because he appealed to people's anger towards the new taxes and to the colonies' cry of no taxation through representation<sup>140</sup>.

As the conflict erupted, fake news was used if not abused by both Patriots and Loyalists. Gen. Washington used it for the first time in July 1776 during the desperate battle for the contention of New York. The General spread the fake news that the Americans had a great supply of food and healthcare with them, and that their resources outnumbered the British ones<sup>141</sup>. The aim of this mission was to lower the morale of the British soldiers and encourage young soldiers to desert the British side for the American one. Despite being used mainly for propaganda, Journal's entries could also contain information that was hidden through a code consisting of usual words that had another meaning for who was reading.

The British were extremely able at crafting false information, their aim was to incite the colonies against the Continental Congress. In 1777, Lord Germain ordered the production of fake dollars, initiating the British campaign to undermine Continental paper money. Loyalists

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<sup>140</sup> J.C.Miller, (1936), *Sam Adams: Pioneer in Propaganda*. PP 103-133. Stanford University Press.

<sup>141</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, PP 98-99., Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.



newspapers like the *Gazette*, spread the news that Congress was responsible for the fraud, diminishing Americans' trust in Congress<sup>142</sup>.

*“There has lately been, as we understand by a Gentleman just arrived from NewEngland, a large Distribution in the Country of counterfeited Continental Bills, so amicably executed, as not easily discerned from those issued by Order of Congress. This has contributed not a little to lower their Value, and will be one effectual Bar To the Repayment or Liquidation”*<sup>143</sup>.

Since they didn't have many resources, the Culper Spy weren't able to write fake news in local journals, but their propaganda usually aimed at turning British soldiers to their side.

Even though it wasn't a method that Washington's spies used, propaganda proved to be essential in order to move the spirits of those who were still undecided and did not know his/her side.

### **Masked Letters**

Finally, another ingenious method, mostly used by the British, was the use of Masked Letters. The text containing the information was usually in the form of an innocent letter that had nothing to do with military matters. In reality, the letter contained crucial information regarding the enemy. This system ensured the agent's security and if the decipherer wasn't an expert, it was difficult to retrieve the real content. The real content of the correspondence could be detected only by placing a specific cut out shape on the paper. The sentences that appear inside the shape are the real content of the message<sup>144</sup>. Many spies didn't send letters and shape at the same time in order to avoid being discovered. The British Sir Henry Clinton was an expert in masked letters, and used them in most of his military correspondence. In the images taken from the William L. Clements Library, it is possible to analyse a masked letter written by Sir Henry Clinton to General Burgoyne on the 7th of August 1777. In the first image, the meaning of the

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<sup>142</sup> E.P. Newman. *“THE SUCCESSFUL BRITISH COUNTERFEITING OF AMERICAN PAPER MONEY DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION”*. PP 175-176. Jstor

[https://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1958\\_BNJ\\_29\\_18.pdf](https://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1958_BNJ_29_18.pdf)

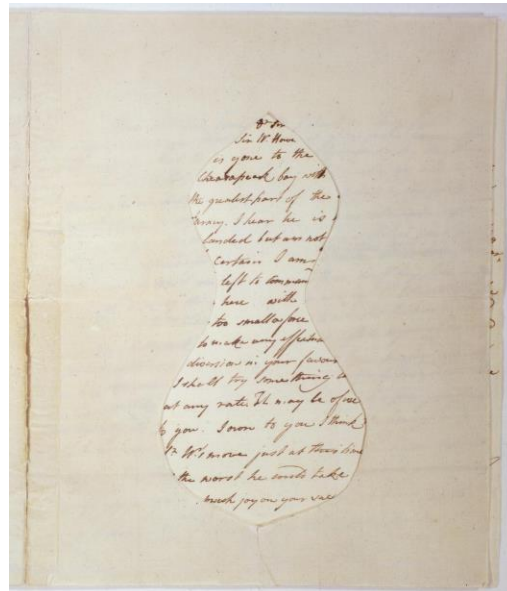
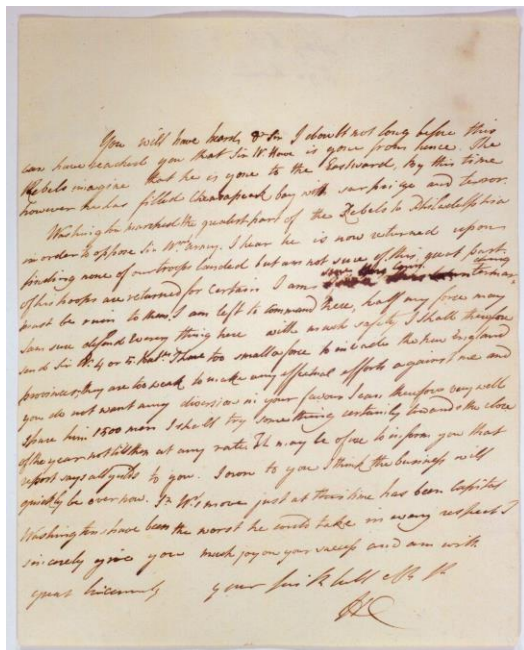
<sup>143</sup> E.P. Newman. *“THE SUCCESSFUL BRITISH COUNTERFEITING OF AMERICAN PAPER MONEY DURING THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION”*. PP 175. Jstor

[https://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1958\\_BNJ\\_29\\_18.pdf](https://www.britnumsoc.org/publications/Digital%20BNJ/pdfs/1958_BNJ_29_18.pdf)

<sup>144</sup> William Clements library. *“Mask Letter”*. University of Michigan. <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/spy-letters-of-the-american-revolution/secret-methods/mask-letter/>



letter doesn't seem to contain any crucial information. In the second picture, once the Shape is applied, the real meaning of the message can be redacted by reading inside the shape<sup>145</sup>.



Images and information from <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/spy-letters-of-the-american-revolution/gallery-of-letters/clinton-burgoyne-mask-letter/>

### 3.3 The Culper Ring in action

Once armed with the sympathetic stain, a code book, and masked letters, the Culper Ring Spies were ready to put into action all the tools they acquired. In truth, the Ring worked before the ink and code arrived, the agents were devoted to their tasks, and always tried to come up with new ways to trick the British. These new methods enhanced their abilities and allowed them to be more precise and timely during their operations, which was what Washington wanted. Townsend's arrival was a blessing for the General, who wanted to gather intelligence directly from the city. With Culper Jr, the Culper Ring carried out impressive missions and outwitted the British. Amongst the many operations that the undercover agents accomplished, some are worth mentioning more than others

<sup>145</sup> William Clements library. "Henry Clinton Letter to John Burgoyne, August 10, 1777, Henry Clinton Papers" University of Michigan. <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/spy-letters-of-the-american-revolution/gallery-of-letters/clinton-burgoyne-mask-letter/>

## Not Worth a Continental

As stated in the previous paragraph, fake news was often used by the British to undermine Congress and the Continental Army, especially Gen. Washington. Between 1779 and 1780, the newly acquired member of the Culper Ring, Robert Townsend, found himself in a New York where chaos reigned. It was during those years of British occupation that Townsend came to know about the British plan to destroy the American economy and Americans' trust in Congress. If there was no real money, then that meant that soldiers were not going to get paid at all, and no soldiers equals no war. This British operation weightened a lot on the shoulders of many Continental soldiers who were starving for free. As Culper Jr discovered, the Loyalists aimed at throwing Patriots against each other, especially against Congress.

In 1777 under Lord Germain's orders<sup>146</sup> The British began to produce a huge amount of fake Continental Dollars. The activity went on for a couple of years, until 1780, and British officers supported by newspapers and locals spread the tale that the currency was fake, and that Congress itself was to blame. Newspapers like the *Gazette*, claimed that Congress had issued the fake currency hoping to increase the credit of the dollar. The newspaper defined Congress as the main culprit for all the chaos. The Dollar, by the end of 1777 had no value and a soldier pay of 5 Dollars was worth less than 2 shillings<sup>147</sup>. The circulation of the fake notes was rendered easy by the British who advertised the free money available. Some advertisements reassured the volunteers by telling them that there was only a little possibility of being discovered since the copies were perfectly made. The plan proceeded swiftly through 1778 and 1779 when Continental bills became literally worthless. Alarmed by the situation, Congress recalled the bills of credit authorised in Philadelphia and Yorktown<sup>148</sup>, and in the hope of solving the situation Congress began to print more money as the value dropped<sup>149</sup>.

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<sup>146</sup> S. Hatfield, (2015), "Faking It: British Counterfeiting during the American Revolution." Journal of The American Revolution. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/10/faking-it-british-counterfeiting-during-the-american-revolution/>

<sup>147</sup> S. Hatfield, (2015), "Faking It: British Counterfeiting during the American Revolution." Journal of The American Revolution. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/10/faking-it-british-counterfeiting-during-the-american-revolution/>

<sup>148</sup> S. Hatfield, (2015), "Faking It: British Counterfeiting during the American Revolution." Journal of The American Revolution. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/10/faking-it-british-counterfeiting-during-the-american-revolution/>

<sup>149</sup> S. Hatfield, (2015), "Faking It: British Counterfeiting during the American Revolution." Journal of The American Revolution. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/10/faking-it-british-counterfeiting-during-the-american-revolution/>

The operation lasted until 1780, when Culper Jr was already an active member of the Spy Ring and found himself in the eye of the hurricane. Townsend, always careful not to ask too many questions, tried to grasp as much information as he could. The able spy reported detailed information and was never suspected of being an undercover agent. After gathering enough information, Culper Jr wrote to Washington that from Philadelphia, the British got hold of several stacks of paper made from Congress' last emission<sup>150</sup>. Hence, now armed with the original papers, the British were issuing perfect copies. After receiving the alarming news, Washington promptly warned Congress reassuring them that he received the information from a trusted correspondent inside the city. Thanks to the great spying abilities of Robert Townsend, in March 1780 Congress retired all the circulating money and declared bankruptcy. This covert operation represents how resourceful and essential for the Culper Ring Townsend was, by hiding behind his introverted personality and discretion, Culper Jr was surely one of the most indispensable members of the network.

The operation was praised by Washington, who was extremely satisfied with the Ring's activity. Washington's satisfaction towards his spies had its ups and down, but the General knew that the Culper Spy Ring was what he needed to win the war and build a new nation.

### **The French are coming!**

The months following the uncovering of the great fraud were not very fruitful in regards to intelligence operations. There were fractures between the members of the network and Washington, and when the two most important agents Woodhull and Townsend did not communicate, information ran short. During these months of tense silence, the General wondered if the best decision was to end the network's operations at once and resort to other means. In May an annoyed Washington wrote to Tallmadge on the idea of putting an end to the Ring given the scarcity of intelligence from the agents<sup>151</sup>. Thankfully, Washington didn't follow his first decision and between May and June 1780, the General reactivated the Ring after a few months of coldness. The reason for the Ring's reactivation was the imminent arrival on Rhode Island of a fleet commanded by the French Comte de Rochambeau<sup>152</sup>. Because of their arrival, Washington needed Culper Sr and Jr more than anything. When Caleb Brewster

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<sup>150</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring*. P.183, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>151</sup> A. Rose, (2006), *Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring*. P.188, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>152</sup> Intel.Gov. "Evolution of Espionage". <https://www.intel.gov/evolution-of-espionage/revolutionary-war/culper-spy-ring>

arrived in Setauket, Woodhull was sick and confined in bed, unable to reach New York to meet the “younger” Culper. To his rescue came Austin Roe who rode to New York to meet Culper Jr. When Roe arrived in New York to meet Townsend, the younger Culper gave him extremely important news that might have altered the course of the war. Given the urgency of the matter, Culper Jr took important precautions. He wrote the vital information with the sympathetic stain in a commercial letter that was supposed to be sent to the British Col. Floyd. To give Roe an alibi, Townsend specified that Austin Roe was the messenger assigned to give Floyd the letter<sup>153</sup>.

In his letter, 723 informed Washington that the British knew of Rochambeau’s arrival with his troops and were planning an ambush. Clinton knew about the arrival because the traitor, Benedict Arnold, was told the plan by Washington who trusted him with the information before he turned out to be a traitor. When Brewster arrived at camp, both Tallmadge and Washington were away. The whaler urged a dragoon to bring the letter to Washington’s headquarters where the information was received by an alarmed Alexander Hamilton. Since the information was urgent, Hamilton did not wait for Washington and sent a letter to Lafayette who was at Newport with Rochambeau. In the letter, signed on the 21st of July 1780, the future Secretary of the Treasury informed Lafayette of a possible attack on the French fleet by the enemy.

My Dear Marquis<sup>154</sup>

We have just received advice from New York through different channels that the enemy are making an embarkation with which they menace the French fleet and army. Fifty transports are said to have gone up the Sound to take in troops and proceed directly to Rhode Island.

The General is absent and may not return before evening. Though this may be only a demonstration yet as it may be serious, I think it best to forward it without waiting the General’s return.

We have different accounts from New York of an action in the West Indies in which the English lost several ships. I am inclined to credit them.

I am My Dear Marquis with the truest affection Yr. Most Obedt

A Hamilton Aide De Camp

Hd. Qrs.

July 21st 80

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<sup>153</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington’s spies. The story of America’s first Spy Ring. PP.189-190, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>154</sup> Letter from Hamilton to Lafayette 21st of July 1780. Founders Archives.  
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-02-02-0775>

Once Tallmadge and Washington returned to camp, the Commander in chief saw the situation as an opportunity to retake New York. At the end, after careful consideration and persuasion Washington realised that taking the city would have been difficult since there wasn't enough time to plan a big attack. In the meantime, to discourage the British ambush on the French, Washington spread the rumour that 12.000 American soldiers were on their way to New York. Washington had to give up his dream of retaking New York, but once Clinton heard the rumours regarding the American defence, he called off the ambush.

Thanks to Townsend's information, and Hamilton's letter to Lafayette, the Americans were once again able to prevent disaster. The French alliance proved to be essential for the outcome of the war, their help signed history and the beginning of America's victory over Britain. The roots of the United States and France's friendship is long and it is certainly linked to the American Revolution.

### **A difficult relationship.**

The Culper Ring was undoubtedly an effective team, their organisation made them resourceful and timely, their operations pleased Washington who thanks to them was able to outwit his enemy. But things were not always all puppies and rainbows, the relationships between the Culpers and the General weren't always easy. Washington had a difficult temper and the two Culpers' personalities often clashed with his. Because of the many clashes between them, many times Washington believed that the right idea was to put an end to the network. Various episodes enraged the General in regards to the most resourceful members of the Ring. Cooperation between Culper Sr and Jr was paramount for the outcome of the operations, but not all the times cooperation worked.

Woodhull tended to be overcautious and paranoid, furthermore he was always in need of money and lamented that the General was not giving him enough<sup>155</sup>. In addition, Culper Sr's habit of hiding supplies of invisible ink instead of using it, annoyed Washington. Constantly afraid of being discovered by the enemy, in the Winter of 1780, Woodhull abandoned a mission<sup>156</sup>,

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<sup>155</sup> Letter from Washington to Tallmadge, 19th of May 1780.

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-26-02-0041-0002>

<sup>156</sup>M.Pennypacker, (1948), *George Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. PP 72-73 East Hampton Library, East Hampton.

causing a long fracture between him and the General. During this period of fracture, Culper Sr's intelligence was always running short and Washington decided to rely on Culper Jr. But once again, Washington's patience was put to test in March 1780. Townsend wanted to try and use the passage to New Jersey as an alternative route, but instead of relying on the contacts that Washington gave him, he decided to entrust his young cousin James to go across the Hudson. The young Townsend's cover was that he was a loyalist visiting his family. Maybe because of the young age, the young covert agent got carried away during his visit to a secret Patriot family, the Deussenberry, and they arrested him under the suspicion of being a British spy. Once brought to the Patriots' headquarters, soldiers found two sheets of papers on him. The papers contained a poem written in Culper Jr S handwriting. The poems were covered with information written by Townsend with the secret ink<sup>157</sup>. After liberating James Townsend, Washington was furious at his agent's recklessness while Woodhull was offended by Culper Jr acting behind his back. Taken by surprise by Washington and Woodhull's anger, Townsend decided to end his collaboration with the Ring, and played deaf at Woodhull's request to join back<sup>158</sup>. Thankfully, the man inside New York decided to join the team just in time to discover the British plan of ambushing the French.

Relationships inside the first American Spy Ring were never easy, but despite their differences the Culper spies knew that the future of their country was at stake. These men with different needs, dreams, and personality, had in common the dream of liberty, the will of serving their country, the knowledge that they had to stand together for a greater cause.

#### **4. The Arnold-André conspiracy**

##### **The story behind the greatest conspiracy of the Revolution**

Some names in a nation's history are regarded with honours and glory, these figures of the past are often mystified and become more Gods than men. These people that shaped nations and led armies have now a special place in a citizen's heart and soul. Everyone, for example, regards Washington as the great founding father of the nation, the father of the United States and the

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<sup>157</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. PP.185-187, Bantam Dell, New York.

<sup>158</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. PP.187-189, Bantam Dell, New York.

only one able to hold the country together. His military career, often overrated, is glorified and is the pride of the country. With his calm and soft smile, Washington resembles a good and understanding father that everyone wants to make proud.

But as history makes her heroes, she also makes her villains. Every American knows the name of Benedict Arnold, and every American associates him with the adjective “traitor”, many compare him to Judas. His betrayal shocked and wounded the American people, Congress, his soldiers, and Washington who regarded him as an honourable man. In fact, Arnold was seen as a hero before the terrible events of West Point. It was probably his past as an ardent Patriot that made his betrayal even more shocking to the eyes of the Americans. He fought valiantly during the early years of the Revolution, but his victory at Saratoga that crowned him a hero is nowadays bypassed by the conspiracy that followed him to his grave and beyond.

Many historians said that if Arnold died at Saratoga, he would be considered as one of America’s greatest heroes. Arnold’s wounded leg from Saratoga, the leg that proclaimed him a hero, actually has a statue in the Saratoga National Park. The “Boot Monument” is located in Saratoga, in the point where Arnold was wounded. The monument does not have his name since he is defined as the greatest traitor of the nation, but the elements on the statue give the observers hints. On the boot there are two stars and a howitzer barrel that are the symbols of a wounded major General. The Laurel leaf is instead the symbol of victory and glory. The inscription of the monument gives another hint on the subject of the statue<sup>159</sup>:

*“In memory of the most brilliant soldier of the Continental army who was desperately wounded on this spot, the sally port of Burgoyne’s great western redoubt. 7th October 1777 winning for his countrymen the decisive battle of the American Revolution and for himself the rank of Major General.”*

There is a lot of speculation regarding Arnold’s reasons. Many believe that the real reason for his actions never resided in ideals, for he had been an ardent believer of liberty since the beginning of the Revolution, but because of an excessive want of money. His reputation as one of the best commanders of the Revolution was greatly outshined by his greed and difficult personality. Andre is instead the other face of the coin of this conspiracy, a man whose death inspired ballads, tragedies, and books. If Arnold is remembered as the dangerous traitor, British

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<sup>159</sup> “Boot Monument”, Saratoga National Historical Park. <https://www.nps.gov/places/boot-monument.htm>



Major John André is seen as the hero that met an unjust death. In order to understand the conspiracy, how it took shape, and the Culpers' discovery, it's important to talk about the two men and maybe one woman that could have changed the course of the war.

#### **4.1 The two sides of the coin.**

##### **From Hero to Zero.**

Born in Connecticut in 1741 from a Rhode Island's founding family, Benedict Arnold saw his illustrious family name brought to shame by his father's alcoholism. The stain of his father's habits and insolvency prompted Arnold to better himself and to build his own fortune. He became a successful apothecary and merchant at only 30 years old<sup>160</sup>. Before the Stamp Act caused the breach between the 13 colonies and England, Arnold aspired to become a rich gentleman and tried in many ways to build his fortune.

Mr. Randall gives us a description of a young Benedict Arnold in his book<sup>161</sup>: *"At 25 Benedict Arnold was typical of many American gentlemen trying to live like English gentry on the edge of a wild continent. At home in New Haven, he wore fine clothing and white satin stockings, and made his way in society. Away from his drawing room, he was an aggressive ship's captain fast becoming Connecticut's most successful smuggler."* Even at that age he yearned for more money and profit. His apothecary gave him a good income but it was never enough for Benedict Arnold.

When the Stamp Act was imposed on the colonies in 1765, Arnold's activity was touched by it as well. As the turmoil and unrest grew in the colonies, he began to participate actively in the Revolution. His firm beliefs in the revolutionary ideals prompted him to join the Sons of Liberty in 1765<sup>162</sup>.

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<sup>160</sup> N. Philbrick (2016), *Why Benedict Arnold Turned Traitor Against the American Revolution*. The Smithsonian Magazine <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/benedict-arnold-turned-traitor-american-revolution-180958786/>

<sup>161</sup> H. Mitgang, (1990), *"Benedict Arnold, the Great American Traitor"* The New York Times, The Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>162</sup> R.W. Sterne, (1990), *"Benedict Arnold: patriot and traitor"*: P.49. Morrow, New York.



When he heard about the Boston Massacre, he raged at his fellow citizens that were still neutral or did not want to take part in the Revolution. To them he screamed, “*Good God, are the Americans all asleep and tamely giving up their glorious liberties?*”<sup>163</sup>”

In 1775, when the battles of Lexington and Concord meant the beginning of the war, Arnold seized a portion of New Haven’s gunpowder supply and marched north with a company of volunteers. His bravery was recognized by his superiors, who appointed him as Captain of the New Haven militia. His confidence, energy, and determination granted him an appointment as Colonel from the Committee of Public Safety, and he was allowed to command 400 men<sup>164</sup>. After proposing the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, Arnold was instructed to leave the soldiers at Ticonderoga and gather as many supplies as he could. After receiving horses and more, the former patriot departed for his mission.

The fort was strategically located between New York and Canada, referred also as the door to Canada. Despite his hopes, the mission proved to be slightly compromised by the presence of Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain boys<sup>165</sup>. The two commanders quarrelled for long on who was going to lead the battle. Already in this episode, Arnold showed to be stubborn and ready to get what he wanted, he wasn’t going to share the success with someone else. Thankfully, after a compromise the two reached an agreement and the plan proceeded. The forces moved swiftly and cautiously, and, in the meantime, Allen was joined by two other parties. At the beginning of May, they reached Lake George and crossed it with only 83 men<sup>166</sup>. Once on the other side, the march towards the Fort began. It’s not hard to imagine what the two commanders thought of what was expecting them at the Fort, but if they were expecting a long battle then they must have been greatly disappointed. As they reached the Fort, they only found one sentinel who ran away terrorised once they arrived at the fort. The next step was reaching headquarters and accepting the surrendering of the Fort. The two men rushed towards headquarters, to the commanders’ apartments. To open the door, was the commander’s subalternan, Lieutenant Feltham. When Feltham asked under whose authority they were

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<sup>163</sup> C.S. Johnson, (1975), “*Who is this Benedict Arnold and why is he storming Quebec?*”. Harvard Magazine. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>164</sup> W.L. Powell, (2004), “*Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary War hero and traitor*”: PP 21-23. PowerPlus Books, New York.

<sup>165</sup> C.S. Johnson, (1975), “*Who is this Benedict Arnold and why is he storming Quebec?*”. Harvard Magazine, Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>166</sup> W.L. Powell, (2004), “*Benedict Arnold: Revolutionary War hero and traitor*”: P 26. PowerPlus Books, New York.

taking the Fort, Allen answered with his famous “*In the name of the great Jeovah and the Continental Congress*<sup>167</sup>”.

Even though with the conquest of Ticonderoga Arnold became almost a mythological figure, his temper and personality put him constantly against Allen. Arnold’s violent treatment towards Easton, who was Allen’s partner, was brutal and uncomfortable. On the other hand, if Arnold preferred discipline and order, Allen was governed by instinct and chaos. His soldiers destroyed everything around them and were never answering promptly at their commander’s orders. The glorious victory at Fort Ticonderoga was obscured by their enmity that peaked when the Connecticut Committee appointed Allen commander of Ticonderoga<sup>168</sup>.

The low blow did not bother Arnold for long, who soon after Ticonderoga launched himself in a fight for the contention of Lake Champlain. One of his greatest exploits included the seizure of the British sloop “George” and the port in Quebec<sup>169</sup>. The sloop was the largest warship on the lake.

Arnold’s thirst for battle and glory was abruptly stopped in June 1775 when his wife died. After leaving his three sons with his sister Hannah, the only way of filling the hole that his wife left, was fighting. After his wife’s death, Arnold became even more brutal and focused, always restless; he told Washington of his plan for the invasion of Canada. It was during the Canadian plot that the Virginian leader grew attached to Arnold and confessed his admiration for him. Of Arnold, Washington admired his military talents, wit, and gift for strategy. Perhaps Arnold’s betrayal hurt Washington so much especially because of how highly he thought of him.

During the disastrous campaign in Quebec, Arnold was terribly wounded in the right leg and earned the reputation of a formidable military leader. The march to Quebec, is still considered today one of the most difficult campaigns of the Revolution<sup>170</sup>. Two forces, one led through Lake Champlain by Gen. Philip Schuyler, and one through the forest by Benedict Arnold, were involved in the impossible campaign. On paper, Arnold’s plan was extremely simple, void of any type of issue. The plan was to lead a small force into Canada through Maine, ascend the

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<sup>167</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), “*Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*”. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC.

<sup>168</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), “*Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*”. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC.

<sup>169</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, P.213, Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

<sup>170</sup> C.S. Johnson, (1975), “*Who is this Benedict Arnold and why is he storming Quebec?*”. Harvard Magazine. Society of the Cincinnati.

Kennebeck to Dead River, easily reach the Chaudiere and then Quebec was going to be taken quickly<sup>171</sup>.

In reality, the plan was extremely different from paper. The excessive wilderness of Quebec did not reason with the army and its Generals. Philip Schuyler fell ill and Montgomery replaced him<sup>172</sup>. Once Montgomery had replaced Schuyler, Arnold handpicked the men that were going to serve under him. All his men were strong, well built, and robust, able to face the various difficulties along the road. The party reached the end of the expedition at the beginning of October 1775. Through the expedition, Arnold tried to turn the Canadians to their side, inciting them against the enemy and the dangers of tyranny. The trip was instead extremely hard, for the soldiers never had enough food and they were all starved and exhausted. In the meantime, Arnold's soldiers fell ill because of the harsh weather and food. On New Year's Eve 1775, Montgomery led the first attack on Quebec City. This attack as well was a disaster especially because of poor education and training on certain grounds. Montgomery was killed in action, and many of his soldiers perished. On the other side, Arnold was constantly attacked as well by the enemy and forced to withdraw. Even though this was a loss, this episode made Washington understand that Arnold was a military prodigy.

After the Quebec expedition, Arnold did not lose faith and continued pushing and dreaming of battle. During the summer of 1776, Arnold was ready to meet the British forces in the decisive battle for the control of Lake Champlain. During the battle, Arnold was initially able to damage the British through his tactics but this did not last long. His strength and will power were not enough to gain control of the lake against the British. Arnold was one of the last men to leave the field. He pushed the last boat with his own hands as the army returned to Crown Point<sup>173</sup>. Once the army withdrew, the morale was extremely low.

Soon after the defeat, the Council of the Officers decided to strengthen the land defences at Ticonderoga and build a new fort on the eastern (Vermont) shore, later called Mount Independence. But the real American frontline was in fact Lake Champlain navy. In the later part of September, Arnold repositioned his fleet in Valcour Island to escape the strong winds. Then at the beginning of October. Continental Army soldiers and Marines fought against the British for five hours. Arnold and his officers executed a daring night-time escape past the

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<sup>171</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), "*Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*". PP 37-38 New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC.

<sup>172</sup> W.L. Powell, (2004), "*Benedict Arnold: Patriot and Traitor*". P.40. PowerPlus Books, New York.

<sup>173</sup> The Clements Library Associates, (2015), the Quarto No.43. PP 1-13. Society of the Cincinnati.

British squadron<sup>174</sup>. Even though this was a defeat, it was extremely important for the Americans. It reinforced Arnold's talent as a naval commander, his perfect delivery and rigour mesmerised other officers who named him one of the best naval commanders of the Revolution. Even in this episode, Arnold's arrogance and egotism pictured him as a talented but difficult man. So young and with an already glorious military career, Arnold's greatest exploits was Saratoga on the 19th September 1777. Before his excellent performance at Saratoga, Arnold's pride was bruised for the first time. In February, Congress promoted five Brigadier Generals to Major Generals, all of them not as competent as Arnold. Even though he received his promotion in May, Arnold was angered by his late appointment<sup>175</sup>.

Nonetheless, battle called him once again and he took the place of Commander of one of the two wings of the Northern Army. This new position came with new problems for the military prodigy. General Horatio Gates, the new commander of the Northern Army disliked Arnold and gave him unimportant duties, unfit to his station<sup>176</sup>. The tension between Gates and Arnold was always present, and the quarrels extended on the battlefield as well. The constant disagreements between the two were received with discomfort from the other officers and the rest of the army. After one battle, an enraged Arnold stormed into Gates's quarters and then decided to leave for Philadelphia, where Washington resided at the time. At the Battle of Bemis Heights, most commonly known as Battle of Saratoga, still removed from any type of duty by Gates, Arnold recklessly launched himself in the middle of the battle after inciting and encouraging the soldiers<sup>177</sup>. In the battlefield Arnold was as fast as thunder while fighting against the enemy. His stamina, bravery, and strength motivated the soldiers that were fighting with him. Quickly the Americans were able to breach into the enemies' lines who decided to withdraw. Before the fight was over, Arnold was hit by a bullet on his already hurt right leg, putting a bitter end to his activities on the battlefield<sup>178</sup>.

The Battle of Saratoga was the battle that changed everything, success was now an actual possibility. The American victory encouraged the French to come and aid the Patriots, and the

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<sup>174</sup> The Clements Library Associates, (2015), The Quarto No.43 PP 1-13. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>175</sup> M.Farquhar, (1995), *Benedict Arnold: Hero, Traitor, Whiner...* The Washington Post. Courtesy of the Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>176</sup> D.Allen, (2012),The Alexandrian I No.1. "From Excellent Officer to Little Consequence: The Deterioration of Gates and Arnold's relationship at Saratoga.file:///C:/Users/utente/Downloads/Allen,+From+Excellent+Officer+to+Little+Consequence.pdf.

<sup>177</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), *Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

<sup>178</sup> K. Daigler (2014), *Spies, Patriots and Traitors: American Intelligence in the Revolutionary War*, PP. 425-426, Georgetown University Press. Washington, DC.

Continental Army's morale was now high. Washington's pride in Arnold had never been higher, and Arnold was delighted to hear that he was now considered a military hero. Despite the glory he was evidently receiving, Arnold despised his new situation, since it did not allow him to fight. Furthermore, he was constantly against Congress and its lack of money. Many times Arnold purchased clothes and supplies<sup>179</sup>, and belittled Congress for its inability to support the army.

After he returned in duty at Valley Forge in 1778, Washington gave him the post of military governor. It must have been strange for such an active man to work as a governor, Arnold was in fact a military man, a man of pure action. As he settled in Philadelphia in June 1778, Arnold's resentment towards Congress that owed him money, and the officers that did not respect him enough, grew even more. In Philadelphia, he was constantly concerned about money as he resumed his activity as a merchant. To earn more money, he engaged in a series of enterprises that weren't always legal, but that allowed him to live a lavish lifestyle. Amongst the various activities, he issued illegal passes to ship trading with the British<sup>180</sup>. He used the closing of the shops in Philadelphia to buy merchandise that he then sold again.

He also used military logistical resources for his own gain. While stationed in Philadelphia, his anger towards Congress' inability to recognize his value grew every day. His bitterness, alongside excessive greed, was what turned the hero into the villain. It was in this period of crippling greed and resentment that Arnold met Peggy Shippen. Peggy Shippen was the daughter of one of the richest loyalists in Philadelphia, her family was considered royalty amongst the wealthy families of the city. Peggy was instead renowned for her vibrant personality and especially for her beauty<sup>181</sup>. Arnold's luxurious lifestyle, his interest in the Loyalist family of Peggy Shippen, added to his trading adventures, did not make him more popular. In addition to the Shippens, Arnold engaged with other prominent Tory families and invited them into his house<sup>182</sup>. This made Congress suspicious and concerned about Arnold's finances.

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<sup>179</sup> M.Farquhar, (1995), *Benedict Arnold: Hero, Traitor, Whiner...* The Washington Post. Courtesy of the Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>180</sup> M.Farquhar, (1995), *Benedict Arnold: Hero, Traitor, Whiner...* The Washington Post. Courtesy of the Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>181</sup> M.M. Theobald, (2001), *The Kidnapping of Benedict Arnold*. Colonial Williamsburg Summer of 2001. Courtesy of the Society of The Cincinnati.

<sup>182</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), *Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*. P. 248. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

In 1778, his courtship of Peggy Shippen began. His love letters expressed a tormented lover who lived only to satisfy his love's happiness. Arnold's letters to the belle of Philadelphia were not always original, as he often copied old letters that he sent to previous lovers<sup>183</sup>.

To allow her to maintain her extravagant lifestyle, the soldier increased his trade and bought one of the most beautiful houses in Philadelphia. When one year later, in the spring of 1779 Arnold married Peggy, the wedding was lavish and proper for one of the wealthiest families of Philadelphia. Peggy was 17 years old when she married Benedict Arnold, who was 38<sup>184</sup>. But alas, the couple's happiness did not last long because the Pennsylvania Council pressed charges against Arnold, concerning his suspicious trade. During the revolutionary years, certain states retained a lot of power. Since Congress did not want to offend the Pennsylvania Council, they ignored a report that cleared Arnold of all his charges. To please the Council, Congress obliged Washington to court-martial Arnold. Arnold confided his anger writing to Washington on the 5th of May<sup>185</sup>:

*"If Your Excellency thinks me Criminal For Heavens sake let me be immediately Tried and If found guilty Executed, I want no favor I ask Only for Justice, If it is denied me from Your Excellency I have no where to seek it but of the Candid Public before whom I shall be under the necessity of laying the whole Matter. Let me beg of you Sir to Consider that a Set of artful unprincipal'd Men in Office may Misinterpret the most Innocent Actions, and by raising the Public Clamour against your Excellency place you in the same disagreeable situation I am in.*

*Haveing made every Sacrafise of Fortune and Blood, and become a Cripple in the Service of my Country, I little expected to meet the ungrateful Returns I have received of my Countrymen, but as Congress have Stampd Ingratitude as a Current Coin I must take it, I wish Your Excellency for your long and Eminent Services may not be paid of In the Same Coin.*

*I have nothing left but the little reputation I have gained in the Army, Delay in the present Case Is worse than Death and when it is Considered that the Presidt and Council have had three Months to produce their Evidence, I cannot suppose the Ordering a Court Martial to Determine the Matter Immediately in the least Precipitateing the Matter, which in Justice ought to have been determined*

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<sup>183</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), *"Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor"*. P244. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

<sup>184</sup> C.S. Johnson, (1975), *"Who is this Benedict Arnold and why is he storming Quebec?"*. Harvard Magazine. Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>185</sup> Washington Papers, from Benedict Arnold to George Washington 05/05/1779. Consulted at the Library of Congress <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-20-02-0293#:~:text=If%20Your%20Excellency%20thinks%20ome.of%20laying%20the%20whole%20Matter.>

*long Since, and which the President and Council wish to put of untill the Campaign Opens Concludeing undoubtedly that the Service will then Prevent the Court from Siting, the tryal Postponed untill the End of the Campaign and their Cruel and Villanous Purposes answered.*

Being court-martialed was an insult for the Connecticut soldier, for after his valiant service to the country he deserved more respect and recognition. Arnold was not even comforted by Washington's admiration and trust in him; his bitterness and anger influenced his future actions. Philadelphia was the turning point for Benedict Arnold, as his greed, anger, and perhaps his wife led him to become persona non grata n.1.

One month after the wedding, in May 1779, the hero of Saratoga decided to pass on the British side. Peggy probably knew about this and agreed with it. What is sure, Peggy Shippen was the point in common of two strangers with different ideals, personalities, and loyalties. These two strangers could easily represent the different sides of the same coin, without one there can't be the other. The treason that shocked America has two main actors, interconnected by an invisible line or, as many think, by a beautiful woman.

### **The man of honour.**

If Arnold had succeeded in his mission, he would have been remembered as one of the most important English heroes. But history is not made of what if, and one of the reasons why Arnold's treason is regarded as such a despicable matter is because of the death of Major John André. If one side of the coin, Arnold, is deemed to be the Judas of America, André who represents the other side of the coin represents the victim. His death was received with great grief by both British and American sides. Throughout history, André has always been remembered as the casualty in this dangerous game that is spying. His life inspired poems, tragedies, paintings and music, the tragedy of his death is a reminder of the brutalities of war. André's final moments are recalled by Benjamin Tallmadge in his memoir, by Alexander Hamilton who denounces the injustice of his death in his private letters, and by American officials that were present at his execution. Unlike Arnold who is remembered for his treason and arrogance, André will always be remembered as a loyal soldier and gentleman. In the story of the American Revolution, John André can be identified as the side character that timidly takes the spotlight but once he says his first lines everyone listens. His execution and capture was witnessed by important figures like Le Marquis De Lafayette, Alexander Hamilton, Benjamin Tallmadge. These figures that are mostly at the centre of the attention step back and in awe look at this brilliant, noble man.

Born in London on the 2nd of May 1750, André's father was Genevese while his mother was French. His graceful manners and genteel tendencies are usually associated with his French blood<sup>186</sup>. In that period of time, many religious minorities fled from France and found refuge in England, where especially in London there was a great level of multiculturalism. Educated like a gentleman, André received his education between London and Geneva; from an early age he was fluent in German, French, and Italian<sup>187</sup>. The knowledge of those languages at the time was extremely popular in Europe and André mastered the languages easily. Passionate for the arts, André was a good musician, artist, and connoisseur of poetry and theatre. These noble talents and skills were also accompanied by his good looks that made him a favourite wherever he went.

A proper gentleman already at seventeen, he dreamt of a military career but decided to work in his father's counting house. When his father died in 1767, young André became the head of the family. His good looks, sharp wit, and chevalier behaviour made him attractive to many gentlemen and ladies. Particularly attracted to him were the shockingly intelligent Anna Seward and her ward Honora Sneyd. Anna Seward intimated André with her intelligence, but the two became friends rather quickly. United by their passion for poetry, literature, and philosophy the gentleman and the poet were always together. Miss Seward's genius made her the fulcrum of London's educated elite, her verses bewitched many gentlemen and ladies of the time<sup>188</sup>.

It was natural for someone like André to become attached to Anna. Despite their closeness, Anna and André always remained close friends, there was between them a sibling-like bond. Anna's father hoped for these two brilliant minds to come together, but Anna instead helped André to get closer to her ward, Honora. The beautiful and delicate Honora Sneyd was living with the Sewards since her widowed father died. From the moment Honora and Anna met, the latter doted greatly on her younger ward, referring to Honora as the "*sun of my youthful horizon*". She taught her poetry, philosophy, and literature, making her a proper lady. When Anna received André at her house, she usually recited verses for her young ward and the honourable gentleman. André's love for the young Miss Sneyd bloomed soon and he earned the nickname of "Cher Jean"<sup>189</sup>. Through time, André's love for Honora grew and his feelings

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<sup>186</sup> H. C. Lodge, (1903), *Major André's Journal*. PP 6-7. The Society of Cincinnati.

<sup>187</sup> H. C. Lodge, (1903), *Major André's Journal*. PP 6-7. The Society of Cincinnati.

<sup>188</sup> R.C. Hatch, (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. PP. 14-15. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>189</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. PP. 15-18. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.



encouraged him to ask her to marry him. The belle agreed to his proposal, making Anna extremely happy and overjoyed. But there were obstacles to their love. The older Swards, considering André's finances, were uncertain of such a match, and asked the two lovers to wait. The wait was of one year, and during this period they exchanged letters and poems. André expressed his love for his lover through drawings, poems, and songs. His letters to Anna were filled with hope for the year to pass quickly<sup>190</sup>.

Finally, after a year, André was able to see his lover once again. But if his feelings for her were unchanged, Honora's feelings were different. When the gentleman called on her, he was surprised to see two other men, among them Richard Lovell Edgeworth. Edgeworth was admired by the elite and unlike André he had a better economic situation. In spite of his love, poems, and tender drawings, Honora's love for André had faded and he was treated coldly. Heartbroken and disappointed, the young gentleman left the house and his beloved Honora married Edgeworth. Honora's union with Edgeworth was also suffered by Anna who wanted Honora married to André<sup>191</sup>.

Her rejection was an incredibly low blow that tore young André's heart apart. It was her decision not to marry him that encouraged him to put all his focus to the military career. As it was custom at the time, André bought his military title and ended his ties with the close knit group of London Huguenots. He was first in the fusiliers and then bought a lieutenant position in the 7th foot. This new appointment came with the higher pay that he desperately needed. In the early 1772 he went to Germany for advanced training and there as well he enchanted his companions with his intelligence and poetry<sup>192</sup>.

After two years of training, the genteel soldier was called to fight in Canada and soon after, in September 1774 he reached Philadelphia. Always restless, the British soldier did not stay long in Philadelphia and went towards Boston. Between Philadelphia and Boston, the unrest between Americans kept growing, and it is possible that the young soldiers witnessed various episodes of anger towards the British taxes. Then from Boston, he went to New York where the scenes of hate against the king were even more violent<sup>193</sup>.

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<sup>190</sup> B.J. Lossing, (1907), *The Two Spies: Nathan Hale and John André*. PP. 19-22. D. Appleton & Co. New York.

<sup>191</sup> B.J. Lossing, (1907), *The Two Spies: Nathan Hale and John André*. PP. 22-25. D. Appleton & Co. New York

<sup>192</sup> W. Sargent, (1871), *The life of Major John André, adjutant-general of the British army in America* PP 40-42. D. Appleton & Co. New York.

<sup>193</sup> W. Sargent, (1871), *The life of Major John André, adjutant-general of the British army in America* PP 42-44. D. Appleton & Co. New York.

There has been a lot of speculation regarding André travels from Philadelphia to New York, as many theorise that this was a sort of recollection operation, perhaps the first time that he became acquainted with intelligence operations<sup>194</sup>.

On the eve of 1775, he went to Canada where he was amazed by the different people and sceneries. In a letter to his sister, André talks about the various things he saw in his long Canadian travels. The sight of Fort Ticonderoga shocked him, and in his diary he reported everything he saw, including the dilapidated barracks, and breached walls. To his sister, he kept describing his travels, without letting out the various difficulties he encountered, including the harsh weather, the scarcity of food and the constant dangers. What fascinated him the most, was the presence of Indian tribes in Quebec. He was fascinated by their dances and clothes<sup>195</sup>. His diary, which now resides at the Society of the Cincinnati in Washington DC, is also an important witness to the Native American tribes that lived in those areas of Canada while the war was being fought. In November 1775, André was captured by Gen. Montgomery in St. John and held prisoner in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. It is important to note that this type of captivity must not be intended as a cell where the prisoners were kept. Prisoners were allowed to go around the village after promising not to escape<sup>196</sup>.

During his days as a prisoner, André saw the rebels for the first time and called them “Perfidious<sup>197</sup>”, in a letter to his mother. Furthermore, he had noted that the rebels were poorly educated and most of them unable to follow orders.

The scarcity of food and provisions for both prisoners and soldiers, made André hope that the war was going to end soon. Prisoner for an entire year, the noble soldier was finally exchanged for an American, and reached New York. Once in the city, he handed his detailed journal to General Howe, who remained greatly impressed by the young soldier. Although he was highly impressed<sup>198</sup> by the boy, Howe could not give him any staff position since there were no vacancies<sup>199</sup>.

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<sup>194</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P31.. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>195</sup> H. C. Lodge, (1903), *Major André's Journal*. P 11.. The Society of Cincinnati.

<sup>196</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. PP 31-32. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

<sup>197</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.70 Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>198</sup> B.J. Lossing, (1907), *The Two Spies: Nathan Hale and John André*. P. 44. D. Appleton & Co. New York

<sup>199</sup> H. C. Lodge, (1903), *Major André's Journal*. PP 11-12. The Society of Cincinnati.

André joined the 26th regiment and became its Captain until the summer of 1777. General Charles Grey, maybe under Howe's counsel, appointed John André as his aide de camp<sup>200</sup>. General Charles Grey was a descendant of a knightly Northumbrian family. In his journal, André wrote about Gen. Grey's affection and admiration for him with pride and he believed that he could only improve under Grey's command. Alongside Grey, André grew as a soldier and became formidable in battle and as an aide de camp, in his diary he wrote about the Americans and their defeat in New York. During this period of early fights between Rebels and Loyalists, André always wrote back home to his mother and siblings, taking care of their lives an ocean away.

As winter approached, the British moved to Philadelphia while the Continental Army was freezing and suffering. In Philadelphia, André seemed to be in his element. The city was elegant and the Tory families hosted balls and banquets for the newly arrived British officers. It was in Philadelphia that André enchanted everyone once again, obtaining their admiration and affection.

During the winter of 1777-1778, André became close to many beautiful wealthy ladies, amongst them Peggy Shippen, Peggy Chew, and Becky Franks. These three ladies were all different from one another and caught André's interest. Miss Franks was the daughter of the commissary to British prisoners. Peggy Shippen was the daughter of the judge Edward Shippen. With her blue eyes and blonde hair, the belle of Philadelphia had both Americans and British and her feet, although spoiled she was well liked by society. Peggy Chew instead was always seen with André, at the Mischianza organised in honour of Gen. Howe, André crowned her his belle. For her, he wrote poems and songs. Peggy married an American officer, but she never destroyed André's poems<sup>201</sup>. It is believed that during this time André fell in love with Miss Shippen, but there are not many proofs defending this theory. That André bore a deep affection for Peggy, was indeed true.

In that period there weren't many battles. In Philadelphia people believed that Howe could have stormed into Valley Forge and won the war easily, but Howe concluded that attacking Valley Forge would have been impossible, given how well it was defended. In truth, Howe was planning to resign<sup>202</sup> because of tiredness and because supplies failed to arrive. Before his

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<sup>200</sup> B.J. Lossing, (1907), *The Two Spies: Nathan Hale and John André*. P. 45. D. Appleton & Co. New York

<sup>201</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.70 Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>202</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. P. 59. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

departure in late May, it was André who organised the celebrations in his honour. For the occasions, the young soldier organised a ball with different types of events, a “Mischianza” where the elite of Philadelphia was going to shine in honour of Howe. The Mischianza was one of the most important social events of the season, and André chose Peggy Chew as his belle of the evening<sup>203</sup>.

Apart from being a favourite from both men and women, André's military career did not cease to go on. In November 1778, he received a promotion, this time under Henry Clinton. Clinton granted him the rank of Major and was named adjutant general, in addition to this rank he was also promoted as chief of intelligence<sup>204</sup>.

When the British evacuated Philadelphia and went to New York, André became Clinton's most important aide. André possessed a sharp wit and sensibility that were agreeable with Clinton's shy personality. New York was also similar to London, making the British feel at home. His work as chief of intelligence respected his personality, and he carried out every mission with an acute precision, asking his scouts to report even the tiniest detail. He established more spies and agents, building a spy ring as well, but he never discovered the Culper Ring.

His new post tired him a lot to the point when Clinton encouraged him to spend time in the country. As lodgings, he chose Oyster Bay, where his friend John Graves Simcoe lived. As shocking as it might sound, John Simcoe lived at a Quakers' house, more specifically the Townsends. And as fate wanted, the house of Culper Jr. Probably, Culper Jr's sister, Sally, played an important role in the discovery of the West Point plot<sup>205</sup>.

In the meantime, while in New York on the 10th of May 1779, André heard of Arnold and his treason for the first time. During the spring, the Major received an unexpected visitor, a man he had met in Philadelphia, Joseph Stansbury. The old acquaintance told the Major that Benedict Arnold had called on him back in Philadelphia, and that Arnold had done some business with him but nothing more. But what Stansbury explained was that Arnold brought him to an isolated corner of the house and confessed his intention to pass to the British lines.

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<sup>203</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. P 59-64. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

<sup>204</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. P. 76. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

<sup>205</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *General Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. PP 112-116. The Pennypacker Long Island Collection East Hampton Free Library, L.I.

Stansbury was instructed to act in secret and bring the news to the British headquarters<sup>206</sup>. For Major André, this was the beginning of the end.

#### 4.2 West Point for Sale.

Greed, bitterness, and arrogance moved one of the greatest soldiers of the revolution to commit treason. Sense of duty, and respect for superior orders encouraged the genteel soul to help in the treason. Arnold and André, a blue coat and a red one, maybe united by the love and/or admiration for a beautiful woman are two names that history always associates. It seems that there cannot be one without the other.

New details regarding the West Point conspiracy have been found throughout the years, making it possible for historians to have a clearer idea of what truly happened. A year before the French's arrival in aid of the Americans, Stansbury's visit can be pinned as the beginning of the conspiracy. After corresponding with Clinton, Arnold sent Stansbury to André, with all the information required. During the visit, Stansbury told André that the American General expressed his true feelings to Sir. Henry Clinton, confessing that he was never sure about American independence, that a division between the Colonies and England would have endangered both countries, hence he was offering his services to the British, hoping for a reconciliation<sup>207</sup>. The Spring of 1779 was the perfect moment for Benedict Arnold's treason, it came in a moment in which the Americans were starting to get tired of the war and the constant struggles of fighting with the Continental Army.

Arnold's actions were even understood by many starving soldiers. The Continental Congress' economy was experiencing a great crisis and only the French arrival made the Americans feel more positive.

It must be added that Clinton did not trust Arnold after one letter, actually he had to reassure him of his pure intent to join the British side. Furthermore, Arnold's greatness during the battle of Saratoga made him incorruptible at the eyes of Sir. Henry. If the hero of Saratoga was ready to betray his country, how many other Americans were ready to put on a red coat? As Stansbury

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<sup>206</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. PP 164-165 Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>207</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.165 Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

told André of the plot, he also told him about the coded name that Arnold was going to use; Monk<sup>208</sup>.

The decision of betraying the American cause did not come quickly or in a rush, but it was built up by Arnold's increasing anger at Congress and its actions against him. The plot to give West Point to the British was already planned almost a year before, as correspondence between Arnold-André-Clinton began in the Spring and Summer of 1779. While the central figures of the scheme were indeed Arnold, Clinton, and André, there were obviously other spies involved. Cautiously, André believed that the use of invisible ink would have helped their cause, and had the idea of involving two of his old acquaintances in Philadelphia, Peggy Shippen and Peggy Chew. André's idea was to write an apparently innocent letter to Miss Chew where he asked her to show the contents of the correspondence to Peggy Shippen<sup>209</sup>, now Mrs. Arnold. The real message was to be written in invisible ink while writing about past, innocent events in the letter, for example about the Mischianza's celebrations<sup>210</sup>. As Arnold's intent became a certainty, the plot evolved and more people were included in the great treason.

Arnold's letter reached André through an acquaintance in New York, while Stansbury instructed André on the code used by Arnold. By the end of May, Arnold communicated that he was going to use Bailey's dictionary for the coded information, and already sent his first intelligence in the early Summer of 1779. Each word in the letter was represented by three numbers. The numbers were the page number, line number, and the name of the word in the line. The letter would have looked like a page filled with numbers. Biblical names were used instead by André; Philadelphia as Jerusalem, Washington St. James, Gates was St. Andrews, and the Delaware river was renamed Red Sea<sup>211</sup>.

During his first intelligence letters, Arnold already gave detailed information of American movements, supplies, and situation. Amongst the first letters, Arnold exposed Washington's new headquarters in the Hudson Valley and the solidification of the Franco-American alliance. In July, Arnold gave up the number of soldiers under Washington's command. Apart from

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<sup>208</sup> John André Letter to Joseph Stansbury, May 10, 1779. Henry Clinton Papers. Information gathered at the Society of Cincinnati. Online Source: <https://clements.umich.edu/exhibit/spy-letters-of-the-american-revolution/stories-of-spies/terms-of-betrayal/>

<sup>209</sup> J.E. Morpurgo, (1975), *Treason at West Point, the Arnold - André Conspiracy*. P. 91. Mason/Charter New York.

<sup>210</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.169-170. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>211</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), *"Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor"*. P278. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

giving out essential information, there was an important discussion regarding Arnold's rank in the British army. Arnold was expecting to be paid and did not want to lower his price; On the 11th of July, Stansbury told André (who had assumed the name of John Anderson), that Arnold (Gustavus), was expecting a consistent reward. André reassured the traitor, telling him that he was going to receive his deserved reward with no hesitation. The amount desired by Arnold was 10.000 pounds<sup>212</sup>.

After a cautious beginning, letters containing important information began to flow, Arnold could finally tell the British his real intent; giving them West Point. The correspondence began to flow easily, Arnold told André about West Point's supplies in the artillery and how it was organised. André was mostly interested in the architecture of West Point. In the meantime, the enemy was gathering more and more information on West Point, employing more spies in their plans. Amongst the most resourceful spies that André had employed, there was Ann Bates<sup>213</sup> who infiltrated Washington's camp as a camp follower. Her service was extremely useful to André and Clinton. The letters between the British head of Intelligence and spy, were usually written in the form of simple commercial or medical affairs. What is probable, is that Mrs. Arnold might have acted as an intermediary between the two, making Peggy Shippen part of the intrigue.

During the remaining months of 1779 and the beginning of 1780, Arnold kept on giving information to André, the names always used Gustavus and John Anderson. It is important to notice that André committed a mistake in choosing his coded name, John Anderson and John André were extremely similar to one another. This mistake was avoided by the members of the Culper Ring who chose completely different names. For a year and a half, Arnold kept passing military information to the British, alerting them of Rochambeau's arrival and the consolidated alliance between America and France. In the meantime, Arnold requested the command of West Point to Washington, at such a request, the Commander in Chief was quite puzzled, it was a shame to waste a man of Arnold's talent at West Point<sup>214</sup>. West Point was indeed the

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<sup>212</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), *"Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor"*. P275. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC.

<sup>213</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.169-170. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>214</sup> C.S. Johnson, (1975), *"Who is this Benedict Arnold and why is he storming Quebec?"*. Harvard Magazine. Society of the Cincinnati.

most important Fort for the Americans, but at the same time it was not the right place for a man of action. Nonetheless, Arnold was given command of West Point in August of 1780<sup>215</sup>.

Arnold could almost see his plan completed and his reputation as a British hero exulted in all the British Empire. Now that Arnold was in command of the fort, a parley was the next step. After two failed attempts, the parley was confirmed for the 21st of September. The plan was pretty simple on paper, there shouldn't have been problems of any kind for both parties.

Before venturing toward the fatal mission, André received commands from Sir Clinton; Don't cross American lines, don't change uniform, and don't accept any type of paper<sup>216</sup>. On the 21st of October André was on board of the sloop "*Vulture*" with Colonel Beverley Robinson<sup>217</sup>, and in the darkness he was brought ashore by Joshua Smith, Arnold's acquaintance.

### **The fatal parley**

After more than a year the two men had been exchanging correspondence. How did they feel while walking towards the meeting point? Was Arnold feeling guilt or remorse? Was André thinking of home as his heart raced? In the middle of the night, Benedict Arnold and John André put their eyes on one another for the first and last time. One of them was going to survive, the other was a few hours away from his death. The two began to discuss the defences, artillery, and supplies. As the sun began to rise the traitor and the victim went to Smith's house to continue the discussion, and Arnold handed André papers with the maps and information on West Point<sup>218</sup>. By accepting those papers, André was already breaking one of the rules. According to the plan, André was supposed to remain in Smith's house until the following day and then head towards the boat that would have carried him aboard the *Vulture*. To André's terror, when daylight was above them, he realised that he was inside American lines. Before leaving him with Smith, Arnold gave a pass to the British, it would have allowed André to go through American lines without any troubles<sup>219</sup>. In the meantime, while the British realised he

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<sup>215</sup> J.E. Morpurgo, (1975), *Treason at West Point, the Arnold - André Conspiracy*. PP 100-101.. Mason/Charter New York.

<sup>216</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.224-225. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>217</sup> *The Trial of Major John André for being a spy*. PP. 465-468, (1780). Tappan, New York. The Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>218</sup> *The Trial of Major John André for being a spy*. PP. 465-468, (1780). Tappan, New York. The Society of the Cincinnati

<sup>219</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P.235. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston



was inside the enemy's territory, the *Vulture* had been spotted by the Americans who began to fire at it, forcing the sloop to move 12 miles away. At this point it was too risky transporting a British officer towards the Sloop. André had to go by foot.

It was at this moment that Major John André broke the last rule that Clinton gave him: don't change your uniform. André put away his uniform and after hiding the papers in his boots he dressed up as a civilian. With the papers hidden inside his boots, André was now 100% a spy. Still with Smith by his side, the Adjutant General passed through the enemy's lines and spent the night with his companion in a house. On the morning of the 23rd, Smith left his British companion, who now had to continue on his own for 15 miles before reaching White Plains and safety<sup>220</sup>. But as we know today, André never reached safety, as he walked with confidence in the woods, he was slowly approaching the end. André was still walking when three men surrounded him, they were not wearing any precise uniform, they were either Cowboys, on the British faction, or Skinners on the American one. The armed men pointing their arms at him were John Paulding, Isaac Van Wart, and David Williams<sup>221</sup>. The three asked him to reveal his identity and allegiance, and instead of turning the question to the three skinners, believing he was talking to other loyalists, the Major confessed that he was a British officer.

At his confession, the Skinners revealed their identities and mugged him, André tried to show his pass but it was too late, the men were already busy robbing him and taking off his boots. Inside his boots, the thieves found the papers with the plans for West Point and soon recognised the Britishman as a spy. In Vain, André tried to give them his watch and promised money if they brought him to the nearest British post, but Skinners knew that catching a spy was worth more than a watch<sup>222</sup>. The hopeless officer must have been terrified, the perfect plan had failed.

### **4.3 Discovery.**

The captured spy was brought to North Castle to a confused Colonel Jameson. The Colonel's confusion came from a letter he received a few days before, in the letter, Arnold told him that an "Anderson" was going to cross the American lines from the British ones, and now the three men brought him a man named Anderson. Still trying to make sense out of that confusion, Jameson decided to send the incriminating papers to Washington, and Mr. Anderson to

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<sup>220</sup> *The Trial of Major John André for being a spy*. PP. 465-468, (1780). Tappan, New York. The Society of The Cincinnati.

<sup>221</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. PP 128-129. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

<sup>222</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. PP 129-133. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

Arnold<sup>223</sup>. André must have felt relieved when Colonel Allen was bringing him to Arnold, he was sure that once arrived at West Point he was going back to his lines. But alas, Allen received orders from Tallmadge to turn back. Allen decided to turn to North Castle before reaching South Salem<sup>224</sup>. If André had hoped to escape, he was now certain that escaping was not a possibility anymore.

The exact reason why Tallmadge called back Allen, was because the American head of intelligence was puzzled by the situation, handling a Spy Ring made him wiser and more attentive. A week before the strange meeting, Tallmadge received a letter from Arnold in which the General told him that a man named Anderson was going to be there<sup>225</sup>. Arnold asked Tallmadge to give his guest two horses and to send an express directly to him. The letter continued, and Arnold invited Tallmadge to join André in his journey<sup>226</sup>. André was soon sent to Colonel Sheldon, where he was informed that the papers he was carrying were sent to Washington.

There was no point in lying anymore, André already knew that other lies would have made the situation worse. With a heavy heart André confessed his real identity through a letter addressed to Washington. Tallmadge was shocked at the discovery of André's rank. In the letter, André confessed that he was not accustomed to duplicity, and confided in the General. The letter itself is extremely moving and showed André's gentle character;

*Sir*<sup>227</sup>

*Salem [N.Y.] the 24th Sept. 1780.1*

*What I have as yet Said concerning myself was in the justifiable attempt to be extricated; I am too little accustomed to duplicity to have Succeeded.*

*I beg your Excellency will be persuaded that no Alteration in the Temper of my Mind or Apprehension for my Safety, induces me to Take the Step of Addressing you, but that it is to rescue myself from an imputation of having assumed a mean Character for treacherous purposes or Self Interest, a Conduct incompatible with the principles that actuate me, as well as with my Condition in Life.*

*It is to vindicate my Fame that I Speak and not to Sollicit Security.*

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<sup>223</sup> B.J. Lossing, (1907), *The Two Spies: Nathan Hale and John André*. P. 90-91. D. Appleton & Co. New York

<sup>224</sup> J.E. Morpurgo, (1975), *Treason at West Point, the Arnold - André Conspiracy*. P 121. Mason/Charter New York.

<sup>225</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. PP 68-70. Library Of Congress, 1858 edition.

<sup>226</sup> A. Rose, (2014), *Washington's spies*. P 206. Bantam Books, New York.

<sup>227</sup> From Major John André to George Washington, 24th of September 1780. "*Washington's papers*" PP 277-278. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

*The person in your possession is Major John André Adjutant General to the British Army.*

*The influence of one Commander in the Army of his Adversary is an Advantage taken in War. A Correspondence for this purpose I held; as confidential (in the present Instance) with His Excellency Sir Henry Clinton.*

*To favour it I agreed to meet upon ground not within posts of either Army a person who was to give me Intelligence; I came up in the Vulture M. of War for this Effect and was fetched by a Boat from the Shore to the beach; Being there I was told that the Approach of day would prevent my return and that I must be concealed until the next night. I was in my Regimentals and had fairly risked my person.*

*Against my Stipulation my Intention & without my Knowledge before hand I was conducted within one of your posts. Your Excellency may conceive my Sensations on this Occasion & will imagine how much more I must have been affected, by a refusal to reconduct me back the next night as I had been brought. Thus become a prisoner I had to concert my Escape. I quitted my Uniform & was passd another way in the Night without the American posts to Neutral ground, inform'd I was beyond all arm'd parties and left to press for N: York. I was taken at Tarry Town by some Volunteers.*

*Thus as I have had the honour to relate was I betrayd (being Adjutant General of the B. Army) into the Vile Condition of an Enemy in disguise within your Posts.*

*Having avowd my Self a British Officer I have nothing to reveal but what relates to myself which is true on the honour of an Officer and a Gentleman.*

*The Request I have to make to Your Excellency and I am conscious I address myself well, is that in any rigor, policy May dictate a decency of Conduct towards me may mark that tho' unfortunate I am branded with nothing dishonorable as no motive could be mine but the Service of my King and as I was involuntarily an impostor.*

*Another request is that I may be permitted to write an Open Letter to Sir Henry Clinton and another to a friend for Clothes & Linnen.*

*I take the Liberty to mention the Condition of some Gentlemen at Charlestown who being either on parole or under protection were engaged in a Conspiracy against us. Tho' their Situation is not Similar, they are objects who may be Set in Exchange for me or are persons whom the Treatment I receive might affect.*

*It is no less Sir in a Confidence in the Generosity of your mind than on account of your Superior Station that I have chosen to importune you with this Letter. I have the hono<sup>r</sup> to be with great Respect Sir Your Excellencys Most obedt & Most humble Servant*

*John André Adj. Genl*

Tallmadge's memoir gives us precious information that allowed historians to understand the plot to sell West Point. Furthermore, André's character can be seen in many lines from the precious memoir.

The first account of André in Tallmadge's memoir, confirms that Anderson and André were the same person;

*“I was informed that a prisoner had been brought by the name of John Anderson<sup>228</sup>”.*

A sharp observer, before interrogating him Tallmadge noticed how the prisoner walked;

*“As I saw Anderson, and especially after I saw him walk (as he did almost constantly) across the floor, I became impressed with the belief that he had been bred to arms<sup>229</sup>.”*

An older Benjamin Tallmadge, wrote details of his first meeting with his British counterpart;

*“It was deemed best to remove the prisoner to Salem, and I was to escort him. I was constantly in the room with him, and he soon became very conversable and extremely interesting<sup>230</sup>.”*

*“After dinner on the 24th, perhaps by three o’clock p.m., he asked to be favored with a pen, and ink, and paper, which I readily granted, and he wrote this letter to Washington<sup>231</sup>.”*

After Tallmadge had read the moving letter, he could not contain his feelings, emotions took him as he read it;

*“When I received the letter my agitation was extreme, and my emotions wholly indescribable<sup>232</sup>.”*

As an incredulous and shocked Tallmadge was reading André’s moving letter to Washington, At West Point things were still good. Arnold had no idea that his plot had failed, and that the glory he dreamed about was going to disappear soon. The date was the 25th of September, and an unaware George Washington was returning from the French camp, Le Marquis de Lafayette and his aides de camp Alexander Hamilton and James Mchenry at his side. The General and

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<sup>228</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 68. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition.

<sup>229</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 70. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

<sup>230</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 71. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

<sup>231</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 71. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

<sup>232</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 71. Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

the three young men had a scheduled breakfast with Mr. and Mrs. Arnold right at West Point that day<sup>233</sup>.

The meeting seemed very calm, Washington encouraged his aides to stay with Mrs. Arnold while the Commander in Chief was inspecting the garrison. During the meal, Arnold received a letter from Jameson's messenger. The traitor's blood must have become cold upon receiving the letter; André had been taken, the plan had failed. After excusing himself, Arnold went upstairs to his wife, who had retired after breakfast, told her what happened and ran away<sup>234</sup>. It was only a matter of time, Washington was going to unmask the plot soon. As Arnold ran away taken by fear, Mrs. Arnold upstairs must have felt helpless if not lost. Once Washington's inspection was over, Arnold had already escaped and asked Washington to meet him at West Point. Only Hamilton and Lafayette remained with Mrs. Arnold who was panicking in her room upstairs.

As Washington arrived at West Point, something strange happened, he was told that the General had been absent for two days. The General kept inspecting the other garrisons until they arrived at Robinson's house again<sup>235</sup>. While a puzzled Washington tried to understand what was going on, Alexander Hamilton appeared in front of them, in pure shock. What the aide de camp referred to, almost broke the Commander's heart, Arnold was a traitor. Hamilton was sent to try and capture the traitor, but it was now too late since Arnold was already gone.

Upon receiving the information of Arnold's treason, Washington was taken by grief and with great sadness exclaimed "*Whom can we trust now?*" to Lafayette<sup>236</sup>.

Attached to the aide's letter, there was another letter<sup>237</sup>, this one written by Arnold for the Commander in chief;

Sir

On Board the Vulture Sepr 25th 1780

*The Heart which is Conciuous of its Own rectitude, Cannot attempt to paliate a Step, which the World may Censure as wrong; I have ever acted from a Principle of Love to my Country, since the*

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<sup>233</sup> J.E. Morpurgo, (1975), *Treason at West Point, the Arnold - André Conspiracy*. P 122.

Mason/Charter New York

<sup>234</sup> H. S. Tillotson, (1948), *The Beloved Spy: The life and loves of Major John André*. PP 138-139. the caxton printers, ltd, caldwell, idaho.

<sup>235</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), "*Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*". P 308. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

<sup>236</sup> O. Sherwin, (1931), "*Benedict Arnold, Patriot and Traitor*". PP 308-309. New York. Consulted at the Gelman Library, Washington DC

<sup>237</sup> From Major General Benedict Arnold to George Washington, 25th of September 1780. "*Washington's papers*" PP 356-357. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

*Commencement of the present unhappy Contest between Great Britian and the Colonies, the same principle of Love to my Country Actuates my present Conduct, however it may appear Inconsistent to the World: who very Seldom Judge right of any Mans Actions.*

*I have no favor to ask for myself, I have too often experienced the Ingratitude of my Country to Attempt it: But from the known humanity of your Excellence I am induced to ask your protection For Mrs Arnold from every Insult and Injury that the mistaken Vengeance of my Country may expose Her to: It ought to fall only on me—She is as good, and as Inocent as an Angel, and is<sup>1</sup> Incapable of doing Wrong. I beg She may be permitted to return to Her Friends in Philada or to come to me as She may choose; from your Excellency I have no fears on Her Account, but She may Suffer from the mistaken fury of The Country.*

*I have to request that the Inclosed Letter may be delivered to Mrs Arnold, and She permitted to write to me.<sup>2</sup>*

*I have also to Ask that my Cloths & Baggage which are of little Consequence may be Sent to me, If required their Value shall be paid in Money. I have the honor to be With great regard & Esteem Your Excellencys Most Obedt Hbl. Servt*

*B. Arnold*

*N.B. In Justice to the Gentlemen of my Family Colonel Varick & Major Franks, I think myself in honor bound to declare, that they as well as Joshua Smith Esqr. (who I know is suspected) are totally Ignorant of any Transaction of mine that they had reason to believe were Injurious to the Public*

The Commander and his aides were all destroyed by the news, but something else was awaiting them.

### **Hot Irons in my head.**

Margaret “Peggy” Arnold has always been one of the most mysterious figures involved in the conspiracy. By some, she is described as an innocent caught between a bigger game. By the majority, Peggy Arnold was able to outsmart the greatest personalities of early America by using just one weapon, her womanhood and all the beliefs that came with it. In the 1700s, women were always seen as weak, unable to understand difficult concepts, and prone to hysteria. Life in Philadelphia’s high society must have taught a great deal to Mrs. Arnold, who had Hamilton, Washington, and Lafayette all wrapped around her fingers.

Still in shock by the treasonous act, the three men were terrified when they found Mrs. Arnold. Alexander Hamilton expressed his distress and sorrow to his wife, Elizabeth Schuyler, in a

letter<sup>238</sup>, where he felt nothing but sadness for Peggy, a poor, innocent woman who was now, according to Hamilton, taken by hysteria;

*September 25, 1780*

*In the midst of my letter, I was interrupted by a scene that shocked me more than any thing I have met with—the discovery of a treason of the deepest dye. The object was to sacrifice West Point. General Arnold had sold himself to André for this purpose. The latter came but in disguise and in returning to New York was detected. Arnold hearing of it immediately fled to the enemy. when on my return, I saw an amiable woman frantic with distress for the loss of a husband she tenderly loved—a traitor to his country and to his fame, a disgrace to his connections.*

*“It was the most affecting scene I ever was witness to. She for a considerable time intirely lost her senses. The General went up to see her and she upbraided him with being in a plot to murder her child; one moment she raved; another she melted into tears; sometimes she pressed her infant to her bosom and lamented its fate occasioned by the imprudence of its father in a manner that would have pierced insensibility itself.”*

*“We have every reason to believe she was intirely unacquainted with the plan, and that her first knowlege of it was when Arnold went to tell her he must banish himself from his Country and from her forever. She instantly fell into a convulsion and he left her in that situation”.*

Le Marquis De Lafayette as well was shocked by the scene, the young Frenchman felt nothing but sorrow for Peggy. He wrote about her, describing her as beautiful in her sorrow.

After the war, Peggy Shippen moved to London with her husband, where she became one of the most influential women of London’s high society.

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<sup>238</sup> From Alexander Hamilton to Elizabeth Schuyler, 25th of September 1780. “Hamilton Papers” PP 441-442. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

### **When spying runs in the family.**

The West Point plot was not discovered only through André's meeting with the three skimmers in the woods, the Culper Ring played an important part as well. Robert Townsend, also known as Culper Jr was the most resourceful member of the Culper Ring, but he wasn't the only able spy in his family.

According to a common tale, Sally Townsend was extremely resourceful for the Culper Ring in the uncovering of the Arnold - André conspiracy. What is certain, is that the Townsend's house was serving as British headquarters in Oyster Bay, and that Lieutenant Colonel John Graves Simcoe not only resided there, but he was also enamoured with Culper Jr's sister Sally<sup>239</sup>.

The "legend" narrates that Sally helped her brother as a spy. While the British lived with the unassuming Quakers, the girl gathered information under the pretence of innocent questions and then passed the intelligence to her brother. Before André embarked on his adventure, he decided to spend some days with his close friend John Graves Simcoe at the Townsend's house<sup>240</sup>. During those days, the two British officers walked a lot and were usually seen whispering.

On the 30th of August 1780, the two men were handling some correspondence and went to Simcoe's room to discuss it. The young spy followed them and overheard their conversation. She heard them talking about West Point, the Hudson, and a certain Anderson. Once André and Simcoe went outside, Sally entered the room and took a letter addressed to the previously mentioned Anderson<sup>241</sup>. At the end of the evening, she took note of what she saw and sent her information to her brother in New York<sup>242</sup>.

On the 4th of September, Austin Roe took the information that reached Tallmadge through Woodhull, Anna Strong, and Caleb Brewster.

The letter reached Tallmadge a few weeks before the conspiracy's discovery. During those weeks, the head of American intelligence was busy with a case regarding mysterious letters between Rhode Island and New York. Washington thanked Culper Jr for the information, but

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<sup>239</sup> P.R. Misencik, (2016), *Sally Townsend, George Washington's teenage spy*. PP 110-111. McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers. Jefferson, North Carolina.

<sup>240</sup> R.C. Hatch (1986), *Major John André, A Gallant in Spy's Clothing*. P139. Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston.

<sup>241</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *General Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. P 114. The Pennypacker Long Island Collection East Hampton Free Library, L.I.

<sup>242</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *General Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. P 116. The Pennypacker Long Island Collection East Hampton Free Library, L.I.



at that stage of the conspiracy, both 711 and 721 believed that there was nothing suspicious about British officers talking about West Point<sup>243</sup>.

Only after reading Arnold's letter and learning about Anderson's capture at the end of September, Tallmadge must have understood what was going on. Culper Jr's information alongside Arnold's letter, put the name Anderson under a different light. After connecting the dots, Tallmadge called Allen back, putting an end to Arnold's plans and André's hope of escaping.

#### **4.4 The End.**

##### **The Martyr's last breath.**

As hysteria was ruling at Robinson's house, Major John André was still with Benjamin Tallmadge. The American felt attached quickly to André, who won Tallmadge through his honourable character and gentle manners, during the interview, the Adjutant General remained composed, there seemed to be no trace of sadness or fear<sup>244</sup>. The two men grew so close despite meeting each other under curious circumstances, that Tallmadge was reminded with great sadness of André's death.

Again it is Tallmadge's memoir which tells the posterity of what happened between the American and British chiefs of intelligence. Tallmadge told André of his dearest friend Nathan Hale, hanged as a spy for serving his country. André believed that his situation was not at all similar to Nathan Hale, but Tallmadge answered that the situation was quite similar<sup>245</sup>. Finally, a court consisting of fourteen generals heard the case<sup>246</sup>. The papers found in his boots, the plans regarding West Point's capture, and other letters were used as evidence.

General Greene, inquired about André's actions as a private citizen or a soldier, to that question André replied that he was indeed wearing his uniform, but was then obliged to change it.

After much consideration, the board of Generals had their verdict; Major John André was a spy, the punishment was hanging.

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<sup>243</sup> M. Pennypacker, (1948), *General Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. P 117. The Pennypacker Long Island Collection East Hampton Free Library, L.I.

<sup>244</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 74 Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

<sup>245</sup> A.Rose, (2014), *Washington's spies*. PP 209-210. Bantam Books, New York.

<sup>246</sup> *The Trial of Major John André for being a spy*. PP. 465-468, (1780). Tappan, New York. The Society of The Cincinnati.

Despite the outcome of the trial being clear, John André was a spy, the situation was exactly not the same as Nathan Hale's. The Connecticut martyr was a Captain, not a senior British officer, an important member of Sir Henry Clinton's staff. Hanging André was not something to take lightly.

In fact, Clinton himself pleaded for his Chief of Intelligence, repeating that André was only following orders, he was an innocent and loyal soldier. Sir Henry's efforts were not only the efforts of a Commander in Chief, but were the efforts of a man that vouched for André's excellent character and exemplary honesty.

The British General felt responsible for his Major's death, and multiple times asked Washington to reconsider his decision. Clinton specified that André was innocent and that

*"I am persuaded the Board of General Officers, to whom You referred the case of Major André, can't have been rightly informed of all the circumstances on which a Judgement ought to be formed."*

Even though Clinton's moving letters did not spare André's life, George Washington allowed the honourable Adjutant General to correspond with Clinton, in order

*"to remove from your Breast any Suspicion that I could imagine that I could imagine that I was bound by your Excellencys Orders to expose myself to what has happened. The Events of coming within an Enemys posts and of Changing my dress which led me to my present Situation were contrary to my own Intentions as they were to your Orders; and the circuitous route which I took to return was imposed (perhaps / unavoidably) without alternative upon me."<sup>247</sup>*

At the end, John André's fate was sealed, and the 29 years old man was ready to accept what was to come. André's final days are described by Tallmadge with intense sadness. As one final grace, he asked Washington to be shot, hence to die like a gentleman<sup>248</sup>.

The 2nd of October 1780 at 5pm, the honourable and beloved Major John André, dressed in his British uniform, met his death. His wish to die like a gentleman was not granted, he was hanged as it befitted a spy. Again, Tallmadge allows us to observe André's final moments.

*"When he came within the sight of the gibbet, he appeared to be startled, and inquired with some emotion whether he was not to be shot. He exclaimed 'How hard is my fate!', but*

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<sup>247</sup> From Sir Henry Clinton to George Washington, 24th of September 1780. "Washington's papers" PP 277-278. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

<sup>248</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 74 Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

*immediately added 'It will soon be over'. I then shook hands with him under the gallows and retired.*<sup>249</sup>”

Soon after his death, André became a symbol of honour, of loyalty, a true gentleman and soldier. The martyr now rests in Westminster Abbey under a monument erected in his honour by King George III.

The reception of André's death was the same on both sides, the Americans mourned a young innocent hero who died because of Arnold's treason. The British mourned an idol, a friend, and a family member.

### **The villain.**

While John André was spending the last days of his life with the Americans, Benedict Arnold reached the British lines aboard the *Vulture*, and reached New York safely. Arnold's arrival in New York was problematic especially for the members of the Culper Ring, who now feared to be discovered and meet the same fate of John André.

The traitor was aware of the existence of the Culper Ring, luckily he did not know their real names and where they were located. In truth, the spy tried to gather more information about the American undercover network months before his escape. He asked Lafayette, who declared that he had no idea of who the spies were. Arnold even tried to ask Tallmadge indirectly, but the Chief of American intelligence did not give any single information to the once idolised soldier<sup>250</sup>.

Once in New York, before his commission in the Virginia campaigns, one of Arnold's first tasks was to find possible spies inside the city. For a short period of time he was able to capture the tailor spy Hercules Mulligan, but the tailor was released soon after his arrest because of a lack of proof<sup>251</sup>. Still desiring to prove himself in battle, Benedict Arnold was given command of British and Loyalists troops. In Virginia, he showed Clinton his incredible stamina by taking Richmond and conducting successful raids in Connecticut<sup>252</sup>.

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<sup>249</sup> B. Tallmadge, *Memoirs of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 74 Library Of Congress, Washington DC, 1858 edition

<sup>250</sup> A.Rose, (2014), *Washington's spies*. PP 213-215. Bantam Books, New York.

<sup>251</sup> A.Rose, (2014), *Washington's spies*. P 226.. Bantam Books, New York.

<sup>252</sup> M.M. Theobald, (2001), *"The Kidnapping of Benedict Arnold"*. Colonial Williamsburg Summer of 2001. Courtesy of the Society of The Cincinnati.

After the Battle of Yorktown, Arnold settled in London with his family. In the city he was acclaimed and admired by both the War Office and the Privy Council. King George III was often seen walking with him, while his wife was an important addition to London's genteel society<sup>253</sup>.

In October 1785 he reached the New Brunswick Colony and after making a fortune all his children reached him. With them, there were always Peggy and his sister Hannah. With his family he returned to London in 1792. Anxious to fight even at fifty-two, Arnold was refused as a commander during the reign of terror in France. In 1801 Arnold died, followed by his wife three years later<sup>254</sup>.

## 5. Conclusions

The famous composer Lin Manuel Miranda defined a legacy as "*planting the seeds in a garden we will never get to see.*" A legacy is something that we start building during our life and that hopefully keeps growing and taking shape after you are gone. Sometimes, those who are planting the seeds of a legacy don't know that they are building something that will last centuries. George Washington, Benjamin Tallmadge, and Colonel Knowlton did not know that while they were simply doing their best for their country they were also putting the basis for what is today's intelligence. The members of the Culper Ring never revealed their code names, their missions, their true service to their country, their great contribution remained a secret only for them to cherish.

Despite being a recent discovery, the Culper Ring members' stories and sacrifices are now being recognised and known, every year a new discovery is made in regards to Culper Jr and the others. After centuries of obscurity, the first American spies have names and a story of what was of them after the war. In order to understand these patriots better, it is useful to have a look at their lives after the war.

### 5.1 1783 and beyond

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<sup>253</sup> M.M. Theobald, (2001), "*The Kidnapping of Benedict Arnold*". Colonial Williamsburg Summer of 2001. Courtesy of the Society of The Cincinnati.

<sup>254</sup> M.M. Theobald, (2001), "*The Kidnapping of Benedict Arnold*". Colonial Williamsburg Summer of 2001. Courtesy of the Society of The Cincinnati.

After the end of the war, those who fought valiantly in battle received honours and recognitions for their services, but those who worked in the shadows went back to their normal lives, pretending that their spying career never existed. Some of them went back to Setauket and Long Island and lived an easy but happy life, far away from the spotlights.

Reconstructing the stories of some of the members is not easy, some of them are still hiding in the shadows of history, but their story is slowly coming out. This is the case of the able horseback rider and courier Austin Roe, who risked his life during his long and exhausting travels between New York and Setauket. Many times it was Roe himself that tried to calm the waters between Culper Sr and Jr, for example in 1780, when the French finally arrived on American shores.

Once the war was won, Austin Roe decided to set aside his horse and focus on his tavern in Setauket. In 1787, he became a Captain and in 1798 moved to the south side of Long Island, where he opened an inn. Through time the inn prospered, allowing Roe to live a good life far away from the heat of the new Republic's politics. It is said that he used to delight guests with tales of his incredible adventures.

It is said that in the Spring of 1790, President Washington rode near Roe's inn and met for the first time all the members of the Culper Ring<sup>255</sup>.

Austin Roe died in 1830, one of the most important and revered citizens of Suffolk County<sup>256</sup>. The whaler who joined the cause for his dream of freedom and love for adventure, had an extremely calm and quiet life after the war. It is indeed shocking imagining an adventure lover living a quiet life as a blacksmith and farmer. Despite his new calm life, Brewster did not remain idle and became an officer in the United States Revenue Cutter Service. He died peacefully at 79 years old in 1827<sup>257</sup>. Brewster's participation in the Spy Ring has been confirmed by the Culper Code book that had his name near the number 725.

Unfortunately, not much is known about what happened to the only woman of the Ring. Anna Strong, through her clothesline, allowed Brewster and Woodhull to communicate and facilitated the Ring's activity. Married to the congressman Selah Strong, Anna died in 1812

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<sup>255</sup> History of American Women, *Anna Smith Strong*.

<https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2011/07/anna-smith-strong.html>

<sup>256</sup> M.DeBonis, (2018), *Long Island's Austin Roe: American Spy*. New York Almanack.

<https://www.newyorkalmanack.com/2018/08/long-islands-austin-roe-american-spy/>

<sup>257</sup> B.Kilmeade, (2013), *George Washington's secret six: The Spy Ring that saved America*. PP 209-210. Sentinel, New York.

and is now buried near her husband and the rest of her family in the Smith-Strong graveyard on Strong's Neck<sup>258</sup>.

The life of Major Benjamin Tallmadge is not as obscure as the other members of the Culper Ring. Washington's head of intelligence left a memoir to remind the future of his story and achievements. Thanks to Tallmadge's memoirs, we have an account of Washington's farewell to his military family at the Fraunces Tavern in 1783. An older Tallmadge writes about the emotional farewell, describing the General as taken by emotion just like all the other officers, aides, and soldiers in the room. Tallmadge, confesses that he never witnessed such a scene where everyone was crying in silence and no one dared break the silence inside the room. Tallmadge's memoir is the only primary source related to the event. The scene is described with great melancholy and sadness<sup>259</sup>.

*“His emotion, too strong to be concealed, seemed to be reciprocated by every officer present. After partaking of a slight refreshment, in almost breathless silence, the General filled his glass with wine, and turning to the officers, he said: “With a heart full of love and gratitude, I now take leave of you. I most devoutly “wish that your latter days may be as prosperous and happy as your former ones have been glorious and honorable.”*

*After the officers had taken a glass of wine. Gen. Washington said: “I cannot come to each of you, but shall feel obliged if each of you will come and take me by the hand.”*

*Gen. Knox being nearest to him, turned to the Commander-in Chief, who, suffused in tears, was incapable of utterance, but grasped his hand; when they embraced each other in silence. In the same affectionate manner, every officer in the room marched up to be kissed, and parted with his General-in-Chief.*

*Such a scene of sorrow and weeping I had never before witnessed, and hope I may never be called upon to witness again. It was indeed too affecting to be of long continuance—for tears of deep sensibility filled every eye—and the heart seemed so full, that it was ready to burst from its wonted abode. Not a word was uttered to break the solemn silence that prevailed, or to interrupt the tenderness of the interesting scene.”*

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<sup>258</sup> History of American Women, Anna Smith Strong.

<https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2011/07/anna-smith-strong.html>

<sup>259</sup> B.Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. PP 63-64.

After the war, Benjamin Tallmadge continued serving his country, in 1792 he became postmaster for Litchfield<sup>260</sup>. In Litchfield he became invested in commerce<sup>261</sup> until 1801 when he was called again to serve his country. For 16 years, from 1801 to 1817, Tallmadge was a member of the House of Representatives. During his time as a member of the House, in 1812, President James Madison offered him a place as commander in the Northern division of the army, but he refused<sup>262</sup>. In 1817, before leaving the House, he did not grant a pension to Paulding, Van Wart, and Williams, the men that caught John André.

Tallmadge stated that the three men did not stop André on the suspicion of him being a spy, but they simply wanted to rob him of his boots and personal possession. Furthermore, the three skimmers usually passed between lines and acted as thieves<sup>263</sup>.

In 1817, after leaving Congress, Tallmadge was appointed as Treasurer of the newly established Society of the Cincinnati and once back in Litchfield, he became the President of a bank<sup>264</sup>.

Colonel Benjamin Tallmadge died at 82 years old in 1835, he never spoke or wrote about his undercover activities as the leader of the Culper Ring.

Tallmadge's legacy doesn't reside only in his activity as a spy, but also in his precious accounts of his life during the American Revolution.

Culper Sr, Abraham Woodhull, did not become a stranger to the world of politics after the war. Unlike his childhood friend, Benjamin Tallmadge, Culper Sr became involved in local politics, obtaining various roles in the Suffolk County government<sup>265</sup>. Greatly involved in his community, he was a beloved member of Setauket and served with honour first as a Magistrate, then as Judge and finally as the first judge of Suffolk County from 1799 to 1810<sup>266</sup>.

Just like all the other spies, he never told anyone of his adventures and service as a spy.

The older Culper died in January 1826 and received only a simple gravestone in the presbyterian church of Setauket.

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<sup>260</sup> C.Swain Hall, (1943), *Benjamin Tallmadge*. PP 88-102. Columbia University Press.

<sup>261</sup> C.Swain Hall, (1943), *Benjamin Tallmadge*. PP 103-152. Columbia University Press.

<sup>262</sup> B.Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 69.

<sup>263</sup> B.Kilmeade, (2013), *George Washington's secret six: The Spy Ring that saved America*. P 211. Sentinel, New York.

<sup>264</sup> B.Tallmadge, *Memoir of Col. Benjamin Tallmadge*. P 69.

<sup>265</sup> A.Rose, (2014), *George Washington's spies, the story of America's first Spy Ring*. PP278. Bantam Books, New York.

<sup>266</sup>Setauket Presbyterian Church Cemetery, *Abraham Woodhull*. Find a grave.

<https://it.findagrave.com/memorial/16222881/abraham-woodhull>

103 years after his death, the Culper Ring was discovered and his bravery finally recognised. In 1931 his house burned down, and after the fire, in 1936, Abraham Woodhull finally received the honours he deserved. On top of his simple tomb, there is now a brass memorial that reads:

*Friend and confidant of George Washington, Head of the long Island Secret Service During the American Revolution he operated under the alias Samuel Culper Sr. He and his associates have been credited with the success of the Army of the Revolution. Son of Richard W. & Margaret Smith. Fifth generation from Richard Woodhull, the original grantee of a large portion of Brookhaven Town. He was a Presbyterian, occupying a "Pew of Authority" in the old church and doing much toward the building of the new church. He was a man of integrity punctual and precise in his business relations. He freed his slaves long before they were legally free. He filled numerous important positions being Magistrate in Setauket many years, Judge of the Court of Common Pleas 1793-1799, First Judge of Suffolk Co. from 1799-1810<sup>267</sup>.*

Of all the members of the Spy Ring, Robert Townsend aka Culper Junior was the most resourceful and able of the group. Culper Jr, used his cover first as a peaceful quaker and then as an innkeeper, allowing him to gather all the information that Washington needed in order to win the war.

After his great and indispensable service during the war, Robert Townsend decided to close the old chapter of his life. He never mentioned the war or his involvement in it, and focused on his career. For a brief period of time, he became a partner in his brother's import business<sup>268</sup>. Culper Jr never married, but he might have had an illegitimate son from his housekeeper, who was mentioned in the spy's will, receiving the sum of 500 dollars<sup>269</sup>.

Unnerved or annoyed by any mention of his involvement in the Revolutionary war, Robert Townsend spent the rest of his life as he wished, contemplating his past while living peacefully and in anonymity. He died in 1838 at 84 years old.

But alas, his dream of remaining anonymous to posterity vanished with the discovery of the Culper Ring in 1929.

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<sup>267</sup> Setauket Presbyterian Church Cemetery, *Abraham Woodhull*. Find a grave.  
<https://it.findagrave.com/memorial/16222881/abraham-woodhull>

<sup>268</sup> J.Rather, (1985), *Remembering a Master Spy at home*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1985/12/15/nyregion/remembering-a-master-spy-at-home.html>

<sup>269</sup> A.Rose, (2014), *George Washington's spies, the story of America's first Spy Ring*. P 276. Bantam Books, New York.



The discovery of the Culper Ring Code names in Clinton's papers<sup>270</sup> opened a Pandora box; these six agents deserved a name and identity. In 1939, the historian Morton Pennypacker compared documents written by Robert Townsend, to documents written by Culper Jr. After further study and research, Robert Townsend's greatest fear became reality, his handwriting betrayed him and unmasked his secret identity as Culper Jr. Since 1929, studies have been conducted on the Culper Ring, and especially on the taciturn Culper Jr who only wished to remain anonymous to history.

His previously simple grave has been changed to a commemorative one, where his great service during the war for American independence has been recognised. The grave reads<sup>271</sup>:

*Spy. Known to George Washington only as Culper Jr, he became a central member of Washington's "Culper ring" of spies operating in New York and Long Island during British occupation 1776-1783. As a merchant, storekeeper, and reporter, he was able for years to collect, coordinate and dispatch intelligence from Manhattan to Washington's headquarters in New Jersey. The ring's efforts led directly to the victory at Yorktown and the foiling of Benedict Arnold's plan to hand over to the British the fort at West Point and possibly even George Washington himself. In 1780, the British were ready to disseminate counterfeit money with such accuracy and volume as likely to collapse the American economy. Townsend was able to get the details to Washington in time for Congress to thwart the plot. Townsend lived quietly after the war, close to his brothers' families, and sought no credit for his revolutionary service. He is, however, extensively credited in multiple historical works published from 1930 to 2013, and is also cited on the municipal plaque at the entrance to the Townsend family burial ground, Fort Hill Cemetery.*

## 5.2 Legacy

Even though it ended in 1783, the American Revolution still lives in today's United States. The legacy of the Revolution itself is shown in Americans and American society.

The Culper Ring, despite being hidden for so many centuries, has a long legacy today. As a matter of fact, Revolutionary Intelligence has left a consistent legacy that is still being built. There are many examples of how yesterday's secret operations shaped today's secret services.

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<sup>270</sup> Michigan Today, (1999), Cool Blue Website. Consulted at the Society of the Cincinnati.

<sup>271</sup> Fort Hill Cemetery, *Robert Townsend*. Find a Grave.

<https://it.findagrave.com/memorial/33240916/robert-townsend>

## **Knowlton's Rangers**

Before the Culper Ring, intelligence was already desperately needed and the greatest contributor to early intelligence was Colonel Thomas Knowlton. Colonel Knowlton's legacy doesn't reside only in the establishment of the Culper Ring itself, but it's still alive and vibrant today.

Knowlton's honourable service granted him an impressive reputation and Washington himself admired him a lot. Thanks to his experience as a scout during the 7 Years' War, Knowlton was able to understand how General Howe would have attacked the Americans during the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. It was his bravery and intelligence that gained him the respect and admiration of General Washington.

In 1776, Colonel Knowlton<sup>272</sup> was given command of a group of soldiers, soon renamed Knowlton's rangers. The Knowlton Ranger are still known nowadays as the first elite organisation of spies. The instalment of the Knowlton's rangers established Military Knowlton's and his rangers were tasked with the gathering of secret information from the enemy. Their activities allowed Washington to understand how critical the situation in New York was. Unfortunately, Knowlton's life ended during the Battle of Harlem Heights in 1776. Despite the short life of the Knowlton's rangers, the rangers' legacy is highly celebrated nowadays. Part of the rangers was also the martyr-spy Nathan Hale.

Nowadays, the Knowlton's rangers legacy resides in Military Intelligence; the LTC Knowlton Award<sup>273</sup>, established in 1995 by the Military Intelligence Corps Association, is an important military award. The award is usually granted to those agents who, like Thomas Knowlton, contributed significantly to the Military Intelligence Corps. The awarded agents are usually amongst the most competent in the field, their service is an example of the American Military Intelligence's excellence.

The award consists of a medal and a certificate that testifies the agent's great service to their country. Through this award, the MICA celebrates a great patriot who lost his life for his country. The awardees embody Knowlton's patriotism, zeal, and honour. Through them Thomas Knowlton's legacy continues to grow.

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<sup>272</sup> DIA Public Affairs, (2014). Knowlton's Rangers: But one life to give. Defense Intelligence Agency. <https://www.dia.mil/News-Features/Articles/Article-View/Article/566972/knowltons-rangers-but-one-life-to-give/>

<sup>273</sup> Military Intelligence Corps Association. *Knowlton Award*. <https://www.mica-national.org/awards/knowlton-award/>

## **Nathan Hale's peculiar legacy**

The martyr-spy of the American revolution is undoubtedly the most beloved victims of the revolution alongside John André.

It is strange to think about legacy while talking about Hale's doomed mission, but in reality the mission is extremely useful still to today's agents. What was valid for yesterday's agents, is still applicable to the agents of today, especially the ones that approach intelligence for the first time. Hale's mission, reminds the trainees of what they must do during a mission, reminds them of always having an eye open, to pay attention to detail and to never trust anyone during an important mission. While Hale's information was carried through papers, in modern days chips and USB keys are used to steal information, but no matter where the information is stored, the rule is always the same: Hide your evidence and never show it to people outside the mission. While the CIA recognizes Hale's mission as a fiasco, the Intelligence agency honours<sup>274</sup> Hale for his service. The reason why Hale's statue stands vigilant at the entrance of the CIA quarter is because it reminds the agency and agents of their origin. Furthermore, the statue is a constant reminder of the duties and sacrifices that a CIA agent must do.

Hale's legacy doesn't reside in the result of his operation, but resides in what intelligence stands for; duty, love, and sacrifice.

Hale's legacy also shows that the spirit of 1776 is still alive and American intelligence preserves it through each generation of recruits.

## **The Culper Ring's legacy in the early days of the Republic and in Modern Agencies.**

As previously said, intelligence was an essential weapon before the creation of the Culper Ring. Figures like Thomas Knowlton, Nathan Hale, and John Clark are a clear example of this.

What makes the Culper Ring's establishment in 1778 extraordinary, is the fact that this is the first organised intelligence ring. The Culper Ring represents an important shift in the history of the American Revolution, since its establishment, Washington's fortune increased and the Americans were finally able to reclaim their deserved independence.

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<sup>274</sup> Lieutenant General S.W.Wilson.(1993), *American Intelligence and the Tricentennial*. CIA Historical Review Program. <https://www.cia.gov/static/61e1a28f955cd06182dd0a92bac77b83/American-Intelligence-and-Tricentennial.pdf>

The legacy of the Culper Ring doesn't concern only modern times, the legacy of the first American Spy Ring was already present during the first years of the United States. From his experience as one of the leaders of the Culper Ring, Washington had the affirmation that intelligence was essential to protect the nation, not only against foreign threats but the ones from inside the nation as well. Thanks to Culpers' work, the first President of the United States had clear views on how he intended to protect the country.

Last century, with the discovery of the Culper Ring's existence, things changed radically. Nowadays, the Culper Spy Ring's legacy resides in the perfectly structured agencies like the CIA<sup>275</sup>, through the example of the Culper Ring wanted to make intelligence essential for the protection of the country.

After the Second World War, US Presidents like Washington before them, realised that relying on intelligence was the right choice.

Modern day secret agencies work in order to defend their country, these agents are aware of the dangers that their profession might bring, but like the Culper Ring before them, they are more than ready to honour their country.

Even though the Culper Ring members had some issues inside their group, what made them so effective was their ability to work together in perfect harmony. When the Culpers were able to put aside their differences and little bickerings, they worked just like a machine producing constant intelligence. Their efficient system functioned well because they realised that only when working together they achieved something, if only one of the members did not cooperate then the network was stuck, and no intelligence was found.

The Culper Ring's unity, camaraderie and teamwork is constantly reflected not only on CIA agents but amongst the military in general. Modern intelligence services are highly detailed in their functions, every agent has a role that is fundamental for another agent's work. The current channels of information are all strictly linked to one another, one mistake from one agent might compromise the entire chain.

The legacy of the first American Spy network is that sense of unity that makes agents part of a big family that always works together to protect the United States. While today's agents are continuing the Culper Ring's legacy, they are adding their own personal legacy for the future generations of agents.

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<sup>275</sup> P.K.Rose, *The Founding Fathers of American Intelligence*.  
<https://www.cia.gov/static/4c28451b90165b446ac948e3dd47c972/The-Founding-Fathers-of-American-Intelligence-.pdf>

## The Culpers Code: A gift to posterity

Codes were used long before the Culper Ring was established, as a matter of fact, codes were used in ancient Rome and Greece as well.

The Culper Code's singularity, resides in the fact that Benjamin Tallmadge was able to create one from scratch, using only a few examples from the past. The code was inspired by the Entick's spelling dictionary and protected the spies' identities. Even though ingenious, the code had imperfections, such as the absence of the word "officer", an extremely crucial word during a war<sup>276</sup>.

Nonetheless, the Culper Ring's code inspired American intelligence. The discovery of the Culper Ring's Code enhanced last century and modern days' spies to avail themselves of codes and ciphers to conduct their activities. By following the Culper Code's example, codes became more refined and difficult to decipher, but at the same time helped Americans to build unbreakable codes. The outbreak of WW2, was essential for codes and codebreaking.

The history of the first American channel of spies, inspired Americans to rely greatly on codes. An example of great use of codes, was made by the Navajo Code Talkers<sup>277</sup>. Through the use of another language, these selected agents invented a code based on the unwritten Navajo language.

Through the deciphering activities of American women, the United States learned that the war had ended and that Germany surrendered to the allies<sup>278</sup>. Spying was not seen anymore as dishonourable or shameful, but thanks to the Culper Ring, espionage was seen as a means to serve the country with honour.

The great lesson of the Culper Ring is never forgotten, not even in our modern days with advanced technology. Nowadays, intelligence services are aware of the new threats that appear every day through cyber attacks. Hackers pose a great danger to the safety of the nation because of their ability to access delicate information from far away. Coding is in fact a primary skill of the modern agent, that through technology can create an unbreakable code.

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<sup>276</sup> M.Pennypacker, (1948), *George Washington's spies on Long Island and in New York*. PP 209-218. East Hampton Library, East Hampton.

<sup>277</sup> Intel.Gov. 1942: *Navajo Code Talkers, inventors of the unbreakable code*. <https://www.intelligence.gov/people/barrier-breakers-in-history/453-navajo-code-talkers#:~:text=Marine%20Corps%20leadership%20selected%2029,key%20phrases%20and%20military%20tactics>.

<sup>278</sup> M.Weei-Has, (2017), *How the American women codebreakers of WW2 Helped win the war*. Smithsonian Magazine. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-women-codebreakers-wwii-helped-win-war-180965058/>

Undoubtedly way more sophisticated than the Culper Ring Code, these modern codes are a living continuation of Benjamin Tallmadge's code. Even though times and technologies have changed, the Culpers' legacy remains.

### **The Legacy of the Culpers' invisible ink.**

Sir James Jay's invisible ink changed the modus operandi of the American Spy Ring, allowing them to pass information with less fear of being caught with evidence in hands. The invisible ink that Sir Jay produced, was easier to handle and to fabric, made of tannic acid and powdered acacia, the ink was safer than the other inks in circulation<sup>279</sup>.

Nowadays, invisible inks are easy to find and are extremely common, not only for espionage. Every child has played with invisible pens that through an electronic light reveal what is written on the paper.

American Intelligence services are aware of how important it is to protect their information.

During WW2, invisible ink was highly used to pass on information regarding the enemy.

Nowadays, invisible ink is used a lot by security services, and it is deadlier than an invisible pen used by a child. Modern inks are not made only of tannic acid and powdered acacia, but they are mixed with toxic chemicals that if touched can do much harm to the spy who is trying to steal the information.

Chemicals that are highly toxic are also used by terrorists as well, the chemical is sprayed or applied on an innocent letter. Once the letter is opened by the victim, the chemical does its work and can, most of the time, kill the recipient.

The use of invisible ink by the Culper Ring offered American intelligence a new method to conduct investigations against the enemies of the nation. The Culper Ring's legacy here resides in the newly chemicals as well, without the discovery of secret ink used by the Ring, maybe CIA and other intelligence services would have discovered the importance of the sympathetic stain later rather than at the beginning of last century.

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<sup>279</sup> George Washington's Mount Vernon. Spy techniques of the revolutionary war  
<https://www.mountvernon.org/george-washington/the-revolutionary-war/spying-and-espionage/spy-techniques-of-the-revolutionary-war/#:~:text=During%20the%20Revolutionary%20War%20invisible,heat%20or%20a%20chemical%20substance.>

## **Fake news, old news, same story.**

Fake news has always been a powerful weapon during war, the American Revolution showed how useful misinformation was. Through fake information on ammunition, the economic situation, and more, both British and Americans spread false information to trick the others.

Washington's experience during the Seven Years' War, allowed him to understand the military importance of propaganda and false information.

His experience was fundamental for the Culper Ring in its missions during the war. Culper Jr, a few weeks after his entrance in the team, was able to communicate the British's trick just in time to save Washington and the Continental Congress.

The Culper Ring's legacy here is visible in the willingness of American intelligence to fight fake news and propaganda from both the outside and the inside. Nowadays, propaganda and fake news are always present in our lives, we live in a world where it's always harder to distinguish what is true from what is not. The current war in Ukraine has shown that propaganda is still highly used especially to convince people of things that aren't true. Social media, with constant bombing of information from all over the world, has made it possible for fake news to go well beyond a nation's borders. The dangers of Fake information on social media doesn't involve only intelligence but also people's physical and mental health. When used well, fake news are more dangerous than weapons, especially when the targets are the youngest and eldest generations that are the most susceptible to certain topics.

During the American Revolution, both sides played on common people's ignorance or fear in order to gain what they wanted.

Propaganda, just like in the American Revolution, plays with the citizens' emotions of distress, pain, and confusion during a time of crisis. Fake news holds great power on people, and fighting it is not always easy, many times a long exposure to false news can lead to severe trauma and psychological issues.

Just like Robert Townsend, the CIA and its agents fight disinformation and always remember that thanks to Washington's spymaster in New York, America was able to fight Great Britain's fake news.



Curiously enough, the Americans were played by British fake news once again during WW1, when the United Kingdom spread false information in order to get American support during the war.

### **Benedict Arnold's legacy: Treason in the United States.**

In every country of the world, treason against one's own nation is considered dishonourable, but Benedict Arnold's treason left a permanent scar in the memory of every American. Even today his name is still associated with his treason. While the founders were drafting the US Constitution, the wound inflicted by Arnold was still a fresh one in their mind. The drafters of the constitution, still disgusted by Benedict Arnold's schemes, wanted to make sure that every American was going to be faithful to the young nation. As a matter of fact, treason is the only defined crime in the Constitution of the United States.

Art III<sup>280</sup> Sec.3 reads: *Treason against the United States, shall consist only in levying war against them, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort. No person shall be convicted of treason unless on the testimony of two witnesses to the same overt act, or on confession in open court.*

*The Congress shall have power to declare the punishment of treason, but no attainder of treason shall work corruption of blood, or forfeiture except during the life of the person attainted.*

The highlighted part of the article is a reminder of Arnold's treason, the former hero aided America's enemies and gave them "comfort" by giving them important information on the American army and its movements. While there isn't any type of evidence that the article was written because of Arnold, it definitely reminds citizens of the first nation's traitor. In modern days' America, calling a fellow citizen a traitor is still one of the greatest personal offences, for being a traitor means having no honour.

Through centuries, Arnold's story has been told to US citizens to warn them of the dangers of treason, but Arnold is not the last traitor of his country.

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<sup>280</sup> Constitution annotated, analysis and interpretation of the US Constitution. Art.3 Sec.3. <https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/article-3/section-3/#:~:text=Section%203%20Treason&text=Treason%20against%20the%20United%20States,on%20Confession%20in%20open%20Court>.



During the terrifying years of the Cold War, while governments around the world feared an atomic war, Arnold's legacy was carried on by Robert Philip Hanssen<sup>281</sup>.

Hanssen, just like Arnold, swore an oath to the United States, in this oath the newly appointed FBI agent swore to protect the country and its laws. Just like his predecessor, Hanssen pretended to be a patriot while acting as a spy for the Soviet Union from 1985 until his arrest. During his time as a double agent, Hanssen had access to classified documents, regularly passed to Russians by Hanssen himself through dead drops. His work as a secret agent caused great damage to US security. His activities as a spy were discovered long after their beginning in 1985<sup>282</sup>.

The first realisation of a mole inside the FBI, occurred in the 1990s after the arrest of another spy, Aldrich Ames. Hanssen was discovered only in 2000 when the CIA obtained Russian documents of an American spy that was Hanssen himself. The mole was arrested in January 2001 and sentenced to life in prison without parole<sup>283</sup>.

Just like Benedict Arnold in 1780, Hanssen passed the United States' secrets to his enemies, and like Arnold he will always be remembered as a traitor.

Arnold's legacy, after all this time, is treason itself.

### **Did the Culper Ring help win the war?**

Since 1929, American Revolution historians and intelligence experts have tried to understand the influence of the Culper Ring on the outcome of the war. Espionage and Deception are ordinary weapons in the 20th and 21st century. Constantly used, these powerful weapons are of great help for a nation at war or in crisis.

In 1700 though things were different, these modern weapons were looked over, were seen as a dishonourable way to conduct a war, the implementation of spies meant cheating at a gentleman's game.

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<sup>281</sup> FBI Website, *Robert Hanssen*. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/robert-hanssen#:~:text=On%20January%2012%2C%201976%2C%20Robert,damaging%20spy%20in%20Bureau%20history>.

<sup>282</sup> FBI Website, *Robert Hanssen*. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/robert-hanssen#:~:text=On%20January%2012%2C%201976%2C%20Robert,damaging%20spy%20in%20Bureau%20history>.

<sup>283</sup> FBI Website, *Robert Hanssen*. <https://www.fbi.gov/history/famous-cases/robert-hanssen#:~:text=On%20January%2012%2C%201976%2C%20Robert,damaging%20spy%20in%20Bureau%20history>.

George Washington, still aware of the stigma on espionage, realised that through a channel of information he would have been able to defeat the mightiest army in the world<sup>284</sup>. The six agents from Long Island and New York, enhanced America's victory in many ways.

From the early days of its establishment the Culpers gave Washington proof of their talents and the General was aware that through his spies he was on the right path.

Without any doubt, the agent that discovered most of the British's plots was Washington's man in New York, Robert Townsend. His addition to the team was a blessing that gave a sprint of positivity to the commander in chief.

Few weeks after he joined the ring, Culper Jr was able to save the Continental Congress's credibility and economy. The British planned to destroy the American economy through false information on American currency<sup>285</sup>. Townsend reported the information to Washington who alerted Congress just in time. In this case the Culper Ring prevented a complete collapse of the American economy and of patriots' trust in the Continental Congress.

Between New York and Long Island, the six spies gathered information on fortifications, ammunition, and ships' arrival. One of the Culpers' most important operations, regards an extremely important ship arrival, the French one. French help was fundamental for America's victory, many believe that without France's help, America could have lost the war. Thanks to the information that Arnold passed to the British, Sir. Henry Clinton knew of Rochambeau's arrival in the Summer of 1780, and prepared an ambush for the tired French army. Through his work connections, Robert Townsend came to know of the British plans and promptly referred it to Washington<sup>286</sup>.

Through the crucial intelligence Washington was able to prevent a total disaster and the loss of the precious French army. If Clinton had ambushed the French, the war might have had a totally different ending. In this case, Robert Townsend changed the course of the conflict, leading America to victory.

1780 was a decisive year for the war and it was the year that the Culper Ring showed its resourcefulness. After preventing an ambush against the French fleet, Benjamin Tallmadge's

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<sup>284</sup> Letter from George Washington to Colonel Elias Dayton, 26 July 1777. <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-10-02-0415>

<sup>285</sup> S. Hatfield, (2015), "Faking It: British Counterfeiting during the American Revolution." Journal of The American Revolution. <https://allthingsliberty.com/2015/10/faking-it-british-counterfeiting-during-the-american-revolution/>

<sup>286</sup> A. Rose, (2006), Washington's spies. The story of America's first Spy Ring. PP.189-190, Bantam Dell, New York.

intuition prevented another horror, the success of Benedict Arnold's plan to give West Point to the British.

As John André was being brought back to Arnold, Tallmadge was able to put the pieces of the puzzle together with great mental agility and asked for André to be brought back. Tallmadge's intuition unmasked Arnold and his plot, preventing a terrible mistake that might have destroyed Americans' hope of victory. Tallmadge's clever decision was also backed up by Arnold's letter in which he asked to allow a certain "Anderson" to pass, and by Robert Townsend that warned the head of intelligence of British officers talking about West Point.

The Culper Ring saved America's fate, and showed that a war can be won from behind the scenes as well, not only on the battlefield. This important teaching that comes from the birth of the United States hasn't been forgotten by American citizens,

The United States of America and its citizens, should honour these remarkable agents that risked their lives for the cause in which they believed. George Washington's visionary spy ring saved America and allowed Americans to come together under the same flag. Culper Sr, Culper Jr & Co, inspire the agents of today to work because of the love they have for their nation, but most importantly they are the clear example that excellent intelligence wins the war.

The Culper Ring turned espionage from shameful to honourable.

The Culper Ring was indeed revolutionary for its time, for the first time in history, intelligence was almost regulated and approved, Washington kept records of his expenses and always had money left for intelligence operations. The Culper spies represented an evolution from the random scouts that spied on the enemy.

As said in the first chapter, European countries had professional code-breakers that deciphered coded messages of a certain level. Although it was revolutionary, Tallmadge's code would have been extremely easy to decipher for a royal codebreaker at his majesty's service. During the Seven Years' War, Prime Minister Pitt was an avid code breaker. If the British had brought their best code-breakers with them, maybe things would have been totally different. During the war, the British did not have a central intelligence channel, but they used singular spies like Ann Bates or scouts to send in enemy territory. Masked letters were regularly used by Clinton and Burgoyne in their correspondence, but undercover networks were still extremely stigmatised.

The Culper Ring might have been the first American intelligence network, but intelligence networks in certain European countries were way more sophisticated than the Culpers. The

Republic of Venice was famous for its constant use of spies. Unlike the Culper Ring, the Venetian networks consisted of more spies and had different ranks of agents, always divided between professionals and amateurs. The council even had an experienced chief that supervised over the professionals and new recruits. The amateurs were usually chosen after careful consideration or after a time of observation on the chosen agent. Unlike the Culpers who had no time for training, the Council of Ten wanted its agents to always be ready for the worst. From the Council of Ten the Culpers could have learned a lot. An agent of the Council of Ten could have deciphered Tallmadge's code easily.

While their bravery and ingenuity cannot be denied, the Culper Ring committed amateur mistakes, the absence of the word "officer" and the easily understandable code could have compromised the missions.

In conclusion it can be said that the Culper Ring's legacy is still around us and that the Culpers' methods and teachings will never be forgotten, only improved by new technologies and new knowledge, nowadays intelligence agencies are still improving their own techniques, derived by the Revolution.

Intelligence is nowadays an important part of the executive branch, and its modern importance is the result of the Culper Ring's work. Every agent from now on should always honour the six spies that changed the destiny of their country.

The story of the Culper Ring is still being written as new discoveries about their services emerge almost every year. Amongst the most recent discovery, the most exciting one came during the recent Covid-19 Pandemic.

In August 2020, the Long Island Museum discovered an uncatalogued letter from Benjamin Tallmadge to Robert Townsend dated "9 November 1779"<sup>287</sup>.

This letter is the only existing direct correspondence from Tallmadge to Culper Jr, which makes the finding extremely significant. Inside the letter Tallmadge, who signed himself as Bolton, asked the younger Culper to be more careful with the invisible ink and not to use it in their private conversations, but only when necessary in order to send information to Washington<sup>288</sup>.

*Sir: No. 16 Nov'r. 8, 1779*

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<sup>287</sup> Long Island Museum, (2020), <https://longislandmuseum.org/exhibition/the-culper-spy-letter-a-new-discovery-at-the-long-island-museum/>

<sup>288</sup> Long Island Museum, (2020), <https://longislandmuseum.org/exhibition/the-culper-spy-letter-a-new-discovery-at-the-long-island-museum/>

*Some time ago I proposed a certain affair to you, & directed you not to write me an answer with the Stain, as it might possibly expose us, I having none of the Coun-terpart then on hand. Not long since I rec'd a line from you written with the Stain, which I luckily discovered to be of a private nature, having a little of the counterpart on hand. What I wish to know of you is whether 707 [you] can 640 [transport]. I [a] few Umcou [silks], Aewtiu [gauzes], 5 [and] such costly articles from 727 [New York]. 634 [to]. 729 [Setauket] without 132 [danger]. I also wish to know what relation 625 [the]. 75 [cost]. of such articles bears now 634 [to]. their 75 [cost] before 625 [the]. 680 [war]. As soon as you resolve me in these Questions I will write you more fully on the Subject. I write this in plain Style as I am informed C— Sen'r is to have an interview with you & can deliver it himself. I should be glad of an answer by the Return of the Bearer. I must again remind you not to write to me on private business with the Stain, as I have none of the Counterpart to decipher it & of course it must go on to 711 [Washington]. I have the Stain & can write you with that, but your private Letters to me must be wrote for the present with the Dic-tionary. I wish in future you would give some distinguishing mark to the Sheet which is the true Letter to 711 [Washington].when it comes in a Quire, as I may possibly send the wrong one to 711 [Washington]. Let what I have wrote here be a profound Secret with yourself & C – Senior.*

*I am yours sincerely*

*Jno. Bolton*

*C. Jun'r*

The Letter was exhibited at the Long Island Museum in 2021 in honour of the Culper Spy Ring Day which usually is in September.

After all these years, the six spies of Long Island continue to amaze, enchant, and bewitch Americans. Their contribution to the birth of the country will always be remembered with pride.

To these six heroes we can only say **vbepo 707** (thank you).

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## SUMMARY

The word “*Intelligence*”, comes from the Latin verb *intelligere*, meaning the acquisition, processing, and storage of information. The Oxford dictionary defines intelligence as *secret information that is collected, for example about a foreign country, especially one that is an enemy*.

Intelligence services aim at the protection of the country and nowadays these fundamental services are constitutionalised, they are part of the government’s structure and are used by the government for the implementation of important policies.



But despite their importance for the protection of peace, politicisation of intelligence is a serious threat as well. As happened with the Stasi and KGB during the Cold War, politicised services don't act to protect their citizens, they act to serve who is in power.

It was during these years of general terror and unrest that the CIA was established in 1947. The CIA is one of the most well known intelligence services in the whole world, but it's not the first American intelligence service. The CIA's roots trace back to the beginning of America itself, precisely during the fight for the birth of the country. These roots are honoured by the CIA with a statue at the entrance of its headquarters. The statue of a proud young soldier represents the first martyr-spy of America, Nathan Hale.

It is important to add that espionage was not born in America, espionage is after all one of the oldest professions in the world.

In 18th Century Europe, intelligence was regarded as base and dishonourable, but this never stopped kings and diplomats from using it. As a matter of fact, secret channels of information were always present in every European court. Amateur and Professional agents gathered secret information, risking their lives to serve a foreign minister or royalty.

Professional agents were mostly diplomats who while serving in another country reported delicate information back home, or in many cases exposed their own nation's secret to aid the enemy. Foreign ministers were capable heads of intelligence, they had secret channels at their service that were almost never discovered.

The amateurs instead were those who happened to be spies, either for a desperate need of money, for ideals, or simply because they craved adventure. Amateurs were the agents that risked the most since they were not protected by their employer. During the American Revolution, the amateur spies Nathan Hale and John André paid for their mistakes with their lives. Hale's tragic death in 1776 and loss of New York made Washington realise that he needed a stable channel of information inside the city. Nathan Hale is the prototype of the amateur spy who decides to embark on the mission for his ideals and for his will to serve his country. Nathan Hale's sacrifice is nowadays remembered with pride but at the same time the mistakes that he committed during his mission represent a reminder for all the present and future agents.

The other amateur spy of the American Revolution is instead the British Major John André. Sir. Henry Clinton's aide and head of intelligence, André corresponded with Benedict Arnold to sell West Point to the British. Between Amateurs and Professionals, there were other two types of 18th century spies; military and women spies.

Nowadays intelligence is especially used by the military, but in the 1700s spying was considered dishonourable and shameful. But despite this stigma, Generals were aware of the usefulness of secret information on the enemy. Undercover agents allowed Britain to win the Seven Years War and helped officers to understand how and when the army had to attack the enemy.

Women in history have always been overlooked or considered inferior and prone to hysterics. But women were instead the best spies, they knew and still know how to use this perception and stereotype that surrounds them through centuries. In European courts, ladies in waiting were not only a lady or queen's best confidantes, but they were able agents who reported any type of information to the lady they were serving. During the American Revolution, women on both the British and American side were the most resourceful spies. Often slaves, sisters, and wives, they eavesdropped conversations and passed information to the other agents.

The use of intelligence increased highly during the Seven Years' War, both in Europe and America.

It was during the unrest of the Seven Years' War that young George Washington approached intelligence for the first time. This approach proved to be essential for the future commander in chief of the Continental Army. Thanks to the knowledge acquired in the Seven Years' War, Washington established the first American Spy Ring during the American Revolution.

While the war was being fought in the 13 former colonies, in France Benjamin Franklin was fighting a diplomatic battle. In order to assure France's support to the American cause, Franklin was aware of the importance of espionage, through propaganda and spies, Franklin secured France's support to the American cause.

As Franklin gained France's support in 1776, the Continental Army had lost the battle of New York. The loss of New York was devastating and Washington was desperate for information from the British occupied city. In September 1776, the Connecticut Captain Nathan Hale volunteered to spy for the general. Unfortunately, Hale was unfitted for the operation and was unmasked by Major Rogers who pretended to be a friend to the American cause. Nathan Hale was hanged as a spy on the 22nd of September 1776, becoming the first martyr-spy of the Revolution. The hanging of Nathan Hale resides somewhere between myth and reality. For centuries historians believed that his final words were "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country" from Cato, but recent findings from the British Captain Frederick Mackenzie reveal the truth about the Captain's last words; *"He thought it the duty of every officer, to obey any orders given him by his commander in chief; and desired the spectators to be at all times prepared to meet death in whatever shape it might appear."*

Although the mission was a failure, it increased intelligence operations from the Americans and in 1778 the Culper Ring was established.

After learning from Nathaniel Sacket and John Clark, Benjamin Tallmadge and George Washington created the first American Spy Ring by using Tallmadge's childhood friends. The six agents were all civilians with a desire to do something for their country. The information reached Washington to a specific delivery system: The man in the city, the quaker Robert Townsend(Culper Jr), passed the information acquired to the courier, Austin Roe(Agent 724). Roe, with incredible speed, rode to Setauket to give the message to Abraham Woodhull(Culper Sr). At this point, there were two different options to take in consideration. Woodhull could directly give the dispatch to Caleb Brewster (725), or he gave the intelligence to Anna Strong who then signalled it to Agent 725. Brewster then returned to camp to give the operation to Tallmadge who assumed the code name John Bolton. Finally, Tallmadge brought the collected intelligence to Washington. Through this simple but effective system, the Culper Ring was able to bring Americans closer to victory.

Apart from the Culpers, Washington availed himself of other agents. The Irish tailor Hercules Mulligan and the slave James Armistead Lafayette were two able spies who decided to risk their life for a cause. James Lafayette wasn't freed after his service to the American cause, but became a free man thanks to le Marquis De Lafayette in 1787.

Through an attentive analysis of the various missions of the Culper Ring, Hercules Mulligan, and James Lafayette, the comparison with Nathan Hale's mission highlights the martyr's mistakes as a spy. The Culper Ring was so successful especially because of the methods employed by its agents.

In order to maintain the agents' identities and their letters a secret, Tallmadge devised a Code book based on Entick's Spelling Dictionary. The code was made of 673 numbers, each number representing a name, place or word that was put in the left column in alphabetical order. Washington was 711, Tallmadge/John Bolton was 721, CulperSr or Samuel Culper was 722, Culper Jr was 723, Roe 724.

Amidst other methods, Washington's spies used a revolutionary invisible ink that had an agent and reagent. The Agent consisted of a mix of tannic acid and powdered acacia, and this mix would have created the ink itself. The reagent instead was made of ferrous sulphate and distilled water.

Fake news does not belong only to our century, but it was also through fake news and propaganda that the British and the Americans fought the war.

These methods were used in all the Culpers' missions. Amongst the most famous ones, the most important operations included the discovery of the British's plot to undermine the American economy, and the British ambush to the French fleet in 1780.

The Culper Ring was also involved in the discovery of the most intriguing plot of the Revolution; the Arnold and André West Point conspiracy.

The names of John André and Benedict Arnold are tied together by history, there can't be one without the other. The story of the turncoat Benedict Arnold and the gallant John André, has inspired poems, plays, and films. Regardless of how different these two men were, it's impossible to divide them.

Benedict Arnold, was the finest battle commandant of the American Revolution, his bravery at Fort Ticonderoga and at the Battle of Saratoga proclaimed him a hero. Although he was considered incorruptible, Arnold betrayed his country for money.

John André instead was a man of arts, a lover of arts and music who enchanted the city of Philadelphia. He was Henry Clinton's favourite aide and his honourable character was exalted by patriots like Alexander Hamilton and Benjamin Tallmadge. André was nothing but a victim in Arnold's scheme. Arnold wanted to give America's most important Fort, West Point, to the British in exchange of money and a military rank in the British army.

In September 1780, after passing American information to the British, Arnold met André to give him the plans for the capture of West Point.

The plot failed and André was promptly captured. During his capture, Benjamin Tallmadge and Hamilton were bewitched by André's gallantry and honourable personality. André's death was a shock both for the British and the Americans that described him as the most honourable and gallant men they ever met.

Even though Arnold escaped and was appointed general by the British, his reputation followed him on the British side as well. Nowadays, Arnold is remembered as the primal traitor while André as an impeccable man.

Even though they were discovered by accident in 1929, the Culper Ring's legacy is visible in today's intelligence sense of unity and camaraderie. The methods used by the Ring are nowadays used in a modern key. Coding is a basic skill that every agent must know how to use. Furthermore, the legacy of the first American intelligence service is alive in the use of propaganda, secret inks, and detailed systems of intelligence collection.

The six spies brought America to victory from the backstage through their missions and will to serve their country. Their story continues to amaze and bewitch Americans while their contribution to the birth of the country will always be remembered with pride.

