

## WAR OFFICE PAPERS.

### INTRODUCTION.

During the colonial period the British army was a decentralized force, made up of independent, self-containing regiments of infantry and cavalry, locally raised, and in large part disbanded when no longer needed for active service. Before 1689 the only lawfully permanent forces were the guards of the king's person and the garrisons in special fortresses. Even after 1689, when an army under the control of Parliament was annually created by the Mutiny Bill, no central board or staff existed that can rightly be termed a war office. War policy was directed by that particular secretary of state, within whose territory lay the seat of the war—the Northern Secretary if the war was in northern Europe, the Southern Secretary, if in southern Europe or the colonies, and both, if the territory of both was involved. At the head of the army was a general-in-chief, and in addition there was a secretary, variously known as the secretary at war to all the forces, the secretary to the general of the forces, or the secretary for the affairs of the army. There was a similar secretary at war as well as an independent military establishment for Ireland until 1800 and another for Scotland till 1707. Such official had nothing to do with the militia, which was under the Secretary of State for the Southern Department and the lieutenants of the counties, and nothing to do with the guards and garrisons, which were under the direct command of the king. All matters of arms and ammunition were controlled by the Ordnance Board, which took its orders only from the king, while the business of victualling and transport was managed directly by the Treasury. The forces were paid by an independent official, appointed by the Treasury, the paymaster-general of the forces, and the establishment and allowances for the companies in the plantations, New York, Jamaica, Leeward Islands, Bermuda, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, etc., the earliest of which was sent over about 1679, thus forming the beginning of a permanent imperial garrison, were fixed by the King in Council. The marines, dating from 1672, came eventually under the control of the Admiralty.

The nucleus of the War Office was the office of the Secretary at War, the origin of which can be traced to the period of the Civil War. William Clarke held that position under Cromwell, and, as Sir William Clarke, was commissioned Secretary at War by Charles II. Jan. 28, 1661. He accompanied the lord general of the forces, the Duke of Albemarle, on board the *Royal Charles*, to the battle with the Dutch, June 2, 1666, where he was wounded and died two days after. At Albemarle's request the king commissioned the duke's private secretary, Matthew Lock, June 20, 1666. Lock had been secretary at war for Ireland, 1661-1662, and adjutant of a foot regiment in England. He was succeeded August 18, 1683, by William Blathwayt, auditor general of the plantation revenues.<sup>1</sup> As Secretary at War Blathwayt accompanied Marlborough

<sup>1</sup>The commission to Blathwayt reads as follows: "James II. to all to whom these presents shall come, greeting. Know ye that we reposing especial trust and confidence in the care, fidelity, and circumspection of our trusty and well beloved William Blathwayt, do grant the office and place of my secretary at war to all my standing forces

decentralized force, infantry and cavalry, were needed for active service. Even after 1689, the guards of the army were usually created by the secretary of state, and rightly be termed a secret army. The secretary of state in southern Europe was involved. At the head of the army was a secretary, the secretary to the army. There was no establishment for the army. Each official had nothing of State for the army and nothing to do with the command of the army. The Ordinance of the army was the business of viceroys. The forces of the army, the treasury, the paymaster, the allowances for the army, the islands, Bermuda, the army sent over about the army, were fixed and came eventually

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<sup>1</sup> According to Pennant, *History and Antiquities of London*, II. 83, referring to Reresby's *Memoirs*, p. 346, William III. offered the office, Apr. 12, 1689, to John Temple, son of Sir William Temple, in Blathwayt's place, but two days afterward Temple committed suicide, giving as his reason his "folly in undertaking what he could not perform."

<sup>2</sup> See ante, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> A sign manual warrant of James II appointing the

<sup>4</sup> A sign manual warrant of James II., appointing the captain of a regiment in England, countersigned by W. Blathwayt, Nov. 9, 1688, a few days before the king fled from London, was sold in 1913 at Sotheby's.



He controlled certain distributions of money, though the paymaster-general made up the accounts of disbanded regiments, paying the arrears to the colonels, who stated the amounts to the captains. He provided the king with soldiers for special guard service, and after 1735 saw to the removal, for three days while the polling was going on, of troops quartered in places of election.<sup>1</sup> In the seventeenth century his pay was twenty shillings a day, with five shillings for his clerk. In 1720 the clerical establishment numbered nine, and cost £580. There were also certain fees and perquisites, and the secretary was able to hold his office by deputy. Under Barrington the office assumed the dignity of a great department and in 1760 contained a deputy secretary, a first clerk, and twelve other clerks, fourteen in all.

During the war period from 1754 to 1783 the powers of the secretary were rapidly and widely extended. The records of the office became voluminous, even though hundreds of papers relating to military affairs found their way into the state papers, notably those of the Southern Department. The office was organized in all respects as were other departments of the British government, except that it had no board and kept no minutes. Barrington and his successors sent important despatches to the commanders-in-chief in America and to the colonial governors, and received letters from them in return. They corresponded with the under officers in the field and with a great variety of other individuals, and to a greater extent than in the earlier period directed the policy and operations of the troops in America. They looked after the despatch and transport of troops, received petitions for pay and half-pay, rewards and compensations, promotions and leaves of absence, and had complete oversight of discharges, captures, military hospitals, courts-martial, prisoners of war, deserters, and leaves of absence. They could compel absent officers to rejoin their regiments, could control exchanges of prisoners and the invaliding of soldiers, could use the troops to put down riots, and in general were expected to look after the troops in any part of the British empire, except Ireland and the Isle of Man. They kept a record of the war establishment, made up the army list, first printed in 1754 and published annually thereafter, watched the careers of the men, and controlled commissions of army officers and military governors, promotions, and all matters that related to appointments, regimental successions, and the like, with which the Secretary of State did not often interfere. They filed headquarters records, engineers' returns, garrison and hospital returns, and furnished statistical information on these points whenever desired. They carried out all details touching foreign troops in the pay of Great Britain, their charges, numbers, transportation, and losses.

Beyond the duties mentioned, the Secretary at War had no authority and assumed no responsibility. At first all plans of campaign were formulated by the Secretary of State or the commander-in-chief, though later, partly because there was no commander-in-chief in England from 1759 to 1766 and from 1769 to 1778, the Secretary at War had considerable influence upon matters of policy. This was particularly true of Barrington, a secretary honest and consistent, with definite ideas regarding the conduct of his office and firmness of attitude in their execution. But at best the secretary's powers were limited. He had nothing to do with discipline, which was exercised by the colonel. He had no control over the Ordnance Office. This important department was under the master-general and Board of Ordnance, which had an office in Westminster on the north side of St. Margaret Street after 1752, hav-

<sup>1</sup> 8 George II., c. 30. *Cf. W. O. 4: 711-713.*

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ing formerly occupied quarters in Westminster Hall. It had charge of the artillery and engineer corps, barracks, fortifications, and works, and all supplies of arms and ammunition. The business end of the Ordnance Department was at the Tower,<sup>1</sup> and the office there, located in what was known as "Cold Harbour", was directly under the authority of the board. The Secretary at War could not order a pennyworth of provisions, straw, wood, or bedding, for the Ordnance Board took its commands only from the king.

The Secretary at War corresponded with other departments and, of course, at great length, with the Secretary of State, to whom were referred many cases of departmental disagreement. Letters and petitions received were transmitted from the office of the secretary and generally bear the latter's comments. The Secretary at War received also many orders from the Privy Council, the House of Lords, and the House of Commons for information and for statistics regarding the army. In general he took his orders from the King in Council and the Secretary of State only, and not from the commander-in-chief, if we are to accept the argument in Lord Palmerston's well-known memorandum of 1811.<sup>2</sup> Despite the importance of his office, the Secretary at War had no constitutional responsibility and his duties are nowhere defined by statute.<sup>3</sup> Consequently his office became the centre of much political jobbery and manipulation, particularly in regard to commissions, appointments, and regimental inspections. So unsatisfactory had the situation become by the close of the Revolutionary War, that in 1783 an act was passed which transformed the influential official of Barrington's day into a financial administrator, preparing and submitting the army estimates and the annual mutiny bill to Parliament and framing the articles of war.<sup>4</sup> These duties, further regulated by royal warrant in 1812, kept the office alive until its abolition in 1863.<sup>5</sup>

Of the army itself little need be said here.<sup>6</sup> Each regiment was an independent unit under the colonel, who raised it and was responsible for its finance and discipline. The colonel received the money issued for the regiment by the paymaster-general, and out of it provided for the pay, clothing, and maintenance of his men. The pay of the officers was rather an *honorarium* than pay properly so called, while that of the men was nothing more than a retaining fee for purposes of loot.<sup>7</sup> From both, stoppages were made for Chelsea Hospital and the regimental agent, and from the soldiers' pay

<sup>1</sup> For the Ordnance Department in 1708 see Hatton, *New View*, II. 634, in 1761, Dodsley, *London and its Environs*, V. 70-76. The office at the Tower was taken down and rebuilt in 1775 on account of damage done by fire.

<sup>2</sup> Clode, *Military Forces of the Crown*, II. 689-714.

<sup>3</sup> Before 1783 the Secretary at War is mentioned, I believe, in but one statute, that of 1735 requiring him to remove the soldiers at the time of elections.

<sup>4</sup> 23 George III., c. 50, §§ 20, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29, 35, 37, 38.

<sup>5</sup> Clode, *Military Forces of the Crown*, II. 273, 687; Anson, II., *The Crown*, pt. II., 196. Captain Owen Wheeler's *The War Office, Past and Present* (London, 1914) is published too late for use in this book, but, to judge from reviews, is valuable.

<sup>6</sup> Clode, *passim*; Reide, *A Treatise on Military Forces*, 9th ed., 1805. The various acts for the better regulating the forces, including those in America, are: 11 Anne, c. 4; 1 George I., c. 3; 8 George I., c. 3; 18 George II., c. 10; 29 George II., c. 35; 5 George III., c. 33; 6 George III., c. 18; 7 George III., c. 55; 11 George III., c. 11; 12 George III., c. 12; 13 George III., c. 24; 14 George III., cc. 6, 54; 16 George III., c. 11.

<sup>7</sup> The same idea governed the raising of troops in the colonies. In 1744 Massachusetts wishing to raise a force of 3000 men for the Louisburg expedition, proposed that "each person so enlisting be allowed twenty five shillings per month and that there be delivered to each man a blanket, that one month's pay be advanc'd, and that they be entitul'd to all the plunder". *Correspondence of William Shirley*, ed. C. H. Lincoln (New York, 1912), I. 170.



certain percentages were deducted for medicines, for the paymaster-general, for specified victuallings,<sup>1</sup> and for clothing. Of actual pay the men received practically nothing. After the regiment had been raised, by recruiting agents under the direction of the nobleman or gentleman of rank to whom a commission as colonel had been granted, the muster was taken by the muster-master and examined by the comptrollers of army accounts. Frauds arose in both connections, the muster-master either passing the regiment as complete when it was not so, or giving his certificate without seeing a single man, and the comptrollers, who were bound by their instructions to inspect all musters and muster-rolls, neglecting to find out whether such rolls had been issued or not.<sup>2</sup> The army had also a judge advocate general to administer military law,<sup>3</sup> and an apothecary general whose business it was to furnish the several regiments "with good and wholesome medicaments".<sup>4</sup>

The office of the Secretary at War must have been at first in or near the chambers of the Duke of Albemarle at the Cockpit. Lock is mentioned as having an office at the Guards House in 1676, and probably Blathwayt used Little Wallingford House for the same purpose. Clarke dated his letters from the Horse Guards in 1697. We learn that for a time the War Office was located on the south side of Pall Mall, in the old Ordnance Office, built for the Duke of Cumberland, when captain-general. For the greater part of the early eighteenth century, however, the Secretary at War, the deputy secretary and clerks, the paymaster-general of the forces, and the commissary-general of musters had their quarters in a building on the east side of the street leading from Charing Cross to Westminster, about where the War Office is today. This building had a frontage on the street of 55 feet, but was only 46 feet wide at the rear, while the dimensions up one flight of stairs were only 31 feet before and behind.<sup>5</sup> In 1751 the present building of the Horse Guards was begun and completed in 1756, on the site of the old Guards House, the yard, and the stables, and thither the War Office was removed in the latter year. The officers there established were the commander-in-chief,<sup>6</sup> the Secretary at War, the paymaster-general, the quartermaster-general, the commissary-general of musters, and there were quartered later the muster-master general and paymaster-general of marines and the comptrollers of army accounts. The latter had been established earlier in two old houses, worn-out structures supported by buttresses, on the bank of the

<sup>1</sup> In 1747 Shirley wrote to the Duke of Newcastle sending an account "of the late Tumult, which happen'd in the Garrison [at Louisburg] upon his publishing His Majesty's Orders among the soldiers for making a Stoppage out of their pay for their Provisions". *Correspondence*, I. 397. Cf. p. 461. In Nova Scotia a stoppage was made to pay the charges of the chaplain of the garrison. For the deductions, see *Treas.* 64: 11.

<sup>2</sup> On this subject see the *Report* of 1746 and the pamphlet *National Oeconomy Recommended*; Clode, *Military Forces of the Crown*, II. 8-10. The original instructions issued in 1703 to the comptroller of army accounts are given in Clode, II. 668-669. The colonels made large profits out of their regiments, even when the mustering was honestly done. Shirley, who with William Pepperrell was commissioned a colonel on the establishment and authorized to raise a regiment in America, estimated that he cleared £1000 a year. Whether this sum included the profits from the off-reckonings or not is uncertain. *Correspondence of William Shirley*, I. 505.

<sup>3</sup> Clode, I. 77.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Treas.* 1: 77; 38: 816.

<sup>5</sup> *Crown Lease Book*, VI. 1; X. 141; XIII. 81, 95-97. The building was very irregular in shape, and in 1756 was described as old and ruinous.

<sup>6</sup> Sir John Ligonier, commissioned in 1757, was the first commander-in-chief to occupy the new building. For a plan showing the location of the offices, see Britton, *Public Buildings of London*, II. 67.

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Thames behind the Banqueting Hall, at the end of the passage leading from the Privy Garden to the private water stairs. As these buildings were wanted by the Duke of Richmond, the comptrollers removed in 1738 to Surrey Street, but their office was burned down in 1744. Thence they moved to Spring Garden, and in 1759 to the Horse Guards.<sup>1</sup>

The majority of the War Office records are of date later than 1732, the earlier papers being scattered among those of the Secretary of State, the Admiralty, and the Treasury. The Ordnance records date in some instances from Queen Elizabeth's reign (stores, 1571, registers, 1594). Blathwayt's correspondence is in the British Museum, and letters from the other early secretaries are among the State Papers, Domestic, and the Admiralty papers. The earliest War Office books date from 1660 and the correspondence from about 1683. The importance of the papers for colonial history runs chiefly from 1754 to 1783. The great bulk of the books and papers now deposited in the Public Record Office were originally stored in 6 Whitehall Yard, a house across the street from the Horse Guards, usually called the War Office Depot. This house was entirely filled with the papers—floors, attic, kitchen, and even the spaces under the eaves being brought into use. In 1854 and 1855 these premises were needed for the increased business of the army and the Ordnance Medical Board, and in the latter year the entire mass of material was transferred to Chancery Lane. The amount was estimated at over 40,000 bound volumes, bundles, and parcels, filling 113 vans. During the following five years other papers were brought from the War Office, the commissariat branch, the Horse Guards branch, and elsewhere. Work on the papers was begun at once and many tons of matter were destroyed as useless. The records were, in the main, in excellent condition, though some had been damaged from water leaking through the roof of the kitchen at 6 Whitehall Yard.

## IN-LETTERS.

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1-13. 1756-1783. Letters and Enclosures, from Officers in America to the Secretary at War.

W. O. I.  
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1. 1756-1763. Letters and despatches to the secretaries at war, Barrington and Townshend,

and Deputy Secretary Walpole from officers in America.

Gen. Loudoun, Gen. Abercrombie, Capt. Aldridge, J. Napier, director of hospitals in America, from St. John's, Albany, New York, Fort Edward, Lake George, London, with enclosures consisting of reports from subordinates, statistics regarding ordnance, regimental returns, schedules of papers, establishment lists, copies of letters referred to, petitions from officers, etc., including "Maj. Gen. Shirley's answer to the Earl of Loudoun's representation of the state of the military chest in North America at the time of Maj. Gen. Abercrombie's entering on the chief command there".

Letters from Gen. Shirley, May 8, June 25, 1759, Sept. 1, 1760-Jan. 26, 1761, Capt. Warburton (copy of his commission), Gen. Bouquet, July 13, 1757 (South Carolina), Gov. Pownall, Apr. 1, 1758 (Boston), Gen. Amherst to Gen. Murray, 1760 (Quebec), Gen. James Wolfe, June 6, 1759 (*Neptune*, at sea), Gen. Monck-

<sup>1</sup> *Crown Lease Book*, V. 22, *Works* I, III. 7, VI. 115, 130, 130 b.



- ton, 1762 (New York), Gov. Dobbs, 1763 (Brunswick), Gov. Belcher, July 6, 1763 (Halifax), and from other officers, dated at Fort Edward, Plymouth, Placentia, Louisburg, Albany, Quebec, Georgia, and on board men of war, chiefly in 1757.
2. 1763-1776. Letters and despatches to Sec. Barrington, the Marquis of Granby, master-general of ordnance, and the commander-in-chief.  
Gen. Gage. New York, Boston, London, 1771-July 23, 1776. Thirty-eight letters in all, that of Apr. 22, 1775, containing a description of the battle of Concord, *cf.* C. O. 5: 92; that of June 25, 1775, battle of Bunker Hill; that of July 21, 1775, distribution of troops in North America; that of Oct. 1, 1775, *id.*; others contain enclosures giving figures and statistics, copies of letters written by Gage to officers of the 18th Regiment and replies thereto; letters from these officers to Barrington; lists of promotions of commissioned officers, Aug. 24, 1765. Many of the letters from Gage have Barrington's comments upon them.
  - Gen. Howe. Camp, heights of Charlestown, Boston, Oct. 16, 1775-June 9, 1776. Eighteen letters in all, that of Oct. 16, 1775, containing memorials, and those of Dec. 2, 1775, and Jan. 19, 1775, important enclosures.
  - Gen. Carleton. Chambly, Montreal, Quebec, June 7, 1775-July 11, 1776. Eight letters in all.
  - Group of letters from Gen. Burgoyne, Gen. Irwine, Col. Pigot, Capts. MacDonald, Macilwaine, Maclean, Christie, Shirreff, Earl Percy, Boston, Quebec, St. Augustine, Halifax, June, 1775-June, 1776, with many enclosures, and comments by Barrington.
  3. 1784-1785. Military despatches of Gen. Haldimand and others to Barrington, with a few earlier documents.
  4. 1755-1757. Military despatches from Gen. Shirley to Barrington, New York, Dec. 19, 1755-Sept. 4, 1756, together with Shirley's memorial to the king, Jan. 3, 1757. Twelve letters, with many enclosures, copies of letters to and from Shirley and others, proclamations, declarations, minutes of councils of war. Many of the letters are marked "Duplicate" or "Triplicate" and all but those of Jan. 13, July 4, and Aug. 20 are to be found in C. O. 5: 47. None of the letters are in C. O. 5: 887. In addition to the letters from America are others sent by Shirley to Barrington and the Treasury for the purpose of vindicating himself in his controversy with Loudoun, Feb. 8-June 3, 1757 (six in all, and the memorial addressed to the king).
  5. 1758-1763. Correspondence of Gen. Amherst with Barrington, the Duke of Devonshire, first lord of the Treasury, Charles Townshend, etc., New York, Albany, Schenectady, Staten Island. Fifty-one letters in all, with many enclosures; also a few copies of letters sent to officers in America and a letter, New York, Dec. 9, 1763, from Gage to Welbore Ellis, secretary at war. Compare with C. O. 5: 54-63, where letters similar in character but not duplicates will be found. Amherst did not often send duplicate letters even when writing upon the same subject on the same date to Barrington and Pitt, therein following a practice unlike that of Shirley.

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6. 1764-1765. Letters from Gen. Gage to Ellis and Barrington. Ten letters in all, with enclosures which are often elaborate, such as those containing descriptions of the Floridas and accounts of dealings with the Indians. Compare 2, above, and C. O. 5: 83-95. Gage rarely sent duplicates. In his letters to Ellis and Barrington, he deals strictly with military affairs, such as concerned the condition and state of the army, vacancies, promotions, estimates of military expenses, and the like, which did not concern the Secretary of State.
7. 1766, Jan. 8-Oct. 11. *Id.* Concerned largely with Indian affairs along the frontier and with Pontiac's War.
8. 1767, Jan. 15-1769, June 16. *Id.*
9. 1769, July 22-1774, Dec. 25. *Id.*
10. 1776-1780. Letters from Gens. Howe and Clinton. Those of Gen. Howe cover the period Aug. 9, 1776-Apr. 13, 1778; those of Gen. Clinton, June 15, 1778-Oct. 31, 1780. They are concerned but little with matters of policy, dealing chiefly with the condition and management of the army—ammunition, clothing, food, housing, sickness—and show a bad state of affairs, regarding which Howe was very outspoken in his comments, presenting evidences of fraud in the furnishing of supplies and medicines. Clinton's letters are briefer and more formal. Enclosures mentioned are frequently missing, but in some cases may be found in C. O. 5: 92-105. In the volume are three letters from Amherst, Whitehall, Dec., 1778-Feb., 1779.
11. 1776-1781. Letters from Gens. Carleton and Haldimand, Quebec and Canada. Those of Carleton cover the period, Aug. 20, 1776-July 17, 1778, those of Haldimand, July 7, 1778-Oct. 22, 1781. Carleton's letters are full of references to colonial affairs and contain comments on current events. Entered between Haldimand's letters of Nov. 1, 1779, and Oct. 25, 1780, are many letters, petitions, and memorials sent to Barrington by officers of the army in America, with the secretary's memorandum in most cases on the dorse. There are also letters from Howe, Jan. 25, 1779, Amherst, Mar. 27, 1779, Phillips, with enclosures, among which are copies of letters from Lord George Germain and a copy of a letter sent to Washington, Dec. 23, 1780.
12. 1781-1782. Letters from Gens. Clinton and Carleton, and other miscellany. Clinton's letters cover the period Jan. 28, 1781-May 4, 1782, those of Carleton, June 14-Dec. 21, 1782. All concern chiefly routine matters, and contain many elaborate statistical returns. The last third of the volume is filled with miscellaneous letters and papers, chiefly from Canada, 1779-1782.
13. 1782-1783. Letters from Gen. Carleton. These letters are chiefly official despatches, of a formal nature, dealing with promotions, appointments, vacancies, leaves of absence, and containing reports and returns, and copies of many memorials received by Carleton and by him sent to the secretary. Entered between the letters of June 16 and 17, 1783, are forty-one enclosures, with schedules of cash and clothing returns. There is also a short account of the King's American Dragoons.