



NEWSLETTER

#3 2000

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1776: Incidents At New York

Following the Patriots' evacuation of New York City, and the Battle of Harlem Heights, the two armies settled into a period of over a month of waiting for the other to initiate a significant offensive. A significant offensive, though, was not to take place in the immediate environs of New York City. Apart from the few incidents, to be noted in the following, the situation on Manhattan Island was relatively quiet.

In the early morning hours of 21 September, nearly a week after Harlem Heights,

numerous fires broke out in the city of New York. The fires spread rapidly. No alarm could be sounded because the Patriots had carried the city's bells with them when they evacuated the city. The first fire appeared in the section of the city known as Whitehall. Other fires soon broke out throughout other parts of the city, making it apparent that they had been set. According to General Sir William Howe, in a report he submitted to the British Parliament:

"Between the 20th and 21st instant, at midnight, a most horrid attempt was made by a number of wretches to burn the town of New York, in which they succeeded too well, having set it on fire in several places with matches and combustibles that had been prepared with great art and ingenuity. Many were detected in the fact, and some killed upon the spot by the enraged troops in garrison; and had it not been for the exertions of Maj-Gen. Robertson, the Officers under his command in the town, and the brigade of guards detached from the camp, the whole must infallibly have been consumed, as the night was extremely windy.

"The destruction is computed to be about one quarter of the town; and we have reason to suspect there are villains still lurking there, ready to finish the work they have begun; one person, escaping the pursuit of a sentinel the following night, having declared, that he would again set fire to the town the first opportunity. The strictest

search is making after these incendiaries, and the most effectual measures taken to guard against the perpetration of their villainous and wicked designs."

In regard to the fire, General George Washington noted, in a letter to Governor

Jonathan Trumbull, dated 23 September:

"On Friday night, about Eleven or twelve O'clock, a fire broke out in the City of New York, which, burning rapidly till after Sun rise next morning, destroyed a great Number of Houses. By what means it happened we do not know; but the Gentleman who brought the Letter from Genl. Howe last night, and who was one of his Aide De Camps, informed Col. Reed, that several of our Countrymen had been punished with various deaths on Account of it; some by hanging, others by burning, &c., alledging that they were apprehended when Committing the fact."

According to reports published in the *New York Gazette* and the *Weekly Mercury*, the fires destroyed all the buildings between Broad Street and North River and almost as north as the City Hall and south to King's College.

A British Lieutenant, Frederick Mackenzie, noted that *"No assistance could be sent from the army 'til after daybreak, as the general was apprehensive the rebels had some design of attacking the army."*

The venerable old Trinity Church was lost to the fire. Of its burning, Lieutenant Mackenzie noted: *"The appearance of the Trinity Church, when completely in flames, was a very grand sight, for the spire being entirely framed in wood and covered with shingles, a lofty pyramid of fire appeared, and as soon as the shingles were burnt away, the frame appeared with every separate piece of timber burning until the principal timbers were burnt through when the whole fell with a great noise."*

On the second day of the fire, another incident vied with the fire for the attention of the British. A Patriot, Nathan Hale was arrested during the morning hours on the charge of espionage.

General Washington, after the defeat on Long Island, had discussed the need for intelligence of the British army with his officers. Acting on that, Colonel Knowlton had issued a call for volunteers to spy on the British to discover their plans. One of the men who answered that call was Nathan Hale, a twenty-four year old Yale-

educated school teacher serving as a captain in the Connecticut army.

Colonel Knowlton was killed in the action near Harlem, and apparently, General Washington had not been made aware of Hale's volunteering for the dangerous mission. It would not be until the evening of the 22nd that General Washington would be informed that an incident had unfolded.

Nathan Hale dressed as a Dutch school teacher and passed behind the British lines on Long Island and began to collect information. His short jaunt into the realm of espionage came to an abrupt end on 21 September when a relative of his, a Tory from New Hampshire, Samuel Hale, recognized him at a tavern. Nathan was promptly arrested.

Hale was carrying documents on his person, which the British found as they searched him. Caught redhanded, he could do nothing but confess. Without benefit of a trial, early the following morning, Hale was informed that he had been found guilty of espionage. The young man was also informed that he had already been sentenced to be hanged. His captors allowed him to write a letter to a brother and one to a fellow officer in the Patriot army. The British would not allow a clergyman to visit Hale.

At 11:00 am on the 22nd, Nathan Hale was led to the gallows. A noose was placed around his neck and he was asked if he had anything to say. A spectator later stated that Hale was calm, as he told the crowd that had come to watch, that a good soldier's duty was to obey any order given by his

commanding officer. A British officer, noting the young man's dignity in the face of eminent death, was the person to later quote Hale's last words as:

"I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country."

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

BLAIR COUNTY CHAPTER MEMBER DIRECTORY

You may have noticed that a pre-stamped postcard has been included in this copy of the Blair County Chapter Newsletter. The purpose of the postcard is to gather certain information that is not normally included on the member rosters. For example, with the proliferation of computers and the fact that many of our compatriot members probably have access to the Internet, it would be helpful to have a listing of our members' e-mail

addresses. Our current Chapter president, John D. Faulds, plans on creating a members' directory booklet compiled from this information. Your cooperation in this project will be greatly appreciated.

Please Note: You may also respond with the information requested by e-mail to
jdfaulds@aol.com -or-
ldshnn@motherbedford.com

The Third Quarterly Meeting Of The Blair County Chapter, SAR

The 3rd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR for the year 2000 will be held on Saturday, 24 June, 2000. It will be held at the Kings Family Restaurant in downtown Altoona, beginning at 12:00 noon. Please plan to attend.

The Mutiny Of The Pennsylvania Line

In January, 1781 a number of Pennsylvania regiments of the Continental Line mutinied out of protest that they had had to endure another devastatingly cold winter without adequate food rations and shelter. They had not been paid for months. The biggest point of contention, though, was that they felt, after spending five years in service, their original three-year periods of enlistment were up. They believed that they were not obligated to serve for the duration of the war, which in January of 1781, showed no sign of ending.

The mutiny began in the ranks of the New Eleventh Pennsylvania Regiment and spread to the First, Third, Sixth, Seventh and Tenth Pennsylvania Regiments. Members of the Second, Fourth, Fifth and Ninth Pennsylvania Regiments did not initially want to join the mutiny. They were threatened by the mutineers first at bayonet point, and then cannon from the Fourth Continental Artillery Regiment was fired over the heads of the non-participants, and they quickly fell in line with the mutineers.

Thusly it was that nearly half of the entire 2,500 Pennsylvania Line fell out in full gear on the morning of New Years Day, 1781 and prepared to leave their camp at Morristown, New Jersey. They intended to march to Philadelphia and demand arrears of the Continental Congress, then in session. General Anthony Wayne attempted to dissuade them, but to no avail.

One casualty occurred when some of the captains attempted to stop the mutiny. Adam Bettin was the captain of the 4th Company of the Fourth Pennsylvania Regiment. According to witnesses, Captain Bettin met his death almost by accident. When the cannon from the Fourth Continental Artillery was commandeered by the mutineers, a detachment of the Fourth Pennsylvania Regiment, commanded by Captain Thomas Campbell, charged against the mutineers in an attempt to retake the cannon. They failed, and in the confusion of the moment, a mutineer attacked Lieutenant Colonel William Butler who was nearby. Butler fled between some huts, and his attacker followed. The attacking mutineer changed direction and headed around the huts in an attempt to cut Butler off. As he came around a corner, he ran smack into Captain Bettin. Bettin raised his spontoon in defense and the mutineer

raised his gun, shooting Captain Bettin and inflicting a mortal wound.

The mutineers traveled to Princeton, where they set up a temporary camp.

British General Henry Clinton saw an opportunity in the mutiny and attempted to persuade the mutineers to take up sides with the British. He sent John Mason and a guide by the name of James Ogden as ambassadors to the mutineers to convince them to take up sides with the British, but they rejected the offers. Their argument was not against the Patriot Cause; rather, it was simply that they wanted redress for their grievances. The men of the Pennsylvania Line believed that if they could present those grievances to the delegates assembled in Congress, they might be persuaded to remedy the situation. Mason and Ogden were taken into custody.

Joseph Reed, appointed by Congress to meet with the mutineers, arrived at Princeton on 07 January. He was successful and persuaded the soldiers with assurances that the Congress would attempt to address their complaints.

On 24 January, 1781 the committee that had been appointed to review the disturbance in the Pennsylvania Line delivered its report to the delegates assembled in Congress.

On their arrival at Trenton on Saturday Evening the 6th Instant, they met and conversed fully with Mr. President Reed from the Executive Council of the State of Pennsylvania, who had that Day been at Maidenhead near Princeton and began a Treaty with the insurgents through General Wayne. The Committee of Congress and of the Council agreed upon the measures to be pursued by them in conjunction and in particular, that not only every thing justly due to the Soldiers of the Pennsylvania line should be granted, but that a construction favorable to them should be put upon the form of enlistment, for three years or during the war; viz: that it should terminate in three years unless the soldier had voluntarily reenlisted but that they would not on any account discharge those who had freely enlisted for the war. They also agreed that as Gen^l Wayne had offered them on the 2^d Instant a general amnesty it should be confirmed whatever reason there was in two or three instances to have made exceptions.

The Committee from Congress met with General Wayne, President Reed and representatives for the mutineers over the course of the next four days. They finally arrived at agreeable terms on the 10th of January.

On the 11th of January, the men of the Pennsylvania Line, their mutiny at an end, handed over the two British ambassadors, Mason and Ogden, to General Wayne, who had them hung as spies.