

Remembering the Revolution
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In June 1779 Gen. Sir Henry Clinton led his second major foray up the Hudson River. He hoped to draw Gen. George Washington's Main Army into a decisive battle – "to stir Mr. Washington" - by capturing King's Ferry, the principal crossing on the lower Hudson. Using 70 ships and 150 flat-bottomed boats, he positioned his 6,000 British and Hessian troops on May 31 to attack the American works at Stony Point, at the western terminus of the ferry, and Fort Lafayette, on the eastern shore. They first took the undefended Stony Point, from which the American troops had fled after setting fire to the "large blockhouse." British Commodore Sir George Collier's sailors put artillery ashore there overnight, and beginning at 5 a.m. on June 1 the battery and Collier's row galleys cannonaded Fort Lafayette until 4 p.m., when Capt. Thomas Armstrong surrendered his 70-plus company of the 5th North Carolina Regiment.

On June 2, Clinton marched 5,000 men to Peekskill; Washington feared he would move further north to seize Nelson's Point, opposite West Point. Clinton instead had the Hessian soldiers burn the barracks at Continental Village, north of Peekskill, before withdrawing downriver. He left behind garrisons on both sides of King's Ferry to control the gateway to the Highlands.

As Clinton anticipated, Washington wasted no time in responding to his moves. He ordered his Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Maryland Divisions to march to Smith's Clove (Central Valley) to support those troops already stationed in the Highlands. Washington himself moved his headquarters from Middle Brook, New Jersey, to Smith's Tavern, in the Clove, and then to the Thomas Ellison house in New Windsor as he tried to divine Clinton's intentions. With his army 12 miles from West Point, he did not take Sir Henry's challenge to risk "an action" for the recovery of King's Ferry until he could do so on his own terms.

On June 12, he set those plans in motion by organizing a Light Infantry Corps, and on June 21 by ordering Brig. Gen. Anthony Wayne to rejoin the army in New York. Soon enough, Clinton would learn to be more careful when he stirred up his adversary. In due course, he and Washington would also learn that on June 21 Spain had declared war on England. King Carlos III had ordered his subjects to fight the English wherever they were to be found. The war for America had truly become a world war.

To learn more about the commemoration of the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution, check out www.hudson-rivervalley.net. - Jim Johnson

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