



#1 1993

THE 3<sup>rd</sup> OF JUNE, 1781 ~

## (THE ENGAGEMENT OF FRANKSTOWN)

The everyday activities of the Bedford County Militia, like those of military units down through history, would have been rather mundane and uneventful most of the time. Looking backward through eyes which have not experienced the exact situations and events, we have a tendency to compress time and events into short paragraphs of time which start and end with noteworthy incidents. The Revolutionary War is seldom put into the perspective that it lasted a period of eight years, most of which were quite uneventful; most people think of it simply as a series of events starting with the battles at Concord and Lexington, through the winter at Valley Forge, and ending with Yorktown. We tend to believe that every patriot soldier spent his every waking moment in bloody, hand to hand combat with the "redcoats". Most of us want to believe that our own patriot ancestors talked (at least once) with George Washington. The fact of the matter is that such beliefs are simply not always correct. The Continental Line soldier would have seen his share of battles, but when we read pension applications we find that the highest number of battles any single soldier engaged in might have been ten. Noting that most of the Revolutionary War battles lasted only a few days, we can conjecture that a soldier who did participate in ten battles would have seen perhaps fifty days of actual fighting, at the most, during the eight years of the war. The rest of the time was spent in marching from one location to another and then spending time in bivouac. The Militia soldier would have had an even more prosaic time of it; his time would have been spent mostly on lookout duty and perhaps some guard duty at a local fortified building. It is because of the fact that the Bedford County Militiaman's life was, in general, uneventful that the Engagement of Frankstown stands as the singularly important Revolutionary War event for the Blair County region.

The Engagement of Frankstown was the only actual engagement of the Revolutionary War to occur in the region which would become Blair County. Although some recent historians have become tangled up in semantics, and have argued that the Frankstown incident was not a true "battle", that is what it was referred to by certain of the actual participants. Despite that fact that the two parties involved may not have formed battle lines *per se*, the elements of a battle existed.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of June, in the year 1781 George Ashman, the Bedford County Lieutenant, sent a letter to Joseph Reed, the President of the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania. In that letter he stated:

*"Sir, I have to inform you that on Sunday the third of this instant a party of rangers under Captain Boyd eight in number, with twenty-five Volunteers under Capt. Moore and Lieut. Smith of the Militia of this County had an Engagement with a party of Indians (said to be numerous) within three Miles of Frankstown where Seventy-five of the Cumberland militia was station'd, commanded by Captn. Jas. Young, sum of the party running into the Garrison acquainting Capt. Young of what happened he Issued out a party Immediately and Brought in Seven more five of whome are wounded and two made there escape to Bedford, Eight Kil'd and scalpt, Capt. Boyd, Captn. Moore, and Captn. Dunlap with six others are missing, Captn. Young expecting from the enemys numbers that his garrison would be surrounded sent express to me Immediately. but before I could collectt as many volunteers as was sufficient to march to Frankstown with the Enemy had return'd over Alligany hill, the warters being high occation'd by heavy rains they could not be pursu'd, this*



County at this time is in a Deplorable situation a number of Familys are flying a way daily ever since the late damage was dun, I can assure youre Excellency that if Immediate assistance is not sent to this County that the whole of the fronteire Inhabitants will move of in a few days. Colo. Abm. Smith of Cumberland has Just Inform'd me that he has no orders to send us any more militia from Cumberland County to our assistance which I am much surpris'd to heare, I shall move my family to Maryland in a few days as I am convinc'd that not any one settlement is able to make any stand against such numbers of the Enemy. If your Excellency should please to order us any assistance less than three Hundred will be of but little reliefe to this County, ammuniton we have not any, the Cumberland militia will be Discharg'd in two days. It is dreadful to think what the consequence of leaving such a number of helpless Inhabitants may be to the Crueltys of a savage Enemy.

Please to send me by the first opportunity Three hundred pounds as I cannot possibly doe the business without money, you may Depend that nothing shall be wanting in me to serve my Cuntry as far as my abilities.

I have the Honor to be, Your Excellencys most obedient Humble Servant, George Ashman Lieut. Bedfd. Cty."

The story of the Engagement of Frankstown has been told in previous volumes. U.J.Jones in his *History of the Juniata Valley* gave a first-person account of the event, despite the fact that he wrote his version seventy-some years after the fact. He stated that the information given by George Ashman in his letter to Joseph Reed was full of errors – that "It would appear that even a man holding an official station is liable to gross mistakes". Jones claimed that he based his first-person narrative on the information given to him by persons living at the time of his writing "who lived at the time of the occurrence". Floyd G. Hoenstine, in his *Soldiers of Blair County Pennsylvania*, stated that, as a result of his own research, he could give an account of the engagement which did not necessarily agree with either Ashman's or Jones' versions. Unfortunately, he does not supply the reader with source references. In the inspection of both Jones' and Hoenstine's narratives, apart from some literary embellishments, their versions of the story follow and agree with Ashman's report fairly closely. The two original county histories which should have included an article on this incident – the *History of Bedford, Somerset and Fulton Counties, Pennsylvania* and the *History of Huntingdon & Blair Co's, Pennsylvania* – make no mention of it, with the exception of the transcription of George Ashman's letter to Joseph Reed in the Bedford history. Assuming that there was probably some element of truth in the three available references (*i.e.* Ashman's, Jones' and Hoenstine's), we will attempt to reconstruct the basic story of this incident.

The exact location of the "Frankstown garrison" is in question. U.J.Jones stated that the fort on Michael Fetter's property, about a mile west of the present-day borough of Hollidaysburg, was the one known as the Frankstown garrison, and that it was a stockaded structure. Hoenstine proposed the idea that the Frankstown garrison would have been in the general vicinity of the Fetter property, but that it wasn't the Fetter barn. He claimed that some of the pension applications noted that a completely different structure, a blockhouse, had been constructed circa 1780 to 1782. Whether it was Michael Fetter's own barn or a new structure built for the purpose of a regional fort is inconsequential in view of the fact that both were supposedly in close proximity. Because the garrison fort in any case stood upon grounds owned by Michael Fetter, we'll refer to it as the Fetter fort.

The site of the engagement was just a little over two miles northwest of the Fetter fort. In the present-day township of Allegheny, the stream called Sugar Run flows southeastward with its mouth joining the Mill Run flowing southward. The general vicinity of the mouth of Sugar Run is occupied by the town of Canan (or Canan Station). The name of Frankstown applied to this area in the year 1781 in terms of it being part of Frankstown Township (which, until 1785, made up the whole of Blair County). The Sugar Run entered into present-day Blair County from present-day Cambria County through the Sugar Run Gap in the Allegheny Mountain range. Although not lying on the Kittanning Indian Trail itself, the site of the engagement lay on a minor Indian trail which led to the Kittanning Trail.

The region making up Frankstown Township within Bedford County had been the site of a number of Indian incursions during the previous three or four years. Evidence of this comes from the letters sent to the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania from 1777 onward requesting financial and military aid. Practically every letter noted that because of the Indian menace, a great number of the residents had fled from the county. In George Woods and Thomas Smith's letter of March 4, 1777, it was strongly implied that Cumberland would again become the frontier county if aid was not soon in coming. Unfortunately, tax assessment returns are no longer extant in the Bedford County Court House for the years 1776 through 1778 to tell us which of the early settlers remained in the region;



it is possible that they have become lost over the years. Perhaps the assessments were never taken because of the danger of travelling in the wooded valleys and hills which made up the township. The 1779 Frankstown Township Tax Assessment does give us some indication of the extent to which the region suffered from settlers moving away. Of the roughly 163 residents listed, 79 (or nearly half of the total resident population) of them are recorded as "absent" or "vacant land" implying that the residents had left the area. In some cases it might be inferred that the male head of the household was absent because of serving in the militia or continental line. But that cannot be assumed to have been the case for all.

Just prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1781 (Hoenstine stated that word was received in Bedford on the 1<sup>st</sup> of that month) a band of Indians, believed to have been from the Seneca tribe, had attacked the white settlements and had killed two men. A woman was taken captive during this raid. The Indian party had gone back into or across the Allegheny Mountains from whence they had come. In his *Soldiers of Blair County Pennsylvania*, Hoenstine proposed that Captain John Boyd was at Bedford when the word arrived of the recent Indian incursion, and that he asked for volunteers to go with members of his own company of Bedford County Rangers. Hoenstine noted that this company starting out from Bedford was later joined, on the way, by Captains Richard Dunlap, Samuel Moore, and \_\_\_\_\_ McDaniel, Lieutenants John Cook, George Smith, and Harry Woods, and Privates James Henry, Horatio Jones, Patrick McDonald, Adam Wimer, Hugh Means, James Moore and Zadock Casteel. Jones in his *History of the Juniata Valley* stated that a force of volunteers led by Captain Samuel Moore and Lieutenant George Smith had started out at the Frankstown garrison and were joined by the rangers from Bedford when they met at the then-abandoned Holliday's Fort (in the vicinity of Gaysport). The Frankstown garrison was being manned by the Company 8 of the Cumberland County Militia under Captain Thomas Askey (and possibly also by a company under Colonel \_\_\_\_\_ Albright and Captain James Young), they had been sent to Standing Stone earlier that spring and then reassigned to the Frankstown garrison. Apparently none of the Cumberland County Militia joined in the expedition to seek out the Indians. U.J. Jones listed a number of local residents who joined the group even though they were not enlisted at the time. These local residents included: James Somerville, \_\_\_\_\_ Coleman (possibly Thomas), \_\_\_\_\_ Coleman (possibly Michael or his brother Macarn), \_\_\_\_\_ Holliday (possibly Samuel), \_\_\_\_\_ Holliday (possibly William), \_\_\_\_\_ Jones, \_\_\_\_\_ Jones (two brothers), \_\_\_\_\_ Gray (possibly Absolom), \_\_\_\_\_ Beatty (possibly Edward), Michall Wallock and Edward Milegin.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, 1781 fell on a Sunday as noted in George Ashman's letter. and in the morning of that day the party of rangers set out to search for the Indians who had made the recent attack on the white settlement. This activity was probably nothing out of the ordinary for the rangers; despite the fact that we might want to make the incident out to be more dramatic than it actually was, the activity of setting out into the wooded region to scout and search for the Indians was the rangers' job. Jones stated that the party planned to travel through the Kittanning Gap and then along an old State road to Pittsburgh and then back by way of Bedford. Perhaps they planned such a long scouting, or maybe they intended just to range through the Allegheny Mountains to make sure that the Indians who had made the recent incursion had left the area. In either case, they did not make it very far before they were ambushed by the Indian party.

At a point close to the mouth of Sugar Run, as the rangers were marching forward along the trail, the body of Indians sprang up from behind the bushes that hid them. It can be assumed that the Indians let out a loud war-whoop in order to surprise the rangers, because that was a generally accepted Indian practice of surprise. Apparently, the rangers were taken so completely by surprise that they failed to return any fire, but simply, in their confusion, turned and fled. Jones, in his account, stated that the only shot fired by any of the Bedford County rangers was that by Harry Woods, who shot at an Indian who approached him, James Somerville and Michael Wallock with an uplifted tomahawk as Somerville stopped to tie a moccasin which had become undone and hindered his escape. Jones stated that fifteen men of the rangers party were killed in the volley of gunfire that accompanied the Indians' surprise. The listing given by Hoenstine trims the number down to thirteen. Two of the individuals who were included in Hoenstine's list died after the engagement, and so the number of rangers who were immediately killed during the ambush was probably closer to eleven. About five individuals were wounded in the engagement, but made it to safety. Hoenstine gives the names of seven men who were captured by the Indians.

According to the version of this story passed down to us by U.J. Jones, Captain Young, with a party of militiamen, went out to help gather up the wounded men after the first survivor, one of the Jones brothers, reached the fort. On the following morning (Monday, June 4, 1781) Captain Young led another group to the site of the engagement to bury the dead. On Tuesday a group of nearly a



hundred men gathered and set out in pursuit of the Indians, but they did not catch up to the Senecas who were well on their way across the Alleghenies.

The Indians, Senecas from the headwaters of the Genesee River in New York state, headed toward the West Branch of the Susquehanna River. One of the captives, a man by the name of Ross, was tortured by the Indians who burned him with firebrands until he died; this occurred in the vicinity of the mouth of the Sinnemahoning Creek. According to a statement made by Henry Dugan in his pension application, he and Captain Boyd received hard treatment, but they achieved their freedom and made their way to New York on Christmas Day, 1782. Boyd, himself, was purportedly saved by an old squaw who claimed him in place of her own son who was lost in battle.

Comparing information presented in the Pennsylvania Archives with narratives and research by U.J. Jones, Floyd G. Hoenstine, J.F. Meginness and James B. Whisker the following list of dead, wounded and captured individuals was obtained. It may not include all victims of the engagement. The dead included: Sgt Florence (Torrence) Grimes, John Conrad, John Downey Jr, Joseph Martin, Henderson (Henry) Murphy, Michael Nicholas, John Thomas, William Tucker (Ducker), Henry Tantlinger, James Henry, and either George or William Jones. The wounded included: Sgt David Bates (Beate), Abraham Bodle, Stephen Gable (Goble), Hugh Means and Adam Wimer. The captured included: Capt John Boyd, Sgt Henry Dugan, Capt Samuel Moore, Lt John Cook, Lt George Smith, Patrick McDonald, Horatio Jones, Capt Richard Delapt (Dunlap), Capt William McDaniel and a man by the name of Ross.

## **1993 ANNUAL MEETING, 100<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE PASSAR**

Our chapter has the very special honor of hosting the 100<sup>th</sup> Spring Board of Management and Annual Meeting which will be held on April 23-24, 1993 at Altoona. It is hoped that many of our members will try to attend this meeting to show support for the chapter. For the members who live in this region, but seldom can attend quarterly meetings, our hosting of the Annual Meeting will be an opportunity to experience what how the state society conducts its business. It will also be an opportunity to enjoy the fellowship with our compatriots from around the state.

**NOTICE:** A committee has been set up to organize this meeting/banquet event, and if you are interested in helping out on that committee (such as registering guests), please contact Joseph Ramsey at 901 Lawrence Dr., Duncansville, PA 16635. Your help will be appreciated.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> QUARTERLY MEETING REMINDER**

This is just a reminder that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held at King's Family Restaurant at 12:00 noon on Saturday, April 17, 1993. Please plan to attend that meeting.

## **◆ Washington's Birthday Celebration, 1993 ◆**

The Colonel John Proctor Chapter, DAR will be hosting this year's Washington's Birthday Celebration. It will be held at the Altoona Ramada Hotel on Saturday, February 20, starting at 12:00 noon. Further information on the cost and deadline date for reservations will be sent to you in the near future.

## **A NOTE OF THANKS AND APPRECIATION**

*At the 1992 Annual Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR, our chapter secretary, Bernard R. Smith, and myself, Larry D. Smith, received "meritorious service" medals from the chapter for our ongoing service for the good of this chapter. We want to thank our compatriot members wholeheartedly for your generosity. We also hope that we will be able to continue to contribute to the chapter in the future.*

## **1993 OFFICERS ~ BLAIR COUNTY CHAPTER, SAR**

For 1993 the following compatriots have been elected to serve as officers of the Blair County Chapter: *President:* Irvin J. Boslet, *1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President:* Jesse C. Williams, *2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President:* E. Merle Glunt, *3<sup>rd</sup> Vice-President:* Wesley L. Burket, *Secretary:* Bernard R. Smith, *Treasurer:* Larry D. Smith, *Chaplain:* Clair S. Hetrick, *Genealogist:* Robert V. Cassidy, *Registrar:* Alvah J. Williams, *Historian:* Joseph Ramsey, *Chancellor:* Edgar R. Hartt.