

# A GUIDE TO OUR LESSER-KNOWN PATRIOTS

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Small-town mayors rehearse red-blooded parade speeches. Suburban fathers top off an extra tank of propane for the backyard barbecue. Underage college students recruit local derelicts to buy beer for their monstrous summer keggers.

Yes, fellow Americans, once again we are preparing to celebrate the birth of our beloved Republic.

This is all well and good, but haven't we forgotten the *true* meaning of Independence Day? Sure, July 4<sup>th</sup> commemorates our violent secession from King George III and his excessive taxation, but it's also a day to remember the brave souls who sacrificed so much to secure our liberties.

Although we must continue to worship men like Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, and Gates (Horatio, that is), we must also tip our tri-cornered hats to a group of Americans who I call the "Everyday Patriots." The following are just a few of these unsung heroes whom time has nearly forgotten.

## SILAS LARK

Lark, a butter churn maker by trade, was also a pioneer in military provisioning. Many readers will recognize his name from the "larky," a flavorless catfish-and-alfalfa filled pastry that is still eaten today by the hill people of southwestern Virginia.



The idea for a pastry that could be carried in the brim of a man's hat came to Lark in a dream. He mentions the epiphany in his diary: "This day, am recalling again those splendiferous confections of which I dreamed a fortnight ago. I am able to envision their unusual forms in my Mind, yet my rolling pin fails to yield their shapes in edible Form. Curse these wretched hands! I must struggle onward, however, as Mary [the inventor's eldest daughter] has encouraged me to present my Designs to Mr. Thomas Jefferson, Esq., of Charlottesville, in the hopes that he may present them to General Washington for employment in this Great Conflict."

True to his revolutionary spirit, Lark persevered. The larky was introduced to Washington's third regiment in the spring of 1779. Food spoilage was still not fully understood, however, and nearly 78% of the regiment expired be-

fore the cause of death was traced to the quartermaster's rancid supply of larkies. Ever the optimist, Lark thanked the Army for testing his product and said he "appreciated their valuable feedback."

## EUNICE PRATT

By the time Betsy Ross was threading her first needle, Eunice Pratt had already sewn more than three hundred anti-British flags of her own. While Ross' banners rallied the American troops and provided the emerging nation with a sense of collective identity, Pratt's daring work attempted to erode British morale. For example, many of her flags addressed the redcoats directly through such unsettling captions as, "William Saunders of Nottingham: Thou art a cuckold, and thy brood are not thine own."



Eunice Pratt chose quantity over quality, however, which is perhaps why Ross is the woman who secured a place in American history. Where Ross' flags were constructed of durable wool, Pratt cut costs by weaving her flags from straw. Indeed, not a single Pratt flag survived the famously humid summer of 1778. We are left with only the verbal history of this brave woman's efforts to spread freedom throughout our great land.

## DR. TEMPERANCE PRINGLE

Temperance Pringle's story begins in the gilded parlors and velvet carriages of the Boston Brahmins; it ends in the squalid filth of the New York State debtor's prison. Pringle did serve for two days as a field surgeon at Saratoga, but that was *before* he discovered the rum halls and rathskellers of nearby Albany.



Two months later, Pringle was nothing but a rheumy-eyed gutter drunk. A year after that he was broke and cut off from the family fortune. I mention him only to show my young readers what ironic fates befall people who don't live up to their own good names.

## "BARON" ROLPH VON KLEINHUPPER

Of all the everyday patriots, von Kleinhupper remains the most mysterious. We have little knowledge of his personal life, but scholars estimate that the legendary "Baron von Barnyard" deserted the British army in 1777 and spent the remainder of the war hiding beneath women's skirts.



Barnyard wrestling was a popular working-class diversion in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, and von Kleinhupper was its greatest champion.

In a recently discovered letter to himself, fight promoter Colonial Ronald Kingsley boasts that drunken soldiers on leave from Valley Forge gladly gave their own boots to watch the brawny Hessian grapple with a team of yearling draft horses.

An excerpt from the Sports section of the April 21, 1778 edition of *Stars and Stripes* also illustrates the intensity of the strapping Hun's celebrity:

The *Croude*, having witnessed von K. dispose of *three and six spry Beasts*, amongst them a flock of laying hens and a *wild Boar in rut*, assembled themselves underneath the *Baron* and carried him about the countryside whilst exuding all manner of *Joyous Commotion*.

The Baron's tale reminds us that those who offer our fighting men a drug-free escape from the horrors of battle are themselves a crucial ingredient for victory.

## H. FITZHUGH STUCKEY

The bastard son of a wealthy Loyalist hog bristle merchant, H. F. Stuckey failed at several occupations--coppersmith's apprentice, barrister, syndicated tea critic--before fleeing Philadelphia in 1776 to enlist in Washington's army. Unfortunately, Stuckey was declared unfit for service when a routine physical revealed that he had no legs.

Indeed, young Fitzhugh (or "Polly," as Ben Franklin often called him) suffered from a variety of maladies, among



them asthma, near-sightedness, arthritis, rickets, distemper, rubella, blood bile, bone spurs, cataracts, tennis elbow, psoriasis, "dark humors," malaria, and simple chronic halitosis. But his physical limitations could not discourage Stuckey from contributing to the cause. He became Franklin's valet after the inventor discovered that Stuckey, when wired to a kite, could conduct electricity.

The two men devised and tested hundreds of inventions, many of which had military applications. For example, did you know that H. F. Stuckey was the first man to explore the murky depths of the Delaware River in a diving bell? It's true--he did it in 1778. Having no legs, he was at the mercy of the undercurrent, though, which carried him downstream to the Chesapeake Bay. When asked if he thought the technology could be used to secretly transport spies, the valiant Stuckey replied, "For certain, but I should advise each man to take a hat full of larkies to tide him over until supper time."

Now I ask you, my fellow Americans: where else but in this wondrous land would you find such inspiring examples of resourcefulness and good old-fashioned stick-to-itiveness? For all of our sakes, I implore you to make this year's a relaxing but *reflective* Independence Day. ♣