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June 1777

Written by Andrew Stough



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"Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne takes the stage."

Greek military practice ordained that military activities begin with the appearance of Antares in the constellation Scorpio. In June, Antares has long since exhibited its blood red sign in the sky but still nothing significant militarily has occurred. However, it is the month when active warfare will begin again Not only is there more than enough activity for Washington. On June 20th, "Gentleman, Johnny" Burgoyne led a large army South down Lake Champlain to Ticonderoga and eventually, to his rendezvous with destiny.

May had ended with an interesting engagement of minor forces at Sag Harbor on Long Island which showed the initiative, courage, ingenuity, audacity and spontaneity by Americans which won battles. It also demonstrates that a war of rebellion can in itself be a civil war. Seventy men from Lt. Colonel De Lancey's Tory Battalion were dispatched from New York on a foraging expedition to Sag Harbor on Long Island sailing in 12 well armed vessels and protected by an equally well armed schooner, there was little reason for concern for any action by American forces.

All went well for the Tories until Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs from an "Additional Battalion" heard about it. Without a "by your leave" from anyone, and like Ethan Allen who demanded the surrender of Ticonderoga "in the name of God and the Continental Congress" with authorization from neither, he took things into his own hands. He and 170 men on the evening of May 23rd promptly set off in whale boats from Guilford, Connecticut, to engage the foragers. Sailing across Long Island Sound "full of British cruisers" the expedition landed at Sag Harbor at two o'clock the following morning.

As Paul Harvey would say "Now for the rest of the story." Christopher Ward's "The War of the Revolution" states: "Taking DeLancey's troops by surprise he killed six men and captured the rest, burnt all their vessels except the schooner, also a large store of provisions and forage, and was back in Guilford by noon, having covered a distance of 100 miles in eighteen hours. For this feat, the Congress voted him an 'elegant sword'."

Prior to the incident at Lexington in April of 1775, various flags had been prescribed for official use by the reigning monarch of Britain. In the meantime colonies and groups had adopted various flags for their own identification. On January 1, 1776, when Washington announced that the Continental Army had come into being, a new flag was hoisted. It stood as the symbol of the army for the siege of Boston. It had 13 red and white stripes and the British "Union Jack" with the crosses of St. George and St. Andrew on the Canton showing allegiance to the Crown as at that time there was no thought of independence. (Editor's note: This flag is called the 'Grand Union Flag'. Click on the following link to find out more about this important flag: A Brief History of the Grand Union Flag).

After independence was declared, the canton and symbols were removed but a more distinctive banner was needed to establish a national flag for identification and around which the citizenry and armies could rally. A rough design retaining the 13 red and white stripes but with a blue canton carrying a circle of 13 stars in a circle to represent unity between the states was presented to Betsy Ross, a Philadelphia flag maker. The greatest modification by Betsy Ross was to change the stars from six pointed to five. On June 14th, 1777 the Continental Congress approved the new flag, which, with modifications to accommodate the admission of new states into the Union remains the national flag. (Editor's note: there is question as to whether Betsy Ross or someone else made this flag. Click on the following link to find out more about this situation: Betsy Ross, Did She or Didn't She?).

Sitting at Morristown, Washington the self taught soldier, continued to ponder Howe's next move and how he could take advantage of it. He knew that a pure war of delay and attrition could in the short term be to the British advantage. He also knew that he would have to fight and defeat Howe while he had a full army with which to fight. Having a smaller army, he could only do this if he reduced the odds against him by diminishing Howe's force to something commensurate with his own. Secondly, he must himself pick the time and place.

