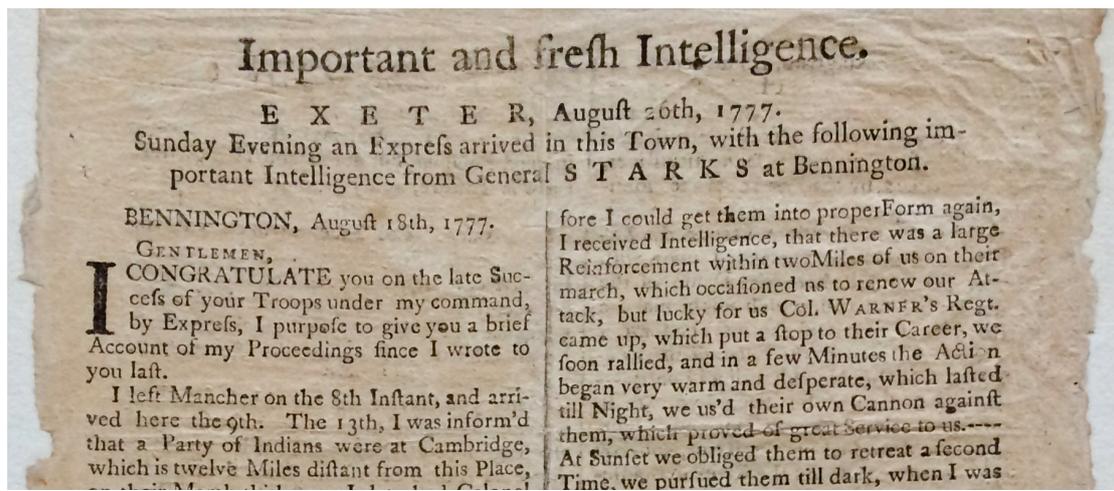


MAUMS – 7th grade

Primary Sources for The Battle of Bennington



General John Stark's August 18, 1777, letter to the N.H. Legislature
from the Collection of the Bennington Museum

Edited by Phil Holland



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Painting by
Sir Joshua
Reynolds

General John Burgoyne issued written instructions to Lieutenant Colonel Baum, leader of the Bennington raid. He originally directed Baum to go by way of Arlington and Manchester over the Green Mountains to Rockingham and Brattleboro on the Connecticut River, and from there to head to Albany. Burgoyne changed his mind when he learned about the lightly guarded (or so he was told) Continental supply depot at Bennington. Burgoyne's instructions were found on Baum when he was wounded and taken prisoner. They begin:

"The object of your expedition is to try the affections of the country, to disconcert the councils of the enemy, to mount the Riedesel's dragoons, to complete Peters' corps, and to obtain large supplies of cattle, horses and carriages."

That makes five objectives or goals.

1) *to try the affections of the country*

What do you think "*to try the affections of the country*" means? Hint: an old meaning of "try" is "test." "Affections" ("feelings") probably refers to which side someone is on (King or Congress). "The country" simply refers to the places on Baum's route.

2) *to disconcert the councils of the enemy*

"Disconcert" means "disturb, confuse." Who is "the enemy"? What do you think Burgoyne hopes Baum will do?

3) *to mount the Riedesel's dragoons*

What one thing did the German dragoons lack? (Remember that dragoons are soldiers that are supposed to travel on horseback).

4) *to complete Peters' corps*

John Peters was a Loyalist leader. A corps (as in "Marine Corps") is a body of soldiers. How was Peters' corps supposed to be "completed" during the expedition to Bennington?

5) *to obtain large supplies of cattle, horses, and carriages.*

Why did Burgoyne need these particular things? Where were these supplies kept, and by whom?

After the Battle, Burgoyne wrote to Lord Germain, his superior back in London:

The great bulk of the country is undoubtedly with Congress, in principle and zeal. And their measures are executed with a secrecy and dispatch that are not to be equaled. Wherever the King's forces point, militia, to the amount of three of four thousand, assemble in twenty-four hours. They bring with them their substance, etc., and, the alarm over, return to their farms. The Hampshire Grants [Vermont] in particular, a country unpeopled and almost unknown in the last war, now abounds in the most active and most rebellious race on the continent, and hangs like a gathering storm upon my left.

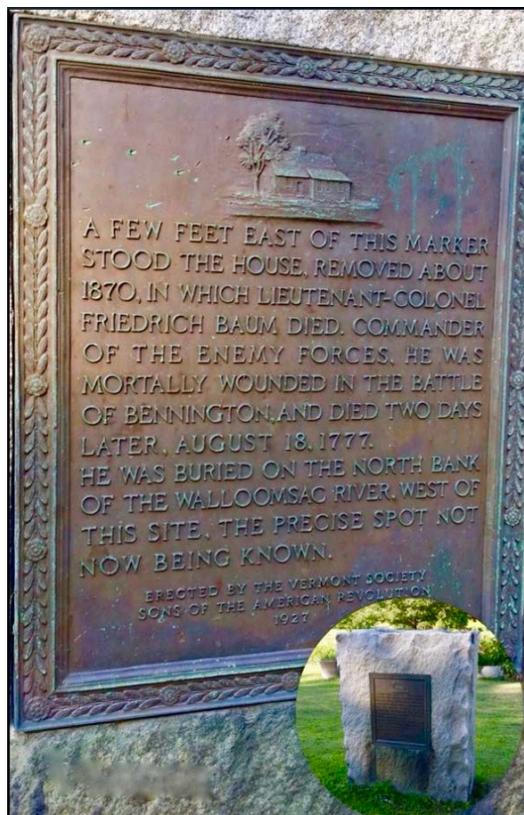
What does Burgoyne mean by "the last war?" What had happened since that time in "the Hampshire Grants?"

[Burgoyne is referring to the French and Indian War, from 1754-63. The settlement of the Grants, the territory that would become Vermont, had begun when that war ended and had accelerated in the 1770s.]

Lieutenant Colonel Friedrich Baum was commander of the British forces at the Battle of Bennington. He himself was an officer from the German state of Brunswick, and most of the men he commanded at the Battle were also German, including those from his own regiment, the Prince Ludwig Dragoons.

Lt. Col. Baum's orders, given to him personally by General Burgoyne, were (among other things) *"to obtain large supplies of cattle, horses and carriages"* held by the Americans at Bennington. He was also told that if he encountered a sizable enemy force, which he did about five miles short of his target at a bridge over the Walloomsac River, to establish and hold his position and send for reinforcements (which he had already done). He set up three defensive positions (at the Troy Fort, at the bridge, and on top of a hill) but was attacked and overwhelmed by American forces under General John Stark before reinforcements could arrive. Lt. Col. Baum was seriously wounded in the action. He was taken to a house a few miles from the battlefield, where he died two days later. The house is no longer standing, but a stone marker with a plaque marks the spot along Route 67 just inside the Vermont border with New York.

Lt. Col. Baum had served in Europe in the Seven Years War, but had no experience of fighting in America. He did not speak or understand English; he communicated in French and German and with the help of translators. He divided his forces on what became the battlefield, which allowed them to be overrun by the Americans. General Burgoyne later wrote, *"He showed great Personal Courage, but was overpowered by Numbers"*.



by Route 67, North Bennington, VT

Levi Beardsley – The Man in the Middle

Battlefields are located where battles happen to take place. Until the 14th of August, 1777, the little hamlet of Walloomsac on the New York-Vermont border had not been touched by the war. On that day the British and American forces led by Baum and Stark ran into each other and skirmished at a bridge crossing the Walloomsac, then established positions across the river from each other. A man named **Levi Beardsley** lived in one of the houses near the bridge. It seems he had not taken sides in the war, but he soon found himself at the very heart of one of its key battles. His grandson told his grandfather's story in his own words.

"A considerable part of the contest was on my grandfather's farm, and in sight of his house; in fact the enemy commenced their breastwork at his house, which being of logs was intended to be filled with men as a strong point of defense. Those who commenced building this breastwork, were finally called away to man the works on the hill, and thus the house was left to the family.

"My grandfather, then about fifty years old, was a non-combatant; he always regarded the life of a soldier with disrelish, full of hardship and danger, and during the French war declined entering into military service. He was reluctant to bear arms against the King and used to remark that 'it was as necessary to have some at home to raise bread and meat for the armies as to engage in active warfare...'

"My father was about fourteen years of age and with a younger brother was made prisoner by some lurking Indians, sent in advance of the Hessians, who were part of the force sent on that expedition. The boys, when surprised and taken, were going to the pasture after cows; the Indians would not permit them to escape, though they treated them with kindness, and whenever they attempted to turn out of the path, the Indians would press them in, by putting their guns by their side, telling them "not to strive." They were finally released by the interference of the Hessian officers, a short time before the battle, and with the rest of the family were shut up in the house.

"After the main force had been called away from the house to man the works on the hill, a soldier came in and commenced pulling out the "chinking" between the logs, to enable him to fire out. My grandfather objected, and when the soldier persisted the old man seized his musket, and being a strong man wrenched it out of his hands and tossed it up into the chamber: then seizing him by the shoulders put him out by main force and fastened the door against him.

The battle was sharply contested, but the result is known; the Hessians were defeated and taken, and a large body of them, when they surrendered, came running down the hill near the house with as little order as so many sheep, and surrendered in plain sight, several being shot after they had ceased firing. The Indians ran away early in the battle, when they were about to be surrounded; they were painted and were nearly naked, and when they left the hill, they ran through a field covered with briars, paying little regard to briars or thorns, naked as they were. I have often heard

that race of the naked Indians described as a masterly effort of Indian retreat, and not altogether without its annoyances to them, as well as amusement to those who saw them scamper off through the briars.

“There had been occasional skirmishing before the final contest commenced; which was on the 16th of August, 1777. The previous day, an Indian chief had been shot by a party of militia men, concealed in a field of grain, as he with several of his warriors were riding along the road on horses that had been plundered from the inhabitants. A few days after the battle, an attempt was made to exhume his body, under an impression that possibly treasures might have been buried with him. When they came to the remains, one of the volunteers who had been engaged in the conflict, stood over the grave with an uplifted tomahawk, and exclaimed, “Arise, you old devil, arise.” But the Indian gave no heed to the summons.

Words:

commenced – began

breastwork – defensive structure that is chest high (often made of logs)

the works – more defensive structures

non-combatant – someone who chooses not to fight

disrelish – not liking something

reluctant – hesitant to do something

“not to strive” – not to try to escape

plundered -- stolen

exhume – dig up

summons – call to come

1. Explain in your own words why Levi Beardsley’s grandfather did not choose to fight in the Revolutionary War. He gives two reasons.

[He did not wish to fight against the King, and he said that someone needed to work to supply food to the armies]

2. What was one role of the Indians in Baum’s force? You can see it clearly here.

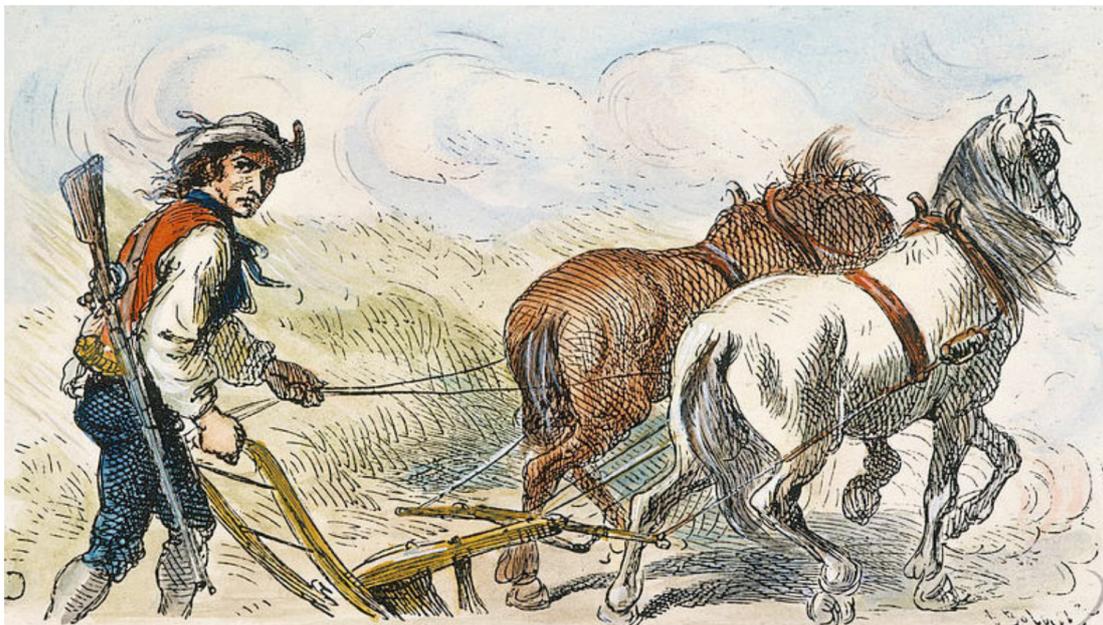
[The Indians were sent ahead of Baum’s main force to make sure the way was clear and to clear it if it wasn’t].

3. Why did they dig up the Indian’s grave “several days later?”

[They were looking for things of value – silver trinkets, jewelry, and weapons, for example.]

Thomas Mellen was a New Hampshire militiaman who fought in both engagements of the Battle of Bennington. He was born in 1756 in Londonderry, NH (General Stark was also born there). He had served in the Continental army under Stark in 1775, and in July, 1777, he enlisted in the New Hampshire militia “as soon as I heard that Stark would accept the command of the State troops.” He served as a private in Col. Stickney’s regiment and was seen and recognized by General Stark on the battlefield.

Mellen returned to New Hampshire, got married, moved to Newbury, Vermont, and lived into his 90s. When he was 92, with his memory still sharp, he told the story of his participation in the Battle of Bennington to a young clergyman (James Davie Butler) with an interest in history, who wrote it down and published it. Mellen died in 1853 at the age of 97, one of the oldest veterans of the Revolutionary War.



Excerpts from the narrative of Thomas Mellen:

[He enlists and is eventually ordered to Bennington]:

"I enlisted as soon as I learned that Stark would accept the command of the State troops; six or seven others from the same town joined the army at the same time. At Fort Number 4 [on the Connecticut River] I received a horn of powder and made two or three hundred bullets; I had brought my own gun. Then my company went on to Manchester; soon after, I went with a hundred others down the valley of Otter Creek; we lived like lords on pigs and chickens in the houses of the Tories who had fled. When we returned to Manchester, bringing two hogsheads of West India rum, we heard that the Hessians were on their way to invade Vermont. Late in the afternoon of the rainy Friday [August 15], we were ordered off for Bennington in spite of the rain, mud and darkness..."

[He marches all night, gets a little sleep in a hay-mow, has a breakfast of bread and milk at a local farm, and heads off to join Stark’s forces on the Walloomsac, in time to be ordered to intercept Tories coming through the woods from the north]

"Between two and three o'clock the battle began. The Germans fired by platoons and were soon hidden by the smoke. Our men fired each on his own hook, aiming wherever he saw a flash; few on our side had either bayonets or cartridges. At last I stole away from my post and ran down to the battle. The first time I fired I put three balls in my gun; before I had time to fire many rounds our men rushed over the breast-works, but I and many others chased straggling Hessians in the woods.

[The first engagement is now over; the second is about to begin. Mellen is forced back by Breymann's cannon]

"We pursued until we met Colonel Breymann with 800 fresh troops and larger cannon, which opened a fire of grape shot; some of the grape shot riddled a Virginia fence near me; one shot struck a small white oak behind which I stood; though it hit higher than my head I fled from the tree, thinking it might be aimed at me again. We skirmishers ran back till we met a large body of Stark's men and then faced about. But the enemy outflanked us, and I said to a comrade, 'We must run or they will have us.'

[The battle turns in the Patriots' favor when Warner's Green Mountain Boys arrive]

"In a few minutes we saw Seth Warner's men hurrying to help us; one-half of them attacked each flank of the enemy and beat back those who were just closing around us. Stark's men now took heart and stood their ground. My gun barrel was at this time too hot to hold so I seized the musket of a dead Hessian, in which my bullets went down easier than my own. Right in front were the cannon, and seeing an officer on horseback waving his sword to the artillery, I fired at him twice; his horse fell; he cut the traces of an artillery horse, mounted him and rode off.

[The Germans retreat. Mellen pursues them till nightfall, choosing not to kill Germans who have stopped fighting]

"Soon the Germans ran, and we followed; many of them threw their guns down on the ground, or offered them to us, or kneeled, some in puddles of water. One said to me, "Wir sind ein, Bruder!" ["We are one, brother"]. I pushed him behind me and rushed on. All those near me did so. The enemy beat a parley [a signal to stop fighting], minded to give up, but our men did not understand it. I came to one wounded man flat on the ground, crying "water" or "quarter" ["spare my life"]. I snatched the sword out of his scabbard [sword holder], and while I ran on and fired, carried it between my teeth, thinking I might need it. The Germans fled by the road and in a wood each side of it; many of their scabbards caught in the brush and held the fugitives till we seized them. We chased them till dark. We might have mastered them all, but Stark, saying he would run no risk of spoiling a good day's work, ordered a halt and return to quarters.

[Mellen and his comrades, exhausted, lie down and go to sleep in a cornfield. The next day they witness the burial of the dead on the battlefield and the parading of prisoners in Bennington.]

"My company lay down and slept in a corn field, near where we had fought -- each man having a hill of corn for a pillow. When I waked the next morning, I was so beaten out that I could not get up till I had rolled about a good while. After breakfast I went to see them bury the dead. I saw thirteen Tories, mostly shot through the head, buried in one hole. We saw many of the wounded who had lain out all night. Afterward we went to Bennington and saw the prisoners paraded. They were drawn up in one long line; the British foremost, then the Waldeckers [the Germans], next the Indians, and hindmost the Tories."

Questions

1. Why do you think Mellen and a hundred other Patriots were ordered from Manchester "down the valley of Otter Creek?" Meanwhile, where were most of the other New Hampshire militiamen ordered to go?

Mellen and the hundred other soldiers were clearing the area north of Manchester of Loyalists (Tories) and bringing back supplies from farms that had been abandoned. The other New Hampshire troops were led by Stark to Bennington.

2. Once he joined Stark's camp, what was Mellen assigned to do?

To prevent Tories from joining Baum's forces by coming through the woods from the north.

3. What did Mellen do when the battle began?

He soon joined in the assault on the dragoon redoubt at the top of the hill, then chased the fleeing Germans down the hill.

4. What did he do when he met Breyman's advancing column?

He retreated when fired on by cannon.

5. What did the arrival of Warner's troops prevent?

Breyman's troops were about to turn the Patriots' flanks, but were pushed back by Warner's men.

6. Why do you think the surrendering German said "Wir sind ein, Bruder!" to Mellen?

He was trying to save his life by saying that he was on the Patriots' side, that they the Americans and he were not enemies but brothers.

7. Why do you think that Mellen didn't kill that German soldier?

The German soldier had already surrendered. There were other Germans up ahead to chase after.

8. Why do you think that Mellen was so tired after the battle?

He had marched through mud most of the night before; he had had very little sleep and not much to eat or drink; he had just fought in two physically exhausting battles.

9. Why do you think the prisoners were paraded in the order mentioned?

The British went first, because they were the King's troops; then came the Germans, who were fighting for the British; then the Indians; and lastly the Loyalists, the lowest of the low, the Americans who were fighting on the side of the King.

10. Do you know anyone in their 90s? Have you ever asked someone in their 90s to tell you about a past event? What would you ask them about if you had the chance?

Joseph Rudd was born in Connecticut in 1740 and built a log cabin in Bennington in 1765 at age 25. Twelve years later he fought in the Battle as a Lieutenant in Captain Elijah Dewey's Bennington militia company. The following letter by Rudd to his father dated 20 August 1777 is in the Bennington Museum's collection.

Honored Father:

After my duty I take this opportunity to write to you, hoping these few lines will find you well, as through the goodness of God they leave me and my family. We met with a great deal of trouble on the 16th instant [= 'of this month']. Myself and brother John was preserved through a very hot battle. We killed and took according to the best account we can get, about one thousand of the enemy. Our loss was about thirty or forty. We marched right against their breastwork with our small arms, where they fired upon us every half minute, yet they never touched a man. We drove them out of their breastwork and took their fieldpieces and pursued and killed great numbers of them. We took four or five of our neighbors – two Sniders and two Hornbecks. The bigger part of Dutch Hoosick was in the battle against us. They went to the Reglers [= Regular troops] a day or two before the fight. Samuel Anderson [of Pownal] was a captain amongst the Reglers, and was in the battle against us. Whilst I was gone my wife and children went off and got down to Williamstown. After I got home I went after them and found them to Landlord Simons. I have got them home again. My wife was very much tired out. She had four children with her. Celinda was forced to run on foot. We soon expect the enemy will come upon us again and what shall I do with my family I know not.

-- Joseph Rudd

We know about what happened to Rudd at the Battle because of this statement by his friend **Amos Searles**, made in connection with Rudd's pension application, filed by his widow Sarah in 1837.

Mr. Rudd related to me that he carried his sword and gun into the Battle of Bennington, that after with others he had stormed the breastwork, and the Hessians were retreating and firing, he snapped his gun at a stout-built Hessian, and that from some cause, and for the first time on that day his gun missed fire, that he pursued to grapple with the Hessian to take him prisoner. The Hessian turned and raised his piece to fire, but Mr. Rudd said he was so near to him that by a spring and quick effort he knocked the Hessian's gun up, and he grappled with him, drew the Hessian's sword instead of his own, and gave the Hessian a severe blow on his neck as he broke from him and turned to run... [another soldier kills the Hessian] The sword Mr. Rudd took from the Hessian I have seen. I have also heard Mr. Herrick and others repeatedly relate the same story.

– Amos Searles

The sword that Rudd captured from that Hessian artillery officer is now on display at the Bennington Museum. So is Rudd's own musket.



Musket carried by Joseph Rudd at the Battle of Bennington.

Collection of the Bennington Museum

Twenty years after Joseph Rudd's death in 1818, **Sarah Rudd**, Joseph's widow, also made a statement for the Pension Board in which she speaks of the hardships she and her family faced while Joseph was away fighting. She was 94 years old when she made this statement. She did receive a pension from the US government and lived to the age of 98. She is buried next to her husband in the Old Bennington Cemetery.

Here she describes what it was like to flee in fear from the British advance toward Bennington. She traveled to Williamstown on horseback with her four children, aged 8, 4, 2, and 4 months.

It was an eventful year. I can never forget, while anything of memory lives, my flight on horseback, and in feeble health, with my babe and two other small children and my eldest daughter running on foot by the side of me from Bennington to Williamstown under circumstances of great alarm and fear from Hessians, Tory-enemies, and Indians, and the absence of my husband at the time of this my trial for months before, and for months afterwards.

-- Sarah Rudd



This illustration shows a family like Sarah's fleeing from the British advance. Sarah may have had to manage her horse and her children all by herself.

John Orr -- The Attack on the Tory Fort

John Orr was born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, in 1748. His father had come to America from Ireland a generation before. Both of Orr's parents died when he was only 5 years old, so he was taken care of by a member of his church until he was 14. He then began to work as a laborer, and later in Maine as a carpenter. When he was 21 he returned to New Hampshire and took up farming with his brother in the town of Bedford. At age 23 he got married to Jane Smith; he would eventually have 8 sons and 7 daughters by two wives. When the call came in July, 1777, for volunteers to serve under Gen. John Stark to oppose the British invasion from Canada, he was 29 years old. He must have been a well-respected man, because he was made a Lieutenant in one of the companies in Colonel Stickney's regiment.

At the Battle of Bennington, Stickney's men were ordered to attack the Tory Fort. As Orr advanced under fire, he was shot just above the knee and lay in the field until he was dragged to safety, as musket balls flew overhead. The injury left him lame for life. After the Battle, his children helped run the farm, and Orr began a life of public service as Representative and then Senator in the New Hampshire Legislature. John Orr died in 1822 at the age of 74 and is buried in the Old Bedford Cemetery.

On August 16, 1777, John Orr and the rest of his company marched half a mile from Stark's camp toward the Tory Fort. Trees and a field of corn hid their advance as they approached. Then, said Orr, *"About 4 o'clock p.m., Nichols began, and the cracking of the muskets was such that imagination could see men falling by the dozens. We arose and with shouts marched rapidly to the attack."* Orr later reported that at that moment he remembered an American who had shown himself to be a coward in the retreat from Fort Ticonderoga. He decided that he would want no one to say that about him, so he advanced *"with the appearance of a brave man."* The moment of truth was about to arrive: *"When we had passed through the wood and cornfield, we came in sight of the enemy, at about fifteen rods distance [one rod = 16.5 feet, so 15 rods = 240 feet, or about 80 yards]."*

"They commenced firing with muskets at an alarming rate, so that it seemed wonderful that any of the attacking party should escape. At that time an expression of the Prince of Orange came into my mind – "every bullet has its billet" – and I soon found one commissioned to lay me low. After having lain fifteen or twenty minutes, one of our sergeants came and offered to take me off the ground. I told him he was unable, for I could not help myself. He said he would not leave me there, for the enemy might come and kill me. He therefore called a soldier to his assistance. They took hold of me by my arms, and attempted to carry me off; but the bullets flew directly at us, so that I charged them to lay me down instantly, each take a hand, and stoop so low, that the flax would conceal them, and drag me on my back into the

cornfield, where I should be out of sight of the enemy. This order they obeyed, and took me to the road, where many of the wounded were collected.

Words:

commenced: began

wonderful: amazing, incredible

party: group

billet: a house where a soldier might be quartered (stay temporarily)

commissioned: given a job to do

I charged them: I ordered them

flax: a kind of tall grass used to make clothing

conceal: hide

[A detail of the Durnford map of the Battlefield with overwriting in red by Philip Lord]:

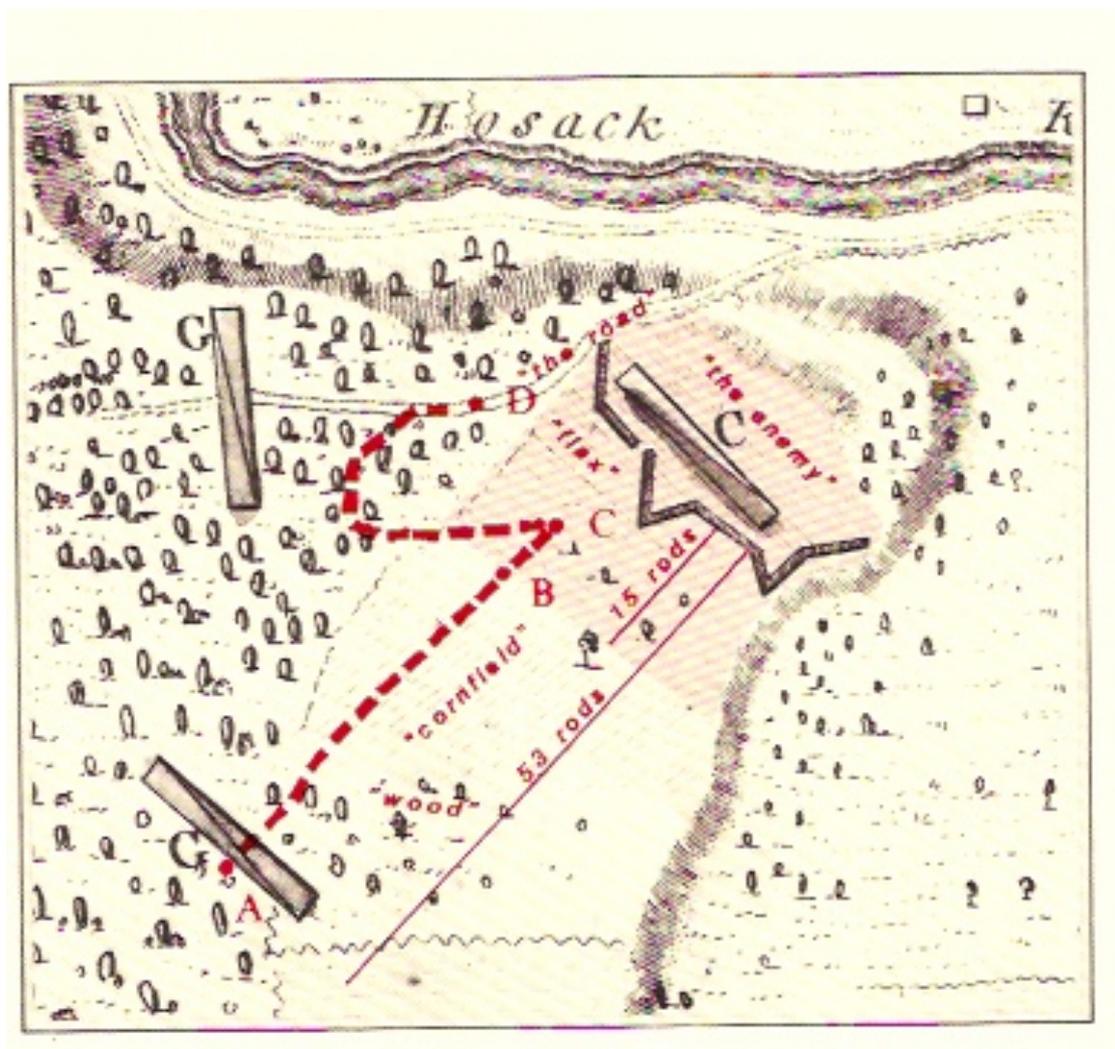


Illustration from Philip Lord, *War Over Walloomscoick*

Questions

1. Who was in the “attacking party” and what did they hope to “escape?”

[The Patriots, who hoped to escape being shot]

2. Why does Orr say that he advanced “with the appearance of a brave man?”

[He may have been afraid on the inside, but he didn’t show it or let it affect his behavior.]

3. “...and I soon found one commissioned to lay me low.”

a) What does the word “one” refer to?

“one” refers to the musket ball that struck him.

b) What happened to Orr at this point?

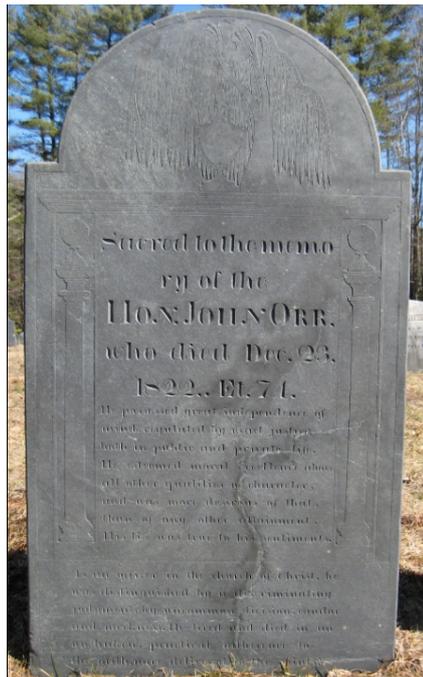
Orr was shot above the knee.

4. Put the phrase “every bullet has its billet” into your own words.

Every bullet will find a home for itself.

5. Do you think John Orr was a good soldier and officer or not? Explain your answer.

Yes, he was a good soldier and officer. As he advanced, he overcame his fear of being shot and set a good example for others. When he was shot, he showed concern for the soldiers that came to rescue him so that they would not also be hit. From what we know of his later life, he learned to live with his war injury and had a long career of public service.



John Orr’s
tombstone,
Bedford,
N.H.

John Peters – A Vermonter Who Fought for the King

John Peters fought in the Battle of Bennington as the commander of the Queen's Loyal Rangers, a Loyalist militia that was stationed at the Tory Fort. Peters had once lived in Bradford, Vermont, but had gone over to the British by joining their forces in Canada. He had raised part of a regiment of Loyalists and was ordered to accompany Baum's forces to Bennington and to recruit more men for the King.

Peters wrote an account of the Battle in a letter to a friend in London:

"I commanded the Loyalists at Bennington, where I had 291 men of my regiment with me, and I lost above half of them in that engagement. The action commenced about nine o'clock in the morning, and continued till near four o'clock in the afternoon, when we retired in much confusion. A little before the Royalists gave way, the Rebels pushed with a strong party on the front of the Loyalists where I commanded. As they were coming up, I observed a man fire at me, which I returned, he loaded again as he came up & discharged again at me, and crying out "Peters, you damned Tory, I have got you," he rushed on me with his bayonet, which entered just below my left breast, but was turned by the bone.

"By this time I was loaded, and I saw that it was a Rebel Captain, Jeremiah Post, an old schoolfellow & playmate, and a cousin of my wife's. Though his bayonet was in my body, I felt regret at being obliged to destroy him. We retreated from Bennington to the reinforcement that was coming up, which was soon attacked and obliged to retreat...

John Peter's wife was in Montreal when she received news of the defeat of the King's forces at Bennington. She was told there was a report that her husband and one of her sons had died of their wounds. She is said to have replied: *"My calamities are very great: but, thank God they died doing their duty to their King and Country; I have Six Sons left who, as soon as they shall be able to bear arms I will send against the Rebels while I and my Daughter will mourn for the dead, and pray for the living."*

1. Why did Peters feel "regret at being obliged to destroy" the man who had just tried to kill him?

[The man, the rebel captain Jeremiah Post, had been a companion of Peters' boyhood. They had played together and gone to school together. And Post was related to Peters' wife. But Peters' political feelings were stronger than these ties.]

2. What does Peters' encounter with the rebel captain Jeremiah Post show about the Battle of Bennington?

[It shows that the Battle had elements of a civil war, a society coming apart at the seams.]

Capt. Joab Stafford – A Hard Man to Keep Down

Joab Stafford was born in Rhode Island in 1729 and moved with his family to the town of Cheshire (then called New Providence) in the Berkshires in the 1760s. He led a company of independent volunteers in the Battle of Bennington. He was assigned by Colonel Seth Warner to circle behind the Tory Fort and attack it from the southwest. His son Richard wrote down his father's story in 1828.

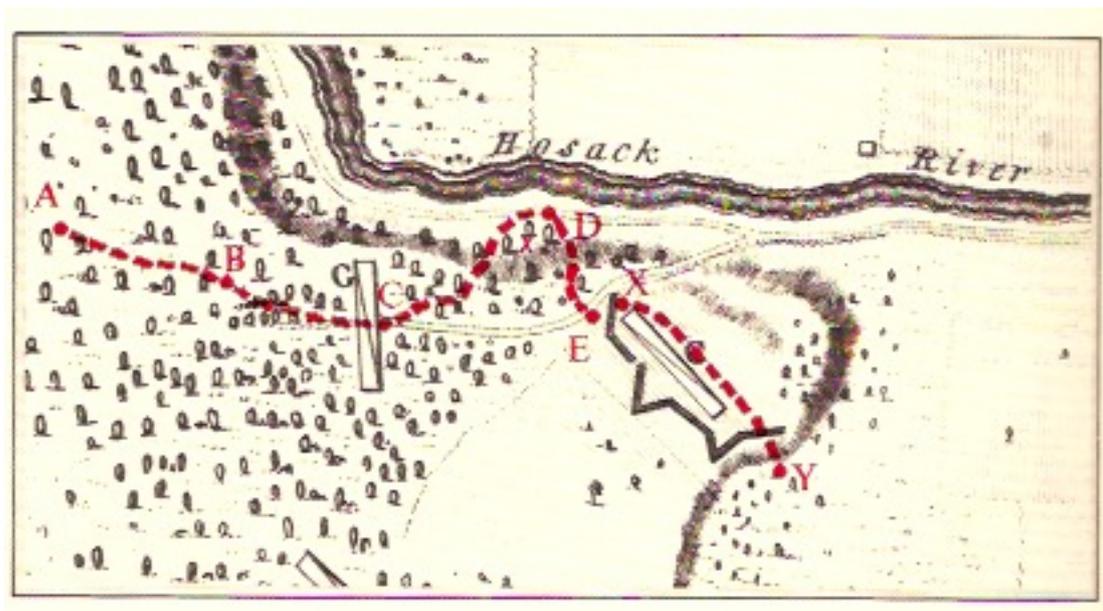


Illustration from Philip Lord, *War Over Walloomscoick*

[Ready to fight]

“My father lived in the western part of Massachusetts, and when Col. Warner called upon the militia to come out and defend the public stores at Bennington, he set off at once with many of his neighbors. He was well known to his townsmen, and so much esteemed that the best men were ready to go with him, many of them pious people, long members of the church, and among them young and old, and of different conditions. When they reached the ground they found the Hessians posted in a line, and on a spot of high ground a small redoubt was seen formed of earth just thrown up where they understood a body of Loyalists or Provincial troops, that is, Tories, was stationed. He was soon assigned a place in the line, and the Tory fort was pointed out as his particular object of attack.”

[Ready – or not?]

“When making arrangements to march out his men, my father turned to a tall, athletic man, one of the most vigorous of the band, and remarkable for size and strength among his neighbors. 'I am glad,' said he, 'to see you among us. You did not march with the company; but, I suppose, you are anxious for the day to begin.' This was said in the hearing of the rest, and attracted their attention. My father was surprised and mortified on observing the man's face turn pale and his limbs tremble. With a faltering voice he replied: 'Oh, no, sir, I didn't come to fight, I only came to drive back the horses!' 'I am glad,' said my father, 'to find out we have a coward among us before we go into battle. Stand back, and do not show yourself here any longer.'”

[“The country in a very critical state”]

“This occurrence gave my father much regret, and he repented having spoken to the man in the presence of his company. The country, you know, was at that time in a very critical state. Gen. Burgoyne had come down from Canada with an army which had driven all the American troops before it. Crown Point and Ticonderoga, the fortresses of Lake Champlain in which the northern people placed such confidence, had been deserted at his approach, and the army disgraced itself by a panic retreat without fighting a battle, while Burgoyne was publishing boastful and threatening proclamations which frightened many and induced some to declare for the King. Just at such a time when so many bad examples were set, and there were so many dangers to drive others to follow, it was a sad thing to see a hale, hearty, tall man shake and tremble in the presence of the enemy as we were just going to fight them.”

[An old soldier sets an example]

“However, an occurrence happened which made amends. There was an aged and excellent old man present, of a slender frame, stooping a little with advanced age and hard work, with a wrinkled face and well known as one of the oldest persons in our town, and the oldest on the ground. My father was struck with regard for his aged frame, and much as he felt numbers to be desirable in the impending struggle he felt a great reluctance at the thought of leading him into it. He therefore turned to him and said: 'The labors of the day threaten to be severe, it is therefore my particular request that you will take your post as sentinel yonder, and keep charge of the baggage.' The old man stepped forward with an unexpected spring, his face was lighted with a smile, and pulling off his hat in the excitement of his spirit, while his loose hair shone as white as silver, he briskly replied: 'Not till I've had a shot at them first, Captain, if you please.' The company gave three cheers.”

[“A small ravine” – and a surprise]

“My father was set at ease again in a moment, and orders being soon brought to advance he placed himself at their head and gave the word, 'Forward, march!' He

had observed some irregularity in the ground before them which he had thought might favor his approach, and he discovered that a small ravine, which they soon entered, would cover his determined little band from the shot of the enemy, and even from their observations, at least for some distance. He pursued its course, but was so far disappointed in his expectations that, instead of terminating at a distance from the enemy's line, on emerging from it, and looking about to see where he was, he found the fresh embankment of the Tory fort just above him, and the heads of the Tories peeping over with their guns levelled at him.

[Stafford goes down – but not for long]

“Turning to call on his men he was surprised to find himself flat on the ground without knowing why, for the enemy had fired and a ball had gone through his foot into the ground, cutting some of the sinews just as he was stepping on it so as to bring him down. At the same time the shock had deafened him to the report of the muskets. The foremost of the soldiers ran up to take him in their arms, believing him to be dead or mortally wounded, but he was too quick for them, and sprang on his feet, glad to find he was not seriously hurt, and was able to stand. He feared that his fall might check his followers, and as he caught the glimpse of a man in a red coat running across a distant field, he cried out, 'Come on, my boys! they run! they run!' So saying, he sprang up, and clambering to the top of the fort, while the enemy were hurrying their powder into the pans and the muzzles of their pieces, his men rushed on shouting and firing and jumping over the breastworks, and pushing upon the defenders so closely that they threw themselves over the opposite wall, and ran down the hill as fast as their legs could carry them.”

Words

esteemed – well thought of

pious – religious

mortified – embarrassed

faltering – getting weaker

repented – regretted

boastful -- bragging

impending – coming

reluctance – a wish not to do something

terminating – ending

sinews – muscles and tendons

mortally – fatally

check – stop

clambering – climbing with difficulty

Questions

1. In your own words, describe the kind of people who went with Stafford to the Battle.

[They were a cross-section of ordinary male citizens, some young, some old, some richer or more important than others, but united through their membership in their church and in their political views.]

2. Why is the country described as being “in a very critical state?”

[Because Burgoyne’s invasion was succeeding and some Americans were going over to his side through fear of what would happen if they didn’t.]

3. Stafford’s son describes the appearance and words of two soldiers in his father’s company. The two make a sharp contrast: in what ways do they differ with each other?

[One is a young, tall and athletic, but cowardly; the other is old and stooped, but courageous.]

4. How did Stafford and his men find themselves in a position where the Tories guns “were leveled at them?” What did they do next?

[They hadn’t realized where the ravine would end. Until they came to the end of it, they couldn’t see the Tories and the Tories couldn’t see them. No sooner were they spotted than they charged up the embankment. The Tories fired once, but didn’t get a chance to fire again.]

5. What happened to Stafford? How was he able to get up and keep charging up the embankment?

[He was shot in (“through”) the foot and fell down. But he was afraid that his going down would discourage his men. So he made himself get up and charge as if he had not been hit. (Soldiers often continue to fight when wounded – they’re too excited to stop and notice that they’ve been hurt).]

6. How much time did it take for Stafford and his men to get to the fort?

[Stafford’s son doesn’t say, but we know that the Tories couldn’t get a second shot off before the Patriots reached them. It usually takes about 20 to 30 seconds to reload a musket, especially if you’re not a trained soldier (and few of the Tories were).]

By One Who Was in the Tory Fort (the Anonymous Tory)

We don't know the name of this Loyalist who told this story about his service at the Battle of Bennington; he's known as the **One Who Was in the Tory Fort**. He recounts his shooting of Joab Stafford as Stafford charged up toward the Tory Fort from the little gully, then his being chased out of the fort and down to the river by a rebel soldier. What gives the story an added twist is that the man to whom it was told (many years later, when the war was a memory) was Stafford's own son, who wrote it down.

"When the Hessians were sent to take the stores at Bennington I went with them, and took my station with some of the other Loyalists in a redoubt or small fort in the line. We were all ready when we saw the Rebels coming to attack us, and were on such a hill, and behind such a bank that we felt perfectly safe, and thought we could kill any troops sent against us before they could reach the place upon which we stood. We had not expected, however, that they would approach us under cover, but supposed we should see them on the way. We did not know that a little gully which lay below us was long enough and deep enough to conceal them; but they knew the ground, and they made their appearance right under our guns.

"Your father was at the head of them. I was standing at the wall with my gun loaded in my hand, and several of us levelled our pieces at once. I took as fair aim at them as ever I did at a bird in my life, and thought I was sure of them, although we had to point so much downward that it made a man a small mark. Your father and I fired together, and he fell. I thought he was dead to a certainty, but to our surprise he was on his feet again in an instant, and they all came jumping in upon us with such a noise that we thought of nothing but getting out of the way of their muskets as fast as possible.

"I saw all my companions were going over the wall on the other side, and I went too. We had open fields before us, and scattered in all directions, some followed by our enemies. I ran some distance with another man, and looking around saw some of your father's soldiers who were coming after us level their muskets to fire. We had just reached a rail fence, and both of us gave a jump at the same instant to go over it. While I was in the air, I heard the guns go off. We reached the ground together, but my companion fell and lay dead by the fence, while I ran on with all my might, finding I was not hurt.

"I looked back, hoping to see no one following, but I was frightened on discovering a tall, rawboned fellow, running like a deer, only a short distance behind, and gaining on me every step he took. I immediately reflected that my gun was only a useless burden, for it was discharged and had no bayonet; and although a valuable one, I thought my only chance of saving my life lay in lightening myself as much as possible... [He throws away his musket, but so does the man who is chasing him, who also kicks off his shoes].

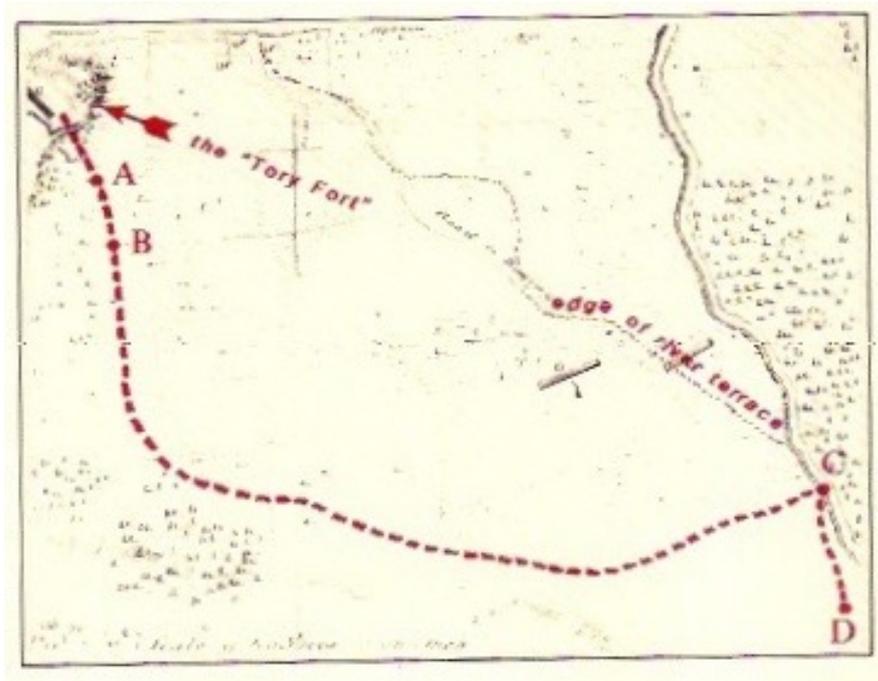


Illustration from
Philip Lord,
*War Over
Walloomskoick*

"I tried to throw my own [shoes] off in the same way, but they were fastened on with a pair of old-fashioned buckles. I strained myself to the utmost to reach a wood that lay a little way before me, with the desperate hope of losing myself in it. I ventured one look more – and was frightened almost out of my senses in finding the bare-legged fellow almost upon me, and ready to grip and perhaps to strangle me by main force. I did not like to stop and give myself up a prisoner... I did not know what to expect from the rebels, as we called them. So I ran on, though but an instant more, for I had hardly turned my head again before I found that the wood that I had seen was only the tops of some trees growing on the borders of Walloomsoac creek, which ran at the foot of a frightful precipice, the edge of which I had reached. I felt as if it was almost certain death to go farther, but I had such a dread of my pursuer that instead of stopping on the brink, I ran right off, without waiting even to see where I was going.

"I fell like a stone, and the next instant struck on my feet in soft mud, with a loud spitting noise, which I heard repeated close by me. Spat! Spat! For down came the fierce fellow after me and stuck close by me in the wet clay by the edge of the water. I looked at him with perfect dismay, for what could I do then? I had sunk in the mud up to my knees and was completely unarmed. It was some relief to see that he had no pistol to shoot me, and was not quite near enough to reach me. He, however, was beginning to struggle to get his legs out, and I expected to see him free and springing upon me in a moment more.

"I struggled too, but found it was no easy work to extricate myself, and I began to think it would probably be as bad for him. This encouraged me to try with all my might, and I found my neighbor was much slower getting out than I feared. Indeed I could not perceive that either of us made any advances, although we had wasted almost all our remaining strength. I now remarked that my enemy was standing much deeper in the mud than myself. Oh, thought I, the fellow was barefooted; the

soles of my shoes prevented me from sinking quite so deep; there is a good chance of my getting out before him.

“Neither of us spoke a word. So I struggled again most violently, but the straps of my shoes were bound tight across my ankles and held them to my feet. This made me desperate. I made another effort, and the straps gave way, and I easily drew out one bare foot, and placed it on the top of the ground. With the greatest satisfaction I soon found the other slipping smoothly up through the clay, and without waiting to regret my shoe buckles (which were of solid silver), or to exchange a blow or a word with my enemy, I ran down the shore of the brook as fast as my legs could carry me.

“A man who has never been frightened as I was, with the expectation of instant death, cannot easily imagine how far he will run, or how much he can do, to get out of danger. I thought for some time that my long-legged enemy was coming and ran on, afraid almost to look behind me. But he did not come, and I never saw or heard of him again.”

The anonymous Tory teller of the story then recounts how he picked his way along the river to his sister’s house somewhere near Hoosick. Soon he was with Burgoyne’s force at Saratoga (“which then seemed sure of reaching Albany and ending the war”) and once again he was on the losing side. He survived a second time to tell his story – to the son of the rebel he had shot in the foot at the Battle of Bennington.

Questions

- 1) it is unusual to have two accounts of the same incident (the shooting of Joab Stafford) from opposing sides. Do the accounts agree in their details?

[They do agree. They were written down by the same person, but they have the ring of truth.]

- 2) The Tory runs away and is closely pursued by a rebel. What does he do (inviting “almost certain death”) out of fear of his pursuer?

[He jumps off a cliff – in reality, a high river bank.]

- 3) Did you find anything funny in the struggle of the men to free themselves from the mud? Did the anonymous Tory find it funny?

[Two men who cannot fight each other because they are stuck in the same mud is pretty funny – but the men evidently didn’t find it so, and the Tory was fighting for his life.]

- 3) What insight do you get into the hearts and minds of the two men involved in the chase?

[They both acted singlemindedly: the Tory to escape death, the rebel to capture or kill a man who was his enemy]

David Holbrook -- He Was Just 17

David Holbrook had just turned 17 when he was called from his home in Adams, Massachusetts, to help defend Bennington. He arrived at Stark's camp the night of the 14th, which was the day that Stark and Baum had first encountered each other four miles west of Bennington. On the 15th he was sent out to watch the enemy's movements. On the 16th, Capt. Enos Parker of the Berkshire militia selected Holbrook and "60 or 70" others to march with Col. Herrick's regiment to attack the dragoon redoubt at the top of "Hessian Hill."



The Battle of Bennington, by Don Troiani

[The approach and the attack]

...and he [Herrick] marched us across the river by a circuitous route of 5 or 6 miles mostly through woods with all possible silence and brought us up in a piece of woods at the Enemy's rear where a line was formed, and the Company formed on the right and there sat in silence until a signal (the firing of two muskets) was given, when the American army upon three sides of the British encampment made a simultaneous attack. The Americans made a rush upon the British entrenchments, which being received by the British with boldness, the battle became general and desperate immediately and continued about two hours in close combat without form or regularity, each American fighting according to his own discretion, until the

entrenchments were completely routed and those who had not been killed and had not escaped surrendered.

[The British reinforcements arrive]

Col. Herrick of the Green Mountain Rangers rode along near where I was and cried out, "Boys, follow me!" and I ran after him with another man about two miles to Ramplar's Mills, when he stopped his horse and drew up his piece and fired, and then wheeled his horse and said there was a reinforcement of British coming, which was soon discovered to be from 900 to 1200 British soldiers with a 9 and a 6 pounder and a band of music [actually 600 soldiers with two 6-pound cannons – led by a military band]. Col. Herrick ran his horse to give intelligence to General Stark and I and my companion having got out of breath ran behind a haystack and rested till the British army came along, and we discharged our pieces at the Enemy and ran. The Enemy returned the fire by the discharge of a six-pounder, which gave general alarm. The Americans then ran together and formed about a mile southwesterly from the entrenchments which had been occupied by Baum and headed [faced] the reinforcement, which was under the Command of Col. Breymann and Major Skene.

[The Americans retreat]

The Americans, in pursuing those who escaped from the entrenchments, had got scattered and fatigued and but few assembled at first but kept falling in continually until a line was formed along a fence on the northeast side of the meadow in which was the haystack aforesaid at the edge of a piece of woods, and the British army formed a line in the meadow extending across the road. The firing commenced as soon as they came within musket shot, but the Americans not being sufficiently strong to keep the ground retreated from tree to tree firing as they left the trees until they came to a ravine where there was a log fence. There they made a halt and held the ground. The British came up within about 16 rods [= 264 feet or 88 yards] and stood.

[Col. Warner's and Col. Rand's men arrive and turn the tide]

The firing there continued some time without cessation, when Col. Warner with the remains of his regiment came up, and some of his men understanding the artillery exercise took over one of the field pieces [cannon] taken in the first engagement and formed on the right of the party (where I was) and about the same time an old man with an old Queen Anne's iron sword and mounted upon an old black mare with about 91 robust men following him in files two deep [this was Major John Rand and his Worcester County militia from Massachusetts].

They came up and filed in front of the company commanded by Captain Parker in which I was serving. Just as the old man had got his men to the spot and halted, his mare fell and he jumped upon a large white oak stump and gave the command. Captain Parker seeing the old man's company between him & the Enemy ordered his men to file in between their files which were some distance apart & which was

immediately done and the battle then became desperate, and immediately I heard a tremendous crash up in the woods at the right wing of the American troops which was seconded by the most terrible yell that I ever heard. Then I heard the voice of Colonel Warner like thunder saying "Fix Bayonets – Charge!" Then the old man on the stump cried out "Charge, boys," and jumped from the stump and ran towards the Enemy, his men some with & some without bayonets followed suit & rushed upon the Enemy with all their might, who seeing us coming took to their heels and were completely routed.

As we came up to the Enemy's line, their field piece being charged, Sergeant Luttingdon knocked down the man with the port-fire and caught hold of the limber and whirled about the piece and fired it at the Enemy, and the blast overtook them before they had got ten rods [= 165 feet or 55 yards] and mowed down a large number of them. Those of the Americans who had not got too much fatigued surrounded and killed and took a number of the Enemy. The Indians that survived the slaughter escaped.

[Holbrook tells of being wounded, cared for, recovering, and falling sick]

In the scaling of the breastwork of the Enemy in the first engagement, I put my right hand upon the top of the breastwork & threw my feet over but my right leg was met by a British bayonet which held it fast and I pitched head first into the entrenchment and the soldier hit me a thump upon the head but was dispatched by the next man that came up & I was thereby relieved and in the heat of feeling forgot my wounds. But when the Enemy fled in the second engagement I found myself exhausted and could not pursue, the blow upon my head and the wound in my leg having occasioned the loss of considerable blood. I found myself unable to walk and was put upon a horse and carried back to Bennington, where I remained 10 or 12 days until I got sufficiently recovered from my wounds to march when Lieutenant White with whom I had enlisted came on and I went with him to Manchester Town, after which I was taken with a fever and was sent home, where I remained sick a number of months. On 12th February 1778 Lieutenant White came to my father and gave me a discharge, I being then very sick and not expected to recover and was not able to do my duty during the whole of the year.

The text is taken (and slightly modified) from David Holbrook's pension application dated 19 September 1832; he died two months later at age 72.

Words

circuitous – roundabout

according to his own discretion – as he chose

commenced – began

without cessation – without stopping

artillery exercise – how to fire cannons

field pieces – cannons

port-fire, limber – equipment used in firing a cannon

Questions

1. What parts of Holbrook's story made the greatest impression on you? Why?

Julius Friedrich Wasmus was a surgeon attached to the regiment of Brunswick dragoons. He kept a diary of his experiences in America, including his being taken prisoner at the Battle of Bennington. His diary was discovered in the 20th century in a library in Germany and later translated into English. It is an extraordinary first-hand look at the events leading up to and following the Battle of Bennington, seen from the perspective of a German doctor. The following extracts begin on August 9, 1777, when Wasmus and the rest of Burgoyne's army were camped near the Hudson River at Fort Edward. That was when Wasmus' regiment was about to be assigned to an important – and ill-fated – expedition to capture supplies at Bennington...

August 9th – Wasmus' regiment begins to march

At midnight, the flags of our regiment were taken to the headquarters of our general; this is an indication that we are to be assigned to an important expedition. Leaving tents and baggage behind, we set out at 5 o'clock this morning along the Hudson River. We found both banks of this river settled with rather well-built houses in Dutch style, which were all empty; the families had fled into the wilderness with all their belongings for fear of the Germans. The beautiful wheat and rye fields were going to ruin; they were all ripe.

August 10th – The Mission

Today was a day of rest. Our corps is designated to advance to Bennington in New Hampshire [Vermont] to destroy the storehouse there, and take horses and oxen away from the inhabitants living on the way there as well as in the adjacent countryside. That is, after we have driven off the scattered corps of Americans who are at Bennington.

August 11th – Forging the Battenkill

This morning, beef and bread were given out. We set out at noon and our corps, which Lieut. Colonel Baum commanded, consisted of our Dragoon Regiment, not quite 200 men strong; 100 Tories, 100 Savage Mohawks, 100 Canadians and 50 Englishmen. The two 3-pound cannon were being drawn along in front of our regiment.

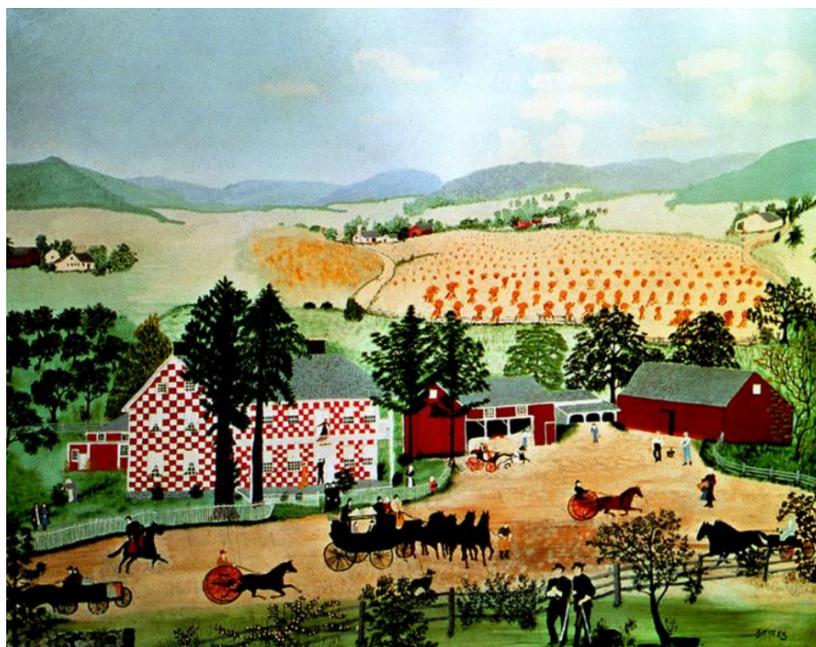
We came to a river [the Battenkill] which empties into the Hudson. For lack of a bridge, the corps had to walk up to their waists through the water, which was a most unpleasant and dangerous undertaking; for the current was so fast that one could hardly keep one's balance. They cultivate much Turkish wheat [corn] here, and many pumpkins have been planted in between the rows. The gardens are full of fruits and vegetables, especially potatoes, from which you can conclude that we are enjoying ourselves very much.

August 12th – Baum gets his orders from Burgoyne

This afternoon, Generals Burgoyne and Phillips came to us, talked a long time with Lieut. Colonel Baum, and returned to the army.

August 13th – Passing through Cambridge

At 5 o'clock this morning, we set out, marched along yesterday's road and reached the borders of New England at noon. The first village we came to was called New Cambridge in the Province of New Hampshire [modern Cambridge, New York]. Here we took the first horses and captured 6 Rebels. These had been sent out as patrols. We passed through the wilderness on a rough road, which only last year had been cleared by the Rebels. At 4 o'clock in the afternoon, we moved our camp into this village near a beautiful house. The house stood empty; the owner had taken flight with his family this morning. We gathered 15 horses today. Our herd of cattle has increased because we came upon some oxen at all the houses we passed.



The Checkered House, by Anna Mary Robertson (“Grandma Moses”)

This is what the “beautiful house” south of Cambridge that Wasmus mentions may have looked like. It stood until 1910.

August 14th – Skirmish at Sancoick [North Hoosick]; Standoff at the Walloomsac bridge

We set out at 5 o'clock this morning, reached the parish of Sancoick at 7 o'clock and made a rendezvous near a beautiful house, which the owner had left this very morning. There was little household furniture left in the house but what there was was being destroyed by the Savages. The owner of this house, son of a Dutchman by birth, is called Van Rensselaer. Our vanguard had driven off the Rebel detachment that was standing in front of the bridge. One of the Savages was wounded, whom I had to bandage on orders of our commander.

We set out again and marched across the bridge at the mill; at noon, we arrived at the Walloomsac Creek just before the bridge across the river. We made our camp in the gardens of two houses here. The inhabitants had loaded 2 wagons full of furniture and put 6 oxen to them. They were just about to depart and take flight into the wilderness. But now they had to unload, and our commander placed a guard in front of both houses so that nobody could take anything from them.

On the other side of the river stood another two houses at which the Savages, the Tories and the Canadians had taken up their posts. On our left, we had a very high mountain, which extended quite far. The oldest of all the Savage Mohawks, whom they venerate as their king, was shot on our arrival at the bridge today. He had ventured out too far, perhaps to take what he could find. The Savages were very grieved and sad about this incident. They made a kind of coffin, laid the dead man in it and carried him to a grave 4 feet deep. Carrying his musket to the grave, a detachment of 16 dragoons from our regiment followed. When the coffin had been lowered and covered with a little dirt, the detachment fired 3 volleys. The Savages appeared to be very satisfied with that.

On the other hand, the enemy seemed to be alarmed. An enemy corps of some 1,900 men stood about half an English mile in front of us behind a height. Since they had heard the bullets whistle at the burial shooting – the dragoons had loaded with balls – they probably thought we were attacking them. They appeared on the height and attacked our patrols there. We, the dragoons, quickly took possession of the mountain on our left, and our 2 cannon were taken up that mountain. The enemy, still behind trees, however, focused their attack on our right and left wings at the foot of the mountain. The enemy sneaked behind a house that stood on the other side of the river, where they loaded their guns and shot at our left wing. One cannon was directed against this house and fired. As the 2nd shot went through the house, the enemy came out at full speed and ran away. On our right wing, they were likewise driven back and our cannon on the mountain pursued the enemy by the bridge, cannonading them on their retreat. We have seen today how the enemy attacks: either lying on the ground or standing behind trees, they load their guns and shoot. They run from one tree to another and then forward as circumstances demand, and the Savages do likewise.

The Savages were so enraged about their loss that they wanted to depart for Canada tonight. Perhaps they thought themselves rich enough, for they had collected much money among themselves, also stolen some, and sold many horses to officers in the army; almost every one of them had a horse laden with all kinds of stolen goods.

Captain MacKay was very dissatisfied that the enemy had not been attacked and pursued with vigor. "Now they will become bold," he said, "we leave them too much time, for they will gather by the thousands during the night. I cannot understand," he added, "how one can entrust a detachment to such a man as Lieut. Colonel Baum, who has no military expertise at all, cannot take proper measures, particularly here in the wilderness, and who has no knowledge at all of foreign languages." He said much more which I have forgotten. Tonight, everything was quiet. The men were

posted behind trees. No sentinel has been posted in front of our regiment. I thought of Capt. MacKay.

August 15th -- Breymann on the way, but every 40 paces an American behind a tree

This morning, the attack upon the right wing started again. A report came that the Breymann Corps was on its way to help us. I hope that is true or that we might withdraw to the bridge at the mill in Sancoick. We would be much safer there than here where every 40 paces a man is standing behind a tree. The inhabitants living around here come and go through our camp; they will surely give the enemy information of our weakness. Soon I fear they will no longer be afraid of our 3-pound cannon but will take them and all the rest of us. The Savages are all lying behind the baggage; they do not want to go forward. The attack continues the whole day. We have more than 180 oxen, also the horses are on the increase; the officers have all they need.

August 16th – The Battle

This morning, 100 oxen were sent to our army [on the Hudson River]. Everything is quiet; we neither see nor hear anything of the enemy, and the patrols that were sent out have not seen anything of the enemy as far as one hour's march away. This morning, we took possession of many other horses. If this continues, the regiment will soon be mounted.

The 2nd patrol sent out from our left wing brought the news that some of the enemy has appeared not far from us in the woods and in the brush. This was immediately reported to our commander. He sent Capt. O'Connell to reconnoiter [take a look], who indeed saw men in front of our line in the brush. After he had gone, it became increasingly lively in the brush in front of our line. A cannon was therefore requested, which was sent with the reminder: one should not consider a few individuals to be a line or a regiment. The strangest thing of all was that our commander did not know where we were standing. He had not visited us these last 3 days.

All the Savages came onto our mountain, lay down behind the trees and refused to go forward against the enemy. Now came the news that the Breymann Corps was very near and would soon arrive. Everyone wished they were here already. The enemy is marching in force against our right wing and it appears that they want to encircle us. After 12 o'clock, a patrol was sent out from our lines and was driven off by the enemy, who fired at them. Half an hour later, a violent volley of fire erupted against the entrenchment that was occupied by 35 dragoons. Our dragoons fired volleys on the enemy in cold blood and with much courage, and it did not take them long to load their carbines [short-barreled muskets] behind the breastworks. But as soon as they rose up to take aim, bullets went through their heads. They fell backwards and no longer moved a finger. Thus, in a short time, our tallest and best dragoons were sent to eternity. Our cannon shot balls and grapeshot sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left and then again forward into the brush.

The Savages made terrible faces and ran from one tree to the next. I had chosen a very big oak tree close behind our entrenchment, behind which I dressed the wounded. The Savages also came behind this tree, and 4 or 5 of them lying down on top of me almost crushed me to death. From the enemy side, the fire became increasingly heavy and they pressed harder. When the Savages saw that, one of them, probably the oldest, gave a strange cry, which cannot be described, whereupon they all ran down the mountain toward the baggage. The cannon in our entrenchment was quiet because the sergeant who commanded it had been shot and the 8 men at the cannon were either shot or wounded. At the bridge, where Lieut. Colonel Baum was stationed, the cannon and volley fire had ceased.

We withdrew now with great speed while I was still busy dressing wounds. Then, following the regiment in a great hurry, I stumbled over a big, fallen tree about 300 paces [250 yards] from our entrenchment. When I got up, the enemy came rushing over our entrenchment and 3 of them quickly took aim and fired at me. I again fell to the ground behind the tree and the bullets were dreadful, whistling over and beyond me. I remained lying on the ground until the enemy urged me rather impolitely to get up. One grabbed me by the arm and another said he should kill me, whereupon he placed the bayonet of his gun with tightened trigger on my chest. He asked whether I was a Britisher or a Hessian. I told him I was a Braunschweig surgeon, shook hands with him, and called him my "Freund und Bruder" [friend and brother]; for what does one not do when in trouble?

I was happy they understood me, for he withdrew his gun. But he now took my watch, looked at it, held it to his ear and put it in his pocket. After this, he made a friendly face and was so kind that he urged me to take a drink from his wooden flask. I was terribly worried because I believed myself to be the only prisoner. I blamed myself for not having retreated earlier and faster, but as some other prisoners were brought to this spot, I calmed down. When one of the enemy heard that I was a surgeon, so he led me behind our entrenchment to dress the wound of his son, who had been shot through the thigh. Now I saw what effect our cannon and musket fire had had, since the enemy had suffered great losses here.

General Stark, who had commanded the corps of the Americans against us, now ordered me to bandage several others of the enemy, but I hurried toward our entrenchment because there were dragoons and Hesse-Hanau artillerymen in need of my help. But the Americans did not allow me any time but pulled me along by force. We went past the trusty tree that had warded off so many bullets from me. Here I found some of my instruments and bandages in a case. Putting all of it in a bag, I wanted to take it along, but my guide took it away from me and urged me to drink some strong rum with him. All the enemy were very well provided with it and I noticed that almost all of them were drunk. Each one had a wooden flask filled with rum hanging from his neck; they all were in shirt-sleeves and had nothing to cover their bodies but shirts, vests and long linen trousers, which reached down to their shoes; no stockings; in addition, each had a powder horn, a bullet bag, a flask with rum and a gun - that was all they had on them. They all were well-shaped men of very healthy appearance and well-grown.

We came to the bridge where Lieut. Colonel Baum had stood; our men had taken this route for their retreat and some of them had run through the water. Many had been killed or wounded in their flight; all the rest had been taken prisoner. They [the Rebels] did not capture one single Savage; it is incomprehensible to me how the Savages got through. The unfortunate Tories who were not killed also fell into the hands of their countrymen. Like cattle, they were tied to each other with cords and ropes and led away; it is presumed that they will be hanged.

Some of our men who had been wounded were still lying here and there; they will be taken to the houses at the bridge. These scenes cannot really be described ---- reading this, the best will perhaps be moved, but it is actually not possible to feel the horror of these scenes -- a thought that makes your flesh creep! To see a friend or fellow creature lie bleeding on the ground who has been cruelly wounded by the murderous lead and approaches his death shaking, crying for help, and then not be able, not be allowed to help him, is that not cruel?

It was past 5 o'clock when we heard cannon and volley firing in the direction of Sancoick. This was the Breymann Corps that had been designated for our aid but unfortunately had now arrived too late. All the enemy ran there from the battlefield and all the prisoners who had assembled here at the bridge were quickly led away. We now were on the road to Bennington. My guide kept holding me tight by the arm, particularly when he was noticed by his countrymen.

On this road, we came past Lieut. Col. Baum, who was lying on a cart. He was shot through the abdomen and was crying and begging that the cart should go slow but the men did not understand our language. They speedily went to [North] Bennington where the cart stopped at a house. We helped him from the cart, took him into the house where we had to lay him on the dirt floor. It was the Lieut. Col.'s order that I and another surgeon should stay with him. The time had come, however, that his orders were no longer allowed to be followed. The guard took us from him by force. Shaking hands with us, he said goodbye and still gave us several messages for Gen. Riedesel and also for a person in the homeland.



*Col. Frederick
Baum and Col.
Francis Pfister, by
Leroy Williams*

After darkness, we were taken into a house where we were to stay overnight. Another 8 wounded dragoons and several wounded Americans were also brought in, all of whose wounds I dressed. To my great sorrow, I learned that my cousin had also been wounded on the retreat but no one could tell me where he was.

About one hour later, Captains from our Grenadier Battalion came in and we learned that the Breymann Corps had suffered the same fate as we had; half of them were fatally wounded or captured. If Lieut. Col. Breymann had hurried more to get to us, not as many men would have had to be sacrificed - and who knows what other unfortunate consequences this calamitous affair may have. The Americans used to consider us unbeatable and did not believe they could capture our regular troops, but what will they now say about us! -- Will they keep on running away from us in the future?

An enemy major, a very handsome man, who had the command over us, was wearing a Braunschweiger Grenadier's cap on his head, had Ensign André's gorget [silver ornament worn at the throat] hanging on his chest and the long straight sword of our dragoons on his side; with these he was showing off. One can well get an idea of the simplemindedness of these creatures.

The future frightens me. To all appearances, we live here under a nation extremely enraged, whose language none of us understands; each one is asking what will become of us. -- But we were cheered up a little when we were treated to with beef, pork, potatoes and punch tonight; we were greatly pleased. "Well," everybody said, "I am satisfied if we will not be treated any better or worse during our imprisonment." While we were still sitting at dinner, a man entered the room who sat down at my side and joined us at dinner. This was the American Colonel Warner. After the meal, he took out a small metal box from his pocket, which belonged to me. It contained lancets that he contemplated with great curiosity. He gave me 6 pieces and the remaining 6 he wanted to keep. He also had this journal of mine, which he returned to me together with my receipt book.

August 17th – Arrival in Bennington with other prisoners

This morning General Stark came and assured us that as many of our possessions as possible would be brought here and that we would get our lost things back. Gen. Stark had commanded the right wing while Colonel Warner had commanded the left wing against us. We set out and, accompanied by a heavy guard, went up to Bennington. On this road, at least 800 to 1,000 men came past us, mostly on horseback and provided with guns. They were going to join General Gates' army. At Bennington, we came upon all our prisoners. All the officers were in the tavern, in a room on the second floor, with a heavy guard in front of the door. The privates were locked up in the church, and with 480 men in there, it was quite crowded.

We got fresh beef this noon, which was put in big chunks in a trough placed upon the table together with cornbread. They did not give us any knives or forks and since all

knives had been taken away from the prisoners, the meat was torn apart with our hands and devoured by our hungry stomachs; this was a remarkable scene.

August 18th – Death of Baum and Pfister

More wounded arrived today but my cousin was not among them. I learned, however, that he lay in the same house where Lieut. Colonel Baum and Colonel Pfister were, who both have died of their wounds today.

Wasmus' 'cousin' was his sister's son, therefore his nephew; he died of his wounds the following month and is buried in the cemetery in Old Bennington. Wasmus himself was sent to Massachusetts with other German prisoners. His medical skills made him welcome wherever he went, but he saw first hand the fear many Americans had of "Hessians." At the end of the war he was exchanged for an American prisoner and was reunited with his wife and children in Germany.

1. What kind of a man was Surgeon Wasmus? What words would you use to describe him? What things in his diary led you to choose those words? Be specific!

[Wasmus is *observant*: he notices things, from the way pumpkins are planted between the rows of corn in American gardens to the details of the American major's impersonation of a German grenadier. He has a *scientific detachment* as he reports on American battle tactics, but he also *shows compassion*, not only for his fellow Germans who are dying on the battlefield after the battle but for the damage to the Americans caused by German guns. He shows *strategic insight* (and he was right about the weakness of Baum's position on the hill and about how "enraged" the Americans were). He shows *dedication to his profession* as a doctor in the way that he treats the wounded as the battle rages around him. He shows *quick thinking* when he is captured and offers to shake hands with his captors. He shows his *own emotional vulnerability* when he thinks about his wounded nephew.]

2. What details stood out for you as you listened to (or read) Wasmus' diary entries?
3. Why do you think he kept a diary?

“Hessians”

The Battle of Bennington was fought chiefly by Americans against Germans under German commanders. Thirty thousand German soldiers fought against the Americans in the Revolutionary War. Twenty thousand were from the state of Hesse in central Germany; the rest came from other German states. The Germans in Burgoyne’s forces were nearly all from the German state of Braunschweig (“Brunswick,” in English), but we usually call them Hessians anyway.

Unlike the American militiamen at the Battle, the Hessians were professional soldiers. But in many ways they were like the Americans. Most were young men in the 20s. Most had been poor farmers in Germany. Their Protestant religious faith was close to that of most Americans too. When one soldier, begging for his life, cried (in German) “We are one, brother” to American Thomas Mellen, he wasn’t far wrong.

Of the 30,000 Germans who came to fight in America, 12,000 didn’t return to Germany. Roughly 7,000 died in battle or of disease; 5,000 remained in America when the war was over. The U.S. was happy to have them to help settle the new country.

Hessian soldiers were greatly feared by Americans. Dr. Wasmus was shocked to find that Germans like him were suspected of being cannibals. We catch more realistic glimpses of what the Hessians were like away from the battlefield in some American reports. When the wife of one of the Bennington militiamen went to “carry some comforts” to those who were wounded and being cared for in Bennington, she observed Hessian soldiers praying for their dying comrades:

They had all been taken to the meetinghouse at Bennington, and were in all stages of suffering, and some were dying. Some could not understand or speak a word of English. Some of their fellow soldiers who were less seriously wounded would go to a dying comrade, and kneeling by his side would clasp their hands, bow their heads near the floor, and swaying their bodies up and down, would mutter prayers in their own language. And when death came to him, they would pass to another and repeat the same exercise.

The following letter was taken from the body of a German killed at the Battle of Bennington. It is from his wife, Anna Maria Muhlenfeld, in Germany, who was never to see him again.

My eternally beloved angel,

I thank the Almighty who has kept you in good health. I heard from your parents that you twisted your leg during a march. Your treasured letters tell nothing of this occurrence. I was very much hurt by this news, still I praise the Almighty that you have remained safe from danger. May God protect you in every way and keep you from dangers and accidents that may await you. May He listen to you and to me whenever we call upon Him.



General John Stark, commander of the Patriot forces at the Battle of Bennington, was one of the heroes of the American Revolution. Born in Londonderry, New Hampshire, in 1728, he spent four months in Indian captivity in Canada in his early 20s. When he was serving as a lieutenant in Robert's Rangers fighting for the British in the French and Indian War, he refused to participate in an attack on the Indian village where he had been held. He had no hesitation in leading New Hampshire militiamen to the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, where he and his troops played a key role in holding the American lines. He also fought bravely under General George Washington in the Patriot victories at Trenton and Princeton at the end of 1776. When he was passed over for promotion, however, he resigned from the Continental Army and returned to his farm in New Hampshire.

As Burgoyne's army surged down the Champlain Valley in the summer of 1777, and Vermont appealed to New Hampshire for military assistance, the New Hampshire legislature asked Stark to defend its territory. Stark accepted, on the condition that he be master of his own troops and responsible only to the State of New Hampshire. The Legislature agreed, and with weeks close to 1500 New Hampshiremen had enlisted and were crossing the Green Mountains to stop the invaders. Stark led them to Bennington with the idea of attacking Burgoyne's left flank. Instead, Burgoyne sent Baum and his raiding party to him (without realizing Stark and his men were at Bennington). Stark met Baum's forces on August 14, 1777, and, joined by militia from Massachusetts and Vermont, and by Seth Warner's Continental soldiers, he

soundly defeated both Baum and Breymann along the Walloomsac River just inside New York State.

A grateful Congress promoted him to the rank of Brigadier General. He served faithfully to the end of the War, then returned to his wife Molly and their family in New Hampshire.

Stark sent this letter to the New Hampshire Legislature immediately following the Battle of Bennington. It was then printed and widely distributed.

Bennington, August 18th, 1777

Gentlemen—

I congratulate you on the late success of your Troops under my command; by express I purpose to give you a brief account of my proceedings since I wrote to you last.

I left Manchester on Sunday the 8th, and arrived here the 9th. The 13th I was informed that a party of Indians were at Cambridge which is 12 miles distant from this place on their march hither. I detached Col. Gregg with 200 men under his command to stop their march. In the evening I had information by express that there was a large body of the enemy on their way with their field pieces, in order to march through the country, commanded by Governor Skene. The 14th I marched with my Brigade & a few of this States' Militia, to oppose them, and to cover Gregg's retreat, who found himself unable to withstand their superior numbers: About four miles from the Town.

I accordingly met him on his return, and the Enemy in close pursuit of him, within half a mile of his rear; but when they discovered me they presently halted on a very advantageous piece of ground. I drew up my little army on an eminence in open view of their encampments, but could not bring them to an engagement. I marched back about a mile, and there encamped. I sent out a few men to skirmish with them, and killed thirty of them with two Indian Chiefs. The 15th it rained all day; I sent out parties to harass them.

The 16th I was joined by this States' Militia and those of Berkshire County; I divided my army into three Divisions, and sent Col. Nichols with 250 men on the rear of their left wing; Col Herrick in the rear of their right, with 300 men, who was ordered when joined to attack the same. In the meantime I sent 300 men to oppose the Enemy's front, to draw their attention that way. Soon after I detached Colonels Hobart & Stickney on their right wing with 200 men to attack that part, all which plans had their desired effect. Col Nichols sent me word that he stood in need of a reinforcement, which I readily granted, consisting of 100 men. He commenced the attack precisely at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, which was followed by all the rest. I pushed forward the remainder with all speed; our people behaved with the greatest spirit & bravery imaginable: the action lasted two hours, at the expiration of which

time, we forced their breastworks at the muzzles of their guns, took two pieces of brass cannon, with a number of prisoners.

Before I could get them into proper form again, I received intelligence that there was a large reinforcement within two miles of us on their march, which occasioned us to renew our attack. But luckily for us Col. Warner's Regiment came up, which put a stop to their career. We soon rallied & in a few minutes the action became very warm & desperate, which lasted till night; we used their own cannon against them, which proved of great service to us. At sunset we obliged them to retreat a second time; we pursued them till dark, when I was obliged to halt for fear of killing my own men. We recovered two pieces more of their cannon, together with all their baggage, a number of horses, carriages &c. We killed upwards of two hundred of the enemy in the field of battle, the number of the wounded is not yet known as they are scattered about in many places. Our wounded are 42; ten privates & four officers belonging to my brigade are dead. The dead & wounded in the other corps I do not know, as they have not brought in the returns as yet.

I am, Gentlemen, with the greatest regard & respect, your most obedient, humble servant,

John Stark

Gentlemen—I think we have returned the enemy a proper compliment in the above action, for the Hubbardton engagement.

The men **General John Stark** had led at Bennington invited him to a commemoration in 1809, when he was 81 years old. He replied that the “infirmities of age” did not permit him to travel, but that he would honor their request for a letter conveying his sentiments. He began by reflecting that his troops were “*men that had not learned the art of submission, nor had they been trained to the art of war,*” and that their success “*taught the enemies of liberty, that undisciplined freemen are superior to veteran slaves.*” He went on:

As I was then, I am now – the friend of the equal rights of men, of representative democracy, of republicanism, and the Declaration of Independence, the great charter of our national rights: and of course the friend of our indissoluble Union and Constitution of the states.

Then he added a P.S.: “*I will give you my volunteer toast – Live free or die – Death is not the greatest of evils.*”

In 1945 the State of New Hampshire adopted “Live free or die” as its motto, and in 1971 ordered Stark’s words to be stamped on all New Hampshire license plates.

Molly Stark

Elizabeth Page, daughter of New Hampshire's first Postmaster, became Molly Stark when at age 21 she married General-to-be John Stark in 1758. "Molly" may have only been her nickname, but it stuck. In fact, the name Molly Stark is probably better known today than her husband's! It was General Stark who made Molly famous when he spoke these words (or something like them) to his men as they were about to fight the Battle of Bennington: "There they are, the redcoats and the Tories. We beat them today or this night Molly Stark sleeps a widow." As he pledged his own life to the Patriot cause, he did it in the name of his wife back home in New Hampshire.

It wasn't easy for the women whose husbands were often called away to fight – and sometimes to die – in the American Revolution. They were left at home with farms and often families to manage while their husbands were away. Beginning the year after her marriage to John Stark, Molly Stark had 11 children; her eldest son Caleb also fought in the Battle of Bennington. She once opened the Stark home in New Hampshire as a hospital to nurse some of the General's troops back to health. She and women like her were no less devoted to American independence than their husbands and sons. The war could not have been won without them.



And yet their contributions have long been overlooked. Statues of General Stark were put up in the 1800s; it wasn't until 2004 that Molly got a statue of her own, along the Molly Stark Scenic Byway (Route 9) in downtown Wilmington, Vermont. She's shown ready to defend her home and family, one hand holding a musket and one arm cradling a child. The plaque on the base of the statue refers to the "love, courage, and self-reliance" with which she served her country.

Molly Stark died in 1814 at the age of 84. But it was General Stark who was left a widower. He lived eight more years, dying at the age 94. He and Molly lie together in the Stark family plot in Manchester, New Hampshire.

Sculpture by Robert Shure

Questions:

1) How many things or places that use the name of Molly Stark can you think of?

[Molly Stark Elementary School; Molly Stark Trail/ Scenic Byway (Route 9 from Bennington to Brattleboro); Molly Stark State Park (Wilmington)]

2) How many more can you find if you search on-line?

[Molly Stark Antiques (Shaftsbury); Molly Stark Children's Dentistry (Bennington); Molly Stark Forest (Wilmington); Molly Stark Mountain (Huntington, VT, on the Long Trail); Molly Stark Balcony (a scenic overlook near Molly Stark Mountain); Molly Stark Hotel (West Brattleboro); the Molly Stark House (Dunbarton, N.H.); the Molly Stark Suite (at the Wilmington Inn); the Molly Stark Chapter of the National Society Daughters of the American Revolution (Manchester, N.H.); the Molly Stark cannon (in New Boston, N.H.); the Molly Stark pitcher (made by Bennington Potters); Molly Stark Hospital (Canton, Ohio); Molly Stark Park (Nimishillen Township, Ohio); Molly Stark Lake (Everts, Minnesota).

3) Do the things and places that are named for Molly Stark have anything in common?

[Most are in Vermont and New Hampshire -- but two are in Ohio, where some veterans of the Revolutionary War later settled, and one is even in Minnesota!]

4) Why do you think the sculptor (Robert Shure) chose to show Molly Stark as he did?