

WEST POINT
AND THE
HUDSON HIGHLANDS
IN THE
AMERICAN REVOLUTION

by

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In May 1775, as the Second Continental Congress was meeting in Philadelphia, word reached anxious members that Patriot militia under Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold had seized Fort Ticonderoga, the wilderness fortress which stood about 225 miles north of New York on Lake Champlain. Upon hearing this sobering news, American leaders realized that the colonies would have to face the imminent prospect of war with Great Britain.

Almost immediately, the Congress appointed a committee to consider the defense of New York. Chaired by George Washington, the committee believed that the colonists would have to protect and secure the Hudson Highlands which stretched from the Tappan Zee to the tiny river town of Newburgh.

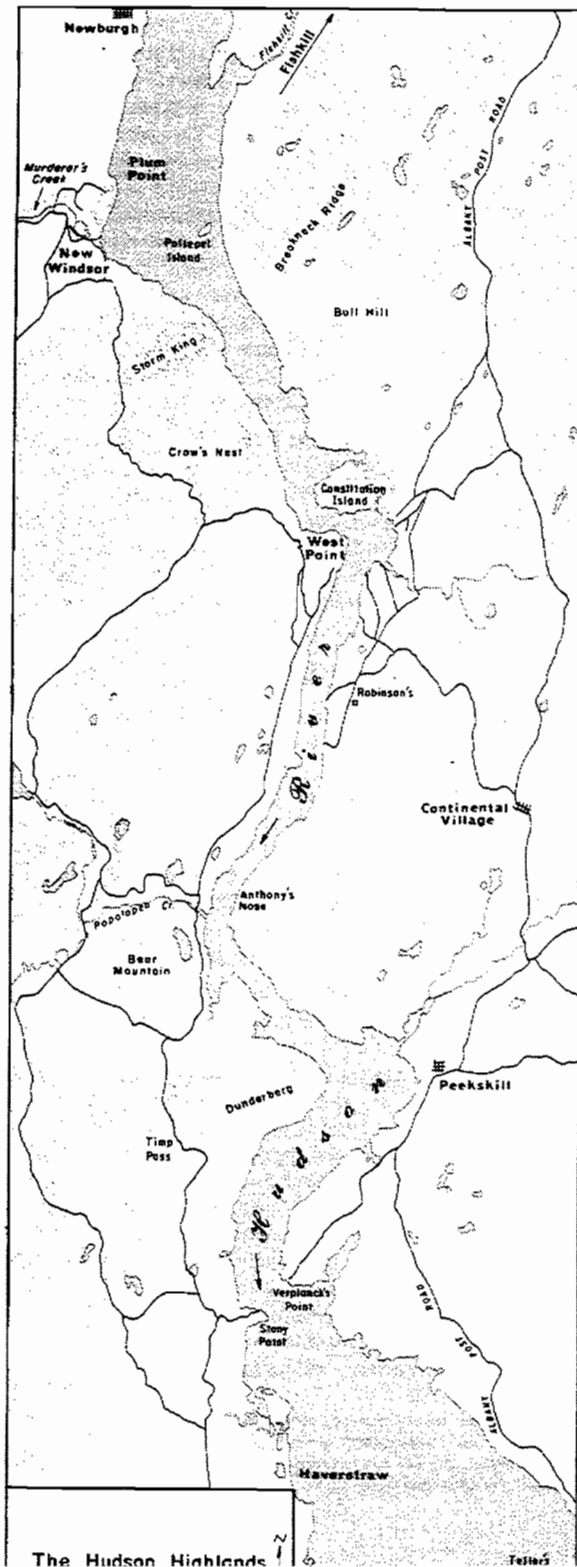
From the experience of the French and Indian War, the American leaders knew that the natural invasion route into the colonies from Canada was Lake Champlain to the Hudson River, and that conversely, the same water corridor was the natural invasion route into Canada from the colonies. Furthermore, the Americans knew that the Highlands controlled the major northeast to southwest land routes of communications which crossed the Hudson from Fishkill to Newburgh on the north and from Verplanck's Point to Stony Point (King's Ferry) at the south. If the British should cut these land routes, they might stop the Americans from moving supplies between New England and the Middle Atlantic colonies and also block the movement of military reinforcements between the colonies. Freedom of movement was particularly important because New England was to provide the bulk of the troops in the war. Loss of the Hudson Highlands, moreover, would isolate the American colonists in upper New York and would leave them at the mercy of the Indians whom the British could more adequately supply and who would consequently become more and more dangerous to the local settlers.

Washington and his committee quickly recommended that the Congress take steps to defend New York. Congress, in turn, sent resolutions to the New York Provincial Convention suggesting that:

. . . a post be taken in the Highlands, on each side of the Hudson River, and batteries be erected; and that experienced persons be immediately sent to examine said river, in order to discover where it will be most advisable and proper to obstruct the navigation.

The New York leaders reacted promptly to the Congress' resolution and on the 2nd of June two members of the Convention, Colonel James Clinton and Mr. Christopher Tappen, sailed north to reconnoiter positions to be fortified in the Highlands.

As they sailed up the scenic river, Clinton and Tappen saw several possible sites for fortification in the rugged Highlands—Stony Point and Verplanck's Point, Anthony's



Nose, the banks of Popolopen Creek, Martelaer's Rock, and "the West Point of the Hudson River." What the two men were looking for, however, was a place where both sides of the river could be fortified. The best choice appeared to be "the West Point," where the river narrows into a S-shaped bend between Martelaer's Rock and the west bank and is buffeted by unpredictable winds and subject to difficult tides. In addition to recommending the emplacement of batteries on "the West Point" and on Martelaer's Rock, Clinton and Tappen urged that a boom be constructed to block the channel to British ships. Surprisingly, they mistakenly recommended that the largest garrison in the area be established on the low ground at Martelaer's Rock which West Point dominates.

Although the New York Provincial Convention accepted the recommendations of Clinton and Tappen and forwarded them to the Continental Congress, it did not order construction begun during the early summer. Only after Washington alarmed the New Yorkers with a report of a possible British raid on New York City, did the Convention take action to fortify the Highlands.

1775: CONSTITUTION ISLAND

Late in August the New York Convention finally appointed a five-man commission to supervise the fortification of the Hudson Highlands near West Point and Martelaer's Rock. Shortly thereafter, the commissioners engaged Bernard Romans, a Dutch botanist, to be their military engineer. Romans, had few credentials to recommend him for military work. But because there were so few engineers in America, the commissioners had little choice and counted themselves lucky to find anyone with a modicum of training or experience to construct the proposed fortifications.

When Romans arrived in the Highlands, he moved onto Martelaer's Rock and immediately reconnoitered the terrain looking for the best possible sites for gun batteries to cover the river. Concentrating on a grand bastion (named Fort Constitution after the British Constitution) on the southwest end of the island, Romans began to build a poorly sited fort which failed to take best advantage of the range of his guns and the constricted Hudson River channel between the island and West Point*. Moreover, Romans inexplicably ignored the recommendations of Tappen and Clinton to fortify the dominating heights of West Point across the river. If the Americans had been required to rely on Romans' position to stop the Royal Navy, a British captain of Nelsonian stripe probably would have been able to run the river gauntlet with ease.

*The military importance of terrain is key to the understanding of the value of the West Point area. Failure to use the best available terrain illustrates the problems associated with non-professional leadership during the Revolutionary War.

When the commissioners discovered Romans' plans for siting the defensive works, they were furious. Unfortunately for the American cause, Romans and the commissioners then argued bitterly about the development of the island's fortifications, delaying construction even further and endangering the security of the Hudson Highlands. When news of the argument reached the Continental Congress, it decided to arbitrate the dispute by appointing a committee to inspect the fortifications on the island. Arriving in November 1775, the Congressional commissioners did not like what they found. The works were so little advanced and so poorly sited that, in reality, Fort Constitution did not exist as a barrier to the Royal Navy. Also, the Patriots had not blocked the landward approach from the east. Furthermore, like Clinton and Tappen before them, they saw the ground across the river at West Point dominated Romans' position. Before they left the island, the inspectors concluded that neither the New York commissioners nor Romans could handle the job of fortifying Constitution Island.

The Congressional report naturally concerned the New York Provincial Assembly, so that body appointed its own committee to visit the island to smooth out the differences between Romans and the commissioners. Although the New York committeemen were also unable to improve conditions on the island, they did recommend that the Patriots fortify the ground near Popolopen Creek, about seven miles south of West Point, instead of Constitution Island. The idea of fortifying the area near Popolopen Creek was a good one, if not new. Romans and the commissioners, in one of their rare moments, had agreed that fortifications there would be better than on Constitution Island. Still, the New York inspectors ignored West Point.

As 1775 ended, the Patriots had not progressed very far with their fortifications on Constitution Island. In the next few weeks the Continental Congress ordered the construction on the island stopped and then started again. To further disrupt efforts at fortifying the Highlands, Congress approved building the new fortifications near Popolopen Creek, a project which eventually brought the work on Constitution Island to a standstill.

Since only relatively simple field-type works were required on Constitution Island, it is hard to believe that the Patriots accomplished so little in the fall of 1775. News from England indicated that they were going to have a stiff fight on their hands as soon as British reinforcements arrived. But even then the historic problems of raising a new army frustrated the colonials: an inadequate command system, lack of money, conflicting priorities, untrained leaders, inexperienced troops, lack of labor, graft, drunkenness, and just plain inefficiency. In 1775, the British could have taken the Highlands easily. In the spring of 1776, new efforts were directed at blocking the river: at Popolopen Creek, south of Constitution Island, the Ameri-

cans began to build Fort Montgomery—named for the American commander killed in the preceding winter during the American invasion of Canada.

Shortly thereafter, Washington heard about the poor condition of the fortifications in the Highlands. Gravely concerned he assigned a new officer to command the area; additionally he sent an inspection team under Brigadier General William Alexander, Lord Stirling, to assess the situation for him. Lord Stirling and his assistants did a thorough job. They recommended that works be built at Stony Point and Verplanck's Point and that a new position be built on the south side of Popolopen Creek on the high ground which overlooked Fort Montgomery. At Constitution Island, Stirling's party, like previous ones, saw that West Point dominated the island and recommended that a redoubt be placed on the west bank. Unfortunately, in his summarized report to Washington, Stirling did not mention West Point and the Patriots ignored this critical area again.

1776: TWIN FORTS OF THE POPOLOPEN

Just a few weeks later in July 1776, British warships ran past the American gun positions on Manhattan and anchored in the Tappan Zee out of range of American land batteries. This threat triggered furious action in the Highlands and the Americans did everything possible to complete their forts on Popolopen Creek and to stretch a chain across the river between Fort Montgomery and Anthony's Nose on the east bank. Later, after the British defeated Washington on Long Island and at White Plains, the fortified positions in the Highlands assumed a critical importance to the American cause. Washington, after he visited the area in November, however, apparently thought that the Highland forts were strong enough to withstand a British advance and decided to move with his army toward New Jersey. While some American soldiers completed the two forts at Popolopen Creek, others constructed Fort Independence overlooking Peekskill Bay, just south of Anthony's Nose. Simultaneously, engineers completed assembling an iron chain* and moved it into place between Fort Montgomery and Anthony's Nose. Because of design and structural weaknesses, the chain broke, and the Patriots could not block the river in 1776. Farther north, other soldiers attempted to block the river between Plum Point (near modern Cornwall) and Pollepel Island (now Banerman's Island) with underwater obstacles.

After facing several British threats in 1776, the soldiers in the Highlands settled down for the long, cold winter while Washington went south to fight his Christmas-New Year's campaign at Princeton and Trenton and to

*This first chain should not be confused with the second chain the Americans installed at West Point in 1778.

winter at Morristown, New Jersey. Poised in a threatening position on the flank of the route between New York and Philadelphia, Washington's little army prevented Sir William Howe from moving between the cities and forced Howe to evacuate New Jersey. At the same time the Morristown camp and the Hudson defenses protected the only remaining land line of communications from Boston to Philadelphia, which ran down the valleys west of the Highlands. On the strength of those meager forces, buttressed by Patriot militia controlling the countryside, the Revolution survived its second winter.

1777: DEFEAT IN THE HIGHLANDS

Beginning early in 1777, the situation changed radically in the Highlands. British commanders in London and America well knew the value of the Hudson River line and one of them, General John Burgoyne, while in London in 1776, developed a plan to strike south from Canada along the Lake Champlain-Hudson River route toward Albany in conjunction with a supporting attack along the Mohawk River by Lieutenant Colonel Barry St. Leger. If all went well, the British commanders would crush the Patriot forces between them. Unfortunately, the British government did not coordinate the armies of Burgoyne and Howe in 1777. In London, Lord George Germain, the Colonial Secretary, actually approved three different plans submitted by Howe, none of which considered a coordinated movement with Burgoyne toward Albany. When Germain finally sent an order calling for Howe to support Burgoyne, it arrived after the British Commander-in-Chief had already begun a previously approved campaign and was at sea en route to Philadelphia.

Before sailing for Chesapeake Bay and Philadelphia, however, Howe could have defeated the Americans in the Highlands if he had moved vigorously against them. In early January 1777, only 156 soldiers remained on Constitution Island and reportedly as few as six remained at Fort Montgomery. These hardly formed a strong defense force. While American militiamen came and departed at will, some troops continued to work in the Highlands to keep the British out. Also, local Tories, rounded up and formed into labor details, built underwater obstacles between Plum Point and Pollepel Island. At the same time a young engineer, Thomas Machin, worked diligently to solve the problem of securing the chain before the ice broke and once again opened the river to navigation. If the river obstacles had been emplaced and if Forts Montgomery, Clinton, Independence, and Constitution had been completed, perhaps the Patriots in the Highlands might have foiled British plans for 1777.

Such was not to be the case. In March, the British quickly and efficiently raided the American collection point and magazine at Continental Village near Peekskill, trig-

gering feverish activity farther north as American regiments manned Constitution Island and Fort Montgomery. The British, however, retired to New York and the threat to the area seemed to diminish. About this time, in Westchester County, a vicious civil war erupted between Patriot "skinnners" and Tory "cowboys".

In April, having solved his engineering riddle, Thomas Machin finally installed the chain across the Hudson under the guns at Fort Montgomery while Governor George Clinton supervised the completion of the underwater obstacles at the north end of the Highlands between Plum Point and Pollepel Island. Even the construction of the forts progressed. But life did not improve in the Highlands, as British feints and bluffs against Peekskill and Continental Village kept the Patriots stirred up.

Meanwhile at Morristown, Washington pondered the situation in the Highlands. American leaders in the Highlands had not distinguished themselves in reacting to the British raids or at constructing defenses. Something had to be done to improve the performance of the troops and to complete the important fortifications. To remedy the situation, Washington considered appointing the combative Benedict Arnold who had fought so bravely at Quebec, Valcour Island, and Danbury to command the forces in the Highlands. Arnold was not available, though, so Washington ordered Major General Israel Putnam ("Old Put") to command the Highlands.* Then he sent Major General Nathanael Greene to the area to inspect the Highland defenses and make sure that they were prepared to meet British attacks from any direction, particularly an attack from the west. Greene and his associates—Brigadier Generals Henry Knox and Anthony Wayne—inspected the defenses, recommended the construction of a boom to protect the chain, concluded that the river obstacles were sound, and generally ignored the problem of overland attack from the west because the ground was so difficult. Brigadier General George Clinton, one of the group, soon reaped the reward of this inadequate appraisal.

When General Putnam arrived in the Highlands in May 1777, the American defenses were still not in order. The Americans lacked the armed galleys needed to back up the chain at Fort Montgomery as well as the boom which was to cushion the shock on the chain. The Patriots were finally called to account for their inefficiency when British troops, aided by the Royal Navy, advanced up the Hudson to the aid of General Burgoyne.

*Major General Israel Putnam was a renowned Indian fighter. Appointed Colonel, 3d Connecticut on 1 May 1775, then a brigadier general of Connecticut militia troops the next month, Putnam became one of the first major generals of the Continental Army on 19 June 1775. He was one of the senior officers in the Continental Army. He had a lackluster record during the war. For many months he commanded the forces in the Highlands.

In June 1777, General Burgoyne, marching south from Canada, maneuvered Patriot forces out of Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain. Washington immediately sent Arnold to upper New York to assist General Philip Schuyler, the American commander there; then he marched his main army toward the Hudson and sought a position from which he could respond to any possible move by General Howe. At this time, Washington was completely in the dark about the British commander's intentions, and it was not until he finally learned that the Englishman had sailed for the Chesapeake Bay area that he moved toward Philadelphia. But even though Washington had been fooled by the movement south, Howe doomed Burgoyne's campaign plan for 1777 and gave the Americans in the Highlands another chance to complete their preparations. Not surprisingly, when the threat diminished, the Patriots relaxed, and recently mobilized militia went home in early August. As the summer came to an end, the Americans still had not completed the fortifications. To make matters even worse, after suffering defeat at Brandywine in early September, Washington ordered Continental forces from the Highlands to join him. Barely two weeks later, 1700 British and Hessian troops arrived to reinforce the small garrison left by Howe in New York, and set the stage for the great event in the Highlands in 1777: the capture of Forts Montgomery and Clinton.²

On the same day that the British defeated Washington at Brandywine, General Sir Henry Clinton, Howe's deputy in New York, informed Burgoyne that he might attack Fort Montgomery and move north to assist the northern column. The message reached "Gentleman Johnny" on 21 September just after he had fought the indecisive Battle of Freeman's Farm—the first Battle of Saratoga—and caused the British commander to withhold his attack against Major General Horatio Gates' American forces.

Sir Henry planned to attack with three divisions. These he would land at Stony Point, sending them west through Timp Pass and Doodletown. Then, splitting the force, he would march one column around Bear Mountain to attack Fort Montgomery from the rear while the main attack force would move north along the riverbank and attack Fort Clinton from the south. To deceive the Patriots about his true intentions, Sir Henry decided to feint toward the east before he landed his troops at Stony Point. This ingenious and sophisticated plan was based upon the advice of Colonel Beverly Robinson, an American Loyalist who was also an old friend of Washington's and whose family homestead still stood on the east shore of the Hudson, just north of Anthony's Nose.

²Three Clintons participated in the Hudson Campaigns. Brigadier General George Clinton (Governor of New York) and Brigadier General James Clinton, his older brother, served the American cause with distinction. Ironically their chief opponent throughout most of the war was Sir Henry Clinton who was a "local" full general. Sir Henry, eventually the British Commander-in-Chief in North America, later was involved in the Arnold treason.

On October 3rd Clinton moved, and on the 6th, British soldiers landed at Verplanck's Point. Later, the naval force demonstrated against Fort Independence and Peekskill, occupying the former when the Patriots withdrew. These moves so confused the Americans that Israel Putnam finally decided, as Clinton wished him to, that the British were headed toward Peekskill.

Clinton, however, landed his main forces at Stony Point on the other side of the river at 6 a.m., October 6th and pressed his soldiers forward rapidly. Splitting his forces into columns as planned, Clinton sent them north, one to the east and one to the west of Bear Mountain. Patriot scouts detected the move, but believing that their orders did not call for engaging the British, they withdrew, giving up Timp Pass, a critical bottleneck in the rugged mountains. This allowed Sir Henry's two columns to advance unhindered until they converged on Forts Clinton and Montgomery from the south and west. Battle was joined in mid-afternoon when the westernmost British column, eventually commanded by Beverly Robinson, attacked George Clinton's force of 300 in Fort Montgomery and the other column of 1200 attacked James Clinton's force of 300 in Fort Clinton. Sir Henry's troops fought without cannon, but even without them, British soldiers bested the American forces and cracked their Highland defenses by dark. Victory came after a determined thirty-minute assault which was distinguished by great gallantry and fearful use of the bayonet. As the Americans surrendered, George Clinton and his wounded older brother escaped in the darkness.

Israel Putnam and George Clinton tried to stop the British advance northward, but they failed. Sir Henry's men first took Fort Constitution without a fight on 8 October; then prepared to move against water obstacles near Pollepel Island. With little difficulty, the British forces moved farther north, burning and pillaging as they went, in an attempt to join Burgoyne. But without firm word from "Gentleman Johnny" they were uncertain of what lay ahead and did not press on quickly to Albany. Word finally reached the British on the Hudson that Burgoyne had surrendered at about the same moment that Howe, who had taken Philadelphia, called for reinforcements to the south. There was nothing left to do but fall back to New York City. Abandoning the Highlands because he did not have enough men to hold them, Sir Henry ordered his men to destroy Forts Constitution, Clinton, Montgomery and Independence.

While 1777 had brought disaster to the Highland forts, the American victory at Saratoga and Washington's determined resistance in the Philadelphia area impressed all of Europe. France soon declared war on England, tipping the scales in favor of the colonies. Presently new forts would appear in the Highlands, creating a formidable obstacle, better attacked by treachery than by bayonets.



George Washington



Sir Henry Clinton



Benedict Arnold



Thaddeus Kosciuszko

1778: FORTIFICATION OF WEST POINT

Americans should have taken immediate action to build new and better fortifications in the Highlands after Henry Clinton retired to New York. They did little, however, during the remainder of 1777, even though the majority of the Americans wanted to abandon Forts Montgomery and Clinton and build a new fortification at West Point. Expert opinion held otherwise: Washington's chief engineer in the Highlands, French Lieutenant Colonel Louis de la Radière, did not agree. He wanted to fortify the Fort Clinton area again. After much discussion, Israel Putnam, George Clinton, and James Clinton prevailed: West Point would be fortified. Finally, in mid-January 1778, La Radière outlined the trace of a new fort on the plateau at West Point, beginning a new era in the Highlands. Later in the month American soldiers marched across the river to West Point for the first time, and established a post which has been occupied continuously ever since.

While Washington and his troops suffered through the winter at Valley Forge, Americans at West Point did little to ensure that the vital waterway would be closed come spring. Arguments between La Radière and the American leaders, reminiscent of earlier squabbles on Constitution Island, produced few tangible results. In one area, however, the Patriots progressed: the determined young engineer, Thomas Machin, moved ahead with details of building a new chain to span the river between West Point and Constitution Island.

In March 1778, things began to improve at West Point. Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a French-trained Polish engineer who had won laurels at Ticonderoga and Saratoga, arrived by order of the Continental Congress to assume the duties of Chief Engineer. Kosciuszko, however, immediately clashed with La Radière. Washington tried to encourage the two engineers to work together, but in late April he finally replaced La Radière with Kosciuszko. West Point now had an expert engineer who could organize the massive undertaking ahead. Under Kosciuszko's supervision and with support of more dedicated commanders, a fortified area began to take shape at West Point. Soldiers built new fortifications to the west and along the ridgeline to the southwest of the original fort drawn on the plain by La Radière. As the construction got well underway in April, Thomas Machin emplaced the Great Chain between West Point and Constitution Island.

On the plain at West Point, Brigadier General James Clinton with New York Militia and Continental soldiers worked on the main fort on the river — soon to be named Fort Arnold (see Map 2) — and its river line batteries: Chain, Lanthorn, Green, and South.* Just to the west other soldiers built a major position, Sherburne Redoubt. Farther

*Sometimes called Chain, Lanthorn. (also Lantern, Lanthorn), Water and Knox Batteries.

west, above the plain, Colonel Rufus Putnam's 5th Massachusetts Regiment threw up the fort which would eventually bear his name. And along the ridgeline south of Fort Arnold and covered by Fort Putnam, three Connecticut Regiments built Forts Webb, Wyllys, and Meigs, naming them after their colonels: Samuel Webb, Samuel Wyllys, and Return Jonathan Meigs.

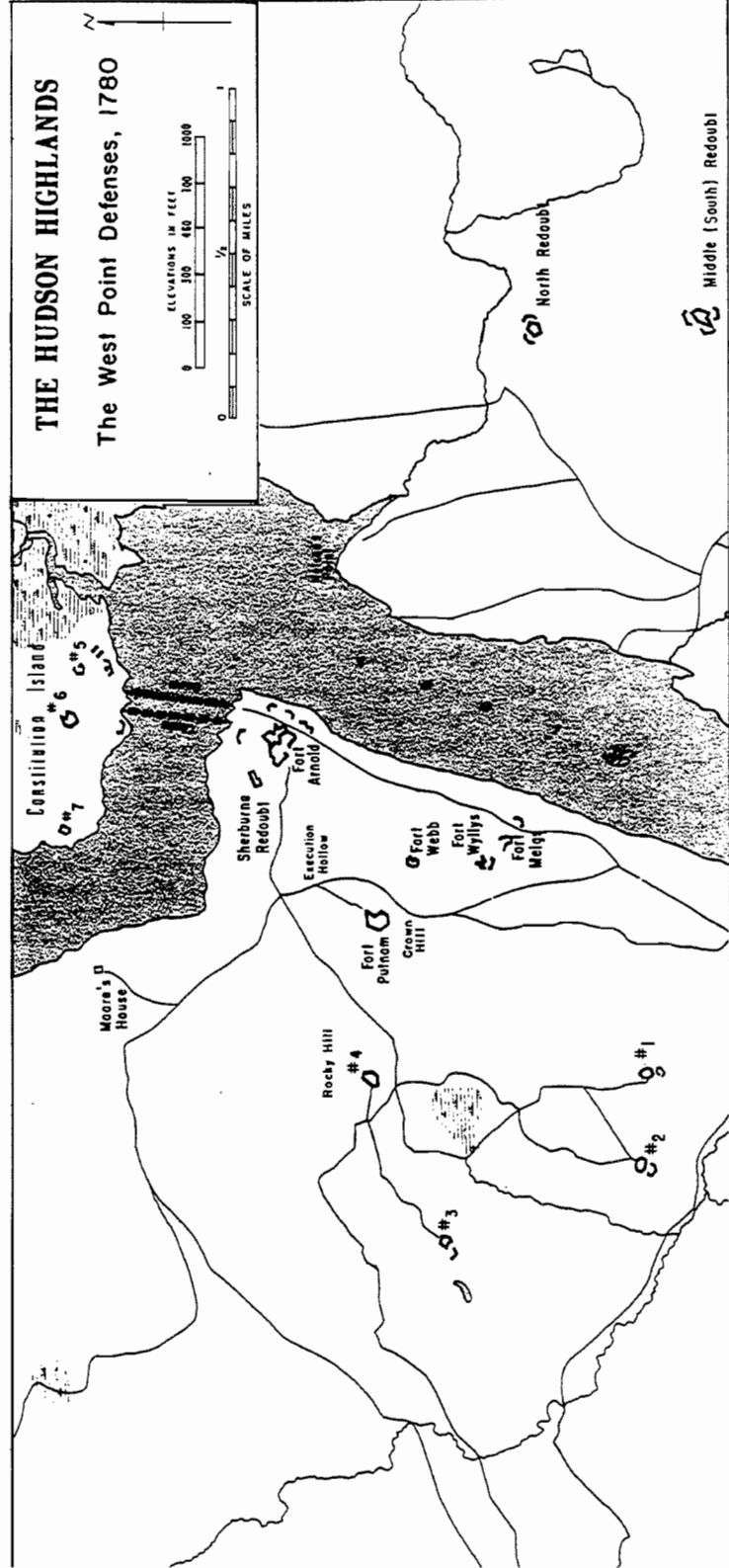
The fortifications at West Point reached their fullest development by 1779, after additional redoubts were completed. Apparently Kosciuszko planned to build Redoubt #4 west of Fort Putnam in 1778, but the Americans did not construct it until 1779. That same year the garrison built the southern and western redoubts — #1, #2, #3 — with their batteries and outlying works. These new fortifications added depth to the West Point position and protected approaches to Fort Putnam, which was the key to the defense of Fort Arnold and the lower positions on the river's edge. Redoubt #4 was critical to the defense of Fort Putnam because it stood on higher ground where enemy cannon could be placed to fire into Fort Putnam below. In addition to adding to the defensive strength of the overall position, Battery #1, below Redoubt #1, was capable of firing on enemy ships coming up the Hudson.

On Constitution Island, which the Americans reoccupied in 1778, soldiers partially rebuilt Marine Battery and Gravel Hill Batteries to cover the river line and the chain. They also constructed Redoubts #5, #6, and #7 along the crest of the island to protect the vital river batteries from attack from the landward approach, just as they constructed the western redoubts to protect Forts Putnam and Arnold. By the same time, the soldiers had completed North and South (Middle) Redoubts on the high ridge above the east shore, across from West Point.

When the Americans had completed the forts, redoubts, and batteries, West Point with the chain installed, blocked the Hudson, discouraging a repetition of Sir Henry Clinton's 1777 Campaign. As a fortress, West Point was much ahead of its time, because as 19th and 20th century soldiers discovered, a fortified area consisting of mutually supporting strong points is the heart of modern defensive positions and is considerably stronger than a single position built in the 18th century tradition.

1779: STONY POINT

After 1777, two important threats placed West Point at the forefront of the war, but neither brought combat again to the area. In 1779 after a lull of a year, Sir Henry Clinton seized Stony Point from the Americans. Because the British seizure of Stony Point cut off the Patriot line of communications across the river and apparently threatened West Point, Washington reinforced the Highlands and subsequently decided to take the point back. To accom-



plish the task, Washington brought Baron Frederick von Steuben to West Point to train the light infantry which would be given the mission; he then entrusted the attack to Brigadier General Anthony Wayne, one of his best combat commanders. Wayne seized Stony Point on 16 July 1779 with a night bayonet attack which has become a classic for students of the art of war. By destroying a British force, Wayne's attack gained wide acclaim in the fledgling nation, boosting Patriot morale and impressing many foreign observers.

1780: TREASON

The most serious threat to West Point came in the fall of 1780 when Major General Benedict Arnold — hero of Quebec, Valcour Island, Danbury, Saratoga, and then commander of West Point and the Hudson Highlands — tried to sell the fortress to the British. General Sir Henry Clinton, now the British Commander-in-Chief in America, wanted West Point even though the position, partly because of Arnold's intentional meddling, was in a rather delapidated condition in 1780.*

The fortified area was, however, still a major American position, and its capture would have improved the British strategic posture in America. After the recent British victories at Charleston and Camden, another British success might have cracked American morale and broken the Revolution once and for all.

Arnold's drift to treason can be traced from his earliest actions in the war. In May 1775, after being commissioned by the Massachusetts Assembly to capture Fort Ticonderoga, he found himself in company of, rather than in command of, Ethan Allen and his Green Mountain Boys who had also been commissioned to attack the British fortress. Forced to accept an unwanted, subordinate role, Arnold did little except irritate his fellow soldiers. Taking command after Allen left, Arnold soon found himself again subordinated to a new commander. Disgusted, he resigned, only to return to active service as a Continental Army colonel and to begin planning an invasion of Canada through the rugged interior of Maine. In November, after completing an incredibly difficult march up the Kennebec River to the Chaudiere River, Arnold approached Quebec. He could not capture it alone with his weakened soldiers, and therefore had to wait until December 31st to attack the city in coordination with the forces of Major General Rich-

ard Montgomery, who had marched to Quebec from Montreal. After Montgomery was killed and Arnold fell wounded, the American assault failed, and the Americans had to content themselves with an imperfect siege of the British citadel.

Within a few weeks, Arnold, newly promoted to brigadier general and now in command of the American forces around Quebec, found himself replaced once again as the commander. Bitterly disappointed, he retired to Montreal where he nursed his wound and his grievances. Arnold next saw action in early 1776 when reinforced British forces attacked to drive the Americans away from Quebec toward Montreal. Later after retreating southward to Ticonderoga, Arnold built and commanded a small naval flotilla on Lake Champlain. There he hurled his crude little navy at the British as they advanced toward Ticonderoga. Suffering tactical defeat in a small deadly naval fight off Valcour Island, the Americans nevertheless stopped the advancing British and ultimately forced their return to Canada. After demonstrating superb combat leadership once again, Arnold burned his fleet and withdrew.

From Valcour Island Arnold returned home to Connecticut where his list of grievances mounted. During the winter Congress angered Arnold by promoting five junior brigadier generals to major general ahead of him. Subsequently, he received his promotion to major general, but did not receive an adjusted date of rank, further rankling him. To make matters worse, some members of Congress charged him with misuse of public funds and would not accept his final accounting for the Canadian expedition. Furious about such treatment, Arnold submitted his resignation.

Battle saved Arnold one more time. In mid-July 1777, General Washington sent Arnold north to assist Major General Philip Schuyler in the campaign against Burgoyne. In the ensuing campaign, Arnold defeated the British in the Mohawk Valley, fought with distinction in the first Battle of Saratoga (Freeman's Farm), but then angered his new commander, Major General Horatio Gates, in a dispute over the conduct of the battle. Consequently, Gates relieved him of his command. Several days later, when the British attacked the American positions at Bemis Heights, Arnold galloped impetuously on to the field, led several charges directed at critical positions along the British line, and finally inspired an American victory.

Seriously wounded in the fight, Arnold reached the height of his martial glory at Saratoga. But he would not fight again for the United States. After Saratoga, Arnold's career and reputation deteriorated. Assigned to Philadelphia, he administered his command poorly and found himself censured by a court-martial and reprimanded by Washington. Although Washington barely slapped his wrists for his improprieties, Arnold never got over the reprimand.

*Arnold reported to General Sir Henry Clinton that: *Fort Arnold is built of Dry Fascines and Wood, is in ruinous condition, incomplete, and subject to take Fire from Shells and Carcasses.*

Fort Putnam, Stone, wanting great repairs, wall on the East side broke down, and rebuilding from the Foundation. At the West and South side have been a Cheveux-de-Frisic; on the West side broke in many Places. The East Side open; two Bomb Proofs and Provision Magazine in the Fort and Slight Wooden Barracks.

Also while in Philadelphia, Arnold, a widower since 1775, met and married Peggy Shippen, ravishing young socialite, daughter of an old friend of Washington, and a known Tory sympathizer. It was about this same time that Arnold first contacted Captain John André, aide to General Sir Henry Clinton, and offered to turn his coat for money. Apparently, Arnold decided to change sides because of his bitter disappointment with Congress over rank and privileges and because of his court-martial. His personal bitterness, fueled by his desire for money to live and support his teenaged wife lavishly, led him to sell his services to the British.

Soon after they had made contact, André informed Arnold that Clinton wanted West Point. With that news, Arnold began planning to obtain command of the key American position. He fixed the price for his treason: first he asked for £10,000 sterling; later he upped his fee to £20,000, a considerable fortune in those days. Ironically, just after Sir Henry agreed to his price, Arnold gained a \$25,000 advance from Congress to return to field duty.

Shortly thereafter Arnold sought out Washington at Peekskill. The American commander, hoping to attack Clinton in New York City, told Arnold of his plans for the conspirator to command the American left wing during that campaign. Shocked, Arnold begged off the assignment, pleading that his wounds were still disabling. Washington was mystified by Arnold's uncharacteristic desire to pass up a combat command, but finally gave Arnold what he wanted: command of West Point and the surrounding Highland positions.

Once in command in the Highlands, Arnold regained communication with Sir Henry through new local contacts. In the meantime he went through the motions of "improving" the West Point defenses. Finally, on 21 September 1780, Arnold met André secretly at Dobbs Ferry, near Haverstraw, after André had come ashore from HMS *Vulture*, a sloop of war anchored just south of Verplanck's Point. After a long conference, the two men stayed the night at a nearby house. Unexpectedly and to the great dismay of André, as dawn broke the American commander at Teller's Point shelled the *Vulture* and forced André's transportation to withdraw southward. Now the British officer was in a terrible fix.

Stranded ashore in his scarlet regimentals, André removed his uniform and donned civilian dress. He then pocketed a pass signed by Arnold and crossed the Hudson by boat, beginning a thirty mile ride south to British lines near White Plains. After spending another hair-raising night within the American zone, André finally neared friendly troops. But just short of safety, three American "volunteer militiamen," probably bent upon plunder, accosted the British major and forced him to halt. The three

Americans searched André after he admitted to being British and discovered maps and papers concerning the fortifications at West Point concealed in André's boot. Bribery failed to do more than convince the Americans that they were on to something of greater value than the contents of his purse. In search of a reward, the three militiamen took André to Lieutenant Colonel John Jameson at New Castle. Jameson immediately sent a message to his commander, Arnold, informing him of André's capture and reported the whole incident to Washington, including in his report the maps and papers found on André.

Events unfolded thereafter with incredible slowness. The message concerning André's capture reached Arnold at his quarters (the Beverly Robinson House on the eastern shore across from West Point) in the early morning of 25 September. The message to Washington missed the general at Danbury, Connecticut: Washington and his party had already departed that place and arrived in the West Point area. Two officers in Washington's party had ridden ahead and had joined Arnold for breakfast. Receiving word of André's capture in the midst of his meal, Arnold excused himself and went upstairs to tell his wife the news. After their hasty conference, Arnold announced that he had to go to West Point to prepare for Washington's arrival. Riding at the gallop, he raced to his barge and ordered his crew immediately to row him downstream to the *Vulture*. Climbing to safety aboard the British ship, Arnold turned his oarsmen over to the British as prisoners of war, and sailed to infamy.

Washington arrived at the Robinson House about thirty minutes after Arnold had ridden off. Disappointed that Arnold was not there, the general immediately crossed over to West Point to find Arnold and to inspect the fortifications. At West Point, the local commander informed Washington that Arnold had not been there all morning. Puzzled, Washington proceeded with the inspection, discovering to his dismay, that the fortifications had fallen into a deplorable state. Washington thereupon arranged a conference with West Point officers and his own staff to correct the many deficiencies.

Crossing back to the east shore, Washington returned to the Robinson House. There in the late afternoon, messages finally arrived which explained Arnold's strange behavior. The Commander-in-Chief finally understood: Benedict Arnold had deserted after discovering that André had been captured.

Washington tried to overtake Arnold, but all his efforts failed because Arnold was safely aboard the *Vulture* by that time. Unsure of British intentions, the general ordered defensive forces in the Highlands alerted to protect West Point. But this was unnecessary, for Clinton was not prepared to attack. As the crisis subsided, Washington directed that André be brought to West Point and on 29

September he ordered a board of officers to investigate the case and to recommend a suitable punishment for the British officer.*

After serious deliberation at the American commander's headquarters in Tappan, the officers recommended that André be hanged as a spy. Washington approved the sentence, and although Clinton tried to bargain for the release of André, Washington was unrelenting. He offered to trade André for Arnold. This time Clinton refused, and the young major's fate was decided. Even though André asked to be shot, as befitting an officer, Washington was adamant: André had been captured as a spy, and he would die as one.

On 2 October 1780, the dashing John André, whose principal mistake had been to take off his scarlet regimentals, died a brave man. After he had blindfolded himself and adjusted the noose about his neck, the wagon lurched forward, dropping him earthward. His partner, Arnold, went on to serve England as a brigadier general, leading a devastating raid through Virginia. Later, he was joined by his darling Peggy, and they lived out their lives in London, pensioned by the Crown for their treachery.

1781-1783: YORKTOWN TO PEACE

With these memorable events past, days of boredom returned to the Highlands and the war in America turned south in 1780 for its final campaigns. In 1781, Washington and his army, joined by a French army and supported by the French fleet, marched to Yorktown and the final military victory. As Americans waited for peace, he returned to the West Point area in 1782, encamping the army at New Windsor, near Newburgh.

Back in the Highlands, Washington and the army faced new but equally important challenges. In 1783, Washington thwarted what has come to be known as the "Newburgh Conspiracy" in which some of his disgruntled officers proposed to disband the Army or take violent action forcing Congress to act favorably on their pay grievances, life pensions, and claims for food and clothing. In a poignant address to his officers, in which he apologized for having given his eyesight in the service of his country, Washington shamed the conspirators and held the loyalty of the officer corps. By his inspiring performance, Washington possibly saved the young nation and the Army from the possibility of a military dictatorship.

*The board of officers was a distinguished one. Major General Nathaniel Greene presided, and Major Generals Lord Stirling, von Steuben, Lafayette, Robert Howe, Arthur St. Clair and Brigadier Generals James Clinton, John Glover, Edward Hand, John Stark, Samuel Parsons, Henry Knox, Jedediah Huntington and John Patterson formed the board.

1802: THE UNITED STATES MILITARY ACADEMY

The history of the Hudson Highlands and West Point provides an excellent microcosm of the entire Revolutionary War. Out of this experience came the traditions and character of American military policy and of the United States Army. From her rich legacy of the American Revolution, the United States bolstered her traditional dedication to civilian supremacy over the military and has continued to emphasize the traditions and responsibilities of the citizen-soldier. Simultaneously, the nation came to realize that it required the services of professional officers to lead a citizen army in time of war and to command a Regular Army in time of peace. Ironically, although Washington, Knox and Hamilton urged the establishment of a national military academy to provide needed professional officers for the Army, it was Thomas Jefferson, an anti-militarist, with consuming interests in the natural sciences and engineering, who actually provided the impetus to found the Military Academy as an engineering school.

West Point—the fortress where Washington and so many other key officers of the Continental Army had served during the eight years of the Revolutionary War—became the home of the Military Academy in 1802. Since then West Point—the United States Military Academy—has served the nation's peaceful needs and provided leaders for the nation's armed services in war based in great part upon the legacies of the American Revolution.

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