

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

1 September Sunday We were ordered to be in readiness to march at a minute's warning. The soldiery were ordered to cook 2 days provisions and were prevented attending religious exercises. We had some Quiet and something like Peace. . . .

1. The Reverend Jedidiah Chapman of the Newark Mountains Presbyterian Church.
2. Colonel Philip Van Cortlandt, Second Regiment, Essex County Militia.
3. Fifteen shillings.
4. H.M.S. *Phoenix* and *Rose*, the principal British frigates brought down from Tappan Bay, had forty-four and twenty-eight guns respectively.
5. Colonel Edward Hand, First Pennsylvania, Continental Line.
6. Pickets (F. *piquets*): pointed or sharpened stakes used for fencing; abatis: a crude fortification constructed of felled trees whose sharpened ends face the enemy.
7. John Warren of Boston, younger brother of Joseph Warren, then chief surgeon of the Continental army hospital on Long Island.
8. Colonel Ephraim Martin, Second Regiment, Sussex County Militia.
9. Lieutenant Edward Thomas, First Regiment, Burlington County Militia.
10. William Alexander of New Jersey and John Sullivan of New Hampshire.
11. Colonel Philip Johnson, Second Regiment, Hunterdon County Militia.
12. Name missing from the manuscript.
13. Fort Stirling, fortification of General William Alexander (the self-styled Lord Stirling) on the shore of the East River near the Brooklyn Ferry.
14. Red Hook, the island directly south of Governor's Island at the northern extremity of Gowanus Bay, was the site of Fort Defiance.
15. Alexander McDougall of New York, Continental army.

### 3 [William Churchill Houston?], The Campaign Journal of a Militiaman, 1776-1777

[*Princeton Standard*, May 1, 8, and 15, 1863]

The following account portrays the life of a militiaman during some of the most trying times confronted by Jerseymen during the revolutionary war. After suffering devastating defeats by the British in and around New York City, Washington's bedraggled army in November and December of 1776 fled through New Jersey and across the Delaware River with Generals Howe and Cornwallis in leisurely pursuit. New Jersey belonged to the enemy. But Washington's audacious attack on Trenton on December 26 and his subsequent victory at Princeton on January 3 reversed the process; by the end of January 1777 the

## X CITIZEN SOLDIERS

British had been driven out of West Jersey and Washington had gone into winter quarters at Morristown. During the next months, local militiamen harassed the British by interdicting supply routes, ambushing patrols, and scattering foraging parties. And when General Howe opened the fighting season on June 11 by boldly marching across New Jersey toward Philadelphia, the seat of the Continental Congress, the militia once again rose to the occasion: Howe was forced to beat an inglorious retreat to Staten Island, there to embark for the Pennsylvania capital by sea. The author of the following campaign journal, who endured privation and exposed himself to death to help drive the British out of the state, has not been positively identified. In all probability the soldier was William Churchill Houston (1746-1788). After graduation in 1768, Houston stayed on at the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) as a member of the faculty. In February 1776 he became a captain in the Second Regiment, Somerset County Militia, thereafter dividing his time between scholastic and military activities. He became a full-time soldier when the college closed in November 1776, but resigned from the militia to resume teaching duties when the institution reopened in July 1777. He left teaching in 1783 to devote his energies to government and politics. During a distinguished career he served in the Provincial Congress (1776), assembly (1777-1779), Council of Safety (1778), and Continental Congress (1779-1781, 1784-1785). He was clerk of the New Jersey Supreme Court from 1781 to 1788, and represented the state in the Annapolis Convention of 1786 and the Federal Convention which drafted the United States Constitution in 1787.

[November 29, 1776-June 30, 1777]

On the 29th of November, 1776 New Jersey College long the peaceful seat of science and haunt of the Muses was visited with the melancholy tidings of the approach of the enemy.

This alarmed our fears and gave us reason to believe we must soon bid adieu to our peaceful Departments and break off in the midst of our delightful studies; nor were we long held in suspense, our worthy President<sup>1</sup> deeply affected at this solemn scene entered the Hall where the students were collected, and in a very affecting manner informed us of the improbability of continuing there longer in peace; and after giving us several suitable instructions and much good advice very affectionately bade us farewell. Solemnity and distress appeared almost in every countenance. Several students that had come 5 and 600 miles, and just got settled in College, were now obliged under every disadvantage to return with their effects or leave them behind, which several through the impossibility of getting a carriage at so confused a time were obliged to do, and lost their all. . . .

Wednesday Dec[ember] 18th I went over the River<sup>2</sup> to join Longstreets Company,<sup>3</sup> found the Company and came back over the River with them the next Day, though I had not joined. The sun set just as we marched from the River after crossing, I marched with them till some time after dark, then took the road to Johnsons,<sup>4</sup> missed my way some miles, got home next day about ten in the morning. Next day went to near Princeton within 1/2 a mile of the Enemy got a Gun and Accoutrements. As it was bad traveling, I sprained my ankle this day.

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

Next day Sunday [December 22], I came back to Amwell, intending on Monday to go over the River. But as the Amwell Militia were at this time coming back over River, I through persuasion staid and enlisted in the Amwell Battallion. Dec. 24th Went off immediately with the scouting Party Capt. Houston's. Took our Lodgings in the neighborhood. My ankle was very painful and the bottoms of my feet blistered so as some times while walking to make me cry out. . . .

Next morning [January 1, 1777] we marched to Penny Town,<sup>5</sup> drew Rations and marched some miles further towards Trenton, and took Lodgings that night. Set out early next morning, towards Trenton, till sun 1/2 an hour high when we heard the Engagement begin towards Princeton;<sup>6</sup> we then immediately marched back to Penny Town waiting some time for Intelligence. Made two or three movements and lay in wait some time in the woods, for the Enemy; but they having got intelligence of us by some Tory, returned another road, and so escaped us, we then came to Levy Hart's took Lodgings, and cooked provisions. I laid about 3 hours with my blankets on cords. At 3 o'clock, set out for Penny Town, after a round about march we came to the field where the Battle was fought. Had a most dismal prospect of a number of pale mangled corpses, lying in the mud and blood. I felt gloomy at the awful scene. Returned in a rough tedious march to Hopewell. Such unpleasant marching occasioned my ankle again to swell and grow painful. . . .

Staid here in peace till Monday morning [January 20] we then received an Alarm and were ordered to march to Boundbrook, we arrived there between 11 and 12, then hearing that the Enemy was plundering at Millstone, we immediately marched for that place, being joined by a considerable body at Boundbrook we marched on till we passed Raritan Bridge, hearing several Cannon fired, while on the way. After crossing the Bridge, the Battallion I was in was taken off for the left wing, I crossed Millstone, some distance below the Bridge, wading through the water, more than knee deep. We immediately marched towards the road, and fired upon the Baggage Guard, who were retreated that way. They immediately left horses wagons and plunder, and returned with the greatest precipitation. The main body of the Enemy lay just over south of the Bridge. Before we crossed the River below, our main Body began the Attack at the Bridge with one Field piece and made the Enemy give way. They continued their fire upon the Enemy some time. Our wing, after driving the Baggage Guard, pursued on and flanked the Enemy. After a short engagement, finding ourselves greatly overpowered with numbers, we received General Orders to retreat, having had 1 man killed and 2 wounded, and we had taken 2 of the Enemy prisoners. We then retreated back to the River, lest our retreat should be cut off. But finding the Enemy did not pursue, we rallied again, with as many of our men as we could collect, and marched on towards the Enemy the second time; but when we came in sight of them, they got possession of an eminence in the End of a clear Field, with one or more Field pieces and poured down their Grape shot upon us briskly. Then finding it in vain to attack them with our little Body, under so great a disadvantage, we immediately retreated back and most of our men went over the River up into a clear field, to where our main Body had by this time collected. . . .

Sunday, Jan. 26th in the afternoon, we were alarmed and marched down to Raritan Bridge, then hearing the Alarm was false, we marched back again to Quarters. The cause of this Alarm was that some of our out Guard had fired upon a small party of Hessians, who had come ('tis thought) to disturb them. After this

## X CITIZEN SOLDIERS

Alarm we remained quiet in our Quarters till Wednesday Feb. 5th, having no other duty to attend but the General's and the Ammunition Guard. This night we were ordered to march at 11 o'clock with the rest of Gen. Dikeson's<sup>7</sup> Brigade and went within 1/2 mile of the Enemy's Quarters. The roads were now excessively muddy, so that we were over Shoes in mud and water; but towards morning it grew very cold and froze very hard. The design of this march was to take off the horses, wagons, fat Cattle and Sheep from the inhabitants to prevent the Enemy from getting any advantage of them. We got off a quantity of these Articles, and marched back (the road being now frozen hard) to Head Quarters. When we got home most of us were wearied and stiff, and our feet sore. We took some refreshments and rested about 2 hours, I being very weary and drowsy, had lain down and got in a sound sleep, when we were again alarmed to go and meet the Enemy, who were advancing towards Raritan. We immediately marched down to Raritan Bridge and there waited till our light horse came in, who brought us word that the Enemy had been up as far as Covenhoven's, had taken and destroyed a great quantity of grain and hay, drove off a great number of Cattle and were gone back. We then all came back to Quarters, and rested in peace that night. . . .

This day June 19th we received Orders to march down to the lines. We marched at Sunrise, and took Quarters this night, below Morristown; Next day, came in to Bullion's Tavern,<sup>8</sup> where we took Quarters, waiting for Orders. The Enemy had, some days before this, removed from Brunswick to Millstone, near the Court house, and it was thought would make an attempt for Philadelphia; This roused the Militia of all the neighbouring counties, and they turned out, with such spirit as will do them honor to the latest ages. Never did the Jerseys appear more universally unanimous to oppose the Enemy; they turned out Old and young, great and small. Rich and poor; Scarcely a man that could carry a musket was left at home. This soon struck a panic into the Enemy, for they could scarcely stir from their Camp, but they were cut off. They then fled with the greatest haste to Brunswick; but the Militia pursued them so closely and so warmly, that they made no stay here. On Sunday morning June 22nd they were driven out of the Town, and chased near to Amboy by the spirited Militia in conjunction with a small party of the English Troops. The Enemy, when they left Millstone and Brunswick, burnt several houses, strangled almost to death 2 or 3 women, and behaved in the most cruel, barbarous manner. After the Enemy were driven from Brunswick, our Army took possession of the Town, and such of the Militia as were called out upon this Alarm, were discharged. Wednesday, June 25th part of Militia at Bullion's Tavern were discharged and part ordered to march next day for Pompton,<sup>9</sup> which they did. Thursday, June 26th, the Enemy came out with their whole Body from Amboy and proceeded to Westfield, where they plundered and destroyed every thing before them, and distressed the Inhabitants in a manner before unheard of, but before they returned to Amboy numbers of them were cut off by part of our Army, and some Militia. They returned to Amboy, and on Monday Evening June the 30th 1777, they all left Amboy and went to Staten Island.

1. John Witherspoon, who was at the time a member of the Continental Congress. In late November 1776 Witherspoon passed through Princeton en

## NEW JERSEY IN THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

route back to Philadelphia after a visit to General Washington's headquarters in New York. Distressed by the deplorable condition of the Continental army and the prospect of an imminent British invasion of New Jersey, he reluctantly advised closing the college. It was a wise decision, for within weeks royal soldiers were garrisoned in Nassau Hall.

2. The Delaware River.
3. Elias Longstreet, captain of the Eighth Company of the First Battalion of the Jersey Continental Line.
4. Jacobus Johnson of Amwell, for whose son Houston was to have served as tutor.
5. Now Pennington.
6. The battle of Princeton (see Sec. IX, Doc. 3).
7. Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson (1739-1809), commander of the New Jersey state militia.
8. In Vealtown, now Bernardsville.
9. Now Riverdale.

### 4 Governor William Livingston to Brigadier General Philemon Dickinson

[Neilson Family Papers, Alexander Library, Rutgers University.]

The retreat of the Continental army before the British advance through the state brought the war to New Jersey in the final months of 1776. To meet the military emergency, the legislature on November 27 passed a law attaching four battalions of militia to General Washington's command. And in the afterglow of the surprise victory at Trenton, Washington on December 31 issued a proclamation "To the Friends of America in the State of New Jersey" which called upon the militia to turn out to drive the British from the state. But as the terse order below indicates, not all militiamen enthusiastically rallied to repel the enemy. Indeed, throughout the war Brigadier General Dickinson, commander in chief of the state's militia, complained about the performance of the citizen-soldiers. As the conflict dragged on, war-weariness and disillusionment accounted for much of the unresponsiveness of the militia. But in the early months of the war, men often were reluctant to leave their families unprotected and commit themselves to a cause that seemed hopeless (see Sec. XI, Doc. 2).

January 14, 1777

Sir,

Though many of the Militia of New Jersey during the present Invasion of this