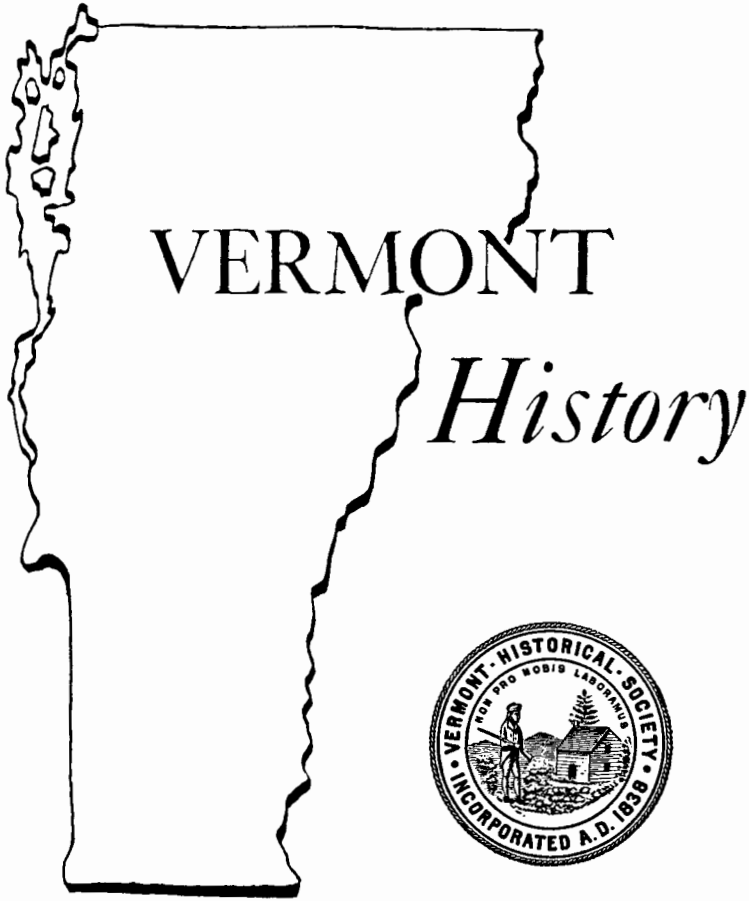


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Besides obtaining information about the Americans and reporting it to their superiors in Canada, these spies had grandiose schemes involving sabotage and political kidnappings. . . .

The British Secret Service in the Champlain Valley During the Haldimand Negotiations, 1780-1783

By IAN C. PEMBERTON

BY THE LATE YEARS of the Revolutionary War, the northern frontiers of New York and Vermont were ringed with a series of British posts ranging from Fort Niagara in the west to Dutchman's Point on North Hero Island in Lake Champlain in the east. Scouting activities originated at virtually all these posts, but their objectives were usually of a local nature, providing information upon which their commanders could act. Increasingly, however, the Lake Champlain route came to be regarded as the chief highway for the passage of intelligence to the seat of British military and civil authority in Canada, Quebec City. To a considerable degree, this development was a result of the sensitive political and geophysical nature of the Champlain Valley, the traditional and oft-travelled invasion route between Canada and her southern neighbours.

General Frederick Haldimand, Governor of Quebec and Commander-in-chief of British forces in Canada after June 1778, was especially apprehensive that an American invasion might be launched in the wake of the disastrous Saratoga campaign in order to expunge the defeat of the Canadian venture of Montgomery and Arnold during the first heady year of the War. For that reason he ordered the construction of Fort Haldimand on Carleton Island at the eastern end of Lake Ontario to protect the Saint Lawrence route¹, but his chief concern was the Richelieu-Champlain

1. Major C. C. J. Bond, "The British Base at Carleton Island," *Ontario History*, L11, number 1, March 1960, 1-16.

area. Engineers began work to strengthen this frontier by improving the defenses of Isle-aux-Noix and St. Johns as well as at Quebec City itself.² The construction of the small advance post of Loyal Block House at Dutchman's Point on North Hero Island in the summer of 1781 further augmented the efforts to protect Canada's southern gateway by providing a forward location from which vital intelligence could be gathered.³ Haldimand's apprehension was additionally heightened by the relatively small force at his disposal for the defense of the province. In the event of attack, he estimated that at best he could muster 2500 men, a demonstration sufficiently large to threaten the Mohawk or Onion River Valleys, but scarcely adequate to deal with a major invasion.⁴

Other factors than fear of attack also worked to emphasise the importance and desirability of the Champlain Valley as a source and channel of intelligence. British naval supremacy on the Lake had been established by Guy Carleton's victory over Benedict Arnold in the engagement of Valcour Island in October 1776, and not even the debacle of the Burgoyne Campaign had seen the British surrender this advantage. Thus scouting parties could ply Lake Champlain in relative safety. Furthermore the southern end of the Lake was heavily populated with "Friends of Government" who could be counted upon to supply information. Of considerable importance also was the question of the Haldimand Negotiations themselves which were carried on from October 1780 until the end of the Revolutionary War in a climate which was marked by frustration and secrecy. The temper of Vermont and its attitude toward a return to the rule of His Britannic Majesty were of very great interest to the governor of Quebec and to his superiors, Sir Henry Clinton in New York and Lord George Germain in London.⁵

In June 1781, Governor Haldimand appointed Justus Sherwood, a Vermont loyalist and a former Green Mountain Boy and who had served as a scout for Burgoyne, as the officer in charge of secret service activities on the northern frontier. Sherwood was thoroughly familiar with Vermont, having lived in Sunderland and in New Haven before the War.⁶ By the time of his secret service appointment, he was deeply involved with the Haldimand Negotiations, having already held two lengthy discussions with

2. J. M. Hitsman, *Safeguarding Canada, 1763-1871* (Toronto, 1968), 44.

3. Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC): Frederick Haldimand Papers, Series B, Volumes 176, 142, Sherwood to Mathews, July 1, 1781.

4. Jean N. McIlwraith, *Sir Frederick Haldimand* (Toronto, 1910), 126-27.

5. The Henry Clinton Papers and Lord George Germain Papers, William Clements Library, Ann Arbor, Michigan reflect this interest.

6. Vermont Division of Public Records, Sunderland Deeds and Vital Records, I, 78. New Haven Deeds and Vital Records, I, 83.

Ethan Allen at Castleton and Ira Allen at Isle-aux-Noix.⁷ In every respect Sherwood was a logical choice to head the vital effort to gather intelligence from the Champlain Valley.⁸ His first undertaking was the construction of Loyal Block House to serve as a centre for both secret service activities and for carrying on negotiations with the Vermonters.

The secret service operated in a basically simple and uncomplicated manner. Scouts were usually volunteers from a Loyalist regiment or civilians who made their way to British lines. A number of agents lived permanently behind enemy lines where they kept their eyes and ears open and reported to Quebec through scouts who would seek them out. One such resident-agent was Elnathan Merwin of Arlington, Vermont who wrote his dispatches under the pseudonym of "Plain Truth".⁹ Men on scouting duty were also to gather newspapers and any other information they could find. Discretion was most important, and was frequently lacking in a breed of men who tended to be highly individualistic.

During the early stages of the Haldimand Negotiations before the shattering news of Cornwallis' defeat at Yorktown had penetrated to the Champlain Valley and blighted British hopes, Vermont's attitude toward a union with Congress or a reunion with Great Britain had been of consuming interest to the secret service. Scouts on missions to Vermont were always urged to relay any information which might indicate the state of the public mood. The Vermont negotiators, Ira Allen and Joseph Fay, were continually suggesting that the time for reunion was not quite right, thus emphasizing the need for an ongoing flow of intelligence.¹⁰ After Yorktown, British priorities changed sharply as rumours spread that a Franco-American invasion would shortly be heading for Quebec. Early in February 1782, Captain Robert Mathews, Governor Haldimand's hard-working military secretary, wrote to Sherwood that an invasion of Quebec was anticipated via the upper Connecticut River Valley. Mathews left no doubt as to the anxiety which was felt at the capital: "I am commanded by His Excellency to acquaint you [with] the indispensable necessity of procuring authentic intelligence of the Enemy's preparations and motions in every quarter [which] is such that no pains, no trouble or expense must be spared to effect it."¹¹

7. See Sherwood's Journal, Part I, *Vermont History*, XXIV, no. 2, April 1956, 101-109; Part II, *Vermont History*, XXIV, no. 3, July 1956, 211-219.

8. PAC: B 179, 52, Haldimand to Sherwood, June 18, 1781.

9. PAC: B 177, 123-124, Report of "Plain Truth", March 10, 1782 provides an example of Merwin employing his cover name.

10. For example, see: PAC: B 176, 220-21, Sherwood to Mathews, August 15, 1781.

11. PAC: B 179-1, 177, Mathews to Sherwood, February 2, 1782.

Sherwood required no urging. His heartfelt desire to woo the Vermonters back to British rule had to be subordinated in view of the increasingly ominous signs which his scouts reported from the south. By January 29, he had received a report to the effect that 4000 French troops were gathering at Albany and were to be augmented by 6000 American volunteers, the entire force to operate in cooperation with the French fleet of Admiral De Grasse.¹² Two weeks later another report had arrived at Loyal Block House which suggested that General Washington was attempting to raise 25000 troops for a spring offensive against either Canada or New York.¹³ Sherwood decided to issue a general order to all resident agents to underscore the crucial need for intelligence in this threatening situation:

[We must learn] Washington's particular objective in reinforcing his army with so large a number of new levies. Whatever his object may be, you will do well to communicate it as soon as you can, but should it be this province, it is expected that you will at any expense or risk immediately dispatch different messengers, unknown to each other, to this post . . . with the particulars sealed and directed to His Excellency . . . The Agents for secret service, your messengers, will be rewarded well and either detained or sent back to you direct. Your bills for whatever expenses you necessarily incur . . . will at any time be honoured here and the money will be sent you by the first safe opportunity.¹⁴

Intelligence received by the end of February seemed to confirm the need for vigilance. Corporal Mathias Snetzinger reported that 8000 stands of arms and as many suits of clothing had been deposited at Claverack on the east bank of the Hudson south of Albany, while British cannons taken at Yorktown had been transported to Hartford, Connecticut. A force of 7000 French troops with some American support was said to be in readiness for a march on Canada via the Mohawk and Connecticut valleys.¹⁵ Sherwood dispatched a party of scouts to southern Vermont where they could maintain a general reconnaissance and keep a particularly sharp watch on the Connecticut route.¹⁶ During this difficult period, a scout was also placed on special duty to report directly from Albany to Quebec without going through the customary channels.¹⁷

The month of March brought more than the first promise of spring to the harried Sherwood and the apprehensive Haldimand. The worrying rumours of invasion began melting away with the winter snows. A report filed with Sherwood's assistant, George Smyth, at St. Johns on March 9 indicated no

12. PAC: B 177, 21-22, Sherwood to Mathews, January 30, 1782.

13. PAC: B 177, 46-47, Ensign Thomas Sherwood's report, February 13, 1782.

14. PAC: B 177, 48-49, General order by Justus Sherwood to all his agents, February 14, 1782.

15. PAC: B 177, 79-80, Corporal Snetzinger's report, February 24, 1782.

16. PAC: B 177, 96, Sherwood to Mathews, March 2, 1782.

17. PAC: B 179-1, 200-01, Mathews to Smyth, February 24, 1782.

American invasion preparations were underway, and that such few Continental troops as there were at Albany and in the Mohawk Valley were ill-equipped.¹⁸ Elnathan Merwin corroborated this general observation, and declared that the report that Washington was being reinforced for a blow to the northward was simply a ruse to attempt to maintain the army's morale.¹⁹ Both Merwin and a scout, Ensign Thomas Sherwood, Justus' cousin, reported that the French were nowhere in evidence on the northern frontier.²⁰ Indeed all evidence seemed to indicate that they were returning to Europe, their continued presence a source of discord among their American allies, many of whom were now questioning the wisdom of a "perpetual alliance" with so traditional and fundamental a foe as the French court. In fact domestic disorders were declared to be common in western Massachusetts and Connecticut where dissatisfaction over heavy taxes, conservative courts, and general economic depression made the local Whigs targets of popular scorn.²¹ Despite these encouraging signs Justus Sherwood still reminded his agents that he needed all the information they could give him on the state, numbers, and movements of the Continental forces.²² The secret service based in the Champlain Valley genuinely represented Canada's first line of defense.

The service was not confined simply to gathering information. Its rather free-wheeling nature lent itself well to such grandiose schemes as political kidnappings and sabotage. At one time or another, several prominent Vermonters were mentioned as potential victims including Governor Thomas Chittenden,²³ Ethan Allen,²⁴ and Jacob Bayley of Newbury, a noted opponent of reunion with Britain. As both Chittenden and Allen were involved in the Haldimand Negotiations, no effort was ever made to carry them off. An attempt to seize Bayley in June 1782 failed when the intended victim was warned and removed himself from danger.²⁵ A plot to kidnap Philip Schuyler from his home near Albany failed for lack of security; Schuyler, apprised of approaching danger, posted a guard of six men and drove off his would-be abductors.²⁶ The only major kidnapping success occurred in

18. PAC: B 177, 117-19, Smyth to Mathews, March 9, 1782.

19. PAC: B 177, 123-24, Report of "Plain Truth", March 10, 1782.

20. PAC: B 177, 148-51, Ensign Thomas Sherwood's report, March 22, 1782.

21. See Robert J. Taylor, *Western Massachusetts in the Revolution* (Providence, 1954), 104-105, 118.

22. For example, see PAC: B 177, 252-53, Sherwood to Colonel Asa Porter, May 1, 1782. Colonel Porter of Haverhill, New Hampshire was one of Sherwood's resident agents.

23. PAC: B 182, 245-47, Sherwood to Brigadier-General Powell, August 24, 1780.

24. PAC: B 161, 306-7, Edward Jessup to Haldimand, August 8, 1781.

25. PAC: B 177, 365-66, Sherwood to Mathews, June 19, 1782; B 177, 367-70, Azariah Pritchard's report, June 21, 1782, Charles Miner Thompson, *Independent Vermont* (Boston, 1942), 441-42.

26. New York Public Library: Schuyler Papers, John Mc Kenstrey to Philip Schuyler, August 5, 1781. Martin H. Bush, *Revolutionary Enigma: A Reappraisal of General Philip Schuyler of New York* (Port Washington, 1969), 154-55. PAC B 176, 225-26, Smyth to Mathews, August 17, 1781.

March 1781 when Colonel Thomas Johnson of Newbury was seized at Peacham, Vermont, and carried off to St. Johns. Johnson convinced his captors that he was truly a Tory and was able to effect his release in October on condition that he become a resident agent. Colonel Johnson happily agreed and spent the balance of the War acting as a double agent.²⁷ On balance one must question the value of political kidnappings; the intended victims displayed an aggravating awareness of their intended fate, and the one successful action in the case of Colonel Johnson was scarcely worth the candle.

The opportunities for sabotage were limited, but one opportunity did present itself when George Smyth learned in November 1781 that the Americans were building a 74-gun ship of the line at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Smyth declared that he had two men who were prepared to go to Portsmouth, get jobs in the shipyard, and then burn the vessel shortly before her completion.²⁸ The ship's construction, however, was being carefully overseen by Captain John Paul Jones, conqueror of the *Serapis* and a naval man of no mean proportions. Jones maintained a nightly guard which he personally financed, and the two would-be incendiaries thus had little opportunity to complete their task.²⁹ Thanks to the devotion of Jones, the ship, christened the *America*, was duly launched on November 5, 1782, and was immediately given to the French Navy by Congress as a symbol of Franco-American solidarity.

Another aspect of secret service work was counter-espionage. In July 1781 Mathews instructed both Sherwood and Smyth to find out who the enemy agents in Canada were, a problem complicated by the presence of so many Loyalist fugitives, particularly around Montreal.³⁰ It was relatively simple for a rebel agent to masquerade as a Loyalist, and in this guise move freely about behind British lines. George Smyth discovered that a Mrs. Cheshire in Montreal was supposedly providing information and lodging to enemy agents.³¹ Smyth subsequently dispatched a party of men whom he described as "three cunning fellows" to seek out Mrs. Cheshire, and to pretend to be recent arrivals from New England. These counterspies were suitably equipped with old clothes, Yankee firelocks, Vermont and Connecticut currency, and a forged letter from Jacob Bayley to add authenticity to their disguise.³² At about the same time, Corporal Snetzinger discovered

27. Benjamin H. Hall, *History of Eastern Vermont* (New York, 1858), 667-69. Frederic P. Wells, *History of Newbury, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury, 1902), 385-86. Vermont Historical Society Collections, IV, The Upper Connecticut, II, 87, 129.

28. PAC: B 176, 335, Smyth to Mathews, November 10, 1781.

29. Lincoln Lorenz, *John Paul Jones: fighter for freedom and glory* (Annapolis, 1943), 494.

30. PAC: B 179-1, 65, Mathews to Sherwood, July 19, 1781.

31. PAC: B 176, 293-95, Smyth to Mathews, September 29, 1781.

32. PAC: B 176, 331, Smyth to Mathews, November 7, 1781.

through friends in Schenectady the identities of three men who were connected with Mrs. Cheshire. Sherwood subsequently noted that the men were artisans named Knowles, Malcolm, and Phillips, who carried on the trades of shoemaker, breechesmaker, and carpenter respectively.³³ In late November the trio was arrested, and Haldimand requested specific written proof of their guilt.³⁴ Sherwood raised the question with Snetzinger, who felt certain that he could obtain such proof through his contacts in Schenectady.³⁵

The operation of the service itself revealed many specific problems which hampered its general operation. There was always a dearth of reliable volunteers, and competition for the services of skilled workmen was invariably lively.³⁶ Vital supplies were often lacking, including such varied items as blankets, coats, caps, mittens, leggings, moccasins, candles, butter, treacle (used in the making of spruce beer), andirons, fire shovels and tongs, and medical supplies.³⁷ Payment for services rendered also raised difficulties. Quebec took the view that men who were fed and clothed from government stores should not require much of an additional stipend. The scouts disagreed with this parsimonious view, not unreasonably noting that their lives were in grave danger on every mission which they undertook.³⁸ Sherwood was authorized to pay good wages to his better scouts in order to encourage them. By 1783 a topflight courier was being paid £20 to carry dispatches between Quebec and New York.³⁹

The indiscretion of individual scouts both while on their missions and after their return to Canada was a constant source of concern. One notorious example involved Joseph Bettys, formerly of Ballston, New York, whom Lorenzo Sabine described as "a shrewd, intelligent, daring and bad man" whose career in the British service was marked "by almost every enormity that can disgrace a human being."⁴⁰ In August 1781 Bettys "kidnapped" a young woman named Lagrange from Norman's Kill near Albany and brought her back to St. Johns. Three of the four men in Bettys' scouting party subsequently deserted him, and when Bettys himself finally

33. PAC: B 176, 369-71, Sherwood to Mathews, December 28, 1781.

34. PAC: B 179-1, 160-61, Haldimand to Smyth, November 26, 1781.

35. PAC: B 176, 369-71, Sherwood to Mathews, December 28, 1781.

36. PAC: B 177, 291, Sherwood to Mathews, May 15, 1782, B 179-2, 16, Mathews to Sherwood, May 21, 1782.

37. PAC: B 161, 399, Edward Jessup to Mathews, February 14, 1782; 179-1, 197, Mathews to Sherwood, February 18, 1782; B 177, 556, Sherwood to Mathews, October 27, 1782; B 177, 608-10, Sherwood to Nairne, November 27, 1782; B 178, 64, Sherwood to Mathews, February 2, 1783; B 161, 474, Sherwood to Nairne, December 31, 1782.

38. For example: PAC: B 177, 641-655, Sherwood to Mathews, December 27 and 28, 1782.

39. PAC: B 178, 36, Sherwood to Mathews, January 16, 1783.

40. Lorenzo Sabine, *Biographical Sketches of Loyalists of the American Revolution* (2 Vols., 1864) I, 228.

returned to St. Johns, he had no intelligence to report. With the Yorktown campaign just entering a crucial stage in Virginia, Bettys' dereliction of duty was quite incredible. Crusty old George Smyth who had no sympathy for this sort of malingering wrote to Captain Mathews: "He is now confin'd to the garrison for refusing to deliver up his Desdamona, who he has secreted. Should this Dame be sent back, I think he will not be long after her. . . ." ⁴¹ Despite his irresponsible behaviour, Bettys was used on scouting duty until his capture and execution at Albany in the spring of 1782. ⁴² His continued employment in this work serves to emphasise the scarcity of willing and knowledgeable scouts.

A less spectacular but no less damaging sort of behavior was that associated with loose tongues. One usually reliable scout, Roger Stevens, made his way to Quebec after reporting to Loyal Block House early in February 1782. Stevens had been in Vermont for a month, and his report to Sherwood had contained a great deal of valuable intelligence. However, within two days of his arrival in the provincial capital, virtually the whole town knew of his mission. Mathews described the process of this breach of security to George Smyth, and urged both him and Sherwood to do everything in their power to stress the absolute necessity for silence and discretion:

It is easy to trace the source of this unpardonable conduct — Mr. Stevens and other messengers arrive. The inquisitive and impertinent flock round them for news, they sit down together to pass the evening, and over their glass make the business they have been upon, the topic of conversation — from thence they retire to their homes and renew the subject with their wives and families, and by the first Post or Express, it is conveyed all over the country, no matter whether by friends or enemies, the effect is the same. ⁴³

There were other scouts in the secret service who also managed to combine thoughtlessness and malice in dangerous proportions, both for the cause they served and for their fellow workers. Sergeant Moses Hurlbert created a sensation on a mission to Arlington, Vermont, early in 1783 when he appeared drunk at a dance being held next door to Governor Chittenden's residence and began openly recruiting among the astonished Vermonters. ⁴⁴ Benjamin Patterson, accused by another agent of being a Whig who had been compelled to flee from his home in the Coos country of New Hampshire to avoid criminal prosecution, turned the secret service upside down in an attempt to prove his innocence. Patterson seems to have

41. PAC: B 176, 270, Smyth to Mathews, September 4, 1781.

42. PAC: B 177, 303-06, Sherwood to Mathews, May 19, 1782.

43. PAC: B 179-1, 185-86, Mathews to Smyth, February 14, 1782.

44. PAC: B 178, 15-16, Smyth to Mathews, January 8, 1783.

been a rather pathetic character, an insecure bungler desperately searching for a scapegoat, essentially well-meaning but ignorant and incapable of performing the demanding tasks of the service.⁴⁵ Azariah Pritchard, on the other hand, was a scout who seemed to do most things well. Clever, ambitious, ubiquitous, quick to take credit for success and slow to accept blame for setbacks, Pritchard aroused the suspicion of his superiors when he began reporting false information in order to lengthen the time of his missions behind enemy lines.⁴⁶ It transpired that he was involved in trading activities with the enemy which had been specifically forbidden by Governor Haldimand.⁴⁷ After November 1782, Pritchard was not regarded as sufficiently reliable for further secret service work.⁴⁸

It would however be an injustice to suggest that the entire secret service was staffed with knaves and incompetents. Sherwood had words of praise for Eli Hawley who served as a courier on the Quebec-New York route — “a very active discreet young man” — and for Joseph Wright, whose “stability, secrecy, and knowledge of the ruling men in Vermont” made him extremely valuable.⁴⁹ Another trustworthy scout was Corporal David Crowfoot who was not overly discerning, but extremely loyal and faithful, and who had proved his value as a go-between during the Haldimand Negotiations. After Pritchard had been removed from the roster of active scouts, Sherwood assured one of his resident agents in Vermont that only men of the calibre of Wright, Crowfoot, and Hawley would be used in his neighbourhood thereafter.⁵⁰

One of Sherwood’s best scouts in the latter stage of the war was John Savage, a young Vermont Tory who had been exchanged and subsequently arrived at the Loyal Block House in August 1782.⁵¹ Both Sherwood and Smyth were impressed with him, and Mathews duly told them that Haldimand approved of their using him on secret service work.⁵² Savage soon repaid their faith. By the end of October Sherwood was reporting that the new recruit had developed a “constant communication to New York and to Washington’s army which he thinks so well established as to enable him to furnish His Excellency with direct and authentic intelligence once a month [over] the ensuing winter . . .”⁵³ Besides this achievement Savage also

45. PAC: B 177, 360-62, Benjamin Patterson to Mathews, June 17, 1782; B 177, 402-03, Sworn statement by eight Loyalist soldiers in favour of Benjamin Patterson, July 28, 1782.

46. PAC: B 137, 347-48, Sherwood to de Riedesel, November 12, 1782.

47. PAC: B 177, 565, Sherwood to Smyth, October 30, 1782; B 177, 610, Sherwood to Major Nairne, November 27, 1782.

48. PAC: B 177, 610, Sherwood to Nairne, November 27, 1782.

49. PAC: B 177, 604-5, Sherwood to Mathews, November 26, 1782.

50. PAC: B 177, 640, Sherwood to Jacob Lansing, November 28, 1782.

51. PAC: B 177, 467-72, Sherwood and Smyth to Mathews, August 28, 1782.

52. PAC: B 179-2, 72-74, Mathews to Sherwood and Smyth, September 2, 1782.

53. PAC: B 177, 554-55, Sherwood to Mathews, October 27, 1782.

brought back information about the desire for trade with Canada and the unpopularity of both Congress and the French Alliance.⁵⁴ During that winter Savage continued his good work, giving Sherwood no reason for regretting having taken him into the service. In March 1783 the often harrassed commandant of the Loyal Block House heartily praised the hard-working and useful Vermonter: "Mr. Savage is wholly bent on doing Government Service, in which I think he appears to be the most sincerely zealous man I have ever met with from the Colonies."⁵⁵

A division of command in any organization can be a source of trouble, and such a division did exist in the secret service between Justus Sherwood and Doctor George Smyth. The latter, a resident of Fort Edward, New York, who had been arrested and imprisoned at Albany for his Tory sentiments, had escaped to Quebec and subsequently arrived at the Loyal Block House in July 1781 where he was to assist Sherwood both with the secret service and the conduct of the Haldimand Negotiations. Sherwood who had found the negotiations to be a tiring and very lonely affair was pleased to have Smyth on hand to assist him: "the first man in Canada that I could have wished for in this business."⁵⁶ Smyth also clearly understood that Sherwood was the man in charge, as Mathews noted: "I am further to acquaint you . . . that notwithstanding you and Dr. Smyth act together, he will always look upon you as the principal and original agent in whatever may be transacted . . ."⁵⁷ Until the end of 1781 the two men appeared to work together harmoniously. However at the beginning of 1782, Smyth stayed at St. Johns, while Sherwood, after a brief holiday respite with his family, returned to the relative isolation of the Loyal Block House. Mathews explained to Smyth that in the future all scouts would be sent through Sherwood's post, and he earnestly hoped that the two men would continue to cooperate in forwarding the secret service and would not permit personal feelings to interfere with their work.⁵⁸

This state of affairs clearly brought home to Smyth his inferior position and he was unhappy about it. He attempted to assert his independence by sending out a mission to Albany which pointedly did not stop at the Loyal Block House before heading south. Sherwood felt slighted by the omission, and Captain Mathews had to utilize his diplomatic talents to settle the squabble.⁵⁹ At the same time, Mathews strongly urged Sherwood not to permit friction to occur: "The General has taken such pains to conciliate

54. PAC: B 177, 558-60, Sherwood to Mathews, October 29, 1782.

55. PAC: B 178, 129, Sherwood to Mathews, March 13, 1783.

56. PAC: B 176, 155, Sherwood to Mathews, July 14, 1781.

57. PAC: B 179-1, 63, Mathews to Sherwood, July 19, 1781.

58. PAC: B 179-1, 168-69, Mathews to Smyth, January 13, 1782.

59. PAC: B 179-1, 189-95, Mathews to Smyth and Sherwood, February 18, 1782.

and keep all jarring intentions to the service . . . at a distance that it is cruel and vicious to oppose his views.”⁶⁰ Sherwood openly declared that, to the best of his knowledge, his relations with Doctor Smyth were excellent.⁶¹ Future developments would indicate that he was either not being entirely candid, or more likely, that he had underestimated Smyth’s deep feeling of resentment.

Captain Mathews was well aware that things were not as they should be. In June 1782 he dispatched a private letter to Smyth in which he deplored the “unworthy jealousy” which still afflicted the service.⁶² Two months later Sherwood wrote “of the disputes and jealousies at St. Johns,” which led “incoming parties of Loyalists . . . to believe that the service is carried on by juntos and parties at variance, such for instance as Pritchard’s and Patterson’s party — Sherwood’s and Smyth’s etc.”⁶³ On March 4, 1783 Sherwood indicated that all was still not well when he wrote privately to Mathews, saying that it was better if he sent his reports to Haldimand via Smyth at St. Johns to avoid “uneasiness.”⁶⁴

In a conflict of this nature, from which Haldimand certainly suffered as he greatly depended on accurate intelligence, both Sherwood and Smyth were probably to blame. Smyth, however, would seem in retrospect to be the more guilty party. His health was poor, he was frequently cantankerous, his son Terrence was still a prisoner in Albany for a period after his own escape, and he obviously felt that he was not receiving his due. He never specifically attacked Sherwood in his correspondence, but there was frequently an edginess when he spoke of this younger man who was placed higher than himself. Smyth did not improve his position or his own tortured mind by adopting a balanced view; he was always very impressed by his own bravery, cleverness, and importance. He concluded one of his official letters to Mathews with the odd statement: “orient intelligence is of no weight, and Black Birds spray upon my branches in the south.” Mathews, asked by Haldimand for an explanation of this cryptic remark, was unable to furnish one, and rather testily requested that Smyth be more explicit in the future.⁶⁵ On another occasion, Smyth reported on a mysterious Captain Tisdall who had sought him out at St. Johns and was very anxious to correspond with him. Although he did not say so, Smyth tried hard to suggest by innuendo that he was sufficiently influential and valuable that he could be a double agent if he so wished.⁶⁶ Perhaps the best example of his

60. PAC: B 179-1, 196, Mathews to Sherwood, February 18, 1782.

61. PAC: B 177, 71, Sherwood to Mathews, February 22, 1782.

62. PAC: B 179-2, 22-23, Mathews to Smyth, June 10, 1782.

63. PAC: B 177, 439-40, Sherwood to Mathews, August 16, 1782.

64. PAC: B 178, 112, Sherwood to Mathews, March 4, 1783.

65. PAC: B 179-1, 91, Mathews to Smyth, February 18, 1782.

66. PAC: B 177, 104-12, Smyth to Mathews, March 6, 1782.

character was provided by a letter which he wrote to Mathews in September 1784:

Through me the secret service was carried on, and if it was not for me, not three out of the numbers that corresponded with us would afford or assist us with intelligence. This is notoriously known to him who has the merit of my indefatigable endeavours. I wish no man ill; nor do I envy any man for his happiness, but lament myself for not being taken a little more notice of at a time when I most need it; and when, I think, my past services deserve it. Captain Sherwood told me from time to time that His Excellency, the Commander in Chief, had promised *him* that after the war, he would make us independent, and fully reward us for our attention to the business we was [sic] employed in. It may be that I have been sufficiently rewarded, and so I am if beggary and a loss of property be my stipendiary.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the British secret service in the Champlain Valley is that it functioned as well as it did. That it worked under severe handicaps and limitations is readily evident from the letters and reports of its harassed operatives. It was called upon to cover a broad range of the northern frontier and to perform a variety of difficult and dangerous tasks. Its primary purpose on balance would appear to have been defensive — even such apparently offensive acts as kidnapping and sabotage were basically designed to keep the enemy off balance. Its defensive nature suggests that the British regarded the Champlain Valley almost as a *cordon sanitaire* between themselves and the revolution further south. After the fall of 1780 and the destructive Royalton raid, they ceased any serious offensive operations in that theatre and prepared to defend themselves against an attack which never came. Even the Haldimand Negotiations had a defensive value in that they neutralized Vermont and kept Congress in a state of uncertainty. A nominally independent Vermont involved in periodic negotiations was certainly preferable to a Vermont fully committed to American independence.⁶⁸ The service also demonstrated an example of British use of the Loyalists, although admittedly in dangerous work and often for small remuneration. Nonetheless it was work for which many Loyalists were well-equipped through their local knowledge and connections. As a human story, the service's history has a definite appeal: it had its heroes, its fools, its villains, its successes and failures. Given the nature of British strategy in the Champlain Valley, it probably performed adequately enough.

67. PAC: B 178, 330-31, Smyth to Mathews, September 3, 1784.

68. Thomas Albert Chadsey, "General Haldimand and the Vermont Negotiations" (Unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Ottawa, 1953) sees the negotiations as an essentially defensive move on the part of the Canadian governor.