



PHILLIP PAPAS

Renegade Revolutionary
The Life of General Charles Lee

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*For
Sophia*

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It is, then, necessary to study war
before we engage in it.

—CHARLES LEE

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Introduction

IN NOVEMBER 1774, A PAMPHLET ADDRESSED TO THE PEOPLE of America was published in Philadelphia and reprinted in other major cities in the colonies and in London. It forcefully articulated American rights and liberties and allayed the fears of many colonists of British military power. The pamphlet contended that the crisis that had unfolded between Britain and America since the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 was not simply a dispute between a mother country and her colonies. Instead, it was part of the ongoing universal struggle for human freedom. To further their cause, Americans needed to stand together, prepared to declare and fight for their independence. The pamphlet's author assured his readers that by emancipating themselves from Britain's imperial shackles, Americans would inspire people who suffer under tyrannical governments to "demolish those badges of slavery" that stifle the natural human aspiration to be free.

The author of this radical and strikingly optimistic pamphlet was not Thomas Paine—nor was it John Adams, Samuel Adams, Thomas Jefferson, or Benjamin Franklin. It was Charles Lee, a former British army officer turned revolutionary, a man who became one of the earliest supporters of American independence and who served as George Washington's second-in-command and military confidant during the early years of the Revolution. Lee fought on and off the battlefield for expanded democracy, freedom of conscience, individual liberties, human rights, and for the formal education of women. While many revolutionaries shared Lee's commitment to independence, few shared his radical outlook. Fewer still shared his confidence that the American Revolution should be waged—and could be won—primarily by militia (or irregulars) rather than with a centralized regular army.

To the eighteenth-century American gentry, who for decades had emulated an idealized and erroneous notion of English gentility, Lee was not a

true gentleman. For Americans, a true gentleman was a man of honor and integrity; he embraced rigid rules of etiquette and manners, demonstrated emotional self-restraint, exhibited a proper sense of decorum in public, and displayed elegance in speech and dress. Lee displayed none of these traits. He was careless in his dress and in his personal habits and hygiene. His manners were no better, although he could be charming, especially in the presence of females. More often, Lee was rude, profane, crude, irritable, egotistical, dogmatic, coarse, and abrupt. He was brutally honest and had a temper that flared at the slightest provocation and a biting and sarcastic wit that frequently left its intended target deeply wounded.

After dining with Lee in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the winter of 1775, the Congregational minister Jeremy Belknap, a graduate of Harvard, an early historian of New Hampshire, and a chaplain for American troops stationed outside Boston, found him “a perfect original, a good scholar and soldier, and an odd genius; full of fire and passion.” But Belknap could not ignore Lee’s outward appearance. He described him as a man with “little good manners; a great sloven, wretchedly profane, and a great admirer of dogs.”¹ Mercy Otis Warren, author of one of the earliest histories of the American Revolution and the sister and wife of two of Massachusetts’s leading revolutionaries, described Lee as “plain in his person even to ugliness, and careless in his manners to a degree of rudeness. . . . His voice was rough, his garb ordinary, his deportment morose.”² And a soldier who had served under Lee during the Revolution remembered that “the soldiers used to laugh about his great nose.”³ To his American contemporaries, Lee was an eccentric, and he looked the part.⁴ Contemporary descriptions and engravings depicted him as a cartoonish, almost grotesque figure with a lanky frame; lean face accentuated by a low-slung jaw and a long, sharp hooked nose; darting eyes; unusually small hands and feet; slovenly dress; and intelligent yet profane conversation. To complete the picture, one or more of his unruly canine companions was always at his side.

Lee evidenced classic signs of what modern psychiatry would classify as manic-depressive disorder (or bipolar disorder). He experienced frequent swings in mood from extreme highs to emotional lows. Perhaps commenting on Lee’s mood shifts, Washington described him as “fickle.” Lee displayed periods of mania with high energy and exaggeratedly good moods. During his manic episodes, he recklessly took major risks when safer and surer alternatives existed or he went on spending sprees that often left him



Major General Charles Lee. This engraving of Lee with his dog Spado is an example of the contemporary caricatures of Lee that existed. By Alexander Hay Ritchie, after a caricature by Barham Rushbrooke. Date unknown. Source: Library of Congress.

in financial straits. Lee experienced phases of hypersexuality during which he obsessively talked of or thought about sex or engaged in numerous sexual encounters with different female partners. He drank to excess and was prone to fast, erratic talking, uncontrollable thoughts, jealousy, delusions of power, poor judgment, insomnia, and an inability to concentrate. Lee's depressive episodes lasted for weeks, during which time he exhibited a lack of energy, mysterious physical ailments, restlessness, anxiety and sadness, insecurity, and feelings of hopelessness, worthlessness, and helplessness. Lee's mental health may have been the cause of his slovenly appearance and poor interpersonal skills. He was unable to maintain many close relationships, leading to a fundamental loneliness that sometimes overwhelmed him. Perhaps Lee's profound love and respect for dogs, which was frequently noted by contemporaries, compensated for his inability to form lasting relationships with people.⁵

Contemporary impressions of Lee revealed a provincial misunderstanding, for he was the epitome of a middle-class English gentleman. Although his outward appearance and behavior did not meet any of the standards that an American would think genteel, in his background, upbringing, financial independence, and classical education, Lee was a gentleman. Lee was also perhaps the most cosmopolitan of the revolutionaries. No other American revolutionary, except maybe Benjamin Franklin, was as worldly as Lee. He seemed to move comfortably—almost effortlessly—between different social and political circles. He socialized with European monarchs, such as Frederick II of Prussia, Stanislaus II Augustus Poniatowski of Poland, and Joseph II of Austria; was accepted into the salons of Britain's leading intellectuals; and hobnobbed with America's republican revolutionaries.

Yet scholars have treated Lee no better than his contemporaries. They have accepted the biased view that he was little more than an eccentric, egomaniacal professional soldier and have interpreted his strategic and philosophical disagreements with Washington as a plot against the commander-in-chief and a betrayal of the Revolution. In the process, they have ignored the complexity of Lee's character and given little recognition to his intellect, his varied and extensive military expertise, the radicalism of his political and military ideals, and his modern sensibilities about religion and pet ownership. Historians have missed the opportunity to contrast Lee's fire-breathing, inflexible, more traditional top-down leadership style (which contradicted his pronouncements concerning democracy) and his inability

to effectively negotiate between civilian and military interests to that of Washington's more diplomatic, confident, and trustworthy managerial style of leadership. Washington's reputation for integrity, his willingness to listen to the advice of others—whether from his senior military officers or civilian authorities—and his ability to accept responsibility for his decisions were hallmarks of his leadership and were admired by his contemporaries.⁶ Lee, who was appointed a major general in the Continental Army by Congress in June 1775 and who became Washington's second-in-command fourteen months later, has been the focus of few studies. As a result, a full and fair evaluation of his life and his contributions to the American Revolution are largely absent from the historiography of the war.⁷

It is now time to reassess Lee's life and ideas on their own merits and in the larger context of the Revolutionary era. "General Lee . . . is the first Officer in Military knowledge and experience we have in the whole Army," confessed Washington to his brother John Augustine.⁸ In September 1776, Washington renamed Fort Constitution on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River Fort Lee in a symbolic gesture that acknowledged the military expertise that Lee brought to the revolutionary cause. Lee saw extensive action in America during the French and Indian War and later in Europe after the conflict expanded into the Seven Years' War (1756–1763). In America, he experienced firsthand the value of stealth, ambush, and psychological warfare as tactics against well-trained regulars. During the postwar years, Lee served as aide-de-camp to Poland's King Stanislaus. In this capacity, Lee enjoyed the splendor of court life in Eastern Europe yet was simultaneously appalled by the absolute power the nobility held over the region's peasants. Lee was commissioned a major general in the Polish army and eventually earned a post in the Russian military of Empress Catherine II during the Russo-Turkish War (1768–1774). Lee also witnessed the brutality of civil war in Poland as bands of partisans conducted guerrilla operations that brought havoc and excessive violence on civilian populations and regular armies. It was during this time that Lee became a harsh critic of hereditary monarchy and joined many British radical Whigs in denouncing the rule of George III and his ministers. He warned that the policies pursued by the king and the ministry, especially those aimed at the American colonists, were tyrannical and would lead Britain to absolutism. Disillusioned by the political atmosphere in Britain, Lee relocated to America in 1773, arriving at a critical juncture in Anglo-American affairs.

Although Lee's military service made him the most experienced officer in the Continental Army, his social and political views made him far more radical than most of his fellow revolutionaries in the military leadership. He had read more broadly and deeply in literature, history, politics, memoir, philosophy, and the art of war than most of his contemporaries. The self-assured John Adams, who rarely paid anyone an easy compliment, praised Lee's attainments as "the soldier and the scholar" but thought him "a queer creature." However, because of his respect for Lee, Adams told his wife Abigail: "You must . . . forgive a thousand whims."⁹ Adams claimed that he "had read as much on the military Art and much more of the History of War than any American Officer" but Lee.¹⁰ Lee's learning had prompted him to form strong commitments to democracy and republicanism, individual liberty, freedom of conscience, the education of women, natural rights, and the democratizing potential of a citizen army.

More than any other officer in the Continental Army, Lee believed that military service should be an obligation of citizenship. He defined the "state" in terms of its citizens and contended that the army should be the representative and defender of the citizenry. Lee took his cues from several historical and philosophical sources: the idea of the public-spirited citizen-soldier existed in ancient Greece and Rome, where a citizen—that is, a person who owned inheritable land—could hold office and was responsible for contributing to national defense. The sixteenth-century Florentine political theorist Niccolò Machiavelli asserted that the cure for what ailed the corrupt republics of Italy was a return to the military organizations of the ancients. This meant the abolition of a professional soldiery and a return to citizen-soldier militias. Machiavelli viewed the militia as essential to the survival of a virtuous republic. Later political theorists echoed Machiavelli, but historian Saul Cornell writes that although there were always "considerable disagreements over how much virtue was necessary for the survival of a republic, at a very minimum there was a broad consensus that a republic had to possess enough virtue to ensure that its citizens would take up arms when necessary to meet internal and external threats."¹¹ In his *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), seventeenth-century Whig writer James Harrington connected military duty in defense of the state to citizenship, and eighteenth-century French Enlightenment thinkers Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau exclaimed the virtues of the citizen-soldier who sacrificed his personal interest for

the public good. Rousseau maintained that a state's "true defenders are its members" and that "each citizen should be a soldier by duty, none by profession." As scholar Everett C. Dolman notes, these and other theoretical arguments for the benefits of a citizen-soldier militia laid "the groundwork for democracy . . . through an understanding and manipulation of military organization."¹²

Lee argued that the citizen-soldier was the military bedrock of democracy. He insisted that in a democracy citizens must actively share the burden of military responsibility equally; they must be willing to fight a war in which their private interests are sacrificed to the common good. National conscription was also an important element in Lee's conception of war and the defense of democratic society. A similar notion that linked citizenship to military obligation and to sacrifice in defense of the nation was adopted by the French revolutionary Lazare Carnot, whose call to arms in defense of the French state, which was known as the *levée en masse*, swelled the ranks of the revolutionary armies during the early campaigns of the wars of the French Revolution in the 1790s.¹³ In America, some colonial militia laws involved selective drafts for service in particular military campaigns, but national conscription was not enacted until the Civil War.

Lee's military views distinguished him from many of his contemporaries. It was Charles Lee the professional soldier and not George Washington the former militia officer who held a high opinion of America's militia as an institution and as an instrument of democracy. Indeed, Washington demonstrated contempt for the citizen-soldiers of the militia, bemoaning the short term nature of militia service, the militiamen's indifference to military discipline, and their unreliability in battle. Historian Michael S. Neiberg notes that "American experiences after Bunker Hill proved this point" to Washington.¹⁴ The American victory at Bunker Hill in 1775 and the outpouring of patriotic rhetoric after the war had solidified the militia's place in national folklore, but the debacle at the Battle of Long Island in August 1776 convinced Washington that the troops available to him could not repeat their successful performance at Bunker Hill. The British were no longer inclined toward reckless frontal assaults against entrenched defensive earthworks; instead, they preferred to turn the Continental flanks in a strategy of feint and maneuver. Washington and his protégés argued that the ability to counter the intricate complexities of this British strategy necessitated administrative efficiency, long-term enlistments, the training

of a professional soldiery, and the creation of a system of rigid discipline and deference to authority. From this perspective, the militia could not be relied upon as the main line of defense; instead, national security had to become the responsibility of a well-trained regular army.

During the first two years of the American Revolution, Washington tried to fashion his troops into a regular army. He called on the Continental Congress to implement reforms that would transform the American militia into professional soldiers. His efforts faced political and ideological opposition, however, and the independent will of the American people. Lee demonstrated the utmost confidence in the abilities of the militia. He believed that the Americans' natural independent spirit would preclude the creation of a professional regular army capable of confronting the British in a conventional war. Lee adhered to the notion that militias comprised of free citizens who were motivated by a desire to fight to preserve their liberty and defend their property and families rather than rewards (financial or honorific) made better soldiers than men who were held to long-term service, paid a wage, and trained to fight from a drill manual. He touted the martial virtues of America's citizen-soldiers and was confident that their cultural acquaintance with firearms, their natural skills as marksmen, and their love of liberty would enable them to defeat Britain.¹⁵ Lee's views were in keeping with the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century radical Whig tradition, which condemned the dissolution of Britain's militia system under the Stuart monarchy in favor of a professional army of long-term enlistments and conventional tactics.

For Lee, then, the movement to create a professional army in America smacked dangerously of a European-style military establishment—one that was tied to absolute authority, monarchy, and European corruption and was at odds with the national character, liberties, and military traditions of the Americans. Lee warned that an army of professional soldiers who were paid by the state was invariably dangerous to liberty and civic virtue because it had the potential to become an instrument of tyranny should it come under the control of morally corrupt leaders concerned only with the protection of personal interests. He argued that the creation of a professional soldiery threatened the very essence of the American Revolution—that is, free citizens fighting for their natural rights and liberties and in defense of their families and their property. Professional armies were obedient to the interests of the state alone, not to the interests of the citizenry of a free

society. He feared that a professional regular army could be turned against the Revolution and used for the suppression of the same natural rights and liberties that the war aimed to protect. The plot by several Continental Army officers at Newburgh, New York, in 1783 to challenge the Congress of the Confederation and wrest power away from the civilian authorities because of the government's alleged indifference to their financial problems proved that this was not the wild fantasy of an eccentric soldier.

If he was out of step with Washington, Lee was not alone among the revolutionaries in his belief that professional standing armies posed a major threat to liberty. Samuel Adams insisted that "a standing Army . . . is always dangerous to the Liberties of the People."¹⁶ The Virginia Declaration of Rights, which George Mason drafted in 1776, declared militias "the proper, natural and safe defense of a free state" and argued that "in all cases, the military should be under strict subordination to, and governed by, the civil power," while "Standing Armies . . . should be avoided as dangerous to liberty."¹⁷ Among the litany of grievances in the Declaration of Independence, Thomas Jefferson, Mason's protégé, condemned George III for keeping "among us, in Times of Peace, Standing Armies, without the consent of our Legislatures," for rendering "the Military independent of and superior to the Civil Power," and for "quartering large Bodies of Armed Troops" among the citizens of America. Jefferson also denounced the king's negotiations to import foreign mercenaries to be used for the American war. He implied that George III sought to use Britain's professional army and foreign auxiliaries to crush the colonists' assertions of their natural rights and liberties.¹⁸ These grievances justified the Americans' decision to sever all allegiance to the British Crown and to establish "free and independent states."

To win the war and America's independence, Lee urged the revolutionaries to adopt a *petite guerre* strategy that would avoid massing the Continental Army for conventional pitched battles against the British. Instead, he advocated forming the army along the lines of a national militia, dividing it into several small detachments that were trained in highly mobile light-infantry tactics, a practice that was consistent with the colonial military experience. The officers of these detachments could integrate their operations with the activities of roving bands of local partisans who were proficient guerrilla fighters. Lee believed that dividing the army into smaller units would improve its mobility and help logistically to supply the troops. Lee reasoned that smaller detachments could move quickly through

the countryside, subsist more easily off the land, and effectively harass the British until they were exhausted. He also suggested that the Americans move their main military operations to the rugged terrain west of the Susquehanna River, in central Pennsylvania. They would stretch out the enemy's already thin supply lines, which relied heavily on the Royal Navy to transport provisions from Britain, creating a financial and logistical burden for officials in London. Furthermore, the smaller, more mobile American units could effectively carry out movements aimed at harassing the British flanks, cutting their outstretched lines of supply and communication, and ambushing isolated patrols and outposts. Local partisans could be used to administer and enforce test oaths, draw neutrals into the revolutionary cause, and intimidate and retaliate against Loyalists.

Although Lee's proposed strategy would expose large areas of the eastern seaboard to enemy occupation, he argued that forcing the British to hold these areas would limit their strategic options. He also maintained that taking military operations into the hinterland would force the British and their Hessian and Hanoverian allies to confront an unconventional enemy deep within unfamiliar territory. Geography would be the Americans' ally; this was their home and they knew its contours. The extreme mobility of the American forces and their detailed knowledge of the terrain would make it possible for them to outmaneuver and to surprise the larger and better-equipped British Army. Lee was confident that this strategy would cause chaos and confusion in the ranks of the conventional forces of Britain and her German allies, causing them to abandon their preferred methodical, linear strategic movements in favor of improvised and reactive tactics that they were wholly unprepared to implement. He also felt it would negate any Loyalist support. Lee's goal was to keep the enemy constantly off balance, to inflict as many casualties on their forces as possible, and to leave them demoralized. The defeat of the British army commanded by John Burgoyne at Saratoga in 1777 and the success of Generals Nathanael Greene and Daniel Morgan against the army of British general Charles Cornwallis in the crucial second southern campaign of 1780–1781, when the revolutionary cause seemed close to collapse, was the result of the application of a similar strategy.

The defeat of the British military was not the only objective in Lee's strategy, however. Lee's scheme, which was reminiscent of Fabian strategy,¹⁹ sought to wear down the political will of the British people to continue

the war. In this way, Lee hoped that the loss of popular support in Britain for the conflict would force George III, his ministers, and Parliament to give up their attempt to subjugate the Americans. The realization of Lee's proposed strategy—one that blurred the lines between soldier and civilian—meant fighting a wholly different war than that envisioned by Washington and other American officers who were continental in their thinking. For these officers, the key to winning American independence was national political unity and the key to national political unity was forging the Continental Army into a national army under a unified command structure that would be subordinate to the civil authority of the Continental Congress. Washington viewed the Continental Army as the key to the survival of the Revolution and did his best to keep it together. "Success for Washington was not in battlefield victory alone," writes historian Caroline Cox, "but also in simply keeping the army together. No matter what disappointments the army faced in the field, as long as it continued to exist, the Revolution was alive."²⁰ Washington developed his own version of the Fabian strategy that concentrated the army just beyond the reach of the enemy and avoided large-scale battles in favor of smaller conventional operations against isolated British outposts and peripheral detachments before withdrawing his forces from the field. Washington carried out this strategy with perfection at Trenton and at Princeton in the winter of 1776–1777. The longer the Continental Army lived to fight another day, "the more secure Congress and the new nation became, the more other nations accepted the legitimacy of the new government, and the more disgruntled and war weary the British became," writes Cox.²¹ In Washington's strategy, the militia was used to screen the Continental Army and to undertake local defense, gather intelligence, and conduct operations that would limit British maneuvers, harass their flanks, and deny them resources. In this scheme, militias played a supporting role to the Continental Army; they did not become a substitute for it.

Washington's vision for the Continental Army required European-style organization and training, the opposite of Lee's ideas. During the winter of 1777–1778, former Prussian military officer Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben joined Washington's staff at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, and was put to work training the Continental troops in the close-order drill system, in the discipline of the parade ground, and in the linear tactics that were familiar to eighteenth-century European armies. Furthermore, France's

entry into the conflict in February 1778 all but guaranteed that the war would be fought according to what Lee called the “European Plan.”

In his opponents’ view, Lee’s proposed strategy would undermine national unity since it had the potential to exacerbate the localism and provincialism that was a significant characteristic of American society in the colonial period; the fear was that this would cause the conflict to devolve into a war of reprisals and counter-reprisals. Historian John Shy writes that those Americans who opposed Lee’s strategy “felt a need to be seen as cultivated, honorable, respectable men, not savages leading savages in a howling wilderness.”²² They argued that a reliance on guerrilla tactics and terrorism carried out by organized militias or roving bands of local partisans or both would lead to the political fragmentation of the Revolution and to a full-scale civil war directed by local juntas. When one looks at the partisan violence that occurred in the areas around British-occupied New York City and in the southern backcountry during the American Revolution or the Jacobin Terror of the French Revolution or, on a larger scale, the recent situations in Iraq and in Afghanistan, where local sectarian militias and death squads have slowed or in some cases have undermined the political process, one can see the merit of this critique.

Washington’s idea for the army ultimately proved correct, both politically and militarily. But his rejection of localism and his lackluster opinion of the American militia hampered the debate over local democracy and popular political participation in America. Washington’s rejection of Lee’s strategy and the rejection of many of his contemporaries do not justify its trivialization by historians as the irrelevant musings of an eccentric. Nor should Lee’s contributions to the American Revolution be dismissed. He was one of the leading voices for American liberty and an early advocate for independence, and he worked tirelessly to strengthen the Continental lines outside Boston and to put Newport, Rhode Island; New York City; and Charleston, South Carolina, into the best defensible position against a British attack.

Lee reached his zenith as a revolutionary and as a hero of American liberty between June 1775 and September 1776. During that fifteen-month time span, he served as Congress’s main military troubleshooter, assigned to wherever the need for his military expertise seemed most critical. It would have served Lee’s reputation better had he been killed in battle early in the war. He would have been universally hailed by contemporaries and

remembered to this day as an ardent revolutionary and perhaps the nation's first true soldier-scholar. But Lee's proclivity for self-destructive behavior, which was demonstrated by the way he demeaned the decisions of his superior officers and civilian authorities throughout his military career, by his suspect actions while he was in British custody from December 1776 to April 1778, by the allegations of incompetence against him at the Battle of Monmouth in June of 1778, and by his subsequent court-martial and removal from the Continental service have left his historical reputation in tatters.

This study draws a new portrait of Charles Lee, replacing a simple "oddy" with a complex, fascinating person who made important contributions to the Revolutionary era as a propagandist and as a soldier. Lee had confidence that a popular war of mass resistance that was fought using a strategy of *petite guerre* would effectively stymie the British war machine and neutralize local Loyalists. To a degree often not admitted and possibly not realized by Washington and his coterie of military officers, the Revolution proved Lee correct. The use of militia and roving bands of local partisans and unconventional hit-and-run attacks to defeat the British army at Saratoga in 1777 and in the South in 1780–1781 vindicated Lee's strategy. The idea of a popular war of mass resistance that relied on guerrilla tactics was later echoed in struggles in France and Haiti during the eighteenth century; in Greece and Latin America during the nineteenth century; in the Philippines, China, Cuba, Vietnam, and Northern Ireland during the twentieth-century; and in Syria and other conflicts around the globe in our time. Thus it could be claimed that Lee was a harbinger of certain aspects of modern revolutionary military strategy.

The American nation was born in war. And, reflecting Lee's arguments, this war shaped the kind of nation that emerged from it. Lee recognized that a strategic choice existed for the revolutionaries: they could try to preserve society by massing troops to fight conventional battles against the British at the risk of losing the war or they could risk that society by fighting a guerrilla-style insurgency that would prolong the war but give them their best chance to defeat the British and gain their independence. According to military historian Don Higginbotham, "a guerrilla war of independence had no appeal to the Americans." They were too prosperous and still very close to their British heritage to consider Lee's alternative. "It is impossible to imagine the Americans as terrorists in the modern sense,"

writes Higginbotham, “for terrorists hate their opponents and all they stand for. Terrorism spawns guerrilla warfare, which in turn produces more terrorism; terrorism rips apart the vitals of the community.” Many Americans did not hate the British nor did they want to risk tearing asunder their society and undermining their prosperity in an effort to fight a guerrilla war.²³

Lee’s ideas were at the center of a debate among the American revolutionaries over the definition of a successful military strategy—one that would win America’s independence from Britain while remaining true to the democratic aims of the war and guaranteeing a stable postwar political situation. As they decided this issue, the revolutionaries confronted a real dilemma: create a national army of full-time professional soldiers and use the militia solely for local defense or avoid the creation of a national army and use the militia as the basis for several independent armies that would coordinate operations with local bands of partisans in a guerrilla-style insurgency. This was not simply a strategic concern; it also raised the question of where the military stood in the system of political power—that is, who should have a claim on the loyalty of the military: the states or the national government. This same issue would reemerge in political form over the next two centuries in America, most immediately in the debates over the Articles of Confederation and the U.S. Constitution.²⁴

This, then, is the story of one of the most complex and controversial figures of the American Revolution and the debates and discussions regarding military strategy and democracy to which he contributed. At first glance Charles Lee was not impressive. He was tall, gangly, and awkward in appearance, dress, and manners and in no way fit the eighteenth-century American vision of an English gentleman. From such a portrait one can understand why contemporaries and historians have dismissed him. But a study of Lee’s life, his ideas, and his leadership style sheds new light on the way the Americans waged war against Britain during the Revolution and on the debate over the proper military organization in a democracy. By doing so, it addresses two critical questions: What kinds of institutions knit together a nation? and What is the price of creating those institutions?

PART I

The World of Charles Lee, 1731–1764

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Colonel Lee's Son

ON A COLD, BLUSTERY DECEMBER DAY IN 1731, COLONEL JOHN LEE and his wife Isabella welcomed their last child into the world. The Lees must have viewed the birth of their son Charles with an equal measure of joy and trepidation, for death had visited their home all too frequently. Five of the six children who came before Charles had died; only this boy and his older sister Sidney would survive to adulthood.¹

The two young Lees entered a world of status and privilege. Since the thirteenth century, Lees had been living in Cheshire, enjoying the comfortable life of gentry. Their distant relationship to the Lees who held the earldom of Litchfield added luster to their name. Isabella Bunbury Lee boasted an even more distinguished lineage. While the Lees were respected locally, the Bunburys had a national profile. Isabella's father, Sir Henry, had served as a Member of Parliament (MP) for Cheshire. Her older brother, Sir William, had attended Cambridge and Oxford, where he studied for the ministry. Isabella's nephew, Sir Thomas Charles Bunbury, was an MP for Suffolk and the first husband of Lady Sarah Lennox, the great-granddaughter of King Charles II (r. 1660–1685), while her brother-in-law, General Robert Armiger, served as aide-de-camp to King George II (r. 1727–1760).²

Like many of his male relatives, Charles's father, John, entered military service, beginning his career as a captain of dragoons (or cavalry). By 1742, he had risen to the rank of colonel of the 55th Regiment of Foot; sold his vast estate in Darnhall, Cheshire; and moved his family to the county seat of Chester, a provincial town of 8,000 residents on the River Dee sixteen miles south of Liverpool. Chester's location on the main route into northern Wales and the western route to northern England and Scotland made the town a key transportation and commercial hub; vessels laden with goods from Ireland, northern Wales, and points beyond filled its wharves.

Although shipping was Chester's major economic activity, local commerce was also brisk. The town's markets regularly filled with local farmers bringing their wool and dairy products to be sold and purchasing manufactured goods with their profits. Prosperous merchants and gentry opened businesses in Chester's popular market area, where unique rows of two-story timbered shops lined the cobblestone and dirt streets. Charles Lee's earliest years were spent in this bustling commercial town instead of in the quieter setting of the countryside.³

Lee left no descriptions of his childhood and he wrote very little about his parents, especially his mother, whom he found to be very difficult. Charles's relationship with his mother was filled with tension; it was so cold that many acquaintances wondered whether there was any love between them.⁴ Although Lee found his mother difficult, he was very much like her. From Isabella's family he inherited his temperamental nature and chronic poor health. His temperament manifested itself in moodiness, a violent temper, periods of melancholia, excessive conversation and profanity, and a voracious appetite for food, drink, and sex, all of which are symptoms of what modern-day psychiatrists might diagnose as bipolar disorder, or manic depression. Charles frequently went for months in a state of lethargy with little or no appetite, and then his appetite, along with his strength and spirits, would return suddenly. Depression and other mental illnesses run in families. Lee's manic episodes were similar to those experienced by Isabella and her brother Sir William. Charles often referenced the "rash humour which my mother gave me" and once confessed to Sidney, "After having entertain'd you on the distemper of my mind, let me say something of my bodily disposition. I think I gave you an Account some time ago of my complaints not totally unlike those of Uncle Bunbury [Sir William], a most canine, insatiable appetite attended with weakness and low spirits."⁵ Such a family history suggests that Lee came by his manic depression through inheritance. His psychological condition was not of his own making, but in some ways it explains his intellectual voracity, his penchant for overindulgence, and his behavior, which many construed as eccentric.

Poor physical health was another trait Lee inherited from his Bunbury lineage, especially rheumatism. Although Lee's rheumatism can be traced to his genes, the chronic attacks of gout he suffered were brought on by years of stress, the excessive consumption of wine and liquor, and a diet that was rich in proteins and fatty foods. Gout affected Lee's stomach, limbs,

and joints, causing him pain, weakness, fatigue, headaches, dizziness, and fainting spells. He often suffered for up to two weeks from an attack of rheumatism or gout or both. "A most dreadful visitation has fallen upon me, whether from exposing myself too much to cold or whether I had it in my blood I cannot say but I am actually incapacitated from moving my legs by the gout or rheumatism, or mixture of both," Lee once complained.⁶

Lee was never afraid to experiment or to try the latest remedies in search of relief for his physical ailments.⁷ He visited experts and, like many members of eighteenth-century Europe's elite who were hypochondriacs or who suffered from debilitating ailments, he took medicinal baths and placed his faith in spa cures. Lee drank mineral water as a tonic and bathed in warm springs as a restorative.⁸ Lee traveled throughout Britain and continental Europe seeking medical advice or simply seeking relaxation and the healing powers offered by spa resorts and baths. While Lee believed that bathing in warm springs helped cure illness, he also touted the therapeutic virtues of swimming as a source of preventative medicine. At a time when few Englishmen paid attention to physical exercise and athletics, Lee believed that swimming in salt water, or what he called "sea-bathing," was beneficial to a person's physical and mental health. In 1769, he informed Sidney that he planned to spend the winter in the Kingdom of Naples where he hoped that "bathing in the Sea in that warm climate will brace my body, which is really in a wretch'd state."⁹ By 1771, Lee had traveled to Calabria on the southern tip of the Italian peninsula and to Sicily and Malta, partly out of curiosity about these Mediterranean locales and "partly to bath in the sea, as long as possible in the Winter, in order to recover the strength and spirits."¹⁰ Lee was not alone in promoting the benefits of swimming. "Learn fairly to swim," Benjamin Franklin advised a friend. "I wish all men were taught to do so in their youth; they would, on many occurrences, be the safer for having that skill, and on many more the happier, as freer from painful apprehensions of danger, to say nothing of the enjoyment in so delightful and wholesome an exercise."¹¹

Lee's quest for a cure for his physical ailments revealed his openness to new ideas, but it also led him to travel. While his poor physical health was a detriment he had to contend with all of his life, it had a positive impact in that it allowed Lee to see many parts of the world. Traveling fed his intellectual curiosity and helped expand the cosmopolitanism instilled in him by his father.

Lee gained an intellectual curiosity from his father. Colonel Lee nurtured his son's inquisitive spirit by encouraging him to read and to think critically. He also instilled in Lee an admiration for Whig politics and a respect for human liberty and natural rights. Lee wrote, "I was bred up from my infancy with the highest regard for the rights and liberties of Mankind, my Father possess'd 'em to the highest degree."¹² Colonel Lee was also the rare eighteenth-century father who nurtured his daughter's intelligence. He encouraged Sidney to read at an early age. In an era when few women had a formal education, Sidney was well read in a variety of subjects, including history, philosophy, literature, and geography, and was an active member of Britain's "bluestocking" intellectual circles.¹³

Four years older than Charles, Sidney had great influence over her younger brother. She was a mother figure to him, and he adored her accordingly. "You will perhaps find me not a less affectionate Brother," Charles told her. "There can be no brother more Sincerely affectionate then myself."¹⁴ Sidney, who was described as "a very agreeable Woman," never married.¹⁵ Instead, she became her brother's one constant confidante. The two siblings remained extremely close throughout their lives. They shared their dreams and hardships and relied on each other for advice and emotional support.

While Colonel Lee encouraged Sidney's informal learning, he made sure that Charles obtained a formal education. Colonel Lee knew that his son would potentially follow him into the military, but he wanted him to receive the education that was expected of a young man from his social class. To be the son of a gentleman was a distinct social advantage in eighteenth-century British society. Like most gentlemen, Lee received a classical education that prepared him for an advanced career. In addition to the basics of reading, writing, arithmetic, and measuring, he studied rhetoric, geometry, logic, philosophy, history, geography, and dancing and became proficient in ancient Greek and Latin grammar, which were essential for reading classical literature. But Colonel Lee also wanted Charles to have more than a basic classical education; he wanted him to experience all the world had to offer culturally and linguistically.

Many of Charles's physical and emotional traits were shaped by his inheritance, but his education and his peers influenced his ideas. Lee's formal education began with tutors. He later attended a grammar school near Chester and progressed to a private academy in Switzerland, where as a teen he demonstrated a love for history and literature and excelled

in languages, becoming versed in French and in ancient Greek and Latin. His gift for languages led him to become proficient in many of them over his lifetime. In addition to his native English, Lee acquired a fondness for and competency in several European languages: French, Italian, Spanish, and German. He also became versed in the Native American language of Iroquoian.¹⁶ Lee's time at the Swiss academy set the foundation for a sound liberal arts education and nurtured his inquisitiveness and the love of learning his father instilled in him.

In June 1746, Lee was enrolled in the King Edward VI Free Grammar School, which was located near Mildenhall, the home of his maternal uncle, the Rev. William Bunbury, in the town of Bury St. Edmunds in the county of Suffolk. The school was famous for preparing young men for studies at Cambridge. Its alumni included seventeenth-century dramatist and poet laureate Thomas Shadwell and the sons of the first governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop.¹⁷ Among Lee's schoolmates were several young men who would become lifelong friends, acquaintances, and ardent supporters, including William Butler, Charles Davers, and Thomas Charles Bunbury, his first cousin. These young men were members of Britain's gentry and formed the major part of Lee's network of social and political connections. Such networks were important for advancement in eighteenth-century British society.¹⁸

Lee and his schoolmates became fully absorbed in the style and wisdom of the ancients. "Let our masters teach nothing but the elements of grammar and instruction in Latin and Greek tongues," read the Bury St. Edmunds curriculum. Students were taught to memorize and recite the classics, a skill required of candidates for college admission.¹⁹ The sons of Britain's gentry were saturated with the virtues and ideals of ancient Greece and Rome. The texts by the great authors of antiquity inspired in Lee romantic notions of democracy, republicanism (or representative government), citizenship, morality, and classical ideals such as the Homeric *arête*—individual heroism, honor, courage, and excellence in a contest or battle—that remained with him his entire life. "It is natural to a young person whose chief companions are the Greek and Roman historians and Orators to be dazzled with the splendid picture," he wrote, referring to the influence of the ancients on him and on other young men of the British gentry.²⁰ Lee particularly admired the Greek historian Plutarch, whose best-known work, *Parallel Lives*, written in the first century AD, compared

the lives of forty-six famous ancient Greeks and Romans and provided a wealth of information about their civilizations. It was distinctly republican in spirit and emphasized the moral lessons that could be learned from history.²¹ “I have ever from the first time I read Plutarch been an Enthusiastick for liberty and . . . for liberty in a republican garb,” Lee declared.²²

Lee could not have come of age at a better time. The eighteenth century witnessed the emergence of a new publishing economy and a print culture boom that was profitable for printers, publishers, and booksellers in Britain and in continental Europe. The number of books and other printed materials soared, and new elaborate networks for their marketing and distribution gave readers access to an extensive range of publications on a variety of subjects. The new media of written communication empowered many Europeans and disseminated ideas, opinions, theory, and practical knowledge to more people than ever before in history, influencing public discourse.

Lee took advantage of this new publishing economy, spending large sums throughout his life filling his bookshelves. He always traveled with an extensive collection that included the classics, philosophy, law, the natural sciences, fiction, poetry, history, biographies, military strategy, and engineering. The new print culture expanded Charles's intellectual horizons, helped foster his cosmopolitan sensibilities, kept him informed on the latest developments in the art of war, and swept him into the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, which emphasized secular, rationalist, liberal, and egalitarian ideals. From the Enlightenment sprang a modern secular worldview that promoted individual liberty, freedom of speech, religious toleration, commercialism and materialism, and representative government. This worldview had a transforming effect on societies in Europe and in the Americas and on individuals such as Charles Lee.²³

Lee was immersed in the ideas of the Enlightenment, including deism. Although he was baptized by his parents and was raised an Anglican, he embraced the deist worldview.²⁴ In this Lee was not alone. Deism appealed to many European intellectuals who believed that religious truths should be based on human reason rather than revelation. For deists, God (or the Supreme Being) took no interest in the moral choices of humans but existed only as the distant creator of the universe who revealed Himself every day in nature. Deists rejected the ideas of original sin and of a vengeful god who condemned the mass of humanity to eternal damnation, instead believing in the natural goodness of humans and hoping for a benevolent afterlife.

They also denied the divinity of Jesus, the Buddha, and Mohammad and argued that each was simply a reformer attempting to rescue his society's corrupted religion.

The intellectual trends concerning the role and meaning of religion had a profound influence on Lee and shaped his modern sensibilities on the subject. He never doubted the existence of God or of God's creation of the world, and he did not doubt the existence of an afterlife. "Let it be sufficient," Lee wrote in the third person, "that he acknowledges the existence, providence, and goodness of God Almighty; that he reverences Jesus Christ: but let the question never be asked, whether he considers Jesus Christ a divine person, commissioned by God for divine purposes, as the son of God, or as God himself."²⁵ Lee took serious issue with the conflicting notions of God and his Word that were propagated by the world's major religions. He denounced "the tediousness and impertinence of the liturgies of the various sects, which so far from being the support are the ruin of all religion." Dogma was "not only absurd," Lee wrote, "but impious . . . [and] dishonourable to the Godhead or visible ruler and moderator of the infinity of worlds which surround us."²⁶

The maturing Lee socialized with intellectuals from an emerging eighteenth-century liberal avant-garde who had traveled extensively through continental Europe on the traditional "Grand Tour"²⁷ and who exchanged ideas and experiences through correspondence or as members of social clubs, debating societies, secret associations, salons, and other communities dedicated to intellectual discourse. In Britain, young wealthy educated males with leisure time formed social clubs and secret societies such as the Club of Honest Whigs, the Spectator Club, the Order of the Knights of St. Francis (or the Monks of Medmenham), and Dr. Samuel Johnson's Literary Club. These clubs offered members thoughtful conversation and debate on everything from art, music, literature, religion, politics, military strategy, education, science, and economics to sexual promiscuity, alcohol consumption, physical exercise, gambling, and hygiene. This freewheeling discourse supported the exchange of Enlightenment ideas and prompted a sense of community and camaraderie among Britain's male intelligentsia.²⁸ For Lee, membership and participation in these clubs fostered his love of free intellectual exchange.

Lee was particularly attracted to the writings of the Geneva-born French Enlightenment thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whom he described as his

“divine and incomparable master.”²⁹ The seventeenth century witnessed the emergence of a new political tradition—a “natural rights” philosophy with its vocabulary of “natural rights,” “civil society,” “social contract,” and “state of nature.” By the mid-eighteenth century, “natural rights” philosophy had been embraced by mainstream Enlightenment thinkers who accepted the idea that consent was the sole legitimate basis for political authority. But only one of them, Rousseau, had actually developed a republican theory of government based on this idea. Rousseau’s theory was so democratic however, that it hindered its widespread acceptance.

In Britain, the natural rights tradition was carried into the eighteenth century by the “commonwealth” or “Real Whig” ideology. By the beginning of the reign of George III in 1760, this ideology had already been well articulated by a group of writers and theorists who identified themselves as the “True” or “Real” Whigs. Their ideological heritage was drawn from several different sources dating to the Civil War, commonwealth, protectorate, and Glorious Revolution periods of British history (1642–1660, 1688–1690) and from the works of writers such as James Harrington, John Toland, Algernon Sidney, Joseph Addison, James Milton, Jonathan Swift, and John Locke. The Real Whigs believed that the Anglo-Saxon, or ancient, constitution of Britain before its destruction by the monarchical forces of William the Conqueror in 1066 had enshrined and expressed three important concepts for the foundation of legitimate government: natural rights, social contract, and virtue. It had also established an equilibrium of king, lords, and commons. Real Whigs also reached back to the politics of classical Greece and Rome for a model of republicanism in which civic virtue—the ability to place the good of society ahead of self-interest—was the key to constitutional stability and the preservation of liberty.³⁰ The Real Whigs argued that throughout history, political leaders—monarchs and courtiers—have used every means at their disposal to extinguish the people’s liberties. They cited examples from history when political leaders driven by a lust for power used different means, especially standing armies populated by professional soldiers, to subvert free constitutions and individual freedom. The notion that a large professional standing army was the greatest threat to liberty was crucial to the Real Whig ideology.³¹

Lee admired the works of Real Whigs Paul de Rapin de Thoyras and Catharine Macaulay. In books by Rapin, Macaulay, and others, British history was presented as a power struggle between monarchical and popular

forces. Lee recalled that he had “read . . . with great attention” Rapin’s *History of England* (1723) and was impressed by Macaulay’s “zeal for true liberty, and the rights of her country and of mankind.”³² Ironically, despite Lee’s admiration for the works of these and other Real Whigs, he would make his career in Britain’s professional standing army.

In April 1746, fourteen-year-old Charles Lee followed the paternal path into the British military. He was commissioned as an ensign in his father’s regiment, the 55th Regiment of Foot. The idea of a fourteen-year-old boy becoming an officer may seem remarkable to modern readers, but such a move was not extraordinary in Lee’s time. Young wealthy men with only a grammar school education were regularly commissioned and promoted in the British army. The officers’ ranks were often a family affair as young men of the gentry followed in the footsteps of a male relative, particularly their fathers, readily obtaining a commission before their formal education had ended. It was very likely that Colonel Lee had used his influence to secure the ensigncy for his son. In the regimental rolls, Lee was listed as engaged in recruiting while he completed his formal studies.³³

In 1748, Lee ended his formal education and officially reported for active duty as an ensign in the 55th Regiment, which soon thereafter became the 44th Regiment of Foot. The 44th was known in the British army as a tough, hard-nosed, highly disciplined unit. It earned much praise for its valor on the battlefields of continental Europe during the War of the Austrian Succession (1740–1748) and for its part in crushing the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 in Scotland, which was led by Charles Edward Stuart, or “Bonnie Prince Charlie,” the grandson of the deposed King James II. The young Lee did not see action with the regiment during these conflicts; instead he joined the 44th while the regiment was on peacetime garrison duty in Ireland. Lee’s formal education had ended and his active military career had begun, but he continued to pursue philosophical and practical knowledge whenever and wherever possible and often shared his enthusiasm for books with others in the regiment. As a result, Lee became known as the regimental savant. He had assembled an impressive library and was fond of quoting from contemporary literary works as well as those of classical antiquity.

But in August of 1750, eighteen-year-old Charles lost his mentor and best friend when Colonel Lee died unexpectedly in his mid-fifties. Colonel Lee had taught Charles to engage in learned conversation, to value

knowledge, to respect the great scholars of the past, and to admire liberty. His father's death left a void in Charles's life that was never filled. The heartache and pain of losing his father did not prevent him from continuing his career in the army, however. Lee actively pursued a promotion even though opportunities for advancement in the British military during peacetime were few. In May 1751, 19-year-old Charles Lee secured his first promotion by purchasing a lieutenantcy that had become vacant in the regiment.³⁴

The British army that Lee joined was divided into two establishments: Britain and Ireland. It had been a standing force since the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660, when it replaced the British militia system.³⁵ It was one of the smallest armies in Europe, but it was also one of the best trained, most successful, and fiercest military machines in the world. As historian Stephen Conway notes, between 1739 and 1763, the British military was engaged in almost continuous warfare. This experience, writes Linda Colley, made the army resilient and always prepared for a fight.³⁶ By the time Lee had reported for active duty at the close of the War of the Austrian Succession in 1748, the British army had a wartime total of roughly 49,000 officers and troops, of which almost 39,000 were assigned to regiments distributed throughout Britain's expanding empire, from Scotland and Ireland to the Atlantic coast of Canada, the Caribbean, India, and West Africa.³⁷

Although young men from the British elite dominated the highest ranks of the officer corps, many officers were the sons of merchants and artisans. The expansion of the British army in the first half of the eighteenth century resulted in the need for more officers. This need could not be met by Britain's upper classes, making it necessary to draw additional officers from a wider social base.³⁸ All commissions from a colonelcy upward were appointed and were often based on seniority. Commissions to lower ranks were usually purchased. While most officers moved up in rank by purchase as vacancies occurred, some officers, like those in the Royal Artillery, were promoted because of their technical and engineering skills.³⁹ An officer's commission was viewed as the property of the person who held it, and thus the holder could lose it without compensation only if he were found guilty by a court-martial or died. Otherwise, he could resign and sell it at any time he officially withdrew from the service. The only other avenue for advancement was if a vacancy occurred during wartime because of death or the establishment of a new corps.

The competition for promotion in the British officer corps was intense, leading to pretentiousness and to jealous rivalries, biting criticisms, and behind-the-scenes maneuvering for influence and favor. Furthermore, in the commission purchase system, money and patronage were the keys to advancement. Young gentlemen such as Charles Lee were at a distinct advantage. He was the son of an officer and thereby had access to wealth and strong patronage networks within the officers' fraternity. This system eventually came under much scrutiny for promoting incompetence and breeding institutionalized corruption, yet it ensured that British officers had a stake in maintaining the army as an institution and keeping it firmly under the control of society's governing elite.⁴⁰

As a cost-cutting measure, the British government always disestablished regiments in peacetime. If an officer's regiment was disestablished, he continued to hold his commission even though he was effectively placed into semi-retirement and reduced to half-pay status. Half-pay officers were expected to remain "on call." They had to be ready to return to active service during a crisis or war. In this way, Britain had developed a military system that supported a shadow officer corps and an army that could be mobilized at any time if necessary.⁴¹

Military academies did not exist; thus, British officers learned their profession in actual service or by studying military tactics on their own. The lack of any formal military education and the purchase of commissions produced an amateur quality in the officer corps, especially at its highest ranks. This amateurism went far to explain why so many junior officers were ready to criticize their superiors or were quickly offended at any rebuke from them. Quarrels were frequent and threats of resignation typical.

The British army relied on volunteers who were paid a cash bounty to fill its ranks. The majority of the recruits were young, single, propertyless men who were victims of the periodic economic recessions that afflicted eighteenth-century Britain or had lost their jobs because of mechanization and other innovations in industrial and agricultural work. While some recruits were unskilled workers, a surprisingly large number were skilled or semi-skilled and worked at home or in small shops. Historian Sylvia Frey argues that "it seems reasonably certain that those crafts suffering the worst effects of economic change furnished the most soldiers for the army." They accepted the opportunity for steady pay even if that pay was notoriously low and meant enlisting for life. The military offered them some

security in the form of food, shelter, clothing, and income.⁴² For other recruits, military service promised adventure—something more exciting than working long hours in a textile mill or on a farm in the county where they were born, while others were given the choice between enlistment and prison or joined to avoid legal responsibilities to pregnant women.⁴³

British recruiters such as Charles Lee were very much aware of the opportunities to recruit from poorer working class and agricultural communities in the British Isles, in Ireland, and in colonial America. Recruiters sold the benefits of joining the army: the adventure, the glorious tradition, the camaraderie, and the steady pay.⁴⁴ Yet British regiments were rarely at full strength. The government occasionally implemented conscription (or impressment) or hired foreign, usually German, mercenaries.⁴⁵ Recruits were subjected to a rigid training regimen and drills and to strict patterns of authority, order, discipline, and subordination. Any infraction of the rules or display of laziness by an individual soldier brought either corporal punishment or public humiliation. This harsh response led to disaffection and high levels of desertion.⁴⁶

As an officer, Lee's experiences in the military would have contrasted sharply with those of the ordinary British soldier. He would not have endured the same rigorous training or harsh discipline that enlisted men experienced. Instead, Lee would have seen other officers conduct drills and impose strict discipline on their men, and he would have done so as well in his capacity as an officer. While Lee's actions to this end would have contradicted his humanist tendencies, corporal punishment and harsh penalties for infractions were an accepted part of British army life.⁴⁷

Beginning in 1751, Lee endured the monotony of garrison duty in Ireland and of recruiting trips to England. This monotony changed in 1754 when Virginians commanded by a militia officer named George Washington exchanged volleys with French soldiers and their Native American allies near the confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers deep in the wilderness of North America, starting a military contest that would test the competency of the British officer corps and the discipline of the army's enlisted men. The conflict would be transformative for eighteenth-century Europe's mighty empires, for Anglo-American relations, and for Charles Lee.

Early Encounters and Life Lessons on the American Frontier

TWENTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD LIEUTENANT CHARLES LEE WAS enjoying the waters at the English spa resort of Bath when he received news that the 44th and 48th Regiments of Foot had been called up for active service in America. "I fancy you have hear'd," he wrote to Sidney, "that our Regiment is order'd to Virginia." The immediacy of the deployment forced Lee to cancel a planned visit to see her. "I hope you won't attribute it to any want of affection towards you, if I leave Europe without seeing you," he lamented, "but I am afraid that the hurry and confusion of my affairs will deprive me of that pleasure." Lee quickly wrote his will, leaving all or most of his property to Sidney, before he rejoined the 44th at a staging area in Cork, Ireland.¹ The 44th and 48th regiments sailed from Cork in October 1754 and arrived in America in early March 1755. Colonel Sir Peter Halkett, who had succeeded Lee's father as commander of the 44th, disembarked his men at Alexandria, Virginia. They were reinforced by provincial troops and marched to a staging area at Fort Cumberland, located on Wills Creek in western Maryland.²

Major General Edward Braddock commanded the British expeditionary force sent to America in late 1754.³ Braddock's army was composed of the 44th and the 48th regiments; militia from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina; and a few Native American scouts. It consisted of between 2,000 and 3,000 troops as well as 500 packhorses, 200 wagons, several pieces of heavy artillery, and hundreds of civilian teamsters, sutlers, herdsman, and female camp followers, including the wives of soldiers. Braddock planned to seize the French Fort Duquesne, at the confluence of the Ohio, Alleghany, and Monongahela Rivers (at present-day Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania). Both France and Britain believed that domination of the American continent depended on securing control of this post and the