

**Military Journal, During the American Revolutionary War describing the Events and
Transactions of the Period with Numerous Historical Facts and Anecdotes.**

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MILITARY JOURNAL - 1775-1776.

January [1775]. - AT the precise period when my medical studies and education are completed, under the patronage of Dr. Abner Hersey of Barnstable, and I am contemplating the commencement of a new career in life, I find our country about to be involved in all the horrors of a civil war.

A series of arbitrary and oppressive measures, on the part of the mother-country, has long been advancing to that awful crisis, when an appeal to the power of the sword becomes inevitable. The event of this mighty struggle is to decide an affair of infinite magnitude, not merely as it respects the present generation, but as it will affect the welfare and happiness of unborn millions. The great fundamental principle, in the present controversy, is the right which is claimed by the Parliament of Great Britain, to exercise dominion, as the only supreme and uncontrollable legislative power over all the American Colonies.

"Can they make laws to bind the colonies in all cases whatever; levy taxes on them without their consent; dispose of the revenues, thus raised, without their control; multiply officers at pleasure, and assign them fees, to be paid without, nay, contrary to and in direct violation of acts of our provincial assemblies, and approved by the crown? Can they enlarge the power of admiralty courts; divert the usual channels of justice; deprive the colonists of trial by a jury of their countrymen; in short break down the barriers which their forefathers have erected against arbitrary power, and enforce their edicts by fleets and armies?" [If so,] Then indeed are we

reduced to a state of abject slavery; and all resistance to acts of Parliament may justly be called by the name of treason and rebellion...

All acts of Parliament therefore, for raising a revenue in America, are considered as depriving us of our property, without our consent, and consequently as a palpable infringement of our ancient rights and privileges. They are unconstitutional and arbitrary laws, subversive of the liberties and privileges secured to us, by our royal charters.

...Among the odious acts of the British Parliament they passed one which imposed a duty on the article of tea, and several cargoes of this commodity were shipped to America to obtain the duty and a market. On the arrival of the tea ships at Boston great indignation was excited among the people; town meetings were called to devise some legal measures to prohibit the landing of the odious article. It was universally understood that if the tea was once landed and stored, it would by some means come to a market, and the duty to the government be secured. In order to defeat this object a number of persons in disguise entered the ships at the wharves, broke open three hundred and forty-two chests of tea, and discharged their contents into the water at the dock. This was on the 16th December, 1773. When intelligence of this summary proceeding reached England, it was condemned by the government as enormously criminal. They menaced our province with the most exemplary vengeance, and Parliament soon passed the Boston Vindictive Port Bill as a part of their coercive system, so that merely the name of tea is now associated with ministerial grievances, and tea drinking is almost tantamount to an open avowal of toryism. Those who are anxious to avoid the odious epithet of enemies to their country, strictly prohibit the use of tea in their families, and the most squeamish ladies are compelled to have recourse to substitutes, or secretly steal indulgence in their favorite East India beverage.

March [1775] - For the purpose of enforcing submission to the cruel mandates of the royal government, a reinforcement of the British army has arrived at Boston and General Gage is appointed Governor and Commander in Chief. An armed fleet also occupies the harbor; and the whole port is closed against all but British vessels. In short, the horrors of civil war seem stalking, with rapid strides, towards our devoted country.

...At the regular term of the Court of Common Pleas at Barnstable in September last, I witnessed the following prompt procedure. A body of about twelve hundred men assembled and obstructed the passage to the court-house door. The leader of this assemblage was Dr. Nathaniel Freeman, a bold son of liberty of Sandwich. Colonel James Otis, the chief justice of the court, preceded by the sheriff, approached; and the venerable chief justice demanded admission. Dr. Freeman replied that it was the intention of the people to prevent the court's being opened to exercise those unconstitutional powers with which they are invested by Parliament. The chief justice, in his majesty's name, commanded them to disperse, and permit the court to enter and proceed to business.

But his majesty's name had lost its power; it can have no charms with the sons of liberty. The venerable judge then said he had acquitted himself of his duty, and retired...

The public indignation is now greatly excited by the following shameful transaction[:]

The people from the country, whose business called them into Boston, were suspected by the officers of purchasing guns from their soldiers. In order to furnish an opportunity to inflict punishment... Lieutenant Colonel Nesbit of the forty-seventh regiment ordered a soldier to offer a countryman an old rusty musket. A man from Billerica was caught by this bait, and purchased the gun for three dollars. The unfortunate man was immediately seized by Nesbit, and confined in the guard-house all night. Early next morning they stripped him entirely naked, covered him over with warm tar, and then with feathers, placed him on a cart; and conducted him through the streets as far as liberty-tree, where the people began to collect in vast numbers; and the military, fearing, for their own safety dismissed the man and retreated to their barracks... What an honorable deed for a British field officer and grenadiers! The selectmen of Billerica remonstrated with General Gage respecting this outrage, but obtained no satisfaction.

April 21st.-Intelligence is now received that the British regulars have marched out of Boston, and actually commenced hostilities against our people at Lexington.

...The sword is now unsheathed, and our friends are slaughtered by our cruel enemies; expresses are hastening from town to town, in all directions through the country, spreading the melancholy tidings and inspiriting and rousing the people *To Arms! Arms!* The people of New England have taken the alarm, and their hearts are animated even to enthusiasm. There is an enthusiasm in religion, in politics, in military achievements, and in gallantry and love, and why not an enthusiasm in the love of country? No species of enthusiasm surely can be more laudable, or more honorable. Never was a cause more just, more sacred than ours; we are commanded to defend the rich inheritance bequeathed to us by our virtuous ancestors; and it is our bounden duty to transmit it uncontaminated to posterity; we must fight valiantly therefore, for our lives and property, for our holy religion, for our honor, and for our dearest friends.

May. - We are now experiencing a singular kind of interregnum in our province; more than a year has elapsed with out any legal government, or any regular administration of law and justice.-No crimes, however, of an atrocious nature have, we believe, been perpetrated; all classes of people appear to be submissive, under the influence of the principles of moral rectitude and common justice; and the resolutions and recommendations of Congress have all the weight and efficacy of laws.

Our domestic tranquillity is in some measure interrupted by a restless spirit among the tories; but the great body of the community are actuated by the glorious cause of our country's freedom. The maxim adopted by our enemies is, "Divide and conquer." We enjoin the command, "Unite and be invincible." It is considered infinitely important to encourage and promote a more perfect union among the colonies, and harmony and unanimity among the people. "Liberty or death," "Unite or die," are the mottoes which blazon the chronicles of the day, and embellish the military standards of almost every militia company. The man who does not acquiesce in the theme of liberty is marked by the vigilant eye of suspicion, or stigmatized as an enemy to his country.

Liberty-poles are erected in almost every town and village; and when a disaffected tory renders himself odious, by any active conduct, with the view of counteracting the public measures, he is seized by a company of armed men, and conducted to the liberty-pole, under which he is

compelled to sign a recantation, and give bonds for his future good conduct. In some instances, of particular stubbornness and obstinacy, individuals have been imprisoned or their names have been published in the newspapers as enemies to their country.

June 14th - We are again shocked by intelligence that a terrible battle has been fought between the British regulars and the American soldiers, on Bunker, or rather Breed's hill, in Charlestown, near Boston, on the 17th instant. The report states that the whole town of Charlestown is burnt to ashes by the enemy, and that Dr. Joseph Warren, lately appointed major-general in our army, is killed; and that several hundreds of our soldiers are killed and wounded. The battle, it is said was extremely severe and destructive; but the provincial troops displayed the greatest courage and bravery, in the face of the regulars, and have obtained immortal honor. The British were several times defeated before they took possession of our works, and have suffered a loss of more than a thousand of their best troops; among whom are a large proportion of their most valuable officers. They are now taught that Americans can bid defiance to royal regulars, when called to defend their freedom.

July 20th.-This day is devoted to a Public Fast throughout the United Colonies, by the recommendation of Congress, to implore the Divine benediction on our country; that any further shedding of blood may be averted; and that the calamities with which we are afflicted may be removed. This is the first general or Continental Fast ever observed since the settlement of the colonies. I have been much gratified this day with a view of General Washington. His excellency was on horseback, in company with several military gentlemen. It was not difficult to distinguish him from all others; his personal appearance is truly noble and majestic; being tall and well proportioned. His dress is a blue coat with buff-colored facings, a rich epaulette on each shoulder, buff under dress, and an elegant small sword; a black cockade in his hat.

November.-Our hospitals are considerably crowded with sick soldiers from camp; the prevailing diseases are autumnal fevers and dysenteric complaints, which have proved fatal in a considerable number of instances. It is highly gratifying to observe, that these brave men, while in the service of their country, receive in sickness all the kind attention from physicians and nurses, which their circumstances require; they have the prayers and consolations of pious

clergymen, and are destitute of nothing but the presence of their dearest friends to alleviate their sufferings.

I am, sorry to have occasion to notice in my journal the following occurrence. The body of a soldier has been taken from the grave, for the purpose, probably of dissection, and the empty coffin left exposed. This affair occasions considerable excitement among our people; both resentment and grief are manifested; as it seems to impress the idea that a soldier's body is held in no estimation after death. Such a practice, if countenanced, might be attended with serious consequences as it respects our soldiers. Much inquiry has been made, but without success, for the discovery of the persons concerned; and the practice in future is strictly prohibited by the commander-in-chief

[December] 4th. - A considerable number of Connecticut troops have left our service and returned home; no persuasion could induce them to continue in service after their time of enlistment had expired. Enlisting officers are distributed in various parts of New England; but it is reported that voluntary enlistments go on slowly. The people seem to be unwilling to engage in the public service, and require higher wages. The spirit of patriotism appears in some degree to have subsided, and the militia are to be employed.

January, 1776. - At the close of the last year, as is now reported, our army was reduced to a very critical situation, being obliged to substitute new-raised troops and militia in the place of those who had been in service five or six months; and this exchange was made within musket-shot of the enemy's lines. During part of this period, our numbers were not sufficient to man the lines, nor was there powder enough in camp to furnish four rounds a man. Before our privateers had fortunately captured some prizes with cannon and other ordnance, our army before Boston had, I believe, only four small brass cannon and a few old honey-comb iron pieces with their trunnions broken off; and these were ingeniously bedded in timbers in the same manner as that of stocking a musket. These machines were extremely unwieldy and inconvenient, requiring much skill and labor to elevate and depress them. Had the enemy been made acquainted with our situation, the consequences might have been exceedingly distressing.

[February] 14th.-The following anecdote is worth notice; it appears by extracts from letters written by the officers who are the subjects of it. Some British officers, soon after General Gage arrived at Boston, while walking on Beacon hill in the evening, Were frightened, by noises in the air, which they took to be the whizzing of bullets, They left the hill with great precipitation, and reported that they were shot at with air-guns, and wrote frightful accounts of the affair to their friends in England. The whizzing noise which so alarmed these valiant officers, could be no other than the buzzing of bugs and beetles while flying in the air.

[March] 8th.-A flag of truce has come out of Boston with a message from the selectmen; acquainting General Washington that General Howe has come to the determination to evacuate the town; and that he would leave it standing, provided his army should be permitted to retire without being molested. At the same time intimating, as is reported, that in case he should be attacked by our army, the town should be set on fire in different places, in order to secure his retreat. We are unacquainted with the determination of his excellency respecting this proposition; but it is well known that he has been in favor of making an attack on the town; and that the necessary preparations were made, and the plan arranged, to be put in execution in the event of the enemy's meditated attack on our works at Dorchester heights. Four thousand troops, the first division commanded by General Sullivan, the second by General Greene, were ordered to be in readiness, and in case the enemy had advanced and been defeated on the heights of Dorchester, this force, at a given signal, was to have rushed into the town and taken possession.

[March] 23d.-I went to view the Old South Church, a spacious brick building near the centre of the town. It has been for more than a century consecrated to the service of religion, and many eminent divines have in its pulpit labored in teaching the ways of righteousness and truth. But during the late siege the inside of it was entirely destroyed by the British, and the sacred building occupied as a riding-school for Burgoyne's regiment of dragoons. The pulpit and pews were removed, the floor covered with earth, and used for the purpose of training and exercising their horses. A beautiful pew, ornamented with carved work and silk furniture, was demolished; and by order of an officer, the carved work, it is said, was used as a fence for a hog-sty. The

North Church, a very valuable building, was entirely demolished, and consumed for fuel. Thus are our houses, devoted to religious worship, profaned and destroyed by the subjects of his royal majesty. His excellency the commander-in-chief has been received by the inhabitants with every mark of respect and gratitude; and a public dinner has been provided for him. He requested. the Rev. Dr. Eliot, at the renewal of his customary Thursday Lecture, to preach a thanksgiving sermon, adapted to the joyful occasion. Accordingly on the 28th, this pious divine preached an appropriate discourse from Isaiah xxxiii. 20, in presence of his excellency and a respectable audience.

29th.-The Massachusetts House of Representatives and Council presented his excellency a respectful and affectionate address; and received from him a reply no less respectful and satisfactory.

One of our soldiers found a human skeleton in complete preparation, left by a British surgeon, which I have received as an acceptable present.

April 8th.-I attended at the Stone Chapel, where were performed the funeral solemnities over the remains of that patriot and hero Major-General Joseph Warren. The remains were taken from the earth at Breed's hill, placed in an elegant coffin, and brought into the chapel, where, in the presence of a numerous assembly, a eulogy was pronounced by Perez Morton, Esq., a young lawyer of abilities. The ceremony was conducted by the society of Free Masons, of which the deceased was grand master. A grand procession was formed, and the remains having received the customary masonic honors, were deposited in the vault under the chapel.

May.- As the small-pox is in many parts of the town among both the inhabitants and soldiers, I was advised by my friends to have recourse to inoculation for my own safety, though contrary to general orders. I was accordingly inoculated by my friend Dr. John Homans, and have passed through the disease in the most favorable manner, not suffering one day's confinement.

June 13th.-The harbor of Boston has not been entirely Cleared of British shipping since the town was evacuated: A fifty-gun ship and several other vessels still occupy the the lower harbor, near

Nantasket. A number of provincial troops and volunteers are now ordered on an expedition, under command of General Benjamin Lincoln, with heavy cannon, for the purpose of driving them from the harbor. A part of our regiment being ordered on the expedition, we embarked at the Long Wharf, and landed on Long Island, and immediately made arrangements for a cannonade. A few shot soon convinced the commodore of his danger; he returned the fire with some spirit; but having received a shot through his upper works, he soon got under sail and hastily departed. Thus is the port of Boston again opened by our own authority after being closed during two years by virtue of an act of the British Parliament.

July 3d,-Orders are given to inoculate for the small-pox, all the soldiers and inhabitants in town as a general infection of this terrible disease is apprehended. Dr. Townsend and my-self are now constantly engaged in this business.

[July] 12th, - Melancholy accounts have been received respect respecting the situation of our army in Canada; they are subjected to very great hardships, sufferings, and privations. Destitute of the necessary supplies of provisions and stores, exhausted by fatigue, and reduced by sickness, with the small-pox attended by unexampled mortality, they are in a state but little short of desperation. In addition to all their sufferings, they now have to deplore the loss of their valuable commander, Major-General John Thomas... In March, 1776, he was promoted by Congress from a brigadier to the rank of major-general, and by them appointed to command our forces in Canada. On his arrival there he found innumerable difficulties to encounter; the smallpox frequently breaking out among the troops, and the soldiers being in the practice of inoculating themselves, to the great injury of the public service. The general deemed it necessary, for the safety of the army, to prohibit the practice of inoculating, and not excepting himself from the injunction, he unfortunately received the infection, which proved fatal to him, and deprived the public of a valuable general officer. He was held in universal respect and confidence as a military character, and his death is deeply deplored throughout the army.

The very important intelligence from Philadelphia is now proclaimed that on the 4th instant, the American Congress declared the thirteen United Colonies, "*Free, Sovereign, Independent States*" The subject has for some time agitated the public mind, and various opinions have been

entertained relative to this momentous transaction. Opinions of much weight and authority have been and still are in collision, and it has been considered very doubtful whether the grand object would be accomplished at the present time. Objections, however, have yielded to imperious necessity, and a new epoch for United America has now commenced. We are now, in the 16th year of the reign of his Majesty King George the Third, absolved from all allegiance to the British crown; and all political connexion between us, as subjects, and his government is totally and for ever dissolved, unless indeed Providence shall so order, that we shall be again reduced to a state of dependence and vassalage.

[July] 18th.- [The Declaration of Independence] is the theme of every circle and topic of universal discussion, and it receives the sanction and approbation of a large majority of the community. When we reflect on the deranged condition of our army, the great deficiency of our resources, and the little prospect of foreign assistance, and at the same time contemplate the prodigious powers and resources of our enemy, we may view this measure of Congress as a prodigy. The history of the world cannot furnish an instance of fortitude and heroic magnanimity parallel to that displayed by the members, whose signatures are affixed to the declaration of American Independence. Their venerated names will ornament the brightest pages of American history, and be transmitted to the latest generations. The instrument was signed by John Hancock, Esq. as President, and by fifty-four others, delegates from the thirteen United States. The Congress have in their declaration, recited the grievances and oppressions, for which we could not obtain redress; and proclaimed to the world the causes which impelled them to a separation from the crown of Great Britain. A sensible and popular writer [Thomas Paine], in a production entitled "*Common Sense*," argues the necessity of the measure from the following considerations.

"We had no credit abroad because of our *rebellious dependency*. Our ships could obtain no protection in foreign ports, because we afforded them no justifiable reason for granting it to us. The calling of ourselves subjects, and at the same time fighting against the prince we acknowledge, was a dangerous precedent to all Europe. If the grievances justified our taking up arms, they justified our separation; if they did not justify our separation, neither could they justify our taking arms.

At home... our currency had no foundation; and the state of it would have ruined whig and tory alike. We had no other laws than a kind of moderated passion; no other civil power than an honest mob; and no other protection than the temporary attachment of one man to another. Had independency been delayed a few months longer, this continent would have been plunged into irretrievable confusion; some violent for it, some against it - all in the greatest cabal; the rich would have been ruined, and the poor destroyed. The *necessity* of being independent would have brought it on in a little time, had there been no rupture between Britain and America. The increasing importance of commerce - the weight and perplexity of legislation - and the enlarged state of European politics, would clearly have shown to the continent the impropriety of continuing subordinate; for after the coolest reflection on the matter, this must be allowed, 'that Britain was too jealous of America to govern it justly; too ignorant of it to govern it well; and too distant from it to govern it at all.'