

Alice: Hello and welcome to Queer as Fact. I'm Alice.

Irene: I'm Irene.

Jessie: And I'm Jessie! Hi!

A: We're a queer history podcast coming out on the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month, talking about people, places and topics in queer history from around the world and throughout time.

Before we begin, we just have a quick announcement for you all: Hamish has decided to move on from this podcast to other things. That won't affect our regular scheduling, and me, Irene and Eli will still be here to bring you your twice-monthly episodes. It does mean you might be hearing more new voices on our podcast, so today we have Jessie joining us. Thank you, Jessie.

J: Hi! Thank you so much for having me. This is properly exciting.

[laughter]

I: Awww.

A: Today I'll be talking to you about Baron von Steuben, a Prussian-born soldier who has been called the father of the American army. Steuben we suggested to us by a couple of people on Tumblr: an anonymous request and one from 22degreehalo, so thank you for bringing him to our attention. He's been a lot of fun to research.

[intro music plays]

A: Before we get started just a couple of content warnings for this episode: this episode takes place during the American Revolutionary War, with everything that an 18th-century war includes. There are also some discussions of paedophilia, and there's one use of a homophobic slur in a quotation. So if any of that sounds like something you don't want to hear, feel free to check out any of our other episodes. We have content warnings at the start of all of them.

Steuben was born in 1730, in Prussia, which is modern-day Germany. His full name is Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben.

J: Oh my gosh.

I: His parents needed to chill. [laughs]

A: They did, but later [laughs] he changes it to Friedrich Wilhelm August Heinrich Ferdinand von Steuben.

J: Wait what's.... what are the differences?

[laughter]

I: Spot the difference!

A: Yeah. One's got Heinrich Ferdinand and the other has Ludolf Gerhard.

J: Woah, what did Gerhard do?

I: I don't know.

[laughter]

I: Was Gerhard like, the estranged uncle?

A: I tried to find out who Ludolf and Gerhard were and I didn't find anything.

J: If he'd shortened it, I would get it, you know...

I: Yeah.

J: ...because like...

A: Yeah.

J: ...it's a mouthful. But to cut a few, but then add a few... I wanna know what they did.

A: I really don't know what the logic behind this was, it just happened, and I thought it was funny, so I told you. [laughs]

J: It's excellent. Excellent. [laughs]

A: So Prussia at the time was a very military country. It was described by Mirabeau, who's a French revolutionary, as "an army with a country" rather than being a country with an army, and they spent about 80% of their budget on the army.

I: That sounds like a bad way to run a country.

A: Yes. It is.

I: Not...

A: Prussia doesn't exist anymore!

J: [laughs]

I: True. [laughs]

J: Correct, it was empirically a bad way to run a country.

A: Yeah. I don't know why Prussia doesn't exist anymore, so, like [laughs] I can't put any historical basis behind that statement.

J: Mm.

A: So Steuben, as was expected of him, coming from a military country and military family, joined the army about age 16. It was Prussian policy at the time for everyone, no matter who they were, to begin as an ordinary soldier and have to work their way up through the ranks of the army, so he started at the bottom and he only moves up from being an ordinary soldier at age 22. So the idea of this system is it gives Prussian officers more respect for their soldiers that they later command and a better relationship with them, which is something that was recognised throughout Europe - Prussian officers were seen as being very good, and we see throughout Steuben's life he has a good relationship with the soldiers that he commands. So good job Prussia!

I: ...ish.

[laughter]

A: If they were gonna be a military country, at least they had a very good army.

J: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

J: Go big or go home I guess.

I: Yeah, I guess.

A: Yeah. [laughs] In 1762 – so he's 32 and he's spent his whole life in the army, doing pretty well for himself – Frederick the Great, who's the king of Prussia, selected Steuben as one of 13 students for his personal officer training school. So they were going to be personally instructed by Frederick himself, who was considered one of the most brilliant military strategists in all of Europe. Frederick was also gay, and he's known for surrounding himself with attractive young men and he pretty much banished women from his

court and apparently visited his wife once a year.

I: This always bothers me, the way like, 19th-century gay men are incredibly misogynist.

J: Mm.

A: Mm. Mm. I didn't find any of that – and maybe he was – in Steuben's own personality, but yeah, Frederick the Great had no time and no interest in women.

J: I can't help but feel for the wife. Unless he's like, particularly obnoxious in his personality or something, it just seems like a really raw deal for her.

I and A: Yeah.

A: I don't know if it would have been an okay deal for her, like she may have just been set up in a palace and pretty well looked after, and like, “Oh yeah, once a year you have to sleep with Frederick.”

I: [laughs]

A: Or if it was like, quite a bad situation for her.

J: Yeah, well when you say it like that... I wasn't quite picturing the palace.

[laughter]

A: Yeah. Yeah.

[laughter]

I: Yeah, being married to a prince and never having to see him is probably a...

J: Win-win? [laughs]

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I turned up a lot of interesting things about Frederick in my research that I cut from this because it was too long and also 'coz I figure we can probably do an episode on him at some stage.

I: Yeah.

A: So we might learn more about how it was for the wife, but for now, basically I just wanted to let you know that Frederick's court was pretty gay.

J: Mm.

I: Okay.

A: For reasons that are never specified, after Steuben's schooling finished under Frederick the Great, he was demoted and he was sent off to a mediocre regiment in a far-flung town in the middle of nowhere, and a few months later he was dismissed from the army.

I: Scandal.

A: Yeah. There's definitely scandal involved, but we don't know what happened. So all Steuben would say about this later on in life was “an inconsiderate step and the rancour of an implacable enemy frustrated my expectation of an appropriate reward” - for his service in the army, for many many years - “I found myself compelled to quit the Prussian service.”

So a lot of his biographers have speculated, and I think it's pretty likely, that this is the first instance we see of homosexual scandal around Steuben.

I: Okay. When you say that the prince surrounded himself with hot young gay men...

A: Yeah.

I: These are the hot young gay men?

A: His court was definitely made up of hot young gay men, and I just wanted to make it clear that you know, the group of men surrounding Frederick was very gay, and it's noted that Steuben doesn't blame Frederick for being forced to leave the army.

I: Okay.

A: And it's probably another man in that officer school who has brought up these rumours about Steuben.

I: Okay.

J: Okay.

A: There is a high chance, given Frederick's nature and the nature of his court, that there was some homosexual stuff going on in this school I think.

I: I feel like that's just the case with schools.

J: Yeah.

A: Yeah, we've seen many people who have gone to all-girls boarding schools on this podcast. And I think it's probably a similar thing.

So Steuben left the school, he left the army, and he got a job working for a man named Prince Josef Freidrich Wilhelm of... I'm gonna try and say this German word... Hohenzollern-Hechingen.

I: [laughs]

J: Oh my goodness.

[laughter]

A: That's hyphenated. And there he befriended a man named Daniel Marianus Frank. And there's a possibility that he and Franck had some sort of relationship. When Steuben travelled away from Hohenzollern-Hechingen for a while...

I: [laughs]

A: ...he wrote home to Frank "the happiest hour of my life will be when I shall be able to embrace you, my dearest friend. After that I shall be ready to die at Hechingen."

I: That doesn't sound very straight.

A: No, it doesn't sound particularly straight.

I: Like, "I'll embrace you and die happy."

A: Yeah, yeah.

J: Yeah.

A: I don't know much about Frank, but they do continue to exchange letters, I think, for most of Steuben's life, so they were close, at least, and that doesn't sound like the straightest thing that's ever happened.

I: Okay, yep.

A: This is gonna be one of those episodes where we get a lot of circumstantial evidence like that and at the end I'm gonna have to be like, "So guys, what do you think? Was he gay?"

I: This always happens though, and then you're like, "Was he gay?" and we're like, "This is a queer podcast."

Of course he was gay.”

[laughter]

I: You set us up for this!

J: We're not gonna conclude that he wasn't.

A: Keep an open mind.

[laughter]

A: He may be straight.

I: [snorts]

A: Around 1775 he quits that job, 'coz he never really liked that job anyway, and he starts trying to find a military position, pretty much anywhere in Europe. He's basically just a mercenary for hire. So two years later, in May 1777, he hears that Benjamin Franklin is visiting Europe from the USA in order to seek financial support and experienced European officers for the War of Independence against Britain. So he heads off to Paris to meet Franklin, but unfortunately when he arrives, Franklin is just in the process of winding down his recruitment operations, 'coz the people back in America are quite angry that all these Europeans keep getting brought in to be paid in the army, and it's not Americans who are being promoted through the army.

I: Okay.

A: So Franklin doesn't really have any interest in recruiting Steuben; he's pretty rude to him; and he tells him that he can't expect to receive an officer's commission – so a paid command position – he can't expect to receive a salary, and they're not even gonna pay for his passage to America. So Steuben was very angry, he stalked out of the meeting, and he headed off to a town called Karlsruhe, where he thought he had a job lined up in the army there.

I: Being a mercenary is so weird.

A: Yeah, it was just a really normal thing at the time. I think it feels really wrong to us now.

J: Yeah, like you say “mercenary” and I picture somebody who's like, you know, bit rag-tag, you know?

A: Yeah.

J: Like, bit of a ruffian, not like a professional guy, just wandering around...

A: [laughs]

J: ...waiting for like, a war to happen.

A: Yeah, but I think the opposite is true, like he was a professional soldier, and that was just his job, and he was just you know, applying and saying, “Hey, can I work here?”

J: Building his resume.

A: Yeah! Exactly.

[laughter]

A: Exactly. Yeah. It's weird. But it was fine and normal at the time, though it will cause some conflict, as we'll see in a minute, in America, because they want people who are fighting for ideals not for money.

I: Ah, yeah, okay.

J: Mm.

A: Yeah. So he's gonna have to tell some lies about his ideals.

[laughter]

A: And his lack of interest in money. But before that, he went off to Karlsruhe. What he found waiting for him was not a job, but another scandal.

I: Oh no.

A: An anonymous letter had been sent to his old boss, Prince Josef, accusing Steuben of having "taken familiarities with young boys". So this is the first time we hear homosexuality explicitly mentioned in association with Steuben. We can't ignore the fact that this also an accusation of paedophilia. He throughout his life does form relationships with men who are much younger than him, but in all other instances they're always adults. That doesn't mean there's no truth behind this accusation, but...

I: There's no evidence.

A: There's no evidence, either way. The accusation was made. That's all I can tell you.

J: When they say like "young boys", do we know that that wasn't like, a reference to somebody who may have been like, 17 or 18?

A: Mm, yeah, I don't know.

J: Yeah.

A: Yeah. That wouldn't have been written originally in English...

J: Yeah.

A: ...as well, so once you get translation, I don't know whether it genuinely means children, or teens, or you know, 18-year-old men when he's a 40-something-year-old man now, so...

J: Oh! Okay, we've jumped a bit! I'm, I think...

A: Until he gets to America we...

J: He's like a professional mercenary for a while!

A: Yeah. Yeah. Until he gets to America we get through his life quite fast.

I: Okay.

A: But things will slow down soon. His biographer Lockhart says that given his subsequent lack of attempts to clear his name from this accusation, previous accusations probably had been made about homosexuality, if not about paedophilia, and I think that probably lines up with what we heard about him leaving the Prussian army, that you know, accusations of homosexuality follow him throughout Europe.

I: Lucky he's got another continent to go to.

A: Yes. But yeah, the accusation was never proven in terms of homosexuality or paedophilia, but nonetheless damage to his reputation was done, and after that he basically wouldn't be able to get a job in Europe. So he found a friend willing to fund his passage to America, and he decided that it was time to flee the continent.

I: Just a friend? Like, he just went to a friend and was like, "So, I wanna be a mercenary in America now. Can you help out?"

A: Well there was all this political complications where there were French people who wanted France to enter the war against Britain with America but they wanted to hold off until they were you know, sure of the moment when America would be going to win and it would most benefit France. They kinda wanted to send talented people over there to keep America going until they decided it was the right time to enter the war.

I: Yeah.

A: So, he was a friend but he also had his own political motivations.

I: Okay. Yeah.

A: Unfortunately, despite have been in the army for a lot of his life – except that stint in that German place whose name I've forgotten 'coz it's not written in front of me...

I: [laughs]

A: ...um... Hohenzollern-Hechingen – Steuben' qualifications didn't actually look that good on paper, and so in what they would later claim was a mistranslation, his friends and Franklin, and Franklin's partner Deane, who had been convinced that Steuben was a valuable addition to the American army, wrote him letters of recommendation claiming he'd been a lieutenant general in the Prussian army, which he never had, and that he'd served as the personal aide-de-camp – which is like a secretary – to Frederick the Great, which he also never had.

I: [laughs] So he lied in his resume.

A: He lied, and he got his references to lie for him in his resume.

[laughter]

J: When I lie in my resume it's like “can ride a horse” not like...

A: [laughs]

J: ...“was a secretary...”

I: “...to the king.”

J: “...to Frederick the Great.”

A: Yeah. [laughs] Yeah, look this was a mistake.

[laughter]

A: They also claimed he turned down many lucrative posts in Europe to take this position in America.

I: Because of his ideals?

A: Because of his ideals, yep, and they wrote he was coming to America “upon no other motive than to render himself useful to our good cause.”

I: [laughs]

A: Deane even went so far as to claim that he'd seen all the papers proving this, but Steuben had had to leave them in Germany 'coz he wanted to get to America, and so he hadn't been able to go back and get them from Paris to bring them with him to America, but Deane was like, “No, I've definitely seen this papers. This is all true.”

I: [laughs] That sounds like quite suspicious.

A: Yeah.

I: Was this a common thing?

A: I don't know.

J: I guess like, if you think about like, military history, you hear a lot of stories about people lying about their ages and being like, “Oh, I left my proof of age at home! You better let me join!”

A: Mm.

J: Or like, people kind of lying about things like marital status.

A: Yeah.

J: I feel like often in wartime everyone's like, just giving you enough excuses to keep going.

A: Yeah, and I think they're also like, "We want you in the army so we're all gonna kinda let it go."

J: Mm.

I: Oh, okay.

J: You just need to say that you have ideals, and turned down many lucrative posts.

A: Yeah. And like, because of communication at the time, like nobody's gonna prove it either way, so they're like, "It's fine."

I: Yep.

A: To complete his image, he gathered himself a staff of five young men— as a officer at the time would be expected to have — including his 17-year-old translation Stephen Duponceau. One of Steuben's biographers describes Duponceau as "dreamy-eyes, near-sighted, and hopelessly scholarly."

[laughter]

A: I'm very fond of Duponceau. I love him a lot.

I: [laughs]

A: Before he met Steuben, he had been a linguistic prodigy as a child, and then he went to study at a Catholic college, basically aiming to get kids to become priests. He eventually ran away after being threatened with a flogging for distracting his friends from their studies by trying to run an Ancient Greek class for his friends out of a textbook that he'd found.

J: I love this man

[laughter]

A: So good. He's so good. So probably the reason he was actually threatened with a flogging was that he didn't want to become a priest, and they were kind of looking for any excuse to...

I: ...get rid of him.

A: ...punish him and kick him out, but yeah, they were standing there with the whip or birch or whatever they used to flog him, and they say, you know, "Come forward and be flogged" and he walked forward towards them and then just dived out the window and ran away.

[laughter]

A: Yep. One of the sources I read on Steuben claimed that he and Duponceau were lovers. There's no concrete evidence for a romantic relationship. They were definitely very close, and we'll discuss this more later on once we get to them being in America together and we see how they interact.

Steuben spent the very last of his money — he was pretty broke by this time — buying his staff new uniforms; they would look very nice and very professional when they got to America. Unfortunately somebody had told him that the American army wore red.

I: Oh no.

A: [laughs]



J: Oh no!

A: Which was what the British army wore! So he kitted them out in their nice new red uniforms and they got on the boat to America.

I: Oh no.

J: That's really heartbreaking.

A: [laughs] It is.

I: I feel so bad for him.

J: Like surely he's the victim of a joke that's gone too far.

A: Yeah like, Franklin was right there. Franklin could have been like, "My friend... It's blue."

J: Like...

I: [laughs]

J: ...five uniforms...

A: Yep.

J: ...were made, and nobody said anything.

A: Yeah, yeah.

[laughter]

A: I'm very sad for him, and before that – so when he was heading over to Paris to see Franklin - he'd bought himself a new uniform, so he would look really nice to see Franklin, but then once he arrived and was like, "Yep, I'm definitely going to America" he went and bought another one in red.

J: [laughs]

I: Oh no.

J: My heart is breaking.

[laughter]

I: I'm so embarrassed for him.

A: Yeah.

J: [laughs]

A: Mm. So they got on the boat – Steuben and his five staff. Steuben spent most of the journey trying to learn English – he doesn't speak English yet – and trying to kind of learn everything he can about America.

I: How long is the journey?

A: They leave Paris in September and they arrive in America in December but I'm not sure exactly what date they left France.

I: Okay.

A: So they left Paris for Marseille and then they got on a boat in Marseille.

I: Okay. But it takes them like two months.

J: Enough for a crash course.

A: Yeah, yeah. He's not very good at English by the time he's arrives, but you know, he'll manage. Duponceau spent the journey trying to design a universal language.

[laughter]

A: 'Coz he's such a good an wholesome man.

[laughter]

A: So yeah, like I said they arrive in America in December 1777, and on arrival they almost get arrested for their red uniforms.

I: Awww! [laughs]

J: So now they know.

A: [laughs] So they've rapidly discovered their mistake, but a former member of Congress finds them at the port and works out what's going on and saves them from arrest.

[laughter]

A: And it's all fine.

I: Surely you wouldn't arrest them for their red uniforms, because no actual British soldier is just going to turn up on a boat in their uniform and be like, "Hey, I'm here for the War of Independence!"

[laughter]

A: Yeah, that's true.

[laughter]

A: That's probably why it was so easy to get them off once he worked out what was going on. He was probably like, "Come on guys. Nobody's that stupid."

I: [laughs]

J: I can imagine the police being like, "You're under arrest... I guess..."

[laughter]

J: "Because... of the red..."

[laughter]

A: And they'd be like, "What's going on?"

[laughter]

I: "We don't speak English!"

A: Yeah, Duponceau did remark that he's the only one of the group who speaks English, and just nobody else knows what's going on.

I: Oh no. [laughs]

A: So they spend a while in Boston. There Steuben meets a group of young French officers who have come over, like he did, to serve in the war; come over about a year ago, been given no position in the army, they're broke, and they're basically waiting for the net boat back to France. So he's very disheartened.

I: Aww.

A: And he heads off very quickly to meet with Congress in York. The British have taken over the capital, which is Philadelphia, so Congress is hiding out in York at the moment.

I: Is York New York?

A: No, York is a different American town.

I: Thanks America. [laughs]

A: New York is called New York by this time.

J: Is it different again from Yorktown, or is that the town of York where like, the Battle of Yorktown happens?

A: [laughs] No, it's different again from Yorktown.

J: So there's New York, Yorktown, and York?

[laughter]

A: Yeah. So he goes to the town of York – different to Yorktown...

I: Okay. [laughs]

A: And he meets with Congress.

J: [laughs]

A: So they're very pleased to have him; they've read his qualifications; he looks pretty great; they're pretty desperate, and so they make him a captain, they promote several of his staff to captains and they send him off to join the army! He also asks for those French officers he met in Boston to be made captains in the army with him and be part of his staff, so he's a nice guy.

I: Good job, Steuben.

J: Very thoughtful.

A: Yeah. So at this point, he writes to an American friend who he met while in Boston, "Now sir, I am an American and an American for life. Your nation has become as dear to me as your cause already was."

I: [laughter] That happened quickly.

A: Yeah, he's definitely saying to Congress at the moment, "Oh I don't want any money, I don't want any positions, I don't want any pay, I just really love your cause and I just want to serve in your army..."

[laughter]

A: Which is all lies. So they set off to where the American army is wintering in the town of Valley Forge. So on the way, they pass the village of Lancaster and a ball is held in their honour, and there Steuben meets a young infantry captain named William North, who comments at the time on Steuben's "graceful entry and manner in the ballroom". We'll see North again soon so I'm just telling you that this is their first meeting. North later goes on to join Steuben's staff while they're at Valley Forge. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, Steuben arrives and he reports as a volunteer, still saying he doesn't want any positions or any pay or anything.

I: Okay.

A: Lies, all lies. He befriends John Laurens, who is the son of the head of Congress and he's also in the army, and within about a week, he's saying to John Laurens, "Look, actually I never was the aide-de-camp to Frederick in Prussia, there were some mistakes in the translation," and kinda trying to gradually play this down now people might find out...

I: [laughter]

A: ...now he thinks he's safely in the army, but he also says to Laurens, "You know, I'd really like to be promoted to the position of major general and get the pay and everything that comes with that." Major general is under Washington himself, who's in charge of the army, like major general is as high as you can

get.

[laughter]

I: Okay, Steuben.

A: So he's not very good at this.

J: Calm down, you know?

[laughter]

A: Yeah. Like, you know, I wasn't as great as I said but promote me. I don't think that damages him in any way, Laurens becomes a pretty good friend of his and I don't think word spreads around that he's told all these lies, he's pretty fine, and the army is pretty desperate. So at Valley Forge, there are about 12000 men and 500 women camped for the winter. About one in four of them has shoes. Many of them that do have shoes are boiling their shoes to eat their shoes 'coz they have no supplies. They're totally snowed in, they can't get anything in to give them supplies, Congress is broke and can't buy them anything, and also can't get to them to understand how bad the situation is...

I: I'm so glad I listened to Hamilton so I know what happens in this war, to be honest.

[laughter]

J: But it's also kinda grim, because you say John Laurens and I'm like, "Ohhhh...."

[laughter]

I: Yeah.

A: Hi, John, we're sorry, John. On the *Hamilton Mixtape*, like the extra tracks, there's a Valley Forge song, and I was like, yes, I can listen to this while I write my script.

J: Very atmospheric.

A: So yeah, you know the ending.

[laughter]

I: Okay.

A: So it's okay. So about 2500 people died over that winter at Valley Forge of starvation, disease, malnutrition and exposure. It had started snowing before they'd had time to build shelters.

I: Oh no.

A: Morale was awful. Washington's leadership was being called into question, there was talk of mutiny, a lot of people were deserting. At this time, George Washington wrote, "Unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place, this army must inevitably starve, dissolve or disperse."

So Steuben arrives in this pretty awful situation, and in addition, the inspector general of the army who's in charge of organisation and supplies and training and kind of just keeping track of who's where and who has what arms and stuff like that had had a fight with Washington over questioning Washington's leadership and left. So they have no one in charge of that at the moment. He still holds the position but he's gone.

So they unofficially appoint Steuben to inspector general and he sets about interviewing individual soldiers about their conditions and what supplies they have and everything, which is something that officers rarely bothered to do. Nobody really went around and talked to the lowest level soldiers. What he found, as he told one of his staff, was that "no European army could have been kept together under such dreadful deprivations". Despite the fact that these men were starving and they didn't have weapons or anything, he was very impressed. But he did also find that they had no central training manual for their military drills and

instead, each colonel trained their own troops, as he said, “according to the ideas of any military author that might have fallen into their hands”, which meant that it was very, very hard for the American army to execute any large-scale manoeuvres.

I: Because everyone just had different training or different strategies or...?

A: Yeah. And also, like, this training included, like, how long a step do you take when you march, how frequent is your step when you march, so they couldn't even march in time, because different manuals had different speeds for marching.

I: Okay.

A: And y'know, how fast and how regularly do you reload and fire your gun, all that kind of stuff. So to address this problem, Steuben gathered around 150 specially chosen troops to train so that they could then go on and train the rest of the army consistently. So every night before his daily training of these troops, he would stay up late, working by candlelight to write out his drills in French, because he doesn't speak English. They're then given to Duponceau who translated them into English, and then they're given to two of Washington's aides who had joined Steuben's staff which is John Laurens and Alexander Hamilton.

I: Oh, they're here.

A: They are here. We're going to talk about them in a moment. And they had that military knowledge which Duponceau didn't have, to make sure he was using the correct military terms. So they had to do this every single day just to get his training done. I feel like he got like, two hours of sleep a night during this time, it sounded very stressful for him.

I: I feel like that about like, every time you hear about wartime.

A: Yeah, yeah. So yeah, Hamilton and Laurens are here and for those of you that don't know about Hamilton and Laurens, they are quite gay.

[laughter]

A: Laurens was recently married but there is some pretty good circumstantial evidence that Laurens and Hamilton were involved in some kind of relationship, whether it was just, y'know, a very intimate romantic relationship or whether it was sexual, we can never know that for sure.

In 1780, following his own marriage to Elizabeth Schuyler, Hamilton writes a letter to Laurens that says, “In spite of Schuyler's black eyes, I have still a part for the public and another for you. So your impatience to have me married is misplaced. A strange cure, by the way. As if after matrimony, I am to be less devoted than I am now.”

J: Quite gay.

[laughter]

A: Quite gay, yeah, quite gay. This isn't the only time we sort of hear Hamilton talking about his feelings for Laurens as being improper in some way or kind of... taking things a step too far and needing to be cured or reigned in.

I: That like, obvious comparison to his wife, too.

A: Yeah like, “I'm married but don't think I don't like you any more. Nice try, Laurens. “

[laughter]

A: They're pretty gay. I'm not going to go into any more detail about them because like Frederick the Great, probably we'll do an episode on them one day. So, they're here. They're gay.

J: Or you could just blast the *Hamilton* soundtrack and then pause at the gay moments that were not included.

[laughter]

A: That's true, it could just be a gay commentary of Hamilton.

J: Yeah, like a director's commentary, but a Queer as Fact commentary.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah. I think we could do this, I think we could do this. Yeah, it's got potential. So Hamilton and Laurens were in charge of helping Steuben with translation. After they'd translated his drills, Steuben would then memorise the English because he didn't really understand it in order to deliver it to his soldiers. When he couldn't express himself, he would swear at them in French or German or whatever other European language came to mind. He also spoke Russian.

[laughter]

A: And then he would call Duponceau over and say, "My dear Duponceau, come and swear for me in English, these fellows won't do what I bid them."

I: [laughter]

A: The only English word he could consistently remember was "goddamn" which he used liberally.

[laughter]

A: And his soldiers loved him, they thought he was great.

I: He sounds like... that would be pretty funny from a soldier's point-of-view. Like he would be fairly entertaining.

A: He would, and I think in appearance, he's a very pompous man, like he's got his perfect uniform because he keeps buying new uniforms even though he can't afford them...

[laughter]

A: ...and he used to walk around with two big pistols in his belt and a silver cane and he's just very over the top.

[laughter]

A: And they really liked him. So one day, when he was struggling to explain a particularly difficult manoeuvre and none of his staff could kinda get it across what he wanted and communicate that, a young soldier named Benjamin Walker emerged from the company to offer help, saying that he spoke fluent French. Steuben was so relieved that he embraced Benjamin Walker and he said later, "If I had seen an angel from heaven, I should not have more rejoiced."

I: [laughter]

A: Steuben and Walker became very close and a few weeks later Steuben made Walker his aide-de-camp.

I: Okay.

A: So along with North, who we met earlier at a ball, Steuben and Walker became very close and they shared quarters pretty much consistently for the next two years while they were in the army. Years later North would write a letter to Walker, saying, "When I began to love you, I know not. The first motion of disregard to Fairlea," who I assume is another soldier he was romantically involved with. So, "the first motion of disregard to Fairlea I remember: I lay on straw with one blanket, but 'tis no matter. I love you, Ben."

I: Aww.

A: From North's letters to Walker throughout his life, which we'll talk more about later, I would say they

were involved in a sexual relationship.

I: But not Steuben? He doesn't come up in the letters?

A: They do talk about Steuben in the letters as well, yeah, I was about to go on and talk about their relationship with Steuben. So Walker and North, probably a couple. Laurens and Hamilton are probably a couple. And along with Duponceau and some of the other young men in Steuben's staff, they form what Steuben, as many of the officers at the time did, called his family, and what North refers to as Steuben's kids. So...

I: Aww.

A: [laughter]

I: That's like, I don't know whether that's cute or weird, honestly.

A: Yeah, I don't really know what Steuben's relationship with these men was. Like, it's obviously a very homoerotic circle.

I: Yeah.

J: But like, his personality is such like, a fun dad...

A: Yeah.

J: ...kind of personality.

I: Yeah.

A: One of his biographers calls it romantic mentorship. Which I think is linked to the idea of romantic friendship that was pretty prevalent at the time, of having those close intimate relationships with people of the same gender that aren't sexual, but from our point-of-view, they're romantic.

I: Yeah.

A: Just without a sexual element. And those romantic friendships probably gave a space for queer people to kind of just cross the line. So romantic mentorship may just be being a fun dad. It may be being a fun supportive queer figure for these young queer men. Or he may be involved with some of them. We don't really know. One of his biographers argues that given how close he is to these men – and they are very close throughout their lives; he absolutely dotes on them and they write in their letters that they love each other – given that, and the accusations of homosexuality in his past, that there were homosexual relationships between Steuben and some of these men, but we don't have any proof either way.

J: It sounds a lot like what Frederick the Great had.

A: Yeah.

J: So if we kind of assume that he's modelling that, and we know that that structure was quite gay...

A: Yeah, yeah. That's true. That's true.

I: Yeah.

A: And also I think the older man/younger man model was quite common in gay men's relationships at the time.

I: Yeah, I guess it still has that kind of pederasty thing about it.

A: Yeah, so the fun dad figure doesn't preclude...

J: Mm.

A: ...a sexual relationship or a romantic relationship.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah, it's hard to know. Before we go any further, one of Steuben's other biographers argues that this couldn't have been gay, and Steuben himself couldn't have been gay, and these accusations against him were just false, because of a story late in his life where he accidentally drops a portrait of a beautiful young woman – a miniature portrait that he's carrying with him I think – and when he's asked who it is he gets emotional and he will only say “she was a matchless woman,” and that clearly he had a relationship with this woman and therefore he couldn't have been gay. [laughs]

I: That is not really how that works.

A: No, it also just sounds so fake, like there's no mention of a woman in his life, but one time, we saw this portrait... [laughs]

J: Yeah, when was this biography written?

[laughter]

A: Well the first record of this story is in a biography written in the 1850s, and this biography is like, pretty good for the time, like they source most of what they say from Steuben's papers, but there's no source for this story.

J: Interesting...

A: So... [laughs] It's pretty fake.

[laughter]

I: Right.

A: Quite fake. Maybe it happened, but I have no reason to believe it happened. It's also worth mentioning that at the time homosexuality was illegal, so not long after Steuben arrived at Valley Forge, a man was dismissed from the army for sodomy, and that was a big deal and he was absolutely disgraced, and he was drummed out of the army, which means they got all the drummers and pipers and musicians and they kinda line up along either side of him and play their drums while he has to walk out of the camp.

I: So he has this like public humiliating exit.

A: Yeah, yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: It's a public humiliation thing. And so obviously no matter how gay anyone in this circle is, nobody's ever gonna come out and be like, “Yep, I was in love we you and we had sex.”

I: Yep.

A: So that's why we're gonna deal with a lot of circumstantial evidence in this episode. But yeah, nevertheless Steuben definitely loves these men – in what way we can't say – and he dotes on them. On one memorable occasion he hosts a party for them, of which Duponceau writes “None should have been admitted that had on a whole pair of breeches.”

I: I see.

[laughter]

A: Which biographers are like, “Yep, yeah that was just a joke about uniform shortages, like, they all had holes in their pants, and they're like, “You can't come in if you don't have holes in your pants””, but like...

J: It was a toga party.



[laughter]

A: Yeah, I don't know what they *were* wearing at this party. And they get together, they have a lovely time, they sing songs, they eat food, and they take flaming shots, which they called salamanders.

I: Oh! Nice!

A: I tried to find out what liquor they were lighting on fire, but I couldn't. [laughs] So we can't recreate it. I'm sorry.

I: But I'm glad to know that they were called salamanders.

A: Yep.

J: Yeah, that's very clever and cute.

I: Yeah.

A: It really is, it's good. So Steuben's training program was a great success and a great boost to morale as well. Before, these men had felt like they'd been abandoned by Congress, and a lot of them were just volunteers who had not much military experience, and now they felt like they were actually a real army. And so by May, Steuben was promoted to major general, just like he'd hope.

I: Oh wow! Really?

A: Yep. Just like he'd told Laurens.

[laughter]

A: So in June, the American army heard that the British were evacuating Philadelphia, because the British had heard that the French were arriving as America's allies, and so on June 19<sup>th</sup> the American army left Valley Forge. Their plan was to overtake the British, who were marching out of Philadelphia, and cut them off, and have a battle. I understand how war works.

[laughter]

A: So by the 23<sup>rd</sup> of June the Americans had successfully overtaken the British. The British were very slow to get moving; they had a lot of wagons filled with possessions of their officers, and they didn't feel like they were under much threat, because the Americans had been a mess last time they saw them, before winter. So the Americans overtook the British, and they camped out at the town of Hopewell, awaiting the British's arrival.

On the night of the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, Steuben and his staff were sent to spy on the British army to find out when they were gonna start moving and head towards Hopewell. At one point they got so close to the British that they were spotted and pursued. Steuben stopped just long enough to turn in his saddle, pull out his two pistols, and fire at his pursuers before galloping off, losing his hat in the process.

[laughter]

I: Did he hit them, or did he just do that to be dramatic?

A: I think he was just being dramatic. [laughs] I don't know.

J: Speaking of drama, like, he's mentioned that he lost his hat, and like, we...

A: Yeah. [laughs]

J: We know that he's like, made sure everybody knows, he was so cool he even lost his hat.

A: Yeah. Yeah.

[laughter]

A: Yeah. He writes a lot of letters home to Prussia and a lot of letters just throughout his life which really talk up his exploits, and sometimes just straight-out lie about what he's done.

[laughter]

A: This one I don't know if the source is him or Duponceau, 'coz Duponceau also wrote memoirs. So if it's Duponceau it's probably true; if it's Steuben he probably made up the hat.

[laughter]

A: I don't know. So eventually they saw the British preparing to march towards Hopewell, and so they returned to warn the American army. The man in the charge of the American army was General Charles Lee.

I: Oh.

A: Who you may have heard of if you've heard *Hamilton*.

I: Yes.

J: Yes.

A: Yep. So General Charles Lee was in charge of this particular branch of the American army, and he was woefully underprepared for this battle. Some of his men didn't even have ammunition, and as they were kind of marching towards the British they were frantically just trying to like, find ammunition in sort of, people's house and stuff on their way.

I: Oh god.

A: They didn't know the lay of the land – they hadn't really scouted it. It was just a mess.

J: And is this Charles Lee's bad?

A: [laughs]

J: Like he's remembered quite poorly in the musical *Hamilton*, but is he actually, like, I feel like it should be somebody else's job to make sure that they have ammunition and know where they're going and.... or it is like, his bad?

A: I think it was a various people's job to make sure they have ammunition. It's his job to know where they're going, 'coz he was supposed to prepare for this battle, and most importantly it's his job to decide whether given they have no ammunition, they should mount an attack.

J: Good point.

[laughter]

A: Which he decides they should.

I: That was an interesting choice. [laughs]

J: Yeah.

A: So once again if you've heard *Hamilton*, this is the Battle of Monmouth.

I: Okay.

A: Which is the moment when Charles Lee comes up. [laughs] For being a failure. So he went ahead with the attack, and it went surprisingly okay, mostly thanks to the men's very good training, but eventually through a series of miscommunications, Lee ended up calling for a retreat. Washington arrived with reinforcements and discovered Lee's terrible mismanagement of the situation, and all these troops retreating, and he was furious. The troops who were retreating were still in like, very good order. They seemed to not be panicking, and they were kinda like, "Look, we didn't need to retreat. Lee just didn't know

what was going on.” And Washington was very very angry with Lee. One witness at the time recalls that when he encountered Washington, who was usually a pretty calm man, “swore like an angel from heaven.”

I: [laughs]

J: Is that a lot, or not very much?

A: I think that's a lot.

[laughter]

A: The additional quote “shook the leaves on the trees” from his swearing so...

I: Okay.

J: A lot.

A: It was a lot.

I: Okay.

A: He was very very angry.

I: So angels know like extra Godly swear words.

A: Yeah, yeah. Washington used all the Godly swear words.

I: Alright.

A: So Lee left the battle, in shame basically. [laughs] And Washington sort of said to the men, “Are you still prepared to fight?” and they all cheered and said, “Yes, we're still prepared to fight” so Washington kinda went, “Well now Lee's put us in this situation we're gonna win this battle.” A: So he placed Steuben in charge of reforming the lines of battle, and thanks to Steuben's training, even though these men had retreated and been in a battle and kind of got mixed up in their different regiments, they could form impromptu battalions because they all had the same training, and march back into battle. Hamilton later told Walker that he'd never understood the concept of military discipline until he saw Lee's soldiers advancing under Steuben's command. So eventually, the British retreated. It was quite successful.

I: That went weirdly well.

A: It was a mess, but it went well. So this was the first time that Washington's army had managed to have this level of success against the British, and Steuben basically took the credit for it because it was thanks to his training that they were able to hold it together.

I: Do we trust all this? Like everything you tell us is quite positive towards Steuben at this point. Do we really think that it's his training that's made them win these battles, or...?

A: I think it is. What I read did go on to say, you know, Lee had some good points. Like, it wasn't Lee's fault they were low on ammunition, all those kinds of things.

I: Yeah...

A: Like, Lee was not totally in the wrong. He goes on to be court marshalled for this and they do discuss this, but it is the good training that allows them to win a battle. Before Steuben arrived they lost Philadelphia, they'd had several defeats.

I: Yeah.

A: So I think it is reasonable to say this is what's changed...

I: Okay.

A: ...is just that they now can move as a cohesive army.

I: Okay.

A: Yep. I mean, look I don't know enough about the military to definitely say that. And I wasn't gonna force anyone to go into orders of battle.

I: Alright, fair.

A: But I think it's pretty legitimate.

I: Okay.

A: So, following that, Steuben and his staff spent the winter of 1778-1779 - so that winter - working on a manual for the US army, which would include organisation, training drills, and also really straightforward things that Steuben had had to teach them like "Don't put your toilet next to your camp".

I: Good idea.

A: "When you kill your animals, don't throw the offal into your camp". So...

I: [laughs]

A: He put this all down in a book, and that book is called the Blue Book, and segments of it are still used in US army training today.

I: Oh wow, really?

A: Yeah, and the whole book itself was still in use until 1812, so that's about, a bit over 30 years later.

I: Oh, okay.

A: So yeah, it was a pretty solid book that he wrote.

I: Do you know what parts they still use?

A: No, I don't. I could find it out, but I don't know off the top of my head.

I: Okay.

A: Walker was at this time dispatched to work for Washington, and he wrote letters to Steuben, asking him to send him a new hat, and then send him a new coat, and a hair ribbon, and gloves, and a belt, and Steuben sends him all these things, which I think helps with our image of Steuben as the friendly dad of this group. And also sends him some underwear.

I: [laughs]

A: I don't know if like, men's longjohns in the 1700s were considered like, a sexy present.

J: [laughs]

I: Again is that a sexy present, or like a dad Christmas present situation?

A: Yeah, is that like buying someone socks, or buying someone lingerie? I just don't know.

J: [laughs]

A: Steuben once again is spending more money than he has here. He's pretty broke. He can't afford this stuff, but he buys it anyway.

So, he finishes writing his book that winter, in the winter of 1778-1779, and that winter was especially brutal and many soldiers were deserting from the American army, and there were also problems with recruitment, in that Congress was trying to compel all the individual states to give men to the army, and the

individual states were kinda all busy doing their own thing, and weren't really contributing the soldiers they said they would contribute when this war started.

I: This seems like an ongoing American problem.

A: It is, yeah, and it's an ongoing problem that I think America still has is that conflict between the states' power and federal power, and Steuben feels like Congress isn't doing enough to compel the states to contribute soldiers. Congress feels like it's broke and doing its best.

I: [laughs]

A: Basically, there are no men. One of Steuben's reports when he was auditing the army found that no regiment was up to strength, and that one company contained just three men, one of whom was the drummer.

J: Ooh.

I: Oh no.

J: A drummer with no one to drum.

A: [laughs] Yup. It's very sad.

J: But well done that regiment for like, keeping it together.

A: Yeah, like they were still there, they were still a regiment, the other two hadn't been like, "I'm going home."

J: Yeah.

A: Steuben spent a while trying to deal with those problems and then in 1780 - so the next year - he was sent to Virginia. And his job there was to recruit and train new troops that would then be sent south to the Carolinas where General Nathanael Greene was fighting the British troops. The British troops were commanded by Charles Cornwallis, whose name will come up again, so I'm just letting you know.

So, Steuben went to Virginia with Duponceau and North. Although, at the time, Duponceau was quite ill, his doctors thought he was going to die, but he was just really determined to come with Steuben, and Steuben said, you know, "You'll either die of disease at home, or you can die an honourable death on the battlefield, so..."

I: That's bad logic...

A: That's what he chose. Yup. So Steuben arrived in Virginia, and he discovered it a complete mess - they weren't prepared to have enough troops to themselves, let alone troops to send to another state that needed them; the troops they did have were totally lacking in training, had no ammunition. Nathanael Greene described the organisation there as "totally deranged".

J: So at this point, does everybody have the Blue Book? Could they have been trained from the Blue Book yet?

A: The Blue Book exists and several copies have been printed. I don't know if they've been distributed to all the states at this time. I'm not sure, because they've sent Steuben down to do this training himself, so it may be that they don't have the book in Virginia yet, but the book was definitely being used in like the main body of the army given out to all the officers to drill their regiments. But Virginia is not well trained, they're a mess. And also, the British had recently looked like they were going to attack and then retreated, and that was because they'd heard other news of what was going on in the war elsewhere, but the Virginians didn't know that, and the Virginians went, "Oh, the British tried to attack us and then they ran away. We're so powerful. We're fine."

I and J: [laugh]

I: Oh my God.

A: They weren't fine. Steuben sort of comes and he's like, "No guys, the British are gonna attack you again, it's gonna happen," and everyone's like, "Nup, nah, we're fine." And then on December 29<sup>th</sup>, 27 British ships anchored off the Virginian coast, carrying about 1600 soldiers. They were under the command of a man named Benedict Arnold, who had defected from the American army to the British army.

I: Okay.

A: I'm telling you his named because there's a good little story here about Benedict Arnold. So, during his audits of the army in the previous year, when he'd found that regiment with three men in it, Steuben had also met a man named Jonathan Arnold, and he'd just been doing a roll call of a regiment and come across Jonathan Arnold, and been like, "Oh, Jonathan Arnold. You share a name with Benedict Arnold." And he said to Jonathan, you know, "How can you bear to share a name with this man, he's just defected to the other side. How can you bear to go around your life with this name?" And Jonathan was like, "Look, I hate it, but like, I can't do anything, can I? It's my name." And Steuben was like, "No, of course you can. Of course you can change your name. Just change your name. You can take my name! Be Steuben!"

I: [laughs]

A: And so after the war, Jonathan Arnold went and legally changed his name to Jonathan Steuben.

I: Wow.

A: Which was pretty good.

A: So, Benedict Arnold landed all these troops of the coast of Virginia and they started heading towards the Virginian capital of Richmond.

I: How did Benedict Arnold end up in command? Like if somebody defected from the opposing army, I wouldn't be like, "Cool, you can order my troops, now."

J: "Yeah, you seem solid."

I: Yeah.

A: I mean, I think it's the thing that he was quite high up in the American army, and so when he defected he had the command skills that the British army needs at the time.

I: But the British army's surely not that desperate. Like, they're a whole empire with an entire army.

A: Yeah but they're an empire on the other side of the ocean.

I: Yeah, true.

A: So I think that he already had the command skills; he would've had the knowledge of America and all those kind of things, they put him in charge of soldiers. I don't know the ins and outs of that. So he marched towards Richmond. Steuben sort of frantically tried to pull together a defence but everyone just ran away. Arnold basically torched a lot of the city. And Steuben was basically the only person left who had the skills to organise a defence. But his job at the time was to be recruiting troops to send elsewhere.

I: Yep.

A: And he's still trying to do that at the same time as he's defending the state. At one point he goes to a barracks expecting to find 500 new recruits waiting to be trained and sent off to Carolina, and he finds five.

I: Oh no.

A: And then three of them go home.

I: Oh no!

A: They don't even have a drummer this time.

[laughter]

A: So without these new recruits that Steuben is supposed to be sending to him, Nathanael Greene down in Carolina has had to retreat. He's heading back into Virginia now with Cornwallis chasing him.

I: Oh god!

A: So not only is Arnold here, but Cornwallis is on his way into Virginia. And then, in March, more British reinforcements arrive, so that brings the British in Virginia to about 1600 men, with an additional 1500 under Cornwallis on their way to Virginia. In Virginia itself there are about 4000 men many of whom haven't been trained and have never been in a battle.

I: Okay, so we're about to have like, a training montage situation?

A: He doesn't have time.

I: [laughs] Okay.

J: Not even one rotation of *Eye of the Tiger*.

A: [laughs] No. No training montage, it's too late. So basically his only hope is to just slow them down while he waits for reinforcements to turn up and for the major Virginian cities to be evacuated.

I: Okay.

A: So on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April, 1791, about 2700 of the British troops and 1000 of the American troops meet at what is called the Battle of Blandford. The Americans don't do too badly. Steuben's men successfully hold off two British assaults, and they only withdraw because they're running out of ammunition.

I: This is a serious problem for them.

A: Having no ammunition?

I: Yeah.

A: I think it's something we don't think about in a modern day army. We're just like, "Yeah, people have guns and they fire bullets," but they were constantly like, "We need more bullets!"

The British pursued them when they retreated. And they caught up with them, and the Americans kept fighting basically just by punching British soldiers.

I: [laughs]

A: They eventually retreated over a bridge, and they managed to maintain enough discipline to pull up the planks of the bridge behind them as they went, so the British couldn't chase them.

J: That's a good move. I like that move.

A: Yeah, it was quite smart! So yeah. So they did okay, all things considered.

I: This is how this keeps happening to them. They're just completely a mess, and then you're like, "So they did all right..."

A: Yeah, they did okay, they did okay. But they did have one remaining problem, which was that there was an arsenal of this ammunition that they're always running out of, and guns and stuff, at a place called Point of Fork, which they were worried that the British would get to before they did. And then they'd have no weapons, and the British would have extra weapons, and it would be a mess. Steuben, who basically has no communication at this point about who's where and what's going on – he doesn't know where Cornwallis is, he's supposed to be getting reinforcements from Lafayette, who's another American general... You've probably heard of Lafayette.

I: Yeah.

A: And another American general by the name of Anthony Wayne, who's known as Mad Anthony.

I: [laughs] For what reason?

A: I couldn't find out like, what happened in his life that got him this nickname, but sounds like quite a good guy. So he's waiting for reinforcements from these guys. He's writing letters to Lafayette like "I don't know where anyone is. What's going on? What do I do?" He eventually decides that he's just gotta go and save this arsenal. So he sets off for the arsenal. He finds it defended by about 450 men. They have no shirts, they have no shoes, they're a complete mess.

I: They have no shirts??

A: They have no shirts. It's an ongoing problem in the army, that people don't have shirts.

I: Do we mean this literally, like, they're running around topless? Or just that they don't have uniform shirts?

A: I don't know.... When they were at Valley Forge, and he did his first day of training, with those 150 troops that he specially trained himself, it is recorded that a lot of them turned up wrapped in blankets because they didn't have clothes for the weather.

I: Okay.

A: So like, they may genuinely have no shirts.

I: Okay.

A: Yup. So, Steuben tries to get these men to load everything onto wagons, and get it away before the British turn up, and they manage to get a decent amount of it away, and they escape across a river, just in time to watch from the other bank as the British arrive and take the last of the supplies that are there. According to Steuben, it was just a bit of cotton and rum that was left and he did a very good job. According to other people, the British got hold of many many muskets, and a lot of ammunition, and Virginian government started talking about how Steuben was the worst officer ever in the army, and they started talking about hanging him.

I: Oh my god...

A: I don't know who's telling the truth here. You know, Steuben was there, but on the other hand Steuben obviously wants to talk himself up.

The Virginian Government has a history of disliking Steuben for kind of coming in and just taking control of everything in their state because nobody else was willing to defend it. So, he's been in conflict with the Virginian Government before; he's taken a very autocratic role in Virginia because he felt it was necessary given the circumstances.

J: It still feels a bit rough though...

A: Yeah, yeah. I think that Steuben has got the short end of the stick here, but yeah. Virginians are understandably pretty upset that their state has just been taken over by Britain basically. Well not entirely take over, like, Steuben did give them time to like, you know...

I: Leave?

A: Retreat.



[Laughter]

A: And Lafayette and Mad Anthony do eventually turn up, so it's okay. So, Virginia actually does okay eventually out of this, and Steuben at this point, he's feeling very under-appreciated, and he takes sick leave from the army. He spends much of the next two months in bed with skin problems, gout and exhaustion.

I: Okay. How old is he now?

A: He's about 50.

I: Okay.

A: He's pretty old for most of this story, we skipped over his early life. So, two months after he took to bed, he received a letter from Lafayette, which Steuben says, cured his gout.

I: Magic.

A: Mmhm. 7,000 French troops have just landed in America, another 3,200 are on their way. Lafayette and Mad Anthony have successfully beaten Cornwallis to a retreat. Cornwallis is now holed up in the town of Yorktown.

I: Which is different to York.

A: [laughs] Which is different to York. A different town. So basically the war is coming to an end at this point, and the Americans are feeling pretty confident that they're going to win. So Steuben rides to Yorktown, where he's given command of one of the four divisions of the American army laying siege to the city. This is a big deal for Steuben - he's been trying to get a command throughout his whole military career in America, but he's always been sort of said "No, you've got to be an Inspector General, you're good at that job. We can't also give you a command, plus you're Prussian and we want to give commands to Americans."

I: Wasn't he major general though?

A: Yes, he's at the rank of major general but he doesn't command troops as a major general would because he's inspector general.

I: Oh, okay.

A: But he does have the rank of major general. And now he gets to be in charge of a wing of the army and he's very happy. He says this is one of the happiest times of his life. The command is probably a thanks from Washington for Steuben's efforts to save Virginia because Washington is from Virginia. So they lay siege to Yorktown; overall it's like a very relaxed siege.

[laughter]

A: Everyone's pretty much like, "We've got this at this point." There's one story that Steuben one day was just standing up in his trench just chatting to Mad Anthony during a British artillery barrage and a shell comes right towards them and Steuben throws himself down in the trench, and Mad Anthony throws

himself down on top of Steuben.

[laughter]

A: And Steuben says to him "I always knew you were a brave general, but I did not know you were so perfect in every point of duty. You cover your general's retreat in the best manner possible."

[laughter]

A: So yeah, that's the tone of that battle. [laughs]

I: Okay. So everyone's pretty chill.

A: From Steuben's point of view, I think he felt it was a pretty chill time. I'm sure there were other soldiers who felt that they were genuinely in a very important and stressful battle. But Steuben was kind of like "At this point, I've got a command, we've got Cornwallis in retreat, like, we're fine."

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of October 1781 - so that's a bit over a week since they began the siege, since they started digging their trenches - the British formally surrender. Yorktown was the last battle of Steuben's career, but the war did continue for a few years while they kind of tied up loose ends.

After Yorktown, Walker was reassigned to Washington's staff for the rest of the war. He and Steuben obviously miss each other very much and they write letters back and forth. He writes one letter to Steuben where he says "We are here in the centre of dullness. I've been obliged to learn backgammon".

I: [laughter] Oh no.

A: I never learnt backgammon. I assume it's bad. [laughs]

J: Yeah. Things have ever gotten so bad for you that you *had* to learn backgammon.

A: Yeah exactly.

[laughter]

And he closes his letters with "Adieu, my dear Baron, tell North I love him".

I: Aww. I was going to ask what happened to North. Is he still with Steuben?

A: Yeah, North is still with Steuben, but Walker's off with Washington. And John Laurens, as we mentioned before, unfortunately is killed in a skirmish in 1782.

I: Okay.

A: So hostilities in the war end officially on the 19<sup>th</sup> of April 1783. Steuben really wanted to give a big sort of send-off to all his soldiers, and have a big military display for their last, kind of big display before they all went home. But Congress basically said "We can't afford it; we need to send them all home because we can't afford to pay them for like, one more day than we have to." So they all just kind of left and went home.

I: Aww.

A: The officers of the American army collectively wrote Steuben a letter of thanks, saying “Your unremitting exertions on all occasions to alleviate the distresses of the army, and the manner in which you have shared them with us, have given you more than a common title to the character of our friend. As our military parent we have long considered you.”

I: Okay. Military parent. Yeah.

A: Yeah.

I: I think...

A: That’s kind of his role in the army.

I: We’ve got the Steuben vibe worked out.

[laughter]

A: Yeah. As one of his last acts before he also stepped down as Commander in Chief, Washington wrote a letter to Steuben thanking him for all the work he’s done. And that was the very last thing Washington did in his official post.

So that might answer your question a bit of like, how much was this thanks to Steuben that the Americans won the war.

I: So Washington thinks it was.

A: Washington thinks it was, yeah.

I: Alright. Washington doesn’t lie. We know that about Washington.

A: [laughs] Washington can’t lie.

[laughter]

A: True facts.

Steuben was discharged from the army on the 24<sup>th</sup> of March 1784. So the war is over. At the end of the war, Steuben is reunited with Walker, but with the demobilisation of the army, the group that he’s gathered around him of his family as he calls them, kind of loses their defined role. So in the army there was a space for that, and now that they’re not in the army there’s kind of no space for that homosocial male homoerotic group to exist, and so it becomes very hard for him to continue to maintain these relationships as they all leave the army and go on with their lives.

So Steuben rents a house, where he hopes to continue to provide a sort of family home for all these young men that he’s become this father figure to...

I: Aww.

A: ...specifically for Walker and North, who he's closest to. North does come and live with him for a bit, but Steuben is broke and he basically doesn't have enough money to keep leasing this house and to support North and the staff he has in that house. And so eventually he gives up the lease at the end of the year.

North and Walker both go on to get married. Confusingly, North marries a woman named Polly and Walker marries a woman named Molly.

[laughter]

A: So you can endure that for a little bit. As we know Laurens is dead. Hamilton is also married now, and goes into politics. Duponceau settles in Philadelphia, and just for a fun fact about Duponceau, he spends a lot of his life recording indigenous American languages and he studies Chinese.

I: Aww! Oh wow. Yeah.

J: That is a fun fact.

A: Yeah. He's a good guy. I got kind of half way through this episode and I was like "Should I just ditch Steuben and do an episode on Duponceau?"

[laughter]

A: And I was like, "No. No I shouldn't."

I: Do like a bonus Duponceau episode.

A: So Steuben is pretty obviously kind of drifting and pretty lost at this point in his life, and he's quite scared of losing all these young men; they've all moved on in their lives. So his letters at this point to North grow more and more affectionate and he writes a letter opening "My loving and dearest Billy" and closing "Goodbye my dear and loving friend. I am until my very final sigh, your very affectionate and sincere friend." So he really heaps this affection on him in kind of the hope of holding onto him, but North has moved on and he's now married, he has kids, doing his own thing.

Steuben remains in financial difficulty as well for the rest of his life; he's never been good at financial management as we've probably noticed.

I: How many new uniforms does he buy?

[laughter]

A: He also is not paid as he should be by Congress, and this is something a lot of officers experience at the time. Congress owes him something like \$8,500 in backpay...

I: Ah, okay.

A: ...which he's constantly fighting for. And, one of his biographers has also speculated that there may be some homophobia involved because Congress' chairman at the end of the war is a man named Arthur Lee - no relation to Charles Lee - who had been in Europe when Steuben left for America and so he might have

heard of the scandal that surrounded Steuben in Europe and that may have been another reason why Steuben in particular struggled to get his pay.

I: But other people also struggled to get their pay?

A: Yeah. Steuben struggled perhaps more, but like, it was not just an attack on Steuben, it was a general problem that Congress couldn't afford to pay all the soldiers who had been in the war.

I: Alright yeah.

A: But yeah, Steuben did feel that he struggled more and his friends also felt that he struggled more. North and Walker both remained close to Steuben even though they'd moved away to live with their wives and they're constantly trying to help him budget and kind of reign in his spending a bit.

I: [laughs]

Which leads to a fair bit of conflict between them. Walker writes a letter to North at one point which says "I sometimes wish I had never seen and never loved the Baron."

I: Aww.

A: Even record of Steuben during one argument with North calling North a French word which translates basically as "aggot" during an argument.

I: Ohhhh.

A: Yeah. In spite of all this, North did still write to Walker of Steuben saying "We love him, and he deserves it, for he loves us tenderly."

I: Aww.

A: So it wasn't that their relationships broke apart, it was just a lot of conflict.

I: I mean I guess it's just very uncomfortable having to tell your friend to try and like, reign in his spending.

A: Yeah, yeah. Especially when you've been the one writing to him saying "Buy me a hat, buy me a coat, I'd like three more hair ribbons..."

[laughter]

I: Yeah true.

A: As Walker had. So eventually Steuben moved to an estate in New York, and he built a small cabin for himself, and he even had a few tenants there, who lived on his land, including Jonathan Steuben, formerly Jonathan Arnold.

I: Oh yeah.

J: Oh wow!

I: He's back.

A: Yeah, he's back! He's obviously felt grateful to Steuben, and stayed close with him.

Steuben continues to provide this sort of fatherly role to young and possibly queer men at this time. So in 1792 he offered his home to Charles Adams, son of Vice President John Adams, and Charles Adams' possible lover John Mulligan, son of Hercules Mulligan. Charles' parents at this time were expressing a lot of very vague and kind of not saying what they were trying to say concern about how close Charles and John were. They were just kind of going "We're really worried about your friends, Charles. Maybe you shouldn't be such *good friends* with John," and they were kind of trying to break apart the pair. So Charles is very grateful to Steuben for trying to help them through this time. And he later wrote "I have never known a more noble character, and his affection for me calls forth every sentiment of gratitude which can exist in my breast." So he looks after them, and John Mulligan eventually moved in with Steuben permanently as his secretary, although North refers to it as his "companion" .

I: We've had this before, the like, secretary/partner euphemism.

A: [laughs] Yeah, we have had it before in previous episodes the kind of secretary is just a euphemism to get another man to come and live with you.

I: Yeah.

A: There is definitely speculation, and based on Mulligan's writings as we'll see in a minute, they were very, very close. It wasn't a purely professional relationship. Whether it was romantic or sexual, we will never know as usual. Before Mulligan moved in with Steuben, North sat him down and gave him a very serious talk about Steuben's spending and helping Steuben budget and, you know, how it would be to live with Steuben.

[laughter]

I: Oh no.

A: So good job North. Steuben and Mulligan spent most of their time at home together and they rarely went out. Steuben was in his 60s by this time.

I: How old was Mulligan?

A: Mulligan's pretty young, but I don't know how young.

I: Okay. So we're imagining John Mulligan being like in his 20s or 30s maybe.

A: I think so. I think so. He is a young man. So on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November in 1794, after a stroke Steuben died. So he was 64 at the time, and Mulligan wrote "Our friend, my all, I can write no more. I am lonely. Oh good God, what solitude is in my bosom."

I: Aww.

A: Yeah. He wrote to North, and North came down to organise the funeral. Steuben was buried in an unmarked grave, with North, Mulligan and just a few of his tenants present at the funeral.

I: Aww. Why unmarked?

A: I'm not sure. Walker, who didn't make it to the funeral, a few years later came along and found that they were building a road very close to the grave and he was quite worried, so he had the body moved and marked the grave. So I don't know why it was unmarked at the time, maybe they couldn't afford a tombstone?

I: Yeah, maybe.

A: Tombstones are expensive. So he is now buried with a plaque which reads "Indispensable to the achievement of American independence." I did also read in one of Steuben's biographies, it was specifically specified by Steuben himself that he wanted to be buried with his shirt on - he didn't want them to take off his shirt to wash the body - and this biographer speculated that he was in some sort of BDSM relationship with Mulligan and that he didn't want the marks on his body to be seen. But I feel like that's, you know, purely speculation.

J: Like, maybe, but also equally, maybe not.

[laughter]

I: Yeah.

A: Like, it could be. Yeah, so that was one of his biographies which really pushed the queer line and kind of just said "Oh you know, these two were sleeping together" and never gave any explanation of why they thought that, so take that with a grain of salt.

So in his will Steuben left his library and \$2,500 to Mulligan.

I: How did he have \$2,500? I thought..

J: Or a library?

I: I thought he was broke?

[laughter]

A: He was broke! I don't know. But he left it to Mulligan. And he split his estate between Walker and North. He did have tenants I guess.

I: Yeah.

A: North divided the property that he received among several of his own military companions. So, before we finish, though Steuben is dead I want to continue to just talk about what Walker and North did with the rest of their lives because it's pretty gay.

[laughter]

A: So Walker seems pretty happy in his marriage to [pauses]

I: Molly?

A: Molly?

[laughter]

A: Yeah. So Walker is pretty happy in his marriage to Molly, but North always seems pretty discontented. In January 1789 - so that's just two years after North got married - he'd written a letter to Steuben saying "My wife is the best woman possible. But I'm not happy. I shall come to New York, kiss you and Ben. I am not the best of husbands, but I will endeavour to be as good as I can." So he was obviously struggling to fit into the defined role that's expected of him, and he's really missing what he had during the war. And in another letter after a visit to Steuben he writes to Walker "I wish we could all live together, Ben." So that's referring to him, Steuben and Walker, he wants them all to live together as they did in the war. Throughout his life he keeps expressing this sentiment, that he kind of wants to go back to that time of his life.

I: Aww.

A: Yeah. Which I think is something Steuben felt as well.

I: Yeah.

A: That that was the only time there was a space for them to have the relationships they wanted to have. It seems like North's wife Polly was aware of some conflict in North's feelings and that he wasn't entirely happy in the marriage and that Walker and Steuben may be the reason. When North suggested naming a son Ben after Walker, Polly refused him, and wouldn't let him. He did manage to name a son Frederick, after Steuben.

I: [laughs]

A: One source I read also cited a vague letter that North writes about how he's not expecting to have any more kids to suggest that his sex life with Polly had broken down and that his homosexuality was basically ruining the expected marriage they were supposed to have.

I: But you don't sound very convinced, or...?

A: I don't know if that's true or not. Like, you know, we don't expect to have any more children, there could be a whole host of reasons for that.

I: Yeah.

A: But that is a possibility. In 1813 Polly North died, and then in 1817 Molly Walker died. Walker decided to go back home to England, where he was originally born, and North wrote to him "I think that you ought not to go to England. Here you are not alone in the world. You are known and respected, and at least by more



than one, beloved.”

I: Aww.

A: That same year, 1817, we see the last letter between North and Walker, and North basically expresses that he’s lost, he doesn’t know what to do in life now that his wife is gone, he doesn’t have his family but he also doesn’t have the male relationships that he wants to have, and he really hopes that Walker is going to come and visit him. But in January 1818 Walker dies. So North lives alone for 18 more years, and he dies in 1836, aged 81.

I and J: Aww.

A: Yeah, I was very sad for them

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah, I feel like North would have just been so much happier if he could have just had a husband instead of a wife, he would have been okay in life, but he wasn’t really okay.

I: Aww, that was a sad story.

A: Yeah. So, Steuben is pretty well remembered in America. There’s a bunch of towns named after him. German-Americans celebrate Steuben Day.

I and J: Aww!

A: Where they have like parades and stuff, and they celebrate the kind of German-American link, because he was born in what is now Germany. But he’s more known for kind of that one image of him at Valley Forge in his full uniform, only knowing how to say goddamn and shouting at his soldiers than he is for kind of what he did with his full life and what his relationships were and stuff like that.

J: Which is kind of the tragedy of the romantic friendship problem, you know.

A: Mm.

J: It’s an interesting academic kind of question, but the tragedy is that you can’t have that high certainty that like a literacy about a person requires, you know, like when we have to say “*probably gay*.”

I and A: Yeah.

J: Rather than like, he was this gay figure then suddenly that doesn’t become so attached to who he is remembered as.

A: Yeah.

I: Yeah.

A: If you have to be like, “maybe he was gay but here’s some qualifiers,” a lot of people in talking about him aren’t going to be willing to just be like “yeah he was gay,” they’ll be like “oh, but was he gay? I’m not going

to just say he was gaym” especially if they’re less progressive in their views of gay people.

J: Yeah, exactly.

A: But I think, from my research, his queerness is becoming more talked about and more kind of recognised as part of his overall identity and the overall story, so that’s a good thing.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah.

J: I don’t want to open a whole can of worms here, but I do think we’ve talked about like *Hamilton*, the musical...

A: Mmhm.

I: Yeah.

J: ...and I do think that that’s having such a defining effect on how the Revolution is remembered, and whilst it’s very kind of progressive in a lot of areas, it is a very heteronormative musical.

A: Mmm. Mm.

I: Yeah.

J: I wonder sometimes whether queerness is written out more than its written in.

A: Yeah. It is written out of *Hamilton* I think, because like Laurens is there in Hamilton and they interact, but...

I: ...that relationship is just never really followed.

All: Yeah.

A: Yeah no it’s true, but I think on the other hand, because of something like *Hamilton* which has made these stories so much more well known, people have heard of these men and people start looking into their relationships. So I had Baron von Steuben recommended to me as an episode topic by 22degreehalo on Tumblr, and when we got this recommendation they directed me to another blog on Tumblr which they said, you know, this person has a lot of good sources, and just from this blog on Tumblr, which is you know, probably not a professional historian, they had so many primary sources and you know, links to academic references talking about these men’s relationships and whether they were queer. And so I think even though something like *Hamilton* has written out the homosexuality, it has led just ordinary people to go and do all this research and kind of write it back in.

J: Mm.

I: I mean, I still feel like it’s a shame that it’s been excised and people have to do that work. You wouldn’t know looking at the musical unless you looked any further.

A: Mm.

J: Yeah. We have this defining document now, that is *so* very straight.

A: Mm.

I: Yeah.

J: But you're right, like we also have this great literacy in this pretty complex part of history, like I can't think of another kind of era that I know where I can kind of rattle off battle names...

A: Yeah.

J: ...in the same way, but you know, when they rhyme with something...

[laughter]

A: Yeah, you're like "Oh yeah," like when I was researching this episode I would be like "Oh yeah, Charles Lee is here. Okay, I kind of know where we're up to, this is what's happening," because I've heard this musical, and it's been a good way to get quite a complicated part of history just, for everyone to think about and talk about and have like a basic understanding of it.

I: Yeah, no I definitely knew nothing about American history until there.

A: Same, same.

I: Until *Hamilton*. [laughs]

A: Yeah, it's like Washington was there...?

[laughter]

J: Washington good?

[laughter]

A: Yeah, that's... We're pretty much done here, so now I'll put the question to you, was he gay?

[laughter]

J: Yeah I'm going to go ahead as the guest and say super gay.

A: Super gay? [laughs]

I: Yeah, like quite gay.

A: Quite gay? Pretty convinced about the gay?

I: Yeah. I mean, it's one of those things, like, you just can't ever really say a lot about people's sex lives, because people don't often write about them.

A: Yeah.

I: And so it's never that reasonable to go "Well he's never mentioned having gay sex so it didn't happen".

A: Yeah, yeah, and I think especially with the fact that he was accused of having relationships - with boys, but still accused - we have some evidence or some suggestion that he was gay.

J: I think even without like evidence of like a sexual relationship - which of course is the problem with this romantic friendship...

A: Yeah.

I: Yeah

J: ...kind of challenge we have - if we're using gay as like, the modern definition of that word, these are very intense relationships that he has on kind of a one-on-one basis with a series of men.

I: Yeah.

A: Mm. That's very true yeah.

I: Yeah no I was definitely going to say that as well that, regardless of whether he's having sex, and regardless of what you were saying about accusations, we can see like directly in his letters that kind of intensity of feeling.

A: Mm. And I also think for him and we also see it with North and with Hamilton, that they are more interested in spending time with men and being close with men than society wants them to be.

I: Yeah.

A: And I think that, you know, makes them queer by some definition of the word in that they're not fitting into what society wants for their romantic attraction because they're interested in the wrong gender.

I: Mm.

A: Yeah.

I: You get a lot of those like, direct comparisons with people's wives, where they're like so "I love you, not Elizabeth." Or like "I love Elizabeth, but it's not the same as you".

A: "I should love my wife more, but I love you instead," and all those kind of things.

I: Yeah.

A: Yeah

I: Yeah. The fact that they make that kind of obvious parallel sort of says something about the way they're thinking about those friendships with other men.

A: Yeah, yeah no I think so, I think so. I would agree, I'm coming down pretty strongly on the gay side of things here.

[laughter]

A: I think he's gay.

I: One day we're going to do one and you're going to get to the end and we'll be like "So is he gay?" "... nahhh." [laughs]

A: And I mean I also thought, well look, Walker and North were definitely gay...

I: Yeah.

A: ..like their letters basically refer to them sharing a bed and being in love and not wanting to be with their wives and wanting to be with each other. Hamilton and Laurens are pretty close to definitely gay.

I: Yeah

A: And then Steuben I was like, even if Steuben was not gay, he was the father figure to this group of young queer men, he looked after these men and supported them when other people tried to, you know, break them apart or things like that, so he's worth talking about as a figure in queer history...

I: Yeah.

A: ...for that role, even if it turns out that he never slept with a man and never felt romantic attraction to a man, which I don't think is true.

I: [laughs]

J: I actually love what you said about like all of his kind of assets being divided up and then divided up again.

A and I: Yeah.

J: It's almost like he has like a genealogy...

A: I dunno.

J: ...making Steuben like a grandfather, like a queer grandfather.

A and I: Yeah.

A: Yeah, exactly. Thank you for listening. With that, we've been Queer as Fact. I'm Alice.

I: I'm Irene.

J: And I'm Jessie. Thank you for having me!

A: Thank you for being here, it was good.

If you enjoyed our episode, you can find us on social media, on Facebook, Twitter or Tumblr as Queer as Fact. If you want to listen to more of our episodes we're on Podbean as Queer as Fact, we're on iTunes as well. If you do listen to us on iTunes please rate us and leave us a review because that really help us to reach

more listeners.

We'll be back on the 1<sup>st</sup> of February when Irene will be talking to us about Tove Janson, the creator of the popular children's characters, the Moomins. Thanks for listening, and we'll see you then.

[music plays]