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## Revolution in Three Acts

excerpted from:

### Official Chronicle and Tribute Book of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations

This Volume Contains  
A CHRONICLE  
of  
Three Hundred Years of Outstanding Events,  
Its Industrial and Commercial Development, and  
A LASTING TRIBUTE  
to the progressive individuals.

Companies and Corporations listed herein who are carrying on and preserving  
the glorious traditions of the city and state.

Compiled by LUCIA HAMMOND WHEELER

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OFFICIAL CHRONICLE COMMITTEE

WILLIAM A. CAHIR, Chairman

THE PROVIDENCE TERCENTENARY COMMITTEE

Chapter Six

## Revolution in Three Acts

RHODE ISLAND'S greatest contribution to the war of the Revolution was General Nathanael Greene. She made others, of course, but he was her major donation. In producing this fighting Quaker who was to George Washington what Stonewall Jackson was to Robert E. Lee, the peppery little colony did the country a good turn which it should never be permitted to forget. Washington had a number of generals, first and last, and very few of them were able men; among the fudgy incompetents who walked around in a fog for seven long years, Nathanael stands forth as in all respects a competent fighting man.

Alexander Hamilton paid Greene a striking tribute when he delivered a funeral oration at Greene's death in 1789.

"So long as the enterprises of Trenton and Princeton shall be regarded as the dawning of that bright day which afterward broke forth with such independent lustre, so long ought the name of Greene to be revered by a grateful country."

In other words Greene planned the campaign. Washington got the credit. And Hamilton was Washington's war secretary.

In the war of the Revolution Rhode Island lay outside the main theatre of operations. Our war here was, in a sense, a minor league affair. That is why we have chosen to start this chapter with a salute to General Nathanael Greene, for the General was most emphatically a big leaguer. His place was where the big battles were fought and the big operations planned, usually far from his native state.

Therefore, the high-chinned gentleman in buff-and-blue whose picture you may see in the Governor's reception room at the State House (he and the immortal George face each other across the marble table just as they must have done at many a council of war) gets his tribute here.

And now we have a war on our hands. . . .

There is no point in going at length into the causes of that most famous of all family quarrels, the dispute between England and her American colonies. Britain wanted to be the middleman between the colonies and the rest of the world and chisel a middleman's profit. To that end she enacted and tried to enforce various Navigation Acts which bore heavily on such hustling seaports as Newport and Providence; that is, they would have if anybody had paid any attention to them. This country has a way of dealing with impossible laws. But these regulations and the various revenue laws were nagging measures and they became worse when George III ascended the throne. George was determined to be an old-fashioned king. His father and grandfather had been compelled to walk softly for fear the English people would kick them out and bring the Stuarts back; but the Stuarts were no longer a menace now and George figured the time was ripe for a display of authority. He and his ministers were still a little chary about trying any fun and games on the home folks, so they decided to see what could be done with the colonies.

They couldn't have made a worse decision, particularly in the case of Rhode Island.

In the history of all the seaboard colonies there is a pattern of the beginnings of Revolution. There is a stage of remonstrance, of attempts to talk things over with the mother country in a spirit of sweet reasonableness. The mother country is supercilious, not to say hard-boiled. Slap a tax on the rascals and damme, let 'em pay it. We've a right to do it, by Gad! More revenue laws, notably the Stamp Act of 1765, follow. English naval officers appear snooping about Newport—pompous, bullnecked little men endowed with the mental powers of so many Sir Joseph Porters, K.C.B., and the tact of precinct captains. The mood of sweet reasonableness vanishes, there are clashes, what we now call "overt acts." Let us mention one or two . . .

July, 1764. The British schooner *St. John* attacked by a Newport mob.

June, 1765. Another Newport mob puts the boats of the *Maidstone* to the torch.

July, 1769. The British armed sloop *Liberty* (of all names!), Captain William Reid, burned and scuttled in Newport Harbor.

Ill people to meddle with, the Newporters who made up these mobs; sailors, most of them, tough, knotty, tarry-breeds who knew the Guinea Coast and the Middle Passage, privateersmen of the French Wars, bucko mates of far-trading merchantmen. Not the sort of people to be awed by English customs officers.

The men of Providence were to show themselves equally capable of prompt and decisive action . . .

On the morning of June 9 (**actually the 10th-ed**), 1772, a young man by the name of Mr. Justin Jacobs appeared on the "Great Bridge" in Providence wearing a gold-laced hat which was not his own. Young Mr. Jacobs made no bones about telling his friends and acquaintances where he got the beaver which was slanted so rakishly over his right eye: the hat came, he informed them proudly, from the cabin of His Majesty's armed schooner *Gaspee*, at that moment still smoldering on Namquit Point, and its owner was Lieutenant William Dudingston, the *Gaspee's* commander, then *hors-de-combat* in a Pawtuxet house with a bullet in his groin.

Young Mr. Jacobs had been among those present at the burning of the *Gaspee* and he was quite inclined to talk about it. Finally somebody told him sharply to button up his month and go home, which he finally did. After lie had gone a pregnant silence descended on the 'Great Bridge.' Some of the citizens who were taking their morning stroll there winked at each other. There was a good deal of chuckling in the taverns all that day . . .

There was an investigation of the affair, of course. Governor Wanton offered a reward of 100 pounds "to any person or persons who shall discover the persons guilty." Nobody came forward, not even when a royal proclamation boosted the reward to 500 pounds. A Mr. Joseph Aplin, a Providence lawyer, was in Market Square the morning the proclamation was tacked up on the pillar of the hay scales. He marched through the crowd, perused the royal "Whereas," sniffed at it and flicked it to the ground with his cane. The Lion and the Unicorn lay trampled in the mud.

The broadside bards got busy and turned out the usual doggerel satires. Chortled one of them:

*"Now this is what the cry's about.  
King George has offered, very stout,  
Five hundred pounds to find out one  
Who wounded William Dudingston....*

*But let him try with all his skill,  
I sadly fear he never will  
Find any of those hearts of gold  
Though he should offer fifty-fold"*

And he never did. In later years the four surviving Hearts of Gold were paraded every Fourth of July in a coach, carrying a banner inscribed with their names, but while the King's Commission was sitting in Boston (**actually Newport-ed**) the people of Providence stayed as mum as a quahaug in a huff.

Today, of course, we know all about what happened. Lieut. Dudingston seems to have been about as popular as an efficient prohibition agent was a few years ago. He was an honest, conscientious, pig-headed navy man and he came into Rhode Island waters in March, 1772 with the *Gaspee*, eight guns, and another small ship, the *Beaver*. His orders were to break up smuggling in Narragansett Bay and he tried to carry them out to the letter. He stopped market boats and fired on oyster fishermen; what was worse, when he made arrests he haled his prisoners off to Boston for trial. There was quite a lot of indignation at the *Gaspee's* carryings-on and Governor Wanton and Admiral Montagu, commanding the British fleet at Boston, got quite stiff with each other. The matter of Lieut. Dudingston's authority in Narragansett Bay was about to come up before the secretary of state in England, the Earl of Hillsborough, when the people of Providence suddenly took things into their own hands.

On June 8 (**actually the 9th-ed**) the *Gaspee* gave chase to the *Hannah*, Captain Benjamin Lindsey, the *Hannah* being bound up the bay to Providence. Capt. Lindsey lured the *Gaspee* to follow him into shoal water and she stuck fast on Namquit Point (now Gaspee Point) some seven miles below the city. Leaving Lieut. Dudingston shaking his fist and swearing himself purple, Lindsey continued up the bay to Providence and told Mr. John Brown ("one of our first and most respectable merchants," says Col. Ephraim Bowen's narrative) of the *Gaspee's* plight.

That night a drum went rapping and ruffling about the streets of Providence, summoning everybody who wanted a little fun to repair to the tavern of Mr. James Sabin on South Main street. About nine o'clock the tavern was full of men, some of them casting bullets in the kitchen. Opposite the tavern, at Fenner's wharf, lay eight big longboats, with their oars and oarlocks muffled. Shortly after 10 o'clock they crept down the harbor, crowded with men. Eight boats, moving in line to the swash of muffled oars.

They reached the *Gaspee*, still stuck on Namquit Point. A sentry hailed them twice. Nobody answered. Then Lieut. Dudingston appeared on the gunwale in his shirt and boomed "Who comes there?" He was a perfect mark against the starlit sky and Joseph Bucklin promptly popped him five inches below the navel, thereby making it unnecessary for Lieut. Dudingston to reply to Capt. Abraham Whipple's demand to surrender. He toppled off the rail and the longboat crews laid to their oars. They boarded the *Gaspee* in a rush and chased the crew below, whither Lieut. Dudingston had already retreated with a slug of lead in his groin. John Mawney, a student surgeon, dressed his wound, assisted by Sureshot Bucklin. Dudingston showed good manners. "Pray, sir, don't tear your clothes," he said to Mawney when the latter started to rip his own shirt into bandages, "there is linen in that trunk." Shortly after, he and his crew were put in their boats and sent ashore; following which the *Gaspee's* captors set fire to her and rowed back to Providence.

The *Gaspee* incident is said to have been the first actual blood-spilling of the Revolution. However that may be, it did much to put the patriotic party on its mettle. Rhode Island had taken the lead in armed opposition to the arbitrary exercise of authority; she was to take it two years later in another move, quite as daring in its implications, when the town of Providence, at a meeting on May 17, 1774, urged its deputies to use their influence at the next General Assembly to promote a general congress of all the colonies. War was coming and Rhode Island wanted to be ready for it. In June, 1774, the Providence Light Infantry was established and a whole swarm of military companies burst into being, the North Providence Rangers, the Providence Fusileers, the Scituate Hunters, and many others. Of all these I think I like best the Scituate Hunters; they sound wild and free and Daniel Boone-ish.

On March 1, 1773, Providence declared itself on the subject of Tea by burning 300 pounds in Market Square - "with great cheerfulness," according to the Gazette of March 4. They also burned a copy of Lord North's speech. While the Bohea was going up in smoke a member of the Sons of Liberty went around painting out the word "Tea" on shop signs. One's imagination pictures him as a tall, gaunt man, very grave, the sort to whom such a piddling task would naturally appeal. He wears a leather coat and a print handkerchief is knotted around his neck. He carries a brush and a pot of lampblack and there is a great big smudge on his nose. . . .

Comes, on April 19, the news of Lexington and Concord. Providence is immediately on fire and the Light Infantry and the Fusileers and the Rangers and all the rest start drilling at a great rate. An "army of observation" is formed. Poor Governor Wanton tries to preach calmness and is ousted from office in favor of Nicholas Cooke. Tories and patriots fizz at each other like angry cats. Captain Wallace of *H.M.S. Rose* announces that if Newport takes part with Providence and New England he'll lay the town in ashes. Nevertheless, two companies of Newport men shoulder muskets and go slogging off to Boston to join the army encamped on Jamaica Plains. For there is an army now, a homespun, leather-coated, straight-shooting army, which drills raggedly but snipes with precision and is gleefully beleaguering a good-sized British army. Thither, presently, goes the whole Rhode Island "army of observation," while preparations for defense go forward at home.

A sentry post is established on Tower Hill in South Kingstown. The harbor of Providence is fortified and fascines and earthworks rise on all its little hills. All along the seaboard spades and pickaxes are plunking into the sod and tossing up raw brown dirt into entrenchments, over whose parapets little bulldog cannon poke their black snouts. There is a boom and chain across the river at Field's Point; a fort on a high hill commands the narrows with plunging fire. A beacon rises on Prospect Hill - a mast eighty feet high with an iron basket at the top hanging from a crane. When fired on the night of August 17, for a test, it is visible as far away as New London and Norwich. Everywhere the newly-raised companies are drilling; the fifes shrill "Yankee Doodle" in the streets.

In October the war comes nearer. Captain Wallace's fleet menaces Newport and the streets are full of lumbering wains carting household goods out of town. So many patriots leave Newport that the Tories virtually capture control of the city government. Wallace leaves the town alone - why be in a hurry? - And sails up the bay to bombard Bristol. Providence is thrown into a furor of military zeal and expects an attack any day, but the British content themselves with knocking a few Bristol buildings about rebel ears.

In January, 1776, there is another scare in Newport. Down to the Island of Rhode Island march 1500 militia. They throw up a ring of fortifications around the town. The colony, by now, is feeling the financial drain of maintaining two armies, one in the field and the other at home, and in New York, General Charles Lee gets a letter from Governor Cooke saying how about sending some troops to Rhode Island? In March the assembly passes an act to encourage privateering and soldiering begins to lose its charms for adventurous young men. There's no drilling aboard ship - and think of the prize money! Letters of marque are issued and a swarm of waspish craft goes buzzing out of Narragansett Bay to sting and bite at British commerce.

On May 4, 1776, the Assembly passes an act severing all ties with Great Britain. The Lion and the Unicorn leave the masthead of the Providence Gazette, never to return. We make a great deal of Rhode Island's own special Independence Day now but the fact of the matter is that the act merely recognized an existing situation. Much more significant was the approval which the July session of the Assembly gave to the Declaration of Independence, as adopted by Congress in Philadelphia on July 4. The Rhode Island legislative body meant what it said when it engaged to "support the said General Congress with our lives and fortunes." In September it sent the whole Rhode Island brigade to the help of Washington, who was then busy getting himself into a box near New

York, and thereby almost stripped the State of soldiers. Another regiment was raised to stand off any possible British attack. First and last, about every able-bodied man in the colony must have served in one or another of Rhode Island's Revolutionary 'armies.'

\* \* \*

And now the first act of the Revolutionary drama in Rhode Island draws to its close. In December the expected blow fell upon Newport.

The watchman on Tower Hill in South Kingstown was Job Watson. One cold, blowy day in December he muffled himself in his greatcoat, tied his hat down over his ears and climbed his observation tower to see what he could see. What Job saw caused him to utter what is usually described as a round oath - in other words a string of cusswords - and exclaim "There they be!"

Up the Sound came sweeping the British fleet - seven ships of the line and four frigates, all ivory-towered beauty above and gun-snouted grimness below, playing sheepdog to seventy transports carrying 6000 men.

Down from your perch, Job, and leg it for the village of Tower Hill! Let dispatch riders go hell-for-leather up the coast, spread the news that the British fleet has been sighted, warn Newport and Providence, call out the militia with their queen's arms and fowling pieces, let the Kentish Guards and the Providence Light Infantry and the Scituate Hunters take the field with squealing fifes and banging drums. It won't do the slightest good. The British are coming and coming to stay. For three long years.

\* \* \*

The British had sound, soldierlike reasons for occupying Newport. By putting a stopper in the mouth of Narragansett Bay they could prevent American privateers from putting out to sea and menacing their communications with England. They had recently captured New York and there was no sense in allowing the Rebels to remain entrenched on their flank. Also, a British army in Newport was a threat to all New England; such a force would give the Yankees something to do at home and cause them to think twice about reinforcing Washington's army.

These are the military reasons for Sir Henry Clinton's arrival at Newport on Dec. 7, 1776, with 6000 homesick Hessians and Britishers. But one cannot help feeling that another factor operated. The student of the military strategy of the Revolution - or its lack of strategy if you will - cannot fail to be impressed with the strong urban urge displayed by most British generals. They loved to shut themselves up in cities. Unlike the Black Douglas, they would rather hear the mouse cheep than the laverock sing. They knocked the Continental army groggy several times but they never followed up a punishing blow with a knockout; they merely moved into another city. Between trips they sat snug and warm and enjoyed the Good Life - which meant plenty of sound port, and a certain amount of feminine companionship. They had to be exhorted to take the field. Listen to the Poetic Muse (Tory) giving Sir William Howe a talking-to:

*"Awake, awake, Sir Billy,  
There's forage on the plain.  
Come leave your little filly  
And open the campaign!"*

A gentleman of some such kidney was General Prescott, commanding the British army in Newport. He was much disliked by the people of that city but he must have had his human side; otherwise we wouldn't have these persistent stories that a woman - or "nymph" as that elegant age would put it - was responsible for his being so far from his headquarters on the night of the 9th of July. The general's apologists have always claimed that he was at the Overing house in Middletown that night because he wanted to be near his men. To anyone knowing the nature of Generals this is just a big laugh.

The British army of occupation was in two sections. One covered the city proper; the other occupied the northern end of the island of Rhode Island and was subdivided into three parts, stationed about half a mile from the

western shore. The American force on the mainland consisted, after reinforcements from Connecticut and Massachusetts, of five or six thousand men posted at strategic points on both sides of the Bay, under command of Major-General Spencer. A tiny fleet of eight ships and the first commander-in-chief of the American navy, Esek Hopkins, lay bottled up in Providence harbor.

The British occupation of Newport was a dolorous period for that erstwhile sprightly city. The invaders found it a thriving port and left it a sad, shuttered town where nobody dared laugh out loud - not even the morning when the news got around that some enterprising Americans had captured General Prescott in his shirttail.

In June, 1777, there was stationed in Tiverton, a young officer by the name of Major William Barton. He seems to have been one of that host of informal warriors whose refusal to fight by the book of arithmetic was always causing the British acute pain. On the face of it his design to snatch General Prescott might well seem foolhardy, but he managed it with surprising ease. He learned that Prescott was in the habit of visiting the house of a man named Overing some five miles above Newport, on the west road leading to Bristol Ferry, about a mile from the shore. The more Barton thought about it the more the idea of snatching the General appealed to him. A patriot refugee named Coffin came to his headquarters one day and told him about the (General's habit of visiting at the Overing house and also gave exact details of its location. By the time he had imparted the added information that the General didn't take many men with him when he was romancing around o' nights Barton's mind was made up. He went striding off to his superior officer, Colonel Stanton, and told him all about his bright idea.

The Colonel seems to have been a man who knew genius when he saw it. He admitted it was a right smart idea and told Barton to go ahead with it. The enthusiastic Major Barton proceeded to call his regimental confreres together in a sort of unofficial council of war. He didn't tell them what he had up his sleeve, all he wanted of them was five whaleboats and the assurance of their support in a certain secret design he had in hand.

The Major's picture shows a bold, forceful face which probably inspired confidence. His brother officers expressed their willingness to back him across the board, sight unseen, and they also got him the whaleboats. Stanton had the regiment paraded and allowed Barton to ask for volunteers for an expedition against the enemy. He only wanted forty; he got the whole regiment, which stepped forward to a man. Thus the young Major had no trouble getting his two-score military kidnapers; he picked and sorted at his ease, and his selections ran strongly to that amphibious type of Rhode Islander which is more at home in a boat than on dry land.

If a certain World War song had been current in the Revolution the immortal forty would probably have rowed out into Mount Hope Bay on the night of July 3 humming "Where do we go from here?" They didn't find out until the next day for there was a storm that night and the boats became separated. They rendezvoused at Bristol the next evening and Barton decided to let everybody in on the secret. But he didn't divulge it to them in Bristol; he assembled his band and had them row over to Hog Island, where he lined them up on the beach and told all. Nobody backed out. Then back to Bristol they went and stayed there until the next night, when they crossed the Bay to Warwick Neck. There they remained until the night of July 9.

The British ships *Lark*, *Diamond* and *Juno* lay on the eastern side of Prudence Island. They heard nothing unusual that night; the sentries bellowed "All's well!" in hearty British voices as Barton and his five whaleboats rounded the southern extremity of the island and pulled for the shore. Barton's boat had a pole with a white handkerchief tied to it to guide the rest. Muffled oars drove the boats silently past the *Lark*, the *Diamond* and the *Juno*, a-swing at their anchors with their crews snoring sound. Soon their keels grated on the beach of the Island of Rhode Island. A boat's guard of five was posted; then the rest of the party, led by Barton, disappeared in a gulley that tunneled the hillside and took them straight inland, almost to the Overing house.

The rest was easy. The raiding party surrounded the house, picketed the road, silenced the sentry and went in and took the General. Most accounts say that a negro servant of Barton's butted the door of the General's bedchamber in with his round, woolly head. Whether he did or not, Barton rushed into the room and found the General sitting on the side of his bed, in his shirt. He was a little man and like most military men of small stature he did not show to advantage in a peeled state. When told to rise and shine he asked to be allowed to put on his regimentals but Barton refused; time, he informed the General, was pressing. So they hustled the poor old boy out of the house - along with Major Barrington, his aide, who was captured when he tried to leap from a window, and the sentry, one

Graham. One rather envies Private Graham. It is not given to every soldier to see his General hopping barefooted through blackberry vines.

The party reached the boats safely and shoved off. As they rowed out into the bay three rockets soared from the Island, three cannon bellowed the alarm. The British army had awakened to the realization that its commander-in-chief had been snatched. Barton had performed what was really an astounding feat when you consider that the capture of Prescott had been effected well within the latter's own lines. There was no pursuit. The lookouts on the *Lark*, the *Diamond* and the *Juno* continued to sing out "All's well" as Major Barton and his men rowed their prize to Warwick Neck. They quartered him at Arnold's Tavern and gave him a pair of shoes that wouldn't fit his poor, swollen old feet.

The next day the news was all over Rhode Island. The Newport man who was jugged for laughing was a Mr. John Miller.

The war in Rhode Island was like that. There were Ione-handed deeds of derring-do past counting, but Barton's was easily the most brilliant. Congress gave him a vote of thanks, a sword and some land in Vermont. Even the British admitted it was a neat piece of work.

The general military situation in the colony continued unchanged through 1777. Rhode Island was divided into two glowering camps. In the war of raids and sniping the Americans did, on the whole, rather better than the British. The latter lacked originality. Their best effort in the way of offensive operations was the raid which General Pigot, Prescott's successor, staged in May, 1778. Five hundred Hessians and Britishers landed near Poppasquash Point, burned seven houses in Warren and thirty in Bristol, destroyed a partly built privateer in the harbor of Warren and some military stores and boats on the Kickemuit River, and went back with the Americans pecking at their rear-guard, as the Americans so well knew how to do. Not only that, but the Warren housewives sallied out and captured a Hessian bass-drummer who was lagging behind his outfit. An army which takes a bass-drummer on a raid doesn't deserve to conquer a country.

It is significant that the Hessian was glad to be captured. Desertion was one of the worst problems the British had to face and it was particularly rife among the hired hands from Germany. Scarcely a foraging expedition went out that didn't come back short one or two Hessians. They were a problem in other ways, too. During icy weather in Newport it was found necessary to issue creepers to them to keep them perpendicular. Perhaps the British did this more or less in self-defense. A Hessian soldier was burdened with so much equipment that when he fell down it was almost a job for His Majesty's Engineers to get him up again.

The Americans, as we said, had the best of the fighting so long as it was conducted on informal lines. When it came to major field operations the shoe was on the other foot. All the originality, all the dash that distinguished the Americans when they fought in small detachments seemed to be exchanged for creeping paralysis and cerebral bedsores when they took the field in force. In October of 1777 an army of about 10,000 men was collected for an attack on the Island. The plan came to exactly nothing. The commander of the expedition was General Spencer and the General was not the man for the job. He dillied and dallied and his army melted away.

General Sullivan took command in Rhode Island in 1778 and in August it began to look at last as if a systematic attempt was to be made to attack the British. Lafayette was sent here, all youthful fire and dash, and with him came two of Washington's best Continental brigades, Varnum's and Glover's, and General Nathanael Greene, his ablest warrior. The French were our allies now. It was to be a grand joint attack, with the French fleet sailing in and landing troops to take the British in flank while Sullivan, Lafayette and Greene drove down the Island. Two things spoiled the plan. D'Estaing arrived with the French fleet and had started to land troops on Conanicut when Admiral Howe and the British fleet appeared off Newport. D'Estaing immediately put out to sea to meet him. "His haste was so great," writes an eye-witness, "that he cut all his cables and came firing through the harbor as if the very Devil was in him." The fleets jockeyed for the weather gage a whole day; then a severe storm came up and prevented a general action, although there were individual engagements between French and British ships. D'Estaing's fleet was badly battered by the storm and he determined to sail to Boston to refit. Howe, meanwhile had limped off to New York for the same purpose.



And now we come to a gallant, appealing act which, if it had achieved its end, would probably have taken rank with Paul Revere's famous ride. I refer to Lafayette's ride to Boston. Understand that while all this naval business was going on, Sullivan had crossed Howland's Ferry and was coming down the Island. 10,000 strong, with the enemy retiring before him. Sullivan was all for attack; he had his faults but he was a fighting General, and Lafayette and Greene were likewise eager to strike the British. Greene commanded the right wing. He and boy Lafayette had a try at persuading D'Estaing to stay and fight; they went aboard his great flagship, the *Languedoc*, the night of Aug. 20 and pleaded with him until midnight, talking to him, but the Frenchman shook his head; he must go to Boston and refit. So he did.

Sullivan's army was made up partly of volunteers and when they learned that any attack on the British would have to be made without the assistance of the French regulars they began to lose interest in the war. Between two and three thousand of them marched away within 24 hours. Sullivan sighed and got everything in order for a retreat, meanwhile cannonading the British entrenchments briskly. By the 28th the army was beginning to fall back to the north end of the Island and Lafayette was galloping to Boston to make one more appeal to D'Estaing to come back and fight.

The heart goes out to him as he canters north on his mission, a slim, youthful figure, gallant as a hero of Dumas. Poor Lafayette had been shunted into a kind of a quartermaster's job with the invading army; now he is out on the road with a sword at his thigh and a horse between his knees, riding hell-for-leather for Boston, seventy miles in seven hours, riding for the freedom of America - and the honor of France. D'Estaing receives him; again the heart is stirred at the thought of this gallant boy standing before him, all mud and ardor, pleading with him to return with his fleet and attack - attack! - attack! "*Voici le beau moment!*" But D'Estaing can't see it that way. He shakes his head again; and so there is no legend of Lafayette's ride to place alongside those of Paul Revere and Phil Sheridan. For all his disappointment, he made the return journey in six and a half hours, for he was anxious to be on hand for any fighting there was going.

And fighting there was, although Lafayette got back too late for it. The Battle of Rhode Island was an indecisive engagement but it was probably as well-fought an action, from the American point of view, as any in the Revolution. It took place on Aug. 29 with the British, aided by flanking fire from ships in the bay, driving hard against Nathanael Greene on the right wing. The brigades of Varnum, Cornell, Glover and Christopher Greene handled the charging Hessians and British roughly and flung them back twice. They came on again the third time and Sullivan threw in two Continental battalions in a savage counter-charge that ripped the British wide apart. The British fell back on their entrenchments and Sullivan would have followed them in, but his men were too tired. They had been marching and fighting 36 hours without rest. All night long screaming cartloads of wounded men were rolling into Newport.

That, in brief, is the story of how Rhode Island just missed being the scene of another Saratoga - even a Yorktown, perhaps. The Battle of Rhode Island is just one big "If." If D'Estaing had cooperated with the French fleet! If Sullivan's tired soldiers had been able to muster strength for just one more slashing charge on the British works! But they couldn't and that was that. Sullivan crossed back to the mainland and left the British to lick their wounds in Newport.

\* \* \*

They stayed there another year while the war dragged on.

Remembering Job Watson on Tower Hill, let us close the second act of our Revolutionary drama by spending a few moments with Col. Israel Angell, Second Rhode Island Regiment. The Colonel's headquarters are on Barber's Heights in North Kingstown, the date is Oct. 26, 1779. Since the 11th of the month the Colonel has spent a good deal of his time pacing the heights with a spyglass under his arm, now and then placing it to his eye to have a look-see at the fleet of transports crowding Newport harbor. Now, on the night of the 26th he is seated at his field desk catching up on his diary.

"October 25th, 1779. A fine pleasant morning and the fleet remains the same as yesterday, about the middle of the day the enemy begun to burn their barracks and great movement was seen among them, there was a great number of people in camp to see the fleet sail, among the crowd was Governor Green's lady and daughter, the Britains



was busy in embarking all the afternoon, by sunset was all on board and the fleet set sail just after sunset, before eleven o'clock in the morning was all without the lighthouse, and we making preparations to take possession of the town."

Col. Angell sands the ink, closes his diary with a smack and goes to bed whistling "Yankee Doodle"

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The third act is short and goes to the music of French flutes. Never, in the history of Expeditionary Forces, was there one so well-behaved, so amiable, so generally vivacious and easy to get along with as the one which landed in Newport in July, 1780. The regiments Bombonnois, Royal Deux Ponts, Soissonais Saintonge, not to mention Louzon's Legion, the artillery, the sappers and the Royal Guides, were all enchanted with Rhode Island. So was their commander, Lieutenant General le Comte de Rochambeau. And Rhode Island was enchanted with them! The war-harried, debt-racked colony took the French army to its heart, mustachioed privates, gay young officers and all. Their arrival, in a financial sense, was a godsend to Rhode Island, which was then experiencing all the horrors of a depreciated paper currency. They paid in good red gold with King Louis' pigtailed profile stamped on it; gold that rang on the counter or the tavern table with an honest, merry chink. But that wasn't all of it. The French stole no apples, they robbed no henroosts, they broke no windows; as to hearts, who shall say? There are many romances of Rhode Island belles and flip young subalterns, and a good thing, too, for all concerned.

Part of the French army was quartered in Providence, part in Newport. Newport literally couldn't do enough for them. Little Count Rochambeau nipping about the streets on a cold winter's day with his hands tucked into a muff was a welcome change from General Prescott fuming and snarling and removing the doorsteps of leading citizens to make himself a front walk.

It all had to come to an end sometime, of course. Early in March, 1781, the French fleet sailed away from Newport. Be sure the Long Wharf was a-flutter with handkerchiefs that morning! The great sails fill, the bands aboard are playing "*Vive Henri Quatre*." Away they go to help Washington bottle up Cornwallis in Virginia and lead the redcoats a dance that goes to the tune of "The World Turned Upside Down."

\* \* \*

A word about Rhode Island's part in the naval operations of the Revolution. Esek Hopkins was the first commander-in-chief of the American navy, his appointment being confirmed in December, 1773. At that time his fleet, consisting of eight converted merchantmen, lay ice-bound in the Delaware River. One morning in February, 1776, it sailed past the Capes of the Delaware with Hopkins' flagship, the *Alfred*, (formerly the *Black Prince*) flying the yellow-and-black rattlesnake flag "Don't tread on me!" Hopkins was under secret orders to proceed to the island of Abacco in the Bahamas and capture a large supply of gunpowder and other war munitions stored there. The fleet arrived off Abacco on March 1 - and then and there Hopkins gave the time-honored phrase, "The Marines have landed," a start in life, for he sent 200 of them ashore and shortly after captured Fort Nassau and the supplies. On the way home the little fleet took two prizes and let a third, the *Glasgow*, a heavily-armed vessel, get away. Hopkins arrived in New London April 8 with the sorely-needed munitions, having carried out a daring exploit which earned him the thanks of Congress.

All this might be expected to presage a brilliant career but it didn't. Hopkins had an almost unexampled run of bad luck. He was court-marshaled for misconduct in allowing the *Glasgow* to escape and though he was acquitted the incident didn't help him any. Congress didn't approve of his act in donating Newport 26 captured guns to be used in defending the city against the then-expected British. Sickness whittled down his crews; Washington sent him 200 men and then took them away from him. The sailors didn't get: their pay and expressed themselves on the point with nautical force and fluency. On May 14 Hopkins was up before the Marine Committee to answer to a charge of breach of orders. He was tried Aug. 12 and censured by Congress, which then sent him to Newfoundland to operate against the fisheries and British merchantmen. Privateering was rampant then and he couldn't get crews. The fleet didn't sail. They ordered him to Cape Fear. Again he was unable to get men to man his ships. The sailors of New England were all at sea reaping a rich harvest of prize money. There is no more tragic figure than Esek Hopkins, commanding a fleet which couldn't sail because the seafaring population of New

England had turned to legalized piracy. Privateering was the most profitable form of patriotism then extant and everybody was going in for it enthusiastically, with a yo-heave-ho and a letter-of-marque.

The British fleet bottled Hopkins and his fleet up in Providence harbor in December, 1776. Even a blockade didn't end Hopkins troubles. He got in trouble because he didn't go after the *Diamond* when that British ship went aground on an island off the Warwick shore.

Wrote Hopkins to William Ellery, signer of the Declaration of Independence and delegate to Congress from Rhode Island:

"We are now blocked up by the enemys fleet the officers and men are uneasy, however I shall not desert the cause but I wish with all my heart the Hon. Marine Board could and would get a man in my room that would do the country more good than it is in my power to do, for I entered the service for its good and have no desire to keep in it to the disadvantage of the cause I am in."

A manly letter - and a heartbroken one. Hopkins was dismissed from the service of the United States on January 2, 1778, an action for which Congress ought to have been kicked.

The brave little fleet which raised the rattlesnake flag off the Bahamas never put to sea again as a fleet.

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