

night. Thus far no one had found cause to complain about his youth or inexperience.

Whatever he lacked in knowledge or experience, he tried to make up for with "carefulness and industry," he would later confide to John Adams.

As commander of the "Army of Observation," encamped at the American citadel on Prospect Hill, he tried to take in everything, to observe and appraise the situation as realistically as possible. While the American army controlled the land around Boston, the British, strongly fortified in the city and on Bunker Hill, had control of the sea and could thereby supply their troops and send reinforcements. (Only weeks before, in September, reinforcements of five regiments had arrived.) The task at hand, therefore, seemed clear enough: to confine the King's men in Boston, cut them off from supplies of fresh provisions, and keep them from coming out to gain what one of their generals, Burgoyne, called "elbow room."

If it ever came to a fight, the American army had scarcely any artillery, and almost no gunpowder, yet to Greene the greater weakness and worry was the continuing disorderly state of the army itself. As he wrote to his friend Samuel Ward at the Continental Congress, the prospect was deeply disturbing, "when you consider how raw and undisciplined the troops are in general, and what war-like preparations are going on [in] England."

AT THE START of the siege there had been no American army. Even now it had no flag or uniforms. Though in some official documents it had been referred to as the Continental Army, there was no clear agreement on what it should be called in actual practice. At first it was referred to as the New England army, or the army at Boston. The Continental Congress had appointed George Washington to lead "the army of the United Colonies," but in correspondence with the general, the President of Congress, John Hancock, referred to it only as "the troops under your command." Washington, in his formal orders, called them the "Troops of the United Provinces of North America." Privately he described them as the "raw materials" for an army.

To the British and those Loyalists who had taken refuge in Boston, they were simply "the rebels," or "the country people," undeserving the words "American" or "army." General John Burgoyne disdainfully dubbed them "a preposterous parade," a "rabble in arms."

In April, when the call for help first went out after Lexington and Concord, militia and volunteer troops from the other New England colonies had come by the thousands to join forces with the Massachusetts regiments—1,500 Rhode Islanders led by Nathanael Greene, 5,000 from Connecticut under the command of Israel Putnam. John Stark's New Hampshire regiment of 1,000 had marched in snow and rain, "wet and sloppy," "through mud and mire," without food or tents, seventy-five miles in three and a half days. The Massachusetts regiments, by far the strongest of the provincial troops, possibly numbered more than 10,000.

By June a sprawling, spontaneous, high-spirited New England army such as had never been seen was gathered about Boston. Washington, arriving in the first week of July, was told he had 20,000 men, but no one knew for certain. No count had been taken until he made it a first order of business. In fact, there were 16,000, of which fewer than 14,000 were fit for duty. More than 1,500 were sick, another 1,500 absent.

In a regular army such a count could have been accomplished in a matter of hours, Washington noted disapprovingly. As things were, it took eight days. The enemy's total strength was believed to be 11,000. In reality, there were perhaps 7,000 of the King's men in Boston, or roughly half the number under Washington's command.

In a formal address from the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Washington had been warned not to expect "regularity and discipline" among the men. The youth of the army had little or no experience with military life. Nor were they "possessed of the absolute necessity of cleanliness." Beyond that Washington found them to be men of a decidedly different sort than he had expected, and he was not at all pleased.

The lay of the land about Boston was also different from anything in the general's military experience. In the simplest terms, as he drew in his own rough map, the setting was one of three irregular peninsulas at the head of Boston Harbor, with the peninsula of Boston in the middle, that of Charlestown (and Bunker Hill) just to the north, and Dorchester close

by to the south. But as Boston was connected to the mainland only by a narrow, half-mile causeway, or neck, it was more like an island than a peninsula. And thus, by barricading the Neck, it had been relatively simple to keep the British "bottled up" in Boston, just as the British had built their own barricades at the Neck to keep the Americans from coming in.

The British still held Charlestown, which was largely in ruins, and Bunker Hill, which was their citadel and a formidable advantage. Neither side had yet moved to fortify the even higher ground of the Dorchester peninsula overlooking the harbor.

With its numerous green hills falling away to blue water, it was a particularly beautiful part of the world and especially in summer. Washington thought it "very delightful country," and more the pity that it should be a theater of war. A British officer described it as "country of the most charming green that delighted eye ever gazed on." Views sketched from the uplands of Charlestown by one of the British engineers, Captain Archibald Robertson, show how many broad, open fields and meadows there were, and how modest was the skyline of Boston, its church spires more like those of a country village. They might have been sketches of Arcadia.

Had a seagull's-eye view been possible, one could have seen the whole American army and its fortifications strung out in a great arc of about ten miles around the landward side of Boston, from the Mystic River on the northeast to Roxbury to the south, with British redcoats camped on the slopes of the Boston Common and manning defenses at the Neck and within the town and on Bunker Hill. A lofty beacon pole rose from the crest of Beacon Hill, and at the center of the town, the Province House, headquarters for the British command, could be readily identified by its large, octagonal cupola and distinctive gold weather vane of an Indian with bow and arrow.

In the harbor off Long Wharf were British ships lying at anchor—and three were ships of the line, ships of fifty guns or more—while over to the right of the Dorchester peninsula, at the narrow entrance to the Inner Harbor, on Castle Island, stood the old fort Castle William, also occupied by the British.

The main concentration of American troops was at Prospect Hill to the north. Others were encamped a few miles farther inland, at the pretty little college town of Cambridge on the Charles River, and close to the Neck at Roxbury, where the white spire of the Roxbury meetinghouse rose from the top of still another prominent hill. At Cambridge troops were encamped mainly on the Common, though most of the town and the red-brick buildings of Harvard College had also been taken over.

Needing more than his rough sketch of the terrain, Washington had assigned a talented nineteen-year-old lieutenant, John Trumbull, the son of the governor of Connecticut, to do a series of maps and drawings. For one sketch of the British defenses at the Neck, young Trumbull had crawled through high grass almost to the enemy line.

For their part, the British had assigned an experienced cartographer, Lieutenant Richard Williams, who, with the help of a small crew, moved his surveyor's transit and brass chains from one vantage point to the next, taking and recording careful sightings. The result was a beautifully delineated, hand-colored map showing "the True Situation of His Majesty's Army and also those of the Rebels." All fortifications were clearly marked, all landmarks neatly labeled, including "Mount Whoredom," Boston's red-light district. Lieutenant Williams had been appalled to find prostitution so in evidence in what was supposedly the center of Puritanism—"There's perhaps no town of its size could turn out more whores than this could," he noted in his journal—and accuracy demanded that this, too, be shown on the map.

Not the least of Washington's problems was that he had command of a siege, yet within his entire army there was not one trained engineer to design and oversee the building of defenses. Still, he ordered larger and stronger defenses built, and the work went forward. "Thousands are at work every day," wrote the Reverend William Emerson of Concord after touring the lines. "'Tis surprising the work that has been done. . . . 'Tis incredible." It had been the Reverend Emerson who declared the morning of April 19, as British regiments advanced on Concord, "Let us stand our ground. If we die, let us die here!"

With telescopes from Prospect Hill and other vantage points, the army kept constant watch on the regulars in Boston, just as the regulars

kept watch on the army. ("It seemed to be the principle employment of both armies to look at each other with spyglasses," wrote the eminent Loyalist Peter Oliver, former chief justice of the province.)

Washington knew little about Boston. He had been there only once and but briefly twenty years before, when he was a young Virginia colonel hoping for advancement in the regular army. And though each side dispatched its spies, he put particular emphasis on "intelligence" from the start, and was willing to pay for it. Indeed, the first large sum entered in his account book was for \$333.33, a great deal of money, for an unnamed man "to go into Boston . . . for the purpose of conveying intelligence of the enemy's movements and designs."

The fear that the British were preparing an attack was ever present. "We scarcely lie down or rise up, but with expectation that the night or the day must produce some important event," wrote one of Washington's staff.

It was in the first week of August, at the end of his first month as commander, when Washington learned how much worse things were than he knew. A report on the supply of gunpowder at hand revealed a total of less than 10,000 pounds, and the situation was not expected to improve soon. Very little gunpowder was produced in the colonies. What supplies there were came mainly by clandestine shipments from Europe to New York and Philadelphia by way of the Dutch island St. Eustatius in the Caribbean. At present, there was powder enough only for about nine rounds per man. According to one account, Washington was so stunned by the report he did not utter a word for half an hour.

~~THE SPRAWLING AMERICAN ENCAMPMENTS bore little resemblance to the usual military presence. Tents and shelters were mainly patched-together concoctions of whatever could be found. Each was "a portraiture of the temper and taste of the person that encamps in it," wrote clergyman Emerson.~~

~~Some are made of boards, some of sailcloth, and some partly of one and partly of the other. Others are made of stone and turf, and others again of brick and others brush. Some are thrown up in a hurry and~~

look as if they could not help it—mere necessity—others are curiously wrought with doors and windows.

~~A notable exception was the encampment of Nathanael Greene's Rhode Islanders. There, "proper tents" were arranged row on row like the regular camp of the enemy . . . everything in the most exact English taste," recorded Emerson approvingly. On the whole, however, he thought "the great variety" of the camps most picturesque.~~

~~Others were considerably less charmed. The drunken carousing to be seen, the foul language to be heard were appalling to many, even among the soldiers themselves. "Wickedness prevails very much," declared Lieutenant Joseph Hodgkins of Ipswich, Massachusetts.~~

~~A veteran of Bunker Hill and a cobbler by trade, Hodgkins was thirty-two years old and a man, like many, who had already seen a good deal of trouble and sorrow in his life. His first wife and four of their five children had all died of disease before the war began. To the remaining child and to his second wife, Sarah Perkins, and the two children born of this second marriage, he was a devoted father and husband. Greatly concerned for their welfare and knowing her concern for him, he wrote to Sarah at every chance. But for now, as he told her, he had no time to be "pertickler" about details.~~

~~A British ship's surgeon who used the privileges of his profession to visit some of the rebel camps, described roads crowded with carts and wagons hauling mostly provisions, but also, he noted, inordinate quantities of rum—"for without New England rum, a New England army could not be kept together." The rebels, he calculated, were consuming a bottle a day per man.~~

~~To judge by the diary of an officer with the Connecticut troops at Roxbury, Lieutenant Jabez Fitch, who enjoyed a sociable drink, there was considerably more besides plain rum to be had. "Drank some grog," he recorded at the close of one day, after a stop at a nearby tavern; "the gin sling passed very briskly," reads another entry. "In the morning I attended the alarm post as usual . . . then down at Lt. Brewster's tent to drink Ens. Perkins' cherry rum, came back and eat breakfast . . ." He imbibed wine and brandy sling, and on an expedition "up into Cambridge town," after a stop to sample "some flip" (a sweet, potent mix of~~

information came by express rider from the captain of an American schooner that had been captured by the *Greyhound* off Cape Ann, then retaken by an armed American sloop.

The next morning, Saturday, June 29, officers with telescopes on the roof of Washington's headquarters and other vantage points in the city and on Long Island, saw signals flying from the hills of Staten Island. The first of the British fleet had appeared.

In a matter of hours, forty-five ships had dropped anchor inside Sandy Hook in the Lower Bay, ten miles beyond the Narrows. To a Pennsylvania rifleman closer at hand their masts looked like a forest of trimmed pine trees. "I declare that I thought all London was afloat."

HENRY AND LUCY KNOX were at breakfast at No. 1 Broadway when they saw the fleet. It had become their practice to enjoy breakfast beside a large Palladian window on the second floor with a panoramic view of the harbor. But now suddenly the morning was shattered and Lucy Knox was in a state of abject terror.

"You can scarcely conceive of the distress and anxiety which she then had," Knox would write to his brother William. "The city in an uproar, the alarm guns firing, the troops repairing to their posts, and everything in the [height] of bustle. I not at liberty to attend her, as my country cries loudest."

For weeks Knox had been urging Lucy to leave the city, for her own safety and that of their infant daughter. "My God, may I never experience the like feelings again! They were too much, but I found a way to disguise them, for I scolded like a fury at her for not having gone before."

By sunset the enemy ships at anchor down the bay numbered more than one hundred.

Riders galloped off to Connecticut and New Jersey to spread the news and "hurry on the militia." Martha Washington said her goodbyes to her husband and departed the city by carriage with all possible speed, as did Lucy Knox, Cary Greene, and their children, along with hundreds more of the city's inhabitants.

"The great being who watches the hearts of the children of men, knows I value you above every blessing, and for that reason I wish you to

be at such a distance from the horrid scenes of war," Knox wrote to Lucy after she reached Connecticut, and lest anyone forget all that was at stake, he reminded her, "We are fighting for our country, for posterity perhaps. On the success of this campaign the happiness or misery of millions may depend."

Further details on the makeup of the enemy armada followed quickly. The ships included the *Centurion* and the *Chatham*, of 50 guns each, the 40-gun *Phoenix*, and the 30-gun *Greyhound* with General Howe on board, in addition to the 64-gun *Isis*. In their combined firepower these five warships alone far exceeded all the American guns now in place on shore. Nathanael Greene reported to Washington that the total fleet of 120 ships had "10,000 troops received at Halifax, beside some of the Scotch Brigade that have joined the fleet on the passage." And as Lieutenant Colonel Samuel Webb of Washington's staff further noted, an additional 15,000 to 20,000 could be expected "hourly" on still more ships from England under the command of General Howe's brother, Admiral Richard Lord Howe.

The whole of New York was "in commotion," wrote Pastor Shewkirk. "On the one hand everyone that could was packing up and getting away; and on the other hand country soldiers from the neighboring places came in from all sides."

On Long Island, one of Nathanael Greene's field officers took time to pen a note to his son back home in Newburyport, Massachusetts. "I am of opinion our hands will be full," wrote Colonel Moses Little, a veteran of Bunker Hill.

IN PHILADELPHIA, the same day as the British landing on Staten Island, July 2, 1776, the Continental Congress, in a momentous decision, voted to "dissolve the connection" with Great Britain. The news reached New York four days later, on July 6, and at once spontaneous celebrations broke out. "The whole choir of our officers . . . went to a public house to testify our joy at the happy news of Independence. We spent the afternoon merrily," recorded Isaac Bangs.

A letter from John Hancock to Washington, as well as the complete text of the Declaration, followed two days later:

That our affairs may take a more favorable turn [Hancock wrote], the Congress have judged it necessary to dissolve the connection between Great Britain and the American colonies, and to declare them free and independent states; as you will perceive by the enclosed Declaration, which I am directed to transmit to you, and to request you will have it proclaimed at the head of the army in the way you shall think most proper.

Many, like Henry Knox, saw at once that with the enemy massing for battle so close at hand and independence at last declared by Congress, the war had entered an entirely new stage. The lines were drawn now as never before, the stakes far higher. "The eyes of all America are upon us," Knox wrote. "As we play our part posterity will bless or curse us."

By renouncing their allegiance to the King, the delegates at Philadelphia had committed treason and embarked on a course from which there could be no turning back.

"We are in the very midst of a revolution," wrote John Adams, "the most complete, unexpected and remarkable of any in the history of nations."

In a ringing preamble, drafted by Thomas Jefferson, the document declared it "self-evident" that "all men are created equal," and were endowed with the "unalienable" rights of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." And to this noble end the delegates had pledged their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor.

Such courage and high ideals were of little consequence, of course, the Declaration itself being no more than a declaration without military success against the most formidable force on earth. John Dickinson of Pennsylvania, an eminent member of Congress who opposed the Declaration, had called it a "skiff made of paper." And as Nathanael Greene had warned, there were never any certainties about the fate of war.

But from this point on, the citizen-soldiers of Washington's army were no longer to be fighting only for the defense of their country, or for their rightful liberties as freeborn Englishmen, as they had at Lexington and Concord, Bunker Hill and through the long siege at Boston. It was

now a proudly proclaimed, all-out war for an independent America, a new America, and thus a new day of freedom and equality.

At his home in Newport, Nathanael Greene's mentor, the Reverend Ezra Stiles, wrote in his diary almost in disbelief:

Thus the Congress has tied a Gordian knot, which the Parl[liament] will find they can neither cut, nor untie. The *thirteen united colonies* now rise into an *Independent Republic* among the kingdoms, states, and empires on earth. . . . And have I lived to see such an important and astonishing revolution?

At a stroke the Continental Congress had made the Glorious Cause of America more glorious still, for all the world to know, and also to give every citizen soldier at this critical juncture something still larger and more compelling for which to fight. Washington saw it as a "fresh incentive," and to his mind it had come not a moment too soon.

On Tuesday, July 9, at six in the evening, on his orders, the several brigades in the city were marched onto the Commons and other parade grounds to hear the Declaration read aloud.

The general hopes this important event will serve as a fresh incentive to every officer and soldier to act with fidelity and courage, [the orders read] as knowing that now the peace and safety of his country depends (under God) solely on the success of our arms: And that he is now in the service of a state possessed of sufficient power to reward his merit, and advance him to the highest honors of a free country.

The formal readings concluded, a great mob of cheering, shouting soldiers and townspeople stormed down Broadway to Bowling Green, where, with ropes and bars, they pulled down the gilded lead statue of George III on his colossal horse. In their fury the crowd hacked off the sovereign's head, severed the nose, clipped the laurels that wreathed the head, and mounted what remained of the head on a spike outside a tavern.

Much of the lead from the rest of the statue would later be, as reported, melted down for bullets "to assimilate with the brains of our infatuated adversaries."

NOT SINCE THE SPRING of 1775 had spirits been so high. But the exuberance of the moment, or any thoughts that grand pronouncements and the toppling of symbolic monuments were sufficient to change the course of history, were quickly dashed in dramatic fashion three days later, on July 12. In a surprise move, the British demonstrated for all to see how much the defenders of New York had still to learn, and the larger, ominous truth that without sea power New York was indefensible.

It was a brilliant summer day with a brisk wind out of the southwest, ideal sailing conditions. At approximately three in the afternoon, His Majesty's ships *Phoenix* and *Rose*, in the company of three tenders, cast off their moorings at Staten Island and started up the harbor under full sail, moving swiftly with the favorable wind and a perfect flood tide.

Alarm guns scounded in New York. Soldiers rushed in every direction through streets crowded with panic-stricken people. The cannon at Red Hook and Governor's Island opened fire, and as the ships swept by lower Manhattan, heading into the mouth of the Hudson, the guns at old Fort George and other shore batteries opened up. Commanding the fire from Fort George was a nineteen-year-old captain of New York artillery, Alexander Hamilton, who had left King's College to serve in the Cause. The ships returned the fire. Cannonballs slammed into houses and came bounding down streets still swarming with people. Washington would write of the extreme distress he felt at the shrieks and cries of women and children running every which way, and at the spectacle of his own men standing at the water's edge gawking helplessly, so awestruck—or terrified—were they by the ferocious barrage let loose by the enemy ships.

Private Joseph Martin, the fifteen-year-old Connecticut recruit, would remember enjoying "a complete view of the whole affair." It was his first experience with the "muttering" of cannon fire, and he "rather thought the sound was musical, or at least grand."

Every battery along the Hudson fired away until cannon smoke lay thick and heavy over the city, and the air reeked of gunpowder.

The British ships, keeping close to the New Jersey shore, proceeded rapidly up the river and were soon out of sight. By five-thirty they had passed the blasts of cannon from Fort Washington, and by evening they were safely anchored thirty miles above the city in the broadest part of the Hudson, the Tappan Zee at Tarrytown, where their mission was to cut off rebel supplies and rouse local Loyalists.

American gun crews had fired nearly 200 shots—more than 150 from the New York batteries alone—and to no apparent effect. (According to the log of the *Rose*, the Americans "shot away our starb[oa]rd fore shroud, fore tackle pendant, fore lift, fore topsail clewlines, spritsail and main topsail braces, one 18 pound shot in the head of our foremast, one through the pinnace, several through the sails and some in the hull.") Knox's guns had proven more deadly to his own men than to the foe. Six American artillerymen were killed, the only fatalities of the day, when their cannon blew up due to their own inexperience or overconfidence, or possibly, as said, because a great many were drunk.

In his ensuing general orders, Washington could barely conceal his disgust over the inexcusable behavior displayed in the face of the enemy, and the shame he felt over officers who, instead of attending to their duty, had stood gazing like bumpkins. To the proud Washington, he and the army had been made a laughingstock.

Such unsoldierly conduct must grieve every good officer, and give the enemy a *mean* opinion of the army, as nothing shows the brave and good soldier more than in case of alarms, coolly and calmly repairing to his post, and there waiting his orders; whereas a weak curiosity at such a time makes a man look mean and contemptible.

Knox wrote privately that while the loss of his six men had been a great misfortune, he consoled himself with the hope that the day's action had taught the rest to be less "impetuous" the next time.

But there was a far larger, more ominous lesson in what had happened. Clearly if two enemy warships with their tenders could pass so

swiftly and readily up the Hudson suffering no serious damage from the onshore batteries, then so could ten or twenty warships and transports, or for that matter, an entire British fleet, and by landing an army of 10,000 or more upriver, they could cut off any chance Washington and his forces might have for escape from New York.

To compound Washington's torment, the day's drama closed in late afternoon with the spectacle of the 64-gun HMS *Eagle* steadily advancing up the bay with all canvas spread and the flag of St. George flying at the foretop masthead, signifying it was the flagship of Admiral Lord Howe and that therefore the fleet from England and still more troops could not be far behind. In the gathering dusk of New York, the boom of a Royal Navy salute came rolling across the waters.

### III

MORALE IN THE BRITISH RANKS had never been higher. After the miseries of the winter in Boston and months of bleak isolation at Halifax, then more wearisome weeks at sea, Staten Island in summer seemed a paradise.

"[We] are in very comfortable cantonments amongst a loyal and liberal people, who produce [supply] us in plenty and in agreeable variety all the necessaries of life, most of which we have been long deprived of," wrote a British officer. "We are on the most beautiful island that nature could form or art improve," declared another. "Here," reported a third, "we experience greater luxury than we have done since the commencement of hostilities . . . fresh meat . . . eggs, butter, milk, and vegetables," and all on "reasonable terms."

Captain Archibald Robertson hiked to the nearby hills with his painting kit to do watercolor sketches as he had at Boston. The difference here was the greater scale of everything spread before him—the sweep of the surpassing harbor defined by New York and Long Island in the distance, and the far larger British fleet now riding at anchor in the middle foreground.

The red-coated soldiers found themselves well nourished and welcome on American soil in a way they had never been—indeed, openly

greeted "with greatest joy." "We have now a very good supply of salt provisions," summarized still another officer, "a great quantity of [and] an immense quantity of ammunition of all kinds, and what is best of all, the very people who we suspected would oppose us are coming over to us in great numbers." Hardly a day passed without distraught Loyalists or American deserters turning up, filled with tales of hope, many of them having crossed at night by boat from Long Island to New York.

Ambrose Serle, a patriotic young Englishman and fluent writer who served as a civilian secretary to Admiral Howe, recorded in his journal how his heart went out to the Loyalists. "It excited one's sympathy to see their poor meager faces," he wrote of several who had escaped from Long Island, "and to hear their complaints of being hunted for their lives like game into the woods and swamps, only because they would not renounce their allegiance to their King and affection for their country."

For deserters there was considerably less sympathy and little or no trust. There was "no believing these poor deluded wretches," wrote Colonel Charles Stuart, summing up what most British officers felt. General James Grant thought no American could be trusted, Loyalists any more than the rest. "The inhabitants of this island," Grant concluded from his observations, "hate the rebel army because they have been oppressed by them. . . . But from the confession and conversation of our most loyal subjects of Staten Island, I am quite confirmed in my opinion that we have not a friend in America."

This, however, was not the view of the more astute General Howe, who saw immediately in the Loyalists an advantage he had been denied at Boston. "I met with Governor Tryon on board of ship at the Hook, and many gentlemen, fast friends to [the] government attending him, from whom I have had the fullest information on the state of the rebels," Howe had reported to Lord Germain, on July 7, just days after landing at Staten Island.

News of the Declaration of Independence served only to underscore "the villainy and the madness of these deluded people," an outraged Ambrose Serle observed. "A more impudent, false, and atrocious proclamation was never fabricated by the hands of man."

Soldiers in his Majesty's ranks talked of "the sporting season" about

committing themselves. The efforts to be made by the army will be along the *dos d'ane* at the points of Flatbush, New Utrecht, etc. These [are] the principle [attacks]; many other small ones to cooperate. They should all be vigorous but not too obstinately persisted in, except that which is designed to turn the left of the rebels, which should be pushed as far as it will go. The moment this corps gets possession of the pass above Howard's House [Howard's Tavern], the rebels must quit directly or be ruined. I beg leave also to propose that this corps may begin to move at nightfall, so that everything may be [ready] at its ground by daybreak.

Several days passed. Then on August 22, the same day Washington spent looking things over at Brooklyn, Clinton was sent for and told by Howe that the attack would be made entirely according to his plan and to be prepared to march that night.

General Grant, with two brigades, was to make a "spirited" early-morning diversion close to the Narrows, striking at the enemy's right. General Leopold Philipp von Heister's Hessians, another 2,000 men, would move out from Flatbush to keep the Americans occupied in the center. In the meantime, the main body of the army would move under the cover of dark to be in position at daybreak.

Clinton was to command the advance guard on the night march, General Howe following with the rest of the main force, numbering in all 10,000 men.

IF ASKED TO DESCRIBE the common soldiers of the King's army, the redcoats now falling in and dressing their ranks in the gathering dusk at Flatlands, most of the American soldiers who lay in wait for them would probably have said they were hardened, battle-scarred veterans, the sweepings of the London and Liverpool slums, debtors, drunks, common criminals and the like, who had been bullied and beaten into mindless obedience. It was the common American view. The truth was something else.

That the rank-and-file British regular was far better trained, better disciplined, better equipped, and more regularly paid than his American counterpart was beyond question, as the commanders on both sides well

appreciated. Further, the redcoats were in far better health over all. Proper sanitation was part of British army life, and discipline in this regard was as strictly enforced as any aspect of the daily routine. Even after their long summer encampment on Staten Island, the British troops, as their officers noted repeatedly, were in excellent health, in striking contrast to the reports of rampant illness among the rebels.

In an effort to explain why the "provincials" would, in their own climate, be so afflicted with "putrid disorders," while his Majesty's troops, who were foreign to the climate, would enjoy near perfect health, the *London Chronicle* said the difference was the great cleanliness of the regulars.

Among the regular troops every private soldier is obliged to put on a clean shirt twice, perhaps three times a week, according to the season and climate; and there are a certain number of officers appointed every day to see that each man washes his own linen, if he had not a woman to do it for him.

While the dregs of society did indeed count among the King's troops, the great majority were young countrymen from rural England, Scotland, and Ireland. They were farmers, unskilled laborers, and tradesmen—blacksmiths, cordwainers, carpenters, bakers, hatters, locksmiths, and weavers—who had been recruited, not pressed into service, drawn by the promise of clothing, food, and steady, if meager, pay, along with a chance at adventure, perhaps even a touch of glory. In their rural or small-town origins they were not greatly different from their American counterparts.

The average British regular was in his late twenties, or about five years older than the average American soldier, but the average regular had served five or six years in the army, or five or six times longer than the average volunteer under Washington. To the British rank-and-file there was nothing novel about being a soldier. The harsh life was their way of life. They carried themselves like soldiers. They had rules, regulations, and traditions down pat. They were proud to serve in His Majesty's army, proud of the uniform, and fiercely proud of and loyal to their regiments.



On a day such as this, on the eve of battle, they would have given close attention to all the particulars of their arms and accoutrements, and each man to his own appearance. Most would be freshly shaved and their uniforms made as presentable as possible. On the move, seen from a distance, they looked glorious in their red coats and crossbelts, marching rank on rank, their huge regimental battle flags flying at the front atop ten-foot poles. Seen up close, however, the red coats, waist-length in front, longer at the back, were often faded and out at the elbows. Cuffs were frayed, knees patched, stockings or marching gaiters often torn beyond mending, try as each man would to look the part.

And with the pride in who and what they were went a very real contempt for, even hatred of, their American foes, whom they saw as cowards and traitors.

But by no means were they all battle-scarred veterans. Some of the older soldiers and officers were veterans of the killing fields of Europe during the Seven Years' War, or the French and Indian War in America, or had survived the retreat from Concord or the Battle of Bunker Hill. The rest, the great majority of the British forces on Long Island, including the Germans, knew only the drill and routine of army life. For as long as the average soldier in Howe's ranks had been in service, it had been longer still, more than ten years, since Britain had last waged war. For most of the redcoats, soldiers and young officers, like nearly all of the Americans, the battle to come was to be their first.

BY NIGHTFALL EVERYTHING WAS READY. At nine came the order to move out. Clinton led a crack brigade of light infantry with fixed bayonets. Cornwallis followed with eight reserve battalions and fourteen pieces of artillery. They in turn were followed by Generals Howe and Percy with another six battalions, more artillery, and baggage wagons. The column of 10,000 stretched more than two miles. At the head of the advance guard rode two mounted officers, Captains William Glanville Evelyn and Oliver DeLancey, Jr., and three Loyalist farmers who knew the way.

The white tents at Flatlands were left standing, campfires burning, all to appear as though nothing were happening.

The night was unseasonably cool. The long column moved with utmost silence and extremely slowly. An exhausted Scottish officer who had had several sleepless nights on duty, described the march as one of the worst he had known and endless. "We dragged on at the most tedious pace," wrote Sir James Murray, "halting every minute just long enough to drop a step, and to be disturbed again in order to proceed twenty yards in the same manner."

By agreeing to Clinton's plan—by committing a force of such numbers to a night march through unknown country, led like the blind by three local farmers who might or might not be all they professed—William Howe was putting his army at extreme risk. In the event of discovery or sudden, surprise attack by the enemy, his stretched-out column could be chopped to pieces. If all went as planned, the maneuver would look like little more than a classic turning of the enemy's flank, but it took no great stretch of imagination to picture the unforeseen circumstances, the vagaries of chance that could play havoc.

As it was, no one except the commanders knew the details of the plan. Not an officer or a man knew where they were going.

The route was northeast along what was known as the King's Highway, then at the village of New Lots the troops would swing north toward the Heights of Gowanus.

The advance guard moved more swiftly, at the same time "sweeping up" any local inhabitants who looked as though they might give the alarm. When the three Loyalist guides warned that the rebels could be waiting at Schoonmaker's Bridge over a little salt creek that emptied into Jamaica Bay, the whole column halted while skirmishers went ahead. But there was no one at the bridge and the army continued on.

Nor was there a sign of the rebels at Howard's Tavern, which stood a few hundred yards from the entrance to the Jamaica Pass. By then it was two in the morning. The tavernkeeper and his fourteen-year-old son were roused out of bed, closely questioned, and pressed into service as additional guides. The pass, as far as they knew, was unguarded.

Captains Evelyn and DeLancey and other mounted officers rode ahead of the pass, a winding, rocky road through a narrow gorge overhung by trees and little wider than a bridle path.

It was only ten minutes or so after leaving the tavern when the officers