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James Kirby Martin, ed., *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin*. 3rd ed. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008. Pp. xx, 199. ISBN 978-1-4051-7706-1.

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Joseph Plumb Martin served as a private soldier in the Continental Army for eight years (1776-83), with one hiatus during the winter of 1776-77. Born in 1760, he was raised by his maternal grandparents on their Connecticut farm from age six. He was fourteen at the time of Lexington and Concord. Inspired by the *rage militaire* directly following the first successful clash of arms with the British invader, Martin decided to join the militia. However, he could not obtain his grandfather's permission until July 1776, when he enrolled as a six-month volunteer in a Connecticut regiment of the Continental Army. He mustered out of the service in December and returned home. In April 1777, Martin again "put my name to enlisting indentures" (41). This final enlistment was for three years, or the duration of the war.

Martin's memoir, published anonymously in 1830 and written on the basis of notes taken during the war, was fulsomely titled *Narrative of Some of the Adventures, Dangers and Sufferings of a Revolutionary Soldier; Interspersed with Anecdotes or Incidents That Occurred within His Own Observation*. The book is structured as a straightforward narrative, each chapter devoted to a year's campaign. Martin avowedly writes from the perspective of the common soldier: "why not ... Alexander never could have conquered the world without private soldiers" (2). With a ready and humorous wit, he provides a fascinating window into the past. Martin's canvass is limited to his own personal experiences and immediate observations. The excellent notes by James Kirby Martin (hereafter, JMK) provide historical context for the modern reader throughout; this new edition also features an expanded introduction, revised annotations, and new maps. Martin's eyewitness focus gives a first-hand feel of what it is like for soldiers who march, fight, and die with little knowledge of the big picture. He had clear objectives in writing:

Why we were made to suffer so much in so good and just a cause; and a note of admiration to all the world, that an army voluntarily engaged to serve their country, when starved, and naked, and suffering everything short of death (and thousands even that), should be able to persevere through an eight years war, and come off the conquerors at last (2)!

The book's final chapter offers an extended argument for which the main narrative serves as the evidence. He forcefully maintains that the Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 was a long overdue payment to the veterans for services rendered. He observes that the Continental Army regulars never received adequate food, clothes, or shelter, much less their monthly pay. While Martin acknowledges the difficulty of moving supplies over winter roads, he blames the army's "starving in detail" on "an ungrateful people who did not care

what became of us, so they could enjoy themselves while we were keeping a cruel enemy from them" (125).

Martin's belief that the Continentals' contributions to final victory were underappreciated (both during the war and after) ties into the second part of his concluding argument: the role of the militia, which performed important service during the war: "I well know, for I have fought by their side" (183). Nevertheless, he contends that the Continental Army was the backbone of the Revolution. Ironically, the scholarly consensus has caught up with the old veteran in its view of the militia as a necessary but insufficient agent for Independence.

In his battle narratives, Martin documents how Continental discipline was vital for ultimate victory. Immediately following his first enlistment, Martin's regiment—5th Connecticut—was ordered to the defense of New York City in the summer of 1776. This regiment was a short-term unit enrolled for six months. Its officers were without experience, their troops green as grass. Prior to the British invasion of New York, the men received little drilling or training. After the American defeat on Long Island, these raw soldiers were tasked with defending the likely landing site on Manhattan at Kip's Bay. Martin describes the position as "nothing more than a ditch dug along on the bank of the [East] river, with the dirt thrown out toward the water" (23). On the morning of 15 September, British warships began bombarding the American position, as 4,000 Hessian troops approached in rowboats toward Martin and his 500 comrades. Expecting raw militia (as the short-term troops were considered) to withstand the fierce cannonade was too much; their officers ordered a retreat. The result was complete disorder and a rout. Martin blames the lack of leadership for this humiliation: "the men were confused, being without officers to command them. I do not recollect of seeing a commissioned officer from the time I left the lines ... until ... in the evening" (29). His regiment did, however, fight with credit at Harlem Heights and White Plains later in the campaign.

Martin mustered out of the 5th Connecticut in late December 1776. The following April, he signed up for the duration with the 8th Connecticut. The recruitment of long service regiments was the result of the manifest failures of the short-term units. Another problem with these semi-militia regiments was that they obliged Washington continually to rebuild the Continental Army while actively campaigning. Washington hoped to create a "respectable" army based on these long-term regiments, but had to use militia as auxiliaries throughout the war due to a chronic shortage of Continentals.

Martin's recounting of the Monmouth and Yorktown campaigns provides ample evidence of the value of Continental veterans. After fighting in the battle of Germantown and the siege of Fort Mifflin, Martin had the great fortune of not spending the winter at Valley Forge; instead, he foraged the countryside for desperately needed supplies. During early spring 1778, he received his first serious training as a soldier: "I was kept constantly, when off other duty, engaged in learning the Baron de Steuben's new Prussian exercise; it was a continual drill" (78). He observes that the militia could neither have endured the great hardships of Valley Forge, nor submitted to the discipline required to create troops capable of standing against British regulars.

Martin certainly needed his training during the Monmouth campaign. He was transferred to the light infantry, charged with maintaining close contact with the British in order to reconnoiter and harass them. Soldiers recruited for the light infantry were generally

the most quick-witted and fleet-footed in the army. In summer 1778, British General Henry Clinton found it necessary to abandon Philadelphia and consolidate his forces in New York City, due to the French declaration of war after the American victory at Saratoga. The British government's concerns over its Caribbean possessions and the security of the home islands made suppressing the American rebellion a lower priority. This obliged Clinton to march his army across New Jersey in order to make forces available for duty in the Caribbean. Martin and his comrades shadowed them every foot of the way.

The main body of Washington's army caught up with the British outside of Monmouth, New Jersey. After General Charles Lee famously bollixed the attack upon the British flank, Washington took personal command of the field. With great dispatch, he organized the nearby Continental regiments (including Martin's) in an effective defense against the British counterattack. Martin vividly describes how the well-drilled Continentals held their ground despite repeated British assaults:

These troops maintained their ground, till the whole force of the enemy that could be brought to bear had charged upon them through the fence; and after being overpowered by numbers and the platoon officers had given orders for their several platoons to leave the fence, they had to force them to retreat, so eager were they to be revenged on the invaders of their country and rights.... As soon as the troops had left this ground the British planted their cannon upon the place and began a violent attack upon the artillery and our detachment, but neither could be routed. The cannonade continued for some time without intermission, when the British pieces being mostly disabled, they reluctantly crawled back from the height which they had occupied and hid themselves from out sight (86).

While the battle was tactically a draw, the British slipped away and left the field to the Continental Army. Two years after the humiliating defeats in New York, and a year after the loss of the capital at Philadelphia, the Continentals had scored a moral victory at Monmouth by repelling the best that European regulars could throw at them.

Monmouth would be the last general engagement of the war in the north. The British believed they could easily conquer the south due to the large numbers of Tories residing there. A "southern strategy" would also allow a better coordination between the North American and Caribbean campaigns. Martin spent the next two years fighting the Tory "villains" who operated between the American and British lines around New York City. In 1780, he was selected to serve in the Corps of Sappers and Miners. The purpose of this small, new unit was to supervise the erection of field works. As JKM states in a footnote, the choice of Martin for this post demonstrates the high regard of his superior officers.

With General Cornwallis cornered at Yorktown and a French fleet available to keep him there, Martin and his comrades marched down to the head of the Chesapeake and boarded ship for Virginia. On the evenings of 5 and 6 October, the sappers laid out and supervised the building of the American siege works around Yorktown. On the 14th, they led an assault on the British Redoubt #10. Their orders were to clear an avenue of approach through the British abatis with axes. As Martin relates, the sappers quickly cleared a route through the obstructions, and the assault troops took the fort while suffering nine killed and thirty-one wounded (154-5). On the 17th, Cornwallis sent an officer through the lines under a flag of truce to negotiate terms for his doomed army.

The hardships the Continentals suffered for an ungrateful nation do not need belaboring. Suffice it to note that about a quarter of the approximately 11,000 soldiers who went into winter quarters at Valley Forge did not live to see the spring. On this score, Martin sounds bitter in defending the small pensions authorized in 1818:

The truth was, none cared for them; the country was served, and faithfully served, and that was all that was deemed necessary. It was, soldiers, look to yourselves, we want no more of you. I hope I shall one day find land enough to lay my bones in. If I chance to die in a civilized country, none will deny me that. A dead body never begs a grave; thanks for that (179-80).

Martin alludes here to the 100-acre farms promised to the veterans—land that never materialized for most of them.

The question remains then, why did Martin and his Continental comrades suffer the tortures of the damned when far easier service was available in the militia? Historian John Shy cites the research of John Resch and Walter Sargent in which “we see much of the old legend confirmed, or most Americans fighting for their independence....”¹ Martin’s memoir substantiates this judgment: he was certainly not fighting for a promised, but largely non-existent, salary of \$6.75 a month.

Martin’s motives for enduring the long years of war and privation were patriotism, loyalty to his comrades, and a loathing of the enemy. Nowhere does he better explain his reasons for sticking with the Continentals than in his recollection of the mutiny of the Connecticut line in May 1780. That winter was the most difficult of the war, due mainly to the complete collapse of the American supply effort. The problem was financial, as farmers and merchants would not accept worthless Continental paper currency as payment for desperately needed supplies. The soldiers starved and froze in near nakedness: “[a]s a result, Washington’s army encamped at Morristown, New Jersey, nearly ... disbanded in the winter of 1780.”² It is a measure of the soldiers’ dedication that the army did not simply melt away:

They [the mutineers] were truly patriotic; they loved their country, and they had already suffered everything short of death in its cause; and now, after such extreme hardships to give up all was too much, but to starve to death was too much also Here was the army starved and naked, and there their country sitting still and expecting the army to do notable things while fainting from sheer starvation We were unwilling to desert the cause of our country, when in distress; that we knew her cause involved our own (122, 125).

Martin stresses that the cause and the army were one: had the army disintegrated, the cause would have been lost. Fortunately, it did not come down to “starve to death or break up the army,” although the troops did engage in an even more dangerous mutiny the following winter (122).

¹ “Introduction: Looking Backward, Looking Forward,” in *War & Society in the American Revolution: Mobilization and Home Fronts*, ed. John Resch & Walter Sargent (DeKalb: Northern Illinois U Pr, 2007) 7; see also Resch, *Suffering Soldiers: Revolutionary War Veterans, Moral Sentiment, and Political Culture in the Early Republic* (Amherst: U Mass Pr, 1999).

² E. Wayne Carp, *To Starve the Army at Pleasure* (Chapel Hill: U North Carolina Pr, 1984) 72.

Martin's *Narrative* has long been recognized as the classic soldier's memoir of the Revolutionary War. JKM's excellent editing and notes should make *Ordinary Courage* the standard edition. I highly recommend it for scholars, students, and interested citizens.

Each chapter of the book begins with a verse epigram by Martin. It seems fitting to give the old veteran the last word with his prelude to the campaign of 1781, on what made all the hardship worthwhile:

I saw the plundering British bands
Invade the fair Virginian lands.
I saw great Washington advance
With Americans and troops of France;
I saw the haughty Britons yield
And stack their muskets on the field.