

“as plain as blue and buff could make it”:  
 George Washington’s Uniforms  
 as Commander-in-Chief and President,  
 1775-1799

by James L. Kochan



Figure 1. George Washington’s Gorget of the Fairfax County Independent Company, engraved with the Virginia coat of arms. Made in late 1774 or early 1775 by an unknown artisan from the Philadelphia area. Gilt over copper alloy, 5 x 5 inches. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston.

On September 21, 1774, “a Number of Gentlemen & Freeholders of Fairfax County in the Colony of Virginia” met and agreed to form themselves “into a Company, not exceeding one hundred Men, by the Name of The Fairfax independant Company of Voluntiers, making choice of our own Officers....” Chairing the meeting was George Mason, local political luminary and author of the Virginia Resolves; absent was his nearby neighbor, Colonel George Washington, who was then in Philadelphia as one of the Virginia delegates to the First Continental Congress. Part of the business at hand was specifying the dress of the new corps, which was determined to be “a regular Uniform of Blue, turn’d up with Buff; with plain yellow metal Buttons, Buff Waist Coat & Breeches, & white Stockings....” The adoption of blue and buff was not by mere accident or whim, as they were “*the antient Whig*

*Colours of England*” — the Whigs being the opposition party to the Tory government then in power and with whom the colonists felt politically aligned. It is very likely that Mason and others may have conferred with Washington over this and other military matters prior to the Colonel’s departure in August, since Washington had served as the colonel-commandant of the Virginia Regiment during the French and Indian War. Washington’s step-grandson and adopted son, George Washington Parke Custis, would later claim that Washington selected the uniform, and it is very likely that he had some influence in the final decision.<sup>1</sup>

Taking advantage of Washington’s expertise and his Philadelphia connections (a city known for its skilled artisans and extensive mercantile establishments), the Fairfax Independent Company wrote to Washington in October

requesting that he acquire various military accoutrements for the corps, as later did its sister independent company from Prince William County (both of which had elected Washington as their commanding field officer). Back home at Mount Vernon in November, Washington had “1 Suite Regimentals” made for him by his indentured tailor, Andrew Judge, at a charge of one pound and six shillings sterling for labor. This uniform was probably the prototype or sample pattern made for the entire Fairfax Independent Company, as they do not appear to have been uniformed prior to this date. The following month, Judge made regimentals for other members (including John Parke Custis, Washington’s stepson, and his estate manager and cousin Lund Washington) at the same cost. More expensive than the rather austere uniform were its accoutrements and trimmings: Washington paid four pounds and ten shillings for a gilt gorget (Figure 1) and one pound, ten shillings for an epaulette of gold lace with bullion fringe.<sup>2</sup>

This uniform would accompany Washington on his return to Philadelphia to attend the Second Continental Congress. Worn by him to the May-June 1775 sessions, it served to remind his fellow-delegates that the tall, impressive-looking Virginian was not only a veteran soldier, but was willing to fight and possibly sacrifice his life in upholding their rights and liberties as free-born British subjects. Though we will never be sure of the extent such martial attire played in convincing his peers that he was the most likely candidate for the challenging task at hand, Congress enthusiastically appointed Washington general and commander-in-chief of the Continental forces raising for or engaged in the siege of British-held Boston.

Before setting off for Massachusetts, Washington took the time to purchase camp equipage and other supplies both necessary for campaign service and as befitting a gentleman-officer of such rank. His accounts reveal that Philadelphia tailor John Galloway was paid twelve pounds sterling on June 21 for work done — almost certainly a fashionable suit of regimentals of better workmanship, materials, and trimmings than that earlier made by the less-skilled hands of Mount Vernon’s indentured tailor. However, the blue and buff color scheme (and probably the cut) of the original uniform was retained. Washington now had a new uniform for full dress occasions, as well as one for everyday military wear and field service. Although Washington would later pay tailors in Massachusetts and New York for repairs to this clothing and those of his servants during 1776, it would not be until April 1777 that Washington would commission another suit of regimentals, again from Galloway. Little did Washington then realize that blue and buff would remain in his wardrobe for the rest of his life and would come to symbolize for future generations of Americans not only his own public service and sacrifices as a citizen-soldier, but also those of his Revolutionary compatriots.<sup>3</sup>

Washington arrived in Cambridge on July 4, 1775, to take command of the “troops of the UNITED PROVINCES of North America.” Instead of well-uniformed regular troops, he found a collection of mostly New England farmers, tradesman, sailors, and the like — largely



*Figure 2. Charles William Peale, George Washington, 1776. Oil on canvas, 44 1/8 x 38 1/2 inches. George Washington sat for this portrait, the second of many by the artist, in 1776. He is depicted in his first uniform as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, a uniform based on that adopted by the Fairfax Independent Company in 1774. Courtesy of the Brooklyn Museum of Art, Dick S. Ramsay Fund 34.1178.*

dressed as they had come from the plow, shop, or mast-head. Washington was shocked by the lack of discipline and proper sanitation as well as by the ragged and non-uniform clothing among the New Englanders, privately writing of them as “an exceeding nasty and dirty people.” In contrast, Washington cut a very martial figure among his men, as noted by Surgeon James Thacher in his journal entry of July 20:

His excellency was on horseback, in company with several other military gentlemen. It was not difficult to distinguish him from the others; his personal appearance is truly noble and majestic; being tall and well proportioned. His dress is a blue coat with buff-colored facings, a rich epaulette on each shoulder, buff under dress, and an elegant small sword; a black cockade in his hat.<sup>4</sup>

Finding that the generals and their staff were not receiving the military recognition and courtesies due to their station, Washington issued the following general order on July 10:

...It is recommended to both Officers and men to make themselves acquainted with the persons of all the Officers in General Command, and in the mean time to prevent mistakes: The General

Officers and their Aids-de-Camp, will be distinguished in the following manner.

The Commander in Chief by a light blue Ribband, wore across his breast, between his Coat and Waistcoat.

The Majors and Brigadier General, by a Pink Ribband wore in the like manner.

The Aids-de-Camp by a green ribband.

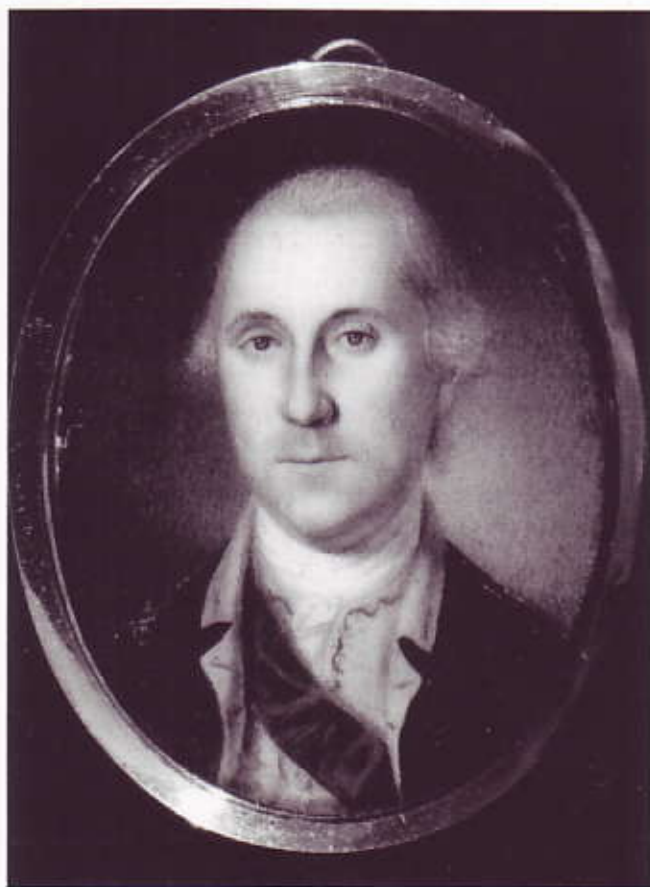
Four days earlier, Washington had already determined upon this course of action and had purchased “a Ribband to distinguish myself  $3/4$  [3 shillings and four pence].” The light blue sash or “ribband” appears to have been made of a length of broad moiré or watered silk ribbon, clearly depicted by Charles Willson Peale in the 1776 portrait of Washington (Figure 2) as well as in the more famous 1779 life portrait and the first of its many copies.<sup>5</sup>

On May 24, 1776, when he returned to Philadelphia to confer with Congress about a possible British attack on the city, “His Excellency” General Washington was acclaimed as the “liberator of Boston” and “the guardian of American liberties.” The wealthy and politically astute

John Hancock, President of Congress, had already “bespoke the portraits of Genl. Washington & Lady” from artist Charles Willson Peale five days earlier in anticipation of his arrival. Between meetings with Congress, Washington apparently managed two, possibly three sittings for Hancock’s commissioned work between May 29 and June 1. Peale was already familiar with the sitter, having painted a  $3/4$ -length portrait of the Virginian planter at his Mount Vernon home in 1772 that showed “Colonel Washington” in the silver-laced, Virginia regimentals of blue and scarlet that he had worn during the French and Indian War. From this life portrait, we can learn a great deal about Washington’s first dress as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army.

The 1776 portrait (Figure 2), also done in  $3/4$  length, was completed for Hancock that autumn and depicts Washington in his general’s uniform of blue and buff standing before a view of Boston Harbor and the city as viewed from the American siege lines. The pose is rather stiff and contrived — in reality, it is almost a reversed or mirror image of Peale’s 1772 portrait of Washington with minor changes in the position of the arms — clearly an indication that Peale was rushed during the sittings and was forced to rely on a study or sketches retained from his earlier work or perhaps on the original (which Martha Washington may have brought with her to Philadelphia) to complete the figure. Washington’s right forearm is resting rather awkwardly on his right hip, rather than tucked behind the back waist, as the left arm (here mirrored) had been placed in the 1772 work. The palm of the hand rests on a gentleman’s cane to provide some suggestion of Washington’s body leaning slightly against the bent arm. The left hand (as opposed to the right in the 1772 work) is inserted into the breast of his waistcoat in a manner both awkward and unconvincing (as the right- or buttoned front panel of the waistcoat is now over the hand, instead of under the left- or buttonholed front panel) — one that would tend to distort the drape of the waistcoat at this point, if truly taken from life. What appears to be the “State” sword, a silver-hilted smallsword now in the collections of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association, is suspended at Washington’s left hip in both works (despite some minor variation in depicting the wrap of the grip).

Of more interest to this study are the details of the commander-in-chief’s first uniform, which are perhaps more faithfully executed than the features of the sitter — a trademark for much of Peale’s work during this period. The deep blue “regimental” coat is cut very much in the British military style of this decade: long-waisted, with full lapels, fall-down cape (collar), and close-fitting sleeves that come down to the wristbone. It is faced and lined with buff and trimmed with plain, flat, gilt buttons. The three buttons on each sleeve are set “long” with “dragon” cuffs — period terms denoting the placement of buttons up rather than around the cuff and the use of indented cuffs, with buttonholes worked on both cuffs and sleeves in a corresponding herringbone form. Each shoulder bears an epaulette made of gold lace finished in a “rose knot” trimmed with fine gold bullion fringe.



*Figure 3. Charles Willson Peale, George Washington (miniature), 1776. Watercolor on ivory, encased in a gold locket frame,  $1\frac{3}{4} \times 1\frac{5}{16}$  inches. This portrait miniature was done by Peale from Washington’s 1776 sitting. Note the embroidered buttonholes and edging on his waistcoat, as well as the light blue “Commander in Chief’s ribband” of silk. Courtesy of The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association.*

The waistcoat appears to be of buff broadcloth or superfine, trimmed with embroidered buttons and edging along the breast, skirts, and pocket flaps. Underneath it is a shirt of apparently fine linen, with ruffles at breast and cuffs. Judging from the original oil and a miniature “copy” Peale made from the same sitting (Figure 3), the waistcoat’s embroidery appears to be of a floral or foliate “chain” pattern, worked with gold wire-wrapped thread and colored silk thread of green or possibly blue. It is interesting to note that a pair of buff-colored, woolen breeches with embroidered knee bands and buttons that belonged to Washington is now in the National Museum of American History. In cut, the breeches appear to date to the 1770s and the embroidery bears a marked similarity to that depicted on the waistcoat in this painting, suggesting that they may have been paired at one time or another.

However, Washington appears to have worn a pair of buckskin or leather breeches to the sittings rather than uniform ones of cloth, judging by differences in both drape and shade or caste between breeches and waistcoat as painted. Considered the “horseman of his age,” Washington preferred the saddle to any chair, and his order and account books reflect an active outdoors lifestyle that wore out numerous pairs of buckskin riding breeches — normally durable, long-lasting garments. Disregarding current fashion extremes, he preferred his leather breeches functionally “roomy in the seat and not so tight in the thigh,” noting that such legwear were typically cut “so strait that it is with difficulty they can be drawn on, to which I have an utter aversion.”<sup>6</sup>

In fact, Washington had always paid a great deal of attention to matters of dress, although he was by no means a slave of fashion. By the time he had reached his thirties, Washington was already a gentleman of property and status within the planter aristocracy of Virginia. His clothing, like his political and social relations, reflected a moderately conservative outlook. Always in search of a quality bargain in his purchases, he preferred clothing that was well made and durable, stylish yet understated, and suited to a lifestyle that included political office, management of plantation-farms, fox hunting, dancing, and other social engagements. In ordering “a Suit of handsome Cloth Cloaths” from his London tailor in 1768, Washington desired it to be made “in the best taste to sit easy and loose as Cloaths that are tight always look awkward [sic] and are uneasy to the Wearer.” He would later advise his young nephews that while “a conformity to the prevailing fashion in a certain degree is necessary. . . it does not from thence follow that a man should always get a new Coat, or other clothes, upon every trifling change in the mode,” noting that a fashion leader or “the first to follow it will certainly appear in the eyes of judicious men, to have nothing better than a frequent change of dress to recommend him to notice.” To risk a contemporary application, Washington would probably buy from Brooks Brothers and L.L. Bean today, rather than from Armani or Hugo Boss, while outlet and sale shopping would prove a profitable alternative from time to time.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 4. Charles Willson Peale, Portrait of Alexander Hamilton, 1777. Watercolor on ivory. Alexander Hamilton sat for this miniature when serving as an aide-de-camp to Washington in 1777. His uniform is nearly identical to his commander's, but distinguished by the green silk sash of an aide-de-camp. Courtesy of The Schwarz Gallery, Philadelphia.*

While many of the colonies strove to furnish proper uniforms for their regiments, Congress had failed to issue a uniform regulation that governed the dress of its general officers, much less the entire Continental Army. Uniforms among senior (and many junior) officers varied with individual whim. For example, in June 1775, Major General Horatio Gates hired Boston tailor Joseph Billings to alter his blue civilian coat and smallclothes into a uniform trimmed with green and crimson. However, Washington’s aides-de-camp seemed to have quickly adopted his own blue and buff dress, as did many of the general officers. Portrait miniatures by Charles Willson Peale of two of Washington’s aides, Richard Cary and Alexander Hamilton (Figure 4), depict them in this uniform and wearing the green ribbon sashes appropriate to their positions. When discussing clothing for his new fifty-man Life Guard in April 1777, Washington requested that “if blue and buff can be had, I should prefer that uniform, as it is the one I wear myself.” Soon blue and buff became the widely used, but as yet still unofficial, uniform of Continental Army general and staff officers (as well as the uniform of choice for certain regiments, some of which referred to themselves as “Washington’s Foot-Guards”).

By mid-1777 buff cloth was already in very short supply, due to its popularization by Washington, and commanded the highest prices in the marketplace. John Laurens, serving as a volunteer aide-de-camp in Washington’s military family, wrote that “Buff even of a bad sort is scarce and dear at York — it was with difficulty I could get a little to furbish up on old coat” when a fellow aide requested him to purchase some on his behalf. Laurens would later turn

to the considerable resources of his father, Henry Laurens, then president of Congress, to acquire enough blue and buff for a new uniform for himself. Even coarse buff-colored cloth was in short supply: Clothier General James Mease replied to Washington that as he “could find no Buff Cloth for facings. . . was obliged to get a ps [piece] Yellow discharged, which although tis a little too strong colourd, does pretty well” for the Life Guard uniforms. As the war dragged on, despite ever-increasing importation of cloth and goods from European ports, Washington himself still experienced occasional difficulty in acquiring buff cloth and trimmings to refurbish old and make new uniforms. On January 23, 1783, he wrote to merchant Daniel Parker for “as much superfine Buff Cloth (not of the yellow kind) as would make me a Vest Coat [waistcoat] Breechs. and facings to a Coat; and that it was my wish to get as much Buff-Silk-Shag as would line a Coat and Vest-Coat” and enclosed “a sample of the *kind* wanted”; two months later, Parker having failed in securing the silk-shag, Washington agreed to accept “a *Buff* lining of *any kind*.”<sup>8</sup>

Although setting demanding standards in terms of quality of materials and finish for his clothing, Washington had adopted an even *plainer* manner of dress by January 1779, when again painted from life by Peale. Although the familiar colors remain, the cut and trimmings of the uniform in the 1779 painting demonstrate some attempt in keeping with current military fashion. Gone is the embroidered waistcoat, replaced by one of plain buff with flat, gilt buttons to match those on the coat. The coat features scalloped cuffs with cross-mounted buttons rather than the “dragoon” cuffs formerly worn, and the sleeves are finished with functional, buttoned “slashes” along the bottom seam at the cuffs, which allow for an even closer fit to the lower arms. Washington still wears the commander-in-chief’s light blue silk ribband in this painting and in a copy now at Mount Vernon (Figure 5). In a 1779-80 copy now at The Yale University Art Gallery, however, the ribband was later painted out, probably by the artist, to reflect Washington’s abandonment of this insignia by 1780.

This abandonment of the ribband as insignia is accounted for by the Marquis de Barbe-Marbois, who noted in September 1779 that Washington formerly “wore a wide blue ribbon [but] He has given up this scarcely republican distinction.” Although Washington may have dropped this designating insignia by late 1779 as chronicled above, it would not be until June 1780 that orders would finally be published that officially prescribed the uniform and insignia of generals in the Continental Army to consist of: “. . . a blue coat with Buff facings and lining, yellow buttons, white or buff under cloaths, two Epaulettes, with two stars [for major generals, while brigadier generals had but one star — Washington alone had three stars] upon each.” Gone forever were the “ribband” sashes across the breast among generals and their aides. It is worth noting that post-1780 copies of Peale’s 1779 original portrait typically show the three stars on the epaulette, while the blue ribband has disappeared.<sup>9</sup>

Later wartime and early post-war portraits of Washington by Charles Willson Peale and his brother James, Joseph Wright, Robert Edge Pine, and many others demonstrate other minor changes in the cut of various uniforms made for the commander-in-chief: round versus scalloped cuffs, lapels with bastion-shaped extensions at the upper ends (known as “lappets”), different epaulettes, etc. However, despite minor fashion concessions, Washington seems to have consciously attempted to reinforce his image as a true *Cincinnatus* or citizen-soldier by consistently adhering to a uniform “as plain as blue and buff could make it.” French officers were particularly struck by Washington’s unassuming appearance. Barbe-Marbois was surprised to find that his dress did “not differ at all from that of the soldier,” while Clermont-Crevecoeur noted that his uniform was “simple and unadorned.” Englishman George Bennet, who visited Washington at his headquarters shortly before the close of the war, left perhaps the best description:

George Washington is now just fifty years old. He is a tall, genteel figure of a man, rather exceeding six feet in height. . . . In his dress he was perfectly plain — an old blue coat faced with buff, waist-coat and britches of the latter, seemingly of the same age, and without any lace



Figure 5. Charles Willson Peale, *George Washington Before Princeton*, ca. 1780. Oil on canvas, 51 x 39 inches. Washington’s uniform had become even plainer by 1779, when he was again painted by Peale at the request of the Supreme Council of Pennsylvania. This painting is a ca. 1780 copy made for Elias Boudinot from the original 1779 life portrait. Courtesy of The Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association.



*Figure 6. John Trumbull, Washington at Verplank's Point, 1790. Oil on canvas, 30 x 20 1/8 inches. Trumbull sketched Washington on horse and on foot before beginning this magnificent portrait from life in 1790. Although the painting commemorates a Revolutionary War event, the uniform and horse equipage depicted were acquired in New York the previous year. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum.*

upon them, composed his dress. His shirt had no ruffles at the wrists, but of very fine linen. He always wears boots....His hair is a little grey and combed smoothly back from the forehead and in a small queue — no curls and but very little powder to it. Such is the man; but his character I cannot presume to describe — it is held in the highest veneration over the whole Continent.<sup>10</sup>

Although peace with Britain came at the close of 1783, Washington's stated intention to retire from public life to the peace of his Mount Vernon estate was but little realized, nor were his old uniforms relegated to gathering dust. His likeness was in great demand both in the United States and abroad, and he was besieged with requests for sittings by amateur and professional artists alike. His fame being of a martial nature, it is not surprising that the vast majority of artists chose to portray him in uniform. Yet it may also have been the choice of the sitter or his wife; Martha always demonstrated a preference for having personal portraits of "the General" (as she came to refer to her husband) done in such manner. Perhaps this predilec-

tion stemmed back to their courtship, when a dapper young colonel in Virginia regimentals won the hand of a wealthy young widow. Called back into public service to lead the Virginia delegation to the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Washington purposely packed his uniform, donning it once again to ride triumphantly into Philadelphia, escorted by the militia of the city, to the acclaim of the crowds. Besides conducting the Convention business at hand, Washington again found himself in front of the palette and brush, noting in his diary on July 2, "Set this Morning for Mr. [Robert Edge] Pine who wanted to correct his portrt. of me"(originally taken at Mount Vernon in 1785). The following morning, he "Sat before the meeting of the Convention for Mr. Peale who wanted my picture to make a print or Metzotinto by." From the resulting works, we know that Washington was still wearing a uniform of Revolutionary War vintage, with its outdated fall-down collar and rather generous cut.<sup>11</sup>

Some two years later, Washington is depicted by artists in a new coat cut in the then-current military fashion, with a "rise- and-fall" collar, narrow lapels, and a more pronounced curve to its breast, while the skirts of the waistcoat are shorter than those of the previous decade. That this new "look" is not merely artistic license can be proven from a number of sources. Trumbull painted his famous "equestrian" portrait of Washington from life during early 1790 (Figure 6). It was intended as a gift to Martha Washington and was proudly displayed in their Mount Vernon home. In a letter to the granddaughter who inherited it following Martha Washington's death in 1802, the artist verified that "in this picture every part of the Dress, the Horse & horse furniture, were carefully painted from the real objects." New York saddler John Young's original estimate to Tobias Lear for "His Excellency The President's Saddle & furniture" — including "Leopard Skin Housen and Saddle Cloth" — still survives, and the articles closely match the equipage shown on the white horse in the painting. Dated May 9, 1789, it suggests a similar date for the uniform's manufacture. The most likely candidates for tailor are Hercules Mulligan or one Bahr, both patronized by Washington during his New York residency.<sup>12</sup>

What *is* unusual about this new uniform is that, although President, Washington then held no active military rank. He may have originally commissioned the uniform for use at Society of Cincinnati meetings and military reviews, but during his Presidency (especially the troubled second term) he clearly used it as a psychological tool in which to garner popular support and approbation. The unofficial uniform served to remind viewers of the past sacrifices of its wearer in the defense of his country. As such, President Washington wore it while reviewing the militia army he called out in 1794 to suppress the so-called "rebels" during the controversial Whiskey Rebellion, as well as to less volatile, and certainly more enjoyable, official and social obligations.

One uniform of Washington's still survives (Figure 7), traditionally held to be the one he wore during the Revolutionary War. It consists of a blue coat with buff facings,

a short-skirted waistcoat, and buff breeches, all trimmed with flat gilt buttons. Unquestionably cut in the style of the late 1780s-1790s, it is probably of Presidential vintage. It bears a remarkable resemblance to that worn by Washington in portraits by Trumbull, John Ramage, Edward Savage (Figure 8) and others executed between 1789 and 1796. However, physical examination of the coat reveals that epaulettes — always shown in the portraits — were never worn on its shoulders. The possibility that this outfit served as some form of undress uniform is supported by an inventory, in Washington's hand, of clothing to be shipped back to Mount Vernon following his retirement from office in 1797. In this slip of paper, he lists both a "Full Suit of Regimentals" and a full suit of "half Ditto." The existing uniform, now in the National Museum of American History, is probably the "half regimentals" or undress uniform noted above.<sup>13</sup>

Following the outbreak of the Quasi-War with France in 1798, President John Adams appointed Washington lieutenant general and "commander-in-chief" of the existing troops of the United States Army and the provisional regiments then raising for the crisis. Washington selected his old aide-de-camp Alexander Hamilton as his second-in-command. The latter took the active lead in organizing, recruiting, and training the troops — Washington intending to take actual command only if invasion actually materialized. Hamilton, with the participation of Washington and others, developed detailed regulations for the army's uniforms, including elaborately embroidered coats for the commander-in-chief and general officers. Washington was delighted that the traditional blue and buff that he had so long worn would be continued in the general officers' uniforms, but was uncomfortable with the embroidered buttonholes and edging proposed. Shortly after submitting the first draft of the new regulations under his signature in December 1798, he confessed to Secretary of War James McHenry, another former aide, that on "re-considering the Uniform for the Commander in Chief, it has become a matter of doubt with me (although, as it respected myself, *personally*, I was against *all* Embroidery), whether embroidery on the Cape, Cuffs and Pockets of the Coat, and none on the *Buff* waistcoat, would not have a disjointed, and aukward appearance." Leaving the final decisions to McHenry (and Hamilton), he noted that he would have his Philadelphia tailor, James McAlpin, "apply to, and follow your directions in making the Uniform" but again-noted that "I should not prefer a heavy embroidery, or one containing much work."

He was clearly uncomfortable with the idea of wearing an elaborate uniform made in the courtly manner of Europe, especially after wearing a plain uniform for nearly twenty-five years. However, his existing uniforms were no longer stylish and were, in light of their repeated use, possibly quite threadbare. Strong-willed and detail-oriented to the end, Washington set out guidelines to ensure that his own sense of quality and comfort would be strictly adhered to. He directed that the "blue cloth be of the best and softest French or Spanish" and "the Buff of the very best sort, fine, and not inclining to yellow or Orange,



*Figure 7. Uniform of George Washington. Of 1790s cut, this uniform is probably the "half regimentals" or undress uniform listed by Washington in a 1797 inventory. It was formerly believed to have been his Revolutionary War uniform. Courtesy of the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.*

like what I have been accustomed to wear," while the "Cuffs of the Coat neither large, nor tight; observing a just medium between the two." Whatever the final patterns decided for the garments by others, he reminded McAlpin that it was his "wish that they be with me by the 22d. of Feby." Unable to locate suitable gold thread or a competent embroiderer, McAlpin failed to ship the uniform for that key date — the sixty-seventh anniversary of Washington's birth and the day selected by his beloved step-granddaughter Nelly Custis for her marriage. Hopeful to receive it in time for the town of Alexandria's 4th of July celebrations, Washington would again be disappointed by his tailor. The problematic uniform would still remain uncompleted while Washington struggled with his last breath on the cold, dreary afternoon of December 14, 1799.<sup>14</sup>

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Figure 8. Edward Savage, *The Washington Family, American, 1789-1790*. Oil on wood, 18 1/8 x 24 1/8 inches. Courtesy, Winterthur Museum.

<sup>1</sup> Robert A. Rutland, ed., *The Papers of George Mason, 1725-1792*, I (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1970), pp. 210-212; Murray H. Nelligan, "G.W.P. Custis Letters on Revolutionary War Uniforms," *The Military Collector & Historian*, III (1951), pp. 21-22.

<sup>2</sup> In the eighteenth century, a "suit of regimentals" typically meant a uniform coat, waistcoat, and breeches. Washington's gorget is now in the Massachusetts Historical Society's collections. Traditionally, this gorget has been believed to be the one Washington wore as colonel of the Virginia Regiment. However, the officers of that regiment wore silver gorgets with the Royal coat of arms engraved thereon, as shown in the 1772 Peale portrait of Washington in his French and Indian War uniform (Washington & Lee University collection), while the surviving gorget is of gilded copper alloy and bears the Virginia coat of arms. Washington ordered "4 Gorgets [double gilt like the one earlier sent to him] having the Virginia arms engraved" and which were to be "somewhat smaller than the last" for use of the Prince William Independent Company on January 22, 1775. Beverly H. Runge, et. als., eds., *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series*, vol. 10 (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), pp. 173-174, 189-191, 214-216, 220-225, 240-50, and 294-295; Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, Lund Washington Account Book, f. 32a-b.

<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia tailor John Galloway received payment of £12.0.0 on 21 June 1775, while the following day Washington paid £6.6.0 to John Cottringer [or Cottringer], another tailor of that city, for work done. It is almost certain that Washington commissioned a new suit of regimentals for himself from Galloway based on the costs. In comparison, in April 1776 artist Charles Willson Peale "paid Mr. Cottringer for a suit of Regementals 12 £-5s-0," a similar amount less than a year later for making his uniform as an officer in the fashionable Philadelphia Associators. Cottringer probably made new livery and clothing for Washington's servants, judging by the charges and related tailoring records from the Washington Papers. Washington would not purchase another suit of regimentals until April 1777, when he again hired Galloway (who billed him £9.16.3 for labor and sundry trimmings, less cloth and coat buttons). Library of Congress, *George Washington Papers*, series 5; Lillian Miller, ed., *The Selected Papers of Charles Willson Peale and His Family*, I (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 177, 191.

<sup>4</sup> James Thacher, *The American Revolution... Given in the Form of a Daily Journal...* (New York: 1857), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1931-44), vol. 3, p. 339.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 25, p. 319.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 492, vol. 30, pp. 247-48.

<sup>8</sup> New York Historical Society, Horatio Gates Papers, vol. 20, item 634; Fitzpatrick, vol. 7, pp. 452-453, vol. 26, pp. 60, 243; Laurens to Duponceau, n.d. [January 1778?], Doc. 20-2 in John Reed Manuscript Coll., Valley Forge National Historical Park; Mease to Washington, May 12, 1777, in LC, *The Washington Papers*, series 4.

<sup>9</sup> Gilbert Chinard, *Washington as the French Knew Him* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 74-77; Fitzpatrick, vol. 19, pp. 21-22.

<sup>10</sup> Chinard, pp. 74-77; Howard C. Rice, Jr., trans. and ed., *The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), vol. I, p. 25; Fitzpatrick, vol. 26, p. 321; Benson Lossing, ed., *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington by His Adopted Son, George Washington Parke Custis* (New York: 1860), p. 165.

<sup>11</sup> Donald Jackson and Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979-), vol. V, pp. 170-175.

<sup>12</sup> Letter, John Trumbull to Eliza Parke Custis, May 1, 1829, Winterthur Museum; the manuscript estimate was purchased in 1997 by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association; Fitzpatrick, vol. 31, p. 474, vol. 37, p. 304.

<sup>13</sup> This uniform had originally been given the U.S. Patent Office by George Washington Parke Custis, along with other Washington relics donated and loaned for public display. It was later transferred to the Smithsonian Institution upon establishment of the National Museum. The tradition that this was Washington's Revolutionary War uniform began as early as the 1850s, when historian Benson Lossing interviewed Custis about Washington's military equipage. Custis told him it was the uniform worn by Washington as "Commander-in-Chief"; what had been overlooked was that Washington again served in this capacity at the request of President John Adams during the Quasi-War with France, from 1798 until his death on December 14, 1799. Photostat copy of May 6, 1797 clothing list in *The Washington Papers*, series 9, LC.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzpatrick, vol. 37, pp. 51-54, 109-12, 127-29, 206-7, 230-31, 254; McAlpin letters to Washington, in *The Washington Papers*, series 4, roll 114.