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Too Little, Too Late: The Campaign of 1777 in the Hudson Highlands

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APPROVAL SHEET

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF MAPS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. GEOGRAPHY OF THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. 1775</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. 1776</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. BRITISH PLANNING FOR THE 1777 CAMPAIGN</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER V. PRELIMINARY MANEUVERS OF THE 1777 CAMPAIGN</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VI. SIR HENRY CLINTON ATTACKS THE HIGHLANDS</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER VII. THE SUBSEQUENT FATE OF THE HIGHLANDS AND AN EVALUATION OF THE EVENTS OF 1777</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Map</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. The Hudson Highlands</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. The Battle of 6 October 1777</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABSTRACT

The Hudson Highlands were the single most important piece of terrain in North America during the War of American Independence. It was vital that this point be defended to prevent New England from being severed from the rest of the colonies.

During 1775 and 1776 the Continental Congress and the New York Provincial Congress erected a series of fortifications in the Highlands. By a system of trial and error the Americans established the precedent that the Highlands were to constitute a distinct force operating independently from the field armies and directly responsible to General George Washington.

In 1777 the British planners failed to appreciate the value of the Highlands. General Israel Putnam, the commander of the Highlands during the campaign of 1777, ineptly handled his forces and was completely outmaneuvered by General Henry Clinton who captured the Highlands on 6 October 1777. He had too few men to retain them, and was unable to move soon enough to rescue Burgoyne.

The British failure to retain control of the Highlands represents one of the three 'turning points' of the war. Although the Battle of Saratoga was decisive diplomatically, and the experience at Valley Forge matured the tactical organization of the American army, it was with this temporary loss of the Highlands that Washington came of age strategically. To prevent a repetition he constructed Fortress West Point and never let the field army leave supporting distance of the Highlands. This strategy stalemated the British in the northern colonies.
TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE:
THE CAMPAIGN OF 1777 IN THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS
CHAPTER I
GEOGRAPHY OF THE HUDSON HIGHLANDS

The Hudson River flows from north to south, originating near Lake George, and emptying into the sea at New York City. For the majority of its length it passes through low, rolling country. Sixty-two miles above New York City there is an abrupt change in the nature of the terrain and the course of the river. At this point, the river enters a twelve-mile wide strip of mountainous country known as the Hudson Highlands.

The Hudson Highlands are a spur of the Appalachian Mountain chain that properly begins near the Pennsylvania-New Jersey border and runs north-west to the Vermont-New Hampshire border. Technically the Highlands here will be considered as the area immediately bordering the Hudson River. The principle peaks on the west side from north to south are Storm King Mountain, Bear Mountain, and the Dunderburg. On the east bank the hills are not as sharply defined. Breakneck Ridge, Anthony's Nose, and the Peekskill hills correspond respectively to the three

1. For convenience sake, and because contemporary spellings were never uniform, modern spellings have been used throughout this paper. See Map 1.
Map 1

The Hudson Highlands*

chief western peaks. These heights rise to over one thousand feet above the level of the river, and the banks are frequently one hundred feet high.

The Hudson River follows an essentially southern course throughout most of its length. In the Highlands, the harder granite and complex gneiss rock formations eroded more unevenly. This has resulted in abrupt changes in the direction of the river. The high shores also serve to funnel the winds, which hinders the progress of sailing vessels. To compound this difficulty, the river is also tidal for a distance above the Highlands. The principle bends occur at points where the river also narrows sharply. The southern pair of right-angle bends is located at the twelve hundred foot high Anthony's Nose at the site of Bear Mountain State Park. The river here narrows to approximately sixteen hundred feet and this funneling effect has carved a channel ninety feet deep. Six miles further north at West Point there is another pair of right-angle bends around the point and Constitution Island (or Martelaer's Rock). The river here is three hundred feet narrower than at Bear Mountain, but just as deep, which results in the tidal surges being less abrupt.

Both above and below the Highlands the river is considerably wider. But the result of this widening coupled with the less severe banks has resulted in noticeable differences in the river. The channel in
these areas is narrower, with extensive shoals. Furthermore, the course of the river is relatively direct, without abrupt changes in direction.

In 1775 the Highlands were rough country. The harsh nature of the terrain is particularly evident today to a motorist driving along either the Palisades Interstate Parkway or New York Route Nine West. On 10 June 1778 Surgeon James Thacher reported on the view from Storm King Mountain.

Looking down as from a cloud, we beheld the Hudson, resembling a vast canal cut through mountains of stupendous magnitude, a few boats playing on its surface were scarcely visible. But to the pen of the poet and the pencil of the painter, he conceived the task of describing the wonders of nature there exhibited, in the form of huge mountains, rocky cliffs, and venerable forests, in one confused mass.\(^2\)

This area, and especially the west bank, was sparsely settled in 1775 and still largely virgin forest.\(^3\)

The west bank of the Highlands was contained in Ulster County. Its centers of population were Newburgh, just above Storm King Mountain, and New Windsor, several miles further north. New Windsor had a population of almost one thousand and was a river town of fifty buildings.\(^4\) Newburgh was also a river town situated on Plum Point, across from Polopel Island, and of a lesser size.\(^5\)

4. Ibid., p. 5.
5. Ibid., pp. 5-6.
Because the river was navigable to ships which could cross the bar at New York harbor, the towns of the Highlands were situated to provide access to the river. Land transportation was rudimentary, and the roads poor. Even the Clove, as the Upper Ramapo Valley was called, which provided the principle road to New Jersey and the south, was primitive, although passable for wagons.

Dutchess County encompassed the eastern portion of the Highlands. Because it was more populous, and because it was contiguous to the settled areas of New York and Connecticut, Dutchess had a more extensive road network. Fishkill was its largest town with fifty buildings astride the road to New England. Peekskill, a hamlet of twenty houses in 1775, possessed docks which made it the center of the river trade and a main stop in the Albany Post Road. The bulk of the county was owned by Pierre Van Courtlandt, who had sided with the patriots in 1774. The other major landowner was Beverly Robinson, who resided opposite West Point and subsequently became an ardent loyalist.

The area north of the Highlands was included in Albany County. Between the Highlands and New York harbor were two counties. On the east bank was Westchester County,

8. Ibid., p. 6.
stretching south-east to Long Island Sound. On the west bank Orange County, with its largest town of Tappan, stretched to the New Jersey border.

Communications between New England and the other colonies passed through New York City, but there were subsidiary routes through the Highlands and lower reaches of the Hudson. Below the Highlands, Dobbs Ferry crossed at the southern edge of the Tappan Zee. In the Highlands proper Kings Ferry, a clumsy, square-ended flatboat propelled by sweeps, crossed between Verplanck's Point on the east and Stony Point on the west. 9 Above the Highlands there were several crossing points including New Windsor and Albany.

Strategically, the importance of the Hudson River Valley had been recognized in the Colonial Wars. The navigability of the river for warships as far as Albany provided a means for the Royal Navy to penetrate effectively far inland. At the same time the Richelieu River-Lake Champlain-Lake George route gave water access from Canada. There were only three places where this penetration could be easily blocked. One was New York City; another was Fort Ticonderoga. The third, of no importance in the colonial wars because the emphasis was directed against Canada, was the Highlands. During the War of American Independence when the Royal Navy was hostile, the Highlands emerged preeminent. The Highlands provided the one solid defensive position where

9. Ibid., p. 6
an inferior American army could block the Royal Navy and the British Army. Not only was the terrain suited for tactical defense by an alert commander, but heavy artillery emplaced at the proper positions could take advantage of the bends, tides, and winds to deny the passage of the river to shipping. In addition to the difficulty in tactical operations, the great extent of the mountain chain prevented even strategic outflanking. ¹⁰

¹⁰. The best examination of this subject is in Gerald C. Stowe and Jac Weller, "Revolutionary West Point: 'The Key to the Continent,'" Military Affairs, XX (Summer, 1956), pp. 81-98.
CHAPTER II

1775

Soon after the outbreak of hostilities, the Second Continental Congress realized the strategic importance of the Highlands. They resolved on 25 May 1775 to have fortifications erected on the north end of Manhattan Island at Kings Bridge, and in the Highlands to bar navigation of the river.¹ The New York Provincial Congress, authorized by the Continental Congress to undertake this fortification, formed a committee to inspect the area on 30 May. Colonel James Clinton and Christopher Tappan, both delegates from Ulster County, were selected as the members of the committee.² Their report, with an illustrative map, was submitted on 10 June, and they were instructed to prepare a cover letter to the New York delegates to the Continental Congress to accompany a copy of the report.³

3. Ibid., Ser. 4, II, p. 1291.
This report was sent on 13 June. In it, James Clinton and Tappan stated that they had completed their survey in the company of Captain Samuel Bayard and Captain Erasmus Williams. In their opinion, a force of three hundred men at Constitution Island and two hundred at Popolopen Creek, opposite Anthony’s Nose, would be sufficient. The works constructed at these points could make the cost of forcing a passage prohibitive. They suggested that stone and lime be used as the construction materials because their relative availability made them cheaper. They also recommended that a boom be installed to block the passage at short notice, several small boats be procured for communications, and a large magazine be built at Constitution Island. The estimated cost of all these measures was £1500.4

On 18 August the New York Congress resolved to build the fortifications according to the recommendations of this report. Five Commissioners were elected to supervise the work, with the provision that any three would form a quorum. Isaac Sears, John Berrien, Christopher Miller, Anthony Rutgers, and Colonel Edward Fleming were elected as Commissioners.5 Four days later Captain Bayard and Captain William Bedlow were elected to replace Fleming and Rutgers who could not participate for personal reasons. At this time, authorization was also given for the procurement of cannon and stores for the Highlands and for the organization

5. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 535.
of the militia of the state. A sixth Commissioner, Thomas Grenell, was selected on 6 September and an initial £250 was advanced to Captain Bedlow.

The first of many controversies erupted on 13 September when the New York Congress requested Brigadier General David Wooster to send one company of his Continental troops to the Highlands to assist in the construction of the fortifications and to garrison them. They cited as their authority instructions from the Continental Congress to do this. In a letter on 15 September Wooster politely refused to comply. He reasoned that since he had received orders from Lieutenant General George Washington to avoid dispersing his forces, he could not send the requested company until he received orders to that effect from Washington or the Continental Congress. After another exchange of letters, the New York Congress gave up and referred the matter to Philadelphia.

In the meantime, work had begun on the first set of works on Constitution Island. On 14 September Bernard Romans, the engineer appointed to supervise construction, submitted his plans and maps for the minimum defences necessary for Constitution Island to the New York Congress. He called for five blockhouses, a battery, a magazine,

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7. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 880.
8. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 893.
10. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, pp. 732-5.
storehouses, a guardroom, a barracks, and stonework. His estimate of the expense of erecting these buildings, including labor, was £4645, 4s, 4d. On 19 September the New York Congress forwarded them to the Continental Congress. In their covering letter they stated that incidental expenses would probably amount to an additional £1500.

Also on 19 September the New York Committee of Safety, the organization of the New York Congress which met during periods of adjournment, took steps to secure title to Constitution Island. A letter was drafted to Beverly Robinson stating that Continental Congress had authorized the construction of a fort on the east bank of the Hudson opposite West Point.

As the Provincial Congress by no means intend to invade private property, this Committee, in their recess, have thought proper to request you put a reasonable price upon the whole point of dry land or Island, called Martelaer's Rock Island, which price, if they approve of it, they are ready to pay you for it.

Robinson's reply of 2 October stated that while he would have been happy to let them use the island since there was little arable land, he did not own it. He mentioned that the property was owned by a Mrs. Ogilvie and her children. Apparently the matter was not pursued further since no subsequent mention was made of it.

11. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, pp. 735-6.
13. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 902.
A second quarrel erupted when Commissioners Hanson, Bedlow, and Bayard wrote the Committee of Safety on 25 September. This letter includes the first reference to the new fort as Fort Constitution, from which the island has derived its current name. In their letter, the Commissioners complained that the Committee of Safety should have consulted them before writing the Continental Congress on 19 September. In their opinion, Romans' plans were not only insufficient for more than a temporary delay, but the position would require an unwarranted expense to be made defensible. They further requested that the Committee of Safety establish whether they were in charge of Romans, or he was in charge of them. As a footnote they mentioned that while the first cannon were to be emplaced that week, the Royal Governor, William Tryon, and several associates had been at Haverstraw on 23 September and had questioned Captain Palmer about the state of the works.\textsuperscript{15}

Romans appeared before the Committee of Safety on 29 September and offered to contract to build the fort under his sole management for £5000, exclusive of cannon. He stipulated that the Commissioners would only supervise his execution of the works.\textsuperscript{16} The next day the Committee again questioned him. They then informed him that they would not contract for the works but would employ him as engineer at the temporary pay of a Continental Colonel.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., Ser. \textit{4}, III, pp. 914-5.
This was neither the twenty shillings a day which he claimed was the pay of a British engineer nor the twelve shillings which was actually the case.\(^17\) The Commissioners were also instructed to assist Romans as engineer on that day.\(^18\) Apparently on the basis of this pay rate Romans began referring to himself as colonel.

The 19 September communication to the Continental Congress was debated from 5 to 7 October in Philadelphia. John Adams recorded that on 5 October a favorable response to Romans' plan was voiced by several delegates on the grounds that fortification should either be effectively prosecuted or dropped entirely.\(^19\) On 6 October John Morton, Silas Deane, and Robert Livingston were elected as a committee to examine the letter and deliver a report on it the next day.\(^20\)

This report was delivered on schedule, and after being debated, a letter to the New York Congress was authorized. New York was directed to render the river immediately defensible, with first emphasis to be given to those portions which could be finished before winter set in. Wood or fascines were suggested as building materials for this reason. But the New York Congress

17. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 919.
was given a free hand "since it is the opinion of the
[Continental] Congress, that the work should by no means
be neglected." The suggestion was also made that West
Point and Popolopen Creek be investigated as sites for
small, harassing batteries of heavy cannon. It was
recommended that an intelligence and warning system be
established, that some means of obstructing the river be
built, and that New Jersey and Connecticut be consulted
for assistance. Brigadier General Wooster was also
instructed to provide the requested troops unless he had
received orders to the contrary from Major General Philip
Schuyler, then commanding the Northern Department.21 Adams
reported that James Duane was responsible for the instruc-
tions concerning Wooster and John Rutledge for the proposal
to construct a boom.22

Yet another controversy erupted at Fort Constitution
on 15 October. Commissioners Bayard and Bedlow had started
requiring vessels passing the works to show their politics
by dipping their sails in salute to the flag. On 15 October
Captain Robert North refused to dip his sloop's sail, even
when threatened with being fired upon by the fort. A
party of armed men boarded the sloop and were greeted by an
incensed North. They were informed that North had a pair
of pistols and

21. Ibid., reel 15.
22. Adams, Diary, p. 199.
if that damned rascal, Captain Bayard, did not produce an order to him from the New York Provincial Congress, for the request... he would blow his brains out; with many more unfriendly expressions.23

Both North and the Commissioners referred the matter to the New York Congress.24 Wisdom prevailed, and on 19 October instructions were dispatched to the Commissioners to leave the shipping alone unless they had a very good reason to suspect someone.25

In response to the Continental Congress' instructions to investigate the other possible sites, the New York Congress communicated with the Commissioners and Romans. On 16 October both reported. Romans stated that he could not give an estimate for the site at Popolopen Creek, but that work on Fort Constitution was progressing well and cannon were being mounted. He did consider Popolopen Creek a good site, but West Point he felt was "at present, to me entirely useless."26

On 17 October the New York Congress considered that the works were far enough along to require a garrison. They requested four artillery companies be raised immediately to man the works.27 The Continental Congress replied on 28 October authorizing one company to be raised immediately.28 This company was recruited in New York

24. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, pp. 1291, 1293.
25. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, p. 1301.
27. Ibid., Ser. 4, III, pp. 1289-90.
City by Captain John Lamb. On 3 November, two incomplete Continental infantry companies were ordered to the Highlands by the New York Congress. These were Captain John Grennell's company of the Second New York and Captain Benjamin Ledyard's company of the First New York.29

A New York request for appointment of a commandant was received on 6 November by the Continental Congress. Robert Livingston and four others were selected to consider this letter, and they reported on 8 November. It was resolved to appoint a colonel to command the Highlands as a separate entity. The New York Congress was also authorized to organize militia to defend the posts until Continentals could take over. This resolution additionally authorized the establishment of a supply depot in the Highlands. Robert R. Livingston, Robert T. Paine, and John Langdon were instructed to inspect the Highlands on their way north to confer with Major General Schuyler.30 The election of a commander was postponed on 9 November, Captain John Hanson being appointed temporary commander until the colonel should be elected.31 The matter was left at that, however. On 10 November Colonel William Alexander, better known as Lord Stirling, was instructed to send six companies of New Jersey Continentals to the Highlands.32 There is no record that they ever reported.

31. Ibid., reel 15. 32. Ibid., reel 15.
While this effort to obtain a garrison was going on, Romans was becoming a source of antagonism to the Commissioners. They quibbled over cost estimates for a second blockhouse following the completion of the first. Romans' plans were being completed, but problems were arising with the civilian workers. On 15 November Romans wrote the Commissioners claiming that they were responsible for stirring up the workers.\(^{33}\)

On 17 November the committee from the Continental Congress arrived at Fort Constitution on their inspection tour. Their report, dated 23 November, was highly critical. While they found a garrison of approximately one hundred men from the two New York companies, a considerable force of civilian workmen, plenty of cannon, shot, and gunpowder, they had reservations.

We must own that we found the fort in a less defensible situation than we had reason to expect, owing chiefly to an injudicious disposition of the labour.... The fortress is unfortunately commanded by all the grounds about it, and much exposed to an attack by land.

They especially pointed out that West Point dominated the island, and that Fort Constitution was overly ambitious. To improve the poor positioning of Romans' battery would be very expensive in their opinion. They mentioned that they had been informed that Popolopen Creek was a promising site, and suggested that qualified experts be sent to survey the area as soon as possible.\(^{34}\)


\(^{34}\) Ibid., Ser. 4, III, pp. 1657-8.
The New York Congress subsequently dispatched a committee to investigate the second site. The members, Isaac Nicoll, Thomas Palmer, and Gilbert Drake, recommended that the primary defensive effort be shifted to the Popolopen Creek site. This committee also attempted to resolve the dispute between the Commissioners and Romans. Their inquiry reached the conclusion that Romans was claiming too much power. 35

The final important decision of 1775 relating to the Hudson Highlands was taken on 13 December. On that date the Continental Congress resolved to construct thirteen ships of war. Two of these ships were to be built in New York with a target date for completion of 31 March 1776. 36 Peekskill was to be the construction site for these ships, one to be a frigate of twenty-eight guns and the other a frigate of twenty-four.

As the year drew to an end the crucial decision on the location of the principle defensive work had been made. Hereafter, Fort Constitution, after the great expense in resources and time, was to be relegated to a secondary role. Popolopen Creek, which was to play the critical role in the Campaign of 1777, had been decided upon, although construction had not yet commenced. The critical problem of unified control was not yet settled.

CHAPTER III

1776

The new year began with a final inquiry into the shifting of emphasis from Constitution Island to Popolopen Creek. On 3 January Pierre Van Courtlandt wrote to the Continental Congress for the New York Committee of Safety. In his letter he summarized the arguments put forth by Romans for Constitution Island and Thomas Palmer for the investigating committee. Van Courtlandt stated that the Committee of Safety was of the opinion that Palmer was correct in his estimate that Popolopen Creek would be both cheaper and a better defensive position.1

Before this letter arrived, Thomas Palmer and Richard Grennell reached the Continental Congress on 5 January.2 The Congress resolved, after questioning them,

That no further fortifications ought to be erected at Martler's rock on Hudson's river, and that a point of land at Puplopen's kill on the said river ought without delay to be effectually fortified.

The New York Congress was authorized to carry out this resolution.3 On 13 January Van Courtlandt's letter

arrived along with Romans, who was examined. The final resolution did not come until 15 February. At this date it was decided that while no new works should be erected at Fort Constitution, those already begun should be finished and garrisoned. The new fort at Popolopen Creek should not mount over forty cannon and be constructed of earth and fascines. Such Continental troops that might be stationed there were authorized to assist in the construction under the direction of the engineers.

The command structure for the Highlands was tentatively organized in the early months of the year. On 16 January Colonel Isaac Nicoll of the New York militia was placed in command of the Highlands by the New York Congress. At the same time Captain William Smith was appointed as the engineer for the new fort. Construction was begun on the modest new fort in February under Smith's direction. Designed to mount fifteen guns, five of them heavy thirty-two pounders, it was named for "the brave Gen Montgomery" who had been killed in the attack on Quebec.

At this same time the Continental Army staff was beginning to realize that New York City would be the target of the 1776 campaign. Major General Charles Lee, sent by Washington to inspect New York City, was the first to be

4. Ibid., reel 15. 5. Ibid., reel 15.
aware of the strategic importance of the Highlands. On 5 February he wrote to Washington advising him that the Highlands passes should be put in a defensible state and guarded by a battalion. Washington responded on 4 May by ordering Lieutenant Colonel Henry B. Livingston of the Third New York to move five of his companies to the forts and assume command if he was not outranked. A subsequent letter dated 8 May was sent to the New York Congress thanking them for their efforts and advising them that Colonel Nicoll would be relieved whenever Livingston arrived. Nicoll obstinately refused to leave Fort Constitution until 8 June.

Washington had moved the Continental Army down to New York City by this time. In May he dispatched the recently promoted Brigadier General Stirling to survey the state of the Highlands. Stirling's report, dated 1 June, enclosed reports from Nicoll on the status of Fort Constitution and Livingston on Fort Montgomery. On his examination tour he was accompanied by Colonel Rufus Putnam, the army's

chief engineer, and Captain-Lieutenant Winthrop Sergeant, an artillery officer. They stated that both forts had a large quantity of cannon, shot, and powder, but that both garrisons were small. Each had a company of the Third New York and two companies of militia. Furthermore, according to the returns, most of the ordinance was of relatively small caliber. The sloop Liberty, Captain Henry Palmer, was employed by the Commissioners to provide communications between the two forts. Copies of the expense records for May included in the report indicated approximately £450 were being expended each month. 12

Washington, confessing that he was unacquainted with the Highlands, submitted recommendations on improvements to the Commissioners on 10 June. These recommendations had been submitted to him by Stirling upon his return to New York City. For Fort Constitution, he recommended that the works be enclosed to make it less liable to capture by a sudden attack. At this time the nature of the fortress was more properly that of an extended battery, rather than a regular enclosed fort. Relying on an extensive marsh to protect its flank, it was exposed to attack from the rear. Fort Montgomery he found in a much better state. All he advised there was that the planned works be completed. He and Colonel Putnam did notice one flaw.

I would also advertise that the Hill on the op- 
posite [south] Side of the Creek, & the Mouth 
thereof, be cleared in such a Manner, that an 
Engineer can lay out a proper regular Work on 
it, if hereafter be found necessary.13

Washington now began to recognize the vital importance 
of the Highlands, and established a unified command of the 
Continental Army there. On 14 June he ordered Colonel 
James Clinton to report to the Highlands with his regiment 
(the Second New York) and relieve Lieutenant Colonel 
Livingston. He was also to relieve the Commissioners and 
assume overall command of the area.

As these are or may become Posts of infinite 
Importance, especially the lower one [Fort 
Montgomery]; I cannot Sufficiently impress 
upon you the Necessity of putting them into a 
fit Posture of Defense, without Delay.14

The New York Congress dismissed the Commissioners on the 
same day, with a reprimand to Captain Jonathan Lawrence for 
storing tea, "that useless herb," at Fort Constitution.15

On 12 July the British made their first penetration of 
the Hudson River. On that day two British warships, the 
frigates Phoenix (Captain Hyde Parker, forty-five guns) and 
Rose (Captain James Wallace, thirty-two guns), with some 
tenders sailed past the fortifications on Manhattan Island 
and penetrated to the Tappan Zee. They were guided from 
the anchorage at Staten Island by Robert Sneden, a New 
Jersey loyalist.16 A deserter subsequently reported that

15. Livingston to Stirling 11 June 1776; Force, American 
Archives, Ser. 4, VI, p. 1405. 
16. Adrian C. Leiby, Revolutionary War in the Hackensack 
Valley, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 
1962), p. 44.
their mission was to destroy the two Continental frigates being built at Poughkeepsie. Washington immediately wrote to Brigadier General George Clinton requesting that he call out his brigade of Orange and Ulster County militia. George Clinton was James Clinton's younger brother, and both were distant cousins of Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton, the British second-in-command. A letter was also sent to the New York Congress suggesting that fireships be prepared to destroy the British vessels.

The militia mobilized and manned the forts and both banks of the river between the Highlands and New York City. Although Washington had anticipated two thousand militia, only nine hundred were actually on duty at any one time. On 14 July George Clinton assumed command of Fort Constitution. He recommended to the Committee of Safety that they purchase old sloops to use as fireships. He also requested two row-galleys and a whaleboat for reconnaissance.

Washington suspected that the British ships were on a mission to seize the Highlands, or were going to distribute

19. Washington to New York Congress 12 July 1776; "Papers of the Secret Committee."
20. Hugh Jameson, "The Organization of the Militia of the Middle States During the War for Independence 1775-1781" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1936), Appendix A.
arms to the New York loyalists, touching off an uprising in his rear.\(^{22}\) While the channel in the Tappan Zee limited their effectiveness as raiders, it also kept the ships out of the range of shore batteries. To dislodge the ships Washington requested Governors Trumbull of Connecticut and Cooke of Rhode Island to send several of their state's row-gallies to the river.\(^ {23}\) While these defences were being prepared, the ships maneuvered in the river without doing anything of consequence. On 16 July fourteen fire-ships were readied at Poughkeepsie, but they were not launched at that time.\(^ {24}\) This lack of action produced considerable annoyance among the militia.\(^ {25}\)

The hastily assembled American flotilla of five armed gallies\(^ {26}\) left its anchorage at Spuyten Duyvil Creek, the north end of Manhattan Island, on 3 August. They moved upriver and engaged the frigates for two hours under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Benjamin Tupper. After scoring several hits on the \textit{Phoenix}, damage sustained by all the gallies forced them to retire to Manhattan.\(^ {27}\) Washington

\(^{22}\) Washington to Congress 14 July 1776; \textit{Fitzpatrick}, \textit{V}, p. 275.
\(^{24}\) Jacobus Van Zandt to G. Clinton 16 July 1776; \textit{Clinton, Public Papers, I}, pp. 254-5.
\(^{26}\) The \textit{Washington}, the flagship; the \textit{Lady Washington}; the \textit{Sniffring}; the \textit{Shark}; and the \textit{Whiting}. \textit{Shark} and \textit{Whiting} were from Connecticut, \textit{Washington} and \textit{Sniffring} from Rhode Island.
referred to this as "a Smart engagement" and commended everyone involved, but apparently realized that it was inconclusive.\textsuperscript{28}

A second attempt on the frigates was made on the night of 16 August. This time two fireships were launched from Peekskill. They were carried down by the current and failed to destroy either of the warships, although they grappled with the Rose for ten minutes.\textsuperscript{29} One tender was destroyed, and the British apparently considered this a sufficient threat and took advantage of a favorable wind to run back past Manhattan Island and rejoin the fleet.\textsuperscript{30} Washington ordered a bounty of $50 to be paid to each man on the fireships who was burned and $40 to the others in an unusual recognition of their bravery.\textsuperscript{31}

This raid, while accomplishing very little for the British, stimulated considerable American concern for the Highlands. The ease with which the British ships had penetrated the obstacles at Manhattan increased awareness of the necessity for sealing the passage in the Highlands. Washington bolstered the Continental forces at the forts by ordering Second Lieutenant Thomas Machin of Colonel Henry Knox's Artillery Regiment to the Highlands on 21 July.\textsuperscript{32} Machin was to serve Colonel James Clinton as an

\textsuperscript{28} Washington to Cooke 5 August 1776; Fitzpatrick, V, p. 373.  
\textsuperscript{29} Washington to Congress 17 August 1776; Ibid., V, p. 446.  
\textsuperscript{30} Washington to Congress 18 August 1776; Ibid., V, p. 452.  
\textsuperscript{31} General Order for 18 August 1776; Washington Papers, Ser. 3G, reel 26.  
\textsuperscript{32} Washington to Machin 21 July 1776; Washington to George Clinton 21 July 1776; Fitzpatrick, V, p. 319.
engineer, and in the event of an attack could do double duty in assisting with the artillery. The disastrous defeat on Long Island on 27 August necessitated the concentration of Continentals for the defense of New York City. Six hundred militia were called out as a means of providing manpower to hasten the completion of the forts, and an average of two hundred were at work every day for two months. 33

The New York Committee of Safety debated the best means for obstructing the river at Fort Montgomery, and eventually decided to stretch a chain across to Anthony's Nose. For this purpose they wrote to Major General Philip Schuyler requesting the chain which had been captured the previous year at Sorel in Canada. 34 To protect the frigates and supply depot at Fishkill a small earthwork was constructed by Machin at Red Hook, on the northern edge of Peekskill Bay. Subsequently named Fort Independence, its garrison consisted of three companies of militia. A small detachment of Continentals provided guards for the stores themselves. 35 Stirling's recommendation that the south side of Popolopen Creek be fortified was also acted upon, and by 8 September the first cannon were mounted by James Clinton. 36 This new fort, soon to surpass the original

33. Jameson, "Militia of the Middle States," Appendix A.
34. Robert Yates to Schuyler [29 July 1776]; Papers of the Secret Committee.
36. James Clinton to G. Clinton 8 Sep. 1776; Clinton, Public Papers, I, p. 337.
Fort Montgomery, was named Fort Clinton, apparently after one of the brothers.

While James Clinton reported to the New York Congress that work was progressing well in September, he did complain that he needed more men, nails, and good food. He especially felt that the current total force of 764 men, only five companies of which were Continentals of the Second New York, was about one thousand men less than necessary. Washington also urged the New York Congress to take "the utmost attention and every exertion" to secure the forts. The Continental Congress determined on 23 September that the Highlands required a larger garrison and directed Washington to station a full battalion of regulars there.

Lieutenant General Sir William Howe had shaken his army into action and landed at Kip's Bay on Manhattan on 15 September, but his advance had ground to a halt in the skirmish the next day at Harlem Heights. While he pondered his next move he dispatched a second naval expedition up the river. At 9:15 AM on 9 October the frigates Phoenix, Roebuck (Captain Andrew Snape Hamond, forty-four guns), and Tartar (Captain Cornwaithe Ommanney, twenty-eight guns), together with the schooner Tryal and two tenders ran past the ineffectual Forts Washington and Lee. The only

American vessels in the vicinity wisely realized that they were overmatched and attempted to flee upriver. The swifter British ran two large ships ashore at Yonkers and destroyed one of them. They also sank a sloop which was carrying David Bushnell's submarine, the Turtle, and captured a merchant schooner and two row-galleys. These galleys were the Crane and Independence, the former a veteran of the earlier raid. The British ships remained anchored at Dobbs Ferry for the entire course of the campaign through Westchester County, leading Washington to recognize that they were being used to disrupt his communications to New Jersey. This increased the importance of Kings Ferry, which now became the shortest route available to the Americans.

The militia turned out to meet this threat as they had for the previous one, and saw as little action. Major General William Heath dispatched five hundred Continentals and three artillery pieces to stiffen the militia, but the majority returned from Dobbs Ferry when they realized that the British were not on an active raid. On 12 October Howe landed on Throg's Neck in Westchester to

42. Washington to Congress 11 Oct. 1776; Fitzpatrick, VI, p. 196.
begin his attempted envelopment of Washington's army. This same day the Secret Committee of the New York Congress wrote to Washington requesting that a "good" regiment and a "good" engineer be sent to secure the Highlands passes to prevent a loyalist uprising. 44

Events in Westchester rapidly worsened. After being thwarted at Throg's Neck, Howe shifted further east and on 18 October landed at Pell's Point. Despite a sharp engagement with a brigade under Colonel John Glover at Eastchester shortly after landing, the British army ground relentlessly toward White Plains. Washington retired to the Croton River after an inconclusive battle at White Plains on 28 October. In a council of war on 6 November, attended by the general officers of the army, it was decided to divide the Continentals into four parts to allow a flexible posture. A garrison was to be left at Fort Washington to preserve a last foothold on Manhattan. A further three thousand men were to be stationed "at Peekskill and the passes in the Highlands for the defence of those Posts [,] erecting Fortifications &c." The flexibility was to be achieved by leaving Major General Charles Lee, the second-in-command, on the eastern side of the river with the regiments recruited from New England while Washington moved to the west side with the remainder. The provision was made that Lee should rejoin the main army if circumstances

44. Robert R. Livingston to Washington 12 Oct. 1776; Sparks, Correspondence, I, pp. 295-6.
This last point was repeated in Washington's orders to Lee leaving him in charge of the troops left on the east side. This arrangement of forces provided a great degree of flexibility, especially since Howe's next objective was unclear. In fact the only inherent weakness was the commitment of a large garrison to Fort Washington. Howe rapidly recognized this and on 16 November captured the fort with its awkward garrison. This resounding disaster exposed Washington to being chased through New Jersey, but it was also "the lesson that made him sophisticated on the subject of forts." Hereafter, he would never construct works too extensive to be properly garrisoned or as poorly situated. This lesson would be embodied in the Highlands in 1778.

The garrison commander selected for the Highlands was the Massachusetts-born Major General William Heath, the sixth ranking general in the Continental Army. He was ordered to report to Peekskill with his division on 8 November and arrived two days later. Washington personally

46. Washington to Lee 10 Nov. 1776; Fitzpatrick, VI, pp. 263-5.
48. Ibid., p. 152. 49. In the Continental Army the organization of divisions and brigades was far more flexible than in World War II. Just as is currently the practice in Vietnam, battalions and regiments were shifted from one major unit to another with high frequency. While this is a headache for the historian, it allowed a great deal of flexibility to meet strategic and tactical needs.
50. Heath, Memoirs, p. 75.
inspected the Highlands for the first time on 11 November while the army was crossing at Kings Ferry. On this inspection tour he was accompanied by Heath, Stirling, the Clinton brothers, Colonel Putnam, and Brigadier General Thomas Mifflin. At this time he noted that West Point should be fortified. Washington crossed into New Jersey on 12 November leaving Heath in command of the troops and posts in the Highlands. Washington stressed the importance of these fortifications and implored Heath to do his best to secure them.51

Heath promptly distributed his troops to protect both sides of the river. James Clinton's Second New York Regiment continued at the forts. Two regiments of Brigadier General Samuel Holden Parsons' brigade were sent to guard the Clove on the west bank while the remaining three, together with Brigadier General John Morin Scott's brigade of three regiments, covered the eastern passes. Brigadier General George Clinton's militia brigade remained at Peekskill as a reserve force.52

Returns for 14 November indicate that the garrison of Forts Montgomery and Clinton numbered 1131, and that of Fort Constitution 388. It must be noted that the numbers of Continentals were a mere 232 and 161 respectively.53 The terms of enlistment of most of these men ended on 1 January

1777. Lee's force of three divisions was concentrated at North Castle. On 16 November it numbered 10,768 men in twenty-five regiments, but had a total effective strength of only 5,162. 54

On 20 November the British struck out swiftly to invade New Jersey, forcing the evacuation of Fort Lee. As Washington retreated towards Philadelphia he wrote to Lee to rejoin the army as soon as possible. Lee was requested to leave behind only those men whose service would expire very shortly. 55 This letter was carried by a cavalryman who also bore a verbal message which was reported to Heath. The conflicting interpretations of this order by the two generals resulted in the most bitter quarrel, and the most important, which had yet occurred in the Highlands.

Lee considered his force to be a command independent of Washington. 57 He acknowledged receipt of Washington's order, which he called "a Recommendation not a positive order," by writing to Heath. Lee requested that Heath, since he was closer to Washington, send a force of two thousand of his own men across the river, inform Washington, and await further orders. Lee promised to replace them as soon as he finished "a necessary Job." 58 Heath, who had been informed by Washington's courier that the troops were

54. Ibid., Ser. 5, III, p. 710.
55. Fitzpatrick, VI, pp. 298-300.
58. Lee to Heath 21 Nov. 1776; Ibid., V, p. 291.
to come from Lee's force and not his own, refused. In his letter to Lee, Heath stressed that it would take him as long to collect the two thousand men as it would for Lee to reach Kings Ferry, and that he had positive instructions from Washington, which he quoted, not to weaken his position.

Lee's "Jobb" involved the attempt to destroy Major Robert Rogers' loyalist force, the Queen's Rangers, then forming in Westchester. He further procrastinated by ordering Brigadier General John Nixon to break his brigade into small parties to forage. The next day, 23 November, he wrote to Heath chastising him for interpreting Washington's orders as being so binding that he could not break a "tittle" to save an army. Lee informed Heath that while he was sending Glover's brigade to Peekskill to cover the passes, Heath should have two thousand men ready to march on the twenty-fifth.

Heath replied on 24 November that if he complied he would be left with a mere 328 men for the forts since the militia's and Scott's brigade's enlistments would all be up in ten days. He stated that he would send the men without Washington's orders if he felt Washington wanted them, but since he knew Washington did not, he would not

61. Lee to Joseph Reed 24 Nov. 1776; Ibid., V, p. 306.
63. Lee to Heath 23 Nov. 1776; Ibid., V, p. 304.
order his troops to march. Heath then sent a dispatch to Washington informing him of the state of affairs and requesting advice as soon as possible. This advice reached him on the twenty-sixth reaffirming that the troops should come from Lee's force, not Heath's.

Lee responded very sarcastically to Heath on 26 November, accusing Heath of believing himself to be as independent as if he were at the Straits of Magellan. Then Lee "pulled rank" and claimed as Heath's superior the right to issue orders to Heath. If anything should happen to Washington because these troops did not arrive in time, Lee claimed, Heath would be responsible. Lee also wrote to Washington on that same day denying that it was his intention to strip the Highlands. All he proposed to do was shift Heath's men to New Jersey and replace them from his own force. There was no risk involved in this maneuver in Lee's estimation.

The matter finally came to a head when the two generals confronted each other on 30 November at Peekskill. When Heath refused to send one man under his orders, Lee certified in writing that he had assumed command of the Highlands. He then ordered two regiments, the Seventh and Twenty-first Continental Infantry, to be prepared to march in the morning.

64. Heath to Lee 24 Nov. 1776; Ibid., V, p. 305.
65. Foath to Washington 24 Nov. 1776; Heath, Memoir, pp. 82-3.
66. Robert H. Harrison (for Washington) to Heath 25 Nov. 1776; Ibid., p. 84.
68. Lee to Washington 26 Nov. 1776; Ibid., V, p. 315.
from Continental Village, the barracks area near Peekskill. Lee also wrote to Washington informing him that he was marching to New Jersey. In this letter he blamed any delay and reduction in the number of troops on Heath. To Heath's amazement, Lee countermanded these orders on 1 December. That same day Scott's brigade's enlistments expired and only fifty men reenlisted. Lee's force crossed Kings Ferry from 1 to 3 December, leaving trails of blood in the snow because so many men were shoeless.

Lee considered Heath sadly misguided, writing to Major General Joseph Spencer that Heath was "confident that all the movements of the Enemy in every part of the continent are only feints, that they only mean to weaken him, and that when he is taken all is lost." Heath was actually more aware of the vital importance of the Highlands, and wisely refused to be a party to Lee's attempts at self-glorification. Heath recognized that the maintenance of an army-in-being under Washington was of primary importance, but together with the Commander-in-Chief realized that control of the Highlands formed an independent department from the field armies, and fell directly under the control of Washington.

Lee failed to join Washington. He chose to remain

with his force in the hills of New Jersey around Morristown where he posed a real threat to the British lines of communications. While this policy was to cause Washington some real problems at the time, he quickly realized its advantages and adopted it in subsequent campaigns.\(^{73}\) Lee himself was captured by the British at Basking Ridge, New Jersey, on 13 December.

On 9 December Washington requested Heath to march with Parsons' Connecticut Continental brigade on a raid into New Jersey to relieve some of the pressure on the rapidly disintegrating main army.\(^{74}\) Heath moved the brigade to Kings Ferry on the next day and entered New Jersey on the eleventh.\(^{75}\) The three regiments of the brigade were accompanied by a field piece and a howitzer, the standard proportion of artillery in the Continental Army. Colonel Isaac Nicoll was left in charge at Peekskill during Heath's absence.\(^{76}\) Heath chose as his target a loyalist regiment supposedly at Hackensack. The attempted surprise on 14 December netted negligible results as the loyalists had changed encampments, and a second attempt on 18 December at Bergen was only slightly more effective. The troops returned to the Highlands on 23 December.\(^{77}\)

In spite of all these movements and distractions

construction continued on the Highlands defenses. The New York Congress employed a Captain Hazelwood from Pennsylvania as an advisor on obstructing the river. In anticipation of the arrival of the chain from Schuyler on 3 November, Captain-Lieutenant Machin prepared for installation at Forts Clinton and Montgomery. The chain was to be supported by rafts of pointed logs. Machin frantically worked to get the chain emplaced, following the scare occasioned by the fall of Forts Washington and Lee. However, the chain broke twice. An inquiry was held, but sworn affidavits from James Clinton, Captain Abram Swartwout, Captain James Rosekrans, and Lieutenant Daniel Lawrence revealed that it was due to specific faulty parts and not to the overall construction. Machin reported that he could make modifications and place the chain properly in the spring.

In the interim it was judged necessary by the Committee of Safety to emplace some obstacle. On 26 November Robert Livingston conferred with Heath and George Clinton, and it was decided to emplace chevaux-de-frise at Polopel Island just above the Highlands. George Clinton was dispatched with two regiments (five hundred men) to garrison Fort Constitution and construct the chevaux. He arrived on 30

78. Minutes of the Secret Committee, 14 Oct. 1776. Also John McKesson to George Clinton 31 Oct. 1776; Clinton, Public Papers, I, p. 404.
82. Ibid., Ser. 5, III, pp. 338-9.
November and began work the next day.\textsuperscript{83} In addition, the two Continental frigates, the Congress (Captain Tudor, designed for twenty-eight guns) and the Montgomery (Captain Lawrence, twenty-four) were ordered from Peekskill to Kingston's Roundout Creek for protection while they were being finished.\textsuperscript{84}

In the closing days of 1776 the Highlands were recognized to be of great strategic importance. If the [British] persevere in their plan of subjugating these States to the Yoke of Great Britain, they must, in proportion to their knowledge of the country, be more and more convinced of the necessity of their becoming masters of the Hudson's River, which will give them the entire command of the water Communication with the Indian nations, effectively prevent all intercourse between the Eastern and Southern Confederates, divide our strength, and enfeeble every effort for our common preservation and security.\textsuperscript{85}

The Commander-in-Chief had become personally convinced of this fact, and saw to it that the works were vigorously carried out. He was to acquire from the events of November and December not only an appreciation of the use of the greater Highlands range, of which the Morristown hills form a part, as a base of operations, but also as a base for raids against British outposts.

\textsuperscript{83} George Clinton to New York Congress 1 Dec. 1776; Clinton, Public Papers, I, p. 440.
\textsuperscript{84} Force, American Archives, Ser. 5, III, p. 330.
CHAPTER IV

BRITISH PLANNING FOR THE 1777 CAMPAIGN

The British ministry had not forgotten the lessons on the importance of the Hudson River learned so painfully during the Colonial Wars. As early as 12 June 1775 it was suggested that British forces seize New York City and operate south from Lake Champlain.\(^1\) Admiral Lord Howe wrote to Lord George Germain on 25 September 1775 stressing the need to shift the center of the war from Boston to New York City, and also suggested that a secondary force operate from Canada as far as Crown Point on Lake Champlain.\(^2\)

These suggestions were adopted in 1776. Sir William Howe evacuated Boston on 17 March and captured New York City in a series of battles culminating in the capture of Fort Washington on 16 November 1776. Governor Sir Guy Carleton and Lieutenant General John Burgoyne attempted to seize control of Lake Champlain. However, through Brigadier General Benedict Arnold's brilliant delaying actions, they were frustrated.

With this background, the British armies settled into winter quarters and began preparing for the coming campaign. On 13 December 1776 the King suggested to Lord North that Burgoyne should move down from Canada to meet Howe moving up from New York City at Albany. This was just a tentative suggestion as the King, to judge from the small portion of his correspondence devoted to military subjects, believed in leaving the actual conduct of the war to Germain. Germain on the other hand believed that the officer on the spot understood the war better and deferred planning responsibility to the generals in North America.

Howe's initial plan submitted for ministerial approval was dated 30 November 1776, when Washington was in full retreat. It called for a ten thousand man force to move towards Boston from Rhode Island while a two thousand man garrison retained Newport. Sir Henry Clinton, who had seized Newport, was to command this force. Five thousand men would hold New York City while ten thousand moved up the Hudson to Albany. A final eight thousand men would occupy New Jersey until the fall, when the completion of the other operations freed forces for a drive through Pennsylvania and Virginia. This would be followed by the conquest of the southern colonies during the winter. This plan required a reinforcement

5. William Howe to Germain 30 Nov. 1776; Manuscripts of Stopford-Sackville, II, pp. 49-51.
of fifteen thousand men and profoundly upset Germain.

During the winter Burgoyne had arrived in England carrying Carleton's proposals for the 1777 campaign. On 10 December he had an interview with Germain in which he presented this proposal and his own modifications. The essence of this plan was that a reinforced army from Canada would drive down the Mohawk and possibly the Connecticut rivers. There was no hint of cooperation with the main army, or of operations on the Hudson.

A letter from Howe dated 20 December arrived on 23 February proposing a radical change in plans based on the idea that the capture of Philadelphia would be easy. This new plan called for a two thousand man garrison for Rhode Island and four thousand to hold New York City. The main push of ten thousand men would move from New Jersey and seize Philadelphia. A further three thousand men would operate on the lower Hudson. If any further men were sent they could be used for additional operations.

Washington promptly took advantage of the British cessation of operations for the winter to score the crucial victories at Trenton and Princeton. This forced Howe to pull back his outposts from the Delaware River and abandon his occupation of most of New Jersey.

As a result of these setbacks, Howe revised his plans

8. Brown, American Secretary, p. 94.
on 20 January. This plan was received and approved by both the King and Germain on 3 March 1777, and Howe was notified immediately. This new plan definitely established that Howe's objective would be Philadelphia, and that any other operation would depend solely on the number of reinforcements sent. Germain and the King both approved of this objective, which did not mention in any way a joint operation on the Hudson. It did provide, however, for keeping the main army between Washington's force and the Hudson.10

On 5 March the King read a memo from Burgoyne presenting a modified plan for the Canadian army. In this plan he strongly urged that an operation be conducted down the Mohawk River, and suggested Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger as the obvious choice for its command. In the main operation, he recommended that the commander decide on his objective (Albany, into Massachusetts, or down the Connecticut River) after the campaign began.11 This plan was approved, and Germain prepared instructions for Burgoyne, who had been selected to lead the Canadian army.12 Burgoyne's force was composed of over seven thousand regulars, St. Leger's of several hundred regulars, a regiment of loyalists, and several hundred Indians. Carleton remained in Canada with thirty-seven hundred regulars.13

10. Brown, American Secretary, p. 96.
11. Fortescue, Correspondence of George the Third, III, pp. 443-4.
Recent scholarship has decisively proved that a junction of Howe and Burgoyne at Albany was never considered essential to the campaign. Burgoyne was expected to be able to reach Albany on his own, and only after the end of 1777 was a British cordon to be established along the Hudson. Even in his defense before Parliament Burgoyne admitted that he expected to winter at Albany. Germain wrote Carleton on 26 March informing him of the instructions which had been issued to Burgoyne giving him freedom of action until Howe should join him at Albany. This looseness, which also included approving Howe's plans for Philadelphia on 26 March, was designed deliberately to allow flexibility to meet unexpected circumstances.

Burgoyne and Sir Henry Clinton, who was also on leave in England, met for dinner on 10 March. They discussed their forthcoming roles, and Clinton became convinced that while no physical junction was planned, Whitehall did expect the campaign to be decisive and that cooperation would be necessary.

Burgoyne departed England on 27 March, and arrived at Quebec on 6 May. Clinton arrived at New York on 5 July.

17. Brown, American Secretary, p. 105.
Confusion began to arise when Howe changed his plans again. In a letter of 2 April, received on 18 May by Germain, he announced that he was abandoning New Jersey and attacking Pennsylvania by sea with eleven thousand men. Major General Tryon would be left with a corps of three thousand loyalists to operate either on the Hudson or in Connecticut as circumstances dictated. Garrisons of forty-seven hundred and twenty-four hundred men would be left in New York and Rhode Island respectively. On 5 April he had informed Carleton of this change, so Burgoyne was well aware of it, as well as the fact that Howe's campaign would start relatively late.  

The old myth of the "pigeonholed dispatch" has been finally laid to rest. Christian D'Oyly, one of Germain's secretaries, supposedly neglected to send a message to Howe telling him to move to Albany in support of Burgoyne. In fact the letter was sent, and received on 5 June, informing Howe of Burgoyne's plans and instructions. No mention was made of any cancellation of the Philadelphia thrust.

Howe's final change of plans was expressed on 16 July. By then, of course, it was too late for Germain to exercise any coordination. In this letter Howe stated explicitly that he was sailing against Philadelphia. He believed that even if Washington seized the opportunity to move against Burgoyne, there was no need to worry since Burgoyne had

20. Brown, American Secretary, pp. 112-5.
enough men to take care of himself. If this eventuality occurred, Howe stated that he would reinforce Clinton. Clinton, who would be left in charge at New York City, could then operate against Washington's rear. But he expected that his move would draw Washington south, freeing Burgoyne from having any problems other than transport.  

At this point the actual Campaign of 1777 got underway. Events in America had not been at a standstill, however, and to properly understand the campaign it is necessary to review them. But it is significant to note that none of the five principal British planners (Germain, Burgoyne, Howe, Carleton, and Clinton) properly recognized the value of the Highlands, the one really crucial factor in the success of operations for the year.

CHAPTER V

PRELIMINARY MANEUVERS OF THE 1777 CAMPAIGN

As the new year began in the Highlands, enlistments of the Continental troops expired. Some men did reenlist on the spot, but until the new Continental Line could be raised the situation was considered dangerous. A call was sent out for one thousand militia to be mobilized to fill the void. From 1 January to 31 March an average of 250 were actually on duty, and they provided a weak, but sufficient, force.¹ The major fear of the generals in the Highlands at this time was not a British attack, but loyalists.²

When Washington began his winter offensive operations in southern New Jersey he became very conscious of the advantages of a demonstration against New York City to ease the pressure on his position. On 5 January he ordered Major General William Heath to gather four thousand militia, and after leaving a sufficient garrison in the Highlands, to advance on New York City.³ Heath gathered his troops

at several locations in Westchester County and moved forward on 17 January. The three columns reached Kings Bridge, opposite the north end of Manhattan, just before sunrise on the eighteenth. Their advance was noticed by an alert sentry, and they were unable to achieve a surprise of the outpost there. Heath then tried to bluff the 350 men in the fort into surrendering, but they knew strong reinforcements were nearby and held out. Heath remained in the vicinity skirmishing until 29 January when a council of war decided that nothing could be achieved, and that a withdrawal should take place. The Americans then fell back to form a cordon through Westchester County.

Washington had advanced to Morristown in the meantime, and he remained there for the remainder of the winter. On 20 February he wrote to Brigadier General Alexander McDougall, in command in the Highlands since 9 February when Heath had returned to Massachusetts. Washington was deeply concerned with the safety of the forts and recommended that the infantrymen at the forts be trained in the use of the cannon until regular artillerymen could be stationed there.

George Clinton assured Washington that the forts would be in shape for the opening of the campaign.

In March, as the new regiments began to be completed in their parent states, orders had to be given for them to concentrate in anticipation of the opening of the campaign. Washington ordered three of the five New York regiments to report to the Highlands while the remainder went to Fort Ticonderoga. Eight of the Massachusetts regiments were ordered to Peekskill, while seven went to Major General Philip Schuyler at Fort Ticonderoga in anticipation of a renewed attack from Canada. Washington's choice of Peekskill was quite logical. At this point he was unsure of what the British objective for 1777 was and felt that Peekskill was a central location from which the troops could be easily shifted to meet any eventuality.

Peekskill had also been used as a supply depot, and this made it the objective of the first British raid of the year. As the port of Courtlandt Manor it was liable to attack from the river as long as it was not heavily garrisoned. On 23 March Lieutenant Colonel John Bird with five hundred men made this raid. They sailed in four transports, escorted by the frigate Brune, the galleys Crane and Independence which had been captured in 1776, and a third galley which had been built during the winter. Bird landed at 1 PM with detachments of the Fifth, Twenty-third, Forty-fourth and Sixty-fourth regiments and four

field pieces at Lent's Cove, a mile and a half south of town. The Americans, outnumbered, fell back on McDougall's orders to secure the passes above the town. The British destroyed the stores and captured one cannon which the Americans lacked the horses to evacuate. After an uneventful night Lieutenant Colonel Marinus Willett arrived with sixty men from the Third New York. He was able to surprise the British advance guard and chase them back into town with a bayonet charge. The British took this as an indication of significant American reinforcements and reembarked. The town was reoccupied by the Americans on the twenty-fifth.  

A blue cloak captured by Willett in this action subsequently became part of the flag flown at Fort Stanwix during its successful defense by the Third New York against St. Leger.  

The Americans became wary of storing materiel near the river and moved their depots inland to Danbury and Ridgefield in Connecticut. In late April Howe dispatched Major General Tryon with a large force of seven regiments and six field guns to destroy these depots. The British force sailed up the Long Island Sound under naval escort to Norwalk, where they landed unopposed on 25 April. They marched to

12. J. Almon, The Remembrancer; or, Impartial Repository of Public Events For the Year 1777, (London: By the Author, 1778), pp. 135-6. This account is borne out in McDougall to Washington 29 Mar. 1777; Fitzpatrick, VII, p. 328n.  
Danbury and destroyed the stores there on the twenty-sixth, the small American garrison having removed as much as possible. On the return to the coast by way of Ridgefield, the British column was attacked in a running battle reminiscent of 19 April 1775. Brigadier Generals Benedict Arnold and David Wooster harassed the British all the way to Norwalk, but were unable to destroy them because they reached the protection of the naval escorts at Compo Beach. A vast quantity of supplies was destroyed, but the raiders suffered casualties of twenty-six killed, 116 wounded, and twenty-nine missing. American casualties were similar, and they felt that the raid had destroyed about half of the stores. The resulting confusion was particularly felt in the Highlands where the food reserves were down to three days. One important result of this raid was to convince the Americans that the western part of Connecticut was strategically a part of the Highlands defensive area.

The newly-raised Continentals began arriving at Peekskill in April. On 3 April Heath started the initial Massachusetts detachment en route. Also on 3 April Brigadier General Samuel Holden Parsons was ordered to bring the eight Connecticut regiments to Peekskill.

15. Howe to Germain 22 May 1777; Ibid., pp. 149-50.
The first of the Connecticut troops began moving on 8 April.20 Also ordered to the Highlands was the newly formed Second Continental Artillery under Colonel John Lamb and Samuel B. Webb's "Additional Continental Regiment", both recruited mainly in Connecticut. The Second, Fourth, and Fifth New York Regiments were ordered to concentrate in the Highlands on 17 April.21 By the end of April there were eight Massachusetts, nine Connecticut, two Rhode Island, and three New York regiments in the Highlands organized in two divisions and two independent brigades.22 The major problem these troops had on their arrival was smallpox inoculation.

Appreciation of the importance of the Highlands was frequently expressed as spring approached. On 23 March the chain was finally put in place at Popolopen Creek, and on 25 March the Continental Congress renewed its interest in the area. In response to a request from the New York Congress it was resolved to appoint a Commandant of the Highlands with the rank of brigadier general. George Clinton was elected to the job.23

On 1 April George Clinton wrote to Washington from the Highlands, stating that while the garrisons of the forts were understrength, they were working on the fortifications

22. Return of the Army for April 1777; Washington Papers, Ser. 4, reel 11.
on the landward side to make them more secure. He also 
enunciated a distinct fear that the British were anticipating 
operations up the Hudson. Washington was also conscious 
of this possibility, and on 10 April he cautioned McDougall 
to be alert. McDougall in turn advised George Clinton 
that the British could dispatch a force of nine hundred men 
from Staten Island up the Hudson at a moment's notice. George Clinton at this time was very concerned over the 
weakness of the landward defenses of Fort Montgomery, and 
relied heavily on a rapid turn-out of militia to protect the 
forts in the event that a British attack should develop.

The Danbury raid produced strategic ripples in the 
Highlands. Washington's intelligence first indicated that 
this expedition was to be directed against the Highlands 
and he accordingly warned McDougall. The presence of a body 
of British shipping at Dobbs Ferry effectively immobilized 
the majority of the troops in the Highlands, preventing them 
from attacking Tryon's raiders. In response to this 
threat two regiments of Ulster County militia were called 
to Fort Montgomery. An average total of several hundred

24. George Clinton to Washington 1 Apr. 1777; Clinton, 
Public Papers, I, pp. 691-3.
25. Washington to McDougall 10 Apr. 1777; Fitzpatrick, VII, 
p. 387. 26. McDougall to George Clinton 
21 Apr. 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, I, pp. 724-5.
27. George Clinton to New York Congress 26 Apr. 1777, Ibid., 
I, p. 736. 28. Washington to McDougall 23 
Apr. 1777; Fitzpatrick, VII, p. 455.
29. McDougall to George Clinton 27 Apr. 1777; Clinton, 
Public Papers, I, p. 742.
30. George Clinton to Colonel Pawling and Colonel Snyder 
27 Apr. 1777; Ibid., I, pp. 744-5.
men spent four months at the fort.\textsuperscript{31}

Washington remained with the bulk of the Continental Army in the strong Middlebrook, New Jersey, position as the spring turned into summer. British inactivity obscured any intelligible guess about their objective, either Philadelphia or Albany. Therefore, he took up a position which would allow him the greatest flexibility to meet either thrust. He counted heavily on Fort Ticonderoga and the forts on the Delaware River to guard the extreme flanks of his strategic position and delay any British offensive until the army could concentrate at the danger point. His force at Middlebrook would be well-protected and at the same time protect most of New Jersey. The concentration of New York and New England troops in the Highlands served the same function for that area.\textsuperscript{32}

Washington became deeply concerned with the force in the Highlands and the forts because they played such a vital role in his plans. He wrote to McDougall that

\begin{quote}
The imperfect state of the Fortifications of Fort Montgomery, gives me great uneasiness; because I think, from a Concurrency of Circumstances, it begins to look as if the Enemy intend to turn their Views towards the North [Hudson] River, instead of the Delaware I therefore desire that Genl. Geo: Clinton and yourself will fall upon every Measure to put the Fortifications in such a State, that they may at least resist a sudden Attack, and keep the Enemy employed until reinforcements may arrive.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

\begin{enumerate}
\item Colonel Hasbrouck's Statement of 18 June 1778; \textit{Ibid.}, II, p. 469.
\item Washington to McDougall 7 May 1777; Fitzpatrick, VIII, p. 26.
\end{enumerate}
A second letter especially warned him to protect his landward approaches. Parsons was instructed to keep his regiments concentrated rather than spreading them thin trying to protect too much. Arnold, generally considered the finest combat general in the army, was ordered to take command at Peekskill, but was recalled before he could report, due to his promotion. Major General Israel Putnam was sent in his place. This decision would have disastrous repercussions in October.

To inform himself of the exact status of the Highlands, Washington dispatched Major General Nathaniel Greene, his right-hand man, Brigadier General Henry Knox, Chief of the Continental Artillery, and Brigadier General Anthony Wayne on 12 May to inspect the area. They were especially cautioned to investigate the possibility of an attack on the forts from the landward side. Their report was a hard, realistic look at the situation, and was summarized succinctly. "We beg leave to observe that the object is too important to be trusted to its present security." Their principle suggestion, to which McDougall and George Clinton adhered, required that a body of four to five thousand men be stationed permanently in considerably strengthened fortifications. This would allow the field army total freedom of movement. Minor points included placing a boom and several

34. Washington to McDougall 10 May 1777; Ibid., VIII, p. 39.
35. Washington to Parsons 7 May 1777; Ibid., VIII, p. 27.
36. Washington to Arnold 8 May 1777; Ibid., VIII, p. 30; the recall is mentioned in Washington to McDougall 16 May 1777; Ibid., VIII, p. 67.
cables in front of the chain to eliminate any possibility of it being snapped by a ship attempting to ram it, and stationing the two Continental frigates and two row-galleys at the chain to add to the defensive firepower. This last point they had taken upon themselves to enact, ordering Captain John Grennell of the Constitution to bring his squadron there as soon as possible. Their conclusion was that if the river defenses could be made strong enough the forts would not be attacked, as "the passes through the Highlands are so exceedingly difficult." 38

Washington acted swiftly on this report. On 24 May he reported to the Congress that he had ordered Major General Putnam to spare no effort to finish the forts and emplace a boom, cables being impractical. 39 He was to adopt the suggested strategy in 1778 and never deviate from it. But this report did cause him to believe that by leaving Putnam with four thousand men, including militia, the posts would be safe. Four thousand Continentals might very well have been inadequate to offset Putnam.

McDougall filed a follow-up report on 19 May. In this report he stated that if the troops would not defend the naturally strong passes, they would not defend works. Nevertheless he was erecting earthworks to cover the defiles as Washington requested. He had ordered work on the extensive

38. Greene et al. to Washington 17 May 1777; Washington Papers, Ser. 4, reel 41.
river batteries at Fort Montgomery to be temporarily suspended while redoubts were constructed to protect the landward approaches of Forts Clinton and Montgomery. Fort Constitution was useless in his opinion once Fort Montgomery was passed, but he had also ordered steps to be taken there to protect its rear. He also believed that a landward assault was out of the question and was more concerned with obtaining the ships to prevent a sudden attack from the river. As far as the state of the troops went, he reported that the Massachusetts regiments were sickly and "almost naked."  

Washington responded to this report by stressing that he was unfamiliar with the area and would defer to the opinions of McDougall and George Clinton. He authorized McDougall to man the frigates and galleys from the army until seamen could be procured. But above all he emphasized that the Continentals should be concentrated and not dispersed to cover Connecticut. Putnam assumed command on 1 June 1777.

The Highlands troops were also used offensively in the summer of 1777. A detachment of Parson's brigade of Connecticut troops raided Sag Harbor, Long Island on 23 May. Washington also hoped to stage a raid on Kings Bridge by

40. McDougall to Washington 19 May 1777; Washington Papers, Ser. 4, reel 41.
41. Washington to McDougall 20 May 1777; Fitzpatrick, VIII, p. 95.
43. A full account is found in Parsons to Washington 25 May 1777; Fitzpatrick, VIII, p. 139n.
having the troops at Peekskill embark supposedly as a reinforcement for the forts and then suddenly drop down the river. 44 While nothing ever happened as a result of this plan, Putnam continually worked on the idea of raiding the British outposts.

On 12 June 1777 Washington called a Council of War to discuss possible plans for the coming campaign. While the exact British objective still was not clear, Washington requested opinions on the size of the Continental garrison which should be left in the Highlands. It was agreed that a total of one thousand effective (enlisted men fit for duty), together with convalescents and militia would be "sufficient to defend the Posts there under the present appearances of affairs." An additional force of approximately one regiment should be left at Morristown for communications purposes. 45 Washington accordingly ordered Putnam to send all his Continentals in excess of one thousand to the main army. 46

At this point Howe advanced into New Jersey, maneuvering there until the end of the month in an effort to lure the Americans into an open battle. It was here that Washington revealed his maturity as a commanding officer. His refusal to be tempted away from the strong position at Middlebrook, or to be frightened into marching to defend the

44. Washington to Putnam 25 May 1777; Ibid., VIII, pp. 121-2.
Delaware River as he had done in 1776 completely frustrated Howe. The British withdrew and began embarking on 1 July. This was completed on 9 July but Howe did not board ship until the seventeenth, when the fleet stood down to the Narrows. Finally, on 22 July, the fleet set sail for Philadelphia.

This lethargy on the part of Howe completely confused the Americans. An effort to determine troop dispositions and composition of units of the Continental Army from mid-June to mid-August becomes an almost impossible task. Units were shifted on an almost daily basis, and frequently spent weeks moving back and forth between New Jersey and the Highlands as estimates of the British objective changed. The effect on the morale of the troops was summarized best by Brigadier General John Glover, who said, "Such is the fluctuating situation of our Army, that we cannot tell this day, where we shall be the next." American estimates of the situation

49. For further reference: Fitzpatrick, VIII and IX is the easiest to handle as it incorporates much material from the Washington Papers in book format. Putnam, General Orders, gives pertinent data on the Highlands organization. Any collection of the papers of brigade or regimental commanders gives the view of the individual unit.
50. Glover to Azor Orne 22 June 1777; "Transcripts of the letters and Orderly Books of John Glover 1776-1781," (typescripts in New York City Public Library of the originals at the Essex Institute, Salem, Mass.)
varied immensely. At one moment they were convinced that Howe had sailed for Philadelphia, at the next that he was only executing a deep feint prior to ascending the Hudson to link up with Burgoyne.

Throughout this period Washington repeatedly stressed in his letters to Putnam the importance of holding the Highlands. Over and over again he emphasized that Putnam must keep his forces concentrated in the Highlands, and forsake trying to protect Westchester Country and the Connecticut shoreline. Although Putnam never gave up the possibility of raiding British outposts, and never concentrated as ordered, he did keep his men alert. Five musters a day were standard procedure, and the troops were forbidden to get beyond recall distance from their encampments.

To further complicate matters, Burgoyne's expedition started scoring impressive successes, requiring additional regiments to be sent to Schuyler's army. On 13 June the advance elements had left Canada. Fort Ticonderoga, the supposed 'Gibraltar of America' proved to be a paper tiger and was hastily evacuated on 5 July. The retreating Americans were further demoralized by defeats of their rear guard elements on 7 July at Hubbardton and Fort Anne on 8 July. Putnam was ordered to dispatch Brigadier General John Nixon's Massachusetts brigade on 5 July and John Glover's Massachusetts brigade on 28 July.

51. For example: Washington to Putnam 25 June, 30 June, 13 July 1777; Fitzpatrick, VIII, pp. 300, 321, 393-4.
52. Putnam, General Orders, p. 18.
53. Glover to Orne 8 July 1777; "Glover Transcripts." Glover to Timothy Pickering, 28 July 1777; Ibid.
The Highlands were further reduced during July by transfers of troops to Washington's army. In Washington's defense it must be admitted that he fully expected Putnam to make up these losses by calling out the militia, for Washington realized that "If we can keep genl Howe below the Highlands, I think their Schemes will be entirely baffled." On 24 July Stirling's division and Major General John Sullivan's division were withdrawn from supporting positions in New Jersey along with all artillery in excess of the standard two guns per brigade, and Lamb's Second Continental Artillery Regiment, a weak one, which was part of the garrison of the forts. On 31 July a further two brigades, those of McDougall and Jedediah Huntington, were ordered south to join the field army. These had been Putnam's strongest. The last day of July was the day when Washington finally committed himself to the belief that Howe's objective was Philadelphia. On that day the field army was ordered to cross the Delaware and head for that city "with all possible dispatch."

The situation in the Highlands at the end of July was somewhat ambiguous. The ships had taken up anchorage at Popolopen Creek in the latter half of June. The frigates

56. Washington to Putnam 31 July 1777; Ibid., VIII, p. 503.  
58. G. Clinton to Putnam 15 June 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, II, p. 34.
were understaffed and poorly armed, with only the Commons having cannon, nine pounders taken from Fort Constitution. The two gallies, the Shank and the Camper, were also there. The cables from the frigates had been stretched in front of the chain.

Washington, although he had drawn off a large number of Putnam's Continentals, felt that the posts were not endangered as long as Putnam kept enough militia on duty to prevent the forts from becoming a tempting target. However, on the thirty-first of July the militia went home, dangerously weakening the Highlands. This left only Lamb's artillery regiment, Colonel Lewis Dubois' Fifth New York, and a few small detachments as garrisons of the forts. Putnam retained only one brigade of Continentals as a field force. This was Parsons' brigade, composed of Colonel Henry Sherburne's and Colonel Samuel B. Webb's "Additional Continental Regiments," Colonel Charles Webb's Second Connecticut, Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs' Sixth Connecticut, and Colonel Samuel Wyllys' Third Connecticut regiments. Parsons attempted to warn Washington that troop strength in the Highlands had fallen to a dangerous level, as did George Clinton, who also stated that he had been elected Governor.

59. G. Clinton to Putnam 4 July 1777; Ibid., II, p. 75; Putnam, General Orders, p. 54.
62. G. Clinton to Putnam 26 July 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, II, pp. 139-40.
63. Hall, Parsons, p. 106.
of New York and had to spend part of his time at the capitol at Kingston. Putnam, however, remained optimistic, although he did request reinforcements if Washington could spare them. This was necessary, he felt, because he had to maintain a five hundred man force under Parsons at White Plains.

By the end of July the war seemed to have left the New York City-Highlands area. Howe had departed for Philadelphia leaving small defensive garrisons at New York City and Rhode Island. Washington had followed him with the bulk of the Continental troops. Burgoyne was advancing relentlessly towards Albany with Schuyler opposing him with the other Continental field army. Putnam was left in command of the Highlands facing Sir Henry Clinton at New York City.

64. Parsons to Washington 30 July 1777; Ibid., pp. 106-7; G. Clinton to Washington 26 July 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, II, pp. 140-1.
65. Putnam to Washington 31 July 1777; Sparks, Correspondence, I, pp. 417-8.
CHAPTER VI
SIR HENRY CLINTON ATTACKS THE HIGHLANDS

Sir Henry Clinton arrived at New York City on 5 July as Howe was preparing to sail for Philadelphia. Sir Henry was properly horrified. In a series of meetings on the sixth, eighth and thirteenth, he argued that a move to Pennsylvania, especially by sea, was a waste of the campaign. He vigorously insisted that the army must advance against the Highlands to retain the initiative. By going to Pennsylvania Howe would allow Washington three alternatives. Sir Henry saw the most distinct possibility as an American move to "murder us" in New York City. Another large possibility was that Washington could go north and make things very hot for Burgoyne. A final option that Washington had was to march south to block Howe. While Clinton by no means foresaw a calamity, he did fear a setback which would prevent the campaign from being as decisive as Whitehall wished.

This controversy also split the other members of Howe's staff. Major Generals Charles Gray and Sir William Erskine supported Clinton, while Major General the Earl Cornwallis,


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whom Clinton was later to call the evil genius behind Howe's decision, favored the Pennsylvania campaign. When the fleet finally departed Sir Henry was left in command of New York City and its dependencies, that is, a one-hundred mile perimeter of outposts. He was given a force of 7,641 rank and file, which Howe felt was sufficient. Of these troops, almost one half were loyalists. The ten battalions of loyalists were considered by the British to be of value primarily as forragers and garrison troops. There was also a brigade of German mercenaries under Brigadier General Schmidt, composed of seven regiments. The key striking force of the New York garrison troops was composed of detachments of the Seventeenth Light Dragoons, three companies of the Fourth Battalion of the Royal Artillery Regiment, and seven infantry regiments of British regulars. Major General Robert Pigot was left in Rhode Island with three British regiments, four German regiments, and a detachment of Royal Artillery, approximately three thousand men.

While Sir Henry was not seriously worried about the possible capture of New York City, he was very conscious of the vulnerability of his outposts, especially Staten Island and Long Island. This prompted him to constantly reshuffle his forces to meet real and imagined threats against various sectors of his perimeter. He was particularly afraid that Washington would choose not to follow Howe and concentrate against New York City. He was greatly relieved to discover on 30 July that Washington was leaving New Jersey for Pennsylvania. 6.

Washington had made his decision to march to defend Philadelphia on the appearance of the British fleet off the mouth of the Delaware River. When the Howe brothers decided that it was an inopportune site and sailed for Chesapeake Bay on 1 August, Washington began to have second thoughts. He assumed that the maneuver had been merely a deep feint to draw him from the Highlands, and that the fleet was returning to New York. He therefore halted his army and dispatched the rear elements, Stirling's and Sullivan's divisions, to Putnam's aid, along with McDougall's and Huntington's brigades which were en route to join the field army. 7 He warned Putnam to be vigilant as

The importance of preventing Mr. Howe's getting possession of the Highlands by a coup de main, is infinite to America, and in the present Situation of things, every effort that can be thought of must be used.8

This uncertain situation persisted for most of August. By the twenty-first Washington had begun to consider the possibility that the British were going to attack Charleston, South Carolina.9 All uncertainty evaporated the next day when the British were seen in the Chesapeake. The army was informed at 10 PM on 21 August that it would march at 4 AM for Philadelphia.10 The troops sent to support the Highlands were recalled on 22 August with one exception.11 This was McDougall's brigade which was detached to cover New Jersey on 10 September, and ordered to Pennsylvania on the nineteenth to replace Washington's losses in the Battle of Brandywine (11 September).12

August was a troubled month for Putnam. As one soldier wrote on 9 August

We are not without Expectations of an attack.... It is a matter of doubt with me whether they will attack us among the hills here (Peekskill) unless they carry that Fortress [Fort Montgomery].13

The fort is strong if that is any consequence.

Twenty-five hundred militia were called out to meet the anticipated emergency, and twelve hundred reported speedily, but dissipated just as fast when the British failed to materialize. Even in the face of this danger Putnam ordered Parsons to send five hundred men to Connecticut to attempt a raid on Long Island. Colonel Samuel B. Webb's attack on 22 August failed because the loyalist detachment was forewarned. Parsons' brigade remained at White Plains until the middle of September. In September another call for twenty-five hundred militia to man the forts was sent out. The response to this alarm was even more transitory than August's. Only three to five hundred men turned out, and dissipated after less than a week. This error in dispersing the Continental troops and calling out the militia on false alarms was to have fatal consequences in October.

Burgoyne's advance from Canada began to run into difficulty in late summer. St. Leger's advance down the Mohawk Valley met determined resistance from the Third New York at Fort Stanwix. The bloody Battle of Oriskany weakened St. Leger considerably, and rumors of an American relief expedition forced him to retreat to Canada on 23 August. While Burgoyne wrote Sir Henry Clinton on 6 August confidently predicting that he would reach Albany on the

twenty-third, his force suffered some reverses. A major foraging expedition was decimated at Bennington on 16 August, and he was forced to regroup his army. He started his final push on Albany on 11 September, but paused at Major General Philip Schuyler's estate three days later to harvest grain. The first hint of disaster came when his advance was stopped cold at the First Battle of Freeman's Farm on the nineteenth.

During the spring and summer the British had used the valley of the Hudson as a route through which to send messengers between New York City and Burgoyne. These men were frequently caught and hung as spies. Colonel Samuel B. Webb's "Additional Continental Regiment" was particularly effective at intercepting messengers, having been outfitted on 28 June with captured British uniforms. Because so many loyalists mistook them for British troops they were known as the "Decoy" Regiment. On 21 July Howe had directed his chief of intelligence to hire an American prisoner of war to carry (unknowingly) a false dispatch to Burgoyne in the hopes that Washington would capture it and conclude that the British were going to attack Boston. As expected, the

messenger, a "Mr. Williams," gave himself up. The ruse was seen through immediately, and Williams revealed the descriptions of several other couriers, including one "Taylor" who was to carry a vital message later. 22

A more successful spy venture was made during August when an agent spent a week examining the Highlands and reported to Clinton. 23 The information this agent brought back, together with Colonel Beverly Robinson’s knowledge of the area, provided Clinton with valuable information which he would subsequently use against the Highlands. 24

Sir Henry had not conducted a static defense even with his manpower shortage. From 12 to 16 September he conducted a forraging expedition into New Jersey. A secondary objective of this raid was to try and destroy McDougall’s brigade. In this he was unsuccessful, but following the British withdrawal McDougall marched south to join Washington. Clinton now began to realize how dangerously weak and out of position Putnam’s force was. 25 On 11 September he wrote to Burgoyne that if Burgoyne wished it, Clinton would stage a diversion against the Highlands with two thousand men as soon as expected reinforcements arrived from Europe. 26

24. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 76.
26. Clinton to Burgoyne 11 Sep. 1777; Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 70.
Clinton by no means considered joining Burgoyne. The best he anticipated doing was dismantling the forts. As far as he knew Burgoyne was still planning on wintering at Albany and Howe still planned to return to New York. Having dismantled the forts, Clinton expected to persuade Howe to link up with Burgoyne in the 1778 campaign.\textsuperscript{27} This message reached Burgoyne on 21 September, after First Freeman's Farm.\textsuperscript{28}

Parsons began warning Putnam that a British move was imminent. On 20 September he reported that he had obtained intelligence that British reinforcements were expected daily, and that Sir Henry was planning to attack the Highlands.\textsuperscript{29} Parsons repeated the warning on 26 September, and in a postscript of the twenty-seventh reported that two days earlier three thousand reinforcements had arrived at New York.\textsuperscript{30} On 23 September Washington wrote Putnam reporting that McDougall had only 911 men and that it was imperative that the rest of the twenty-five hundred Continentals he had requested be sent to him, under Brigadier General Varnum. This order was repeated on 28 September.\textsuperscript{31}

Putnam sent these men, stripping his force of Continentals to a new low. On 27 September he ordered Parsons'
brigade to return to Peekskill.\footnote{32} The militia which Washington was counting on failed to materialized, however, and by the end of the month only three hundred had reported out of the six regiments summoned.\footnote{33}

A large convoy from England had reached New York on 24 September. It contained seventeen hundred British and German reinforcements. Then on 29 September a messenger from Burgoyne reached Clinton bearing a message dated eight days earlier. In this note Burgoyne replied to Clinton's letter of 11 September by announcing that he was preparing to sever his communications with Canada and attempt to reach New York City. In this context he stated that even a threat against the forts would be of great help.\footnote{34}

Sir Henry began his preparations for an assault on the Highlands. While Sir Henry was making these preparations, Burgoyne's situation became even more precarious. On 3 October his army went on half rations. That same day Sir Henry had Commodore William Hotham, the senior British naval officer at New York, order transports to Spuyten Duyvil to embark troops. The flatboats which Hotham ordered in three divisions under the overall command of Captain Pownall embarked eleven hundred men that afternoon and sailed up to Tarrytown. The next morning these men landed at Tarrytown where they were joined by a second body of troops.

\footnote{32} Hall, Parsons, p. 115. \footnote{33} Circular letter to Commanders of Militia Regiments 29 Sep. 1777; George Clinton, Public Papers of George Clinton, (10 vols.; Albany: State of New York, 1899), II, p. 349. \footnote{34} Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 72.
which marched overland from Kings Bridge. Captain Sir James Wallace was placed in command of the escorts. These consisted of several men-of-war and a flotilla of armed galleys. Wallace was a logical choice, based on the experience he had gained on the river in 1776. A third group of troops embarked at New York City and joined the others at Tarrytown on the fourth. Hotham joined this division aboard his flagship, the frigate Preston.\textsuperscript{35} Clinton later explained that adverse tides prevented his force of three thousand men from moving earlier.\textsuperscript{36}

During the evening of the fourth all the troops reembarked and headed for Kings Ferry. Wallace's squadron preceded the transports and, after covering the noon landing at Verplanck's Point, took up a position in Peekskill Bay.\textsuperscript{37} The vastly outnumbered Americans did not oppose the landing and abandoned a cannon when they withdrew. Sir Henry fully expected Wallace to effectually prevent Putnam from transferring any men to the forts.\textsuperscript{38} But to insure confusion among the Americans he had Colonel James De Lancey raid White Plains with sixty of his loyalist Westchester Light Horse on the fifth.\textsuperscript{39} That night a messenger, Captain Archibald Campbell, arrived bearing news that Burgoyne was

\textsuperscript{35} Hotham to Lord Howe 9 Oct. 1777; J. Almon, \textit{The Remembrancer: or, Impartial Repository of Public Events For the Year 1777}, (London: By the Author, 1778), pp. 431-2.
\textsuperscript{36} Clinton, \textit{American Rebellion}, p. 72.
\textsuperscript{37} Hotham to Lord Howe 9 Oct. 1777; Almon, \textit{Remembrancer} 1777, pp. 431-2.
\textsuperscript{38} Clinton, \textit{American Rebellion}, p. 73.
\textsuperscript{39} Rivington's (New York City) \textit{Royal American Gazette}, 11 Oct. 1777.
down to five thousand effectives, was cut off, and could only
hold out until the twentieth. Burgoyne stated that he still
felt able to reach Albany, but wanted to know how soon sup­
plies could reach him there. An answer in triplicate was
requested. This profoundly shocked Sir Henry, since the
last he had heard from Burgoyne was that all was going
well. He also did not understand how, on the basis of the
information in his 11 September letter, Burgoyne could
expect to be rescued.\footnote{73-4}

American strength in the Highlands was ridiculously
absent at this critical juncture. Washington was firmly
of the opinion that if the British advanced from New York
City, they would move to Philadelphia through New Jersey.
By 1 October he was also convinced that Burgoyne was doomed.\footnote{777}
He did solicit militia from Connecticut to strengthen
Putnam's dangerously small force.\footnote{296} The forts themselves
were poorly manned and quite low on food. Captain Gershom
Mott of Lamb's Artillery Regiment commanded at Fort Consti-
tution with a single company in garrison. Colonel Lamb
commanded at Fort Montgomery with Brigadier General James
Clinton in overall command of Popolopen Creek's fortifications.
Dubois' regiment was split between the two forts there, a
company of Lamb's artillerymen was at each, and there were
several hundred militia available to man the forts. On

\footnote{73-4}{Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 73-4.}
\footnote{777}{Washington to Putnam 1 Oct. 1777; Fitzpatrick, IX,
pp. 289-90.}
\footnote{296}{Washington to Trumbull 1 Oct. 1777; Ibid., IX, p.}

the east bank Putnam had finally concentrated his forces at Peekskill. Parsons' brigade of twelve hundred Continentals was supported by three hundred militia.43

At daybreak on 6 October, a Monday, the British took advantage of a heavy fog to reembark the majority of their troops and cross to Stony Point. Two loyalist regiments, Bayard's and Fanning's, remained at Verplanck's Point as did the transports after the assault forces had been ferried across. The British column was divided into three groups. Lieutenant Colonel Mungo Campbell led the advance guard with Colonel Beverly Robinson as his second-in-command. This force was composed of Campbell's Fifty-second and the Fifty-seventh regiments of redcoats, and three loyalist units: Robinson's Highlands-raised Loyal Americans, Lieutenant Colonel Andreas Emmerich's Chasseurs, and Major Alexander Grant's New York Volunteers. This wing was to swing through the hills and strike Fort Montgomery from the rear. The longer route they had to travel required that they march immediately to secure Dunderberg pass.44

Sir Henry personally accompanied Major General John Vaughan and the main body. This section was composed of the expedition's flank companies, the Twenty-sixth and Sixty-third regiments, one company from the Scottish Seventy-first Regiment, a troop of dismounted Seventeenth Light Dragoons, and Captain von Waldenfels' Anspach-Beyreuth Chasseur company. They were transported in the second wave, and

43. Hall, Parsons, p. 117.
44. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 75. See Map 2.
Map 2

The Battle of 6 October 1777*

* Based on John Hill, Sketch of Forts Clinton and Montgomery Stormed the 6th October 1777...., Map 164, Clinton Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan.
followed the advance guard through the passes. Their objec-
tive was to attack Fort Clinton and thus cover the de-
tour of Campbell. From their supporting position they
could cover a retreat if Campbell's force failed to
capture Fort Montgomery.45

The rear guard under Major General William Tryon fol-
lowed in the third wave. They were charged with the re-
sponsibility of keeping communications open to Kings Ferry.
To secure this end the Seventh Regiment remained at Dunder-
berg Pass while Tryon brought the Hesse-Cassel Musketeer
Regiment von Trumbach under Colonel E. von Bishoffhausen
up later in the day to support the main body.46

Campbell's force waited for Vaughan's at the pass on
the west side of the Dunderberg, and the two continued to
march together until they reached Bear Mountain. At this
point Campbell veered west to cross Popolopen Creek and get
into position to attack Fort Montgomery. The main body
passed east of Bear Mountain and advanced from the south
against Fort Clinton between the river and a large pond,
subsequently named Hessian Lake. The longer march kept
Campbell from getting into position until late in the day.47

While the British were moving smoothly ahead, the
Americans were in a state of total confusion. Governor
George Clinton had arrived at the forts to assume command

45. Ibid., p. 75. 46. Ibid., p. 75.
47. Ibid., p. 76. Also John Hill's map of the attack in
British Headquarters Maps, Clements Library, Ann Arbor,
Mich. (Photostats of originals at the New York Histori-
tical Society, New York, N.Y.)
on the evening of 5 October and immediately dispatched Major Samuel Logan with a small scouting party to Kings Ferry. Logan returned with a report that the British were advancing early in the morning on the sixth.\(^{48}\) Putnam remained completely unaware of the British transfer. His scouts reported that a large force was burning the storehouses at Kings Ferry, and that the British shipping seemed to be preparing to attack Fort Independence and Peekskill. While he wanted to attack the British, he felt it would be unwise with the small force available to him. So he left his force in the passes and together with Parsons rode down to reconnoitre Verplanck's Point. By the time they returned the attack on the forts was already in progress and it was impossible for him to influence the outcome.\(^ {49}\)

Governor Clinton began taking vigorous steps to defend the forts. He dispatched a messenger to Putnam for reinforcements, but the "infamous scoundrel" did not report to Putnam until late in the afternoon when it was too late.\(^ {50}\) A small force under Lieutenant Paton Jackson was sent to observe the British advance, but it ran into the lead elements several miles from the forts and retreated. Upon hearing this firing a second, larger, force was sent out under Lieutenant Colonel Jacobus Bruyn. This column was

\(^{48}\) George Clinton to Washington 10 Oct. 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, pp. 389-95.


\(^{50}\) Webb, Journals, I, p. 230.
composed of fifty Continentals, fifty militia, and a three-pound field gun. This force took position behind a stone wall one-half mile south of Fort Clinton. A second party of similar size was dispatched to cover the approach to Fort Montgomery under the command of Captain Ephraim Fenno, also with a field piece. This force delayed Campbell until he could deploy flanking parties which drove in the defenders, and yet another force which had come to their support. The gun was captured as was Fenno.  

This firing served as the signal for Vaughan to start his attack. He cleared Bruyn's troops from their advanced position and then halted on Clinton's orders to wait for Campbell to begin his final attack. In this way pressure on the defenders could be maximized by coordinated assaults. The frigates Mercury and Tarter and the British galleys then advanced upriver and began firing on the forts in support of the infantry attack. The galley Dependence alone fired ninety-five rounds at the American forts and shipping from about 5 PM when the attack began until 5:45 when the troops became too closely engaged for artillery support.

The British assault was more properly a series of rushes separated by close range exchanges of musketry.

52. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 76.
Vaughan's column attacked the southern face of Fort Clinton, especially the three gun redoubt forty yards from the main lines. Campbell's men worked on the western point of Fort Montgomery. Three times these rushes were hurled back by the badly outnumbered defenders. About 5 PM Campbell approached Fort Montgomery under a flag of truce and demanded its surrender. Lieutenant Colonel William S. Livingston of S. B. Webb's regiment summarily rejected it.

The final assaults were made about 5:30 PM, at dusk. Vaughan's force, on Clinton's orders, advanced with bayonets only and in a hard struggle penetrated Fort Clinton. The Trumbach Regiment remained at the stone wall to cover a retreat if the assault failed. The attack on Fort Montgomery suffered heavier casualties. Campbell was killed, and Colonel Beverly Robinson directed the final minutes of the attack. Major Grant was also killed, and Captain George Turnbull assumed command of the New York Volunteers. Turnbull was the first attacker to enter the works and survive, nine men having died in the attempt. Once the forts were penetrated, the American resistance crumbled and the outnumbered survivors took advantage of the darkness to fight their way from the works. With this the firing ended.

57. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 76.
The American squadron failed to make good its escape and was burned about 10 PM to prevent its capture. 59

Any estimate of casualties becomes mired in conflicting claims and must be taken with a grain of salt. British official admission of forty killed, 141 wounded, and five missing is probably a bit less than exact. 60 Losses among the defenders amounted to under one hundred killed, but 263 prisoners including twenty-six officers, mostly militia, were taken. 61 American estimates varied widely due to the fact that the confusion of the escape prevented the units from rallying promptly. Survivors dribbled in for days. The British captured sixty-seven guns in these two forts, and Fort Constitution which subsequently fell. They also captured over six tons of gunpowder and massive quantities of other stores. 62

All accounts by witnesses on both sides praised the gallantry of the combatants. The badly overmatched Americans acquitted themselves well, and the British troops achieved remarkable success in an attack made without the benefit of close artillery support. The Americans recognized that "The Fort was finally taken, merely for want of men to man the lines, and not for want of spirit in the men." 63

59. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 76.
60. Clinton to Howe 9 Oct. 1777; Almon, Remembrancer 1777, p. 426.
61. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 79.
63. Parsons to Trumbull 7 Oct. 1777; Hall, Parsons, p. 118.
On 7 October Sir Henry sent a flag of truce to Fort Constitution demanding its surrender. However, "contrary to the practice of civilized nations," Captain Mott fired on it. This development resulted in Mott's decision to evacuate the fort after destroying what he could. George Clinton managed to cross the river and confer with Putnam and Parsons. It was decided to abandon Peekskill and move what stores they could to the relatively safe Fishkill. Parsons left immediately to gather militia from Connecticut, returning on the ninth. Putnam retired to Fishkill with the bulk of the Continentals while George Clinton returned to the west bank to rally the remnants of the defenders. and militia at New Windsor. He was joined there on the eighth by S. B. Webb's regiment to provide the stiffening needed. Far to the north on 7 October, events had occurred which made further action in the Highlands futile. Burgoyne had been severely defeated in the Second Battle of Freeman's Farm and his surrender was made almost inevitable.

Minor activity occurred on the eighth and ninth. The British snapped the chain on 8 October and occupied the abandoned Fort Constitution. Upon completing the destruction there, Wallace sailed up to probe the chevaux at Polopel Island and returned with news that there were no obstacles

64. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 77.
65. Putnam to Washington 8 Oct. 1777; Sparks, Correspondence, I, pp. 438-40.
66. Hall, Parsons, p. 117.
to hinder advance once that was passed. On 9 October, Tryon landed with a force at Peekskill and destroyed the evacuated buildings at Continental Village.

The Americans spent this time rallying their forces. Putnam reported to Washington on 8 October that he was convinced that Albany was the British objective and that while all possible attempts to annoy their passage would be made, he doubted that much could be done. These sentiments were echoed by Parsons who said the troops would fight, but the outcome of any further actions would be in the hands of "the great Arbiter." A note had been sent to Gates by George Clinton on 7 October advising him of the fall of the forts.

Lieutenant Colonel James Wilkinson, Aide-de-Camp to Gates, replied on 9 October that Burgoyne was in retreat and that Gates would send all the militia he could spare to the Highlands. This news buoyed American morale.

Sir Henry had attempted to advise Burgoyne of his success. On 6, 8 and 10 October he sent messengers to the north. Captain Campbell and Captain Thomas Scott were both unable to penetrate and returned after several days. First Lieutenant Daniel Taylor made the third attempt.

69. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 78.
70. Putnam to Washington 8 Oct. 1777; Sparks, Correspondence, I, pp. 441-2.
71. Parsons to Trumbull 9 Oct. 1777; Hall, Parsons, p. 119.
72. Wilkinson to George Clinton 9 Oct. 1777; Clinton, Public Papers, II, p. 384n.
73. Vaughan to Clinton 19 Oct. 1777; Willcox, Portrait, p. 184.
Warned by the report of Henry Williams in July, the Americans were able to snap him up on 14 October. He carried his message in a silver bullet which he swallowed when he realized that he had identified himself to one of S. B. Webb's patrols rather than one of Burgoyne's. This movement was seen and a "severe dose of emetic tartar" was administered which caused him to disgorge it. He was courtmartialed, found guilty, and hung on 18 October. Burgoyne remained unaware of Sir Henry's success until his scouts finally spotted Vaughan's advance elements on 16 October. By that time it was too late to continue resistance.

Sir Henry began to consider the possibilities of exploiting his victory. However, he was very concerned with his defensive commitments which prevented his maintaining all the captured posts. Therefore, he destroyed Fort Montgomery and began strengthening Fort Clinton, which he renamed Fort Vaughan. Meanwhile, he left the bulk of the troops under Vaughan at Kings Ferry where they were in a position to either support Fort Vaughan or return to New York City. This latter possibility he considered very real as he had no information concerning the whereabouts of Washington. His hopes were buoyed when he received a letter from Major General Pigot offering one thousand men from Rhode Island. On 11 October Clinton returned to New

York City to prepare a renewal of the offensive. He ordered Pigot to send the Forty-fifth Regiment and two German battalions at once to the Highlands. He also ordered six months' provisions for five thousand men put on ships to be taken to Albany.77

Sir Henry returned upriver on 12 October, the same day Burgoyne was effectively surrounded. Vaughan and Wallace were sent upriver on ships with orders to help Burgoyne, and if necessary to remain with him.78 Vaughan had favored using a much larger force, but Clinton felt that two thousand men were all that could be spared.79 A series of ships were left on station throughout the Highlands to provide communications, and at 5 PM on 12 October the lead elements of the task force passed the Polopei chevaux-de-frise. On 13 and 14 October the expedition passed upriver slowly, doing moderate damage.80 The Americans followed along both sides of the river.81

On 15 October the British flotilla, escorted by the galleys Dependence, Crane, and Spitfire, brig Diligent, and tender Hotham, arrived off Kingston.82 When they were stalled there by adverse winds, two small batteries fired on the flotilla. Vaughan felt that since he was halted anyway, and since Kingston was "a nurseries for almost every villain

77. Clinton, American Rebellion, p. 79.
78. Ibid., pp. 79-80. 79. Ibid., p. 80n.
in the country," he should destroy these batteries. Troops were landed and had no trouble scattering the defenders and capturing the cannon. When they were sniped at from some buildings by the militia, Vaughan had the entire town burned to the ground. In the process a large amount of stores were burned. Wallace also destroyed several small ships. The galley *Lady Washington* escaped destruction by being run up Roundout Creek and scuttled by her own crew.  

George Clinton's small force could not reach the town in time to influence the action, and the state government decamped with great haste. Sir Henry was later to claim that the town was burned as a military necessity. S. B. Webb was probably closer when he said "such cursed Barbarity is not equalled in History, Revenge for Burgoyne's misfortune seems their darling object."  

On 17 October Burgoyne surrendered. Wallace and Vaughan continued upriver to Livingston's Manor, forty-five miles south of Albany, which they reached on 19 October. En route they destroyed some shipping and buildings. There the pilots refused to go further. Vaughan began to feel uneasy as the militia turned out to raise Putnam's force to about five thousand and George Clinton's to fifteen hundred. Sir Henry had meanwhile received an order from Howe to dispatch

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three British regiments, two German battalions, and all
detachments from units with the main army, even if he had
moved upriver. Sir Henry wrote Vaughan to return to New
York City because of this order. The passes of the Highlands
were also to be abandoned. Vaughan retreated at 8 AM on
23 October. Fort Clinton, now Fort Vaughan, was abandoned
and destroyed on 25 October, and on the twenty-seventh the
last British units arrived back at New York City. The
Highlands were now completely in American hands again.

88. These units, the 7th, 26th, and 63rd British Regiments,
the Jaegers, and the 1st and 2nd Anspach battalions,
arrived at Billingsport, Pennsylvania, on 17 November.
André, Journal, p. 64.

89. Clinton, American Rebellion, pp. 80-1; Howe's message
is paraphrased in Howe to Germain 21 Oct. 1777; Manu-


91. Rivington's (New York City) Royal Gazette, 1 Nov. 1777.
CHAPTER VII

THE SUBSEQUENT FATE OF THE HIGHLANDS AND AN EVALUATION OF THE EVENTS OF 1777

The same day that disaster struck the Highlands, 6 October 1777, the Continental Congress resolved that Washington should send one of the army's four engineers "to do duty at Fort Montgomery + the defences on Hudson's River."¹ On 8 October Washington ordered Lieutenant Colonel Louis LeBégue DuPortail to report to Putnam at Fort Montgomery.² This was to prove very important in the attempt to rebuild the fortress complex in the Highlands.

After the defeat of Burgoyne, a large element of Gates' army was freed for operations further south. Twenty regiments were directly requested by Washington on 29 October, and a further two brigades were ordered from Putnam's share of the reinforcements on the next day.³ This left several thousand Continentals still in the Highlands. Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Hamilton, who had been sent north by Washington to supervise forwarding

Gates' troops to Pennsylvania, ran into difficulty with Putnam. Hamilton wrote Washington on 2 November that Putnam intended to retain four thousand Continentals to attack New York City. Washington wrote to Putnam on 4 November directly ordering him to retain only enough troops to rebuild the forts and to send the rest immediately to relieve the weak main army.

The threat from Canada was further alleviated on 8 November when the British garrison at Fort Ticonderoga destroyed that fortress and retreated. Putnam still procrastinated, considering an attack on New York City. This scheme was out of the realm of possibility and infuriated Hamilton, who referred to it as Putnam's "hobby-horse." George Clinton requested Gates to inspect the Highlands on his way to report to the Continental Congress, and complained that Putnam was off in Westchester County leaving only the wrecked regiments to defend the Highlands. As late as 27 December George Clinton could report that S. B. Webb's regiment had been repulsed in a raid on Long Island, and that although

Gen'l Putnam is ordered to turn his Views to the works for the Security of the River in Future.—hardly anything is done yet at them + little I

6. Hamilton to Washington 10 Nov. 1777; Sparks, Correspondence, II, p. 33.
A penetrating evaluation of Putnam, but unfortunately about six months too late. New York City posed no threat, as Sir Henry Clinton had a mere 6,142 men and felt that he was limited to a static defense. 9

The Continental Congress was deeply concerned with the refortification of the Highlands and passed a series of resolutions on 5 November to start action. Washington was to have Gates replace Putnam in the Highlands, send one or two more "able engineers" to assist him, and have Gates supervise the construction of new forts. Gates was ordered to collect all the galleys, chains, and other accessories he felt necessary to obstruct the river, and was cautioned not to make the forts "too extensive," and to insure "that each be completed with a well, magazines, barracks, bomb casements [shelters] as would be sufficient for a determined defence." 10 Putnam and George Clinton both preferred West Point to the old Popolopen Creek site. 11 Washington deferred to their better knowledge of the countryside, and gave them a free hand. 12

On 12 January 1778 the first troops began construction at West Point. 13 Lieutenant Colonel Radiere, the

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10. Putnam to Washington 7 Nov. 1777; Sparks, Correspondence, II, p. 30.
engineer who replaced DuPortail, dissented and stirred up yet another argument. He insisted that the new fortress would be easily besieged because it was dominated by a series of hills. This defect did not exist at Popolopen Creek.  

Washington reprimanded him, and ordered him to go along with the majority and get something built before the spring opened the new campaigning season.  

Progress began with this decision on the site, and the appointment of George Clinton to supervise the construction on 18 February. In a resolution of that date the Continental Congress appointed him to replace Gates under the provisions of the 5 November 1777 resolutions.  

Governor Clinton's energy produced results. On 16 March Brigadier General Samuel Holden Parsons, whose brigade was at work at West Point, wrote Washington informing him that the first guns were being emplaced, and that the main work, Fort Arnold, would be well advanced by the end of the month.  

Major General Alexander McDougall, recently promoted, was ordered to the Highlands on 16 March with orders to exercise command of the entire Highlands area and its dependencies.  

He was equally energetic and could report on 13 April that

the works were sufficiently advanced to preclude falling to
a sudden raid, but that they were still liable to a siege
because several important hills were as yet not defended.\footnote{McDougall to Washington 13 Apr. 1778; Kite, Dupontail, pp. 93-4.}

A new chain was emplaced that spring, the necessary
hills were defended, and work continued throughout the war
to improve upon the defenses. In response to advice from
Washington, the Continental Congress formally created an
independent command for the Highlands on 21 March.\footnote{Papers of the Continental Congress, Transcript Journals, reel 17.}
This unified structure proved to be one of the most important
results of the fiasco of 1777. By March of 1779 Fortress
West Point had reached a sufficient level of development
that the Americans desired a British attack on it. They were
confident that such an attack would be shattered, and that
they could counter-attack and recapture New York City.\footnote{Louis Du Portail, Memoire sur la défense de Wespoint, Translated typescript of the original at the United States Military Academy Library, West Point, N.Y.}

As Surgeon Thacher wrote on 26 September 1778, West Point was

\begin{quote}
Considered by General Washington as the key which
locks the communications between the eastern and
southern states; and of all the posts in the United
States, this is the most important.\footnote{James Thacher, A Military Journal During the American Revolutionary War, (2nd ed.; Boston: Cottons & Bernard, 1827), pp. 210-11. The best source on the subsequent history of West Point in the war is Dave Richard Palmer, The River and the Rock: The History of Fortress West Point, 1775-1783, (New York: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1969).}
\end{quote}

From 1778 to the end of the war in 1783 the greater
Hudson Highlands became the center of the American strategy.
West Point was the fortress which anchored this defensive position. Only once was Washington to move the main field army from close supporting range of West Point, and that was in 1781 to destroy Cornwallis. Even then he left half of his force in the Highlands on constant alert, and took elaborate precautions to convince Sir Henry Clinton that New York City was his objective. Only minor skirmishing took place in the Northern half of American after the battle of Monmouth on 28 June 1778, and this was dictated by Washington's refusal to abandon the Highlands, and British inability to attack him there. The Campaign of 1777 had taught this lesson to Washington, and it represents the turning point of the war in terms of strategic thinking. The importance of Washington's new strategy, which effectively stalemated the British in the northern colonies, qualifies this campaign to rank in importance with Valley Forge and Saratoga as one of the key factors in the ultimate American victory.

The first immediate repercussion of the Campaign of 1777 had been a series of courts of inquiry into the actions of the principal commanding officers of the various forts which were captured in New York and Pennsylvania. Washington was ordered by the Continental Congress to establish such a court for the Highlands forts on 28 November 1777. Washington appointed Major General McDougall, Brigadier General Jedediah Huntington, and Colonel Edward Wigglesworth as the investigating officers. Washington wrote to George Clinton that he fully expected the Clinton brothers,
Putnam, and Parsons to be exonerated, as he felt it was a case of simple bad judgement. He did expect it to be a good excuse to retire Putnam, whom he felt had outlived his usefulness.  

Actual responsibility for the loss of the forts must be placed on Putnam for failing to make realistic defensive preparations. He left the forts undermanned, dispersed his Continentals, and ignored repeated warnings and indications of a British advance. This was due to his inherent incapacity as a general and not, as one contemporary accused him, of having intimate relations with Beverly Robinson's wife, revealing information to her, and being drunk. All the other officers on the scene behaved superbly. Washington has been accused of misunderstanding the British plans and drawing off too many Continentals from the Highlands. This is hindsight. While Washington did draw off the Continentals, he fully expected Putnam to replace them with militia, which Putnam failed to do. In the light of the optimistic reports Putnam had been sending, and the other information he had, this was a reasonable request. Furthermore, Washington had repeatedly issued instructions for the defense of the Highlands which, if followed, could have saved the forts, for he correctly foresaw the danger of an attack from the landward side.

On the British side the most striking point is that after brilliantly seizing the Highlands, they abandoned them. Germain has been correctly blamed for the overall failure of coordination in the Campaign of 1777. This defect is not confined to this one campaign, but rather to the general attitude he maintained towards planning for the war. Sir William Howe claimed that there was no advantage in ascending the Hudson with his main army, and much to be gained by attacking Philadelphia. This was indeed one of the greatest British blunders of the war, exactly because it drew him away from the basically sound strategy of severing the colonies. His successes in Pennsylvania were meaningless. As Henry Knox observed, "Upon the whole, I know he ought (sic), in justice to his master, to go either up the North River or the eastward, and endeavor to form a junction with Burgoyne." Burgoyne can be dismissed as a blunderer who, knowing he would have no support, essentially threw his army away.

Sir Henry Clinton scored the most spectacular success of his career with a feat unparalleled by any other British commander in the war. Admittedly, it was physically impossible for him to rescue Burgoyne, and he could not hold the Highlands once he had captured them. But Burgoyne and

27. Henry Knox to Lucy Knox 26 July 1777; Francis S. Drake, Life and Correspondence of Henry Knox, (Boston: By the author, 1873), p. 46.
Howe must bear the responsibility for his being too late with too little. This operation was "prompt, well planned, successful, and fruitless. Clinton could score off the Americans, but not off Howe." 29

The one time in the war that the British army was able to seize the single most important piece of terrain in the War of American Independence, they failed to retain it. The Americans never gave them a second chance.

APPENDIX A

GLOSSARY OF TECHNICAL TERMS

Abatis - An obstacle serving the function of barbed wire formed of trees felled toward the enemy.
Aide-de-camp - A staff officer.
Adjutant - A staff officer.
Battalion - The tactical unit in all armies, at this time virtually synonymous with regiment. It was usually composed of eight to then normal, or line, companies and two special, or flank, companies in British battalions.
Chevaux-de-frise - Underwater obstacles consisting of a heavy timber frame bustling with iron-tipped spikes.
Commissary - A staff officer responsible for supply functions.
Coup-de-main - A sudden assault against a fortified position as opposed to a siege.
Fascines - Bundles of sticks used in military construction.
Flank Companies - Each British battalion had a light infantry company and a grenadier company which were elite units frequently detached to form special battalions for specific campaigns.
Fleche - A small arrow-shaped earthwork open to the rear.
Fraise - A line of stakes imbedded as a horizontal palisade around a fortification.
Quartermaster - A staff officer responsible for supply functions.
Quartermaster General - Senior supply officer.
Rank and file - Those enlisted men present in the line of battle with weapons, exclusive of sergeants and musicians.
Redan - A two-sided earthwork similar to a fleche.
Redoubt - A relatively small independent outwork, completely enclosed, frequently used to protect the approaches to fortresses.
Regiment - In all armies the administrative unit of organization. Only certain regiments such as the Seventy-first Regiment had more than one battalion at this time.
Rifle pit - The forerunner of the modern foxhole.
APPENDIX B
EIGHTEENTH CENTURY MILITARY RANKS

Lieutenant General
Major General
Brigadier General
Colonel
Lieutenant Colonel
Major
Captain
Captain-Lieutenant - Virtually synonymous with First Lieutenant.
*First Lieutenant
*Second Lieutenant - Virtually synonymous with Ensign.
*Ensign
Sergeant
Corporal
Private

*All of these ranks were occasionally referred to as Subalterns.
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