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The Forts on the Delaware  
in the Revolutionary War

BY

WILLIAM S. STRYKER

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Adjutant-General of New Jersey

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## The Forts on the Delaware.

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On the 26th of September, 1777, at eleven o'clock in the morning, Lieutenant-General Cornwallis, with 3,000 British troops, entered Philadelphia, the capitol city of the young American republic. This was the advance detachment of the royal army, which had left the city of New York July 5, destined for a port unknown to the patriot leaders. General Sir William Howe had taken 18,000 men and put to sea, thus abandoning the Hudson river to fate, and General Burgoyne's army to defeat. On August 25, General Howe landed near the head of Elk, now Elkton, on the northern end of Chesapeake Bay, and on the 11th of September made a good fight with Washington's Continentals on the Brandywine. This struggle over, another two weeks were consumed in making the march from Chadd's Ford to Philadelphia, on account of so many skirmishes having to be fought with the harassing parties which hung on the flanks of the victorious British army.

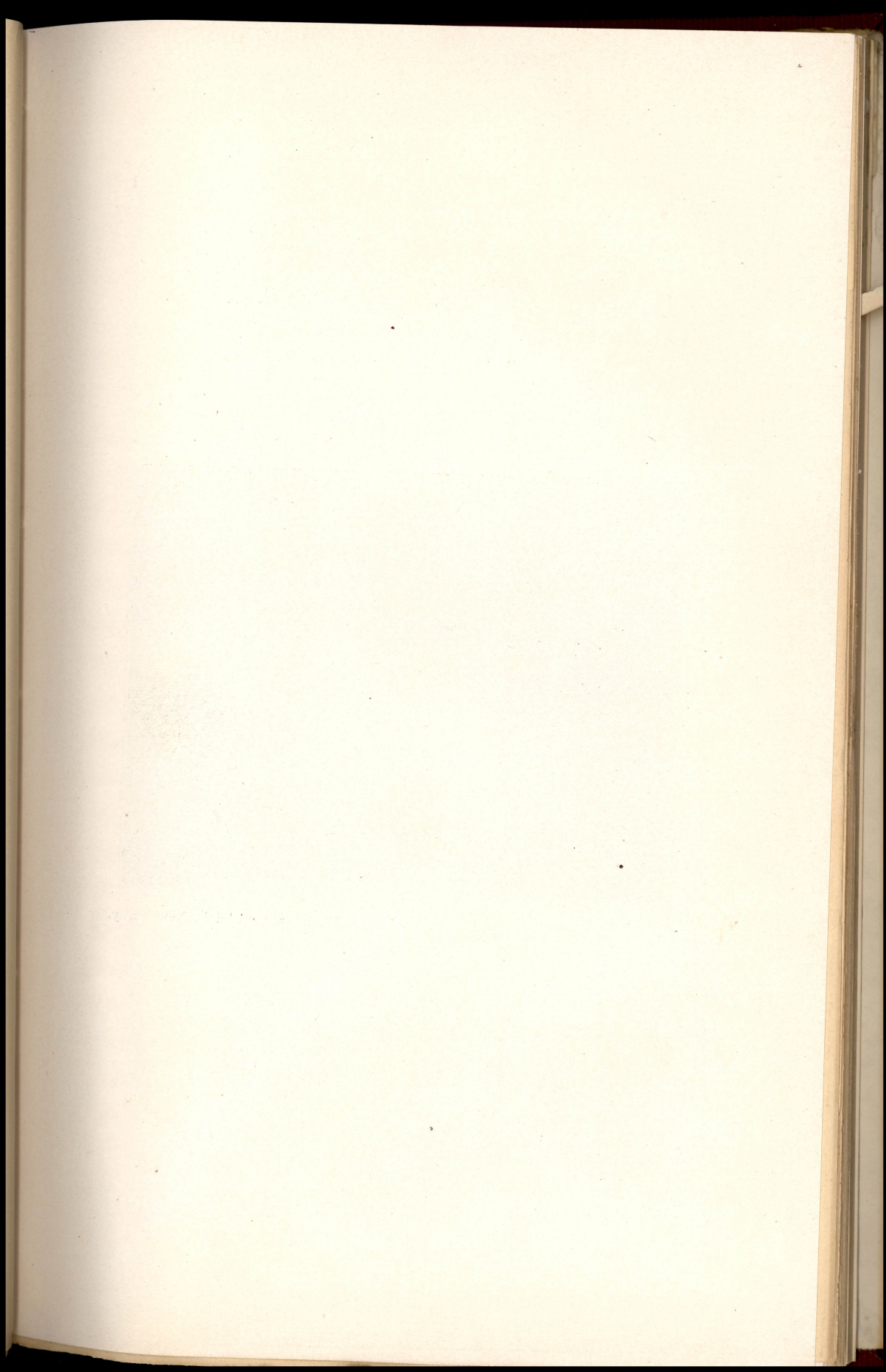
In the very early hours of September 27, the day after the occupation of the city, the British soldiers, under the competent direction of Captain John Montresor, the chief engineer, began to erect three batteries to protect the city against the American armed flotilla, anchored only a short distance below Philadelphia, on the Delaware River. Before these batteries were completed, and with only four guns mounted, the American frigate Delaware, Captain Charles Alexander, mounting thirty-four guns, and the ship Montgomery, Captain William Allen, mounting eighteen guns, with the sloop Fly and four galleys, came up to the lower battery and at nine o'clock the same morning began

firing on them and greatly annoyed the British working parties. This affair lasted about an hour, when a shot struck the foremast of the Delaware and carried it away, the frigate got aground on the ebb of the tide and the captain hastily struck his colors. The sloop Fly met the same fate a few moments afterwards. The ship Montgomery, however, made sail and with the galleys moved down the river, out of range of the British cannon, and escaped. The frigate Delaware was taken possession of by the British, and some of the crew who failed to reach the other vessels or the Jersey shore, were made prisoners.

As early in the war as July 11, 1775, we find that plans and models for obstructing the Delaware River had been sent to the Committee of Safety of Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> And again, a year afterward, we learn that Robert Smith,<sup>2</sup> of Philadelphia, a man of considerable fortune, much influence and great energy of character, having invented in June, 1776, some plans for protecting the city, had been instructed by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania to take charge of the construction and the placing of barricades, or what they called the chevaux-de-frise, in the river. During the summer of 1777 Smith had the professional advice and valuable aid of Captain Thomas Antoine, the Chevalier de Mauduit du Plessis, who had been an officer in the regiment Port au Prince Infanterie of the French army, and was then a captain in the Continental regiment of artillery. This distinguished officer added to his military record at Red Bank as well as on the field of Monmouth. In the navigable channel of the river off Byllinge's Point, afterwards called Billingsport, nearly twelve miles below Cooper's Point, and three and a half miles below Red Bank, two of the chevaux-de-frise had been sunk and formed a serious obstacle to the British fleet.

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Vol. I., p. 751 et seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, Vol. IV., p. 79.





Portion of the Brick Wall formerly a part of Fort Mercer, at Red Bank, New Jersey.

These submerged machines consisted of large pieces of heavy timber very strongly jointed and bolted together. To the upper part of this framework were fastened sharpened iron spikes projecting down stream, and of course very dangerous to shipping. Heavy stones attached to these timbers and resting on the bottom of the river kept them concealed at low tide about four feet from the surface of the stream.<sup>1</sup>

About this time General Washington received carefully prepared opinions on the defense of Philadelphia from such competent officers as Major-Generals Greene and du Coudray, Brigadier-Generals Wayne, Reed and Knox.<sup>2</sup> During the progress of this siege Washington held councils of war at the following places: September 23, at camp, near Potts Grove, fourteen officers present; September 28, at Pennibecker's Mill, twenty officers present; October 29, at White Plains, near Ambler, Montgomery County, sixteen officers present; November 8, at Whitemarsh, thirteen officers present.

On the eastern bank of the river at Red Bank, Gloucester County, New Jersey, a large redoubt, partly built of brick, had been erected, which was named Fort Mercer, in honor of the heroic Virginian who fell in the battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777. This place was about eight miles below Cooper's Ferry, now Camden, on a bluff overlooking the Delaware River. When the fort was originally planned it was intended to be garrisoned by from twelve to fifteen hundred men. In the last of September and early part of October, 1777, it was held by some four hundred of the New Jersey militia. When Captain Mauduit du Plessis was ordered on duty at this fort as an officer of

<sup>1</sup> The minutes of the State Navy Board, sitting in Philadelphia from February 13, 1777, until September 24, 1777, shows a constant attention to the ships, galleys, forts and chevaux-de-frise on the Delaware river.

—*Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Vol. I., pp. 73-226.

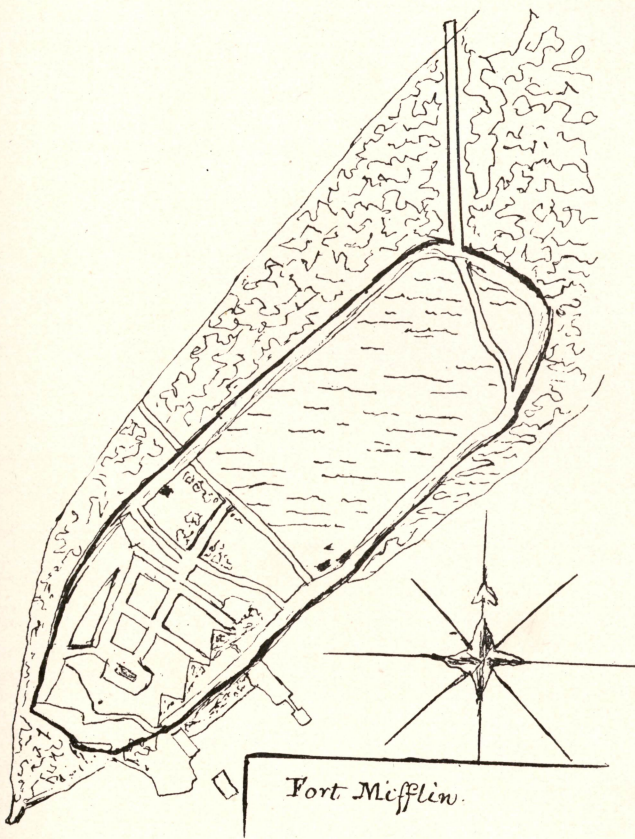
<sup>2</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Vol. XVIII., pp. 5, 12, 163, 164, 172.

artillery, as well as a skilled engineer, and had thoroughly inspected it, he determined to reduce the extensive outwork to a five-sided and smaller fortification, with a ditch ten feet deep and a strong abatis to protect it. The parapet he also faced with timber and fortified with a fraise. This formed an irregular pentagon. A portion of the old outlying ramparts was left, but with no intention of using it. The armament of the fort consisted of fourteen cannon. The garrison flag was attached to a high walnut tree on the south side of the redoubt.

On Mud Island, a little below the mouth of the Schuylkill River, extensive outworks and batteries had been constructed. This fortification was called Fort Mifflin, after Pennsylvania's distinguished officer, Major-General Thomas Mifflin, and its armament consisted of two eight-pounder guns, four twelve-pounder guns, two eight-inch mortars and two eight-inch howitzers. There was a very narrow and shallow channel between the island and the Pennsylvania shore. The guns of the fort were directed toward the main channel, which was on the east side of the island. The rear portion of the fort had a stockade and a ditch, and, in addition, there were three block-houses on the island, none of them, however, of any great strength.

Between Fort Mifflin and Fort Mercer and nearly three hundred yards diagonally below the former battery, thirty of the heavy pieces of framework, the chevaux-de-frise, had been sunk across the channel. These barricades were of great weight, very strong and difficult to cut through or remove. Indeed there was little possibility of this being accomplished or even attempted while the guns of either fort commanded the alinement.

Soon after the occupation of Red Bank and Mud Island by the Americans, the dikes between that island and Province Island were cut, so that by letting in the water the erection of batteries that would command Fort Mifflin would be prevented.



Fort Mifflin on Mud Island.  
From a Map in the Library of Congress.



The British engineer, Captain Montresor, saw instantly that these dikes must be restored or the capture of the fort could not easily be accomplished. The tory leader, Joseph Galloway, who was the British superintendent of the port of Philadelphia, afterward complained that this work consumed a month and that precious time was wasted. At last, however, it was completed and an order was issued by General Sir William Howe to erect counter batteries on the northern end of Province Island.

A temporary battery of two heavy guns was constructed on the east side of Mantua creek, two and a half miles below Red Bank and a mile above Byllinge's Point, in New Jersey. This battery was defended entirely by New Jersey militia.

At this time the vessels of the Continental navy and of what was called the Pennsylvania State Navy were gathered above the upper chevaux-de-frise and close to the New Jersey shore.

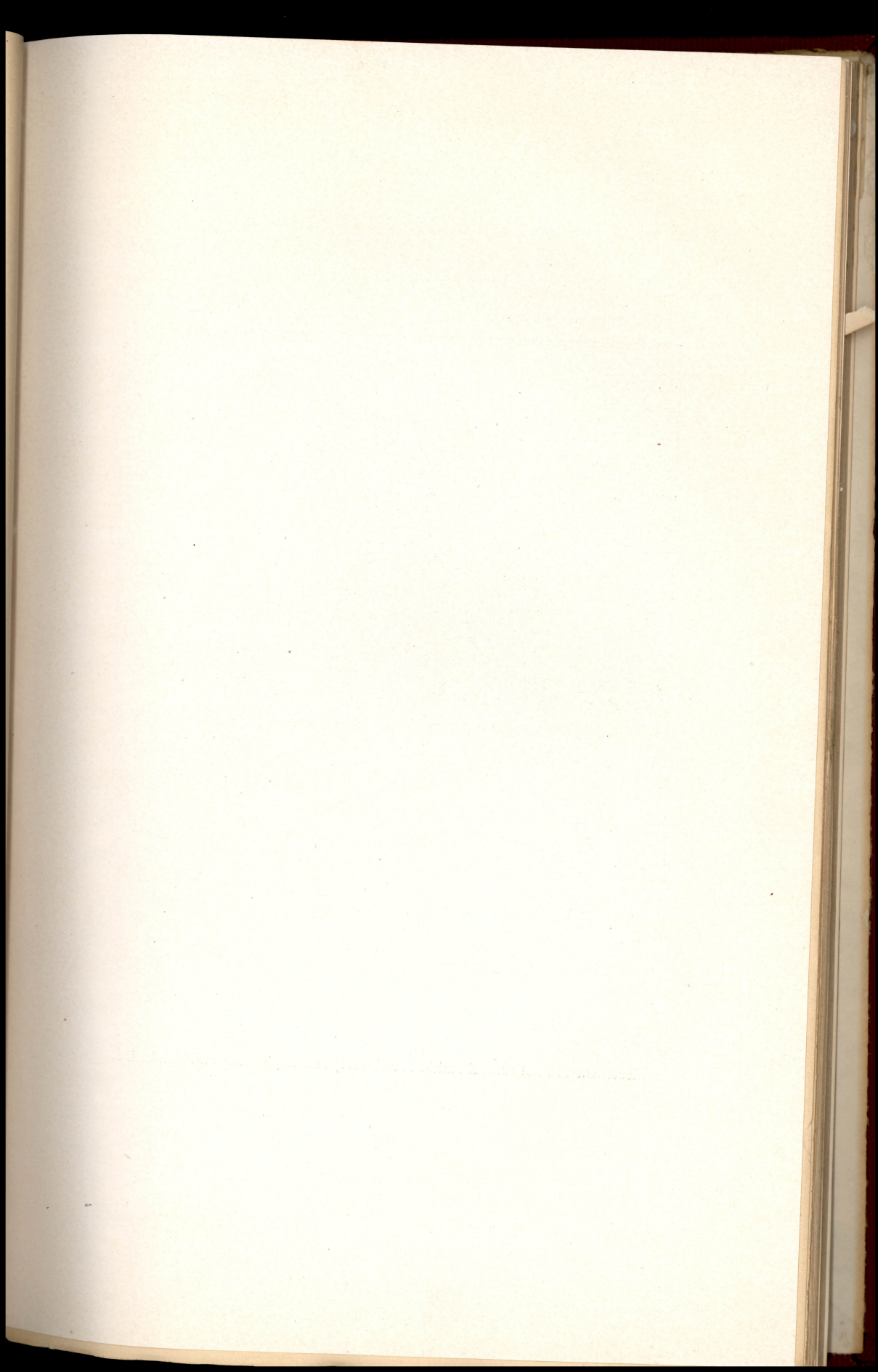
The British fleet, off Chester, Pennsylvania, also began to institute measures for destroying the lower chevaux-de-frise, and under the direction of Captain Sir Andrew Snope Hammond, commanding the *Roebuck*, in the British navy, this work was at last successful and a few feet of the obstacle were removed, sufficient to allow six vessels to pass through the open channel and come to anchor a short distance from and in range of Fort Mifflin.

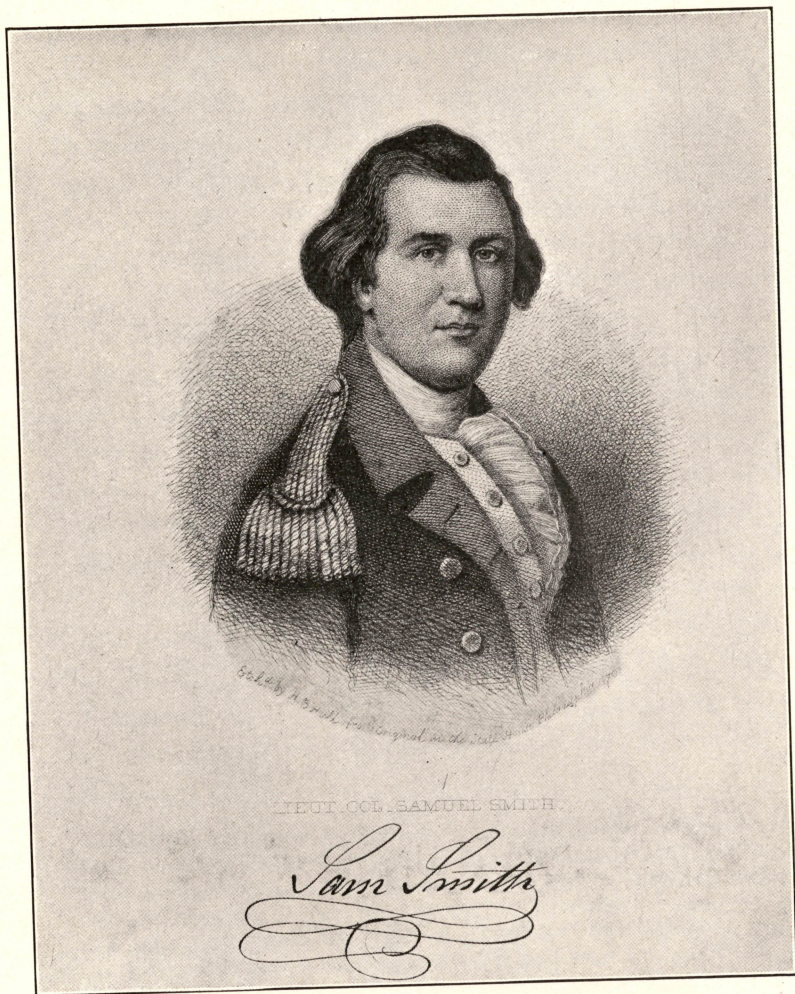
On October 1, 1777, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Sterling of the Forty-second British regiment of foot, with his own regiment, the Tenth regiment, and three light batteries, left Philadelphia for Chester, crossed the river the next day, under cover of the *Roebuck*, and without difficulty captured the battery at Byllinge's Point, on the New Jersey shore. The Americans retired on their approach, having spiked all the guns there and set fire to the barracks they had erected. Colonel William

Bradford<sup>1</sup> of the Philadelphia City battalion, Pennsylvania militia, was in charge of this little fortification, but his command was too small to make even a feeble resistance to two of the best disciplined regiments of the British army. He marched up to Red Bank, camped just outside of the fort and remained in that vicinity until November 16. An immediate attempt should have been made to take Fort Mercer from the southern side, before it had been occupied by Continental troops, and it is said that Lieutenant-Colonel Sterling was earnestly in favor of doing so but could not obtain the required orders from General Howe. The capture of Fort Mercer at this time would have compelled the surrender of Fort Mifflin, because the latter fort depended on the former for reinforcements of men and supplies of ammunition and provisions. After Sterling had performed this prescribed tour of duty he crossed the river again to Chester, gathered up a large quantity of provisions for the garrison post at Philadelphia, started for that city, was met by a regiment ordered to escort his force thither, and so entered the city in triumph.

The British fleet, under Admiral Lord Richard Howe, who was on board the *Eagle*, entered the Delaware River October 4, the day of the battle of Germantown, and after October 6 anchored near the Pennsylvania shore from Reedy Island to New Castle, with a few vessels up the river as far as Byllinge's Point.

<sup>1</sup> Colonel William Bradford was the grandson of William Bradford who introduced the art of printing into the colonies. He was born in New York in 1719 but lived his active life in Philadelphia. He published the *Pennsylvania Journal* in 1742 and the *American Magazine* in 1757. He opposed the stamp act. He was wounded in the battle of Princeton, as Major of a battalion of Philadelphia Associators. In 1777 he was Chairman of the State Navy Board of Pennsylvania. The close of the war found him with "shattered health and ruined fortune." Benjamin Franklin remarked of him, "His writing was spirited, his press correct and his sword active." He died in Philadelphia, September 25, 1791.





Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Smith, Fourth Maryland Regiment, Continental Line.

During the time Lieutenant-Colonel Sterling made the excursion just described, Brigadier-General James Potter, of the Pennsylvania militia—the same officer who had figured in the Princeton battle and was erroneously reported killed, instead of taken prisoner—with about six hundred of his militia force, and Captain Henry Lee, with his troop of Virginia light horse, carefully watched the west bank of the Schuylkill River so as to prevent the taking of food and forage into Philadelphia. Congress had ordered the penalty of death to be inflicted on anyone within thirty miles of the city who should furnish any information or convey any commissary supplies to the British.

General Washington had seized the opportunity, seemingly auspicious, when two good regiments of the British line had left the city, to begin the affair which resulted in the battle of Germantown. The 4th of October is memorable for the fierce attack and repulse around the Chew house in the streets of that village. The conclusion of this battle left the contending armies with a still greater desire to secure the absolute control of the Delaware River.

On September 23 orders had been issued by General Washington for Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Smith,<sup>1</sup> of the Fourth Maryland regiment, Continental infantry, to cross the river into New Jersey at Dunk's Ferry, near Bristol. This he did, and on

<sup>1</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Smith was born in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, July 27, 1752. He was educated at Elkton, Maryland, and afterward resided in Baltimore. He went to sea in one of his father's vessels in 1772. Early in 1776 he joined Smallwood's Maryland Continental regiment as a captain, and before the end of the year had been commissioned to the majority of the Fourth Maryland regiment. He was made lieutenant-colonel of the same organization February 22, 1777, and took part in the battles of Brandywine and Monmouth. He commanded the Maryland troops in the Pennsylvania Insurrection of 1794, was a member of Congress in 1793, and of the United States Senate from 1803 to 1815 and from 1822 to 1833. He was a major-general of the Maryland troops organized for the defense of Baltimore in 1814, and mayor of that city from 1836 until his death, April 22, 1839.

the night of September 26, his force marched down the New Jersey shore and were taken in boats from near Red Bank, at what he called Ferry Ancocus, to Fort Mifflin. Smith's command consisted of detachments of the First Virginia regiment, Continental infantry, Major Robert Ballard, and a battery of the Second Continental regiment of artillery, Captain-Lieutenant Samuel Treat, in all about two hundred infantrymen and forty artillerymen. On arriving there, they relieved a captain, a lieutenant and forty enlisted men of the Pennsylvania militia from further duty at that post.

On the 7th of October a determined effort was made by the British officers to erect batteries on Province Island which would command Fort Mifflin. On that day Major John Vataass, of the Tenth regiment, British foot, and one hundred grenadiers, were sent there to put a heavy armament into position. The next day two twelve-pounder guns, two eight-inch howitzers, two eight-inch mortars, with one hundred rounds of ammunition for each gun, were in readiness to open on the fort. On the night of October 10, another battery was constructed on Province Island and then the American galleys fired on them for two hours and so successfully that one captain, one lieutenant, one ensign and eighty men came to the shore and surrendered. Apparently they had been misinformed as to the numbers of the attacking force and thought it to be numerically stronger than it really was. Just at this moment, however, a considerable detachment of British under Lieutenant George Moncrieffe, of the Tenth regiment, landed and came across the meadows to rescue them. They were fired upon from one of the block-houses on Mud Island and many of the men who had been captured escaped, but Lieutenant William Finch and Ensign Richard Hawkins, both of the Twenty-seventh regiment, British foot, with fifty-six enlisted men, were carried off in boats to the New Jersey shore. The next day the Ameri-

can galleys essayed to repeat this manœuvre, but failed. In the meantime, the British had thrown up another battery on what was called hospital wharf on Province Island.

On the 7th of October, at the headquarters of the American army, in camp near Pennibecker's Mill, now Schwenkville, Montgomery county, Pennsylvania, General Washington issued an order to Brigadier-General James M. Varnum, detaching from his brigade the First Rhode Island regiment, Continental infantry, Colonel Christopher Greene commanding, and some of the officers and men of Colonel Israel Angell's Second Rhode Island regiment, Continental infantry, for duty at Fort Mercer to relieve the militia in that fortification. Colonel Greene was directed to assume command and Captain de Mauduit du Plessis, who was already there, was directed to report to Greene for service. In General Washington's directions to Colonel Greene, October 7, 1777, he said: "I have sent Du Plessis to take charge of the artillery and to superintend any works which may be necessary. Attack any British who may be endeavoring to get there before you, if your force is equal. You will be pleased to remember that the post with which you are now intrusted is of the utmost importance to America and demands every exertion of which you are capable for its security and defence. The whole defence of the Delaware depends upon it; and consequently all the enemy's hopes of keeping Philadelphia and finally succeeding in the present campaign."<sup>1</sup> Colonel Greene arrived at the fort at Red Bank on Saturday, October 11. He was accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Adam Comstock and the major of his own regiment, Samuel Ward. Colonel Greene and Major Ward were relatives.

Even before this date, Lieutenant-Colonel Samuel Smith, of the Fourth Maryland regiment, Continental infantry, had assumed command of Fort Mifflin, and Colonel Greene was now

<sup>1</sup> *Ford's Writings of George Washington*, Vol. VI., p. 104.

directed to co-operate in every possible way with Lieutenant-Colonel Smith.

On the 14th of October, General Howe directed that batteries be erected at the mouth of the Schuylkill River and new batteries on Province Island, in order to harass the garrison at Fort Mifflin. The American naval force immediately attacked them and stopped their working parties.

While these plans were being executed, Governor William Livingston, of New Jersey, was exerting himself, although with only partial success, in sending into a camp near Fort Mercer a militia force of that State which would in some way aid the patriot army. Brigadier-General Silas Newcomb had a few men under his command, but he seems to have handled them so indifferently as to have been severely criticised by Continental officers and afterward by Washington himself.<sup>1</sup> Brigadier-General David Forman, who had fought so well in the streets of Germantown, tried to help the New Jersey governor, but he was not pleased with the slow response of the people to the urgent appeals, and, in disgust, he wished to resign.

A company of the Second battalion, Gloucester County militia, commanded by Captain Felix Fisler, was joined by some other militia of the county and camped near the fort under Colonel Greene's orders. On the 18th of October, the news of the surrender of Burgoyne reached the American camp at Worcester, Montgomery county, Pennsylvania. There was great rejoicing among the patriots at the good tidings from the north. However, it caused this victory of Gates and what was called the Fabian policy of Washington to be strongly contrasted by members of Congress at York, Pennsylvania, and by the people of the country. This news and the success almost gained at Germantown made some people think that Washington could easily

<sup>1</sup> *Ford's Writings of George Washington*, Vol. VI., pp. 157, 169.

drive the British regiments out of Philadelphia; and ought to make the attempt.

The next day, October 19, by order of General Washington, Lieutenant-Colonel Charles Sims, with a detachment of the Sixth Virginia regiment, Continental infantry, one hundred and twenty rank and file, crossed the Delaware River at Bristol, Pennsylvania, marched down by way of Moorestown, New Jersey, and arrived at Cooper's Ferry at ten o'clock in the night of October 20. Here they heard a report of an intended crossing at this ferry by the British from Philadelphia, but without tarrying there, they marched on all night, arriving at the Red Bank fort before daylight. The rumors with reference to an attack on Fort Mercer had also reached Colonel Greene, and although he felt confident that a movement of this kind was imminent, he preferred to carry out Washington's orders; so, without retaining a single man of Lieutenant-Colonel Simms' command to augment and strengthen his own force, he hurried them off to Fort Mifflin.

Captain Fisler's company of Gloucester County militia was also sent by Colonel Greene to Cooper's Ferry to watch the expected crossing and to dispatch an express rider back to him with the information.

It is believed that the field and staff officers then in Fort Mercer, with Colonel Christopher Greene, were Adam Comstock, the lieutenant-colonel; Samuel Ward, the major, and Peter Turner, the surgeon, of his own regiment, the First Rhode Island Continental infantry; Jeremiah Olney, the lieutenant-colonel of the Second Rhode Island regiment, Continental infantry; Jacob Harris, surgeon's mate of the Fourth New Jersey regiment, Continental infantry, detailed from Brigadier-General William Maxwell's brigade; and with them, also, was First Lieutenant David Cook of the Third regiment, Continental artillery.

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It had become a positive necessity for the British army to open the channel of the river to the passage of their boats with provisions for their army. If this were not accomplished, if there were any further delay in this matter, the occupation of Philadelphia as winter quarters would be, at least, problematical. For Howe to abandon the city after occupying it less than a month could not really be considered. He must needs have the British fleet at the city's wharf. Two forts, one on each side of the river's channel, restrained him, and the barriers anchored between these forts stopped free navigation. It is true that a few small boats, drawing but little water, occasionally slipped through unnoticed, but the provisions they brought made only a meagre addition to the commissary stores. It was essential that the American cordon should be broken and that instantly.

At this time the vessels of the American fleet were clustered close to the New Jersey shore in a harbor between Fort Mercer and Byllinge's Point, under the cover of the two-gun battery above Mantua Creek.

On the morning of October 21, under orders of General Howe, three grenadier battalions and one regiment of Hessians—the battalion von Minnigerode, Lieutenant-Colonel von Minnigerode commanding; battalion von Linsingen, Lieutenant-Colonel von Linsingen commanding; battalion von Lengercke, Lieutenant-Colonel George Emanuel von Lengercke commanding; the regiment Mirbach, Lieutenant-Colonel von Schieck commanding, which had been ordered up from Wilmington, Delaware, the previous day; a detachment of four companies of light infantry and twelve mounted chasseurs, and a detachment of Hessian artillerists, with eight three-pounder guns and two British howitzers—were ordered to prepare for this expedition. Some accounts make this force twenty-five hundred men,

but historians generally name twelve hundred soldiers.<sup>1</sup> All this detachment was placed under the command of Colonel Carl Emil Kurt von Donop, commander of the Hessian yager corps, a brave and zealous officer, who had commanded the advance corps of the British army in New Jersey in December, 1776. When Colonel von Donop received his orders, he made a request for more artillery, but the German records say he received a reply to the effect that if he could not trust himself to attack the fort with this contingent the British soldiers would take it. "Tell your general," said von Donop to Howe's aide-de-camp, "that Germans are not afraid to face death." Von Donop then declared to the officers about him at this time, "Either the fort will soon be called Fort Donop or I shall have fallen."

Early in the evening of October 21 this Hessian contingent crossed the river from Philadelphia to Cooper's Ferry, New Jersey, in a large number of flat boats in charge of Captain Clayton. Immediately on landing they marched to Haddonfield for the night. At three o'clock in the morning of the 22nd they left Haddonfield and marched on what is still sometimes called the "Hessian road" toward the bridge over Timber creek. This bridge they found had been broken down by the Gloucester County militia, so they had to march up the creek nearly four miles and then cross the stream near what is now called Clement's bridge.

Captain Fislser's company had retreated down this road about a mile in front of von Donop's marching column. In the grey of early morning two mounted officers from the fort came up to them and they were informed by the captain that the Hessian force was near, obscured only by the curvature of the road in this

<sup>1</sup> *Marshall's Life of George Washington*, Vol. III., p. 163. Major Samuel Ward's report to General Washington, October 23, 1777.

heavily wooded section of the state. The officers, advancing still farther, were fired upon and one of their horses was disabled. The officers then directed Captain Fisler's company, fatigued, as they were, by breaking down the bridge, to file off toward Woodbury as they could do no good at the fort, the small redoubt there having its full complement of men. They obeyed, accordingly, and took no further part in the conflict of the day, but after the fight was over, they were directed to re-occupy their camp just outside of the fortification.

Soon after crossing the creek, Colonel von Donop saw the detachment of Lieutenant-Colonel Simms, of the Sixth Virginia regiment, crossing the river in small boats to Fort Mifflin, as we have stated they did, and the impression became fixed in his mind that Fort Mercer was about to be abandoned.

At this time the American force in Fort Mercer was, as all reports seem to agree, about four hundred men, and Fort Mifflin was garrisoned by the same number. It is to be hoped that they were better clothed and equipped than when the First and Second Rhode Island regiments were inspected by General Varnum, August 27, 1777, as he reported: "The naked situation of the troops, when observed parading for duty, is sufficient to extort the tears of compassion from every human being. There are not two in five who have a shoe, stocking or so much as breeches to render them decent."

The detour which von Donop's force was compelled to make delayed their arrival and it was not until twelve o'clock noon on October 22 that they arrived in sight of Fort Mercer. The north and east sides of the fort were somewhat concealed by heavy woods. Small earthworks were immediately begun on the northeast approach, not far from the river, to conceal and protect the light artillery. It took them until after four o'clock in the afternoon to complete these little works and they then felt themselves ready for the assault. Colonel Greene had ample

time to measure the strength of his enemy and make any plans he deemed necessary for the disposition of his defensive force.

Just before half-past four a mounted Hessian officer, with a drummer, emerged from the little artillery works and advanced toward the fort. The musician beat on his drum to attract the attention of the garrison in the redoubt. In a haughty and insolent tone the officer called out: "The King of England orders his rebellious subjects to lay down their arms; and they are warned, that if they stand the battle, no quarter whatever will be given." When Colonel Greene heard the words of this summons, he said: "With these brave fellows this fort shall be my tomb." Lieutenant-Colonel Jeremiah Olney, of the Second Rhode Island regiment, came out of the fort to meet the officer, told him that the challenge was accepted, that there should be no quarter on either side, and added: "We shall defend the fort to the last extremity." The Hessian officer returned to his command, reported the reply to his message and said he could see but a very few soldiers in the redoubt. Colonel Greene had so concealed his men as to make it appear that his force was very small. He allowed only fifty men to be seen above the ramparts. The position of the Hessian detachment just before the assault was one of considerable strength. Their artillery was all in battery on their right flank and a cordon of troops took position on nearly three sides of the fort. On the right, with the artillery, the von Minnigerode grenadier battalion and some companies of light infantry were alined, the regiment Mirbach held the center, and the von Linsingen grenadiers were in force on the left flank. The battalion von Lengercke and some of the yager corps were posted at the boat-landing to prevent reinforcements coming from the galleys and to serve as a protection to the rear. About one hundred men had charge of the fascines, which they had made that day in the woods and which they

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thought might suddenly be needed after the first movements of the assault had been made.

The attack then opened, at a quarter before five o'clock, by a heavy cannonade from the Hessian artillery and the British howitzers, and this continued until five o'clock. The assault was then made in two columns. On the more northerly side Lieutenant-Colonel von Minnegerode led a heavy detachment to storm the outer works. In a moment, with the drummer beating a lively tune, the assaulting force reached the first line of earthworks with little or no resistance, and unconscious that they had been designedly abandoned, they thought in the excitement of the first surprise that the entire fort was their own. Then they began to cheer, to shout "victoria" and to wave their hats to the few men who could be seen very quietly peering over the rampart of the inner redoubt. The temerity of von Minnegerode and his battalion increased when they received the impression that Fort Mercer had been evacuated. In another instant they had reached and were against the nine-foot palisades, but they had no scaling ladders or other means of surmounting this obstacle. The abatis had been passed, they had reached the ditch and some few had scaled the outside pickets, when a galling musketry fire and discharge of grape-shot opened on the assaulting column. Their flank also was raked by fire from two galleys which had been concealed in the bushes on the shore. The Hessians dropped in heaps, killed and wounded, among the felled trees which formed the abatis, and into the deep fosse. With great energy the men still unhurt began to attempt to pull down the branches of the trees so as to aid in scaling the rampart. Captain de Mauduit du Plessis had made the curtain of the inner intrenchments with loop-holes and a rifle was thrust out of every aperture. The insolent Hessian officer was seen to fall, the drummer also

received a wound, and the assailants in large numbers were every moment receiving a terrible and unexpected punishment. The Hessians were also taken on the flank by the severe cross-fire from an obscure angle of the redoubt. The assault came to a sudden stop as Lieutenant-Colonel von Minnigerode fell with a grievous wound and Lieutenant-Colonel von Schieck, of the regiment Mirbach, the next in rank on that side of the fort, was carried off into the woods, desperately injured.

While this movement was being made on the north side, Colonel von Donop was making a quick dash at the fort on the more southerly angle in the same gallant style, a few moments after the first attack had taken place and in the excitement produced by the cheering of von Minnigerode's detachment. Colonel von Donop had spoken a few brave words to his officers and encouraged them to behave with great valor. They all responded to the sentiments he expressed and promptly took their places with their battalions for the action. They, too, started with a double quick and cheered also as they leaped over the abandoned outer works and stumbled into the ditch under a shower of bullets. A considerable number of grenadiers succeeded in mounting the berne on the south side, but at the fraises, the pointed stakes, a murderous volley came fairly into their faces and they staggered under the fire. Some were killed, some wounded and others taken prisoners. The dead and wounded piled up in the ditch in the same manner as on the other side of the redoubt. Twenty men only clung to the shelving of the parapet and so kept out of the zone of fire and of danger. These men were afraid to retreat, but left their comrades for the moment without their aid. Colonel Green, Lieutenant-Colonels Comstock and Olney and Major Ward, cool and brave, were giving clear and distinct orders to the fighting Rhode Islanders. Captain de Mauduit du Plessis, also, having

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vigorously resisted the attack on the one side, came quickly to the other side of the fortification with cheering words and wise counsel. The attack on the south side by von Donop was maintained with great obstinacy and the Hessian officers promptly rallied their men when any want of spirit was seen. Von Donop himself was very alert and conspicuous. The military decorations on his fine manly figure were noticeable and made him a sure mark for the deadly riflemen. But this detachment also was unable to stand the severe fire of the Americans and began to retire with great loss, finding refuge in the neighboring woods.

But forty minutes had elapsed since the close of the opening cannonade and the four gallant organizations had recoiled and fled, totally shattered, leaving many of their dying and dead lying in the ditch around the fort. The command of the remnant of this demoralized force now devolved on Lieutenant-Colonel von Linsingen, as the senior officer unhurt, and he struggled manfully to get them into some military shape for a proper retreat. They were in detached groups, however, and sullenly took up their line of march by Timber Creek and Blackwood Town to Cooper's Ferry, taking with them a few wagons they had pressed into the service to carry off some of their men who were slightly wounded.

When the men under Colonel Greene looked over the ramparts and saw the deadly effect of their weapons, they were astonished and rejoiced. They hesitated, however, to come out of their breastworks for the moment, fearing some treachery. After some time, du Plessis, desirous of replacing some of the palisades which had been torn down, sallied out with a few men, saw the great disaster which had happened and gathered in as prisoners the twenty men who had tried to conceal themselves from the fire under the parapet. After fixing the broken palisades and

seeing the foe in full retreat, he examined the heaps of dead and dying. A feeble voice called out from this mass of quivering humanity and he recognized the wounded leader von Donop, who said: "Whoever you are, draw me hence." He was carried within the fort, the sturdy Americans under intense excitement, saying: "Well, it was determined to give no quarter," echoing in spirit the words of the challenge von Donop had dictated to his subordinate officer when he demanded the surrender. "I am in your hands," said Colonel von Donop, "you may revenge yourselves." Silence was enjoined by the captain and he called Surgeon's Mate Harris of the New Jersey line to attend to the needs of the sorely-wounded commander. Pleased with this attention, von Donop said to du Plessis: "You appear to be a foreigner; who are you—a French officer?" Du Plessis replied in the affirmative, and von Donop continued: "I am content; I die in the hands of honor itself."

Colonel von Donop had his thigh fractured by a musket ball, but at first the wound was not thought to be mortal.

In slow and straggling march, crossing Timber Creek (and, it is said, throwing two brass guns into the stream), the shattered Hessian column, under the guidance of Lieutenant von Linsingen, at last reached Cooper's Ferry, October 23. On the road they met the Twenty-seventh regiment of British foot and a battalion of light infantry which had been sent over the ferry to reinforce them and whose duty it was now to cover their retreat. The reports published in the papers of that day say that they buried twenty-one enlisted men who died on the way from the fort to the ferry, and that they carried two hundred wounded men back to Philadelphia. Late in the afternoon they were ferried over to the Quaker City, and the Hessian commander reported the terrible mishap to General Howe.

Colonel von Donop was carried from Fort Mercer to the house

of James Whitall<sup>1</sup> near by, still standing, and some reports say that he was afterward carried to the house of Joseph Low at the dam on the south side of Woodbury Creek. Some of the wounded soldiers were carried to Woodbury, two and a half miles away, and the house opposite the Court House, now the residence of Doctor Duncan Campbell, was used as a hospital. Fifteen wounded officers were discovered among the heaps of slain and Captain de Mauduit du Plessis took them under flag of truce to Philadelphia, was properly received by General Howe and turned them over to the custody of the British surgeons.

The following is a roster of the officers killed and wounded in the fight:

Colonel Carl Emil Kurt von Donop, Yager Corps, wounded October 22, 1777, and died October 25, 1777.

Lieutenant-Colonel von Minnigerode, grenadier battalion von Minnigerode, Knight of the "Order of Merit," wounded October 22, 1777, died in New York City October 16, 1779.

Lieutenant-Colonel von Schieck, of regiment Mirbach, wounded October 22, 1777, and died October 23, 1777, before he reached Philadelphia.

Captain von Brogatzky, grenadier battalion von \_\_\_\_\_, killed October 22, 1777.

Captain Wagener, killed October 22, 1777.

Captain von Stamford, grenadier battalion von Linsingen, wounded October 22, 1777.

<sup>1</sup> James Whitall filed an account of the damages to his place by the American forces. The original document is on file in the Adjutant-General's office in Trenton. It is signed by Joseph Low and James Wilkins, as appraised April 17, 1779, and the total amount is valued at £5,760, 1s. Among the items are the following:

April 10, 1777.	Breaking the ground and rendering it unfit for tilling,	£300
	Cuting and Destroying the Timber,	£1200
Oct. 12, 1777.	15 Tun of Hay at £30 pr Tun,	£550
	8550 Rails at £12 pr Hundred,	£1026
	Orchard of near 300 trees all Grafted,	£1500



Present appearance of the Hospital in Woodbury, New Jersey, now the residence of Dr. Duncan Campbell.

Faint vertical text on the right edge, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side.

Captain Wachs, grenadier battalion von Minnigerode, wounded October 22, 1777.

Captain Stendorff, grenadier battalion von Minnigerode, wounded October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Riemann, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Du Puy, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Van Wurmb, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Heinrich Reinhard Hille, regiment von Lossberg, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant von Offenbach, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Heymel, killed October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Carl Friedrich Ruffer, regiment Mirbach, wounded October 22, 1777.

Lieutenant Gottschalk, wounded October 22, 1777.

The statements in historical works as to the number of killed and wounded of the Hessian force differ greatly. Dawson says, one lieutenant-colonel, three captains, four lieutenants, seventy non-commissioned officers and privates, killed; one colonel, one brigade major, one captain, one lieutenant and over seventy non-commissioned officers and privates wounded and prisoners, making a total of one hundred and fifty-two casualties. Irving puts the loss at about four hundred. Lowell says, eighty-two killed, two hundred and twenty-nine wounded and sixty missing, in all three hundred and seventy-one. Du Plessis told Lafayette and Chastelleux that three hundred men were buried in the front of the ditch. Some of the German accounts name four hundred as the total in killed and wounded. Von Eelkings says the Americans buried one hundred and eighty and captured one hundred wounded men.

Of the Americans it is known that Captain Sylvanus Shaw, Second Rhode Island regiment, was killed October 22, 1777.

Major Samuel Ward reported the following casualties:

First Rhode Island Regiment: Two sergeants, one fifer and four privates killed; one sergeant and three privates wounded; one captain taken prisoner.

Second Rhode Island regiment: One captain, three sergeants and three rank and file killed; one ensign, one sergeant and fifteen rank and file wounded.

Captain Du Plessis' detachment: Two wounded.

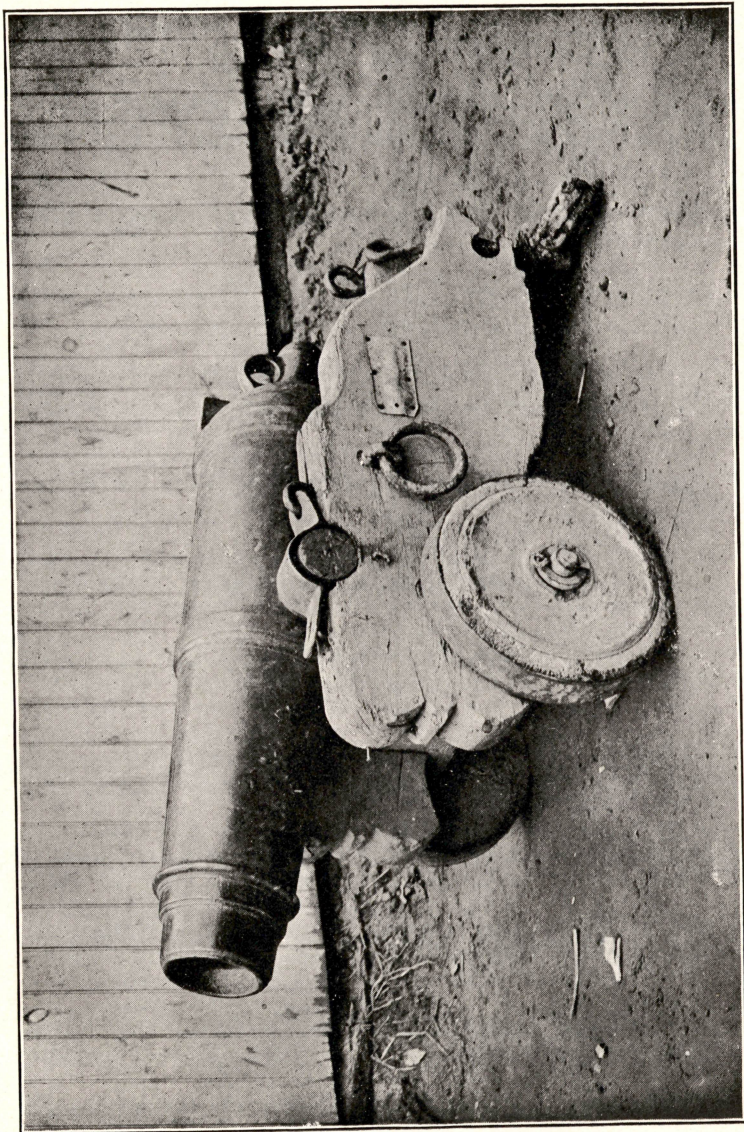
Three hundred muskets, a number of swords and cartouche boxes were brought into the fort.

The conduct of Colonel Christopher Greene,<sup>1</sup> of the First Rhode Island regiment, was only what might be expected of such a gallant officer. Captain de Mauduit du Plessis also had done good service to the American arms. His disposition of the outer works of the fort, his great activity at all the points of danger, gave him well-deserved honor. The Continental Congress brevetted him a lieutenant-colonel for this day's work.<sup>2</sup> Later on in the war, in Major-General Greene's

<sup>1</sup> Colonel Greene was born at Warwick, Rhode Island, in 1737. He was a Lieutenant-Colonel in the "Army of Observation;" had fought at Bunker Hill, had been with General Arnold in the operations around Quebec, and was taken prisoner when General Montgomery fell. He was very soldierly in appearance, of manly bearing, fine health, strong and brave. On May 14, 1781, when quartered near Croton river, Westchester county, New York, he was surprised by a detachment of Delancey's light horse and after desperately defending himself in a tent with a dozen enemies, he, with his major, Ebenezer Flagg, and two other officers and twenty-seven men, were cruelly killed.

<sup>2</sup> A letter of the 13th, from General Washington, was read, wherein he recommends the Chevalier de Mauduit du Plessis to be promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel, adding that "the gallant conduct of the young gentleman at Brandywine, Germantown, and his distinguished services at Fort Mercer, where he united the offices of engineer and commandant of artillery, entitle him to the particular notice of Congress;" that "he made several judicious alterations in the works at Red Bank, showed great good conduct during the action, in which the Hessians were repulsed; that after the evacuation was determined on he became the means of saving some valuable artillery and stores, and cheerfully undertook as volunteer the hazardous operation of blowing up the magazine, &c., without apparatus usually provided upon such occasions;" concluding in Captain du Plessis' favor, "that he possesses a degree of modesty not always found in men who have performed brilliant actions;" whereupon it was "*Resolved*, That a brevet of lieutenant-colonel be granted to the Chevalier de Mauduit du Plessis, as a reward for his services and an encouragement to merit; and that his commission bear date the 26th of November, 1777, in order that the recompense may more immediately follow the services which he has done."—*Journal of Congress*, Vol. IV., p. 37, January 19, 1778.

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Cannon from the British Frigate Augusta.

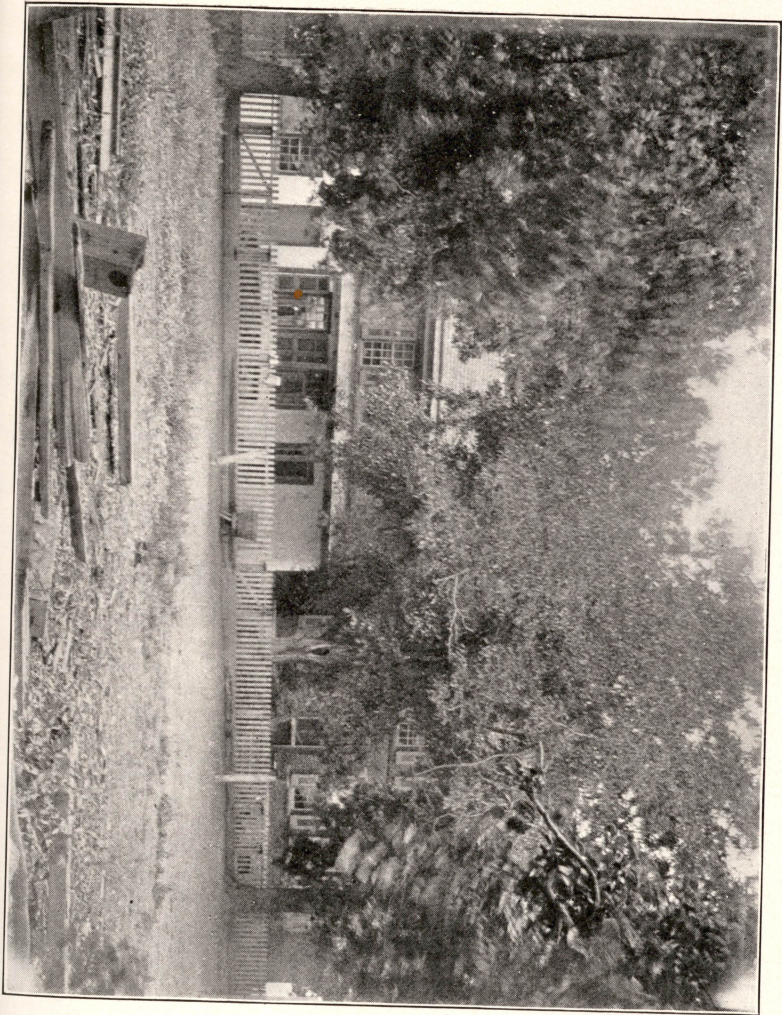
division on the field of Monmouth, he gained new laurels in the efficient service of his artillery.

It does not appear that in the fight at Fort Mercer Colonel von Donop received any of the support from the British fleet that he had reason to expect. The guns on Province Island did not fire that day, but at half-past six on the morning of October 23, the batteries on that island opened with a furious cannonade, and thirty minutes afterward the British fleet which had come up through a passage in the lower barricade, fired into Fort Mifflin (not Fort Mercer), and at the American fleet above the chevaux-de-frise. This British fleet consisted of the *Augusta*, a sixty-four gun frigate, Captain Reynolds; afterward Lord Ducie; the *Roebuck*, forty-four guns, Captain Andrew Snope Hammond; the *Liverpool*, twenty-eight guns, Captain Quelest Bellew; the *Pearl*, thirty-two guns, Captain O'Hara; the *Cornwallis* galley, thirty-two guns, and the sloop *Merlin*, eighteen guns. These vessels kept up an incessant fire until noon and then began to retire down the river. During these five hours Fort Mifflin hurled eighteen and thirty-two pound shot at the vessels with good effect. The American fleet also took an active part in this bombardment, and a captain and one of the seamen received slight wounds. At the close of the engagement the frigate *Augusta* ran aground, and either as a result of a red hot shot from Fort Mifflin, or by accident, took fire and about one o'clock in the afternoon the magazine of the ship exploded with terrific force. For nearly three hours thereafter the fragments of the vessel burned. A lieutenant, the chaplain, and sixty of the crew were lost, although a large number escaped as soon as the vessel was found to be on fire. About three o'clock in the afternoon the sloop *Merlin* also ran aground, took fire and burned to the water's edge. Her entire crew escaped. The *Roebuck* was slightly damaged, had six seamen killed and ten wounded, but with the other three boats succeeded in sailing

down the river. The upper stories of two of the block-houses on Mud Island were knocked away by shells from the British fleet. Two twenty-four pounder guns were taken off the wreck of the *Augusta* by the active Americans during the succeeding night. The American fleet was very little damaged and had no casualties, and but little loss was reported at Fort Mifflin.

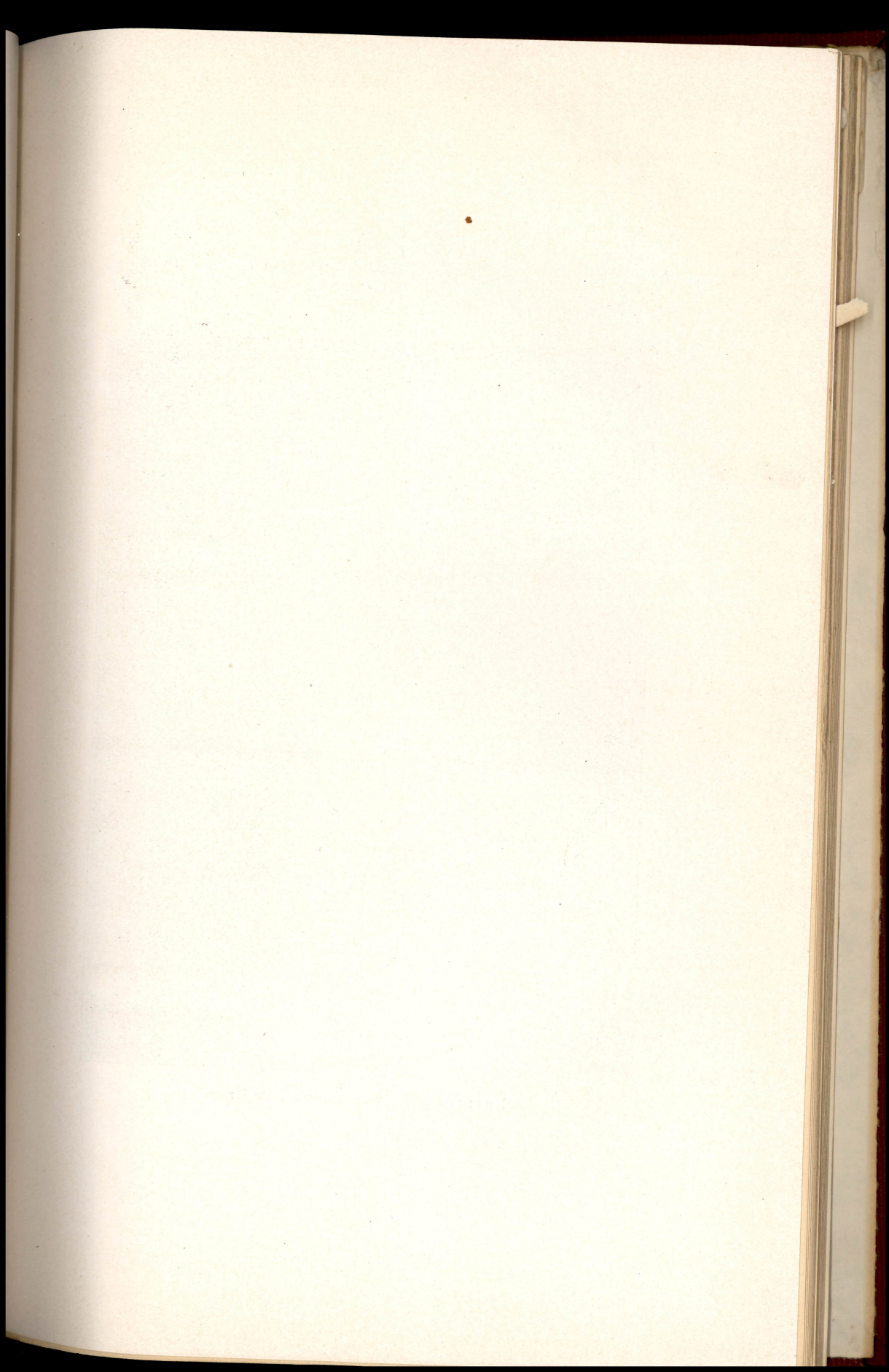
Colonel von Donop lingered in much pain until the afternoon of October 25, and when told by the surgeons that his end was near, he said: "It is finishing a noble career early; but I die the victim of my ambition and of the avarice of my sovereign." Ann Whitall, the wife of James Whitall, of the society of friends, gave him much attention when he was in her house. During the first stages of the battle she had busied herself, so tradition says, with her spinning-wheel, saying: "God's arm is strong and will protect me. I may do good by staying." But the shots came so thick and fast against the old house, built in 1748, that she concluded that the cellar was a safer place, and so went below until the assault was over. When the noise of musketry had ceased, she came up the stairs, attended the wounded and dying of friend and foe alike, and did everything she could to relieve their sore distress. She saw von Donop buried near her house with military honors. The silver watch and spurs of the colonel came into possession of Surgeon Peter Turner, of the First Rhode Island regiment, the former now being in the hands of his great-grandson, James V. P. Turner, of Philadelphia, and the spurs in the estate of the late Henry E. Turner, of Newport, Rhode Island.

The attack at Red Bank and the affair of the next day were fully reported to General Washington, in Colonel Greene's name, by his major, Samuel Ward, in an official letter dated October 23, 1777. On the 26th of October, General David Forman, of New Jersey, then at Red Bank, wrote him further particulars of the situation. The next day a return was made of the troops



Present appearance of the Whittall house, near Fort Mercer, at Red Bank, New Jersey.







Monument erected at Red Bank, New Jersey.

fit for duty in Fort Mercer, and its garrison was then five hundred and thirty-four men, consisting of the First Rhode Island regiment, two hundred and forty-four men; Second Rhode Island regiment, two hundred and twenty-seven men; and the artillery company, sixty-three men. A considerable reinforcement had been effected.

The earthworks and the redoubt are in a fair state of preservation to-day. A thick pine woods filled with underbrush covers the place. A rough monument, much damaged by relic hunters, the inscription defaced by their vandalism, still marks the line of the fortification. On the south side is this inscription: "This monument was erected on the 22 Oct., 1829, to transmit to posterity a grateful remembrance of the patriotism and gallantry of Lieut. Colonel Christopher Greene,<sup>1</sup> who, with four hundred men conquered the hessian army of two thousand troops, then in the British Service, at Red Bank, on the 22nd Oct., 1777. Among the wounded was found their commander, Count Donop, who died of his wounds, and whose body is interred near the fort where he fell."

And on the west side: "A number of the New Jersey & Pennsylvania Volunteers, being desirous to perpetuate the memory of the distinguished Officers and Soldiers who fought and bled in the Glorious struggle for American Independence, have erected this monument on the 22 day of Oct., A. D. 1829."

The defeat of von Donop's force and the disaster in the British fleet, although severe, did not for one moment check the efforts of the Howe brothers and their coadjutors in the attempt to open the Delaware River to the passage of their vessels with supplies.

There was considerable suffering in Philadelphia because of the vigilance of the Americans. Captain Harry Lee and his

<sup>1</sup> It seems strange that his rank is given erroneously.

partisan troopers were ever alert and this made the guard duty for the British grenadiers unpleasant and severe. They all needed some rest from this harassing situation and they felt compelled again to exert themselves to capture the American forts and break the remaining impediments to a safe passage up the river.

On the 28th of October, Brigadier-General James M. Varnum, of Rhode Island, with the remainder of his brigade, was instructed by General Washington to cross the river at Bristol, Pennsylvania, to Burlington, New Jersey, and then march down to Woodbury, a few miles from Red Bank, to form a reserve encampment at that post. He arrived there November 2 and had instructions to co-operate with the commanding officer of Fort Mercer and Fort Mifflin. Brigadier-General David Forman, of the New Jersey State troops, was also directed to collect all the militia possible and report at Woodbury to General Varnum. It was hoped in this way to form an encampment of about sixteen hundred men.

Fort Mifflin at this time was in command of the Baron d'Arendt, Colonel, since March 19, 1777, of the German regiment, Continental army. He had reported at the fort under Washington's orders October 22, when Fort Mercer was being assaulted. On the 26th he wrote to the Commander-in-Chief, giving his professional views of the situation on the island and its dire necessities. He was a very military looking officer, but Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, probably jealous of his superior rank, said he did not consider him very brave. It seems as if General Washington feared their relations might not be of the most pleasant character, but he said: "His knowledge and experience in war fully entitled him to the confidence of every officer and man under his command." Nevertheless, Smith remained in the fort as a subordinate officer. On October 29, however, Colonel d'Arendt was taken ill and by direction of Surgeon Alexander Skinner, First Virginia regiment, Continental in-

This Monument was  
 erected on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1789  
 to transmit to posterity  
 the names of the brave  
 who fell in the  
 of Liberty fought  
 CRISTOPHER ARBENE,  
 who by the solemn agreement  
 he had made of 2000  
 to support the British  
 Service at Red Bank  
 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1789.  
 Amongst the wounded were  
 many that were ordered  
 to be thrown in the sea  
 but were rescued by  
 the British and the  
 who were sent to  
 France to be  
 tried.

Monument of the  
 New Jersey & Pennsylvania  
 to commemorate the  
 of the District of  
 Officers & Soldiers who  
 fought and died in the  
 of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1789  
 for the Cause of  
 INDEPENDENCE  
 The names of the  
 who were killed  
 on the 22<sup>nd</sup> Oct 1789  
 are as follows:

Inscription on the Monument at Red Bank, New Jersey.



fantry, was taken in a boat to Red Bank and placed in a house near by, under the care of the medical men in Fort Mercer. Before leaving the fort the colonel says he instructed Lieutenant-Colonel Smith and Major de Fleury<sup>1</sup> exactly what to do. He asked General Washington that a garrison of seven hundred infantry and at least seventy artillerymen be posted in the fort and on the island.

Much new work had been done on Fort Mifflin and on the very reedy marsh of Mud Island during the past month. The defenses in front had been strengthened to some degree and made secure against the vessels coming from below the chevaux-de-frise; the rear was defended by a fosse with strong palisades and the lower stories of the three block-houses were still some protection against an attack. On the New Jersey side the fort was walled with freestone and the stockade opposite Province Island was made of very heavy pine logs. There was an open platform or water battery opposite Hog Island, on which sixteen eighteen-pounder guns were mounted, pointing down the stream, and one thirty-two-pounder gun was ranged toward Province Island.

The number of men of all arms of the service who were at this time on the island does not appear to have exceeded three hundred. This would seem to have been insufficient to hold an

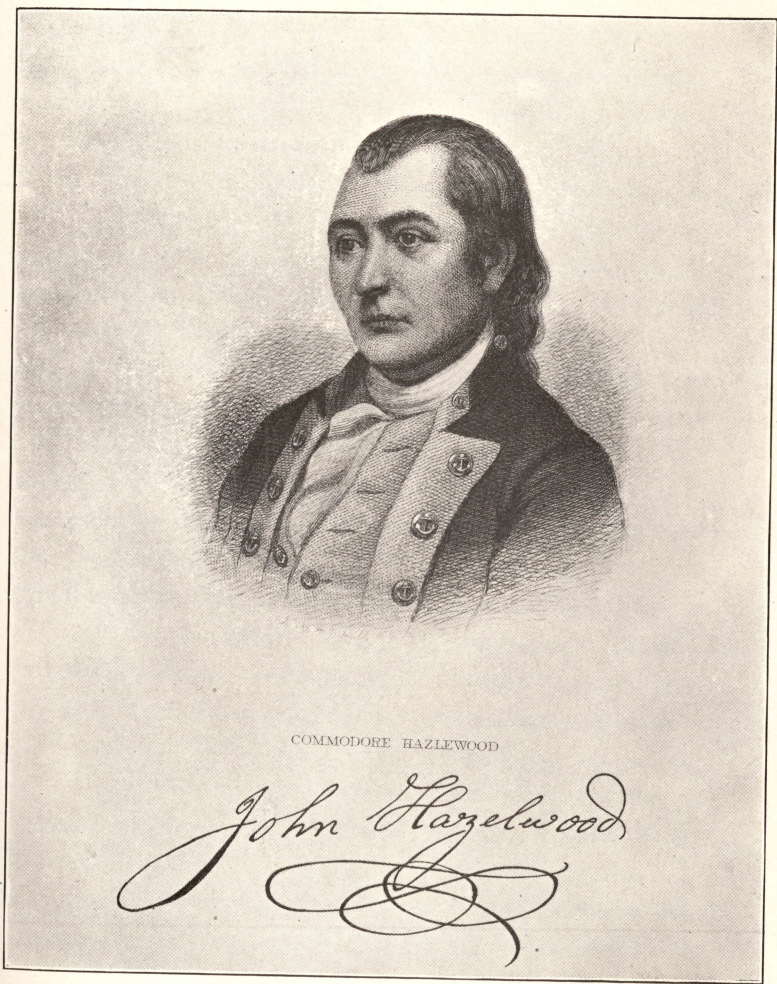
<sup>1</sup> Major the Marquis Francois Louis de Fleury was born August 28, 1749. He had been a captain and engineer in the Continental army, and on October 3, 1777, had been commissioned brigade-major in the legion of Brigadier-General Casimir Pulaski, but had not yet reported to that officer. He had received a horse from the Continental Congress as a testimonial to his gallantry at Brandywine, where his own horse had been shot. He was wounded at Germantown and the horse referred to was killed there. He was made a lieutenant-colonel in the army November 26, 1777, for his good conduct in this siege. Colonel d'Arendt said he was "active and brave," and Lieutenant-Colonel John Laurens said that his "zeal and talents recommend him to public notice." General Washington wrote of him to Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, November 4, as "A Young Man of Talents and has made this branch of Military Science his particular Study." He gained great honor at the storming of Stony Point. —*Magazine of American History*, Vol. I., p. 724.

island seven miles long. For further defence of the river the American troops in New Jersey had erected a battery one mile above Byllinge's Point. On the evening of November 4 the two cannon in this work, one an eighteen-pounder gun and the other a twelve-pounder gun, fired on the Somerset, a sixty-four gun ship, Captain Curry commanding, and moving up to reply, she got aground and was compelled to receive the damaging shot. She put up a signal of distress, hoping for aid from other vessels, but received none. After some time, however, the tide floated her and the attack was over.

The condition of the men in the fort at the approaching inclement season was pitiable indeed. In acknowledging the receipt of some clothing, October 26, Lieutenant-Colonel Smith said: \* \* \* "received fifty blankets, fifty shoes, four coats, one vest, four breeches and two great coats for my poor ragged fellows, now chiefly without breeches, who are obliged to turn out before day, perhaps may soon be obliged to be so all night." He was also greatly in need of ammunition, and he made urgent requisition for these all-important necessities. He asked especially for two artillery sergeants and these men were ordered to report to him. One of them was Moses Porter, a very brave and most efficient soldier in the struggle soon to follow.<sup>1</sup>

Commodore John Hazelwood, of the Pennsylvania State Navy, still commanded the American fleet. Between Lieutenant-Colonel Smith and the Commodore no very friendly feeling existed. Washington expressed his surprise at this in a letter to General Varnum November 4. Smith had a contempt for Hazelwood because he said he did so little to aid his garrison. It is to be feared that on this account the guard duty was not so

<sup>1</sup> He became a colonel of artillery in the regular army of the United States, having been appointed from Massachusetts, and was made a brigadier-general by brevet for distinguished services in the war of 1812.



Commodore John Hazelwood, Pennsylvania Navy.



strictly observed in the galleys as was necessary. A surprise was so liable to occur that General Washington kept the situation constantly in his thoughts and gave such orders as he was able to carry out both on land and in the naval force.

At this time the navy can be summarized in this way: a ship of twenty-eight guns, a brig of sixteen guns, three vessels from thirty-six to twenty guns, two floating batteries of ten and twenty-four-pounder guns each, twelve gondolas of one twenty-four-pounder gun each and several fire ships.

During these days plans for a grand attack were being discussed in British official circles. Captain John Montresor, the chief engineer, made "an arrangement for a general attack on the fort on Mud Island, 6th November, 1777."<sup>1</sup> He knew its real weakness and he had planned a way to capture it. His scheme, however, was never carried out. He had floating batteries now bearing on Fort Mifflin and new works not more than six hundred yards distant that contained two thirty-two-pounder guns, six twenty-four-pounder guns, one eighteen-pounder gun, two eight-inch howitzers, two eight-inch mortars and one thirteen-inch mortar.

A small reinforcement now arrived at Fort Mifflin consisting of two hundred men of the First Virginia regiment, Continental infantry, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel John Green. Lieutenant-Colonel Green had been wounded at Mamaroneck October 21, 1776, and it appears that he thought he outranked Lieutenant-Colonel Smith in commission and therefore should command the garrison.<sup>2</sup> Smith, however, differed from him and declined to relinquish the command except under distinct orders from Washington. These orders he did not receive. On the contrary, Washington expressed the wish in

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine of History*, Vol. VI., p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Smith's commission as lieutenant-colonel was dated February 22, 1777, and Green's March 22, 1777.

a letter to Smith, dated October 28, that he should retain the command. Green, being physically quite infirm, gave up his regimental authority to his major, Robert Ballard, and left the post. It does not appear that he was in active service again during the war.

At Woodbury, on the night of November 3, General Varnum sent the first reinforcement, consisting of twelve officers and two hundred and twenty-four men, over the river to Fort Mifflin. This augmentation of troops he continued during the entire siege, generally at night, and the removal of the sick, wounded and worn-out men was always done at night. Occasionally he went over to the island, as on November 9, to consult and arrange plans with Smith.

By this time General Howe had called in all his army in and around the city of Philadelphia and erected defences and batteries to protect the garrison town. A bridge five hundred and forty feet long had been thrown over the Schuylkill River at Middle Ferry to facilitate the operations about to begin. On November 5 the little battery on Mantua Creek, just above Byllinge's Point fired on the British fleet and a brave little action began. Through the mist and smoke it is said that General Washington saw this encounter from the top of the Chew house in Germantown.

At last, on November 9, the British batteries may be said to have opened for the final bombardment. On that day six pieces of American cannon were dismounted, three block-house guns injured, some of the barracks were destroyed and the heavy palisades badly damaged. The following day, the British having completed five new batteries, one at the hospital wharf, one at a wharf just below it, and three others above their main fortification, at seven o'clock in the morning they opened with four thirty-two pounder guns taken from the Somerset, and six twenty-four pounder guns taken from the Eagle (Lord Howe's





flagship), and several thirteen-inch mortars, joined with the other British batteries to make a great cannonade. The bombs flew thick and fast into the barracks and the men became much demoralized by the killing and wounding of their comrades and by the awful damage done to the works. During that night the firing continued for the purpose of hindering the repair by the working parties of the damage done during the day, and the soldiers became worn out with grievous toil. The British felt that the forts must be subdued before the American troops received reinforcements which they heard were on the march from the northern army.

During the night of November 10 the rain came down in torrents and the morning of the 11th opened very cold. Early in the morning a shell from the battery on Province Island blew up the central block-house. On the northwest of the fort only one gun was now in position, and the most of that side of the fort had fallen, the palisades, struck obliquely, had been broken down and a small battery in front completely leveled. Lieutenant-Colonel Smith sent word to Commodore Hazelwood, describing the dire situation in which he was placed and asked for his active assistance. The American fleet drew near and opened fire, and it is said that Smith waded out in the water to get within calling distance, so as to urge Hazelwood to engage the British batteries at close quarters. But this the commodore did not do. There was at this time nearly two feet of water over the meadows and there were few dry places for the men except inside the damaged fort, the platform of the batteries and the barracks. The wind was blowing a gale and the tide was exceptionally high.

Soon after this effort of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, he received a letter from General Varnum and went into the barracks to write a reply. While he was there a ball passed through the stockades and two stacks of chimneys, struck him severely on

the arm and injured his left hip. He was stunned by the scattering bricks and fell senseless to the floor, where he remained for some time. When he recovered he was placed in a boat and taken to the New Jersey shore at Red Bank. The command then devolved on Lieutenant-Colonel Giles Russell, of the Fourth Connecticut regiment, Continental infantry. He was a veteran of the French and Indian war, had been wounded therein, and General Varnum called him "a sensible and excellent officer." But he had been exhausted by fatigue and was "totally destitute of health." Within twenty-four hours he had to be relieved.

Major Francois Louis, the Vicomte de Fleury, of the Continental engineers, was badly wounded the same day but still continued on duty. Captain-Lieutenant Samuel Treat, of the Second regiment, Continental artillery, a New York officer, was killed by a bursting bomb, and Captain Cord Hazzard, of the Delaware Continental regiment, and Lieutenant James Henry, Second Continental regiment, artillery, were wounded. Great efforts were made on the night of November 11 to repair the damage done during the day.

The morning of November 12 opened with a heavy bombardment, in a strong, cold wind with some snow and rain. During the night a council had been held at General Varnum's headquarters at Woodbury, and of the five field officers present, Major Simeon Thayer,<sup>1</sup> of the Second Rhode Island regiment, having volunteered, was instantly sent to take command of Fort Mifflin. He assumed command early on November

<sup>1</sup> Major Thayer was born in Mendon, Massachusetts, April 21, 1738. He commenced his military life as a lieutenant in the "Army of Observation" in 1775; was taken prisoner at Quebec, December 31, 1776; exchanged July 1, 1777, and made major of the Second Rhode Island regiment. He lost an eye in the battle of Monmouth; retired from the service January 1, 1781, and died October 14, 1800. At Fort Mifflin he made a reputation for cool and determined bravery. General Varnum said of him, "It is impossible for an officer to possess more merit than Colonel Thayer."—*Lee's Memoirs of the War in the Southern Department of the United States*, p. 427.

12. First Lieutenant William Comstock, of Elliott's regiment, Rhode Island State artillery, now had charge of the artillery force in place of Captain-Lieutenant Treat, but he was soon relieved. Lieutenant John George, of the Third regiment, Continental artillery, a Massachusetts officer, was wounded that day and taken to New Jersey. One hundred reinforcements were sent to the fort that day from the Fourth and Eighth regiments, Connecticut Continental line, and the worn-out men of the Pennsylvania and Virginia regiments were relieved. On the morning of November 13, the British opened a battery on old Ferry Wharf, and the last of the block-houses which could serve either as a protection or for offensive warfare, was abandoned. The weather had become very cold, but still the Americans were able to fire one of their eighteen-pounder guns and an occasional shot from their two gun batteries. The garrison at Fort Mifflin on this day consisted of two hundred and eighty-six infantry and twenty artillerymen, a force still unequal to a proper protection of the island and utterly inadequate to resist an assault. In the evening Captain James Lee, with his company of the Second Continental regiment of artillery entered the fort, relieving Lieutenant Comstock. Lee was a Pennsylvanian, and he remained in charge of the artillery and acted with great efficiency until the close of the siege. The casualties were small, being three killed and seven wounded.

On the 14th two floating batteries were sent down the river from Philadelphia, but they were quickly silenced about noon by Captain Lee's guns at the lower battery and the effort was pronounced a failure. There was some firing during the afternoon and also in the evening. First Lieutenant Aaron Steele, Seventh Massachusetts Continental regiment, was severely wounded and died November 24, 1777. A boatload of seamen deserted from the American fleet during the night and the men no doubt informed the British officers of the weakness of

the American force and the condition of the American fort. It is doubtful if they were fully aware of it until then. On this day the naval officers, twenty-one present, held a council of war on the galley Chatham. General Varnum spent a great part of the night in the fortification and he was accompanied by Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, who was somewhat improved. Colonel Smith hoped that he might be able to resume command of Fort Mifflin by the night of November 15 or the next morning. However, he did not do so.

The morning of November 15 opened with a strong westerly wind and the weather fine and cool. All the repairs of the fort had been made that it had been possible to make during the previous night. The British promptly opened with a new battery on Province Island a short distance from Fort Mifflin. This made five batteries, mounting eighteen guns, two mortars and ten howitzers, which they had mounted and ranged for the American works. Soon there was really no safe place about the fortification, every point seemed to be covered by a direct or a cross-fire. Shortly after eight o'clock in the morning the Somerset, sixty-four guns, Captain Curry, and the Isis (or Iris), fifty guns, Captain Cornwallis, went up the channel on the east of the fort to act in front of Fort Mifflin. The Roebuck, forty-four guns, the Pearl, thirty-two guns, the Liverpool frigate, the Cornwallis galley and some small vessels, instantly attacked the little work which the Americans had erected on the east side of Mantua Creek. The great attack of the siege had now opened and a most terrific cannonade began on the devoted garrison. Captain Cornwallis, of the Isis, gained great honor for the effective service he now rendered and for the accuracy of his fire. His vessel and the Roebuck, however, received many severe shots from the American works and from the galleys.

The chevaux-de-frise and the tides during these recent days had caused a singular and unexpected change in the conditions

of the channels. This seems to have been known to the British, but not to the American naval officers. The water had been forced back and the channel on the Pennsylvania side of the river had been deepened and now light draught vessels could work in and up that side of Fort Mifflin. At eleven o'clock in the morning the *Vigilant*, formerly an East Indian and called the *Empress of Russia*, cut down low and mounting twenty-four-pounder guns all on one side, ballasted with stone on the other, and an old hulk with three eighteen-pounder guns, commanded by Lieutenant Botham of the *Eagle*, came up back of Hog Island. In the topmast of the *Vigilant* were forty riflemen. These vessels anchored within three hundred feet of Fort Mifflin and instantly opened fire. At intervals they continued this close bombardment until six o'clock in the evening. A thirty-two-pounder gun from the American battery struck the *Vigilant* fourteen times, but her broadsides soon completed the work of destruction on Mud Island. Very soon all the guns were dismounted, the gun-carriages destroyed, the parapet entirely demolished, the platforms, palisades and traverses ripped up and the block-houses burned. By one o'clock the American ammunition was entirely exhausted and after that hour no response came from the American post. All that the patriots now had to do was to hide somewhere so as to prevent the men in the round-top from picking them off with their rifles. About two o'clock a brief council of war was called by Major Thayer, but it was little that the gallant band could now do. The works were really untenable. Soon after the council was held, Captain Silas Talbot, of the First Rhode Island regiment, afterwards a commodore in the United States Navy, was severely wounded. Captain Stephen Brown, Fourth Connecticut regiment, Continental infantry; Captain Nathan Stoddard, of the Eighth Connecticut regiment, Continental infantry, and First Lieutenant James Mackinson, of the Second regiment, Continental artillery, were

killed by shots from the Vigilant. The company of Continental artillery was nearly destroyed. The Connecticut Continentals seem to have borne the brunt of the contest.<sup>1</sup>

The American naval force does not appear to have done much service on this day. Major Thayer applied to Commodore Hazelwood for assistance to drive away the Vigilant and the hulk before mentioned, but he failed to do so. With desperate energy, however, the little garrison held its position, hourly expecting an assault and longing only for the darkness. At a quarter of three Major Thayer was informed that the floating batteries and galleys were trying to get near to aid him, but this was found impossible on account of the adverse wind blowing very strongly. The Americans had lost thirty-eight men killed and wounded that day, and the British loss, in their navy, had been

<sup>1</sup> Brigadier-General Jedediah Huntington wrote to Governor Trumbull, of Connecticut: "We have lost some gallant officers and men."

Some of the casualties in the Connecticut troops were as follows:

Private Alvin Ames, Captain Jedediah Hyde's Company, Fourth Connecticut, killed November 11, 1777.

Private Mordecai Bedeant, Captain Samuel Comstock's Company, Eighth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Simeon Booten, Captain Samuel Comstock's Company, Eighth Connecticut, wounded and died November 26, 1777.

Private Nathan Brown, Captain Sylvanus Brown's Company, Eighth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Beriah Halbard, Captain John Harmon's Company, Fourth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Nathaniel Harris, Captain Paul Brigham's Company, Eighth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private William Jenkins, Captain Samuel Comstock's Company, Eighth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Constant Matthewson, Captain Simon Spaulding's Independent Company, of Connecticut, killed November 14, 1777.

Private Samuel Patten, Captain David Smith's Company, Eighth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Uriah Pease, Captain John Harmon's Company, Fourth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Richard Sowas, Captain Jedediah Hyde's Company, Fourth Connecticut, killed November 15, 1777.

Private Luther Waterman, Captain Abner Bacon's Company, Fourth Connecticut, killed November 14, 1777.

six killed and twenty wounded.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that during the entire siege of Fort Mifflin the American loss was two hundred and fifty killed and wounded.

It was nearly eleven o'clock at night, November 15, when the boats which General Varnum had sent to the island were filled with the worn-out soldiers and they pushed off from the fort they had defended so well and rowed over toward the New Jersey shore. The wounded and sick were sent into Fort Mercer to be cared for by the surgeons there.

It was two o'clock in the morning of November 16 before Major Thayer, the brave commander, having placed on the boats everything of value that could be transported, and having set fire to the barracks and the remains of the block-houses, left the island with the forty men whom he had kept to aid him. Up to that hour the stars and stripes had been flying from the staff of the fort. At half-past seven that morning a few sailors from the British fleet landed on Mud Island and hoisted the English ensign. At nine o'clock Sir George Osborne and a small force came from Carpenter's Island in eight flat-bottomed boats, took formal possession of the island and instantly placed four thirty-two-pounder guns in a little battery which by rapid exertion they restored. Then the grenadiers of the Royal Guards arrived with Brigadier-General Samuel Cleaveland and officers and men of the Royal artillery regiment. Desolation was all around and evidences of a fiercely defended position were everywhere apparent. Every dismounted cannon was stained with human blood. Never were the orders to defend a post to the last extremity more perfectly carried out than in this affair.

In the official report of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, sent to

<sup>1</sup> Somerset, five wounded; Isis, three wounded; Roebuck, three killed, seven wounded; Pearl, one master killed, three seamen wounded; Vigilant, one midshipman and one seaman killed; Cornwallis, one master and one pilot wounded.

General Washington November 16,<sup>1</sup> the gallant conduct of the following named officers was very favorably referred to: Captain Edmund B. Dickinson, First Virginia Continental regiment (afterward Major of his regiment and killed at the battle of Monmouth), who was in charge of two guns on the extreme left of the works; Captain George Walls, Fourth Virginia Continental regiment; Captain William Dent Bell, Sixth Maryland Continental regiment. The splendid defence by Major Thayer in the closing hours completely eclipsed the previous good conduct of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, and the name of the former was on the lips of every patriot. Thayer had been everywhere, at every hour of the entire bombardment, and his skill, firmness and strength had been severely tested and found equal to the occasion. Lord Cornwallis remarked that the Americans "lost a great number of brave fellows" and he called the fort "a cursed little mud island."

On the next day, November 17, General Washington directed Major-General Arthur St. Clair, Major-General John de Kalb and Brigadier-General Henry Knox, of the Continental Army, to go over to New Jersey and examine and report whether Fort Mercer could now resist a determined attack from the British, which was reported to be imminent. They were directed to confer with Commodore Hazelwood and the American captains. These general officers returned with their report to the American camp in Pennsylvania on the evening of November 19. General Washington wrote to General Varnum the same day, saying: "They are all clear in their opinion that keeping possession of the Jersey shore at or near Red Bank is of the last importance. \* \* \* Altho I am anxious to have the fort kept I do not mean that it should be done at all even so as to endanger

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Vol. XIX., p. 372.

the safety of the Men without any probability of success.”<sup>1</sup> He also desired Colonel Greene to hold the fort, if possible, until the relief arrived. They told General Washington that they thought it would be well for the American fleet to take advantage of the flood tide on the night of November 20 and move up the river to Bordentown or Burlington.

At eleven o'clock on the night of November 17, Lieutenant-General Cornwallis marched out of Philadelphia over the Middle Ferry, proceeded to Chester and crossed the Delaware River to Byllinge's Point at noon of November 18, for the purpose of again attacking Fort Mercer. He had with him the Fifth, Fifteenth, Seventeenth, Thirty-third and Fifty-sixth regiments of the British foot, a detachment of Hessians and of light infantry troops, and twelve light guns and several howitzers. His force was about two thousand men. At Byllinge's Point he was reinforced by between two and three thousand men, the corps of Major-General Sir Thomas Wilson, consisting of five battalions, which had come around from New York by ship. Upon the approach of this formidable army of Lord Cornwallis, notice of which had promptly been sent to General Varnum, he gave orders, November 19, for the fort to be dismantled and the works destroyed by Captain du Plessis. This was accomplished during that night, and the early morning of the 20th found the works entirely evacuated. General Varnum had moved his command that night to Haddonfield and thence to Mount Holly.

In the meantime Major-General Nathanael Greene had crossed the river at Bristol with a considerable force—the entire brigade of Brigadier-General Jedediah Huntington and one hundred and seventy of Morgan's riflemen—for the purpose of aiding General Varnum, if necessary, and of giving fight to Lord Cornwallis, if prudent. A successful movement, however, depended to a great extent upon his being efficiently

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Magazine*, Vol. XIX., p. 488.

reinforced and supported by a column of men from the Northern Department, released from active work since the capitulation of Burgoyne, and which, by the orders of Washington, transmitted by his active aide-de-camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Hamilton, had been ordered to New Jersey. Lord Cornwallis, however, received his reinforcements sooner than Brigadier-General John Glover could effect a junction with Greene, and so the British army came up to Gloucester county numerically much stronger than the corps under Greene. An attack by Greene was then deemed very hazardous. A spirited movement was made at Gloucester, November 25, by Major-General Lafayette, who had accompanied Greene (although he had hardly recovered from a wound received at Brandywine), against a considerable body of Hessian troops. Lafayette, as usual, behaved in the most gallant manner on this occasion and gained for himself much glory.

On the night of November 19, thirteen American galleys and twelve armed boats quietly sailed up the river as far as Burlington. The next night, and before five o'clock the following morning, the Continental brig *Andrea Doria*, the schooner *Delaware*, Captain Eyre, the xebecs *Repulse* and *Champion*, two floating batteries, the *Putnam* and the *Arnold*, were burned, while the sloops *Race Horse* and *Fly*, the brig *Convention*, Captain Rice, and four shallops, passing close to the New Jersey shore unmolested, sailed up to Burlington and anchored in Neshanic and Rancocas creeks. Some of the ships that were fired burned for five hours off Gloucester Point, and four boats blew up by the ignition of their magazines.

The *chevaux-de-frise*, which for seven weeks had detained the British fleet and kept them from subduing the forts and from supplying Philadelphia with necessary food, was now abandoned. It would appear, however, as if remains of these barricades were in the river as long as the war lasted. On

February 21, 1784, seven merchants of Philadelphia petitioned the Supreme Executive Council of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to have them all removed as injurious to the trade of the city.<sup>1</sup>

On the 4th of November, 1777, the Continental Congress passed the following resolutions:

*“Resolved, That Congress have an high sense of the merit of Colonel Greene and the officers and men under his command in their late gallant defence of the fort at Red Bank on Delaware river; and that an elegant sword be provided by the board of war and presented to Colonel Greene.*

*“Resolved, That Congress have an high sense of the merit of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith and the officers and men under his command in their late gallant defence of Fort Mifflin on the river Delaware; and that an elegant sword be provided by the board of war and presented to Lieutenant-Colonel Smith.*

*“Resolved, That Congress have an high sense of the merit of Commodore Hazelwood, commander of the naval force in Delaware river, in the service of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and of the officers and men under his command in the late gallant defence of their country against the British fleet, whereby two of their men-of-war were destroyed and four others compelled to retire; and that an elegant sword be provided by the marine committee and presented to Commodore Hazelwood.”*

The sword intended for Colonel Greene was never presented to him while he lived, but came into possession of his family after his death. In consideration of the great gallantry of Major Thayer, it seemed as if he were the proper recipient of a sword. But this action of Congress was anterior to the close of the siege and apparently the grand attack and the stubborn resistance of the closing hours were ignored. Considerable dissatisfaction

<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Archives*, Second Series, Vol. I., pp. 757-773.

was expressed among the soldiers and the people. The whole matter was awkward, but the situation could not now be improved. General Varnum pointed out the mistake in a letter which he wrote August 2, 1786. On the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Smith, John Howland published an article in a Providence, Rhode Island, paper, signing the same, "A Friend to Justice," in which he gave a complete narrative of the entire affair and endeavored to point out who was the active man in the defence of Fort Mifflin.<sup>1</sup> It does not appear that Major Thayer was ever specially honored for his part in the affair.

On the 28th of November, 1777, the Continental Congress ordered that an inquiry be made into the causes of the evacuation of Fort Mercer, and into the loss of Fort Mifflin, and into the conduct of the principal officers commanding those forts.

The American comments on the defence of the Delaware were varied and interesting. Some thought that if still another chevaux-de-frise had been placed between Hog Island and Mud Island, the resistance would have been successful, or at least might have been prolonged until reinforcements arrived from the north. Some thought it might have been possible, had Washington's army been enlarged, to have sent a choice body of troops to the west side of the Schuylkill River and to have driven the British from Province Island. This plan, however, was doubtful of success and it might have opened to the British the American stores at Easton, Bethlehem and Allentown. General Washington wrote to his brother, John Augustus Washington, November 26, in reference to the troops of the Northern Army reluctantly sent forward by General Gates: "Had the reinforcements from the northward arrived but ten days sooner, it would, I think, have put it in my power to save Fort Mifflin, which defended the chevaux-de-frise; and consequently have rendered

<sup>1</sup> *Cowell's Spirit of '76 in Rhode Island*, pp. 299-304.

Philadelphia a very ineligious situation for them this winter." <sup>1</sup> The long defence, however, did great credit to the American arms and it will ever reflect glory on the officers and men who garrisoned the two forts and who resisted two severe attacks, one with success and the other with supreme valor. This action had the effect of greatly delaying other plans which had been discussed in British councils; the active work of this season's campaign had to close, and western New Jersey and eastern Pennsylvania were to some extent secure from the indiscriminate ravages of the British and Hessian armies.

The loyalist, Galloway, remarked on this condition of affairs, as follows: By neglecting to take post at Red Bank on the East and by the blunder of not permitting the dykes on the West side of the Delaware to be repaired, the fort on the Island which might have been taken in a few days, held out a siege of near six weeks, which entirely prevented the more important operations against the main force of the enemy, at a season of the year the most proper for action." <sup>2</sup>

The expeditions and the fightings had now only secured to the British a pleasant city for the winter of 1777-8, giving them a chance to get food from the storehouses in New York, but they had accomplished really nothing in the way of subduing the rebellion in what they considered the colonies of the British empire.

<sup>1</sup> *Ford's Writings of George Washington*, Vol. VI., p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Galloway's Letters to a Nobleman on the Conduct of the War in the Middle Colonies*.

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