



#5 1995

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War
with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role
Continued

1775: THE SIEGE OF BOSTON

The *shot heard 'round the world* woke many people up. It woke up the American colonists who hoped that a reconciliation would yet be possible. The fears and concerns that the people of Boston had been voicing ~ the same fears and concerns that the other colonies had sloughed off as exaggerated and premature ~ had startlingly become reality. It woke up the British who believed that the American "rabble" could be effortlessly intimidated into accepting any directive handed down from the Parliament. They found out, at Concord, that the colonials could muster themselves into an army that could take on the King's Regiments. Lord Percy wrote to General Edward Harvey, a friend in England:

"Whoever looks upon them as an irregular mob, will find himself much mistaken; they have men amongst them who know very well what they are about, having been employed as Rangers against the Indians and Canadians, and this country being much covered with wood and hilly, is very advantageous for their method of fighting...Nor are several of their men void of a spirit of enthusiasm, as we experienced yesterday, for many of them concealed themselves in houses and advanced within ten yards to fire at me and other officers, though they were morally certain of being put to death themselves in an instant. You may depend upon it, that as the Rebels have now had time to prepare, they are determined to go through with it, nor will the insurrection here turn out so despicable as it is perhaps imagined at home. For my part, I never believed, I confess, that they would have attacked the King's troops, or have had the perseverance I found in them yesterday."

On 22 April, 1775 the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts~Bay was summoned to meet by Dr. Joseph Warren. It approved a resolution to raise an army of 13,600 men for the sake of carrying out a siege of the British then occupying the city of Boston. A letter was sent out to all of the committees of safety in the province dated the 30th of April, 1775 which stated:

"The barbarous Murders on our innocent Brethren on Wednesday the 19th

Infant, has made it absolutely necessary that we immediately raise an army to defend our Wives and our Children from the butchering Hands of an inhuman Soldiery, who, incensed at the Obstacles they meet with in their bloody progresss, and enraged at being repulsed from the Field of Slaughter, will, without the least doubt, take the first Opportunity in their Power to ravage this devoted Country with Fire and Sword. We conjure you, therefore, that you give all Assistance possible in forming an Army. Our all is at Stake. Death and Devastation are the certain Consequences of Delay; every Moment is infinitely precious; an Hour lost may deluge your Country in Blood, and entail perpetual Slavery upon the few of your Posterity who may survive the Carnage. We beg and entreat you, as you will answer it to your Country, to your own Consciences, and above all, as you will answer to God himself, that you will hasten and encourage, by all possible Means, the Enlistment of Men to form an Army, and send them forward to Headquarters at Cambridge, with that expedition which the vast Importance and instant Urgency of the affair demands."

The letter was necessary. As soon as the news of Lexington and Concord had begun to spread throughout the countryside, militia units and men who, till then, didn't belong to any militia were making their way toward Boston. The "rabble", as the British termed the colonial ranks, swelled to (according to some reports) twenty thousand men over the first few days following the British flight from Concord. It might be remembered that when General William Heath realized it would be futile to pursue the British into the town of Boston, he had dismissed the militia under his authority. But the majority of them did not leave; instead they set up an impromptu camp to keep an eye on the British. They were soon joined by other militiamen and farmers who had not arrived in time to help on the journey from Concord. There was confusion and uncertainty of what should be done next ~ and who should do it. Not all of the men who traveled to Boston stayed much longer than a few days.

An express rider had galloped through the village of Shrewsbury during the late hours of the 19th with news of the day's engagement at Concord. One of those who were interested in what the rider had to report was General Artemas Ward, the Massachusetts militia commander-in-chief who had been lying in bed, ill from gall-stone trouble. He rose at daybreak and made his way to Boston, arriving in the afternoon of the 20th. Although Ward has been described as unimaginative and slow, he was well liked and deliberate in his actions. He immediately called the militia officers together and laid out duties and objectives for them which included distribution of troops, establishment of guard posts, formal recruitment and burial of the previous day's dead. He directed certain precautions to be taken to prevent the British from launching another soiree into the countryside.

Dr. Joseph Warren established a headquarters on the 20th in the Cambridge home of Jonathan Hastings. Being the virtual embodiment of the Massachusetts~Bay Provincial Congress, Dr. Warren's presence helped Artemas Ward's attempt to transform the "rabble" into an army. Enlistment papers were quickly printed and through Warren's encouragement, nearly 8,000 men signed their names. Whether they actually took into consideration what they were signing, or if they did so simply in the heat of the moment can not even be guessed at. The enlistment notices called for service from the date of enlistment until the "last day of December next". {The men who signed those enlistment sheets thusly became known as "eighteen months men".}

Despite the progress Dr. Warren and General Ward made in organizing the troops, many of them must have begun to understand the reality of the situation during the days following the 20th. Some of the men who had journeyed to the impromptu encampment may have expected to participate in a quick skirmish with the British and then head back home; they brought with them only what weapons they could carry and the clothes they wore. They were not prepared to engage in a long siege. Many of the men, having seen no immediate action, simply left to resume their spring planting chores. On the 24th of April Ward notified the Provincial Congress that many of the men were leaving for their homes. He noted that:

"My situation is such that if I have not enlisting orders immediately I shall be left all alone. It is impossible to keep the men here, excepting something

be done. I, therefore, pray that the plan may be completed and handed to me this morning, and that you, gentlemen of the Congress, issue orders for enlisting men."

General John Thomas commanded troops holding the crucial position at Roxbury, to the south of the Boston Neck and the route the British would undoubtedly need to take if they moved out of Boston. The desertion situation got so bad that of six thousand men under Thomas, four thousand left after the first week of the encampment.

Although it was a bit slow in taking action on the matter, the Massachusetts~Bay Provincial Congress finally, on the 30th, sent out the letter transcribed above. On the 3rd of May, 1775 the Provincial Congress sent a packet of letters to Philadelphia to be submitted to the delegates who were expected to meet in a *Second Continental Congress* on the 10th of that month. That packet was presented to the delegates of the congress by John Hancock on the 11th. The packet contained depositions taken from participants and eyewitnesses of the events at Lexington and Concord. It also contained a letter from the Massachusetts~Bay Provincial Congress to the people of Great Britain informing them of the actions of General Gage and the engagements at Lexington and Concord. Although the purpose of contacting the Continental Congress was to lend currency to their recent actions, the Massachusetts~Bay Provincial Congress could not wait for a reply from Philadelphia. It had to act soon. Nearly a month had already passed since the redcoats had been shut up in Boston by the colonists' siege camp.

What of the redcoats in Boston? The British felt the effects of the siege in two ways. Firstly, although the port of Boston was controlled by the British, and therefore open for His Majesty's ships to come and go as they pleased, the British were running out of food and fuel. The main supply of these two commodities came from the American countryside. It was very costly and inconvenient to ship foodstuffs across the Atlantic. It must be remembered that there were no means of refrigeration or packaging in the mid-1700s. If meat was sent by ship across the ocean it would be practically all spoiled by the time it reached the shores of the new world. Shipping live cattle and swine by ship had its own drawbacks. Fodder and hay to feed the livestock enroute were too bulky to ship. Horses were the only practical grazing animal to travel across the water because they could live on oats which also could be economically transported. But the Europeans never had much of a taste for horsemeat. As a result, salted beef and pork were the only type of meat to be shipped from the mother country for her troops. It might be noted that butter, oatmeal, pease and flour were shipped as provisions for the army, but meat was essential for the soldier's diet.

The trip across the ocean was only one small part of the overall problem of provisioning the British army. The entire provisioning system, from English farm to the overseas theatre of war was floundering in red tape and bureaucratic delays. There were simply too many middlemen in the system and any delay on the part of one affected the rest. The farmers did not work directly for the government, and they might sell their products to other bidders. Even the provisions purchased by the army victuallers might simply arrive late to the docks. Some of the provisions were spoiled when they reached the docks and therefore all of the casks and barrels had to be inspected. Apart from such delays with the provisions themselves, there were problems with obtaining ships for convoys and escorts. The weather did not always cooperate either. A much greater problem than all those mentioned already was a simple disagreement between the department of the Treasury and the Admiralty. The Admiralty's Navy Board grabbed up all of the best ships for army and equipment/arms transports, leaving the Treasury (which had been saddled with the duty of supplying the army with provisions) with few or no ships with which to transport food. The Treasury had to resort to hiring transport vessels on its own. The British troops who were holed up in Boston laid almost no faith on receiving food provisions by ship; the open port was of little use if there were no provision ships to sail into her.

Secondly, Gage's troops in Boston were afraid of what the colonists, in such large numbers, might do. Frederick Mackenzie, the lieutenant of the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, took notice of General Gage's uneasiness about the Americans.

"From all the measures which have been taken since the nineteenth instant, it appears that the general is apprehensive the rebels will make some desperate attempt on the town. The numbers which are assembled round it and their violent

and determined spirit make it prudent to guard against what they may do."

The "measures" General Gage took against a possible offensive move by the colonists included increasing the number of guards throughout the town. He also strengthened and expanded the fortifications of the town. The colonists were seen to be constructing entrenchments in the countryside surrounding the town. Although the Americans did not have many cannon to carry on actual siege warfare, they were seen to be digging in. {The British, of course, were not aware of the fact that Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen were, at that time, on their expedition to capture the guns of Fort Ticonderoga.} The British soldiers were instructed "to lay at their barracks" so that they might be ready at a moment's notice.

Gage was concerned about the possibility of an uprising by the Boston residents who were also trapped in the town. All intercourse between the townsfolk and the surrounding countryside was cut off; General Gage, alone, could grant permits for residents to leave the town. The people in the town began to fear starvation themselves without free access to the farms outside of the town. General Gage called for a meeting with the town's selectmen to discuss how the two factions could survive the siege. On 22 April Gage met with the selectmen and an agreement was reached:

"That, upon the inhabitants in general lodging their arms in Faneuil Hall, or any other convenient place, under the care of the felectmen, marked with the names of the respective owners, all fuch inhabitants that are inclined might leave the town, with their families and effects, and thofe who remained might depend upon the protection of the governor; and that the arms aforefaid, at a fuitable time, fhould be returned to the owners."

The Committee of Safety, then convening at Cambridge, was agreeable to this plan for a peaceful evacuation. A general exodus from the town proceeded for a short time. But then the Tories who had chosen to remain in the town began to protest to Gage that if and when all of the rebel colonists had left the town, they might set fire to it. It might be more prudent to keep some of the rebel colonists in the town as hostages. General Gage concurred with those arguments and prevented any further removals from the town. In order to prevent a calamity such as that feared by the Tory residents, General Gage refused to grant any more passes except ones so framed that families would be separated and property would be left behind.

On 25 April, the General Assembly of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation approved a resolution to raise an army of 1,500 men to go to the aid of the colonists laying siege to Boston. Nathaniel Green, an ironmaster by profession, was chosen as the commander of this militia army and granted the rank of brigadier.

On 26 April, the Connecticut Assembly approved a resolution to raise an army of six regiments, each consisting of one thousand men. Generals Wooster, Putnam, Spenser, Hinman, Waterbury and Parsons were given their commissions.

On 17 May, the Assembly of New Hampshire approved a resolution to raise two thousand troops in addition to the uncounted many who had marched under Colonel John Stark at the first sound of alarm, on the 18th of April.

As a result of the various colonial Assemblies' actions, a force of approximately 16,000 men was ultimately raised in the four New England provinces. Massachusetts~Bay furnished roughly 11,500, Connecticut furnished 2,300, New Hampshire supplied 1,200 and the tiny colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation supplied 1,000 by the beginning of June. The *continental* army, a nation-wide militia, which certain of the delegates to the Continental Congress behind Richard Henry Lee, of Virginia, had implored the rest to create, was forming then and there on the soil of Massachusetts. Rather than treat each other as separate entities, the authorities of the various militia groups, by common consent, agreed to render obedience to General Ward and to fight together as a unified body.

While the *continental* army was taking shape in the countryside around Boston, the Provincial Assembly of Massachusetts~Bay sent another letter to the delegates assembled in Congress at Philadelphia. The letter, dated 16 May, 1775, recounted the recent history of the British occupation of the town of Boston against the colony's will, and asked that the delegates to the Second Continental Congress consider taking on the task of regulating and commanding the *continental* army

which was being formed. The missive from Massachusetts~Bay, in part, read:

"We are now compelled to raise an Army, which with the assistance of the other colonies, we hope under the smiles of heaven, will be able to defend us and all America from the further butcheries and devastations of our implacable enemies. -But as the sword should in all free states be subservient to the civil powers and as it is the duty of the Magistrates to support it for the peoples necessary defence, we tremble at having an army (although consisting of our countrymen) established here without a civil power to provide for and controul them.

"As the Army now collecting from different colonies is for the general defence of the right of America, we wd. beg leave to suggest to yr. consideration the propriety of yr. taking the regulation and general direction of it, that the operations may more effectually answer the purposes designed."

The May 16 letter was read before the assembled delegates of the Congress on 02 June, but was not taken into consideration at that time. When the Congress reconvened on Saturday, the 3rd of June, a committee consisting of John Rutledge, Thomas Johnson, John Jay, James Wilson and Richard Henry Lee was chosen to consider it. It should be noted that John Rutledge hailed from the colony of South Carolina. Thomas Johnson was a delegate from Maryland. John Jay was from the New York Colony. James Wilson represented Pennsylvania. Richard Henry Lee, who had been the most vocal during the *First* Continental Congress in urging that an army be raised from throughout the united colonies, came from Virginia. It is interesting that no delegates from the New England colonies were included on this committee. The committee brought in their report on the 7th of June. It was read and then ordered to lie on the table for consideration. The minutes transcribed in the *Journals Of The Continental Congress* do not reveal any dissenting arguments. Finally, on 14 June, 1775 the Congress approved the establishment of its control over a Continental Army and, additionally called for the raising of ten companies of expert riflemen from the mid-Atlantic colonies to be sent to augment the army already encamped at Boston.

The Second Continental Congress hoped, by asking for recruits from the mid-Atlantic region, to promote a feeling of unity between all the colonies and provinces. The action would also project an image of unity to the rest of the world. Pennsylvania was requested to raise six of the companies; Virginia and Maryland were each to raise two companies. The response to this call was very positive. In fact, the northern and western frontier counties of Pennsylvania (including Bedford) responded so favorably with men eager to join the new Continental Army, that the Pennsylvania Assembly, on the 22nd of June, authorized two additional companies to be formed.

The Continental Congress convened on Thursday, 15 June, and, among other items of business, discussed a resolution that (according to the minutes of the Continental Congress):

"...a General be appointed to command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty. That five hundred dollars, per month, be allowed for his pay and expences. The Congress then proceeded to the choice of a general, {by ballot} when George Washington, Esq. was unanimously elected."

The announcement by John Adams that his nomination for the position of commander-in-chief would go to George Washington, and the subsequent shouts of agreement from the rest of the delegates embarrassed the Virginia colonel, and he promptly left the room. He did not return until the following afternoon. Perhaps only one other individual in that room was as surprised as Mr. Washington to hear of his nomination. John Hancock, the acting president of the Congress, assumed all along that he would be chosen for the position. Speaking of Mr. Hancock's reaction to his nomination of Washington, John Adams noted in his diary that he *"never remarked a more sudden and sinking change of Countenance. Mortification and resentment were expressed as forcible as his Face could exhibit them."*

Returning our attention to the British for the time being, it should be noted that during the month of May transports of troops had arrived from England and Ireland. The new troops increased the British army to about ten thousand men. Also, on the 25th of May the British frigate, the *Cerberus* had arrived at Boston Harbor. The ship carried three major generals to assist General

Gage, whom the Ministry under Lord North had begun to suspect was incompetent to subdue the rebellious colonists. The fact of the matter was that the Ministry had no idea of what was going on in the Massachusetts~Bay Colony; General Gage did not keep his superiors informed of his intentions and actions. He didn't even inform his own staff of his intentions. It is surprising to note that only Lord Percy and a few other officers who would be directly involved in it were made aware of the intended march on Lexington prior to it taking place. General Haldimand, who served with Gage at Boston, was later asked how the sortie had happened, and he responded that he only knew of it from what his barber told him. The three generals who had been sent to assist Gage with the administration of the American Department, William Howe, Henry Clinton and John Burgoyne were completely unprepared for what they found upon disembarking at Boston. The news of Lexington and Concord had not reached England prior to their departure. General Gage had not sent the news himself. A letter to the inhabitants of Great Britain had been drafted and sent by the Provincial Assembly. It would not arrive there until late in May ~ about the same time that Howe, Clinton and Burgoyne landed in America. As a result, they had assumed that they would have a leisurely outing in the colonies, and perhaps engage in a little fishing and other diversions.

Howe, Clinton and Burgoyne urged General Gage to take action. They advised him to fortify the Dorchester Heights which was located on a peninsula to the south of Boston and to the east of Boston Neck. With that position occupied and heavily fortified, the British could be ferried from Boston and an offensive launched against the colonists. The plan for that expedition was leaked and the Patriots formed their own plan to fortify Charlestown peninsula to the north of Boston. The events which would lead to the battle of Bunker Hill were thusly set in motion.

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

COMMENTS ON THE MICHAEL NEW COURT-MARTIAL

{Editor's Note: Compatriot E. Merle Glunt presented the following comments at our most recent Quarterly Meeting. While many members of the SAR desire that it should only function as a *social* organization, we must not forget Section 2. of the Act To Incorporate The National Society Of The SAR, which we all agreed to uphold by becoming compatriot members.}

The court-martial of Army Spc Michael New in Germany, November 9th, charged with refusal to wear the insignia and blue beret of the United Nations and to serve under a foreign flag and commander raises a serious question with respect to the sworn allegiance of US forces to the Constitution. New's objections are well taken as the military oath taken pertains to the protection of the Constitution and the commitment to protect the United States from all enemies. The threat to the United States; has not been established in this case and brings into focus the question whether US Forces can legally be used by the United Nations as mercenaries, even though they are paid by the United States. Considering the casualties suffered in Somalia and Haiti, as two examples, so-called "peace-keeping" is fraught with frustrations and dangers which should not be excused in hand, because they occurred during actions required by the UN under the concept of the New World Order. The legality of the order being given to Spc New and other members of the US military certainly requires rigid review, bearing in mind that deployment of United States forces on the whim of the UN Secretary most certainly can have a long term effect of the viability of our volunteer military. Should the military forces of the United States be weakened through a decrease of volunteers, the only recourse will be the resumption of the draft and the forced participation in UN political crusades and the possible involvement not only of our young men, but also our young women in alien combat areas.

1995 ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR will be held this year on Saturday, Dec. 9. The dinner~meeting will be held at the R Waffle King restaurant in Altoona starting at 1:00pm. The election and installation of the chapter's officers will be conducted at this meeting. The cost of the meal will be \$10, payable to: Larry D. Smith, Treas./RD #1, Box 704-A/East Freedom, PA, 16637. The dinner will be buffet style including: roast turkey w/filling, baked ham w/pineapple sauce, mashed potatoes w/gravy, vegetable, cole slaw, jello, assorted fruit, relish tray, bread w/butter and coffee, tea and soda. As with the past Annual Meetings, you may bring a guest. Please notify either Larry or the chapter secretary, Bernard Smith if you plan to attend and how many will be in your party. You may pay in advance by mail, or at the door. Please respond by noon, Dec. 4, 1995.