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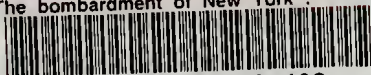




# THE BOMBARDMENT OF NEW YORK

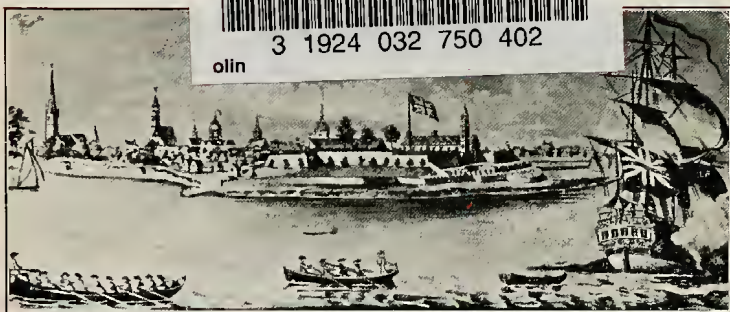
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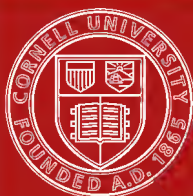
REGINALD PELHAM BOLTON

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THE BOMBARDMENT *of*  
NEW YORK

AND

THE FIGHT FOR INDEPENDENCE  
ON THE WATERS OF NEW YORK CITY

AGAINST  
THE SEA POWER OF GREAT BRITAIN

IN THE YEAR 1776

*By* REGINALD PELHAM BOLTON  
*Member of the New York Historical Society*

1915

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The Obstruction of the North River 1776.  
Scene of Marine Engagements July 12, August 18, Oct. 9 and Nov. 6.



**T**HE fight for Independence in the year 1776, which centered upon the possession of the City of New York, exhibited in several directions, features similar to the struggle now proceeding in Europe, to break or maintain the maritime ascendancy of Britain. It was this marine superiority only, which in the War of Independence enabled the British authorities to maintain their hold upon the coast at certain points, and to support their troops in their various undertakings.

It was only the fact that the country was so extensive, and that its habitable parts extended so far away from the ocean, and had so great a capacity in natural materials and production, that offset the destruction of its trade and supplies by the British navy.

The provincials had from the first no means whatever, of opposing the enormous marine available to throw land forces at any point on the extensive coast and to penetrate the broad rivers of the Atlantic seaboard. Their early efforts to meet this desperate situation brought forth the native ingenuity and exhibited to a marvelous degree the determination and self-sacrifice of the independent states.

The efforts that were made, and the methods employed, were the basis of all the future developments adopted by other nationalities in resisting the aggressive maritime force of Britain. The earth-work, the torpedo, the fire boat and the submarine were all weapons of defence de-

vised by Americans for this purpose, and in highly developed forms they constitute the main defence of every nation against any other possessing superior marine power today, which is the situation of every nation in the world in regard to Great Britain. The methods in actual use today in the great struggle now proceeding, are almost parallel to the circumstances of the fight in 1776. The immensity of modern operations are however, of no greater relative proportions than those of the year of Independence, when the slowly gathered and irresistible sea power of England was concentrated upon the capital city of the colonies and was opposed by a conglomeration of merchant marines, deep sea and off shore fishermen and coast-wise sailors, without a single warship, and destitute of guns and ammunition.

“The principal objects of the war,” says an English contemporary author, “were the relief of Quebec, the recovery of Canada, an attack upon the Southern colonies, and the reduction of New York. Great hopes were founded upon this last part of the scheme. Its islands,” he continued, being long and narrow were exposed on all sides to the hostilities of our fleets, and to the descent of our troops, with every advantage in their favour. When reduced the protection of the ships of war would be as effectual in their preservation, as their hostility had been in their reduction.”

The story of the enormous marine preparations in the year of Independence, which were made by the govern-

ment of Great Britain in the effort to subdue the City of New York, and of the efforts made with the slenderest means by the American forces to defeat this object, is particularly instructive as a lesson in the purpose and possibilities for oppression of sea power.

It has been largely overshadowed by the exciting military and political occurrences of that fateful year.

The important bearing which the marine actions had upon the operation of the armies on land, is forcibly illustrated by these events in New York waters. And the recital of the bold actions of his Majesty's ships, and the fearless opposition of the provincial forces against such overwhelming odds, forms a story of part of the struggle for the principles of liberty, and Independence, of deep interest to students of history, and of information to observers of the resistance of lesser nations to the dominance of Great Britain.

The first step towards the support of the political authority of Great Britain was then as it is now, the appearance of a warship upon the scene. At Boston, Charlestown, and in New York, the growing insubordination was met by the stationing of a vessel at the disposal of the governing body, in which, after its appearance had been found to be ineffective, the respective authorities took refuge, and maintained for a while a show of continuance of their control.

Such was the case in New York, when the fast waning authority of Governor Tryon was re-inforced by the ap-

pearance in 1775, of the formidable warship "Asia", a sixty-four gun ship of the line of the latest and most powerful class, under the command of Captain George Vandeput. This imposing demonstration of British readiness did not however, retard greatly the progress of public agitation, and in December, 1775, she was re-inforced by the arrival of the "Phoenix", one of the most recent type of frigate, of forty-four guns, the commander of which was Hyde Parker, the son of an Admiral of the same name, who later also attained the same rank in the British service.

The position of these two vessels, and of their supply ship, the Dutchess of Gordon, was not very comfortable, for the ice in the Hudson River made their anchorage insecure, and they were compelled to take up quarters so close to the town wharf in the East River, that their crews were in danger from any reckless "sniper" in the city streets.

But in this position she was forced to lay, when the Governor, finding his personal safety threatened, decided to remove the headquarters of authority to the "Asia." As she moved out on the 17th of February, the "Asia" struck ground at the foot of Whitehall Street, and for a while the fine vessel occupied by the Governor, lay exposed to the small guns in the old Battery, and the few muskets possessed by citizens, had they chosen to try their effects upon her. Such efforts would have been only of limited value, for even assuming that the guns of the "Asia" could not have been brought to bear on the city, the "Phoenix" lay

outside and could have battered the little town to pieces in a few hours. At high water, doubtless greatly to Tryon's relief, the "Asia" floated off the ground, which was probably the same as that on which the "Massachusetts" grounded a hundred and fifty years later, and came to anchor "in the Bay below the Islands."

The "Phoenix" moved out to Gravesend Bay, and established herself as a sort of watch-dog upon the gateway of the Port. In this position Captain Hyde Parker doubtless felt secure, knowing that the largest number of sympathizers with the British cause were in Long Island, from which he could, therefore, secure necessary supplies, with little risk of attack from the shore.

As soon as it became evident that the British authority was being defied, and the ships were without sufficient backing to attack the city, the method of starvation, which is in evidence again today, became the policy of the marine commanders, and Parker proceeded to prohibit the passage of any supplies to New York. This action was probably decided upon in advance of the arrival of General Clinton on the warship "Mercury," on February 4th, with two transports filled with troops, on his way to attempt to overawe and subdue rebellious Charleston. It was the day before that the first peaceful merchant vessel was seized by the warships; the ship "Sally," belonging to Samuel Franklin, bound in with a very necessary cargo of salt.

Other captures soon followed, as many craft, unsuspecting any hostile action, were plying in and out of the Port,

whose winds and tides not infrequently placed them at the mercy of the well equipped enemy.

The "Sally" was packed off as a prize to Boston, but on her way was wrecked at Montauk and her prize crew and some passengers were taken prisoners by some local rebel forces.

Snugly anchored just below the present Fort Hamilton, the "Phoenix" became a source of great annoyance and dire loss to the patriotic cause, as aided by sympathizing Tories on Long Island, and still kept supplied by direction of the Congress, she worked havoc with small trading craft that ran the gauntlet of the Narrows. She fired on and detained the passage-boat "York," the passenger boat from Amboy to the city, laden with unfortunate travelers, and her commander excused the act on the ground that she had been used by rebels in a hostile expedition some weeks before. What she could not utilize as a prize, the "Phoenix" scuttled. She sank the sloops "Ranger" and "Betsy," to the bottom of the Bay, sent the ship "Lady Gage" and the brigs "Diligence" and "Amazon" to Halifax, and cut out and sank the ship "Wanton," from Cranberry Inlet, besides disposing in ways unrecorded, of half a dozen smaller sloops.

These accomplishments were greatly aided by treachery on land and water. Colonel Lord Stirling wrote: "It is absolutely necessary to prevent the communication between the ship 'Phoenix,' which lies off the west end of Long Island below the Narrows, and the people of that part of Long Island, but more especially to take or destroy a cer-



“ tain Frank James, a pilot, who now assists Captain Parker, “ who commands the ‘Phoenix,’ in decoying and taking ves- “ sels of great importance to the cause we are now en- “ gaged in.”

But on the other hand, the active supporters of the national cause were on the alert for any chance, however small, of harassing the war vessels, or depriving them of their supplies and supports, and one of their first ventures, organized by Colonel Stirling, was so exceptionally fortunate as to inflict a severe loss on the British army.

Learning through a pilot, of the advent of one of the British transports, without her convoying guard, and that the vessel was beating about in heavy weather, trying to make the entrance to the Bay, an expedition was organized in the “York,” with some smaller craft, which surrounded the “Blue Mountain Valley,” boarded her and worked her through the Bay to Amboy. There her complement of two companies of Highland soldiers was removed to captivity, amid much local rejoicing.

The British land forces were thus found to be arriving, and in order to make their way as difficult as possible, it was decided to dismantle the Light House at Sandy Hook, which was accomplished early in March, by a party of hardy seamen volunteers, led by Major William Malcolm.

The hostilities had now become so marked that parties of American volunteers were kept on the watch to fire on the boats of the war vessels as they went for water to the wells of Brooklyn and Staten Island. The British armed

sloop, "Savage," was stationed near the watering place at Staten Island to protect their landing, but in one such encounter the watering party was driven off with a loss of three men and all the water casks. On a later occasion four British seamen were killed, nine wounded, and twelve were taken prisoners.

Another spring which served the "Asia" was on Nutten or Governor's Island. A bold party under General Israel Putnam, landed at night on the little island, and by dawn had constructed "a good Breast Work there raised which will cover them from the fire of the ships and it is directly in the way of the ship coming to the town."

This last action decided the commander of the "Asia" to move further down the Bay, and the "Phoenix" shifted to Sandy Hook with the armed sloops "Nautilus" and "Savage," being the only place where water could be obtained without a fight. But while the watering sloop of the "Asia" was at Sandy Hook, an attack was made on her by an American force of seamen in several whaleboats. They were driven off by the fire of the guns of the "Phoenix" and the despatch of her armed boats to the assistance of the sloop.

These occurrences helped to demonstrate to Washington and his aides, who by this time were in New York, busily engaged upon the problem of its defences, the helplessness of the Colonial forces against the floating power of Great Britain. The disparity of force has perhaps never been greater, the deficiency in any effective means of resistance never more apparent.

But the men of that day were by no means willing to acquiesce helplessly in even so adverse a state of affairs. The situation roused the determination to attempt the impossible. It was determined to organize a marine force of any kind of vessel, to be manned with volunteers from the semi-marine battalions of the east coast sea folk, and Ward's amphibious Massachusetts Regiment. So the first American "Fleet" came into being in New York waters, a heterogeneous collection of schooners, sloops, gallies and whale-boats, of which Lieutenant Benjamin Tupper took command, hoisting his flag on the schooner "Lady Washington."

They soon distinguished themselves in operations upon the supply ships arriving from Europe, among which was a most valuable prize containing much needed gun-powder and weapons. One of the privateer vessels operating outside Long Island, captured a Glasgow transport, with a battalion of four hundred and fifty men of the Royal Highland Regiment, the afterwards famous Black Watch, together with the Lieutenant Colonel and fifteen other officers. After removing the prisoners, the ship was despatched as a prize to Rhode Island. On the way she fell into the clutches of the British man-of-war, "Cerberus," who took her captive, and started her back to New York under convoy of an armed sloop. But near that port, both fell into the maw of the American armed schooner, "Schuyler," which closed the ship's chapter of vicissitudes in favor of the patriots.

The Sandy Hook light house had been restored to service,

and was now guarded by a guard of the British Forty-fourth Foot Regiment. Its destruction was a desirable means of depriving the now numerous vessels of the enemy of guidance, so on June 1st an expedition sallied down the Bay to attack it. They eluded the war ships and boldly bombarded the stone guard house for nearly two hours, with little field guns mounted on their galleys. The "Phoenix" joined in with her heavy guns, and after damaging the light house, they retired with the loss of several men.

All these efforts, however could have but little effect in checking the growth of the marine forces now arriving from England, which day by day increased as fresh war-ships and troop-transports arrived. The arrival of the great fleet of war vessels and transports was preceded by the "Greyhound," on board of which was the commander-in-chief of the land expeditionary forces, Sir William Howe. This vessel, which was one of the new "crack" class of thirty-gun frigates, the model of which is still to be seen at the Whitehall Museum, in London, was commanded by Captain Archibald Dickson, and on her run had taken no less than four American craft which were, however, re-captured by the "Schuyler," a smart retrieval of loss. The "Greyhound" was soon followed by the main body; for three days later the anxious watchers on the Jersey Highlands counted no less than forty-five sail off the Hook, and soon, "more than a hundred square rig vessels had arrived and anchored in the Hook."

The military force was conveyed in about two hundred

transports, and was accompanied by a powerful squadron of war vessels led by the "Cerberus" and "Centurian."

Lieutenant John Shreve, accompanying Ephraim Anderson to Philadelphia, caught a view of their masts in the Lower Bay, which he said, "appeared like a forest of dead "trees." But even this great gathering of vessels was only a part of the immense effort being made by Britain to force the colonists to recognize the futility of opposition, a policy frequently followed in later times.

A new fleet had been formed, and placed under the command of General Howe's brother, Viscount Howe, Vice Admiral, whose flag-ship the "Eagle," arrived early in July. He, with his brother, had been authorized to offer terms of forgiveness to the rebellious provincials, prior to commencing active hostilities, and doubtless it was due to this fact that the war-vessels were held at anchor in the lower bay, and the unfortunate troops confined in their miserable quarters on the transports during the hot days and nights of the early summer of 1776. What their discomforts may have been is indicated by the circumstances of the Coldstream Guards, whose complement of 959 rank and file, with 86 women and 17 children, 39 commissioned and 103 non-commissioned officers, or 1204 persons in all, were crowded into nine little merchant vessels.

Pending the arrival of additional troops from Halifax, and the much discussed and hated Hessians, there gathered in the Bay upwards of fifty war-ships of all classes, to the sixty-four-gun class, the whole mounting about 1200 guns

in broadside. Even this colossal force was but a part of the entire force which was later on assembled.

Meantime, the nominal and expropriated Governor had been leading an uncomfortable official existence on board the "Dutchess of Gordon," upon which a show of the maintenance of British authority continued. Notwithstanding the increasingly hostile course of events, an appearance of civility was maintained between the Committee of Safety, which was guiding the civil and military affairs of New York, and the rather forlorn Governor, who was supplied from time to time with necessaries for the crews of his vessels and with some delicacies for his own table. As late as April 4th, the Committee allowed to be supplied six barrels of beer and two quarters of beef to the "Dutchess of Gordon," and to her tender, two barrels of beer, 12 dishes, 24 plates, 12 spoons, 2 mugs and two quarters of beef, while fresh meat and vegetables were permitted to be sent to the "Asia" and to the "Phoenix."

Inasmuch as at this time these vessels were pursuing the policy of capturing merchant vessels with supplies for the city, this policy must be regarded as very conciliatory.

General Washington arrived in New York on April 14th, and promptly put an end to these amenities, appealing formally to the Committee of Safety to put a stop to "a continuance of the intercourse which has hitherto subsisted between the inhabitants of this colony and the enemy on board their ships of war," as being injurious to the common cause. This method and the rapid construction of

land defences on the salient points and headlands of the shore line, brought the situation to a clear issue between the strength of the floating force and the efforts of the provincials.

The ingenuity of Americans was taxed to find some means of opposition, and Congress received and considered various suggestions from inventors, such as Captain Ephraim Anderson, who had, on May 3d, organized an attack by fire floats upon the British shipping at Quebec, in which he had taken a part, and upon his craft prematurely exploding, he had been "considerably burned." Undaunted by his experience, he made his way to Philadelphia, and "proposed a scheme to destroy the fleet" by a system of fire-ships, which he was authorized to attempt, though Washington was dubious "that it will be better in theory than practice."

But a still more important device came into being at this time, the production of the ingenuity of David Bushnel, a student of Yale, and a native of Maine, who propounded the idea of a submarine vessel, armed with a detachable torpedo operated by clock-work.

"This machine," says General Heath, "was worked under water. It conveyed a magazine of powder, which was to be fixed under the keel of a ship, then freed from the machine, and left with clock-work going, which was to produce fire when the machine had got out of the way."

The device was put to a trial, a volunteer, Sergeant Lee, making his way with it unseen to the British flag-ship

"Eagle," then laying at anchor in the Inner Bay. He succeeded in his trip, only to fail in the attachment of the torpedo, for the vessel was copper-bottomed and the auger provided for the purpose would not pierce the metal. So the attempt failed, which, had it succeeded, would have probably affected the whole course of marine development by rendering the under-water type of vessel a formidable equivalent to the floating armament of the most powerful warship. In its later development by Robert Fulton, the menace of the system to the predominance of their sea power was recognized by the British, who discouraged the inventor so that he abandoned the line of invention, and it was left for Simon Lake to resuscitate the idea and bring about the radical disturbance of sea power which the submarine boat is now effecting.

In the headquarters of the American army now organizing for the defence of New York, the deepest anxiety prevailed as to the probable use to which the warships would be put. At one of these conferences the indomitable Putnam proposed a scheme, the very magnitude of which must have caused many a heart to sink, in view of the difficulties it involved.

It was no less than a proposal to block the great estuary of the Hudson, at its narrowest point, with sunken vessels, to be provided with poles protruding from their decks to or near the surface, and so to force any vessels which might and probably would attempt to force their way up the river in the rear of the city, to pass so close to land defences as to



endanger them. Similar discussions were taking place on the British flag-ship, between the Governor Tryon, with "many gentlemen attending him," and Sir William and his brother, Lord Howe. The expediency of despatching a naval force up the North River was discussed, the special object being the obstruction of supplies to the American troops. While this proposal was under consideration, the troops were put ashore at Staten Island, in the new barges, of which nearly a hundred had been specially constructed for the purpose. These boats, manned by the tars of the warships, were destined to do the most effective service in later military operations.

The American army had not, meanwhile, been idle. They had brought from Boston eighteen brass cannon, for the defence of the Battery, had secured some gun-powder by a shipment from France, and were busily occupied in constructing land batteries, at the mouth of and up the East River, at Red Hook, Corlears Hook, and Hoorn's Hook, and on the North River at Paulus Hook, on Governor's Island, the Battery, at several points on the Island of Manhattan to Fort Washington.

Some hulks were sunk in the East River at Governor's Island, rendering the passage of the strait less secure. But the most formidable defences were in course of construction at the upper end of the island, eleven miles up the noble river, at the point at which the Island thrusts a bold promontory into the tide-way, narrowing its width there to about one-third of that below.

Jeffrey's Hook, now Fort Washington Point, is a spur of the eminence immediately behind it, which latter rises to the greatest altitude of any part of the island, and was crowned with the fortification which received and still retains the name of Washington.

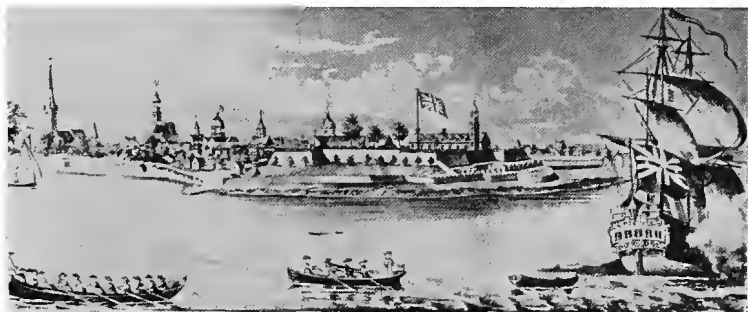
The corresponding height of the Jersey shore forms the abrupt southern extremity of the Palisades, and on this a fortification was laid out and named Fort Constitution, later changed to the name of Lee.

In these two forts, the strength of their location was discounted by the feeble capacity of their artillery, which consisted, in Fort Washington of but two of eighteen pound capacity, the larger part being the little cast guns taken from the old Fort at the lower end of the Island.

Matters stood thus when various shifts of the warships presaged some movement of importance. Men of war made their way through the Narrows, the "Asia" and the "Greyhound" took up new positions, and the American army was kept under arms day and night in anticipation of some attempt upon the city.

In the afternoon of Saturday, July 12th, the frigate "Phoenix" made signal to the "Rose," a thirty-gun frigate, commanded by Sir James Wallace, and both hove anchor, and with their tenders the "Shuldham" and the "Charlotta," accompanied by the armed schooner "Tryal," stood boldly up the North River before a favoring wind and tide. As their intention was perceived, a cannonade started from the American batteries at Red Hook, Governor's Island, and

from Paulus Hook. As they passed the city, keeping well over towards the Jersey shore, their long silent guns were opened upon the town, and shocking scenes of panic and distress resulted. The unexpectedness of the incursion had given no opportunity for the removal of the helpless inhabitants, and as Washington described the scene, "the shrieks



Provincial New York.

" and cries of these poor creatures, running every way with their children, were truly distressing."

" The smoke of the firing," says Shewkirk's diary, " drew over our street like a cloud, and the air was filled with the smell of the powder."

The ships were struck by several shot, but received no damage sufficient to stay them, while on the other hand, the excitement of the situation and the inexperience of the men; led to the premature discharge of guns by which six American lives were sacrificed.

The fire was fast and furious. Colonel Kemble said that one hundred and ninety-six shots were fired by the batteries at the Red Hook, the Battery and at Paulus Hook. From every muzzle that could be brought to bear, the American gunners in this their first naval engagement, did their best to halt the progress of the vessels, which as they neared the narrow passage at Jeffrey's Hook, faced a formidable danger.

Bags of sand were piled high on their upper decks as a protection against the rifle fire they expected and received, as they passed the zone of fire of the elevated batteries on either hand.

In the quiet reading room of the Record Office in London, it was strange to read, in the faded ink of the writing of the master of the "Rose," the account of the action from the British side. In the quaint abbreviations of the ship-master, and his defective spelling, he tells how, "at 1/2 past 3 the "Rebels began a Constant firing on us and the 'Phenix.' "From the Red Hook, Governor's Island, Powles Hook, and "the Town as we past, and continued there firing from 6 "different Batterys on the E't shore above the Town for 11 "mile as high as Margett's Hook," and how they "shot "away the Starboard foreshroud Fore tackle Pendant fore- "lift, fore topsail Clew line Spiritsail and main topsail "Braces" with "one 10 pound Shott thr'o the head of the "foremast, one through the Pinnacle several thr'o the sails "and some in the hull."

But the American gunners' "most terrible fire," as General Greene described it, proved insufficient to stay the progress of the two bold frigates, as with their little tenders between them, shrouded in the smoke of their broadsides, they passed with swelling sails and favoring tide through the growing heights, out of the last long range shots of the guns in Fort Washington, and came to anchor in the quiet waters of Tappan Bay, "with the Best Bower in 6½ f'm " low water soft bottom," and spent the rest of the evening in making repairs, their commanders no doubt congratulating each other that at last they had seen some real action and had gained a decidedly advantageous position for the British Navy.

A feeling little short of consternation resulted in the American councils. This bold and gallant incursion might be succeeded by the passage of still more powerful vessels, which might endanger the entire effort to hold New York. The dangers were increased by the arrival at this time of the main body of the fleet, commanded by Richard, Lord Howe, with transports containing the British Guard Regiments and the Hessian First Brigade. The reverberations of the shotted batteries up river had barely ceased before the roar of the saluting guns welcoming the arrival of these formidable reinforcements was heard. Now the full measure of the stupendous sea supremacy of Britain was shown, as four hundred vessels of all sorts and sizes, many of them war vessels of the latest design, and every one an added menace to the cause of liberty, lay swinging the flag of

England over the lower bay, a vaster Armada than had ever before been gathered.

The immensity of the effort illustrates the determination of the British Government to crush, once for all, any further resistance to the King's authority.

A strenuous effort was now made to carry out the plan of General Putnam, and obstruct the river at Jeffrey's Hook. A survey was made by General Mifflin, selected for the duty on account of his reputation for "activity and fire," and General Washington expressed himself "extremely anxious" about the obstruction of the Channel, and measures are "daily used for executing that purpose."

The work was entrusted to Colonel Robert Magaw, commandant of Fort Washington, and it was carried out in the vicinity of that position. The Point has two sandy beaches still presenting, in their rocky surroundings, the natural features which existed in those excited times. This part of the river shore must have presented a scene of great activity. On the heights above, the Pennsylvania troops were busily engaged in constructing the embankments of Fort Washington, while below at the Hook, the preparation of condemned vessels for their last long plunge proceeded.

Heath describes the process, as the sinking of hulls and "frames called *chevaux-de-frise*, composed of large and long timbers framed together with points elevated to pierce and "stop the way of vessels meeting of them. These were "boxed at the bottom to contain a vast weight of stones—" with which they were sunk. A line of these, and hulks,

“ was formed across the River; some of them sank very well, others, rather irregular, and some of the hulks which were strapped together with large timbers, separated on going down.”

The execution of this important scheme was directed to be kept as secret as possible, and all preparations for it were to be made as though destined for the East River.

The vessels sunk were commandeered from merchant owners. The work when completed, left the channel close to the Hook, on the extremity of which a small “demi-” or half-moon earthwork was constructed, the traces of which can still be seen. In this was probably mounted a single gun.

While the effectiveness of this great work was somewhat weakened by the force of the tides, its moral effect would have been great had it not been for the treachery of lukewarm and jealous persons in the American ranks, by whom the facts and details were communicated to the British officials.

The risk of such surreptitious information was anticipated by Washington, who made preparations for a sufficient force to be maintained at Fort Washington and Fort Lee, to resist any naval and military attempt upon the locality of the obstructions.

A deserter took information to the commander of the “Phoenix” as to the risk which his squadron ran.

Meantime, the squadron, against whose security these great exertions were mainly directed, in the hope of trap-

ping them in their position up the river, lay anchored in the Tappan Zee, not altogether in quietude, since they were obliged to shift their quarters from day to day, to keep out of musket shot from points on the shores.

Their barges were busy by daylight taking soundings for the guidance of future naval operations, and by night paddling up and down on patrol against night surprises, as well as communicating, under cover of darkness, with the boats of Tories of Westchester and Dutchess counties.

Their menacing presence was resented by the men of the American marine, and under the bold guidance of Tupper, an attempt was made in six open galleys or flat boats, the hardihood of which has seldom been surpassed, to cut out the two powerful frigates in broad daylight, in the neighborhood of Tarrytown, where they then lay.

The warships had received some warning of the intention of this attack, and were on their guard to make the attempt doubly hazardous. They had been aground, and it was probably by that fact that the attack was timed, but by the time it was made, both ships had swung free, and lay with springs on their cables, and broadside guns shotted ready for action. Some idea of the disparity of forces is gained from the statement that, "the ground tier of even "one side of the 'Phoenix' was equal to all the force of our "galleys put together."

The galleys were stated by the British to carry twenty-four and eighteen pounders, and about two hundred and



fifty men, while the boats, of which there were twelve, carried from sixty to one hundred men each.

“The enterprise,” says an eye-witness, “was worthy of a people contending for their dearest rights.” “Let our enemies judge,” he continues, “if the sons of Connecticut and Rhode Island, from which States our galleys were almost wholly manned, did not behave with a spirit and intrepidity becoming the descendants of such noble ancestry.” The little force started from Tarrytown and were engaged for upwards of two hours, sustaining great damage, as might be expected, but giving the frigates a hard time of it, and hulling them repeatedly with their bow-chaser guns. They lost two men killed and fourteen wounded, and their galleys they ran ashore, but their spirits were undimmed by the result. “We hope,” said one, “to have another touch at these pirates before they leave our river, which God prosper.”

On the American side, the intruders were closely watched, and were aware of the peculiar hostility they excited, requiring a constant vigilance and shifting of their anchorage to avoid further surprise. “I believe,” wrote Colonel William Douglas to his wife, “they would be glad if they were safe back to their old station, (by their motion).”

While these events were transpiring in the Hudson River, another naval expedition was sent out from the Bay. Three frigates with thirty transports were reported “to be gone

“around the east end of Long Island,” a new menace to the rear of the American defence of the city.

The little floating force of the Americans was meantime busy with preparations for another and even more hazardous attempt upon the squadron up river. The desperate need for some measures which might combat the naval force and especially such means as would render the position of the squadron untenable, directed attention to the methods proposed by Captain Hazlewood of Philadelphia, and Ephraim Anderson for the use of fire. Hazlewood had a scheme for preparing fire-vessels, so as to make them extremely dangerous to other craft, and Anderson was already engaged in building fire-rafts to be chained together and floated on to a hostile fleet. Both these men's services were secured by Congress, and Hazlewood was despatched to Harlem.

He surveyed the situation, and then went up to Poughkeepsie, where he secured the sloop “Polly,” of about one hundred tons burden, and a schooner, unnamed, of somewhat less size. These he filled to their decks, as far aft as their cabins, with sawn and split cord wood dipped in pitch, interspersed with bundles of straw cut to short lengths, and also dipped in pitch.

The two craft were worked down to Spuyten Duyvil Creek, and there concealed, while the final addition to their inflammable outfit was made in the shape of canvas strips soaked in turpentine and secured to their rigging.

By the second week in August the two fire vessels were ready for a demonstration of their efficiency.

On several nights the anticipation of their despatch against the British shipping led parties of intensely interested observers to points on the Riverdale hillsides, whence a distant view could be obtained of the hostile squadron.

The night of Friday, August 16th, was cloudy and dark enough for the desperate attempt, and only a lack of wind was adverse to the success of the enterprise.

At the dead of night and in a drizzling rain, the volunteer crews took their posts, and in the tow of row-galleys, were hauled out of the shadows of the creek, and swung up river on their perilous journey. On the deck of each the tiller was held by a steersman, and along the bulwarks were crouched his crew with grappling irons, while below, in each little cabin was the fireman, who had volunteered to set fire to the combustibles in the interior at the word of command, and was then to make his escape out of a hole cut in the side of the craft.

A whaleboat was towed alongside the quarter in which two men sat ready to cut the lashings as soon as the crew, after grappling and firing should have tumbled overboard.

The dangerous duty of fireman was undertaken by Joseph Bass, on the "Polly," and by Sergeant Thomas of Webb's Massachusetts Regiment, on the schooner.

Ensign Thomas Updike Fosdick, of the same regiment, steered the sloop and the deck hands numbered seven on one and five on the other boat.

The commanders of the hostile vessels had obtained some inkling of the probability of renewed attacks, and shifted their positions almost daily. They were anchored this night under the shadow of the Palisades, a mile or two above the town of Yonkers, and with springs on their cables, ready to cut loose at short notice, they lay in line; the "Phoenix" furthest south, the "Rose" next, then the "Tryal," the "Charlotta," and the "Shuldham."

On the heights below Yonkers was gathered a group of American officers, including Heath and Clinton, who as the hour of midnight approached, made out the dim forms of the fire vessels, their ghost-like rags trailing from every spar, "silently running up with the tide."

The steersmen endeavored to work them over across the river, and in the shadow of the Jersey cliffs nearly missed their prey. So dark was it, that the first intimation of their proximity was the cry of the British sentinels, "All is well," as the ships' bells were struck for the eleventh hour.

Swinging hard over, the "Polly" just missed the "Rose," but Fosdick ran her fairly head on to the "Charlotta." Instantly the grappling irons were thrown, the vessels made fast together, and the word was passed to Bass, who, plunging his torches into the combustible mass around him, sprang out into the whale-boat with all his men, the almost explosive effect of the ignition being shown by the fact that the last men to get overboard were "somewhat burnt."

The mass of inflammable material was ablaze in a few seconds, and the flames shot high, illuminating the scene of

action. The schooner following at some little distance, was thus enabled to make for the "Phoenix," and although a little too late to fetch square on to her, she succeeded in falling into her rigging, but received the contents of her broadside guns from her now aroused crew. Her grapples thrown, she was fired by Thomas, who, probably in the confusion engendered



The fight of the Fireships.

by the cannon being fired almost point-blank alongside, found his retreat cut off by the flames he had started, and with his deck hands, had to spring overboard into the dark waters.

The scene must have been singular and weird. The "horrid flames" of the fire-ships and of the burning "Charlotte," mingled with the smoke of the guns, while the shouts of officers and men were heard on shore, as the crew

swarmed the rigging of the "Phoenix," or tumbled into the ships' barges in the effort to save the lives of those on board the tender. These poor panic-stricken creatures, some of whom it is stated were women and children, probably Tory refugees, were emerging from their quarters in the utmost consternation. Several perished in the flames, many in the running tideway, others were rescued by boats from the fleet, as the "Ketch," parting from her moorings, drifted, flaming, toward the shore.

The crew of the "Phoenix," at the risk of their lives, made superhuman exertions to save their vessel from her imminent peril; luckily for her, the wind was too light to drive the flames aboard, and by cutting away her own rigging, they got her free from the grasp of her dangerous visitor.

"A number of seamen ascended and got out on the yard arm, supposed to clear away some of the grapplings. The fire vessel was alongside, as was judged" by the excited watchers ashore, "near ten minutes, when the 'Phoenix' cut or slipped her cables, let fall her fore top sail, wore round, and stood up the river, being immediately veiled from the spectators by the darkness of the night," thus escaping by a very narrow margin what would have proved her total destruction, had the flames reached her magazines.

The account of the affair from the point of view of those on the vessels, may be read in the handwriting of the captain's log:

“Phoenix August 16 Friday:

“Light breezes & cloudy P. M. at 8 sent a Boat to row Guard. At 11 discovered a Vessel near us and standing up the river. The Rose’s Tender being near us hail’d and ordered her to fire into the above vessel in 5 seconds the Rebel vessel Board the Tender, and was sett Fire too by the light we discovered another vessel standing towards us about Cable’s length distance. Immediately we Cutt our Cable & began fireing at Her. About 10 Minutes Afterwards she Boarded us on our Starboard Bow. At the same time Rebels sett fire to the Train and left Her sett our Headsails which Fortunately cast the ship and disingaged us from the Fire ship after She having been twenty minutes with her Jibb Boom over our Gunwale. The Rose’s Tender was totally consumed the same fate must have attended the Phoenix had not the steadyness of the Officers and Ships Company saved her.”

As it was, the material injury to the squadron was severe, about seventy lives were sacrificed, and the “Charlotta” was a complete wreck, burnt to the water’s edge. The moral effect was the greatest gain to the American cause, since it demonstrated the insecurity of these powerful vessels in narrow waters, when unsupported by troops on land, and forced upon the attention of the naval commanders a recognition of the untiring ingenuity and daring of their poorly-equipped opponents.

The attack is shown as one of the large features of the

campaign, in a Navy Map prepared and issued by the English Admiralty in January, 1777, on which the squadron is occupying a station on the North River opposite the mouth of the Nepperhan, or Yonkers.

So great was the impression which this event created, that a sketch made by Sir Richard Wallace, of the "Rose," was made the basis of a painting by Serres, and this was afterwards reproduced in a naval history of Great Britain, from which another reproduction was made for Valentine's Manual, in 1864.

The painting rather characteristically omits from the dramatic scene the loss of the "Charlotta," directing attention chiefly to the rescue of the frigate "Phoenix" from the clutches of the burning schooner. But it forms an interesting record by an interested observer of the affair, and is a striking illustration of the disparity of forces between attackers and attacked.

A contemporary account which has an unusual personal interest, was contained in a long letter which was written by Captain Nathan Hale, addressed to his brother Enoch, on August 20, 1776. Hale was at the time serving with his regiment in the defences of Washington Heights, and only one month later his own gallant action and death was the theme of discussion in the camp.

"Last Friday night," he wrote, "two of our fire vessels (a sloop and a schooner) made an attempt upon the shipping up the River. The night was too dark, the wind too slack, for the attempt. The schooner which was intended



“for one of the ships had got by before she discovered them; but as Providence would have it, she ran athwart a bomb-catch which she quickly burned. The sloop, by the light of the fire, discovered the Phoenix—but rather too late—however, she made shift to grapple her, but the wind not proving sufficient to bring her close alongside, or drive the flames immediately on board, the Phoenix after much difficulty, got her clear by cutting her own rigging. Sergeant Fosdick, who commands the above sloop, and four of his hands, were of my company, the remaining two were of the Regiment.”

“The General has been pleased to reward their bravery with forty dollars each, except the last man who quitted the fire sloop, who had fifty. Those on board the schooner received the same.”

*Your loving Brother*  
*Nathan Hale.*

The next day three daring members of the American marine force, a lieutenant and two men, succeeded in floating and towing the burnt hull of the “Charlotta” down to Fort Washington, undisturbed by the guns of the frigates. They beached their prize, out of which were taken her arma-

ment, a 6-pound gun, three carronades, and ten swivel pieces; the hazardous undertaking being carried out "in a manner reflecting great credit upon their enterprize and courage."

Among the annals of our nation this attack, as an exhibition of patriotic determination surely deserves a larger place than it has heretofore been accorded.

The disturbing effect upon the enemy was soon apparent. The statement given out was to the effect that their retreat was due to their having expended their ammunition, which does not seem to have been likely, as they had used little after their first ascent of the river. If they were short of missiles, they probably fired some of those destructive bar-shot, which were intended to be used for the destruction of rigging and sails of other vessels, of which specimens have been found at a number of places on Washington Heights. The commanders waited only for wind, during one more night of anxiety, before making a retreat, and at dawn on Sunday, August 18th, hoisting anchor, they drove down river before a fresh north-east breeze and favoring tide. As they drew within the fire zone of Forts Washington and Lee, they were met by a furious cannonade. The officers commanding the shore fortifications were in high hopes of their being caught by the obstructions, but the information they had gained from the deserter had informed them of the gap which was intended to have been closed and would have been completed only a day or two later, so that standing close in under the Point, and running great risk from

the guns of Fort Washington at short range, they succeeded in passing through.

The "Phoenix" was hulled three times by round shot from the Fort, while the "Rose" received a number of shot and her rigging was torn. Their crews were kept close below decks in order to avoid the fire of the picked shots who were posted among the rocks and trees of Jeffrey's Hook, and the riflemen received the point blank fire of the frigates as they passed. Their shot, buried deep in the soil, have been found in and around Fort Washington Park. As they swung further down river, a continuous salute of fire greeted them from the batteries along the shore to the lower part of the Island, to which they replied in kind, and, followed to the Narrows by American row-galleys which "played smartly" upon them, they bombarded the city again as they approached and passed. "The fright," says the Moravian Diarist, "seemed not to be so great as it was when they went up, and yet the balls hurt more houses; some men were likewise hurt."

Their return down the river or the probability of other ships advancing to their aid, had been somewhat anticipated in New York, and on the Saturday a proclamation in the town had warned the inhabitants to remove the women and the sick, "as a bombardment was expected."

"By His EXCELLENCY

GEORGE WASHINGTON, Esquire, General, and Commander in Chief of the Army of the United States of North America.

WHEREAS a Bombardment and Attack upon the City of

New York, by our Cruel and inveterate Enemy, may be hourly expected:

And as there are great Numbers of Women, Children and infirm Persons, yet remaining in the City, whose Continuance will rather be prejudicial than advantageous to the Army, and their Persons exposed to great Danger and Hazard: I Do therefore recommend it to all such Persons as they Value their own Safety and Preservation, to remove with all Expedition, out of the said Town, at this critical Period,—trusting, that with the Blessing of Heaven, upon the American Arms, they may soon return to it in perfect Security.

And I do enjoin and require, all the Officers and Soldiers in the Army, under my Command, to forward and assist such Persons in their Compliance with this Recommendation.

Given under my Hand, at Head Quarters, New York, August 17, 1776.

GEORGE WASHINGTON."

The expected bombardment came the next day, as the log books of the "Phoenix" and "Rose" record:—

The Captain of the Phoenix wrote:—

"Phoenix, Sunday 18th August.

"At 5 p. m. weighed and came to sail in company with H. M. Ship Rose, Tryal Schooner and Shuldham Tender. At 20 minutes past the Rebels began firing at us from a Battery on the East side of the River—about 7 minutes we pass'd by there sunking vessels &c. in a channel close by

the East shore—we no sooner pass'd the sunken Vessels than some Batterys on the West shore began firing at us. About 7 being gott almost as low as York we commenced firing at some Batterys on York Island. Soon after Batterys on Pawlos Hook—Governor Isld and Red Hook began firing at us and we at them . . . anch'd off Staten Isl. In passing the Batterys the shott from the Rebels sunk the Long Boat as she was towing a Stern—by which we lost a stream cable that was in her, oars &c.—had our riging and sails much damaged.”

Sir Richard Wallace's account gave some more details of the running fight:—

“Remarks on Bd His Maj'ys Ship *Rose*:

“First part light Bree's and hazey—Middle little wind with hard Showers of Hail—latter fresh Gales. A.M. at 5 weighd and came to sail—as did H. M. Ship Phenix, Tryal Schooner & Shuldham Tender Steerd down the River—at  $\frac{3}{4}$  past 5 the past the Chiver de fries's within  $\frac{1}{2}$  a Musquet shot of the Rebel Battery on the Eastern Shore—the Rebels began firing on us from a high Hill on which they had a fort on the western shore & another on the East shore & a heavy fire of Musquettry from a Breastwork under the battery—returned the Fire—when we came abreast of New York rec'd a heavy Fire from 11 Batterys viz. the Town, Powles Hook, Governors Island and Red Hook—d° returned a constant fire. Had 2 Men wounded some of the riging shott away & some in the Hull.”

General Washington was actively following these events.

From the city he wrote to Heath: "The ships of war and "tenders were fired at from the batteries here as they "passed, and I suppose received similar damages to what "they met with from the forts at Mount Washington and "Burdit Ferry," and to Knox, he wrote to learn why the gallees were not more active.

It seemed more than probable that a retaliatory attack might be made by the naval force in the North River, and therefore Heath was directed to have men ready to march south from the Mount Washington in case any shipping came up the River. The limited character of the defences is indicated by the suggestion that "two or even four pieces of cannon might be spared from Fort Washington to the post over the bridge," that is to the Forts on Spuyten Duyvil hill, "but query if it might not do to run them from thence when occasion shall seem to require it."

General Heath, who was in command of the troops camped at and near Kings Bridge, had a scheme for constructing a floating bridge across the Haerlem River, to supplement the little Kings Bridge and Farmers Bridge, and provide means to transfer cannon from Fort Washington to the north and proposed in the absence of other craft that the fire-rafts, which had been prepared in Spuyten Duyvil Creek for further operations on the frigates, should now be taken for that purpose.

The British military preparations were now completed and were probably somewhat determined, if not modified,

by the report of Captain Parker upon the information gained during his five weeks absence up the River.

The descent upon Long Island was arranged, and on August 22nd, at early dawn, the "Phoenix" and "Rose," accompanied by the "Greyhound," with the bomb-ketches, "Carcass" and "Thunder," acted as guards during the disembarkation of the troops at the north part of Gravesend Bay, while Sir George Collier, commanding the 50-gun ship, "Rainbow," brought her to a station within the Narrows above the present position of Fort Hamilton, and the "Carysfort" frigate advanced between the Staten Island Camp and the American battery at Red Hook. The tars of other men-of-war manned more than eighty of the flat-boats and ship's galleys, and made the transfer of the troops from their Camp on the Staten Island side, rowing no less than ten times to-and-fro across the water of the Narrows. The transports which bore the Hessian division were also brought up in Gravesend Bay, a little after 9 in the morning, and their disembarkation was directed by Admiral Lord Howe in person. The landing of this great force could not have been prevented by any means the Americans possessed, under the guns of so formidable a marine force, and no attempt was made to do so. But active watch was kept on the East River, where the sentinels were instructed to prevent any vessel passing the sunken hulks near Governor's "Island except between the Albany pier and a mast in the "river nearly opposite."

Four days elapsed before the battle of Long Island took

place, in which engagement the now well-known vessels took but little part, though the "Roebuck," another 32-gun frigate, worked her way into Gowanus Bay, and actively engaged the garrison of "Fort Défiance" on Red Hook.

Away to the east, in anticipation of the British General's plan of enveloping the American army, two frigates, the "La Brune" and the "Niger," were anchored in Flushing Bay, with a bomb-ketch, their boat crews being occupied in sallies along the inlets of the Bronx and Eastchester, helping themselves to fresh meat and provender at the expense of the unfortunate Westchester farmers.

The British fleet failed to effect any movement in the direction of the rear of the American army, and no attempt was made to force the East River. A garrison stood on duty day and night on Governor's Island, but the wind failed and the ships could not get up from the lower Bay. The fate of the American army hung on this slender circumstance, while the depleted and defeated forces stood doggedly at their entrenchments in Brooklyn, and the British and Hessians sapped their way towards them.

The opportunity of withdrawal of the army was also afforded by the rather unusual weather conditions, and the famous fog of August 29th, helped the Americans directly by concealment, and at the same time rendered the warships helpless. The withdrawal was effected without any hindrance by armed boats, which might have been sent with some probability of success.



The author of the history of the Coldstream Guards says:

“This retreat of the Americans must necessarily have been anticipated, and the naval department is justly chargeable with negligence, as the depth in the East River was sufficient for vessels of the largest description, and a single ship, stationed between Long Island and New York, would have cut off all intercourse between them.”

But this view does not take into account the reputation which the American army had established for vigorous defence of the passage, the strength of which was probably not fully ascertained at this occasion.

The English author of the “Impartial History of the War in America,” asserts that “the warships only waited for a fair wind to enter and take possession of the East River, which would have totally cut off all communication between the islands.” The retreat, he says, was “exceedingly difficult under the watchful eye of an active enemy—almost close to their works.” The effort “required an extraordinary address to conduct it and must be allowed a master-piece in its kind in the art of war. It showed plainly that General Washington knew how to profit by the miscarriage of others, and had the capacity to turn his misfortune to his own honour.”

The British commander was now advantageously placed for a descent upon New York Island, the main object of the naval and military campaign, as soon as he should be able to get his flat boats up the East River, a problem not

altogether easy, in view of the marksmanship heretofore shown by the American forces. The exposed position of the defending force on Governor's Island led to their withdrawal, and within a few days the British had discovered the fact, and had taken possession of its spiked guns. On the 3rd of September, the first effort was made by the Fleet to force the East River's real or imaginary obstructions. The "Rose" was selected for the attempt. She chose the Buttermilk Channel, made her way through, and with thirty flat boats pulling under her lee, took the fire of the forts all the way up past Wallabout, finally taking shelter, "after a severe cannonade from us," behind Blackwell's Island. Here she lay a day, and having thus secured the passage of the boats into Newtown Creek, made a retreat as far as Wallabout Bay (the depth of which gave her some distance from the forts). Here she remained, however, the target for the gunners of the Corlears Hook battery, until nightfall.

The "Niger" and "La Brune," accompanied by their bomb-ketch, had, meantime, moved down the Sound from their anchorage near City Island, and working as close to the dangers of Hell Gate as their commanders dared, they aided the land forces on Long Island in bombarding a small American redoubt at Horn's Hook. Accompanying the success of this bold manœuvre, other vessels from the main fleet in the lower Bay were advanced, the warships working their way to a point "about long cannon shot from the "Battery," without firing on either side. Troops were

landed on Montresor's Island, and other detachments occupied the islets around the waters of Hell Gate, plundering the residences thereon.

The Americans were awaiting the next move on the marine chess-board, doubtfully expecting a landing either at Harlem or at Morrisania, and still working with feverish energy to strengthen the blockade of the Hudson, on which Washington's chief dependence was now placed. He wrote to Heath, "In particular, I must request of you that the chevaux-de-frise be immediately sunk. Was it in my power to send you Colonel Putnam, I would willingly comply with your request."

Putnam was the engineer of the army, and his help had been asked in advancing the difficult operation. Tide and storm had affected those vessels already sunk, and some of the frames of the chevaux-de-frise had become detached, and not being secured in time, floated off. There were but three hundred men at Fort Washington at this time, as the Pennsylvania troops had been withdrawn to aid the army and help garrison New York after the defeat in the Long Island engagement. They could accomplish little except to keep a good lookout against surprise.

No move was made by the ships for ten days, when on the afternoon tide of the 13th and 14th of September, the ever ready "Phoenix" and her companion, the "Roebuck," convoying more flat boats, pushed their way up the East River, and joined the "Rose," all coming to anchor at Kips Bay. Here they were joined by the frigates "Carrysfort"

and "Orpheus," commanded by Captains Fanshaw and Hudson, with two transport vessels full of troops. For their gallantry in running the gauntlet of the Batteries, these commanders were commended by the Admiral in a later despatch.

The next attack was evidently threatened from that direction, and the arrangements portended some effort to land a force and to trap the Americans in the lower part of the Island. Preparations already making for the evacuation of the town were, therefore, hastened; the removal of the sick, the stores, and the baggage, taxing the overworked men of the American army to the limit of their strength.

The quiet of the early morn on the succeeding Sunday was disturbed by the passage up both the East and North Rivers, of more vessels, greeted from Powles Hook Battery, and by the few remaining artillerists in the city, with an energetic fire. The squadron advancing up the North River was led by the "Asia," and the British map by Faden—authorized only a month later, shows His Majesty's ships "Renown," Captain Banks, and "Repulse," Captain Davis. The 20-gun frigate "Pearl," under Captain Wilkinson, with the "Tryal," armed schooner, were with these ships, and all brought up and anchored in the river off Bloomingdale, about the line of 100th Street. This squadron was designed to menace any retreat of the American forces on the west side of Manhattan Island, and especially to stop the removal of stores, which was then proceeding by water. The

evident intention of the whole scheme was to trap the entire American forces within the lower part of the island.

Meantime, the five frigates in the East River, led by the "Phoenix," had taken positions in line at Kips Bay, where, with springs on their cables, they lay in deep water, but within musket-shot of the shore. So close were they, that the cry, "All's well," of the American sentries ashore, was answered by a mocking hail from one of the frigates—"We " will alter your tune before to-morrow night!" Along the shore, a line of hastily constructed entrenchments had been thrown up, manned by Connecticut troops.

Between 10 and 11 a. m. on the following morning, on a signal from the Long Island shore, where the British and Hessian forces had embarked unseen in the flat boats within the shelter of Newtown Creek, a terrific fire of grape shot was suddenly opened from the broadsides of these five ships upon the shore defences, which, consisting only of slender earthen embankments, proved totally inadequate as a protection or cover for the men. Under this withering hail of shot from the eighty guns in the broadside of the frigates, the landing of British flat boats, which numbered eighty-four in all, was easily effected, and the troops were able to form and advance without serious opposition. The effect of the awful fire that preceded them was felt in the collapse of all resistance to their advance. As Kemble describes it, resistance was impossible within half-a-mile of the shore line. Washington rode hastily to the scene upon the sound of the gunfire, but reached the vicinity only

to find the American force falling back in a hasty retreat.\*

The escape of the rear guard of artillerymen, which had been left to the last moment in New York City, to stave off the approach of the warships was effected by boats transferring them to Paulus Hook, and the withdrawal of the last of the patriotic forces from the City to the Heights of Harlem and Mount Washington, was effected, much to the chagrin of the British commanders. The exciting events of the 15th of September terminated in the landing of officers of the British fleet, near the then Battery, who hauled up the British flag in the City of New York, to be lowered again only after seven long years of strife and effort to maintain its possession.

The official British description of the Kips Bay landing is given in a despatch from Vice-Admiral Lord Howe, dated the 18th of the month :

“ I have the satisfaction of being able to inform their Lordships that a disposition having been made for landing the army on York Island, on the morning of the 15th, the Captains Parker and Wallace, whose abilities and distinguished resolution point them out for the most important services, with the Captains Fanshaw, Hammond and Hudson, officers of great merit, passed the fire of the town of New York, with their ships on the evening of the 13th, to wait off Bushwick Creek, opposite to Kepp’s Bay, where the landing was proposed to be forced in the East River.

\* The retreating troops were blamed by Washington and have been censured in every history, for their abandonment of the defence; but they scarcely deserved such harsh criticism in view of the overwhelming character of the artillery opposed to them.

“ The pilots declining, on account of the strength of the tide, to take charge of the particular covering ships that were intended to be placed towards Hell Gate for countenancing the appearance of a descent on that part of the coast, all were placed in the Kepp’s Bay on the morning of the 15th, and having, by the effect of their well-directed fire, compelled the Rebels to quit their entrenchments upon the shore, the debarkation was made without further opposition.”

Some risky and effective work was done in the removal of the American supplies by the little vessel “Fortune,” under the command of Anthony Glean. At dead of night she was run from the East River round to the North River, and was safely got up to Fort Washington, being laden with provisions and military stores. She was quickly unladen, and was despatched back again with a sergeant’s guard of twelve men, almost into the jaws of the enemy at the city. But after loading on board fifty-seven wounded and disabled men, and some more of the stores, she successfully got away, and landed her stores on the Jersey shore below the guns of Fort Constitution, whence she proceeded to Dobb’s Ferry, where the men were safely disembarked. This little vessel afterwards became a Continental transport on the Hudson, and eventually fell a victim to fire in the British attack on Esopus.

The British squadron, anchored off Bloomingdale, was not long left undisturbed. On the same afternoon’s tide four of the American fire-rafts in succession were floated down

upon them from Jeffrey's Hook, by which they "narrowly escaped destruction," the boldness of the attack being again discounted by partial ill-success, due to the strong tide. The dangerous attempt was conducted by Captain Talbot, who narrowly escaped with his life, although he was badly burned.

Lord Howe, in his despatch, said that, "in order to facilitate the operations of the army in the East River, another detachment of the ships of war was appointed by the General's desire, to proceed up the North River to give jealousy to the enemy on this side. The Renown, Captain Banks, with the Captains Davis and Wilkinson in the Repulse and Pearl, were ordered for that purpose. They passed the enemy's battery without material injury early on the 15th, to a station about six miles to the northward of the town. On the ensuing night the enemy directed four fire-vessels in succession against them, but with no other effect than of obliging the ships to move their stations, the Repulse excepted. The Renown returned on this side of the town, but the two frigates remain still in the North River, with the Tryal armed schooner, to strengthen the left flank of the army, extending to the western shore of York Island, as circumstances will admit."

That the attempt consisted of two attacks, firstly individual rafts and then by a trial of Anderson's method of chaining two fire-vessels together, after the individual rafts had failed, appears from a perusal of the log books of



the "Pearl." The log books of the frigates "Renown" and "Repulse" have not been preserved in London, but on their little consort, the "Pearl," the Captain and the Master made notes of the event, which came perilously near ending her career.

The Captain's "Remarks &c on board His Majesty's Ship Pearl," recorded that "At 3 P. M. was alarm'd by our Guard Boat, on the sudden approach of four Fire ships, which obliged us to Cut our small Br. (Bower) Cable and drop lower down. Anchor'd with the Bt Br (Best Bower) in 6 f m. (fathoms) water at 4 weigh'd and steer'd in shore & anchor'd in 5 f.m to avoid them. Two of the Fire ships were towed on shore, by the Boats, and the other two drove on shore. At 5 the Renown Cut and run down to the Fleet with the Schooner in Company at ½ past 8 weigh'd and worked up and Anchor'd with the Bt. Bower, got the end of the small Bower Cable in. Weigh'd the Bt Br. and spliced the small Do."

In the Master's Log, of the next day, he tells the story in his sailor's style:—

" at 3 was alarm'd by our Guard Boats on ye sudden approach of a Fire Ship which obliged the Tryal Schooner to Cutt and Renown to slip ye Renown anchor'd again close to us at ½ past 4 was alarm'd wt another fire ship we Cutt as did the Renown we run in Shore & anchor'd wt the Bt Br in 6 fm Ye Renown & Tryal run down to the Fleet. At 5 was alarm'd by 2 vessels chain'd together weigh'd run further in shore to avoid the fire vessels. Anchor'd in

6 fathom. The 2 first was tow'd in shore by our Boats the 2 second drove down as far as Polas Hook where they lickwise drove on shore."

Captain Banks managed to extricate the "Renown" from her danger, only by cutting and slipping her cable, leaving her consorts, the "Repulse" and the "Pearl," which escaped molestation by shifting their positions, opportunely to protect by their fire on the following day, the retreat of the British and the Hessian forces in the affair known as the battle of Harlem Heights. The unexpected success of this movement drove back the British advance line to 100th Street, and not only encouraged the American army, but led the invaders to adopt a policy of more prudence. Entrenching their position across the island, from Bloomingdale through the upper part of Central Park, they abandoned further direct attacks and contented themselves with keeping Washington on the watch on Washington Heights. Meantime, the fleet of war-ships moved up in security to the inner bay, and a number of the transports were taken into the East River and the troops landed in the city. The effort to trap the American army in the Town had failed. The next effort required wider development, and preparations to get in the rear of a more difficult position. But the next attempt again involved some advance up the North River, and another incursion through the chevaux-de-frise. The "Phoenix," with the "Roebuck" and the 20-gun frigate "Tartar," were transferred to the Bloomingdale anchorage from the scene of their recent operations at Kips Bay,

and several other vessels were sent up to try their luck in getting in rear of the Americans on the east. They made their way through the dangers of Hell Gate, only the "Niger" taking ground during the operation. The "La Brune" took station near Morrisania in order to block the passage of the Harlem River.

Congress and Convention having heard of the partial disintegration of the Chevaux de Frise, now became anxious as to the eventual success of the attempt to block the estuary, and distrusting previous reports, Captain Thomas Greenhill was delegated to make an accurate survey of that part of Hudson's river, to see if the work at Fort Washington was effective.

The result of his report was evidently to the effect that further effort was desirable, for on the 21st of September, a Congressional Committee was appointed to confer "as to purchasing vessels or taking them at an appraisement, for completing the obstructions to the navigation of Hudson's river opposite to Mount Washington."

Washington wrote to the State Convention, asking for two fire-ships which were being prepared at Poughkeepsie, and the secret committee promptly responded by ordering down the Fire vessel "Mary Anna," and also the sloop "Camden," which had been fitted up as a war vessel by the State, and they sent by the latter vessel "all such plank as could be spared from the shipyard." The sloop "Clinton" was also purchased for the purpose of being sunk at the obstruction, and two days later two new ships were

impressed "for the use of the Publick," which were found near Esopus landing, also a brig belonging to Malcom Kip, and finally a Fishkill brig, for all of which appraisers were promptly appointed.

Captain Matthew Cook, who, under the direction of Colonel Robert Magaw, acting with Colonel Tench Tilghman, Washington's aide-de-camp, was in actual charge of the renewed operations, was sent up river to cut special long lumber required for the spikes or "fraises," and on October 3rd, an urgent message was sent after him to return, "as he is much wanted here to sink the sea vessels, the General begs that he may be sent down immediately; we are at a stand for want of him, for, as he has Superintended the Matter from the Beginning he best knows the properest places to be obstructed."

Every effort was concentrated upon the strengthening and extending of the river obstructions, and Washington being then quartered on the Heights, at his headquarters in the Roger Morris house, gave personal attention to its effectiveness, corresponding daily with the Secret Committee on the subject.

"If the works," wrote John Jay on October 6th, "now carrying on by the General for obstructing the navigation of Hudson's River at Mt. Washington, prove effectual, Lord Howe must rest content with New York for this campaign." Arrangements were made to reinforce the obstructions by a floating force of four row-galleys, provided each with one heavy gun, and others of lighter calibre on

swiveling mounts. These were stationed at Fort Washington Point, where the two vessels recently secured were being prepared for sinking at a point beyond those already laying in the river bottom. The proverbial ingenuity of America was developing further schemes for the undoing of the King's floating arsenals. David Bushnell was still improving his submarine craft since its failure to destroy the "Eagle," and it was loaded on a sloop ready for transport to its next scene of action.

Nearer the tide-water line than the forts on the Manhattan and Jersey Heights, new defensive works were under construction. A rifle Redoubt was being constructed on Jeffrey's Hook, under the direction of Antoine Felix Imbert, a young French engineer officer, who had volunteered with other Frenchmen into the American service. He had been educated in military construction, and his work shows the effect of his training. This particular work was constructed by men of Scottish blood of New York, composing the regiment known as the Caledonian Rangers, and it is at this day one of the best preserved evidences of the work of the men of 1776 which remains in existence upon the Island of Manhattan. It is fortunately comprised, as is the Hook itself, within the public park, and has thus escaped the destruction which the rest of the interesting remains of the struggle for liberty left on Washington Heights and elsewhere on Manhattan have met or are rapidly approaching.

Many years after the war was over Captain Robert Smith, one of the Regimental Officers, passed this scene of

his own labors, and referred to it in a letter to his wife as follows: "I also had a view of a battery near Fort Washington which I erected under the Direction of a French engineer on the margin of the river in 1776, it was so well constructed as to leave its remains. It brought to my recollection many scenes of that day."

The earthwork may be readily reached by descending the little winding roadway, locally known as Sunset Lane, leading through Fort Washington Park, and after passing over the bridge which spans the deep rock cutting of the railroad, a little foot-path leads sharply south up to the embankment. It is a three-sided rectangular work,



The Rifle Redoubt and Monument, Fort Washington Park.  
Engagement of October 9, 1776.

about 157 yards along its west front and about 30 yards on the north and south ends, cleverly placed to take advantage of the rocky eminence on which it stands, and to command a view up, down and across the noble stream. There is no spot wherein one can so appropriately ponder upon the desperate efforts made by the patriot forces in the face not only of the overwhelming marine and land forces of the enemy, but of the colossal task which they had undertaken against the forces of nature.

It is marked by a natural boulder Monument, erected in 1910, by the Fort Washington Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Once again the treachery of deserters or spies conveyed to the naval authorities the fact that the completion of the obstruction was imminent, and on Wednesday, the 9th of October, the inactivity of the British fleet was broken. On the early tide, at 8 a. m., the hardy commander of the "Phoenix," who had once before taken the chances of the passage, hove anchor, and with the "Roebuck" and the "Tartar," and three tenders, the redoubtable frigate again came standing up the river before a southerly breeze.

The unexpectedness of what appeared to be an attack in force upon the Point, threw the defenders into unnecessary confusion, in a frantic effort to save the craft laying off the Hook from the fire of the approaching squadron. Instead of standing to their positions, which were at any rate partly protected by the batteries of Fort Washington, the two galleys were got under way in undue haste, an

attempt was made to tow off the two hulks which were then loading, and other boats took in tow a schooner which lay at the Hook, unloading rum and sugar. Finally the sloop, bearing the important submarine, was cut loose and started to run. But the purpose of the squadron was only to force another passage through the barrier, while still incomplete, and so, standing straight ahead, they passed through the gap without damage from the picks and hulks, though suffering severely in their masts and rigging, from the fire of all the batteries concentrated upon them. With their previous experience to guide their commanders, the crews were carefully kept below decks, but the cool courage of one of the commanding officers is recorded by General Greene, who saw him calmly walking the deck while the shot struck all about him. Notwithstanding, their loss was considerable. The Lieutenant of the "Roebuck," two 'midshipmen and six men were killed, and eighteen were wounded on that vessel alone. Among them was a 'midshipman named Skinner, who lost his arm, and who was described as "a fine Boy and behaved well." Their upper works suffered severely. Sailing fast, however, they passed the zone of fire, the last ship signalling the others as she passed the obstruction that all was well, and then they found ahead of them the little craft which had so unnecessarily scurried away at their approach, and which now paid dearly for their mistake. The heavy laden and sluggish schooner was overhauled and captured, and the two hulks drifted ashore at Yonkers, and a well-directed shot sent the sloop with Bushnell's submarine craft



and torpedo to the bottom of the river, where it may probably lie buried to this day, thus terminating the attempt at under-water defense on which so much effort had been expended and on which so much depended.

Two of the galleys made a gallant race of it, but by 11 a. m. came within range of the bow-chaser guns of the leading frigate, and at noon were driven ashore by a fire of grape shot and were captured just above Dobb's Ferry, their crews, however, escaping. The squadron came to anchor abreast the village, and once more the obstruction had failed of its purpose.

This bold incursion naturally caused the greatest concern to the American commanders, for fears were expressed that they might have carried troops to be landed up the River, and prevent the passage of the River by American vessels. The French engineer Imbert was posted off, with instructions to use all efforts in safeguarding the river at the Highlands by fortifications, and the militia were called out along the shores, and a company of Rangers hastily despatched to Fishkill, to suppress any active efforts on the part of the Tory sympathizers to aid the vessels in their operations.

The ships' log books tell the story of the passage and their own injuries better than has been done by those who derived their information from observation from the shores.

The log of the Phœnix runs:—

“Wed'y Oct 9

“A. M. at 1½ past 7 weighed and came to sail / as did

his M. ship Roebuck Tartar & Tryal schooner and two Tenders /  $\frac{3}{4}$  past 7 the Rebels began a very hot canonading at us from both sides of the river / about  $\frac{1}{4}$  past 9 we past as did the rest of the ships the sunken vessels &c which was sunk to stop our passage. /  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 9 having got out of there reach of the guns the ceas'd firing at us but continued at the ships astearn till they had got out of there reach. / we lost in passing by the above Batterys Mr. Charles Boen, Midshipman and three men, and 12 were wound'd our Mizen and Mizentopmast entirely disabl'd our Main stay and several of our lower and topmast shrouds shot away / with much of the running riging / the sails greatly torn with the shot / one side Booms entirely destroy'd being the spare topmast 2 fishes and several spars / the Boats much shattered / we received 24 shot in our Hull."

The Master's "Remarks &c on Board His Majesty's Ship Tartar," confirm the effects of the American fire:

"Mod. and cloudy wr. / at 7 a. m. weigh'd and came to sail in Co. with his Majesty's ships Phoenix Roebuck Tryal Schooner and two Tenders at 8 do. Five batterys on the York and two on the Jersey shore began to Fire on us / likewise hove a number of shots / with a continual fireing till  $\frac{1}{2}$  past 9 / after Hulling us several times wounded our masts and cutting a great deal of the Riging and sails / a Shott went thro the Mizen Mast and afterwards killed a Midshipman. the splinters of the Masts wounded the Capt. lieu.t of Marines & Pilot / after passing the Batterys the enemy began to Fire small Arms from the Woods which

they continued several Miles up the River / also gave chase to the enemy's Galleys / at 11 drove on shore several of their merchm'n and the Independence Galley / at Noon drove on shore the Crane Galley and continued chase."

The marksmanship of General Knox's artillerists appears to have been as good in its way as that of the American soldiers and sailors of the present time.

On October 11th, the American Commander-in-Chief's despatch sloop was sent on a hazardous cruise up the river to reconnoitre the movements of the British squadron, and on her return she fell a victim to the gunnery of the enthusiastic artillerymen on the Mount, who, mistaking her on her approach, fired a 12-pounder at her, with so unerring an aim as to kill three of her crew and wound her captain.

Now work was redoubled on the River defence, under the urgent orders of Washington. Men were sent off to secure the two derelicts at Yonkers, and the two new ships and the brig, which lay in Spuyten Duyvil Creek, were hastily ballasted by men of Heath's division at the King's Bridge. They were not, however, destined to be sunk in this manner. The hopelessness of the task began to be apparent. They were turned over on the 12th October, to Captain Cook, who receipted for them and their rigging, &c., as they lay in the creek, but their sinking was postponed indefinitely. It began to be apparent that the whole position of Fort Washington was likely to become untenable.

The expedition of the squadron was evidently but the

first step in a very wide and deeply planned manœuvre on the part of the British commander to entrap the entire American forces; a plan which was promptly recognized by Washington. It was a well-conceived general movement, having the same set object as the attempt which culminated on September 15th, to entrap the American army without a set battle. Sir William Howe's plan was to land on one side or the other of Westchester County, and keep the American army occupied in guessing which was to be the side decided on, while occupying their attention with attacks on the southern lines of the American defences by the brigades on the Harlem side, aided by vessels of the fleet on the North and East rivers.

The information as to local conditions up River gained by Captain Parker of the "Phoenix," during the stay of the squadron in the Hudson the previous summer, doubtless led to the plan to push vessels up to corresponding points on both coasts of the county, and to throw troops across country between them, and then on set dates to start attacks on the southern lines, in order to keep the Americans occupied while the net was drawn around them. The plan was deliberately developed by the advance of these and other vessels.

On October 3rd, Colonel Chester wrote to James Webb, dating his letter from the Manor of Fordham, "Whilst you was here there was a frigate opposite the Wido Morris' House." "Since that there has another come through and anchored just above Hell Gate opposite Harlem Church

“almost. Another has moved up East of Morrisania a mile “or two, near Frog’s (Throgg’s) point.” This was the “Carrysfort” frigate, which was really engaged in taking soundings so as to decide upon the best point for landing in Westchester.

These vessels being at their eastern stations, the next move was the forcing of the squadron through the Hudson river barrier as far as Dobb’s Ferry, which was done three days later, thus affording time for receipt of news of their success, ere the British troops were embarked for Throg’s neck.

An ample time was set for the operation of spreading troops across Westchester County, the difficulties of which were anticipated, and also for bringing up artillery, so that the grand advance on the enclosed American forces should be a complete success.

That the trap so elaborately set, only closed finally upon the garrison left at Fort Washington to hold the Mount, was a result due to the pre-vision and promptitude of Washington.

An autumnal fog shrouded the waters of the East River, when, on October 12th, a force of four thousand men was loaded into the indispensable flat boats, and started up the East River towards Westchester. Under the cover of the friendly mist, these boats passed, unobserved, through the troubled waters of Hell Gate, and passing the quiet shores of the Bronx, landed their passengers in safety on Throg’s Neck. The position selected was disadvantageous, for

egress was promptly barred along the narrow causeway by American troops hastily assembled.

The landing disclosed the purpose of the prior preparations, and was met by advancing forces to guard the eastern landing places and by preparations to withdraw the American army from Washington Heights.

It became clear that the main attack would be made from the East, and that the incursion on the Hudson side was perhaps only a feint and at best but a subsidiary feature. The bold front put up by the Americans on the causeway at Throg's Neck deprived the British commander of the advantage of surprise, and five days were lost ere the mistake was corrected by the re-shipment of the four thousand men and their debarkation at Pell's Point. Marching parallel to each other the British and American forces made their way through the county, the latter reaching White Plains once again ahead of their foes, and intrenching themselves in a position with their backs to the inaccessible heights of Northcastle.

Meantime, the force left to guard the Heights of Upper Manhattan, under the charge of Colonel Robert Magaw, comprising about three thousand men, confronted the brigades still holding the British lines from Bloomingdale to the East River, and faced a formidable risk of attack in force, which soon followed.

Early on the morning of Sunday, the 27th of October, probably a date set for the purpose of specially engaging the forces of the patriots at the south, while the grand at-

tack should be made on the north, an assault in force commenced by the appearance of two frigates in the Hudson, probably the "Renown" and the "Repulse," which deliberately anchored as high up as "Fort No. One," or abreast of the first line of defences drawn across Washington Heights at the line of 147th Street, while Earl Percy's brigade made its appearance on the plain of Harlem, and, driving in the American outposts, advanced on the rocky heights, preceded by a heavy fire from the field artillery and mortars. Whether intended as a feint in force, or as a positive attempt to dislodge the Americans, the engagement was certainly more than a reconnoissance, as it was "continued almost all day without intermission." Colonel Robert Magaw, who had been, as commandant of the post, specially charged by Washington to defend the place to the last extremity, boldly and well fulfilled the trust reposed in him, so "happily disposing of his forces," as to inflict serious losses on the enemy's force without any of moment to his own.

General Greene came over from Fort Lee, but left the control to the energetic post commander, who promptly set his men to drag down an 18-pounder gun from the fort, and brought it into position on the Heights near 147th Street, to play with effect on the war-vessels, which were at the same time harassed by the fire of two guns of equal calibre on the Jersey heights above the Burdetts ferry landing, now Fort Lee. Making a special target of one of the men-of-war, probably the "Repulse," upwards of sixty

rounds were fired at her, using double shotted charges, by which she was hulled twenty-six times. Both vessels found themselves in distress. Instead of effecting a diversion, as they had been expected to do, on the flank of the defence, they were themselves caught between two lines of fire, and had the tide run flood a half hour longer, in all probability one would have been sunk. It was certainly no fault of the American force that she escaped. Slipping her cable and towed by two of her boats, they endeavored to work her out of the zone of fire, but could make little headway, and the vessel was on the point of drifting ashore below the guns of the Americans, when the tide turned and two more barges, manned by men of her consort, made fast to her and got sufficient way on her to move her beyond the danger line. The American artillerymen particularly distinguished themselves, not only in this part of the affair, but in replying to the artillery attack of the land force, earning from Greene the encomium, "Our artillery behaved incomparably 'well.'" The attack was defeated, and though a renewal was expected in the morning, none was made.

This interesting engagement has received little notice from historians, yet was, in point of fact, an excellent exhibition of American determination, and a military affair of considerably larger extent than the "Battle of Harlem Heights," on September 16th, preceding, involving also a not inconspicuous marine engagement.

The story of the Master of the "Pearl" is the only one that remains in the British marine records:—



“At 6 weigh’d and worked up the River in Company wt the Repulse / At 1/2 past 7 anchor’d w’th Bt Br off the Rebels Breastwork / they firing at us from both sides which we ret’d / they Cutt some of our Rigging & Sails &c. / at 11 weigh’d & run down into our old berth / heard a number of Great Guns & Small Arms fired from our Army.”

On the 31st of October, some vessels again moved up the River, but only to a point parallel with the British lines at Bloomingdale, coincidentally with the appearance of the Hessian advance line on the Fordham hills above the King’s Bridge. The final chapter in the stubborn defence of New York was now to open, and with a new and fatal act of treachery to the patriotic cause.

Under the cover of night, on November 3rd, the young Adjutant of the garrison of Fort Washington made his way down from the rocky heights, and entered Harlem, where he delivered to Earl Percy a plan of the fastness and of its entire defences, and disclosed the slender force which guarded its long line of rugged bluffs.

On the night of the 5th of November, the last move of the arrangements for the Westchester campaign took place, when the 20-gun frigate “Pearl,” Captain Wilkinson commander, with two victualling vessels with supplies for the King’s troops then at Dobbs’ Ferry, forced their way in the darkness through the ineffective obstructions at Jeffrey’s Hook, and though apparently “prodigiously shattered “from the fire of our cannon,” joined their consorts beyond the Tappan Zee, with the reported loss of “A Few Men

'killed and wounded.'” The actual circumstances are better told by the Master of the “Pearl.”

“Wed. Nov 6

“At 3 weigh'd & came to Sail with the Joseph & British Queen in Comp'y / at 1/2 past the Rebels op'd their Battrys on us from both sides / at 5 running throw the Shivadefruse they fir'd cannister grape & musketry at us / we returned Round grape & musketry / at 1/2 past sent all our Boats to assist the Joseph / found Wm Brown Seaman killed & seven wounded / we received a number of shot in the Hull, several between wind & water / found the ship to make at the rate of 5 ms pr hour / had the Majer part of our Running Riggins & great part of our Lower Cutt to pieces / the sails much torn the Mizzen & Mizzentopmast shatt'd / the Boats likewise damag'd / at 6 anch'd 1/2 mile above Kingsbridge.”

On the other hand, the ever alert Tupper was at the same time preparing to run the gauntlet of the now augmented squadron, with a cargo of flour for the garrison of Fort Washington, loaded on “pettiaugers.” He was discovered, and a strong force put out from the frigates in “several barges, two tenders and a row-galley,” and attacked them. “Our people run the pettiaugers ashore and landed and defended them. The enemy attempted to land several times, but were repulsed. The fire lasted about an hour and a half, and the enemy moved off. We lost one man mortally wounded.”

Foiled in his main object, Howe broke camp on Novem-

ber 5, and completed the junction with the squadron, which lay during the White Plains engagement a little north of Tarrytown. His great net now closed only on the garrison of Fort Washington, and in default of the larger game, he retired towards Harlem, to decide or develop his next operation.

Seizing the evacuated heights which dominated the Harlem from Riverdale to Morrisania, he disposed his own and the Hessian forces in a long semi-circle, extending through Harlem to Bloomingdale, the northerly and southerly extremities of his position resting on the Hudson, and there terminating, each with the support of a naval force in the river. But even the slender stream which now divided his main army from Fort Washington, presented an obstacle which required the assistance of the marine to overcome. It was necessary to have the flat boats for the purpose of ferrying troops over the Harlem, and they were, therefore, brought back from the Sound by sailors of the fleet. The ships of war and the transports which had conveyed the Second Hessian Division to Westchester proceeded to make their way back from the Sound to the East River, and the boats were brought round to Bloomingdale. Meanwhile, Knyphausen's division of Hessian troops had pushed their advance guard across the ruins of the King's Bridge on to Marble Hill, and were building advanced earthworks on the rocky summit of Isham Park in the Dyckman vale.

The new trap was set, only awaiting the flat boats in

the Harlem, and Fort Washington and its barrier to the river was practically doomed.

“In the late passage of the three vessels,”—the “Pearl” and her convoy—“up the North River,” wrote Washington, sadly, from White Plains, “is so plain a proof of the inefficacy of all the obstructions we have thrown into it, that I cannot but think it will fully justify a change in the dispositions which have been made.”



Jeffrey's Hook, or Ft. Washington Point, with Remains of the Lunette or One-Gun Redoubt, of 1776.

The great attempt had failed, not from lack of energy or effort, but from its inherent difficulties, and the great

natural obstacle of the mighty flood, which they had so boldly sought to bridle. The barrier being worthless, it was no longer worth while to risk much to defend it. The decision to withdraw the garrison was postponed by the preponderance of the opinion of subordinate officers based on the enthusiasm of the garrison and the assumption that no means of crossing the Harlem was in Howe's hands. But the one means of rescuing the garrison in case of need was lacking. No boats were provided to enable them to retreat from the island on which they were cooped up.

The "Pearl" and her convoy, their cargoes not having been required at Dobb's Ferry, fell down the river to a point near Spuyten Duyvil, where the stores would be available for the Hessian division on the north banks of the creek, and where the frigate could prevent the succor of the garrison by other vessels or boats.

The troops now required only the means of ferriage to be ready for the attack on Fort Washington, which should, in Howe's plan, clear the Island of Rebels, and thus redress his reputation, for the failure of his encircling manœuvres at Brooklyn and Westchester. The problem of getting their open boats past forts, from which sailing war vessels had severely suffered, was a difficult one. It was solved by the hardihood of Captain Wilkinson of the "Pearl," who, seconded by Captain Molly of the Royal Navy, undertook to drift the flat boats past the sentinels on the heights, and to take their chances of the fire of the batteries at the Hook, and at Fort Lee, and work them round the Spuyten

Duyvil Creek under the frail protection of the covering shadows of a dark November night.

Seamen from other ships in the East River also brought at night through the Harlem river, some small boats which were utilized to great effect in the eventful assault, bearing the Highland or 42nd foot regiment to that unexpected attack on the weakest portion of the defence, which became practically the turning point of the assault and capture of Mount Washington.

The story of the combined British and Hessian assault of November 16th, resulting in the surrender of the fort, cannot here be given. It is a vivid story of a hopeless defence against overwhelming force guided by treacherous information. The marine was represented by the frigate "Pearl," which took a prominent part in the events of the day, but it is rather remarkable that the other warships up the river were not brought into action. The "Pearl," to cover the advance of the Hessian division from Kingsbridge tacked to-and-fro off Tubby Hook, now known as Inwood. Her attentions were marked, and the missiles she threw have been found as far east as Fort George, where she probably somewhat helped the attacking force under Lord Cornwallis and Brigadier-General Matthews by planting shell and bar-shot on the rear of the American defending force of Pennsylvanian volunteers. On the Hudson River side, where the repeated charges of the Hessians were thrice repulsed by the Maryland and Virginia riflemen, she was at short range, and no doubt contributed not a little to the final success of

Kohler's grenadiers, who, led by Colonel Rahl, worked their way around to the west side of what is now Fort Tryon, and eventually got in between the fort and the river, cutting off the only line of retreat of the garrison, and compelled the abandonment of their defences.

But the vessel did not come off scot free as may be seen from the Master's and Captain's records:

"16th A. M.," the Master wrote, "at one mann'd the flat Boats/at 7 weigh'd & ran down under Fort Washington/at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past anchor'd wt the Sd Br in 7 fm/muddy Bottom/Veer'd to  $\frac{1}{2}$  a Cable/hearing our Army in Action began Scouring the woods/at 11 the army pass'd us/at  $\frac{1}{2}$  past weigh'd & run up off Kingsbridge Creek wt the Bt Br in 7 fathom & Veer'd to  $\frac{1}{3}$  of a Cable/at Noon heard a smart fire of Great Guns & Musketry/the people repairing the Rigging &c."

The Captain's log adds that the vessel "received many "shot in our Hull, and the Rigging much damaged."

From the number of bar-shot found through the Heights, which missiles, designed for the destruction of rigging and sails, nevertheless appear to have been used in this or other attacks, it seems probable that this frigate may have used up all her ordinary shot and shell. The sizes, however, vary so much that they indicate use on other occasions. A specimen found at 181st Street and Fort Washington Avenue, within the lines of the fort, is  $5\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter. One of 16 lbs. weight was found on Fort George hill, which still had some of the spikes and nails with which they were filled, adhering, others are as large as a 32-pound shot over two

feet in length and weigh 27 lbs. An unusual specimen is a small bore bar-shot, the heads forged by hand, found on the Harlem side, which may have been made by the Americans as an attempt to reply in kind to these terrible missiles of the fleet. Solid shot and shrapnel shell of all sizes up to fifty pounds in weight have been found all along the line of the rugged Heights, and nearly every old family has had some specimens as a treasured reminder of the last days of the defence of the City of New York.

The defence was crumpled up from all sides, the men crowded back to the Fort and the Hessian general sent in a demand for surrender. When too late, the Commander received a message from Washington that, if he could hold out till nightfall, an attempt would be made to bring boats to the rescue and take off the men under cover of darkness. The situation was too desperate for delay, and the means of retreat too dubious. The messenger as he bounded down the rocks on his return was stabbed at by the Hessians cutting off the garrison's access to the river. With tears in his eyes Washington was forced to witness the lowering of the flag that represented the cause of freedom, and the final act in the drama of the defence of the City.

The result was doubtless, inevitable, and that a defense could have been continued for upwards of three months, was the remarkable and unforeseen fact.

With the overwhelming marine force opposed to them, and the almost entire absence of any means of resistance, it was no small testimonial to the respect which the Ameri-



cans imposed by their efforts at resistance, that the results of the three months' campaign were relatively so insignificant.

The military events on land have, by a not unnatural process, taken the predominating position, and have therefore attracted the greatest attention in our histories and studies of the events of the year 1776.

But it would seem proper that, in the light of more modern appreciation of the effects of predominance on the ocean, due appreciation should be given to the share which marine events and circumstances had upon the outcome of the campaign, and such a study seems to lead to the conclusion that the eventual result was due rather to naval than to military operations.

Out of the incidents of that eventful year, the bold and unwavering determination of the patriots, their forces, and their leaders, in the defence of the waters of New York, hampered by the lack of any proportionate means or material, in the face of the most colossal marine force which the sea-power of Britain had ever brought together, stands as one of the most striking demonstrations of American spirit and devotion which History affords.













