

...y. The number of men for
of Observation was fixed at
...l. They were to be formed
...e, under the command of a
...al, and the brigade divided
...ments, each one of which
...nmanded by one colonel,
...-colonel and one major.
...was to consist of eight com-
...them to be a train of
...ve the use of the Colony's
...May 8, 1775, Henry Ward,
...the Colony and authorized
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...ton, signed and sealed the
...t made Nathanael Greene,
...s greatest soldier of all
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...tle army that was soon to
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...at the muster rolls of those
...hode Islanders who rallied
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...the same spirit that sent
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...eadlong pursuit after the
...shers are few; the State
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...The names of all the com-
...ers are in the Colonial
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...n has been uncovered from
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...rs. Greene written by the
...al from Providence before
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...June 2, 1775, is quoted in
...etermined to defend my
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...hat rules the world will
...of America, and receive
...se whose lot it is to fall in
...paradise of God, into whose

protection I commend you and myself; and am, with truest regard, your loving husband, N. Greene." Greene found the Rhode Island troops encamped at Jamaica Plain, poorly disciplined and in need of complete reorganization. Through intelligent management and great personal influence he soon restored a high order of military discipline and this was strictly maintained thereafter.

At home, every precaution was taken to protect the Colony in case of invasion. Fortifications were thrown along the shores and upon high ground overlooking the waters of Narragansett Bay. Rhode Islanders inaugurated and enthusiastically supported the movement that finally ended in the building of the first American Naval fleet; the famous Beacon Pole alarm device was erected on Prospect Hill

in Providence; soldiers were recruited for active service, and every man in the Colony, of age and physically fit, was required to hold himself in readiness for any duty that his country might require of him. The torch was applied when determined Rhode Islanders burned the hated "Gaspee," the fires of war were fanned into flames the day after Paul Revere rode through the Massachusetts countryside with his startling message; the long-anticipated conflagration broke forth on June 17th, when a stubborn force of little-trained farmer soldiers entrenched themselves on Bunker Hill and fought to the end for freedom. The blow had been struck; the time for diplomacy had passed; a nation of liberty-loving men and women plunged into a bitter struggle that could end only in victory.

THE CALL TO ARMS

TH**ERE** is nothing more inspiring for loyal, patriotic Rhode Islanders than a parade of the several military organizations which today compose the Rhode Island Militia. These Commands, authorized by State charter, never fail to bring forth genuine enthusiasm and heavy applause whenever they pass in review to the tune of "Yankee Doodle," with their officers and troopers arrayed in colorful uniforms and brilliant trappings which have long been discarded for the sombre but practical olive-drabs and grays. There is something romantic and adventuresome about cockades, epaulettes, shoulder straps, ruffles, gold braid and shiny boots, even though they were more appropriate for parading and strutting about in the presence of impressionable young ladies than they were for actual combat service in the field.

These picturesquely uniformed bodies retain the high-sounding titles that must have thrilled the early patriots, especially the young men, and associated their activities with deeds of daring and adventure-filled exploits. Such titles as the "Newport Artillery, Kentish Guards, United Train of Artillery, Bristol Train

of Artillery, First Light Infantry," and the comparatively new "Varnum Continentals" have survived since the first of these, the Newport Artillery, was founded in 1741. At the time when the Colonies faced war with England, the active military force in Rhode Island, in addition to some of those already mentioned, consisted of such groups as the Kingstown Reds, North Providence Rangers, Scituate Hunters, Providence Rangers, Pawtuxet Rangers, and the Providence Grenadiers. In spite of the fact that these companies were recruited from inexperienced youngsters they were well equipped and strictly disciplined and the Colony had a feeling of safety as long as the drilling, parading and mustering continued in its midst. The officers were elected at stated times by the companies themselves, their choice was communicated to the General Assembly for approval and then the Governor did the formal commissioning. These officers were, for the most part, prominent citizens who had had military experience in the field or on the training grounds, but practically all of the soldiers were raw recruits.

Although the intent was serious enough,

these muster days and training days were regarded pretty much as holidays. Those who were not members of the companies joined the frolic and put aside all work in order to watch the drilling of the troopers, and also to take part in the general jollification in the vicinity of the parade-ground. The headquarters of the militia was usually at some one of the many taverns in the town, and the tavern-keeper always made provision for the celebrating by laying in an extra stock of refreshments. It was customary for the newly-elected officers to be generous in treating, not only the soldiers in the company, but everyone else, and quoting Edward Field "liquor was furnished in such overflowing abundance that some who attended training took many more steps returning home than they had in coming."

By a law of the Colony, passed in 1774, each enlisted soldier was required to furnish at his own expense "a sufficient gun or fuzee" and a good bayonet for his gun. This equipment was therefore the soldier's own property and, as long as he furnished all that the law required, no question was raised as to the type. There must have been a strange collection of assorted fire-arms when those early defenders of peace and liberty marched and counter-marched across the rough fields and paraded through the narrow dusty streets. The original purpose of the maintenance of these home troops was for protection of the Colony itself but all this preparation led to a much more important and more active service than "home-guarding."

Immediately following the immortal clash of arms at Concord and Lexington, the General Assembly of Rhode Island ordered a so-called Army of Observation to be raised "with all the expedition and despatch that the nature of the thing will admit of," and all of the militia companies were ordered to drill a half-day every two weeks. This Army of Observation, as it was politely called, was raised for the purpose of repelling any "insult or violence that may be offered to the inhabitants" by the fleets and armies which surrounded them — the fleets and armies of His Britannic Majesty. Those who entered the army did so by subscribing to the following oath of enlistment: — "I, the

subscriber, hereby solemnly engage and enlist myself, and in the pay of the Colony of Rhode Island, for the preservation of the liberties of America, from the day of my enlistment, to the last day of December next, unless the service admit of a discharge sooner, which shall be at the discretion of the General Assembly; and I hereby promise to submit myself to all the orders and regulations of the army, and faithfully to observe and obey all such orders as I shall receive from time to time from my officers."

This Army of Observation was enlisted in the King's service and, on the face of it, the intention was not hostile to English interests. But the promptness in which this emergency force was organized and put in the field, and the zeal which the patriots displayed in rallying to arms must have worried His Majesty a bit and caused him to surmise that perhaps this hurried military preparation on the part of Rhode Island might have a far different meaning from what appeared on the surface. Thus, Rhode Island began to enter into the eight year struggle which was to lead to freedom and self-government by a new nation. Throughout the entire period of the war Rhode Island played an active indispensable part and from the tiny colony enlisted more fighters than from any other colony in proportion to its population.

Governor Wanton, the Deputy-Governor and two assistants protested the action of the Assembly in forming this Army of Observation, but their protestations were of no avail. Nathanael Greene and William Bradford were appointed a committee to confer with the Connecticut Assembly in regard to this matter of general defense; the public ammunition was distributed among the towns; and it was voted to hold the election session of the Assembly at Providence for greater security. At the May session for the election of officers the dividing line between Whigs and Tories was more sharply drawn. Those who preferred allegiance to England were forced to declare themselves, and there was no place for a straddler. As Nathanael Greene put it "those who were not for the Colonies were against them."

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Governor Wanton was suspended for
having in various ways "manifested his
intentions to defeat the good people of
these colonies in their present glorious
struggle to transmit inviolate to posterity
those sacred rights they have received
from their ancestors." A Committee of
Safety was appointed which, with the two
highest military officers, was to super-
intend the paying and furnishing the
troops and direct their movements when
called away from the Colony. The army
was formed into one brigade of three
regiments, each regiment consisting of
eight companies, with a train of artillery.
Nathanael Greene was placed in command
with the rank of brigadier-general and by
the first of June nearly a thousand men of
this Army of Observation were encamped
with their artillery on Jamaica Plain.

After the battle of Bunker Hill an extra
session of the General Assembly was
called. Committees were appointed to
take account of the arms and ammunition
in the Colony and report it to Congress.
Saltpetre and brimstone supplies were
sent to the powder mills in New York, and
in all sections of the Colony could be seen
open preparations for the impending
struggle. A signal post was established on
Tower Hill, and the famous beacon pole
was raised on Prospect Hill and instruc-
tions were broadcast relative to the
method in which it would be fired should
the enemy strike. The Colony was put on
a war footing, and every man of age and
physically fit was required to hold himself
in readiness for active service. A portion
of the militia was designated to act as
"minutemen" and the independent com-
panies of infantry and artillery drilled
with these militia companies. The Army
of Observation which, by this time, num-
bered about seventeen hundred men, was
placed under the command of General

Washington, who had arrived after the
battle of Bunker Hill and taken charge of
the Continental Army, relieving Artemas
Ward.

Providence harbor was fortified between
Field's Point and Sassafras Point and a
battery of six eighteen pounders was
erected on Fox Point. The Beacon on
Prospect Hill was given a thorough trial
and the glow from the suspended kettle
was found to shed a light over an area
extending from Cambridge to New Lon-
don, and from Newport to Pomfret.
Preparations for war continued. All live
stock was removed from Block Island and
the islands in Narragansett Bay. Rhode
Island delegates in Congress were in-
structed "to use their whole influence for
building at the Continental expense, a
fleet of sufficient force for the protection of
these colonies, and for employing them in
such manner and places as will most effec-
tually annoy our enemies, and contribute
to the common defense of these colonies."
This recommendation led to the appoint-
ment of a committee of which Stephen
Hopkins and John Adams were members,
and which soon laid the foundations of the
Continental Navy, the first commander-
in-chief of which was Esek Hopkins, the
distinguished Rhode Island sailor.

In this and in subsequent conflicts in-
volving the safety of the nation, Rhode
Island was always in the forefront leading
the way for a fight to the finish. This
same spirit will ever prevail should similar
emergencies be met again. George W.
Greene, the historian, described well the
spirit of Rhode Island during those
exciting days of preparedness for the
struggle for independence when he said
"Rhode Island drew its sword when the
'Gaspee' was burned, and the scabbard
was thrown away when Governor Wanton,
the Tory, was deposed."