



Newsletter #1 2000

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1776: Long Island

General George Washington's assumption, on the evening of the 29th of June, 1776, that the entire British fleet carrying General Sir William Howe's army must have arrived from Halifax, proved to be true. Before the 30th had passed, one hundred and twenty-seven ships of the Royal Navy were floating in New York Harbor. Within a few weeks, the British armada in the harbor would grow to include roughly three hundred vessels, ten of which were ships of the line and twenty were frigates.

The British troops remained on board the ships until the 3rd of July. At that time, 9,300 redcoats were disembarked on Staten Island. On the 12th of July, Admiral Richard Howe (Sir

William's brother) arrived with 11,000 additional troops. On August 1, Commodore Parker arrived with nine warships carrying 2,500 troops under the command of Generals Clinton and Cornwallis. By the end of August, Howe's army would number approximately 32,000. That number included 8,000 Hessian (*i.e.* German) mercenaries.

On the American side, the number of troops was significantly less than the British. Only some 10,500 Patriot troops from the army raised in the siege of Boston made up Washington's army. And not all of those troops were fit for service. On 8 August, the General reported to Congress:

"For the several posts on New York, Long and Governor's Islands and Paulus Hook we have fit for duty 10,514. Sick present 3039. Sick absent 629..."

"Our posts too are much divided, having Waters between many of them, and some distant from others many miles. These circumstances sufficiently distressing of themselves, are much aggravated by the sickness that prevails thro the Army; every day more or less are taken down, so that the proportion of Men that may come in,

cannot be confidered as a real and ferviceable Augmentation in the whole. Thefe things are melancholy, but they are neverthelefs true."

It might be noted, at this time, that while the American army was encamped at the environs of New York Island, a number of Stockbridge and Mohickan Indians requested to be permitted to join the Patriots. Their requests had been submitted to the Continental Congress. At first, the Continental Congress refused the requests. On Monday, 24 June, the Congress resolved *"That a letter be written to the General, defiring him to put a ftop to the raifing of companies of Mohickan and Stockbridge Indians..."* On the 2nd of August (during the session in which the delegates to the Continental Congress actually placed their signatures on the "engrossed and compared" copy of the Declaration of

Independence), the Congress resolved *"That General Wafhington be inftructed to employ in the fervice of the ftates, as many of the Stockbridge Indians as he fhall judge proper."*

The General therefore instructed Timothy Edwards to *"engage in the Service, as great a Number of them as you pofsibly can."*



General Washington was convinced that the British would make an attack before too much time had passed. From his headquarters on the island of New York, Washington wrote to Brigadier General Hugh Mercer on the 8th of August:

"The Account given you by a deferter, as brought me by Mr. Tilghman is confirmed by two Sailors who came off the Night before laft from the Enemy; That Genl. Clinton is arrived with his Army from South Carolina, and that Preparations are making for an early and Vigorous Attack. They further add, that laft Sunday 1000 Hefians landed, part of 12,000, the Remainder being left off the Banks of Newfound Land, that may be expected every Hour. Under thefe Circumftances, and confidering how much deficient this Army is, from the not filling up the new Levies, and Sicknefs, I muft defire you to fend over one of the Rifle Regiments, as we have not one Corps of that kind on this Ifland. I leave it to you, to fix upon that which you think will come with the moft Chearfulnefs, and are beft appointed, but would not have any time loft. The Quarter Mafter may fet out immediately to prepare for them; from all accounts the grand Attack will be made here, and at Long Ifland."

Despite General Washington's concerns at the beginning of August, the "grand Attack" would not occur before nearly two weeks had passed. On 15 August he wrote to the Congress with information that a great number of boats had been passing and repassing the Narrows, and that

it appeared that British General Howe intended to land a part of his forces on Long Island, but that it had not happened thus far. The General, no doubt, was growing more anxious by the minute as the two armies waited and watched each other. In a letter dated 17 August, he wrote to the Congress:

"The circumftances of the two Armies having undergone no material Alteration fince I had the honor of writing you laft, I have nothing particular or Important to communicate refpecting them."

The General did provide for the delegates assembled in Congress an account of an attempt

by the Americans to set fire to the British ships in the harbor.

"two of our Fire Vefels attempted laft night to burn the Enemy's Ships and Tenders up the River...they burnt one Tender, and one of them boarded the Phoenix and was graped with her for near ten Minutes, but fhe cleared herfelf."

Washington divided his forces into five divisions. Three of the divisions were positioned on Manhattan Island around the city of New York, one was positioned on Long Island at Brooklyn Heights, and the fifth was garrisoned Fort Washington at the northern end of Manhattan Island. The British remained at their encampment on Staten Island.

Finally, on 22 August, the British made their move. Howe began to move his troops from Staten Island across to Gravesend. Four thousand

of Howe's troops were ferried across the Narrows that separated Staten Island from the southern tip of Long Island. On Long Island, the British troops met with only a slight bit of opposition. Colonel Edward Hand and two hundred riflemen from Pennsylvania were positioned near Gravesend, but they withdrew as the British advanced. Although they fired only a few shots at the British, Hand's men burned supplies and crops as they retreated.

According to a letter sent by General Washington to the Continental Congress:

"Yefterday Morning and in the courfe of the preceeding night, a confiderable body of the Enemy, amounting by report to eight or nine thoufand, and thefe all Britifh, Landed from the Tranfport Ships mentioned in my laft, at Gravefend Bay on Long Ifland, and have approached within three miles of our Lines, having marched acrofs the Low, cleared Grounds, near the Woods at Flat Bufh where they halted, from my laft Intelligence.

"I have detached from hence, Six Battalions, as a reinforcement to our Troops there, which are all I can fpare at this Time, not knowing but the fleet may move up with the remainder of their Army and make an Attack here on the next flood Tide. If they do not, I fhall fend a further reinforcement fhould it be necefsary, and have ordered five Battalions more to be in readinefs for that purpofe. I have no doubt but a little Time will produce fome Important events.

A long ridge running east to west, the Heights of Guan, divided Long Island. Four gaps in that ridge provided passage from the southern end, where Howe's troops had landed. To throw off the Americans, Howe initially led his troops toward the Flatbush and Bedford Passes, but his plan was to divide his troops and take the majority through Jamaica Pass. The British established a camp near the village of Flatbush, about four miles from the point of landing. According to a Hessian officer, they slept quietly all night despite the fact that they believed the Americans *"might have made it very nafty for us."*

In order for the main body of the British troops to safely cover the distance to gain access

to the Brooklyn Heights through the Jamaica Pass, Howe's plan called for engaging the Patriots at the Flatbush and Bedford Passes with a steady but restrained fire. It was hoped by Howe that the Americans would misinterpret his restraint, and become overly confident. John Sullivan, in command of the troops stationed at the Brooklyn Heights, believed Howe's ruse. As a result, Sullivan directed most of the Patriots into position to the north of the Flatbush and Bedford Passes. Through the morning of the 23rd, the Patriots engaged the redcoats in a series of minor, but sharp skirmishing.

The Hessian officer would write of the skirmishing:

"The rebels approached twice, fired howitzers and ufed grape and ball... The rebels have fome very good markfmen, but fome of them have wretched guns, and moft of them fhoot crooked. But they are clever at hunters' wiles. They climb trees, they

crawl forward on their bellies for one hundred and fifty paces, fhoot, and go quickly back again. They make themfelves fhelters of boughs, &c. But today they are much put out by our green-coats, for we don't let our fellows fire unlefs they can get good aim at a man, fo that they dare not undertake anything more againft us."

For a time it appeared that the Americans might thwart Howe's plans. Hand's Pennsylvania riflemen forced the Hessians, under Colonel Carl von Donop, to retreat from their outpost near the Bedford Pass. But the Hessians rallied and the Americans retreated in turn.

Washington traveled over to Long Island on the 23rd to observe the situation. He disagreed with the way that Sullivan was handling the Patriot forces; and although he had no proof, he had the feeling that the British were planning a two-pronged attack. The General expected one attack against Brooklyn Heights and the other attack to be aimed directly at Manhattan Island. For that reason, he did not want to send too many of the Patriot troops across to Long Island. On the 24th, Major General Israel Putnam was sent over to replace Sullivan as general commander of the forces on Long Island. Sullivan was to serve as his second in command. Also sent to reinforce the American lines on Long Island were the troops under Major General William Alexander, the self-proclaimed "Lord" Stirling. The Patriot force on Long Island now numbered roughly 5,800.

As reports of the British numbers made their way to Washington's headquarters, and as the movements of the British indicated that they intended to make the defences around Brooklyn

their primary target, it became clear to him that he would need to increase his reinforcements on Long Island. On the 26th of August he directed more of the troops, then on Manhattan Island, across the river. The additional men brought the Patriot force defending the Brooklyn Heights to 9,000 men. General Putnam established two lines of defence. 5,000 men were positioned along a line of breastworks that stretched from Wallabout Bay to the Gawanus Bay for the purpose of shielding the village of Brooklyn from the east. Putnam, himself, commanded that force. A second, outer line was established along the northwest edge of the Heights of Guan at the various mountain passes. About 1,600 men under the command of "Lord" Stirling were positioned at the gap through which the Gowanus Road traveled north toward Brooklyn. About a thousand Patriots were positioned on the northwest of the Flatbush Pass, covering the Flatbush and Bedford Roads, and were commanded by Sullivan. The American left was primarily made up of Colonel Samuel Miles' Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment.

General Washington may have felt a little better with the increase of troops on Long Island, but he had another thing to worry about. Over the 24th and 25th it rained. The General issued a General Order on the 26th:

"The General is very anxious for the ftate of the arms and ammunition, the frequent Rains giving to much reaſon to fear they may fuffer; He therefore earneftly enjoins officers and men to be particularly attentive to it and have them in the beft order."

British General James Grant, early on the 26th, edged a force of some 5,000 redcoats toward the Patriots led by Stirling. During that afternoon, two brigades of Hessians and the 42nd Highlanders, under the command of General Philip von Heister moved into position at the Flatbush Pass. Those actions were intended to keep the Patriots busy while the main body of the British army moved through the one mountain pass unguarded by the Americans.

The Jamaica Pass, the easternmost of the mountain passes, was left unguarded, save for five men; and it was through that gap in the mountain that General Howe led the main body of the British army during the night of 26 August.

At about 1:00 am on 27 August, 1776 a volley of gunfire broke the night stillness as the British troops under Grant fired on sentries stationed near the Red Lion Inn along the Gowanus Road. The main body of Stirling's men

were sleeping when the firing began. They were roused from their slumbers and hurriedly formed

into ranks. One of those men wrote of the experience:

"About funrife... we came up with a very large body of them. The Delaware and Maryland battalions made one party. Colonel Atlee with his battalion a little before us had taken poft in an orchard and behind a barn; and on the approach of the enemy he gave them a very fevere fire, which he bravely kept up for a confiderable time, until they were near furrounding him, when he retreated to the woods.

"The enemy then advanced to us, upon which Lord Stirling drew us up in a line and offered them battle in the true Englifh taftte. The Britifh army then advanced within about three hundred yards of us and began a very heavy fire from their cannon and mortars, for both the balls and fhells flew very faft, now and then taking off a head. Our men ftood it amazingly well ... Our orders were not to fire until the enemy came within fifty yards of us; but when they perceived we ftood their fire fo cooly and refolutely they declined coming any nearer, although treble our number."

Colonel Samuel J. Atlee, mentioned in the above, gave his own account of the battle. Atlee was the commander of the Pennsylvania Musketry Battalion, a part of Colonel Samuel Mile's Rifle

Regiment. He submitted this account of the portion of the battle in which he took part to the Pennsylvania Executive Council on 16 November, 1779.

"This morning before day, the Camp was alarmed by an attack upon the Pickett, ftationed upon the lower Road leading to the Narrows, commanded by Major Burd of the Pennfylv'a flying Camp. About day light a part of Lord Sterling's Brigade, to wit: Col. Smallwood's, Col. Haflett's, part of Lutz's & Kirhline's Flying Camp, and part of mine, in the whole about 2,300 men, under the Command of Maj. Gen. Sullivan and the Brigadiers, Lord Sterling and Parfons, march'd to fupport the Pickett attacked by the enemy. About 1/2 after feven the enemy were difcovered advancing, about 2-1/2 miles from the lines at Brookline, in order - their field Artillery in front. This proved the left wing of the Britifh Army, the 4th & 6th Brigades, compofed of the following Regiments: the 17th, 23d, 40th, 42d, 44th, 46th, 55th, 57th and 64th under the Command of Major General Grant.

"I then rec'd orders from L'd Sterling, with that part of my Battalion in the Field, to advance and oppofe the Enemy's pafing a morafs at the Foot, a fine rifing Ground upon which they were drawing up, and give him time to form the Brigades upon the Heights. This order I immediately obeyed, expofed without any kind of Cover to the Enemy's Fire of Artillery charged with Grape. We fuftained their Fire untill the Brigade was form'd. I then filed off to the Left and took poft on a fine woody eminence on the left of the Brigade.

"My troops juft pofted, when I received a Reinforcement of 2 Companies from the Delawares, with orders to file off further to the Left, and prevent, if pofsible, a large detachment of the enemy from turning the Left of the Brigade. Upon filing off to the Left, according to the orders rec'd, I fpied, at the Diftance of about 300 yards, a Hill of Clear Ground, a proper fituation to oppofe the Regiments endeavoring to flank us; which hill, I determined, if pofsible, to gain before them, judging they were likewife making for it. On marching up the Hill, and within about 50 yards of the fummit, we unexpectedly rec'd a heavy Fire from the Enemy taken poft there before me, notwithstanding the forced march I made. Upon receiving the heavy Fire, my

detachment, under a continued and exceeding warm Fire of the Enemy, formed in order.

"The 2 companies of the Delaware Reg't, excepting the Lieuts. Stewart & Harney, with about 16 privates, broke, and had nearly drawn after them the whole of my detachment. This caused a moment's Halt, but the Officers & men recovering from the surprize at receiving so rough & unexpected a salutation, upon receiving my orders to advance, immediately obeyed, with such Resolution that the Enemy, after a severe Conflict of a few minutes, left me master of the Hill, leaving behind them a Lieut. and six privates wounded, and fourteen privates killed. My troops, flush'd with this advantage, were for pushing after the flying Enemy, but perceiving at about 60 yards from the Hill we had just gain'd, across a Hollow way, a Stone Fence lined with wood, from behind which we might be greatly annoyed, I ordered not to advance but maintain the possession of the Hill, (which answered at this Time every necessary purpose.) The order was immediately obeyed, when we found by a heavy Fire from the Fence that it was lined as I expected. The Fire was as briskly returned by my brave Soldiers. The Enemy finding it too hot and our fire too well directed, retreated to and joined the Right of this wing of their army. In this severe conflict I lost my worthy Friend and Lt. Col. Parry, whom, in the midst of the action and immediately after he fell, I ordered to be borne by four Soldiers off the Field into the Lines at Brook Line. The Enemy's situation here was so advantageous that had they been marksmen, and directed their Fire with judgement, they might have cut off the greatest part of my detachment, I having left, for the security of my Right Flank and to protect my Rear in case of Retreat, a Company in a Wood upon my Right. After this first Attack which continued in the whole for about 15 minutes, we brought from the field such of their wounded whom I judged might be spared, and about 25 stand of Arms. The wounded I placed in my Rear under the Shade of some Bushes, it being intensely hot; the arms I distributed to such of my soldiers as were the most indifferently arm'd, and the wounded Lieut. taken at our first gaining of the Hill I sent to Lt. Sterling by a Drum & Fife. He died on the way. After placing the proper Guards, I ordered my fatigued soldiers to rest themselves. We continued in this situation about 20 minutes, when the Enemy was discovered marching down to make a second attempt for the Hill. Both officers and soldiers immediately flew to arms, and with remarkable coolness and resolution sustained and returned their Fire for about 10 minutes, when the Enemy were obliged once more to a precipitate flight, leaving behind them, Killed, Lt. Col. Grant, a number of Privates, and great many wounded. These wounded not mortally, I likewise removed into my rear; one I sent to Lt. Sterling that had rec'd a wound in the leg. I sent my Adjutant to his Lordship, with an account of my successive advantages, to know his Lordship's further orders and to request a Re-inforcement. My Adjutant returned with 2 Companies of Riflemen of the flying Camp, who remain'd with me a few minutes, being soon order'd to rejoin their Corps. Very luckily, after this second engagement, an ammunition Cart belonging to Col. Huntington's Reg't arrived at my post, of which we stood in great need, having entirely exhausted our ammunition and fired many rounds from that taken from the Enemy every time we had the good fortune to beat them off the Field. The officers were extremely alert, and from the ammunition so opportunely arrived, soon supplied their men with sufficient Stock to sustain another attack, should the Enemy think proper to make it. They did not suffer us to wait long. In about half an Hour we were alarm'd of their appearance the third Time.

"The eagerness of the Officers and Soldiers to receive them deserves me warmest

acknowledgements and those of their Country. They were received as usual, and as usual fled after a warm conflict of about 10 or 12 minutes. I now determined to pursue by observing a Reg't which proved to be the 22d or Royal Highlanders coming down to sustain the Royal Runners who were the 23d and 44th. I halted, prepared to receive them likewise, but the drubbing their Friends had so repeatedly received, I believe, prevented them, and they seemed fatigued with protecting the refugees and conducting such as were able to the army.

"Major Burd, who was taken at the attack of the Pickett on the Right, and was at Gen'l Grant's Quarters during the above several attacks, informed me after each great number of Officers and Soldiers came in wounded.

"I fully expected, as did my Officers, that the strength of the British Army was advancing in this Quarter with intention to have taken this Rout to our Lines, but how greatly were we deceived when intelligence was received that the Center, composed of the Hessians and the Right wing, were rapidly advancing to our Rear, and that we were nearly surrounded.

"This we were soon convinced of by an exceeding heavy Fire about a mile in our Rear, no Troops being in that Quarter to oppose the march of this Grand Body of the British Army but Col. Miles, 2 Battalions of Rifle men, Col. Willis's Reg't of Connecticut, and a part of Lutz's Battalion of Penn'a Flying Camp.

"I once more sent my Adjutant to Lord Sterling to acquaint him with my last success and for further orders, but receiving no answer and after waiting for the Enemy more than half an hour, they not approaching in Front, those in the Rear drawing very near, I judged it most prudent to join the Brigade, where I might be of more service than in my present situation. I therefore ordered a march, leaving the Field, Killed, Lt. Col. Grant and upward of sixty men and great number wounded, beside those taken at sundry times into my Rear. The World may judge my surprise when coming to the Ground where our Brigade had been drawn up, to find they had gone off without my receiving the least intelligence of the Retreat or orders what to do.

"I could, I doubt not, with considerable loss, have made my retreat, but perceiving at a distance, near the water, the Rear of our Troops and at the same time a Body of the Enemy advancing toward them, who proved to be the British Grenadiers, commanded by Col. Monckton, these were attacked by a few brave fellows. Not able to prevent them I ordered my Fatigued party once more to advance and take possession of a post and Rail Fence, at the Foot of a rising Ground over which the Grenadiers were moving with great rapidity. The timely assistance brought these few brave fellows by a party this day, often try'd and as often victorious, encouraged those already engaged and obliged the Grenadiers to quit the ground they had gain'd and retire to a fence lined with wood. Here we kept up a close and constant Fire for upwards of a Quarter of an Hour, until the Brigade had retreated out of our Sight. Our ammunition now again entirely spent and our Retreat after the Brigade effectually cut off, I was then obliged to file off to the Right with what men I could collect and endeavor to find a way out in that Quarter.

"After various Struggles, running thro' the Fire of many of the Enemy's detachments, and nearly fatigued to death, not having eat or drank since the day before about 4 O'Clock in the afternoon, no alternative presenting, I was obliged to surrender to the 71st Highlanders, having with me about 40, officers included. About 5 O'Clock arrived at Gen'l Howe's Quarters, receiving as we passed thro' the right wing of the British Army. The most opprobrious and scurrilous Language."

While the Right Wing was engaged with Grant's attacks, retreats and counterattacks, the Center was under a constant, but largely ineffectual bombardment by the Hessian artillery.

And also, in the meantime, as described by Colonel Atlee, the main body of the British Army had made their way through the Jamaica Pass and were closing in on the Patriots from their rear.

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

2000 Meeting Schedule ~ Blair County Chapter

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| February 12 | 1st Quarterly Meeting | 12:00 noon | Kings Family Restaurant |
| February 19 | George Washington Birthday (SAR) | 12:00 noon | Ramada Inn Altoona |
| April 15 | 2nd Quarterly Meeting | 12:00 noon | Kings Family Restaurant |
| June 24 | 3rd Quarterly Meeting | 12:00 noon | Kings Family Restaurant |
| September 16 | Constitution Day Dinner | 12:00 noon | Ramada Inn Altoona |
| October 21 | 4th Quarterly Meeting | 12:00 noon | Kings Family Restaurant |
| December 9 | Annual Meeting | 12:00 noon | Kings Family Restaurant |

A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

One of my objectives as your new Chapter President is to improve participation at our meetings. I promise you an up-beat atmosphere and brief business meetings, only as long as it takes to dispose of the business at hand. Why not come out to our meetings, enjoy a good lunch, and join in the camaraderie with your fellow compatriots?

John D. Faulds

2000 George Washington Birthday Dinner

- ☞ The George Washington Birthday Dinner will be hosted this year by the Blair County Chapter, SAR. The celebration will be held at the Ramada Inn Altoona. It is scheduled for Saturday, February 19, 2000 beginning at 12:00 noon.
- ☞ The dinner's entree will be chicken cordon-bleu. Dessert will be apple pie a-la-mode.
- ☞ The featured speaker will be Dr. David C. Hsiung, a professor at Juniata College.
- ☞ The cost of the dinner will be \$12 per person.
- ☞ It is requested that you respond with your reservations by Wednesday, February 16 to Larry D. Smith, Treasurer, RR #1, Box 704-A, East Freedom, PA 16637. You may pay at the door, but reservations need to be made by the 16th in order for us to provide the Ramada with the number to be in attendance. You may leave a message on my answering machine at 224-6408 or you may call the Chapter's Secretary, Bernard Smith at 695-5400.