

# The Birth of the United States Army



by Joseph K. Leach

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The Birth of the US Army tells the story of how our Army was formed during the American Revolution and fought to gain our independence from Great Britain. Joseph Leach is an amateur historian who has contributed many articles to Grunts.net over the past year. This is his first to be published in ebook format.

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## **First Blood**

Without going into the politics of the day, we'll suffice it to say that conditions

were very tense between the 13 colonies of North America and the English government back in Great Britain. By 1775 Boston was occupied by a British army under the command of General Thomas Gage. Gage had information that the colonial militia had ammunition and war supplies stored in the village of Concord, about 21 miles north of Boston, and decided to dispatch troops to confiscate the materials.

On the night of April 18th, 700 British soldiers (11 Grenadier companies and 10 light infantry companies) under the command of Lt. Francis Smith, with Major John Pitcairn of the Royal Marines as 2nd in command, left to carry

out Gage's order. Pitcairn had volunteered for the job while Smith was a bumbling, ineffectual officer and the troops were soon three hours behind schedule after being ferried across the Charles river.

To reach Concord the British would have to pass through the small village of Lexington. The village and surrounding area had been alerted by Paul Revere, William Dawes and Dr. Samuel Prescott and the colonial militia had been forming there. Each village had a militia, originally formed as protection against Indians. They had also fought alongside of these same British soldiers that now marched against them during the French

and Indian War.

The militia at Lexington was under the command of a Capt. John Parker, and by 1AM on the 19th he had 130 men assembled along side the Lexington-Concord road. They had been assembled by the beating of a drum by a 16yr old villager named William Diamond. When no British showed up by 2 AM Parker dismissed the group telling them to stand by for the drum signal when the British did show. The consensus at the time was that when they did show up the militia would let them pass. Some of the men retired to Buckmans tavern and most went home to wait in comfort. By 4 AM word came that the British were very

close and William Diamond started drumming again. 38 men assembled immediately and waited for the redcoats.

The force that was approaching Lexington comprised 200 men (6 companies) under the command of Maj. Pitcairn. He was sent ahead by Smith to secure two bridges over the Concord River outside of Concord. This was to keep any colonials that lived in the outlying areas away from Concord while the troops searched the town. Pitcairn had the false information that from 600 to 1000 men had formed at Lexington to oppose him. When he saw the small force (By now Parker had 77 men) he ordered his men to hold fire but surround

the militia and capture them. (This part of the Militia called themselves Minutemen due to the fast way they could be mobilized).

The British troops ignored Pitcairn and started toward the colonists at a fast pace yelling curses at them. Parker also ordered his men to hold fire and the minutemen started to back away but holding on to their weapons. One man, elderly Jonas Parker, stood his ground and put his hat filled with bullets at his feet and made ready to fight. As Pitcairn was yelling for the colonists to disperse and lay down their weapons, a shot rang out. No one knew where it came from but it started the war.

The British soldiers opened fire point blank into the retreating minutemen. When Smith arrived 17 colonists lay on the ground, eight of them dead and nine wounded. He ordered the firing stopped and reformed the troops. As they marched out of Lexington he stopped the troops and they gave three cheers and fired a victory volley. This angered the citizens of Lexington and newly approaching militia even more so. They were of one mind then. The Redcoats would have to pass this way again on their way back from Concord and this time things would be different. The first shot may have been the birth of the American Army, but this volley was the birth of it's soul.

The following are the names of the first Americans killed in action fighting against the British:

- Jonas Parker
- Robert Munroe
- Isaac Muzzy
- Jonathon Harrington
- Samuel Hadley
- John Brown
- Ashabel porter
- Caleb Harrington.

The first of a never ending roll call of Americans who have given their lives in the name of Freedom.

## **Concord**

After the onesided victory over the colonists at Lexington, Col. Francis Smith led his forces toward Concord against the advice of most of his officers. They were afraid that the people of the countryside would rise up against them. But Smith was brimming with confidence for the first time since he was assigned the mission of destroying the militia's supplies at Concord. He was also more confident due to the fact that he had sent back to Boston for reinforcements.

He had no idea that the relief column would be just as slow in leaving Boston as he himself had been on the night of the 18th.

Concord had been alerted by Dr. Samuel Prescott at 1 AM and the alarm spread over the area by the ringing of church bells. By dawn 250 men had gathered at Concord under the command of Major John Buttrick. They were eager to meet the British and convinced Buttrick to lead them down the road toward Lexington.

They started out with drums and fifes leading the way and soon came upon the British who had their own fife and drums playing. When Buttrick saw the size of the British force he correctly foresaw what would happen in a face to face conflict, and ordered his force to withdraw.

Both groups marched back toward Concord to martial airs. A stranger viewing this would take it for a peaceful patriotic parade.

Upon reaching the town Buttrick ignored the Rev. Williams advice to stand and fight to the death right in Concord, and ordered his men back to a hilltop behind the town. This hill served as a rallying point for the hundreds of men responding to the alarm.

The British entered the town at 8AM. Smith put soldiers on the ridges flanking the town and ordered both bridges (north and south) fortified. He then began searching the town for contraband.

The North Bridge and ridges on either side were held by a British detail under the command of a Lt. Walter Laurie.

They nervously watched the ranks of the militia on a hill facing them steadily get larger. When this same group of militia saw the smoke of burning contraband (including their liberty pole) they incorrectly assumed the soldiers were burning the town and started down from the hill. Upon seeing this Laurie ordered the men back down from the ridges and sent a runner back to Smith for help.

Someone in the British ranks fired a shot without orders and soon others fired at the advancing colonists. Two militia officers fell and Buttrick ordered the

minutemen to return fire. They did so with deadly accuracy ,killing three soldiers and wounding 4 officers. The British retreated from the bridge and were met by Col. Smith and his reinforcements. Smith backed away from any further conflict with the militia and led his men back into Concord to await the relief force he was sure was on the way.

It was only 10:30AM, and the ranks of the colonist were swelling by the hour. By noon Smith decided he could wait no longer and started his men on the march eastward.

Leaving Concord was easier than expected. There was no firing at them

from the hills and the confidence of the British grew. As they marched along the British came to a fork in the road. The road to Lexington and Boston veered to the right, and the Bedford road to the left. This intersection was cut by a stream with a bridge over it and was known as Merriam's Corner. Now Smith saw the reason for the uncontested leaving from Concord. The militia men had ran ahead and positioned themselves around Merriam's Corner. They were behind any and every object that offered them cover. Smith had marched straight into the Militia's ambush.

When the column slowed and started to cross the bridge a tremendous amount of

gunfire erupted. The British were being cut down and could not see their enemy to shoot back. This method of fighting had been perfected by the colonists over several generations of Indian warfare and was completely foreign to the British soldiers.

At about this time, the Lexington Militia arrived on the scene. They had assembled on the Lexington Green (with bandaged wounded men) a few hours after the first fight at Lexington and marched after the British to get their revenge. They were led by Capt. Parker. These men knew what British firepower was capable of and they still went forward. Parker positioned them along

the road and waited.

The British doggedly resumed the march under fire (Col. Smith was wounded in the leg) and, leaving their dead and wounded behind, reached Lexington at 2:30PM. The relief force under Earl Percy was awaiting them there. Percy had 800 men and two cannons. Percy allowed the exhausted and dispirited men to rest for a half hour, while the cannon fire kept the colonists at bay. He then ordered the retreat back to Boston.

A militia General William Heath had arrived on the scene and took command. He ordered the militia to follow the British all the way to Boston. They did so, firing into the column the whole way.

Given the mood of the Americans that day, they did not need such an order.

The fighting was vicious, Percy's men burned any house from which they suspected firing came from and killed any occupants. There was also fighting between the colonists and flankers Percy sent out. This stopped after awhile due to the exhaustion of the flankers and a shortage of ammunition. The British finally got to Charleston and under the protection of the guns of the British ship *HMS Somerset* in the Charles River.

The British were finally bottled up in Boston at the end of the day. The Americans were jubilant. They had

beaten the mighty British army. The day of the citizen soldier had arrived.

The Americans had lost 49 dead and 39 wounded. The British lost 73 dead ,174 wounded,and 26 missing. They had also lost a lot of their honor and pride.

## **Bunker Hill**

Within 2 days of Lord Percy leading the demoralized British troops back into Boston 20,000 colonists had responded to the cause. Dr. Joseph Warren knew this vast amount of men would be too unwieldy to control , so he enlisted a force of approximately 8,000 men into companies of 50 men each. They were to

serve for seven months (or shorter if the fighting ended) General Artemus Ward commanded.

Warren had long been a leader in the patriot cause and was the liaison man between the Mass. Provincial Congress and the minute men. He also petitioned the 2nd Continental Congress to take over responsibility for the army and to appoint a commander in chief. The Continental Congress wasn't exactly of one mind on this issue of fighting the British. Some wanted full independence and others wanted to negotiate a settlement. These latter were not aware of the attitude of King George III. He made the statement that America was

either a colony or an enemy. There'd be no concessions on his part.

Since this is to be an essay on the birth of, and first battles of, the U.S. Army I'll dispense with any further narrative on the in-fighting in the Congress on the issue except to say that George Washington was selected to be the Commander in Chief of the new army on 6/14/75. He was selected in part due to his military experience and in part because he was a southerner (Virginia).

The battles of Lexington and Concord had gotten the new Englander the respect and moral support of the southern colonies, this would ensure their active support. While this selection process

was being carried out, an action that would forever become a legendary part of American history was in the making.

When Lt. Col. Israel Putnam of the Connecticut Militia responded to the area he saw immediately that the hills overlooking Charlestown should be fortified. From them, Boston could be harassed and observed. The Committee of Safety agreed and the plan was authorized with the lukewarm endorsement of General Ward. They put a Massachusetts man, Col. William Prescott in charge. Prescott and Putnam marched to the area and saw that Breed's Hill was closer to Boston and had more strategic value. Prescott fortified Breed's

Hill with 850 men and some cannon and Putnam put 1500 men on Bunker Hill on the 16th of June. The British Navy in the Charles river began shelling the Americans and there were some desertions. General John Stark and his New Hampshire Militia responded and reinforced the men on Breed's Hill.

The British in the meantime had no intentions of letting the Americans stay on these hills. General Gage ordered General Howe to mount an expedition to oust the Americans. He also ordered the burning of Charlestown to deprive the Americans any shelter to fight from when they were driven from the hill.

On the 17th Howe ferried 2200 men

across the river and prepared to drive the Americans from the hill. His plan was to have a frontal assault, ignoring Lord Percy's warning that the colonists were a formidable enemy.

Howe had his men advance slowly up the gentle slope of Breeds Hill with the idea of breaking through the area nearest the Mysisic River. The Americans had posted a stick in front of their line showing when the British would be most vulnerable to their fire. Legend has it that Prescott told them "Don't fire until you see the whites of their eyes."

When the British reached the stick the Americans opened fire. the result was

horrific for the British and they were driven back down the hill. When the elements on the right saw this they also withdrew. Howe then decided to forego trying for a weak spot and ordered his men back up. They went right up against the center of the American line and once more were shot to pieces and retreated.

It was now a matter of British military pride. Howe was not about to let a bunch of farmers defeat his professional army, and he ordered them up the hill one more time.

Once again they were met by a powerful volley and wavered. but this time it was different. The 2nd volley was weak and there was no 3rd volley. The Americans

were out of ammunition. The British regrouped and drove the Americans from the hill.

Two of the dead this day were part of the opening scene back in April.

Dr. Joseph Warren on the American side, and Major Pitcairn on the British side.

The British may have won the ground but the Americans won also. They showed they could stand up to the British regulars. They were of the mind that if they had more ammo they could have held onto the hill. After all, the British losses were twice as much as the American losses. They also felt that some of their leaders such as Ward and

Putnam let them down. They needed a great leader who would never let them down. He was on the way.

## **George Washington**

Before getting into how George Washington started the Army on its way to being the force we know today, we should take a glimpse into what sort of a man he was.

Born in 1732, he led a combined genteel/rugged outdoors type of life. By the age of 16 he was becoming familiar with the Virginia wilderness by working as a surveyor. By age 21, in 1753 he was appointed a major in the Virginia

Militia. The commission had been held by his brother Laurence. Upon his death George received the commission upon request.

Determined that the post would be more than just honorary, Washington volunteered for a dangerous mission.

The French had been encroaching upon what the British considered British territory (the Ohio river country).

Washington took a letter of warning from Virginia Governor Dinwiddie to the French. Washington returned to Virginia with intelligence that the French had no intention of complying with the British demands.

One year later (1754) Washington, now

a Lt.Col. led a force into the disputed area to reinforce a fort on the Monaghela River. Well into the wilderness he received information from indians that the French had already taken the fort. Before he could turn back or check out the reliability of the information he decided to attack a group of French soldiers camped nearby. He did so, and in the action 10 French were killed and 10 captured. The rest fled.

After sending the captives back to Virginia Washington dug in at a place known as Great Meadows . He called it Fort Neccessity (showing he was not humorless)and awaited the French reaction. There is some validity to the

idea that he fired the first shot in the French and Indian War.

The French attacked July 3rd and by the 4th, Washington was obliged to surrender after losing 30 dead and many more wounded. The terms of the surrender enabled Washington to return to Virginia with all the survivors, save two officers left behind as hostages. He also signed a document of surrender, that when translated into French looked like a confession of murder and aggression. Upon his arrival home, Washington was castigated by the British for his actions but praised by the militia for his bravery and calmness under fire. He is purported to have made a statement at this time

about liking the sound of bullets going past.

By May 1755 , Washington went with General Edward Braddock and a force of 2000 plus men to wrest Fort Duquesne (present day Pittsburgh) from the French. He was traveling with the army as a civilian volunteer (paying his own expenses) after resigning his commission in the militia. (political squabbles with the governor). They left from Fredricksburg and had to travel 150 miles to the fort. As they neared the fort the army was attacked by a force of French and Indians (mostly indians) firing from the cover of trees and bushes. The effect upon the British soldiers was

horrific. They suffered about 1,000 killed and wounded. Braddock himself was killed and buried in an unmarked grave during the retreat.

Washington distinguished himself in this action. He rallied the American militia and, fighting indian style, they covered the British retreat. His actions kept it from being a total massacre. In so doing Washington had two horses shot from beneath him and his clothing was bullet torn. This time he was praised by British and colonists alike.

So while he never led an army as large as the one assembled at Cambridge in 1775, he was far from being a stranger to the sound of shots being fired in

anger. He also showed himself to be adroit at surviving both actual and political warfare, a trait he would need over the next eight years.

## **War Spreads from New England**

Washington arrived at Cambridge July 2, 1775, a Sunday, accompanied by his ADC Thomas Mifflin and Joseph Reed, his military secretary. The men chosen to be his generals were: Artemus Ward, Charles Lee, Horatio Gates, Phil Schuyler, and Israel Putnam. Lee, Ward, and Putnam were put in command of different sections of the line around

Boston and Schuyler was sent to New York (Albany ) to prepare an army there.

After establishing a headquarters at Harvard, Washington and Lee set off on an immediate inspection of the army. They received a very discouraging view. Conditions were quite unsanitary and the men were in a high state of disorder. As Washington was a firm believer in military discipline, he realized this would be his first order of business. He also saw the need for a separation of the officers from the rank and file. A gentleman himself, he thought every officer should also be a gentleman. The old adage "familiarity breeds contempt" certainly applied here.

Recruitment picked up temporarily after Washington took command, most notably, Daniel Morgan and his Virginia riflemen. They could fight like bears but were most unruly.

By Autumn of '75 there were almost 19,000 men under arms and they were starting to show some semblance of a regular army. So much so that Washington wanted to take an action against Boston. His generals declined to support him in this though. He did authorize Schuyler to attack the British in Canada . The attack was carried out by General Montgomery, who captured Montreal. He then combined his force with one led by Benedict Arnold and

attacked Quebec. The Americans were repulsed with Montgomery being killed and Arnold being wounded.

By October, the only change was in the command of the British troops. Lord Howe replaced Gage, who returned to England. The problem Washington now faced was keeping his army together. Enlistments were almost up, and men were leaving to take care of their families and ready their farms for winter.

The Connecticut enlistments were up on December 1st and they could not be persuaded to stay. Many other enlistments would run out December 31st so it was possible that on New

Years Day Washington's army would cease to exist. He put out a call for volunteers, and militia from Mass. and New Hampshire responded with 5,000 men. Even with these new men, the size of the army fell below 10,000 men. Washington started to whip these men into shape, and to bolster morale gave them a flag to fight under. It had thirteen red and white stripes and a British Union Jack in the upper left hand corner.

At about this time King George made a speech that gave a hint of some concessions the British might give the colonies but also contained threats to use German mercenaries (Hessians) to help quell the rebellion. Neither Washington

nor the Congress paid much attention to either notion.

About the middle of January 1776 information was received that the British were going to leave Boston and go to New York City. After ascertaining that he had the authority to do so, Washington dispatched General Lee to New York to set up defenses there. He was to use local troops and militia from New Jersey.

Washington was now more than ever determined to attack Boston and put out a call for more militia. Thirteen regiments responded. Seven from Mass. 4 from Connecticut and two from New Hampshire. Now the problem was arms

and ammunition to sustain an attack by this many men. By the end of January this problem was alleviated by the arrival of Henry Knox with cannons taken from Fort Ticonderoga and sledged all the way to Cambridge. The fort had been taken months earlier by Eathan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys (Benedict Arnold was also a commander in this short battle).

Washington put these cannon on the Dorchester heights and started shelling the city. He wanted the British to attack the guns and he would counter attack the city. Howe refused to bite at the bait and stayed in the confines of Boston, An artillery battle waged between the two

armies with little damage to either one.

By March 8th, word was received by the Americans that the British were about to evacuate. The Americans tightened the noose around the city by digging in on hills closer to the city. By the tenth, boats were being loaded with equipment, and on the 17th the troops boarded and the city of Boston was free of the British at last. The British stayed off shore for ten more days until favorable winds arrived and they sailed away to Nova Scotia.

Washington was sure that they were heading to New York City, and he started his army on a march there. He proved to be prophetic, because before

very long the British did head for New York, and the Mettle of the American Army would be sorely tested.

## **The Battle of Long Island and New York**

While Washington marched his troops south and fortified New York, the British were taking steps to quell the rebellion with massive force. In February 1776, General Cornwallis was sent from England with a convoy loaded with troops to North Carolina. At the same time General Clinton headed south from New England with another convoy. The plan was for the two forces to join

up with the southern Tories and keep the South for the crown.

This action deserves an essay of its own, but to make a long story short, the Tories were already beaten by the patriots by the time the fleets arrived. Then poor planning, bad weather, and a determined patriot defense kept the British troops from landing.

Both convoys then sailed for New York and joined forces with General Howe, who had already landed a force on Staten Island. By the middle of August there would be 32,000 British troops facing the Americans, 8,000 of whom were German mercenaries (Hessians) General Howe had tried to negotiate a

peace with the rebels but the point became moot when Congress endorsed a draft of the Declaration of Independence on July 4th, declaring to the whole world that the colonies were an independent nation. From that point on the war had only one way it could end; by force of arms.

On the 22nd of July, after some days of mutual bombardments between British ships in the Hudson and the Americans on New York, the British attacked in earnest. Cornwallis led troops across the Narrows and landed in what is now Brooklyn and pushed the rebels back after a series of American blunders. The retreat would have become a general

rout save for the actions of a few brave men. Lord Sterling( an American leader despite the British sounding name) and a force of 250 Marylanders held the British off in a rear-guard action while the bulk of the army got away safely. The Marylanders then tried to fight their way out, but only ten made it to the newly formed American line.

These gallant soldiers, now only a small footnote in our history, made it possible for the Revolution to continue. Who can say what would have happened to our country,or even the world,had they not stood their ground.The day ended with 1500 casualties(including those taken prisoner) for the Americans and 370 for

the British.

The new American line was on the Brooklyn heights and Howe hesitated before them. He remembered what had happened when he attacked the Americans on Bunker Hill, and decided to lay a siege this time. Washington decided to use this lull in the fighting to evacuate his men. Another old adage applied to the American army, "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day." At dusk the Americans started an evacuation that was almost miraculous. The soldiers began an orderly pull back under cover of a convenient fog, and were rowed across the East River to Manhattan by

fishermen turned soldiers from Marblehead Massachusetts. It wouldn't be the last time that the men from Marblehead would save Washington's army. By the time the sun burned off the fog in the morning even the rear guard, commanded by Thomas Mifflin were gone and the British were facing empty trenches.

Congress wanted Manhattan held, but Washington told them it wasn't possible and they agreed to let him retreat again, but ordered him not to destroy the city. In the meantime 4,000 British stormed ashore at Kips bay and routed the new American recruits in the area. This put the troops still on Manhattan in danger of

being cut off. Israel Putnam led them to safety when for some reason Howe did not pursue him immediately.

Legend has it that Howe was held up by a patriotic woman named Mrs. Murray. He dallied at her home near Kips Bay for refreshments while the Americans escaped. Washington himself had tried to get Putnam's men to make a stand, but to no avail. He had to be forcibly removed by his aides from the area when the British advance units appeared.

By the 16th of September the new American line was on the Harlem Heights. From this spot a moral victory of a sort was won by the

Americans. Washington ordered a counter attack by American rangers and Virginians under the command of a Colonel Knowlton and a Major Leitch. Twice these men led attacks and both times drove the British from the field. Both leaders were killed but the action did boost the fighting spirit of the Americans for the time being.

A lull in the fighting enabled Washington to suggest to Congress that a long term regular army was needed, as well as a stronger set of the Articles of war. He knew the war would not be won by undisciplined militia. These suggestions would become reality, but not in time to save New York. During this lull, a large

part of New York City was burnt to the ground. There is no evidence that it was set by the rebels.

On October 12th the British again moved against the patriots by landing a large number of troops at Pells Point, north of the city. Washington again narrowly escaped by leading most of his army to White Plains. A contingent of 2,000 men were left at the northern part in a fortified area named Fort Washington. Another group was sent directly across the river and fortified an area named Fort Lee.

Howe advanced toward White Plains But when he saw the Americans in positions atop a row of hills he again

halted and retreated.

Once more the memory of Bunker Hill made him cautious.

Washington used this time to get his men across the Hudson to Fort Lee in Jersey. The men at Fort Washington refused to retreat and were attacked from all sides and capitulated. When Washington heard the British had also crossed the Hudson, he once more retreated south across the Hackensack River and headed for the town of Newark. His only thought now was to keep his army intact.

As in all future wars our country was to become involved in, only a small handful did the actual fighting. Today

these men would be called "Grunts."  
Only the weapons have changed over the years.

Now these "Grunts" of 1776 marched along unaware that by the beginning of the new year they would have two victories that would inspire themselves and the rest of the world.

## **Crossing the Delaware**

When he received word that Cornwallis was on the west side of the Hudson, Washington assumed correctly that Philadelphia would be the British ultimate target, and he immediately sent out requests for more man power.

Charles Lee was in White Plains with 5,000 men but dragged his feet at responding. He stayed where he was to allegedly harass the British from their rear. It would not be the last time the former British officer tried to undermine George Washington. Congress would respond with troops, but not in time for Washington to try to stop the British advance. Retreat was the answer once more. Again his top priority was to keep his army, however small, intact. As the Americans left from one end of Newark, on the road to Brunswick, the British were entering Newark from the opposite end.

By the beginning of December 1776,

there were only 3,400 men under Washington's command and he decided to leave New Jersey altogether. After securing every boat from the Jersey side for miles around he crossed the Delaware into Pennsylvania .

During this period word arrived that General Lee had been captured by the British in New York. There was a silver lining to this cloud. Lee's 2nd in Command, General Sullivan took it upon himself to take the 2,000 men left in Lee's command and join Washington. The rest of Lee's army had dissipated away due to sickness and lack of supplies to sustain them.

Washington now decided to hit the

enemy back. He was aggressive by nature, and also knew his men needed something to boost their morale. He decided to strike at Trenton, New Jersey, a town held by 3 regiments of Hessians under the command of a Colonel Rall.

The plan was to recross the Delaware in three spots. Washington would cross in the vicinity of McKonkee's Ferry with 2,400 men, General Ewing would cross further south to cut off any retreat, and a Colonel Cadwalader would cross even further south to guard against any reinforcements coming from that direction..

Washington started them across on Christmas night and by 3:00 AM they were on the Jersey side. The crossing took 9 hours due to the extra artillery taken along, and the horrible weather. Once again the Marblehead, Mass. men saved the day for Washington with their expert seamanship. It was another hour before the column got underway for Trenton, nine cold and snowy miles away. The sun would be up by the time Trenton was reached, denying the attackers complete surprise, but it was too late to turn back now.

Earlier in the night, some American scouts had fired on a Hessian outpost, almost giving away the operation before

it got underway. The Hessians investigated and brushed it off as an isolated incident. They were contemptuous of the American fighting man. They got this from Colonel Rall who refused the British advice to dig in and fortify the town. He was confident that his professional soldiers would rout any amateur American rabble that came at them. He wouldn't be the last German to underestimate the American soldier.

At 7:45 AM the Americans reached the town and launched a spirited attack. That they would be able to attack after what they went through this Hellish night was nothing short of miraculous, but attack they did. It was a lightning fast strike.

They hit the Hessians with such speed and fury, the mercenaries could hardly get a defense together. The battle lasted all of 90 minutes and ended in a complete Hessian defeat.

When the smoke cleared, the Hessians had lost 22 dead and 1,000 captured. Colonel Rall was mortally wounded, and died 36 hours later, after getting assurances from Washington that his captured men would be treated with honor and dignity. The Patriots lost 2 dead and 2 wounded. There had also been two men lost the night before in the crossing. Four hundred Hessians had escaped due to the failure of Ewing and Cadwalader to get their men across the

Delaware.

Some officers wanted to pursue the Hessians, but Washington took the advice of a council of war he called together that advised against it. This probably was the wisest course due to the presence of strong enemy forces about in New Jersey, and so many of the Americans (Ewing and Cadwalader) still across the river. There was also the fact that the exhausted American troops had discovered a large cache of Hessian Rum.

They would rest on their laurels today. They had beaten the mighty Hessians. Tomorrow would be time enough to fight again.

# Battle of Princeton

Many Americans do not realize that George Washington crossed and recrossed the Delaware River a total of four times in the waning days of 1776. The first time was in early December when he left New Jersey in retreat from the British. The 2nd was when he crossed to attack Trenton(Dec.25-26). After Trenton was taken, he deemed it best to put the river between his army and the more powerful British army, and went back to Pennsylvania. When he arrived at the Pennsylvania camp he received word that General Cadwalader had crossed the Delaware and was in

Trenton. Cadwalader had not crossed on Christmas due to the bad weather and mistakenly assumed that Washington would not have crossed either. Upon learning that Washington had not only crossed but had beaten the Hessians, the shame-faced Cadwalader crossed and entered the unoccupied Trenton.

Washington did not want to put a negative spin on the so far victorious venture by ordering Cadwalader to retreat, and so crossed the river once again and joined the two commands together on the 29th of December.

By this time Cornwallis had arrived at Princeton, New Jersey with 8,000 troops. Washington knew he could

expect an attack by Cornwallis very shortly and was determined to make a fight of it. Instead of fortifying Trenton he put his lines just south of the town on the south bank of the Assunpink Creek.

On the first day of 1777, Washington sent a force under General Fermoy toward Princeton with orders to harass and delay any British force they meet.

Fermoy was another one of those so called professional soldiers who had come to the American cause with a reputation allegedly won on European battle fields. His courage was questioned by Washington when he retreated before the British van guard without a shot being fired. He was

replaced by General Hand who promptly set out to see if Cornwallis had left Princeton.

Cornwallis had indeed left Princeton. He left three regiments at the small town, another three at a town called Maidenhead, and with 5,500 men headed toward Trenton to defeat the Americans once and for all. He was immediately met by General Hand's group in a series of small delaying action battles. It was not until five PM on the 2nd of January that Cornwallis reached the American lines at Assunpink Creek.

He attacked right away and was repulsed three times by the American defenders before he called it quits for

the day. He decided to wait for full daylight before hitting the Americans again.

It was during this lull that Washington devised a plan that showed how daring and imaginative he was. He decided to quietly move his whole army around the British flank and attack Princeton. The plan worked. A small group was left behind to keep the camp fires going, while the rest (artillery and all) made for Princeton through the darkness.

Princeton was hit the next morning. The battle was not as easy as Trenton though. A British column, on its way to Trenton, for some unknown reason, did an about

face and headed back to Princeton. They ran smack into a force led by General Mercer that had been stationed behind the main American Army for such a contingency. The Americans fought gallantly but were pushed back by the British. Mercer was mortally wounded in the engagement. George Washington led a counter attack and thoroughly beat the British attacking force.

While this battle was being fought, General Sullivan was taking Princeton. The British put up a short resistance on the grounds of the college in town but soon either fled or surrendered.

Washington regrouped his Army and took what supplies were available, and

headed his victorious army on the road to Morristown about seventy miles away. Here they would go into winter camp. The winter of '77 would be a bitterly cold one, but the two victories would give the Americans enough spirit to get through it. The Revolution was once again very much alive.

## 1777

With the coming of spring, 1777, Washington marched his troops from their winter camp at Morristown to within ten miles of the British camped at Brunswick, New Jersey. With a sizable turnout of New Jersey and Rhode Island Militias he was

determined to force a fight. He also had at least 7,000 men split between Peekskill, NY and Fort Ticonderoga, safeguarding the Hudson Highlands and to stop any British invasion from Canada.

Howe reinforced the troops at Brunswick and maneuvered them about for a few days but did not attack the Americans. Instead he marched to Amboy and boarded them on ships and left New Jersey altogether.

The Americans marched toward the Hudson with the false idea that that was where the British fleet was heading. They reversed course when it was learned that the fleet was coming back

south to the Chesapeake Bay, and marched into Philadelphia.

On the 25th of August Howe landed at the mouth of the Elk River in Maryland and started a march on Philadelphia, expecting the populace to welcome and support him. He found a land devoid of people and supplies. The Americans had put into effect a scorched earth policy. A picked group of riflemen were sent out under a William Maxwell to stall the British advance while the army left Philadelphia for a better defensive position. They found one at Brandywine Creek outside the city. The British were only temporarily slowed by Maxwell's troops and hit Washington

with a two pronged attack. It was a bloody battle and after a series of blunders by the Americans they were forced to withdraw from the field. Only the actions of Anthony Wayne kept the retreat orderly and prevented a rout. They Americans made it to Chester Pennsylvania under the cover of darkness. Despite losing a thousand men, twice as many as the British did, morale was very high in the American camp.

Once again the Americans entered Philadelphia, only to learn that the Congress had fled for Lancaster leaving word for Washington that he was now in supreme command of the army. His next

action was to leave the city and take up positions on the far bank of the Shuylkill River. There was another defeat of the Americans at this time at Paoli Pennsylvania when a detachment under Anthony Wayne suffered heavy losses.

Despite these set backs Washington still wanted to engage the enemy again, and attacked the British at Germantown in early October. Once again mistakes by the Americans let a victory that was almost in hand slip away. The Americans retreated with twice the number of dead as the British, but for unknown reasons Howe did not pursue them. He entered Philadelphia and after a series of skirmishes to secure the river

approaches to the city he settled in for the winter. Washington stayed close to the British until December when he marched his men to a winter camp in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania where a legend began that would live as long as there were soldiers.

## **The Tide Begins to Turn**

While Washington was fighting around the New Jersey/Pennsylvania area, blood was being spilled elsewhere in the country. Settlers in the outlying districts of New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia (Virginia claimed all the country westward that was drained by the Ohio and Mississippi rivers) were

being slaughtered by Indian tribes stirred up and supplied by the British. The southern settlers were also being attacked by Indians that were stirred up by the Tory John Stuart.

In the spring of '77 General John Burgoyne arrived in Canada from England with a plan to split the colonies in half and effectively end the war. This plan depended largely on the use of Indian aid.

The plan was threefold. Burgoyne would head south from Canada with an army of British, Hessians, and Indians and head for the Hudson River, destroying all American posts in his path. He then would push down the Hudson to Albany.

General(Brevet) Barry St.Leger would lead a force of British, Canadians and Indians down the Mohawk River destroying all American forces he should meet while laying waste to the Mohawk valley. Upon Reaching the Hudson he would join forces with Burgoyne north of Albany.

General Howe would lead an army up the Hudson and attack Albany from the south while they attacked from the north. This would split the New England colonies from the rest. Then both halves would be dealt with separately.

Burgoyne started out in late June and had some early success such as retaking the

forts at Crown Point and Ticonderoga. But after that his progress was slowed by the delaying actions taken by the retreating Americans under General Schuyler. The Americans blocked all roads by chopping down large pine trees across them. Burgoyne never tried flanking these Americans. Instead he just held up his advance while his own axemen cleared the way. This slow progress got the Indians restless and they started raiding the surrounding countryside murdering settlers. This had a negative effect on the British campaign. When stories and rumors of Indian atrocities spread around, the settlers became infuriated and flocked to the American army.

On August 16th Burgoyne dispatched a force under Colonel Frederick Baume to take Bennington in what is now Vermont. (the area then was called the New Hampshire Grants) This force was beaten by Americans under John Stark losing 800 men.

Burgoyne finally started moving again and clashed with the Americans at a place known as Freeman's Farm, outside of Saratoga. General Gates was now in charge of the Americans having replaced Schuyler. Again the British suffered heavy losses but held the field at fighting's end. Burgoyne claimed a victory, but even his own troops realized this was a hollow face saving boast. The

Americans fortified Bemis Heights at Saratoga and the British sat facing them on an open plain. The two armies stayed like this until October 7th, when the Americans attacked.

The battle raged all day and this time it was the British who retreated under the cover of darkness. The Americans pressed after them until they surrounded them in the hills outside of Saratoga. Here the starving, beaten British sat hoping for a relief force under General Clinton to reach them. Clinton never showed and Burgoyne was forced to surrender. General Gates took credit for this victory, but the men that did the actual fighting credited Benedict Arnold

for inspiring them and leading them to victory.

At the same time that Burgoyne started his campaign St. Leger left Canada with a thousand British and Canadians, picked up a thousand Indians at Oswego and started south, fully confident that he would crush any Americans that opposed him. The first item on his agenda was the taking of Fort Stanwix situated where the town of Rome New York is today. The fort was reached in early August, surrounded, and an immediate surrender was demanded. This was rejected by the American Commander Colonel Gansevoort and the siege was on. The surrender demand

included a threat that the Indians would be turned loose on the populace if the demand was rejected. This had the opposite result than what St Leger hoped for. It enraged the Americans so much that they determined never to surrender.

The Mohawk Valley militia (800 strong) under General Herkimer tried to reach the fort but was ambushed at Oriskany Creek by a force of mostly Indians under the Mohawk Joseph Brant, and some Tories under the renegade John Butler. The fighting, including much hand to hand combat, raged for two hours before a violent thunder storm caused a temporary halt. When the storm passed the fighting started up again for another

hour. The fighting ended when the Indians started to retreat. They were spooked by the storm, considering it a bad omen. They were also concerned about losing so many of their chiefs (23 were killed) This wasn't their type of fighting. They liked to hit and run. When the Indians left, the battle was over. The Americans losses were severe; only three hundred survived. Herkimer was carried from the field with a shattered leg, only to die a few days later from gangrene.

The Indians were further demoralized when they reached their camp outside of Stanwix. Here they learned that the Americans had attacked the small party

left to guard the camp and took every bit of supplies the Indians had there. The Indians blamed the British for not protecting the camp. Then a Tory acting as an agent for the Americans entered the camp and spread the false story that a very large American army was approaching. After seeing how the Americans fought after being ambushed, the Indians did not want anything to do with a large army and started a general withdrawal. When they left they helped themselves to the British supplies to replace those taken in the American counterattack.

St. Leger then knew he was beaten and started a humiliating retreat back to

Canada. Burgoyne's plan was a total flop because Howe never started north at all. He claimed not to have received any orders to do so. St. Leger was totally disgraced when it was learned he retreated even before Burgoyne was defeated. If he wasn't so obsessed with taking Fort Stanwix, he might have bypassed it, laid waste to the Mohawk Valley and joined up with Burgoyne. But who is to say it might have turned out differently? As it was, the Colonies were still united and the Revolution still lived.

## **Valley Forge**

On the 19th of December, 1777,

Washington set up his winter headquarters at Valley Forge Pennsylvania. He had 12,000 troops, representing 11 of the colonies, with the exception of Georgia and South Carolina, who were represented by only a few officers. Valley Forge was actually a small village on the west bank of the Schuylkill River, 22 miles from Philadelphia. It was ideally situated to keep an eye on the British (in Philadelphia for the winter,) and to offer protection to the Jersey and Pennsylvania settlers in the area. It was also a natural stronghold, with a creek on either side (the Valley and Turtle Creeks) and the Schuylkill to the rear. In fact after the Americans fortified it,

General Howe cancelled preparations to attack the area.

Due to poor quartermastering, an inept congress, and an uncaring citizenship, the men soon started suffering from lack of food and supplies. Add to these conditions extreme weather and you can see the hardships they had to endure. My writing skills are nowhere near adequate enough to describe the conditions.

Suffice it to say 3,000 men were lost by June due to sickness, exposure, and desertions. General Wayne supplied the camp on more than a few occasions with supplies gotten from forays against the British.

Despite these hardships Washington still

wanted to get the men more adequately trained and on February 23rd a great change was about to take place. This was the day, Baron Von Steuben arrived in camp. He came from Europe where he served under Frederick the Great, and had been recruited by Ben Franklin.

His ideas on drill and discipline were exactly what Washington wanted, and Washington appointed him Acting Inspector General, with authority to implement training procedures.

Today's American soldiers and Marines can thank this man for the training they receive.

He stressed drill, inspections, and

instilled in the officers a sense of responsibility for the men in their care. He also wanted them to show kindness and humanity toward the men who would do the actual fighting and dying.

On the 23rd of April it was announced that France had formed an alliance with the united colonies and would send military help. The parade that was held in celebration of this announcement showed a well disciplined army.

At the end of May, an incident took place that also showed how much the army changed. Lafayette led a force out of the valley and occupied a hill 10 miles from Philadelphia to keep a closer eye on the British. General Clinton ( he

had just replaced Howe) ordered an attack and the Americans were pushed back toward the Forge. When the men at the Forge heard the firing they reacted swiftly and professionally, and repulsed the British with a counter attack.

On the 18th of June, Clinton marched his army out of Philadelphia, crossed the Delaware into Jersey, and started on the march to New York. Washington immediately ordered his army in pursuit with orders to harass the British but to avoid an all out battle for the time being. Soon all they had learned at Valley Forge under Von Steuben would be put to practice.

# **The Battle of Monmouth, June 1778**

The British were harassed constantly by the Americans as they crossed New Jersey. This, plus the heavily uniformed and equipped troops, and an excessive heat wave wore the British troops down, So much so, that Clinton called a halt in the area of Monmouth Court House for a much needed rest. He planned to rest the troops and then head for Sandy Hook on the coast, and have the army board transports.

This was the opportunity Washington was waiting for, and, on the 28th of June, he ordered Charles Lee to lead an

attack on the British as soon as they took the road again. The British started off and Lee did not attack. He delayed and then finally started his force after the British. When the Americans came upon the British rear guard at Monmouth Court House he ordered an immediate retreat. This had a domino effect as other advancing troops joined the retreat. Only the actions of General Wayne kept it from becoming a panicked rout.

Washington arrived on the scene, and after dismissing Lee, he took charge and stopped the retreating soldiers, and formed them into battle lines. Clinton saw this as an opportunity to put an end to the American army, and turned the

main body of troops around and attacked the Americans. Now Von Steubens' training took over as the Americans repelled attack after attack by the British. They even stood their ground and repulsed a vaunted British bayonet attack, inflicting heavy casualties on the Redcoats and Hessians. When darkness fell, the fighting stopped and the British army skulked away under the cover of darkness. Washington had been prepared for a major showdown in the morning, but he learned that the British sneaked away and had a six hour head start.

This would be too much for his exhausted army to overcome and he decided to give the troops a much

deserved rest. The British reached Sandy Hook without further trouble and sailed for New York with a new found respect for the fighting ability of the American soldier. Washington had won a victory from what looked like a sure defeat. The Revolution was not only still alive, it now looked like it had a good chance of succeeding.

## **The War in the South**

When Clinton headed for New York, Washington followed and positioned his army so as to contain the British on the island of Manhattan. A quiet period then engulfed the area with the exception of a few spectacular raids by the Americans.

In July of '78 General Sullivan attacked Rhode Island. He was supposed to do it in concert with a French force from the newly arrived French fleet. Signals were somehow crossed and Sullivan attacked alone and was repulsed. The Americans held some recriminations against the French, but any hard feelings were quickly squelched by Washington for the sake of the alliance.

On the 15th of July, Anthony Wayne captured the British post at Stoney Point, up the Hudson, in a fierce bayonet charge. A month later Henry Lee led a raid on the British at Paulus Hook (now downtown Jersey City, N.J.) and came away with captives.

Sullivan did have some success when he attacked the New York Indians(Iroquois Confederacy), destroying their towns and crops and causing them to flee into Canada. The Iroquois were no longer a factor in the war after this. George Rogers Clark defeated the British and Indians in the west and gained the whole Ohio and Mississippi Valleys for the colonies. Clarks venture was as daring and heroic an accomplishment as any in the history of the United States.

Washington waited the whole of 1779 for Clinton to leave New York and attack, and when the crafty Clinton stayed put, Washington put the army into winter camp at Morristown once again.

The winter of 79/80 turned out to be the coldest and snowiest winter of the century and the men suffered worse than they did at Valley Forge. By winters end they were reduced to eating leather belts, shoes, tree bark, and any unlucky dog that happened to wander by. There were desertions but not as many as one would expect considering the circumstances.

A force of Hessians did make a move toward the Americans, but were soundly beaten by Americans under General Greene at Springfield, N.J. The British then left the colony of New Jersey altogether. Washington then moved the main army to the Hudson Highlands.

It was here in late September that Washington learned that Benedict Arnold had turned traitor and went over to the British. Incriminating papers in Arnold's handwriting detailing the strengths and weaknesses of West Point were found on the person of John Andre, a British officer. Since Andre was in civilian clothes he was tried as a spy and hanged. Arnold led British troops against his former comrades in the South for the duration of the war. He would die in England years later in bitter obscurity, shunned by both sides.

While things were relatively quiet in the North, there was plenty of action down South. Clinton sailed from New York

and along with General Cornwallis captured Charleston, South Carolina taking General Ben Lincoln and 5,000 men prisoner. It was the worst American defeat of the war. Clinton then sailed back to New York, leaving Cornwallis with orders to pursue the war in the South in any manner he saw fit.

Cornwallis headed north through the state. He also had American Tories under John Ferguson with his army. During this advance a British force under Colonel Banastre Tarleton defeated a small American unit at a place called Waxhams (between Camden and Charlotte). Word spread that Tarletons men massacred the Americans as they were trying to

surrender. "Tarleton's quarter" became a rallying call for revenge by the Americans. It would have an adverse effect on the British shortly after.

On the 16th of August the Americans under General Gates were severely beaten by the British at Camden. It was after this battle that Cornwallis made one of his mistakes. He allowed the Tories under Ferguson to split off from the main army and go about scourging the south. Ferguson's force ended up at Kings Mountain, Tenn. where they were savagely beaten by a force of American backwoodsmen. Here's where "Tarleton's Quarter" came into effect. The Americans didn't stop killing the

Tories even after the battle ended. Ferguson himself was literally shot to pieces. Waxhus was revenged. This defeat temporarily stopped the British advance toward North Carolina. It also stopped the flow of Tories joining the British colors.

Nathaniel Greene replaced Gates as Commander and things took an upturn for the Patriots. In the middle of January 1781 Morgans riflemen destroyed Tarleton's Legion at Cowpens South Carolina, killing almost all of his 1,000 men.

Cornwallis then started advancing north again while Greene fell back before him. They met at Guilford Courthouse, North

Carolina in the middle of March and fought. The British held the field at the battles end but at a terrible cost in officers and men. It was after this battle that Cornwallis again made a mistake, and set a course that changed history. Instead of retreating to South Carolina and regrouping his forces, he headed for Virginia on a path that would lead him to Yorktown. Who knew then, that himself and Washington, now 700 miles apart, would soon meet here and draw a violent conclusion to all these years of war.

## **Yorktown - Final Victory**

Cornwallis entered Virginia in May of

1781, but previous events had transpired that set the first pieces in place for the final campaign. Around the time of the new year Benedict Arnold had landed in Virginia at the head of a large expedition that sacked Richmond and set up in fortified positions at Portsmouth.

Lafayette was sent with a small army to attack Arnold in concert with a French force. The French were beaten off and Lafayette was not strong enough to attack Arnold without them. He was ordered by Washington to stay in Virginia though, to keep an eye on Cornwallis who was approaching the area with his army.

Lafayette got behind the afore mentioned army and dogged its heels. Not strong

enough to meet Cornwallis head on, he contented himself to harass the rear units of the British. When Cornwallis turned and attacked, the Americans retreated, only to start the harassment again when the British march resumed. Cornwallis finally got behind the fortifications at Portsmouth. It was here he received a suggestion from Clinton that he, Cornwallis, take up defensive positions at either Old Point Comfort, or Yorktown. He chose Yorktown.

Washington, at this point in time, was still of the mind to attack Clinton in New York. On August 14th he received a dispatch that changed his mind. It informed him that a French fleet, under

Admiral De Grasse, was leaving the West Indies, and heading for the Chesapeake Bay. The fleet had a force of 3,200 French soldiers with it.

Washington immediately saw this as a chance to deliver a death blow to Cornwallis' army, and within four days was heading south with his army. The march was started on the 19th of August and by the 14th of September, Washington was in Williamsburg, Virginia, taking control of all troops(French and American)in the colony. He had 18,000 troops under his command,of which 7,500 were French. They outnumbered the British by at least two to one. This included the 3,200 that DeGrasse landed.DeGrasse than

defeated the British fleet.

On the 28th of September, the army left Williamsburg for Yorktown and set up siege operations immediately. It was done methodically. A parallel trench was dug around the British works, with siege guns being set up as they progressed. As soon as a gun emplacement was ready, the gun proceeded to fire on the enemy. There is evidence that Washington fired the opening shot.

By the middle of October, a second parallel trench was dug closer to the British lines. During this digging two British redoubts had to be assaulted and taken by French and American raiding

parties. The American party was headed by Alexander Hamilton. Now Cornwallis was in a desperate position and he knew it. On the 15th of October he ordered a sortie against the besiegers and it was beaten back. The next day he tried ferrying his troops across the river to Gloucester, but only a few made it across before a violent storm put an end to the operation. The French then tightened their ring around Gloucester and that ended that idea.

Finally on October 17th, the British gave up and asked for a 24 hour cease fire, so surrender terms could be discussed. Terms were granted and the battle was over. The American and French losses

were 400 killed. The British lost 500 killed and surrendered 5,000. On the 19th the British and Hessians marched out of Yorktown between the ranks of French and American soldiers. They marched to a tune called "The World Turned Upside Down." As far as the Americans who just overthrew tyranny were concerned, the world was finally right side up.

The British were allowed to sail to New York. Washington took his army to the Hudson to await the outcome of negotiations. The French left the country the following spring. King George wanted to continue the war, and Washington was more than willing to

oblige him, but Parliament wanted the war to end. Finally on September 2, 1783, the Treaty of Paris was ratified and the war was officially over. On November 25, 1783 the last British soldiers left from the port of New York.

The men that ended the war were a far cry from the brave citizens that stood up to the British at Lexington in '75. The first fighters were all so-called citizen soldiers. Their kind were still here at the end, but for the most part these soldiers at Yorktown were "regulars." In fact there was no higher compliment that could be paid militia than "they fought like regulars." These were the men that set the traditions and standards that are

carried on today in the Regular Army of the United States.

There is an expression, "when God made him/her He threw away the mold." Well, when God made these first American soldiers, He kept the mold and used it over and over. It was used to make soldiers over the centuries in America. It was used on those special people that took the traditions of 1775, used them and passed them on to the next generation. Only their names were changed. They've been called, Johnny Rebs, Yanks, Doughboys, and G.Is. Today they're called "**GRUNTS**"

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