

# ALFRED THAYER MAHAN

THE MAJOR OPERATIONS  
OF THE NAVIES IN THE  
WAR OF AMERICAN  
INDEPENDENCE

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American Independence**

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*The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence:*

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# **A. T. Mahan**

# **The Major Operations of the Navies in the War of American Independence**

## **PREFACE**

The contents of this volume were first contributed as a chapter, under the title of "Major Operations, 1762-1783," to the "History of the Royal Navy," in seven volumes, published by Messrs. Sampson Low, Marston, and Company, under the general editorship of the late Sir William Laird Clowes. For permission to republish now in this separate form, the author has to express his thanks to the publishers of that work.

In the Introduction following this Preface, the author has summarized the general lesson to be derived from the course of this War of American Independence, as distinct from the particular discussion and narration of the several events which constitute the body of the treatment. These lessons he conceives to carry admonition for the present and future based upon the surest foundations; namely, upon the experience of the past as applicable to present conditions. The essential similarity between

the two is evident in a common dependence upon naval strength. There has been a careful rereading and revision of the whole text; but the changes found necessary to be made are much fewer than might have been anticipated after the lapse of fifteen years. Numerous footnotes in the History, specifying the names of ships in fleets, and of their commanders in various battles, have been omitted, as not necessary to the present purpose, though eminently proper and indeed indispensable to an extensive work of general reference and of encyclopædic scope, such as the History is. Certain notes retained with the initials W.L.C. are due to the editor of that work.

*A.T. MAHAN.*

December, 1912.

# INTRODUCTION

## THE TENDENCY OF WARS TO SPREAD

Macaulay, in a striking passage of his Essay on Frederick the Great, wrote, "The evils produced by his wickedness were felt in lands where the name of Prussia was unknown. In order that he might rob a neighbour whom he had promised to defend, black men fought on the coast of Coromandel, and red men scalped each other by the Great Lakes of North America."

Wars, like conflagrations, tend to spread; more than ever perhaps in these days of close international entanglements and rapid communications. Hence the anxiety aroused and the care exercised by the governments of Europe, the most closely associated and the most sensitive on the earth, to forestall the kindling of even the slightest flame in regions where all alike are interested, though with diverse objects; regions such as the Balkan group of States in their exasperating relations with the Turkish empire, under which the Balkan peoples see constantly the bitter oppression of men of their own blood and religious faith by the tyranny of a government which can neither assimilate nor protect. The condition of Turkish European provinces is a perpetual lesson to those disposed to ignore or to depreciate the immense difficulties of administering politically, under one

government, peoples traditionally and racially distinct, yet living side by side; not that the situation is much better anywhere in the Turkish empire. This still survives, though in an advanced state of decay, simply because other States are not prepared to encounter the risks of a disturbance which might end in a general bonfire, extending its ravages to districts very far remote from the scene of the original trouble.

Since these words were written, actual war has broken out in the Balkans. The Powers, anxious each as to the effect upon its own ambitions of any disturbance in European Turkey, have steadily abstained from efficient interference in behalf of the downtrodden Christians of Macedonia, surrounded by sympathetic kinsfolk. Consequently, in thirty years past this underbrush has grown drier and drier, fit kindling for fuel. In the Treaty of Berlin, in 1877, stipulation was made for their betterment in governance, and we are now told that in 1880 Turkey framed a scheme for such,—and pigeonholed it. At last, under unendurable conditions, spontaneous combustion has followed. There can be no assured peace until it is recognised practically that Christianity, by the respect which it alone among religions inculcates for the welfare of the individual, is an essential factor in developing in nations the faculty of self-government, apart from which fitness to govern others does not exist. To keep Christian peoples under the rule of a non-Christian race, is, therefore, to perpetuate a state hopeless of reconciliation and pregnant of sure explosion. Explosions always

happen inconveniently. *Obsta principiis* is the only safe rule; the application of which is not suppression of overt discontent but relief of grievances.

The War of American Independence was no exception to the general rule of propagation that has been noted. When our forefathers began to agitate against the Stamp Act and the other measures that succeeded it, they as little foresaw the spread of their action to the East and West Indies, to the English Channel and Gibraltar, as did the British ministry which in framing the Stamp Act struck the match from which these consequences followed. When Benedict Arnold on Lake Champlain by vigorous use of small means obtained a year's delay for the colonists, he compassed the surrender of Burgoyne in 1777. The surrender of Burgoyne, justly estimated as the decisive event of the war, was due to Arnold's previous action, gaining the delay which is a first object for all defence, and which to the unprepared colonists was a vital necessity. The surrender of Burgoyne determined the intervention of France, in 1778; the intervention of France the accession of Spain thereto, in 1779. The war with these two Powers led to the maritime occurrences, the interferences with neutral trade, that gave rise to the Armed Neutrality; the concurrence of Holland in which brought war between that country and Great Britain, in 1780. This extension of hostilities affected not only the West Indies but the East, through the possessions of the Dutch in both quarters and at the Cape of Good Hope. If not the occasion of Suffren being sent

to India, the involvement of Holland in the general war had a powerful effect upon the brilliant operations which he conducted there; as well as at, and for, the Cape of Good Hope, then a Dutch possession, on his outward voyage.

In the separate publication of these pages, my intention and hope are to bring home incidentally to American readers this vast extent of the struggle to which our own Declaration of Independence was but the prelude; with perchance the further needed lesson for the future, that questions the most remote from our own shores may involve us in unforeseen difficulties, especially if we permit a train of communication to be laid by which the outside fire can leap step by step to the American continents. How great a matter a little fire kindleth! Our Monroe Doctrine is in final analysis merely the formulation of national precaution that, as far as in its power to prevent, there shall not lie scattered about the material which foreign possessions in these continents might supply for the extension of combustion originating elsewhere; and the objection to Asiatic immigration, however debased by less worthy feelings or motives, is on the part of thinking men simply a recognition of the same danger arising from the presence of an inassimilable mass of population, racially and traditionally distinct in characteristics, behind which would lie the sympathies and energy of a powerful military and naval Asiatic empire.

Conducive as each of these policies is to national safety and peace amid international conflagration, neither the one nor the

other can be sustained without the creation and maintenance of a preponderant navy. In the struggle with which this book deals, Washington at the time said that the navies had the casting vote. To Arnold on Lake Champlain, to DeGrasse at Yorktown, fell the privilege of exercising that prerogative at the two great decisive moments of the War. To the Navy also, beyond any other single instrumentality, was due eighty years later the successful suppression of the movement of Secession. The effect of the blockade of the Southern coasts upon the financial and military efficiency of the Confederate Government has never been closely calculated, and probably is incalculable. At these two principal national epochs control of the water was the most determinative factor. In the future, upon the Navy will depend the successful maintenance of the two leading national policies mentioned; the two most essential to the part this country is to play in the progress of the world.

For, while numerically great in population, the United States is not so in proportion to territory; nor, though wealthy, is she so in proportion to her exposure. That Japan at four thousand miles distance has a population of over three hundred to the square mile, while our three great Pacific States average less than twenty, is a portentous fact. The immense aggregate numbers resident elsewhere in the United States cannot be transferred thither to meet an emergency, nor contribute effectively to remedy this insufficiency; neither can a land force on the defensive protect, if the way of the sea is open. In such opposition

of smaller numbers against larger, nowhere do organisation and development count as much as in navies. Nowhere so well as on the sea can a general numerical inferiority be compensated by specific numerical superiority, resulting from the correspondence between the force employed and the nature of the ground. It follows strictly, by logic and by inference, that by no other means can safety be insured as economically and as efficiently. Indeed, in matters of national security, economy and efficiency are equivalent terms. The question of the Pacific is probably the greatest world problem of the twentieth century, in which no great country is so largely and directly interested as is the United States. For the reason given it is essentially a naval question, the third in which the United States finds its well-being staked upon naval adequacy.

# CHAPTER I

## THE NAVAL CAMPAIGN ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN

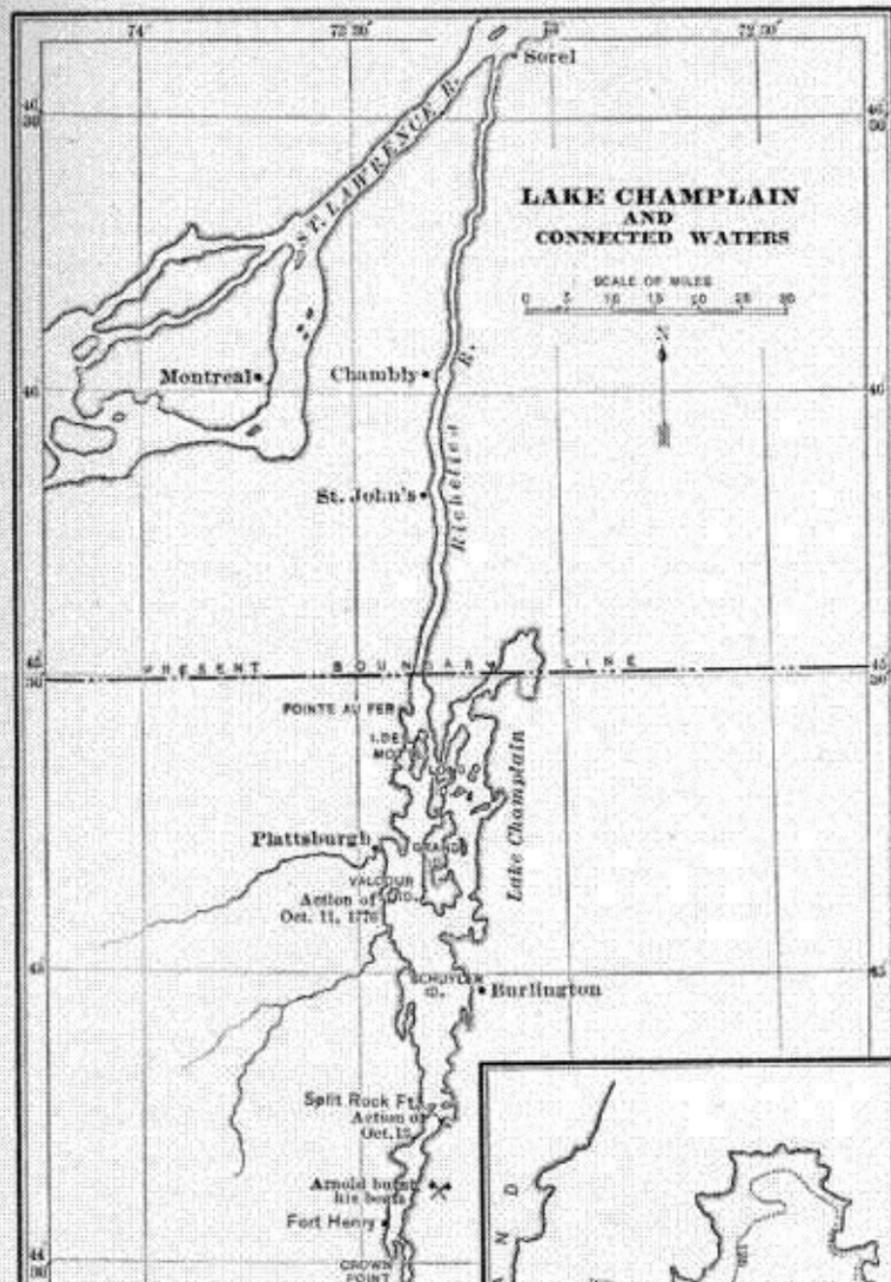
### 1775-1776

At the time when hostilities began between Great Britain and her American Colonies, the fact was realised generally, being evident to reason and taught by experience, that control of the water, both ocean and inland, would have a preponderant effect upon the contest. It was clear to reason, for there was a long seaboard with numerous interior navigable watercourses, and at the same time scanty and indifferent communications by land. Critical portions of the territory involved were yet an unimproved wilderness. Experience, the rude but efficient schoolmaster of that large portion of mankind which gains knowledge only by hard knocks, had confirmed through the preceding French wars the inferences of the thoughtful. Therefore, conscious of the great superiority of the British Navy, which, however, had not then attained the unchallenged supremacy of a later day, the American leaders early sought the alliance of the Bourbon kingdoms, France and Spain, the hereditary enemies of Great Britain. There alone could be found the counterpoise to a power which, if unchecked, must ultimately prevail.

Nearly three years elapsed before the Colonists accomplished this object, by giving a demonstration of their strength in the enforced surrender of Burgoyne's army at Saratoga. This event has merited the epithet "decisive," because, and only because, it decided the intervention of France. It may be affirmed, with little hesitation, that this victory of the colonists was directly the result of naval force,—that of the colonists themselves. It was the cause that naval force from abroad, entering into the contest, transformed it from a local to a universal war, and assured the independence of the Colonies. That the Americans were strong enough to impose the capitulation of Saratoga, was due to the invaluable year of delay secured to them by their little navy on Lake Champlain, created by the indomitable energy, and handled with the indomitable courage, of the traitor, Benedict Arnold. That the war spread from America to Europe, from the English Channel to the Baltic, from the Bay of Biscay to the Mediterranean, from the West Indies to the Mississippi, and ultimately involved the waters of the remote peninsula of Hindustan, is traceable, through Saratoga, to the rude flotilla which in 1776 anticipated its enemy in the possession of Lake Champlain. The events which thus culminated merit therefore a clearer understanding, and a fuller treatment, than their intrinsic importance and petty scale would justify otherwise.

In 1775, only fifteen years had elapsed since the expulsion of the French from the North American continent. The concentration of their power, during its continuance, in the valley

of the St. Lawrence, had given direction to the local conflict, and had impressed upon men's minds the importance of Lake Champlain, of its tributary Lake George, and of the Hudson River, as forming a consecutive, though not continuous, water line of communications from the St. Lawrence to New York. The strength of Canada against attack by land lay in its remoteness, in the wilderness to be traversed before it was reached, and in the strength of the line of the St. Lawrence, with the fortified posts of Montreal and Quebec on its northern bank. The wilderness, it is true, interposed its passive resistance to attacks from Canada as well as to attacks upon it; but when it had been traversed, there were to the southward no such strong natural positions confronting the assailant. Attacks from the south fell upon the front, or at best upon the flank, of the line of the St. Lawrence. Attacks from Canada took New York and its dependencies in the rear.



## Lake Champlain and Connected Waters

These elements of natural strength, in the military conditions of the North, were impressed upon the minds of the Americans by the prolonged resistance of Canada to the greatly superior numbers of the British Colonists in the previous wars. Regarded, therefore, as a base for attacks, of a kind with which they were painfully familiar, but to be undergone now under disadvantages of numbers and power never before experienced, it was desirable to gain possession of the St. Lawrence and its posts before they were strengthened and garrisoned. At this outset of hostilities, the American insurgents, knowing clearly their own minds, possessed the advantage of the initiative over the British government, which still hesitated to use against those whom it styled rebels the preventive measures it would have taken at once against a recognised enemy.

Under these circumstances, in May, 1775, a body of two hundred and seventy Americans, led by Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold, seized the posts of Ticonderoga and Crown Point, which were inadequately garrisoned. These are on the upper waters of Lake Champlain, where it is less than a third of a mile wide; Ticonderoga being on a peninsula formed by the lake and the inlet from Lake George, Crown Point on a promontory twelve miles lower down.<sup>1</sup> They were positions of

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<sup>1</sup> In customary representation of maps, North is upper, and movement northward is commonly spoken of as up. It is necessary therefore to bear in mind that the flow of

recognised importance, and had been advanced posts of the British in previous wars. A schooner being found there, Arnold, who had been a seaman, embarked in her and hurried to the foot of the lake. The wind failed him when still thirty miles from St. John's, another fortified post on the lower narrows, where the lake gradually tapers down to the Richelieu River, its outlet to the St. Lawrence. Unable to advance otherwise, Arnold took to his boats with thirty men, pulled through the night, and at six o'clock on the following morning surprised the post, in which were only a sergeant and a dozen men. He reaped the rewards of celerity. The prisoners informed him that a considerable body of troops was expected from Canada, on its way to Ticonderoga; and this force in fact reached St. John's on the next day. When it arrived, Arnold was gone, having carried off a sloop which he found there and destroyed everything else that could float. By such trifling means two active officers had secured the temporary control of the lake itself and of the approaches to it from the south. There being no roads, the British, debarred from the water line, were unable to advance. Sir Guy Carleton, Governor and Commander-in-Chief in Canada, strengthened the works at St. John's, and built a schooner; but his force was inadequate to meet that of the Americans.

The seizure of the two posts, being an act of offensive war, was not at once pleasing to the American Congress, which still clung to the hope of reconciliation; but events were marching

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water from Lake George to the St. Lawrence, though northward, is *down*.

rapidly, and ere summer was over the invasion of Canada was ordered. General Montgomery, appointed to that enterprise, embarked at Crown Point with two thousand men on September 4th, and soon afterwards appeared before St. John's, which after prolonged operations capitulated on the 3d of November. On the 13th Montgomery entered Montreal, and thence pressed down the St. Lawrence to Pointe aux Trembles, twenty miles above Quebec. There he joined Arnold, who in the month of October had crossed the northern wilderness, between the head waters of the Kennebec River and St. Lawrence. On the way he had endured immense privations, losing five hundred men of the twelve hundred with whom he started; and upon arriving opposite Quebec, on the 10th of November, three days had been unavoidably spent in collecting boats to pass the river. Crossing on the night of the 13th, this adventurous soldier and his little command climbed the Heights of Abraham by the same path that had served Wolfe so well sixteen years before. With characteristic audacity he summoned the place. The demand of course was refused; but that Carleton did not fall at once upon the little band of seven hundred that bearded him shows by how feeble a tenure Great Britain then held Canada. Immediately after the junction Montgomery advanced on Quebec, where he appeared on the 5th of December. Winter having already begun, and neither his numbers nor his equipments being adequate to regular siege operations, he very properly decided to try the desperate chance of an assault upon the strongest fortress in

America. This was made on the night of December 31st, 1775. Whatever possibility of success there may have been vanished with the death of Montgomery, who fell at the head of his men.

The American army retired three miles up the river, went into winter-quarters, and established a land blockade of Quebec, which was cut off from the sea by the ice. "For five months," wrote Carleton to the Secretary for War, on the 14th of May, 1776, "this town has been closely invested by the rebels." From this unpleasant position it was relieved on the 6th of May, when signals were exchanged between it and the *Surprise*, the advance ship of a squadron under Captain Charles Douglas,<sup>2</sup> which had sailed from England on the 11th of March. Arriving off the mouth of the St. Lawrence, on the morning of April 12th, Douglas found ice extending nearly twenty miles to sea, and packed too closely to admit of working through it by dexterous steering. The urgency of the case not admitting delay, he ran his ship, the *Isis*, 50, with a speed of five knots, against a large piece of ice about ten or twelve feet thick, to test the effect. The ice, probably softened by salt water and salt air, went to pieces. "Encouraged by this experiment," continues Douglas, somewhat magnificently, "we thought it an enterprise worthy an English ship of the line in our King and country's sacred cause, and an effort due to the gallant defenders of Quebec, to make the attempt of pressing her by force of sail, through the thick, broad,

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<sup>2</sup> Afterwards Captain of the Fleet (Chief of Staff) to Rodney in his great campaign of 1782. *Post*, p. 222. He died a Rear-Admiral and Baronet in 1789.

and closely connected fields of ice, to which we saw no bounds towards the western part of our horizon. Before night (when blowing a snow-storm, we brought-to, or rather stopped), we had penetrated about eight leagues into it, describing our path all the way with bits of the sheathing of the ship's bottom, and sometimes pieces of the cutwater, but none of the oak plank; and it was pleasant enough at times, when we stuck fast, to see Lord Petersham exercising his troops on the crusted surface of that fluid through which the ship had so recently sailed." It took nine days of this work to reach Anticosti Island, after which the ice seems to have given no more trouble; but further delay was occasioned by fogs, calms, and head winds.

Upon the arrival of the ships of war, the Americans at once retreated. During the winter, though reinforcements must have been received from time to time, they had wasted from exposure, and from small-pox, which ravaged the camp. On the 1st of May the returns showed nineteen hundred men present, of whom only a thousand were fit for duty. There were then on hand but three days' provisions, and none other nearer than St. John's. The inhabitants would of course render no further assistance to the Americans after the ships arrived. The Navy had again decided the fate of Canada, and was soon also to determine that of Lake Champlain.



Major-General Philip Schuyler



Edward Pellew, afterwards Admiral, Lord Exmouth

When two hundred troops had landed from the ships, Carleton marched out, "to see," he said, "what these mighty boasters were about." The sneer was unworthy a man of his generous character, for the boasters had endured much for faint chances of success; and the smallness of the reinforcement which encouraged him to act shows either an extreme prudence on his part, or the narrow margin by which Quebec escaped. He found the enemy busy with preparations for retreat, and upon his appearance they abandoned their camp. Their forces on the two sides of the river being now separated by the enemy's shipping, the Americans retired first to Sorel, where the Richelieu enters the St. Lawrence, and thence continued to fall back by gradual stages. It was not until June 15th that Arnold quitted Montreal; and at the end of June the united force was still on the Canadian side of the present border line. On the 3d of July it reached Crown Point, in a pitiable state from small-pox and destitution.

Both parties began at once to prepare for a contest upon Lake Champlain. The Americans, small as their flotilla was, still kept the superiority obtained for them by Arnold's promptitude a year before. On the 25th of June the American General Schuyler, commanding the Northern Department, wrote: "We have happily such a naval superiority on Lake Champlain, that I have a confident hope the enemy will not appear upon it this campaign, especially as our force is increasing by the addition of gondolas, two nearly finished. Arnold, however,"—whose technical knowledge caused him to be intrusted with the naval

preparations,—"says that 300 carpenters should be employed and a large number of gondolas, row-galleys, etc., be built, twenty or thirty at least. There is great difficulty in getting the carpenters needed." Arnold's ideas were indeed on a scale worthy of the momentous issues at stake. "To augment our navy on the lake appears to me of the utmost importance. There is water between Crown Point and Pointe au Fer for vessels of the largest size. I am of opinion that row-galleys are the best construction and cheapest for this lake. Perhaps it may be well to have one frigate of 36 guns. She may carry 18-pounders on the Lake, and be superior to any vessel that can be built or floated from St. John's."

Unfortunately for the Americans, their resources in men and means were far inferior to those of their opponents, who were able eventually to carry out, though on a somewhat smaller scale, Arnold's idea of a sailing ship, strictly so called, of force as yet unknown in inland waters. Such a ship, aided as she was by two consorts of somewhat similar character, dominated the Lake as soon as she was afloat, reversing all the conditions. To place and equip her, however, required time, invaluable time, during which Arnold's two schooners exercised control. Baron Riedesel, the commander of the German contingent with Carleton, after examining the American position at Ticonderoga, wrote, "If we could have begun our expedition four weeks earlier, I am satisfied that everything would have been ended this year (1776); but, not having shelter nor other necessary things, we were unable

to remain at the other [southern] end of Champlain." So delay favors the defence, and changes issues. What would have been the effect upon the American cause if, simultaneously with the loss of New York, August 20th-September 15th, had come news of the fall of Ticonderoga, the repute of which for strength stood high? Nor was this all; for in that event, the plan which was wrecked in 1777 by Sir William Howe's ill-conceived expedition to the Chesapeake would doubtless have been carried out in 1776. In a contemporary English paper occurs the following significant item: "London, September 26th, 1776. Advices have been received here from Canada, dated August 12th, that General Burgoyne's army has found it impracticable to get across the lakes this season. The naval force of the Provincials is too great for them to contend with at present. They must build larger vessels for this purpose, and these cannot be ready before next summer. The design *was*<sup>3</sup> that the two armies commanded by Generals Howe and Burgoyne should coöperate; that they should both be on the Hudson River at the same time; that they should join about Albany, and thereby cut off all communication between the northern and southern Colonies."<sup>4</sup>

As Arnold's more ambitious scheme could not be realised, he had to content himself with gondolas and galleys, for the force he was to command as well as to build. The precise difference between the two kinds of rowing vessels thus distinguished by

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<sup>3</sup> Author's italics.

<sup>4</sup> *Remembrancer*, iv. 291.

name, the writer has not been able to ascertain. The gondola was a flat-bottomed boat, and inferior in nautical qualities—speed, handiness, and seaworthiness—to the galleys, which probably were keeled. The latter certainly carried sails, and may have been capable of beating to windward. Arnold preferred them, and stopped the building of gondolas. "The galleys," he wrote, "are quick moving, which will give us a great advantage in the open lake." The complements of the galleys were eighty men, of the gondolas forty-five; from which, and from their batteries, it may be inferred that the latter were between one third and one half the size of the former. The armaments of the two were alike in character, but those of the gondolas much lighter. American accounts agree with Captain Douglas's report of one galley captured by the British. In the bows, an 18 and a 12-pounder; in the stern, two 9's; in broadside, from four to six 6's. There is in this a somewhat droll reminder of the disputed merits of bow, stern, and broadside fire, in a modern iron-clad; and the practical conclusion is much the same. The gondolas had one 12-pounder and two 6's. All the vessels of both parties carried a number of swivel guns.

Amid the many difficulties which lack of resources imposed upon all American undertakings, Arnold succeeded in getting afloat with three schooners, a sloop, and five gondolas, on the 20th of August. He cruised at the upper end of Champlain till the 1st of September, when he moved rapidly north, and on the 3d anchored in the lower narrows, twenty-five miles above St.

John's, stretching his line from shore to shore. Scouts had kept him informed of the progress of the British naval preparations, so that he knew that there was no immediate danger; while an advanced position, maintained with a bold front, would certainly prevent reconnoissances by water, and possibly might impose somewhat upon the enemy. The latter, however, erected batteries on each side of the anchorage, compelling Arnold to fall back to the broader lake. He then had soundings taken about Valcour Island, and between it and the western shore; that being the position in which he intended to make a stand. He retired thither on the 23rd of September.

The British on their side had contended with no less obstacles than their adversaries, though of a somewhat different character. To get carpenters and materials to build, and seamen to man, were the chief difficulties of the Americans, the necessities of the seaboard conceding but partially the demands made upon it; but their vessels were built upon the shores of the Lake, and launched into navigable waters. A large fleet of transports and ships of war in the St. Lawrence supplied the British with adequate resources, which were utilized judiciously and energetically by Captain Douglas; but to get these to the Lake was a long and arduous task. A great part of the Richelieu River was shoal, and obstructed by rapids. The point where lake navigation began was at St. John's, to which the nearest approach, by a hundred-ton schooner, from the St. Lawrence, was Chambly, ten miles below. Flat-boats and long-boats could be dragged up stream,

but vessels of any size had to be transported by land; and the engineers found the roadbed too soft in places to bear the weight of a hundred tons. Under Douglas's directions, the planking and frames of two schooners were taken down at Chambly, and carried round by road to St. John's, where they were again put together. At Quebec he found building a new hull, of one hundred and eighty tons. This he took apart nearly to the keel, shipping the frames in thirty long-boats, which the transport captains consented to surrender, together with their carpenters, for service on the Lake. Drafts from the ships of war, and volunteers from the transports, furnished a body of seven hundred seamen for the same employment,—a force to which the Americans could oppose nothing equal, commanded as it was by regular naval officers. The largest vessel was ship-rigged, and had a battery of eighteen 12-pounders; she was called the *Inflexible*, and was commanded by Lieutenant John Schanck. The two schooners, *Maria*, Lieutenant Starke, and *Carleton*, Lieutenant James Richard Dacres, carried respectively fourteen and twelve 6-pounders. These were the backbone of the British flotilla. There were also a radeau, the *Thunderer*, and a large gondola, the *Loyal Convert*, both heavily armed; but, being equally heavy of movement, they do not appear to have played any important part. Besides these, when the expedition started, there were twenty gunboats, each carrying one fieldpiece, from 24's to 9-pounders; or, in some cases, howitzers.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The radeau had six 24-pounders, six 12's, and two howitzers; the gondola, seven

"By all these means," wrote Douglas on July 21st, "our acquiring an absolute dominion over Lake Champlain is not doubted of." The expectation was perfectly sound. With a working breeze, the *Inflexible* alone could sweep the Lake clear of all that floated on it. But the element of time remained. From the day of this writing till that on which he saw the *Inflexible* leave St. John's, October 4th, was over ten weeks; and it was not until the 9th that Carleton was ready to advance with the squadron. By that time the American troops at the head of the Lake had increased to eight or ten thousand. The British land force is reported<sup>6</sup> as thirteen thousand, of which six thousand were in garrison at St. John's and elsewhere.

Arnold's last reinforcements reached him at Valcour on the 6th of October. On that day, and in the action of the 11th, he had with him all the American vessels on the Lake, except one schooner and one galley. His force, thus, was two schooners and a sloop, broadside vessels, besides four galleys and eight gondolas, which may be assumed reasonably to have depended on their bow guns; there, at least, was their heaviest fire. Thus reckoned, his flotilla, disposed to the best advantage, could bring into action at one time, two 18's, thirteen 12's, one 9, two 6's, twelve 4's, and two 2-pounders, independent of swivels; total thirty-two guns, out of eighty-four that were mounted in fifteen vessels. To this

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9-pounders. The particulars of armament are from Douglas's letters.

<sup>6</sup> By American reports. Beatson gives the force sent out, in the spring of 1776, as 13,357. ("Mil. and Nav. Memoirs," vi. 44.)

the British had to oppose, in three broadside vessels, nine 12's and thirteen 6's, and in twenty gunboats, twenty other brass guns, "from twenty-four to nines, some with howitzers;"<sup>7</sup> total forty-two guns. In this statement the radeau and gondola have not been included, because of their unmanageableness. Included as broadside vessels, they would raise the British armament—by three 24's, three 12's, four 9's, and a howitzer—to a total of fifty-three guns. Actually, they could be brought into action only under exceptional circumstances, and are more properly omitted.

These minutiae are necessary for the proper appreciation of what Captain Douglas justly called "a momentous event." It was a strife of pigmies for the prize of a continent, and the leaders are entitled to full credit both for their antecedent energy and for their dispositions in the contest; not least the unhappy man who, having done so much to save his country, afterwards blasted his name by a treason unsurpassed in modern war. Energy and audacity had so far preserved the Lake to the Americans; Arnold determined to have one more try of the chances. He did not know the full force of the enemy, but he expected that "it would be very formidable, if not equal to ours."<sup>8</sup> The season, however, was so near its end that a severe check would equal a defeat, and would postpone Carleton's further advance to the next spring. Besides,

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<sup>7</sup> Douglas's letters.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas thought that the appearance of the *Inflexible* was a complete surprise; but Arnold had been informed that a third vessel, larger than the schooners, was being set up. With a man of his character, it is impossible to be sure, from his letters to his superior, how much he knew, or what he withheld.

what was the worth of such a force as the American, such a flotilla, under the guns of Ticonderoga, the Lake being lost? It was eminently a case for taking chances, even if the detachment should be sacrificed, as it was.

Arnold's original purpose had been to fight under way; and it was from this point of view that he valued the galleys, because of their mobility. It is uncertain when he first learned of the rig and battery of the *Inflexible*; but a good look-out was kept, and the British squadron was sighted from Valcour when it quitted the narrows. It may have been seen even earlier; for Carleton had been informed, erroneously, that the Americans were near Grand Island, which led him to incline to that side, and so open out Valcour sooner. The British anchored for the night of October 10th, between Grand and Long<sup>9</sup> Islands. Getting under way next morning, they stood up the Lake with a strong north-east wind, keeping along Grand Island, upon which their attention doubtless was fastened by the intelligence which they had received; but it was a singular negligence thus to run to leeward with a fair wind, without thorough scouting on both hands. The consequence was that the American flotilla was not discovered until Valcour Island, which is from one hundred and twenty to one hundred and eighty feet high throughout its two miles of length, was so far passed that the attack had to be made from the south,—from leeward.

When the British were first made out, Arnold's second

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<sup>9</sup> called North Hero.

in command, Waterbury, urged that in view of the enemy's superiority the flotilla should get under way at once, and fight them "on a retreat in the main lake;" the harbour being disadvantageous "to fight a number so much superior, and the enemy being able to surround us on every side, we lying between an island and the main." Waterbury's advice evidently found its origin in that fruitful source of military errors of design, which reckons the preservation of a force first of objects, making the results of its action secondary. With sounder judgment, Arnold decided to hold on. A retreat before square-rigged sailing vessels having a fair wind, by a heterogeneous force like his own, of unequal speeds and batteries, could result only in disaster. Concerted fire and successful escape were alike improbable; and besides, escape, if feasible, was but throwing up the game. Better trust to a steady, well-ordered position, developing the utmost fire. If the enemy discovered him, and came in by the northern entrance, there was a five-foot knoll in mid-channel which might fetch the biggest of them up; if, as proved to be the case, the island should be passed, and the attack should be made from leeward, it probably would be partial and in disorder, as also happened. The correctness of Arnold's decision not to chance a retreat was shown in the retreat of two days later.

Valcour is on the west side of the Lake, about three quarters of a mile from the main; but a peninsula projecting from the island at mid-length narrows this interval to a half-mile. From the accounts, it is clear that the American flotilla lay south of

this peninsula. Arnold therefore had a reasonable hope that it might be passed undetected. Writing to Gates, the Commander-in-Chief at Ticonderoga, he said: "There is a good harbour, and if the enemy venture up the Lake it will be impossible for them to take advantage of our situation. If we succeed in our attack upon them, it will be impossible for any to escape. If we are worsted, our retreat is open and free. In case of wind, which generally blows fresh at this season, our craft will make good weather, while theirs cannot keep the Lake." It is apparent from this, written three weeks before the battle, that he then was not expecting a force materially different from his own. Later, he describes his position as being "in a small bay on the west side of the island, as near together as possible, and in such a form that few vessels can attack us at the same time, and those will be exposed to the fire of the whole fleet." Though he unfortunately gives no details, he evidently had sound tactical ideas. The formation of the anchored vessels is described by the British officers as a half-moon.

When the British discovered the enemy, they hauled up for them. Arnold ordered one of his schooners, the *Royal Savage*, and the four galleys, to get under way; the two other schooners and the eight gondolas remaining at their anchors. The *Royal Savage*, dropping to leeward,—by bad management, Arnold says,—came, apparently unsupported, under the distant fire of the *Inflexible*, as she drew under the lee of Valcour at 11 A.M., followed by the *Carleton*, and at greater distance by the *Maria*

and the gunboats. Three shots from the ship's 12-pounders struck the *Royal Savage*, which then ran ashore on the southern point of the island. The *Inflexible*, followed closely by the *Carleton*, continued on, but fired only occasionally; showing that Arnold was keeping his galleys in hand, at long bowls,—as small vessels with one eighteen should be kept, when confronted with a broadside of nine guns. Between the island and the main the north-east wind doubtless drew more northerly, adverse to the ship's approach; but, a flaw off the cliffs taking the fore and aft sails of the *Carleton*, she fetched "nearly into the middle of the rebel half-moon, where Lieutenant J.R. Dacres intrepidly anchored with a spring on her cable." The *Maria*, on board which was Carleton, together with Commander Thomas Pringle, commanding the flotilla, was to leeward when the chase began, and could not get into close action that day. By this time, seventeen of the twenty gunboats had come up, and, after silencing the *Royal Savage*, pulled up to within point-blank range of the American flotilla. "The cannonade was tremendous," wrote Baron Riedesel. Lieutenant Edward Longcroft, of the radeau *Thunderer*, not being able to get his raft into action, went with a boat's crew on board the *Royal Savage*, and for a time turned her guns upon her former friends; but the fire of the latter forced him again to abandon her, and it seemed so likely that she might be re-taken that she was set on fire by Lieutenant Starke of the *Maria*, when already "two rebel boats were very near her. She soon after blew up." The American guns converging

on the *Carleton* in her central position, she suffered severely. Her commander, Lieutenant Dacres, was knocked senseless; another officer lost an arm; only Mr. Edward Pellew, afterwards Lord Exmouth, remained fit for duty. The spring being shot away, she swung bows on to the enemy, and her fire was thus silenced. Captain Pringle signalled to her to withdraw; but she was unable to obey. To pay her head off the right way, Pellew himself had to get out on the bowsprit under a heavy fire of musketry, to bear the jib over to windward; but to make sail seems to have been impossible. Two artillery boats were sent to her assistance, "which towed her off through a very thick fire, until out of farther reach, much to the honour of Mr. John Curling and Mr. Patrick Carnegy, master's mate and midshipman of the *Isis*, who conducted them; and of Mr. Edward Pellew, mate of the *Blonde*, who threw the tow-rope from the *Carleton's* bowsprit."<sup>10</sup> This service on board the *Carleton* started Pellew on his road to fortune; but, singularly enough, the lieutenancy promised him in consequence, by both the First Lord and Lord Howe, was delayed by the fact that he stayed at the front, instead of going to the rear, where he would have been "within their jurisdiction."<sup>11</sup> The *Carleton* had two feet of water in the hold, and had lost eight killed and six wounded,—about half her

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<sup>10</sup> Douglas's letter. The *Isis* and the *Blonde* were vessels of the British squadron under Douglas, then lying in the St. Lawrence. The officers named were temporarily on the lake service.

<sup>11</sup> Sandwich, First Lord of the Admiralty, to Pellew.

crew,—when she anchored out of fire. In this small but stirring business, the Americans, in addition to the *Royal Savage*, had lost one gondola. Besides the injuries to the *Carleton*, a British artillery boat, commanded by a German lieutenant, was sunk. Towards evening the *Inflexible* got within point-blank shot of the Americans, "when five broadsides," wrote Douglas, "silenced their whole line." One fresh ship, with scantling for sea-going, and a concentrated battery, has an unquestioned advantage over a dozen light-built craft, carrying one or two guns each, and already several hours engaged.

At nightfall the *Inflexible* dropped out of range, and the British squadron anchored in line of battle across the southern end of the passage between the island and the main; some vessels were extended also to the eastward, into the open Lake. "The best part of my intelligence," wrote Burgoyne next day from St. John's, to Douglas at Quebec, "is that our whole fleet was formed in line above the enemy, and consequently they must have surrendered this morning, or given us battle on our own terms. The Indians and light troops are abreast with the fleet; they cannot, therefore, escape by land." The British squadron sharing this confidence, a proper look-out was not kept. The American leader immediately held a conference with his officers, and decided to attempt a retreat, "which was done with such secrecy," writes Waterbury, "that we went through them entirely undiscovered." The movement began at 7 P.M., a galley leading, the gondolas and schooners following, and Arnold and his second

bringing up the rear in the two heaviest galleys. This delicate operation was favoured by a heavy fog, which did not clear till next morning at eight. As the Americans stole by, they could not see any of the hostile ships. By daylight they were out of sight of the British. Riedesel, speaking of this event, says, "The ships anchored, secure of the enemy, who stole off during the night, and sailing round the left wing, aided by a favourable wind, escaped under darkness." The astonishment next morning, he continues, was great, as was Carleton's rage. The latter started to pursue in such a hurry that he forgot to leave orders for the troops which had been landed; but, failing to discover the fugitives, he returned and remained at Valcour till nightfall, when scouts brought word that the enemy were at Schuyler's Island, eight miles above.

The retreat of the Americans had been embarrassed by their injuries, and by the wind coming out ahead. They were obliged to anchor on the 12th to repair damages, both hulls and sails having suffered severely. Arnold took the precaution to write to Crown Point for bateaux, to tow in case of a southerly wind; but time did not allow these to arrive. Two gondolas had to be sunk on account of their injuries, making three of that class so far lost. The retreat was resumed at 2 P.M., but the breeze was fresh from the southward, and the gondolas made very little way. At evening the British chased again. That night the wind moderated, and at daybreak the American flotilla was twenty-eight miles from Crown Point,—fourteen from Valcour,—having still five

miles' start. Later, however, by Arnold's report, "the wind again breezed up to the southward, so that we gained very little either by beating or rowing. At the same time the enemy took a fresh breeze from northeast, and, by the time we had reached Split Rock, were alongside of us." The galleys of Arnold and Waterbury, the *Congress* and the *Washington*, had throughout kept in the rear, and now received the brunt of the attack, made by the *Inflexible* and the two schooners, which had entirely distanced their sluggish consorts. This fight was in the upper narrows, where the Lake is from one to three miles wide; and it lasted, by Arnold's report, for five glasses (two hours and a half),<sup>12</sup> the Americans continually retreating, until about ten miles from Crown Point. There, the *Washington* having struck some time before, and final escape being impossible, Arnold ran the *Congress* and four gondolas ashore in a small creek on the east side; pulling to windward, with the cool judgment that had marked all his conduct, so that the enemy could not follow him—except in small boats with which he could deal. There he set his vessels on fire, and stood by them until assured that they would blow up with their flags flying. He then retreated to Crown Point through the woods, "despite the savages;" a phrase which concludes this singular aquatic contest with a quaint touch of local colour.

In three days of fighting and retreating the Americans had lost one schooner, two galleys, and seven gondolas,—in all, ten

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<sup>12</sup> Beatson, "Nav. and Mil. Memoirs," says two hours.

vessels out of fifteen. The killed and wounded amounted to over eighty, twenty odd of whom were in Arnold's galley. The original force, numbering seven hundred, had been decimated. Considering its raw material and the recency of its organisation, words can scarcely exaggerate the heroism of the resistance, which undoubtedly depended chiefly upon the personal military qualities of the leader. The British loss in killed and wounded did not exceed forty.

The little American navy on Champlain was wiped out; but never had any force, big or small, lived to better purpose or died more gloriously, for it had saved the Lake for that year. Whatever deductions may be made for blunders, and for circumstances of every character which made the British campaign of 1777 abortive and disastrous, thus leading directly to the American alliance with France in 1778, the delay, with all that it involved, was obtained by the Lake campaign of 1776. On October 15th, two days after Arnold's final defeat, Carleton dated a letter to Douglas from before Crown Point, whence the American garrison was withdrawn. A week later Riedesel arrived, and wrote that, "were our whole army here it would be an easy matter to drive the enemy from their entrenchments," at Ticonderoga, and—as has been quoted already—four weeks sooner would have insured its fall. It is but a coincidence that just four weeks had been required to set up the *Inflexible* at St. John's; but it typifies the whole story. Save for Arnold's flotilla, the two British schooners would have settled the business. "Upon the whole,

Sir," wrote Douglas in his final letter from Quebec before sailing for England, "I scruple not to say, that had not General Carleton authorized me to take the extraordinary measure of sending up the *Inflexible* from Quebec, things could not this year have been brought to so glorious a conclusion on Lake Champlain." Douglas further showed the importance attached to this success by men of that day, by sending a special message to the British ambassador at Madrid, "presuming that the early knowledge of this great event in the southern parts of Europe may be of advantage to His Majesty's service." That the opinion of the government was similar may be inferred from the numerous rewards bestowed. Carleton was made a Knight of the Bath, and Douglas a baronet.

The gallantry shown by both sides upon Lake Champlain in 1776 is evident from the foregoing narrative. With regard to the direction of movements,—the skill of the two leaders,—the same equal credit cannot be assigned. It was a very serious blunder, on October 11th, to run to leeward, passing a concealed enemy, undetected, upon waters so perfectly well known as those of Champlain were; it having been the scene of frequent British operations in previous wars. Owing to this, "the *Maria*, because of her distant situation (from which the *Inflexible* and *Carleton* had chased by signal) when the rebels were first discovered, and baffling winds, could not get into close action."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas's letters. The sentence is awkward, but carefully compared with the copy in the author's hands. Douglas says, of the details he gives, that "they have been collected with the most scrupulous circumspection."

For the same reason the *Inflexible* could not support the *Carleton*. The Americans, in the aggregate distinctly inferior, were thus permitted a concentration of superior force upon part of their enemies. It is needless to enlarge upon the mortifying incident of Arnold's escape that evening. To liken small things to great,—always profitable in military analysis,—it resembled Hood's slipping away from de Grasse at St. Kitts.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Post*, p. 205.



Benedict Arnold

In conduct and courage, Arnold's behavior was excellent throughout. Without enlarging upon the energy which created

the flotilla, and the breadth of view which suggested preparations that he could not enforce, admiration is due to his recognition of the fact—implicit in deed, if unexpressed in word—that the one use of the Navy was to contest the control of the water; to impose delay, even if it could not secure ultimate victory. No words could say more clearly than do his actions that, under the existing conditions, the navy was useless, except as it contributed to that end; valueless, if buried in port. Upon this rests the merit of his bold advance into the lower narrows; upon this his choice of the strong defensive position of Valcour; upon this his refusal to retreat, as urged by Waterbury, when the full force of the enemy was disclosed,—a decision justified, or rather, illustrated, by the advantages which the accidents of the day threw into his hands. His personal gallantry was conspicuous there as at all times of his life. "His countrymen," said a generous enemy of that day, "chiefly gloried in the dangerous attention which he paid to a nice point of honour, in keeping his flag flying, and not quitting his galley till she was in flames, lest the enemy should have boarded, and struck it." It is not the least of the injuries done to his nation in after years, that he should have silenced this boast and effaced this glorious record by so black an infamy.

With the destruction of the flotilla ends the naval story of the Lakes during the War of the American Revolution. Satisfied that it was too late to proceed against Ticonderoga that year, Carleton withdrew to St. John's and went into winter-quarters. The following year the enterprise was resumed under

General Burgoyne; but Sir William Howe, instead of coöperating by an advance up the Hudson, which was the plan of 1776, carried his army to Chesapeake Bay, to act thence against Philadelphia. Burgoyne took Ticonderoga and forced his way as far as Saratoga, sixty miles from Ticonderoga and thirty from Albany, where Howe should have met him. There he was brought to a stand by the army which the Americans had collected, found himself unable to advance or to retreat, and was forced to lay down his arms on October 17th, 1777. The garrison left by him at Ticonderoga and Crown Point retired to Canada, and the posts were re-occupied by the Americans. No further contest took place on the Lake, though the British vessels remained in control of it, and showed themselves from time to time up to 1781. With the outbreak of war between Great Britain and France, in 1778, the scene of maritime interest shifted to salt water, and there remained till the end.

# CHAPTER II

## NAVAL ACTION AT BOSTON, CHARLESTON, NEW YORK, AND NARRAGANSETT BAY— ASSOCIATED LAND OPERATIONS UP TO THE BATTLE OF TRENTON 1776

The opening conflict between Great Britain and her North American Colonies teaches clearly the necessity, too rarely recognised in practice, that when a State has decided to use force, the force provided should be adequate from the first. This applies with equal weight to national policies when it is the intention of the nation to maintain them at all costs. The Monroe Doctrine for instance is such a policy; but unless constant adequate preparation is maintained also, the policy itself is but a vain form of words. It is in preparation beforehand, chiefly if not uniformly, that the United States has failed. It is better to be much too strong than a little too weak. Seeing the evident temper of the Massachusetts Colonists, force would be needed to execute the Boston Port Bill and its companion measures of 1774; for the Port Bill especially, naval force. The supplies

for 1775 granted only 18,000 seamen,—2000 less than for the previous year. For 1776, 28,000 seamen were voted, and the total appropriations rose from £5,556,000 to £10,154,000; but it was then too late. Boston was evacuated by the British army, 8000 strong on the 17th of March, 1776; but already, for more than half a year, the spreading spirit of revolt in the thirteen Colonies had been encouraged by the sight of the British army cooped up in the town, suffering from want of necessaries, while the colonial army blockading it was able to maintain its position, because ships laden with stores for the one were captured, and the cargoes diverted to the use of the other. To secure free and ample communications for one's self, and to interrupt those of the opponent, are among the first requirements of war. To carry out the measures of the British government a naval force was needed, which not only should protect the approach of its own transports to Boston Bay, but should prevent access to all coast ports whence supplies could be carried to the blockading army. So far from this, the squadron was not equal, in either number or quality, to the work to be done about Boston; and it was not until October, 1775, that the Admiral was authorized to capture colonial merchant vessels, which therefore went and came unmolested, outside of Boston, carrying often provisions which found their way to Washington's army.

After evacuating Boston, General Howe retired to Halifax, there to await the coming of reinforcements, both military and naval, and of his brother, Vice-Admiral Lord Howe,

appointed to command the North American Station. General Howe was commander-in-chief of the forces throughout the territory extending from Nova Scotia to West Florida; from Halifax to Pensacola. The first operation of the campaign was to be the reduction of New York.

The British government, however, had several objects in view, and permitted itself to be distracted from the single-minded prosecution of one great undertaking to other subsidiary operations, not always concentric. Whether the control of the line of the Hudson and Lake Champlain ought to have been sought through operations beginning at both ends, is open to argument; the facts that the Americans were back in Crown Point in the beginning of July, 1776, and that Carleton's 13,000 men got no farther than St. John's that year, suggest that the greater part of the latter force would have been better employed in New York and New Jersey than about Champlain. However that may be, the diversion to the Carolinas of a third body, respectable in point of numbers, is scarcely to be defended on military grounds. The government was induced to it by the expectation of local support from royalists. That there were many of these in both Carolinas is certain; but while military operations must take account of political conditions, the latter should not be allowed to overbalance elementary principles of the military art. It is said that General Howe disapproved of this ex-centric movement.

The force destined for the Southern coasts assembled at Cork towards the end of 1775, and sailed thence in January, 1776.

The troops were commanded by Lord Cornwallis, the squadron by Nelson's early patron, Commodore Sir Peter Parker, whose broad pennant was hoisted on board the *Bristol*, 50. After a boisterous passage, the expedition arrived in May off Cape Fear in North Carolina, where it was joined by two thousand men under Sir Henry Clinton, Cornwallis's senior, whom Howe by the government's orders had detached to the southward in January. Upon Clinton's appearance, the royalists in North Carolina had risen, headed by the husband of Flora Macdonald, whose name thirty years before had been associated romantically with the escape of the young Pretender from Scotland. She had afterwards emigrated to America. The rising, however, had been put down, and Clinton had not thought it expedient to try a serious invasion, in face of the large force assembled to resist him. Upon Parker's coming, it was decided to make an attempt upon Charleston, South Carolina. The fleet therefore sailed from Cape Fear on the 1st of June, and on the 4th anchored off Charleston Bar.

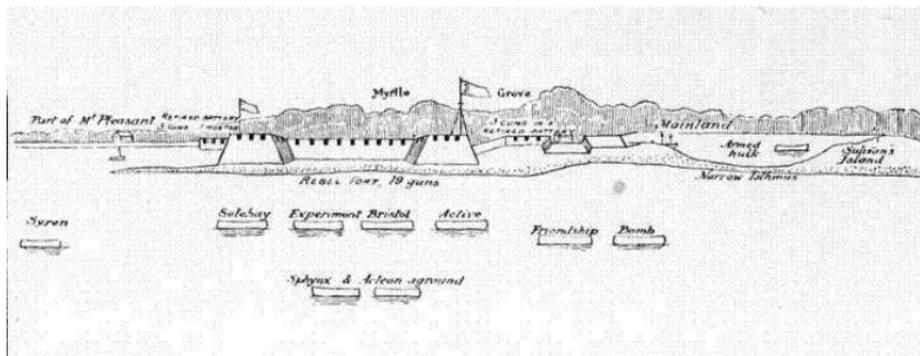
Charleston Harbour opens between two of the sea-islands which fringe the coasts of South Carolina and Georgia. On the north is Sullivan's Island, on the south James Island. The bar of the main entrance was not abreast the mouth of the port, but some distance south of it. Inside the bar, the channel turned to the northward, and thence led near Sullivan's Island, the southern end of which was therefore chosen as the site of the rude fort hastily thrown up to meet this attack, and afterwards called Fort Moultrie, from the name of the commander. From

these conditions, a southerly wind was needed to bring ships into action. After sounding and buoying the bar, the transports and frigates crossed on the 7th and anchored inside; but as it was necessary to remove some of the *Bristol's* guns, she could not follow until the 10th. On the 9th Clinton had landed in person with five hundred men, and by the 15th all the troops had disembarked upon Long Island, next north of Sullivan's. It was understood that the inlet between the two was fordable, allowing the troops to coöperate with the naval attack, by diversion or otherwise; but this proved to be a mistake. The passage was seven feet deep at low water, and there were no means for crossing; consequently a small American detachment in the scrub wood of the island sufficed to check any movement in that quarter. The fighting therefore was confined to the cannonading of the fort by the ships.

Circumstances not fully explained caused the attack to be fixed for the 23d; an inopportune delay, during which Americans were strengthening their still very imperfect defences. On the 23d the wind was unfavourable. On the 25th the *Experiment*, 50, arrived, crossed the bar, and, after taking in her guns again, was ready to join in the assault. On the 27th, at 10 A.M., the ships got under way with a south-east breeze, but this shifted soon afterwards to north-west, and they had to anchor again, about a mile nearer to Sullivan's Island. On the following day the wind served, and the attack was made.

In plan, Fort Moultrie was square, with a bastion at each

angle. In construction, the sides were palmetto logs, dovetailed and bolted together, laid in parallel rows, sixteen feet apart; the interspace being filled with sand. At the time of the engagement, the south and west fronts were finished; the other fronts were only seven feet high, but surmounted by thick planks, to be tenable against escalade. Thirty-one guns were in place, 18 and 9-pounders, of which twenty-one were on the south face, commanding the channel. Within was a traverse running east and west, protecting the gunners from shots from the rear; but there was no such cover against enfilading fire, in case an enemy's ship passed the fort and anchored above it. "The general opinion before the action," Moultrie says, "and especially among sailors, was that two frigates would be sufficient to knock the town about our ears, notwithstanding our batteries." Parker may have shared this impression, and it may account for his leisureliness. When the action began, the garrison had but twenty-eight rounds for each of twenty-six cannon, but this deficiency was unknown to the British.



## Attack on Fort Moultrie in 1776

Parker's plan was that the two 50's, *Bristol* and *Experiment*, and two 28-gun frigates, the *Active* and the *Solebay*, should engage the main front; while two frigates of the same class, the *Actæon* and the *Syrén*, with a 20-gun corvette, the *Sphinx*, should pass the fort, anchoring to the westward, up-channel, to protect the heavy vessels against fire-ships, as well as to enfilade the principal American battery. The main attack was to be further supported by a bomb-vessel, the *Thunder*, accompanied by the armed transport *Friendship*, which were to take station to the southeast of the east bastion of the engaged front of the fort. The order to weigh was given at 10.30 A.M., when the flood-tide had fairly made; and at 11.15 the *Active*, *Bristol*, *Experiment*, and *Solebay*, anchored in line ahead, in the order named, the *Active* to the eastward. These ships seem to have taken their places skilfully without confusion, and their fire, which opened at once, was rapid, well-sustained, and well-directed; but their position

suffered under the radical defect that, whether from actual lack of water, or only from fear of grounding, they were too far from the works to use grape effectively. The sides of ships being much weaker than those of shore works, while their guns were much more numerous, the secret of success was to get near enough to beat down the hostile fire by a multitude of projectiles. The bomb-vessel *Thunder* anchored in the situation assigned her; but her shells, though well aimed, were ineffective. "Most of them fell within the fort," Moultrie reported, "but we had a morass in the middle, which swallowed them instantly, and those that fell in the sand were immediately buried." During the action the mortar bed broke, disabling the piece.

Owing to the scarcity of ammunition in the fort, the garrison had positive orders not to engage at ranges exceeding four hundred yards. Four or five shots were thrown at the *Active*, while still under sail, but with this exception the fort kept silence until the ships anchored, at a distance estimated by the Americans to be three hundred and fifty yards. The word was then passed along the platform, "Mind the Commodore; mind the two 50-gun ships,"—an order which was strictly obeyed, as the losses show. The protection of the work proved to be almost perfect,—a fact which doubtless contributed to the coolness and precision of fire vitally essential with such deficient resources. The texture of the palmetto wood suffered the balls to sink smoothly into it without splintering, so that the facing of the work held well. At times, when three or four broadsides struck together, the merlons

shook so that Moultrie feared they would come bodily in; but they withstood, and the small loss inflicted was chiefly through the embrasures. The flagstaff being shot away, falling outside into the ditch, a young sergeant, named Jasper, distinguished himself by jumping after it, fetching back and rehoisting the colours under a heavy fire.

In the squadron an equal gallantry was shown under circumstances which made severe demands upon endurance. Whatever Parker's estimate of the worth of the defences, no trace of vain-confidence appears in his dispositions, which were thorough and careful, as the execution of the main attack was skilful and vigorous; but the ships' companies, expecting an easy victory, had found themselves confronted with a resistance and a punishment as severe as were endured by the leading ships at Trafalgar, and far more prolonged. Such conditions impose upon men's tenacity the additional test of surprise and discomfiture. The *Experiment*, though very small for a ship of the line, lost 23 killed and 56 wounded, out of a total probably not much exceeding 300; while the *Bristol*, having the spring shot away, swung with her head to the southward and her stern to the fort, undergoing for a long time a raking fire to which she could make little reply. Three several attempts to replace the spring were made by Mr. James Saumarez,—afterwards the distinguished admiral, Lord de Saumarez, then a midshipman,—before the ship was relieved from this grave disadvantage. Her loss was 40 killed and 71 wounded; not a man escaping of those stationed

on the quarter-deck at the beginning of the action. Among the injured was the Commodore himself, whose cool heroism must have been singularly conspicuous, from the notice it attracted in a service where such bearing was not rare. At one time when the quarter-deck was cleared and he stood alone upon the poop-ladder, Saumarez suggested to him to come down; but he replied, smiling, "You want to get rid of me, do you?" and refused to move. The captain of the ship, John Morris, was mortally wounded. With commendable modesty Parker only reported himself as slightly bruised; but deserters stated that for some days he needed the assistance of two men to walk, and that his trousers had been torn off him by shot or splinters. The loss in the other ships was only one killed, 14 wounded. The Americans had 37 killed and wounded.

The three vessels assigned to enfilade the main front of the fort did not get into position. They ran on the middle ground, owing, Parker reported, to the ignorance of the pilots. Two had fouled each other before striking. Having taken the bottom on a rising tide, two floated in a few hours, and retreated; but the third, the *Actæon*, 28, sticking fast, was set on fire and abandoned by her officers. Before she blew up, the Americans boarded her, securing her colours, bell, and some other trophies. "Had these ships effected their purpose," Moultrie reported, "they would have driven us from our guns."

The main division held its ground until long after nightfall, firing much of the time, but stopping at intervals. After two hours

it had been noted that the fort replied very slowly, which was attributed to its being overborne, instead of to the real cause, the necessity for sparing ammunition. For the same reason it was entirely silent from 3.30 P.M. to 6, when fire was resumed from only two or three guns, whence Parker surmised that the rest had been dismantled. The Americans were restrained throughout the engagement by the fear of exhausting entirely their scanty store.

"About 9 P.M.," Parker reported, "being very dark, great part of our ammunition expended, the people fatigued, the tide of ebb almost done, no prospect from the eastward (that is, from the army), and no possibility of our being of any further service, I ordered the ships to withdraw to their former moorings." Besides the casualties among the crew, and severe damage to the hull, the *Bristol's* mainmast, with nine cannon-balls in it, had to be shortened, while the mizzen-mast was condemned. The injury to the frigates was immaterial, owing to the garrison's neglecting them.

The fight in Charleston Harbour, the first serious contest in which ships took part in this war, resembles generically the battle of Bunker's Hill, with which the regular land warfare had opened a year before. Both illustrate the difficulty and danger of a front attack, without cover, upon a fortified position, and the advantage conferred even upon untrained men, if naturally cool, resolute, and intelligent, not only by the protection of a work, but also, it may be urged, by the recognition of a tangible line up to which to hold, and to abandon which means

defeat, dishonour, and disaster. It is much for untried men to recognise in their surroundings something which gives the unity of a common purpose, and thus the coherence which discipline imparts. Although there was in Parker's dispositions nothing open to serious criticism,—nothing that can be ascribed to undervaluing his opponent,—and although, also, he had good reason to expect from the army active coöperation which he did not get, it is probable that he was very much surprised, not only at the tenacity of the Americans' resistance, but at the efficacy of their fire. He felt, doubtless, the traditional and natural distrust—and, for the most part, the justified distrust—with which experience and practice regard inexperience. Some seamen of American birth, who had been serving in the *Bristol*, deserted after the fight. They reported that her crew said, "We were told the Yankees would not stand two fires, but we never saw better fellows;" and when the fire of the fort slackened and some cried, "They have done fighting," others replied, "By God, we are glad of it, for we never had such a drubbing in our lives." "All the common men of the fleet spoke loudly in praise of the garrison,"—a note of admiration so frequent in generous enemies that we may be assured that it was echoed on the quarter-deck also. They could afford it well, for there was no stain upon their own record beyond the natural mortification of defeat; no flinching under the severity of their losses, although a number of their men were comparatively raw, volunteers from the transports, whose crews had come forward almost as

one man when they knew that the complements of the ships were short through sickness. Edmund Burke, a friend to both sides, was justified in saying that "never did British valour shine more conspicuously, nor did our ships in an engagement of the same nature experience so serious an encounter." There were several death-vacancies for lieutenants; and, as the battle of Lake Champlain gave Pellew his first commission, so did that of Charleston Harbour give his to Saumarez, who was made lieutenant of the *Bristol* by Parker. Two years later, when the ship had gone to Jamaica, he was followed on her quarter-deck by Nelson and Collingwood, who also received promotion in her from the same hand.

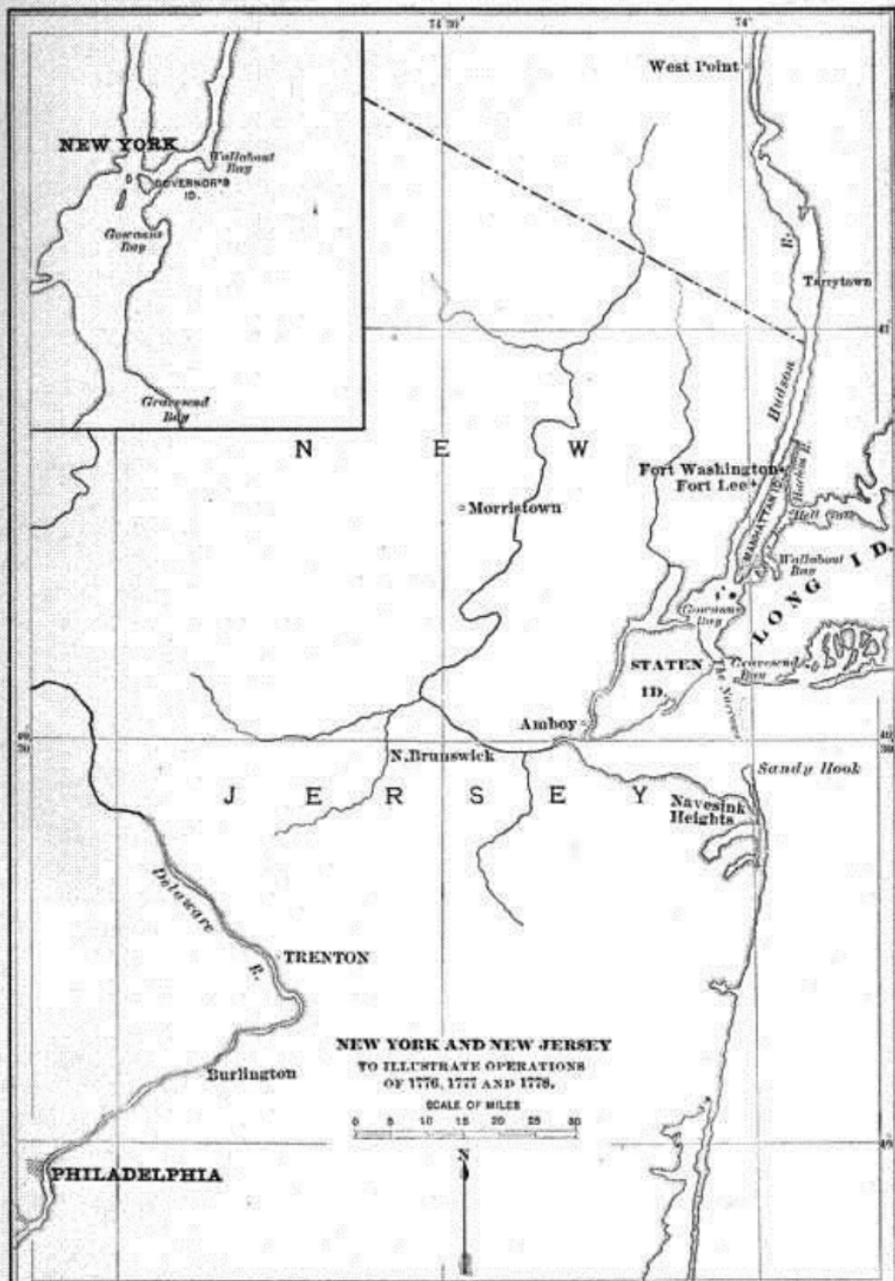
The attack on Fort Moultrie was not resumed. After necessary repairs, the ships of war with the troops went to New York, where they arrived on the 4th of August, and took part in the operations for the reduction of that place under the direction of the two Howes.

The occupation of New York Harbour, and the capture of the city were the most conspicuous British successes of the summer and fall of 1776. While Parker and Clinton were meeting with defeat at Charleston, and Arnold was hurrying the preparation of his flotilla on Champlain, the two brothers, General Sir William Howe and the Admiral, Lord Howe, were arriving in New York Bay, invested not only with the powers proper to the commanders of great fleets and armies, but also with authority as peace commissioners, to negotiate an amicable arrangement with the

revolted Colonies.

Sir William Howe had awaited for some time at Halifax the arrival of the expected reinforcements, but wearying at last he sailed thence on the 10th of June, 1776, with the army then in hand. On the 25th he himself reached Sandy Hook, the entrance to New York Bay, having preceded the transports in a frigate. On the 29th, the day after Parker's repulse at Fort Moultrie, the troops arrived; and on July 3d, the date on which Arnold, retreating from Canada, reached Crown Point, the British landed on Staten Island, which is on the west side of the lower Bay. On the 12th came in the *Eagle*, 64, carrying the flag of Lord Howe. This officer was much esteemed by the Americans for his own personal qualities, and for his attitude towards them in the present dispute, as well as for the memory of his brother, who had endeared himself greatly to them in the campaign of 1758, when he had fallen near Lake Champlain; but the decisive step of declaring their independence had been taken already, on July 4th, eight days before the Admiral's arrival. A month was spent in fruitless attempts to negotiate with the new government, without recognising any official character in its representatives. During that time, however, while abstaining from decisive operations, cruisers were kept at sea to intercept American traders, and the Admiral, immediately upon arriving, sent four vessels of war twenty-five miles up the Hudson River, as far as Tarrytown. This squadron was commanded by Hyde Parker, afterwards, in 1801, Nelson's commander-in-chief at Copenhagen. The service was

performed under a tremendous cannonade from all the batteries on both shores, but the ships could not be stopped. Towards the middle of August it was evident that the Americans would not accept any terms in the power of the Howes to offer, and it became necessary to attempt coercion by arms.



New York and New Jersey: to illustrate Operations of 1776, 1777, and 1778

In the reduction of New York in 1776, the part played by the British Navy, owing to the nature of the campaign in general and of the enemy's force in particular, was of that inconspicuous character which obscures the fact that without the Navy the operations could not have been undertaken at all, and that the Navy played to them the part of the base of operations and line of communications. Like the foundations of a building, these lie outside the range of superficial attention, and therefore are less generally appreciated than the brilliant fighting going on at the front, to the maintenance of which they are all the time indispensable. Consequently, whatever of interest may attach to any, or to all, of the minor affairs, which in the aggregate constitute the action of the naval force in such circumstances, the historian of the major operations is confined perforce to indicating the broad general effect of naval power upon the issue. This will be best done by tracing in outline the scene of action, the combined movements, and the Navy's influence in both.

The harbour of New York divides into two parts—the upper and lower Bays—connected by a passage called the Narrows, between Long and Staten Islands, upon the latter of which the British troops were encamped. Long Island, which forms the eastern shore of the Narrows, extends to the east-north-east a hundred and ten miles, enclosing between itself and the continent

a broad sheet of water called Long Island Sound, that reaches nearly to Narragansett Bay. The latter, being a fine anchorage, entered also into the British scheme of operations, as an essential feature in a coastwise maritime campaign. Long Island Sound and the upper Bay of New York are connected by a crooked and difficult passage, known as the East River, eight or ten miles in length, and at that time nearly a mile wide<sup>15</sup> abreast the city of New York. At the point where the East River joins New York Bay, the Hudson River, an estuary there nearly two miles wide, also enters from the north,—a circumstance which has procured for it the alternative name of the North River. Near their confluence is Governor's Island, half a mile below the town, centrally situated to command the entrances to both. Between the East and North rivers, with their general directions from north and east-north-east, is embraced a long strip of land gradually narrowing to the southward. The end of this peninsula, as it would otherwise be, is converted into an island, of a mean length of about eight miles, by the Harlem River,—a narrow and partially navigable stream connecting the East and North rivers. To the southern extreme of this island, called Manhattan, the city of New York was then confined.

As both the East and North rivers were navigable for large ships, the former throughout, the latter for over a hundred miles above its mouth, it was evident that control of the water must play a large part in warlike operations throughout the district

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<sup>15</sup> At the present day reduced by reclaimed land.

described. With the limited force at Washington's disposal, he had been unable to push the defences of the city as far to the front as was desirable. The lower Bay was held by the British Navy, and Staten Island had been abandoned, necessarily, without resistance, thereby giving up the strong defensive position of the Narrows. The lines were contracted thus to the immediate neighbourhood of New York itself. Small detached works skirted the shores of Manhattan Island, and a line of redoubts extended across it, following the course of a small stream which then partly divided it, a mile from the southern end. Governor's Island was also occupied as an outpost. Of more intrinsic strength, but not at first concerned, strong works had been thrown up on either side of the North River, upon commanding heights eight miles above New York, to dispute the passage of ships.

The crucial weakness in this scheme of defence was that the shore of Long Island opposite the city was much higher than that of Manhattan. If this height were seized, the city, and all below it, became untenable. Here, therefore, was the key of the position and the chief station for the American troops. For its protection a line of works was thrown up, the flanks of which rested upon Wallabout Bay and Gowanus Cove, two indentations in the shores of Long Island. These Washington manned with nine thousand of the eighteen thousand men under his command. By the arrival of three divisions of Hessian troops, Howe's army now numbered over thirty-four thousand men, to which Clinton

brought three thousand more from before Charleston.<sup>16</sup>

On the 22d of August the British crossed from Staten Island to Gravesend Bay, on the Long Island shore of the Narrows. The Navy covered the landing, and the transportation of the troops was under the charge of Commodore William Hotham, who, nineteen years later, was Nelson's commander-in-chief in the Mediterranean. By noon fifteen thousand men and forty field-guns had been carried over and placed on shore. The force of the Americans permitted little opposition to the British advance; but General Howe was cautious and easy-going, and it was not till the 27th that the army, now increased to twenty-five thousand, was fairly in front of the American lines, having killed, wounded, and taken about 1,500 men. Hoping that Howe would be tempted to storm the position, Washington replaced these with two thousand drawn from his meagre numbers; but his opponent, who had borne a distinguished part at Bunker's Hill, held back his troops, who were eager for the assault. The Americans now stood with their backs to a swift tidal stream, nearly a mile wide, with only a feeble line of works between them and an enemy more than double their number.

On the morning of the 27th, Sir Peter Parker, with a 64-gun ship, two 50's, and two frigates, attempted to work up to New York, with a view of supporting the left flank of the army; but the wind came out from the north, and, the ebb-tide

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<sup>16</sup> Beatson's "Military and Naval Memoirs," vi. 44, give 34,614 as the strength of Howe's army. Clinton's division is not included in this. vi. 45.

making, the ships got no nearer than three miles from the city. Fortunately for the Americans, they either could not or would not go farther on the following two days. After dark of the 28th, Howe broke ground for regular approaches. Washington, seeing this, and knowing that there could be but one result to a siege under his condition of inferiority, resolved to withdraw. During the night of the 29th ten thousand men silently quitted their positions, embarked, and crossed to Manhattan Island, carrying with them all their belongings, arms, and ammunition. The enemy's trenches were but six hundred yards distant, yet no suspicion was aroused, nor did a single deserter give treacherous warning. The night was clear and moonlit, although a heavy fog towards daybreak prolonged the period of secrecy which shrouded the retreat. When the fog rose, the last detachment was discovered crossing, but a few ineffectual cannon-shot were the only harassment experienced by the Americans in the course of this rapid and dexterous retirement. The garrison of Governor's Island was withdrawn at the same time.

The unmolested use of the water, and the nautical skill of the fishermen who composed one of the American regiments, were essential to this escape; for admirable as the movement was in arrangement and execution, no word less strong than escape applies to it. By it Washington rescued over half his army from sure destruction, and, not improbably, the cause of his people from immediate collapse. An opportunity thus seized implies necessarily an opportunity lost on the other side. For

that failure both army and navy must bear their share of the blame. It is obvious that when an enemy is greatly outnumbered his line of retreat should be watched. This was the business of both commanders-in-chief, the execution of it being primarily the duty of the navy, as withdrawal from the American position could be only by water. It was a simple question of look-out, of detection, of prevention by that means. To arrest the retreat sailing ships were inadequate, for they could not have remained at anchor under the guns of Manhattan Island, either by day or night; but a few boats with muffled oars could have watched, could have given the alarm, precipitating an attack by the army, and such a movement interrupted in mid-course brings irretrievable disaster.

Washington now withdrew the bulk of his force to the line of the Harlem. On his right, south of that river and commanding the Hudson, was a fort called by his name; opposite to it on the Jersey shore was Fort Lee. A garrison of four thousand men occupied New York. After amusing himself with some further peace negotiations, Howe determined to possess the city. As a diversion from the main effort, and to cover the crossing of the troops, two detachments of ships were ordered to pass the batteries on the Hudson and East rivers. This was done on the 13th and the 15th of September. The East River division suffered severely, especially in spars and rigging;<sup>17</sup> but the success of both, following upon that of Hyde Parker a few weeks earlier,

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<sup>17</sup> Admiral James's Journal, p. 30. (Navy Records Society.)

in his expedition to Tarrytown, confirmed Washington in the opinion which he expressed five years later to de Grasse, that batteries alone could not stop ships having a fair wind. This is now a commonplace of naval warfare; steam giving always a fair wind. On the 15th Howe's army crossed under cover of Parker's ships, Hotham again superintending the boat work. The garrison of New York slipped along the west shore of the island and joined the main body on the Harlem; favored again, apparently, in this flank movement a mile from the enemy's front, by Howe's inertness, and fondness for a good meal, to which a shrewd American woman invited him at the critical moment.

Despite these various losses of position, important as they were, the American army continued to elude the British general, who apparently did not hold very strongly the opinion that the most decisive factor in war is the enemy's organised force. As control of the valley of the Hudson, in connection with Lake Champlain, was, very properly, the chief object of the British government, Howe's next aim was to loosen Washington's grip on the peninsula north of the Harlem. The position seeming to him too strong for a front attack, he decided to strike for its left flank and rear by way of Long Island Sound. In this, which involved the passage of the tortuous and dangerous channel called Hell Gate, with its swift conflicting currents, the Navy again bore an essential part. The movement began on October 12th, the day after Arnold was defeated at Valcour. So far as its leading object went it was successful, Washington feeling obliged to let go the

line of the Harlem, and change front to the left. As the result of the various movements and encounters of the two armies, he fell back across the Hudson into New Jersey, ordering the evacuation of Fort Washington, and deciding to rest his control of the Hudson Valley upon West Point, fifty miles above New York, a position of peculiar natural strength, on the west bank of the river. To these decisions he was compelled by his inferiority in numbers, and also by the very isolated and hazardous situation in which he was operating, between two navigable waters, absolutely controlled by the enemy's shipping. This conclusion was further forced upon him by another successful passage before the guns of Forts Washington and Lee by Hyde Parker, with three ships, on the 9th of October. On this occasion the vessels, two of which were frigates of the heaviest class, suffered very severely, losing nine killed and eighteen wounded; but the menace to the communications of the Americans could not be disregarded, for their supplies came mostly from the west of the Hudson.

It was early in November that Washington crossed into New Jersey with five thousand men; and soon afterwards he directed the remainder of his force to follow. At that moment the blunder of one subordinate, and the disobedience of another, brought upon him two serious blows. Fort Washington not being evacuated when ordered, Howe carried it by storm, capturing not only it but its garrison of twenty-seven hundred men; a very heavy loss to the Americans. On the other hand, the most explicit

orders failed to bring the officer left in command on the east of the Hudson, General Charles Lee, to rejoin the commander-in-chief. This criminal perverseness left Washington with only six thousand men in New Jersey, seven thousand being in New York. Under these conditions nothing remained but to put the Delaware also between himself and the enemy. He therefore retreated rapidly through New Jersey, and on the 8th of December crossed into Pennsylvania with an army reduced to three thousand by expiry of enlistments. The detachment beyond the Hudson, diminishing daily by the same cause, gradually worked its way to him; its commander luckily being captured on the road. At the time it joined, a few battalions also arrived from Ticonderoga, released by Carleton's retirement to the foot of Champlain. Washington's force on the west bank of the Delaware was thus increased to six thousand men.

In this series of operations, extending from August 22d to December 14th, when Howe went into winter-quarters in New Jersey, the British had met with no serious mishaps, beyond the inevitable losses undergone by the assailants of well-chosen positions. Nevertheless, having in view the superiority of numbers, of equipment, and of discipline, and the command of the water, the mere existence of the enemy's army as an organised body, its mere escape, deprives the campaign of the claim to be considered successful. The red ribbon of the Bath probably never was earned more cheaply than by Sir William Howe that year. Had he displayed anything like the energy of his

two elder brothers, Washington, with all his vigilance, firmness, and enterprise, could scarcely have brought off the force, vastly diminished but still a living organism, around which American resistance again crystallised and hardened. As it was, within a month he took the offensive, and recovered a great part of New Jersey.

Whatever verdict may be passed upon the merit of the military conduct of affairs, there is no doubt of the value, or of the unflagging energy, of the naval support given. Sir William Howe alludes to it frequently, both in general and specifically; while the Admiral sums up his always guarded and often cumbrous expressions of opinion in these words: "It is incumbent upon me to represent to your Lordships, and I cannot too pointedly express, the unabating perseverance and alacrity with which the several classes of officers and seamen have supported a long attendance and unusual degree of fatigue, consequent of these different movements of the army."

The final achievement of the campaign, and a very important one, was the occupation of Rhode Island and Narragansett Bay by a combined expedition, which left New York on the 1st of December, and on the 8th landed at Newport without opposition. The naval force, consisting of five 50-gun ships and eight smaller vessels, was commanded by Sir Peter Parker; the troops, seven thousand in number, by Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Clinton. The immediate effect was to close a haven of privateers, who centred in great numbers around an anchorage which flanked

the route of all vessels bound from Europe to New York. The possession of the bay facilitated the control of the neighbouring waters by British ships of war, besides giving them a base central for coastwise operations and independent of tidal considerations for entrance or exit. The position was abandoned somewhat precipitately three years later. Rodney then deplored its loss in the following terms: "The evacuating Rhode Island was the most fatal measure that could possibly have been adopted. It gave up the best and noblest harbor in America, capable of containing the whole Navy of Britain, and where they could in all seasons lie in perfect security; and from whence squadrons, in forty-eight hours, could blockade the three capital cities of America; namely, Boston, New York, and Philadelphia."

At the end of 1776 began the series of British reverses which characterised the year 1777, making this the decisive period of the war, because of the effect thus produced upon general public opinion abroad; especially upon the governments of France and Spain. On the 20th of December, Howe, announcing to the Ministry that he had gone into winter-quarters, wrote: "The chain, I own, is rather too extensive, but I was induced to occupy Burlington to cover the county of Monmouth; and trusting to the loyalty of the inhabitants, and the strength of the corps placed in the advanced posts, I conclude the troops will be in perfect security." Of this unwarranted security Washington took prompt advantage. On Christmas night a sudden descent, in a blinding snow-storm, upon a British outpost at Trenton, swept off

a thousand prisoners; and although for the moment the American leader again retired behind the Delaware, it was but to resume the offensive four days later. Cornwallis, who was in New York on the point of sailing for England, hurried back to the front, but in vain. A series of quick and well-directed movements recovered the State of New Jersey; and by the 5th of January the American headquarters, and main body of the army, were established at Morristown in the Jersey hills, the left resting upon the Hudson, thus recovering touch with the strategic centre of interest. This menacing position of the Americans, upon the flank of the line of communications from New York to the Delaware, compelled Howe to contract abruptly the lines he had extended so lightly; and the campaign he was forced thus reluctantly to reopen closed under a gloom of retreat and disaster, which profoundly and justly impressed not only the generality of men but military critics as well. "Of all the great conquests which his Majesty's troops had made in the Jersies," writes Beatson, "Brunswick and Amboy were the only two places of any note which they retained; and however brilliant their successes had been in the beginning of the campaign, they reaped little advantage from them when the winter advanced, and the contiguity of so vigilant an enemy forced them to perform the severest duty." With deliberate or unconscious humour he then immediately concludes the chronicle of the year with this announcement: "His Majesty was so well pleased with the abilities and activity which General Howe had displayed this campaign, that on the 25th of

October he conferred upon him the Most Honourable Order of the Bath."

**CHAPTER III**  
**THE DECISIVE PERIOD OF**  
**THE WAR. SURRENDER OF**  
**BURGOYNE AND CAPTURE**  
**OF PHILADELPHIA BY**  
**HOWE. THE NAVAL PART**  
**IN EACH OPERATION**  
**1777**

The leading purpose of the British government in the campaign of 1777 was the same as that with which it had begun in 1776,—the control of the line of the Hudson and Lake Champlain, to be mastered by two expeditions, one starting from each end, and both working towards a common centre at Albany, near the head of navigation of the River. Preliminary difficulties had been cleared away in the previous year, by the destruction of the American flotilla on the Lake, and by the reduction of New York. To both these objects the Navy had contributed conspicuously. It remained to complete the work by resuming the advance from the two bases of operations secured. In 1777 the fortifications on the Hudson were inadequate to stop the progress

of a combined naval and military expedition, as was shown in the course of the campaign.

The northern enterprise was intrusted to General Burgoyne. The impossibility of creating a new naval force, able to contend with that put afloat by Carleton, had prevented the Americans from further building. Burgoyne therefore moved by the Lake without opposition to Ticonderoga, before which he appeared on the 2d of July. A position commanding the works was discovered, which the Americans had neglected to occupy. It being seized, and a battery established, the fort had to be evacuated. The retreat being made by water, the British Lake Navy, under Captain Skeffington Lutwidge, with whom Nelson had served a few years before in the Arctic seas, had a conspicuous part in the pursuit; severing the boom blockading the narrow upper lake and joining impetuously in an attack upon the floating material, the flat-boat transports, and the few relics of Arnold's flotilla which had escaped the destruction of the previous year. This affair took place on the 6th of July. From that time forward the progress of the army was mainly by land. The Navy, however, found occupation upon Lake George, where Burgoyne established a *dépôt* of supplies, although he did not utilise its waterway for the march of the army. A party of seamen under Edward Pellew, still a midshipman, accompanied the advance, and shared the misfortunes of the expedition. It is told that Burgoyne used afterwards to chaff the young naval officer with being the cause of their disaster, because he and his

men, by rebuilding a bridge at a critical moment, had made it possible to cross the upper Hudson. Impeded in its progress by immense difficulties, both natural and imposed by the enemy, the army took twenty days to make twenty miles. On the 30th of July it reached Fort Edward, forty miles from Albany, and there was compelled to stay till the middle of September. Owing to neglect at the War Office, the peremptory orders to Sir William Howe, to move up the Hudson and make a junction with Burgoyne, were not sent forward. Consequently, Howe, acting upon the discretionary powers which he possessed already, and swayed by political reasons into which it is not necessary to enter, determined to renew his attempt upon Philadelphia. A tentative advance into New Jersey, and the consequent manœuvres of Washington, satisfied him that the enterprise by this route was too hazardous. He therefore embarked fourteen thousand men, leaving eight thousand with Sir Henry Clinton to hold New York and make diversions in favor of Burgoyne; and on the 23d of July sailed from Sandy Hook, escorted by five 64-gun ships, a 50, and ten smaller vessels, under Lord Howe's immediate command. The entire expedition numbered about 280 sail. Elaborate pains were taken to deceive Washington as to the destination of the armament; but little craft was needed to prevent a competent opponent from imagining a design so contrary to sound military principle, having regard to Burgoyne's movements and to the well-understood general purpose of the British ministry. Accordingly Washington wrote, "Howe's in

a manner abandoning Burgoyne is so unaccountable a matter, that till I am fully assured of it, I cannot help casting my eyes continually behind me." He suspected an intention to return upon New York.

On the 31st of July, just as Burgoyne reached Fort Edward, where he stuck fast for six weeks, Howe's armament was off the Capes of the Delaware. The prevailing summer wind on the American coast is south-south-west, fair for ascending the river; but information was received that the enemy had obstructed the channel, which lends itself to such defences for some distance below Philadelphia. Therefore, although after occupying the city the free navigation of the river to the sea would be essential to maintaining the position,—for trial had shown that the whole army could not assure communications by land with New York, the other sea base,—Howe decided to prosecute his enterprise by way of the Chesapeake, the ascent of which, under all the conditions, could not be seriously impeded. A fortnight more was consumed in contending against the south-west winds and calms, before the fleet anchored on the 15th of August within the Capes of the Chesapeake; and yet another week passed before the head of the Bay was reached. On the 25th the troops landed. Washington, though so long in doubt, was on hand to dispute the road, but in inferior force; and Howe had no great difficulty in fighting his way to Philadelphia, which was occupied on the 26th of September. A week earlier Burgoyne had reached Stillwater, on the west bank of the Hudson, the utmost point

of his progress, where he was still twenty miles from Albany. Three weeks later, confronted by overwhelming numbers, he was forced to capitulate at Saratoga, whither he had retreated.

Lord Howe held on at the head of the Chesapeake until satisfied that his brother no longer needed him. On the 14th of September he started down the Bay with the squadron and convoy, sending ahead to the Delaware a small division, to aid the army, if necessary. The winds holding southerly, ten days were required to get to sea; and outside further delay was caused by very heavy weather. The Admiral there quitted the convoy and hastened up river. On the 6th of October he was off Chester, ten miles below Philadelphia. The navy had already been at work for a week, clearing away obstructions, of which there were two lines; both commanded by batteries on the farther, or Jersey, shore of the Delaware. The lower battery had been carried by troops; and when Howe arrived, the ships, though meeting lively opposition from the American galleys and fire-rafts, had freed the channel for large vessels to approach the upper obstructions. These were defended not only by a work at Red Bank on the Jersey shore, but also, on the other side of the stream, by a fort called Fort Mifflin, on Mud Island.<sup>18</sup> As the channel at this point, for a distance of half a mile, was only two hundred yards wide, and troops could not reach the island, the position was very strong, and it detained the British for six weeks. Fort Mifflin was

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<sup>18</sup> This was just below the mouth of the Schuylkill, a short distance below the present League Island navy yard.

supported by two floating batteries and a number of galleys. The latter not only fought, offensively and defensively, but maintained the supplies and ammunition of the garrison.

On the 22d of October, a concerted attack, by the army on the works at Red Bank, and by the Navy on Fort Mifflin, resulted disastrously. The former was repulsed with considerable loss, the officer commanding being killed. The squadron, consisting of a 64, three frigates, and a sloop, went into action with Mud Island at the same time; but, the channel having shifted, owing possibly to the obstructions, the sixty-four and the sloop grounded, and could not be floated that day. On the 23d the Americans concentrated their batteries, galleys, and fire-rafts upon the two; and the larger ship took fire and blew up in the midst of the preparations for lightening her. The sloop was then set on fire and abandoned.

So long as this obstacle remained, all supplies for the British army in Philadelphia had to be carried by boats to the shore, and transported considerable distances by land. As direct attacks had proved unavailing, more deliberate measures were adopted. The army built batteries, and the navy sent ashore guns to mount in them; but the decisive blow to Mud Island was given by a small armed ship, the *Vigilant*, 20, which was successfully piloted through a channel on the west side of the river, and reached the rear of the work, towing with her a floating battery with three 24-pounders. This was on the 15th of November. That night the Americans abandoned Fort Mifflin. Their loss, Beatson

says, amounted to near 400 killed and wounded; that of the British to 43. If this be correct, it should have established the invincibility of men who under such prodigious disparity of suffering could maintain their position so tenaciously. After the loss of Mud Island, Red Bank could not be held to advantage, and it was evacuated on the 21st, when an attack was imminent. The American vessels retreated up the river; but they were cornered, and of course ultimately were destroyed. The obstructions being now removed, the British water communications by the line of the Delaware were established,—eight weeks after the occupation of the city, which was to be evacuated necessarily six months later.

While these things were passing, Howe's triumph was marred by the news of Burgoyne's surrender on the 17th of October. For this he could not but feel that the home government must consider him largely responsible; for in the Chesapeake, too late to retrieve his false step, he had received a letter from the minister of war saying that, whatever else he undertook, support to Burgoyne was the great object to be kept in view.

During the operations round Philadelphia, Sir Henry Clinton in New York had done enough to show what strong probabilities of success would have attended an advance up the Hudson, by the twenty thousand men whom Howe could have taken with him. Starting on the 3d of October with three thousand troops, accompanied by a small naval division of frigates, Clinton in a week had reached West Point, fifty miles up the river. The

American fortifications along the way were captured, defences levelled, stores and shipping burned; while an insignificant detachment, with the light vessels, went fifty miles further up, and there destroyed more military stores without encountering any resistance worth mentioning. Certainly, had Howe taken the same line of operations, he would have had to reckon with Washington's ten thousand men which confronted him on the march from the Chesapeake to Philadelphia; but his flank would have been covered, up to Albany, by a navigable stream on either side of which he could operate by that flying bridge which the presence and control of the navy continually constituted. Save the fortifications, which Clinton easily carried, there was no threat to his communications or to his flank, such as the hill country of New Jersey had offered and Washington had skilfully utilised.

The campaign of 1777 thus ended for the British with a conspicuous disaster, and with an apparent success which was as disastrous as a failure. At its close they held Narragansett Bay, the city and harbour of New York, and the city of Philadelphia. The first was an admirable naval base, especially for sailing ships, for the reasons given by Rodney. The second was then, as it is now, the greatest military position on the Atlantic coast of the United States; and although the two could not communicate by land, they did support each other as naval stations in a war essentially dependent upon maritime power. Philadelphia served no purpose but to divide and distract British enterprise. Absolutely dependent for maintenance upon the sea, the forces

in it and in New York could not coöperate; they could not even unite except by sea. When Clinton relieved Howe as commander-in-chief, though less than a hundred miles away by land, he had to take a voyage of over two hundred miles, from New York to Philadelphia, half of it up a difficult river, to reach his station, and troops were transferred by the same tedious process. In consequence of these conditions, the place had to be abandoned the instant that war with France made control of the sea even doubtful. The British held it for less than nine months in all.

During 1777 a number of raids were made by British combined land and sea forces, for the purpose of destroying American dépôts and other resources. Taken together, such operations are subsidiary to, and aid, the great object of interrupting or harassing the communications of an enemy. In so far, they have a standing place among the major operations of war; but taken singly they cannot be so reckoned, and the fact, therefore, is simply noted, without going into details. It may be remarked, however, that in them, although the scale was smaller, the Navy played the same part that it now does in the many expeditions and small wars undertaken by Great Britain in various parts of the world; the same that it did in Wellington's campaigns in the Spanish peninsula, 1808-1812. The land force depended upon the water, and the water was controlled by the Navy.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**WAR BEGINS BETWEEN FRANCE**  
**AND GREAT BRITAIN. BRITISH**  
**EVACUATE PHILADELPHIA.**  
**NAVAL OPERATIONS OF**  
**D'ESTAING AND HOWE ABOUT**  
**NEW YORK, NARRAGANSETT**  
**BAY, AND BOSTON. COMPLETE**  
**SUCCESS OF LORD HOWE.**  
**AMERICAN DISAPPOINTMENT**  
**IN D'ESTAING. LORD HOWE**  
**RETURNS TO ENGLAND.**  
**1778**

The events of 1777 satisfied the French government that the Americans had strength and skill sufficient to embarrass Great Britain seriously, and that the moment, therefore, was opportune for taking steps which scarcely could fail to cause war. On the 6th of February, 1778, France concluded with the United States

an open treaty of amity and commerce; and at the same time a second secret treaty, acknowledging the independence of the late Colonies, and contracting with them a defensive alliance. On the 13th of March, the French Ambassador in London communicated the open treaty to the British government, with the remark that "the United States were in full possession of the independence proclaimed by their declaration of July 4th, 1776." Great Britain at once recalled her Ambassador, and both countries prepared for war, although no declaration was issued. On the 13th of April, a French fleet of twelve ships of the line and five frigates, under the command of the Count d'Estaing,<sup>19</sup> sailed from Toulon for the American coast. It was destined to Delaware Bay, hoping to intercept Howe's squadron. D'Estaing was directed to begin hostilities when forty leagues west of Gibraltar.

The British ministry was not insensible of the danger, the imminence of which had been felt during the previous year; but it had not got ready betimes, owing possibly to confident expectations of success from the campaign of 1777. The ships, in point of numbers and equipment, were not as far forward as the Admiralty had represented; and difficulty, amounting for the moment to impossibility, was experienced in manning them. The vessels of the Channel fleet had to be robbed of

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<sup>19</sup> Charles H., Comte d'Estaing. Born, 1729. Served in India under Lally Tollandal, 1758. After having been taken prisoner at Madras in 1759, exchanged into the navy. Commanded in North America, 1778-80. Guillotined, 1794. W.L.C.

both crews and stores to compose a proper reinforcement for America. Moreover, the destination of the Toulon squadron was unknown, the French government having given out that it was bound to Brest, where over twenty other ships of the line were in an advanced state of preparation. Not until the 5th of June, when d'Estaing was already eight weeks out, was certain news brought by a frigate, which had watched his fleet after it had passed Gibraltar, and which had accompanied it into the Atlantic ninety leagues west of the Straits. The reinforcement for America was then permitted to depart. On the 9th of June, thirteen ships of the line sailed for New York under the command of Vice-Admiral John Byron.<sup>20</sup>

These delays occasioned a singular and striking illustration of the ill effects upon commerce of inadequate preparation for manning the fleet. A considerable number of West India ships, with stores absolutely necessary for the preservation of the islands, waited at Portsmouth for convoy for upwards of three months, while the whole fleet, of eighty sail, was detained for five weeks after it had assembled; "and, although the wind came fair on the 19th of May, it did not sail till the 26th, owing to the convoying ships, the *Boyne* and the *Ruby*, not being ready." Forty-five owners and masters signed a letter to the Admiralty, stating these facts. "The convoy," they said, "was appointed to sail April 10th." Many ships had been ready as early as February. "Is not this shameful usage, my Lords, thus to deceive the public

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<sup>20</sup> Grandfather of the poet.

in general? There are two hundred ships loaded with provisions, etc., waiting at Spithead these three months. The average expense of each ship amounts to £150 monthly, so that the expense of the whole West India fleet since February amounts to £90,000."

The West Indies before the war had depended chiefly upon their fellow colonies on the American continent for provisions, as well as for other prime necessaries. Not only were these cut off as an incident of the war, entailing great embarrassment and suffering, which elicited vehement appeals from the planter community to the home government, but the American privateers preyed heavily upon the commerce of the islands, whose industries were thus smitten root and branch, import and export. In 1776, salt food for whites and negroes had risen from 50 to 100 per cent, and corn, the chief support of the slaves,—the laboring class,—by 400 per cent. At the same time sugar had fallen from 25 to 40 per cent in price, rum over 37 per cent. The words "starvation" and "famine" were freely used in these representations, which were repeated in 1778. Insurance rose to 23 per cent; and this, with actual losses by capture,<sup>21</sup> and by cessation of American trade, with consequent fall of prices, was estimated to give a total loss of £66 upon every £100 earned before the war. Yet, with all this, the outward West India fleet

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<sup>21</sup> The Secretary of Lloyd's, for the purposes of this work, has been so good as to cause to be specially compiled a summary of the losses and captures during the period 1775-1783. This, so far as it deals with merchantmen and privateers, gives the following results.<sup>22</sup> Including those re-taken or ransomed. W.L.C.

in 1778 waited six weeks, April 10th-May 26th, for convoy. Immediately after it got away, a rigorous embargo was laid upon all shipping in British ports, that their crews might be impressed to man the Channel fleet. Market-boats, even, were not allowed to pass between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight.

Three days after Byron had sailed, Admiral Augustus Keppel also put to sea with twenty-one ships of the line, to cruise off Brest. His instructions were to prevent the junction of the Toulon and Brest divisions, attacking either that he might meet. On the 17th of June, two French frigates were sighted. In order that they might not report his force or his movements, the British Admiral sent two of his own frigates, with the request that they would speak him. One, the *Belle Poule*, 36, refused; and an engagement followed between her and the British ship, the *Arethusa*, 32. The King of France subsequently declared that this occurrence fixed the date of the war's beginning. Although both Keppel's and d'Estaing's orders prescribed acts of hostility, no formal war yet existed.

Byron had a very tempestuous passage, with adverse winds, by which his vessels were scattered and damaged. On the 18th of August, sixty-seven days from Plymouth, the flagship arrived off the south coast of Long Island, ninety miles east of New York, without one of the fleet in company. There twelve ships were seen at anchor to leeward (north), nine or ten miles distant, having jury masts, and showing other signs of disability. The British vessel approached near enough to recognise them as

French. They were d'Estaing's squadron, crippled by a very heavy gale, in which Howe's force had also suffered, though to a less extent. Being alone, and ignorant of existing conditions, Byron thought it inexpedient to continue on for either New York or Narragansett Bay. The wind being southerly, he steered for Halifax, which he reached August 26th. Some of his ships also entered there. A very few had already succeeded in joining Howe in New York, being fortunate enough to escape the enemy.

So far as help from England went, Lord Howe would have been crushed long before this. He owed his safety partly to his own celerity, partly to the delays of his opponent. Early in May he received advices from home, which convinced him that a sudden and rapid abandonment of Philadelphia and of Delaware Bay might become necessary. He therefore withdrew his ships of the line from New York and Narragansett, concentrating them at the mouth of Delaware Bay, while the transports embarked all stores, except those needed for a fortnight's supply of the army in a hostile country. The threatening contingency of a superior enemy's appearing off the coast might, and did, make it imperative not to risk the troops at sea, but to choose instead the alternative of a ninety-mile march through New Jersey, which a year before had been rejected as too hazardous for an even larger force. Thus prepared, no time was lost when the evacuation became necessary. Sir William Howe, who had been relieved on the 24th of May by Sir Henry Clinton, and had returned to England, escaped the humiliation of giving up his dearly

bought conquest. On the 18th of June the British troops, twelve thousand in number, were ferried across the Delaware, under the supervision of the Navy, and began their hazardous march to New York. The next day the transports began to move down the river; but, owing to the intricate navigation, head winds, and calms, they did not get to sea until the 28th of June. On the 8th of July, ten days too late, d'Estaing anchored in the mouth of the Delaware. "Had a passage of even ordinary length taken place," wrote Washington, "Lord Howe with the British ships of war and all the transports in the river Delaware must inevitably have fallen; and Sir Henry Clinton must have had better luck than is commonly dispensed to men of his profession under such circumstances, if he and his troops had not shared at least the fate of Burgoyne."

Had Howe's fleet been intercepted, there would have been no naval defence for New York; the French fleet would have surmounted the difficulties of the harbour bar at its ease; and Clinton, caught between it and the American army, must have surrendered. Howe's arrival obviated this immediate danger; but much still needed to be done, or the end would be postponed only, not averted. A fair wind carried the fleet and the whole convoy from the Delaware to Sandy Hook in forty-eight hours. On the morning of the 29th, as Howe was approaching his port, he spoke a packet from England, which not only brought definite news of d'Estaing's sailing, but also reported that she herself had fallen in with him to the southward, not very far

from the American coast, and had been chased by his ships. His appearance off New York, therefore, was imminent.

Howe's measures were prompt and thorough, as became his great reputation. To watch for d'Estaing's approach, a body of cruisers was despatched, numerous enough for some to bring frequent word of his movements, while others kept touch with him. The ships at New York were ordered down to Sandy Hook, where the defence of the entrance was to be made. Clinton, who had been hard pressed by Washington throughout his march, arrived on the 30th of June—the day after Howe himself—on the heights of Navesink, on the seacoast, just south of Sandy Hook. During the previous winter the sea had made a breach between the heights and the Hook, converting the latter into an island. Across this inlet the Navy threw a bridge of boats, by which the army on the 5th of July passed to the Hook, and thence was conveyed to the city.

On the same day the French fleet was sighted off the coast of Virginia by a cruiser, which reached Howe on the 7th; and two days later another brought word that the enemy had anchored on the 8th off the Delaware. There d'Estaing again tarried for two days, which were diligently improved by the British Admiral, who at the same time sent off despatches to warn Byron, of whose coming he now had heard. Despite all his energy, his preparations still were far from complete, when on the morning of the 11th a third vessel arrived, announcing that the French were approaching. That evening they anchored outside, four

miles south of Sandy Hook. Howe, who during all these days was indefatigable, not only in planning but also in personal supervision of details, hastened at once to place his vessels according to the disposition which he had determined, and which he had carefully explained to his captains, thus insuring an intelligent coöperation on their part.

The narrow arm of land called Sandy Hook projects in a northerly direction from the New Jersey coast, and covers the lower bay of New York on the south side. The main ship-channel, then as now, ran nearly east and west, at right angles to the Hook and close to its northern end. Beyond the channel, to the north, there was no solid ground for fortification within the cannon range of that day. Therefore such guns as could be mounted on shore, five in number, were placed in battery at the end of the Hook. These formed the right flank of the defence, which was continued thence to the westward by a line of seven ships, skirting the southern edge of the channel. As the approach of the French, if they attacked, must be with an easterly wind and a rising tide, the ships were placed with that expectation; and in such wise that, riding with their heads to the eastward, each successive one, from van to rear, lay a little outside—north—of her next ahead. The object of this indented formation was that each ship might bring her broadside to bear east, and yet fire clear of those to the east of her. In order to effect this concentration of all the batteries in an easterly direction, which would rake the

approach of the enemy, a spring<sup>22</sup> was run from the outer, or port quarter of every ship, except the leader.<sup>23</sup> These springs were not taken to the bow cable or anchor, as was often done, but to anchors of their own, placed broad off the port bows. If, then, the enemy attacked, the ships, by simply keeping fast the springs and veering the cables, would swing with their broadsides facing east. If the enemy, which had no bow fire, survived his punishment, and succeeded in advancing till abreast the British line, it was necessary only to keep fast the cables and let go the springs; the ships would swing head to the east wind, and the broadsides would once more bear north, across the channel instead of along it. These careful arrangements were subject, of course, to the mischance of shot cutting away cables or springs; but this was more than offset by the probable injury to the enemy's spars and rigging, as well as hulls, before he could use his batteries at all.

Such was the main defence arranged by Howe; with which New York stood or fell. In the line were five 64's, one 50, and an armed storeship. An advanced line, of one fifty with two smaller vessels, was placed just inside the bar—two or

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<sup>22</sup> A spring is a rope taken usually from the quarter (one side of the stern) of a ship, to the anchor. By hauling upon it the battery is turned in the direction desired.

<sup>23</sup> The leader, the *Leviathan*, was excepted, evidently because she lay under the Hook, and her guns could not bear down channel. She was not a fighting ship of the squadron, but an armed storeship, although originally a ship of war, and therefore by her thickness of side better fitted for defence than an ordinary merchant vessel. Placing her seems to have been an afterthought, to close the gap in the line, and prevent even the possibility of the enemy's ships turning in there and doubling on the van. Thus Howe avoided the fatal oversight made by Brueys twenty years later, in Aboukir Bay.

three miles outside the Hook—to rake the enemy as he crossed, retiring as he approached; and four galleys, forming a second line, were also stationed for the same purpose, across the channel, abreast of the Hook.<sup>24</sup> The retreat of these was secure into the shoal water, where they could not be followed. One 64 and some frigates were held as a reserve, inside the main line, to act as occasion might require. The total available force was, six 64's, three 50's, and six frigates. D'Estaing's fleet, in detail, consisted of one 90-gun ship, one 80, six 74's and one 50. Great as was this discrepancy between the opponents, it was counterbalanced largely by Howe's skilful dispositions, which his enemy could not circumvent. If the latter once got alongside, there was little hope for the British; but it was impossible for the French to evade the primary necessity of undergoing a raking fire, without reply, from the extreme range of their enemies' cannon up to the moment of closing. The stake, however, was great, and the apparent odds stirred to the bottom the fighting blood of the British seamen. The ships of war being short-handed, Howe called for volunteers from the transports. Such numbers came forward that the agents of the vessels scarcely could keep a watch on board; and many whose names were not on the lists concealed themselves in the boats which carried their companions to the

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<sup>24</sup> It may be recalled that a similar disposition was made by the Confederates at Mobile against Farragut's attack in 1864, and that it was from these small vessels that his flagship *Hartford* underwent her severest loss. To sailing ships the odds were greater, as injury to spars might involve stoppage. Moreover, Howe's arrangements brought into such fire all his heavier ships.

fighting ships. The masters and mates of merchantmen in the harbour in like manner offered their services, taking their stations at the guns. Others cruised off the coast in small boats, to warn off approaching vessels; many of which nevertheless fell into the enemy's hands.

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