



#4 1995

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1775: Ticonderoga

The 10th of May, 1775 fell on a Wednesday. In the City of Philadelphia forty-eight men sat down to a meeting in the State House at about ten o'clock on that Wednesday morning. They were the delegates to a *Congress* from the various colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts-Bay, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New-Castle~Kent~and~Sussex~on~Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina. These representatives from the colonies had met in general *congress* during September and October of the previous year. When they had adjourned on 22 October, 1774 they resolved that another *congress* should be convened during the following spring. They agreed upon the date of May 10 and then returned to their respective colonies and to their homes and farmsteads. The new *congress* on this Wednesday morning commenced with only a minimum of business to be attended to. The delegates chose Peyton Randolph to serve as a president to guide the proceedings of the *congress*. Charles Thomson was chosen as the Secretary, and then Andrew McNeare was appointed with the duties of "door-keeper" and William Shed, "messenger". The last point of business was to request that the Reverend Mr. Duché open the Congress on the following morning with prayer. The assembled delegates then adjourned until 10 o'clock the following day. It was fairly uneventful.

Far to the north, in New York's Hudson Valley formed between the Adirondack Mountains and the Green Mountains, where the waters of Lake George flowed into the southern end of Lake Champlain, the morning of 10 May, 1775 was not so uneventful. But the delegates assembled in *congress* at Philadelphia would not know of the minor victory which had been achieved that morning until eight days later. Their attention, on the first few days of the new *congress* would need to be directed toward the depositions of participants and witnesses to the hostilities that took place at Lexington and Concord.

As the realization that the "threat" of war had become actual war settled in on the colonies, the need for arms and ammunition became apparent. No sooner had the smoke from the muskets fired at Lexington and Concord cleared than Dr. Warren and his Sons of Liberty were planning an expedition to obtain cannon. Unbeknownst to Dr. Warren, events were unfolding in the village of New Haven, Connecticut which would enable that plan to be carried out. Israel Bissel had ridden into New Haven on the 21st to spread the alarm of the British march toward Concord. A thirty-four year old merchant owned an apothecary shop in New Haven and, when needed, commanded the local militia company. That apothecary owner was a Connecticut native by the name of Benedict Arnold.

Described as vain, hot-blooded and quarrelsome, Mr. Arnold was outraged at the conservatives of the village who, at the town meeting prompted by Bissel's news, carried a vote against sending any armed militia to the aid of their endangered neighbors in Massachusetts. Arnold refused to accept the official results of the town meeting and demanded that the selectmen hand over the keys to the New Haven powder house. "*Good God, are the Americans all a Sleep & tamely giving up their glorious Liberties*" he asked, "*...that they don't take immediate vengeance on such miscreants?*" Arnold gave the selectmen an ultimatum. He would either have the powder and balls peacefully or he would have his militiamen break down the doors of the powder house. Seeing themselves in a no-win situation, the town leaders gave up the keys to the powder house and on the next morning Benedict Arnold and his militia, known by the name of the Governor's Foot Guard, set out for Cambridge.

Colonel Samuel H. Parsons was traveling northward from Cambridge to attempt to convince more Connecticut residents to join the Patriots who were forming a siege~line around Boston. Whether he was familiar with Dr. Warren's secret plan to obtain arms and ammunition is not known; his primary purpose was to recruit more militia. He and Arnold discussed the events that were taking place and Parsons noted the dire need for cannon. It was Arnold who suggested that some cannon might be taken from the old and deteriorating Fort Ticonderoga. Arnold had made a number of trips to Canada on merchant business and had learned that there was a fine collection of cannon and only a skeletal British force maintaining control over the fort. He estimated that there were eighty pieces of heavy cannon, nearly two dozen brass guns and a dozen or so smaller mortars. Colonel Parsons was understandably excited about the possibility of capturing such a prize. While Arnold and his militiamen proceeded on to Cambridge, Parsons headed for Hartford to enlist the help of two other men who were known to be sympathetic to the Patriot cause: Colonel Samuel Wyllys and Silas Deane.

Silas Deane was a prominent businessman and lawyer. He had argued Connecticut's position toward the Townsend Acts and had served on the Committee of Correspondence in Connecticut. Deane liked the plan suggested to him by Parsons and, without authority, withdrew £300 from the Connecticut Treasury to underwrite the project. Deane also proceeded to enlist the services of the only militia unit in the vicinity of Ticonderoga ~ the Green Mountain Boys.

Ethan Allen had made the backwoods region of present-day Vermont, then known as the New Hampshire Grants, his home. He was originally from Connecticut and had moved to the New Hampshire Grants in the late 1760s. He organized a group of men under the name of the Green Mountain Boys with the purpose of preventing the encroachment of settlers from New York into the New Hampshire Grants. Their name for Allen's group was the "Bennington Rioters". Allen's tactics of raiding, burning and terrorizing the settlers in the region whom they considered New Yorkers offended not only the New York, but also the New Hampshire authorities. The group's attacks on the other settlers had gained them outlaw status and placed prices on their heads in 1771. Silas Deane knew that Allen and the Green Mountain Boys would make good accomplices now that the entire population of the American colonies had become "outlaws".

Mr. Deane made contact with Ethan Allen and persuaded him to head an expedition to capture Ticonderoga. Allen and his second and third-in-command, James Easton and Seth Warner, assembled a force of two hundred and thirty men from both Connecticut and Massachusetts. The mission was afforded quasi-legal status when the Massachusetts Committee of Safety sent an envoy to Allen's camp at Castleton with a letter of commission for the expedition.

Benedict Arnold, in the meantime, had arrived with his militia at Cambridge. Arnold met with the Dr. Warren and the Massachusetts Committee of Safety and made his proposal. They were not, at the time, aware of Silas Deane's contact with Ethan Allen, and readily agreed to the proposal Arnold made. They were concerned, though, that the expedition would require an invasion of territory that fell within New York's jurisdiction. They sent a missive to that colony's Committee of Safety, but Dr. Warren felt action had to be taken immediately. He convinced the committee that a force should be sent at once to effect a surprise on the fort. On 03 May, 1775 the Massachusetts Committee of Safety appointed Benedict Arnold to the rank of colonel *for secret service*. He was commissioned to raise a force of up to four hundred men in western Massachusetts and the neighboring colonies for the purpose of capturing Fort Ticonderoga, stationing a garrison of militia there, and then transporting the cannon and ammunition stores to the siege camp surrounding Boston.

When Benedict Arnold discovered that Ethan Allen had been engaged by Parsons and Deane to undertake the mission he was outraged. Rather than waste any time organizing his own force, Arnold assigned that duty to a subordinate officer and set off, with a servant, to intercept the Green Mountain Boys. At Castleton, Arnold met up with the Green Mountain Boys and the additional Connecticut and Massachusetts militiamen who were about to rendezvous with their leader, Allen, at

a point a few miles to the north, along the eastern bank of Lake Champlain. The soldiers, somewhat drunk on "stonewall", a drink made up of rum and hard-cider, and favored by the Green Mountain Boys did not give Arnold the reception he expected. He was arrogant enough to assume that they would simply acquiesce to his authority without question. When he demanded that they recognize him as their commander, they just laughed in his face. He stormed off to the intended rendezvous point to confront Allen, and the Green Mountain Boys and militiamen followed. One of the junior officers noted:

"We were...shockingly surprised when Colonel Arnold presumed to contend for the command of those forces that we had raised, who we had assured should go under the command of their own officers, and be paid and maintained by the Colony of Connecticut. Mr. Arnold, after we had generously told him our whole plan, strenuously contended and insisted that he had a right to command them and all their officers, which bred such a mutiny among the soldiers which ...nearly frustrated our whole design, as our men were for...marching home."

Ethan Allen was not as vain as Benedict Arnold and did not mind sharing the glory that the expedition might bring, but he had little intention of giving up command of the Green Mountain Boys. When Arnold confronted him, Allen simply invited Arnold to join his troops. He even suggested that the two of them might enter the fort together at the head of the troops. This offer by Allen carried the codicil that Arnold would issue no orders to the troops. In view of the circumstances, Arnold could do nothing except agree to the offer.

Prior to Arnold's and the rest of the Green Mountain Boys' arrival, Allen had sent men out through the neighborhood to find boats in which they might cross the lake. As the wee hours of the morning of May 10th arrived, the necessary boats had not been obtained. Only two flatboats could be found, so they would have to suffice. By three o'clock that morning, the first group of eighty-three men arrived on the western shore of Lake Champlain near the fort. The fear that they might lose the element of surprise prompted Allen to make the decision to leave the remainder of the troops on the east side of the lake. He proceeded on toward the fort with the eighty-three. The path from the north side of the fort, where they had landed, wound through a thickly forested area. The Patriots circled around to the fort's south side where they found a wicket gate standing open.

Control of the British garrison was fairly easy. A single sentry was on watch, but he was probably dozing when the colonials first entered the fort. He attempted to fire his musket at the intruders, but it flashed in the pan. He flung it away and let out a call to the other forty-seven soldiers asleep in the barracks. There were twenty-four women and children also in the fort at that time. A British soldier came rushing toward Allen with his bayonet pointed. Allen slashed at the soldier with his drawn sword and disarmed him; he then demanded to know where the commander of the fort was. Meanwhile, the Green Mountain Boys continued to stream into the fort and formed a line on the parade ground with their muskets aimed toward the barracks. On Allen's orders they let out a shout to rouse the British soldiers.

Ethan Allen later wrote an account of the taking of Fort Ticonderoga in an autobiography. In that account he noted the following.

"I arrived at the lake opposite to Ticonderoga on the evening of the ninth day of May, 1775... and it was with the utmost difficulty that I procured boats to cross the lake. However, I landed eighty-three men near the garrison, and sent the boats back for the rear guard, commanded by Col. Seth Warner. But the day began to dawn, and I found myself under a necessity to attack the fort before the rear could cross the lake; and, as it was viewed hazardous, I harangued the officers and soldiers in the manner following:

"Friends and fellow soldiers - You have, for a number of years past, been a scourge and terror to arbitrary power. Your valour has been famed abroad, and acknowledged, as appears by the advice and orders to me from the general assembly of Connecticut, to surprise and take the garrison now before us. I now propose to advance before you, and in person conduct you through the wicket gate: for we must this morning either quit our pretensions to valour or possess ourselves of this fortress in a few minutes. And in as much as it is a desperate



attempt, which none but the bravest of men dare undertake, I do not urge it on any contrary to his will. You that will undertake voluntarily, poise your firelocks."

"The men being at this time drawn up in three ranks, each poised his firelock. I ordered them to face to the right; and at the head of the centre file, marched them immediately to the wicket gate aforesaid, where I found a sentry posted, who instantly snapped his fusee at me. I ran immediately toward him, and he retreated through the covered way into the parade within the garrison, gave a haloo, and ran under a bomb-proof.

"My party, who followed me into the fort, I formed on the parade in such a manner as to face the two barracks, which faced each other. The garrison being asleep, except the centries, we gave three huzzas, which greatly surprised them. One of the centries made a pass at one of my officers with a charged bayonet, and slightly wounded him. My first thought was to kill him with my sword, but in an instant altered the design and fury of the blow to a slight cut on the side of the head; upon which he dropped his gun and asked quarter, which I readily granted him, and demanded of him the place where the commanding officer kept.

"He shewed me a pair of stairs...which led up to a second story...to which I immediately repaired, and ordered the commander, Capt. Delaplace, to come forth instantly or I would sacrifice the whole garrison; at which the captain came immediately to the door with his breeches in his hand, when I ordered him to deliver to me the fort instantly, who asked me by what authority I demanded it. I answered, 'In the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress.' "

Jocelyn Feltham was the fort's second-in-command. He was a lieutenant in His Majesty's Twenty Sixth Foot regiment. Although Ethan Allen claimed in his report to the Continental Congress that he made his purpose known to the commander of the fort, Feltham was the man, and not Captain Delaplace, who, dressed only in his nightshirt, faced Allen. Feltham's own account of the incident follows.

"I was awakened by numbers of shrieks and the words, "No quarter, no quarter," from a number of armed rabble. I jumped up,...ran undressed to knock at Captain Delaplace's door and to receive his orders or wake him. The door was fast. The room I lay in being close to Captain Delaplace's, I stepped back, put on my coat and waistcoat and returned to his room, there being no possibility of getting to the men, as there were numbers of the rioters on the bastions of the wing of the fort on which the door of my room and back door of Captain Delaplace's room led.

"With great difficulty I got into his room...from which there was a door down by stairs into the area of the fort. I asked Captain Delaplace, who was now just up, what I should do and offered to force my way, if possible, to our men. On opening this door, the bottom of the stairs was filled with the rioters and many were forcing their way up, knowing the commanding officer lived there...

"From the top of the stairs I endeavored to make them hear me, but it was impossible. On making a signal not to come up the stairs, they stopped and proclaimed silence among themselves. I then addressed them, but in a style not agreeable to them. I asked a number of questions, expecting to amuse them till our people fired, which I must certainly own thought would have been the case. After asking them the most material questions I could think, viz. by what authority they entered His Majesty's fort, who were the leaders, what their intent, &c., I was informed by one Ethan Allen and one Benedict Arnold that they had a joint command, Arnold informing me he came from instructions received from the Congress at Cambridge, which he afterward showed me.

"Mr. Allen told me his orders were from the province of Connecticut and that he must have immediate possession of the fort and all the effects of George, the Third (those were his words), Mr. Allen insisting on this with a sword drawn over my head and numbers of his followers' firelocks presented at me, alleging I was commanding officer and to give up the fort, and if it was not complied with, or that there was a single gun fired in the fort, neither man, woman, or child should be left alive...

"Mr. Arnold begged it in a genteel manner, but without success; it was owing to him they were prevented getting into Captain Delaplace's room, after they found I did not command.

"Captain Delaplace, being now dressed, came out, when after talking to him some time they put me back into the room. They placed two sentrys on me and took Capt. Delaplace downstairs."

The question has been asked by historians over the years, whether or not Ethan Allen, when he found out that he had been greeted by a minor officer, actually thundered over the noise of the men around him: *"Come out of there you damned old Rat"* or *"Come out of there, you sons of British whores"*. Both versions have filtered down to us as examples of the strong will of Allen. The thing that is not in question was the fact that Captain Delaplace probably had not yet even heard of the *Continental Congress*. In any case, when Delaplace saw that some of the colonial militiamen had already beat down some of the barracks doors and that already his men were being corralled into submission in the parade ground, he realized he could not mount any kind of defense and soon agreed to surrender.

The captured garrison consisted of Captain Delaplace, Lieutenant Feltham, a conductor of artillery, a gunner, two sergeants and forty-four rank and file soldiers. There were about one hundred pieces of cannon, one 13-inch mortar and a number of guns on swivels. The fort also held some ninety gallons of rum, which Allen's men helped themselves to. Allen politely gave Captain Delaplace a receipt for the rum, which he was assured might be redeemed from the Connecticut treasury.

The Green Mountain Boys and their fellow militiamen were enjoying Delaplace's liquor as the sun was rising over the Green Mountains when Colonel Seth Warner arrived with the rear guard of militia. Warner pointed out to Allen that the small British fort at Crown Point, a few miles to the north should also be captured before news of this victory at Ticonderoga leaked out. Allen agreed to his cousin, Warner's suggestion and so, on the following morning of 11 May, 1775 Warner led a group of fifty militia northward. They traveled over Lake Champlain against strong headwinds, Fort Crown Point was deteriorating more than Ticonderoga and had recently sustained a fire. It was

garrisoned by only one sergeant and eight soldiers. {Allen's account gave the number at twelve.} Needless to say, it fell easily to Warner and his militia. Captured also were nearly one hundred cannon and other guns.

Over the next two days (*i.e.* 12-13 May) the troops which had been raised under Arnold's commission began to arrive at Ticonderoga. Arnold, smarting from the fact that Allen was not allowing him the "joint command" that he had promised earlier, saw the arrival of the troops as his means to claim the command he desired. He took his troops northward about a hundred miles across the Canadian border and took possession of a British schooner, which he (rightly) believed held the key to maintaining control over Lake Champlain. Then, starting out on the afternoon of the 14th of May, Arnold and fifty men used the captured schooner to sail within thirty miles of St. Johns Fort. One of the men accompanying Colonel Benedict Arnold on this expedition wrote:

"After rowing hard all night, we arrived within half a mile of the place at sunrise (on 15 May), sent a man to bring us information, and in a small creek infested with numberless swarms of gnats and musquetoos, waited with impatience for his return. The man returning, informed us they were unapprised of our coming... We directly pushed for shore, and landed about sixty rods distance from the barracks. The [British] had their arms, but upon our briskly marching up in their faces, they retired within the barracks, left their arms, and resigned themselves into our hands. We took fourteen prisoners, fourteen stands of arms, and some small stores. We also took the King's sloop, two fine brass field-pieces, and four boats. We destroyed five boats more, lest they should be made use of against us."

The effective capture of the three forts and the quantity of cannon and other arms was a major victory for the Patriot cause. The British, though they had already proceeded to send reinforcements to St Johns Fort just prior to its capture, would not be able to regain control of that region throughout the duration of the war.

There remained one small problem. The entire expedition of taking possession of the forts and their arms had been undertaken without the Continental Congress' knowledge. The general assumption in the *congress* was still that the colonies should attempt to obtain a reconciliation with the mother country. The *victory* at Ticonderoga was an embarrassing one. When word finally arrived on 18 May, 1775, the representatives assembled in the *congress* decided that the cannon should be kept at the south end of Lake George and inventoried against the possibility that they could be returned to Britain in the event that a reconciliation was effected.

The cannon would eventually be transported by Henry Knox to Boston after the Battle of Breed's Hill underlined their urgent need. By that time, the thought of reconciliation with England had faded into oblivion.

Bedford: The Bedford County Committee of Correspondence was established on 09 May, 1775, the day before the taking of Fort Ticonderoga.

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

CONSTITUTION DAY DINNER

The 1995 Constitution Day Dinner will be held on September 16, 1995 at the Altoona Ramada Inn. The dinner will begin at 12:00 noon. The meal will consist of chicken breast with filling and supreme sauce, fresh seasonal fruit cup, glazed carrots, tossed salad and parfaits for dessert. The guest speaker for this year will be the Honorable Jolene Kopriva, who will speak on the subject of how the Constitution is alive and well today.

The cost of dinner will be \$12.00 per person. Those wishing to attend should respond with their reservations by Wednesday, September 13, 1995 to Larry D. Smith, Treasurer, RD #1, Box 704-A, East Freedom, PA 16637. As always, you may pay at the Dinner, but please notify me of the number who will be able to attend by the 13th. You may leave a telephone message on my workplace answering machine at 224-6408 if you wish.