

AMERICA'S FIRST SPY STORY

CryptoComics #14



In June 1775, General George Washington took command of the Revolutionary Army, which had the British Army under seige in Boston, Massachusetts.

Godfrey, a friend asked me to deliver this letter to Boston and I can't get into the city. Will you take it for me the next time you go there?



In late summer 1775, a young man who delivered baked goods to Boston encountered a young lady who had once been his neighbor in the town of Cambridge.



The Revolutionary Army was outnumbered and outgunned by the British forces in North America. It was beset with supply problems. The British Army was the most professional in the world, and could draw on all the resources of the British Empire.



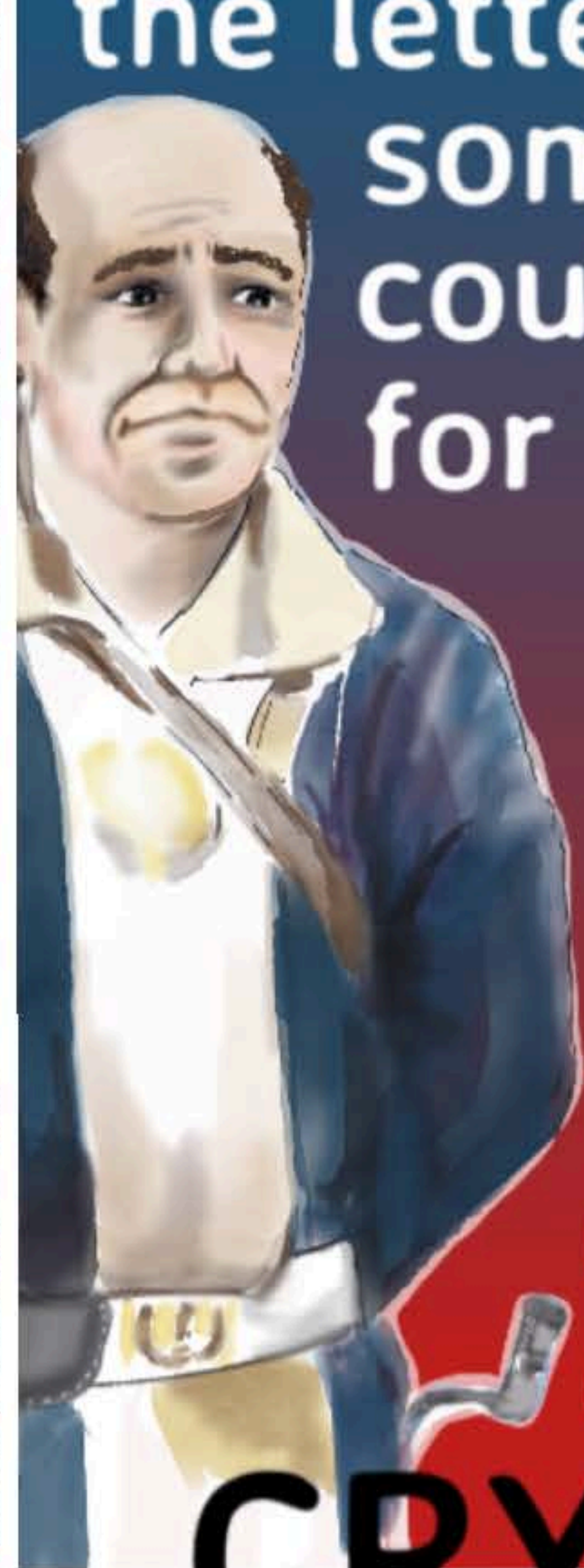
The letter was addressed to a British officer in Boston, and the strange writing made Godfrey Wenwood

SUSPICIOUS.



Rather than take the letter to Boston, Godfrey saw that it got to General Washington himself.

Washington was also suspicious of the letter, & sought to find someone who could interpret it for him.

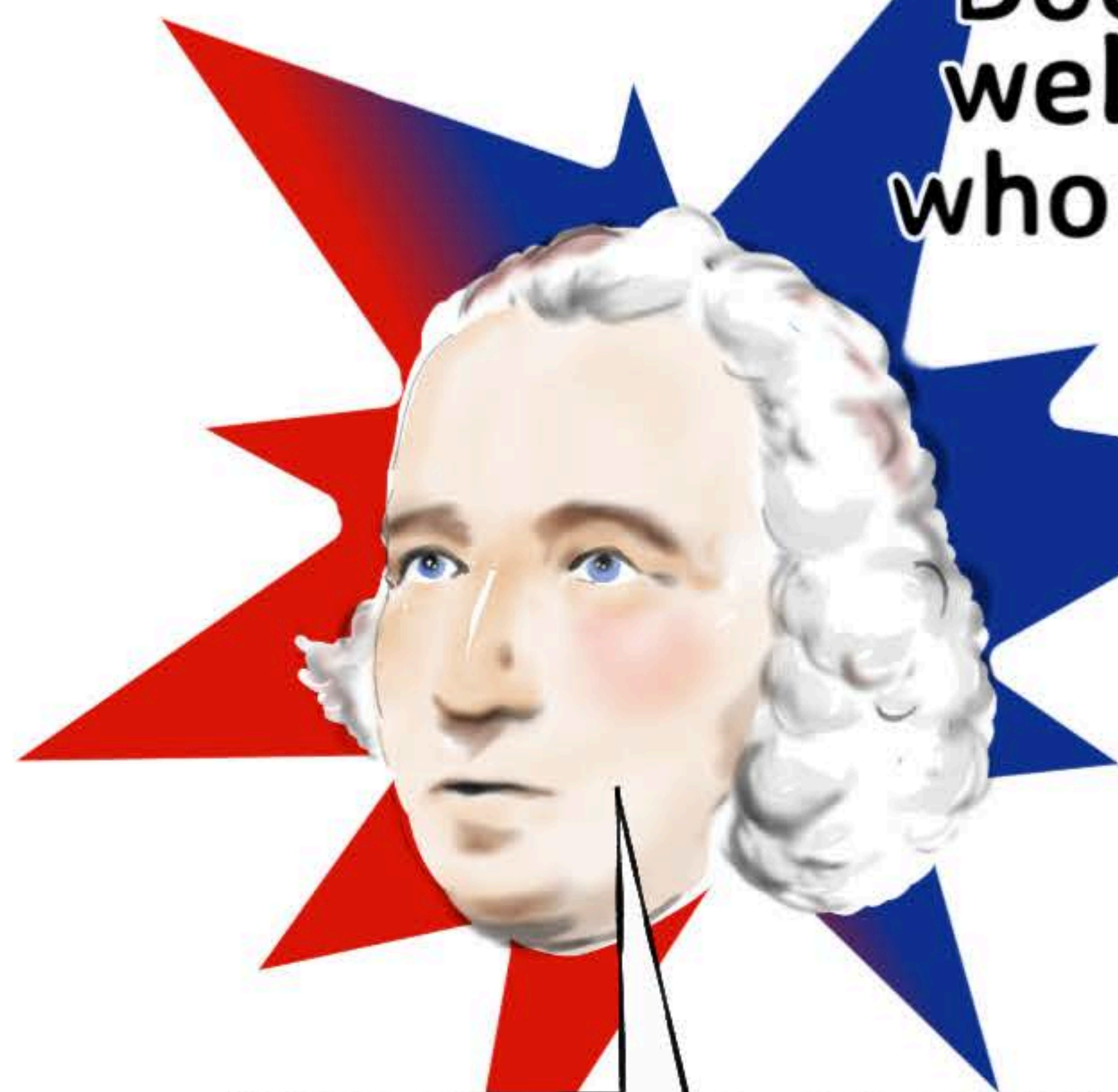


"Interpret" was the word used in those days for

CRYPTANALYSIS.

Washington was shocked & alarmed.

Doctor Church was a well-known surgeon who provided medical services to the revolutionary
A R M Y.



Bring Doctor Church to me!

General Washington questioned the young lady. She was reluctant to confess, but eventually said she had received the letter from Doctor Benjamin Church for delivery in Boston.

I wish to talk to the young lady that had this LETTER.



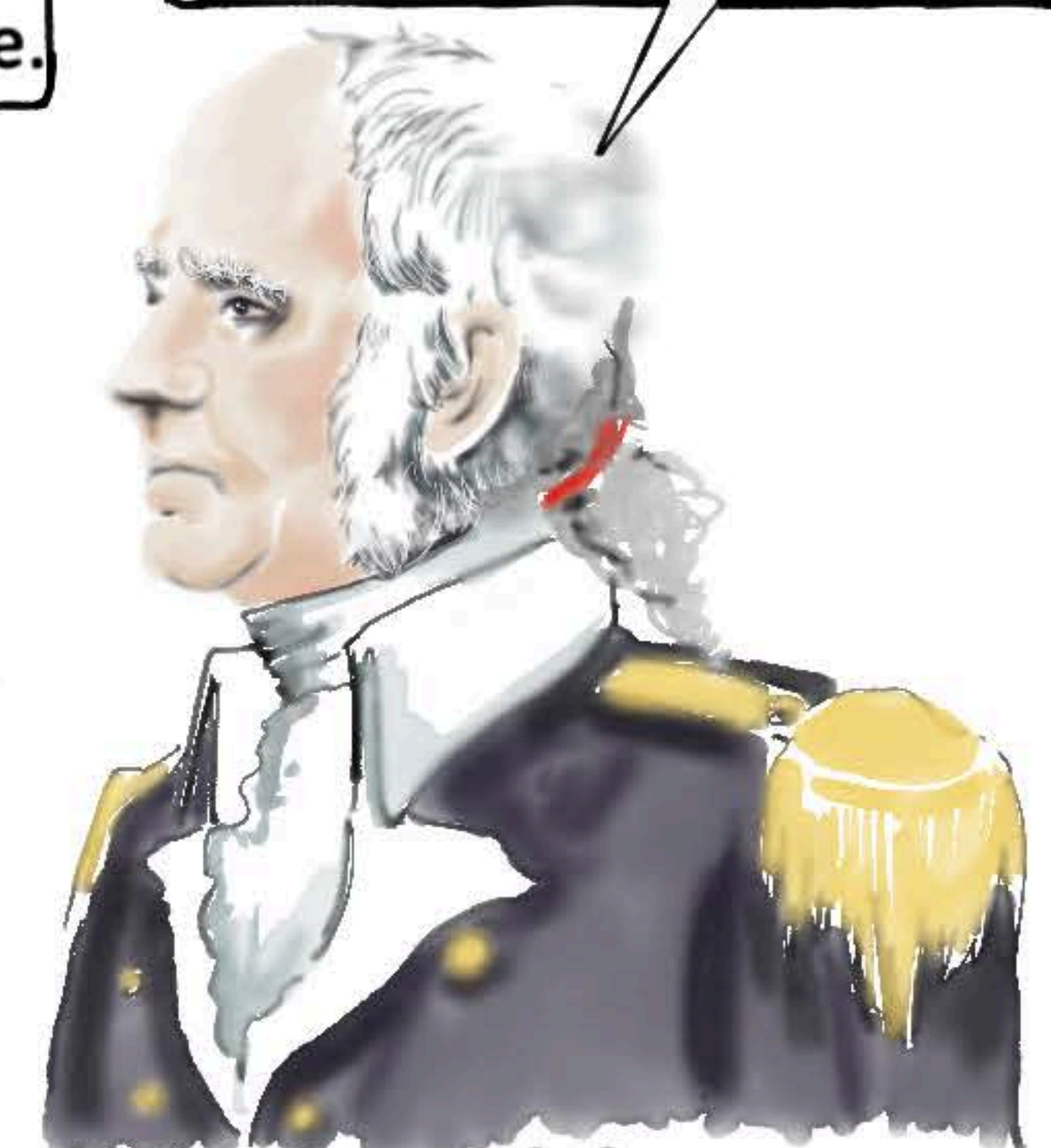
As your commander, I am asking you to tell me about this letter.

I understand. Then you will not mind giving me, your commander, the cipher key to read your letter in plain language.



Very simple. My brother is stuck in Boston, and I need to inform him of some family news.

Alas, sir, that I cannot do.



Washington knew that enciphered letters were common, used by many people to protect private information in the mail system. He offered Doctor Church a chance to explain.





Washington had Doctor Church taken into custody, and he sought someone who knew how to solve secret ciphers.

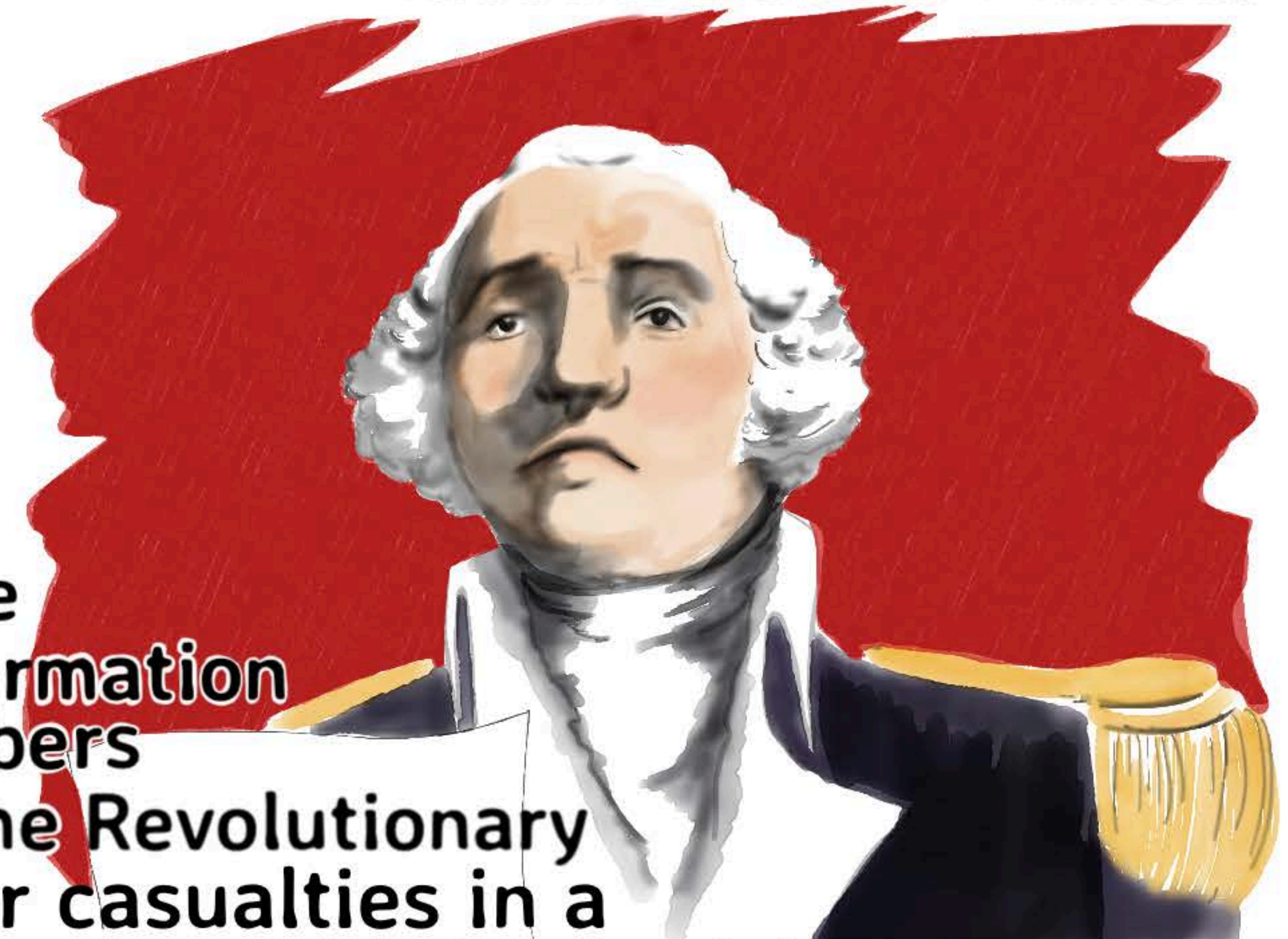


Washington found a few patriots skilled at solving enciphered messages. One was Reverend Samuel West, chaplain to a Massachusetts army unit. The other was Elbridge Gerry, an officer in the Massachusetts militia.

Alert the
General!

Both
men
solved
the
letter
CORRECTLY.

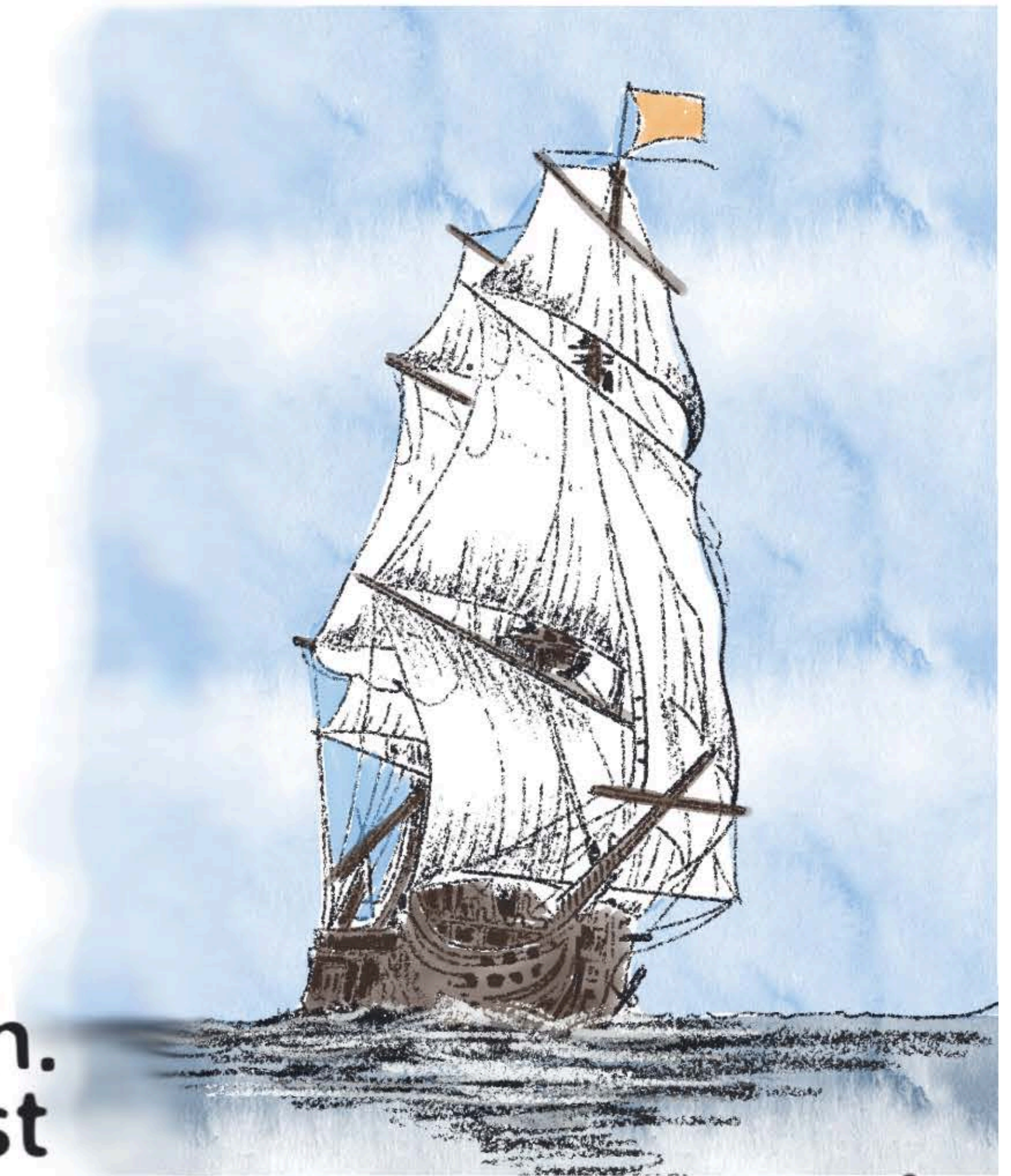
The "letter" gave the British information about the numbers of soldiers in the Revolutionary Army, and their casualties in a recent battle. It also told the British that the revolutionary spirit was growing in North America.



Dr. Church was held under guard for nearly three years, then he was banished from **Massachussets.**



In 1780, he sailed for a British island in the Caribbean. His ship was lost at sea and he was never seen again.



General Washington continued to lead the patriot Army through many defeats until final victory, and the establishment of the United States of America.



Elbridge Gerry, who solved the cipher letter, became the 5th Vice President of the United States.