



Amos Doolittle, *A View of the South Part of Lexington, 1775* (detail)
print #4 of series *Battles of Lexington and Concord*, colored etchings/engravings, 1775 [New York Public Library]

“*This I can well remember*”

__Narratives of Revolutionary War Veterans, 1830s__

In 1832 Congress passed the last and most extensive pension act for Revolutionary War veterans—it granted partial or full pay to every man who had served in the war for at least six months. Over 80,000 veterans submitted applications, often accompanied with dictated narratives and handwritten accounts of their wartime experiences. From these records, housed in the National Archives, historian John C. Dann published *The Revolution Remembered: Eyewitness Accounts of the War for Independence* (University of Chicago Press, 1980), from which these selections provide a glimpse of the Revolutionary War soldier’s experience.

SYLVANUS WOOD “*we concluded that trouble was near*”

A minuteman at Lexington Green on 19 April 1775, Wood may have captured the first British prisoner of the Revolutionary War.

. . . I, Sylvanus Wood, was born in Woburn, but in that part now called Burlington, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, twelve miles from Boston, and there I learned to make boots and shoes. There I joined a minute company, disciplined with activity by a man who was in the fight on Abrahams Plains¹ with the brave General Wolfe, and in fifteen months hostilities commenced.

I was then established at my trade two miles east of Lexington meetinghouse, on west border of Woburn, and on the nineteenth morn of April 1775, Robert Douglass and myself heard Lexington bell about one hour before day. We concluded that trouble was near.

We waited for no man but hastened and joined Captain Parker’s company at the breaking of the day. Douglass and myself stood together in the center of said company when the enemy first fired. The English soon were on their march for Concord. I helped carry six dead into the meetinghouse and then set out after the enemy and had not an armed man to go with me, but before I arrived at Concord I see one of the grenadiers standing sentinel. I cocked my piece and run up to him, seized his gun with my left hand. He surrendered his armor, one gun and bayonet, a large cutlash [cutlass] and brass fender, one box over the shoulder with twenty-two rounds, one box round the waist with eighteen rounds. This was the first prisoner that was known to be taken that day.

MICHAEL GRAHAM *“the disaster of that day”*

An 18-year-old militia volunteer, Graham fought in the Battle of Long Island (NY) in August 1776.

On the next morning, the battle commenced about the break of day or perhaps a little before. At the Narrows, where Lord Stirling commanded, there was a pretty heavy cannonading kept up and occasionally the firing of small arms, and from the sound appeared to be moving slowly towards Brooklyn. This continued for hours. At length the firing commenced above us and kept spreading until it became general almost in every direction.

We continued at our post until I think about twelve o'clock, when an officer came and told us to make our escape, for we were surrounded. We immediately retreated towards our camp. We had went but a small distance before we saw the enemy paraded in the road before us. We turned to the left and posted ourselves behind a stone fence; from the movements of the enemy, we had soon to move from this position. Here we got parted, and I neither saw officers or men belonging to our party (with the exception of one man) during the balance of that day. I had went but a small distance before I came to a party of our men making a bold stand. I stopped and took one fire at the enemy, but they came on with such rapidity that I retreated back in the woods. Here I met Colonel Miles, a regular officer from Pennsylvania, and Lieutenant Sloan, a full cousin of my own. As soon as I had loaded my gun, I left them (Colonel Miles was taken prisoner and Lieutenant Sloan killed), as the firing had ceased where I had retreated from. I returned to near the same place. I had not been at this place I think more than one minute before the British came in a different direction from where they were when I retreated, firing platoons as they marched. I turned and took one fire at them and then made my escape as fast as I could. By this time our troops were routed in every direction.

It is impossible for me to describe the confusion and horror of the scene that ensued: the artillery flying with the chains over the horses' backs, our men running in almost every direction, and run which way they would, they were almost sure to meet the British or Hessians.² And the enemy huzzahing when they took prisoners made it truly a day of distress to the Americans. I escaped by getting behind the British that had been engaged with Lord Stirling and entered a swamp or marsh through which a great many of our men were retreating. Some of them were mired and crying to their fellows for God's sake to help them out; but every man was intent on his own safety and no assistance was rendered. At the side of the marsh there was a pond which I took to be a millpond. Numbers, as they came to this pond, jumped in, and some were drowned. Soon after I entered the marsh, a cannonading commenced from our batteries on the British, and they retreated, and I got safely into camp. Out of the eight men that were taken from the company to which I belonged the day before the battle on guard, I only escaped. The others were either killed or taken prisoners.

At the time, I could not account for how it was that our troops were so completely surrounded but have since understood there was another road across the ridge several miles above Flatbush that was left unoccupied by our troops. Here the British passed and got betwixt them and Brooklyn unobserved. This accounts for the disaster of that day.

JOSEPH RUNDEL *“Stop . . . or I'll take your head off”*

At age 16, Rundel witnessed the “stone steps” escape of Gen. Israel Putnam during a British attack. Captured and imprisoned, he planned a successful escape.

On the day or day after I enlisted, General Putnam, whose headquarters were at Reading, Connecticut, was visiting Horseneck, one of the outposts. He saw me at that place, at what was called the Picket Fort. He told me I looked too young (I was then in my sixteenth year) to go into the line and said he would take me as his waiter. I told him I should like it. . . .

A few days after I enlisted, the British, being a part of General Tryon's forces, I believe, attacked our men. Our men had stationed near the meetinghouse a cannon or two, which fired upon the enemy till they approached in so great force and so near that General Putnam ordered his men to retreat and save themselves the best they could. He also retreated on his horse at full speed, pursued closely by the British

² Hessians: soldiers contracted through Prussian (German) nobles to fight in the British army during the American Revolution.

horse [cavalry]. He made down a flight of stone steps, the top of which were about sixty rods (I should think) from the meetinghouse. He did not ride down more than fifteen or twenty of them (there being, I think, about one hundred of them in the whole). He then dismounted and led down the horse as fast as possible. I was at the bottom of the steps as soon as he was. He then mounted his horse, told me to make my escape to a swamp not far off, and he rode off.

By the time the British horse, who had gone around the hill by the usually traveled road, come in tight pursuit, I run towards the swamp. One of the dragoons (I think there were six who come round the hill) took after me. As I was getting over a stone wall, he overtook me. He halloed, "Stop, you little devil, or I'll take your head off." In attempting to get over the wall, my foot slipped. He struck my left arm with his cutlass and inflicted a wound, the scar of which is still visible. I surrendered. He took me to Kingsbridge near New York City. From there I was sent with other prisoners to the Sugar House in the city of New York and there confined. I remained there about three months.

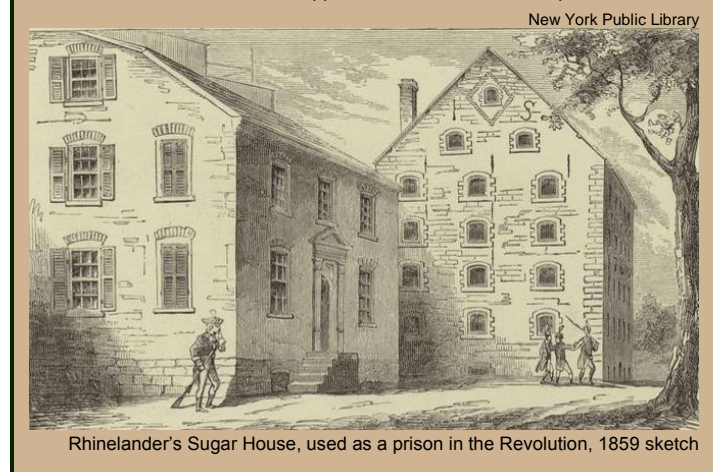
As I was young and small of my age, they permitted me in the daytime to be out, and I was sent to bring water and do chores about the yard. Some others of the prisoners were also permitted to be out. It was the custom at night to lock us up. The names were called over, and care taken to see all were in. I had gained the confidence of a Hessian soldier named Michael Hilderbrand. He could speak broken English. He was one of our guard at the Sugar House. I proposed to him to go off with me. He at first declined, saying that they would catch and shoot him. He finally consented, and we agreed upon a plan. When he stood sentinel, it being dusk, when our names were called over to go in and be locked up, he secreted me under his watch cloak. When my name was called, he said that I had gone in.

After dark, we started from the Sugar House and went with all haste out of the city about three miles on the Hudson River. We then made a float of some posts we procured from the fence and some slabs and boards and got over the river on the Jersey side. We slept in the bushes. Early next morning we went to a house. They asked us to come in. We declined, as we were lousy [full of lice]. They brought us out some victuals. We then made our way to West Point, where we arrived the next day about dark. The name of the person to whose house we stopped as above was Ephraim Darby. I have known him since. He lived in Cairo, Greene Country, New York, and died there about twenty years since. I stayed at West Point two days. They gave myself and Hilderbrand some new clothes. From West Point, I went with Hilderbrand to Horseneck and there again went into General Putnam's service as waiter. I stayed there about five weeks. General Putnam then went to West Point. I went there also on one of the baggage wagons.

I continued at West Point as such waiter till I was discharged, which was in December 1779, the last of the month I think.³



Knapp's Tavern and the stone steps, 19th-c. sketch



Rhinelanders' Sugar House, used as a prison in the Revolution, 1859 sketch

³ Rundel's application was turned down because he had served as a waiter and not as a soldier. Dann, ed., *The Revolution Remembered*, p. 65.

RICHARD WALLACE *“I was not a great swimmer”*

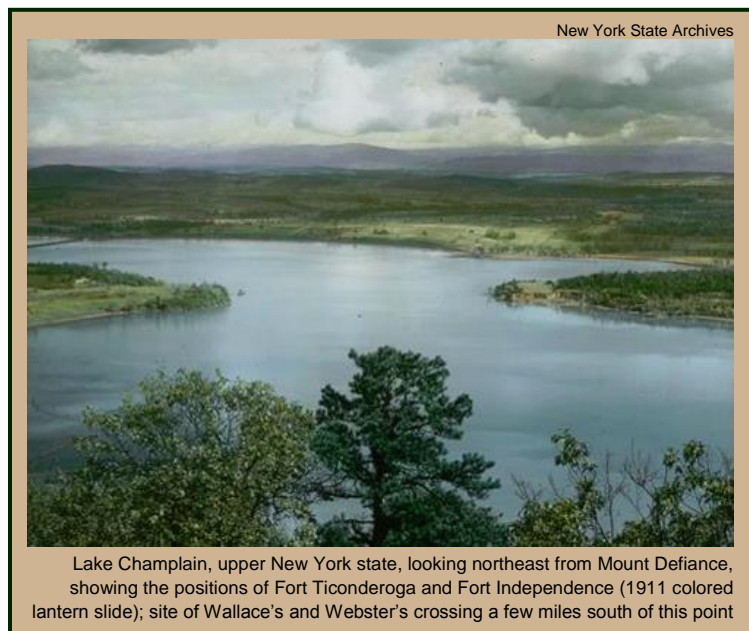
. . . [British] General Burgoyne was so hemmed in and surrounded by [American] General Gates’s army that he could not escape, only by forcing his way to Lake George and there taking shipping to Lake Champlain⁴ and proceeding on to Canada. To prevent this, General Gates contrived to cut off the British watercraft on Lake George, and for that purpose sent two detachments of five hundred men each, one on the west side of the lake to the south side of the mountains that lie south of Ticonderoga, where our troops were ordered to halt. I belonged to this detachment.

Directly after halting, Colonel Brown came to me and inquired if I could swim. I told him I was not a great swimmer. He said he wanted me to swim a little way but did not then tell me where or for what purpose. After excusing myself a little, I agreed to swim [as] he was exceedingly earnest to have me engage. He then said he wanted a man to go with me and enquired who would volunteer in the service. A man by the name of Samuel Webster offered himself and said he was a great swimmer. Colonel Brown engaged him to go with me. This done, Colonel Brown called several officers and some soldiers, and we all set off together and travelled up the mountain a few miles until we came in full view of the British encampment, and, after reconnoitering the mountain east and west for about three miles and taking observations, the officers arranged all things for an attack at break of day the next morning.

Colonel Brown then called Webster and myself and told us of “the little way” he wished us to swim, which was nothing less than across Lake Champlain, then in view about five miles distant. He accordingly gave us our instructions, both verbal and written, and then we made our [way] over rocky mountains and through hurricanes of fallen trees to the lake, where we arrived a little before sunset, so near the enemy’s ships that we could see them walk on their decks and hear them talk, and had they seen us they might have reached us with their grapeshot.

With deep anxiety for the event, we undressed, bound our clothes upon our backs, drank a little ginger and water, and entered the cold waters of the lake, here about a mile in width. Webster went forward, and I followed. After proceeding a few rods, I was on the point of turning about. The water was so chilling I thought I could never reach the opposite shore, but when I reflected that the lives of many of my countrymen might depend upon the success of my effort, I resolved at every hazard to go forward, and if I perished I should die in the best of causes. When we had got into the middle of the lake, the wind blew and dashed the water onto our bundles of clothes and wet them and made them very heavy. And the garter with which I bound on my bundle swelled and got across my throat and choked me and exceedingly embarrassed me. When we had swam about two-thirds across, I found myself almost exhausted and thought I could not proceed further. But at the instant I was about giving up, the Lord seemed to give me new courage and strength, and, shifting my manner of swimming a little, I went forward and soon discovered a tree directly before, about twenty rods from the shore. This tree I reached with a struggle and

Wallace performed one of the “greater athletic feats of the Revolution”⁴ in a nighttime swim across frigid Lake Champlain—saving his drowning partner—to deliver a message to an American general a month before Burgoyne’s momentous defeat at Saratoga (NY) in 1777.



⁴ Among the “finger lakes” of upper New York state.

⁵ Dann, p. 96.

thought I could not have obtained the shore if it had been to the gain the world. The tree was large, and I made out to get onto it and adjust my bundle.

At this instant Webster, who was about twelve rods north of me, cried out, "For God's sake, Wallace, help me, for I am a' drowning!" The cry of my companion in distress gave me a fresh impulse. I swam to the shore, ran opposite to him, and directly found there poles, which had been washed upon the beach, about twelve or fifteen feet long. I flung one toward him, but it did not reach him. I flung the second without success. The third I pushed toward him until the further end reached him; he seized it and sunk to the bottom. I then exerted myself with all my might and drew him out, I hardly know how. As soon as he came to a little and could speak, he cried out, "O Lord God, Wallace, if it had not been for you, I should have been in the eternal world." I told him not to make any noise, as the enemy might be watching us in ambush.

I then wrung his clothes and dressed him and put on my own, and we set out to find the American encampment. But it soon became so dark that we lost our way, and in a short time we found ourselves in an open field near the enemy's guard. We then returned into the woods and remained in a secure place until the moon rose, which appeared to rise directly in the west. I, however, told Webster the moon must be right, and we travelled on until we came to the road that led north and south, just as the enemy fired their nine o'clock gun. But we did not know whether to go north or south. Our object was to find General Warner's encampment and deliver our express to him. But we were not certain whether he was north or south of us, and we might fall into the enemy's hands, let us go which way we would, and the whole plan of our officers fail of success. In this trying dilemma, we agreed that one should go north, followed by the other at few rods distance, and risk his life to the best advantage, and if taken by the enemy, the hind one should go south and deliver the express. It fell to my lot to go forward, and, after I had travelled about an hour, I came to a sentry who hailed me and said, "Who comes there?"

I answered, "A friend."

He asked, "A friend to whom?"

I asked him whose friend he was.

He then said, "Advance and give the countersign."

This I could not do, as I did not know the countersign of this detachment. I knew the sentry was an American from his voice, yet he might be a Tory [Loyalist] in the British service. I then asked him in a pleasant voice if there was another sentry near and if he would call him. He did so, and to my great joy, I knew the man and informed them at once that I was a friend to America and had brought an express to their commander and requested to be conducted to him immediately, and, calling Webster, who was a few rods behind, we were conducted by an officer and file of men to General Warner's quarters and delivered our message, both written and verbal. I also informed General Warner that the British were much nearer than he imagined, and that unless everything was still kept in the camp, the plan would yet fail. He then ordered all lights be extinguished and no noise to be made. We then retired a little into the woods and lay down cold and wet in blankets furnished us by the commissary, and when we awoke in the morning all our troops destined to this service on both sides of the lake were in motion. The Indian spies took possession of all the watercraft belonging to the British on Lake George, and about five hundred prisoners were taken.

JEHU GRANT *"the songs of liberty that saluted my ear"*

Jehu Grant, an enslaved black man in Rhode Island, was one of hundreds of African Americans who fought with the American or British forces.

I was then grown to manhood, in the full vigor and strength of life, and heard much about the cruel and arbitrary things done by the British. Their ships lay within a few miles of my master's house, which stood near the shore, and I was confident that my master traded with them, and I suffered much from fear that I should be sent aboard a ship of war. This I disliked. But when I saw liberty poles and the people all engaged for the support of freedom, I could not but like and be pleased with such thing (God forgive me if I sinned in so feeling). And living on the borders of Rhode Island, where whole companies of colored people enlisted, it added to my fears and dread of being sold to the British. These considerations induced

me to enlist into the American army where I served faithful about ten months, when my master found and took me home. Had I been taught to read or understand the precepts of the Gospel, “Servants obey your masters,” I might have done otherwise, notwithstanding the songs of liberty that saluted my ear, thrilled through my heart. But feeling conscious that I have since compensated my master for the [financial] injury he sustained by my enlisting, and that God has forgiven me for so doing and that I served my country faithfully, and that they, having enjoyed the benefits of my service to an equal degree for the length [of] time I served with those generally who are receiving the liberalities of the government, I cannot but feel it becoming me to pray Your Honor to review my declaration on file and the papers herewith amended.⁶

JOHN McCASLAND *“to shoot a man down in cold blood”*

A native frontiersman, McCasland served as a company scout near Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, in 1778.

And on one occasion, sixteen of us were ranging about hunting Hessians, and we suspected Hessians to be at a large and handsome mansion house in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, about sixteen miles from Philadelphia. We approached near the house and discovered a large Hessian standing in the yard with his gun, as a sentinel we supposed, and by a unanimous vote of the company present it was agreed on that Major McCorman or myself, who were good marksmen, should shoot him (McCorman was then a private). We cast lots, and it fell to my lot to shoot the Hessian. I did not like to shoot a man down in cold blood. The company present knew I was a good marksman, and I concluded to break his thigh. I shot with a rifle and aimed at his hip. He had a large iron tobacco box in his breeches pocket, and I hit the box, the ball glanced, and it entered his thigh and scaled the bone of the thigh on the outside. He fell and then rose. We scaled the yard fence and surrounded the house. They saw their situation and were evidently disposed to surrender. They could not speak English, and we could not understand their language. At length one of the Hessians came out of the cellar with a large bottle of rum and advanced with it at arm’s length as a flag of truce. The family had abandoned the house, and the Hessians had possession. They were twelve in number. We took them prisoners and carried them to Valley Forge and delivered them up to General Washington.

GARRET WATTS *“I was amongst the first that fled”*

In the decisive 1780 British victory at Camden, South Carolina, Watts fled from a British cavalry charge with fellow soldiers.

I well remember everything that occurred the next morning. I remember that I was among the nearest to the enemy, that a man named John Summers was my file leader, that we had orders to wait for the word to commence firing, that the militia were in front and in a feeble condition at that time. They were fatigued. The weather was warm excessively. They had been fed a short time previously on molasses entirely. I can state on oath that I believe my gun was the first gun fired, notwithstanding the orders, for we were close to the enemy, who appeared to maneuver in contempt of us, and I fired without thinking except that I might prevent the man opposite from killing me. The discharge and loud roar soon became general from one end of the lines to the other. Amongst other things, I confess I was amongst the first that fled. The cause of that I cannot tell, except that everyone I saw was about to do the same. It was instantaneous. There was no effort to rally, no encouragement to fight. Officers and men joined in the flight. I threw away my gun, and, reflecting I might be punished for being found without arms, I picked up a drum, which gave forth such sounds when touched by the twigs I cast it away. When we had gone, we heard the roar of guns still, but we knew not why. Had we known, we might have returned. It was that portion of the army commanded by de Kalb fighting still. De Kalb was killed. General Dickson was wounded in the neck and a great many killed and wounded even on the first firing. After this defeat, many of the dispersed troops proceeded to Hillsboro in North Carolina. I obtained a furlough from General Dickson and had permission to return home a short time. This last tour was for the space of three months and truly laborious.

⁶ After the war Grant purchased his freedom and settled in Connecticut. His pension application was denied because he had been a fugitive from his slaveholder. (The Pension Office in the 1830s was dominated by southerners.) Dann, p. 26.

JAMES FERGUS *“we pretended to be a party of Loyalists”*

In 1779 Fergus joined a South Carolina militia regiment to fight the British and Loyalists in Georgia.

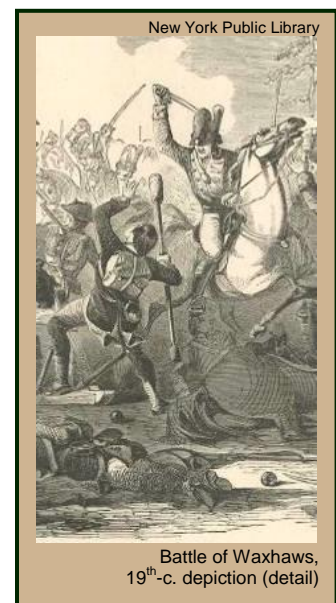
It was a very wet winter, the roads exceedingly deep. We had two hundred miles from where we started to Augusta [Georgia], where we were to join General Williamson. We had a very uncomfortable march and a tedious time on the road. I think there was eight days on the way the sun never appeared to us; it sometimes rained incessantly, and frequently showery. This I can well remember — all that time, the clothes on my back was not dry, nor had I them off, for we had generally to encamp in the woods and always to take care of our horses. What time we got there, I cannot now recollect. However, General Williamson sent us on from Augusta to join General Ashe at Briar Creek time enough to get defeated.

Some days after we got there, we got intelligence of the English coming up the opposite side of the creek from Ebenezer, where they lay between us and Savannah. The river was very full by reason of the late rains; the backwater extended up the creek twelve miles at least to where it was fordable from where we lay. To ascertain the truth of this report, forty of us were ordered up the creek to reconnoiter. With this party I went. We set out late in the evening with a guide. About midnight we came to a house where was a woman and children. We pretended to be a party of Loyalists from North Carolina coming to join the British and wished to know if she could inform us where they lay and how we could get to them. The woman seemed delighted and told us they were encamped about a half a mile from us on the bank of the creek; that they were on their way to drive the rebels out of the forks and would make us very welcome; her husband was then with them at the creek; that it would be best to wait till morning before we joined them, or at least till her husband came home, for fear they might mistake us for rebels. From her we got all the intelligence we wanted, and after giving our horses plenty of oats we returned to camp the next day and gave General Ashe the above account, and that we might expect them on us the next day at farthest.

MOSES HALL *“I felt such horror as I never did before”*

While fighting Loyalists in North Carolina in 1781, Hall witnessed the killing of prisoners and a noncombatant.

The evening after our battle with the Tories,⁷ we having a considerable number of prisoners, I recollect a scene which made a lasting impression upon my mind. I was invited by some of my comrades to go and see some of the prisoners. We went to where six were standing together. Some discussion taking place, I heard some of our men cry out, “Remember Buford,”⁸ and the prisoners were immediately hewed to pieces with broadswords. At first I bore the scene without any emotion, but upon a moment’s reflection, I felt such horror as I never did before nor have since, and, returning to my quarters and throwing myself upon my blanket, I contemplated the cruelties of war until overcome and unmanned by a distressing gloom from which I was not relieved until commencing our march next morning before day by moonlight. I came to Tarleton’s⁹ camp, which he had just abandoned leaving lively rail fires. Being on the left of the road as we marched along, I discovered lying upon the ground something with appearance of a man. Upon approaching him, he proved to be a youth about sixteen who, having come out to view the British through curiosity, for fear he might give information to our troops, they had run him through with a bayonet and left him for dead. Though able to speak, he was mortally wounded. The sight of this unoffending boy, butchered rather than be encumbered in the [illegible] on the march, I assume, relieved me of my distressful feelings for the slaughter of the Tories, and I desired nothing so much as the opportunity of participating in their destruction.



⁷ Battle of Haw River, North Carolina, February 1781.

⁸ Abraham Buford had been the Continental Army officer at the 1780 Battle of Waxhaws in South Carolina. Americans attempting to surrender were shot and bayoneted to death by the Loyalists, an event reviled by the Patriots as the “Waxhaw Massacre.”

⁹ Banastre Tarleton, British commander of the Loyalist regiment.

JOHN INGERSOLL “*we laid a plan for our escape*”

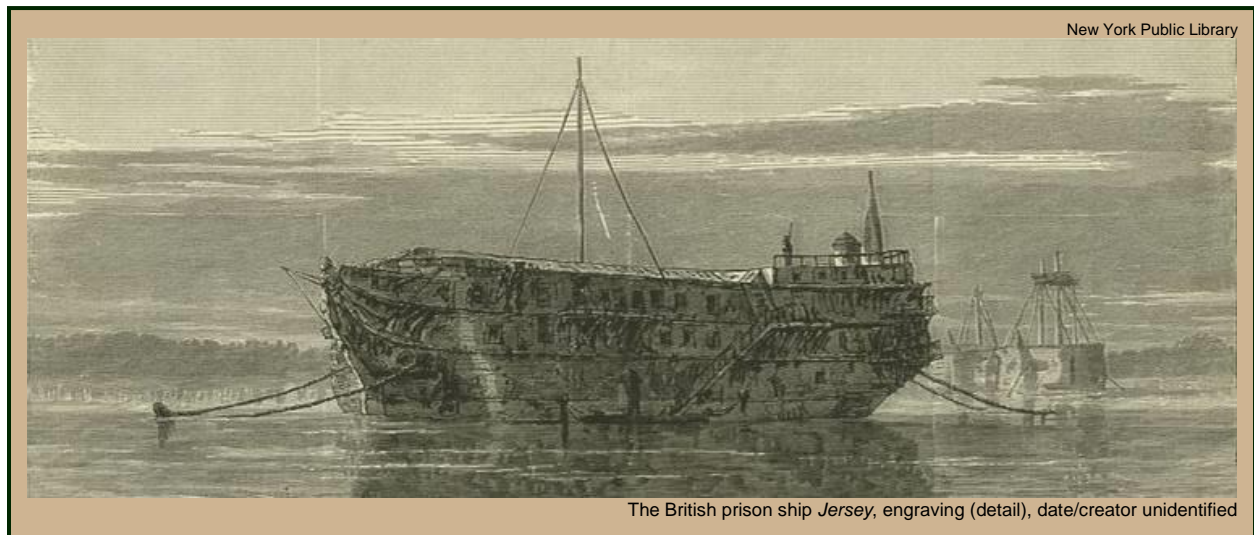
While serving on a lookout boat off New Jersey, Ingersoll was captured and spent two months on a British hospital prison ship, the *Huntress*.

I remained on board the *Scorpion*¹⁰ about three weeks. It being then in the month of July, I was taken sick with a camp fever, when I was removed out of the *Scorpion* and put on board the *Huntress*, also a prison ship but then converted into an hospital. I was on board the *Huntress* but a short time, when I was attacked with dysentery. Here I thought would be an end to my sufferings, but, although death relieved some of my messmates from the horrors of that prison (Captain Willets was among the number who fell a victim to the disease), I was one among those who recovered. The water was bad and the provisions worse. Our allowance was a half pound of mutton per day, but, to our surprise, when the mutton came on board it was only the heads of sheep with the horns and wool thereon. Our bread was oatmeal, neither sifted nor bolted. Our manner of preparing it was as follows: pound up a sheep’s head until the bones were all broken, then sink the oatmeal in a bowl of water and float out the hulls; with this we would thicken the broth and thus we kept soul and body together.

I had been on board about two months, sometimes almost famished for the want of provisions, when the officers of the hospital ship made a proposal to me. In case I would keep the cabin clean, boil their teakettle, black their boots, etc., I should have a hammock to sleep in, should be better fed, and should be exchanged when the rest of my company was. I accordingly accepted of the offer. The hospital ship was anchored in what is called Buttermilk Channel¹¹ with their cables and anchors. The center one was a tremendous chain cable. There were but one gun kept on board said ship, and that was an English musket which the officers kept in the cabin. There were about two hundred prisoners on board said ship, with seven officers and one physician.

I had been doing my duty in the cabin about two weeks, when we laid a plan for our escape. It was as follows. One day while the officers were absent on Long Island, I took down the said musket, poured out the priming, poured water in the barrel of the gun until the load became thoroughly wet. I then wiped the pan thoroughly dry, reprimed her, and put her back in her place. One or two days had elapsed, but we could get no boat wherein to make our escape, for they universally at night chained and locked her fast.

An opportunity at length presented itself, to wit, the officers had a mind to go on shore, and, it being tremendous stormy weather, they unlocked their boat from the chain, brought her up alongside, and ordered a boy to get into the boat and bail the water out of her. I had communicated the secret of the gun being out of order to some of my fellow prisoners, and there being at time a heavy storm, with the wind blowing directly upon the Jersey shore together with a thick, dense fog in the air, we considered this a favorable time to make our escape. We accordingly embraced the opportunity which then offered.



The British prison ship *Jersey*, engraving (detail), date/creator unidentified

¹⁰ British prison ship.

¹¹ New York Bay, near Brooklyn. Most British prison ships were moored in the harbor of New York City and in the Hudson River, their masts removed.

Seven prisoners (besides the boy which was in the boat) sprang into the boat. We shoved off, but before we had fairly cut the boat loose, one of the officers came on deck and discovered us. He screamed out for the gun, which he readily obtained, took aim at us, but as he pulled trigger, she only flashed. He reprimed her, but as oft as he pulled trigger, she would only flash. They then abandoned their musket, all ran upon the quarterdeck, halloed as loud as they could to give the alarm to the fleet then laying at anchor around us, but the wind was blowing so heavy it was impossible for them to be heard at even so short a distance. They then hoisted a flag on the flagstaff on the stern of the ship as a signal of distress, but, the fog being so dense, none of the fleet discovered it. By this time we were pretty nearly over to the Jersey shore, which we reached at length.

We landed on an island in the meadow called Communipaw, between Staten Island and Paulus Hook, but here we were in great danger of being taken up as runaways, for the enemy had possession of the whole country through which we had to travel for some miles at least. We were emaciated with hunger and sickness, and vermin covered our bodies. We were, however, fortunate enough to reach the camp of General Lafayette in safety, who received us joyfully and sent a sergeant of his guard to pilot us on to General Washington's army. We stayed with General Lafayette's army about one day, when we left it and reached General Washington's camp, which was about two miles distant. General Washington's army was then under arms and about to remove from that place of encampment. We marched with his army about two miles further, when he again encamped and furnished us with passes to return to our homes, which I reached in safety. My pass which I received from General Washington at that time I kept for many years, and I was under strong impressions that I had it to this day, but I have had my papers searched, and it cannot be found. What has become [of it], it is impossible for me to say.

EPAPHRODITUS CHAMPION *"3,019,554 pounds of beef"*

A purchasing agent for the Continental Army, Champion served in a critical noncombatant role.

The appropriate duties of my office were to receive, provide for, and safely keep all the beef cattle, sheep, and livestock which were purchased for the army, cause the same to be butchered as the daily necessities of the army required, deliver the meat into the issuing stores, sell the hides and tallow, and keep and render all accounts of the weight of the meats and of all issues of meat and fresh provisions which I made to the issuing commissaries or stores. In short, I had the sole charge of the magazine of fresh provisions for the use of the main army.

The army was furnished with salt meat on Sundays and with fresh meat the other six days of the week. I was also required by the orders of the commissary general to keep him constantly informed of the state of supplies of fresh provisions and the number and condition of the beef cattle on hand, and to keep Col. Henry Champion, the principal purchasing commissary of beef cattle, constantly informed of the consumption of beef by the army, the number of cattle on hand, and the number required. . . .

In February 1778 my father, Col. Henry Champion, received from General Washington a letter dated February 17, 1778. . . . Under the pressure and necessity of the case, he considered this letter was an authority for him to act as a deputy commissary general for supplying the army with beef cattle. He immediately commenced the most active exertions, using his own credit and the credit of his purchasing commissaries for the relief of the army. He immediately visited those parts of the country most capable of fattening cattle in the winter season, particularly the towns bordering on Connecticut River in Massachusetts, a district of country at that time far more capable of fattening cattle than any other in the United States. His object was to induce the people to fill their stalls and fatten their cattle, assuring them that they should not be losers by it. To promote that object, he read that letter probably a hundred times over, which is the reason why it appears so much worn and defaced. . . .

During the 542 days I was with the army under Colonel Trumbull, I received alive and delivered slaughtered or dressed for the use of the army 3,019,554 pounds of beef, 40,275 pounds of mutton, 18,639 pounds of pork, 19,913 pounds of fat. Also, I received and delivered alive 3,257 beef cattle, 657 fat sheep, and 35 fat hogs. During the aforesaid time that I acted as purchasing commissary, I purchased and delivered for the use of the army 3,710 fat cattle and 758 fat sheep.

ANGUS M^cCOY *“the play of human destruction”*

McCoy fought in the ill-fated 1782 Sandusky Expedition, sent to destroy Indian towns in the Ohio country but routed by the Indians and their British allies.

Here we sent our spies [scouts] ahead, who had not gone far before they discovered the Indians.¹² The Indians gave chase to our spies and ran them hard. William Midkirk, one of the spies, having a swift horse, soon appeared, giving us the signal. We each mounted and went to meet them as fast as we could. There was one Indian who did outrun his comrades to meet us, but he was the first killed. We dismounted and endeavored to screen ourselves behind the few remaining trees and let them advance on us. The play of human destruction began. I think it was a little after the middle of the day when this powder music began. We continued watching and firing at our adversaries and them at us until dark occasionally. Soon after the commencement of the battle, a number of our men got wounded, some badly, and some fell to rise no more. I got my own clothes riddled with balls, but a merciful Providence preserved my flesh.

Finding that the Indians were concealed in the long grass, Daniel Leet mounted his horse and, as he passed me, looked me in the face, said “Follow me.” I immediately gave the same invitation to those around me who were on foot. I took after Leet, who rode between a canter and a gallop and I suppose between fifteen and twenty after me. We routed them in groups out of the grass in this daring maneuver. In their consternation, not a gun was fired at us until Leet wheeled to the left, at which time two Indians discharged at Leet. I saw his horse bounce as if mortally wounded (but neither injured). Our pass was so quick we had no time to fire on them, and a kind Providence presented them. We supposed that we passed at least one half of the Indian line. The reason why Leet, I suppose, selected me was we were well acquainted, having served on a former draft together (but he is a few years past numbered with the dead, or I have not the least doubt would corroborate this statement).

Shortly after this, a brother soldier close by me got wounded. I asked him for the loan of his gun, it being a superior one to that of mine. He gave it me and his ammunition (mine I left on the battleground). I confess I felt myself stouter, being prepared with my additional stock of ammunition. We had some of as brave a men as ever shouldered a gun. We had some, it is true, were no credit to themselves, but they were the fewest number. I think we were at this work of destruction for at least five hours; dark at length prevented us, the night being short at this season of the year (being the fourth of June). We were all anxiety and expected that the same course would be pursued in the morning. But the Indians did not advance on us, and our officer gave us no orders to advance on them. . . .

The next day we made across through the plain and continued our course as fast as our wounded could bear, keeping together as well as we could in the evening, some of our small army being a small distance ahead. The Indians, laying in ambush, rushed on them and caught John Hayes, and before we could rescue him they had his scalp half raised off his head and inflicted a mortal wound with the tomahawk on the same. And shortly after, and before we were out of the plains, a body of Indians both on horseback and foot attacked our rear. Our small army gave them powder and ball in exchange, while our front gained [reached] the woods with the wounded. John McDonald got his thighbone broken with an Indian ball or slug. Captain Bilderback requested me to take charge of McDonald.

We got to the woods about dark, and there we camped for the night. It commenced and poured down rain and that very heavy for the forepart of the night. Hayes, who was still living, and McDonald was laid on one blanket. My business was to guard them. I walked around them all night, with the lock of my gun under my arm in order to keep it dry. At the break of day, things in readiness, we started. I got McDonald on a horse. Hayes was still living but could not live long. We left him there. The Indians did not attack us any more. I brought McDonald home with much difficulty, having to lead his horse all the way, as we had no road. He died in a few days after his arrival at home. I believe all the rest of the wounded were able to guide their own horses.

¹² McCoy was part of the Sandusky Expedition (aka Crawford Expedition) of 1782, sent to destroy enemy Indian settlements along the Sandusky River in the Ohio country. The Indians and their British allies defeated the initiative (near present-day Upper Sandusky, Ohio), leaving many Americans to retreat through the woods back to Pennsylvania.

JOSEPH WOOD *“I felt much too sorrowful and gloomy”*

An enlistee at age 14, Wood was one of the few survivors of the Battle of Groton Heights (Conn.) in September 1781.

At the time when the fort was taken,¹³ there were in the fort as I understood about seventy-five. I made my escape from the fort. A man by the name of Avery, whose Christian name [last name] I do not remember, also made his escape from the fort. I never heard of any others having made their escape from the fort at that time, but all who did not make their escape were put to death. Colonel Ledyard and Capt. Simeon Allen were killed.

When Colonel Ledyard found that he was not able to withstand the attack upon the fort, he opened the gate to surrender. As he did so, the British commander asked, “Who commands this fort?”

Colonel Ledyard answered, “I did, but you do now,” and presented to the British commander his sword.

The British commander took the sword and thrust it through Colonel Ledyard. This I heard and saw. I then leaped the walls and made my escape. . . .

I stayed in New London [Conn.] overnight, and on the next morning I crossed over the river in a ferryboat and went to Fort Griswold. The dead were still lying in and about the fort, and the people were just then coming in to bury the dead. . . . I did not then look about to ascertain whether I knew any of the dead. I felt much too sorrowful and gloomy to do so then.

JOHN SUDDARTH *“a deed of personal daring and coolness”*

Encamped at Yorktown in October 1781, Suddarth witnessed George Washington’s courage under fire.

During a tremendous cannonade from the British in order to demolish our breastworks, a few days prior to the surrender, General Washington visited that part of our fortifications behind which your declarant [Suddarth] was posted and, whilst here, discovered that the enemy were destroying their property and drowning their horses, etc.¹⁴ Not, however, entirely assured of what they were doing, he took his glass [telescope] and mounted the highest, most prominent, and most exposed point of our fortifications, and there stood exposed to the enemy’s fire, where shot seemed flying almost as thick as hail and were instantly demolishing portions of the embankment around him for ten or fifteen minutes, until he had completely satisfied himself of the purposes of the enemy. During this time his aides, etc., were remonstrating [pleading] with him with all their earnestness against this exposure of his person, and one or twice drew him down. He severely reprimanded them and resumed his position. When satisfied, he dispatched a flag to the enemy,¹⁵ and they desisted from their purpose.

EDWARD ELLEY *“the day will soon be ours”*

Drafted into the Continental Army, Elley was rewarded for a timely comment during the Battle of Yorktown, which ended with Cornwallis’s surrender in October 1781.

The Continentals at this time were encamped about a mile off towards Williamsburg. I frequently saw General Washington riding around and directing the operations, and after the siege [of Yorktown] began my place was at the guns in the battery called Washington’s Grand Battery. There were in this battery four twenty-four pounders [cannon], four eighteen-pounders, four twelve-pounders, and twelve mortar pieces, and these were fired in platoons, four at a time, and the mortars three at a time, making four rounds of mortars, in order to keep up a constant fire. And, whilst firing, the elevator [man] of the guns got in a violent passion because the men in assistance dodged when fired upon by the enemy from their portholes and produced a considerable confusion. And General Clinton,¹⁶ coming up just at that moment, put things to rights, and I remarked to the men in his hearing, “Come, my brave fellows, stick to your posts and the day will soon be ours,” and for this remark I was very soon rewarded with a good breakfast

¹³ Fort Griswold in Groton, Connecticut. Other eyewitness accounts confirm that the British continued firing on American soldiers after the fort had been surrendered. The victory was the last for the British in the north before Cornwallis’s surrender two and a half months later.

¹⁴ By implication, the property and horses of civilians.

¹⁵ A messenger under a flag of protection.

¹⁶ Major General James Clinton of the Continental Army.

from the general, which was very acceptable as I had not had a meal for twenty-four hours. And I never saw men more mystified than were these serving with me at the guns when I received the reward.

Shortly after the siege began, thirty-three of the enemy deserted and came around in a boat about midnight and joined us, and General Clinton gave them a pass to General Washington. And whilst engaged in firing the guns, it appeared to me as if the earth would sink beneath us.

SARAH OSBORN *“No, he could not leave her behind”*

As one of many women who followed their husband soldiers during the war, Osborne witnessed Cornwallis's surrender at Yorktown, Virginia, in October 1781.

[A]fter deponent¹⁷ had married said [Aaron] Osborn, he informed her that he was returned during the war, and that he desired deponent to go with him. Deponent declined until she was informed by Captain Gregg that her husband should be put on the commissary guard, and that she should have the means of conveyance either in a wagon or on horseback. That deponent then in the same winter season in sleighs accompanied her husband and the forces under command of Captain Gregg on the east side of the Hudson river to Fishkill [New York], then crossed the river and went down to West Point. . . .

. . . They continued their march to Philadelphia, deponent on horseback through the streets, and arrived at a place towards the Schuylkill where the British had burnt some houses, where they encamped for the afternoon and night. Being out of bread, deponent was employed in baking the afternoon and evening. Deponent recollects no females but Sergeant Lamberson's and Lieutenant Forman's wives and a colored woman by the name of Letta. The Quaker ladies who came round urged deponent to stay, but her said husband said, "No, he could not leave her behind." Accordingly, next day they continued their march from day to day till they arrived at Baltimore, . . .

They, however, marched immediately for a place called Williamsburg, as she thinks, deponent alternately on horseback and on foot. There arrived, they remained two days till the army all came in by land and then marched for Yorktown, or Little York as it was then called. The York troops were posted at the right, the Connecticut troops next, and the French to the left. In about one day or less than a day, they reached the place of encampment about one mile from Yorktown. Deponent was on foot and the other females above named and her said husband still on the commissary's guard. . . .

Deponent took her stand just back of the American tents, say about a mile from the town, and busied herself washing, mending, and cooking for the soldiers, in which she was assisted by the other females; some men washed their own clothing. She heard the roar of the artillery for a number of days, and the last night the Americans threw up entrenchments. It was a misty, foggy night, rather wet but not rainy. Every soldier threw up for himself, as she understood, and she afterwards saw and went into the entrenchments. Deponent's said husband was there throwing up entrenchments, and deponent cooked and carried in beef, and bread, and coffee (in a gallon pot) to the soldiers in the entrenchment.

On one occasion when deponent was thus employed carrying in provisions, she met General Washington, who asked her if she "was not afraid of the cannonballs?"

She replied, "No, the bullets would not cheat the gallows," that "It would not do for the men to fight and starve too."

They dug entrenchments nearer and nearer to Yorktown every night or two till the last. While digging that, the enemy fired very heavy till about nine o'clock next morning, then stopped, and the drums from the enemy beat excessively. Deponent was a little way off in Colonel Van Schaick's or the officers' marquee and a number



¹⁷ Osborn's pension application, like many, was dictated to a transcriber.

of officers were present, among whom was Captain Gregg, who, on account of infirmities, did not go out much to do duty.

The drums continued beating, and all at once the officers hurrahed and swung their hats, and deponent asked them, "What is the matter now?"

One of them replied, "Are not you soldier enough to know what it means?"

Deponent replied, "No."

They then replied, "The British have surrendered."

Deponent, having provisions ready, carried the same down to the entrenchments that morning, and four of the soldiers whom she was in the habit of cooking for ate their breakfasts.

Deponent stood on one side of the road and the American officers upon the other side when the British officers came out of the town and rode up to the American officers and delivered up [their swords, which the deponent] thinks were returned again, and the British officers rode right on before the army, who marched out beating and playing a melancholy tune, their drums covered with black handkerchiefs and their fifes with black ribbands tied around them, into an old field and there grounded their arms and then returned into town again to await their destiny. Deponent recollects seeing a great many American officers, some on horseback and some on foot, but cannot call them all by name. Washington, Lafayette, and Clinton were among the number. The British general at the head of the army was a large, portly man, full face, and the tears rolled down his cheeks as he passed along. She does not recollect his name, but it was not Cornwallis. She saw the latter afterwards and noticed his being a man of diminutive appearance and having cross eyes.

On going into town, she noticed two dead Negroes lying by the market house. She had the curiosity to go into a large building that stood nearby, and there she noticed the cupboards smashed to pieces and china dishes and other ware strewn around upon the floor, and among the rest a pewter cover to a hot basin that had a handle on it. She picked it up, supposing it to belong to the British, but the governor came in and claimed it as his, but said he could have the name of giving it away as it was the last one out of twelve that he could see, and accordingly presented it to deponent, and she afterwards brought it home with her to Orange County and sold it for old pewter, which she has a hundred times regretted.

