



NEWSLETTER

#2 2001

## A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

# 1776: White Plains & The Fall Of Fort Washington

Following the withdrawal of the American army from New York City, and their taking up of a position near the Harlem Heights, General

George Washington wrote to the Massachusetts Legislature:

*Head Quarters, Colo. Roger Morris's House,  
10 Miles from New York, September 19, 1776.*

*"Gentl.: I was honored the Night before laft, with your favor of the 13th. Inft.; and at the fame time that I conceive your anxiety to have been great, by reafon of the vague and uncertain Accts. you received refpecting the Attack on Long Island, give me leave to afsure you that the Situation of our Affairs and the Important concerns which have furrounded me, and which are daily prefsing on me, have prevented me, from tranfmitting in many Inftances, the Intelligence I otherwife fhould have conveyed.*

*In refpect to the Attack and retreat from long Ifland, the Public papers will furnifh you with Accounts nearly true. I fhall only add, that in the former we loft about 800 Men; more than three fourths of which were taken Prifoners. This Miffortune happened in great Meafure, by two Detachments of our people, who were pofted in two Roads leading thro' a Wood, in order to intercept the Enemy in their March, fuffering a Surprife and making a precipitate retreat; which enabled the Enemy to lead a great part of their force againft the Troops Comanded by Lord Stirling which formed a third detachment, who behaved with great Bravery and Refolution, charging the Enemy, and maintaining their Pofts from about Seven or Eight O'Clock in the Morning, 'till two in*

*the afternoon; When they were Obligated to Attempt a retreat, being furrounded and overpowred by Numbers on all Sides, and in which many of them were taken, one Battalion, Smallwoods of Maryland, loft 259 Men and the general damage fell upon the Regiments from Pennfylvania Delaware and Maryland and Col Huntingdon's of Connecticut. As to the Retreat from the Ifland, it was effected without lofs of Men and with but very little Baggage; a few heavy Cannon were left, not being Movable, on Account of the Grounds being foft and miry, thro' the Rains that had fallen. The Enemy's lofs, in killed we could never afcertain, but have many reaons to believe that it was pretty confiderable, and exceeded ours a good deal. The Retreat from thence was Abfolutely Necefsary, The Enemy having landed the Main body of their Army there to attack us in front, while their Ships of War were to cut off the Communication with the City, from whence refources of Men, Provifions &c. were to be drawn.*

*Having made this Retreat, and long after, we difcovered by their Movements and the Information we recd from deferters and others, that they declined attacking our Lines in the City and were forming a Plan to get in our Rear with their land Army, by crofsing the Sound above us, and thereby cut off all intercourfe with the Country and every Necefsary Supply. The Ships of War were to co-operate, Pofsefs the North River and prevent Succour from the Jerfeys &c. This Plan appearing probable and but too practicable in its execution; it became Necefsary to guard againft the fatal Confequences that muft follow, if their Scheme was effected, for which purpofe I caufed a removal of a Part of our Stores, Troops &c from the City; and a Council of General Officers determined on thurfday laft, that it muft be intirely abandoned, holding up however every Shew and appearance of defence, till our Sick and all our Stores could be brought away. The Evacuation being refolved on, every exertion in our power was made, to baffle their defign and effect our own. The Sick were Numerous and an object of great Importance, happily we got them away; but before we could bring off all our Stores, on Sunday Morning Six or Seven Ships of War, which had gone up the Eaft River fome few days before, began a moft fevere and heavy Cannonade.*

*The Retreat was effected with the lofs of three or four Men only. We encamped and ftill are on the Heights of Harlem, which are well calculated for defence againft their approaches. on Monday Morning they advanced in Sight in Several large Bodies, but attempted nothing of a General Nature; Tho' there were fmart Skirmifhes between their advanced parties and fome Detachments from our Lines which I fent out; In thefe our Troops behaved with great Refolution and Bravery, putting them to flight in open Ground and forcing them from pofts they had Seized two or three times. A Serjeant who deferted from them, Says, the Report was, they had 89 Mifling and Wounded, and Eight Killed. in the laft Instance his Account is too Small, becaufe our People have buried more than twice as Many. In Number our Lofs was very inconftiderable, but in the fall of Lieut Colo. Knowlton of Connecticut, I confider it as great, being a brave and good Officer. Maj or Leitch who Commanded a detachment from the Virginia Regiment, unfortunately received three Balls thro' his fide, he ftill fupports his Spirits and feems as if he would do well. Colo Knowlton was Interred with every honor due to his Merit and that the Situation of things would admit of. Since this affair, nothing has happened. The Enemy, it is faid, are bringing forward feveral Heavy Cannon to force us from the Heights. At the fame time that they open their Batteries in front, their Ships of War, Seven or Eight of which are in the North River, are to Cannonade our right Flank. Thus have I run over, in a curfory rough way, an Account of the moft material Events from the Battle on Long Ifland to the prefent moment. I have not time to ftudy order or*

*Elegance. This however I do not fo much mind, and only wifh my Narrative was more agreeable. But we muft fet down things as they are. I hope they will be better: Nothing on my part fhall be wanting to bring about the moft favorable Events.*

*I am now to make my moft grateful Acknowledgments to your Honble. Body, for the fuccour they meant to afford me in the Militia lately Ordered to March; and have only to lament, that they fhould be fo unprovided with Tents and other Camp Necefsaries. Our Diftreffes in thefe Inftances are extremely great, having by no means a Sufficiency for the Troops already here, nor do I know how they can be procured. I am at a lofs for the Officers Names who Command this Reinforcement as they are not Mentioned. However, I have wrote by Fefsenden, that they fhould lead the Men on as faft as poffible, fending before them, when they get within one or two days March of King's Bridge, an Officer to receive Orders from me, How they are to be difpofed of. Inftuctions given now, might become improper, by the Intervention of a Variety of Circumftances. I have the honor to be &c."*

The British continued to engage the Americans in a series of minor skirmishes. They moved onto Montresor's Island, from which they would be able to land troops above Harlem, and also flank the Americans at Kingsbridge. Through the urgings of General William Heath, General Washington directed Lieutenant Colonel Michael Jackson to take a detachment of 240 men to attempt to retake the island. On the morning of 23 September, 1776 Jackson started on his mission. The men were divided between three boats. The first boat landed under heavy fire from the British. The other two retreated from the bar-rage. Fourteen Patriots died before Jackson made the decision to withdraw.

On the 12th of October it was the British turn to take the offensive. In the early morning fog, General Howe, with 4,000 men, of his total force of nearly 25,000, boarded eighty-some vessels and started the journey up the East River that divided Manhattan Island from Long Island. The flotilla passed through the narrows known as Hell's Gate and landed at Throg's Neck (variously called by Washington in his dispatches, Frog's Point) with the intention of encircling the Americans on Manhattan Island and cutting off any hope they might have of making their escape by land.

To the President of the Congress, General Washington wrote, on 12 October:

*"Yefterday the Enemy landed at Frog's point about Nine Miles from hence further up the Sound. Their number we cannot afcertain, as they have not advanced from the point, which is a kind of ifland, but the Water that furrounds it is fordable at low tide. I have ordered works to be thrown up at the pafses from the point to the Main. From the great number of Sloops, Schooners and Nine Ships, that went up the Sound in the Evening full of Men, and from the information of two Deferters who came over laft night, I have reafoen to believe, that the greateft part of their Army, has moved upwards, or is about to do it, purfuing their original plan of getting [with an intent (as I fuppofe) to get] in our rear and cutting off our communication with the Country. The grounds [leading] from Frogs point [to Kings Bridge,] are ftrong and defenfible, being full of Stonefences, both along the road and acrofs the adjacent Fields, which will render it difficult for Artillery, or indeed [for a] a large Body of foot to advance in any regular [way] order except throught the main road. Our men who are pofted on the pafses feemed to be in good fpirits when I left 'em laft night..."*

The British progress was stopped momentarily, though, by a force of only twenty-five

Rangers under Colonel Edward Hand. Only one road, running through the marshes, connected the

Neck to the mainland, and it was along that road that the Pennsylvania riflemen held Howe's troops at bay. The British were not deterred from their goal so easily, and continued to land their troops, but moved on to Pell's Point.

General Washington held a council with his officers on the 16th to decide if they should withdraw from Harlem Heights or to stand firm. The decision was made to withdraw to a more secure location, mostly upon the advice of General Charles Lee. A contingent of roughly 2,800 men, under the command of Colonel Robert Magaw,

were to remain at Fort Washington, north of the Harlem Heights to continue to harrass British transport ships on the Hudson River. (A force of nearly 3,500 under the command of General Nathaniel Greene held Fort Lee on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River opposite to Fort Washington.) The rest of the nearly 13,200 Americans would proceed northward to establish a new camp in the vicinity of the village of White Plains on the Bronx River. On the 17th of October, General Orders were issued by Washington from his headquarters at Harlem Heights:

*"As the Movements of the Enemy make an Alteration of our pofition necefsary, and fome Regiments are to move towards them, the commanding and the other Officers of Regiments, are to fee the following Orders punctually executed. - The Tents are to be ftruck, and carefully rolled, the men to take the Tent poles in their hands - two Men out of a Company with a careful Subaltern, to go with the Baggage, and not to leave it on any pretence - No Packs (unlefs of Sick Men) Chairs, Tables, Benches or heavy lumber, to be put on the Waggons - No perfon, unlefs unable to walk, is to prefume to get upon them - The Waggons to move forward before the Regiments, the Quarter-Mafter having firft informed himfelf from the Brigadier, or Brigade Major, where they are to pitch - Every Regiment under marching orders, to fee they have their Flints and Ammunition in good order and complete."*

On 18 October, a detachment of 750 Americans under the command of Colonel John Glover engaged the British near Eastchester, to the north of Pell's Point. The Patriots took up a position behind a stone wall as the British troops advanced. After an initial skirmish, Glover withdrew his detachment from the position at the wall. Despite the fact that Glover withdrew, he did so in an orderly manner, and sustained fewer losses than the redcoats.

The engagement at Eastchester succeeded in its intended purpose of commanding the attention of Howe, and allowed time for General Washington to advance toward White Plains. On the morning of the 18th he moved his army across the Harlem River and then along the west bank of the Bronx River. Because of the lack of enough wagons and teams to pull them, it was necessary to haul a load forward a distance, unload it, and then return to the previous point and take on a second load to be hauled forward. The trip that normally would have taken a day, developed into four days of toil for the Americans. Washington's

army finally made camp at White Plains on 22 October, 1776. Washington chose a series of small elevations on both sides of the Bronx River (the largest of which was named Chatterton's Hill, occupying the west side of the river) upon which to establish the camp. The American line stretched for nearly three miles to the north of the village. From the camp, the Patriots would have a pretty clear view of the plains.

Washington arranged his troops with the bulk of the army positioned to the east side of the Bronx River, and north of the village of White Plains. General Putnam commanded the right flank, Brigadier General William Heath was on the left, and Washington, himself in the center. On the opposite side of the river, on the heights of Chatterton's Hill, were sixteen hundred men under Colonel Joseph Reed.

Four days after the skirmish at Eastchester, Colonel John Haslet's Delaware Regiment attacked the 500-man corps of The Queen's American Rangers, a Tory regiment led by Major Robert Rogers. The engagement took place at

Mamaroneck, along the west shore of Long Island Sound. The Americans routed the Tories and took thirty-six of them captive. On the following day Colonel Edward Hand's Pennsylvania Rifle Regiment routed an equal sized body of Hessian troops with the loss of only one man.

Howe waited on the arrival of a force of roughly 8,000 Hessians under the command of Lieutenant General Wilhelm von Knyphausen before he commenced an advance toward the Americans. Half of the Hessians were left to garrison a fortification at New Rochelle. The remaining 14,000 British troops began their march toward White Plains on the 24th, and arrived within four miles of White Plains by the 25th.

General Washington rightly assumed that the British would attempt an assault on the portion of his army positioned on Chatterton's Hill.

On the morning of 28 October, before dawn, General William Howe ordered four thousand redcoats and Hessians to begin marching on the Americans. They met an advance guard under Brigadier General Joseph Spencer. Their progress was slowed by a barrage of musket fire that caused them to fall back temporarily. The redcoats rallied and regrouped. Their second thrust forced the Americans to fall back. Being near the spot in the river which could be forded near the east slope of Chatterton's Hill, Spencer's troops entered the river and ascended the hill.

An anonymous Patriot described the battle:

*"We marched on to a hill about one mile and a half from our lines with an artillery company and two field-pieces, and placed our selves behind the walls and fences in the best manner we could to give the enemy trouble. About half after nine o'clock...the light parties of the enemy, with their advance guard...came in fight and marched on briskly towards us, keeping the high grounds; and the light horse pranced on a little in the rear, making a very martial appearance.*

*As our [own] light parties...[revealed] where we were, the enemy began to cannonade us, and to fling shells from their hobits [howitzers] and small mortars. Their light parties soon came on, and we fired upon them from the walls and fences, broke and scattered them at once. But they would run from our front and get round upon our wings to flank us, and as soon as our fire [revealed] where we were, the enemy's artillery would at once begin to play upon us in the most furious manner. We kept the walls until the enemy were just ready to surround us, and then we would retreat from one wall and hill to another and maintain our ground there in the same manner, till numbers were [again] just ready to surround us.*

*Once the Hessian grenadiers came up in front of Colonel [William] Douglas's regiment, and we fired a general volley upon them... and scattered them like leaves in a whirlwind; and they ran off so far that some of the regiment ran out to the ground where they were when we fired upon them, and brought off their arms and accoutrements and rum (that the men who fell had with them), which we had time to drink round before they came on again."*

Lieutenant Benjamin Talmadge was one of General Spencer's subordinates. He noted that the Hessian regiment was hot on the heels of the

American troops as they crossed over the Bronx River and started the ascent up Chatterton's Hill.

*"As we ascended the hill I filed off to the right, expecting our troops on the hill would soon give them a volley. When they had advanced within a few yards of a stone wall behind which Gen. McDougall had placed them, our troops poured upon the Hessian column... such a destructive fire that they retreated down the hill in disorder, leaving behind a considerable number of the corps on the field."*

General Alexander McDougall's brigade, had been sent to Chatterton's Hill prior to the British assault to erect earthworks. McDougall's men had joined Colonel Reed's troops along with a regiment of militia, Haslet's Delaware Regiment. As Spencer's troops made their way across the river and up the slope of the hill, the redcoats and Hessians in the advance at first charged right after them; but then they withdrew, apparently sensing the need to wait for their fieldpieces and the main body of the British army. To the Patriots on the

hill, it appeared to them that the British might not attempt to take their position. But Howe had decided, like Washington had, that the hill, being the highest prominence in the valley, was of strategic importance. As the Patriots waited, Howe arranged eight regiments, equipped with about a dozen fieldpieces, for an assault.

Howe began his attack with a rigorous cannonade against the Americans on the summit of Chatterton's Hill. Then, according to Brigadier General William Heath:

*"A part of the left column, composed of British and Hessians, forded the river and marched along under the cover of the hill, until they had gained sufficient ground to the left of the Americans, when, by facing to the left, their column became a line, parallel with the Americans. When they briskly ascended the hill, the first column resumed a quick march. As the troops which were advancing to the attack ascended the hill, the cannonade on the side of the British ceased, as their own men became exposed to their fire if continued. The fire of small arms was now very heavy and without any distinction of sounds. This led some American officers, who were looking on, to observe that the British were worsted, as their cannon had ceased firing, but a few minutes evinced that the Americans were giving way. They moved off the hill in a great body, neither running, nor observing the best order. The British ascended the hill very slowly, and when arrived at its summit, formed and dressed their line without the least attempt to pursue the Americans."*

According to one writer, the retreat of the Americans was an orderly and controlled movement, as General Heath alluded to. A cavalry charge by the British light dragoons instigated the end of the American control of the hill. The charge panicked certain of the American militia, and they started to flee; many of them were either shot as they ran, or were taken captive. Haslet held his troops together and formed a defensive cover while Reed and McDougall formed their men into ranks and began to withdraw down the north side of the hill. As the dragoons regrouped in order to launch another attack on the American line,

Haslet's regiment fell into line and brought up the rear of the line as it headed toward the main American encampment.

The British made no effort to pursue the Americans as they made their way back across the Bronx River to join the rest of Washington's army. Instead, they busied themselves with reinforcing the earthworks begun by McDougall's troops.

Washington, in the meantime, decided to move his encampment a bit to the north, to the plateau called North Castle Heights, which was located near the New York / Connecticut boundary. General Heath noted:

*"The two armies lay looking at each other, and within long cannon shot. In the night time, the British lighted up a vast number of fires, the weather growing pretty cold. These fires, some on the level ground, some at the foot of the hills and at all distances to their brows, some of which were lofty, seemed to the eye to mix with the stars and to be of different magnitudes. The American side doubtless exhibited to them a similar appearance.*

*3rd: The sentinels reported that, during the preceding night, they heard the rumblings of carriages to the southward; and it was apprehended that the British were*

*changing their position.*

*5th: The British sentinels were withdrawn from their advanced posts...The American army was immediately ordered under arms. At 2 o'clock p.m. the enemy appeared, formed on Chatterton's Hill and on several hills to the westward of it. Several [American] reconnoitring parties who were sent out reported that the enemy were withdrawing. About 12 o'clock this night a party of the Americans wantonly set fire to the court house, Dr. Graham's house, and several other private houses which stood between the two armies. This gave great disgust to the whole American army..."*

Apparently believing that Washington now occupied an impregnable position on North Castle Heights, Howe led his army from White Plains on the 5th of November. He moved southwestward,

and established an encampment at Dobbs Ferry on the Hudson River. To the President of the Continental Congress, General Washington wrote, on 06 November, 1776:

*"Sir: I have the honor to inform you, that on yesterday Morning, the Enemy made a sudden and unexpected movement from the several posts they had taken in our front, they broke up their whole Encampments the preceding night, and have advanced towards Kingbridge and the North River. The design of this Manoeuvre is a Matter of much conjecture and speculation, and cannot be accounted for, with any degree of certainty. The grounds we had taken possession of, were strong and advantageous, and such as they could not have gained, without much loss of Blood, in case an attempt had been made; I had taken every possible precaution to prevent their outflanking us, which may have led to the present measure. They may still have in View their original plan, and by a sudden wheel, try to accomplish it. Detachments are constantly out to observe their motions, and to harass them as much as possible.*

*In consequence of this movement, I called a Council of General Officers to day, to consult of such measures as should be adopted, in case they pursued their retreat to New York. The result of which is herewith transmitted. In respect to myself, I cannot indulge an Idea, that Genl. Howe, supposing he is going to New York, means to close the Campaign and to sit down without attempting something more. I think it highly probable and almost certain that he will make a descent with part of his troops into Jersey, and as soon as I am satisfied that the present Manoeuvre is real and not a feint, I shall use every means in my power, to forward a part of our force to counteract his designs."*

*"I expect the Enemy will bend their force against Fort Mifflin and invest it immediately, from some advices, it is an object that will attract their earliest Attention."*

The American army was set in motion soon after the British left White Plains. General Charles Lee remained at North Castle with about seven thousand men. Heath took four thousand men to Peekskill, on the Hudson River, to guard the New York Highlands. Washington himself led the remainder of the army, which amounted to about two thousand men, to a point below Stony Point, and there ferried across the Hudson River with the intention of joining the garrison of Fort Lee (previously known as Fort Constitution).

General Nathaniel Greene was in command of some thirty-five hundred men at the forts on the Hudson, twelve hundred of which were stationed across the river at Fort Mifflin under the command of Colonel Robert Magaw of the Pennsylvania Continental Line.

On 14 November General Howe sent his adjutant general, Lieutenant Colonel Paterson with a request to Colonel Magaw that he surrender the fort. Magaw refused to surrender. He stated that "he did not expect inhumanity from Englishmen"

and that he would defend the place to the last extremity. On the following morning the British began a cannonade from their batteries on the east side of the Harlem River and from the *Pearl*, a frigate anchored in the Hudson River. Unbeknownst to the Americans, on the 2nd, a Pennsylvanian, William Demont, who was serving as an adjutant in Magaw's battalion, had deserted to the enemy, and Howe was then in possession of sketches of the fort and surrounding works.

Fort Washington was basically an earthwork with a surrounding abatis. There were no buildings other than a wooden magazine and some offices. The only thing to recommend it was that the fort was located on rocky heights that might hinder a direct frontal assault. But there was no fresh water supply within the earthwork, and that would be detrimental in a long siege.

When it became clear that Howe intended to strike first at Fort Washington, reinforcements were sent over from New Jersey. The garrison rose to nearly twenty-nine hundred. Of these troops, Magaw directed a detachment of eight hundred under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Lambert Cadwalader to be positioned in the old entrenchments on Harlem Heights. Two hundred Bucks County, Pennsylvania militia from the Flying Camp, under the command of Colonel William Baxter were positioned in fleches, or 'v' shaped earthworks along the slopes of Laurel Hill. Colonel Moses Rawlings and his rifle regiment were positioned at Fort Tryon, about a half to three-quarters of a mile north of Fort Washington. The rest of the garrison remained at the earthen fort which covered roughly four acres.

In a letter dated 19 November, Washington wrote to his brother, John Augustine Washington:

*"I began this Letter at the White Plains as you will see by the first part of it; but by the time I had got thus far the Enemy advanced a Second time (for they had done it once before, and after engaging some Troops which I had posted on a Hill, and driving them from it with the loss of abt. 300 killed and Wounded to them, and little more than half the number to us) as if they meant a general Attack, but finding us ready to receive them, and upon such ground as they could not approach without loss, they fled and retreated towards New York.*

*As it was conceived that this Manoeuvre was done with a design to attack Fort Washington (near Harlem heights) or to throw a body of Troops into the Jerseys, or what might be still worse, aim a stroke at Philadelphia, I hastened over on this side with abt. 5000 Men by a round about March (wh. we were obliged to take on Acct. of the Shipping opposing the passage at all the lower Ferries) of near 65 Miles. But did not get time enough to take Measures to save Fort Washington tho I got here myself a day or two before it surrendered, which happened on the 16th. In fact. After making a defence of about 4 or 5 hours only.*

*We have no particular Acct. of the loss on either side, or of the Circumstances attending this matter, the whole Garrison after being drove from the out lines, and retiring within the Fort surrendered themselves Prisoners of War, and giving me no Acct. of the terms. By a letter, which I have just received from Genl. Greene at Fort Lee, (wh. is opposite to Fort Washington) I am informed that "one of the Train of Artillery came across the River last Night on a Raft, by his Acct. the Enemy have suffered greatly on the North side of Fort Washington. Colo. Rawlings's Regiment (late Hugh Stephen's) was posted there, and behaved with great Spirit. Colo. Magaw could not get the Men to man the Lines, otherwise he would not have given up the Fort."*

*This is a most unfortunate affair, and has given me great Mortification as we have lost not only two thousand Men that were there, but a good deal of Artillery, and some of the best arms we had. And what adds to my Mortification is, that this Post, after the last Ships went past it, was held contrary to my wishes and opinion; as I conceived it to*

*be a dangerous one: but being determined on by a full Council of General Officers, and receiving a resolution of Congress strongly expressive of their desires, that the Channel of the River (which we had been labouring to stop for a long time at this place) might be obstructed, if possible; and knowing that this could not be done unless there were Batteries to protect the obstruction I did not care to give an absolute order for withdrawing the Garrison till I could get round and see the Situation of things and then it became too late as the Fort was invested. I had given it, upon passing of the last Ships, as my opinion to Genl. Greene, under whose care it was, that it would be best to evacuate the place; but as the order was discretionary, and his opinion differed from mine, it unhappily was delayed too long, to my great grief..."*

In regard to "the Circumstances attending this matter", of which General Washington was not knowledgeable when he wrote to his brother on the 19th, the following is known. During the night of the 14th, General Howe transported his troops up the Hudson River, under the eyes of the Americans in the two forts (Lee and Washington). The thirty flatboats used for the transport of the troops were diverted into the Spuyten Duyvil Creek and from there into the Harlem River so that an attack could be made from the east.

On the morning of 16 November, Generals Washington, Putnam, Mercer and Greene rowed over to Fort Washington from Fort Lee, in order to discuss an evacuation. As they arrived at the eastern shoreline of the Hudson River, they heard the opening shots of cannon, and sensed that the British assault had begun. They rowed back to Fort Lee where Washington organized about 3,000 of the troops to march west to Hackensack.

The British assault on Fort Washington would be made in four phases.

The first phase was an assault made by the 3,000 Hessian troops under General von Knyphausen against Rawling's riflemen at Fort Tryon. Knyphausen's troops, which included men from Johann Gottlieb Rall's Brigade and Waldeck's Regiment, crossed the Kings Bridge around 7:00am. Because Howe's plan was for all of the major bodies of American troops were to be hit at the same time, Knyphausen made initial contact with Rawling's troops around 10:00, but then backed off while he waited for the signal, by cannon, that General Mathews had crossed the Harlem River and was ready to attack.

Knyphausen divided his force into two columns. He led the one and Colonel Rall the

other. The terrain through which they traveled was very rough and difficult, and the fire from Rawling's riflemen was hot and heavy. It would prove to be the longest and most intense combat of the day.

The second phase involved Lord Hugh Percy, whose 2,000 men, composed of one Hessian brigade and nine British battalions, marched northward from McGown's Pass to confront Cadwalader's troops.

The third phase got under way around noon when General Edward Mathew arrived with the 1st and 2nd Battalions of Light Infantry, followed by two guards battalions, who were supported the 1st and 2nd Grenadier Battalions and the 33rd Foot Regiment led by General Charles Cornwallis. This force marched against the militia led by Colonel Baxter on Laurel Hill. Baxter was killed early in the assault, and his militia fled to the safety of the fort.

The fourth phase was to be a feigned landing due east of Fort Washington by Colonel William Alexander (*aka* Lord Stirling) and his 42nd or Royal Highland Regiment (*aka* the "Black Watch"). When it was discovered that Percy was meeting greater resistance than anticipated, and with the retreat of Baxter's militia at Laurel Hill, Stirling was redirected to strike Cadwalader's flank. Two battalions from Cornwallis' command were attached to Stirling's for the flanking move. In response, Cadwalader directed 150 men of the 3rd Pennsylvania Regiment to defend his side. The combined strength of Percy's and Stirling's forces was too much for Cadwalader to stand up to, even with the reinforcements. Despite having inflicted heavy casualties on Percy's Hessian Brigade, Cadwalader, at length, was forced to accept the

futility of his situation, and called for a retreat back to Fort Washington.

The Hessians under Colonel Rall succeeded in breaking Rawlings' defence and pushed through to arrive at Fort Washington in the early afternoon. Captain Hohenstein was ordered by Colonel Rall to tie a white cloth to the end of a musket barrel and then to advance to the fort and demand its surrender. The American surrender of Fort Washington came at about 3:00pm.

Four days later, on the 20th of November, Howe sent General Cornwallis across the Hudson River to attempt to take Fort Lee. Over 4,000 troops crossed the Hudson in a steady rain and landed about six miles north of the fort. The Americans were warned of the movement of the British troops, and General Greene began a general evacuation of the fortification. Greene and some 2,000 Patriots would make their way to join

Washington's army at Hackensack, New Jersey. In their haste they left a considerable amount of equipment. It was said that when the British arrived at the site they found tents and personal equipment still in place, with pots of stew still boiling. Only twelve drunken American soldiers were in it when Cornwallis claimed the fort for the redcoats. About 150 others were taken captive in the vicinity around the fort.

The loss of both forts was a devastating blow to the American Cause. In the surrender of Fort Washington, 2,818 men had been taken prisoner. Loss of life amounted to 53 for the Americans, with about 96 wounded. (By comparison, the British lost 458.) The City of New York would remain in British hands until after the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1783. The loss in terms of morale was even greater than the loss of arms and ammunition.

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

## ***Constitution Day 2001***

***The Blair County Chapter, SAR will sponsor the Constitution Day luncheon on Saturday, September 15, 2001. The event will be held at the Ramada Inn - Altoona, starting at 12:00 noon.***

***The guest speaker will be the Honorable E.G. (Bud) Shuster.***

***The cost of the luncheon will be \$15.00 per person. You may pay by mail or at the door. Please respond with the number of reservations you would like to make by September 7 to: John Faulds, 3 Sylvan Drive, Hollidaysburg, PA 16648 (Tel: 814-695-2724) (E-mail: jdfaulds@aol.com)***

### **The Third Quarterly Meeting Of The Blair County Chapter, SAR**

The 3rd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR for the year 2001 will be held on Saturday, 29 September, 2001. It will be held at the Kings Family Restaurant in downtown Altoona, beginning at 12:00 noon. Please plan to attend.