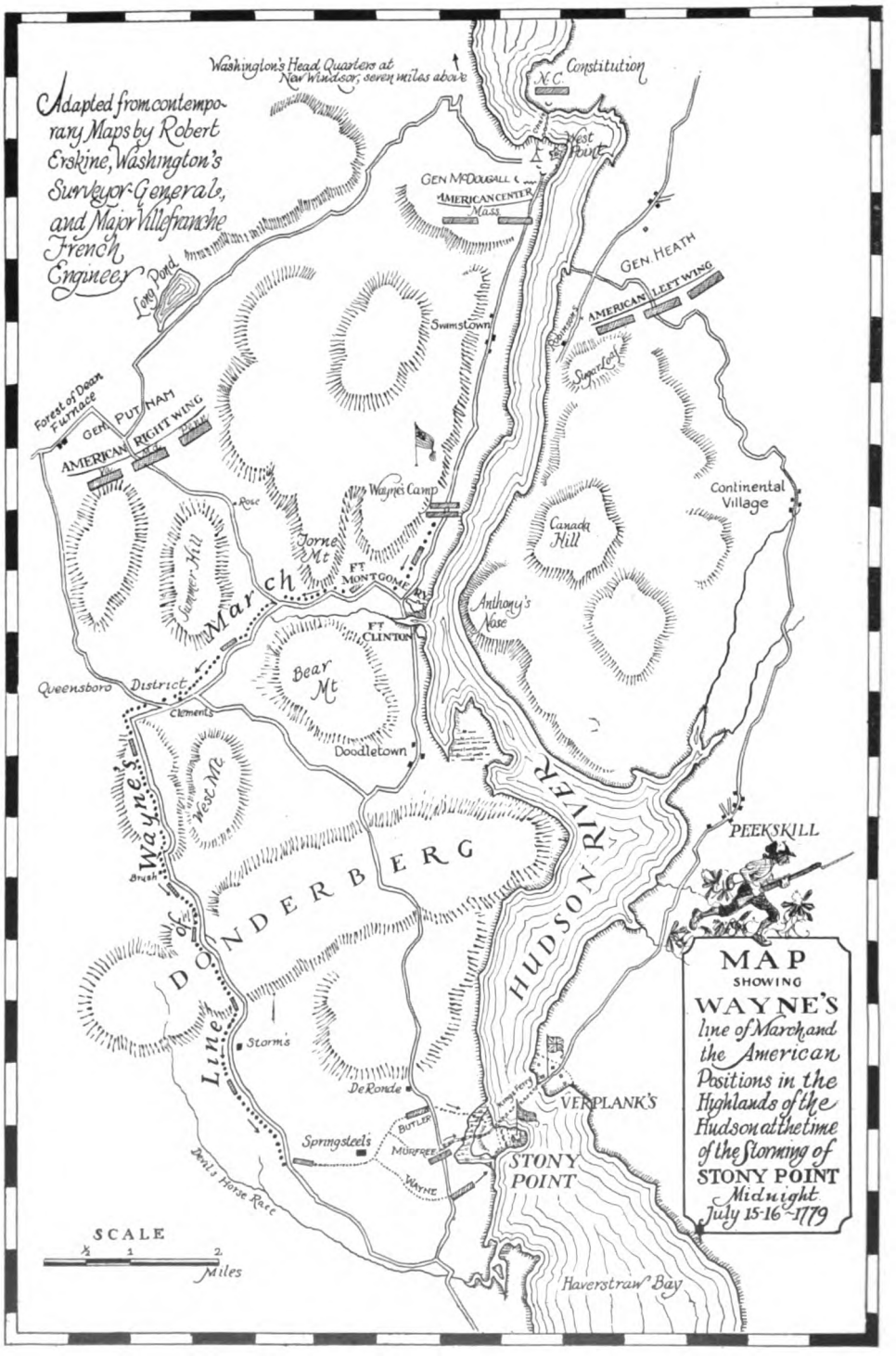


THE SESQUICENTENNIAL OF THE STORMING OF STONY POINT

The succession of sesquicentennial anniversaries of the War for American Independence, which have reminded us in the past few years of the notable and glorious events of that successful struggle of our forefathers, brings us, this summer, to what was called by a contemporary,—"The finest stroke that has been struck this war," the storming of Stony Point, by General Anthony Wayne, and 1200 Continental light infantry, just after midnight, July 16, 1779.

Planned by General George Washington, to the last detail, and faithfully executed by his trusted commander, "Mad" Anthony Wayne, the capture of Stony Point in this midnight assault, was one of the most effective actions of the whole war, in daunting the spirit of the British and paralyzing their extensive plans for offensives during that year, and in elating the morale of the Americans.

"A second Trenton," said another military commentator of the time, and such it was, a bold stroke quite like Washington's earliler surprise of the Hessian garrison at Trenton, which stunned the enemy and restored the spirit of the patriot cause.

The pride of American patriots in this feat is reflected in all the published accounts, from Washington Irving to more recent historians. The sesquicentennial anniversary calls for the retelling of the story of this great blow in our fight for freedom, and it is here presented, with illustrations drawn from various sources, which have not before been assembled in one article in this manner.

But, in addition to recalling to Americans this glorious military exploit, the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, which was given the custody of Stony Point Battlefield Reservation when it was acquired by the State in 1898, felt that it had another duty to perform, in seeking to bring about the proper monumentation of Stony Point, to make it known and understood by the hundreds of thousands of people who pass yearly along the Hudson River, one of the country's scenic and recreational waterways.

Except to the passerby who is familiar with the scenery of the Hudson, or to one who may be fortunate, on a river steamboat, in having some friend in his company who can tell him the story, Stony Point does not convey to the traveler the significance of its name and military history. There is need, therefore, of a monument on the highest point of the peninsula, in clear view of the Hudson River steamboats, which by its character would recall at once the meaning of the scene and the glorious tradition of the place.

Such a spot exists, in the open slope just east of the highest point where stands the white towered light house, now out of use and replaced for navigation purposes, by the automatic beacon near the water's edge. It is on land owned by the United States Bureau of Lighthouses, but if public or private funds could be found to erect the monument which is suggested, the matter of the transfer of the federal land to the custody of the state, making the whole Point a state park, could probably be arranged without difficulty.

The desirability of such a monument was recognized thirty years ago, by Professor Henry P. Johnston, of the College of the City of New York, whose excellent book, "The Storming of Stony Point," is one of the best monographs on the subject. Referring to the fact that the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, then only a few years old, had brought about the acquisition of the Point by the state, he urged that it be suitably marked, and declared:

"Indeed, there are few spots on the Hudson where a noble Revolutionary monument could stand more appropriately or with more imposing effect. . . . A lofty column on Stony Point dedicated to the men of the Revolution, whose qualities of strength and vigilance the position itself so strikingly typifies, would be very much to the purpose."

With the approach of the sesquicentennial of the storming of Stony Point,

it was suggested by Mr. LeRoy E. Kimball, Chairman of the Stony Point Committee of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and approved by President George F. Kunz and the Trustees, that the most desirable form of observance would be a permanent one, in the form of an adequate monument. And it was felt that an outstanding episode of the action, which might be the basis of the conception of any military group, would be the moment of the escalade when General Wayne, wounded in the forehead by a British bullet, and believing himself mortally struck, called upon the nearest soldiers to carry or assist him into the British armparts, that he might die there. Fortunately it was but a flesh wound and Wayne lived many years thereafter, to fight other battles against British and Indians, and to become General in Chief of the Army of the United States.

Through the helpfulness of the legislative representatives of Rockland County, in which Stony Point is located, State Senator Harry J. Palmer, of Staten Island, and Assemblyman Walter J. Gedney of Nyack, there was introduced at Albany, early in the 1929 session, the following Act, "making an appropriation to provide for the cost of a bronze military group as a memorial to General Anthony Wayne on Stony Point peninsula, in observance of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the glorious American victory at that place during the War of the American Revolution":

"The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

"Section 1. The sum of fifty thousand dollars $50,000, or so much thereof as is necessary, is hereby appropriated from moneys in the state treasury, not otherwise appropriated, for the purpose of designing, casting and erecting a bronze military group, as a memorial to General Anthony Wayne and the Continental troops whom he led, on the Stony Point peninsula, at Stony Point, N. Y., in observance of the sesquicentennial anniversary of the recapture of the post from the British, July fifteenth-sixteenth, seventeen hundred and seventy-nine. Such memorial group is to depict the climax of the American assault, when General Wayne, wounded by a British bullet, was carried by his soldiers into the ramparts.

Section 2. The moneys hereby appropriated shall also be used to provide the necessary landscaping about the site of the memorial, on land now owned by the state, or which may be transferred to it by the United States, and are to be expended by the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society as agent for the state, subject to the approval of the conservation commissioner. The design of the monument is to be subject to the approval of the superintendent of public works.

Section 3. The moneys hereby appropriated shall be paid out of the state treasury on the audit and warrant of the comptroller on the certificate of the conservation commissioner.

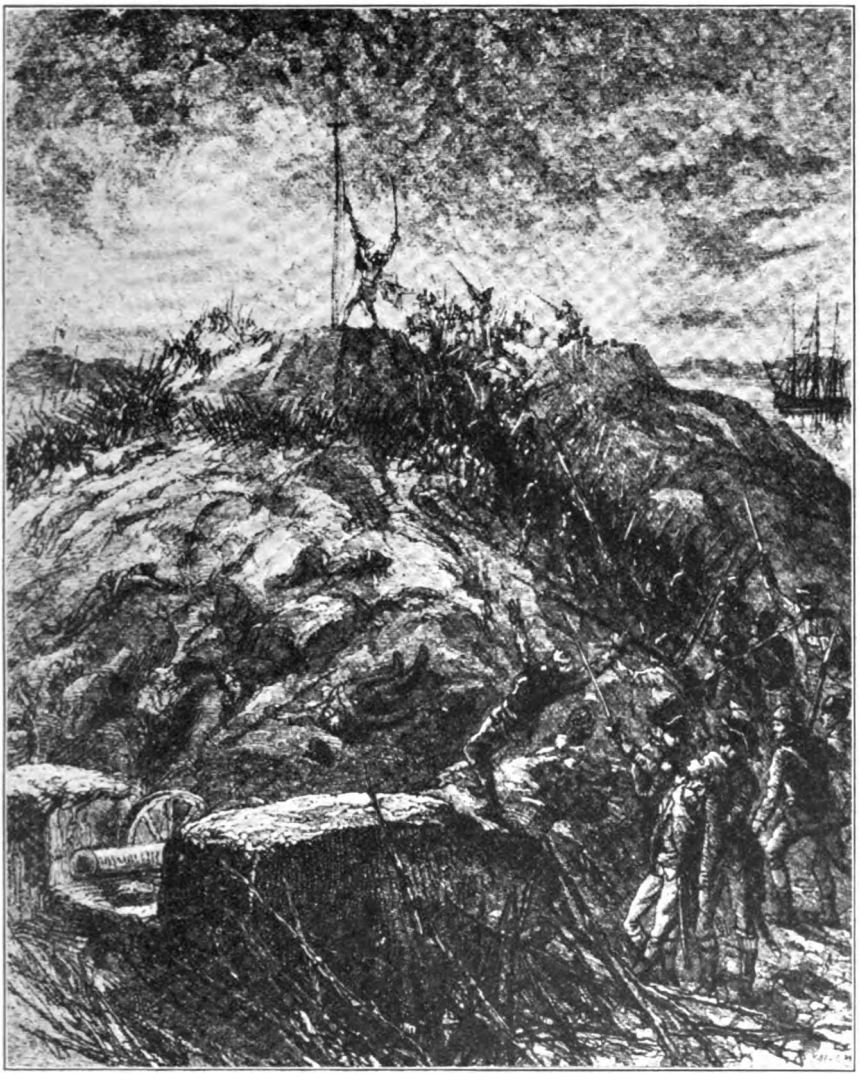
Section 4. This act shall take effect immediately."

The Military Significance of Stony Point

The storming of Stony Point was one of the most admirably conceived and perfectly executed military exploits in history. It was carefully reconnoitred, planned to the least detail by Washington himself, and carried out in the midnight gloom, with scarcely a departure in the slightest respect from the prearranged design. It was practically complete, for only a few of the British garrison of 600 escaped.

Beyond the immediate result, the capture of Stony Point was a stunning blow to the British campaign plans for 1779. Lord George Germaine, the British Minister of War, was putting it mildly when he wrote Sir Henry Clinton that King George III was "surprised and concerned," and marvelled that an enemy which had been reported to him as discouraged and ineffective should carry out so determined and brilliant a project.

The details of the march upon Stony Point, the pause until midnight, and the



A DEPICTION OF THE MIDNIGHT STORMING OF STONY POINT, WHICH APPEARED IN HARPER'S MAGAZINE. FOR JUNE. 1879.

assault, are part of the military tradition of the United States of America. Let us consider the background, what was the situation in general at the moment, what the British sought to do that year, and how the exploit of Washington and Wayne disconcerted them.

The great object of British strategy in fighting the Americans in the War for Independence was to bring Washington and his army out into the open in the sort of full dress stand up battle to which British commanders were accustomed, battles like Blenheim and Fontenoy. In such a battle they would likely have been victors and have destroyed Washington's army. But the American commander faithfully pursued the Fabian policy which he adopted after the Battle of Long Island, and the retreat across New Jersey

in the summer and autumn of 1776 convinced him that the short term militia would not stand against disciplined British, Scotch and Hessian troops. Well did the British general call him a fox. He kept in the shelter of the hills back of the seaboard cities occupied by the British, to sally forth when there was a good chance of success.

But always Washington kept to the belief that in the Highlands of the Hudson, and in West Point, the American Gibraltar, lay the key of the war. He was determined to hold the line of the Hudson, whatever happened in other fields.

After the British found it necessary to evacuate Phialdelphia, in 1778 and retired to New York, fighting the rearguard engagement at Monmouth which might have been a rout for them but for the treason of General Charles Lee, in recalling the American advance, the war quieted down for several months. The British held New York and Savannah, Georgia; and that was about all. King George and his Ministry tried negotiations, anticipating the conclusion of the alliance between France and the United States.

When the three British commissioners empowered to tell the American Congress that the King would repeal the tax measures which led to the war, and concede everything but independence, reached Philadelphia, the British were leaving it and they had to flee as well. They launched some Parthian shots of pacificatory promises, toward Congress, which were received with ridicule and contempt —it was too late for negotiations of this kind.

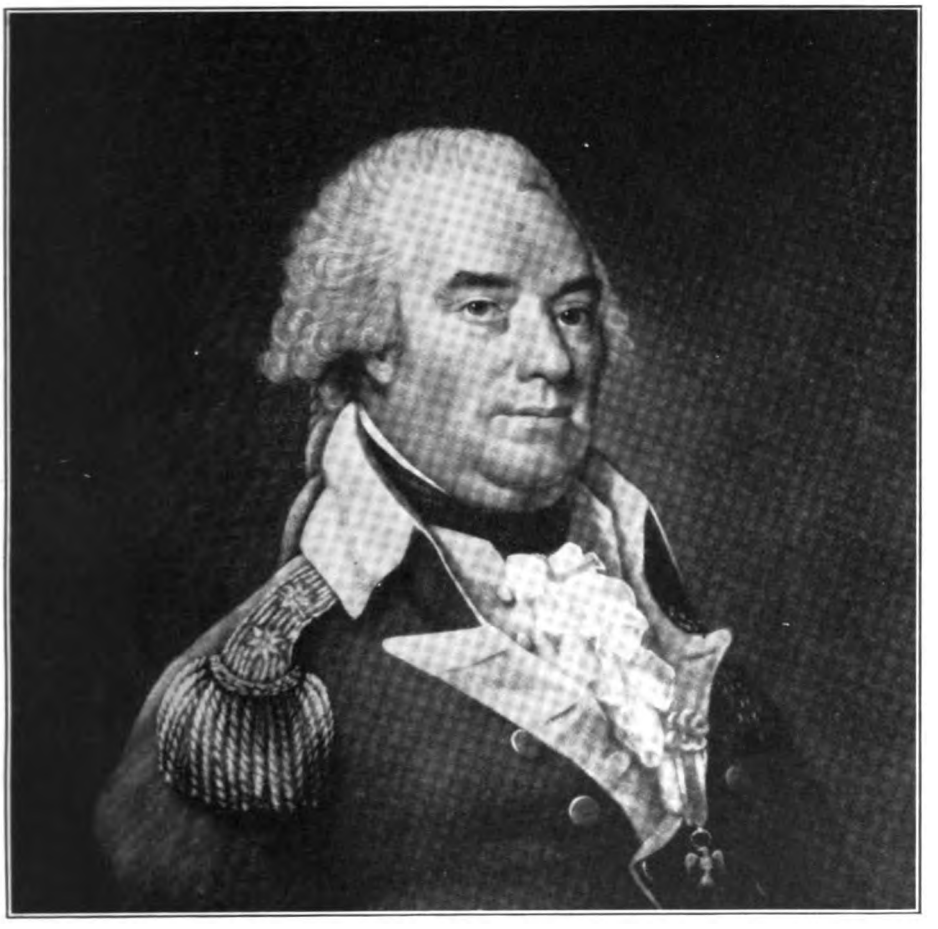
With the opening of 1779, when France had engaged in the War as our ally, Lord Germaine made up a plan of campaign for Sir Henry Clinton, in New York, which that commander knew in his heart he had small chance of carrying out, but openly he agreed to attempt it. Lord George's idea was to sever Washington's lines of communication and to dissipate his army. He proposed that Clinton should force him to open battle in New Jersey, or if he refused such a general engagement, and withdrew for security into the Highlands of the Hudson, to occupy the open country and give the inhabitants an opportunity to return to the old allegiance, which it was supposed they would do.

Part of the scheme was to draw Washington from his well equipped camp at Middlebrook, N. J., to seize and occupy that camp, and thence to make a raid in force against the American magazines at Trenton, N. J. and Easton, Pa., thus cutting Washington's lines of communication. Naval and land forces were to raid the coast of New England and of Chesapeake Bay, to destroy shipping and stores and break up privateering, and at the same time the Indians were to be incited to harass the northern frontiers of the Colonies.

The coast raiders did their part, in May, 1779, burning Norwalk Conn., and Norfolk, Va., doing much damage, but achieving no more permanent result than to stiffen American determination to be independent. The Indians and Tories in the Mohawk Valley, and in western New York and Pennsylvania, were aroused by British agents and rum, to massacre frontier settlers, although their punishment was soon to come at the hands of General Sullivan, whom Washington had dispatched against them early in the year.

None of these raids diverted Washington from his post at Middlebrook, where he could watch the British in New York, and move his troops on short notice, by interior roads, screened by lines of hills, toward the Delaware or the Hudson.

Late in May, Sir Henry Clinton moved up the Hudson with a large fleet of warships and transports. This was according to Lord Germaine's strategy of luring Washington away from Middlebrook, so that the large British force in Staten Island and on Manhattan Island, could march into the American camp and force a general engagement, or continue west to the Delaware. Sir Henry seems not to have intended to capture the fortress at West Point, which he regarded as unattackable, but Washington thought West Point was the objective of the British

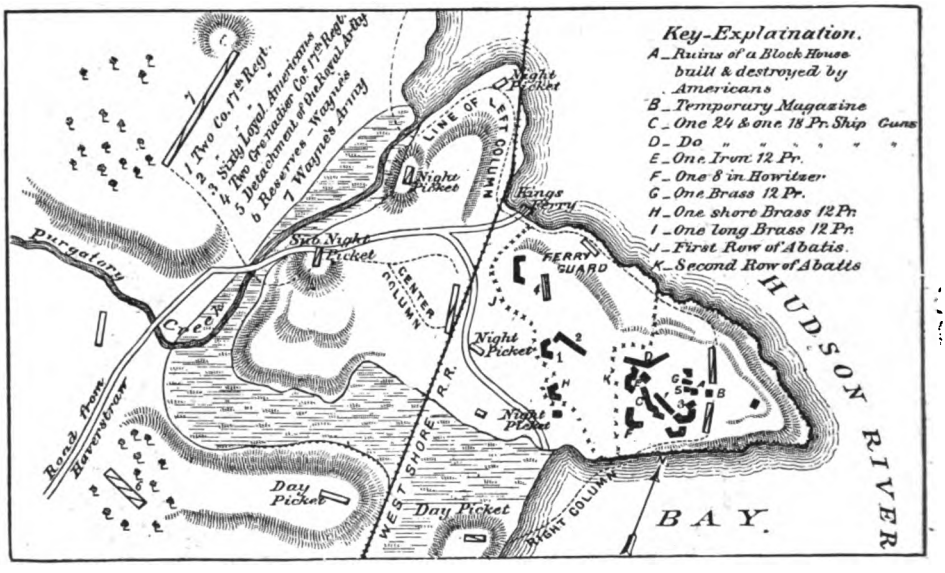


PORTRAIT OF GENERAL ANTHONY WAYNE, BY SAVAGE, IN THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, AS GENERAL IN CHIEF OF THE ARMY. ON HIS LAPEL IS THE EAGLE OF THE ORDER OF THE CINCINNATI. PUBLISHED BY COURTESY OF THE MUSEUM.

expedition, and was determined to prevent it. He moved his army, regiment by regiment, northward, by the familiar interior route, hidden from the enemy, via Troy, Pompton, Ringwood, and Tuxedo Lake, into Smith's Clove, as the Ramapo Valley was then called, and marshalled his best troops along the valley road, within a short day's march of West Point, if that was to be the point of the enemy's attack; yet ready to move south into New Jersey if need be. Again was shown the natural advantage which Washington held, in these lines of screening hills, which enabled him to move back and forth out of sight of the enemy.

In the van of the Americans was the new corps, the light infantry composed of the best men from several states, drilled in the use of the bayonet by Baron von Steuben, and other European officers. They were enlisted "for the war" and they constituted the first United States Army "regulars."

Sir Henry Clinton's flotilla and the troops he landed took Stony Point, which was only lightly manned by the Americans, and Verplanck's Point, opposite, on July 1. Washington had started marching northward from New Jersey and soon



held the Highlands strongly. But for some reason Sir Henry did not carry out the next step of Lord Germaine's grand design, the advance of the rest of the British force into New Jersey. Sir Henry complained he did not have a large enough force for that advance, that expected reinforcements did not arrive from England, the reason for that being the interference of the French with British movements in the English Channel.

Sir Henry Clinton turned toward Long Island Sound, where Tryon was burning and ravaging. Washington, puzzled but watchful, found time to plan reprisal. He called Wayne from retirement in his home in Pennsylvania, to the command of the light infantry in the Highlands. He recommended to Wayne the desirability of retaking Stony and Verplanck's Points.

On July 2 Wayne reconnoitred Stony Point and on the 4th Washington joined him in another reconnoisance. About this time appeals were coming to Washington from Governor Trumbull of Connecticut for Continental troops to protect the Long Island Sound shore from Tryon who had burned Norwalk, Fairfield and part of New Haven. But Washington would not be diverted, as Clinton had hoped, into scattering his forces protecting the Hudson Highlands.

Washington was now determined, in order to counteract the effect of the seacoast raids, to attempt to capture the British works and garrison at Stony Point. He and Wayne worked out the details with great care and the correspondence between the Commander in Chief and General Wayne, and the Order of Battle, have been published in various accounts of the action. In general the plan was for a small detachment, armed with loaded muskets, to advance upon the British lines with loud firing and shouting and to draw out the garrison in that quarter, supposing it to be the main attack, while larger American forces armed only with the bayonet moved along the shore from north and south, got inside the abatis, and stormed the highest redoubts from every side.

On opposite page, facsimiles of the medal awarded by Congress to General Anthony Wayne, in recognition of his capture of Stony Point. Obverse showing an Indian maiden, representing America, handing a laurel wreath and crown to General Wayne; reverse a depiction of the storming of the British post. Original in the possession of Dr. William S. Thomas, Vice President of the Order of the Cincinnati. Photos by A. Tennyson Beals.

The Light Infantry corps of 1300 men was marshalled for inspection by General Wayne, on the morning of July 15, at Sandy Beach, on the west shore of the Hudson two miles north of the ruins of Fort Montgomery, which the British had taken two years before. They did not know what was afoot, and were elated at the prospect of action, when, at the close of the inspection, they were ordered to march southward. The route was through what is now the village of Fort Montgomery, then uphill through the gorge between the Torne and Bear Mountain, past the old Queensboro iron furnace, to the hamlet of Queensboro where then was but one house, of one Clement.

From Queensboro the corps followed a rude road south through Beechy Bottom, between West Mountain, and a ridge given on the maps of Robert Erskine, Washington's Surveyor General, as "De-Gaffles Rugh," now known, on the map of the Harriman State Park, as Black Mountain. In later years this was a farming region, and afterward declined and is now part of the Harriman section of the Palisades Interstate Park. Beechy Bottom Brook is occupied by several beaver ponds, and the dam of one pond is partly composed of a stone wall along the road over which Wayne and his men marched on July 15, 1779.

The force climbed over the southwest end of West Mountain (shown in Erskine's maps as part of the Dunderberg), descended into the valley of Bulsontown, then turned eastward toward the river, to be halted, out of sight and sound from the British garrison on Stony Point, behind a ridge fronting the marsh which almost makes an island of the Point and was wetter then than now.

In his letter to Wayne dated July 10, Washington had recommended a midnight hour, for the reason that "the usual time for exploits of this kind is a little before day, for which reason a vigilant officer is then more on the watch."

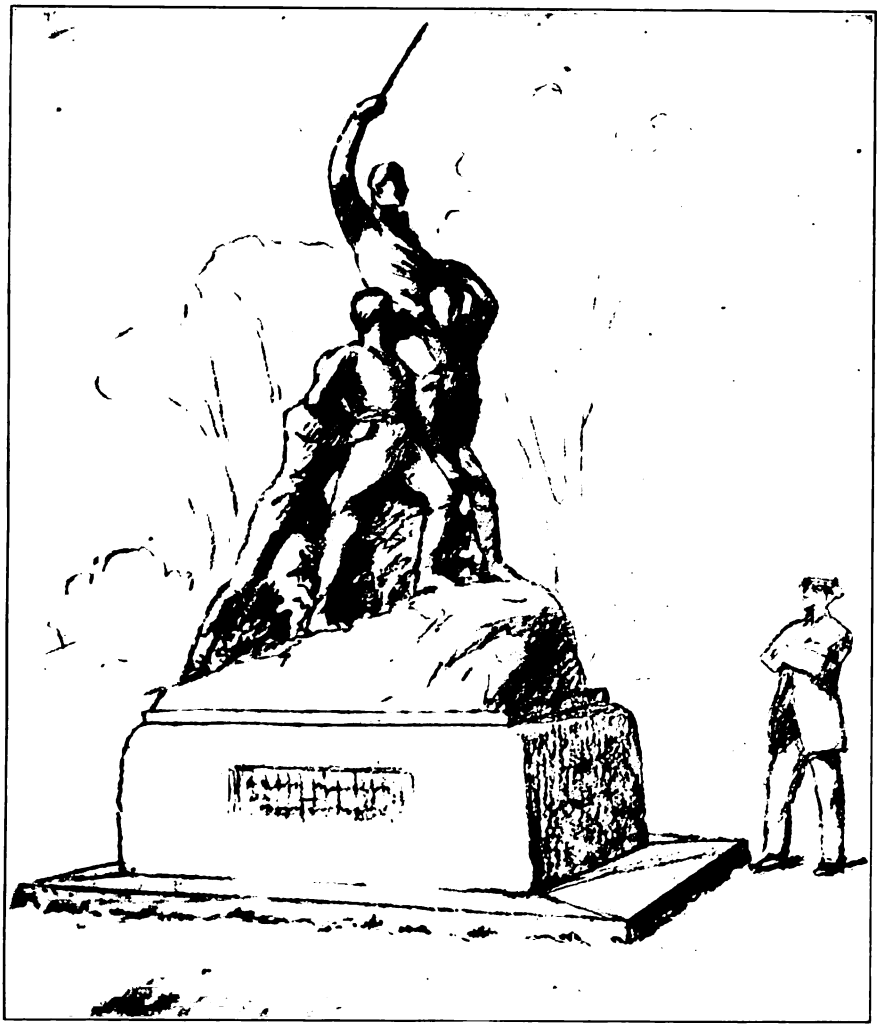
The troops, tired after their long and arduous march in hot July weather, were given a few hours of the evening to eat and rest while Wayne and his aides reconnoitred the ground again. Wayne seems to have had a strong idea that he would not survive the battle and wrote a rather melancholy letter to his brother-in-law, Sharp Delany, commending his wife and children to Delany's care. But with his earthly affairs thus settled, in the event of his death, he threw himself into the business at hand with ardor and intelligence.

At 11:30 P. M., the order to march was given, and the columns divided, to right and left of the approaches to the Point. The right column was headed by a forlorn hope under Lieut. Knox, then 130 men under Lieut.-Col. Fleury, General Wayne, and the regiments of Colonels Febiger and Meigs and a detachment under Major Hull. The left column was led by another forlorn hope, for the deadly work of clearing the abatis, under Lieut. Gibbon, then Major Stewart's detachment, then Butler's Regiment, followed by Major Murfree's companies.

The left column descended to the shore of the Hudson, at a point now covered by the dump of the New York Trap Rock Company, and followed the water's edge, around the rocky point of the Ten Eyck farm, past the landing of King's Ferry, and along the steep bank easterly, to the point east of the present bath house and pier, where the order of battle called for them to penetrate the abatis and scale the steepest part of the point into what the British called their "little Gibraltar."

This column marched in silence until it aroused the picket at the ferry. Meanwhile, Major Murfree's companies left the column, crossed the "mud bridge" across the swamp, occupying much the same position as now, and advanced toward the rocky knoll west of the present line of the West Shore Railroad, on which were some of the British advanced positions. According to Washington's plan, they began a continuous fusilade, with the object of making the garrison suppose the main attack was directed there.

The right column crossed the fields south of the marsh, and reached the muddy shore, about 500 yards south of the Point. Aiming to get inside the lines of



SKETCH OF A SUGGESTION FOR A MONUMENT TO GENERAL WAYNE, AT STONY POINT, BY HENRY K. BUSH-BROWN, SCULPTOR, IDEALIZING THE INCIDENT, WHEN WAYNE, WOUNDED, CALLED UPON THE SOLDIERS TO CARRY HIM INSIDE THE RAMPARTS.

abatis, the column followed a line which forced the outer files to wade waist deep in the water.

Major Murfree's detachment, with loaded muskets, carried out their orders to "amuse" the enemy by noisy firing. But the heads of the converging right and left columns, armed only with the bayonet, were discovered by British sentries in time for the garrison to be aroused, dressed and to man their guns. So it was not a complete surprise, but became a storm in the face of a surprised but fighting enemy. But the momentum of the American's assault was not to be resisted. The forlorn hopes chopped away the logs of the abatis, losing heavily from the storm of British bullets and grapeshot, and the main columns forged steadily upward over the rocks, and into the redoubts.

General Wayne was wounded in the forehead in the blast from the British guns, and called upon his men to carry him forward. Lieutenants Fishbourne and Archer assisted him upward, and it soon proved his hurt was not serious. Within twenty minutes all was over. The British garrison evidently feared they might be slaughtered in reprisal for the cruelties of Tryon in the raids on the Connecticut shore towns, and they cried, "Mercy, Dear Americans." The British themeslves conceded that none of the garrison was harmed after resistance had ceased, and that remarkable restraint and discipline was shown by the Americans.

The casualties of the action were reported as follows: Americans, fifteen killed, eighty-three wounded. British, twenty killed, seventy-four wounded, 58 missing and 472 prisoners.

After the British commander, Lieut.-Col. Henry Johnson, surrendered, Wayne's force turned the captured guns across the river toward Verplanck's Point, occupied by another enemy garrison, but without effect.

Because of the difficulty of maintaining the post, menaced by British ships in the Hudson, Washington evacuated Stony Point two days later, removing the guns and stores to West Point. Some of these guns were built into the walls of one of the structures at the Military Academy, but one was loaned by the United States War Department to the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society and is in the Museum at Stony Point.

The British reoccupied the Point and fortified it more strongly than before, including a blockhouse removed from Fort George in Manhattan Island. Washington meditated another assault, but concluded it unfeasible. Pressure of the Americans on the British at various points and shortage of troops for outlying posts, caused Sir Henry Clinton to evacuate it in October, 1779, together with Verplanck's Point and a week later the Americans reoccupied it and restored the fortifications. It was held by the Ameircans, with Verplanck's Point and the important military crossing of King's Ferry for the remainder of the war. It was intended by the traitor, Benedict Arnold, to have been delivered to the British, with West Point and other American fortifications in the Hudson Highlands, but that plot failed.

Washington and Arnold crossed at King's Ferry in the same barge, Sept. 18, 1780, the commander being on his way to Hartford, Conn., to meet General Rochambeau, commander of the French troops who had come to aid the American cause. Arnold parted from Washington then, never to see him again, for the traitor was then completing his plot, and met Major John Andre, the British agent, five miles south of Stony Point on Sept. 22. On the 23rd, Andre was captured, on the 24th Arnold fled to the British, and soon after Andre was found guilty and hanged as a spy at Tappan.

In July, 1781, Stony Point saw the crossing of Rochambeau's troops, and the Americans under Washington, on their march to the Chesapeake to besiege and capture Cornwallis at Yorktown, the final disaster to the British which practically ended the War.

Acquisition of The State Reservation

The movement for the acquisition of Stony Point as a state park began in 1895, when Mr. H. K. Bush-Brown, the sculptor, conducted the Gettysburg Commission on a visit to the battlefield on the Hudson. The interest shown by the members of this commission led Mr. Bush-Brown to suggest that the property be acquired, to the Empire State Society, Sons of the American Revolution. A committee of that society made a detailed investigation as a result of which it recommended that the property be acquired through the Trustees of Scenic and Historic Places and Objects, now the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society. The Society did take up the matter, and in 1897 a bill was passed appropriating $25,000 for the purchase and committing the Point to the care of

VIEW FROM THE NORTHERN REDOUBTS OF STONY POINT, LOOKING UP THE HUDSON, WITH DUNDERBERG MOUNTAIN AT LEFT, VERPLANCK'S POINT AT RIGHT. PHOTO BY DR. EDWARD HAGAMAN HALL.

the Society. The Society has maintained it since, and with public and private moneys has made many improvements, including a right of way entrance road, shelters, keeper's house, restoration and marking of the redoubts, with the help of the United States Army authorities at West Point; a bath house and pier. The museum in the keeper's house has interesting relics of the battle.

Valuable additions by private gift were the donation in 1908 by Ada F. Allison and others, of 1.16 acres on the west side of the railroad cut at the entrance, on which, in 1909, the New York State Society of Daughters of the Revolution built a stone memorial arch. The reservation has become an attractive retreat for parties, large and small, seeking a place free from the noisy features of larger recreation resorts. Its annual attendance in recent years has averaged over fifty thousand.

MANY IMPROVEMENTS AT JOHN BOYD THACHER PARK

John Boyd Thacher Park, on the Helderberg Escarpment, in the towns of Guilderland and New Scotland, fifteen miles west of Albany, and the only state park in Albany County, has been greatly improved for public enjoyment in the past year. A large part of an allocation of $13,000 of State Park bonds, by the State Council of Parks, was expended, in carrying out a plan of development made by Major W. A. Welch, General Manager and Chief Engineer of the Palisades Interstate Park. The work was done with the keen interest of Hon. Frank L. Wiswall, chairman of the Thacher Park Committee of the American Scenic and Historic Preservation Society, and under the field direction of the new superintendent, Scott Knowles, formerly superintendent of the Palisades division of the