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## October 1776

Written by Andrew Stough



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Editor's Note: This article was reprinted by Permission of the Gold Country Chapter No. 7 of the CSSAR and was slightly edited by the Sons of Liberty Chapter of the CSSAR

For the first two weeks of October there was very little offensive activity in the New York area by the Howe brothers. The general was busy getting bedded down in the city before the winter took hold. Washington was putting the time to good use in better securing his defenses and once again reorganizing the army.

The most outstanding event was the Battle of Valcour Island in Lake Champlain. Who, but our hero of Quebec, General Benedict Arnold, had the foresight, the vitality and persistence to see that Carleton's continuing pursuit down Lake Champlain must be stopped before the onset of a Canadian winter? Arnold foresaw the developing action as a threat to the unity of the thirteen states. Carleton's success with his Canadian Expeditionary Force if not unimpeded, would lead to a probable link-up with Howe to split New England from the remaining states.

Arnold, having in June led what remained of the Canadian Expeditionary Force from Montreal, finally found refuge at Crown Point in early July. Realizing the gravity of Carleton's advance Arnold proposed a stop-gap battle to buy time for the Patriots and to stall the Canadians long enough to force them into a retreat to winter quarters. Meanwhile the tempo was increasing in the New York area. On 12 October Howe landed troops at Throg's Neck. Little or no action occurred. The Americans retreated, destroying the only bridge to the island, leaving the British regulars stranded. Re-embarked, the regulars next landed at Pell's Point. Washington, realizing the danger of being trapped immediately, began moving his army beyond King's Bridge stopping at White Plains. Howe, not to be denied a victory, moved on until he reached Pelham Bay where he encountered Colonel Glover and his regiment of Marblehead seamen. Outnumbered 4 to 1 by British regulars and Hessians, Glover and his men used a stone wall as a shield to hold the enemy at bay for the entire day (October 18th) allowing Washington time to complete his move to White Plains. Congress, ever fearful of a military takeover, insisted on setting priorities that should have been the province of the military commander. In this spirit they had previously demanded that New York be held at all costs. Washington originally agreed with Congress but as events unfolded it was apparent to him that any serious attempt to hold New York would sacrifice a large portion of the army. That army would be direly needed elsewhere and at another time. Congress grudgingly agreed that Washington could use his own judgment to determine the fate of New York. Congress at this time made another faulty decision by ordering Washington to hold Fort Washington, a high point on the New York side of the Hudson. Therefore, 2,000 troops (most were from the Pennsylvania Line commanded by Colonel Magaw) remained at Fort Washington while Carleton was building ships at Fort St. John's to transport a heavy reinforcement of troops and supplies down the lake.

Convinced that Carleton planned to split off the New England from the remaining states Congress approved construction of a small fleet of American ships under the command of Benedict Arnold. to counter any action by Carleton.

As the first raw American ships were launched, Arnold sailed within cannon shot of the Canadian construction yards, firing a few harassing shots to annoy the British before turning south. The idea was to annoy Carleton more than to harm his fleet. Arnold did not want a battle. What he really wanted was to spur a continuing development of the Canadian fleet, thereby using up valuable summer and fall weather in construction and not in battle. If the British fleet could not be built in time for a victorious fall battle then construction would be stopped by the onset of winter and the danger of an invasion would be put off until 1777.

In early October with winter fast approaching, Arnold decided to challenge the British fleet even though it outnumbered him in vessels as well as firepower. On October 10th, Arnold, having chosen Valcour Island as the site of battle, engaged the British fleet. The battle raged all day. The guns fell silent at sunset and the Canadian fleet secured for the night. Arnold with his battered but not beaten fleet silently passed the Britons and sailed down the lake toward safety. The fleet, succumbing to battle damage and unable to outrun its pursuers, had to be destroyed to prevent the remnants falling into the enemy's hands. Arnold and his men then walked the remaining distance to safety at Crown Point and then to Ticonderoga.

In mid-October Carleton pursued only to Crown Point. Given false information that 20,000 men were at Ticonderoga, he returned to Montreal allowing Schuyler's Northern Army at Ticonderoga and Albany to await

springtime and an assault from Canada. General Greene held Fort Lee on the opposite bank of the Hudson in New Jersey.

Five days later (October 23rd) the Howe's arrived at White Plains, bringing a mixed army of regulars and Hessians. On the 28th a series of engagements developed culminating in what is known as the Battle of Chatterton's Hill. A force of 1,600 Americans was attacked by British and Hessians. Despite determined resistance and many British casualties, the Americans were put to flight. The British then moved on to the Battle of Red Bank, which was then invested by the British. Losses in the battle were 230 British and 452 Americans.

Washington, seeing that he was jeopardized in his present position, slipped away in the darkness of night (October 31st) to entrenchments at North Castle.

If the major part of 1776 saw little military action, the final two months of November and December will more than make up for any earlier slighting.

References: Robert Leckie's "George Washington's War"; Don Higginbotham's "The War Of American Independence"; A. J. Langguth's "Patriots"; Richard M. Ketchum's "Saratoga".

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