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March 1777

Written by Andrew Stough



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"For brethren, ye have been called unto liberty." - Galatians 5:13"

March of 1777 found the colonies wrapped in confusion. In some localities adherents to the idea of freedom lived in an uneasy peace with their erstwhile friends and neighbors who remained loyal to George III. Other localities found themselves involved in open civil war between the two factions leading to bloody encounters. Religion could not stay out of the argument and passages were found to support each particular faction's point of view. Those who were for independence found passages like the one above. Loyalists (Tories) found other passages favoring support of the King. Not only was the support of the Almighty asked for, but, assurance found for either persuasion.

General George Washington's morale was probably at it's lowest point of the entire conflict. His hopes for heavy re-enlistment was gone. Soldiers had left in droves to return to their homes and farms, leaving him with too few men to adequately man his positions. North Castle was previously manned by over 3,000 soldiers but now was reduced to 250 men and was overrun and its substantial stocks of supplies destroyed and the town left ablaze. In this weakened state, Washington could do nothing about it. Appeals to Congress and the individual States (Colonies) for men and supplies had resulted in pitifully little support. The occasional spring-like day must have been agonizing as he looked at the danger ahead and how ill-equipped he was to cope with the British Lion when it awoke from it's winter lethargy.

Things were not really as bad as they appeared to Washington in the Army's winter quarters in Morristown. Local fighters and militia encouraged by Washington's use of hit and run tactics were harassing the British on their own initiative. Aside from a few in-force engagements, as at North Castle, British General William Howe's usual foraging expeditions had been dried up because of the deadly effect of local militia and other units acting independently of the Continental Army. Howe was once again forced to call for supplies from England and Canada as had been the case in Boston.

Washington was seen by Britain as indispensable to the war effort; it was felt that if they could remove him, the Revolution would fall apart. Historians seem to agree that Howe was right - Washington was the guiding force that kept the war going. In this low state of the Continental Army, Howe could easily have searched out, defeated and probably captured George Washington. Fortunately for the American Cause, Howe and his generals preferred the comfort of warm winter quarters to pursuit in the field under winter conditions. European battles were generally not fought in winter and it was probably assumed that the Continentals could easily be destroyed by a reinforced British army in the coming spring and summer. Whatever the reason, it was for Washington a time for rebuilding his shattered forces. The respite allowed the army to recover and grow again to fighting strength and spirit.

In the ensuing years when errors in judgment and/or the tide of battle would cause the situation to appear hopeless, it was Washington's tenacity, his courage and optimism that buoyed the hopes of the populace, his men and generals, spurring them to keep the battles and the war going when lesser men would have given up and sued for peace.

During the previous articles we have dealt with military actions, in particular those of Washington and the Continental Army. There were of course, many other actions both military and civil which occurred at the same time. Any commentary here is limited by space and frequency of publication. Many books have been written on the subject and it is impossible in a monthly publication to try and recall everything that transpired on a monthly basis.

Essentially this column is what in theatrical parlance might be called a collection of cameo appearances or vignettes. I plan to follow the main events of the war on a monthly basis corresponding to the current month and year, i.e. The events of March 1777 will be related in our March 1777 newsletter.

No matter how neutral an author may try to be, any story will be colored by the author's perception. In order to

give a broader view it would be interesting to hear stories by other members concerning the Revolutionary War or their ancestor's participation in that war.

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References: Christopher Ward's "War of the Revolution";  George Washington, Man and Monument".

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