



The American Soldier, 1775

When the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia on 10 May 1775 the battles of Concord, Lexington, Ticonderoga, and Crown Point were history. New England patriots were successfully maintaining a tight land siege of Boston. On 14 June the Continental Congress adopted the army besieging Boston as the Continental Army when it appointed a committee to bring in "a draft of rules and regulations for the government of the army." On 15 June the Congress appointed George Washington as the "General and Commander in Chief of the Army of the United Colonies," and he formally took command on 3 July 1775.

Washington described the Army as "a mixed multitude of people. . . under very little discipline, order or government." Out of this "mixed multitude" Washington set out to create a disciplined army. Suspicious of the "leveling" tendencies of the New Englanders, Washington made the distinction between officers and enlisted men more rigid. He ordered in mid-July that all general officers, their aides, and the brigade majors were to be distinguished by ribbons of various colors. The distinctive insignia chosen for the field and company grade officers were cockades of various colors to be worn on the hats. The cockades of field officers were to be red or pink, those of captains yellow, and those of subalterns green. The non-commissioned officers were to be distinguished from the enlisted men by epaulettes or strips of cloth sewed on the right shoulder, red for sergeants and green for corporals.

In this scene from one of General Washington's surveys of the lines before Boston, an aide-de-camp in a brown semi-military coat with buff facings and the green ribbon of his position across his chest is seen in the left foreground. In the center foreground General Washington is shown in the blue and buff "suit of regimentals" he had had made that spring, and worn at the sessions of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. The light blue sash on his breast denotes his rank as "Commander in Chief." In the right foreground is Major General Artemas Ward in a plain dark military style coat and the purple sash of a major general over his white small clothes. All three of the foreground figures wear black cockades on their hats as did their British adversaries. In the background are various regiments of General Ward's Division in the motley array of the Continental troops before Boston, the officers distinguished by their cockades.