

In May and June 1781, as the civil war between Loyalists and Patriots continued unabated in the Neutral Ground in the vicinity of the Croton River in Westchester, Gen. George Washington and French Gen. Jean Bapiste Donatien de Vimeur, Viscount de Rochambeau, were planning to execute the most decisive allied campaign of the war. As a result of their conference on May 22 in Wethersfield, Connecticut, they would mass their armies first against New York City and then against the army of British Lt. Gen. Charles Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia.

The northern banks of the Croton River marked the southern outpost line of the Continental Army in Westchester. At sunrise on May 14, "about sixty Horse and two hundred foot" of Col. James Delancey's Loyalist Westchester Refugees crossed the river at Oblen's Ford and attacked 50 men of Col. Christopher Greene's 1st Rhode Island Regiment at his headquarters. Most of these soldiers were former slaves recruited when the Rhode Island legislature had voted in February that "every able-bodied negro, mulatto, or Indian man-slave in this State may enlist into either of the said two battalions, to serve during the continuance of the present war." Dr. James Thacher reported in his journal that Delancey's troops "first attacked Colonel Greene's and Major Flagg's quarters, and killed the major while in bed." The colonel, badly wounded, was "carried into the woods and barbarously murdered. Two subalterns and twenty-seven privates were also killed, and a lieutenant and surgeon, with about twenty men, taken prisoners." Thacher also explained why

the Loyalists had gained such complete surprise: Greene "had taken post in a situation to guard a certain fording-place at Croton river, and had practised the greatest vigilance in the night time, calling off his guards at sunrise, on the idea that the enemy would not presume to cross in the day-time; but the enemy having learned his mode of performing duty, effected their purpose by crossing the ford immediately after the guard had been withdrawn."

Upon hearing about what came to be known as the Battle of Pine's Bridge, Washington wrote that "The loss of these two Officers is to be regretted, especially the former, who had upon several occasions distinguished himself,



particularly in the defence of the post of Red Bank [opposite Philadelphia] in 1777." The soldiers of Greene's headquarters detachment distinguished themselves as well, many choosing to fight to the death rather than lose their newfound freedom. The Americans regained some measure of revenge when Delancey's troops stumbled into Capt. Jeremiah Fogg's New Hampshire patrol near White Plains. Washington reported that the Loyalists "attempted to surround him and cut him off by dint of superior numbers, but the Captain made so good a disposition of his small force, that he brought them off with the loss of two Men only. The enemy

had a Captain and several Men killed in the attack." Partisan warfare would remain a staple of the Neutral Ground for the rest of the war. Peter Pratt's Inn will host the 225th anniversary of the battle of Pine's Bridge on June 11; for details, visit www.prattsinn.com.

A week after Greene's fight, Washington and Rochambeau began to hammer out a course of action that would bring together their combined land forces with two French naval squadrons. Rochambeau had some 4,000 troops in Rhode Island poised to cooperate with Washington's 3,500 Continentals. The major question was where these forces should be concentrated.

Washington sold New York City as the first objective. Rochambeau's *expédition particulière* departed Newport on June 9. This month, a group of re-enactors will begin marching the entire route from Providence to Yorktown, Virginia, following the dates and original route of Rochambeau's army as closely as possible; the venture is called "America's March To Yorktown." (They will travel through New York on July 2-6 and August 17-25.) Washington put his troops into camp at Peekskill on June 24 to await the arrival of the French. The march to victory had begun.

To learn more about the Hudson Valley and the French marches through New York during the 225th anniversary of the American Revolution, log onto www.hudsonrivervalley.net and www.hudsonrivervalley.com.

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