



#2 1996

A Chronology Of The Revolutionary War

with emphasis on Bedford County, Pennsylvania's role

Continued

1775: A Commander~In~Chief

When the delegates to the Second Continental Congress met together on Wednesday, the 14th of June, 1775 the events that would play themselves out on the Charlestown Peninsula were not yet commenced. But the delegates to that second Congress were thinking about the state of affairs at Boston. The Journal of the Continental Congress noted that:

The Congress met and agreeable to the order of the day, resolved itself into a committee of the whole, to take into consideration &c. After some time spent thereon, the president resumed the chair, and Mr [Samuel] Ward reported, that not having yet come to a conclusion they desired him to move for leave to fit again. At the same time they desired him to report some resolutions which they had come into.

The resolutions being read, were adopted as follows:

Resolved, That six companies of expert riflemen, be immediately raised in Pennsylvania, two in Maryland, and two in Virginia; that each company consist of a captain, three lieutenants, four sergeants, four corporals, a drummer or trumpeter, and sixtyeight privates.

That each company, as soon as completed, shall march and join the army near Boston, to be there employed as light infantry, under the command of the chief Officer in that army.

That the pay of the Officers and privates be as follows, viz. a captain @ 20 dollars per month; a lieutenant @ 13-1/3 dollars; a sergeant @ 8 dollars; a corporal @ 7-1/3 dollars; drummer or [trumpeter] @ 71 doll.; privates @ 6-2/3 dollars; to find their own arms and cloaths.

That the form of the enlistment be in the following words:

I _____ have, this day, voluntarily enlisted myself, as a foldier, in the American continental army, for one year, unless sooner discharged: And I do bind myself to conform, in all instances, to such rules and regulations, as are, or shall be, established for the government of the said Army.

Upon motion, Resolved, That Mr. [George] Washington, Mr. [Philip] Schuyler, Mr. [Silas] Deane, Mr. [Thomas] Cushing, and Mr. [Joseph] Hewes be a committee to bring in a dra't of Rules and regulations for the government of the army.

A letter from the convention of New York, dated 10 June, 1775, respecting a vessel which is kept there, on suspicion of having provisions on board for the army and navy at Boston, was read and referred to the delegates of Massachusetts bay, Connecticut, and New York.

Resolved, That the Congress will, to Morrow, resolve itself into a committee of the whole, to take into consideration the ways and means of raising money, and the state of America. This to be a standing order, until the business is completed.

Adjourned till to Morrow at 9 o'Clock.

The Congress was again assembled on the 15th of June, 1775. One item of that day's business was a report which was read, debated and resulted in the following Resolution:

"Resolved, That a General be appointed to command all the continental forces, raised, or to be raised, for the defence of American liberty. That five hundred dollars, per month, be allowed for his pay and expences."

Although George Washington was surprised when his name was voiced in nomination for the position ~ he left the room in embarrassment ~ he accepted the commission put to him. John Hancock, the president of the Congress, formally announced the appointment of Mr. Washington, by a unanimous vote, "to be general and commander in chief to take the supreme command of the forces raised and to be raised, in defence of American Liberty..." Edmund Pendleton, a delegate from Virginia, wrote down Colonel Washington's reply:

MR. PRESIDENT,

"Tho' I am truly sensible of the high Honour done me, in this Appointment, yet I feel great distress, from a consciousness that my abilities and military experience may not be equal to the extensive and important Trust: However, as the Congress desire it, I will enter upon the momentous duty, and exert every power I possess in their service, and for support of the glorious cause. I beg they will accept my most cordial thanks for this distinguished testimony of their approbation.

"But, lest some unlucky event should happen, unfavourable to my reputation, I beg it may be remembered, by every Gentleman in the room, that I, this day, declare with the utmost sincerity, I do not think myself equal to the Command I am honored with.

"As to pay, Sir, I beg leave to assure the Congress, that, as no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to have accepted this arduous employment, at the expence of my domestic ease and happiness, I do not wish to make any profit from it. I will keep an exact Account of my expences. Those, I doubt not, they will discharge, and that is all I desire."

A committee was appointed to draft a commission for the position of *commander-in-chief*. That committee reported back to the Congress on Saturday, 17 June, 1775 with the following report:

IN CONGRESS

The delegates of the United Colonies of New Hampshire, Massachusetts bay, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, the Counties of New-Castle, Kent, and Sussex, on Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina: To George Washington, Esq.

WE, repofing fpecial truſt and confidence in your patriotifm, valor, conduct, and fidelity, do, by theſe prefents, conſtitute and appoint you to be General and Commander in chief, of the army of the United Colonies, and of all the forces now raiſed, or to be raiſed, by them, and of all others who fhall voluntarily offer their ſervice, and join the ſaid Army for the Defence of American liberty, and for repelling every hoſtile invaſion thereof: And you are hereby veſted with full power and authority to act as you fhall think for the good and welfare of the ſervice.

And we do hereby ſtrictly charge and require all Officers and Soldiers, under your command, to be obedient to your orders, and diligent in the exerciſe of their ſeveral duties.

And we do alſo enjoin and require you, to be careful in executing the great truſt reposed in you, by cauſing ſtrict diſcipline and order to be obſerved in the army, and that the ſoldiers be duly exerciſed, and provided with all convenient neceſſaries.

And you are to regulate your conduct in every reſpect by the rules and diſcipline of war, (as herewith given you,) and punctually to obſerve and follow ſuch orders and directions, from time to time, as you fhall receive from this, or a future Congrefs of theſe United Colonies, or committee of Congrefs.

This commiſſion to continue in force, until revoked by this, or a future Congress.

By order of the Congress.

Dated, Philad^a June 17, 1775.

Mr. (now General) Washington did not waste any time in preparing to head for Boston. The Congress had also issued commissions for subordinate positions on the 22nd of June. By the 23rd, Washington and his staff were ready and started their journey northward. They had not gotten more than twenty miles from Philadelphia before they were met by a courier bearing the news of the Battle of Bunker/Breeds Hill. On Monday morning, 03 July, 1775, General Artemus Ward handed over his command to the new commander-in-chief.

It should be noted that, in view of the fact that the position of commander-in-chief was a newly created one, one which had no prior equivalent, the powers vested in it were somewhat ambiguous at first. General Washington understood the delicate situation in which he had been placed. He could easily abuse the authority of the position for personal gain, or he could respect the trust and faith of the citizens that the position was devised by the Congress to represent. Fortunately for the Patriot cause, and for the nation which developed out of that cause, he chose the latter course. At the very beginning, General Washington established the principle that the Congress must be the ultimate, and therefore absolute, master. The Commander-In-Chief was simply the army's executive – the executor of the Congress' decisions. And if the decisions made by Congress were the will of the people, then the Commander-In-Chief could be seen to be the supreme public servant.

Upon his arrival at the camp at Cambridge, General Washington was greeted by members of the Massachusetts-Bay Provincial Council. The Commander-In-Chief's response is given below.

"Gentlemen, –Your kind congratulations on my appointment and arrival, demand my warmeſt acknowledgements, and will be ever retained in grateful remembrance. In exchanging the enjoyments of domeſtic life for the duties of my preſent honourable but arduous ſituation, I only emulate the virtue and public ſpirit of the whole Province of Maſſachuſetts, which, with a firmneſs and patriotifm without example, has ſacrificed all the comforts of ſocial and political life, in ſupport of the rights of mankind, and the welfare of our common country. My higheſt ambition is to be the happy inſtrument of vindicating theſe rights, and to ſee this devoted Province again reſtored to peace, liberty, and ſafety."

This chronological history of the Revolutionary War will be continued in a future newsletter.

IMPORTANT NOTICE - CHANGE OF MEETING DATE

The 2nd Quarterly Meeting of the Blair County Chapter, SAR was originally scheduled for Saturday, April 13. That meeting date has been changed. The 2nd Quarterly Meeting will be held on Saturday, April 27, 1996, beginning at 12:30noon. This meeting will be held at the Kings Family Restaurant in Altoona.

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At this time it is not foreseen that any other meeting dates will need to be changed from the schedule which was included in Newsletter #1, 1996 - with the exception of the Annual Meeting. The low interest level that has been exhibited by the chapter in attending the Annual Meeting for the past two years was discussed at the First Quarterly Meeting. Someone suggested that the lack of interest might actually be the result of one or both of two things. For one, the unsurety of the weather might inhibit some members from planning to attend any event during the month of December. Secondly, the various other events which take place during the month of December (such as Christmas parties) might conflict with the schedules of some members. The proposal was made to change the date of the Annual Meeting to the month of November. The date of November 16, 1996 has been chosen for the 1996 Annual Meeting. Please plan on attending this meeting this year.

Request For Quarterly Meeting Programs

A year or so ago the suggestion had been made at a Quarterly Meeting that, rather than simply hold a business-type meeting, we should have some kind of short program. Whether that program would be a lecture, viewing of a video, demonstration or what-have-you, the point was to provide the attending members with something educational about the Revolutionary War and/or the time period. The intention was not to have anything too formal nor too long, but rather just an informal sharing of information. Over the past year we have enjoyed such informal programs which have included subjects ranging from Thomas Jefferson's personal life (and the gossip-mongers who would like to see his memory defamed) ~ to the chapter's namesake, John Blair and his family's Revolutionary War heritage ~ to the aspects of General Benedict Arnold's role in the Patriot cause before his indiscretion and act of treason.

If any of you have a special interest in some aspect of the American Revolutionary War and would like to present a program for the benefit of the members at a future Quarterly Meeting, please do not hesitate to contact either myself (Larry D. Smith, RD#1 Box 704-A, East Freedom, PA 16637), the chapter secretary (Bernard R. Smith, RD#1 Box 704, East Freedom, PA 16637) or the current president (for 1996: E. Merle Glunt, RD#1 Box 303, Mount Union, PA 17066). Even if you can't physically attend the Quarterly Meetings of the Blair County Chapter, you can contribute a program by sending anything in writing to us and someone attending the meeting could read it in your behalf. We want to encourage all our members to participate in whatever way is possible, and distance should not be a hindering factor.

New Coordinator Of Eagle Scout Program

Compatriot Wesley Burket made the decision to resign from the position of Eagle Scout Coordinator at the end of 1995. At the 1st Quarterly Meeting that vacated position was discussed and Compatriot Edgar R. Hartt graciously volunteered to handle the duties for this year. Our thanks are extended to Mr. Hartt for helping to keep a good program alive.