

could it be understood by them and the community, that there is a vast difference between an excellent and well qualified teacher in instruction and influence and a fair one (to say nothing of the quack) soon the joyful tidings would come wafted on the wings of the wind from one district to another that none but first rate instructors can find employment here. Then our schools would improve. Then, all concerned would begin to appreciate the truth that education is of that importance which should interest all, for it lays the foundation for all that is great and good. It forms pure, noble and virtuous citizens for a prosperous and happy community. All this should be obtained in youth. "For just as the twig is bent, the tree is inclined."

With my best wishes for the advancement of the schools in culture and educational attainments, I remain

Your obedient servant,  
Richard G. Stone, Supt.

Foster, May 27, 1878

## THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND

By J. Bruce Whyte

One hundred and eighty-six years ago this August, one of the most disappointing battles of the American Revolution was fought on Aquidneck, just about a mile and a half north of Newport.

Newport was one of the most important vantage points on the eastern seaboard, second only to New York. It was reported that Newport was "far enough from the ocean to be out of reach of the guns of an enemy and near enough to be within easy exit to challenge the most daring foe.

"It commanded all ocean approaches and nowhere on the coast was there a better seat of operations against a maritime adversary."

Vessels staging out of Newport were a constant menace to cargos entering Long Island Sound, and it is not difficult to understand why on December 26, 1776, nearly eight-thousand British and Hessian troops under the command of General Clinton and Earl Percy landed on Rhode Island about four and a half miles north of Newport.

Clinton removed to New York leaving General Prescott in command, but that figure suffered a rather revolting experience when he was captured in his heavily guarded headquarters by Colonel Barton and a handful of American "rabble". Sir Robert Pigot took charge of the British forces in Newport and was in command when Comte D'Estaing appeared in Rhode Island waters on July 29, 1778.

General Sullivan, commander of the Continental forces in Rhode Island, boarded D'Estaing's brig, the "Languedoc" and there the course of action to capture Rhode Island, as mapped out by General Washington, was agreed upon. The French fleet was to play an important role in the Battle of Rhode Island by bombarding the English garrison of Newport from the rear while the land forces pressed the front lines.

D'Estaing opened the campaign by sending a message to Sir Pigot suggesting that the British General surrender to the American and allied forces, but Pigot replied with a brisk cannonade from his batteries.

Massachusetts and Connecticut sent ten thousand militia men to Providence to join forces with the Rhode Island militia. In Providence, the entire army was divided with one half command by Lafayette and the other by General Greene.

On August 5th, D'Estaing destroyed several British warships with only two of his. Chances for success were excellent at this time, but the American forces in Providence were not prepared to move.

Finally ten days later, eighty-six hundred militia men landed in Portsmouth, and the next day four-thousand French troops landed on Jamestown.

During the delay of the Americans the British withdrew to concentrate their forces at a position about three miles north of Newport. Sullivan received intelligence of this movement and immediately paraded his troops south and occupied Quaker Hill, eight miles from the British lines.

Monday, August 10th, proved to be an eventful day. The previous day an armada of twenty-five British warships commanded by Lord Howe had appeared about five miles off the entrance to Narragansett Bay. At around ten on this clear Monday morning, D'Estaing set out in the "Languedoc" with his entire fleet behind. As the French sailed out of the bay, heavy fire was laid upon them from the British at Brenton's Reef, but the French laid heavy their own fire.

Boiling clouds were gathering in the northeast, and soon the clear blue sky was masked in black. The wind increased as the two fleets were trying to gain the advantage over each other, and before either side was prepared to fire, the rain was falling in torrents and the sea was raging in the wind.

The "Great Storm" as it was later called, raged for forty-eight hours without interruption, during which time it was recorded that "the spray from the ocean carried in by the terrific force of the wind,

covered town windows with a deposit of salt."

Nature had won the battle at sea, badly defeating both the Houses of Hanover and Bourbon. The "Languedoc" was completely dismasted and had lost a rudder. Lord Howe retreated to Gardiner's Bay and D'Estaing in his deplorable condition pursued not a mile behind. But Howe's fleet was in no condition to engage in battle, and likewise, the French were in no condition to take the offensive. On the 20th, D'Estaing returned to Rhode Island.

Generals Greene and Lafayette boarded the "Languedoc" and conferred with D'Estaing on a future course of action. The British were severely battered by the storm and now seemed a feasible time to press an attack. D'Estaing eagerly anticipated an easy victory, but the officers of his vessels had other ideas. Overruled, D'Estaing was obliged to sail to Boston for repairs. Lafayette and Greene returned to camp and told Sullivan the sorry news that the French would be unable to support the campaign.

Embittered, Sullivan sent a note to D'Estaing declaring that his departure would not be "justified by his instructions and derogatory to the honor of France and not in compliance with the spirit and letter of the alliance."

The troops on land, too, were much in despair at the news of the French departure. Chaplain Cutler reported that "this unexpected desertion of the fleet, which was the main spring of the expedition, cast a universal gloom on the army, and threw us all into consternation. Our most sanguine hopes were cropped in the bud, and we expected immediate orders to move off the ground." Nevertheless the French departed leaving an unsupported army behind.

The condition of the American land forces after the storm can best be described as being in a sorry plight. On the evening of August 12th, the storm had claimed every tent, much ammunition was ruined and the number of injured and dead was great.

The storm had prevented an advance planned by Sullivan for six on the morning of the 12th, and Chaplain Cutler reported that "a great number of the militia, having no tents were obliged to continue out the storm without any shelter."

On Thursday, the 13th, the storm grew in intensity. Ten deserters from the British 22nd regiment were captured, and it was learned from them that on the day D'Estaing moved out to meet Howe's fleet, French fire had dismounted the guns and nearly demolished two forts. Several were reported dead.

At six on Saturday morning, August 15th, the Americans advanced to about a mile and a half from the British lines, and for the next six days, both sides engaged in moderate cannon fire.

All seemed to be going against the Americans up to this point. First, and perhaps the most decisive factor in the failure of the campaign, was the delay in Providence. Next, the unexpected appearance of Howe's fleet, and then, the inability of D'Estaing to give the naval support so desperately needed for a successful expedition.

Lafayette had gone to Boston and attempted to urge D'Estaing to return the fleet to Rhode Island, but the Admiral's officers still held that their ships were in no condition for battle. D'Estaing did, however, promise to march thirty-six hundred men to Rhode Island to carry out the land portion of the campaign. But meanwhile, three thousand of the militia in Rhode Island returned to their homes. Retreat now seemed the only answer.

It was now the 28th of August. Fighting during the past week had been confined to behind-the wall skirmishes but only on this day, the British emerged from their trenches and began an open attack.

Colonel John Trumbull, volunteer aid to General Sullivan recorded a rather spirited account of the ensuing conflict. He said that "soon after daybreak the rear guard, commanded by that excellent officer, Colonel Wigglesworth, was attacked on Quaker Hill, otherwise known as Windmill Hill, and General Sullivan, wanting to avoid serious action on that ground, sent me with orders to the commanding officer to withdraw the guard." Colonel Trumbull continued to say that when he reached the summit of Quaker Hill, he at first saw "a round shot or two drop near me, and pass bounding on. I met poor Colonel Tousard, who had just lost one arm, blown off by the discharge of a field piece . . . Soon after, I saw Captain Walker, of H. Jackson's regiment, who had received a musket ball through his body, mounted behind a person on horseback. He bid me a melancholy farewell and died before night. Next grape shot began to sprinkle around me, and soon after, musket balls fell in my path like hail stones." Trumbull approached Colonel Wigglesworth who said, "Don't say a word, Trumbull, I know your errand, but don't speak; we will beat them in a moment." Trumbull replied, "Do you see those troops crossing obliquely from the west road towards your rear?" "Yes," said the commander, "they are Americans coming to our support." The troops, it was soon discovered were Hessians. The commander gave Trumbull orders to retire to General Sullivan which the Colonel immediately did.

To Be Continued

## THE BATTLE OF RHODE ISLAND

By J. Bruce Whyte

Continued from May Issue

"As I rode back to the main body on Butt's Hill, I fell in with a party of soldiers bearing a wounded officer on a litter, whom I found to be my friend, H. Sherburne, of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a fellow volunteer. They were carrying him to the surgeons in the rear, to have his leg amputated. He had just been wounded by a random ball, while sitting at breakfast. This was a source of lasting mortification, as he told me afterwards—'If this had happened to me in the field, in active duty, the loss of a leg might be borne, but to be condemned through all future life to say I lost my leg under the breakfast table it too bad.'

"Soon after this, as I was carrying an important order the wind, which had risen with the sun, blew off my hat. I therefore, tied a white handkerchief around my head, and as I did not recover my hat until evening, I formed, the rest of the, the most conspicuous mark that ever was seen on the field—mounted on a superb bay horse, in a summer dress of nankeen—with this head dress, duty led me to every point where danger was to be found, and I escaped without the slightest injury.

After the battle, General Sullivan sent his account to Congress in which he reported that "skirmishing continued between the advanced parties until near ten o'clock, when the enemy's two ships of war and some small armed vessels having gained our right flank and begun a fire, the enemy bent their whole force that way, and endeavored to turn our right under cover of the ships' fire, and to take the advanced redoubt on the right. They were twice driven back in great confusion! but a third trial was made with greater numbers and with more resolution, which, had it not been for the timely aid sent forward, would have succeeded. A sharp contest of nearly an hour ensued, in which the cannon from both armies, placed on the hills, played briskly in support of their own party. The enemy were at length routed, and fled, in great confusion, to the hill where they first formed, and where they had artillery and some works to cover them; leaving their dead and wounded, in considerable numbers, behind them. It was impossible to ascertain the number of dead on the field, as it could not be approached by either party without being exposed to the cannon of the other army. Our party recovered about twenty of their wounded, and took nearly sixty prisoners, according to the best accounts I have been able to collect. . . . The firing of artillery continued through the day, the musketry with intermission of six hours. The heat of action continued near an hour; which must have ended in the ruin of the British army, had not their redoubts on the hill covered them from further pursuit. We were about to attack them in their lines; but the men having no rest the night before, and nothing to eat either that night or the day of the action, and having been in constant action through most of the day, it was not thought advisable, especially as their positions were exceedingly strong, and their numbers fully equal, if not superior to ours. Not more than fifteen hundred of my troops had ever been in action before."

The Battle of Rhode Island was fought between Americans who had never seen battle before, or if they did, had seen very little of it, and professional soldiers; yet, after seven hours of ceaseless engagement, the inexperienced American troops were the victors. They had lost two-hundred and eleven men, while the loss of the British numbered over a thousand. Sullivan held his position for only a day, for he had received intelligence of Clinton's fleet moving toward Rhode Island; consequently, on the evening of the 30th of August, the American army retreated to the mainland. And fortunate it was that Sullivan acted when he did, for on the following morning an armada of a hundred British warships entered Newport Harbor. Had the American forces remained, the overpowering British most probably would have annihilated them all.

Although the absence of the French fleet rendering the necessary naval support to the Americans was an important factor in the failure to capture Rhode Island, D'Estaing's departure was not a cowardly move on his part, which seemed to be the general public belief at the time. Congress became so alarmed at public sentiment towards the Comte D'Estaing that a resolution was adopted "in appreciation of the zeal and attachment the Comte D'Estaing has shown to the cause of the United States on several occasions, and especially in the noble and generous offer to march from Boston at the head of his troops to cooperate in the reduction of Rhode Island."

Rhode Island was not captured by the Americans, but every soldier who fought during the entire campaign fought well. As Sullivan wrote to Congress: "No troops could possibly show more spirit than those of ours which were engaged. Colonel Livingston, and all the officers of the light corps behaved with remarkable spirit. Colonels Lauren, Fleury, and Major Talbot with the officers of that corps behaved with gallantry. The brigades of the first line—Varnum's Glover's, Cornell's and Greene's—behaved with great firmness. Major General Greene, who commanded in the attack on the right, did himself the highest honor, his best judgement and bravery exhibited in the action."

And Lafayette declared the Battle of Rhode Island to have been "the best fought action of the war."

### NOTICE

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