



## PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION: Military Officers, Continental & British Armies

### CONTINENTAL ARMY: James Thacher (1754-1844)

*I am obliged to devote the whole of my time, from eight o'clock in the morning to a late hour in the evening, to the care of our patients... Amputating limbs, trepanning fractured skulls, and dressing the most formidable wounds, have familiarized my mind to scenes of woe.*

James Thacher, *Military Journal*

**James Thacher** of Barnstable had just finished his study of medicine when war broke out. Shortly after the Battle of Bunker Hill, Thacher set off to join the Continental Army at Cambridge. Armed with a letter of introduction from James Otis (Senior) of Barnstable to Otis' son-in-law James Warren, President of the Provincial Congress, Thacher passed an examination by the medical board and was awarded the position of surgeon's mate.

**Thacher served with the Continental troops in Boston** until fall of 1776, when his regiment moved to New York. There he served in a military hospital. In October 1778, Washington visited his hospital. "He appeared to take a deep interest in the situation of the sick and wounded soldiers," wrote Thacher, "and inquired particularly as to their treatment and comfortable accommodations."

**In the fall of 1779, Thacher was transferred** to Rhode Island and then to New Jersey, where he got to know Prussian General von Steuben. In his journal, Thacher related the difficulties faced by the American soldiers, from worthless paper money to harsh winter conditions: "The suffering of the poor soldiers can scarcely be described... at night they now have a bed of straw on the ground, and a single blanket each." Thacher continued service as a surgeon, traveling to Yorktown in 1781 with troops under the command of former Plymouth schoolteacher Colonel Alexander Scammel, and witnessing the surrender of Cornwallis. He left the military on January 1, 1783, and settled in Plymouth where he practiced medicine for many years. until fall of 1776, when his regiment moved to New York. There he served in a military hospital. In October 1778, Washington visited his hospital. "He appeared to take a deep interest in the situation of the sick and wounded soldiers," wrote Thacher, "and inquired particularly as to their treatment and comfortable accommodations."

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## BRITISH ARMY: Gideon White (1752-1833)

*Gideon White is one of the three of the Inhabitants of this Town who have for Several months past been in the practice of Selling tea [and] has refused to give any Satisfaction that he will not Continue.*

Resolution of the Town of Plymouth, 24 March 1774

**Gideon White Junior** was an outspoken Tory. His friends included British officers in Boston. He was visiting them in June of 1775 when the Battle of Bunker Hill started and joined them in the fight. After the battle, his father urged him to flee to Nova Scotia to avoid the wrath of his fellow Plymouthers. When he left Plymouth for Canada, White took the large painted panel of Plymouth's Royal Arms, which hung in Plymouth's Court House as a symbol of royal authority, with him.



Central motif from  
Plymouth's Royal Arms

**In Nova Scotia**, Gideon was involved in transporting supplies to Loyalist communities in Nova Scotia. Late in 1776, his ship, the *Roebuck*, was captured by Patriot captain Simeon Sampson of Plymouth and Kingston. White was returned to Plymouth as a captive and put under house arrest, subject to a £200 bond for violation. Two neighbors, George Watson and Isaac LeBaron, stood as sureties for him. He was eventually released and purchased a commission in the British Army, serving for the rest of the war.

**White served in both Nova Scotia** and in British-occupied New York City. He was declared an enemy of the American state in 1778. After the war, White settled in Shelburne, Nova Scotia, with other displaced Loyalists. There he married and raised his family. His eldest daughter Joanna, born in 1788, returned to Plymouth where she lived with her husband, William Davis. Their son, William T. Davis, became Plymouth's best-known historian.

## CONTINENTAL ARMY: Judah Alden (1750-1845)

**Judah Alden of Duxbury** served the entire duration of the war. A minuteman since 1773, Judah responded to the call to arms in 1775 after the Battle of Lexington and Concord. According to tradition, British Captain Balfour, whose troops were stationed in nearby Marshfield, needed information. He sent Cato, a slave with a local Tory family, to report on the Patriot troop movement. Judah intercepted Cato and told him to tell Balfour (prematurely) that the Patriot troops were marching against him in large number. By the time a large number of

Patriots had actually arrived, Balfour and his troops had retreated to Boston.

**After fighting with Theophilus Cotton's regiment** After fighting with **Theophilus Cotton's regiment** at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, Alden served with the Massachusetts 23d and then spent the winter at Valley Forge with the 2d Massachusetts in 1777. There he met Polish freedom fighter Thaddeus Kosciuszko who sketched him, big nose and all. Alden became a friend of Washington and Lafayette. Thirty years later, on a visit to Boston, Lafayette spotted Alden and exclaimed, "Alden, how are you? I know you by your nose!"

**All of the men in Judah's family** were involved in the war. His father Briggs Alden, a long-standing officer in the local militia, was appointed colonel in 1776. Judah and his three brothers all joined the fighting in 1775. The youngest brother Amherst was only 16 and served as a fifer. Judah's brother Samuel was wounded and died in 1778. Judah served the entire war, rising from the rank of 2d lieutenant in 1775 to major in 1775

### **BRITISH ARMY: Edward Winslow, Junior (1746-1815)**

**While his father**, Edward Winslow Senior, quietly held to his Loyalist convictions, Edward Junior was an outspoken Tory. Winslow and his father opposed James Warren's efforts to get Plymouth to follow Boston's example in boycotting English tea in 1773. A strong opponent of the mob violence that had occurred in Boston, Winslow set up a guard to preserve order in Plymouth.

**In 1775, Winslow and his father** met with British Army Captain Balfour, stationed in nearby Marshfield, to discuss his plans to capture Plymouth. Balfour was uncertain whether or not to attack the town and wanted the opinion of local Loyalists. When John Watson, one of the guests at the dinner, was asked if residents would fight back, he replied, "Yes, like devils." Balfour decided against attacking Plymouth. While Patriots rushed to Marshfield to challenge Balfour, Winslow was serving as a guide for the British troops at Lexington. Winslow stayed in British-occupied Boston as Collector of the Port and Register of Probate until the British evacuation, when he removed that city's Royal Arms to Halifax to protect them from "the mob" of rebels.

**Winslow was given a commission** as lieutenant colonel commanding Loyalist troops. He served as a Muster Master General for Loyalist forces, as well as leading British naval forces along the New England coast. In 1779 he led a bombardment of the town of Falmouth. He was mistakenly reported killed in the battle. When his family, still in Plymouth, heard that he was alive, they secured permission from Patriot General Sullivan to see him. Under flags of truce, Winslow was reunited with his father and sister. He described the reunion

***I could not speak, I flung myself by my father in the ground...  
"I am glad," says he, "to see you my boy," and down he fell  
again...***

***There were present rebel officers and rebel soldiers, King's  
officers and King's soldiers, sailors of both denominations  
and Negroes -- not a heart among them that did not melt. All  
formalities usual with flags was forgotten, every man turned  
from us, walked different ways, and were profoundly silent.***

**Late in the war**, Edward Winslow Junior was joined in British-occupied New York City by his parents and sisters. At the end of the war, the now-married Winslow went to Nova Scotia. There he was appointed surveyor to lay out farm land to be given to Tories as compensation for their losses in the war. Winslow was one of the founders of the Province of New Brunswick, where he lived land rich but cash poor, taking care of his mother, sisters, wife, children and servants.

## **CONTINENTAL ARMY: John Thomas (1724-1776)**

**One of the first Revolutionary Generals named** was Kingston doctor John Thomas. In summer of 1775, the Continental Congress appointed George Washington as commander-in-chief and chose generals, Thomas among them, from across the colonies. Dr. Thomas had served with great distinction in the French and Indian War.

**Thomas' first command** was to take charge of the American forces surrounding the occupied city of Boston. Soldiers gathered in three camps south of Boston: Dorchester, Roxbury, and Jamaica Plain. The Patriots wanted to force British troops from Boston before they could be reinforced in the spring.



**On March 4, 1776, Thomas' troops** fortified Dorchester Heights so the Patriots could shell the British ships in Boston Harbor. Using cannons brought in by sled from Ticonderoga in upstate New York, Thomas besieged Boston. The British evacuated soon after.

**Shovel used to dig fortifications at Dorchester Heights**

**Thomas then was stationed in Quebec** where he commanded the American forces. There he died of smallpox at the age of 52, leaving his wife Hannah and three young children.