



#4 1998

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1776: On To New York

March 9th. Yesterday evening a Captain Irvine, who escaped from Boston the night before, with Six of his crew, came to Head Quarters and gave the following Intelligence "That our Bombardment and Cannonade caused much surprize in Town, as many of the Soldiery said they never heard or thought we had Mortars or Shells."

"That several of the Officers acknowledged they were well and properly directed. That they occasioned much distress and confusion; that the Cannon Shot, for the greatest part went thro' the Houses and he was told, that one took of the Legs and Arms of 6 men lying in the Barracks on the Neck; That a Soldier who came from the Lines there on Tuesday Morning Informed him, that 20 men had been wounded the night before; It was also reported that others had been hurt, and one of the Light Horse torn to pieces by the explosion of a Shell, this was afterwards contradicted; That early on Tuesday Morning ~ Admiral Shuldham discovering the Works our People were throwing up on Dorchester Heights, immediately sent an Express to General Howe to inform him, that it was necessary that they should be attacked and dislodged from thence, or he would be under the necessity of withdrawing the Ships from the Harbour under his command; That preparations were directly made for that purpose as it was said, and from twelve to two O'Clock, about 3000 men embarked on board the Transports which fell down to the Castle, with a design of Landing on that part of Dorchester next to it, and attacking the Works at 5 O'Clock next morning; That Lord Percy was appointed to command, and that it was generally believed the attempt would have been made, had it not been for the Violent Storm which happened that night, as I have mentioned before; That he heard several of the privates and one or two Serjeants say, as they were embarking that it would be another Bunker Hill affair. He further Informs that the Army is preparing to leave Boston, and that they will do it in a day or two..."

"Notwithstanding the report from Boston that Halifax is the place of their Destination, I have no doubt but that they are going to the Southward of this, and I apprehend to New York..."

The British evacuation of the city of Boston was completed by the 17th of March, 1776 (see *Newsletter #3 1996*), but the British did not leave the vicinity immediately. The fleet lingered a while in Boston Harbor, raising some

concern as to their motives. According to General Washington, in a letter he dispatched to the Massachusetts Provincial Legislature on the 21st:

"Er'e now, I was in hopes of congratulating you on the departure of the Minifterial Troops, not only from your Capital, but Country. That they ftill remain in the Harbour, after having been five days embarked, affords matter for fpeculation, and, collected as their force is now, of apprehenfion."

On the 24th the General issued General Orders to his troops in which he noted the

non-movement of the British fleet:

"The Enemy ftill continuing in the harbour, without any apparent caufe for it, after Winds and Weather have favoured their failing, leaves abundant reafon to fufpect, that they may have fome defign of aiming a blow at us before they depart ~ The General therefore in the ftrongeft terms imaginable, recommends to the commanding Officer of every Corps, to prevent his men that are off duty, from ftragging, but to have them ready to turn out at a moments warn~ ing, with their Arms & Ammunition in good order ~ For this purpofe a ftrict attention is to be paid to Roll~calling, and all delinquents feverely punifhed..."

On the 25th of March, in a letter to Joseph Reed, his friend from Philadelphia and secretary,

Washington expressed his amazement at the lack of activity on the part of the British:

"Since my laft, things remain nearly in ftatu quo. The enemy have the beft knack at puzzling people I ever met with in my life. They have blown up, burnt, and demolifhed the Caftle totally, and are now all in Nantafket Road, have been there ever fince Wednefday, what doing, the Lord knows. The Boftonians think their ftay abfolutely necefsary to fit them for fea, as the veffels, neither in themfelves nor loading, was in any degree fit for a voyage, being loaded in great hafte and much diforder..."

Finally, on the 28th of March, General Washington was able to send the following

favorable message to Joseph Reed:

"General Howe has a grand manoeuvre in view, or has made an inglorious retreat. Yefterday evening the remains of the British fleet left Nantafket Road, and, (except an armed vefsel or two,) hath left the coaft quite clear of an enemy. Six more regiments will infantly march for New York, two days hence another, and a day or two after that our whole force, except about three or four regiments, to erect fuch works as fhall be adjudged necefsary for the fecurity of this place. In three or four days from this date, I fhall follow myfelf..."

When George Washington mentioned that "Six more regiments will instantly march for New York..." he was referring to the fact that he had, on the 19th of March, directed Brigadier General William Heath to take command of a Brigade consisting of the 5th, 16th, 19th, 24th and 25th Regiments and march to the environs of New York City. The regiments chosen for

the defense of New York included those commanded by Generals John Groaton, John Patterson and John Stark, and Colonels William Bond and Charles Webb. Two artillery regiments and General John Sullivan's Rifle Regiment were also directed to become part of General Heath's Brigade. General Washington's army that arrived at New York over the next

few weeks would become the largest he would command during the course of the American Revolutionary War; it would number between 25,000 and 28,000 men by August, 1776.

Leaving Major General Artemas Ward in charge of the Continental Forces in the province of Massachusetts~Bay, General Washington

arrived in the vicinity of New York City and established his headquarters there on 14 April. From that time, until well into July, the general kept his Patriot army active in constructing fortifications around the city of New York and on Long Island. By May 1st Washington was able to write to General Charles Lee to tell him:

"We have done a great deal of work at this place. In a fortnight more, I think the city will be in a very respectable posture of defence. Governor's~Ifland has a large and strong work erected, and a regiment encamped there. The point below, called Red~Hook, has a small, but exceeding strong barbet battery; and several new works are constructed, and many of them almost executed at other places..."

On 21 May, General Washington wrote a letter to Major General Israel Putnam, who

would be in charge of the troops at New York during Washington's absence.

"The Congresses having been pleased to signify a desire that I should repair to Philadelphia, in order to advise and consult with them on the present posture of affairs, and as I am on the point of setting out accordingly; I have to desire that you will cause the different Works now in agitation to be carried on with the utmost expedition, to this end I have wrote to the Provincial Congresses (of this Colony) for Tools and have hopes of obtaining them. Apply therefore accordingly, take an exact acct. of what you receive.

The Works upon Long Island should be completed as expeditiously as possible, so should those in and about this Town, and upon Governor's Island. If New Works can be carried on without detriment to the old, (for want of Tools) I would have that intended at Powles Hook, set abt. immediately as I conceive it to be of Importance, in like manner would I have that at the Narrows begun, provided Colo. Knox, after his arrangement of the Artillery should find that there are any fit pieces of Cannon to be spared for it; otherwise, as I have no longer any dependance upon Cannon from Admiral Hopkins, it wd. be useless.

The Barriers of those Streets leading from the Water are not to be meddled with; and where they have been pull'd down are to be repaired, and (erected) near the Water if more advantageous.

As it does not appear to me improbable that the Enemy may attempt to run past our Batteries in, and about the Town, and Land between them and the woody grounds above Mr. Scot's, I would have you imply as many Men as you can in throwing up Fleches at proper places, and distances within that space in order to give opposition in Landing but if there are not Tools enough to carry on the other (more essential) Works and these at the same Instant you are not to neglect the first but esteem these as secondary considerations only...

As I have great reason to fear that the Fortifications in the High lands are in a bad situation, and the Garrisons on Acct. of Arms worse; I would have you send Brigadier Lord Stirling with Colo. Putnam (and Colo. Knox if he can be spared) up there, to see report and direct such alterations, as shall be judg'd necessary for putting them into a fit, and proper posture of defence..."

Meanwhile, at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Admiral Lord Richard Howe was preparing an armada of some 300 transport and supply vessels, ten ships of the line and twenty frigates to transport his brother, General William Howe's force of 32,000 men to New York. The British army included, in addition to eight British regiments, 12,000 men hired as mercenaries in the German

states of Brunswick, Hesse~Cassel, Hesse~Hanau, Waldeck, Anspach~Bayreuth and Anhalt~Zerbst, and 3,500 Scot Highlanders. (The original intention was that the German mercenaries would be stationed in Ireland to relieve the British troops there, who would then be transferred to America, but the Irish Members of Parliament objected to the idea, and the Germans

were sent to America.)

The British plan was to take control of the harbor of New York, and thusly, the Hudson River, thereby driving a wedge between New England and the other colonies. Lord George Germain's Ministry had attempted, and accomplished, the first part of a very difficult feat: the raising of a very large army and the transport of it across the ocean to bring the war to a quick end. It should be noted that the British Ministry, under Lord Germain, was divided into the Cabinet, which made the decisions on what expeditions should be undertaken and the particulars of how many troops should be deployed and where, when, how and so forth those deployments should occur; the Secretaries Of State, who had the responsibility and authority to issue orders to the Treasury, the Admiralty,

Ordinance and the Commander-In-Chief of the army to undertake the expeditions; and the King, who had a say in whether the expeditions should proceed. Then there was the Navy Board, which had the responsibility to make arrangements for transport ships and the victualling of those ships for the long journey across the Atlantic. Despite the obstacles inherent in the segregation of the authority and duties within the British Ministry, the largest British force ever assembled for a foreign campaign was set into motion by the middle of June and began to arrive on Staten Island on the 30th of that month. On the 29th of June, 1776 Samuel Webb was one of a group of Americans who were serving as lookouts on Staten Island. He made the following notation in his personal journal:

"This is the fleet which we forced to evacuate Bofton and went to Halifax laft March, where they have been waiting for reinforcements, and have now arrived here with a view of putting their curfed plans into execution."

News of the arrival of the British fleet reached General Washington at his headquarters in the city of New York on the 29th and he immediately wrote a letter to Brigadier General

William Livingston requesting that additional troops be sent into the city for its defence. In that letter, Washington stated that:

"Since Colo. Reed left this, I have received certain Information from the Hook, that about forty of the Enemy's Fleet have arrived here, and others now in Sight, that there cannot be a Doubt, but the whole Fleet will be in this Day, and To-Morrow. I beg not a Moment's Time may be loft in fending forward fuch Parts of the Militia, as Colonel Reed fhall mention..."

To the Congress General Washington wrote:

"When I had the Honor of addefsing you Yefterday, I had only been informed of the arrival of Forty five of the Fleet in the Morning; fince that have received Authentic Intelligence from fundry perfons, among them from General Greene, that one hundred and ten fail came in before Night, that were counted, and that more were feen about dufk in the offing. I have no doubt, but that the whole that failed from Hallifax, are now at the Hook."

This chronological history of the Revolutionary War will be continued in a future newsletter.

4th Quarterly Meeting

The 4th Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held on Saturday, October 24, 1998 at the Kings Family Restaurant in downtown Altoona. The meeting is scheduled to begin at 12:00 noon. Due to the low response to the Constitution Day Dinner, it had to be cancelled, but the guest speaker, the Honorable Judge Norman D. Callan, graciously agreed to reschedule his comments to this Quarterly Meeting. Therefore, the local DAR chapters have been invited to attend. To all Blair County Chapter, SAR compatriot members, please bring your wives or other guests. We will order from the menu.