

TWIN FORTS OF THE POPOLOPEN
Forts Clinton and Montgomery, New York
1775-1777

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AND

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BEAR MOUNTAIN TRAILSIDE MUSEUMS
UNDER THE JOINT AUSPICES OF
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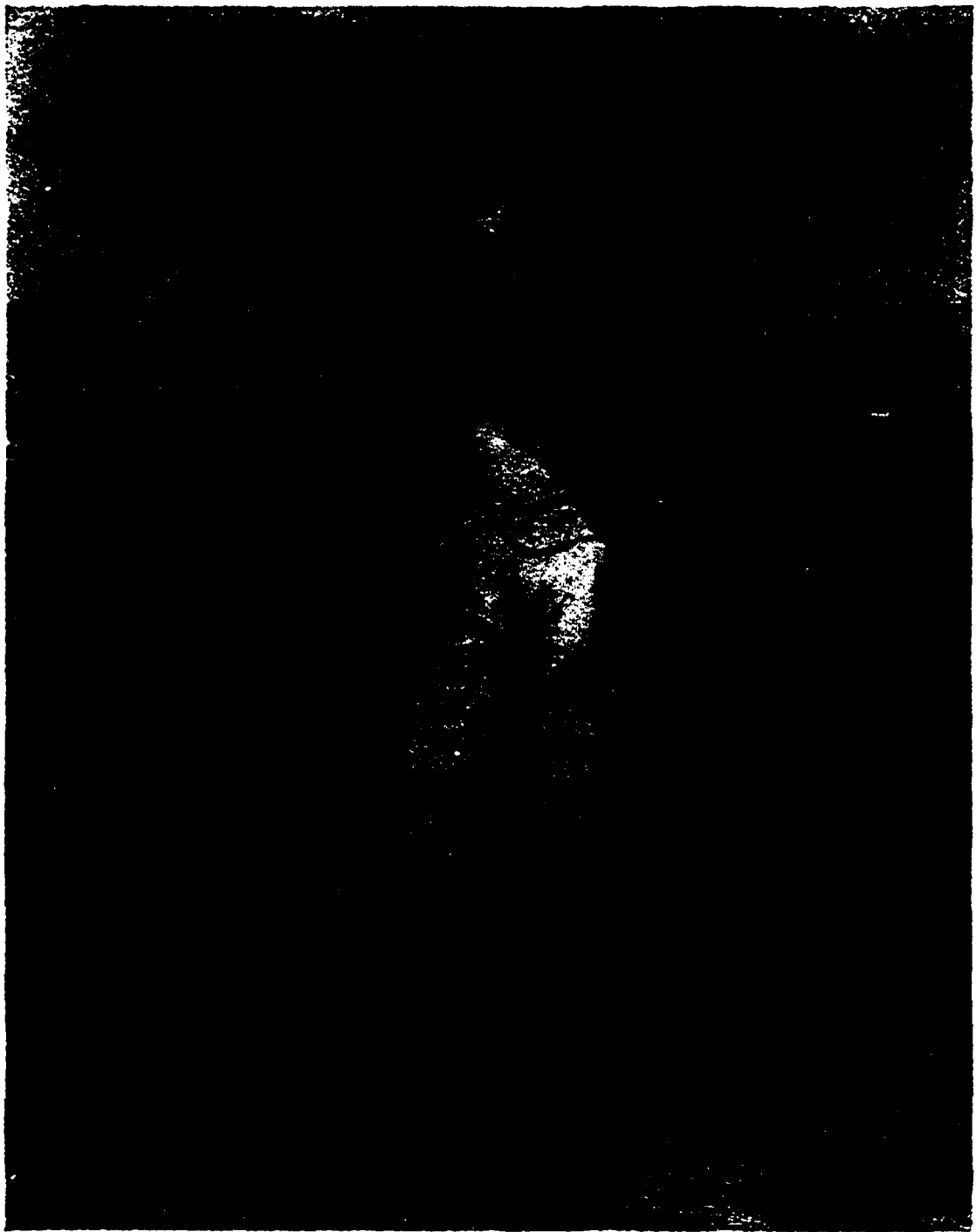
Photograph by William Thompson Howell, 1906

HESSIAN LAKE

On the borders of this beautiful pond, now called Hessian Lake, Major General John Vaughan attacked the small American detachment, posted behind a stone wall, and forced them to retreat to Fort Clinton. Anthony's Nose casts its reflection in the cool winter waters.

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BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE CLINTON
From the painting by Alonzo Chappel.

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FOREWORD

The Bear Mountain Nature Trails and Trailside Museums were established in 1927 under the joint auspices of the Commissioners of the Palisades Interstate Park and the American Museum of Natural History. Originally a natural history expositional institution, the activities soon embraced other fields of education as well. In 1934 the Trailside Historical Museum was erected upon the site of Fort Clinton overlooking the Hudson River. At this time the subjects of local history and archaeology were formally added to the "curriculum." The Hyde Memorial Library was also located in this building.

In 1927 an historical trail was first established along the ramparts of Fort Clinton. Many out-of-door labels were placed to describe local events during the American Revolution. Residents of Orange and Rockland Counties, in New York, soon showed their interest in the project. Historical objects were presented to the Trailside Museum although, at the time, there were no provisions for their display. The new buildings immediately facilitated our work to a valuable degree. It is believed that the historical section of this Trailside unit will eventually house objects relating only to the nearby Forts.

The present paper, "Twin Forts of the Popolopen," is our first historical publication. We have had many requests for material describing the significance of Forts Clinton and Montgomery. It is our earnest hope that this brief outline will answer many of the questions asked by Trailside visitors. We also hope that it may be possible to publish detailed accounts of our historical field work from time to time.

We give our best thanks, for the critical reading of this paper, to Mr. Oscar T. Barek, Mr. Edward F. Barron, Mr. William L. Calver, Dr. A. Elwood Corning, Dr. Alexander C. Flick, Mr. Frederick C. Sutro and Major William A. Welch.

The Bear Mountain Trailside Museums.

Bear Mountain, New York.

July 15, 1937.

A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY PLAN

The importance of "the pass" of the Hudson River at Anthony's Nose, that so clearly manifested itself during the American Revolution, was presented as early as 1672—more than a century prior to the events which this paper attempts to portray :

"Instructions for Capt. DeLavall & Mr. Steenwyck, at their goeing for Albany, June y^e 16th, 1672

"... In my travails I have observed (w^{ch} I desire you to take a more strict observation of y^e Scituation as you pass that way) at *Antonios Nose*),* upon the West Coast there is in a Corner a piece of ground well watered, low, & very strong by nature, where if a Block-house were but erected, & a Breast-work cast up to make a Battery, & but 4 Gunns planted there, It would stop y^e Passage of any Vessell or Vessells from passing up the River, y^e place lyes in an Angle w^{ch} y^e Stream makes there, & y^e Current Setts on that Shore, within less than halfe Pistoll Shott; This fforte being supplied but with a douzen Men from *Albany & Esopus* to manage y^e Gunns & to afford some small shott must of necessity give a Stopp to any Vessell from attempting their Designe, if this bee not thought a proper Place, any other may bee picht in on y^e East side of the River in the Highlands; Provided y^e Scituation bee naturally low & capable to Erect a Battery & well watered."

Documents Relating to the Colonial History
of the State of New York, XIII, p. 464

* See Appendix B, Number 1.

TWIN FORTS OF THE POPOLOPEN

FORTS CLINTON AND MONTGOMERY, NEW YORK 1775-1777

The early Revolutionary fortifications and military engagements in the Highlands of the Hudson have seldom been described in any

Introduction connected fashion. Particular neglect has befallen Forts Clinton and Montgomery that stood guard upon the Hudson River's western heights forty-five miles north of New York City. The well-preserved remains of these fortresses may be seen today above the northern and southern slopes of a little river that separates them. The dividing stream, now known as Popolopen Creek,* cascades eastward through a nearby mountain gorge and joins the Hudson's tidal waters at a point directly between the forts.

The purpose of this factual account is to describe the heroic part enacted at the Twin Forts of the Popolopen, by American forces, during the dramatic defensive preparations of 1775-1777. It will first be necessary to recount briefly events prior to the building of the picturesque structures.

The Great River With the outbreak of armed hostilities between the American Colonies and Great Britain, at Lexington and Concord on April 19, 1775, the thirteen Provinces prepared for the struggle, which on July 4, 1776, became the War for American Independence. The strategic importance of the Hudson River, and the part it would play in ensuing events, was recognized early in the growing contest. Every road leading from New England to the other colonies crossed the great river at some point. The use of waterways from the St. Lawrence through Lake Champlain and southward, also was vitally dependent upon the control of the river. Troops, supply trains, and messengers had, of necessity, to use these roads or the neighboring wilderness trails to journey from north to south, or east to west. It was evident that the British, with their powerful navy, might force a wedge with armed vessels and posts, from New York to Canada, gaining control of the river from the sea to Albany. This physical means of separating the colonies would have spelled disaster to the American cause. The several provinces, denied mutual assistance through loss of communication, would have been gradually strangled.

* See Appendix B, Number 5.

The Hudson River is navigable for heavy shipping for a distance of about 160 miles. North of Albany the currents become shallow and rapid. From this point southward to the sea, the estuary flows through rolling country for the greater part of its course. In the Highlands of the Hudson, where neighboring hills reach an elevation of one thousand and more feet, the river winds tortuously for some twenty miles before emptying into the ocean fifty miles downstream.

During the period of the Revolution, there were few large settlements in the valley. New York, at the river's mouth, was a small city, surrounded by large manorial land grants maintained by influential Loyalists. The mountains were considered a forbidding region. Beverly Robinson, later to assume an important part in the attack on Fort Montgomery, was one of the Crown sympathizers to venture into this area. His home was built near the present village of Garrison. New Windsor, Newburgh, Poughkeepsie, Kingston and Albany were the principal settlements north of the Highlands.

On May 25, 1775, the Continental Congress, in Philadelphia, took active measures to secure the river to the American cause and issued the following:

**First Plans
for Defense** “*RESOLVED*, that a post be also taken in the highlands on each side of Hudson's River and batteries erected in such a manner as will most effectually prevent any vessels passing that may be sent to harass the inhabitants on the borders of said river;” (1)

John Hancock, president of the Congress, sent the resolution to the New York Provincial Congress on the following day. (2) On May 30, the Provincial Congress ordered Colonel James Clinton and Mr. Christopher Tappen,

“to go to the Highlands and view the banks of Hudson's river there; and report to this Congress the most proper place for erecting one or more fortifications; and likewise an estimate of the expense that will attend erecting the same.” (3)

The two men delivered their report to the Provincial Congress on June 10 (4), but it was not until the thirteenth that it was read to the assembled body of the Provincial Congress. (5) Clinton and Tappen recommended the erection of two armed posts on the east and west sides of the river, designated as “A” and “B” on a map which they submitted. The proposed fortifications were undoubtedly intended to be located on both banks of the Hudson at the bend of

the river where West Point and Martelaer's Rock* (now Constitution Island) face each other.

This first defense in the region was to be erected later, some five miles north of the future Forts of the Popolopen, and must be mentioned here because of relationships with events to follow.

Clinton and Tappen hoped that the sites they selected would :

"answer the purposes proposed and directed by the Continental Congress. As it is not only the narrowest part of the said river, but best situated on account of the high hills contiguous to it, as well on the west as east side of the river, which cover these parts, so that without a strong easterly wind or the tide, no vessel can pass it; and the tide in said part of the river is generally so reverse that a vessel is usually thrown on one side of the river or the other, by means whereof such vessels lay fair, and exposed to the places your committee have fixed on." (6)

The Continental Congress desired to commence construction of the new forts immediately. On June 16, they resolved to apply to Governor Trumbull of Connecticut for the use of some of the Connecticut troops "in securing the navigation of Hudson's river." (7) The New York Provincial Congress did not begin to push matters until August 18 when they passed the following resolution :

"*RESOLVED AND ORDERED*, that the fortifications formally ordered by the Continental Congress, and reported by a committee of this Congress, as proper to be built on the banks of Hudson's river in the Highlands, be immediately erected." (8)

At the same time they appointed five commissioners "to manage the erecting and finishing the said fortifications," adding to their number as the month drew to a close. (9)

On September 7 the Committee of Safety, sitting in the recess of the Provincial Congress, received a letter from the commissioners in the Highlands requesting instructions in regard to the plan and expense of the defenses. They were informed through one of their members, that it would be advisable to wait until the arrival of the engineer, Bernard Romans, who was coming to New York from Philadelphia. (10)

Romans, a Dutchman, examined the land in the Highlands and wrote his report on September 14, 1775. The document was dated

* See Appendix B, Number 4.

from "Martelaer's Rock, on Martyr's Reach." It mentioned in detail the various hills and sites for proposed works on Martelaer's Rock. (11) Although Romans suggested a small battery at West Point, where a farm was then situated, it was not erected during the period of his supervision.* Four days later, on September 18, he carefully compiled an estimate and expense account for erecting the forts in the Highlands. It was an elaborate document and called for the construction of batteries, blockhouses, and barrack buildings. Work was actually begun later that month upon the new defenses of the island, to which the name, "Fort Constitution," was later given. (12)

The story of Fort Constitution is a tragic and absorbing history in itself. Confidence in the location and design of the fort weakened after thousands of pounds had been poured into its construction. It was said that the works were ill-planned and ill-situated. A memorable controversy ensued between Romans and the commissioners of fortifications, while other regions of equal or superior defensive position were being recommended.

As early as October 16, 1775, Romans himself, acting upon a resolution of the Continental Congress, urged a battery at Popolopen Creek. He said, in part: ". . . . at Pooploop's kill, opposite to Anthony's nose, it is a very important pass; the river narrow, commanded a great ways up and down, full of counter currents, and subject to almost constant full winds; nor is there any anchorage at all, except close under the works to be erected." (13) Two of the commissioners at Fort Constitution sent a letter, on the same date, to the President of the Provincial Congress and stated that, "the engineer informs us he cannot give an estimate of the charge of a further work that may be necessary at Pooploop's kill." (14)

The original drafts of two of Bernard Romans' maps of the fortifications in the Highlands, then in course of erection, may now be seen in the library at West Point. One chart shows the location at Popolopen Creek "where the committee of the Cont^l Congress ordered me to make out an Estimate for & where I would make a

* Fortifications were not commenced at West Point until January, 1778, after the battle at Forts Clinton and Montgomery. See, "The Centennial of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York." Vol. I, 1904, p. 154.

Battery of 12 heavy cannon.” However serious difficulties had arisen at Fort Constitution between Romans and the commissioners which delayed further work at Popolopen Creek. The antagonism between the engineer and the commissioners caused the Provincial Congress to send a committee to investigate affairs on the island. This committee was composed of Francis Nicoll, Joseph Drake and Thomas Palmer. (15)

On December 14, 1775, the three men wrote their report. It resulted in the condemnation of Fort Constitution and recommended **New Plans** placing a strong battery five miles to the south, on the west shore, opposite a high hill called, “Anthony’s Nose.” They said:

“We are clearly of opinion that this is by far the most advantageous situation in the Highlands for a fortification, as one erected on this point would command the reach of the river downwards to the point of the Dunderbarragh, being the distance of nearly 3 miles, and from the same point the reach upwards may be commanded as far, and is environed in its adjacent and contiguous situations with marshes and inaccessible mountains, which renders it impracticable for the enemy to land. We are therefore of opinion that a battery of 16 or 18 guns ought to be erected on this point, and that barracks be erected there to make it a post of about 150 or 200 men.” (16)

Romans had persistently attempted to complete Fort Constitution in the face of strenuous objections. He unsuccessfully defended his plans before the New York Provincial, and later, the Continental Congress. It was officially ordered on January 5, 1776, that work was to cease on “Martler’s Rock” and that a point of land at Popolopen kill, on the river, “ought without delay to be effectually fortified.” (17)

On January 16 the Committee of Safety ordered “that the timber designed for the additional barracks at Martlyr’s Rock and not yet erected, be removed by the first opportunity to Pooplopen’s kill, there to be applied to use, pursuant to some future order.” (18)

On March 1, 1776, Captain William Smith reported to the Provincial Congress that he had surveyed the ground at Popolopen Creek and had staked out a line of defense on the height above the river. He informed them that he would send a map of the site to the commissioners as soon as possible. Smith also laid out a new battery at

Fort Constitution, which was intended to control the river at that point. (19)

On March 14, Commissioners Thomas Palmer and Gilbert Livingston commenced operations at Popolopen kill with troops sent from Fort Constitution, but no sooner did the work start than difficulties arose. On March 20, Colonel Isaac Nicoll, then commanding officer at Fort Constitution, questioned the right of Commissioner Palmer to assume command of the troops at Popolopen Creek. As commander in the Highlands, he felt the men should be under his authority and wrote a complaint to the Provincial Congress on the next day (20), but a reply was deferred. The Committee of Safety was again in session. On March 26, they communicated their sentiments to Nicoll and agreed with him in regard to his command of all the troops in the Highlands until he was relieved by some Continental officer, or an order from the legislative body of the province. (21)

Palmer and Livingston wrote the first letter from "Fort Montgomery" on March 28. (22) This was the name given to the new fort, the construction of which, they were supervising. **Fort Montgomery** Although there is no documentary evidence to prove it, the fortification was probably named in memory of Brigadier General Richard Montgomery, the leader of a division of the American army sent into Canada in 1775. He was killed in a blinding snowstorm in the unsuccessful assault on Quebec, on December 31, 1775.

The two commissioners reported that several buildings were almost completed and work would soon begin upon the battery. However, the militiamen, they said, were on the verge of mutiny because of the lack of proper supplies and accommodations. They further reported that if relief were not forthcoming, the workers would probably desert the post in a body. (23)

In the early spring of 1776, the American Army headquarters were transferred from Boston to New York. General Washington at once began forwarding the construction of defensive works in and about the city. Progress was being made at Fort Montgomery, but complaints, regarding deficiencies in the militia regiments, lack of proper supplies, and illness at Fort Constitution, did not improve matters. The militiamen were independent. They would visit their homes

when the spirit moved, and return if and when they chose. Conditions were far from ideal.

The apparent inability of the legislative body of the State to cope with the immediate problems and properly garrison the posts worried General Washington. As a result, the Commander-in-Chief endeavored to remedy the discouraging beginnings in the Highlands by appointing various officers to further investigate conditions. At this time the local command was changed frequently. On May 4, 1776, Lieutenant Colonel Henry B. Livingston was ordered to relieve Nicoll of his post. (24) Nicoll, however, remained at Fort Constitution. He was formally discharged by the Provincial Congress on May 8. (25) In the meantime, on May 20, Colonel James Clinton assumed charge of the Highland military projects and dismissed all but two of the Commissioners. (26)

Another committee, sent to examine and report upon the Highland activities, consisted of Major General William Alexander, more commonly known as Lord Stirling, Colonel Rufus Putnam, and Captain Winthrop Sargent, an officer in the artillery. These officers left New York on May 26. On June 1 Lord Stirling submitted a report relating to the personnel and condition of the defenses. Of Fort Constitution, he wrote in part:

“Upon the whole, Mr. Romans has displayed his genius at a very great expense, and to very little public advantage.” (27)

The report included an opinion in regard to the existing works at Fort Montgomery and suggested other positions that would prove well to defend. Lord Stirling recommended an additional fort at the Popolopen.

Another Fort

He wrote:

“The works begun and designed at Fort Montgomery are open lines, and all lie on the north side of a small creek called Pooplopen’s Kill, on the south side of which is a point of land which projects more into the river, commands all the principal works, and is within two and three hundred yards of them. On top of this point is a level spot of ground, of near an acre, commanded by nothing but the high, inaccessible mountains, at about twelve hundred yards distance; this spot, I think, should by all means be fortified, as well for the annoyance of the enemy in their approach up the river, as for the protection of the works at Fort Montgomery. Indeed, this appears to me the most proper place I have seen on the river to be made the grand post; and in my opinion, should be a regular strong

work, capable of resisting every kind of attack and containing a grand magazine of all kinds of warlike stores. The whole would then command the passage of the river with so formidable a cross fire as would deter any attempt to approach with shipping." (28)



BRIGADIER GENERAL GEORGE CLINTON

Governor of the State of New York; Commandant during the unsuccessful defence of Forts Clinton and Montgomery, October 6, 1777.

George Clinton, younger brother of James, now appears upon the scene. In 1775, George Clinton was elected one of the New York

**Brigadier General
George Clinton**

Delegates to the second Continental Congress in Philadelphia. On May 15 of that year, he took his seat and continued in his legislative duties throughout that season and well into 1776. Upon election to the New York Provincial Congress on June 25, 1776, he was recalled from



From "Journals of the Military Expedition of Major-General John Sullivan Against the Six Nations of Indians, in 1779."

BRIGADIER GENERAL JAMES CLINTON

Post Commandant at Fort Clinton on the occasion of its heroic defence,
October 6, 1777.

Philadelphia. George Clinton, with his brother, was destined to make history at Forts Clinton and Montgomery. No sooner had he arrived in the Province of New York than he was given active military command in the Highlands with the rank of brigadier-general in the militia. In the middle of the month he was in charge at Fort Montgomery and vigorously forwarded the defensive works in the region.

General Clinton was well suited for the task. He knew the region intimately. An examination of his voluminous correspondence, published by the State of New York, shows that his main thoughts at this time were for the safety of the Highlands.

On July 23, George Clinton wrote General Washington as follows:

. . . . The Hill on the South side of Pouplopen's Kill & not above $1\frac{1}{2}$ Miles of it overlooks our works, every Gun on our Battery lays in open view of it. It is accessible to the Enemy from a Landing that we cannot command with out Batteries & a Road from thence to it that Field Pieces may be brought up from our side is almost inaccessible. We must for the safety of our Men keep a Body of Men there if no Works are erected. If fortified, a less Number will hold the ground, annoy the Enemy's Shipping & render us safe from that Quarter or any attempt by Land. Indeed it is the spot where our first Works should, in my poor Judgment, have been. Mr. Jay Livingston &c. a Committee of Provincial Congress, lately here, are of Oppinion with me, that this Fortress is by no means safe, unless that Hill is secured. Genl. Fellows & other Officers from the Eastward are all of the same Oppinion. They advised me to begin some small Works there. I have laid out as well as I know how and the Militia are employed in making Facines & other Preparations, which are not attended with any public expence, but I Can't think of doing any Thing more than making a small Breast Work for Musquetry, till I receive your Excellency's Orders on this Head, especially as there may be good reasons ag't erecting such Works which from my want of Military Knowledge don't occur to me. A few Cannon will serve them & these I believe may be spared from our other Fortifications where they cannot be so serviceable. . . ." (29)

Two days later, in the Fort Montgomery garrison General Orders, the pressing need for fortifying the height was presented to Militia at the post:

"Fort Montgomery, 25th July 1776.

Genl & Garrison Orders,—

It must be Evident to every reasonable man who is possesst of the least Military Knowledge & acquainted with the Situation of this Place, that proper Works erected on the Hill on the south side of Poplopen's Kill will not only contribute greatly to the safety of our present Works; but if properly constructed will enable us more effectually to annoy the Enemy's Shipping, should they attempt to pass up the River; induced by these Considerations proper Works are in part laid out there & began upon; But unless they are carried on with Spirit & finished in season they will not only be useless to us but may be converted by the Enemy to Purposes which they are intended to prevent.

It is expected, therefore, that the Detachment of Militia now here, honorably employed in Defence of their Country, will as Early each Morning as if working for themselves, which is truly the Case, turn out on Fatigue to forward & compleat these Works in Season, leaving one Field Officer only, 1 Subaltern 1 Non Commissioned Officer and 10 Privates of each Company as a Protection to the Sloops to guard the Landing, the Privates also Cook, & do the other necessary Business of the Camp. . . . A Serjants Guard is to be placed Every Evening on the Hill at the New Works, a small shed to be erected there for their Accomadation, & to continue there all Night keeping out at least one faithful Centry; this Guard to be composed of the Militia not on Fateigue; A Commissioned Officer to be appointed by the Colo. or next Commanding Officer of the Militia employed on those Works to receive the Necessary Tolls [tools] from Capt. Tappen to see them collected every Evening & put under the Care of the Guard there & to return them When relieved or dismissed & who is to be exempted from all other Duty. . . .” (30)

The next day, General Washington wrote George Clinton and heartily agreed that the spot should be occupied:

“Head Quarters, New York, 26 July, 1776.

Dear Sir,

.....
I have sent up Lieut. Machin to lay out and oversee such Works as shall be tho't necessary by the Officers there, and from your representation of the Hill, which overlooks the Fort, I think it ought to be taken possession of Immediately.—You who are on the spot must be a better judge than I possibly can, must leave it with you to erect such Works as you, with Col. Clinton and the Engineer may think Necessary,” (31)

On August 2, General Clinton informed the Commander-in-Chief that possession had been taken of the hilltop and that, “the proper
Fort Clinton Works are laid out there by Mr. Machine which shall be carried on with the greatest Dispatch & Oeconomy.” (32)

These works, on the south side of Popolopen Creek, were designated on several British maps as a “battery.” Eventually the defense was known as, “Fort Clinton.”* That it was named after one of the brothers, Clinton, there can be little doubt.

* Another “Fort Clinton,” at West Point, was not erected until the year 1778. Originally it was called Fort Arnold, but, upon the occasion of Arnold's treason in 1780, it was given this new name. Its restored remnants may still be seen.

During August, 1776, a small fortification was begun at the southern gate of the Highlands, commanding Peekskill Bay. Un-
Other Defenses named for a while, it later bore the appellation, "Fort Independence." It played a minor part in subsequent engagements.

One of the most spectacular undertakings of the Americans during the war concerned the placement of iron chains across the river to obstruct English shipping. Early in 1775 committees had been working upon logical points for the location of the barriers. In July,



SIR HENRY CLINTON

Clinton designed and executed the surprise attack on Forts Clinton and Montgomery, October 6, 1777, which caused the abandonment of the remaining American posts in the Hudson Highlands.

1776, a Secret Committee, appointed by the Provincial Convention, selected the narrow part of the river at Fort Montgomery as the most advantageous position for the blocking of the waterway. Machin, the engineer, had his attention divided between the forts and the proposed chain. It was an attempt to fortify both land and water.

George Clinton soon departed to join the forces campaigning about New York. His brother, James, assumed command at the fort. Before leaving, General Clinton gave Machin the following orders:

“Fort Montgomery, 10th Augt, 1776.

To Lieut Machine,

As I am ordered to march with the new Levies to Kings Bridge, and as you will want many Necessaries for compleating the new works we have begun on the South Side of Poplopen's Kill, and the works to be erected for securing the Pass at Anthony's Nose, You are to use your best Endeavors by all means in your Power, applying to Colo. Clinton from Time to Time for his advice and to purchase & procure such Articles as may be wanted of which the Clerk of the Check is to keep a just Account. The Artificers already imployed & such others as may be wanted, are in the erecting of these Works to be under your Direction, for which Colo. Clinton will give the necessary orders.

Geo. Clinton, Brigr. Genl'' (33)

On September 8, James Clinton wrote to his brother:

“Fort Montgomery, Sept'r 8th, 1776.

D'r Brother,

.....
We have mounted four twelve Pounders on the south side of the Kill where you begun the Battery and Expect soon to have more; we turn out all hands on Duty Every Day to work on the Battery &c; we are Building three Barracks, one at Fort Constitution, one on the south side of the Kill, and the other at Red Hook, but Cant finish them for want of nails; I have wrote to Q. M. Genl., for them and am in hopes of being suplyed.' (34)

In August, September, October and November, war raged about the defenses and environs of New York City. The campaign proved a disastrous one for Washington. The Americans lost the Battle of Long Island; they evacuated the city; were driven from Westchester; lost Fort Washington and finally were forced on a dogged retreat through New Jersey. New York became the headquarters of His Majesty's forces under Sir William Howe.

From this time forward the story of Forts Clinton and Montgomery merged. The great iron chain was finally completed and drawn across the river in November, 1776, under Lieutenant Machin's able direction.* Just north of the Highlands, along the flats between Plum Point and Polopel's Island, the patriots had placed a chevaux-de-frise. This consisted of large, stone-filled cribs, lying submerged, with long, iron-tipped poles just below the surface of the water to penetrate the hull of any vessel driven upon them. The device proved eventually to be a failure as was one that had been previously sunk in the river at Fort Washington.

In the town of Poughkeepsie, two Continental frigates, the *Congress* and the *Montgomery*, were in course of construction.

Throughout the autumn of 1776, and during the spring and summer of 1777, work upon the fortresses progressed surely if slowly.

Alarms George Clinton's letters are filled with continual complaints against the militia, who, though patriotic enough, failed to turn out in sufficient number to garrison the forts. On April 1, 1777, he wrote from Fort Montgomery:

"The Garrisons of this & the other Fortresses in the Neighbourhood being already rather Weak considering their Importance & their defencesless Situation on the Land side where we are now buisilly employed in erecting proper Works." (35)

Troops from the Counties of Dutchess, Orange, Ulster and Westchester marched to and from Forts Clinton and Montgomery. Beacons and alarm posts were established at vantage points. Signal guns were in readiness at the different forts and landings, to be fired upon the approach of any British force. The safety of the lands north of the mountains rested considerably upon the troops in the Highlands.

On March 23, 1777, a British raid was made on Peekskill under Lieutenant Colonel Bird. This expedition destroyed considerable amounts of stores in the town after driving off the Americans who were under command of General Alexander McDougall. General George Clinton was unable to send help to the patriots at Peekskill because his garrison was too weak. He considered Fort Montgomery, "a Post of the utmost Consequence." (36)

* The chain at Fort Montgomery preceded that drawn across the Hudson River at West Point in 1778. Several links of the West Point chain may now be seen near the Parade Ground at West Point.

On May 7 Washington, then in his Headquarters at Morristown, New Jersey, wrote to General Alexander McDougall:

“The imperfect state of the fortifications of Fort Montgomery, gives me great uneasiness, because I think from a concurrence of circumstances, that it begins to look as if the enemy intended to turn their view towards the North River, instead of the Delaware. I therefore, desire, that General George Clinton and yourself will fall upon every measure to put the fortifications in such a state, that they may at least resist a sudden attack, and keep the enemy employed, till reinforcements may arrive. If the North River is their object, they cannot accomplish it unless they withdraw their forces from Jersey, and that they cannot do unknown to us. Your present force is fully sufficient to oppose any body of men, that can be sent against you, previous to the calling the detachments from Jersey and Rhode Island.” (37)

On July 1, 1777, Washington wrote to George Clinton urging him to call out the militia for fear of an attack by Sir William Howe upon the Highland posts. (38) Clinton immediately issued orders for the reinforcements to march to Peekskill, Fort Montgomery, and to a post in the Ramapo Valley. (39) The day following the receipt of the Commander-in-Chief's letter, General Clinton wrote to General Israel Putnam, the new commanding officer in the Highlands, and notified him of his garrison's weakness. “If they make any Attempt ag't this Post,” he said, “it will be by a sudden Assault so that our Fate will be determined one way or other before we shall be able to hear from our Friends after we begin.” (40) Even the ships in preparation for service on the river were not ready. The *Montgomery* did not have a single gun on board. (41)

Amid the turmoil of preparation in the Highlands, George Clinton received on July 7 the somewhat unexpected news, from his brother-in-law, Christopher Tappen, that he, Clinton, had been elected governor and lieutenant-governor of the State of New York. (42) His name had been placed upon the ballot as a candidate, but, when the returns began to come in, it appeared as though General Philip Schuyler had been elected to the office. It was the vote of some of the counties in the southern part of the state that finally gave Clinton a majority and assured his election. (43)

The newly elected executive continued to carry on his work of defense, reporting to Washington on the eleventh that the redoubts

at Forts Clinton and Montgomery were, "in as good Condition as could be expected," and that he had just drawn a rope cable across the river in front of the chain. (44)

On July 9, Pierre Van Cortlandt, President of the Council of Safety, duly notified Clinton of his election to the office of governor, and also of lieutenant-governor. Clinton wrote to the Council, at Kingston, on July 11, thanking them, and accepting the office of governor but declining that of lieutenant-governor. (45) Though this honor had been conferred upon him, he still tarried at the forts, anticipating a British attack.

On July 24, the Council of Safety requested Clinton to journey to Kingston and assume his duties as governor. Two days later he wrote to General Putnam, commanding officer in the Highlands, from Fort Montgomery:

" It is sometime past since I have been summoned by the Council of Safety of this State to attend at Kingston to take upon me the Government, and as by a late Resolve of theirs for convening the Legislature by the first of August my attendance will be absolutely necessary. I propose, therefore, with your Consent to set out for that Place on Monday next which can only afford me a Day or two there previous to the meeting of the Representatives.

When I saw General Washington the last week at Head Qrs., I mentioned this to him but as it was supposed the Enemy were then moving up the River it was his wish I should continue here a few Days till their Designs were most fully known nor could I (in that Situation of affairs) think of leaving the Post upon any Consideration. But as there seems to be no great Prospect of a sudden attempt against this Quarter I must ask your Leave of absence for an unlimited Time as it is impossible to determine when, if ever, I shall be able to return to Military Service. As this Post with other Fortresses in the Highlands are, by your Instruction, put under your Command I conceive this Application to you most proper otherwise I should have wrote to his Excellency and Congress on the occasion." (46)

By the first of August, Clinton had taken his place in the State Capitol at Kingston.

The crisis of 1777, in New York, came with the invasion of General John Burgoyne. In addition to this northern thrust, the



PALMER MAP NUMBER ONE OF FORT MONTGOMERY

This draft, attributed to Thomas Palmer, one of the commissioners of fortifications, is one of the earliest known plans of Fort Montgomery. It shows the works as they probably appeared in the latter part of May, 1776, on the occasion of Lord Stirling's visit of inspection.

**Forerunners
to the Crisis**

British determined to further separate the American Colonies by gaining control of the Hudson Valley. In brief, Burgoyne planned to drive through from Canada to the Hudson, taking Fort Ticonderoga and other American posts. Barry St. Leger was to pierce the Mohawk Valley and stamp out revolt in that sector. Sir William Howe, from headquarters in New York, was to place his army on board vessels, smash the Highland barriers, and sail to the rendezvous of the three forces at Albany.

Burgoyne and St. Leger advanced according to plan, but Howe, instead of coöperating with them, sailed in July, 1777, for the Chesapeake in an attempt to seize Philadelphia. Sir Henry Clinton was left in command at New York.

Both St. Leger and Burgoyne failed in their objective. The former was turned back after the unsuccessful siege of Fort Stanwix, and the latter found himself in the rolling country at Saratoga face to face with the increasing "rebel" forces of General Philip Schuyler who was later succeeded by General Horatio Gates. Burgoyne finally surrendered on October 16, 1777, but not before dramatic events had taken place in the Hudson Highlands.

In New York, Sir Henry Clinton was making plans for a thrust up the Hudson and had hoped for an early start, but was delayed by the failure of reinforcements to come from Europe. In September the troops arrived and he eagerly went forward with his preparations. Foraging parties were sent into the Jerseys and men were massed in the camps about Kingsbridge, on the northern end of Manhattan Island.

The American forces on duty in the Highlands were under the immediate command of Major General Israel Putnam who, at his headquarters in Peekskill, had managed to collect 1,200 men to resist any oncoming attack. Heavy reinforcements had been withdrawn from the region to assist in the Philadelphia campaign and to augment the northern army under General Gates. As a result, reduced garrisons were left in the nearby forts. (47) The garrison at Forts Clinton and Montgomery consisted of between five and six hundred men, under General James Clinton. A guard of about thirty men was maintained in Fort Constitution under the command of Gershom Mott, an artillery captain.



PALMER MAP NUMBER TWO OF FORT MONTGOMERY

This plan was evidently drawn after the preceding map. It accompanied Lord Stirling's report to General Washington, June 1, 1776, and shows several additional works and buildings that were proposed to be constructed there. It is interesting to note that the remains of three buildings drafted upon the Palmer Maps are still in existence in Fort Montgomery.

General Samuel H. Parsons, on duty in Westchester County, observed with apprehension the activities of the British in New York and wrote Putnam regarding his fears. Parsons thought, on September 26, that the English were going to make a raid into Westchester but, on the next day, was convinced that something more serious was under way. The arrival of sixty enemy ships in New York Harbor on the 25th, with about three thousand reinforcements for Sir Henry Clinton from Europe, "may alter the face of affairs," he said, "and perhaps may enable them to make a Real attack on the North River Posts." (48)

Putnam immediately communicated Parsons' information to George Clinton. The governor lost no time. He issued a circular letter with instructions to his colonels to reinforce Putnam.

"Kingston Sep'r 29" 1777

Sir,

By letters just rec'd by Express from the Honorable Major Genl. Putnam dated the 27" & 28" Inst. and Copies of Letters from Genl. Parsons inclosed there is the utmost Reason to apprehend that the Enemy stationed at New York and Kingsbridge are much more numerous than was generally expected, and that they are making great and speedy Preparations for an Expedition which there can be little Doubt must be intended against the County of W: Chester and the Posts and Passes in the Highlands, As an Attempt of this Kind will co-operate with their Northern Army under Genl. Burgoyne to which also they may be induced by the weakness of these Posts by the large Reinforcements lately ordered from thence for Genl. Washington. . . . And as the Enemy appear determined to make this campaign decisive it becomes our indispensable Duty for a few weeks Longer to perserve in our Services and by spirited Exertions not only give Security to our distressed Country [but] render the Enemy so weak before the present Season is ended as that they shall not be able to enter upon another Campaign with the least Prospect of Success.

You will therefore immediately march on half of your Regiment completely armed, equipped and accoutred to Peek's Kill to the Reinforcement of the Army there under Genl. Putnam to continue in Service for one Month unless sooner dismissed & then to be relieved by the other half of the Regiment. You will also put the other half of your Regiment under marching Orders to be ready upon the shortest Notice.

I am &c.

[G. C.]'' . (49)

Governor Clinton hurriedly wrote his brother advising him to make the best defensive arrangements possible with the troops at Forts Montgomery and Clinton, giving him authority to "call out" additional reinforcements from Orange and Ulster Counties. (50)

On the night of October 3 and the morning of the 4th, Sir Henry Clinton suddenly struck to the north, embarking his regiments and battalions on board transports, and proceeding as far as Tarrytown where a landing was made. The following day the ships stood upstream and cast anchor off the low shores of Verplanck's Point, about five miles below Peekskill, and ten below Forts Clinton and Montgomery. (51)

The Enemy Approach

After Governor Clinton had written his instructions of September 29 to his colonels, he left Kingston, and was at New Windsor, near the cheveaux-de-frise, on October 4. On that date, his brother wrote him that the British fleet was on the river:

"Fort Montgomery, 4th October 1777

Dear Brother:

By Capt. Lieut. Gano of the Artillery, who has just come from Peeks Kill, he informs me that the Enemy are landed at Tarry Town, that they have several Transports & some men of Warr, with a number of flat Bottom'd Boats, & that the inhabitants at Peeks Kill are all moving away and are in the Utmost confusion. I have had no Account from Genl. Putnam. I am informed he has gone Down towards Kings Ferry to reconiter, &c. Our Gallies & Privateer Sloop has not yet come up—neither has there been any Alarm Guns Fired, tho' there has been about 8 or 10 Cannon heard below—there is very few of the Militia yet come Down. I Can't tell you the number, as I have had no Returns from them as yet—there has no Field Officers come down with any of the Regim'ts Except Major Du Bois of Colo. Hasbrouck's Rigt. which are at Fort Constitution.

I have waited some time thinking I might have an Express from Genl. Putnam with a more Certain Account—but as I have Receiv'd none; I think it my duty to give you the Earliest notice Possible. Upon the Enemies Approach, you may Expect to hear the Alarm Guns fired here."

I am Yours Affectionately,

James Clinton (52)

To His Excellency Geo. Clinton, Esqr.
Gov'r of the State of New York"

From his home at New Windsor, Governor Clinton wrote James Clinton, at seven o'clock that evening:

“New Windsor, 4th October 7 p.m.
[1777]

D'r. brother:

I have this moment rec'd yours of this Date with an Account of the Enemy's Landing [at] Tarry Town, &c. I am surprised you have not had a particular Account of it from Genl. Putnam & that no more of the Militia have yet arrived. I think on a Confirmation of the Account you had better send Express to the Orange Regiments to march in. I will set out for your Post in the Morning early, & am,

Yours Affectionately,

Geo. Clinton

I think the Alarm Guns ought to be fired the Moment it appears probable that the Enemy's Intentions are higher up the River or that is certain that they have landed any Number of Troops at Tarry Town; as that will be most expeditious Way of collecting the Militia to oppose their Progress, but for this I suppose you wait Genl. Putnam's Orders or the Alarm Gun at Peek's Kill.”

[To General James Clinton] (53)

At three o'clock on the morning of October 5, a messenger reached the governor with a letter from General Putnam. Clinton instantly dispatched news of it to the Legislature, at Kingston, and said:

“.... You have inclosed a Copy of a Letter from Genl. Putnam which I have just now received containing a more particular Acct. of the Enemy than that from my Brother, from which I am rather inclined to believe the Enemy's Intentions are to ravage West Chester County than any Thing serious ag't the Posts in the Highlands. However it is, but I believe that a Contrary Opinion prevails at Peek's Kill; least I should be Misstaken in my Conjecture & their Design shoud realy be what Genl. Putnam suspects. . . .” (54)

On October 5, Sir Henry Clinton landed large numbers of his troops at Verplanck's Point as a menacing gesture toward Putnam.

The Enemy in Sight

The old general was confused by this feint. He believed Peekskill to be the point of attack. (55) At the same time Commodore Hotham, Commander of the British fleet, dispatched galleys and the advanced squadron, under command of Sir James Wallace, to the broad waters of Peekskill Bay where the vessels dropped anchor. (56)

Early on the morning of October 5, Governor Clinton set forth by water for the Highland forts. When he was a mile north of Fort Constitution, he heard the signal guns roar their message of alarm

and saw the beacon fire at Fort Constitution lighted. (57) He landed there, ordered the guns repeated, and marched on to Fort Montgomery where he arrived at about three o'clock in the afternoon. (58) From here he dated a letter to the President of the Council of Safety just as the first of the British ships rounded the point of the Dunderberg preparatory to anchoring for the night. (59)

At the time of which we speak the two defenses above the Hudson were not complete. Fort Clinton, it is said, was in its final stages of construction and consisted of a circular line following the ground contour. On the heights was an eight-pointed "star" redoubt commanding the River. To the rear of the works lay a "four-pointed" redoubt, heavily constructed of earth and stone that is still in existence. The lines of Fort Montgomery, along the river were strong, with their complement of guns, but the rear was comparatively open with the works poorly situated and incomplete. Both posts were surrounded by abattis of felled trees, that of Fort Clinton extended southward for four hundred yards, and was protected by the fire of ten cannon.

There were now only two regiments of the line at the post—the Fifth New York Regiment, from Ulster County, under Colonel Lewis Dubois, and Colonel John Lamb's Regiment of Continental Artillery. The remainder of the troops were militia from the neighboring counties, included in the regiments of Colonels William Allison, Jesse Woodhull, James McClaghry and Jonathan Hasbrouck. There were apparently detached men from several other commands at the forts, bringing the full complement to between five and six hundred men. (60)

The strategic importance of the two forts and the safety of the iron chain below them, guarded by so small a garrison, prompted Governor Clinton to take an added precautionary measure. On the evening that the British landed at Verplanck's Point he sent Major Samuel Logan and one hundred men southward through the mountains to reconnoitre. (61) In the meantime, Putnam, through his entreaties, secured the frigates *Congress* and *Montgomery*, two row galleys, and a privateer sloop to protect the two forts. The American boats lay just above the chain and boom. Thus matters stood in the waning hours of October 5.

The eerie light of a fog greeted the opposing forces on the morning of the sixth. Within a protected elbow of the river, under the

The British March to the Twin Forts

northern slope of Stony Point, opposite Verplanck's Point, was situated the western landing place of Kings Ferry. Here the steep hillsides break away and a gradually descending promontory leads to the water's edge. A narrow road stretched west and north over Dunderberg Mountain to Doodletown, about two miles from Fort Clinton. In the early morning hours a general debarkation of enemy troops took place upon this western shore. Daylight was breaking as flatboats, filled with soldiers, were rowed to the landing place. About four hundred Loyalist troops were left in possession of Verplanck's Point across the river. (62)

The projected attack was under the command of able officers. On the west shore, Lieutenant-Colonel Mungo Campbell, of the Fifty-second Foot, led an advanced guard of nine hundred **British Personnel** men. Five hundred men were regulars, seasoned soldiers of the Fifty-second and Fifty-seventh Regiments of Foot; the remaining four hundred were composed of Provincials. Colonel Beverly Robinson, instrumental in planning this attack with Sir Henry Clinton, was Campbell's second in command. Returning to the Highlands, from which he had fled to join the Royal forces in New York, Robinson came with a corps that he had raised, the *Loyal American Regiment*. There was also in the advance guard, the *New York Volunteers*, under Major Alexander Grant, and Captain Andraes Emmerick's corps of Provincial Chasseurs. (63)

A second division of twelve hundred seasoned troops was intrusted to the experienced leadership of Major General John Vaughan. His command constituted the Grenadier and Light Infantry Battalions, the Twenty-sixth and Sixty-third Regiments of Foot, one company of the Seventy-first Foot—Fraser's Highlanders, a dismounted troop of the Seventeenth Regiment of Light Dragoons, and two hundred Hessian Chasseurs. The rear guard consisted of the Seventh Regiment of Foot and the Musketeer Regiment von Trumbach. Major General William Tryon, former Royal governor of New York prior to the outbreak of the rebellion, commanded this division. (64)

The real test of the day's march fell upon the advance guard under Campbell who was ordered to proceed through, "the pass of Thunder Hill,"* enroute to Doodletown. On crossing the mountain he was to journey over a long and circuitous route, west of Bear Hill†

* Dunderberg. † Bear Mountain, see Appendix B, Number 2.

and attack Fort Montgomery from the rear. Vaughan's column followed, as a cover for the advanced guard, and halted at Doodletown to permit Campbell's troops to make the lengthy detour. Vaughan then continued onward to await the sound of Campbell's guns and, at this signal, to hurl his men upon the ramparts of Fort Clinton. Tryon brought up the rear guard and posted a battalion at the mountain pass to maintain communication with the fleet. (65)

Daylight was breaking when Campbell began his march from Stony Point. The rough roads were little better than trails. Commodore Hotham wrote that they were, "almost impenetrable" and forced the abandonment of the use of artillery. (66) Two years later, when Anthony Wayne was advancing to storm the forts on Stony Point, he marched in part over the same route that Campbell had followed. Wayne bears testimony that the roads over which he travelled were, "exceedingly bad and narrow." (67)

The red-coated regulars, the green clad Loyalists, and their hired allies reached "the pass" near the summit of Dunderberg Mountain at approximately eight o'clock. Charles Stedman, a British military historian, wrote, "As the path would not admit above three men to march abreast, and by its windings would have exposed the troops during their passage, to be destroyed at the pleasure of any force stationed at the top of the hill, the most trifling guard would have been sufficient to have rendered the attempt of the British abortive. The very difficulties of the attempt secured the passage to Sir Henry Clinton; and a small advanced guard, sent forward to explore if the pass was undefended, having made signal that the coast was clear, the main body of the British ascended the hill with all possible expedition." (68) After a short rest the army traversed the mountaintop and descended the northern slope toward Doodletown.

Sir Henry Clinton imagined the movements of his advancing forces to be clothed in secrecy. However, early in the morning Governor Clinton's scouts returned to the forts with the information that the enemy had landed, "above & opposite to Kings Ferry, as they supposed, about 2,000 men from upwards of forty flat bottomed boats & that they had reason to believe that a greater number were about to land." (69)

Immediately upon receiving this news, just after sunrise, Governor George Clinton wrote an account of it to his commander, General

Putnam. (70) Before the note had been dispatched the following letter from Putnam arrived:

“D’r General,

I am this moment returned from Fort Indepandance, and find that the Party of the Enemy which were said to have landed last night at that Fort is without foundation, by the Inhabitants who live just by Fort Indepandance, I am informed that the enemy have landed betwixt Kings Ferry and Dunderbarrack, if thats the case they mean to attack Fort Montgomery by land (which when I am sure off), shall Immediately Reinforce you.

I am D’r Gen. Your Very Hble

[Israel Putnam]

Paper Mills 6th Oct’r 1777” (71)

To Genl. Clinton.

This promise of reinforcements was the only word of encouragement that arrived from the east side of the river until late that afternoon when aid was of no avail.

The receipt of Putnam’s letter was acknowledged by Governor Clinton in a postscript to the one he had previously written, stating that the original information was the best answer he could give. This dispatch was entrusted to the Commissary Officer, Silvester Waterbury, with positive instructions to deliver it promptly to the American headquarters at Peekskill. (72)

Colonel Samuel Blachley Webb, an officer of the Continental line, in camp at Peekskill with Putnam, said that, “the letter was sent by an infamous scoundrel who did not deliver it ’till the firing was heard at 3 o Clock p.m.” (73)

In anxious anticipation of aid from Putnam, the Governor ordered ferry boats, with a sufficient number of hands, to await in readiness to transport the hoped-for detachment. The ferry men were stationed at Robinson’s Landing, on the east shore, about two miles north of the defenses. (74)

Clinton then gave directions to govern the activities of the American ships and galleys above the nearby chain. The frigate *Congress* was ordered to proceed upstream and take post off Fort Constitution while the frigate *Montgomery* and the smaller vessels were to aid in the defense of the forts. (75)

At approximately nine o’clock Major Logan and the troops under his command returned from their reconnoitering expedition. (76) The Major informed Governor Clinton that, “from the best intelli-

gence he could procure and the rowing of the boats, he had reason to believe they (the British) had landed a considerable force on the west side of the river at King's Ferry and between that and Dunderberg; but, as the morning was foggy, it was impossible to discern them so as to form any judgment of their numbers." (77)

At this alarming news Clinton dispatched a party of thirty men under Lieutenant Paton Jackson to keep watch on the enemy's movements. (78) Jackson proceeded safely for two miles from Fort Clinton when suddenly at ten o'clock he fell in with the British columns at Doodletown. (79) A rapid fire was exchanged between the British and Americans, Jackson managing to fight his way back to Fort Clinton. (80)

The First Skirmishes Governor Clinton at the forts could hear the firing during Jackson's skirmish. He dispatched a second entreaty to Putnam for reinforcements, pointing out that the entire safety of the post depended upon immediate assistance. (81)

Shortly afterward Governor Clinton received additional word that the enemy were moving around the rear of Bear Hill, to fall upon Fort Montgomery. (82)

With the separation of Vaughan and Campbell at Doodletown, the advance guard turned west and north, through the deep valley between Bear Hill and the slope of Dunderberg Mountain. Toiling out of the defile and moving to the rear of Bear Hill, they at length crossed Popolopen Creek and commenced the ascent of a rocky knob known as, "Torne Hill."

Governor Clinton desired to gain time in order to permit the expected reinforcements to relieve the American defenses. Notwithstanding the weakness of his command, he determined to employ advance parties to delay the enemy then advancing from the south and west. (83)

The Governor immediately dispatched Lieutenant Colonel Jacobus Bruyn, with fifty Continental troops, and Lieutenant Colonel James McClaghry, with as many of the Militia, to take post toward Doodletown. (84) At the same time, Colonel John Lamb was instructed to order the only field piece in Fort Montgomery out upon the road leading to the iron works at the Forest of Dean Mine. (85) This road intersected the path upon which Campbell was now marching near Torne Hill.

Governor Clinton anticipated the probable abandonment of the field piece by the gunners for he fully realized the futility of attempting to hold the British in check for any length of time upon unfortified ground. Orders were given to spike the gun and destroy the ammunition if and when the encounter was lost. (86) A brass field piece, under command of Captain Ephraim Fenno, rumbled out of the fort into the hills. One hundred and twenty men acted as a covering party for the gunners. (87)

The attack on the south came soon after. Bruyn and McClaghry had posted their command behind a stone wall half a mile in front of Fort Clinton.* This small barrier was located near the southern margin of the pond now known as Hessian Lake.† Vaughan was not long pushing north. The road was alive with the marching feet of the army after they had crossed a shallow creek at Doodletown.

The Americans, behind the advanced position, opened a galling fire upon the British, but Vaughan, "by his good disposition," forced the defenders, "too weak to stand the enemy's great force," slowly back to the main defense. The gallant opposition and the roughness of the terrain checked the British advance momentarily. (88)

While the action was in progress at the stone wall, Captain Fenno and his command had reached the heights of Torne Hill. The field piece was placed at least a mile from Fort Montgomery, on the steep, rocky slope and the covering party took their posts. (89) The hill falls away rather precipitously to the rapid waters of Popolopen kill below. Today this deep, narrow, wild gorge bears the appropriate name—the Hellhole.

Fenno had hardly established the cannon before the British were observed advancing with "hasty strides." (90) He opened a well directed fire, and, aided by the covering party, succeeded in throwing Campbell's men into confusion and causing "great havoc" among them as the unexpected barrage rained down. (91)

The artillerymen were serving the gun well, loading with grape shot, and firing into the British ranks, repeatedly driving them back. At length, however, Campbell deployed flanking parties into the woods on both sides of the road with a view of surrounding the small opposing force. This movement caused great alarm among the

* The location of this engagement is marked upon a boulder near the present site of Bear Mountain Inn.

† See Appendix B, Number 3.

handful of "brave fellows" and necessitated the prompt spiking and abandonment of the piece before the gunners were driven from their post by fixed enemy bayonets. (92)

Governor Clinton had fortunately hurried out a twelve pounder to cover the men in their retreat and to further delay the enemy, which had taken post upon slightly higher ground several hundred feet to the rear of the first Rebel gun. (93) The Americans fell back in good order to their second position and opened fire once more with grape shot, sending the iron hail whistling among their opponents, and causing them great "annoyance." (94) The piece must have been soon abandoned but it afforded the Americans an opportunity to retreat to the fort with very little loss with the exception of Captain Fenno, who was unfortunately made prisoner. (95) Both pieces of ordnance were seized by Campbell. (96)

Governor Clinton was making feverish preparations to resist the impending attack. (97) A short time later, Campbell and Vaughan, who had been joined by Sir Henry Clinton himself, closed in and "invested on all sides" Forts Montgomery and Clinton. (98) The day had worn on and still no word came from Putnam. Clinton penned a third and last urgent appeal for assistance to his commanding officer. (99)

The attack now began. The British pressed forward continually, rushing up to the walls only to be beaten back again and again by the defenders, half of whom had neither a spear nor a bayonet to resist the attacks. (100) For three hours throughout that long, weary afternoon, from the hour of two until the growing dusk of evening the plucky defenders remained at their posts behind the protecting works. The roar of the artillery was continuous. Samuel Parsons wrote: "The enemy must have suffered much as for more than three hours of this attack, the musketry was incessant within forty yards, and less a greater part of the time." (101) A noble defense was kept up inspired by the brothers Clinton and their subordinates.

During this period of combat, General Putnam remained with his men in Peekskill. He had been aware of the British crossing in the morning and had promised reinforcements for Governor Clinton. Meanwhile, he remained in a state of confusion regarding the number of English troops upon his own side of the river, "owing to the morning being so exceedingly foggy." (102) Putnam believed that at

least 1,500 enemy troops were under arms at Verplanck's Point. Sir Henry Clinton's ruse had succeeded. General Putnam's activities had been delayed long enough to permit the British to gain their position at Forts Clinton and Montgomery.

It was at this time that the British shipping got under way. His Majesty's Ships *Preston*, *Mercury*, and *Tartar*, with a number of transports, moved higher up the river, anchoring early in the afternoon in Peekskill Bay. (103)

Putnam now feared a combined attack by land and water, and it was these circumstances, he said, that prevented his march upon the enemy at Verplanck's Point. (104) Finally, he went to reconnoitre the ground near which the vessels lay, and when he returned—too late—he was “alarmed” to hear the roar of the artillery and musketry at the forts. It was only then that five hundred men were sent to the relief of Forts Clinton and Montgomery. (105)

David Humphreys was in the encampment near Peekskill and later wrote :

“The author of these memoires, then major of brigade to the first Connecticut Brigade, was alone at headquarters when the firing began. He hastened to Colonel Wyllys, the senior officer in camp, and advised him to despatch all the men not on duty to Fort Montgomery, without waiting for orders. About five hundred men marched instantly under Colonel (Return J.) Meigs: and the author, with Dr. Beardsleys, a surgeon in the brigade rode, at full speed, through a bye-path, to let the garrison know that a reinforcement was on its march. Notwithstanding all the efforts these officers made to and over the river, the fort was so completely invested on their arrival, that it was impossible to enter; they went on board the new frigate which lay near the fortress, and had the misfortune to be idle, though not unconcerned, spectators of the storm.” (106) Meigs arrived at the ferry at Robinson's Landing, too late to be of any use to the desperate defenders.

At three in the afternoon, the signal was made to weigh anchor among His Majesty's Galleys, the *Crane*, *Dependence* and *Spitfire*, a
British brig and a tender. The ships stood on and off for about
Attack an hour and a half until they finally made sail up the
 mountainous river channel toward the two forts. (107)

Sir James Wallace, in command of these vessels, found it necessary to resort to the use of sweeps in the galleys to bring the boats upstream

against an ebb tide (108). This movement was made with a view to causing a diversion in favor of the British land forces then hammering at the defenses. (109) Artillerymen in the forts who could be spared were manning the ponderous guns of the river works, waiting to open fire.

At five o'clock the order was given for the British ships to commence action. (110) A steady bombardment was begun and heavy missiles were directed at the works upon the heights and also at the American flotilla north of the chain. The fire was briskly returned from the American forts and boats, and a heavy barrage was exchanged while disastrous events were taking place in the rear.

At five, Campbell himself went forward with a white flag of truce before Fort Montgomery. (111) Governor Clinton sent young Lieutenant-Colonel William S. Livingston from the works to discover the nature of the British officer's errand. (112)

**Surrender
Refused**

The meeting was undoubtedly a brief one. Campbell demanded the surrender of the fort and garrison within five minutes to prevent further bloodshed. Livingston answered that Forts Clinton and Montgomery would be defended to the last extremity, and added that if the British, in their turn, would surrender, they could depend upon being well treated. (113)

Day was fast drawing to a close, and the dusk of evening enveloped the mountains. Ten minutes after the opposing officers had concluded their conference, the British launched a

**Storming
and Capture**

powerful and concentrated attack upon the upper fort. Campbell, leading the assault, at the head of his own regiment, was killed in the first onrush. (114) The charge of the British proved to be irresistible. Haggard American troops at the walls were weary after hours of continual struggling, which required every man to be upon constant duty. (115) They resisted obstinately but were outnumbered and unable to defend every point of the sprawling works. George Turnbull, of the *Loyal American Regiment*, was the first over the works. He had been hurriedly thrown into the gap as acting commander of the *New York Volunteers* when Major Alexander Grant fell in the battle, (116) The assailants smashed the lines and streamed into the defenses of Fort Montgomery. *Rivingston's Gazette*, a Tory newspaper, said of Turnbull: "He has acquired great honor, being the first that entered Fort Montgomery, after losing one officer and eight privates." (117)

The tide of battle rolled in on all sides. While the fierce fighting was in progress at Fort Montgomery, and the ships were battering away from the river, sending their heavy shot plunging onto the heights, Sir Henry Clinton eagerly awaited his time before ordering the troops to move upon Fort Clinton.

His Excellency, Sir Henry, in his report to Sir William Howe, wrote vividly of the final advance:

“As the night was approaching, I determined to seize the first favourable instant; a brisk attack on the Montgomery side; the gallies with their oars approaching, firing and even striking the fort; the men of war that moment appearing, crowding all sail to support us; the extreme ardour of the troops, in short all determined me to order the attack.” (118)

Sir Henry posted the Musketeer Regiment von Trumbach at the stone wall south of Fort Clinton where the skirmish with American forces had taken place earlier in the day. (119) This precaution was observed to cover a retreat in case of a possible disaster. (120) General Vaughan was then ordered forward with the remaining troops to storm the fortress. (121) Having no time to lose, it was particularly directed that not a shot be fired and that the men rely solely upon bayoneted muskets. (122)

The heavily armed soldiers pressed forward under a steady fire of round and grape shot, scrambling over the rocks and picking their way through fallen trees of the abbatis. (123) They came to the foot of the works, where they actually pushed one another up upon the walls. One after another of the British and foreign troops fell, shot or bayoneted as the garrison beat them back. Some were killed in the very embrasures. Count Grabouski, a Polish nobleman, acting as an aid-de-camp to Sir Henry Clinton, fell mortally wounded at the foot of the works. Major Francis Sill, leading the charge of the Sixty-third Regiment on the fort, was killed, Captain Stewart of the Grenadiers went down, but the defenders were no match for the trained troops who, eventually, cleared the parapets and entered the fort, driving all before them. (124)

On both heights there was a tumultous *melée* of struggling men, savagely contesting the ground from redoubt to redoubt. The British crushed the garrisons everywhere. The fight was practically over; the defense crumpled like a deck of cards. It was no longer a struggle to retain the forts, but one of escape. Those of the garrisons who broke out of the works had to hack and

**Fort Clinton
Falls**

Escape

slash their way through the opposition. Favored by the growing dusk, which spread its mantle over the scenes of strife and contention, many officers and men, well acquainted with the ground, managed to stumble out of the forts and lose themselves to pursuit in the gloom. (125) Stedman says that the garrison of Fort Clinton retreated fighting across the parade ground where they fired a last volley and threw down their arms.

Governor Clinton succeeded in crossing the river in a boat. His brother, James, also escaped although wounded in the thigh with a bayonet. (126) Many other of the garrison officers were in a wounded condition. Colonel Lewis Dubois, commander of a Continental regiment at the forts, received a bayonet wound in his neck, but escaped. (127) Colonel Lamb and Thomas Machin, the latter desperately wounded in the breast, fled from the fortifications. Lieutenant-Colonel McClaghry and Major Logan, both wounded, were captured by the enemy. (128) Two hundred and sixty-three Americans were taken prisoners, of whom twenty-six were commissioned officers. (129)

By a quarter of six the firing died down in both fortresses and thus, as Commodore Hotham reported, "... the two important forts of Clinton and Montgomery, upon whose dependence the safety of the state so greatly depended fell by storm to His Majesty's Arms." (130)

The death rate among the British officers was considerable. Campbell, Sill, Grant, and Grabouski paid with their lives for the parts they took in the attack. Sir Henry Clinton, himself, narrowly escaped the grape shot. (131) Vaughan's horse had been killed under him. In all, forty-one Englishmen were killed and one hundred and forty-two wounded.

Owing to the darkness, it was not until eight o'clock that Sir Henry Clinton had been assured of the success of the attack against Fort Montgomery. (132) The gruelling and hazardous invasion of the Highlands had culminated in the success of British arms.

Commodore Hotham wrote:

"When it is considered that this attack was made after a most fatiguing (march) over precipices and through roads almost impenetrable which made it impossible for the troops to avail themselves of the use of cannon, so necessary for such a purpose, and the little assistance they could therein promise themselves from the ships, the access through the highlands to the Forts rendering the approach to them so precarious it redounds the more to the credit of an enterprise which was

formed and executed with equal judgment, valour and success." (133)

The final tragedy of the day was yet to come. The inadequately manned American ships in the river above the chain were vainly trying to beat their way upstream in the face of a strong ebb tide. The frigate *Montgomery* had been stripped of her cables which had been spliced and drawn across the river in front of the great chain. She drifted down close to the river barrier. Captain Hodge, her commander, "was constrained to set her on fire to prevent her from falling in the hands of the enemy." (134) At ten o'clock that night the *Montgomery* and two row galleys were doomed to the funeral pyre. (135)

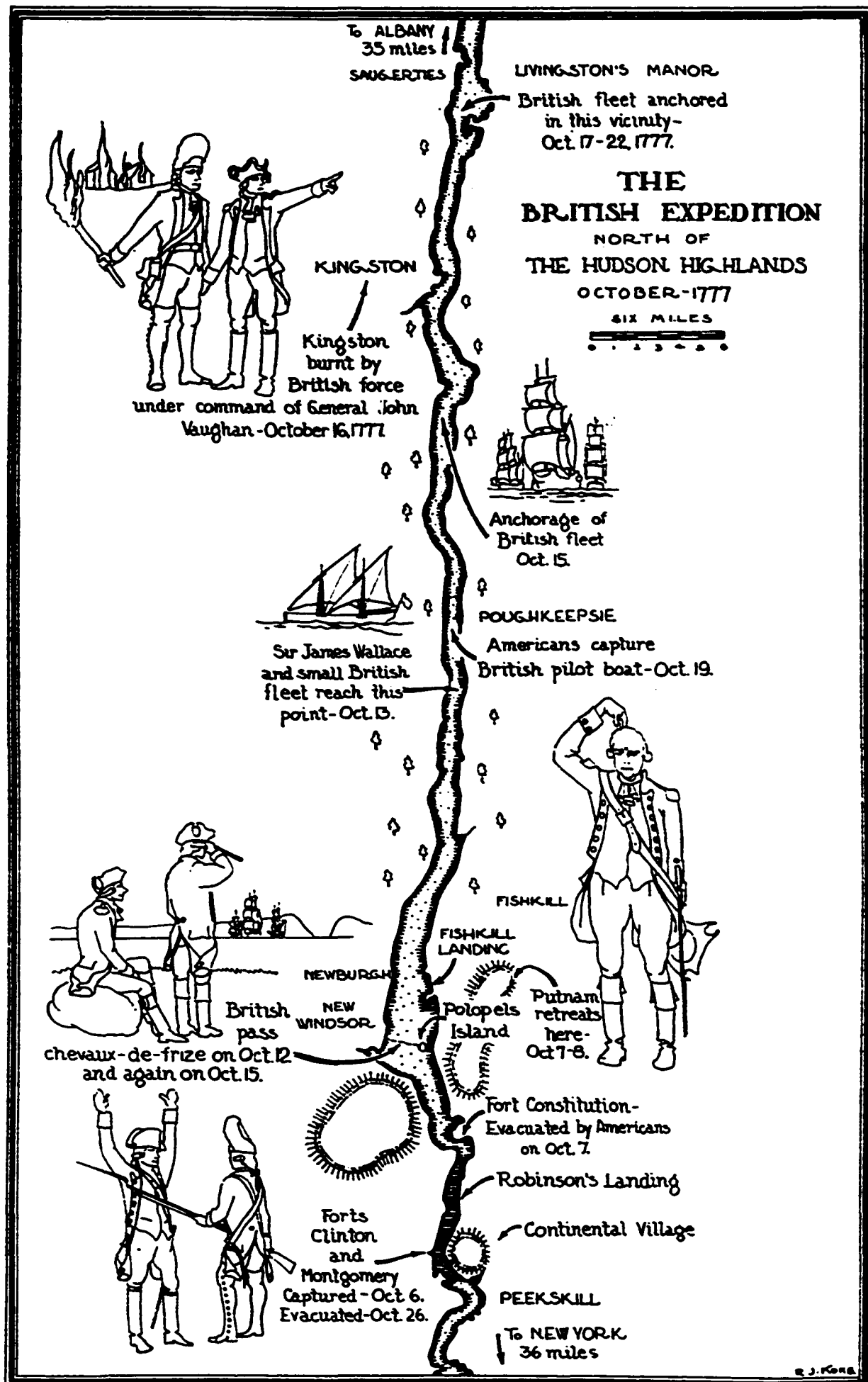
Charles Stedman wrote:

"The flames suddenly broke forth; and, as every sail was set, the vessels soon became magnificent pyramids of fire. The reflection on the steep face of the opposite mountain [Anthony's Nose], and the long train of ruddy light that shone upon the water for a prodigious distance, had a wonderful effect; whilst the ear was awfully filled with the continued echoes from the rocky shores, as the flames gradually reached the cannon. The whole was sublimely terminated by the explosions, which again left all to darkness." (136)

The frigate *Congress*, commanded by Lieutenant Shaw, lay grounded on the flats near Fort Constitution. The torch was also applied to that vessel after the crew escaped to the shore. (137)

At midnight Governor Clinton had reached Continental Village, a small military settlement on the Albany Post Road, north of Peekskill. (138) Here he met General Putnam and other of the staff officers in a council of war where it was finally decided to evacuate the American posts around Peekskill and retreat to the northern part of the Highlands. (139) On the following morning the American Army, under General Putnam, commenced its march out of the mountains, taking a position on the Albany Post Road about three miles south of the village of Fishkill.

The day following the battle, Fort Clinton was renamed "Fort Vaughan" in honor of the active part taken by Major General Vaughan in its reduction. (140) Captain Gershom Mott, with his small American garrison, had abandoned Fort Constitution after firing upon a flag of truce that Commodore Hotham and Sir Henry



MAP OF THE BRITISH CAMPAIGN, STONY POINT TO KINGSTON

Clinton had sent upstream, demanding its surrender. At eleven o'clock on the morning of October 8 the great iron chain at Fort Montgomery was cut off by British artificers. (141) During the afternoon of the same day, British galleys and flat boats proceeded up the river to Fort Constitution where troops were landed at the deserted work. (142)

After the capture of Fort Constitution, Sir Henry Clinton wrote the following message to Burgoyne, from his quarters in Fort Montgomery:

“Fort Montgomery, October 8, 1777.

Nous y voici, [We are here] and nothing now between us but Gates. I sincerely hope this little success of ours may facilitate your operations. In answer to your letter of the 28th Sept. by C. C. I shall only say, I cannot presume to order or even advise, for reasons obvious. I heartily wish you success.

Faithfully yours,
H. Clinton” (143)

The message, enclosed in a silver bullet, was intrusted to the care of Lieutenant Daniel Taylor, of the Ninth Regiment of Foot, who immediately set out for Burgoyne's army. On the following day, however, this messenger was captured by an American patrol near the village of Little Britain, north of the Highlands. The circumstances surrounding the capture of Taylor are interesting as described in a letter written by Governor Clinton on October 11, 1777:

“The letter from Clinton to Burgoyne, taken from Danl. Taylor, was enclosed in a small silver ball of an oval form, about the size of a fusee bullet, and shut with a screw in the middle. When he was taken and brought before me he swallowed it. I mistrusted this to be (the) case from information I received, and administered him a very strong emetic, calculated to operate either way. This had the desired effect; it brought it from him; but though close watched, he had the art to conceal it a second time. I made him believe I had taken one Capt. Campbell, another messenger who he knew was out on the same business; that I learned from him all I wanted to know, and demanded the ball on pain of being hung up instantly and cut open to search it. This brought it forth.” (144)

Taylor was brought before a general court martial on October 14 and ordered to be hanged as a spy. The sentence, after delay, was

executed on October 18, 1777, in the town of Hurley, three miles from the capitol at Kingston.

Meanwhile, on October 11, Sir James Wallace, with four ships, broke through the *cheveaux-de-frise* on a reconnoitering expedition as far north as Poughkeepsie. (145) Neither Governor Clinton, collecting his brave but scattered forces near New Windsor, on the west shore of the river, nor General Putnam on the east shore, were able to halt the advance of the British seamen.

Sir Henry Clinton had selected the former Fort Clinton as the base of operations for British forces in the Highlands. In a letter of Commodore Hotham's to Sir William Howe, dated October 15, we read:

"I take the . . . opportunity to acquaint your Lordship that the number of men which would be necessary for the defense of the more extensive garrison of Fort Montgomery has induced Sir Henry to destroy it and to add some works to that of Fort Clinton which commanding the first effectually removes all apprehension from thence and reduces the force necessary to maintain it to about 800 men." (146)

Destruction of Fort Montgomery Begun

An interesting, if melodramatic, account of the forts during this period is the following statement, taken, in part, from an Extract of a Letter from Fort Montgomery dated October 13:

"No Place on Earth bears more visible Marks of the Divine Vengeance than this; indeed it baffles Description, and fills the Minds with the most shocking Ideas. Were a Plan of the Forts here (one of which is nearly demolished) taken, it would hardly gain Credit in future Ages, that so small a Number of Men, with so little Loss, reduced them:—were you to see them, you would not think 20,000 Men adequate to the Task." (147)

Wallace and his squadron returned from the northern reconnoitering journey on October 14. (148) In the meantime, a fleet of some

The British Fleet Moves North thirty vessels had been collected just below the *cheveaux-de-frise* near New Windsor. Wallace was immediately placed in charge of this new fleet and set sail northward once more on the morning after his return. Approximately sixteen hundred troops were aboard the ships, under command of Major General Vaughan. In British dispatches it was said that this, "second expedition up the river," was calculated, "to facilitate the motions (whatever they may be) of the Northern

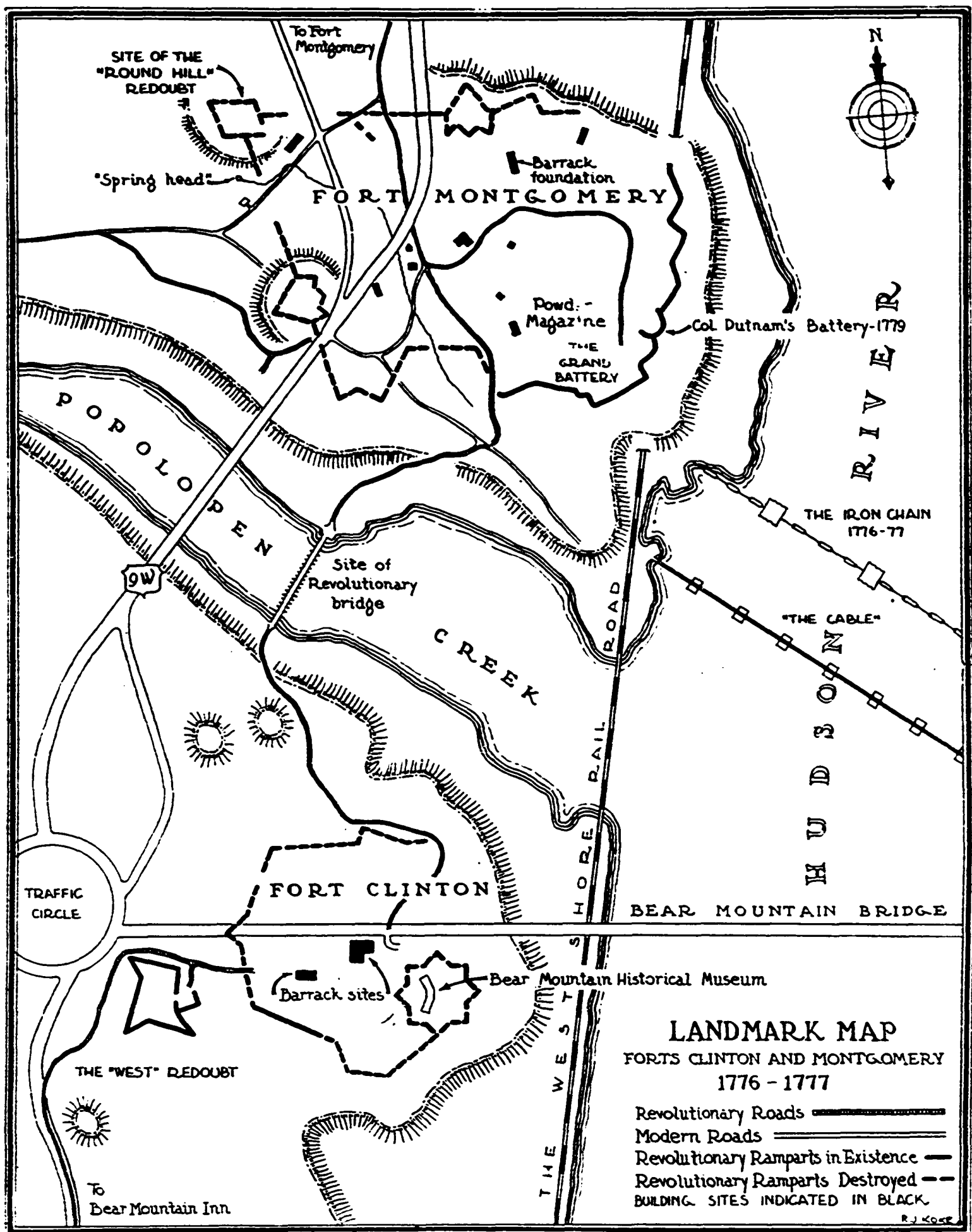
(Burgoyne's) Army and by the alarm which it will occasion to cause a diversion in their favor." (149)

The expedition under Vaughan and Wallace failed to relieve Burgoyne. On the morning of October 15, the fleet sailed through the cheveaux-de-frise and anchored that night six miles below the town of Kingston. (150) On October 16 Vaughan went ashore with his troops at Kingston Landing, attacked two American batteries on the nearby heights and marched to Kingston. Vaughan said that Kingston was "a Nursery for every Villan in the Country" and proceeded to demonstrate his own villainy by setting fire to the entire town. (151) The next morning Burgoyne surrendered at Saratoga. His elaborate campaign had come to an end. Vaughan and Wallace tarried on the upper Hudson for several days until, through the receipt of reports, they evidently became convinced that Burgoyne had been taken prisoner.

While the British fleet remained north of the Highlands, Sir Henry Clinton received instructions from his superior, Sir William Howe, to send reinforcements to Philadelphia. **The British Return to New York City** Stephen Kemble, a British officer, wrote in his Journal on this occasion: "General Sir William Howe's Express, which arrived on the 16th, demanding 4,500 Troops, and forwarded to Sir Henry Clinton by Colonel Shirreff, counteracts his proceedings up the North River, and prevents Mr. Clinton's succouring Burgoyne;" (152).

On October 26, Captain Andraes Emmerick, whose small corps had participated in the battle of the Twin Forts, received orders to burn everything in Fort Montgomery and to destroy the bridge across Popolopen Creek. (153) **Final Destruction** Emmerick's Chasseurs then formed the rear guard of the retiring British forces. A short time later the last of Sir James Wallace's ships returned to New York City.

Sir Henry Clinton's raid up the Hudson had been brilliantly executed; nevertheless, it had failed in its primary objective of relieving Burgoyne. It had resulted in the destruction of Forts Clinton, Montgomery, Constitution, and Independence. The great chain across the Hudson had been severed, and considerable amounts of American stores in the Continental Village, north of Peekskill, had been destroyed. The American fleet had been totally destroyed. Sixty-seven pieces of ordnance had been seized with immense quanti-



LANDMARK MAP

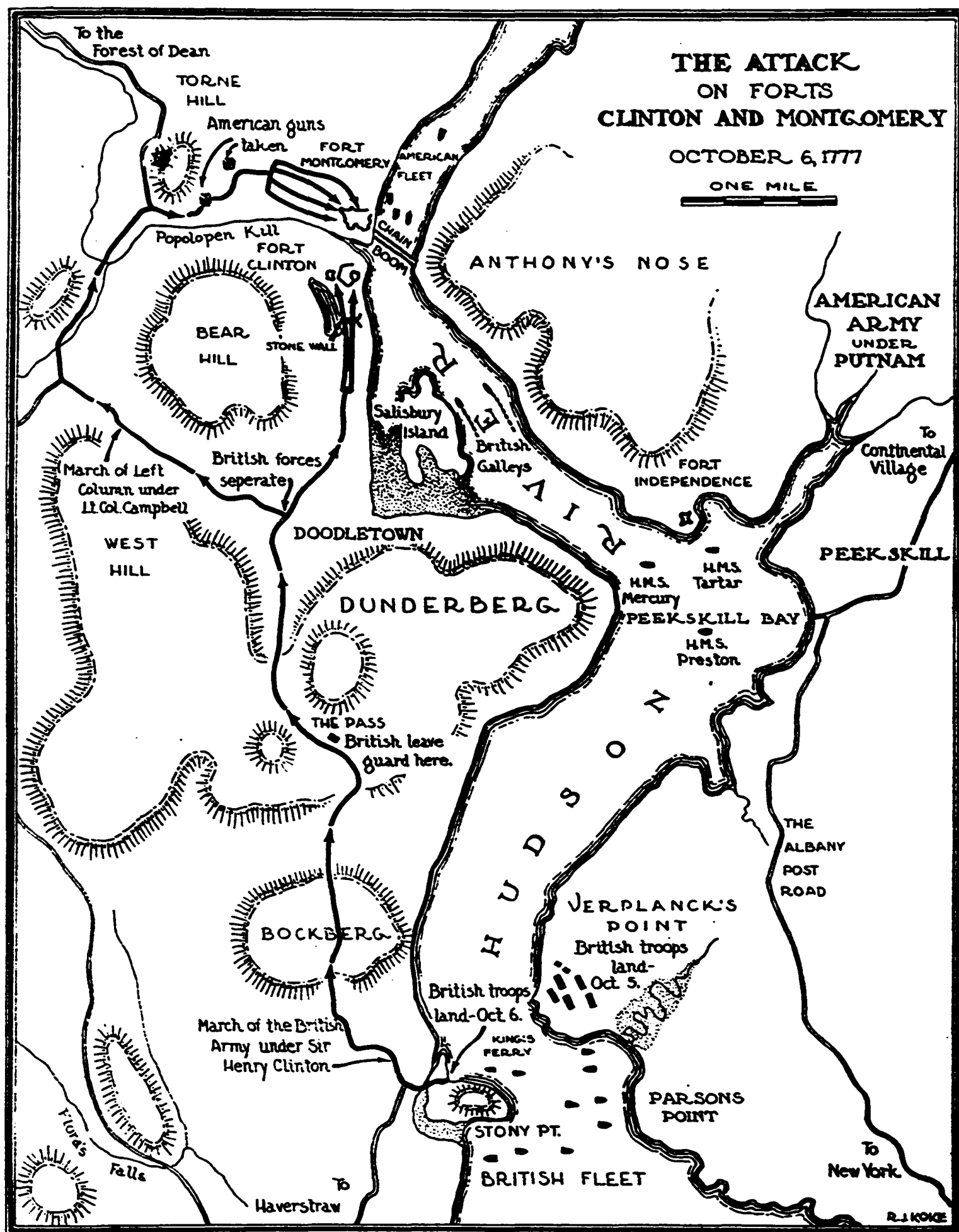
Map of modern and old sites in and about the forts.

ties of cannon shot, ammunition and powder in the two Popolopen forts. North of the Highlands the country along the river banks lay in shambles. Vessels on stocks had been burnt or captured. Kingston was in ruins; of over three hundred houses in the town only one was left standing. The *cheveaux-de-frise* had proved a failure; the enemy fleet had sailed straight through it. In twenty days Sir Henry Clinton had undone everything the Americans had been laboring upon for more than two years. Destruction marked the location of every patriot post upon which the powerful blow fell. The dramatic history of the first set of fortifications in the Hudson Highlands drew to a close with the departure of the last British vessel in 1777.

In December, 1777, at Washington's initiative, work was resumed by the American officers and the state legislature to again plan a series of defenses and river obstructions in the Highlands. The strategic position of Fort Clinton, which Lord Stirling had so earnestly favored in 1776, was again recommended by various individuals in preference to a new site at West Point. In a letter of George Clinton's to General Washington of December 20, it was recommended that the new works be either located at West Point, or "on the opposite Side of the Creek from where Fort Montgomery stood. . . ." (154) Lieutenant Colonel Louis Deshaix de la Radiere, a young French engineer, was heartily in favor of the new post being at Fort Clinton, but Governor Clinton, his brother, James, General Putnam, and a committee of the New York Provincial Convention, appointed on January 8, 1778, ruled against the proposals.

The report that this committee made on the following fourteenth, clearly explained some of the difficulties that had to be encountered in the erection of a fort at Popolopen Creek:

"Your Committee, who were sent to ascertain the place for fixing a chain and erecting fortifications for obstructing the navigation of the Hudson River, beg leave to report, That they have carefully viewed the ground on which Fort Clinton lately stood, and its environs and find that the ground is so intersected with long, deep hollows, that the enemy might approach without any annoyance from the garrison within the Fort, to within a few yards of the walls, unless a redoubt should be raised to clear the hollows next the Fort, which must be built at such distance from the Fort that it could not be supported from thence in case of an assault, so that the enemy might make themselves masters of the redoubt the first dark night after



MAP OF THE HIGHLAND CAMPAIGN, OCTOBER 6, 1777

The above map has been drawn after a careful examination of many Revolutionary documents and charts. It shows the situations of the American and British forces and fleets on October 6, 1777, and the routes followed by Sir Henry Clinton to attack Forts Clinton and Montgomery.

their landing, which would be a good work, ready to their hand, for annoying the Fort and facilitating their operations against it; and, together with the eminences and broken grounds within a short distance of the Fort, would render it impossible for the garrison to resist a general assault for many hours together. Another objection that appeared to the Committee was the want of earth on the spot, which would reduce the engineer to the necessity of erecting his works entirely of timber, which must be brought to Pooploop's Kill in rafts, and from thence drawn up a steep and difficult road to the top of the hill. The rafts cannot be made till the water is warm enough for men to work in it, by which it is probable that a Fort cannot be erected before the ships of the enemy will come up the river. Beside, at this place, the chain must be laid across the river, so that it will receive the whole force of the ships coming with all the strength of tide and wind on a line of three or four miles. Add to these, if the enemy should be able to possess themselves of the passes in the mountains through which they marched to the attacks of Forts Montgomery and Clinton, it would be extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the militia of the country to raise the siege." (155)

The committee who submitted this report were in favor of the new fortification being located at West Point. In consequence of this recommendation, on January 20 the brigade of General Samuel H. Parsons crossed the Hudson River and commenced operations there. Year by year the defenses were extended or improved until the citadel became a position of great importance, so great that, in 1780, Benedict Arnold unsuccessfully attempted to betray it to the enemy.

In May, 1778, Dr. Timothy Dwight, a chaplain in the American army, visited the sites of Forts Clinton and Montgomery, and described the scene:

THE SITES OF FORTS CLINTON AND MONTGOMERY, FROM THE SUMMIT OF ANTHONY'S NOSE

Here we see the rocky bluffs, separated by Popolopen Creek, on which the Twin Forts stood. In the left background can be seen the rounded knob of Popolopen Torne, on the slopes of which the Americans made their first desperate, but unsuccessful, endeavor to halt the march of the British column *en route* to attack Fort Montgomery. In the foreground flows the Hudson, across which, in November, 1776, the iron chain was first drawn. Here, also, the American ships were burnt by their own crews on the night of October 6, 1777, to prevent their falling into the hands of the enemy.

Photograph by William Thompson Howell, 1906



“The first object which met our eyes, after we had left our barge and ascended the bank, was the remains of a fire, kindled by the cottagers of this solitude, for the purpose of consuming the bones of some of the Americans, who had fallen at this place, and had been left unburied. Some of these bones were lying partially consumed, round the spot, where the fire had been kindled; and some had, evidently, been converted into ashes. As we went onward, we were distressed by the foetor of decayed human bodies. To men this was a novelty; and more overwhelming and dispiriting, than I am able to describe. As We were attempting to discover the source from which it proceeded; we found at a small distance from fort Montgomery, a pond of a moderate size, in which we saw the bodies of several men, who had been killed in the assault upon the fort. They were thrown into this pond, the preceeding autumn, by the British; when, probably the water was sufficiently deep to cover them. Some of them were covered at this time; but at a depth, so small, as to leave them distinctly visible. Others had an arm, a leg, and a part of the body, above the surface. The clothes which they wore, when they were killed, were still on them; and proved, that they were militia; being the ordinary dress of farmers. Their faces were bloated, and monstrous; and their postures were uncouth, distorted and in the highest degree afflictive. My companions had been accustomed to the horrors of war; and sustained the prospect with some degree of firmness. To me, a novice in scenes of this nature, it was overwhelming. I surveyed it for a moment and hastened away.

From this combination of painful objects we proceeded to Fort Clinton, built on a rising ground, at a small distance further down the river. The ruins of this fortress were a mere counterpart to those of Fort Montgomery. Everything combustible, in both, had been burnt; and what was not, was extensively thrown down. Every thing which remained, was a melancholy picture of destruction.

From this place we proceeded to find the grave of Count Grabouski, a Polish nobleman, who was killed in the assault, while acting as aid de camp to the British commander. The spot was pointed out to us by Lieut. Col. Livingston; who saw him fall, and informed us, that he was buried in the place, where he was killed. Here we found a grave; in all probability that, in which he was buried; without “a stone,” to “tell where he” lay; and now forgotten, and undiscoverable; a humiliating termination of a restless, vain, ambitious life.”
(156)

For many years, local legend and tradition have been responsible for the statement, which still persists, that dead soldiers were thrown into the large body of water at the foot of Bear Mountain now known as "Hessian Lake."* This may be so, but not one map, manuscript or diary, contemporary with the time, has been found that will prove this assertion. Both from the account of Timothy Dwight, and that given below, it would seem that the location of this "pond" was near Fort Montgomery.



Photograph by William Thompson Howell, 1906

THE HUDSON RIVER AND THE DUNDERBERG

On the afternoon of October 5, 1777, the advanced squadron of the British fleet dropped anchor in Peekskill Bay, just off the tip of the Dunderberg. Late the next afternoon, the ships made their way up this narrow river-reach to aid in the reduction of Forts Clinton and Montgomery.

The interesting account of Samuel Richards, an officer in General Parsons' brigade, who accompanied Timothy Dwight on his visit to the site of Forts Clinton and Montgomery in 1778, has received comparatively little notice. It follows:

* See Appendix B, Number 3.

“When the weather had become mild and pleasant in April I went one day with Doctor Dwight down to view the ruins of Fort Montgomery, distant about 8 or 10 miles. There was a pond just north of the fort, where we found the British had thrown in the bodies of their own and our men who fell in the assault of the fort. The water had receded, leaving a number of the bodies entirely out of the water, while others lay covered at different depths. I saw many fine sets of teeth, bare and skeleton-like. Mournful and impressive reflections arose in my mind. There lie the youth who stood in the hour of their country’s trial; they fought and fell to purchase the independence of their country; and there they lie without burial. I thought too, of the vicissitudes to which a soldier is subject. Had the fort held out a little longer, I very probably might have lain among them.” (157)

During the latter part of the war the area in and around the site of Fort Montgomery was extensively used as a campground for American troops. Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, prior to, and succeeding his memorable capture of Stony Point, on July 16, 1779, dated several of his letters from the fort on the Popolopen. For a considerable length of time the promontory served as an advanced watchpost for West Point. In August, 1779, Colonel Rufus Putnam erected a small moon-shaped battery on the lines of the old walls of the fort. The well-preserved remains of this redoubt may be seen today.

The importance of this section of river to the safety of West Point may be clearly emphasized in the following extract from the general orders issued at West Point in October 11, 1780, shortly after the discovery of Arnold’s treachery :

“A Gun boate is to be posted armed with a subaltern Serj^t & 24 privates in the river opposite to fort Montgomery. A non Commissioned and six men are to be Landed on Each side the River directly opposite the boate. this Guard is Intended Examine all boates Comeing up or Going down as well as to pick up such as are adrift and upon discovering the approach of the Enemy to Give the alarm by firing the Gun. . . .” (158)

From the beginning of the struggle to the end, “the pass” of the river at Anthony’s Nose held a position of strategic value. Today aeroplanes drone high overhead, and excursion boats carry thousands past the battlements. A huge iron bridge spans the current, where the chain was once stretched, and automobiles flash over the trestle

endlessly. Locomotive and boat whistles sound up and down the Hudson narrows, awakening modern echoes. The old forts still crown the bluffs at Popolopen Creek to remind us of hopes and struggles long vanished. They deserve the attention and respect of all who revere our country's historical backgrounds.

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105. *Ibid.*, p. 341.
106. Humphreys, *Life of Putnam*, footnote, pp. 153-54.
107. *Year Book of the Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 96.
108. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
109. *Ibid.*, p. 91.
110. *Ibid.*, p. 96.
111. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 393.
112. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
113. *Ibid.*, p. 393.
114. *Kemble Papers*, I, 134; *Almon's Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 425.
115. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 393.
116. *Rivington's Gazette*, October 11, 1777, p. 3, col. 1.
117. *Ibid.*
118. *Almon's Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 424.
119. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
120. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
121. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 424.
123. Major Holland's map of the attack, reference "O": "Trees cut down . . . which together with the rocks and Stones made it exceedingly difficult."
124. *Almon's Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 424; *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 381-82, 393; *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, I, 441-42; Hall, *Life of Samuel Holden Parsons*, pp. 118-119, etc.
125. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 393-94, etc.
126. *Ibid.*, p. 393; *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, I, 442.
127. *Correspondence of the American Revolution*, II, 539.
128. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 403.
129. *Ibid.* p. 623-24.
130. *Year Book of Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 91.
131. *Rivington's Gazette*, October 11, 1777, p. 3, col. 1.
132. *Almon's Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 424.
133. *Year Book, Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 92.
134. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 394.
135. *Almon's Remembrancer*, 1777, p. 425.
136. Stedman, *History of the American War*, I, 405-406.
137. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 394.
138. Letter quoted in Dawson, *Battles of the United States*, I, 341.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 341
140. *Rivington's Gazette*, October 18, 1777, p. 3, col. 2, etc.
141. *Year Book Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 96.
142. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
143. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 414.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 413.
145. *Year Book Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 98.
146. *Ibid.*, p. 93.

147. *The New York Gazette and Weekly Mercury*, October 27, 1777, p. 3, col. 1.
148. *Year Book Dutchess County Historical Society*, 1935, p. 98.
149. *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
151. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, footnote, pp. 457-59.
152. *The Kemble Papers*, I, 139.
153. *Steven's Facsimilies*, III, No. 281.
154. *Public Papers of George Clinton*, II, 591.
155. Quoted in Boynton's *History of West Point*, pp. 53-54.
156. Dwight, *Travels in New England and New York*, III, 435-36.
157. *Centennial of the U. S. Military Academy at West Point, New York*, I, p. 156.
158. *Orderly Books of the 4th New York and 2d New York Regts.*, p. 525.

APPENDIX A

Herein are brief biographies of the three "Clintons" prominently concerned with Forts Clinton and Montgomery.

1. GEORGE CLINTON

GEORGE CLINTON, the youngest son of Colonel Charles Clinton of Ulster County, was born at Little Britain, in what is now Orange County, N. Y., on July 26, 1739. When he was but sixteen years old he took a voyage on a privateer from the port of New York; in 1758 he served as a lieutenant in Colonel John Bradstreet's expedition against Fort Frontenac, near Lake Ontario, and, together with his brother, James, and a small force participated in the capture of a French sloop of war on the lake. On his return from Canada he entered the law office of William Smith in New York City, in preparation for a legal career, but shortly after returned to Ulster County. He was commissioned by Governor Cadwallader Colden as an attorney at law to practice in the Mayor's Court in Albany, and the Inferior Court of Common Pleas in the counties of the province, except in the Mayor's Court in the city of New York 12th September, 1764; appointed Surrogate of Ulster County 26th August, 1765. In 1766 he took his seat as a member of the General Assembly from Ulster County and continued as a member for seven years; was chosen a member of the Provincial Convention, 1775; on 20th April, 1775, delegates were elected to represent the colony in the Continental Congress, and Clinton was one of the members chosen; took his seat in Philadelphia, 15th May, 1775. In December, 1775, he was appointed Brigadier General of Militia by the second New York Provincial Congress; appointed deputy to the fourth New York Provincial Congress 27th June, 1776. In July, 1776, Clinton assumed a military command in the Hudson Highlands and took active measures for the defence of the Hudson River; appointed Brigadier General in the Continental Army 25th March, 1777; took oath of office as first governor of the State of New York 30th July, 1777; commanded American forces in the gallant but unsuccessful defence of Forts Clinton and Montgomery 6th October, 1777. In 1780, 1783 and 1786 he was reelected governor without having an opponent against him; in 1792 he won the election only after a bitter political contest; declined renomination for governor in 1795, but in 1800 he was again elected after a brief retirement, which office he held until 1804. In 1805 he was elected vice-president of the United States on a ticket with Thomas Jefferson; reelected in 1808 on ticket with James Madison. Clinton died in Washington 20th April, 1812, aged seventy-two years. His remains are now interred in the Reformed Church at Kingston, New York.—

Public Papers of George Clinton, I, 3-189; *Washington and the Generals of the American Revolution*, II, 203-09; *Unveiling of the Statue of George Clinton* . . . pp. 16-24; *Heitman's Register*, p. 161.

2. JAMES CLINTON

JAMES CLINTON, brother of George Clinton, was born on August 13, 1736. In 1756, Sir Charles Hardy, governor of the province of New York, appointed him an ensign in the militia; he remained in military service during the succeeding years; attained rank of Lieutenant Colonel, 2d Regiment of Ulster County, 1774; Colonel 3d New York, 30th June, 1775, to January, 1776. Accompanied Brigadier General Richard Montgomery on the expedition into Canada, 1775; Colonel 2d New York, 8th March, 1776; Brigadier General Continental Army, 9th August, 1776; wounded in the thigh in the storming of Forts Clinton and Montgomery 6th October, 1777. In 1779, he accompanied General John Sullivan in the expedition against the Indians in New York State; ordered to Albany, May, 1780, and in following October was placed in command of that district by General Washington; Brevet Major-General 30th September, 1783; served to close of war. Died 22d December, 1812. He was the father of Governor De Witt Clinton of New York.—*Public Papers of George Clinton*. I, 16-18; *Washington and the Generals of the American Revolution*. II, 209-212; *Heitman's Register*. p. 161.

3. SIR HENRY CLINTON

"Sir HENRY CLINTON, K. B., was the eldest son of Admiral George Clinton, formerly Governor of the Province of New York . . . , and grandson of the 6th Earl of Lincoln. He entered the army early in life, having been appointed, during his father's administration, Captain-Lieutenant of the New York companies. He became Lieutenant in the Coldstream guards 1st, November, 1751; and was promoted to Captain of a company in the 1st Foot guards 6th May, 1758. *Mackennon's Coldstream Guards*. II, 487. In 1762 he became Colonel in the army, and of the 12th regiment of Foot on the 28th November, 1766. After gaining great credit by his services during the seven years' war in Germany, he rose to the rank of Major-General 25th May, 1772, and in May, 1775, arrived at Boston. In June he distinguished himself at Bunker Hill, and was rewarded, on the 1st September following, by being created Knight of the Bath and advanced to the rank of Lieutenant-General in America. On 1st January, 1776, he was appointed General in America and was defeated that year at Sullivan's Island; commanded the first line of the British army at Staten Island 1st August; on the 27th of the same month, commanded a division in the battle of Long Island; on October, defeated a portion of the American army on the Bronx, in Westchester county; and in December, and against his will, was sent to take possession of Rhode Island. In 1777, he was engaged in operations on the Hudson river for the relief of Burgoyne; was appointed Lieutenant-General in the army in August, and in October was present at the storming of forts Washington and Clinton. In 1778, Sir Henry Clinton was commissioned Commander-in-Chief, and conducted the retreat from Philadelphia to New York; was appointed Colonel [in Chief] of the 84th [Regiment] in December, of the same year . . . in December embarked for Charleston, which he reduced. He was succeeded in the chief command by General Carlton in 1782, when he returned to England, where he published a *Narrative of his Conduct in America*. 1782; *Observations on the Earl Cornwallis' Answer*, 1783; *Letter to the Commissioner of Public Accounts*. 1784; and *Observations on Mr. Stedman's History of the American War*. 1794. He died 13th December, 1795."—*Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York*. VIII, footnote, p. 717.

APPENDIX B

Variations in the spelling of place names in the vicinity of Forts Clinton and Montgomery have given rise to some doubt regarding orthographical methods. Several of the variations follow.

1. *Anthony's Nose*

- (a) Anthony's Nose Van Cortlandt's Patent, 1697; John Hills' Map of the Attack of Forts Clinton and Montgomery.
- (b) Antonios Nose Document of 1672 (see page V).
- (c) St. Anthony's Nose Major Holland's Map of the Attack of Forts Clinton and Montgomery.

2. *Bear Mountain*

- (a) Bear Hill Richard Bradley Patent, July 30, 1743; British military map of 1784; Atlas Map of Rockland County (Davis), 1876; John D. Christie Map, 1900.
- (b) Bare Mountain "Bare Mountain had its name from its bald crest." Eager, *History of Orange County*, p. 597.
- (c) Bear Mountain Lossing, *The Hudson from Wilderness to the Sea*, p. 269.

3. *Hessian Lake*

This lake has been called at various times: Clove Pond (Hdqtrs. Maps of Sir Henry Clinton—No. 168), Mill Pond, Bloody Pond, Lake Sinnipink and Highland Lake.

4. *Martelaer's Rock*

- (a) Martyr's Cliff, or Martelaar's Rock *American Archives*, 4th Series, III, 735 (Sept. 14, 1775).
- (b) Martelair's Rock Island *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 152 (Sept. 19, 1775).
- (c) Martler's Rock *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 253 (Jan. 16, 1776); *Ibid.*, p. 317 (Feb. 22, 1776), Map; *Survey of The U. S. Lands at West Point*, 1839 (In Boynton, *History of West Point*, p. 14).
- (d) Martland's Rock Headquarters Maps of Sir Henry Clinton—No. 188.
- (e) Martelears Rock Bernard Roman's maps in the *American Archives*, 4th series III, 735-38.
- (f) Martles Rock *Ibid.*
- (g) Martiler's Rock Extract of an account of a voyage up the Hudson River in 1769, quoted in Bacon's *The Hudson River*, p. 346.

5. *Popolopen Creek*

- (a) Coplops Kill Major Holland's Map of the Attack of Forts Clinton and Montgomery.
- (b) Peploaps Kill John Hills' Map of the Attack of Forts Clinton and Montgomery.
- (c) Polipels Creek Headquarters Maps of Sir Henry Clinton—No. 167.

- (d) Pooploop's kill *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 179 (Oct. 16, 1775); *Ibid.*, p. 183 (Oct. 21, 1775); Bernard Romans' Maps in the library at West Point (circa November, 1775).
- (e) Pooplopels Kill Headquarters Maps of Sir Henry Clinton—No. 166.
- (f) Pooplopen kill *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 330 (March 1, 1776).
- (g) Pooplopen's kill *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 253 (Jan. 16, 1776).
- (h) Poplope Kill Headquarters Maps of Sir Henry Clinton—No. 172.
- (i) Puplops Kill Patent to Richard Bradley, July 30, 1743. (See Cole's *History of Rockland County*, p. 321.)
- (j) Puplopes Kill Palmer Map No. 2.
- (k) Puplope's kill *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, I, 224 (Dec. 14, 1775).
- (l) Puplopens Kill Palmer Map No. 1.
- (m) Puplopen's kill *Jour. N. Y. Prov. Cong.*, IV, 34 (Jan. 5, 1776).
- (n) Popolopen Creek "*Map of the Highlands of the Hudson*," by James C. Kirby, 1880.

Note: Benson J. Lossing in his, "The Hudson from Wilderness to the Sea," p. 262, mentions Popolopen Creek as "Fort Montgomery Creek." D. Wise in "Summer Days on the Hudson," p. 133, also refers to it as "Montgomery Creek."

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