

[French on Washington, 'The Papers of George Washington, Volume 21, 1 June-31 July 1779' and Washington, 'The Papers of George Washington, Volume 22, 1 August-21 October 1779'](#)

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George Washington. *The Papers of George Washington, Volume 21, 1 June-31 July 1779.* Edited by William M. Ferraro. Revolutionary War Series. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2012. Maps. 896 pp. \$95.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3322-1. **George Washington.** *The Papers of George Washington, Volume 22, 1 August-21 October 1779.* Edited by Benjamin L. Huggins. Revolutionary War Series. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012. Maps. 904 pp. \$85.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8139-3366-5.

Reviewed by Gregg French (Western University) **Published on** H-USA (January, 2016)
Commissioned by Donna Sinclair

Understanding the Man and the General

As the American War of Independence reached its fourth year, General George Washington continued to be the most significant figure in both the Continental Army and the country. Stationed in the New York Highlands during the summer of 1779, Washington oversaw the fortification of his headquarters at West Point. He successfully planned and won battles against the British garrisons that were stationed at Stoney Point and Paulus Hook, in July and August, respectively; and he oversaw the logistical aspects of Major General John Sullivan's victories over British Loyalists and their Indian counterparts from June to October of the same year. In the closing months of the summer of 1779, and into the early fall, Washington also began planning a major offensive on New York City, which he hoped would expel the British from the continent and eventually bring the American War of Independence to an end.

While playing a vital role in the strategic planning phases of these military conflicts, Washington continued to seek information from American political and military officials in Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York City, the southern frontier, and Europe. Such officials also depended heavily on Washington's advice, which led to a staggering amount of communications between the general and these men. When traditional channels failed to provide adequate information, Washington looked to the Culper spy ring, which he had ordered Major Benjamin Tallmadge to establish the preceding year. Washington trusted the members of the Culper spy ring and was willing to use invisible ink and secret codes to send and receive information. Through this spy ring, Washington received valuable information about British supplies and troop movements in New York City and on Long Island.

In volumes 21 and 22 of *The Papers of George Washington*, editors William M. Ferraro (volume 21) and Benjamin L. Huggins (volume 22) bring together the correspondences that were written and received by General Washington from June 1 to October 21, 1779. The Revolutionary War Series is part of a much larger collection of Washington's papers, which the University of Virginia began

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compiling in 1968. The complete collection also includes a six-volume series of Washington's diaries, journal, and proceedings as president; ten volumes entitled the Colonial Series; six volumes that detail 1784 to 1788; sixteen volumes on his writings while president; and finally, four volumes on his years in retirement from 1797 until his death in 1799.

The included correspondences were collected at repositories throughout the United States and Europe, including the Library of Congress, the US National Archives and Records Administration, the National Archives of the United Kingdom, and the Niedersächsische Staatsarchiv in Wolfenbüttel, Germany. Ferraro and Huggins use these correspondences to illuminate both the military responsibilities and personal relationships that Washington possessed and developed during the summer and early autumn of 1779. Organized in chronological order, with a variety of in-depth footnotes and illustrated maps, the archival documents bring the reader into the life and times of one of the most influential men in the United States. Rather than simply providing documents that would only interest military historians of the American Revolution, Ferraro and Huggins chose to include a variety of letters to illustrate the human aspects of the future president, which allowed him to win the loyalty of his men and the country. More specifically, these documents explore Washington's frustration with inept military officers, his personal struggle with courts-martial decisions that sentenced men to death, and his willingness to allow military officers to take leaves to see their family members.

Ferraro's and Huggins's volumes also highlight Washington's abilities as a diplomat and his interest in international affairs, two oft-overlooked aspects of his tenure as the commander in chief during the revolutionary era. While reinforcing the Continental Army's positions on the Hudson River, receiving information from the Culper spy ring, and planning the American attack on New York City, Washington managed to find time to remain well informed on political events in Europe and to host foreign dignitaries while they visited the United States. Throughout the summer and fall of 1779, John Jay, who later became the American minister plenipotentiary to the Court of Spain, kept Washington up to date on issues relating to Spain's entrance into the war on the side of the Americans and the French. Washington also remained in contact with Major General Lafayette in France and Juan de Miralles, one of the Court of Spain's representatives in the United States. In mid-September 1779, Washington also hosted Anne-César, Chevalier de la Luzerne, who had recently been appointed as the new French minister plenipotentiary to the United States. Washington's abilities as a diplomat and connections with French and Spanish dignitaries allowed the United States to gain allies, and played an influential role in the United States' eventual victory over the British Empire during the American War of Independence.

These two volumes of *The Papers of George Washington* are a fascinating collection of Washington's correspondences between June 1 and October 21, 1779. The documents illustrate Washington's abilities as a military tactician, skilled diplomat, and passionate commanding officer. By transcribing the source material into standard type, with modern spellings and punctuation, as well as including detailed footnotes and illustrated maps, Ferraro and Huggins have made Washington's correspondences much more accessible to academics, undergraduate students, and the public. At the same time, they have maintained the authentic meaning and purpose of the documents. Although the volumes are clearly a veneration of the man, his role in the American War of Independence, and the establishment of the United States, the high level of accessibility of the documents is undeniable. These volumes would serve as a useful reference in both public and university libraries. An examination of a

selection of excerpts from the volumes would also serve as a useful tool when introducing high school and undergraduate students to the writings of Washington, the Revolutionary era, or the study of primary source documents.

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