

Remembering the Revolution
The Hudson Valley Magazine
September 2004

On September 30, 1779, Gen. George Washington wrote a “long letter” to the Marquis de Lafayette. As would be expected, the first part of the letter dealt with details of the alliance with the French and the growing relationship between the two men as both served “the cause of liberty.” The rest of the letter was devoted to communicating the recent American successes at the battles of Stony Point, Paulus Hook, and Newtown. Washington also provided his analysis of the British strategy in the Northeast: “Since these notable exploits they have never stepped out of their Works or beyond their lines. How a conduct of this kind is to effect the conquest of America the wisdom of a North, a Germaine, or Sandwich [British political leaders] best can tell. It is too deep and refined for the comprehension of common understandings and general run of politicians.”

Two days earlier, the Continental Congress took the important step of exploiting the new alliance between the French and Spanish by appointing Valley resident John Jay as minister to Spain. Jay had already made his mark on the Revolution. In the early years, he had worked for reconciliation and slowly became a “reluctant revolutionary.” Drafter of the state constitution that was approved in 1777, he served as the first chief justice of the state. In 1778, his fellow delegates elected him president of the Continental Congress, from which he assumed his ministerial post the next year. Jay’s service would continue: he signed the treaty ending the war with Great Britain, then went on to serve as secretary of Foreign Affairs, first chief justice of the new U.S. Supreme Court, and governor of New York.

As the British forces in New York worked on their defenses and the allied vise began to close around them (however distantly), the Americans added to the strength of Fortress West Point and conducted raids to keep the Redcoats off balance. At West Point, Col. Tadeusz Kosciuszko, as chief engineer, expanded the footprint of the works by adding four redoubts (1, 2, 3, and 4) on the ridges to the south and west of Forts Putnam and Arnold/Clinton, and two (North and Middle/South) on the eastern ridge overlooking present-day Garrison. Over the course of the fall, Redoubts 5, 6, and 7 were constructed on Constitution Island. Kosciuszko was determined to avoid the fate of Fort Ticonderoga in 1777, when General Burgoyne’s troops had put artillery atop Mount Defiance, forcing Gen. Arthur St. Clair’s army to retreat. With the Great Chain in the Hudson protected by rings of forts, batteries, and redoubts, West Point was living up to General Washington’s expectation for it to be the “key of America.”

Washington was not content to be totally passive in regard to the British garrison on Manhattan and Long Island. A small force of loyalists at Lloyd’s Neck, Long Island, had been threatening the residents along the Sound, and the Commander in Chief gave Major Benjamin Tallmadge, a native of Long Island himself, the opportunity to capture the post. On Sept. 5, he led 150 dismounted cavalymen from the 2nd Regiment of Light Dragoons across the Sound and captured the garrison of some 500 men without the loss of a single soldier of his own. This type of raid characterized the civil war that would pervade the “neutral ground” and the Long Island Sound for the rest of the conflict.

To learn more about the American Revolution in the Hudson Valley, see the Hudson River Valley Institute's www.hudsonrivervalley.net and the Hudson River Valley National Heritage Area's www.hudsonrivervalley.com.

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